

*The Reclining  
Nude* Agnès Varda,  
Catherine Breillat,  
and Nan Goldin



*Emma Wilson*

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EMMA WILSON

# The Reclining Nude

Agnès Varda, Catherine Breillat,  
and Nan Goldin

LIVERPOOL UNIVERSITY PRESS

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for Lapin

Je suis exténuée du désir d'Hélène Lagonelle.

Je suis exténuée de désir.

Je veux emmener avec moi Hélène Lagonelle, là où chaque soir, les yeux clos, je me fais donner la jouissance qui fait crier. Je voudrais donner Hélène Lagonelle à cet homme qui fait ça sur moi pour qu'il le fasse à son tour sur elle. Ceci en ma présence, qu'elle le fasse selon mon désir, qu'elle se donne là où je me donne. Ce serait par le détour du corps d'Hélène Lagonelle, par la traversée de son corps que la jouissance m'arriverait de lui, alors définitive.

De quoi en mourir.

[I am worn out with desire for Hélène Lagonelle.

I am worn out with desire.

I want to take Hélène Lagonelle with me to where every evening, my eyes shut, I have imparted to me the pleasure that makes you cry out. I'd like to give Hélène Lagonelle to the man who does that to me, so he may do it in turn to her. I want it to happen in my presence, I want her to do it as I wish, I want her to give herself where I give myself. It's via Hélène Lagonelle's body, through it, that the ultimate pleasure would pass from him to me.

A pleasure unto death.]

Marguerite Duras

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‘Cléo and Dorothee’, in Marie-Claire Barnet (ed.), *Agnès Varda Unlimited: Image, Music, Media* (Cambridge: Legenda, 2017), pp. 11–25.

I am grateful for permission to draw on this material.

# Illustrations

1. Still from *L'Opéra-Mouffe*.
2. Still from *L'Opéra-Mouffe*.
3. Still from *L'Opéra-Mouffe*.
4. Still from *Agnès de ci de là Varda*.
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11. Still from *Anatomie de l'enfer*.
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16. Still from *Anatomie de l'enfer*.



## *shoreline*

*At Land* (Maya Deren, 1946) opens with shots of the sea. In the surge of liquid a woman's body is visible. There is the sensual curve of her dark dress, and the line of her neck. Her cool pale skin, the sheen of the cloth, the salt water offer a stretch of sensations. In a cascade of shots, the film cuts to her shoulders, her long neck, a reclining head. The sweep of the camera shows the rush of water over her body, how her image is deformed in the flow, how the form dissolves in the waves. Her body re-emerges. Her head is cast back, the water rinsing through her long hair. Her mouth is open in rapture. The image seems at first one of drowning. Her body recedes and returns in the frame, moved in the water, her flesh unworldly, morbid, and fragile. The sequence effects a metamorphosis, a sleight of hand. She is there, alive, born. The sea recedes before the film cuts to the woman on the shore. Her eyes are open. Her dark pupils are peculiarly animate.

A following image shows her lying, reclining, her head cast back, her arm outstretched, the life of the sea behind her. The camera is close. The stillness and scale of the shots reveal her newness, her bliss. There are differently angled images of her face and of her body, as her form is unfixd. Her face is seen from a different angle, from above, on fine shingle. Her mouth is closed, her pupils move. She is watching and the film cuts to birds against the open sky. She closes and opens her eyes. She turns as she gets up and makes her way, feline, into the dream scenarios of the film.

*At Land*, a 14-minute film, was Maya Deren's third after *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943) and *Witch's Cradle* (1944). The filming was by cinematographer Hella Heyman. Deren herself plays the woman in the

water.<sup>1</sup> In her essay, 'Adventures in Creative Film-Making', Deren says of the woman she plays: 'She is not drowned; rather, the scene implies a birth or passage from one element into another' (2005, 183). Her 'girl' is confronted with 'a volatile and relentless metamorphosis' (126).<sup>2</sup> Deren says of her own films: 'They are certainly not documentaries. Or rather, they are documentaries of the interior' (97).<sup>3</sup>

Deren's opening shots offer images of horizontality, of a woman prone. If she is not naked, the clinging fabric of her dress still discloses her.<sup>4</sup> These shots look forward to other documentaries of the interior, reimaginings of female horizontality, of flesh and skin exposure and extension through the twentieth and twenty-first century. Deren's image is unsettling and prescient in its hesitation between death and animation.<sup>5</sup> Her drowned woman is washed up uncannily alive. Her outstretched body, its reclining, falling, metamorphosing form conjures death, sleep, and dream, as well as birth, awakening, and a strangely animal life. Extreme closeness and sudden distance unsettle intimacy with the image and also any sure sense of its remoteness and opacity. Laid out, glimpsed from different angles, Deren's body is alluring and alien. This body reclines, displayed, in sensory loveliness, ungrasped.

1 As Maureen Turim points out, Deren reprises an image 'of the beached mermaid' (2001, 93) from *Meshes of the Afternoon*. Lucy Fischer (2001, 194) also makes a connection to earlier mermaid images, comparing the reclining figure to one of Méliès's mythical sea queens from *The Kingdom of the Fairies* (1903) or *The Mermaid* (1904).

2 In 'Planning by Eye', Deren offers an account of the filming on Long Island, where she had discovered 'a deserted beach and sand dunes, which had a fine quality of infinite extension' (2005, 157).

3 Deren says more liberally of *At Land* that 'It is in a sense a mythological voyage of the twentieth century' (2005, 205).

4 The pose looks out to photographic images of Deren's naked body on the beach. These images are held in the collection of the Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Centre at Boston University. I am grateful to John David Rhodes for drawing these to my attention.

5 In this way it is a variation on the sleeping beauties contemplated by Elisabeth Bronfen (1992), artworks of the female corpse that I look at elsewhere (Wilson, 2012).

# The Reclining Nude

I am interested in why the figure of a woman reclining, in repose, lying displayed, abandoned, fallen, beached, awake, asleep, or dreaming, returns in the work of women film-makers and photographers in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This figure appears in the narrative films, documentaries, slide shows, and still photographs I examine.

I imagine the images of a naked woman reclining that are seen in the world. They are images of a girl after her bath, of a pregnant woman examined, of a mother lying in bed. They are images of a woman lying reading in an enclosed apartment in summer. They are images of a lover in sheets, a nudist swimmer in water, or by the lakeside. They are images of a woman exhausted after work, stretched out asleep. They are images of anomie, depression, and numbness. They are images of the ill lying in hospital, naked parts of the body gaping. They are images of the dead. These are all images of the closest intimacy, of desire, happiness, rest, absorption, exercise, tending, care, vulnerability, emergency, numbness, and grief.<sup>1</sup> These moments of being, of living, and of dying are apparently remote from the timeless serenity of the European tradition of the reclining nude, yet disconcertingly these images and paintings share a pose, an attitude, the same proneness, the same repose.<sup>2</sup>

1 Elizabeth Bowen reflects on this range of meanings and affects attached to reclining as a pose as she looks at sculptures from Ancient Rome: 'The statuesque pose of recline adopted by leading Romans (as though anticipating adorning tombs) did, however, place them at one advantage: they could *appear* languid and imperturbable. Masters of households, they had the air of being masters of the situation – as they were, till it came to their night thoughts' (2010 [1959], 101).

2 Zbigniew Herbert (2014), visiting Siena, remarks on the figure of Peace in Ambrogio Lorenzetti's fresco series *The Allegory of Good and Bad Government* (1339). He finds her natural pose memorable and reminiscent, realising she looks forward, for him, to Matisse's later images of reclining and relaxing women.

I use the English term ‘reclining’,<sup>3</sup> referring both to the classical pose in nude paintings and also, as per the usage of the term beyond the art history context, to other situations of lying down, of being prone. If the term is often used to express relaxation and repose, I stretch its meanings outwards, referring to all manner of situations of horizontality. French, the language of the artworks I discuss, has no direct equivalent to the word ‘reclining’, coming closest to the reclining nude, in the language of painting, in the term *nu couché*, nude lying down, and *nu allongé*, nude stretched out, the terms carrying, like reclining, connotations of being in repose, on a sofa, or in bed. Yet French carries too the figure of the *nu renversé*, the upside-down nude, the nude who has been overturned, knocked over, lain prone, with connotations of disarrangement, of falling away from the vertical. I reach out to these senses and, further, in thinking horizontality, to prostration. Prostration has a stretch of meanings from the initial sense of lying out on the floor with one’s face down, to being completely overcome, helpless, distressed, and exhausted. This latter meaning carries with it the idea of being stunned, dazed, laid low, drained. Lying down face down in honour, submission, or worship is voluntary, while the state of being stretched out is involuntary, annihilating.

This book makes a claim for the resources which the reclining nude, and other figures of female horizontality, can offer female-identified artists. I see these artists returning to images of beauty, eroticism, intimacy, and aligning them with images of listlessness, grief, and depression. Looking closely at the form of the reclining nude,<sup>4</sup> her poses, the angles and perspectives from which she is seen, I ask how this image becomes fascinating. It is my sense that this image is still interesting, even important, for female-identified artists – and for all those allied in feeling and picturing femininity – in the sensitive, ethically adventurous, politically complex issues it engages. The reclining nude is an image variously of passivity, of submission, of hedonism, of autoeroticism, of curiously inactive, indolent forms of resistance, and anarchy. Through this image, female-identified artists have claimed the freedom to come close to, test out, and transform images of inactivity, languor, and rest. They are reimagining horizontality.<sup>5</sup>

3 Reclining is associated with furniture, seats and chairs, as well as naked people.

4 I use this term for simplicity but always imply all the related figures as well.

5 Sophie Calle looks at these issues in *Ainsi de suite [And so Forth]*, writing: ‘On demande à des hommes d’analyser une peinture représentant une femme allongée. Pour la plupart d’entre eux elle semble triste, voire délaissée, alors qu’aux

These works in their own ways express grief about the entrapment, idealisation, and objectification of women, the stilling and fixing in the figure of the odalisque and other reclining nudes. They also seek out what is seductive in these images, seeing them yielding a wider, more elastic range of emotions about female embodied life. The artists I look at explore nakedness, exposure, sometimes damaging, sometimes pleasurable, in the reclining nude. Through this image, this pose, reimagined, they respond to nakedness, to laying out, bareness, skinlessness. Their works take on the privileges of ultrasound, its jellied moves, sensing, revealing the skin, the surface, and also the deep, stretched-out interior of the prone body.

I focus on images of female-identified naked bodies reclining. The tradition of images of the reclining nude is overwhelmingly dominated by paintings of women by men. I am curious about how female artists look at female bodies, cisgender, and occasionally trans, and at the place of the reclining nude as genre, within their work. I am interested in how women look at and pose for each other, and in particular in the queering of subject and object positions this allows, the issues of vicariousness, or of choreography, this opens up. The women artists I look at occasionally also represent men reclining and I will sometimes look at these images for purposes of comparison. But my story is about reclining as a pose, an issue, of a particular energy for all who, in Beauvoir's terms, become women. I draw out sensations, emotions, micro-histories of grief, love, desire, mortality that are part of an archive of female-identified experiences which the artists I look at variously explore. This is not to claim these sensations and emotions as the exclusive preserve of women, but to attend to them as each in its own way singular, diverse,

yeux des femmes elle serait plutôt sereine ou alanguie. Mon père déroge à la règle. Hier nous sommes allés au théâtre. A la fin de la pièce, l'actrice s'enfonce dans la dépression et se suicide dans son bain, par électrocution, avec un sèche-cheveux. Sa tête repose sur le rebord de la baignoire. Rideau. Mon père trouve que ça se termine bien. Il voit une femme enfin apaisée qui se détend' (2016, 337) ['A group of people are asked to describe a painting of a reclining woman. Most men see her as sad or abandoned. Women, on the other hand, see her as serene, even languid. My father deviates from the norm. Yesterday we went to the theater. At the end of the play, the female protagonist sinks into a depression and electrocutes herself in her bath with a hairdryer. Her head rests on the edge of the tub. The curtain comes down. My father considers this a happy ending. He sees a woman relaxing, finally at peace' (2016, 337)]. Translations from the French are mine unless an English-language edition is referenced. In the case of film dialogue, English-language subtitles are cited.

opening, unexpected, and as each in some way related to an embodied experience of femininity.

This is largely a story about white women reclining, and this is one of its limits. The sphere of white privilege, historic and contemporary, is arguably a safer space from which to conceive possibilities for reimagining, re-engaging, emotions deriving from an image of passivity, abasement, or containment, possibilities that are grievous in other contexts, and especially in relation to images of the bodies of women of colour. White passivity is my subject, as I show white women looking at each other, posing for each other, working out and moving through the prostration and grief which horizontality may conjure.

The reclining nude, startlingly pallid from the Renaissance through to and including nineteenth-century Orientalist images of the odalisque and the harem, is a genre which has its part to play in a toxic idealisation of smooth, blemish-free, hairless, childlike, literally *white*-coloured skin.<sup>6</sup> This idealisation is challenged in the work explored here with attention to female-identified bodies as sexual, sensate, hairy, damp, blushing, marked, prehensile. It is challenged too in an envisaging of the morbid, markable, death-bound qualities of actual marmoreal skin. For the artists I examine, pallor and whiteness are dwelt on, skin is made luminous, and sometimes beautiful, in an optic which also involves recognition of the misogyny and racism which govern a sickly, blood-drained, stilling ideal.

A commitment behind this project is to open up for feeling, for reflection, images that envisage something more for the reclining nude, which explore the issues for relationality, alterity, respect for remoteness, and unknowing that the figure can conjure. I choose artists, and works, that are committed to thinking about engagement with an animate but sometimes unspeaking or unconscious other, a figure basking, lying, fallen, or asleep. I see the reclining nude with her listlessness as a figure for thinking about opacity, vulnerability, and estrangement. This touches on questions about knowing and unknowing, about telling one's own story or the story of another, that have preoccupied some strands of feminist philosophy and ethics. These issues are particularly charged in works of art that draw attention to the history and feelings of the living or dead woman who is represented naked, reclining.

In the *reflections* that follow, I devote time to four ways of approaching

6 For further discussion of the odalisque, and the history of representations of the harem, see DelPlato (2002).

reclining. The first, which is organised around *affect*, casts an eye over the tradition of the reclining nude and other idealised images of Venus and explores the ways in which feminists and writers on art have opened up ideas about the feelings of, and summoned by, historical nude images, upright, sitting, and reclining. The second moves towards modernity closing in on *horizontal*ity, the fall from the vertical, and the meanings that are held in this pose. The third, on *sleep*, opens questions about relationality and specifically the relations entertained with a sleeping or otherwise unconscious reclining other. The fourth reflection, pursuing these thoughts, evokes the feminist agenda of the book as a whole in reflections on *vicariousness*, on the feelings of standing in for someone else, of being painted, of having one's story told, of giving oneself over to the other, in passivity and inscrutability.

*four reflections on reclining: 1*

Lidia Guibert Ferrara has published a volume of images, *Reclining Nude*, which cascades from Giorgione's *Sleeping Venus* (1510) in Dresden to modern images of naked women and girls painted by Balthus and Lucian Freud. In the introduction, Frances Borzello writes: 'Although there are not painted predecessors for Giorgione's nude, there are hundreds of successors who fall into line behind her' (2002, 7). Borzello specifies that the reclining nude is an artistic genre (7). In her later volume, *The Naked Nude*, she details the meanings associated with that genre: 'In Venice in 1510 Giorgione's glorious invention, the *Sleeping Venus*, opened the door to the unapologetic and ideal female nude, a reclining woman, a beautiful and passive vision of perfection' (2012, 15). In thinking about the reclining nude as a genre associated with an ideal beauty, Borzello recognises her debts to, and departure from, Kenneth Clark's *The Nude*, and to his distinctions between the naked and the nude (in French *la nudité* and *le nu*). For Clark, there is exposure and discomfiting bareness in nakedness. As he says, 'To be naked is to be deprived of our clothes' (1960, 1), where the word 'nude' carries no discomfort for him.<sup>7</sup> Thinking about this move from nakedness to the nude, John Berger explains that 'a nude is not the starting point of a painting, but a way of seeing which the painting

7 As Flaminio Gualdoni writes in his *A History of the Nude*, 'Nudity in art is the chaste clothing of nakedness' (2012, 12).

achieves' (2008 [1972], 53).<sup>8</sup> Lynda Nead argues further that 'The female nude can [...] be understood as a means of containing femininity and female sexuality' (1992, 2).

In *The Naked Nude*, which breaks down the division between the ideal nude and other images of nakedness, Borzello writes: 'Artists today do not produce up-to-date versions of the reclining nude' (2012, 9). She argues that 'The birth of modernism signaled the death of the ideal nude' (20).<sup>9</sup> Looking at representations of the nude subsequent to the death of the ideal, she finds 'a very naked nude' (11) that she sees as a response to a contemporary feminist engagement with the body. One of her aims, like Nead's, is to think about the contestatory politics of identity in feminist art of the 1960s and after.<sup>10</sup>

Yet already in her work with Lidia Guibert Ferrara, Borzello engages affectively with paintings from the dominant and historic artistic genre. She opens up possibilities for fascination with these precursor images. Her account offers a form of triage of the poses and responses that may be adopted as these ways of seeing and containing are approached. She finds a different, and ambivalent, intimacy with these images. In this way she is expansive in her detailing of the variations even within the norms of the genre and her writing yields a sense of her own pleasure in the nudes viewed. She observes:

In no way are these reclining nudes homogeneous [...] They display the front of their body, the back of their body. They look at the spectator, they ignore the spectator, they sleep oblivious to the spectator's gaze. They are voluptuous, they are slim. Sometimes they lie in a landscape, their hummocks and hollows echoing nature itself, and sometimes they rest indoors, as luxuriously displayed as the costly fabrics on which they lie. Very few are completely naked. They wear a necklace, a bracelet, a hat. And they have hair. Not pubic hair but hair on their head, curling, flowing. (2002, 7)

8 Berger complicates the distinction between the naked and the nude: 'To be naked is to be without disguise' (2008 [1972], 54). He continues: 'To be on display is to have the surface of one's own skin, the hairs of one's own body, turned into a disguise which, in that situation, can never be discarded. The nude is condemned to never being naked. Nudity is a form of dress' (54).

9 This is a shift at the moment of modernity that Gualdoni considers too in the chapter 'Odalisques, Models, Prostitutes' (2012, 109–122).

10 She examines artists such as Ana Mendieta, Rineke Dijkstra, Elinor Carucci, Marlene Dumas, Jenny Saville, and Tracey Emin.

Borzello is drawn to velvet and silk, to the pearls of a necklace, and to lavish, sexual, flowing hair. There is some delicate sense of identification with these nudes as subjects. As she appraises these images, Borzello finds ways in which the naked women she looks at resist containment. In her response to the paintings, she reveals a sense of the imagined agency of the naked women represented.

For Borzello, individual nudes variously look back, remain distracted, or sleep oblivious. This account stretches to see the images holding, allowing, anticipating the reflections on relationality and eroticism I look at here. Reclining, in Borzello's account, is associated with lying, rest, and sleep, and with display, luxury, certain textures and sensations. She runs between various states of consciousness and bodily feeling as she looks at these nudes, her collective appraisal conjuring a Delvaux-esque landscape, a series of interiors, a pleasure dome, solely populated by reclining women. Borzello courts the possibility that these images are seductive, that the women they show are desirable.

Also responding to individual nudes, Berger considers what he believes to be some exceptions in the history of the nude in European painting. He argues that these images are set apart by the way in which affect inflects the relations in the image: 'There are a few exceptional nudes in the European tradition of oil painting [...] Indeed they are no longer nudes – they break the norms of the art-form; they are paintings of loved women, more or less naked' (2008 [1972], 57). In his television series *Ways of Seeing*, Berger includes beautiful images of light-caressed, tranquil women upright and reclining, Rubens's *Hélène Fourment in a Fur Coat* of c. 1538, Rembrandt's *Bathsheba at her Bath* finished in 1654, Georges de La Tour's *Woman Catching Fleas* painted in the 1630s. In his commentary he speaks about the paintings being 'as personal as love poems'. In each case, in each of these paintings of a naked woman, 'The way the painter has painted her includes her will and her intentions in the very structure of the image, in the very expression of her body and her face' (58). He makes no overt distinction between standing, sitting, and reclining nudes, embracing the expressivity of all. He shows Rembrandt's *Danaë*, painted between 1636 and 1643, where the naked woman reclines in bed, her body against pillows, her face irradiated, her arm outstretched. Looking at the portrait of *Hélène Fourment*, Berger remarks on 'the tenderness with which the exaggerated susceptibility of her skin has been painted' (61).

Berger's account is arresting, and its sensuality, its sense of the skin's susceptibility, grips me. He lets in an inadmissible sense that love and feeling can dynamise an image, making relationality, feelings about a

loved one, a part of the effect of the painting on the spectator, an exit from an economy of consumption and an enforced pursuit of ways of seeing. In his embrace of the images, Berger finds the feelings of the loved women also easily involved and apprehended.<sup>11</sup>

A more doubting account of the exceptionality of certain nudes is found in the work of Hélène Cixous. For Cixous, the tenderness of such paintings of women may be seen to derive not from assumed mutuality, shared feeling, but instead from the unfathomability of their female subjects. In her text 'Bathsheba or the Interior Bible', she looks at one of the images summoned by Berger, Rembrandt's *Bathsheba at her Bath*.<sup>12</sup> This is an image of sitting, bathing, rather than reclining, and is modern, domestic in its setting, despite the biblical theme. It looks out to my reclining nude images in its capture of stillness and *rêverie*. Like Berger, Cixous remarks on the singularity of the picture, writing, 'Cette nue n'est pas un nu' (2010, 47) ['this female nude is not a nude' (1998, 3)]. Bathsheba is not a nude, in the sense of the tradition, and she is not painted to be seen nude. In her nakedness, she is 'Bethsabée en vérité' (47) ['Bathsheba in truth' (3)]. Nudity is associated not only with love but with baring, with truth, a truth that is also unfathomable.

Cixous, like Berger, reclaims Rembrandt's Bathsheba, and responds to the delicacy and sumptuousness of the painting. Her work, and mine in this book, following in this line, reclaims for feminist inquiry, for an archive of bodily sensation and affect, an image from the past of European painting. Cixous responds to the image in the feminine, in feminine writing. Her sense of the painting is delirious in its sensuality: 'La chambre entière est chair. Sexe' (49) ['The entire room is flesh. Sex' (6)]. She writes: 'Les "rideaux" se sont soulevés comme les paupières, découvrant la prunelle claire: le corps lumineux de Bethsabée' (49) ['The "curtains" have raised themselves like eyelids, uncovering the clear pupil: the luminous body of Bathsheba' (6)]. She feels the texture

11 Jane Gallop explores this involvement of feeling, intimacy, and art, from the model's perspective as she writes in *Living with his Camera* about photographs of her taken by her lover Dick Blau. She notes: 'Before I was living with it, I was going out with his camera – he'd bring it along on dates' (2003, 2). She explores a split between her body photographed and her subjectivity as a writer looking at the images.

12 This essay on Rembrandt first appeared in a shorter form as 'Bethsabée ou la Bible intérieure' in the *Revue Franco Maria Ricci*, no. 43 (April 1993). A longer version appeared in English in *Stigmata* (1998) and a full French version has appeared more recently (Cixous, 2010, 47–55).

of Bathsheba's flesh, buttery: 'Avec du beurre de chair', 'Ce beurre blond rosé', 'Bethsabée nue' (50) ['the flesh's butter', 'rosy blond butter', 'Bathsheba nude' (6)]. The daubing of the paint, the coolness, the soft modelling and melting of her body, its smoothness, its impressionability, its pleasure all saturate Cixous's account. This apprehension of Bathsheba is queer, erotic. It holds an infant pleasure at the soft edibility of the mother. It captures a sense of unfixed wonder at Bathsheba's live newness, her new-born opening into the world. Berger finds in the aura of these exceptional nudes a lovers' discourse. Cixous unfixes that narrative in her softer, more plastic imagining.

For Cixous, Bathsheba's will and intentions are not held in the painting. Her feelings escape us as any clear mutuality is excluded: 'Elle ne nous regarde pas. Elle est de celles qui ne nous regardent pas' (50) ['She does not look at us. She is of those who do not look at us' (6)]. She continues: 'Elles s'éloignent, elles s'en vont lentement, une pensée les emporte vers l'inconnu, au loin' (50) ['They withdraw, they take their leave slowly, a thought carries them toward the unknown, far away' (7)]. In nested parentheses she lays bare her own thoughts and feelings as she looks at this image of a naked woman:

(A quoi pense une femme nue – son rapport à son corps, toujours la légère veille, comme un voile, le coup d'œil ou le regard. Toujours, quand je suis nue, je ne me regarde pas, je jette sur moi le regard – de l'autre, de toi/moi sur moi. Mais non, Bethsabée ne regarde pas son corps. Elle n'est pas devant elle-même. Elle n'est pas ici. Elle est partie, derrière ses paupières). (51)

[(What does a naked woman think about – her rapport to her body, always the slight attention, like a veil, the glance or the gaze. Whenever I'm naked, I don't look at myself, I cast a glance my way – the glance of the other, of you/me at me – But no, Bathsheba does not look at her body. She is not before herself. She is not here. She is gone, behind her eyelids). (7)]

These reflections yield the affirmation that Bathsheba's thoughts are not captured, they differ, and diverge again. For Cixous, Bathsheba's thoughts are the subject of the painting, and they are left unaccounted for. The painting gestures to unfathomability. Cixous lets imagining of this body in representation open into an apprehension of the other as ungraspable.

Berger and Cixous have been variously on the side of the tender, the erotic, the ethical. A last dialogue offers a sense of the darker feelings, the more morbid attachments fostered by images of women bared,

unconscious, stilled. In his study *Ouvrir Vénus: Nudité, Rêve, Cruauté* [*Opening Venus: Nudity, Dream, Cruelty*], Georges Didi-Huberman contests the fixity of the ideal nude in art, whilst pursuing thought about inscrutability. He writes of *The Birth of Venus* (painted in the mid-1480s) that ‘La Vénus de Botticelli est aussi belle qu’elle est nue. Mais elle est aussi reclose, aussi impénétrable qu’elle est belle. Dure est sa nudité: ciselée, sculpturale, minérale’ [‘Botticelli’s *Venus* is as beautiful as she is naked. But she is also closed in on herself, as impenetrable as she is beautiful. Her nudity is *hard*: chiselled, sculptural, mineral’] (1999, 11). Nakedness is not bareness here, or at least not accessibility. Didi-Huberman emphasises her marmoreal qualities, finding Venus ‘opaque et lumineuse, pâle comme une pierre’ [‘opaque and luminous, pale as a stone’] (11).<sup>13</sup> His reading shimmers with the feelings conjured by the textures in the painting, its moves from cold flesh to hair:

Le corps de Vénus semble celui d’un marbre très lisse et très froid, auquel l’artiste aurait seulement ajouté ce flot presque étranger, presque choquant, de la chevelure dorée, ainsi que ce bleu-vert vitrifié des yeux et ces quelques passages d’incarnat aux extrémités du corps, sur les joues, sur les lèvres. (11–12)

[Venus’s body seems like that of a very smooth and cold marble, to which the artist would only have added this almost strange, almost shocking flood of golden hair, and likewise this glassy blue-green of her eyes and these few streaks of rosininess at her extremities, on her cheeks, on her lips.]

His apprehension of her opacity, her gem-like hardness and chill, leads to an admission that she is impenetrable:

Mais le cœur de ce corps nous restera impénétrable, bien qu’il soit offert à nos regards dans sa plus entière nudité. Son espèce de solitude pensive l’éloigne de nous comme de sa propre existence sexuelle. (12)

[But the heart of this body will remain impenetrable to us, even though it is offered to our gaze in its fullest nakedness. The pensive solitude

13 Botticelli takes us back to *At Land*, in an image of a goddess born from the sea. In the opening section, ‘A Woman Seeing’, the first part of *The Legend of Maya Deren*, Millicent Hodson writes: ‘One photograph of Maya Deren became, even during her lifetime, the touchstone of her legend. It is a still from her first film, *Meshe of the Afternoon* (1943), made with Alexander Hammid, her husband. Deren’s uncanny likeness in the photograph to the Venus of Botticelli’s *Primavera* has been remarked on often among her contemporaries and our own’ (Clark, Hodson, and Neiman, 1985, ix).

she exhibits removes her from us as it removes her from her own sexual existence.]

She is elusive. Botticelli's Venus is removed from the viewer but, unlike Bathsheba, she is also removed from herself, and her own pleasure in her body.

Didi-Huberman explores how the containment of the naked body, its sexuality, in the ideal image of the nude, can be particularly morbid, death-bound. In this ideal there is a fascination with a body that is still, smooth, pale, because it is dead. He draws on another Botticelli nude image, this one of a naked woman chased and slaughtered, lying with her back cut open, from *The Story of Nastagio degli Onesti*, Botticelli's series of panel paintings from 1482–1483 in the Prado. He finds in these panel pictures 'trace de cette *charnière masquée, inquiétante, où le toucher de Thanatos vient épouser celui d'Eros*' ['a trace of this *masked, uncanny hinge* where the touch of Thanatos is wedded with the touch of Eros'] (26). He looks for 'ce côté déchirant, tranchant' ['this agonising, cutting aspect'] (37) in the nude image. For Didi-Huberman: 'être nu, se mettre nu, c'est avant toute chose *sacrifier sa chair, la soumettre, la mortifier*' ['to be naked, to strip naked, is above all to *sacrifice one's flesh, to submit it, to mortify it*'] (53). This opens to further senses of nakedness in mortification and penitence, as much as in passivity and eroticism.

As it looks at literal, violent openings of the body, feeling the touching point between Eros and Thanatos, *Ouvrir Vénus* moves on to the 'openable' anatomical figures of Clemente Susini, eighteenth-century wax nudes with cascading human hair, decorative pearls, and dissected organs. Looking at one anatomical Venus, Didi-Huberman emphasises her life-like quality:

l'échelle naturelle, la pose générale, la 'chaleur' intrinsèque de la cire, son admirable modelé, la texture de la peau, le coloris 'vivant' (qui vient du 'dedans', la cire étant teintée dans la masse, et donc appelle un fantasme de l'animation), l'étrange familiarité de la soie, des perles, du divan de velours, des cheveux, de la toison. (106)

[the life-size scale, the general pose, the intrinsic 'warmth' of the wax, its admirable modelling, the texture of the skin, the 'living' colouring (which comes from the 'interior', the wax being dyed in its mass, so conjures a fantasy of animation), the strange familiarity of the silk, the pearls, the velvet couch, the hair, the pubic down.]

He speaks of this Venus as 'une effigie à *désirer toucher*' ['an effigy to *desire to touch*'] (106, his emphasis). This comes from the matter of

her parts – wax, silk, pearls, hair – all inhabiting some interim realm between living and dead, animal and mineral. His apprehension of her, tender, like Cixous with Bathsheba, conjures her as a three-dimensional vision of the reclining nude.

Discussing the image, Didi-Huberman investigates her iterations. He looks at the closed form of Venus where the shutting of her torso door leaves her apparently intact. He looks at an open image of her ribcage and flayed breast. He considers a deeper image, below the ribcage, of her heart and the coils of her alimentary canal. The deepest image shows her ovaries and womb revealing a curled foetus. He describes the line of the compartment which opens as ‘un sillon de cruauté qui part du sexe, qui suit l’aîne et se prolonge jusque sous l’aisselle’ [‘a groove of cruelty which runs from the sex, following the groin and going right up to the armpit’] (108). As the upright figure is stretched out, first in the Botticelli painting, and then in the anatomical examples, the ideal image is made victim to a violent opening, a rupture of surface, skin, and flesh which sets in train a relay of feelings around living and dying, impenetrability and violation, that Didi-Huberman traces through Freudian notions of the Uncanny.

Didi-Huberman’s image of opening Venus offers a reminder of the disavowal of the sensate, damageable, operative interior of the body achieved in silken, smooth-surfaced images of the reclining nude. The anatomical figures show that the soft wax figure has an operating interior. She is anatomically accurate, as scientific modes of laying bare her hidden depths reveal. Didi-Huberman’s ideas about opacity and interiority, about the death-drive as well as desire, shadow my thoughts on the reclining nude whom I imagine variously as erotic, tangible, pregnant, sensate, and as numb, morbid, sick, lifeless. This array of responses, this excoriating set of feelings, is within the affective possibilities opened up by reclining as figure, by prone images. The artworks I explore open themselves to this range of feelings, a passionate response to reclining.

*four reflections on reclining: 2*

In his first book on nymphs, *Ninfa Moderna*, following his work on Botticelli, Didi-Huberman looks at the erotic, unsettling figures that survive into modernity. He draws a line from the Renaissance, seeing an affective heritage that illuminates returning images of the reclining nude. As he remarks, nymphs in art are sometimes seen reclining, amongst other poses:

Aux Nymphes de la tradition, déjà, il arrive bien des choses, et l'iconographie classique nous les montre en toutes les situations possibles: assises ou debout, à la pose ou à la course, alanguies près d'une source ou endormies dans une grotte. (2002, 11)

[Many things happen already to the nymphs of tradition, and classical iconography shows them to us in all possible positions: sitting or standing, still or running, stretched out by a spring or sleeping in a grotto.]

In these various poses they are sexually vulnerable and also seductive, ravishing. Looking at paintings by Bellini and Titian, Giorgione, Correggio, Didi-Huberman summons images of Venus, Danaë, and Leda. He glimpses *Ninfa* in Nerval's *Aurélia*, Mallarmé's *Hérodiade*, and Breton's *Nadja*. He sees her return in the heroines of hysteria, 'Anna, Emma ou Dora' (7).<sup>14</sup>

Nymphs are multiple, uncanny, in movement and stasis, fluid, fleeting, and sometimes marmoreal like a fossil. In modernity, Didi-Huberman traces their fall, 'l'irréversible chute de *Ninfa*, son mouvement vers le sol' [*Ninfa's* unavoidable fall, her movement towards the ground'] (11). Her erotic abandon gives way to a descent, a slippage, a lowering: 'elle s'abandonne aux "basses forces" du désir et de l'horizontalité' ['she abandons herself to the "lower forces" of desire and horizontality'] (12). He sees this fall as at once sexual and mortal, ending in the rejected, the abject, the formless. Didi-Huberman's vision of the lineage of *Ninfa*, its relation to the reclining nude, and to latterly fallen, carnal, horizontal forms is apt for my work and I follow it but add a feminist incline.

Didi-Huberman's thinking focuses not on the nymph fallen, but on the draped fabric which has clothed her, the cloth the only residue of her flesh, a remainder and reminder of her pose. He speaks of Charcot's hysterics as 'ces malheureuses nymphes modernes' (7) and brings in line their inspiration of Freud on neurosis and of Aby Warburg in his work on the surviving image. As he references a subject of Freud's case histories, Anna O., or speaks of a woman artist, Ana Mendieta, as a contemporary *Ninfa* (2015, 166–167), for Didi-Huberman the nymph remains as a figure, a form. My work asks questions about the feelings and sensations, the histories, the dreams, of *Ninfa's* iterations, of the

14 In his later *Ninfa Profunda*, looking at drawings by Victor Hugo, Didi-Huberman describes 'un schéma classique de nymphe endormie que l'on trouve chez Titien, Velázquez, Rembrandt, Goya' ['a classical schema of the sleeping nymph one finds in Titian, Velázquez, Rembrandt, Goya'] (2017, 34).

women, models and artists, who repeat her poses. Pausing before the dissolving of carcass into carapace, I remain with the fall of the body, its lowering to horizontality, finding a move, a mood, that returns in reclining figures in later artworks.

In *The Optical Unconscious*, Krauss explores Dalí's *Le Phénomène de l'extase* [*Phenomenon of Ecstasy*]:

To represent ecstasy, Dalí finds, it is enough to rotate the head 180 degrees, to disorient the human axis from its vertical alignment – eyes, then nose, then mouth – to a horizontal in which, curiously, the mouth is now uppermost. (1993, 156)

This horizontality is exacted upon women, a series of nymphs, nudes, falling. Krauss continues:

[Dalí's] *Phenomenon of Ecstasy* is a photographic collection of such heads, which, like the Salpêtrière hysterics, are for the most part women. They are women falling, falling from the vertical into the horizontal. (156)

She reflects: 'How is it that with that simple implication of falling, ecstasy is produced as image?' (156). The answer comes in Bataille:

The scenario, as it were, for this collage had been published in 1930 by Georges Bataille in the 'Dictionary' project ongoing in *Documents*. It came as the 'definition' for 'Mouth'. For animals, Bataille writes, the mouth is a 'prow'. It is the foremost projection of that sleek horizontal that, like the ship's silhouette on the sea, comprises the animal's natural geometry. Mouth/anus. A straight line. The formal relations of the alimentary drive. Which every other animal knows how to read. By standing up, the human being has abandoned that simple, direct geometry and assumed, in his verticality, a more confusing form. (156)

Falling, turning, lying prone disrupt verticality and open out a new apprehension of the body, a different alignment, a different stretch and order, animality, a debased, vacuous, erotic stretching from mouth to anus. The body is emptied, newly pliable and elastic, fillable, open, abject, floundering.

Via Bataille, Krauss associates this falling away from the vertical with affect, the intensities of Didi-Huberman's Eros and Thanatos:

this architecture of the human will be transformed in moments of greatest pain or greatest pleasure. Then, the subject will grip his or her neck and, throwing the head fully back, will reassume that position in which it is the mouth that is at the end of the vertebral column. (156)

Convulsion, rictus, ravishment disrupt verticality, aligning human anatomy rather with the animal, with a new splaying out. For Krauss, with Dalí,

Rotating the head to produce the mouth as the human 'prow' is not an elevation of the mouth but a lowering of the human structure, which has, by assuming the animal 'geometry', fallen into the horizontal. (156)

Her thinking moves with animal forms, to the formless, the operations of the *informe*:

To attain the formal coherence of the animal's structure is [...] to descend into a condition of *informe*. For it is to blur the distinctions between human and animal and thus to produce a formal rupture that goes deeper than any apparent form. (156–157)

The body is known again falling and fallen, succumbing to ecstatic openness and vulnerability, an animality at the limits of the human. Krauss writes: 'Rotate the image of the body and you produce a different geography. A geography that undoes the *form* of the human form' (157).

It denatures Krauss's work on horizontality to bring it back to the tradition of Renaissance and modernist images of the reclining nude. In later work with Yve-Alain Bois, Krauss writes about Cy Twombly's *Olympia* (1957):

Twombly's painting rehearses the whole trajectory of modernism, with its beginnings in the erotics of a traditional, classical relation to the image that Manet's *Olympia* itself had acted to transform. 'Fuck Olympia' is, we might say, the form through which Manet's painting stripped away the veils of denial and self-deception under which the thrill of libidinal possession was carried on in the name of disinterested pleasure and ideal beauty. (Bois and Krauss, 1997, 148)

Krauss points to Manet's revelation of the sexual contract in *Olympia* (1863) and his contempt for Olympia. In Twombly, she finds an undoing of the classical images of the reclining nude:

The narrative suggestions of the dead Olympia, or of the death of Olympia, opened up the scarred and desecrated surface of the painting from the back, as it were, excavating a space within and beyond it, a space into which we pass imaginatively as onto a stage. It is a stage inhabited by ghosts – the long-departed gods of classical mythology and, even closer to us, the dead figure of Manet's painting, the one that inaugurated the whole history of modernist ambition itself now curiously liquidated, declared a myth. (147)

Olympia is figured not only as fucked, but as a dead image, liquidated.

I return to this stage of ghosts seeing the reclining nude reimagined, half living, half dead, as she appears in a series of lens-based artworks. Some of these take *Olympia* as reference point, others only the precursor images. Moving differently from Twombly, and Krauss, the women artists explored here return to this figure to find images, bodily poses, which speak of autonomous, autoerotic loveliness, and also of ravishment, of depression and loss, of moves to self-annihilation and suicide. The figure of the reclining nude, revived, focuses a range of affective intensities, from a stage of ghosts, between living and dying.

Looking back at a Surrealist variation on the reclining nude, Max Ernst's *La Puberté proche* [*Approaching Puberty*] (1921), Krauss intimates that this can be seen as part of a love narrative. The image speaks to Gala, the painter's departing lover: '*Ernst's achingly beautiful overpainting called La puberté proche, dedicated to her and executed during the six weeks between the time she left and the turn of the year, is a monument to her nakedness, real or fantasized*' (1993, 45, her italics).

Comparing the work to Ernst's other experiments with collaged material, Krauss suggests:

Now, late in 1921, for this monument to Gala, the page from an illustrated catalogue or some other kind of book did not seem to have satisfied Ernst. Instead his readymade ground had had to have been a photograph ... of a nude woman, lying stretched out upon a couch, her arched body supported by one elbow, the other arm reaching for her head. (46)

Krauss writes of the erotic provenance of the image, situating it in relation to the erotic imaging that is also a point of reference for the modernist painters of reclining nudes, Manet and Courbet. As she says, 'it had floated into his view from out of the vast commercial production of turn-of-the-century erotica' (46). She shows how he renegotiated the meanings of the image: 'He now remade it, in order to dedicate it anew' (46).<sup>15</sup>

Krauss's interest is in the new verticality of the figure: 'it had been made newly pendent, a weightless vertical suspended in the strangely material, velvety ether of the gouache that covers the surface of the

15 Krauss pursues her examination of Ernst's recyclings of the reclining nude, 'its final avatar, perhaps, the clutched knees and crossed ankles of the nude that Ernst will lift from Cabanel's *Birth of Venus* and bury just below the screenlike surface of his own *Garden of France*' (1993, 82).

photograph like a hardened skin' (47). Her evocation of the gouache embraces contact between the nude and her environment, as if the gouache is felt against the outlines of the naked body. Her formal analysis takes me into the sensorium of the image, its laying bare of skin that is silken, slippery, and smooth, like silver nitrate. Krauss does not address the present or absent thoughts of the reclining nude, of Gala herself. For Krauss, this pendent figure fleshes out the phallus, the fantasy of having and being the sex of the mother. The image is a monument to a lost woman, a fetishistic hanging, dandling of her naked body, holding onto it, making it vertical, graspable.

If I see women artists reviving the reclining nude, I see the late embrace of this figure, by contrast, as a move away from the phallic, from verticality, however difficult it may be to attach the phallic and non-phallic too tightly to particular axes. I see the embrace of horizontality and its attached emotions and states of being as an anti-patriarchal gesture, as a move towards different modes of being, attachment, melancholy, anomie, and pleasure.

The sculptor Louise Bourgeois offers a sense of the meanings, and attached emotions, for her, in horizontality and verticality: 'Horizontality is a desire to give up, to sleep and be passive, to retreat. Verticality is affirmation, an attempt at a peaceful compromise and a desire for acceptance. Hanging and floating are states of ambivalence and doubt' (cited in Meyer-Thoss, 2016, 62–63).<sup>16</sup> A pose, a positioning draws with it a feeling, an emotional state. The energy of Bourgeois's work, material and psychic, is directed in the move from the passive to the active, as she writes, in line with Deren in *At Land*, that 'The move from the passive to the active is life itself. It means survival through your own will' (125). Moves from passivity to activity are felt in her very work with matter, as Christiane Meyer-Thoss illuminates in her conversations with the artist. She asks Bourgeois about 'the silence, the inertness', 'the deep sleep' (115) of the materials she uses, and Bourgeois replies: 'I'm very proud, very pleased, to be able to disturb that sleep. And yes, I get the materials' dreams, though not in a narrative way, or in a symbolic way. Perhaps in an unconscious way?' (115).

Bourgeois's work offers resources for dallying with all those states, horizontality, verticality, and hanging, floating, being unhinged in

<sup>16</sup> As Christiane Meyer-Thoss writes, citing Bourgeois: 'Her sculptures are monuments of "the devastating effects of emotions you go through." They penetrate and expose raw emotions' (2016, 47, her emphasis).

between. It is in the lability of the moves between these states that the affective range of her work is felt. Its sensitivity, its aptness, and plangent honesty come in its openness to these different states of being and its ability to make these felt in work with matter and in the choreographing of somatic and other forms. She is interested in ‘the heartbeat, breathing, perspiration’ (124). She is alive to febrile, fluttering sensation, the fragility of a sculpture offering ways of feeling vulnerability, passivity (and so, for Bourgeois, overcoming them). Meyer-Thoss suggests that ‘Fragility, as a conceptual element in her oeuvre grew out of the insight that emotional relationships are vulnerable, unreliable, subject to change’ (66).

I draw from Bourgeois’s sensitivity to these different states to offer different affirmations of horizontality and its related senses of giving up, being passive, sleeping, and retreating. In their conversations, Meyer-Thoss and Bourgeois anticipate the pleasure, anarchic, masochistic, freeing, in these images. Meyer-Thoss does this through the novels of Marguerite Duras. She writes: ‘Duras’s “falling figure,” usually a woman, illuminates Louise Bourgeois’s sculpture’ (57). This falling figure, Anne-Marie Stretter, Lol V. Stein, is seen abandoned in the moment, in risk, as a “mad” happiness swells in her’ (57). Bourgeois speaks of her own pleasure in an image of a woman cut in half, a theme, for her, of the passive state:

It reminds me of the women, the lavandières in France, whom I used to see as a child. When they washed tapestries in the river, these girls knelt inside little boxes. You couldn’t see their lower bodies; they looked as if they were cut in two. That gave me a fantastic pleasure, because I myself wanted to cut them in two. I wanted to move from the passive to the active, since I experienced myself as cut in two. (126)

I am interested in this image of reorganised bodily geography, prostration. I contemplate whether there is a different pleasure in the body undone, divided, stretched out, in horizontality, a release of feelings of being cut in two through a giving up to passivity. Bourgeois’s move is sadistic in its bid to damage the body of the other woman. I ask whether these feelings can be suspended, too, in a different apprehension of, and approach to, the reclining other. This leads to the third reflection on reclining, where I think about *sleep*, about how to approach the other who is prostrate and unconscious.

*four reflections on reclining: 3*

In *Tombe de sommeil* [*The Fall of Sleep*], Jean-Luc Nancy offers a reflection on sleep that extends thoughts about falling. Falling, the fall into sleep, sleep itself as fall into oneself, as fall away from oneself in unconsciousness are implied in his writing. In the latter parts of the text, through the proximity between *tomber*, to fall, and *tombeau*, tomb, in French, that fall is figured also as temporary annihilation, and as death. He writes: ‘Lorsque je tombe dans le sommeil, lorsque je sombre, tout est devenu indistinct, le plaisir et la peine, le plaisir lui-même et sa propre peine, la peine elle-même et son propre plaisir’ (2007, 12) [‘When I fall into sleep, when I sink, everything has become indistinct, pleasure and pain, pleasure itself and its own pain, pain itself and its own pleasure’ (2009, 1)]. Krauss sees the architecture of the body knocked sideways as an expression of acute pleasure and pain, ecstasy. Nancy shows those sensations themselves foundering, losing their distinction from each other, in the fall away from consciousness. For Nancy, in sleep (in words recalling Deren), ‘je deviens à moi-même le gouffre et la plongée, l’épaisseur des eaux profondes et la descente du corps noyé qui sombre à la renverse’ (19) [‘I myself become the abyss and the plunge, the density of deep water and the descent of the drowned body sinking backward’ (5)].<sup>17</sup> He registers the assault on subjectivity that takes place in sleep, the altering of the *je*: ‘Je dors et ce *je* qui dort ne peut plus le dire qu’il ne saurait dire qu’il est mort. C’est donc un autre qui dort à ma place’ (19) [‘I sleep and this *I* that sleeps can no more say it sleeps than it could say that it is dead. So it is another who sleeps in my place’ (5)]. There arises the surreal image of another who is sleeping in my place, an unbidden sleeper who has slipped in, in place of me. He or she is another, reposing, unknown form of myself. Nancy speaks of being, in sleep, ‘*en même temps* moi-même et autre chose que moi-même’ (22) [‘*at the same time* myself and something other than myself’ (7)]. In conjuring sleep, he speaks of the subtraction of functions: ‘je suis soustrait à tous mes aspects et à toutes mes fonctions, sauf à cette fonction de dormir’ (20) [‘I am removed from all aspects of me and from all my functions except the function of sleeping’ (6)]. The words are reminiscent of the account of suspension of subjectivity, in

17 Sleep also figures in Deren. In his study of *Meshes of the Afternoon*, Rhodes draws attention to the ‘female protagonist asleep on the chintz armchair, outside the picture window the landscape of Hollywood arrayed before her unseeing eyes’ (2011, 67).

pain, in Nancy's *L'Intrus* [*The Intruder*]: 'Je finit/s par n'être plus qu'un fil ténu, de douleur en douleur et d'étrangeté en étrangeté' (2000, 40) ['I end/s by being nothing but a tenuous thread, from pain to pain and from strangeness to strangeness']. In sleep, this subtracted strangeness reaches beyond the limits of the human: 'On dira qu'il s'agit d'une fiction végétative. Je végète, je deviens un moi végétatif, presque végétal' (2007, 20) ['Some will say it's a matter of a vegetative functioning. I vegetate, I become a vegetative self, almost vegetable' (2009, 6)].

Krauss speaks of a stretching out of animality along the horizontal axis. Nancy, in contemplating the fall into sleep, moves further in thinking non-human life, away from mammalian, and even amphibious forms, to the life of plants. His words, *végétatif* (vegetative) and *végétal* (vegetable, as an adjective), draw together the bare life of coma states and the apparently unconscious life of plants.<sup>18</sup> He draws out these liminal suspended states, states of illness and pain, states of unconsciousness and sleeping, meditating on his own subtraction from himself. His imagery of sleep and dream echoes literary precedents where a man watches over a sleeping woman.

In his poem 'La Dormeuse', Paul Valéry reflects on change in matter in the female sleeper, addressing her as: 'Dormeuse, amas doré d'ombres et d'abandon' ['Sleeper, gilded mass of shadows and abandon']. Her body is abstracted. She is a mass of shadows, given over and unknown, fallen away from herself in sleep. A similar fathoming of the other removed in sleep, slippery, serene, is found in Constantin Brâncuși's *Sleeping Muse* of 1910: an orb of bronze. This muse is later submerged by Pierre Huyghe in *Zoodram 5 (after 'Sleeping Muse' by Constantin Brâncuși)* from 2011, where the sculpture sleeps underwater in a live marine ecosystem, with arrow crabs. Huyghe allows a different transit, inhabitation, and aquatic movement to take place around the sleeping face. Her sleep, a sea change, is estranged in this aquarium space of non-mammalian life.<sup>19</sup>

This imagining of the sleeping woman sinking into non-human realms returns in Proust's *La Prisonnière* [*The Prisoner*]. The narrator says of his sleeping lover: 'Elle n'était plus animée que de la vie inconsciente des végétaux, des arbres, vie plus différente de la mienne, plus étrange

18 In *Roots* (1943), Frida Kahlo offers reflections on reclining and plant life, on the vegetative and the vegetable, as she reimagines a hybrid root system, a thread of vessels and leaves, in her conjuring of her own injured, reclining body.

19 Martine Beugnet offers a different example of the observation of a woman sleeping in Andy Warhol's *Poor Little Rich Girl* (1965): 'La caméra reste ensuite

et qui cependant m'appartenait davantage' (1989, vol. 3, 578) ['She was animated now only by the unconscious life of plants, of trees, a life more different from my own, more alien, and yet one that belonged more to me' (1996 [1992] 72)]. Like Nancy, he sees the sleeping other as plant-like, unconscious. Yet this brings not an apprehension of her, but an admission that, so deeply unconscious, she seems to belong to him more. She is more his than when she is awake with her opacities, her infidelities. The narrator succumbs to delirious attraction for this plant-like, languid, half living other.<sup>20</sup>

In her film *La Captive* [*The Captive*] (2000) Chantal Akerman reprises Proust's image of Albertine asleep.<sup>21</sup> Her scene of vigil beside a sleeping woman, Ariane (Sylvie Testud), emphasises the otherness, the unknowability, of the loved one. The scene is preceded by a conversation between Simon (Stanislas Merhar) and two young women in love with one another. One of these women says:

Quand on ferme les yeux, on pense à qui on veut. On est libre. On pense à ce qu'on veut. On oublie avec qui on est, on s'en va. Puis quand on ouvre les yeux c'est fini. C'est parfois très bizarre parce que quand on ouvre les yeux on se trouve avec quelqu'un qui soudain est un étranger, plus étranger qu'avant.

[Eyes closed, you think of who you like. You're free, to think of what you like. Oblivious, you drift off, you open your eyes, it's over. It's weird to open one's eyes on someone who's suddenly a stranger, stranger than before.]

Her words, apprehending the unknowing in love, and openness to fantasy, offer a prelude to the sleeping scenario.

Ariane is asleep in a blue shawl with her arm stretched out. The small canopy bed where she sleeps makes this a scene of enchantment from a

fixée pendant plus de trois minutes sur son visage presque entièrement immobile (Sedgwick fait un léger mouvement, sans ouvrir les yeux), étendue laiteuse à la surface de laquelle les traits sont à peine esquissés' ['The camera next stays fixed for more than three minutes on her almost entirely motionless face (Sedgwick makes a small movement, without opening her eyes), a milky screen on whose surface the features are barely sketched'] (2017, 88).

20 In *The Albertine Workout*, Anne Carson points to the narrator's delusion: 'There are four ways Albertine is able to avoid becoming entirely possessable in volume 5: by sleeping, by lying, by being a lesbian or by being dead' (2014, 19).

21 I return to the sleeping scenes in *La Captive* in Wilson (2019).

fairly tale.<sup>22</sup> Simon speaks to his lover but she does not wake or reply. In a closer shot he moves to touch her. He reaches towards her with tenderness. His longing is rhymed with the camera movements as his vision of Ariane asleep comes more closely into the frame. Akerman creates an image of extreme delicacy figured in the fragile white ribbons of Ariane's gown, her pearl earrings, a pulse visible in her throat. The silk of her dress, her pearls, recall once-living matter. Ariane unconscious, between living and dying, is like a sleeping muse. Simon climbs on her, crouching. He touches her. She does not wake. The shot is held a luxuriously long time. The scene is tantalising as her sleep resists him. She moves and makes a small sound which impels him to wake her.

Simon's approach to Ariane implies insistence, an imposition of will. Prone, unconscious, Ariane pliable, plant-like, beyond the human, strangely unsettles Simon's grasping of her. She makes departures in dream. She is held, fawned on. Reclining, asleep, she slips Simon's grasp, leaving him in the grip of tender and violent feelings. Sleep, as in Nancy, is a way of absenting herself. Ariane is absent now, oblivious, and unfathomable in her reclining form.<sup>23</sup> Akerman undoes the secure sense, for Proust's narrator, that Albertine belongs to him more when she is asleep.

22 In her beautiful reading of *La Captive*, Alison Criddle (2016) makes comparisons between this sequence and an image by Esther Teichmann, *Untitled*, from *Fractal Scars, Salt Water and Tears*. The back of a naked woman reclining is seen on a sky-blue sheet. Gold velvet curtains on a canopy bed enclose the scene. The image is one of withdrawal and anonymity, its sheer blue stripe making it poised, unearthly. See also Carol Mavor (2012, 23) on stillness in Teichmann.

23 A difficult and darker engagement with the image of the sleeping lover is realised in Julia Leigh's film *Sleeping Beauty* (2011), where in a fantasy brothel, Lucy, a young woman, is paid to sleep drugged beside male clients. One focus of the film is on the relation of this work to other lower-paid jobs she takes as she is going through college. But the psychological violence inflicted upon her as she accompanies men who touch her unconscious body is felt in the latter stages of the film. A similar scenario is found in the Japanese text by Yasunari Kawabata, which I know in its illustrated French edition *Les Belles Endormies* [*Sleeping Beauties*] (1997). The narrative perspective offers a sense of the appeal of the youthfulness of the sleeping girls, the smell of their skin, their flower-like softness, and capacity to conjure memories of the mother's breast and of beloved daughters. The sleeping girl offers space for abandonment to memory and a fantasy refuge at the end of life. Leigh's film also emphasises the interiority of Lucy (Emily Browning). This is shown first in laboratory scenes where she consents to having tubing run down into her stomach for paid medical experiments.

A feminist apprehension of the difficulty of approach to the sleeping other is realised also in the artwork *The Maybe* (1995) created by Tilda Swinton and Cornelia Parker. The live actress lay in a glass case, prone and sometimes sleeping.<sup>24</sup> Swinton herself situated the work in relation to the recent loss of her close friend Derek Jarman (Jones, Swinton, and Scanlan, 2012, 473). For her, this is not a mourning project, but one that is attentive to different states of life.<sup>25</sup>

Swinton evokes her work on the iteration of *The Maybe* in Rome: ‘I started to contemplate the encasement of the child in utero, the vulnerability/security/passivity/activity of this stage of life, this limbo state, this promise, this maybe’ (474). The glass case is reimagined as a womb, a warm membrane, luminous in ultrasound images. From her conjuring of vulnerability and security, she moves to images from infancy and childhood:

a simple experience from childhood, very likely shared by most: the moment of being on the verge of sleep and largely ignored and hearing someone whisper ‘Is she asleep?’ and the thrill of someone answering ‘Yes’ ... the sensation of a blanket being laid incredibly softly onto one, surely more softly than ever in ‘life’ ... the feeling of being between worlds/ states ... an alien, visible, but not truly encountered as when awake. (475)<sup>26</sup>

Her words are close to Nancy as she speaks of this nearly sleeping self, a dozy child, as ‘an alien, visible’. This summoning of a state near sleep

24 She was dressed, not naked. However, the conditions of viewing her recumbent open some of the themes explored here.

25 Looking at life and death, Amelia Jones argues: ‘the iconic image of Swinton in the glass case has come to represent a signature moment in the exploration of the links between the “live” (performance art) and the “death” of the gallery space (its tendency to freeze in time and space that which is displayed there)’ (2012, 469). Jones cites Parker saying of Swinton, ‘I created an installation around her in the form of a reliquary’ (471). For Jones, ‘Swinton’s “death” (her making of herself into an object) was, like the life-in-death of sleeping beauty, only partial as visitors could see her breathing, her eyelids move and (in fact) she was often awake and feigning sleep’ (470).

26 Clarice Lispector describes a similar experience in *Near to the Wild Heart*: ‘Then the man said: “Look, your daughter’s almost asleep ... Be kind: put her to bed”. But she wasn’t asleep. It was just that half closing her eyes, letting her head fall to one side, was a bit like if [*sic*] it was raining, everything mixed lightly together. That way when she lay down and pulled up the sheet she’d be more accustomed to sleeping and wouldn’t feel the dark weighing on her chest’ (2012 [1943]; 20–21).

slips into an image of being viewed sleeping, ‘the experience of being witnessed sleeping ... so run of the mill in the life of children and lovers, so rare for everyone else’ (475). These are the states of sleeping, variously precarious and secure, imagined in *The Maybe*. Swinton attaches to them consolatory modes of attention.

The performance leads her to think about moments when ‘we see ourselves mirrored back at us, in all our privacy, in all our skinlessness’ (474). She attaches ideas of compassion, rather than power, to the scenario where one can watch someone who does not look back. For Swinton, the act of entering a state that is open to vulnerability and passivity is not to imperil or objectify oneself, but to open a new form of sharing and complicity, a shared openness, tenderness, rawness, impressionability. Lying down in the glass, she invites viewers to see her, asleep.

The project is touched by her experiences of accompanying Jarman near the end of his life. She says: ‘I thought about a kind of loving attention – pretty much unconditional – that is accorded only to those sleeping, ailing, dying or dead’ (475). A line runs from the security of the womb to the sleepiness of children, the sleeping otherness of lovers, to the prone and vulnerable states of the ill and dying. Swinton says of herself as a sleeping subject:

I thought about how tired I was ... how much I longed to sleep ... how much time I had spent over the past two years at the side of my friends, prone and living – although maybe only just – and how energetically engaging it had been, how exhausting, how inspiring to life. (476)

Sleep is a sanctuary after this work of care. Sleep offers a suspension of this loving self, a sense that she can be held, unconscious, like a child, in the loving gaze of those who visit. The project speaks of that sensual need to fall away from the self. Yet the performance also takes its toll on the body of the artist. Amelia Jones explains that ‘she had to psychologically recover from the extreme nature of her experience’ (480). The words describing the labour of the project, the emotions conjured, open up all the ways in which sleep, and the figure of the sleeping other, can be opened up differently. These are the different energies and economies of care, consolation, grief, life, eroticism I consider here.<sup>27</sup>

27 Griselda Pollock (2018) offers important reflections on ‘lying down’, exploring works by Sonia Khurana and Sutapa Biswas. For Pollock: ‘Lying down “speaks” the weight of the trauma of psychological dereliction in the pathos of that act of giving way, desiring the support of bare earth or hard ground, or giving into a wish

*four reflections on reclining: 4*

This last reflection pursues thoughts about the sleeping other, through ideas of *vicariousness*, and the questions of self and other this opens up. Vicariousness implies taking the place of a person, acting as a substitute. It can be about performing or suffering in the place of another. It can be about sensing or enjoying the experience of another, or others, by imaginative participation. It is involved in the ways in which women lay each other bare, in the ways in which women look at each other naked. The represented figure acts as unfathomed portrait of the self and figure of the seduction or pathos of the other. Vicariousness emerges too from the affective and ethical concerns of this book. Feeling with and feeling for are involved with each other, as I look towards modes of thinking that also suspend empathy, that approach possibilities of unknowing.

In feminist philosophy Adriana Cavarero has approached questions of vicariousness and the telling of life narratives with particular delicacy.<sup>28</sup> In *Relating Narratives: Stories and Selfhood*, she explores how I know my own story by someone else telling it to me. Through Nancy, she thinks about how I depend on someone else's narrative, since 'one always appears to someone' (2000, 20). This requires a giving over, a lack of mastering oneself, a form of dependence or submission, where 'an identity constitutively exposed to others is also unmasterable' (21). Cavarero's emphasis is on storytelling, narrative, but her thinking encompasses a bodily encounter, a dimensional, snug gauging of self, as she speaks of the 'self now rendered palpable by the story' (13). For Cavarero, where philosophy can tell me *what* I am, the privilege of storytelling is to tell me *who* I am, to let me feel. The story, told by

to escape into unconsciousness or sleep that might also feel like death. Lying down takes the artist – and the viewer – to the borderline where subjectivity is under such pressure that it experiences itself as becoming object'. Her work identifies the political invocation in the gesture but looks away from the erotic, which I explore. I am grateful to Jules O'Dwyer for sending me this article.

28 In her most recent work, Cavarero (2016) thinks beautifully about a 'postural ethics' and a different relation to rectitude and uprightness. She looks at 'inclining', and 'inclinations', rather than reclining as I do. Her work is inspiring to mine in her thought about vulnerability and dependence, but her model is specifically maternal. She looks at Leonardo's *The Virgin and Child with St Anne* (1503–1519) and the inclination of the Madonna, arguing: 'the posture of self-sacrificing maternity thus becomes a figure that can keep in check the vertical system in general and the verticalized subject in particular' (102).

another, vicariously gives me a form. Through the story I become, I sense, what I already was. With grace, Cavarero thinks through the uniqueness of each individual:

Every human being is unique, an unrepeatable existence, which [...] neither follows in the footsteps of another life, nor repeats the very same course, nor leaves behind the same story. This is [...] why life-stories are told and listened to with interest; because they are similar and yet new, insubstitutable and unexpected, from beginning to end. (2)

She pays attention to the living individual. She gives a sense of the specific value of an infinite number of life stories, seeing each story as uniquely interesting. Integral to my sense of my story as unexpected, as unforeseen, is the way it is revealed not in my own writing and storytelling, but in another's narrative. I cannot see with my own eyes the design of my life. In Cavarero's account, I need to be present passively before the other for this story to be configured and told. Not only tracing a design, but meeting a desire.

Telling the story of another becomes, more obscurely, in deeper ways, meeting a certain desire in that person to be told. This is a desire to be passive, to be exposed before the other. For Cavarero, making a reading of Karen Blixen, the question "who am I?" flows indeed, sooner or later, from the beating of every heart' (4). She continues, citing Hannah Arendt,

If leaving behind a design, a 'destiny', an unrepeatable figure of our existence, 'is the only aspiration deserving of the fact that life was given us', then nothing responds to the human desire more than the telling of our story. Even before revealing the meaning of a life, a biography therefore recognises the desire for it. (3-4)

Storytelling meets a deep-seated desire. This is a desire to have one's story told, for one's life to exist as a narrative so that its pattern can be perceived. It is a desire to be passive in this telling.

Telling the story of another is, for Cavarero, a mode of relation to the other, a mode of attention, a sharing, mutual involvement. Looking at the affect that exists in hearing one's own life story narrated, she tells a tale of Amalia and Emilia:

The first writes the story of the second because Emilia had continually recounted her story, in the most disorganised way, showing her friend her stubborn desire for narration. The gift of the written story is precisely Amalia's response to this desire. Now Emilia can carry the text of her

own story with her and reread it continuously – moved every time by her own identity, made tangible by the tale. (56)<sup>29</sup>

Cavarero's account is optimistic about the attention paid to others. Her account is on the side of tenderness.

In *Giving an Account of Oneself*, a work that acknowledges Cavarero, Butler argues that 'ethical agency is neither fully determined nor radically free. Its struggle or primary dilemma is to be produced by a world, even as one must produce oneself in some way' (2005, 19). She looks at this interaction between precariousness and agency, in order to think through responsibility and accountability:

Does the postulation of a subject who is not self-grounding, that is, whose conditions of emergence can never fully be accounted for, undermine the possibility of responsibility and, in particular, of giving an account of oneself? (19)

The subject who is not self-grounding is precisely, in part, opaque to herself. For Butler, each individual knows only an imperfect account of him or herself *and* of others. This is no impediment, as Butler proposes 'a theory of subject formation that acknowledges the limits of self-knowledge can serve a conception of ethics and, indeed, responsibility' (19). Key to this is an understanding of the opacity of the subject:

The opacity of the subject may be a consequence of its being conceived as a relational being, one whose early and primary relations are not always available to conscious knowledge. Moments of unknowingness about oneself tend to emerge in the context of relations to others, suggesting that those relations call upon primary forms of relationality that are not always available to explicit and reflective thematization. (20)

Butler continues this account of opacity, with relation to narrative, to storytelling:

The singular body to which a narrative refers cannot be captured by a full narration, not only because the body has a formative history that remains

29 This is a true story. Emilia and Amalia were friends who attended *Le scuole delle 150 ore* ['the 150-hour schools'], schools founded by the Italian left in the 1970s for workers or housewives who had not had access to higher education. Cavarero draws on the report of Amalia which appears in the book *Non credere di avere dei diritti* [*Don't Think You Have Any Rights*] which has been published in English under the title *Sexual Difference: A Theory of Social-Symbolic Practice*, translated by Patricia Cicogna and Teresa de Lauretis (1990).

irrecoverable by reflection, but because primary relations are formative in ways that produce a necessary opacity in our understanding of ourselves. (20–21)

For Cavarero, Amalia can tell Emilia's story and can release it to her as a gift she can treasure. There is no question of Amalia's adequacy as narrator, of gaps or fissures in her account. For Butler, as for Cavarero, relations with the other, the narrative relations, are still generative, giving. But for Butler there is no full narrative, either of oneself or of an other, and this is precisely because the self is exposed to others, open to others, formed by others, in ways that remain unfathomable. This opacity to ourselves, my unknowingness to myself, is the basis of my openness to others, openness to an account of a life that, if imperfect, is still attentive, is perhaps the more tender, indeed moving, in all it lacks. I want to pause over the desire to have one's story told, the desire for narrative relations in the face of opacity. What is seductive to me in Cavarero's account is that I am not in control of, nor fully cognisant of, who I am, in my own terms. Rather, my story, who I am, is revealed to me by a narrator. Passivity is enmeshed with intersubjectivity and incomplete understanding. It is a precondition for a creative act by the other who produces and knows the self. This is a desire for another, or others, to play the role of narrator for one's story, and concomitantly a desire for passivity, even in receptiveness and responsiveness. I am interested in the ways in which inhering in this is a desire to be given over to another, to be exposed to them. This is an experience that includes submission, passivity and vulnerability, as well as ravishment, in ways I find alluring for thinking about the reclining nude as she reappears in the work of women artists. Cavarero prompts me to ask questions about the pleasure in telling, and the pleasure, more passively, in being told. I wonder whether the storyteller ever adequately respects or represents the fragility, the fine lines and the uniqueness, of the story of another. I wonder if her story can be respected as a design, and as a living drawing, and if she can be known, apprehended, approached adequately, as a living subject, live specimen, a life model.

In her autobiographical novel *L'Amant* [*The Lover*], Marguerite Duras writes about another young girl, H el ene Lagonelle. She opens a scene with an image of reclining: 'Je reviens pr es d'H el ene Lagonelle. Elle est allong ee sur un banc et elle pleure parce que je vais quitter le pensionnat' (1984, 86) ['I come back to H el ene Lagonelle. She's lying on a bench, crying because she thinks I'm going to leave the school']

(1985, 76)]. This vision of Hélène ‘allongée’ as she weeps leads to a moment of rapture. The child sits beside her reclining friend and feels her sensuous presence:

Je suis exténuée par la beauté du corps d’Hélène Lagonelle allongée contre le mien. Ce corps est sublime, libre sous la robe, à portée de la main. Les seins sont comme je n’en ai jamais vus. Je ne les ai jamais touchés. (86)

[I’m worn out by the beauty of Hélène Lagonelle’s body lying against mine. Her body’s sublime, naked under the dress, within arm’s reach. Her breasts are such as I’ve never seen. I’ve never touched them. (76)]

The child herself is worn out, blighted, ravished by the beauty of her friend, by her loveliness. The child looks at Hélène and wants to devour her, and to be devoured, consumed, opened, by her lover, and by Hélène:

Je voudrais manger les seins d’Hélène Lagonelle comme lui mange les seins de moi dans la chambre de la ville chinoise où je vais chaque soir approfondir la connaissance de Dieu. Etre dévorée de ces seins de fleur de farine que sont les siens. (88)

[I’d like to eat Hélène Lagonelle’s breasts as he eats mine in the room in the Chinese town where I go every night to increase my knowledge of God. I’d like to devour and be devoured by those flour-white breasts of hers. (78)]

Duras’s child repeats the word ‘exténuée’, continuing:

Je suis exténuée du désir d’Hélène Lagonelle.  
Je suis exténuée de désir. (88)

[I am worn out with desire for Hélène Lagonelle.  
I am worn out with desire. (79)]

The word speaks of exhaustion, yet also of being drained, enfeebled, stretched out like a thread, like dilute liquid. Desire for Hélène, seizing the self, takes the form of a languor, an extension. This desire nurtures a fantasy of vicarious pleasure:

Je veux emmener avec moi Hélène Lagonelle, là où chaque soir, les yeux clos, je me fais donner la jouissance qui fait crier. Je voudrais donner Hélène Lagonelle à cet homme qui fait ça sur moi pour qu’il le fasse à son tour sur elle. Ceci en ma présence, qu’elle le fasse selon mon désir, qu’elle se donne là où je me donne. Ce serait par le détour du corps d’Hélène Lagonelle, par la traversée de son corps que la jouissance m’arriverait de lui, alors définitive. (89)

[I want to take Hélène Lagonelle with me to where every evening, my eyes shut, I have imparted to me the pleasure that makes you cry out. I'd like to give Hélène Lagonelle to the man who does that to me, so he may do it in turn to her. I want it to happen in my presence, I want her to do it as I wish, I want her to give herself where I give myself. It's via Hélène Lagonelle's body, through it, that the ultimate pleasure would pass from him to me. (79)]

The child seeks to choreograph relations between her lover and Hélène. Hélène's silken body inspires the fantasy that she, the child, will see herself replaced. Hélène's body would render the child's *jouissance* palpable to her, allowing her to witness, to feel and see, her own erotic story, the scene of her desire. The child desires Hélène. She is wrung out with desire. This desire is the means for her to sense herself. She takes vicarious pleasure from this image of herself replaced by Hélène. She choreographs, in her imagination, a scene that at once renders palpable her own image, and absents her. Hélène becomes her unknown other as she makes love, as she receives love. Hélène is also a gift of love from the child to her lover. The words Duras uses, 'le détour' ['via'], 'la traversée' ['through'], express modes of exchange, of vicariousness that are imagined as erotic sharing, as a means to self-emptying.<sup>30</sup>

Duras's scenario echoes and complicates Cavarero's ideas. The child's story is bound up with that of her friend Hélène. The child tells a story of Hélène with her lover that is imagined, projected. This story gives the child a vision of Hélène that is a reflection of her own erotic exposure, of herself as given over to her lover. This image of another in her place would allow her to realise her *jouissance*, some shattering truth of her own desire. Hélène is necessary to this but it is the vision of Hélène's body, its milky loveliness, that gives this to the child, not a story that Hélène will tell. It is Hélène's body which makes the child in this way palpable to herself, in a relay of reclining images, as Hélène lies crying, and as she is imagined lying where the child lies, with her eyes closed, made to come by the lover. The child desires, through Hélène, to see herself exposed, and thus to see herself vulnerable to replacement.

30 Michael Sheringham writes of this scene: 'Hélène becomes a pole in the triangular structure of desire which involves the "capture" of another look through which we become imaginary spectators of our own desire, lose our fixed position, and experience the "ravisement" of desire as a constant negation and displacement of all fixities, a movement between identities' (2006, 316).

Duras realises a certain extreme in the desire to be given over to the other, to be told by the other, to have one's story told by another and this is, peculiarly, annihilation. The last quotation continues:

Ce serait par le détour du corps d'Hélène Lagonelle, par la traversée de son corps que la jouissance m'arriverait de lui, alors définitive.

De quoi en mourir. (89)

[It's via Hélène Lagonelle's body, through it, that the ultimate pleasure would pass from him to me.

A pleasure unto death. (79)]

This is a desire, a play of vicariousness, also entertained in the compulsive return in recent works to the figure of the reclining nude.

With Duras I see vicariousness positively as a way of expressing the unfathomable involvement of self and other, the enmeshing of stories, ways of witnessing the experiences of the self and other as enhancing and estranging each other, complicating rapport and representation. I have laid aside other meanings of vicariousness, living through the other, taking advantage of, sapping, or absorbing their experience. It is this latter sense of vicariousness that one of my artists, Nan Goldin, refers to as she speaks in a 1997 film, *Nan Goldin, In My Life*, about her retrospective exhibition *I'll Be Your Mirror*:

If I hadn't constructed it in such a personal manner, they [art critics] would be accusing me of voyeurism and vicariousness. I think that people are missing out on the fact that the work is about empathy and connection and how deep you can go with another person. It's neither narcissistic nor voyeuristic, I think. It's something else.

Beyond voyeurism, it is this question of how deep you can go with another person that informs my work. I see it attaching to representations of the reclining nude. This figure of opaqueness and distraction, a sleeping muse, is also a figure of seduction and capaciousness, accommodating, intimate, exposed.

I look at the work of three women artists, Agnès Varda, Catherine Breillat, and Nan Goldin, whose engagement with the reclining nude has been ambivalent, adventurous, poignant, erotic, sensuous, and indulgent. Their approaches, and mine in line with theirs, work to release from the ideal nude a different range of meanings, to adore, redraw, and open the image, to reclaim it and multiply its senses. Their art suggests that

there are questions of pleasure and pain still to be asked in contemplation of the reclining nude. This recognition of a range of feelings, of affective ambivalence and intensity, is part of the feminist politics that can be gauged in their works. Allowing the seduction and pathos of such images allows a reckoning with their aesthetic appeal, their elusiveness and inscrutability. In the work of the three women examined, images of the reclining nude are a more than incidental point of reference in broader reflections on the female body. It is the recurrence of reclining nudes that caught me by surprise and inspired this book.

I make three case studies of the work of artists who explore moving and still images. Where Varda and Breillat both work in the context of the French film industry, the projects of American artist Goldin were developed in installation work in Paris. The images of the reclining nude to which they all refer are from the European traditions of painting and sculpture, French, Italian, and Spanish paintings from the Renaissance to modernity. The reclining nude is for all three a starting point for reflection on the relation of film, projections, and still photography to painting and sculpture. The images explored include Renaissance and later images, Titian's *Venus of Urbino* (1538), Correggio's *Venus, Satyr, and Cupid* (c. 1524–1527), Velázquez's *The Rokeby Venus* (completed between 1647 and 1651), nineteenth-century images of the odalisque, and modern works, Courbet's explorations of sexuality, a nude by Caillebotte, Picasso's lovers.

The work of the three artists allows an array of engagements with the reclining nude to be explored. All three are interested in attending to variations and produce serial engagements with the reclining nude. Varda creates a *tableau vivant* of Velázquez's *Rokeby Venus* in *L'Opéra-Mouffe* [*Diary of a Pregnant Woman*] (1958) and further *tableaux vivants* of Titian's *Venus of Urbino* and Goya's images of the naked and clothed Maja in *Jane B. par Agnès V.* [*Jane B. by Agnès V.*] (1988), whilst exploring other images of nakedness and of reclining in *Cléo de 5 à 7* [*Cléo from 5 to 7*] (1961) and *Documenteur* (1981), and engaging with sculptural images of women overturned in her television documentary series *Agnès de ci de là Varda* [*Agnès Varda: From Here to There*] (2011). Breillat engages extensively with nineteenth-century images of the reclining nude, those by Ingres and Courbet in particular, in *Anatomie de l'enfer* [*Anatomy of Hell*] (2004), but painterly references exist in her earlier films and singularly in the compositions and lighting of *Romance* (1999), whose visual style was inspired by the paintings of Georges de La Tour. References to Goya's reclining nude return in

her 2007 *Une Vieille Maîtresse* [*The Last Mistress*]. Goldin includes in her project *Scopophilia* (2010–) grid images aligning her contemporary photographs with images from European painting and sculpture. Close to my theme is the grid *Odalisque* with images from Correggio, Delacroix, and Ingres, but many of the grids offer images of reclining and exposure, brought into contact with intimate sex, sleeping, bathing, and swimming photographs from Goldin's corpus.

The forms of the grids of images created by Goldin, and of her projections, are reminiscent of the serial images of motion studies. In their returning images of the reclining nude, Varda, Breillat, and Goldin offer a set of stillness and motion studies, stillness related to animation and sensation. They dramatise two-dimensional artworks, in the form of a *tableau vivant*, or in a larger scenario that reflects on the erotic, intimate aspects of the image of a woman reclining. There is a push from stillness into motion, a fleshing out, even as the opacity, the hiddenness, the unconsciousness of the original is drawn on.

Varda, Breillat, and Goldin all attend to a living otherness, to other women flexing and bristling with life, with sensation. Their works explore living difference, animation, in even the most marmoreal forms. They offer reflections on the relation of the artist to a living model or muse, from whose real presence the representation is grafted, and with whose complicity the image is realised. They allow ideal images to metamorphose, to change heft and shape. They remind viewers of the labour, the patience, the contortions that make the artwork possible. They show fascination for a whole run of textures and materials, from softness, to sheen, liquidity, from flesh, to hair, fabric, flowers, feathers, marble, and paint, all instilling hesitation between animate and inanimate. They show a predilection for the trembling, the unconscious, the hesitant, the *flou*.<sup>31</sup> They respond to pliability, plasticity, the uncanny stretching, lability, of the body, extending outwards from a Surrealist aesthetic of extensibility, of quicksilver movements. They install differences in scale and speed in the image, using montage in different ways, courting proximity and distance, playing with still frames and slow panning shots, experimenting formally and affectively.

In their images of reclining, these works explore interior spaces, material spaces, dream spaces. These are spaces of the bed, its sheets

31 For brilliant discussion of the *flou*, see Beugnet (2017). She links the *flou* particularly to the *informe*, speaking of 'la matière informe de la zone de flou' ['the formless matter of the zone of the *flou*'] (40) and further connects the *flou*

and covers, of the bedroom and its opening to sleep, to eroticism, to cocooning, to nestling, of the bathroom and its acts of washing, tending, basking, of the pool and its liquidity, of the sofa and its intimacy, of the couch in the analyst's consulting room, of the hospital bed, of the coffin.<sup>32</sup> In thinking about sleep, Nancy conjures images of a 'monde sublunaire, monde d'en dessous des cils, des plafonds et des draps, monde de dessous, crypte à soi-même dérobée' (2007, 85) ['sublunary world, world of beneath the lids, of ceilings and sheets, world of beneath, crypt hidden to itself' (2009, 48)]. This is the dream world of the reclining nude. To Nancy's lunar world, I append images of the amniotic, held already in imagery of *bercement* ['rocking'], that run through Nancy's work. This is the oneiric, intimate world, orb, of these images and their different affects. The amniotic speaks of suspension, recalling Bourgeois, sleep, and retreat. It is a figure of limbo between living and dying, of involvement that remains dreamlike, unknown.

My reclining images show bodies whose sensitive interior is also made strangely apparent. The alimentary canal, and also the blood vessels, the respiratory system, the sex organs, so many conduits, tubes, enclaves, so many unseen locales for feeling, are all stretched out, drawn, imagined here. This body is vulnerable, open, and porous. This is an interiority felt and imagined, given and produced. This is explored through images of pregnancy and other modes of fecundity and care, through acts of penetration and interior touching, erotic and medical, and bodily impressions of weeping, blushing, laughing, pleasure, pain, *jouissance*. The body is apprehended dimensionally as vital, living, feeling, and as vulnerable, individual, treasured, fragile. This is pursued through stages of life from infancy to death, from periods of vitality and serenity to times of sickness and dying. Their artworks offer forms of vivisection.

to emotion: 'le flou est certes un remarquable ferment d'émotions' ['the *flou* is certainly a remarkable ferment of emotions'] (81).

32 In her novel *L'Indolente. Le Mystère Marthe Bonnard* [*The Indolent Woman. The Mystery of Marthe Bonnard*], about Pierre Bonnard's model and wife Marthe, Françoise Cloarec evokes her withdrawal into a closed, prone world: 'Marthe la plupart du temps se trouve malade, sa santé physique et morale se dégrade encore. Elle ne quitte plus son univers, sa chambre. Elle s'y trouve comme dans des baignoires, contenue par les bords, en même temps qu'un peu noyée' ['Most of the time Marthe finds herself ill, her physical and mental health declining further. She no longer leaves her world, her room. She finds herself there like in the bathtubs, held by the sides of the bath, but all the same nearly drowned'] (2016, 222).

Lying prone, I am knocked off my axis; I am more animal, more lavish, more extended. I am in a different, more intimate, more open relation to the viewer who beholds me. Questions arise about who I will lie down for, who I lie beside, who lies before me. It is through the seductive, elusive image of the reclining nude that new energies are found by these artists for imagining experiences, both cisgender and trans, of femaleness. The reclining nude allows reflection on the pleasures as well as the risks of passivity. The remodelling of the image, its new efficiency, fascinates me.



# Agnès Varda

In her retrospective volume *Varda par Agnès*, Varda writes that her mother had a collection of postcards of the Annunciation to the Virgin Mary (1994, 212). Images from Christiane Varda's collection are included in the catalogue to the exhibition *Agnès Varda: patates et compagnie* [*Agnès Varda: Potatoes and Company*] held in the film-maker's birthplace and childhood neighbourhood, the Ixelles district of Brussels, in 2016.<sup>1</sup> Varda writes in an accompanying essay:

Il y a au moins deux albums pleins d'images d'Annonciations: La Vierge, lisant ou pas, voit arriver l'Ange annonciateur [...] Moi, j'ai fait comme maman, j'ai des cartes et des cartes d'Annonciations. Je les regarde souvent. (2016, 19)

[There are at least two albums full of images of Annunciations: the Virgin, reading or not, sees the annunciatory Angel arrive (...) And I've done the same as my mother, I've got cards and cards with Annunciations. I often look at them.]<sup>2</sup>

Varda's narrative of her mother's art as collector offers an insight into the film-maker's passion for art reproductions. This collecting seems to lead into her own collage practice with art historical images in her films. The mother's images of the Annunciation are pasted into a ring-bound album with squared paper.<sup>3</sup> The images overlap. Juxtapositions give a

1 They are also seen in the fifth episode of Varda's TV documentary series *Agnès de ci de là Varda*.

2 Varda's essay is entitled 'Du côté de maman', which might be translated, recalling Proust, 'Mama's Way'. Varda's work is rarely nostalgic for her childhood and the project in her birthplace Ixelles looks at her mother's creativity and also at the meanings she gave to images circulating in the 1930s.

3 In *Varda par Agnès*, Varda writes about her own love of notebooks as a child,

sense of serial variations on the image of the Angel and the Virgin, the same image sometimes reappearing on a different scale or in a different colour, or quality of reproduction. It feels as if there is a pleasure in the images and also in the act of gathering and arranging them, materially pasting them together. Varda makes her mother's albums part of the exhibition. She also recalls her own practice of looking at images, her own collections. This image of the film-maker as collector contemplating a series of images allows this chapter to take shape. I am collecting here the reclining nudes in Varda's films.

In an article in the catalogue to the same exhibition, 'Agnès Varda la triptyquesse' ['Agnès Varda Triptych-Maker'], Jean-Luc Douin looks at the relation between Varda's film practice and the other arts.<sup>4</sup> He claims her narratives of herself speak to others, who find their own lives and images reflected in hers (2016, 27). He speaks about the affective in her work and her opening of an economy of love: 'L'essentiel pour Agnès c'est qu'on s'aime vivant ou pas. Elle a placé sa vie et son œuvre sous le signe de l'amour, de la liberté, de l'engagement, d'une humeur vagabonde et des plages' ['The essential for Agnès is that we love each other, living or dead. She has placed her life and her work under the sign of love, of liberty, of political engagement, of vagabond humour, and of beaches'] (30). In this reckoning with Varda and love, he comments on 'le goût d'Agnès Varda pour la nudité' ['Agnès Varda's taste for nudity'] (31).<sup>5</sup>

'Le désir qu'on avait en les choisissant' ['The desire one felt choosing them'] (1994, 13), and explains that her mother took fifty empty notebooks when the family fled from Brussels to the south of France in 1940.

4 Varda has shown interest in the form of the triptych in large photographic and moving image works, notably in the exhibition *Triptyques Atypiques* [*Atypical Triptychs*] at the Galerie Nathalie Obadia in Paris, 8 February–5 April 2014. Douin's broader point about Varda's films and the other arts is reflected in important recent work on Varda as installation artist and even as multimedia artist (Bénézet, 2014; DeRoo, 2017). Maïthé Vallès-Bled connects the forms of Varda's installation art with the practices of early Renaissance art, in particular the use of double or multiple panels: 'la plupart de ses installations vidéo procèdent d'un recours au triptyque ou au polyptyque, présents dans la peinture depuis les primitifs' ['most of her video installations start from recourse to a triptych or polyptych form, present in painting from early Italian art'] (2012, 16). Isabelle McNeill writes: 'Arguably for Varda film has always been a hybrid form, whose borders with other arts, such as photography, painting, sculpture and even writing, are permeable and uncertain' (2009, 284).

5 Douin refers to a photographic series of five naked boys looking out at the ocean exhibited in the *Patates et compagnie* exhibition and also cross-references

A glimpse at her films sees her laying bare nudity through the history of art, through reflections on the sensuality, humour, and vulnerability of nakedness.<sup>6</sup> Her films considering love, intimacy, and illness come close to bare human skin and animal fur.

In her engagement with nakedness Varda has a predilection for the reclining nude. In *Varda par Agnès* she shows a photograph of a naked baby Jacques lying on a fur coverlet. She couples the image with one taken by Demy where she herself reclines speaking on the telephone in their apartment in Venice Beach.<sup>7</sup> Varda's arms and shoulders are bare while a flowered sheet covers her breasts. The back of her head is seen in a mirror in the bedroom. The pose seems unguarded, relaxed. But the image of the film-maker reclining is in dialogue with images from Varda's films, with her reflections on naked women reclining.

Examples of reclining nudes are scattered through Varda's works. She shows Viva, Andy Warhol's superstar, lying like a waterlily in a Los Angeles pool in *Lions Love (and Lies)* (1969). She shows a woman lying naked in a Persian illustration in *Plaisir d'amour en Iran [Pleasure of Love in Iran]* (1976).<sup>8</sup> She exhibits a blown-up postcard of a reclining bather in *La Grande Carte Postale [The Big Postcard]* or *Souvenir de Noirmoutier [Souvenir of Noirmoutier]* in the installation *L'Île et elle [The Island and She]* (2006).<sup>9</sup> I close in here on serial images of the

Varda's *7p., cuis., s. de b. ... à saisir [Seven Bedrooms, Kitchen and Bath]* (1984) with its images of a naked elderly lady in a room coated in white feathers, a scene of nesting, of flaking, of soft wrinkled skin. The film cuts to a naked baby boy dandled in swansdown. The feathers fall floating down on the lady as she watches. Another point of reference might be Varda's *Réponse de femmes [Women Reply]* (1975) with its theme of our body, our sex, and its images of a laughing woman naked and pregnant, saying, 'Je me sens belle, pleine et désirable' ['I feel beautiful, full, and desirable']. Another would be *Les Dites Caryatides [The So-called Caryatids]* (1984) with its images of a naked man wandering the streets of Paris.

6 For excellent discussion of Varda and nakedness, see Bell (2017).

7 Similar images recur in her artwork where, for example, in *Agnès de ci de là Varda*, she shows a photograph of Wilfredo Lam's daughter as a little girl reclining nude and equally films Annette Messager lying down in her studio.

8 This film is a companion to Varda's feature *L'Une chante, l'autre pas [One Sings, the Other Doesn't]* (1977) with its fuller reflections on nudity and the photographer's model.

9 This image holds various meanings relating to the figure of the reclining nude. In the exhibition catalogue Varda explains how she thinks of the drowned as she looks out at the smooth surface of the sea and how she commemorates

reclining nude in the early film *L'Opéra-Mouffe*, on a standing nude in *Cléo de 5 à 7*, and on images of reclining in two films from the 1980s, *Documenteur* and *Jane B. par Agnès V.* The chapter ends with naked statues by Maillol found in her television series for ARTE, *Agnès de ci de là Varda.*

Reclining nudes in these films emerge through Varda's overt engagement with the history of art and the tradition of European painting and sculpture. This engagement has been traced most extensively in Rebecca DeRoo's groundbreaking work which looks at Varda's references to photography, art, and visual culture (but does not focus on the reclining nude). For DeRoo, Varda's 'cinematic work reveals a rich knowledge of these traditions; dialogue among them is a core characteristic that unites her diverse work across the long trajectory of her prolific career' (2017, 9).<sup>10</sup> Many images from these traditions, Annunciations, as evoked

a drowned fisherman in one of the drawers she has created in the installation. This thematic of drowning returns in a projected image that coats the seaside bather: 'Parfois une noyée ou une sirène échouée ou dormeuse de lune vient se poser sur la femme au soleil, le temps d'un soupir, puis s'en va. J'aime penser que certains visiteurs manqueront le moment où elle apparaît, pâle comme de la nacre, pâle comme du sel' ['Sometimes a drowned woman or a beached mermaid or a moonlight sleeper comes to place herself over the woman in the sun, the briefest moment, and then disappears. I like thinking that some visitors will miss the moment when she appears, pale like mother of pearl, pale like salt'] (Varda, 2006, 33). For discussion of this installation see Jordan (2009), Barnett (2011), and Conway (2015). McNeill places emphasis on memory and commemoration, seeing the projection as a ghost: 'It is as though a virtual realm of past existence is actualized momentarily, evoking the hidden world of all that is lost, persisting only in memory' (2009, 292).

10 Alison Smith writes: 'The young Agnès [...] studied art history at the Ecole du Louvre' (1998, 3). Varda went on to pursue photography but, for Smith, 'Her early interest in art history has [...] had a great influence on her vision' (3). Smith draws on a typology of references to painting in Varda's films provided by French critic Frank Curot. He finds four particular modes of reference to paintings: 'as an object, framed and hung on the wall or otherwise susceptible to being handled within the diegetic space'; 'in individual close-up which retains the identity of the picture but gives it full status as a frame of the film'; as 'the tableau vivant'; and finally in 'the visual or even thematic reference which may concern only one element of the image [...] or even remain unseen' (32–33; see Curot, 1991b). For Smith, looking at Varda's films up until the late 1990s, pictorial references are mostly of the first and fourth type, either materially present images or fleeting allusions. From *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse* [*The Gleaners and I*] (2000) on, Varda has drawn increasingly on the second type of reference, individual close-ups, often

already, but also portraits and self-portraits, pictures of gleaners, *vanitas* and still life images, return in Varda's work.<sup>11</sup>

In an essay on gesture in Varda, Cristian Borges and Samuel de Jésus explore the miming of gestures from paintings in her works. They argue, through Didi-Huberman, that painted images survive, live on in her works:

Ni tant affaire de vie, ni tant affaire de mort, les images peintes semblent plutôt relever, chez Varda, d'une 'survivance', d'une 'vie' au-delà de leur 'mort'. (2009, 64)

[Neither concerned with life, nor concerned with death, the painted images, in Varda, seem rather to be part of a 'survival', of a 'life' beyond their 'death'.]

They see the return of gestures, speaking not of a heavy influence of painting and photography in her films but as part of 'une étrange connivence' ['a strange connivance'] (70) between pre-existing images and spontaneous everyday gestures. They see Varda's films animated by curiosity about this accord, this survival of images and spectral resonance.

In the case of the reclining nude, the pose, the scenario and its bodily languor, returns consciously in set pieces in Varda's work, as well as being found sometimes lying there, laid out, unconsciously adopted. The *tableaux vivants* in *L'Opéra-Mouffe* and *Jane B. par Agnès V.* are shadowed by many other returning images of bodies supine, stretched out, horizontal. The reclining nude is a spectral, memorial figure recalling so many prior painted images.<sup>12</sup> Varda's films emerge from

making these coextensive with or connected to references of the first type where the painting is materially present within the film. This increased attention to filmed artworks has been part of her documentary film-making in the last decades. It is also a product of her international mobility where, as charted in the ARTE television series *Agnès de ci de là Varda*, she travels the world with her films on an itinerary that allows encounters with paintings and artists.

11 Chamarette also draws attention to dialogue with images of beaches, writing on the installation *Les Veuves de Noirmoutier* [*The Widows of Noirmoutier*]: 'Notions of a painterly tableau are drawn into the moving image via the starkly outlined, darkly dressed figures on a beach, with colour palettes of dull washes of colour, recalling Degas' *Sur la plage* or Manet's *Sur la plage de Boulogne*' (2011, 41).

12 Looking at the episode in *Les Plages d'Agnès* [*The Beaches of Agnès*] (2008) that takes place in Avignon, Chamarette writes about the interaction between past

a collection of images, from a memory of images, from moments of contemplation. Paintings, their poses and gestures, survive and circulate in her imagination, and in her films. Reclining is, in the life-giving play of the films, also marked out as one of the most intimate, relaxed, and restful poses, human and animal all at once.

One particular inflection Varda offers is attention to stillness and immobility, which is at the heart of her ambivalence about this figure of the reclining nude. If she returns to the pose, she also undoes it in different ways, and thinks it creatively. She approaches ideas about immobility in her film *Daguerréotypes* (1976), a documentary about shopkeepers in the rue Daguerre where she lived in Paris, made while she was nursing her baby Mathieu. She describes the central subject of the film as ‘immobility – the immobility of sleep but also the immobility of thought which rejects dreams, assumed to be the agents of disorder and troubles’ (Kline, 2014, 69). She moves from her own restricted world as she looks after her small child at home, going shopping in the local area, to the immobility of the shopkeepers each held in his or her own work environment, to the photographic capture, the stilling of these individuals in Varda’s own daguerreotypes.<sup>13</sup> Varda shows immobility as a form of captivity. This is underlined with most pathos in her attention to the elderly wife in the shop *Le Chardon bleu* [‘The Blue Thistle’], which Varda describes as ‘a sort of dress-makers, bazaar, and perfume shop all in one’ (64). She says of this fragile lady: ‘She’s amnesic and is thus captive of this closed world of the store and in this street’ (64). For Varda, escape from this immobility comes in dream, in disorder. As she approaches the reclining nude, she probes her, moves her, shows the pain and strange unworldly respite, numbing, in her languishing. She opens to her dreams.<sup>14</sup> If Varda is interested in dream, she is more interested in

images and present gestures: ‘The motility of mourning, and the spectral presence of bodies that were once flesh, but which are now no more than a layer of silver acetate, are intertwined with the physical gestures of the on-screen Varda’ (2011, 44).

<sup>13</sup> See DeRoo (2017, 84–114) for a powerful account of the relation of the film’s aesthetic to that of early photographic images of tradesmen in Paris.

<sup>14</sup> Varda is open in interviews about her own dreams. This one, about a form of enclosure, comes from the time of the making of *Les Créatures* [*The Creatures*] (1966): ‘I had it three times over, this dream that I was mute and couldn’t speak any more. And it was strange, because I’m a woman who likes to speak. But it wasn’t a nightmare. In the dream I simply didn’t want to speak. I remember it clearly, because I had it three times and it was a very long dream. Jacques was in it and so

daydreaming, in *rêverie*, that creative play that suspends the boundaries of the imaginary and the real. This interest she unleashes in her serial studies of the reclining nude.

In thinking about Varda's stretch of images of proneness, of bodies lying out, from the smallest children to the dead and dying, I isolate two issues that are apt for reflecting on her filmic practice and for her predilection for the reclining nude. Their insistence in her work, and their link to the pose of the reclining nude, show the return of that figure as not incidental or decorative. These two issues are *rêverie*, dreaming and daydreaming, and flesh. In referring to *rêverie*, I use Varda's vocabulary. In thinking about flesh, I draw on Judith Butler's writing about vulnerability.

In *Varda par Agnès*, Varda speaks of the inspiration afforded to *Cléo de 5 à 7* by images of Death and the Maiden by Hans Baldung Grien:

Tout ce que je sentais de la tension intérieure de cette femme douce pendant les quatre-vingt-dix minutes du film (de 5 heures à 6 heures 30), tout cela est inspiré par ces femmes et ces squelettes de Baldung Grien. (1994, 48)

[Everything I could feel of this gentle woman's inner tension through the ninety minutes of the film (from 5pm to 6.30), was inspired by Baldung Grien's women and skeletons.]

She speaks about how a little reproduction of one of the paintings was pinned to the wall where they were filming (48). In this painting she finds the feelings of the film. And she goes on to reflect on what painting offers a film-maker: 'C'est la force de la peinture de proposer des œuvres qui peuvent devenir inspiration et rêverie continue' ['Painting has the power to offer works which can become a source of prolonged inspiration and musing'] (48). She sees painting as a resource for *rêverie*, which she associates with imagining and creative inspiration, and also with affect and unspoken feelings.<sup>15</sup>

was our daughter, and the old lady we'd engaged as a pediatrician when our child was born. She was in the dream explaining to me that I should bring myself to speak – but I didn't want to' (Kline, 2014, 45).

15 Varda says, beautifully, in an interview in *Film Quarterly* in 1987: 'we have sleeping emotions in us all the time' (Kline, 2014, 132). She speaks in the same interview about the relation between culture, a book we have read, a film we have seen, and our emotional life. Varda speaks strongly about emotions in a radio interview of the same period: 'The reality with which I inform myself liberates my imagination. Groups of shots are put into place, or an emotion invades me and

Varda writes that as a film-maker starting out, she found it hard to find in films the interiority of Virginia Woolf's writing (38).<sup>16</sup> This is something she feels for, and creates, in her own films. One of the ways she speaks about this interiority is through the language of *rêverie*. Annette Kuhn, thinking about *rêverie*, or its English equivalent, looks back to Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* and 'what he calls poetic reverie, a state in which the relaxed and self-realized adult may immerse herself in a kind of oneiric state' (2010, 84 and Bachelard, 1969, 13).<sup>17</sup> She notes that for Bachelard there is much in common between the adult's *rêverie* and the daydreaming or play of a solitary child, who similarly seeks interaction between real and imaginary worlds.

This state of *rêverie* is also one Varda seeks to inspire in her viewers, allowing access to imagining, to dream. As Bénézet reveals:

In a statement published for one of her recent exhibitions, Varda explains that she aims to make images with the potential to surprise, provoke and trigger thoughts and *rêverie* in her audience: 'Je voudrais que ces images, fixes ou animées, créent des surprises, éveillent des pensées et suscitent des rêveries' ['I would like these images, still or moving, to create surprises, to awaken thought, and inspire reveries']. (2014, 93)<sup>18</sup>

Varda's visual archive, literal collections of reproductions and a host of images seen in museums, open spaces for musing. In their contemplation of still painted surfaces, her films open to *rêverie*.

dominates the scene yet to be invented [...] the sudden fear of the violence of others; nostalgia for the lives of others as they're telling their stories; solitude among ruins; the desire to cry'. Alain Veinstein, Radio interview with Agnès Varda, Nathalie Sarraute, Macha Méril, Jacques Demy. 'La Nuit sur un plateau'. *France-Culture*, 7 January 1986. See Conway (2015, 66).

16 Maureen Turim links Deren, Woolf, and Frida Kahlo in a comment about home movies, artist, and home which might also embrace Varda and her work on spatial and oneiric interiority: 'Maya Deren gives us her vision of a home movie as a gift to a future generation of filmmakers. Many women filmmakers since Deren have made their own versions of home movies, the autobiography of the relationship between artist and lover, artist and home. In fact this legacy extends back into literature, to Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* and Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* and into painting, to Frida Kahlo's images of her bedroom, garden, and her relationship with Diego Rivera' (2001, 92).

17 Cooper's recent work on Varda explores the connection of the film-maker to the thought of Bachelard, who was once her teacher.

18 The statement accompanied an exhibition at Sète in 2009 and is no longer online.

Varda is not alone in this recourse to painting from within film-making. For Angela Dalle Vache, references to pictures in film reflect fascination with the lustre, the individuality, and human dimensions of Western painting. She speaks of ‘the beauty of the encounter between cinema and painting’ (1996, 1). Rather than looking for sources, she says, ‘one must imagine all the possible elements of visual culture that a film, just by virtue of its circulation, has the power to attract into the textual orbit’ (1). Paintings in Varda add new folds of meaning and feeling to her work, showing film art as shimmering with memories of this fuller visual archive. This is not a sign of medium-envy, a search for painting as object of desire, as much as it is an opening, non-hierarchical, to a plethora of associations. Images are rendered living and tactile in Varda’s films. Paintings are attracted into the orbit of the works. Varda creates a volatile relation between cinema and painting, one that leaves neither untouched.

In her reflections on the reclining nude, she takes some of the most seductive images of Venus, of female sexuality, finding in them a different affect and different fragilities. These new *rêveries*, this remodelling, are manifested too in her interest in sculpture, and in the ways in which she turns around, comes close to, measures, and re-views plastic and sculptural works. Her approach to these works, both paintings and sculptures, involves new engagement with interiority and vulnerability, with exposure and pleasure. These figures who are often apparently indolent, dreamy, between real and imaginary, asleep and awake, dead and alive, offer rich, plangent resources for Varda’s *rêveries*.<sup>19</sup>

If interiority is Varda’s concern, she yokes it in her works to the body as much as to the mind, to flesh and naked flesh in particular.<sup>20</sup> In *Undoing*

19 There is a happy slippage in Varda between *rêve* [‘dream’] and *rêverie* [‘daydreaming’] as she thinks about reclining nudes. Late in the film *Jane B. par Agnès V.* there is a large-scale reproduction of Henri Rousseau’s painting *Le Rêve* [*The Dream*] (1910), where a naked woman, reclining on a couch, finds herself in a lush forest with fruits, flowers, a snake-charmer, and lions. In a poem accompanying this painting, Rousseau has identified this reclining woman as Yadwigha, his Polish mistress. She returns in a dream. In the *tableau* Varda creates in *Jane B.*, with the Rousseau as backdrop, Birkin is with Tarzan in this faux forest. She asks questions about Yadwigha on the couch. Tarzan explains: ‘elle rêve’ [‘she’s dreaming’]. This Rousseau image also appears in Varda’s earlier film *Elsa la rose* [*Elsa the Rose*] (1965).

20 I am grateful to Stuart Bell for inspiring this. The OED offers a range of meanings for the word ‘flesh’. The primary meaning reads: ‘The soft substance, *esp.* the muscular parts, of an animal body’. This sense of softness becomes connected

*Gender*, Judith Butler makes an argument for the involvement of flesh, vulnerability, politics, and ethics: ‘we are constituted politically in part by virtue of the social vulnerability of our bodies; we are constituted as fields of desire and physical vulnerability’ (2004, 18). Social vulnerability, exposure to and construction by the discourses of others, is enmeshed with desire and with an openness of the flesh. Butler continues:

Let’s face it. We’re undone by each other. And if we’re not, we’re missing something. If this seems so clearly the case with grief, it is only because it was already the case with desire. One does not always stay intact. It may be that one wants to, or does, but it may also be that despite one’s best efforts, one is undone, in the face of the other, by the touch, by the scent, by the feel, by the prospect of the touch, by the memory of the feel. (19)

The body is seen as the site of exposure, of affect, of grief and desire. Reading with Varda in mind, I see that the body is also a site of *rêverie*, of foreshadowing, imagining, remembering, as sense impressions interplay with affect, intimations, memories. This *rêverie* is part of the undoing Butler describes. In bodily experience I yield to my impressions, and the imprint of others. Butler argues: ‘The body implies mortality, vulnerability, agency: the skin and the flesh expose us to the gaze of others but also to touch and to violence’ (21).

For Varda, the body is not seen as intact or autonomous. It is seen as acting and acted upon, as looking, as looked at, as touched and touching.<sup>21</sup> For Butler, that openness, that susceptibility to being undone by others, is

to a secondary meaning, ‘the soft pulpy substance of fruit’, so softness in its sensory, material dimensions. Yet, backtracking a little, variations on the primary meaning offer affective and erotic connections to softness. ‘Flesh’ can be used ‘In or with reference to the Biblical phrase “a heart of flesh”, i.e. a heart capable of feeling, opposed to a “heart of stone”’. Further, ‘flesh’ can be used ‘In euphemistic phrases with reference to sexual intercourse’. Moving on to figurative uses, ‘flesh’ can refer to ‘one’s near kindred and descendants’, to ‘That which has corporeal life’, ‘the body’, and also ‘human nature as subject to corporeal necessities and limitations’, ‘the sensual appetites and inclinations’. Varda’s film-making mobilises and sets in motion, imagines and daydreams about these various meanings of flesh.

21 In the essay ‘Looking back, looking onwards’, in the tenth anniversary edition of *Studies in French Cinema*, Cooper argues that Varda’s ethical approach involves openness to ‘vulnerability and contingency’ (2010, 59). Exploring selflessness in *Les Plages d’Agnès*, she writes: ‘Varda is unraveled in two senses, cinematically and emotionally, and, of course, the two necessarily merge in the film: at one moment her image dissolves into an earlier film, and at another moment she dissolves into tears’ (62).

the body's state of being from its opening into the world. It is this fleshy existence and experience that opens us ethically to others, to their lives as liveable and grievable, to their bodies as desirable and touching on ours. Butler espouses a politics of vulnerability, where our exposure to others leads not to disempowerment but to a heightened engagement with others and ourselves as at once feeling, intimate, and unknowing. This very engagement with and acceptance of intimacy and unknowing is explored in Varda's films through her fascination with *rêverie*, with fleshiness, tropes that return in her serial images of the reclining nude.

### *A pregnant odalisque*

Varda's early documentary *L'Opéra-Mouffe* was a personal project, made for a programme of experimental films shown at the 1958 Brussels Exposition Universelle (Varda, 1994, 114). It is an approach to stream of consciousness, to a new, innovative interiority. It is a reflection on *rêverie* and flesh. As Steve Ungar writes, 'Varda was pregnant when she shot the film, but she has often stated that *L'Opéra-Mouffe* was neither an account of her pregnancy nor a film about pregnancy' (2008, 27). *L'Opéra-Mouffe* was filmed in a neighbourhood in Paris, the rue Mouffetard, where a pregnant Varda would go each day and stand on a folding chair in the street market.<sup>22</sup> Its first image shows a seated woman from the back. The curves of her body are accentuated as the rounded, painted letters of the title of the film are seen superimposed. The combination of a flesh figure and painted brushstrokes is reminiscent of early cinema. From this artisanal opening, Varda turns to a modern image of a woman's pregnant body.

The diary of a pregnant woman holds near its start an image of a woman's pregnant torso, the full arc of her belly almost touching the skin of her thighs, her breasts swollen, and her darker nipples distended. Since her head is not in the frame, the image focuses on flesh, her enlarged nipples, the elastic curve of her belly. Evoking softness, the shaded skin emphasises the dimensionality of the body, inviting touch, offering a sense of plasticity, of sculptural form, of a mass shaped in stretched skin. The footage shows the woman breathing. Her flesh and its small movements are the focus of the camera. This movement

22 As Conway points out, the street was 'a place designated by French health officials in the 1950s as an *îlot insalubre* (unsanitary slum)' (2015, 34).

of breath is repeated in a closer shot where the camera focuses on the orb of her belly and her navel, the frame almost filled by the tight, real skin.<sup>23</sup> The navel itself is taut.<sup>24</sup> The image draws attention to its painful in-curving point. In a third framing the woman is on her side, sinuous, her body laid out. The mass of the pregnant belly protrudes, outweighing the breast that has slid flat. The last image, as she reclines, is the loveliest with its shadows and curves, yet it is also unsettling, awkward, as the woman's breathing changes the shape of her belly. The three sequences are rendered simultaneously intimate and unreal by a sheer black background recalling Surrealist photography.<sup>25</sup>

These images show a pregnant odalisque.<sup>26</sup> The image of a naked woman on display has fuller, shifted meanings. She is no less sensuous and appealing but she is also here fecund, stretched.<sup>27</sup> Varda said in an interview around the time of her second film about pregnancy (and also about the women's movement and the right to abortion), *L'Une chante, l'autre pas* [*One Sings, the Other Doesn't*] (1977): 'Pregnancy is an idea,

23 Varda returns to images of breathing in *7p., cuis., s. de b., ... à saisir* where she films Pierre Spitzner's anatomical model of Venus, looking outward to the sphere of images that Didi-Huberman explores in *Ouvrir Vénus*. Bénézet writes: 'Spitzner's wax model had a mechanical movement intended to emulate breath so that her chest rose and fell as she lay on a bed in her white nightgown. Like many other anatomical waxworks, her body could be opened to reveal her organs to the scrutinizing gaze of doctors-in-training or the audience of a fair' (2014, 132–133). In line with her Surrealist aesthetic, there is a thread of mannequin, model, and mask imagery running through Varda's work.

24 In interview Varda says: 'Making a child is also something that presses. Viscerally, it seems like life is pressing in the womb until the child is pushed out' (Kline, 2014, 7).

25 Katharine Conley has described the 'ongoing influence of surrealism' on women's creative practice in *écriture féminine* and elsewhere, linking this particularly to the expression of 'innermost, uncensored thoughts' (1996, 24). In *Les Plages d'Agnès*, Varda identified the influences of Surrealism in her work, visually echoing Man Ray's image of the members of the Surrealist movement as she creates a collage of *nouvelle vague* film-makers, identifying herself as 'la femme' in the centre. For Bénézet, 'The opening of the film is a clear homage to surrealism and the artistic practice of collage' (2014, 12).

26 Images of naked pregnant women are found later in her work in *Réponse de femmes* and in *L'Une chante, l'autre pas*.

27 A further point of reference might be Paula Modersohn Becker's image from 1906 *Reclining Mother and Child*, where the mother lies with her now born child in her arms.

a mental image, a bizarre form, a superb scandal' (Kline, 2014, 84). This sense of *bizarrierie*, of shift in form, seems caught in these opening images in *L'Opéra-Mouffe*. Pregnancy for Varda is also seen as part of female sensuality and sexual arousal. Again in interview around *L'Une chante, l'autre pas*, she says: 'It's never talked about, but most women actually enjoy sex more when they're pregnant, for reasons we don't really understand' (Kline, 2014, 96). She claims pleasure as a feminist issue: 'If I enjoy pregnancy as a sexual event it's my life, my body!' (96).

Each shot opens and varies the images of female nakedness in this exploration of pregnancy. The tremulous movement in the image gives thoughts of interiority, of the life inside pressing, and also of the feelings, dreams, and fears circling pregnancy. The image is gravid, living. Varda explores embodied experience and at the same time opens the film to a stream of consciousness. She approaches here the interiority, the *rêverie*, of Woolf's writing. This subjective experience also opens, as so often in Varda, to the outside world, to the experience of others. She associates the hyperacuity and observational style of the film also specifically with pregnancy, saying in an early interview from 1962:

I pushed this sense of objectivity by adding a specific kind of subjectivity – pregnancy – which is a kind of super-sensitivity which chooses to see the world in a particular way to the degree that the woman's interest in the child she will bear causes her to see the people around her as former babies whom some mother was expecting. (Kline, 2014, 5)

Her interest is in how pregnancy allows a reimagining, a new sensitivity to others, to the world, to physical sensation.

There is a cut that suddenly reframes the pregnancy images as the belly is replaced by, and aligned with, a pumpkin. The formal continuity between the shots is maintained in the return of a curve and shading, but the move from flesh to fruit is brutal, and more so when the greengrocer turns the pumpkin on its side, bisects it with a knife, and lays bare the seeds and pulp inside. A closer shot of this interior offers an image of soft, nestling, fecund fruit flesh. It is scooped out, clasped by the grocer, his fingers deep in the pulp, intimately hollowing a fruit womb. Varda moves from bodily matter to the pulp of a fruit, a pumpkin, and a first link to the produce displayed on market stalls on the rue Mouffetard. The kinship between the shapes of the female flesh and the pumpkin is such as to create the illusion of a form dissolve.<sup>28</sup>

28 As she reflects on her cohabitation with Dick Blau and his imaging of her,

Later in market scenes there are piles of tripe at the butcher's stand. In attraction between the fleshy images, Varda opens meanings that move from ripeness and fullness to feeling, opening, wounding. She works associatively, aligning human and vegetable forms, setting her odalisque in a series of visually connected images that express something of the woman's feelings about pregnancy, capaciousness, delivery.<sup>29</sup> Varda is concerned with naked human flesh as one in a non-hierarchised series of vulnerable and tractable materials. The matter she shows is never quite severed from emotion and impressionability.<sup>30</sup>

*L'Opéra-Mouffe* moves on to a sequence between lovers, opening a new range of images of *rêverie* and flesh.<sup>31</sup> A woman (Dorothee Blanck) appears in her nightgown, looking out of the window. Her lover (José Varela), his torso bare, approaches her from behind and puts his hand on her shoulder. She is yielding, smiling as she turns in his arms and he pulls off her nightgown. She is laid bare here in an image of mutuality, of 'modern' love.<sup>32</sup> Varda moves to show the lovers face to face. Movement in the frame is crucial, the blink of the man's eyes, the brush of his eyelashes. There is a cut to a differently scaled image as the woman emerges naked into the court outside the apartment.<sup>33</sup> In a further shuffling of scale, the lovers can be seen in bed with antiquated flowery wallpaper behind them. She is laughing. They turn in one

Gallop draws attention to an image of herself giving birth to her first child, where her head is not in the frame. She also dwells on an image, 'The Prize Watermelon', which shows her belly measured with tape: 'My title for the photograph suggests a relation to my body somehow like a farmer's relation to her prized produce' (2003, 28) and she continues: 'This is a way of embracing my objectification' (28).

29 Another reflection on pregnancy comes in a slow-motion sequence with a girl running. Her face flashes past, an image of elation. She catches at a stem, and bears it like Flora, resembling the Roman painting from the Villa di Arianna at Stabiae close to Pompei. Varda offers a modern Flora, goddess of flowers and fertility, the season of spring.

30 For Conway, the images speak of 'the violence of childbirth or even an abortion' (2015, 32).

31 Steven Ungar offers a rationale for the inclusion of the lovers by making a connection to comic opera or musical comedy (*opera buffa*): 'The *opera buffa* typically staged dialogues as songs and included at least one pair of lovers' (2008, 31).

32 Later in the film, the words 'La Moderne' are seen on the side of the sewing machine after the woman has slept with another man.

33 In its dilapidation, and with its rows of hanging washing, the court is like a memory of old Paris now estranged by the presence of naked lovers.

another's arms. Her openness renders the shots serene. He stretches with happiness. The film cuts to close-up body images of their contact, the camera following the line of her torso.

These body images recall the pregnancy shots. They open the meanings of flesh from softness, progeny, pulpiness, to eroticism, to love. The black-and-white cinematography and close-up images, the emphasis on line and curve, on a surreal geography of the body, make it hard in places to make out what is visible. The curve of the image, its flow into the foreground, gestures towards the living reality of this scenario. Varda's camera has come close into the intimacy of the bodies, capturing a trace of warmth, tactility, the involvement of lovemaking.

### *The Rokeby Venus*

In the midst of these images of lovers, Varda opens out a differently scaled *tableau vivant*. It adds poetry and playfulness to the sequence, echoes Velázquez's *The Rokeby Venus* of 1647–1651, with its composition reversed.<sup>34</sup> There is a resemblance in the model's body morphology, her pose, slim waist, curved hips, gathered hair, and long outstretched legs. Where Cupid holds a mirror for Venus, Varda's pale nude looks at her own reflection in a mirror she holds herself.

This *tableau vivant* is the film's most direct address to pictorial tradition and to nude imaging. It is as if the line of Blanck's torso, the curve of her body, has conjured this reflection on art historical tradition. Blanck lies on a daybed, stretched out like Venus. She holds the mirror in her hand. The shot is beautifully imagined with her fragility and suppleness on view in the delicate choreographing of her body, with the lines of shadow on her body picked up in a crossing network of leafless, linear trees and branches. The black-and-white shot is lighter, airier than Velázquez's interior composition with its satin drapes. The image speaks of delicacy, modernity, and freedom. It crosses between art historical reference to the reclining nude and an intimate imaging of a female lover lying naked. The historical point of reference is opened out.<sup>35</sup>

34 This painting in the National Gallery in London was slashed by suffragette Mary Richardson in a feminist attack in 1914.

35 Writing about the awakening scene in Chris Marker's *La Jetée* (1962), Vivian Sobchack writes: "The image becomes "fleshed out," and the woman turns from a posed odalisque into someone who is not merely an immortalized lost object

The image is not without melancholy, and this adds to its sense of transience, of momentary, free, living beauty. In the far right-hand corner of the frame a graffiti image is sketched. It looks like an elongated skull with dark eye cavities and a long jaw. Behind are crossed sticks that resemble an axe and an angel's wing. The graphic style of the graffiti looks forward to the chalk drawings and political slogans about Algeria, the words 'Algérie française' ['French Algeria'] crossed out, that are seen on the walls around rue Mouffetard in the last parts of the film. This match of styles draws a line from the arcadia of the lovers' attachment to the brutalities and vulnerabilities of the Algerian War. If the graffiti image in the tableau vivant is a skull, its appearance here also draws out a sense that *The Rokeby Venus* is, with its mirrored glass, a *vanitas* image, an image which reminds the beholder of the transience of life. Varda includes 'V comme Vanitas' ['V for *Vanitas*'] in her alphabet in *Varda par Agnès* and writes: 'Autrefois, les peintres rappelaient que tout est vain si l'on pense à la mort. Ils introduisaient dans l'image une représentation de la vanité: un miroir ou une tête de mort' ['Formerly, painters reminded us that all is vain if one thinks about death. They brought a representation of vanity into the image: a mirror or a death's head'] (33).<sup>36</sup>

Beyond this reminder of mortality, and in counterpoint to it, what is most vivid in this *tableau*, as in the earlier pregnancy shots, is the life and movement within the frame. This animation records the living presence of the actress, as her moves and gestures are filmed by Varda. Blanck angles the mirror in different directions as if she is playing with her image.<sup>37</sup> Then she puts the mirror down. Her body is never entirely still, but she wriggles, moves it naturally, stretching, unselfconscious with her back to the camera, so her body is seen in its lived dimensions even as she is framed in the pictorial setting. The moving of flesh and skin is part of the reclining nude imagined here. She never settles into a fixed ideal so that she is seen as living, as lovelier because she moves and feels. Varda opens the painting to this different apprehension of female nakedness. She references Velázquez and salutes the visual beauty

of desire but also – and more so – a mortal and desiring subject' (2004, 146). I'm grateful to Isabelle McNeill, who drew this passage to my attention.

<sup>36</sup> The entry is illustrated by Georges de La Tour's *La Madeleine à la veilleuse* [*Magdalene with the Nightlight*] (1640). This image will also be a point of reference for Breillat and Goldin. These themes are pursued in *Cléo de 5 à 7*.

<sup>37</sup> This looks forward to the more melancholy mirror scene in *Documenteur*.

and melancholy of his image, yet also tenderly unfreezes the pose. This mobility is part of the relation to tradition Varda establishes, which is reverent and irreverent all at once. Her work is enriched by the precursor images to which she refers but Varda claims freedom of association and repurposing, a liberty expressed in the very literal movement in and shaking up of the timeless still pose.

From this living picture, Varda returns to tactile images of the lovers. His body is pressed close to hers. Varda allows a closer apprehension of this woman's side, her back, her buttocks. He smiles as he rests his cheek against her. This relay of sensations is pursued as he strokes and holds a cat, its fur in his arms. Varda changes the images again as the female lover moves to clasp his feet against her cheek, her back displayed, foreshortened from this angle. Her hand holds his foot and then he turns and they are enwrapped in each other. A cut shows her eye in close-up,<sup>38</sup> and then they are turning again and curling into each other beneath the sheet, and glimpsed asleep, mirroring each other. The film moves off into a series of analogous, natural variations, here sweeping the curve of the woman's bodyline into a series of images of smooth striations in wood, images that dissolve into a play of indentation, shadow, and surface.

The woman is seen again later, meeting a different male lover in the marketplace, this time viewed by a male observer (played by Antoine Bourseiller).<sup>39</sup> She smiles as she embraces her lover. They are in outdoor clothes. The earlier images of the woman still line the shots with intimacy. Varda returns to interior lovemaking, as they are seen in their room, in reflection in a mirror, then after sex, her head resting on his torso.<sup>40</sup> Dorothee Blanck says of these lovemaking scenes:

il y avait des tas de plans où l'on ne savait plus si c'était le genou, si c'était l'épaule, ou des entremêlements; d'ailleurs, j'ai eu le sentiment quand j'ai vu 'Hiroshima', notamment la scène d'amour 'Tu me fais du mal, tu me fais du bien!', que Resnais avait repris cette idée de corps entremêlés sans qu'on puisse distinguer si c'est une cuisse ... (2000)<sup>41</sup>

38 A similar shot of an eye in close-up will return in *Jane B. par Agnès V.*

39 The actor reappears as Antoine in *Cléo de 5 à 7*. He also voices Varda's early short *O saisons, ô châteaux* [*Oh seasons, oh châteaux*] (1958). He is the father of Rosalie Varda.

40 Bénézet writes: 'We know [...] that she has three different lovers and that she lives by herself' (2014, 17).

41 She speaks in an interview with Vincent Jourdan conducted 18 April 2000 for the radio programme 'Bande à part'. See <http://mapage.noos.fr/dorotheeblanck/>

[there were lots of shots where you no longer knew if it was a knee, if it was a shoulder, or limbs entangled; and so, when I saw ‘Hiroshima’, particularly the love scene, ‘You hurt me, you give me pleasure!’, I had the feeling that Resnais had borrowed this idea of bodies entangled so you can’t say what’s a thigh ...]

These sequences with the lovers, foreshadowing Resnais’s work, offer ways of thinking about undoing and opening, allowing desire, contact, movement, the most tender forming and reforming in love, pictured visually, to be one of the modes through which film can explore how individuals are enmeshed with each other. For Varda, her approach to love privileges sharing, mutuality:

The couple I show in *L’Opéra-Mouffe* is a sort of homage to love; it’s very pure, not in a puritan sense of the word. There is a beauty in shared love that is phenomenal. The sequence was filmed this way: first the couple is in bed ... I had a sense at that time that love is a kind of doubling, love is a ‘transport’ as if by a medium ... You see what I mean? Opium is a transport. Love is one of the ways to attain a reality that would otherwise remain inaccessible. (Kline, 2014, 9)

It is in such intersubjectivity, such sharing, that she finds beauty possible: ‘They see their own beauty. At the same time, she sees her own beauty. It’s not narcissism: it’s through his look that she becomes beautiful’ (9).

The lovers, variously in couples, offer a tender prehistory of the pregnant woman, of her love affairs, of passion. They offer an image of involvement and enmeshing of self and other, in a project that movingly takes as its subject homelessness and precariousness on the streets of Paris.<sup>42</sup> The contact between these themes of the film, love and homelessness, is illustrated formally, visually, as Varda cuts from images of lovers asleep after their lovemaking to similarly composed shots of the homeless sleeping in the street.<sup>43</sup> The similar poses establish parity between the subjects in Varda’s stretch of meanings from satiation after love to intoxication, to sleep, unconsciousness, obliviousness and dying, all these images of the living prone. She reaches back too to the

unentretienavec.html (accessed 4 August 2016). Blanck refers to Alain Resnais, *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959).

42 *L’Opéra-Mouffe* foreshadows *Documenteur* and its similar preoccupations with love and precariousness in Los Angeles.

43 In commenting on *The Maybe*, Swinton remarks too that homeless people, like children and lovers, are seen sleeping (2012, 476).

subjective perceptions of pregnancy, observing close-up images of the faces of the homeless, with the comment on the soundtrack, 'ils étaient des nouveau-nés' ['they were newborn once']. The film imagines the homeless as infants, using this image of kinship to stretch the frame of reference for her human observations from old age back to smallest childhood.

In her entwining of the intimate with the public, as throughout her career, Varda observes her lovers with grace, showing them with affection, showing their novelty and freshness, their freedom, their promiscuity. The film embraces their ease of involvement, illustrated in Blanck's simplicity and sensitivity. Her touching and receiving in love, sheer pleasure, coexists with the anxiety and grief of the film, stretching out its reflections on flesh.<sup>44</sup>

### *A standing nude*

Varda worked with Dorothée Blanck again, using her body to return to themes of nudity, in *Cléo de 5 à 7*.<sup>45</sup> In *Varda par Agnès*, she explains her casting of Blanck as Cléo's friend:

Pour L'AMIE DE CLEO qui pose nue, j'ai tout de suite pensé à Dorothée Blank [sic] que j'avais filmée, nue aussi, dans *L'Opéra-mouffe* et photographiée pour des essais. Les journaux avaient parlé de cette jeune sourde-muette rééduquée jusqu'à faire l'actrice. Moi j'aimais sa modestie absolue. Elle avait un corps qui faisait rêver des peintres et des photographes, comme on a un don pour faire la tarte Tatin ou un don de clairvoyance. On aimait qu'elle existe, simple et sensible. (53)

[For CLEO'S FRIEND who poses naked, I immediately thought of Dorothée Blan(c)k, who I'd filmed before, also naked, in *L'Opéra-Mouffe*, and who I'd photographed for casting shots. The papers had talked about this young deaf-mute girl who had been rehabilitated to become an actress. I liked her absolute modesty. She had a body that

44 It is apt that Blanck observes Resnais using similar close-up images to Varda at the moment in Duras's screenplay of *Hiroshima mon amour* where there are the words: 'Tu me tues. Tu me fais du bien' ['You kill me. You give me pleasure'].

45 Dorothée Blanck appeared first (uncredited) as a dancer in Renoir's *French Cancan* (1954). She worked as a model in the art world and was then recommended to Varda for *L'Opéra-Mouffe*. She later acted in Jacques Demy's *Lola* (1961), again playing the role of a dancer, with Corinne Marchand, before being chosen by Varda to play Cléo's model friend in *Cléo de 5 à 7*.

inspired painters and photographers, just as people have a gift for making tarte Tatin or have second sight. It was a joy that she just existed, sensitive and unaffected.]

Varda speaks of the qualities of Dorothée Blanck's body, her sensuous existence. Posing naked, and her gift for this, are associated with simplicity, sensitivity, a nourishing presence and aura. Varda acknowledges the contact, the thrill, between living bodies and artists, models and photographers. This is conjured not only as a response to physical loveliness, but as a further warm skin and flesh appeal, naked and unassuming.

Varda, like Berger, responds to the appeal of the nude as a form of radiance, of intuitive intimacy. Her words identify affect, the love, tenderness, and energy that are held in the actress's body, that are her possessions, her inner gift. She writes: 'On aimait qu'elle existe, simple et sensible' ['it was a joy that she just existed, sensitive and unaffected']. Of her casting by Varda in *L'Opéra-Mouffe*, Blanck has said:

elle avait demandé à des peintres, c'est comme ça que je l'ai connue, s'il y avait 'un nu froid' dans Paris; alors ils ont dit 'Il n'y en a qu'un seul, c'est Dorothée!' Elle ne voulait pas un nu érotique, elle ne voulait pas en faire une strip-teaseuse. (2000)

[she had asked some painters if there was an 'icy nude' in Paris, and that's how I got to know her; so they said, 'There's only one, Dorothée!' She didn't want an erotic nude, she didn't want to make her into a stripper.]

Varda looks to find in Dorothée Blanck a different image of nudity. In her filming of her she presents her as a living, vivid, sensual other.

*Cléo de 5 à 7* is a film which traces a turn, a tropistic move in its protagonist, from thoughts of mortality to emergent, tender life.<sup>46</sup> The encounter between Cléo (Corinne Marchand) and Antoine (Antoine Bourseiller) and the film's concomitant embrace of its political moment, of the terror and contingency of the Algerian War, are vital to the film.<sup>47</sup> Yet it espouses, like *L'Opéra-Mouffe*, an ethos of connectivity, of association, of refusal of the separation of intimate and public. Attention to Dorothée and to her role in Cléo's metamorphosis, and awareness of the film's binding of exposure, flesh, nakedness, to a

46 Varda uses the term *tropismes*, borrowed from Nathalie Sarraute's novel of the same name, in writing about her interest in influence, in being swayed or drawn involuntarily (1994, 21).

47 See Higgins (1998, 108–111) for a discussion of *Cléo de 5 à 7* in relation to the Algerian War.

broader questioning of agency, risk, and vulnerability, are also vital to the film's feminist project. As Varda writes in the screenplay: 'Apparition du thème de la nudité. (Dorothée le représente, formellement; plus loin, Antoine l'exprimera spirituellement.)' ['appearance of the theme of nudity. (Dorothée represents it formally; further on, Antoine will represent it spiritually)'] (67). Dorothée's perspectives on nakedness and modelling are formative in her friendship with Cléo.

Dorothée's sequence in the film, 'Dorothée de 17h.52 à 18h.', begins in a sculpture studio.<sup>48</sup> The sequence opens up as a type of studio installation, a series of sculptural rooms, at the centre of the feature film. Varda offers a reflection on the kinship between sculpture as art form and her use of cinema as a medium that attempts to hold dimensional, vulnerable bodily forms, the impress and imprint of the material world. In this sculpture studio she offers a new imagining of the role, the scope, the agency of the artist's model.<sup>49</sup> For Varda, 'Dorothée, le modèle, est sans prétention; sa présence, son comportement, sont l'image du simple bonheur de vivre' ['Dorothée, the model, is without pretention; her presence, her behaviour, are the image of simple joy in living'] (67).<sup>50</sup>

48 The film offers a representation of the Left Bank art world of which Varda was herself a part, studying art history at the Ecole du Louvre, while Demy studied at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Nantes before moving to the Ecole nationale de photographie et de cinématographie in Paris. The images of Dorothée in the studio and on the streets of Paris are reminiscent of the photographs of Edouard Boubat, collected in his volume *Lella* (1987), with his images of models and friends who were students of drawing in Paris. Varda represents this world again in a reconstructed scene in *Les Plages d'Agnès*, where as a student she looks at art books by the Seine.

49 Varda reflects on images of fashion models in her early short *O saisons, ô châteaux* [*Oh seasons, oh chateaux*] (1958) and explores the role of models for photographers in the opening parts of *L'Une chante, l'autre pas*. Her conception of the artist's model differs from that of the model familiar from the nineteenth century in France (and England) where, as Frances Borzello explains: 'The fantasies about models divide into two: the model as the artist's sexual partner and the model as the artist's inspiration. More often than not the sexual and inspirational roles are entwined. Fantasies focusing on the model's sexual aspect deal with her beauty, her sexual generosity towards the artist and her scorn of conventional morality' (2010 [1982], 5). Borzello specifies further: 'The fact that they are paid means models become objects to be used as the buyer desires' (7).

50 Ungar comments on the ways in which freedom is expressed in her very bodily gestures and comportment: 'Dorothée's ease with her body and her lack of affectation are in direct contrast to Cléo's distress' (2008, 71).

In her first appearance in *Cléo de 5 à 7*, Dorothee is seen after a series of Cléo's subjective shots. A mobile camera moves past plaster forms, the film attentive to the textures, tactile, clotted, of this sculpted matter, the contrast of different densities of pliable, sensuous material. The screenplay describes this: 'Dans une salle très claire, de grandes sculptures couchées, des ébauches' ['In a very bright room there are large reclining sculptures, unfinished works'] (65). The unfinished plaster shapes create a series of near-abstract forms on the screen. Through the doorway in the far wall appears the first of a series of variations on a sculpture of a naked woman. The figure of a woman is seen in the angles of the various effigies from the front, from the side, from the back, as she turns. Within the moving frame the statues appear as a series of motion studies, looking back to the capture of movement in still photography. Amidst the series of statues, there are sculptors at work.

After an image of Cléo, establishing her as the subject of the point-of-view shots, the film cuts back to the studio to show Dorothee posing. She stands with her back to the camera and to the sculptors, poised, her hands clasped at the small of her back. Showing her modelling, standing up, her back on show, the film creates a variation on her image as reclining nude in *L'Opéra-Mouffe*. Varda writes in the screenplay: 'une vingtaine de jeunes gens en blouse blanche tentent de recréer, en plâtre sur armature, une femme mince coiffée d'un chignon qui pose nue' ['twenty or so young people in overalls attempt to recreate in plaster on an armature a slim young woman posing naked with her hair up'] (65). Her words point to the ways in which the sculpture studio is the space where artists attempt to capture life in art. She continues: 'le corps du modèle apparaît et disparaît derrière les sculptures la représentant' ['the model's body appears and disappears behind the sculptures representing her'] (66). Shots show parts of Dorothee glimpsed in between the sculpted forms, bringing the difference in materials into vivid contrast. Dorothee's body is still but holds an almost velvety life, shadow, tactility. The statues resemble her and yet their forms in their fixity are still remote from Dorothee's liveliness. Her body, filmed by Varda, is angular with a bone showing at her elbow, her spine and scapulae visible through the skin, yet softer and curved around the top of her thighs, with greater density of flesh, entirely different in texture from the sculpted matter. Varda shows the play of presence and absence, through juxtaposed images in a single shot. So she reflects formally on an interrelation between art and life, sculpture and model, both on view in her frame.

Dorothée, her living flesh, elastic, tactile in its appeal, is a radiant presence. She is the focus of attention. As the scene evolves, the film pays particular attention to the friendship between Dorothée and Cléo. Varda writes in the screenplay: ‘Cléo fait le tour de l’atelier. Dorothée l’aperçoit enfin et lui sourit’ [‘Cléo goes round the studio. Dorothée catches sight of her at last and smiles at her’] (66). Dorothée turns, abandoning her pose. The next chapter heading is ‘Dorothée de 17h.52 à 18h.’ Dorothée is seen crossing her eyes, and blowing out her cheeks, before she breaks into an angelic smile. This playfulness makes her resemble a performer like Josephine Baker.<sup>51</sup> The gesture illustrates the elasticity of her skin, how she wriggles and moves and laughs. She is on her makeshift plinth, her hair softly pinned, her arms draped. But then she gets down, she gets dressed, and she gets paid. Dorothée and Cleo leave the studio and the film follows them outside into the yard, a further space of correlation of sculpted and living forms.

The screenplay offers Dorothée’s inner monologue: ‘Tiens, Cléo qui vient ici. Ce qu’elle est gentille; ce qu’elle est belle’ [‘Look, Cléo’s coming. How sweet she is, and how beautiful’] (67–68). Her appreciation of Cléo is part of the calm and ease she creates around her. The scenario of modelling, of nakedness and art, has allowed Cléo different reflections on the body. She says to Dorothée: ‘Ils sont si calmes, si attentifs. Vraiment, ça ne te gêne pas de poser?’ [‘They are so calm and attentive. Doesn’t it bother you posing for them?’] (69). Dorothée replies, ‘Mais non, pourquoi?’ [‘Not at all, why?’] (69). Cléo is lucid about her own fear of exposure: ‘Il me semble qu’on est encore plus nue que nue devant plusieurs personnes. J’aurais peur qu’on me trouve un défaut’ [‘I feel that one is even more naked with lots of people there. I would be afraid they’d find a fault in me’] (69). Dorothée’s reply reflects all the qualities Varda found in the actress:

Quelle idée! C’est rien ça. Moi je suis heureuse de mon corps, pas orgueilleuse. Quand ils me regardent, je sais bien qu’ils recherchent autre chose que moi, une forme, une idée, je ne sais pas... Alors, c’est comme si je m’absentais, comme si je dormais ... Et puis on me paie pour ça, tu vois. (69)

[What an idea! That’s nonsense. I’m happy in my body, not proud of it. When they look at me, I know they’re looking for something else other than me, a form, an idea, I don’t know ... So, it’s as if I was leaving myself, as if I was sleeping ... And then, you see, they pay me for it.]

51 I am grateful to Isabelle McNeill for remarking on this.

As she speaks of her own security in her body, her opening to its exposure, Dorothée offers Cléo a narrative to which she may aspire. Through their involvement, their sharing, Dorothée offers a different lived experience of the flesh, a new simplicity and tangibility.<sup>52</sup> She offers an alternative to Cléo's taut, tortured apprehension of her own body. As the screenplay relates: 'Elle est, avec Cléo, amicale et calme, puis émue' ['She is friendly and calm with Cléo, and then moved'] (67).

Dorothée takes Cléo's arm in a rush of emotion. Her smile is open as she engages Cléo with humour, lightness. Her black velvet band seems to nestle in her hair. Her dress, silky cotton, fits her body perfectly, its neckline echoing the shape of her neckbones. She is playful, rapid, tactile, arm in arm with Cléo. Her hand seems tender on Cléo's forearm. The frame is filled with the rush of Dorothée's hair, its flow and thickness, its movement creating something fluid, an area of *flo*, of something living, almost animal, as Dorothée moves and responds to Cléo.

Beyond the sculpture studio, the ensuing scenes with Dorothée open a space of comedy where Dorothée drives Cléo around Montparnasse, takes her into a cinema to watch a silent film, and then disappears, running up a flight of stairs. She is seen as she runs, her lightness accentuated by the languid movements of her arms, the flow of her dress and hair. She turns to wave as she runs up the stairs. It feels as if she has disorganised the fixity and sobriety of the city.<sup>53</sup>

In *Varda par Agnès*, Varda writes of Cléo: 'Elle se met à voir les choses et les gens d'une façon plus simple' ['She begins to see things and people in a simpler way'] (48). This encounter with Dorothée, a living muse, shows Cléo moving from opacity to exposure, receptivity, a new, more vivid, fragility. Baldung Grien's maiden, a standing nude, pale, her hands clasped, her face contorted with grief, saturates and inspires Varda's realisation of Cléo. Varda comments that Cléo has experienced 'the fear of being taken, of giving herself' (Kline, 2014, 10). She adds:

52 In an interview at the time of *L'Une chante, l'autre pas*, Varda says: 'We have to decide what kinds of images we like about ourselves. We should not be ready to go along with the anxiety of so many male artists who try to put their problems on women's backs, like Modigliani, Giacometti, or especially Bergman' (Kline, 2014, 99).

53 These shots of Dorothée recall the shots of a woman running in slow motion that are included in *L'Opéra-Mouffe*. Conway reproduces a questionnaire completed by Serge Daney about *Cléo de 5 à 7*. He cites as his favourite sequence: 'Dorothée Blank [*sic*] vue par la vitre d'un taxi, montant des escaliers' ['Dorothée Blan(c)k seen through a taxi window, climbing the stairs'] (2015, 49).

‘the very expression “to get taken,” means to be naked and defenseless, a threat to one’s sensibilities’ (10). Through Dorothée’s naked body, its peace and loveliness, Varda redraws this image of the standing nude.

### *Ariadne on the shore*

As Varda’s works accumulate, as she moves on to reflective, hybrid, emotional works in the 1980s, reclining returns, and her female characters sink down further in new challenges to verticality. *Documenteur*, with its companion piece *Mur murs* (1981), makes up her Los Angeles diptych.<sup>54</sup> Of the two, *Documenteur* is ostensibly a *film de fiction*, where *Mur murs* is a documentary about street art and community in Venice and East LA.<sup>55</sup> Varda describes *Documenteur* more specifically as an ‘emotion picture’.<sup>56</sup> One emotion, *la douleur*, variously distress and pain, rises to the fore and is explored through images of reclining. *Documenteur* is a work that shows the challenge and hazard of iterating real feelings.

The first five minutes of the film have a voice-over by Varda in which she speaks about language. She shows the film’s protagonist, Emilie (Sabine Mamou), a French woman alone in Los Angeles with her child Martin (played by Mathieu Demy at eight years old). Over an image of Emilie in *rêverie*, Varda says, ‘elle est sans doute moi et vraie mais je ne me reconnais pas dans cette femme-là’ [‘she is mostly like me,

54 Bénézet, considering *Documenteur* and *Mur murs*, argues that ‘the more intimate narrative of *Documenteur* should [...] be looked at as a feminist companion to the political collection of testimonies of the first film’ (2009, 94). Varda says of *Documenteur*: ‘It’s the shadow of the previous one, the shadow of *Mur Murs*. It’s an idea I’ve had for a long time: to do a series of films on the same subject, the way painters do sketches, drawings or watercolours’ (Kline, 2014, 107).

55 In an essay on nomadic gazes in Varda, Phil Powrie speaks of the fusing of objectivity and subjectivity in her work. For Powrie, in Varda: ‘Objects, like *le hasard objectif* of the Surrealists, reveal traces of hidden subjectivity. In that respect, the real world, if taken at face value, at topographical value, lies, hence Varda’s pun combining the word documentary and lies, “documenteur”, the title of one of her films’ (2011, 68).

56 This is given as the second title of the bilingual film in the titles sequence. Varda moves from ‘motion picture’ to ‘emotion picture’, anticipating the ground covered by Giuliana Bruno in her *Atlas of Emotion*, where she writes: ‘Film moves, and fundamentally “moves” us, with its ability to render affects and, in turn, to affect’ (2002, 7).

and real, but I don't recognise myself in her']. The camera then pans sideways across a wall, pulling away. The words recognise a likeness between Agnès and Emilie, a woman Agnès identifies as herself, and as real, and yet always also apart, unrecognised, hallucinatory. Varda opens a space in autofiction, in autobiographical film, of observing and of not knowing oneself.<sup>57</sup> Emilie is her, and is not her, in ways the film holds onto all at once. Emilie is an unravelling self, unassimilated.<sup>58</sup> This film documents a departure into suffering where the self is not recognised, but instead operates anonymously, numbly, at one remove.<sup>59</sup> This strategy allows a close reckoning with grief. Yet it also responds to properties of *la douleur*. It has estranged Emilie, has intruded into her and taken her far from herself. Varda approaches pain through a series of shadowings, between Emilie and herself. This sense of indirect connection exists too between the words of the film and its images. Varda asks her viewer to see connection and also not to count on it, to respond to the film as a series of points of contact and simultaneous estrangement.

Her voice-over at the start, one of the most meditative in her film-making oeuvre, speaks of what is in this woman's mind, 'des mots qui sont des émotions' ['words that are emotions'] and she lists 'désir, douleur, dégoût' ['desire, distress, disgust'].<sup>60</sup> She unfolds an array of emotions, but there is the one word that returns: 'il y a un mot qui s'est installé en elle, qui s'impose et qui s'incruste, c'est le mot douleur, c'est un parasite, un mal blanc, un mot tourment' ['but one word lives inside her. It moved in uninvited, bored a hole. That word is pain. It's

57 Dominique Blüher emphasises this autofictional aspect as she examines how it is referenced in the later film *Les Plages d'Agnès*: 'Varda does not only insert excerpts from *Documenteur*, but also an old photograph of herself split into four parts. This refracted photograph echoes the fragmented images of Emilie reflected in a mirror, and is followed by a shot of Pablo Picasso's *Femme en pleurs/Weeping Woman* (1937). Although Varda doesn't give the title of the painting, the depicted woman appears shattered, almost literally "broken up" with grief' (2013, 66).

58 I borrow the word 'unravelling' from Sarah Cooper, aligning *Documenteur* with *Les Plages d'Agnès*.

59 Bénézet suggests that 'it is difficult to identify with Emilie' (2009, 95), adding, 'Despite our knowledge of her intimate thoughts, Emilie's detachedness is overwhelming' (95). My reading reveals how close I feel to her.

60 Varda lets one word grow out of another as she moves from 'mots' to 'émotions'. Her move through sequences of words recalls her sense of filming as a form on *cinécriture*: 'Un film bien écrit est également bien tourné, les acteurs sont

a parasite, an infection, a torment’]. Varda speaks about words that are feelings and words that are things, and then she speaks about the words that have lost their sense and meaning. But this word, ‘le mot douleur’, is an agent, an ache inside, ‘le mot douleur lui fait mal’ [‘the word pain hurts her’].<sup>61</sup> As these words are spoken, words about pain and its incision into this woman’s person, its abusive inhabitation of her interior, there are documentary images of the LA fishermen. A fish, a plaice, is hooked on a line, and a fisherman has covered it with a towel and steps on it to release the hook, the line. The fish’s body is prone, flattened, and its mouth is raised, gaping, as the man holds it open with his hand. The fish’s open oesophagus is visible, its redness in contrast to the clean blue-white of its underside and its mottled grey scales. The man yanks the fish, reaching inside its gullet with pliers, the image familiar and violent, accentuated by the brute, efficient gestures. The shots capture the pliability of the fish, the delicacy of its jaw, its bones, and the ravaging of its entered, damaged interior. As the man is cutting inside the throat with the pliers, the soundtrack holds Varda’s words about *la douleur*, its inhering, inhabitation inside Emilie. The near onomatopoeia of the word ‘s’incruste’ seems echoed in the contact of the metal against fish flesh. Timed exactly, the fish drops, released, bloody, its throat gagged, at the word ‘tourment’, and the film cuts to the face of the fisherman.

bien choisis, les lieux aussi. Le découpage, les mouvements, les points de vue, le rythme du tournage et du montage ont été sentis et pensés comme les choix d’un écrivain, phrases denses ou pas, type de mots, fréquence des adverbes, alinéas, parenthèses, chapitres continuant le sens du récit ou le contrariant, etc.’ [‘A film that is well-written is also well-filmed, the actors well-chosen, the locations too. The cut, the movements, the points of view, the rhythm of shooting and editing have been felt and thought out like the choices of a writer, whether to use dense sentences, the type of words, frequency of adverbs, indentations, parentheses, chapters pursuing the sense of the narrative or going in a different direction, etc.’] (1994, 14). *Cinéécriture* involves a sense of bodily rhythm, of feeling and dreaming the work, its justness, its balance.

61 *Documenteur* joins Duras’s text *La Douleur* (1985) and Sophie Calle’s installation and book project *Douleur exquise* [*Exquisite Pain*] (1984–2003) as a work that takes stock of the pain of separation. Varda returns to the subject of pain again in *Agnès de ci de là Varda*, where she looks at images of the Virgin Mary painted by Rogier van der Weyden. Closing in on images of Mary’s grief, of her light-rimmed tears caught in milky paint, Varda finds in these images, ‘la douleur’ [‘human pain’]. She specifies that it is ‘une douleur qui dépasse l’histoire sainte’ [‘pain above and beyond sacred history’].

In an interview with Emmanuelle Loyer, included on the Ciné-Tamaris DVD, Varda speaks about the way she uses documentary images in the film to speak in place of Emilie.<sup>62</sup> In this sequence Emilie and Martin are watching the fisherman work. The sequence is undramatic, observational, yet the attraction between Varda's words about *la douleur* and these sudden close-up fish images is immense. There is an indirect illustration of the emotion Emilie experiences and the word, and the hook, seems to stick in her throat. There is a heightened sensitivity, a porousness, where Emilie's own pain, her bruised psyche, render her unusually susceptible to the images around her. Going on to speak of separation, Varda lingers on fish in a bucket between living and dying, still and suddenly contorting. This last fish image is the mark of transition from Varda's intimate voice-over to the intradiegetic dialogue of the film. Martin names the image of the fish dying 'disgusting' and Emilie, separated from her *rêverie*, says in contrast that this is normal. This is fishing.

I see in the film a search for respite from *la douleur* that only intensifies the sense of the emotion. This emotion exists in the film as unfathomable, always, even if its ending is envisaged. Emilie says: 'Ça ne peut durer cette douleur. Je vais me réveiller bientôt' ['This pain can't last. I'll wake up soon']. Her 'sleep', its *douleur*, its bid for numbness and self-altering dispossession, lasts for the duration of the film. This is a time of unknowing and *rêverie*. Her friend Ginou asks how the separation from her husband happened and Emilie replies: 'Je ne sais pas' ['I don't know']. Ginou asks her to tell her that she's all right. In tears Emilie replies, 'Non' ['No']. It is not clear if this is a refusal to speak, or a denial that she's all right. Immediately after this phone call, a failure of reassurance, comes a sequence where Emilie seeks her own respite, distraction.

In her monologue Emilie says: 'Des fois quand je ne sais pas quoi faire de moi je vais voir une femme, elle m'anesthésie, elle me calme, j'oublie tout' ['Sometimes when I'm at a loss, I go and watch this woman, just to look at her. She transfixes me, calms me down, helps me forget']. She enters a convenience store. The woman is working. It is the woman's hair that draws Emilie in. It is voluminous, elaborate, striated by different

62 Later, with Conway, Varda speaks about how she 'use[s] documentary images to say things one doesn't say [...] what Emilie can't say, because she has a child, you don't explain solitude, romantic suffering, or waiting to a child, all of that' (2015, 143).

strands of silver and black. She gazes at the woman's hair, enraptured: 'je m'endors dans ses courbes, ses boucles, ses circonvolutions' ['I slumber in her waves, her curls, her convolutions']. In this mesmerising thicket of hair she finds anaesthesia, balm: 'je m'absente, je souffre moins' ['I float away, I suffer less']. The sequence includes moments of blocking. Emilie's own hair in the frame blocks the image of the woman. The image is further blocked by the braided surface of a wicker fan bought by a customer. The film cuts to an image of the woman's hair in close up, the curls almost filling the frame and it is a sea to watch, a cradling mass, lulling, drawing the eye through its textures, its soothing threads, its silver, its deep shadow, the infant memories it summons of senseless shapes. For Emilie it is also a labyrinth, a maze in which she loses herself looking for a thread. She cites a fragment from *Phèdre*, 'Ariane ma sœur' ['Ariadne my sister'] and in a later scene fills out the reference citing the lines in full and encircling the hair sequence in another narrative of lost love: 'Ariane, ma sœur, de quel amour blessée / Vous mourûtes aux bords où vous fûtes laissée' ['Ariadne my sister / Abandoned forevermore / By what wounds of love / Did you die on this shore?']. Ariadne is conjured as an image through the reference to the labyrinth, yet her presence also looks forward to pictorial imaging of Emilie herself.<sup>63</sup>

Emilie offers word trails: 'Répit, repos, refuge' ['Respite, rest, refuge']. She conjures an image of a 'Voyage au bout du monde' ['Voyage to the ends of the earth']. Her contemplation of the woman's hair is realised as Baudelairean and Emilie in her *rêverie* moves onwards in her associations to 'Exil, exotisme, pacotille, courrier du cœur' ['Exile, exoticism, bric-a-brac, Miss Lonely Hearts'].<sup>64</sup> This trail runs on to heartsickness, to 'neurasthénie, molle et triste' ['depression, limp and sad']. Emilie describes herself as 'abrutie, secouée, assommée' ['stunned, shaken, knocked out']. She is annihilated and exiled by her longing.

Exile as theme is felt in Emilie's positioning as a French woman in Los Angeles.<sup>65</sup> In her opening words, Varda speaks of any woman who

63 Ariadne, left by Theseus while she was sleeping, is sometimes painted as an abandoned figure reclining. See for example Angelica Kauffman's *Ariadne Abandoned by Theseus* (1774).

64 Baudelaire is a frequent point of reference for Varda. His image is seen on the wall in *L'une chante, l'autre pas*. His poems are cited in *Les Dites Cariatides* and *Les Plages d'Agnès*.

65 Her landlord reassures her that she'll feel at home because her district has Israelis, Mexicans, and Germans.

has separated from a man being in exile amongst all men, her comments accompanied by images of the faces of the fishermen, many of them Latino. In her voice-over, Varda reflects that the only thing Emilie knows about these people around her is that they shut their eyes to sleep at night. Emilie speaks about all she doesn't know about the Angelinos. She says she doesn't even know if they shut their eyes when they're making love. The faces of these individuals in their community are seen around Emilie, at one remove from her story, and shadowing it.

In this mix of untold stories of exile and belonging, and of being and longing, Varda involves an exoticism borrowed from *Les Fleurs du mal* [*The Flowers of Evil*]. The migration of this text, and its contemplation of women, into Varda's film is part of her reflection on traditions of representation. The scene between Emilie and the woman in the store, Millie, her near-namesake, is of a peculiar delicacy and strangeness. There is a tiny, inexplicable attraction. Emilie is drawn into contemplation of her hair. Varda allows this looking to happen and she captures it as idiosyncratic, as non-reciprocal. She opens possibilities for looking which are imaginative, sensuous, moving, and non-appropriative. Emilie evokes sensations of sleeping, of absenting herself, of anesthetising her feelings. She has found something still and soft to absorb her. Looking offers an act of *pansement*, assuaging, which lets her be absent from herself and from her pain. Varda embraces a different articulation of the gaze and its summoning of imagination, of emotion.

This same effect is sought more extensively in the major nude sequence of the film.<sup>66</sup> This is a scene of *repos*, of temporary withdrawal from suffering, a gathering of the self in looking. There are four scenes of nudity in the film. Three, the first, second, and fourth, appear as memories or fantasies conjured from Emilie's perspective. The first is an image of Emilie's lost husband Tom (Tom Taplin), a male reclining nude. Emilie speaks about the body of a man she has loved and his image becomes visible, his eyes shut, his penis lying to the side, his body stretched out. Tom's body, its 'douceur' ['softness'] is still clear in Emilie's mind's eye. The camera moves in on his torso, showing his belly moving with his breaths, showing his penis closer to. This is her intimate image of him that is suddenly real in the film. The second nude sequence,

66 Bénézet reads this scene as a turning point in the film: 'By finding a protected space that she can fully take over, and by observing her reflection in the mirror, Emilie is asserting her independence and her desire to become active in the construction of her own image' (2009, 96).

all shot in close-up, shows Emilie making love with Tom, her body under his.<sup>67</sup> Her legs are splayed and her hands caress his skin and cradle his buttocks as they move together. In a closer shot, flesh fills the frame, with darkness at the centre where their sexes meet. The lovemaking seems leisurely, natural. These are sensations Emilie recalls. Her face is shown in the frame with her impressions almost unreadable and then her eyes closed. Then the fourth scene, closer to the end of the film, offers a return to the close-up sequence of Tom and Emilie. He kisses her on the mouth. Only the third scene is a scenario that appears to take place within the film's diegesis.

In this third scene, Emilie alone explores the house of her friend Delphine for whom she is working, typing scripts and correspondence. Delphine is not present in the film. She is only heard speaking on the telephone and never seen.<sup>68</sup> Emilie replaces Delphine when a film crew comes to the house expecting to use her to record a film voice-over. This act of ventriloquism imaginatively makes possible Emilie's further exploration of the spaces of her friend's house. Entering Delphine's bedroom, Emilie thinks of a cashmere shawl that she lost in Germany and that she could never replace. A cashmere shawl lies on Delphine's bed, where Emilie herself will strip naked and lie down, a reclining nude, fashioning herself as an image in her friend's mirror.

*Documenteur* as a whole is made up of a series of mirages and vicarious images. Varda says that Emilie is no doubt her, yet she also says she doesn't recognise herself in this woman. When Emilie's voice is recorded, the film crew play the voice-over back to her and she does not recognise her voice. (The snippet heard is Varda's voice from the soundtrack of *Mur murs*.) Emilie sees herself in the mirror of her friend Delphine, as she lies on a cashmere shawl that resembles and calls to mind one she has lost. She comes to resemble nineteenth-century images of the reclining nude, odalisques, themselves often basking in cashmere. She finds a pose and an image that speaks of her own need for *repos*, for languor, for absenting herself from her present moment. She enters, and makes for her own gaze, an erotic image that recalls, reimagines, and opens out the odalisque.

Emilie sits down on the bed naked, her breasts exposed. She removes her red sandals. Her full pubic hair is seen, her smooth body. Her first

67 A similar scene of lovemaking is found in *Les Plages d'Agnès*, in the image of the trapeze artist lovers on the beach.

68 The part is played by Delphine Seyrig.

gesture is to prop her head on her elbow and to observe herself in mirrored doors by the bed. She is like another woman in the reflection. She is seen from behind and the film captures her own gaze in the mirror.<sup>69</sup> She adjusts herself. The framing of the shot shifts to show the double image closer to. Emilie's flesh lines the shot at its lower edge. The image shows the closeness to the colour, and to the touch, of the cashmere shawl and of her nipple and breast. Emilie scoops up her hair, lost now, absented in observing herself. The image is estranged in the mirror by a bisecting line that divides two panels of the mirrored doors.<sup>70</sup> As she moves before the mirror, Emilie plays with this line so that she sees herself as an imperfect reflection, her face absented as its image falls across the line. Her right cheek is lost, and her eye. She settles, dreaming, in *rêverie*, as the line cuts through her, showing two subtly different angles of her face. In her tranquillity, her languor, in the soft dormancy of her body, the image of Emilie recalls the mood of the reclining nude. Varda feels and shows the appeal, the intimacy, the lavishness of this image. Yet she also makes it newly hesitant, newly annihilating, as Emilie lets the lines pass through her face, leaving a stripe at her meridian undisclosed. Emilie makes the smallest movements. Her self-absenting is barely perceptible, yet she uses the optical illusion to delete a part in her image, to create a blind spot as she gazes at her reflection. The sequence is also bisected by footage of Martin going home from school and finding Emilie not there. She is also, momentarily, separating herself from her son, playing with her absence from him, as she seems to seek to do by small degrees throughout the film. The image of the reclining nude may also be an image of the mother in self-absorption, somnolent, disengaged, absenting herself from the child.<sup>71</sup>

When the film returns to Emilie in the bedroom it also seems suddenly possible that the sequence with Martin is her imagining of what is happening to him in her absence. She is lying on the bed in *rêverie* and the angle of the shot means that her reflection in the mirror can no longer be seen, but she herself can be seen reaching out to touch the objects around her. In a cut back to the child, Martin is seen playing at home and viewing, out the window of the apartment, a construction

69 This image is comparable to the *vanitas tableau vivant* in *L'Opéra-Mouffe*.

70 In *L'Opéra-Mouffe*, about two minutes in, shoppers in the rue Mouffetard can be seen reflected in a mirror with a cracked pane of glass, creating a similar distorting effect.

71 This resonates with possible readings of Akerman's *La Captive*.

worker kiss his girlfriend. The film cuts from this scene to Emilie in the bedroom. The inserted kiss, the image of the lovers, floats as a scene that may or may not be seen by Martin, that may or may not be imagined by Emilie.<sup>72</sup> The film untethers these readings, offering different tempos of longing and imagining.

The reclining sequence is a space for *rêverie*, where the swirling pattern of the cashmere recalls the curves, the circles of Emilie's body, her breast, her nipples, and the circumvolutions of Millie's hair. Emilie turns to prop her head in her hands and look at a retro image of lovers kissing, the woman's neck arched back, *soumise*, reclining, in a postcard in the bedroom. The man kisses her throat. Emilie gazes at the ceiling. Languid, she moves her arm and smiles and closes her eyes. She lies back, baring her throat and drifting with freedom and rapture. The film cuts to images from the murals in LA, including a spaceman inverted, falling through the sky, from John Wehrle's 1978 Venice project *The Fall of Icarus*.<sup>73</sup> The cosmonaut mural speaks of suspension, offering a painted, murmured correlative of her floating, anaesthetised state of mind.<sup>74</sup> The film cuts to Emilie completely overturned, knocked off her vertical axis, lying like a lover or a child. Her fingers trail in the beads dangling from a lightshade. She turns and moves, as if she is making love, and then the film cuts to her apartment.

The scene is followed closely by an episode where Emilie is invited to sleep with one of Tom's friends. She has no interest in a random encounter. She is absorbed instead in *rêverie*, in the grip of the dream, the sensual imagining through which she seeks to assuage her pain and distress. The film cuts from the encounter to framed and then unleashed images of the ocean waves of the Pacific. From these emotional images the film cuts to Emilie playing with Martin on the shore. The waves are seen drawing back, the beach uncovered, and then there are shots of an improvised wake for a homeless woman who has died on the shore.<sup>75</sup>

72 Varda says in interview: 'The child misses his father and desires his mother' (Kline, 2014, 114).

73 This image is seen earlier in *Documenteur*, when Emilie has told the film crew that these are the images she knows in LA. The image is glimpsed too in a scene with Juliette Berto in the companion film *Mur murs*.

74 Bourgeois writes, as cited above, 'Hanging and floating are states of ambivalence and doubt' (Meyer-Thoss, 1992, 69).

75 The scene pursues Varda's small memorial for the homeless who have died on the streets of Paris in *L'Opéra-Mouffe*. She shows photographs of the dead with votive offerings and images of saints. The scene also looks forwards to her imagery

Emilie takes Martin abruptly away.<sup>76</sup> Her own death, her annihilation in her suffering, like Ariadne's on the shore, is one of the intersubjective fears of the film, a fear for Martin and for Emilie herself, played with in the act of reclining, in self-absenting. Varda shows the relation between being washed up, lying down to die, and reclining. This undertow to her engagement with the figure of the reclining nude, this intimation that indolence may shade into a desperate inability to move and move on, or a near pleasurable giving in and giving up, as attempts to stay alive are undone, looks forward to engagement with dying and horizontality in Breillat and Goldin.

In her voice-over earlier Emilie has asked, 'combien de temps encore?' ['how much longer?']. She reminds herself: 'Attendre, tenir le coup, vivre avec cet enfant unique' ['Wait, ride it out, live with this only child']. The image of the homeless woman serves to speak in place of Emilie, to give a form to her wishes and fears. From finding imaginary kinship in a community of migrants, of the exiled, Emilie is aligned now with the homeless who find temporary homes at Venice Beach, living and dying there. Emilie is not only in exile. She has been unhomed. For much of the film she seeks to make a new temporary home with Martin, scavenging discarded pieces of furniture in the streets around her and cleaning them carefully. The film cuts to an image of another homeless woman stretching her arms and brushing sand from her clothes.

The stream of images is now so completely absorbed with Emilie's feelings, the emotion pictures that make up her consciousness, that there is no need for her voice-over.<sup>77</sup> The mood is more somnolent, dreamy, absorbed in her sensations. *Documenteur* becomes most fully a moving image stream of consciousness. Piano music is heard close to the end of the film and children are seen whose gestures recall those of the homeless woman stretching her arms. There is a worker in a restaurant, cleaning the windows now the lights are turned off. Neon lights are reflected in

of an unknown corpse in *Sans toit ni loi* [*Vagabond*] (1985). In interview Varda speaks about the material details of this scene, her image of 'this little frozen body that they put into a little snow bag of white plastic with a zipper that reminds us of the zipper on her sweatshirt and this sack that looks like the sleeping bag she was sleeping in' (Kline, 2014, 125). She goes on to say, in *Film Quarterly*, 'It's clear that she died. Alone in a ditch, frozen, which is an awful death' (Kline, 2014, 129).

<sup>76</sup> Marked by the separation from his father, he has already conjured the possibility of Emilie's death when they are sitting in a fast-food restaurant.

<sup>77</sup> Bénézet points out that in the last stages of the film, 'Emilie's monologue suddenly disappears' (2009, 95).

the glass. Her gestures as she cleans echo the woman on the beach and the stretching children. She limps as she walks away to the back of the frame. Discarded shop mannequins are in view in another window. These bring to Emilie's mind, and summon into the film, the fourth nude scene, a memory or fantasy, close-up images of Emilie and Tom making love. The images close in on body parts. In these shots Varda traces the closest contact of Tom's body against Emilie's skin, the tender moulding of one body to the shape of another.<sup>78</sup> His body hair is seen, his moles. The images summon the imprint and bodily presence of Tom, who is missing through the film.<sup>79</sup> The vision of hair against sex is prehensile, touching, clinging. His torso, its markings, are close, coating her skin, lining her, drawing a line of sensation. The film cuts from their clasped hands to an image of another homeless woman suddenly sensual, seen from behind running her hands through her long, unwashed dark hair.<sup>80</sup>

In *Mur murs* street artist Terry Schoonhoven says that 'daydreaming about what Los Angeles is or might be or what's hidden out there' is the true source of the murals in the city. He says: 'it's about everybody dreaming together'. The film shows his work *Isle of California* (1972). It is a post-earthquake, post-apocalyptic scene where the wrecked infrastructure of the freeway is seen suspended over the rocks and ocean

78 The shots recall the scenes with the lovers in *L'Opéra-Mouffe*.

79 The only image seen of the family before is a black-and-white photograph where Tom has his arm around Emilie and she smiles. Martin, at the side, watches his parents. The composition of the image is copied from that of one of the murals that appears in *Documenteur* and *Mur murs, Moratorium* by Willie Herrón and Gronk. The mural represents the 1970 Chicano Moratorium, the movement that organized anti-Vietnam demonstrations.

80 The editing makes it appear that the sexual images are this woman's fantasy, and that she responds by running her hands through her hair. She becomes another uncanny image of Emilie found by chance in Venice Beach. In interview in *Positif*, Varda says: 'In *Documenteur* I shot a love scene (realistic, concrete, love-making) between Emilie and her lover. It's the illustration but also the sign of amorous voluptuousness bodied out in each other's arms. In another scene shot by Nurith Aviv, we watched a woman one night in a Laundromat with her back to us caressing her hair. She's absentmindedly weaving childlike braids in her greasy hair. It's a troubling image, of impossible voluptuousness yet evident sensuality. When I showed this film with Sabine Mamou – who also plays Emilie – I noticed this gesture that Sabine, as actress, does while making love. She would raise her elbows above her head. I remember how happy I was when I realized I could juxtapose the shots of the woman in the Laundromat with these elbows raised in the act of love' (Kline, 2014, 113–114).

of the California coast. This dream of California is the backdrop of the first shot of *Documenteur*. In *Mur murs* the same mural forms the backdrop for the last frame, a still image, where there is a woman and a child, Varda herself and Mathieu Demy, playing catch with a ball. In *Mur murs*, in front of a mural by Art Mortimer, of a series of family photographs painted in sepia colours, Varda speaks of a primal need: 'raconter sa vie sur la place publique' ['to display one's private life in the public square']. Against another family image, this time from the mural *Moratorium* by Willie Herrón and Gronk, Herrón speaks of the inception of his art project in the gang killing of his brother. He says: 'Violence affects everyone and it hurts'.

Between *Mur murs* and *Documenteur*, Varda opens a *rêverie* on how to represent pain, *la douleur*, loss in separation, in mourning, in gang violence, in exile. She explores how documentary images, shots grafted from the real Los Angeles she observes around her, can be invested with feeling. She explores an economy of viewing that is open, associative, sensual, moving, non-appropriative. In this world she also animates an image of a reclining nude in order to make felt all its possibilities for holding sensations of absencing, annihilation, anesthetising, sleep, unconsciousness, and dying. She combs through these meanings. Pain, distress, an erotic languishing, *la douleur* wrought by the disappearance of the loved one, are felt through a series of images of lying prone, the fish, Emilie naked, the dead woman on the shore.

Emilie comments, across languages, on the proximity between the word *corps* in French and the word *corpse* in English. These images are also attached to the floating, limbo images of the cosmonaut from *Mur murs*, images in Los Angeles of 'des anges tombés du ciel' ['angels fallen from the sky']. The figure of the reclining nude shadows and is shadowed by the prone bodies glimpsed in the sequences of lovemaking, the dreaminess of these sensations sought again, between pain and numbness, in the labyrinth of hair, in the patterns of the cashmere shawl. This hallucinatory figure, Emilie, both Varda and not, lives her environment through her emotions, in indirectness and unmotivated attraction.

In an interview about her film *Le Bonheur* [*Happiness*] (1965) in *Cahiers du cinéma*, Varda says: 'I knew that I needed two long takes from five to six minutes, one with the wife and one with the mistress. I needed two long "breaths"' (Kline, 2014, 37).<sup>81</sup> Looking at the reclining nudes in

81 *Le Bonheur*, which has no reclining nude images as such, though beautiful shots of lovemaking, and pictorial reference to the colours of Impressionist

Varda's films, I find two long 'breaths', one with a wife and one with an actress, Emilie's reflective sequence in the mirror in *Documenteur*, and Varda's slow images of the naked Jane Birkin in *Jane B. par Agnès V.*

### Venus of Urbino, La Maja desnuda, et quelques autres

Varda describes *Jane B. par Agnès V.* as a kaleidoscope film,<sup>82</sup> a film of various stories, over various seasons. It is a film of coloured facets, falling shards, about a varying woman, a starlet, an icon, Varda's friend Jane Birkin.<sup>83</sup> Unlike a conventional film homage to an actress, rich with clips and tributes, this collaborative project, an imaginary archive of Birkin, comprises new scenes from imagined films, scenarios in which Birkin might have, or would have liked to have, starred.<sup>84</sup> It creates a repertory to meet Birkin's desire and to realise her possibilities. It intersperses imagined scenes with interviews between Varda and Birkin, living and alive, in moments of apparent intimacy and limpidity.<sup>85</sup> In among its

painting, inspires me to allude to a rare Berthe Morisot image of a reclining nude shepherdess, lying in a meadow with a yellow headscarf, her skin pale in the grasses but dappled with sunlight. The painting dates from 1891 and hangs in the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza in Madrid.

82 Varda uses the formulation 'film kaléidoscope' (1994, 184). Sandy Flitterman-Lewis finds a different metaphor, embroidery, as she describes the film as 'a fiction sewn with Jane B.'s mini-confidences' (2015).

83 Varda and Birkin met after Birkin wrote a letter to Varda about *Sans toit ni loi*.

84 *Jane B.* has been seen as a precursor to *Les Plages d'Agnès*. Claire Boyle describes it as a 'a self-conscious cinematic portrait' and argues that the goal of *Jane B. par Agnès V.* is 'to use film and this film project to generate multiple selves for her subject, using the cinema as a technology of the self to create her anew, to bring multiple new Birkins into being in a way that lays the ground for *Les Plages d'Agnès*' (2012, 11). Dominique Blüher argues for the novelty of *Les Plages d'Agnès* as a film which '(re-)enacts moments of [Varda's] life without altering the defining moment of autobiography or becoming a fiction' (2013, 61). If *Jane B. par Agnès V.* does not enact moments of Birkin's life in the same way, Blüher acknowledges that 'Varda is drawing her cinematic self-portrait as a "woman in the moving mirror", in the line of her "portrait-en-cinéma" of the public and private persona of Jane Birkin' (63). For Cybelle McFadden, writing about *Les Plages d'Agnès*, 'It is not surprising that Varda relies on key excerpts from *Jane B. par Agnès V.* (1987) to showcase her filmography, since this was her first attempt at reflexivity' (2014, 47).

85 Cooper argues that Varda's attempt not to fix Birkin, but rather to show her

ways of imaging Birkin, of approaching her, the film returns to the figure of the reclining nude. This is the image Varda chooses as she responds to an actress who is her intimate friend and who is also a beautiful, notorious, and fragile star. The figure of the reclining nude allows Varda to attend to and reflect on Birkin's erotic appeal, her pliability, her aura of nymphet and *femme enfant*, her availability, and provocation.

*Jane B. par Agnès V.* is a film about apprehending another woman's impressionability. This is its feminist curiosity. It acquires poignancy as a portrait about mortality and vanity, responding to Birkin's nearing the age of forty.<sup>86</sup> The film is dedicated to Jane Birkin, with love, with kisses, on her fortieth birthday. Critical to the film is Birkin's particular vulnerability at this stage of her life. Interviewed in *Varda par Agnès*, Birkin explains her feelings of fear surrounding forty: 'Cela m'apparaissait surtout le moment où la peur de perdre des êtres chers vous prend' ['It seemed to me above all to be the moment when you feel the fear of losing loved ones'] (184).<sup>87</sup> Her fear comes in her sensing of the fragility of life, in her apprehension of her loved ones as damageable, impermanent.<sup>88</sup> It is this vulnerability that draws Varda's interest. She explains in the same interview:

Moi je trouve [...] que la quarantaine est un âge magnifique pour les femmes parce que – justement à cause de leurs craintes – elles sont vulnérables. Je crois fermement que la peur de quelque chose rend les gens plus sensibles. (184)

[I think forty is a wonderful age for women because – precisely on account of their anxieties – they are vulnerable. I firmly believe that fear of something makes people more sensitive.]

variations and to draw from various sources, is ethically motivated: 'Varda's film searches popular culture, history, cinema and art, along with Birkin's stories of her life and Varda's own imaginary, in order to see how she might provide an accurate portrait of her muse that does not confine her to one image' (2006, 78).

86 Born in 1928, Varda was herself nearing sixty during the making of the film. Her next film would be *Jacquot de Nantes* (1990) responding to the loss of her husband Jacques Demy.

87 Birkin's next film role would be the bereaved daughter Caroline in Bertrand Tavernier's *Daddy Nostalgie* [*These Foolish Things*] (1990), in which Dirk Bogarde plays Caroline's dying father.

88 This concern is expressed in Birkin's autofictional film *Boxes* (2007), where the actress interacts poignantly with characters who recall her living and dead relatives.

Varda validates vulnerability as it produces a new sensitivity and impressionability.<sup>89</sup> She says that her aim was to reassure Birkin.<sup>90</sup> She seeks to reassure her about ways of living in vulnerability, about the passage of time, about loss.

The poignancy of the film is quickened by the recognition of all that is childlike, natural, disarming, and erotic in Birkin, and the apprehension, never voiced, that these qualities will be lost. The film captures moments of evanescent loveliness and also envisages pursued sentience, liveliness, desire, not least through the creative presence of Varda herself. Varda says of Birkin in the film that ‘elle a été drôle, étrange, magnifique, pathétique’ [‘she was funny, strange, magnificent, moving’].<sup>91</sup> Varda offers a gift to Birkin of a faceted portrait, a series of mirroring reflections that show life as transient, as passing, and as painful and resplendent.<sup>92</sup>

For Varda, *Jane B. par Agnès V.* is a film about transience, ‘sur le temps qui passe, sur les saisons, sur les maisons’ [‘on time passing, on seasons, on houses’] (1994, 184),<sup>93</sup> and as such it fits with her interests in the seasons in other films.<sup>94</sup> Its opening words are about time passing, as she describes a Titian painting she has rearranged into a *tableau vivant*:

89 In an interview from 1962, Varda speaks about her research with cancer patients when she was developing *Cléo de 5 à 7*: ‘I also noticed that, overwhelmed by these emotions, the sensitivities of many of the patients were sharpened and they began to see and understand things they didn’t normally comprehend’ (Kline, 2014, 21).

90 From the introduction ‘Agnès présente le film’ on the Arte/Ciné-Tamaris DVD edition of *Jane B. par Agnès V.*

91 Ibid.

92 In a study of late works by Colette and by Varda and their sanguine approach to themes of memory and age, Diana Holmes comments on the visual metaphor for the relation between past and present offered by glass paperweights: ‘Each transparent demi-sphere contains a tiny preserved flower, sea creature, snow flake, but their beauty is created by their framing in the delicate glass globe and by the light of the present reflected in their surface. The present shapes, illuminates, and gives value to the past’ (2016, 171).

93 The film was made over several seasons following the pattern of Birkin’s availability.

94 In an article in *Films and Filming*, Gordon Gow writes, for example, of one of Varda’s earlier films: ‘Mutability is a primary theme of *Le Bonheur*, carefully stressed in the autumn sequence at the end, when the leaves of the trees have changed colour, still agreeable but perceptibly upon the verge of decay’ (Kline, 2014, 45).

‘C’est une image très calme. Hors du temps. Tout à fait immobile. On a l’impression de sentir le temps qui passe, goutte à goutte, chaque minute, chaque instant, les semaines, les années’ [‘The image is very calm, timeless, motionless. Yet time seems to be passing, drop by drop. Each minute, each second, weeks, years’].<sup>95</sup> For Flitterman-Lewis, this film is ‘pure gold’ (1996, 354).

In a coruscating article on the portrait of the artist in Varda, Mireille Rosello writes:

In *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse* she invents a season, a moment that we could call ‘the season of gleaning’ and which establishes a powerful – albeit untold connection, between death and gleaning. Just as we can see *Sans toit ni loi* as a story about winter, about the cold, so *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse* is a film about a season that does not exist, an after-season. When the land has produced its fruit, a moment of dormancy begins, a hiatus, or in-betweenness. Grapes and apples have been picked, the wheat has been harvested, and between the end of that process and the beginning of a new stage of preparation, Varda inserts her story. (2001, 35)

This season of gleaning is its own season.<sup>96</sup> Rosello sees it as a moment of dormancy, a hiatus. This is what Varda has created also, differently, as she spends time, across the seasons, with Birkin in *Jane B. par Agnès V.* In this film of Birkin, Varda shows a period of dormancy between the quickness of childhood and adolescence, and full-blown existence and vulnerability as a woman. Varda lays Birkin out, a reclining nude, and she is all ages, child and mother, erotic icon and mortal, a woman now fragile as she feels vanity, imminent loss, time passing. The film’s capture and dilation of time is mesmerising. Varda’s filming looks forward to the precious encounters with Jacques Demy in *Jacquot de Nantes* where there are diaphanous images of Jacques still living, the sand passing through his fingers.

The films do not stop time, or fetishise the past, but rather open moments, seasons, outside time, moments for contemplation, intensity, dormancy, stillness. Time will move on, but the films cherish this

95 Sandy Flitterman-Lewis describes the quality of the voice-over beautifully: ‘Varda’s words seem to hover over the film’ (1996, 348).

96 I am thinking of T. S. Eliot’s composite ‘midwinter Spring’ in ‘Little Gidding’. In her memoir about Rome, Elizabeth Bowen remarks on a *décalage* of the seasons: ‘The February, March and April I was there, Winter was like Spring, Spring like Summer’ (2010 [1959], 144).

richness, heightening, instantaneity stretched out. In her television series about photography *Une Minute pour une image* [*An Image a Minute*] (1983), Varda chooses an image by the photographer Gladys, *Série du canapé* (no. 6) [*Sofa Series*] (1978), where a couple make love in the afternoon, their bodies cocooned. They recline, extended, nestling on the sofa. In voice-over Varda says:

C'est comme un frisson d'amour. Ici deux êtres se touchent, s'enlacent, et leur étreinte fait trembler l'air, fait tomber les feuilles, fait s'envoler les oiseaux. Ici, en une minute, c'est un 5 à 7. On sent passer les quatre saisons et les trois âges de la vie et les 32 positions et les 36 chandelles. Cette image c'est en même temps la tranquillité d'un canapé confortable [...] et l'instabilité du transport amoureux, avec ce bougé flou qui dessine une chevelure flamboyante à l'un des deux amants [...] L'après-midi va s'achever, les feuilles vont se poser à terre, les cheveux et les choses vont devenir nets [...] L'heure de l'amour aura passé. Mais pour le moment ça vibre encore.

[It's like a shiver of love. Here two beings touch, embrace, and the air quivers, leaves fall, birds take flight. Here, in one minute, is an afternoon delight. The four seasons and the three ages of life pass in a myriad of positions and starry visions. The image is both the tranquillity of a comfy couch (...) and the flux of amorous transport, in the blurry movement of one of the lovers' thick hair (...) The afternoon will soon end, the leaves will fall to the earth, the hair will come into focus (...) The hour of love will have passed. But right now, they're still vibrating.]

This is a time that will be left behind, but that is still alive here. This is the time of Varda's portrait of Birkin.<sup>97</sup>

In her short introduction to the film, Varda says that she takes the theme of the painter and model. She is the painter and Birkin is her model. Varda finds these words to describe her relation to Birkin: 'On

97 Varda's film can be seen in two senses as a *vanitas* film and as a film about vanity. Borzello describes 'the type of still life known as the *vanitas*, an arrangement of objects that illustrate the transitory nature of the pleasures of life' and she notes: 'Female beauty has traditionally embodied the idea of a short and poignant flowering before a fading' (2016, 69). She makes a connection elsewhere between female self-portraiture and vanity: 'The idea of the female affinity for self-portraiture may have drawn strength from the personification of the vice of vanity, and is in fact a subtle insult. Since vanity was for centuries personified as a woman looking in a mirror, a female self-portrait is evidence of this female vice' (28–30).

était complices, celle qui filme, celle qui est filmée' ['We were in it together. She who films and she who is filmed'].<sup>98</sup> Varda explores this complicity by recalling earlier images of women in erotic and supine representation. She returns to a tradition in Western painting, animating its seductive figure, opening *Jane B. par Agnès V.* to the dreams and nightmares of a reclining nude.<sup>99</sup> She enters into dialogue with these images, allowing them entry into her film world as beautiful objects. This engagement encourages vigilance and self-awareness, as Varda adopts and questions the role of the artist and her model.

In Adriana Cavarero's account of storytelling and selfhood, Amalia writes the story of her friend Emilia and gives it to her as a gift. Emilia is overcome by emotion. Cavarero explains:

Emilia had continually recounted her story, in the most disorganized way, showing her friend her stubborn desire for narration. The gift of the written story is precisely Amalia's response to this desire. (2000, 56)

Amalia's narrative gives Emilia's life a tangible form and her story gives Emilia overwhelming pleasure. Cavarero imagines complicity between the two friends and a common desire:

[Emilia] weeps because she recognises in that narration the object of her own desire. Autobiography and biography come thus to confront each other in the thread of this common desire, and the desire itself reveals the relation between the two friends in the act of the gift. (56)

In *Jane B. par Agnès V.*, the filmic portrait is also figured explicitly as a gift, on Birkin's birthday. For Varda, as for Cavarero, a fuller, more tangible portrait may be achieved by another. Something richer and stranger emerges as others tell our stories.<sup>100</sup> Cavarero and Varda meet on the same terrain as they think through the ways in which we

98 The structure of the statement also recalls the title of Varda's earlier film of female friendship *L'Une chante, l'autre pas*.

99 Sandy Flitterman-Lewis describes the film as 'a woman (actress/filmmaker) artist's look at the history of representation and the representation of woman's desire' (1996, 323).

100 Georgiana Colville asks if the film is a portrait of Birkin, of Varda, of both of them or of an imaginary woman, continuing: 'On songe à des films féministes comme *Film about a Woman Who ...* (1974) d'Yvonne Rainer ou *George qui?* (1973) de Michèle Rosier' ['One thinks of feminist films like *Film about a Woman Who ...* (1974) by Yvonne Rainer or *George qui?* (1973) by Michèle Rosier'] (2009, 146).

always appear before someone else, in which we coexist.<sup>101</sup> They both pay attention to the feminist possibility of women making each other's stories apparent.<sup>102</sup>

*Jane B. par Agnès V.* opens questions about what it feels like to have your desire perceived by another. It meditates on what it implies to have your self-portrait presented to you in tangible form. There are questions here of not recognising oneself. But also, more pressingly, if the portrait is true, questions of the rupture of looking at your own truth, your own desire, held open and made visible by another. These issues begin to fall into place in the film's first dialogue between Varda and Birkin.<sup>103</sup>

This dialogue occurs after a sequence illuminating Birkin's glamour.<sup>104</sup> She is seen in showy, gossamer shots on the Champs-Élysées, accompanied by the song 'The Changeling' by the Doors.<sup>105</sup> Uptown, downtown, Birkin's movements are free, elated, and involved with the image she is projecting. A moving camera follows Birkin in an arc, always in line with her as she circles the roundabout at the base of the avenue. In these evening shots a technician runs in front of Birkin, lighting her, and she and he are complicit in their moves. Thickets of Christmas trees are behind her, white with floodlighting and pearl baubles. There is the gush of a fountain. Birkin crosses several radiating

101 In a discussion of *Les Plages d'Agnès* inspired by Foucault, Claire Boyle writes: 'Indeed, it is the way in which the film pushes her towards her collaborators, towards others, that can be read as its final operation as an ameliorative and transformative technology of the self' (2012, 26).

102 Female friendship has been important to Birkin, beyond her relation with Varda, as witnessed in her collaboration with her friend photographer Gabrielle Crawford on the book *Attachments* (2014), a book of photographs of the two friends, and on Crawford's film *Jane Birkin – Mother of all Babes* (2003).

103 Cybelle McFadden writes: 'In *Jane B. par Agnès V.*, Varda creates a complex interplay between a portrait of an actress and a singer Jane Birkin and a portrait of herself, between other and self, between sexualized body and nonsexualized body, and between distortion and reflexivity' (2014, 47). I am more wary of this distinction between the sexualised and nonsexualised body, seeing the film open to the desire and desirability of both women. Varda through her works has been radical in opening a range of unexpected images of beauty, tenderness, susceptibility, sexual avidity, and longing in bodies of all ages.

104 Dirk Bogarde summed up Birkin's celebrity in France in a letter cited in *Attachments*: 'She is absolutely worshipped in France [...] she was besieged by, not raging idiots and louts, but by people who loved her and so cherished her that to touch her would seem profane' (Birkin and Crawford, 2014, 143).

105 The lyrics include the words 'I'm a changeling / See me change'.

streets until she reaches the Champs-Élysées, the trees garlanded with lights and traffic stretching behind her to the Arc de Triomphe. The titles of the film are superimposed over the image of a mirror circled by coloured bulbs. Lights of the traffic are seen moving in the mirror, as the spangles of the trees are now in blurred reflection. Birkin's stardom is a light show, a *tableau vivant* with illumination.<sup>106</sup>

Birkin enters the glass doorway of a Paris bar.<sup>107</sup> The space itself is kaleidoscopic, faceted, situated on a corner with panes of glass skirting the curve of the street and a further glass-panelled area opening out behind. The camera is set back at one remove, to show Varda sitting alone and Birkin approaching her. They are both in profile against different panes of glass, facing each other, but with obstacles – a table, a doorframe – in view between them. Despite the careful composure of the shot, the mood is casual, the setting quotidian. In this setting Varda asks two questions. She asks whether Birkin likes being filmed and she asks whether she likes talking about herself. Exposed here are questions of what Birkin consents to, of the contract between Varda and Birkin in the making of this film.

Birkin seems rushed, ill at ease. She says initially that she likes being filmed. She explains: 'parce que j'aime le jeu avec le metteur en scène, ce qu'il veut de moi' ['because I like playing the game with the director, finding out what he wants']. She likes finding out the director's will, his wish. There is a desire to be given over, to be choreographed by another.<sup>108</sup> She is seen to be absorbed in knowing how she may be perceived, desired, imagined. She also expresses reservations: 'je ne sais pas vraiment les règles du jeu [*sic*]' ['I don't really know the rules of the game']. Her work as actress throws her into the unknown, allowing another to be in control. If this is fun, it is risky.

The focus stays still on Birkin during her replies. She is shy, disinclined to look into the camera. She speaks of her own unknowing with Varda too: 'Avec toi je ne savais pas à quoi m'attendre' ['What will you ask me?']. Varda remarks that in photos and interviews she has seen, Birkin never looks into the camera. In the next shot Birkin is in profile, not

106 This titles sequence can be compared to the play with mirrors at the start of *Les Plages d'Agnès*.

107 The entry into a Paris café recalls *Cléo de 5 à 7*, where Cléo enters the Dôme.

108 This is a desire that an artist such as Sophie Calle plays with through her works which explore surveillance, asking author Paul Auster, for example, to do what he wanted with her. See Baudrillard (2009).

looking into the camera. The film shows the gaping hole of the camera lens centre screen. Then Birkin says, looking now straight into the lens: ‘C’est trop personnel’ [‘It’s too personal’]. She is flushed. It feels as if she is focusing on keeping the lens in her field of vision. Her shyness makes her vulnerable. Her willingness to meet Varda’s desire is suddenly disarming.

The film cuts to an image of Birkin looking at her own reflection in an antique mirror.<sup>109</sup> Varda says: ‘C’est comme si moi je filmais ton autoportrait’ [‘I’m filming your self-portrait’].<sup>110</sup> She says that Birkin will not be alone in the mirror. There will be the camera, which is partly her, and there will also be Varda herself in the mirror. Varda reassures her: ‘ce n’est pas un piège, je ne veux pas te piéger, te coincer’ [‘I don’t want to trap you, to corner you’]. The film shows threat, shyness, and also exposure, performance, and pleasure. Birkin’s desire is fragile, volatile. Varda’s move is at once to reveal and reassure.

Varda shows Birkin before a real distorting mirror. Her head is stretched pliantly in the reflections, expanded and excised, disappearing in the distortion of the image. This elasticity allows a further extension of the contract between them. Birkin speaks of her willingness to be deformed: ‘Moi, si j’accepte qu’un peintre ou qu’un cinéaste fait [*sic*] mon portrait, je veux bien me déformer’ [‘If a painter or a film-maker wants to do my portrait, I don’t mind distortion’].<sup>111</sup> She submits to this if she is confident in the artist, as she implies she is with Varda:

C’est comme avec toi. L’important c’est l’œil derrière la caméra ou la personne derrière la brosse à peinture. Je m’en fous un peu de ce que tu fais avec moi, du moment que je sens que tu m’aimes un peu.

109 As McFadden points out, ‘This is the very baroque mirror at the beginning of *Les Plages d’Agnès* that Varda once again employs to emphasize the act of seeing’ (2014, 51).

110 *Jane B. par Agnès V.* is a work like Gertrude Stein’s *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, in its exploration of how one can make a self-portrait of another. McFadden writes of Varda’s later film *Les Plages d’Agnès*: ‘Varda suggests that the self-portrait revealed to others is never the full picture, but rather one has to be opened up for more versions to appear’ (2014, 48).

111 The conjunction of these words with the deforming mirror image speaks of playful deformation. Yet the broader context of the film allows associations with distortion through another’s perception and also with deforming and distortion in erotic exchange, echoing Duras’s protagonist in *Hiroshima mon amour*, who says, ‘Dévore-moi. Déforme-moi jusqu’à la laideur’ [‘Devour me. Deform me to the point of ugliness’] (1992 [1960], 35).

[It's like with you. What counts is the eye behind the camera, the person holding the paint brush. I don't care what you do to me, as long as I feel you like me.]

Birkin wants to be liked. She wants to be perceived as lovely. Later in the film, when her wishes are shown more frankly, she says: 'Je veux plaire à tout le monde' ['I want everyone to like me'] and 'Je veux bien avoir l'air sympathique, enfin, naturel' ['I want to be nice, natural'] and 'être aimée, populaire' ['to be loved, popular'].<sup>112</sup>

The film she makes with Varda is to work as an enchantment gaining lustre from its indulgence of Birkin's wanting to be liked, this meeting of an appeal. Varda asks Birkin why she thinks she, as director, wanted to make this film. She answers her own question, replying that it is because Birkin is beautiful. There is a meeting of Birkin's desire here, a moment where Varda gives her what she wants. But the film also shows up this need, Birkin's desire to be wanted. The film exposes Birkin's craving and Varda's calm meeting of this.

Varda responds to Birkin's beauty and also conceptualises it: 'Comme la rencontre fortuite sur une table de montage d'une androgyne tonique et d'une Eve en pâte à modeler' ['Like a chance encounter on an editing table between a tomboy Sloane Ranger and a plasticine Eve'].<sup>113</sup> The words let meanings fan out, anticipating images to come of Birkin as nude Eve remodelled across a series of *tableaux vivants*, and as nymphet and star in London and Paris. Lability, stretchiness, as figured in the surreal moves in the mirror, are key to Varda's vision here.<sup>114</sup> The film

112 These words are heard as the film shows a montage of magazine covers of Birkin including cinema journals, *Paris Match*, *Elle* with a feature on her smile, and a knitting magazine which shows Birkin in angora.

113 Varda echoes the phrase 'la rencontre fortuite sur une table de dissection d'une machine à coudre et d'un parapluie' ['the chance meeting on a dissection table of a sewing machine and an umbrella'] (Lautréamont, 1973 [1869], 234). The phrase, associated with the Surrealists, occurs in the sixth song of Maldoror and it is the last in a series of similes used to describe the beauty of a sixteen-year-old boy, Mervyn, 'ce fils de la blonde Angleterre' ['this son of blond England'] (234). Discussing her reading as a young woman, Varda says to Kelley Conway: 'I don't want to forget to tell you about the surrealist writers, André Breton, Max Jacob, Lautréamont, they absolutely mean a lot to me' (Conway, 2015, 135). Varda created an installation, *Beau comme la rencontre fortuite*, showing the chance encounter literally in material objects as part of her exhibition *Triptyques Atypiques* at the Galerie Nathalie Obadia in Paris in 2014.

114 At moments, more than one reflection of Birkin's face is caught in the mirror,

to come, languorous and acute, will stretch out Birkin's skin across its series of distorting reflections.

Varda's choreographing of Birkin, the game she asks her to play, involves the re-creation of a series of reclining nude images. In an interview with Dennis Bartok, Varda speaks of letting Birkin come into her world, a world of paintings by Titian and Goya, of the Renaissance poems of Louise Labé.<sup>115</sup> She says she loves the paintings so much. Her play with these works with Birkin is indulgent, luxurious, and affectionate. It is a pursuit of love. She says Birkin looks so beautiful in these images.

The film opens with a *tableau vivant* whose coordinates are rearranged. Varda takes the setting and furnishings of Titian's *Venus of Urbino*. This honeyed image is her reference, but in recreating in cinema the scenario of the painting, she opens it to a hive of further art historical references. She alludes to the Ecole de Fontainebleau, notably *La Dame à sa toilette* [*Lady at her Dressing Table*] (1560), and lavishly references paintings of reclining women by Goya, placing Goya's nude on Titian's couch. The Titian *tableau vivant* offers a set in which different reclining nudes may be restaged and reimaged.<sup>116</sup>

In the opening scene Birkin is dressed in yellow. The dress identifies her with the servant seen looking into a coffer in the background of Titian's painting. In Varda's reconstruction, Birkin is seated on a chair in front of the coffer. The details of the setting are correct, with the same column and plants at the window behind, the same patterns of light, the same drapes. But Varda has added a naked woman with a yellow flower on the left and a reproduction of *La Dame à sa toilette* on the right (though the image postdates the Titian). The setting is used as a space for Birkin to speak about her thirtieth birthday.

Varda creates her filmic portrait of Birkin with a nod to pictorial tradition. Announcing a further reclining sequence, she says: 'Et si on commençait par un portrait officiel à l'ancienne, à la Titian, à la Goya' ['Let's start with a traditional portrait à la Titian, à la Goya']. She leaves unremarked the fact that she will offer a portrait form that alludes not to portraiture but to the reclining nude. The film cuts to a further *tableau*

these several Birkins recalling Maya Deren's multiple selves in *Meshes of the Afternoon*.

115 This interview is included as an extra on the 2015 Cinelicious Blu-ray edition of *Jane B. par Agnès V.*

116 The set from Titian's *Venus of Urbino* comes to resemble the imaginary photographic studio Jacques Demy films in *Model Shop* (1969).

*vivant*. Birkin is wearing a Goya-style robe with a gold gilet, a salmon-pink sash and gold shoes. The fabric of her shift is so thin her nipples and thick pubic hair can be seen through it. She is still in the scene, on a Titian-style stage with a little spaniel sharing her couch. The image references Goya's *La Maja Vestida* [*The Clothed Maja*] (1800–1805) though the pose is inverted. The film cuts again only fifteen seconds later to Birkin naked, but still resembling a Goya painting, now the *La Maja Desnuda* [*The Naked Maja*] (1797–1800). Birkin is a Goya beauty rather than a Titian: lean, dark-haired, pallid. She is noticeably thinner than Goya's model, her body stretched like a dancer's. Her delicate skin is loose in places, structures of her bones and joints showing. She is ethereal yet, more than the Goya, present, centred, absorbed, not coquettish. Her body is stretched out in an arabesque, unabashed, basking, and it is skinny, labile. This image yields to mesmerising footage of Birkin, naked.<sup>117</sup> Beyond the playfulness and staginess of the *tableaux vivants*, these shots are Varda's most imaginative cinematic apprehension of Birkin as reclining nude.<sup>118</sup>

Here there are shots of a different scale from any others in the film, intimate images of Birkin, naked, reclining. There is a blur of sheet and then suddenly large-scale toes as the camera prepares to pass close to its subject in a pan which travels from right to left up the line of Birkin's body. The camera is languid in its moves along the body and the take is continuous. The camera approaches the sensitive flesh of Birkin's nipple, then the almost imperceptible curve of her breast and her soft face, pearly, blushing, with her glossed lips drawing out the colour of her nipple.<sup>119</sup> The sequence rests on Birkin's eyes looking back. Her gaze reveals that she is present in the image, responsive, calm. She has let this shot be achieved. She is immobile. She has submitted to the slow sweep of the camera that

117 Birkin carries meanings of nudity through her early work with Antonioni on *Blow-Up* (1966), where she appears as a naked model, and her appearances in nude photographs. In *Attachments*, Crawford includes a black-and-white photo she took of Birkin naked face-down on a bed. It is an intimate, antique image with lace-edged sheets and gauzy mosquito net. Birkin's body is shown naturally spread out, her thinness revealing her ribs, the delicacy of her body (Birkin and Crawford, 2014, 102).

118 In a publicity shot for the film, included in *Varda par Agnès* (1994, 184), Varda also shows Birkin lying on the couch in jeans and sneakers, running together the casual glamour images of the start and the Renaissance stage of the painting. Birkin's gaze, her easy nestling, the simplicity of her t-shirt, her soft cardigan, the loose denim of her jeans, all speak of her comfort playing games with Varda.

119 Georgina Colville draws a beautiful visual parallel: 'La bouche rouge évoque

feels at its close to be a form of rapture. The audacity of what is done is tempered by the extraordinary simplicity, intimacy, and tenderness. As part of her portrait of Birkin, Varda reimagines the reclining nude closely showing Birkin's naked, pale, living body.<sup>120</sup>

Varda finds a different apprehension of the body of a living other. Her attention renders her approach to a figure from pictorial art newly mobile, sensory, dimensional. As Birkin's body is followed with a background of sheets, white material, the difference between animate and inanimate matter is marked here, heightening a sense of skin and flesh as feeling, as vulnerable. In that vulnerability, the exposure to the gaze, the incarnation, the yielding, the curves and folds show eroticism. The body of the other as impressionable, sexy, is unexpectedly revealed. The film captures the hush, the trust, the tremulousness, glistening, taut, of being naked, of being bare before the camera and surveyed and filmed. The camerawoman is close enough to sense emotion, response, feeling. Complicity and tenderness are needed for these shots to be achieved.

Varda's cinematographer on *Jane B. par Agnès V.*, as on *Documenteur*, was Nurith Aviv.<sup>121</sup> Aviv first worked with Varda on *Daguerréotypes* in 1975 and in that year Varda spoke in interview with Mireille Amiel about ways of approaching subjects in documentary: 'The thing is, that if you're going to approach someone, you must do it gently. Slowly in physical terms

les lèvres de Lee Miller peintes par Man Ray et le tout respire une tendre sensualité, une solidarité féminine' ['The red mouth evokes Lee Miller's lips painted by Man Ray and it all exudes a tender sensuality, a feminine solidarity'] (2009, 153).

120 Cooper writes of Varda's variation on the reclining nude that she 'blocks an overview of Birkin as nude. She suggests that the female film-maker's approach to her muse breaks with her presentation within a western tradition, and thereby also questions gendered knowledge of the female body according to the codes of spectatorship. The conventional visually-informed and male gendered knowing gaze is refused. This establishes a bond between Varda and her model that de-eroticises the latter in order to love her differently, in her own way' (2006, 83). Colville makes a different connection to eroticism, writing: 'La fragmentation de *Jane B.* évoque la jouissance féminine plurielle et diffuse, célébrée dans les années 1970. Ici la cinéaste se met dans la peau de l'actrice, pour mieux la fixer sur sa pellicule' ['*Jane B.*'s fragmentation evokes plural and diverse female *jouissance*. Here the film-maker puts herself into the skin of the actress to better fix it on film'] (2009, 152). For Smith, 'the close look is singularly uninformative – seen in such close range Jane's body becomes anonymous, at times even unidentifiable. If [...] this is woman's body considered as a landscape, it is a landscape in which one sometimes needs landmarks – the nipple, the mouth – to work out where the camera is' (1998, 39–40).

121 Aviv was the first woman in France to be recognised as Director of Photography

and slowly in moral terms as well' (Kline, 2014, 68). She continues: 'I have a lot of admiration for Nurith Aviv's camera work: her images affirm her deep respect for her subjects' (68). Aviv's work with Birkin is gentle, the slowness of the pan gesturing to affective attention and care, the shots yielded intimate and protective. This gentleness also involves eroticism and response to Birkin's body as sexual, as desirable, as adorable.<sup>122</sup> This is the gaze that Aviv's camera allows and that Varda's film encompasses as part of its response to Birkin's beauty and her vulnerability.<sup>123</sup>

The reclining nude shots of Birkin, pursuing the visual experimentation of the mirror images in *Documenteur*, allow Varda to approach a sensual, tactile, prehensile, and expressly horizontal, non-vertical reckoning with female eroticism. In the 1975 interview with Mireille Amiel she offers a vision of the body that is responsive across its whole surface, its length and depth:

For me, to be a woman is first of all to have the body of a woman. A body which isn't cut up into a bunch of more or less exciting pieces, a body which isn't limited to the so-called erogenous zones (as classified by men), a body of refined zones ... (74)

She continues:

All you have to do is imagine a woman who likes to be caressed under her arms and who says so only to have her lover complain that he's not her physical therapist! Our women's voluptuousness, *our* desire must be reclaimed! (74)

by the CNC. She is director of her own documentaries. Her filmography as cinematographer includes Greta Schiller's documentary about lesbian artists and writers in the interwar years, *Paris Was a Woman* (1996).

<sup>122</sup> There is an assumption in feminist critique that a woman artist does not put her female subject on show as erotic object. Borzello writes, for example, that 'Lotte Laserstein's *In My Studio* demonstrates how normal a subject the woman artist and her model had become by 1928. The brilliance of this image arises from the omission of any undercurrents of sexuality that traditionally cling to artist-and-model paintings. The model's breasts flatten truthfully as she lies on her back and the artist works at her easel with deep absorption. You can almost hear the quiet and stillness in the work' (2016, 150).

<sup>123</sup> Richard Brody, writing in the *New Yorker*, responds to the desire in the scene: 'a daringly inventive scene of Birkin in the nude – a slow tracking shot from her toes to her face, scanning her body like a landscape and ending in a confrontational closeup – conveys an eroticism that's vibrant with complicity and breathless curiosity' (2016, 8).

The shots of Birkin moving across her body do not fetishise or organise the parts they glimpse.<sup>124</sup> These images of Birkin revel in her sensuous loveliness, attending to her voluptuousness. As they pass over her surface they are pearly, limpid, ecstatic in their sensing of her skin and its stretch and pliability. Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind Krauss have drawn attention to ‘the vision of animals focused on the horizontal ground on which they and their prey both travel, a vision that is therefore, in certain ways, merely an extension of the sense of touch’ (1997, 90). They continue, through Freud, to see that ‘The imbrication of animal vision not only with touch but even more with smell, intimately tied seeing and sexuality’ (91). In Varda, horizontality is used to realise a different relation to touch and proximity in a remapping of female pleasure that envisages the possibility of the full stretch of Birkin’s body offering different sensations, and polymorphous pleasures, and which also remains with inscrutability, not anticipating control of what she likes or what she feels.

Voluptuousness, eroticism, are held in Varda’s gift to Birkin of these skin images, a grafting, a reminder of her loveliness, a promise that she is all this and that her body, at this moment of perfection and vulnerability, exists, and will also be remembered, cherished, held on celluloid. If Varda lets a timeless pose, the reclining nude, survive in her imaging of Birkin, it is to know that image, and Birkin’s image, anew, and also to hold her body, to spread it out for pleasure, ravishing, whole. With these shots, Varda writes a different history of pleasure and erotic imaging for Birkin and envisages a different apprehension of the reclining nude.<sup>125</sup> This gift to Birkin seems especially poignant at this moment in her life, and marked in relation to the more pornographic sexual imaging of Birkin to which the film also refers.

124 In this way they reiterate the imaging of Brigitte Bardot’s naked body in *Le Mépris* (1963).

125 In a Mexico sequence of *Agnès de ci de là Varda*, Varda films the luxurious hotel where she is put up on her trip. Her assistant Elodie is given a bridal suite with ‘une salle de bain de noces’ [‘a bridal bathroom’], a circular bath hung with white drapes, like veils. Elodie shows the bathroom to Agnès. Intrigued, Varda says: ‘Je lui demande de poser. Elle accepte’ [‘I ask her to pose. She accepts’]. She is like an Ingres or Renoir painting. She holds her hair up and Varda’s camera captures her back and the curves of her pale naked body, its lines in lovely symmetry with the tub and bridal curtains. The image recalls Renaissance images of Susanna and the Elders, of Diana and her nymphs, and nineteenth-century models in pans of water.

In *Varda par Agnès*, Birkin is quoted in interview: ‘Etre un modèle pour un artiste, j’ai toujours adoré ça. Mon père faisait de la peinture, et quand j’étais jeune, je pouvais rester des journées entières à poser pour lui’ [‘I’ve always loved being an artist’s model. My father painted, and when I was young I could spend whole days posing for him’] (185). Her narrative of her life as model and actress goes back to childhood and her relation to her father.<sup>126</sup> Varda goes back to Birkin’s childhood, blowing up images of a little girl as she explores her childlike persona. In an interceding scene where Birkin plays an art dealer, her artist describes her as ‘une petite fille déguisée en femme fatale’ [‘a girl disguised as a man-eater’]. Nostalgia for childhood is referenced in the film later in snow scenes where Birkin wears a swan’s down hat and the colours of the shot are blanched sepia. Birkin speaks of ‘la rêverie, le silence, l’enfance aussi’ [‘a dream world, silence, and childhood’].<sup>127</sup> She speaks about fairy tales, *Snow White* and *Beauty and the Beast* that her mother read to her as a child and that she reads to her children.<sup>128</sup> Birkin later tells Varda a story of a film she’d like to make, her fantasy, of the love between a woman and a young boy. Varda tells her that she is really thinking about her own childhood and about the pain of leaving childhood behind.<sup>129</sup> The scenarios of the film can seem at times like a series of dressing-up games with Birkin as an overgrown child.

In the slideshow Varda shows an image of Birkin’s face and shoulders, illuminated, with behind her a shadowy black-and-white photograph of her childhood self with her siblings. The little girl Birkin is seen on the right of the frame looking towards her adult self. The child’s posture is correct, her hair combed, her body clothed in a dark high-necked sweater.<sup>130</sup> Birkin says: ‘J’étais un enfant sage’ [‘I was a good child’].

126 Speaking later in the film about the size of her breasts, Birkin says Gainsbourg had sketched models with flat chests when he was at art school.

127 She goes on to reference the cold that kills the homeless, implicitly drawing in Varda’s *Sans toit ni loi*, which drew the women together and whose success allowed *Jane B. par Agnès V.* to be funded.

128 These fairy-tale references, and their images of reclining women and beloved monstrosity, are in line with the fairy-tale adaptations of Breillat referenced in the following chapter.

129 This fantasy was originally to be realised as an episode in *Jane B. par Agnès V.* but it was developed instead as the full-length companion feature film *Kung-Fu Master!*

130 In a reading of *Ydessa, les ours et etc.* [*Ydessa, the Bears and etc.*] (2004), McNeill comments on Varda’s attention to the childhood photos which *Ydessa*

She says she wanted to be like her brother Andrew, her words directing the viewer round the frame to see him, and then to see her girlish sister. Birkin has her siblings and her child self around her like a halo. She speaks with the photos blown up to life-size behind her but she looks at the camera, as if she can also see them in her mind's eye. There are the sounds of a slide projector as another photo appears: Birkin is in a party frock and holds a posy of flowers.<sup>131</sup>

As the slideshow continues, Birkin is lost from the frame and there is a family picture, a schoolgirl image of Birkin with spaniels,<sup>132</sup> boarding school photographs in faded colours. Birkin speaks about her unhappiness and her passion for another girl at school, Jane Wepley. Varda uses the domestic set-up of the slideshow to hold Birkin's memories.<sup>133</sup> Images from Birkin's childhood close in on Birkin's vulnerability, her accessibility. Crawford writes in *Attachments* that 'Photographier Jane est comparable à photographier un enfant' ['Photographing Jane is like photographing a child'] (Birkin and Crawford, 2014, 120). This image of Birkin as ingenuous and in need of protection, like a child, exists in Varda's film alongside images of Birkin as nymphet, as nude. These shuffled images are all part of an affective history of Birkin's bareness, her nudity, her availability to be fashioned. Part of this slideshow of earlier moments in Birkin's life, and interspersed with pictures of Birkin and her tiny daughters, of Birkin and Gainsbourg in family snapshots, the pin-up images reveal her eroticism, her professionalism, alongside her naturalness, her intimacy, all part of the stretch of her life.

The slideshow moves on to Birkin's first film role in *The Knack ... and How to Get It* (Richard Lester, 1965), to her role as a nymphet in *Blow-Up*. There is a blanched still of Birkin, fragile, bare to the waist, with long fringe and hair, her lips open as David Hemmings wrests a dress from her. She is seen in a colour film still with Gainsbourg and then dining with him in a black-and-white photo. He smokes a cigarette. Her long hair is sleek as she glances at him. The restaurant is decorated with frescoes of an Arabian

exhibits: 'She notices a type of hairstyle – a side parting and a bow – that recurs in photographs of young girls of a particular epoch, her own, and into the flow of examples she inserts her own image as a child, similarly coiffed' (2009, 289).

131 She offers the flowers to the Queen and Prince Philip in this early celebrity shot.

132 Varda had included a rather fidgety spaniel in the Titian *tableau vivant* earlier in the film.

133 The slideshow is, very differently, a mode used by Nan Goldin also in the 1980s, as discussed further in the third chapter.

palace, a fairy-tale setting. In a closer image of the couple, Gainsbourg's arm is draped across Birkin reaching to clasp her as he stands behind her. His bare forearm is round her, his face close enough behind her for her to feel his breath, for her hair to brush his lips. His face is half covered by hers in front. In an impromptu backstage photo they are seen practising together, Birkin elated, her face doubled in a reflection in the piano. The photographs are small documents of their love for each other. These are a few glancing images, affective pieces, stills from a passed world.

The film pauses twice over an image of Birkin in a silver suit, her hair long in curled tresses, her pink lips against the denim of Gainsbourg's crotch. Her face is there on the material as she is between his legs looking up at him. The first time the image is shown, Varda crops it so that Birkin is in the frame, and Gainsbourg just from waist down. This editing shifts focus to her. With her head inclined, her hair falling, she resembles one of the prone faces of Dalí's *Le Phénomène de l'extase*. Her skin is unreal pale. Her silvery dress, the folds of the fabric and curls in her hair make of her a sexual *Ninfa*. She looks at Gainsbourg with ardour, her eyes almost surreal as they roll back. Her face between his legs, her lowered pose, create a disorganisation of the image, an imbalance that is erotic. The closeness of her face to the denim between his legs leaves tactile impressions.<sup>134</sup> The detail Varda shows is blurry, the colours and edges softened. It feels as if the showing of this image works to hint at some of Birkin's feelings in this shot, the framing getting closer to her perspective and viewpoint.<sup>135</sup>

The full image appears further on and it is reversed. Full length, the image gives attention to the reciprocity of the gaze between Gainsbourg and Birkin as she looks up from her pose on the floor. The sureness of his stance, the elegance of her silver shining shin, her high heels, make the image more iconic, more glitzy. In her play with the image Varda crosses between and correlates this public provocation and hidden feelings. In conversation with Miranda July, she says about Birkin:

134 Varda also explores denim affectively as she attends to Demy's living body in *Jacquot de Nantes*, the blueness and the softness of the much-washed fabric part of the sensorium of pursued love in that film.

135 Commenting on another sequence in *Jane B. par Agnès V.*, McFadden draws attention to Varda's feminist acts of revision: 'Varda visually cites the original music video for "Je t'aime ... moi non plus" [...] by featuring the same establishing shot of the Trocadéro with the Eiffel Tower in the background [but] Varda places Jane in the foreground and focuses on her as the subject of the shot' (2014, 49).

What I love about how her mind works is that she never erased things that had happened in her life, no matter what happened. And I loved the idea that she said at some point that whatever Gainsbourg asked her to do, whatever it was, stupid things like being locked to a radiator or something else ... okay, that was the time she did that. She would never say: 'that was stupid and that I shouldn't have done that'. She told many stories just like this and had no regrets. (Varda, 2015, n. pag.)

Varda shows these foolish things. These images are part of her archive of Birkin. They are images she chooses and asks Birkin to contemplate, to look at now. They are part of her visual collage adding something still more lurid, surreal, varied, to the film. The imagery recalls Varda's invocation of a plasticine Eve as Birkin is seen in a fetish suit and conical heels with a fire bucket and fire hydrant, her hair dizzily bunched to one side. In a further image she is seen in the sheerest stockings and fragile gold-and-black sandals, draped, posing, across a velvet chair. If the idiom of these images speaks of porn, the centrefold, their details return in family photos which Varda also includes, showing Birkin with her tiny daughters, her bare back crossed by the thin straps of a bathing suit. Gestures, her smile, her elated feelings return across the spread of images.

The image of Birkin padlocked to a radiator appears in the film as a serial and varying image, as Varda films the plates in Gérard Lenne's 1998 book on Birkin. These bondage images were for a Christmas issue of *Lui* magazine. The plates show three small images of Birkin in high heels and stockings on a metal frame bed. She lies on her front and her body is contorted, in hand cuffs. The turns in the image recall hysteria. Her hair hangs down and she seems to move naturally across the shots, as if these are motion studies. The fourth image, crossing over two pages, the glossiest and most composed, shows Birkin kneeling on the floor and locked by one handcuff to the radiator. Her buttocks are on show, modelled flesh delineated by the black elastic of her suspender, her hair in strands all down her back. She is almost nestled against the radiator, her arm relaxed in the cuff as if it is a metal hand holding hers. She is childlike, despite the carnal, raw, inert presence of her hips and thighs. She says to Varda: 'J'étais si contente que Serge soit fier de moi' ['I was so happy that Serge was proud of me'].<sup>136</sup>

136 McFadden offers a different feminist critique of the images from mine, focusing on the politics of Birkin's acceptance of being a sex object. However, my account is in line with hers when she writes: 'Varda's insertion of these photos does not reproduce Jane as an object of sexual dominance and consumption in exactly

Birkin's happiness is Varda's focus across this bizarre range of images: her happiness as Gainsbourg's lover, her happiness as a sex object and model meeting his desire, her happiness as a mother, as a young woman. In a double portrait with Gainsbourg, he holds Charlotte and Birkin holds her oldest daughter Kate in a towel on her lap. She is drying her after the bath and her head is on one side. She is smiling, enclosing her damp child in her arms.<sup>137</sup> The slideshow explores with due delicacy the involvement of Birkin's desire to be loved, to be beautiful, with an expanded narrative of family happiness, of tenderness, sensuousness, intimacy. Varda says of Gainsbourg and Birkin in her interview with July that 'they were an incredible couple, so different, so strange' (Varda, 2015, n. pag.).

Varda's film makes visible a passion, a need to be loved, on Birkin's part. She shows what this lets Birkin consent to. She shows need, response, codependence, with clarity, combining a measure of indulgence with critique, care, and curiosity, a liberal acknowledgement of the queerness and inscrutability of all attachments, including Varda's own to Birkin in this film.

These issues are caught up in a rehearsal scene between Gainsbourg and Birkin filmed by Varda.<sup>138</sup> For Richard Brody this is 'the film's most tender sequence', showing 'Serge Gainsbourg carefully coaching Birkin through one of his songs' (2016, 8).<sup>139</sup> The scene is prefaced by a shot of the scribbled pencil manuscript of the song, like a Cy Twombly painting of the wilder shores of love. Gainsbourg standing behind Birkin as she sings directs her, his hands moving. His presence is tender, yet also rough as he rights the sounds of her French, as he teaches her where to breathe, as he forcibly brings her closer to the mic, and directs her with his hand on the back of her neck. He wants a kiss at the close. Her smile is untroubled, radiant, and the song, rehearsed, is lovely, its rhythms bringing his body and hers, their voices, their gestures into

the same way as their initial publication and circulation, since Varda includes these images of Jane to establish her relationship to the public and to Gainsbourg at the beginning of her career' (2014, 63).

<sup>137</sup> The affective stretch of these images looks forward to Goldin's work on maternity and sexuality in her images of Cookie Mueller and others, as explored in the third chapter.

<sup>138</sup> The couple had separated in 1980.

<sup>139</sup> McFadden writes: 'She is literally trying to find her voice in this sequence' (2014, 49). She draws attention to the lyrics of the song, with their play on words: 'Si j'hésite si souvent entre le moi et le je / Si je balance entre l'émotion et le jeu ...' ['If I hesitate so often between the me and the I / If I swing between feeling and playing'].

some alignment. In the middle of the song Varda cuts to an image of Birkin practising at home in her dressing room full of flowers, abundant lush orchids. She is in luxury. Yet she is also roughed up in this sequence, corrected, disciplined in her singing by her past lover, childishy inept as her English accent upsets the sounds of the song. Varda comes closest to showing Birkin's gaucheness in shots of her performing where a technician needs to move her into the spotlight.

For Birkin's fortieth birthday, Varda literally wraps her house up like a gift with pink ribbon. The film moves into the interior of the house, a documentary of the interior.<sup>140</sup> Birkin speaks of baby photos, of her mother as a baby, of herself, of her children, and the images are seen lining the stairs. Their images are glimpsed later as Birkin talks of her fantasy with a young boy. Domestic images and erotic fantasy illustrate each other. There are white flowers Birkin has received, Madonna lilies on long stalks, in cellophane and ribbons embalmed as if under glass. Taxidermy creatures live in her house, further reminders of time passing, mortality, and agelessness. She has a Victorian mahogany bathroom with bottles of English lotion tied with laces. These spaces are the depths of the story, deeply in Birkin's domestic life, in her daydreams.

Varda asks Birkin if she dreams.<sup>141</sup> The forms of Birkin's dreams then offer so many small surreal pieces in the kaleidoscope narrative. Varda says that she finds Birkin offering herself to the imagination. She speaks about lability, malleability, about how this is what inspires her in Birkin. She talks about the ways in which she can use Birkin in her imagining, how she can dress her up, model her.

Varda offers a staged image of Birkin as muse reclining, dreaming or daydreaming in sand, half-submerged.<sup>142</sup> She is crowned with leaves and pensive. Her dreaming face, staring into the distance, seems to call up a sequence of still frames of paintings, Arcimboldo's kaleidoscopic *Rudolf II* (1590–1591), Paul Delvaux's *La Visite [A Visit]* (1939) and a scene from Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights* (1503–1515). Varda allows

140 In *Agnès de ci de là Varda*, Varda visits the blue house of Frida Kahlo, a place she says she returns to many times, a space of relics of the artist, of her domesticity – a crocheted bedcover, embroidered cushions – and of her art.

141 The question comes as an image of caryatids on a deep green city water fountain is visible, silently recalling Varda's Parisian essay, a dream narrative of sorts, *Les Dites Caryatides*.

142 In a previous scene she is buried in leaves and uncovered by Jean-Pierre Léaud.

the reproduced paintings to exist as figments of Birkin's imagination, her dream world. She runs from a composite portrait where leaves, fruits, and blades of corn have consumed an entire face, recomposing it, through a Surrealist image of a woman holding her breasts as a child enters the room, to the enlaced and enchanted lovers, pale, cavoring, the strange-scaled fruits, the butterflies, in Bosch's paradise. There is an elastic, associative relation between the paintings and the returning preoccupations of the film. Painting here offers an intersubjective space of imagining that Birkin makes possible for Varda, and which Varda projects as Birkin's unconscious.

In this *vanitas* film, Varda buries Birkin in leaves and in sand and burns her as Joan of Arc. As she muses on Birkin's ambivalence about fame and glamour, her desire to be both unknown and famous, she begins to talk about the death mask of 'l'inconnue de la Seine' ['the unknown woman of the Seine'] and of her enigmatic smile.<sup>143</sup> The image of the corpse of Mona, the unknown woman whom Varda brings back to life for the short time of *Sans toit ni loi* [*Vagabond*], is never far from *Jane B. par Agnès V.* Making Birkin a sister of Emilie in *Documenteur*, Varda returns too to the myth of Ariadne. She shows Birkin as Ariadne, daughter of Minos, in the labyrinth, her own camera with its gaping viewfinder the pursuing minotaur. She says that she sees Birkin like Ariadne sleeping on the beach abandoned by Theseus. Her film responds to Birkin's capacity for abandonment, for giving herself up, leaving her like Lol in Duras's novel: 'Elle dormait dans le champ de seigle, fatiguée, fatiguée par notre voyage' ['She was sleeping in the field of rye, tired, tired by our journey'] (1964, 191).

Birkin gives herself over to Varda for this film. She lets her story be told and in the end looks into the camera with ingenuous charm. The film reflects on how to be a model is to be intoxicated with this giving over, with a childlike malleability, and even an inert, doll-like vacancy. It shows Birkin's vulnerability, her impressionability, her openness to Gainsbourg, to sexual exposure. It opens itself as film to these relations, showing their truth, their foolishness, but not dissolving or dismissing their power. This is a bid rather to understand pleasure that women might take, to encompass variations in female subjectivity, interiority, and desire. If she critiques Gainsbourg, Varda also shows herself choreographing and correcting Birkin. She shows the

143 For further discussion of 'l'inconnue de la Seine' and her relation to modernity, see Anne-Gaëlle Saliot (2015).

complicity, codependence, sadism, and love, of relations between artists and models. The film feels like an experiment where Varda puts herself at risk where she also works to reassure Birkin. It is a project where she achieves a new, beautiful filmic engagement with the reclining nude in her slow pan over Birkin's body. She lets the viewer reflect at length on her love of the reclining nude, her sensitivity to these suave images of repose that return in her films, these images that speak of indolence, pleasure, death, and commemoration.

Birkin tells one childhood memory of being at the beach and finding a newspaper that reported the death of Marilyn Monroe. She speaks of Monroe as 'inspiratrice naïve' ['naïve muse'] and she tells her dreams of wanting to move like her. What they have in common, she says, is held in the song 'My Heart Belongs to Daddy'. She whispers the lyrics in English and in French. A late scene in the film is set in the casino at Knokke le Zoute with its Magritte frescoes, with Birkin as croupier and Varda as gambler. In a slow pan from right to left (the direction of the pan along Birkin's body), Varda's camera moves across the images on the wall, their Surrealist dissolving world, the blue breasts of a naked woman. Music composed by Joanna Bruzdowicz for violin, flute, and saxophone accompanies the image. The casino is where Varda's father died. This sequence seems to exist in the film, unspoken, as a small elegy for this man, the pan, as with Birkin, a movement in time, in memory, a caress, a visual survey, an expanse of emotion.

Carol Ann Duffy, in a love poem, writes of a servant wearing her mistress's pearls before placing them 'round her cool, white throat' (2009, 3). The pearls require the warmth, the humidity of living flesh to shine at their most beautiful. The maidservant wears the pearls so that they will glow, and not sit on skin cold to the touch. The necklace, slack, a rope, renders sensory the exchange between the women. The poem is attentive to surface, the rush of sensation, a blush. As it continues, the maidservant imagines the mistress returning, undressing, and 'slipping naked into bed'. She knows the pearls are cooling and she misses their touch on her skin: 'All night / I feel their absence and I burn'. The pearls are used to find a form for the epidermal contact between the two women, their sensual closeness, the animal sensing, the touch of fur.

In a late return to the Titian *tableau vivant*, Birkin plays the servant again and dresses up in her mistress's white dress and iridescent pearls. In a discussion of Titian with her father John Berger, Katya Berger writes: 'Jewels remind us, don't they, of the pleasure we'll lose when we're dead, and how they and their precious stones will still be here?'

They console a body for its vulnerability' (2003, 34). In these borrowed clothes Birkin reads lines from a poem by Louise Labé.<sup>144</sup> The episode with the pearls leads to a last reclining nude image where the mistress herself (Pascale Torsat) lies out naked on Titian's sofa, a living double of Birkin, as she lets red roses fall from her fingers. Birkin as Pandora at her coffer lets out flies that settle on the image of the naked woman. If these are the flies of the Italian summer countryside, they also make the mistress an image of death in life, of mortal flesh, of incipient rot. If pearls console us for the frailty of the flesh, the flies still gather.

*La Nana renversée par Maillol*

Varda returns to the *vanitas* image in her five-episode television series, *Agnès de ci de là Varda*.<sup>145</sup> The series is peripatetic, permissive, relaxed in its formulations. Contemporary art is for the most part Varda's concern, but on a trip to Russia, in episode three, she also visits two historical nudes, loved women, the images of Danäe by Titian and Rembrandt. I take up the series at the end of its last part, the fifth documentary in the ARTE series, first shown on French TV on 23 December 2011.<sup>146</sup>

Parts of this episode take place in Mexico and Varda describes the moves in Mexican art to treat death lightly, as carnival, 'pour apprivoiser l'idée de la mort' ['to tame the idea of death']. She contrasts this taming with exposure to the horror of death in the *vanitas* in Western art, a thought that allows her transfer in the film back to Paris and two exhibitions about death and art, one, *Vanité. Mort que me veux-tu?* [*Vanitas: Death, What Do You Want From Me?*], at the Fondation Pierre Berger-Yves Saint Laurent and the other *Vanités du Caravage à Damien Hirst* [*Vanitas Pictures from Caravaggio to Damien Hirst*] at the Musée Maillol.<sup>147</sup>

144 The poem is Labé's 'Baise m'encor, rebaise-moi et baise' ['Kiss me again and again a kiss'] and Birkin reads the first two stanzas. The sonnet continues, in lines not heard in the film, to speak about double life, the self rendered other and taken out of herself.

145 Conway describes *Agnès de ci de là Varda* like this: 'Structured primarily around her encounters with art and other artists, the series provides a survey of contemporary art as well as a chronicle of Varda's conversations with famous and ordinary people alike' (2015, 84).

146 For a slightly fuller discussion of this episode see Wilson (2014a).

147 The first was held 23 June–9 September 2010 and the second 3 February–28 June 2010.

As she visits the *vanitas* exhibitions, she comments on the ‘thèmes récurrents’ [‘recurrent themes’] of ‘la femme et la mort, la chair et l’os’ [‘woman and death, flesh and bone’], themes recurrent in art and in her own work.

As Varda visits the Musée Maillol, she pauses over Annette Messager’s *Gants-tête* [*Gloves-head*] (1999), an image of a death’s head shaped in woollen gloves with pencil fingers. The spiked shadows of the fingers create a hesitation, an aura of movement and fear around the image. Varda then moves on to Niki de Saint Phalle’s black-and-white (and red and blue and silver) skull sculpture that she says (by contrast) does not look deadly at all. With its lace images and central heart, reversed, it reminds Varda of the artist’s other figures of women, *Nanas*, ‘pleines de vie’ [‘full of life’]. As she is heard saying this on the voice-over, the image track shows in close-up the deep red of the cavity below the skull’s nasal bone. As Varda speaks of her own associative thinking, of her obverse affective attachment to this death’s head image, the camera moves over the skull. Association, the flow of connection and feeling, is implicitly linked to these technological moves where it appears that the brute object on view can be filmed in such a way as to reveal Varda’s subjective vision, its attachments and reversed values. This mapping of affection is pursued through editing where the film cuts, as if tracking a thought pattern, to a flow of images of Niki de Saint Phalle’s *Nanas* exhibited on a beach (seen previously in *Jane B. par Agnès V.* in a discussion of breasts). The camera shows in close-up a *Nana* with circular breasts bulging from her body, one nipple a coloured flower, the other an encircled red heart.<sup>148</sup>

The film cuts abruptly back to the Musée Maillol and black-and-white skull pictures by Yan Pei-Ming on the wall, Varda filming the textures of the skull with the same moves she uses for the hair of her beloved Jacques near death in *Jacquot de Nantes*. But after this silent tribute, the film repeats the associative drift of the previous sequence, endorsing it with a verbal echo, a repeat of the name Nana, as Varda moves down towards ‘une magnifique Nana renversée par Maillol’ [‘a magnificent Nana overturned by Maillol’], one of Maillol’s sculptures of women that are displayed in his former studio.

148 As she picks out her *vanitas* images from the two exhibitions, Varda also closes in on the breasts in Guido Cagnacci’s *Allegory of Vanity and Penitence* (n.d.) and Marina Abramović’s *Balkan Erotic Epic: Banging the Skull* (*Marina*) (2011).

The woman in the sculpture here is not merely reclining but completely overturned, upended. Her fall, her overturning, align her with my reclining nudes. It rehearses too the theme of the *vanitas*, of frailty. This sculpture is *La rivière* [*The River*] (1938).<sup>149</sup> The camera pans down from the breasts to the face of a fallen, lead, substantial woman. Skull images are visible in the upper part of the frame as she is first glimpsed, but below them it is the apparently live mass of her body that draws attention, as Varda gradually shifts her focus away from mortality. The film does not pause over the woman's body but passes down it, as if using the camera to respond to an effigy of flesh. Her attention to this fixed image is oxymoronic. Her camera responses show the paradox that the most static, grave forms can be rendered mobile.<sup>150</sup>

The move from skull to flesh is repeated a third time in a lateral pan from a skull to a further enclosed range of Maillol sculptures, white plaster images held behind a pane of glass.<sup>151</sup> As Varda says in the voice-over, there is an irony in finding this exhibition of *vanitas* images, these 'visions décharnées', precisely, in the Musée Maillol. This irony is evidenced in the images of sumptuous marble bodies, smooth, curved, muscled, so lifelike and palpable they appeal to the touch as if they would be elastic and warm. But then Varda's words work through these meanings of living and dying. Further images of statues by Maillol emerge, tactile and held in the rhythm and grain of her voice, in the assonance, the association she captures as she moves from 'la pierre'

149 Marguerite Duras films the same statue in her work *Césaire* (1978). The film returns in slow sweeping tracking shots to several of the Maillol lead statues in the Jardin des Tuileries in Paris. Duras's shots are taken at a further distance from *La rivière* and the image is more unfathomable as it appears against the muted green of the Tuileries trees in a spectral mist. The splaying, the debasement, of the fallen pose is more apparent with her distanced shots. The words of the film speak of desperate love and separation.

150 In a brilliant discussion of *Les Dites Caryatides*, McNeill explores Varda's filming of statues, here the stone caryatids of the Paris streets: 'Varda's first task is to make us see the caryatids anew. The most obvious way she does this is through the use of camera movement' (2017, 112). McNeill remarks on Varda's interest through the film in 'the incongruity of nakedness in the city, where the contrast between the softness and warmth of human flesh and skin, and the cool, hard surfaces of buildings and streets is more usually hidden behind a barrier of clothing' (115).

151 The shot recalls Dorothée's studio in *Cléo de 5 à 7*.

['stone'] to 'la chair' ['flesh']. She describes the sculptor as 'Maillol qui a su célébrer la vie en sculptant dans la pierre la chair des corps des femmes' ['Maillol, who knew how to celebrate life, sculpting in stone the flesh of women's bodies']. The film ends with Maillol's images of women's bodies almost animate, held, rather than caught, in pale matter.



# Catherine Breillat

In an interview with Claire Clouzot, Catherine Breillat says that the first film that moved her during her adolescence, and made her want to become a film-maker, was Ingmar Bergman's *Sawdust and Tinsel* (1953). She saw *Viridiana* (Luis Buñuel, 1961) one week later (Clouzot, 2004, 149). These films offer images of ravishing and glacial women, Anne in *Sawdust and Tinsel* played by Harriett Andersson and Viridiana played by Silvia Pinal. These protagonists, pale, sensual, virginal women, are precursors of Breillat's heroines. If there is an affective and erotic imprint of Bergman and Buñuel felt in Breillat's films more widely, *Sawdust and Tinsel* and *Viridiana* also yield very beautiful images of reclining.<sup>1</sup> Breillat tells Clouzot of the persistence of images from the films in her imagination, and of the ways in which this imagining reaches into her far later filming of Amira Casar prone on the bed in *Anatomie de l'enfer* (149).<sup>2</sup> The films are recalled pictorially, but also in the relation they materialise between pose, angle, and meaning.

In *Sawdust and Tinsel*, Harriet Andersson is first seen upside down in the frame. Her eyes are closed and the close shot reveals the delineation

1 I use the word 'erotic', but to refer to Eros, sexual feeling, rather than eroticism, the genre of sexually explicit material of which Breillat herself is wary. For strong discussion of Breillat's aversion to eroticism, see Best and Crowley (2007). They insist: 'her work cannot be understood without reference to its proximity to the pornographic; this proximity demands to be thought as both citation and entanglement' (55) and remind us that 'the erotic is also for Breillat hypocritically hygienic' (59). See also Vincendeau (1999) for a consideration of pornography, sex, and pleasure in *Romance*.

2 Breillat's comment offers insight into her imagination. This influence of a pose or gesture, a specific materiality, is witnessed in her interest in seeing a girl swimming back and forth in a pool and her replay of this in Anaïs's swimming in the pool in *A ma sœur!* [*Fat Girl*] (2001). See Best and Crowley (2007, 64).

of her lashes, her full mouth. The image is intimate, illicit, because it is inverted and because it shows her unawares, unconscious. She is childlike in a *broderie anglaise* camisole. She is sensual with her dark hair cascading and her pale throat. Her body is moved as she is jolted in her sleep by the rolling of the circus wagon. Her lover looks in at her like a creature catching sight of a nymph. He kisses the skin of her upper arm. She turns and a scene between them unfolds. The shots are thick with hesitation between sleep and waking. In the tight-framed world of the carriage the scene has a felt intimacy of skin, hair, cotton, closeness, animality.

*Viridiana* extends these meanings of unusual, childlike sensuality, of hidden intimacy, all wrapped up in these images of reclining, to elaborate a further, related obsession with eroticism and death. Viridiana's uncle Don Jaime (Fernando Rey) touches silk ribbons, flowers from a nosegay, the satin wedding dress, corset, and shoes his dead bride has left behind. Visiting his house Viridiana sleepwalks, her somnambulism dissolving the divide between sleeping and waking. Her presence is phantasmagorical as her floating form recalls the physical presence of her dead aunt. Viridiana is a mannequin like the sculpted naked figures that hold up Don Jaime's fireplace.<sup>3</sup> She is spectral in the firelight, its reflections making her face and nightgown radiant, otherworldly, the film opening to a queer, searing dimension between dream and reality. The erotic presence of the sleeping, vivid Viridiana, her feet bare, her hands in the ashes of the fire, triggers the uncle's desire to resurrect a scenario of his wedding night.

Viridiana puts on her aunt's wedding dress and veil and walks with candles through her uncle's house. He drugs her, and carries her dormant in his arms, her head lying back, her hair flowing down.<sup>4</sup> She lies out unconscious on the bed, submerged beneath the billowing gauze of her veil. He untucks her, rearranging the blossoms in her hair. She is like her aunt who died on her wedding night, yet she is also alive and malleable, sensual in the thick satin. Her hands can be moved. Her breathing is visible. She is held in her uncle's delirium, lying out. He raises her to kiss her. Viewed by a child through the window, he opens her bodice to touch her pale breasts.

3 Breillat films a similar sculpted fireplace in Bluebeard's mansion in her fairy-tale film *Barbe Bleue* [*Bluebeard*] (2009).

4 She resembles Man Ray's *Femme aux longs cheveux* [*Woman with Long Hair*] (1929).

In interview with Claire Vassé, Breillat says: ‘Le corps renversé d’Harriet Andersson, jeune fille marmoréenne pleine d’humiliation, d’orgueil et de perversité, est le prototype de la jeune fille de mon film’ [‘The prone body of Harriett Andersson, a marmoreal girl brimming with humiliation, pride, and perversity, is the prototype of the young girl in my films’] (Breillat, 2007a, 17). She remarks on the appeal of the girl reclining, implicitly linking the pose to physical qualities, pallor, iciness, and affective intensities, erotic impressionability, self-domination, and a sort of burning, febrile pathos. This is the glacial, pure femininity whose incandescence she seeks in her films.<sup>5</sup> It is sought in the figure of the young girl whose sexuality is blossoming as she exists poised between child and adult.

The images of dormancy from *Viridiana* append to this a more morbid reflection on dormancy. If Bergman brings a surreal re-vision of the contours of the body, an overturning of anatomy in an upside-down frame, Buñuel approaches borders between living and dying, consensual and unknowing, drugged, as he shows visions of *Viridiana* shadowing her aunt, desired by her uncle. The marmoreal flesh of the young girl is suddenly unfeeling, dead, or, more eerily still, an animate resurrected form of a dead lover. Both scenes, both these precursor films, show the body at its most intimate, impressionable, disarming.<sup>6</sup>

Breillat speaks of the girls in her films as always pure, very pure, and ‘toujours des insoumises’ [‘always undefeated women’] (2007a, 32). The term *insoumise* conveys the sense of undefeated, unsubdued, and also of autonomy, of not being subjected to or submitted to the other, not being placed under the control or constraint of the other, not delivered up. Breillat’s words about the *insoumise* open up unusual ways of interpreting reclining images, allowing us to see a pose of apparent passivity and inaction as also about autonomy and an upending of

5 In interview with Vassé, Breillat says, ‘il y a cette incandescence propre aux jeunes filles et que j’ai essayé de retrouver dans mes films’ [‘there is this incandescence that young girls have that I’ve tried to find in my films’] (2007a, 25). She summons images of her protagonist, Marie (Caroline Ducey), in *Romance* (1999), whom she compares to a flame, like Joan of Arc. She continues: ‘Car ce qui compte, c’est la vraie virginité, c’est-à-dire l’orgueil, la pureté, la flamme qui traverse tout et qu’absolument rien ne peut abaisser’ [‘For what counts is true virginity, that is, pride, purity, the flame that passes through everything and that nothing can extinguish’] (25).

6 Both films also show observers approaching young women asleep.

power relations. Her films return to scenarios of lying out, lying awake, or lying unconscious, yet refuse interpretation in terms of submission or exposure.<sup>7</sup> She finds this energy already in Bergman and Buñuel. But Breillat moves further in exploring the paradox of the refusal of submission figured in scenes of exposure, undoing, close intimacy, and abandonment, being given up for dead. As Breillat reimagines the reclining nude, remembering shots of Andersson and Pinal, she explores states of self-absorption, of autonomy, of intactness, of autoerotic sensual pleasure in the body, even in its stalling, its mortification. She finds in the figure, its languishing, a peculiar freedom.<sup>8</sup> Clouzot writes: ‘A la question de Sigmund Freud: “Que veut une femme?”, à laquelle force psychanalystes ont cherché en vain une réponse, l’œuvre de Catherine Breillat répond: “Elle veut tout” [‘To Sigmund Freud’s question: “What does a woman want?”, a question to which many psychoanalysts have failed to find a response, Catherine Breillat’s work responds: “She wants everything”]’ (2004, 139).<sup>9</sup>

7 In interview she says: ‘Mais peut-être aussi qu’il fallait montrer des femmes qui ressentent, sinon un malin plaisir, du moins un trouble à se faire humilier, tout en étant orgueilleuses’ [‘But perhaps it was also necessary to show women who feel, if not a malign pleasure, at least some arousal at letting themselves be humiliated, while they retain their pride’] (Breillat, 2007a, 94).

8 So Mayer looks particularly at Breillat’s fairy-tale films, which include a retelling of the Sleeping Beauty story, *La Belle Endormie* [*The Sleeping Beauty*] (2010), and she argues: ‘the fairytale telefilms of Catherine Breillat offer what Hollywood cannot, and it is something we need urgently. Experimental cinema is more able to enter the unconscious, combining economic (relative) low risk with aesthetic high risk. Since Maya Deren’s “Meshes of the Afternoon” (1942) experimental feminist cinema has had the enthralling power of undoing thrall by stepping out into the dark’ (2016, 118). She notes of the heroine in *La Belle Endormie*: ‘Her self-willed finger-pricking – inspired by hearing the classic Charles Perrault tale – leads not to a coma, but to an adventure, which could be read as her fever-dream’ (123).

9 Clouzot continues: ‘la jouissance féminine, c’est à la fois la perte et l’horreur, l’extase et la honte, la maternité et la mort. [Breillat] – comme d’autres avant elle – fait voler en éclats l’alternative: soit maman soit putain. La jeune fille, la femme chez Breillat est en même temps petite fille, putain, mère, maîtresse, prostituée, amante, morceau de chair qui pue ... et homme’ [‘female *jouissance* is at once loss and horror, ecstasy and shame, maternity and death. Like others before, (Breillat) shoots to pieces the alternative: mother or whore. The young girl, the woman in Breillat’s films is at once a little girl, a whore, a mother, a mistress, a prostitute, a lover, a piece of flesh that smells ... and a man’] (2004, 139–140).

In *The Art of Cruelty*, Maggie Nelson writes:

A woman who delves into the relation between Eros and Thanatos is not typically regarded as someone making a transgressive, probing move, but as a self-abasing traitor aiding and abetting rape culture. Likewise, a woman who explores the depths of her despair or depression isn't typically valorized as a hero on a fearless quest to render any 'darkness visible', but is instead perceived as a redundant example of female vulnerability, fragility, or self-destructiveness. A woman who lives, as did Artaud, like a mad animal at the furthest reaches of her sanity, isn't a shamanistic voyager to the dark side, but a 'madwoman in the attic', an abject spectacle. (2011, 260)<sup>10</sup>

Nelson's words reveal the challenge of Breillat's fascination with Eros and Thanatos. Clouzot has said of Breillat: 'elle n'a qu'une seule chose à dire: que le sexe et la mort sont inséparables' ['she has only one thing to say: that sex and death are inseparable'] (2004, 11). Eugenie Brinkema notes: 'sexuality and finitude are absolute necessities for the realization of her cinematic corpus and the corpus in her cinema' (2006, 148). In showing this inseparability of sex and death, Breillat seeks to acknowledge, without prejudice or censorship, that masochism, a desire for pain and danger, is also a part of (some) women's psyche. She says to Clouzot: 'Encore une chose des féministes patentées: elles ne supportent pas la dimension masochiste des femmes qu'on ne peut pourtant pas nier' (2004, 170) ['Another issue with patent feminists: they do not accept the masochistic dimension of women that one can nevertheless not deny']. Her most transgressive move, in thinking Eros and Thanatos, comes in her refusal to deny this. This masochistic dimension is explored in the specific figure of the reclining nude that Breillat reclaims from European painting, animates, opens, and undoes.

10 Clouzot has acknowledges critical ambivalence to Breillat's work: 'Elle ne fait pas l'unanimité. Violette Leduc, Frida Kahlo, de leur vivant, non plus' ['She is not universally liked. Nor were Violette Leduc or Frida Kahlo in their lifetime'] (2004, 140). She aligns Breillat with a female writer and a female artist whose autofictional works are uncompromising and densely imaginative in explorations of compulsive desire, insanity, bodily pain, and annihilation.

*La Maja Vestida*

Paintings have always been a point of reference in Breillat's cinema. In an early film, *Tapage nocturne* [*Nocturnal Uproar*] (1979), they appear in the décor of the sets. The apartment of Bruel (Daniel Langlet), the sometime lover of Solange (Dominique Laffin), resembles a gallery of nude paintings, with reclining figures in bed linen, standing nudes, nymphs bathing, a naked figure fleeing. The images offer variations on the nude, their serial quality enhanced by the return of similar pallid figures. They are also pictorial copies of Solange's body as she sleeps with Bruel in pale sheets beneath a quilt. Mirrored panels double Bruel and Solange, and capture reflections of the paintings.<sup>11</sup>

In her images of naked women and girls, from her first film, *Une vraie jeune fille* [*A Real Young Girl*] (1976) onwards, Breillat creates in her cinema an image repertoire of the reclining nude which recalls Renaissance images of mythological and secular figures, nineteenth-century odalisques and prostitutes, and Surrealist photography. This is one of the clear innovations of her film-making. She not only creates in narrative cinema an unprecedented and densely imaginative series of visual explorations of female sexuality, but in so doing she draws on the resources of pictorial and plastic traditions. European painting and sculpture provide her with a repository of images, enhancing the sensory richness and material luxury of her films.<sup>12</sup> She is passionate about the

11 This effect is achieved too, but less lavishly, in a play between images of Lili (Delphine Zentout) and paintings hanging on the wall in the two locations where she encounters her lover Maurice (Etienne Chicot) in *36 fillette* [*Virgin*] (1987).

12 Sculpture is less my subject but is also important in Breillat. Bernini's sculpture of the *Ecstasy of St Teresa* (1647–1652) returns as influence, for example, for thinking about her approach to rapture. Clouzot speaks of finding in her films 'L'extase des statues de Bernin' ['The ecstasy of Bernini statues'] (2004, 82). Discussing Breillat's first film, *Une Vraie Jeune Fille*, Eugénie Brinkema writes of the heroine Alice: 'Something bites her, she slaps her arm with a look of pained ecstasy, our little Bernini sculpture' (2006, 163). In discussion of *Une Vieille Maîtresse*, Keesey writes: 'At the 2007 New York Film Festival, Breillat compared the look on Vellini's face during orgasm to the rapturous expression of Saint Teresa in Bernini's sculpture of the *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*' (2010, 13). Breillat herself says: 'Parce que c'est un vrai mystère une femme qui jouit! Peut-être pas toujours, mais parfois c'est totalement mystérieux. C'est le ravissement de Bernin, le visage de sainte Thérèse, l'extase mystique, l'extase charnelle ...' ['Because a woman who comes is a real mystery! Perhaps not always, but sometimes it's

artworks she draws on. In her feminist politics she rethinks and redraws those images, giving them different dimensions, opening them to the dreams and sensations of her imagined women. Unlike Varda, Breillat does not show shots of paintings or reproductions directly in the frame in her films, but painting is increasingly a point of reference for her and her engagement with the history of art is as fluid and imaginative as Varda's.<sup>13</sup>

This engagement is realised in her films most fully from *Romance* onwards in her collaborations with Greek cinematographer Yorgos Arvanitis.<sup>14</sup> With Arvanitis her films become more stylised visually, as can be seen in *Romance* with its palette of colours, an intense red between scarlet and crimson, blueish whites, and a shining, lacquered black. In the sensually charged lighting, the static framings, and pictorial *mise-en-scène* of shots, a painterly register is approached. Indeed the scenarios of the films begin to open out like a series of fantasmatic *tableaux vivants*. Sarah Cooper has commented that in Breillat's films, 'Linearity is dilated through the presence of memory, the imaginary and fantasy, or disrupted, in favour of cyclical movement or myth' (2010, 103). This embrace of *rêverie* and the unconscious in her works is amplified as she pursues her engagement with painting. The pictorial, painterly scenarios and their images (frequently of reclining) are wrapped up in this wishful, dilated, layered form found in Breillat's later works. A particularly lavish example of such a *tableau vivant* is found in the late film *Une Vieille Maîtresse*.

La Vellini (Asia Argento) is completely prone when she is first glimpsed in *Une Vieille Maîtresse*. She lies on a dark wooden daybed, surrounded by cushions and with a silk-tassled pillow. She is languid and horizontal, her head lying on her elbow but in line entirely with the length of her body. A queer effect is created as she converses with a

totally mysterious. It's Bernini's ravishment, the face of Saint Teresa, mystic ecstasy, carnal ecstasy ...'] (2007a, 69).

13 Eugenie Brinkema conjures a different pictorial reference, arguing for 'a direct aesthetic relationship between [Francis] Bacon and Breillat' (2006, 161). She argues that 'Breillat realizes Bacon's colours in a weighty, even bodily, sense ("I use my actors like a painter uses his colours", she has said)' (167). Brinkema's approach to the pictorial in Breillat pushes in a different direction from mine, looking less at influences on the films than their operations. She writes, brilliantly: '*Romance* is comprised of a series of canvasses, pure potentiality, spaces waiting to be coloured, filled in, impregnated' (151).

14 After *Romance*, they collaborated on *A ma sœur*, *Anatomie de l'enfer*, and *Une Vieille Maîtresse*.

seated man (played by Michael Lonsdale) The pose speaks of Vellini's sensuality, her disregard for convention. She arranges herself decoratively like an adornment, like the flame-red silk flower she wears in her hair. Horizontality dominates the scene.<sup>15</sup> A statue of an extended snake curled beside her reflects her long, fine, almost tubular form. Her body has this same serpentine coil and seemingly boneless, ridged pliability. Her arm likewise lies pale, caught in light along her outlined side.

The image speaks of the capture of the full stretch of a body on film, of Breillat's adaptation of the film frame as a form of stretched-out, horizontal canvas. Yet Vellini is also an animate figure, her face responsive. The film cuts to another framing of her, still prone, but closer to, so her expressions are seen more finely. The shot captures the bare flush of her cheeks, the sensuality of her lower lip, the detail of the stamens at the centre of the silk flower in her curling hair. An ornate silver belt encloses her waist. Her arm presses against the cushion, her body against the couch. She is surrounded by silk, paisley, cashmere, and brocade. She is living and animate, as Breillat brings the reclining nude to life, but in a theatrical, encrusted environment. Breillat's two framings offer different variations in this moving, reclining portrait of Vellini. She is apprehended first pictorially, in an image of repose that she is seen to construct as her staged scenario for receiving suitors. Then she is seen more closely, in haptic shots.<sup>16</sup>

Vellini reclining is in almost exactly the outfit of Goya's *La Maja Vestida* painted between 1800 and 1805 (Breillat's film is set in 1835).<sup>17</sup> The Maja wears a crushed silk dress, white, cream, with the sheen of mother of pearl.<sup>18</sup> This dress resembles entirely the long shift, with its

15 Throughout *Une Vieille Maitresse*, beyond the *tableau vivant*, Breillat constructs images of Argento, and others, notably her younger lover Ryno de Marigny (Fu'ad Ait Aattou), in ways that challenge verticality.

16 Best and Crowley write beautifully about the haptic in Breillat, looking back to her first film to comment that 'The texture of Alice's flesh is in each case experienced as uncomfortably close to the viewer, its tiny lines (in the first instance) or tiny hairs soaked with heavy water droplets (in the second) reconfiguring visual pleasure as a phenomenology of haptic contact' (2007, 79).

17 As Douglas Keesey remarks, 'In one scene, Vellini is reclining like a queenly courtesan on a daybed in the same "spiderweb" shawl and seductively languorous pose as the woman in *The Clothed Maja*, Francisco de Goya's 1805 painting' (2009, 156). The painting is also referenced by Varda in *Jane B. par Agnès V.*

18 After so many reclining nudes, Breillat's places a *clothed* Maja at the inception of her first costume drama.

ruffles at the collar, worn by Argento. If the Maja's waist is clasped in a rose-pink sash missing in Breillat's image, her golden satin sleeves reappear. Breillat also gives Vellini a black crocheted jerkin that matches the Maja's black decorations. The reference to Goya amplifies the importance of Vellini's Spanish origins – she is called 'la Malagaise' in the film.

Awareness of the reference to the painting dilates the film's linearity, reframes this scene as a *tableau*, a sensory environment in which to draw out sensations attaching to reclining. Breillat creates dream spaces, stages, in which to imagine strong, seductive femininity. This is part of the serene pictorial stylisation of her work. She displays a painterly fascination with surface and texture, offering heady work on material, on colour, on light. She adds gloss, amplification, an aestheticisation of the material world. These oneiric scenarios offer a casement for the display of the female body. They are apt for the torpor of the reclining nude.

### *Roxane*

Breillat is interested, in her reclining images, in impressions of the body, in sensations and affects that are unsettled, vivid, unbounded. Her interest is in the whole stretch of feelings from the most intense apprehension of life, Eros, *jouissance*, to horror, abjection, the rigour, the morbidity, the draining of feeling in an embrace of death, in annihilation. These feelings are all part of the sensual address of her film. If the figure of the reclining nude is in its origins pictorial, as Breillat shows in her reference to Goya, her project is to unfix the image, to think its affects, to feel what it implies about how a pose, a gesture, an angle, carries particular senses, allows a work of undoing. Key in this is an absorption with the work of choreography, directing. Breillat is concerned with the ways in which a body may be moved, posed, laid out, so as to make different feelings apparent, to give living forms over to art. If this is indirectly about vicariousness – feeling through her actresses or asking them to feel for her, for us – it speaks of involvement of self and other, of their impress on each other.

In her reclining images Breillat dramatises and reflects on a peculiarity of film-making where living others, vulnerable, luminous, opaque, are choreographed, moved, exposed, held. The lush, impressionable surfaces of bodies, their responses, coloration, inflection, are organised into art,

massed, stilled. This is not about control or fixing. Breillat is interested in living bodies as impulsive and vulnerable, in their responses as involuntary, beyond volition, instinctual. This offers a strange vibrancy to her art. She asks what a body can be made to do, what unexpected responses can be triggered, what artist and actress can make available to each other. She looks, like Goldin, to see how deep you can go with another person.

Breillat seeks to hold in her films the feelings mobilised between director and actors, between one body and another, allowing something real and disturbing to happen on screen. This is particularly charged in relation to horizontality, where an actress is asked to lie down, to lie out, to be knocked off her axis. Reclining is about exposure and openness for Breillat, impressionability, disorganisation. The stillness of the pose brings with it the animality of living and dying, the hesitations of the Uncanny where flesh and other non-sentient materials are indistinguishable, alike. Breillat's films, with their serial images, are motion studies that also find an approach to motionlessness. Their challenge in this is to find involvement and enjoyment.<sup>19</sup>

Breillat's engagement with reclining pushes towards entropy and annihilation, the subtraction of feeling and the reduction of person, by her own volition, to object or thing. Her film-making is alive to this extreme figured in the challenge to verticality, to the upright organisation of anatomy. This is part of the fuller bodily drama, darkness, and truth of her work as, in composed pictorial settings, she focuses on undoing and intrusion. I look at how she exposes these issues in her self-reflexive film *Sex Is Comedy* (2002), before going on to trace moves towards entropy and annihilation in *Romance* and *Anatomie de l'enfer*.

Early in *Sex Is Comedy*, Breillat shows a young girl (played by Roxane Mesquida) lying on the beach.<sup>20</sup> Mesquida's right arm is outstretched

19 Breillat looks at involvement and pleasure, at all we didn't know we wanted or had agreed to. Geneviève Fraisse offers an understanding, apt for Breillat, of how consent is bodily as well as linguistic: 'Le consentement ne se réduit pas au langage. Il emporte avec lui le visage, les émotions, les mouvements du corps' ['Consent cannot be reduced to language. It includes the face, emotions, bodily movements'] (2017, 127).

20 The image echoes shots of Anaïs (Anaïs Reboux) lying in waves in *A ma sœur*. Fiona Handyside considers the site of the beach as a space for the expression of a specifically female subjectivity. About *A ma sœur*, she argues: 'Water acts in this film as a medium through which Anaïs expresses her fascination with sexuality, death, and the imbrications of the two outside of her sister's naïve consumption

and her long hair lies wet, drenched, in line with her skin surface, rough sand between the two. The reach of the arm and line of hair speak of abandonment, of a body laid out artistically, yet also apparently thrown up from the waves. The angle of the composition means that her face is not visible. The shot shows her breasts and naked shoulder, barely touched by another strand of hair, and the clinging garnet fabric, deep blood-red, carmine, that drapes her.<sup>21</sup> Her feet splay out. The arc of the image, its Mantegna-like foreshortening, in contrast to the clear line of the outstretched arm, offers a variation on horizontality, the body arranged in new directions, yet also dropped, discarded. Mesquida seems entirely inert, perfect, untouched. Her body is then engulfed in the waves.

This image is a set-piece about reclining, recalling Deren, and also a moment of self-reflection for Breillat as she draws attention to the embrace of abandonment, of the doing and undoing of the pictorial in her films. She constructs an image that is very beautiful, and makes it more so as it comes alive. This move to undoing, the roughing up of stillness, composure, is pursued as the film goes on. It is integral to the work of Breillat's fictional counterpart, a director played by Anne Parillaud, who choreographs the part played by Mesquida, unsettling her, preparing her to give herself over in the film's sex scenes.

Parillaud's character lies down in bed with her actors, acting out their roles. Mesquida lies prone, like a sexual doll in black lace and white elasticated underwear. Parillaud stretches over her to touch her hair, to tease its strands into place, each tendril adding to the picture of languor. Mesquida lies back with her eyes closed as Parillaud poses her waist, the director's hand resting on the small of her back. Director and actress talk sitting up in the bed. Parillaud has her hand flat on Mesquida's upper arm. She kisses her on the cheek. Mesquida, in white toweling, lies like a child and Parillaud grips her hand, holds her, and asks her to scream.

The scream visibly alters Mesquida's affect, leaving her skin flushed, her mouth open in disturbance. The sex acts in the film, shot soon

of Fernando's banal heterosexual romance narrative' (2011, 95). She adds: 'David Vasse compares Anaïs to a water nymph, clothed often in green or blue and able to use water to gain critical purchase on the sexual relation experienced by her sister and even possibly her mother' (95).

21 Clouzot speaks of Breillat's predilection for 'des femmes à la peau très blanche, noires de cheveux' ['women with very white skin, and black hair'] (2004, 8) and Mesquida fits this prototype.

after, are thick with feeling, sympathy.<sup>22</sup> Mesquida is more unsettled, more discomposed. The sex acts undo her further. Her lover folds her into him, grips her, turns her so his hand is at her throat. She is pliable, flushed, abandoned in the act, her hair running through his hands. She is prone under him, entered from behind, held at her head and at her wrist. The images are watched with rapture by Parillaud. Mesquida wipes back her hair. She contorts. Her breast is distended beneath red gauze. The culmination of the scene comes after filming has stopped. Parillaud holds Mesquida and Mesquida weeps, Parillaud clasping the girl's face in her hands.

Breillat has spoken of the relation between love and film-making, describing 'un langage inconscient et muet qui émane de tous les pores de la peau, un langage plus fort que nous' ['an unconscious and silent language exuded from all the skin's pores, a language stronger than we are']. She continues:

Ça, c'est vraiment une chose que sentent bien les metteurs en scène: des émotions, des informations se transmettent de cerveau à cerveau, de corps à corps, de regard à regard en un millième de seconde sans qu'on s'en rende compte, et tout d'un coup vous donnent le désir de l'autre. (Breillat, 2007a, 59)

[That's really something that directors feel: emotions, knowledge that is passed from mind to mind, from body to body, from gaze to gaze in a fraction of a second without one realising it, and which suddenly give you the desire of the other.]

She explains in particular her relation to her actors and her actresses: 'J'ai en général une relation plus forte avec les actrices, parce qu'il y a quelque chose de l'ordre amoureux avec elles' ['I usually have a stronger relationship with actresses, because there is something of the order of love with them'] (Clouzot, 2004, 144). Breillat lays bare in *Sex Is Comedy* the erotic work, the nurturing, the composing, the release that her film-making involves. All these operations, their dynamism, are evident in relation to the figure of reclining in love, lying down to die on the shore.

22 David Vasse explains the scene like this: 'Ce que recherche ardemment la cinéaste du film (Jeanne, *incarnée* par Anne Parillaud), est en définitive l'expression intraduisible d'un état provoqué par l'intensité d'une scène sexuelle, au moment de la prise' ['What the film's director (Jeanne, *incarnated* by Anne Parillaud) ardently seeks is the definitive and untranslatable expression of a state provoked by the intensity of the sex scene, the moment of being taken'] (2004, 180).

*Romance*

*Romance* is Breillat's first film to be marked extensively by pictorial composition, catalysed sensually by engagement with the paintings of Georges de La Tour.<sup>23</sup> The film does not cite the tradition of the reclining nude directly, but it concertedly approaches reclining and the slide from an upright axis. This compositional move, in the imaging of erotic contact, opens up bodily sensation, undoing, flattening, and abandonment. Marie (Caroline Ducey) is prone through much of the film, in many variations. I work through these variations, responding to the film as a series of visual studies and scenarios.

In a first reclining scene, Marie is lying on the bed with her boyfriend Paul (Sagamore Stévenin) as she moves to make love to him. She is listless, soft, pallid in a white cotton t-shirt. The blanching of the scene and its clinical white light intimate the draining of his desire for her, the starkness and astringency of their relations. Marie's head is down beside him on the sheets, her face knocked sideways. The scene shows her prone emotions, heat, mess, strands of her hair escaping. A curl of hair draws a line across her face.<sup>24</sup> Her cheek is pressed into the sheet, her eyes are liquid. Her expression is one of grief, ravishment, *anéantissement*, her mouth open.

Her first scenes of nudity come in a sexual encounter with Paolo (Rocco Siffredi) where the colour scheme is warmer and attention is given to the fragility and slenderness of Ducey's body. She lies with her head propped on her arm. She loosely resembles a Modigliani nude. She is pale and recumbent with Siffredi behind her. He kisses the skin over her pelvis and she lies back so he can cradle her torso in his arms. She lies passive as his hand encircles her below her waist. As he enters her, she lies with her face down.<sup>25</sup> Her cheeks are pressed into the sheet.<sup>26</sup> She is

23 Interviewed about *Romance*, Breillat comments: 'je suis allée voir une exposition de Georges de La Tour et cela a été décisif' ['I went to see an exhibition of Georges de La Tour and that was decisive'] (2007a, 142). Arvanitis extends the range of pictorial reference: 'j'ai beaucoup pensé à la peinture des nus, au Caravage et aux Flamands' ['I was thinking a lot about of nude painting, Caravaggio and the Flemish'] (Clouzot, 2004, 87).

24 Hair is carefully choreographed by Breillat, at once styled, pictorial, and curling, Baudelairean, sensual, animal.

25 The same pose is found, inverted, in *Sex Is Comedy*.

26 In *Romance* this feels like a sensory memory of the earlier scene where she was with Paul.

then nestled round, her head curved, her breast pressed against folds of material. The scene draws out her pliability, her impassivity, where she is now moved and controlled by Paolo.

The next reclining images come from the range of s/m sex acts Marie engages in with Robert (François Dorleand). Marie is dressed in a tight white dress and lies with her pubic hair revealed, a white rope running through it, and her white underwear down around her thighs. Her face, down in the bedding, shows her dishevelment. There have been rehearsals of the pose with Paul and Paolo, but here it is actualised. She is inconsolable, shuddering, stirred, elated, knocked sideways, taken out of herself. The images speak of her relief, her accomplishment, and eventual repose after she has been soothed, rather anxiously, by Robert.<sup>27</sup>

The series of reclining images continues with Marie alone naked on her white bed, viewed from behind. Then, in another image, she is seen collapsed in the stairway, her head against a step, her buttocks exposed, as she is bent, contorted like a Bellmer doll.<sup>28</sup> The disarrangement of her body comes in a series of images of horizontality, upending, and overturning. The film has its own choreographic drive and energy as Marie is moved in different directions, as if it achieves a protracted motion study.

These rearrangements reach a certain end point in the last s/m sequences where the tying of Marie's limbs lets her emerge as an armless torso striped across by black underwear, by white ropes, and by her now scarlet skirt.<sup>29</sup> She lies still as Robert fixes metal cuffs around her ankles

27 Clouzot specifies: '[Robert] fait l'offrande de la douceur et de la tendresse, alors même qu'il accomplit les gestes du sado-masochisme' [(Robert) makes an offering of gentleness and tenderness, even while he carries out sado-masochistic acts'] (2004, 82). Vasse describes him as 'Robert, *le dernier homme*, à qui elle s'en remet *corps et âme* et sans mot dire' ['Robert, *the last man*, to whom she gives herself over *body and soul* and without saying a word'] (2004, 119).

28 Clouzot references Bellmer, describing a doll, 'la tête en bas, la robe renversée laissant voir sa culotte en coton et le bas de ses jambes articulées' ['head down, skirt raised revealing her cotton pants and the lower part of her articulated legs'] (2004, 12).

29 For Clouzot, 'l'ascension de Marie vers la grâce commence dès que Robert lui fixe les cordelettes, lui lie les mains en l'air, la bâillonne, l'appuie contre une haute chaise, de style espagnol' ['Marie's ascension to grace begins when Robert puts ropes round her, ties her hands in the air, gags her, supports her against a high-backed Spanish-style chair'] (2004, 81).

with a bar to keep her legs apart. The shots dwell on the anomaly of sentient skin controlled to this extent. In one framing only her torso is visible.<sup>30</sup> Ropes encircle Marie's neck and then successive bands constrain her: her black underwear, the ropes close below her diaphragm, the scarlet fabric of her frock pulled down. Marie's docile body bound up finds material proximity to the hard furniture and elaborate décor of Robert's apartment, as he has previously propped a chair behind her to achieve disarticulation of her body. Each band around her torso invites a sense of the difference in its material construct. The skin is of such smoothness that it seems polished, impervious, an intact organ. Marie's face reveals her as composed, less agonised and discomfited than previously, as if she is taking part in a soothing ritual. For Lynsey Russell-Watts, 'Though it is she who is bound and gagged, the ultimate power [...] lies with Marie, since she is the one who has to give consent to these acts' (2010, 81).<sup>31</sup>

Robert's hands are seen working on Marie's face as if he is a surgeon in an operating theatre. He feeds a black cloth into her mouth. It makes a black hole between her lips, nothingness, an emptiness in her body pushing her to the stillness of a corpse. Then a black gag covers her mouth, fabric bisecting her face so that only the mask-like top half appears. The image is matched and varied as the shot moves between her legs, where Robert cuts a gash in her black underwear.

The reclining images of the film lead to an image of annihilation, fixity, a mouth agape then gagged. Sentience and feeling are stilled, the difference between body and furniture barely felt, limbs numb and bloodless, as Marie moves towards loss of animation. Breillat's work finds proximity with Georges Bataille's writing in *L'Erotisme* [*Erotism*]: 'L'angoisse mortelle n'incline pas nécessairement à la volupté, mais la volupté, dans l'angoisse mortelle, est plus profonde' (2007 [1957], 116) ['Mortal anguish does not necessarily make for sensual pleasure, but that pleasure is more deeply felt during mortal anguish' (1986, 105)]. Bataille shows finitude resourcing pleasure in this convulsion of the flesh:

30 Although so different in affect and sensory specificity, the shot could be compared to Varda's framing of the torso of the pregnant woman in *L'Opéra-Mouffe*. Marie is a pregnant odalisque later in *Romance* as she lies out to be examined by a series of doctors.

31 Ruth McPhee writes of another sexual sequence in the film: 'Marie's body may be used by the men within her fantasy, but she also uses these men for her own pleasure and to fulfill her own desire' (2014, 107).

L'activité érotique n'a pas toujours ouvertement cet aspect néfaste, elle n'est pas toujours *cette fêlure*; mais, profondément, secrètement, cette fêlure étant le propre de la sensualité humaine est le ressort du plaisir. Ce qui, dans l'appréhension de la mort, retire le souffle, de quelque manière, au moment suprême, doit couper la respiration. (2007 [1957], 116)

[Erotic activity is not always as overtly sinister as this, it is not always a crack in the system; but secretly and at the deepest level the crack belongs intimately to human sensuality and is the mainspring of pleasure. Fear of dying makes us catch our breath and in the same way we suffocate at the moment of crisis. (1986, 105)]<sup>32</sup>

This move to the inanimate is also achieved through pictorial reference in one last visual composition. The painter whose visual universe inspired *Romance* was Georges de La Tour. If La Tour does not provide a reclining image, he offers images of intimate affect as in Berger's example of the painting of a naked woman catching a flea. The painting that holds resonance for *Romance* is the penitent Magdalene, *La Madeleine à la veilleuse* [*Magdalene with the Nightlight*] (1640).<sup>33</sup> The Magdalene holds a skull on her knee, her hand on its forehead, the curve of the hand encircling the bone. She is calm, her face propped in *rêverie* on her other hand, her hair sleek, gleaming and falling over her shoulder. Aptly for *Romance*, a rope circles the scarlet fabric of her waist, its braided strands resembling those that bind Marie. The texture of the rope in the painting is echoed in the thick wick in the oil of her nightlight and in the coil of the scourge that sits on her table.

Beyond these material details, in the warmth, the dark and light, the chiaroscuro of the image, Georges de la Tour offers a foreshadowing of Breillat. The painting of the Magdalene's legs, their pictorial composition, looks forward to Breillat in the eroticism of the not-quite-closure of her knees and in the line of light which runs the length of her leg like clear liquid. In the choreography of the feet, angled apart from each other, the painting looks forward to Marie's more exorbitant poses. The flesh of the Magdalene anticipates Marie's smoothness, her clay docility and torpor.

In his book *Noli me tangere*, Jean-Luc Nancy explores specific connections between Mary Magdalene, death, and the dead. For Nancy,

32 Best and Crowley find in Breillat 'a quasi-Bataille anthropology' (2007, 55).

33 One vertical composition of Marie tied up, with tears in her eyes, looks outwards to Titian's various images of the penitent Magdalene. The Georges de la Tour image appears in Nan Goldin's grid images discussed in the next chapter.

she senses that the dead can rise up and walk, accompanying the living. In a passage of grace and melancholy, contemplating the Magdalene, he writes:

Les morts sont morts, mais en tant que morts ils ne cessent de nous accompagner, et nous ne cessons pas de partir avec eux. De partir nulle part: de partir, absolument, d'aller au fond du tombeau jusqu'au fond sans fond dans lequel on ne cesse pas d'avancer sans que pour autant on fasse route vers aucune destination (2003, 64–65)

[The dead are deceased, but as deceased, they do not cease accompanying us, and we do not cease leaving with them. To leave nowhere: to leave absolutely or to go from the ground (*le fond*) of the tomb to the ground without ground (*au fond sans fond*) upon which one does not cease moving forward, without for all that heading toward some destination (2008, 38–39)]

Nancy intimates the extensibility, the end without end, of relations with the dead. His words align with Georges de La Tour's Magdalene, with her nighttime *rêverie*, her absorption, the lit candle. Breillat courts this closeness to death in her figuring of Marie as Magdalene. This is the rigour, the serenity she seeks in her pictorial filming in *Romance*. She makes of her erotic films, their luxurious pictures, a contemplation of mortality. She makes of sex a passage through non-being.

### *L'Origine du monde*

Breillat's exploration of female sexuality, pursued across ten films from the 1980s onwards, reaches its extreme point in *Anatomie de l'enfer*.<sup>34</sup> Clouzot writes:

C'est l'acmé. Et si le mot 'acmé' comporte une part de douleur puisque, dans la définition du dictionnaire, c'est 'la phase de la maladie où les symptômes morbides sont au plus haut degré d'intensité', c'est bien de cela qu'il s'agit dans *Anatomie de l'enfer*. (2004, 135)

34 In a timeline of key dates for the film published in *Libération*, Breillat includes: '10 janvier 2004. Ma mère meurt' ['10 January 2004. My mother dies'] (BIFI, Breillat). The film was released on 28 January 2004. Clouzot writes that Breillat has always refused psychoanalysis. She continues: 'La matière de son œuvre est son inconscient' ['The subject of her work is her unconscious'] (2004, 11).

[It's the acme. And if the word 'acme' brings with it some pain since, in the dictionary definition, it's 'the phase of the illness when the morbid symptoms are at their greatest intensity', this is exactly what *Anatomy of Hell* is about.]

In this film, an unnamed woman (Amira Casar) pays an unknown man (Rocco Siffredi), to come for four nights to look at her sex, the lips of her vulva, her hair. Through this scenario, first developed by Breillat in the novel *Pornocratie* (2001) and inspired by Marguerite Duras's *La Maladie de la mort* [*The Malady of Death*], the film-maker pursues the compulsion of her films with prone images, variations on the reclining nude, rich with sensuality, ravishment, opacity, morbidity.<sup>35</sup> In *Anatomie de l'enfer*, death, the stilling of the flesh, perfect docility, is the furthest point of desire and the end of her scenarios. Casar says of her character: 'Le personnage est comme un papillon qui aurait choisi de mourir' ['The character is like a butterfly who has chosen to die'] (BIFI, Morain and Niklaus). This deathwish is felt across the film through play with a series of materials, substances, textures. Flesh is floppy, flaccid, and flesh is mineral, stone, without feeling.

One strand of the film, in its approach to Eros and Thanatos, runs through a trail of blood images, bleeding, a strident red, the drinking of menstrual blood. After the strobe whiteness, unreal blue and red light, and dark, of a dance party, Casar's character knocks against Siffredi's and goes into the bathroom to cut her veins. She is seen from a distance as she puts the blade to her wrist. Then the camera comes close and descends, following her downcast gaze. Her lips are red and her hair is dark. Her sweater is a virginal baby white, wool, fledgling sleeves, soft on her breasts. Its down, its smallest fibres, are in contrast to the skin of her smooth arms. The camera shows the pale pink satin of her skirt. The sheen of the blade she holds reflects textures of the satin.<sup>36</sup> The incision is a clean cut, the groove slowly filling with blood. She goes deeper with the same blade, meeting the blood as it begins to run down her wrist.

She is bandaged in a late-night pharmacy, her wound now bound up. A flowing stain of blood, red, marks her satin skirt, seeping into

35 Duras's text offers a scenario where a woman lies down for a man. Its affect is tender, oneiric, despairing. The man faces her strangeness as she lies sleeping, even as he enters her body, even as she is soft, docile, consenting, and he feels her repose.

36 Pink clothes, a hyper-feminine suit, a baby pink dressing gown, are chosen in Breillat's earlier film *Sale comme un ange* [*Dirty Like an Angel*] (1991). Casar's coat is pink, as are the walls of the town she and Siffredi walk through at night.

the fabric.<sup>37</sup> The film cuts to Siffredi and then in a reverse shot, his fantasy, to a Christic image of Casar taking the same blade to her neck, the blood, red, painterly, running in droplets down her skin.<sup>38</sup> She kneels before him, her bandage still visible on her wrist. She lets out his red penis and fellates him, her face visible at the end with sperm on her mouth, like milk or tears of the Virgin.<sup>39</sup> Kneeling before him, his cum still on her lips, she makes a contract with him. She will pay him to come and look at her: ‘me regarder là où je ne suis pas regardable’ [‘watch me where I’m unwatchable’]. Breillat’s voice intervenes, deeply, softly, to say: ‘Voici comment le marché s’est conclu’ [‘That’s how the deal was made’].<sup>40</sup> The film cuts to an intertitle, ‘Première nuit ...’ [‘First night ...’].<sup>41</sup>

In *The Art of Cruelty*, Maggie Nelson refers to Ana Mendieta, whose work encompasses bodily and bloody performances:

Blood, for Mendieta, often signified violence, especially sexual violence – as in 1973’s *Blood Writing*, in which Mendieta dips her hands in a bucket of blood and writes the ominous report, ‘SHE GOT LOVE,’ on a white gallery wall.’ (2011, 79)

37 Brinkema speaks of Marie in *Romance* as ‘a wild explosive droplet of scarlet, like a menstrual stain, just waiting to erupt all over the purified space that she inhabits’ (2006, 150). Keeseey speaks of Marie’s ‘red dress in disarray like the corpse of a rape/murder victim’ (2009, 131), signalling how the colour red in Breillat seems to speak of sexual violence and homicide (it is also menstrual, erotic, luxurious, and hot).

38 Clouzot says of Arvanitis: ‘Il fait office de guide vers les Vierges de Bellini, les passions du Christ, les scènes religieuses de Zurbarán’ [‘He plays the role of guide towards Bellini’s Virgins, images of the passion of Christ, the religious scenes of Zurbarán’] (2004, 134).

39 Clouzot draws attention to the specificity of Breillat’s fluid imaginary, speaking first about *Sale comme un ange* and then moving on to *Anatomie de l’enfer*: ‘La jouissance est liée aux larmes dans le cinéma de Breillat. Douze ans plus tard apparaîtront le sang et la semence dans *Anatomie de l’enfer*’ [‘Jouissance is tied to tears in Breillat’s cinema. Twelve years later, blood and sperm will appear in *Anatomy of Hell*’] (2004, 63).

40 Breillat’s voice recalls a scene in *Women in Love*, with Gerald and Gudrun: “‘You have struck the first blow,” he said at last, forcing the words from his lungs, in a voice so soft and low, it sounded like a dream within her, not spoken in the outer air’ (Lawrence, 1995 [1920], 171).

41 In the Duras, it is the first day instead: ‘Le premier jour elle se met nue et elle s’allonge à la place que vous lui désignez dans le lit’ [‘The first day she takes off her clothes and lies down in the place you show her in the bed’] (1986, 11).

Nelson remarks too her ‘*Silueta* series, in which Mendieta makes a slit in the earth, often in the shape of her body, and fills it with either sand, water, twigs, flowers, pigment, gunpowder, or fire’ (220).<sup>42</sup> Breillat likewise runs through a series of materials, blood, and also other liquids, fabrics, minerals, which are shaped, imprinted, copied. Breillat achieves a material repertoire of shapes, textures, often hesitating between animate and inanimate, quick, erotic, and mortuary objects. She seeks this elemental, bodily set of paints, rocks, and workable, surfacing materials. The blood of *Anatomie de l’enfer*, which returns later as Casar’s character bleeds during sex, seems to speak of her interior breached, yet it is also part of a painterly world of luxurious substances that render this art more tied to the real, to infraction, to damage.<sup>43</sup> Breillat says in interview: ‘I had to make the film like a sacred painting. I had to paint my Caravaggio’ (Murphy, 2005, n. pag.).

Speaking of the blood sequences in *Anatomie de l’enfer*, Breillat refers to beauty, as well as to horror and allure: ‘Amira Casar (“Elle”) se fait un collier de sang, comme du corail. C’est très beau. Parce que le sang à la fois vous répugne et vous attire’ [‘Amira Casar (“Elle”) makes herself a necklace of blood, like coral. It’s very beautiful. Because blood repels you and attracts you’] (Clouzot, 2004, 176). She continues:

le sang frais est d’un rouge éblouissant [...] un éclat de sang sur une peau blanche, c’est ce qu’il y a de plus beau [...] c’est dans les mythes. Le sang de la méduse devient un collier de corail. Les vierges de l’Antiquité, elles ont du corail. Le sang et le corail sont symboliques. J’adore ça! (176)

[fresh blood is of a dazzling red (...) a splash of blood on white skin is the most beautiful thing (...) it’s in the myths. The blood of the Medusa becomes a coral necklace. The virgins of antiquity have coral. Blood and coral are symbolic. I love that!]<sup>44</sup>

42 Louise Bourgeois’s ‘sculptural play’ is also a point of reference for Nelson at this point.

43 In *Ouvrir Vénus*, Didi-Huberman quotes *Madame Edwarda* about the opening of the body to Eros and Thanatos together: ‘l’être ouvert – à la mort, au supplice, à la joie – sans réserve, l’être ouvert et mourant, douloureux et heureux’ [‘all of being ready and open – for death, joy or torment – unreservedly open and dying, painful and happy’] (1999, 123; the quotation is from Bataille, 1990 [1956], 20; translation taken from Bataille, 1986, 271).

44 Breillat looks out to a sphere of myth and fairy tale that she will realise further as she films *Barbe Bleue* with images of the white nightgowns and the dripping blood of murdered wives.

Breillat's mention of coral speaks of a substance once living now dead and fashioned into jewellery. Coral ornaments and playthings surround the infant Christ as a foreshadowing of his passion. Coral, its blush, its textures, as jewel, is a fetish object. Breillat recalls the droplets of the blood of the Medusa described by Ovid, hard in the air and soft below the surface of the water. She makes an association with virginity. Casar, her *insoumise*, however erotically knowing and dolorous, is in some senses always beautifully still, pale, escaping, bleeding inside, yet impenetrable.

Breillat describes the image of Casar bleeding as beautiful. She marks it as sensual, as visually resplendent, as gorgeous and disturbing all at once. This impulse towards visual pleasure underlies her work with the pictorial, and in particular with the trope of the reclining nude. Breillat takes pleasure in making beautiful images. Her references, with Arvanitis, to paintings from the European tradition, serve this aesthetic purpose, a scopophilic search to enjoy images of female beauty. She reaches into these images, vivifies them and mortifies them, feels for their horror and pleasure.

After Casar's bloodletting, the film proceeds to a series of nights, a string of scenarios in a room with a bed where Casar's character lies out. This bedroom is a primal space of Breillat's films.<sup>45</sup> The bed has an iron frame and white sheets. The room has white walls and dark blinds.<sup>46</sup> John Paul Ricco sees it as one of a series of bed scenes with empty and unmade beds in contemporary art, where the unmade bed is

neither the property of the stage (as in theater), nor the place of conjugal coupling, nor a final destination and resting place, but rather the image of

45 Rehearsals for this space are found in *Sale comme un ange* and in *Romance*, in the gradually more self-conscious staged scenarios. Breillat says of the earlier film, 'Barbara renverse la tête, le cou courbé, très blanc, les bras relevés en arrière, comme le fera Amira Casar dans *Anatomie de l'enfer*' ['Barbara lays back her head, her very white neck curved, her arms up behind her, as Amira Casar will do in *Anatomy of Hell*'] (Clouzot, 2004, 60).

46 For *Romance*, Breillat says, 'je voulais la chambre tout en blanc, avec les draps tout blancs aussi' ['I wanted the bedroom all in white, with white sheets as well'] (Breillat, 2007a, 142). The character Vivian Parker in Breillat's novel, *Bad Love*, says: 'mon lit c'est autre chose, avec ses draps immaculés blancs comme les ailes d'un ange' ['my bed is something else, with its sheets immaculately white like angel wings'] (2007b, 64). In *La Maladie de la mort*, the sheets are white as the female lover is seen 'dans la flaque blanche des draps blancs' ['in the white pool of the white sheets'] (Duras, 1986, 30).

an exposure to a sense of freedom that remains open and no place other than in the finitude and concealment that is nakedly present as the shared space around and between bodies. (2014, 73)<sup>47</sup>

He goes on to speak about the room as a stage for ‘the nakedness of our shared exposure to life and death’ (113). The room is also a cavity, an empty dreamlike space where flesh can be felt, laid out, exposed pictorially, and also moved, moulded, modelled.<sup>48</sup>

In the sequence of the ‘Première nuit ...’ Breillat creates a reclining nude.<sup>49</sup> Clouzot notes that Manet’s *Olympia* is her model (2004, 134).<sup>50</sup> In an interview on the Flach DVD, Breillat elaborates on the range of references that influenced the film, and shows postcards of images that were sent to her by Casar.<sup>51</sup> Breillat describes her interest in Casar as odalisque and in the resemblance between the actress’s body and bodies

47 For Murphy, ‘the woman puts her body on display for the man, reclining nude in the center of a clinically lit, sparsely dressed room, as if on a medical examination table’ (2005, n. pag.).

48 Vasse emphasises the status of the scenes beyond realism, in a space of myth and the psyche: ‘comme pour renforcer cette atmosphère de conte funèbre, Breillat imprègne son huis clos de l’étoffe des songes, ceux de la belle endormie entre les mains du veilleur perdu’ [‘as if to strengthen this atmosphere of a funeral tale, Breillat clothes her enclosed space in the stuff of dreams, those of the sleeping beauty in the hands of the lost watchman’] (2004, 191).

49 Keesey suggests that this is achieved in part by framing the reflected image of Casar in a mirror in the room: ‘The borders of the antique mirror frame Amira like a painting, raising her naked flesh to the level of an artistic nude’ (2009, 139).

50 Keesey notes: ‘Breillat and Arvanitis based their representation of Amira on Manet’s *Olympia* (among other artworks) so that she would appear to be both corporeal and sublime’ (2009, 139). Cooper continues: ‘The painterly qualities of the film, when it refuses to fetishize fragments of the female body, at times also summon the perfection of the *Grande Odalisque* (1814) of Ingres’ (2010, 109–110). Azouray references Titian in a broader acclamation: ‘C’est dans les films de Breillat, son plus japonais: cérémonial et pictural. Lent et âpre. Hanté par le cadavre, par le rouge du sang, par la peur des poils. Film de peintre, avec Amira Casar en Vénus du Titien, peau de nacre, formes pleines, toison emblématique; un peu modèle, beaucoup sorcière, c’est-à-dire un délicat bijou du diable. C’est peint au scalpel, avant la découverte des rayons X’ [‘Amongst Breillat’s films, it’s the most Japanese: ceremonial and pictorial. Slow and harsh. Haunted by death, by the red of blood, by fear of hair. A painter’s film, with Amira Casar as Titian’s Venus, with pearly skin, curves, an emblematic bush; she’s a little bit a model, more a witch, so a delicate jewel of the devil. It’s painted with a scalpel, before the discovery of X-rays’] (BIFI, Azouray).

51 I am grateful to Emilija Talijan for drawing this to my attention.

in the paintings of Ingres and Manet. She references a less widely known image, Caillebotte's *Nude on a Couch* (1880), which she chanced to see in an exhibition of nude paintings in Frankfurt. The pallor of the woman, her thick pubic hair, look forward to Breillat's images of nudes, while the sleep the painting captures, the woman's crooked arm, the bare underside of her foot, reveal intimacy and disarrangement.

Breillat shows another postcard from Casar, a fresco by Giulio Romano of *Jupiter Seducing Olympias* (1526–1528) in Mantua. Jupiter's huge phallus and snake tail recall Siffredi. Breillat runs in her commentary from the ravished form of the Giulio Romano queen who slept with snakes to an image of the smooth surface of a Brâncuși sculpture. Casar says in a different interview:

elle m'avait montré les livres de Man Ray. Et moi, je pensais à Meret Oppenheim, à Dora Maar aussi. *Dora et le minotaure* m'obsédait: l'image de Dora assaillie par le Minotaure. Elle est en arrière, avec la tête dressée, les ongles rouges, dans une position d'abandon; mais dans son regard, elle est indomptable. Il me semblait que c'était un parallèle très juste pour mon personnage. J'ai dit à Catherine que je voyais en Rocco le Minotaure. (BIFI, Morain and Niklaus)

[she showed me books of Man Ray. And I thought of Meret Oppenheim, of Dora Maar as well. I was obsessed with *Dora and the Minotaur*: the image of Dora set upon by the Minotaur. She is lying back, her head raised, her nails red, in a position of abandonment; but in her gaze, she is unassailable. It felt as if this was a very correct parallel with my character. I told Catherine I saw the Minotaur in Rocco.]<sup>52</sup>

As she choreographs Casar, posing her body in the pictorial frames of the film, Breillat runs through a creative series of reclining positions. The actress is laid out on the bed, and propped up on her elbow. Her body is

52 Pascal Quignard included reproductions of both the Giulio Romano image and Picasso's Minotaur in his album, *La Nuit sexuelle* [*The Sexual Night*] (2007, 17 and 124–125). The Minotaur as image of predatory spectatorial practice is found in *Jane B. par Agnès V.* The image of Simon crouching on Ariane in *La Captive* also draws on a similar iconography. Picasso's Minotaur images show contrast between white female flesh and dark bull-like masculinity, but have tenderness, sensual co-involvement, and mutuality. Keesey also references *Dora et le minotaure* [*Dora and the Minotaur*] (2009, 146). The interview with Casar shows the ways in which Breillat collaborates with her actors. Casar notes too that she listened to: 'les Stones, Nico, Kathleen Ferrier' ['the Stones, Nico, Kathleen Ferrier'] (BIFI, Morain and Niklaus).

seen from behind, her head foreshortened. Her legs are seen open. She is seen from behind again, her back and buttocks bare, as she lies on her side, in the shadow of her bedroom. She lies with her belly pressed into the sheet and her arm crooked. She lies with her head back and her body outstretched, her ankles folded. She lies face-down sleeping in her pillow. She is seen inverted, copying the pose from *Sawdust and Tinsel*. She is seen foreshortened from her feet forwards. She is seen lying and lifting up her legs.<sup>53</sup>

Sarah Cooper writes beautifully about the pictorial qualities of the odalisque images of Casar, reflecting on the stilling of the image and its glow. She argues: ‘This semblance of eternity through the form of the image is discernible in some of the painterly fixed-frame observational shots of *Anatomie de l’enfer*, which play on the statuesque quality of Amira Casar’s body’ (2010, 107). She continues: ‘Through Yorgos Arvanitis’s ethereal lighting effects [...] Amira Casar’s body assumes luminescence’ (108).<sup>54</sup> The film is also concerned with moving in more closely to explore what Casar’s body feels like. Douin describes ‘Amira Casar en odalisque à la chair blanche’ [‘Amira Casar as odalisque with white flesh’] (BIFI, Douin). Clouzot speaks of her letting herself be turned and turned about like an object (2004, 131).

Casar takes off white clothes, a jersey t-shirt, a cardigan. Her underwear has left marks on her flesh. In *Pornocratie*, Breillat speaks of

53 Reclining allows for variations. In another nineteenth-century reference, Roberto Calasso discusses a daguerreotype by Désiré-François Millet found in the desk of the painter Ingres. In the daguerreotype a lost nude painting can be seen: ‘The painter had done away with the picture – and apparently had kept only the daguerreotype, tucked away in a drawer, out of discretion, at the time of his second marriage’ (2012, 98). Calasso draws attention to the strangeness of the woman’s reclining pose, where she is both outstretched and lying on her side: ‘this pose shows the largest possible surface of the body – and all with the same delicate luminous value, where the focus of the light is concentrated transversely between the right breast and the left part of the belly’ (98).

54 Casar speaks of Arvanitis creating ‘une lumière très rassurante pour moi. Je me sentais moins nue, je me sentais parée’ [‘a very reassuring light for me. I felt less naked, I felt adorned’] (BIFI, Morain and Niklaus). Breillat says in a different interview: ‘Habituellement, au cinéma, on égalise les teintes des peaux. Là, nous nous sommes donné beaucoup de mal pour obtenir la blancheur lumineuse d’Amira et l’aspect un peu fauve de Rocco’ [‘Usually in cinema, you match the skin tones. Here, we went to a lot of trouble to achieve Amira’s luminescent whiteness and Rocco’s rather tawny look’] (BIFI, Widemann). In *Pornocratie*, Breillat describes ‘ce corps blanc et laiteux’ [‘this white and milky body’] (2001, 43).

‘la mâchure des élastiques qui gâte ici et là les chairs de ses marbrures tuméfiées et rouges’ [‘the bite of the elastic which spoils the flesh here and there with its red raised markings’] (2001, 36).<sup>55</sup> Casar’s flesh is impressionable and marked by the straps, a reminder of the friction of her clothes and the delicacy of her skin. Undressing is shown before the first reclining scene, as Breillat marks the difference between an undressed body and an ideal nude. The marks seem like stigmata, red lines etched. They show the body’s softness. Casar sits on the bed and the press of her buttocks against the white linen looks out to Ingres’s *La Baigneuse de Valpinçon* [*Valpinçon Bather*] (1808). Casar lies like an odalisque now dormant. The looseness of her body recalls Courbet’s *Le Sommeil* [*Sleep*] (1866). She is pressed softly into the pillow, the sheet touching her torso and her breast. The curve of her hipbone is outlined, and the fluid line it creates is rimmed in light.

Casar’s breathing moves her flesh and shows it as pliable. She moves on the bed, as Dorothée Blanck moved in Varda’s *tableau vivant*, but Casar’s movements are more languid, her laziness speaking of the softness of her body, its fragility.<sup>56</sup> The attention to her softness and floppiness seems to carry with it some of the impulse of feminist soft sculpture and its reflections on bodily states. Briony Fer explores the organic, floppy character of Eva Hesse’s work (1999, 25–26) and looks at the use of liquid rubber in Louise Bourgeois’s sexual forms.<sup>57</sup> Fer says of latex: ‘It can be poured or painted. It has a viscosity which solidifies in time; it is skin-like, mostly like a shed skin with raw unfinished edges’ (1999, 32). She goes on: ‘In Bourgeois, latex does not so much bear the mark of touch – it is not modeled – as act out its previous liquidity, of wetness, of bodily secretions which make the skin of surface bulge and almost leak or seep out’ (32–33). Breillat’s filming renders Casar’s body a liquid, soft substance with its curves, its movements, its uncanny bulging, bloating, and wetness. Breillat, like Bourgeois, imagines flesh as a strangely pliable, liquid, and solidifying substance. It is this move from liquid towards solidity, the marmoreal, beyond Bourgeois, that she tracks in the film.

55 Best and Crowley discuss this image too, focusing on its haptic properties (2007, 81).

56 Clouzot writes that ‘Tout *Anatomie de l’enfer* est construit sur la douceur et la langueur, non sur la violence’ [‘All of *Anatomy of Hell* is constructed in the register of softness and languor, not of violence’] (2004, 136).

57 I am grateful to Olga Smith for inspiring this.

In this visceral, palpable attention to the reclining nude, Breillat turns to Courbet's *L'Origine du monde*:

Est-ce qu'un tableau comme *L'Origine du monde* de Courbet est érotique? Pas une seconde, puisqu'il a un sens. Et ce sens est bien au-delà de la concupiscence et du désir de consommation sexuelle qui sont des choses microscopiques. Ce que j'aime dans l'art et dans l'amour, c'est *L'Origine du monde*. (Clouzot, 2004, 165)

[Is a painting like Courbet's *The Origin of the World* erotic? Not for a second, because it has a meaning. And this meaning is well beyond lust and desire for sexual consummation which are microscopic things. What I like in art and in love is *The Origin of the World*.]

Talking in interview about her references to the painting in her film, she says: 'Les arts plastiques me paraissent très en avance sur le cinéma pour casser les codes esthétiques' ['The plastic arts seem to me far in advance of cinema in breaking aesthetic codes'] (BIFI, Widemann). Courbet's *L'Origine du monde* (1866) was painted for the collector Khalil Bey (Ottoman ambassador to Athens and St Petersburg) and later owned by Jacques Lacan, purchased for his wife Sylvia Bataille.<sup>58</sup> In *L'Origine du monde* the reclining nude's prone body is reduced to vulva and splayed legs, where the move towards a new animality, a fallen image, pushes towards anatomical and erotic minimalism.<sup>59</sup> For Thierry Savatier, the image achieves 'une nouvelle géographie corporelle' ['a new bodily geography'] (2009, 15).<sup>60</sup> He speaks of the sensory appeal of Courbet's

58 For further discussion of *L'Origine du monde*, see Savatier (2009) and Teyssède (2007).

59 For Gualdoni, 'It is the fascination with organic life, the female body as the identity itself of nature at its fullest and most tangible physicality, including erotic enticement, in the absence of any sort of moralism, of any preventative idea of what is beautiful and what is ugly' (2012, 115).

60 Savatier raises the question of whether the painting may have been inspired by a photograph. He pauses over coloured pornographic images taken by Auguste Belloc held in the Bibliothèque Nationale's *enfer* (a collection of erotic and pornographic material). Several of these, like Courbet's painting, represent a woman's torso, cut off, and her displayed vulva. As Savatier details, there are explicit similarities between Courbet's painting and Belloc's images: an equivalent framing, a comparable presence of cloth or petticoat hiding the model's face, an almost identical pose (2009, 69). These images are reproduced and discussed in a volume by Sylvie Aubenas and Philippe Comar (2013). They are also evoked in the catalogue to the 2008 Courbet exhibition, *Gustave Courbet* (Amic, Calley Galitz, and des Cars, 2008), specifically in Laurence des Cars's essay 'The Nude

painting: ‘on devine facilement les veinules qui courent sous une peau légèrement ambrée, une peau qui semble veloutée, douce et souple au toucher, dont la luminosité charme par son réalisme’ [‘one can easily make out the small veins which run under a lightly golden skin, a skin which seems velvety, soft and supple to the touch, whose luminosity is appealing in its realism’] (26).

Savatier cites Maxime Du Camp’s description of seeing the painting: ‘Lorsque l’on écartait le voile, on demeurait stupéfait d’apercevoir une femme de grandeur naturelle, vue de face, émue et convulsée’ [‘When one drew back the veil, one remained transfixed making out a life-size woman, seen straight on, moved and convulsed’] (2009, 76).<sup>61</sup> Speaking about this secret viewing scenario, Savatier reminds us:

Le XIXe siècle fut riche en livres et en objets à secret. Il suffisait de rabattre un feuillet, d’actionner un mécanisme, de tourner une clef et, d’un banal ouvrage, d’une innocente gravure encadrée, du cadran d’une montre classique, jaillissaient les scènes les plus érotiques, comme par enchantement. (2009, 73–74)

The nineteenth century was rich in books and objects holding secrets. It was enough to turn down a leaf, to start a mechanism, to turn a key, and from a banal work, from an innocent framed print, from the dial of a classic pocket watch sprang out the most erotic scenes, as if by magic.<sup>62</sup>

Breillat seems not immune to the appeal of these scenarios, saying of *Anatomie de l’enfer*: ‘Ce film-là, à la limite, j’aurais voulu le fabriquer pour un collectionneur et qu’il soit vu par une personne, mais vendu très cher’ [‘I would almost have wanted to make this film for a collector so it was seen by one person, but sold at a great price’] (BIFI, Vecchi).

Savatier singles out Courbet’s picture:

Mais *L’Origine du monde* n’est pas un tableau comme les autres, il occupe une place unique dans l’art occidental puisqu’il représente, sans

Transgressed’ (2008, 383–384). Gualdoni argues: ‘Courbet decided to turn to photography precisely because it guaranteed a sort of emotional cooling down of vision, a drier objectivity of the gaze, which he could then variously intensify in the pictorial process’ (2012, 115).

<sup>61</sup> The reference Savatier gives is Maxime Du Camp, *Les Convulsions de Paris* [*The Convulsions of Paris*], tome II, 5th ed. (Paris, Hachette, 1881), 189–190.

<sup>62</sup> This interest in the hidden and revealed erotic image seems in line with the anatomical images, with their interior compartments, discussed by Georges Didi-Huberman in *Ouvrir Vénus*.

concession, sans alibi historique ni mythologique, non seulement le sexe d'une femme, mais LE Sexe de LA Femme et, au-delà, toutes les femmes, amantes et mères incluses. (2009, 11)

[But *The Origin of the World* is not a painting like any other, it has a unique place in Western art because it represents without concession, or historical or mythological alibi, not only a woman's sex, but THE sex of WOMAN and, beyond that, of every woman, of lovers and mothers too.]<sup>63</sup>

Breillat writes: 'il était irrépressible pour moi de montrer le sexe de la femme en gros plan dans *Anatomie de l'enfer* parce que c'était ce que j'avais évité dans *Romance*' ['it was impossible for me not to show the woman's sex in close-up in *Anatomy of Hell* because that was what I had avoided in *Romance*'] (Breillat, 2007a, 109). She comes close to this image.<sup>64</sup> She explains this in relation to her own sensations and psyche: 'C'est parce que j'avais moi-même beaucoup de mal à supporter la vue d'un sexe féminin que j'ai fait *Anatomie de l'enfer*. C'était comme un exorcisme. Car dans le fond, il faut supporter le beau et le laid' ['It was because I myself found it very difficult to face the sight of the female sex that I made *Anatomie de l'enfer*. For in the end, you have to face

63 In a chapter about possible models for the painting, Savatier wonders whether this may be the unseen body of Joanna Heffernan, Whistler's mistress also painted by Courbet, or the dark-haired model in Courbet's *Le Sommeil*. Late in 2018, the model was identified by Sylvie Aubenas as Constance Quéniaux, a former dancer and one of Khalil Bey's mistresses. Keesey's readings of Breillat are in line with Savatier on Courbet as he writes: '*Anatomie de l'enfer* would offer Breillat's most sustained confrontation with that part of the female body often demonized by patriarchy as if it were a burning shame, a gaping obscenity, a den of iniquity' (2009, 135) and 'Breillat modeled the close-up of Amira's sex on Gustave Courbet's 1866 painting *L'Origine du monde* (*The Origin of the World*) which has both naturalistic detail and mythic power in its magnified view of a woman's vagina. Breillat's close-up is not the "beaver shot" of pornography that belittles and objectifies the female sex for male consumption, but a shot of woman as goddess with awesome creative and destructive power' (142–143).

64 Cooper sees this as part of Breillat's approach to what is extreme or outside representation: 'even when the film does fetishise body parts, it is not complicit with the ways in which this dissection has worked against the representation of women in film. Its more provocative focal points (the pubis or anus) take us to a different visual source, more resonant with Courbet's *L'Origine du monde* (1866), and this trajectory works utterly in keeping with Breillat's project to film what is usually left outside of filmic representation' (2010, 110).

the beautiful and the ugly’] (107).<sup>65</sup> She continues: ‘Je pense qu’il faut se confronter à la sexualité humaine et à nos peurs, nos interdits et nos émotions’ [‘I think one has to confront human sexuality and our fears, our taboos and our emotions’] (116).<sup>66</sup>

What Breillat doesn’t speak about, beyond what is there silently in the presence, the luxury, of the images in the film itself, is the outcome of her confrontation. I think she gets to the point where looking closely at a woman’s lips, her hair, is a source of visual pleasure. She says in interview: ‘Je n’ai jamais pu supporter l’idée d’avoir le moindre dégoût de moi-même’ [‘I have never been able to bear the idea of having the tiniest bit of disgust at myself’] (32). In *Anatomie de l’enfer* she is seeking to open this gash in the image of the reclining nude, in this ideal, pearly surface, and to show it as fascinating, like blood, in its allure and horror. It is the breaking of this taboo, the relay between the perfect surface images of Casar as reclining nude and the close-up genital shots, that makes for the stridency and effect of the film, and its pleasure too, as it collects together these different, densely cathected images of female beauty and explicit sexuality. The surface exists in electric contrast with the red, wet image of the vulva.<sup>67</sup>

Alyce Mahon, referencing Courbet, writes about Henri Maccheroni’s two thousand photographs of the vulva. She comments on the ways ‘in which the camera lens lingers on the surface texture and folds’, and reckons that the photographs are intended to explore ‘the erotic promise of women’, but also work as ‘sign and symbol of the erotic pulses which permeate our existence’ (2007, 10). She sees Maccheroni ‘forcing the viewer to reconsider the beauty – but also the taboo – which continues to surround the vulva’ (10). Mahon makes reference to female artists,

65 In a 1975 interview, Varda said of her *Réponse de femmes*: ‘We went back and forth with the show’s directors on whether we could show a close-up of the woman’s sexual organs. Okay, but ... ultimately the close-up was cut before the broadcast’ (Kline, 2014, 73).

66 For Vasse, ‘le film se présente aussi comme une interrogation du spectateur devant des images de sexe en gros plan’ [‘the film also presents itself as a questioning of the spectator in front of images of a sex in close-up’] (2004, 190).

67 For Duras, the perfect surface calls for violence: ‘Le corps est sans défense aucune, il est lisse depuis le visage jusqu’aux pieds. Il appelle l’étranglement, le viol, les mauvais traitements, les insultes, les cris de haine, le déchaînement des passions entières, mortelles’ [‘The body is without any defence at all, it is smooth from face to feet. It calls for strangling, rape, bad treatment, insults, shouts of hatred, the unleashing of whole, mortal passions’] (1986, 21).

such as Judy Chicago and Carolee Schneemann, whose work similarly foregrounds the vulva:

women artists contemporary to Maccheroni were also radically embracing female genitalia and producing ‘vulva art’ as a means of offering an alternative tradition to High Art and its patriarchal values and as a means of celebrating and liberating the female body. (11)

I am interested in placing Breillat in this context whilst also registering how she creates a more ambivalent dissident art, in her own conflicted apprehension.

In words to Casar’s character, Siffredi voices feelings – his feelings, her feelings – about ‘la profondeur féminine’ [‘feminine depth’], her capaciousness and interiority, and also ‘le côté informe et indolente de vos lèvres cachés’ [‘the sloppy, shapeless aspect of your hidden lips’]. In *Pornocratie*, the female sex is described as ‘ce gouffre vivant’ [‘this living abyss’] (Breillat, 2001, 16). The vagina is imagined as abyssal, as formless, as abject, flaccid, non-phallic. Breillat goes with these feelings and goes beyond Courbet’s pictorial aesthetic towards a still more dimensional, tactile apprehension.

The first shots of the sex full-screen are variations on *L’Origine du monde*.<sup>68</sup> The framing and severing of the image owe something to Courbet’s composition, realising its starkness, its closeness. But the film, coming closer still, first shows downy pubic hair and Siffredi inserting his finger, seeing it emerge shining with clear liquid discharge. Then the sex is seen in extreme close-up, the pubic hair wet and Siffredi’s finger inserted again, going in to its full length, so his knuckles meet her hair. The film shows insertion, sequence, summoning depth, dampness, response.<sup>69</sup> The interiority of the female sex is imagined.<sup>70</sup>

68 The vulva filmed is not Amira Casar’s, but that of a body double (Pauline Hunt).

69 Childhood memory flashbacks (or fantasies) for both Siffredi’s character and Casar’s, his of crushing a downy fledgling bird, hers of her sex being laid bare and watched by little boys, shadow the sequence played out.

70 The affect is quite different in *La Maladie de la mort*, where the man rests in the opening of her body, even if the text is also about Eros and Thanatos: ‘vous dormez le visage dans le haut de ses jambes écartées, contre son sexe, déjà dans l’humidité de son corps, là où elle s’ouvre’ [‘you sleep with your face between her legs, against her sex, already in the wetness of her body, there where she opens’] (Duras, 1986, 14).

*Anatomie de l'enfer* follows and enhances the experimentation of *Romance* which already explores the openings of the body, in contact and in insertion, as rope is tightened on the vulva of Marie, as it is caught in her pubic hair, as Robert puts his fingers in her, withdrawing them wet, and then in escalation as a group of medical students insert gloved hands into her vagina, and as a baby's head crowns full-screen as she gives birth. In *Anatomie de l'enfer*, the vulva and vagina, behind the hair, are sensate, vulnerable, pleasure-giving, prehensile, elastic.<sup>71</sup> Breillat draws in wetness as one of the ways of showing the body as responsive and of making her film-making appeal to senses other than vision.<sup>72</sup> The image shows interiority, being felt inside, and feeling inside as pleasurable, even as the experiences are also variously intrusive, queasy, horrifying, uncanny.<sup>73</sup> Looking at pubic hair, and its wetness, Breillat comes close to the visceral qualm, shiver, pleasure, of Meret Oppenheim's surrealist *Object* (1936).<sup>74</sup>

71 Breillat's valuation of interiority recalls Cavarero's feminist insistence that voice emerges from the interior of a body: 'When the human voice vibrates, there is someone in flesh and bone who emits it' (2005, 4). The voice is part of the body, it arises from interiority and flesh: 'The impalpability of sonorous vibrations, which is as colourless as the air, comes out of a wet mouth and arises from the red of the flesh' (4). Cavarero continues: 'The sense of hearing, characterised as it is by organs that are internalised by highly sensitive passageways in the head, has its natural referent in a voice that also comes from internal passageways: the mouth, the throat, the network of the lungs' (4).

72 As Brinkema argues: 'Breillat's foray into the ontological realism of the image is always and uniquely centred on the sticky production of wet female desire' (2006, 149).

73 Brinkema works brilliantly to think through the different modes of interiority that Breillat explores, drawing in the visceral and the animal in an example from *Une vraie jeune fille*, as she argues about the death of a chicken 'when the mother and Alice put their hands inside its warm walls to pull out trails of guts, this is the essence of the model of interiority that the female body's sex provides' (2006, 166). For Brinkema, this interest in interiority is not just about sensory or existential experience, but has feminist traction: 'The dark, metaphysical gap, the fantasy of female interiority, is filled in, given-image-to; it is shown and seen and therefore known' (152).

74 Savatier writes that the fur came from a Chinese gazelle (2009, 93). He describes in the art of the nude 'un souci omniprésent de gommer toute trace de pilosité' ['an omnipresent concern to rub out any trace of hair'] but pays attention to a few 'rarissimes et timides tentatives, telles une *Eve* de Jan Van Eyck, *La Jeune fille et la mort* de Hans Baldung Grien, la *Maya nue* de Goya, l'étude pour la figure d'Angélique dite *Angélique aux trois seins* d'Ingres ou la *Nymphé endormie* de

In a further close-up vulva image, from the same night, while Casar's character is sleeping, Siffredi rouges her sex with lipstick, gashing the hair and skin with carmine. The shot shows her anus and the interior of the exterior lips as Siffredi pulls her open, her sex much more visible than the vulva in *L'Origine du monde*. The act of drawing, the press of lipstick on hidden, folded flesh now stretched gives a sense of the body's pliability, extensibility.<sup>75</sup> The drawing enlarges the sex, draws it round and out so it is signalled, outlined like a crime scene. Siffredi moves to paint lipstick on her mouth, enlarging her lips, her features. The red lipstick, its grease smoothness, recalls the stringent reds of the earlier blood images, and looks forward to the menstrual blood in which Siffredi will later dip his fingers. The heat of the red recalls Marie's garments in *Romance*. In the daubing of the sex with red, this act of painting, Breillat opens out and embraces other idealised images of the vulva as red flower, as petals. The image reminds me of a line from Caroline Bergvall's 'Sixteen Flowers', 'smallred Vibrant lovegash pétales embedded' (2005, 15), of Tracey Emin's drawings *A Cunt Is a Rose Is a Cunt* (2009), or of Molly Bloom, a flower of the mountain.<sup>76</sup> The red is decorative, staining, smudging on Casar's skin, its waxy smell and texture seeming to linger.

As Siffredi moves towards her mouth to paint her lips, any moves of her body seem completely involuntary. She seems to be completely unconscious, deadened as much as sleeping. Her body is without impulse or agency. There is something uncanny as Siffredi moves and Casar remains still, as if for a moment two enchanted realms open onto each other and intersect.<sup>77</sup> Siffredi moves her leg and its heaviness,

Chassériau ainsi (pour le sexe) que *La Vanité* du *Triptyque de la vanité* d'Hans Memling' ['very rare and timid attempts such as Jan Van Eyck's *Eve*, Hans Baldung Grien's *Death and the Maiden*, Goya's *Naked Maja*, the study for the figure of Angelica called *Angelica with Three Breasts* by Ingres, or Chassériau's *Sleeping Nymph* as well as (for the sex) *Vanity* from Hans Memling's *Triptych of Earthly Vanity*'] (18). Goya's images of the naked and clothed Maja return for Varda and Breillat, and the Baldung Grien is important for Varda.

75 Murphy speaks of the film approaching the female sex, 'confronting the horror of its parts and properties, its elasticity and discharges, in queasy detail' (2005, n. pag.).

76 For Clouzot, in Breillat, 'Les voix off, c'est le flot intérieur de Molly Bloom' ['The voice-over is Molly Bloom's stream of consciousness'] (2004, 82).

77 On the DVD commentary, Breillat speaks about her passion for the sleeping beauty story: 'J'adore le mythe de la belle endormie' ['I love the story of Sleeping

its fall, conjure not sleep but a deeper, more morbid torpor. Siffredi is holding onto her skin.<sup>78</sup> In *Pornocratie*, Breillat describes ‘une pose de doux abandon’ [‘a pose of soft abandonment’] (2001, 47). She says: ‘Elle est immobile comme une morte’ [‘She is immobile like a dead woman’] (63).

Casar is like a soft marionette, a doll painted.<sup>79</sup> Siffredi touches her, imprints her, and she remains impassive. The morbidity of the image is increased by the view of the bandage on her previously slit wrist and the staining of her lipstick on her cheek.<sup>80</sup> There is animation, a pulse in her neck. But even after Casar stirs, she keeps a waxy stillness, exacerbated by the pallor of her skin and the diaphanous, milky lighting of the scene. She is unmoving as Siffredi enters her from behind, pawing her skin, showing its cool looseness as he holds her.

The morbidity of her flesh, the way it is moved, unresponsive, sinks, as the film moves on, towards annihilation, the stillness of the earth, of an inanimate object. Her body is tractable, tactile, pliable, clay, coolly close to extinction. This is tested out further, on the fourth night, where Casar’s character expels a stone dildo from her vagina, this expulsion recalling the birthing scene in *Romance*. Of the former scene, Clouzot says: ‘L’apparition violente de la tête du bébé est un des plans de jouissance les plus violents du film’ [‘The violent appearance of a baby’s head is one of the most violent shots of *jouissance* in the film’] (2004, 88). Keeseey speaks of Robert in *Romance* ‘using [Marie] as and reducing her to a hole’ (2009, 129). The vagina is a hole, outlined in red ink, in *Anatomie de l’enfer*. Casar’s character pushes out a dark stone.<sup>81</sup>

Beauty’] and explains: ‘c’est le ravissement dans le sommeil’ [‘it’s rapture while you sleep’]. In *Pornocratie*, Breillat calls her ‘la dormeuse’ [‘the sleeper’] (2001, 79).

78 Siffredi’s gripping hand is reminiscent of Bernini’s statues of rape and metamorphosis, in particular *The Rape of Proserpina* (1621–1622) and *Apollo and Daphne* (1622–1625), both in the Galleria Borghese in Rome.

79 I think of the doll of Alma Mahler fabricated by Oskar Kokoschka.

80 The image of the bandage allows the shot also to recall Mañuel Alvarez Bravo’s photograph, *The Good Reputation, Sleeping* (1938).

81 Best and Crowley also align the two scenes: ‘When Casar’s character (the body of her double) expels the stone dildo before the man’s gaze, the abrupt cut to a close-up of the emerging mineral surrounded by the organic contractions of her body produces an effect of extreme defamiliarisation, a brief moment of monstrosity (this is a petrified transposition of the vision of childbirth from *Romance*) which enforces a self-conscious interrogation of what exactly it is the female body is cloistered for supposedly containing’ (2007, 72).

For Breillat, the stone image is a source of pleasure. She writes in *Pornocratie* (fetishizing black masculinity): ‘Et soudain il voit surgir du fond du vagin une forme arrondie, oblongue; un de ces galets noirs, luisants et gros comme la verge d’un nègre, en basalte poli par le ressac infini des mers’ [‘And suddenly he sees surging from the depth of the vagina a rounded, oblong form; one of these black pebbles, shiny and big like a black man’s penis, in basalt polished by the infinite surge of the seas’] (2001, 106). The text continues: ‘C’est absolument fascinant de voir la vulve dévorer allègrement cette pierre dure silencieuse et volcanique’ [‘It is absolutely fascinating to see the vulva slowly devour this silent, volcanic rock’] (108).<sup>82</sup>

Siffredi’s character can see nothing as she completely engulfs the stone. But then she pushes it out, in a visual convulsion and with a liquid, haptic sound that speaks of the elasticity of her vagina, the slick holding and disclosing she achieves.<sup>83</sup> The close-up image of the stone, its wetness catching the light, makes it resemble a tongue, a piece of liver, so it seems alive and alien, a medusa, horrid, alluring, beautiful as it stretches the red lips that encircle it.<sup>84</sup> Siffredi holds the stone and its rigidity, its shape, are visible. He holds it in his hand like his own penis. He moves it to insert it again and to move it in and out, as if the connection between lips and stone is magnetic, as if this is a secret game to be played, the insertion of this stone into her sex and its moist expulsion. She finds pleasure in his hand moving the unreal hard tumescent stone.

*Anatomie de l’enfer* moves from floppiness, impressionability, to a rock hardness, as the film undoes divisions between human, animal,

82 Cooper points out that the stone is used literally to give the woman pleasure: ‘Prior to his penetrating her, he inserts a dark black stone into her that she demonstrates she can expel at will. He brings her to orgasm by inserting and withdrawing the stone’ (2010, 112).

83 Emilija Talijan offers a brilliant discussion of sound and noise in Breillat. She argues that ‘by attending to the auditory, we open up another sensory dimension through which to think about Breillat’s key relationship with the pornographic and her appeal to listening in spectatorship’ (2017, 1).

84 It is an image of quivering and life, ironically where it is a stone that is expelled. Duras writes very beautifully about quivers of feeling in *La Maladie de la mort*, capturing an image of bodily sensation that Breillat does not replicate in *Anatomie de l’enfer*: ‘Vous voyez d’abord les légers frémissements s’inscrire sur la peau, comme ceux justement de la souffrance’ [‘At first you see the light shudders writing themselves on her skin, just like those of suffering’] (1986, 39).

vegetable, and mineral.<sup>85</sup> This is anticipated already in *Pornocratie*, where the characters imagine themselves as sponges ‘entre le règne animal et végétal’ [‘between the animal and vegetable orders’] (2001, 14).<sup>86</sup> This attaches to reclining, with the embrace of an animal horizontality, with unconsciousness and sleep, in the move towards a plant-like inertia, and finally with Thanatos, and the achievement of a lack of animation and sentience, a minerality that approaches the limits of life.

*Anatomie de l'enfer* shows an apprehension of male hatred of women, with the violent urge of Siffredi's character to damage Casar.<sup>87</sup> In unreal sequences in the later parts of the film, he seems to kill her and then discuss her with a stranger in a bar. The stranger says, ‘c'était une salope, une pute, une pute comme les autres’ [‘she was a slut, a whore, a whore like the others’]. Their exchange rehearses tropes of misogyny that Breillat gives space to here.<sup>88</sup> She envisages heterosexuality, and

85 This approaches Bataille as he writes: ‘Le corps est une chose, il est vil, asservi, il est servile, au même titre qu'une pierre ou qu'une pièce de bois. L'esprit seul, dont la vérité est intime, subjective, ne peut être réduit à la chose’ (2007 [1957], 167) [‘The body is a thing, vile, slavish, servile, just like a stone or a piece of wood. Only the spirit with its intimate and subjective truth cannot be reduced to a thing’] (1986, 150). But Breillat's interest is in the willed, desired reduction of the body to object.

86 In *Bad Love*, Vivian Parker says: ‘Rien de mieux que parler de tout et de rien pour laisser avancer la nuit comme les mains sur mon corps et là je sais être languissante comme une algue’ [‘There is nothing better than talking about everything and nothing to let the night advance like hands on my body and there I know how to languish like seaweed’] (Breillat, 2007b, 62).

87 Confronting this violence in interview, Breillat says: ‘Ce que je filme dans *Anatomie de l'enfer*, c'est pour faire comprendre que, masochisme ou pas, la violence de la faible (la victime) est plus forte que la violence du fort (le bourreau). La femme (Amira Casar) est emblématiquement plus forte’ [‘What I film in *Anatomy of Hell* is done to let it be understood that, whether or not there is masochism, the violence of the weak (the victim) is stronger than the violence of the strong (the torturer). The woman (Amira Casar) is emblematically the stronger’] (Clouzot, 2004, 170). For Duras, ‘Il est vrai qu'il y a une sorte de gloire du subissement que beaucoup de femmes nient. C'est le règne du subissement, c'est la femme qui est royale là-dedans, ce n'est pas l'homme qui frappe’ [‘It is true that there is a sort of glory in submission that many women deny. It's the reign of submission, and it is women who are royal in it, not the man who hits’] (Ceton, 2012, 81). (Breillat and Duras are speaking about consensual erotic relations, and not about other situations of male violence against women.)

88 So Mayer's summing up is appealing where she describes Breillat's ‘absurdist demonstration of the limits of gendered behavior under patriarchy’ (2016, 178). Best

sexual difference, as death-bound. She does not deny the erotic force of this agonistic relation, showing that, in some real and fantasy worlds, men want to kill women, and women find pleasure in masochism.

Siffredi leaves the bar and walks along the cliffs by the sea. He visits the bedroom, now dismantled, the bed in separate pieces, and he lifts a blood-stained cover. It looks like a body in a Pietà image, or a shroud. The film reprises the club music of its opening and Siffredi is seen on the cliffs pushing a virginal, spectral Casar into the surge of the abyss, the waves below.<sup>89</sup> The last shots of the film are magnetic, sublime images of the Atlantic ocean, its pulse recalling the surge of the stone from the vagina, the darkness of the scene broken by the froth of the white surf, its moonlit viscosity. Breillat says to Clouzot: 'L'océan, c'est la chose la plus belle du monde. J'ai très peur de l'océan' ['The ocean is the most beautiful thing in the world. I am very afraid of the ocean'] (2004, 173).<sup>90</sup>

Casar's character has achieved her own erasure, which has been pending through the film. She is brought to a liquid end. The substances and materials of the film have tended her in this direction. In *Pornocratie*, the heroine is described as wearing 'un mince kimono de satin fluide et glissant comme le reflet des eaux où Ophélie est morte' ['a thin kimono in satin that is fluid and slippery like reflections in the water where Ophelia drowned'] (2001, 33).

In *Anatomie de l'enfer*, Breillat is at her most Durassian. In interview with Duras, Jean Pierre Ceton cites words from *L'Homme assis dans le couloir* [*The Man Sitting in the Corridor*]: 'Je vois que l'homme pleure couché sur la femme. Je ne vois plus rien, non, je ne vois rien d'elle que l'immobilité. Je l'ignore, je ne sais rien, je ne sais pas si elle dort' ['I see that the man cries as he lies over the woman. I see nothing else,

and Crowley describe 'male violence as defence mechanism, a way of refusing the unknowability of women and the male weakness this implies' (2007, 74). Richard Rushton argues: 'One of the defining issues of Catherine Breillat's films is *acknowledgement*. Acknowledgement is an issue primarily in terms of these films' attempts to work out how a woman can be known by a man. Acknowledgement is thus a matter of the kinds of knowledge a man can have of a woman and vice versa. How can a woman know a man? How can a man know a woman?' (2010, 85).

89 In Breillat's *Parfait Amour!* [*Perfect Love*] (1996), the female protagonist is killed by her younger lover.

90 Vasse adds another painterly image, describing the last shot as 'cosmique et ténébreux comme une toile de Turner' ['cosmic and shadowy like a Turner canvas'] (2004, 189).

no, I see nothing of her except her immobility. I am not aware, I know nothing, I do not know if she is sleeping'] (2012, 100–101). Duras adds: 'j'espère qu'elle est morte' ['I hope she is dead'] (101). In *Pornocratie*, Breillat describes 'cette acceptation du regard brun velouté des animaux qui connaissent leur mort' ['the acceptance in the velvet brown eyes of animals who know they are going to die'] (2001, 142). In *Bad Love*, she shows the woman's urge towards self-destruction: 'Me précipiter la tête la première; devenir la chute elle-même, et c'en est fini de moi! C'est simple! La nuque fracassée par la terrible force, voilà l'irrésistible pulsion qui a toujours été en moi!' ['To throw myself head-first; to become the fall itself, and it's over for me! It's simple! My neck broken by the terrible force, this is the irresistible urge which has always been in me!'] (Breillat, 2007b, 37).<sup>91</sup>

In *Anatomie de l'enfer*, Breillat leaves unanswered whether Siffredi's character has killed Casar's and whether she wanted this. The film allows these urges and horrors to coexist. They are animated as possibilities, dreamt up in the film's landscapes. Martine Beugnet writes of the waves: 'Entre la forme et l'informe, la vague ne peut être saisie que de manière elusive, imprécise, elle est la manifestation même de la mobilité perpétuelle' ['Between form and formlessness, the waves can only be grasped in an elusive, imprecise manner, they are the very manifestation of perpetual motion'] (2017, 21). Georges Didi-Huberman, in *Ninfa fluida*, offers a liquid interpretation of Eros and Thanatos, describing 'Eros (l'érotique des fluides où naître et se lover) et Thanatos (la menace des fluides où se perdre et se noyer)' ['Eros (the erotics of fluids in which to be born and to curl up) and Thanatos (the threat of fluids in which to lose yourself and drown)'] (2017, 97–98).<sup>92</sup> He describes 'l'exploit, l'inceste pourrait-on dire, de "voir le dedans de la mer"' ['the exploit,

91 The possibility that self-destruction is the achievement of sovereignty for Breillat is found in Nikolaj Lübecker's brilliant reading of the end of *A ma sœur*: 'Breillat's provocation is to present the final rape as a Georges Bataille-inspired experience of sovereignty. This does not mean that Breillat is condoning rape, but in the end sequence Anaïs reaches something like a complete ecstatic dissolution of her being: she is now, as Bataille would say, "like water in water"' (2015, 145). He continues: 'Breillat's film is not meant to leave the spectator shattered, it testifies to a continued belief in the link between transgression and emancipation' (145).

92 Didi-Huberman writes, referencing Victor Hugo, 'Un homme regarde, immobile et pensif, sa Ninfa ou sa Gradiva océane' ['Motionless and pensive, a man watches his Ninfa or his marine Gradiva'] (2017, 7), recalling his words on Mendieta.

that one could call incestuous, of “seeing the inside of the sea”] (9).<sup>93</sup> *Anatomie de l'enfer*, Breillat’s exploration of the female sex as origin of the world, is made in the regime of the dying mother, its return to origins savage, visceral. Breillat’s closest look at images of reclining is also her clearest approach to violence and mortality. Breillat’s truncated, cut-up, reclining nude, her vulva art, opens questions about whether this display on a butcher’s slab, this quietude, may also be a source of pleasure.

93 Evidently he plays on the French homonyms of *la mère* and *la mer*.

# Nan Goldin

This chapter looks at two bodies of work developed in Europe by American photographer Nan Goldin. I focus on two major projects that respond to specific sites in Paris, where Goldin sometimes lives and works. The Chapelle Saint-Louis de la Salpêtrière is the location of her installation *Sœurs, saintes et sibylles* [*Sisters, Saints, and Sibyls*] (2004) about the suicide of her sister Barbara Holly Goldin.<sup>1</sup> The Musée du Louvre is the focus of a projection, and ensuing series of grid pictures, and other grouped images, *Scopophilia* (2010), shown in New York, Rio de Janeiro, and Rome.<sup>2</sup>

Writing in 2001, Guido Costa notes the shift of focus of Goldin's work from the United States to Europe during the 1990s: 'Paris, Switzerland and Italy have gradually replaced Times Square and the Bowery as settings for her work. There are obvious personal reasons for this – mainly the loss of so many of her New York friends to AIDS' (2001a, 12).<sup>3</sup> He continues: 'But also, perhaps, at a deeper level, Goldin feels a close intellectual and artistic connection with Europe (12). European art has always been a point of connection in her photography.'<sup>4</sup> In her

1 This work was shown again at the Matthew Marks Gallery, New York, 11 March–22 April 2006 in the show *Chasing a Ghost*. See Larkin (2006), Smith (2006), and Stender (2006).

2 *Scopophilia* was presented at the Matthew Marks Gallery, New York, 29 October–23 December 2011 and at Gagosian Rome, 21 March–24 June 2014. The latter was Goldin's first major exhibition in Rome. Works from these two shows are my focus here. *Scopophilia* was also presented in Rio de Janeiro in 2012.

3 In his *New Yorker* profile of Goldin, Hilton Als recounts: 'she left the U.S. in 2000, when George W. Bush was elected' (2016, 27).

4 A relation to European art is evident in manifold ways in Goldin's earlier US work, explicitly for example in the citing of Caravaggio's *Bacchus* (1596–1597) from the Uffizi Gallery, visible above the fruit and flowers on the table in Goldin's

later works, European locations – chapels, cemeteries, mausoleums, museums, hotel rooms, palazzi, and also volcanoes, islands, pools, and seas – are her spaces of creation and affective investment. In this work, in these locations, she realises a departure from the US that was already apparent or desired.<sup>5</sup> This departure has led to an enriched understanding of her stretch as an artist. She speaks of how her work has been perceived differently in Europe: ‘In a deeper way, I think. It was seen as more about the human condition. And related to painting’ (Goldin, 1996, 448).

In her European phase, and in particular in France and Italy, her pictures hold ecstatic and melancholy expressions of grief and love, and are more languorous than her edgier images from an American bohemia.<sup>6</sup>

*Gina at Bruce’s Dinner Party, NYC, 1991*, and more extensively in the influence of painters, including Caravaggio, but also Géricault, Courbet, and many others, on her apprehension of the body. These connections are then explored in *Scopophilia*. See Dinse (2016, 156) on the incidental presence of paintings in Goldin’s art. Another point of reference for Goldin is Hieronymus Bosch: in a number of images in the catalogue to her 1996 retrospective, *I’ll Be Your Mirror*, two postcard reproductions of naked lovers from Bosch’s *Garden of Earthly Delights* (1503–1515) are visible on the walls in Goldin’s apartment. See Goldin (1996, 233, 237–238). When Als visited Goldin for his *New Yorker* profile, he found ‘a movie still of Renée Jeanne Falconetti’ on the wall (2016, 27). Goldin’s close friend, Cookie Mueller, said of a trip to the Berlin Film Festival in 1981: ‘Basically I just needed some live European exposure’ (1990, 125). Catherine Lampert writes: ‘Goldin and her peers invented for themselves an aesthetic that favoured indeterminate gender, was informed visually by a European sense of culture, glamour and innuendo’ (2001, 57).

5 Glenn O’Brien says, in fact, that all ‘Nan Goldin’s photos are located in Bohemia, once a country, now a place in the head that can be reconstructed in any city’ (2016, 82). Vera Dika pursues this idea that spaces are subjective in Goldin, writing about *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*: ‘downtown is presented more as a state of mind or, more specifically, a state of the body’ (2012, 106). In his essay ‘Nan Goldin: Bohemian Ballads’, Townsend writes about Goldin’s early work in the United States, exploring how, in collaborative early works, and in the multiple iterations of the project *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*, she offers ‘an authentic document of life in the bohemian cultures of Boston and New York in the 1970s and 1980s’ (2003, 103). He notes: ‘Hers was a group that was, by its emphasis on its gay sexuality, drag, drug use, and self-consciously bohemian lifestyle, outside the norms of conventional behavior. As Goldin says in the film *I’ll Be Your Mirror*: “It was as if we’d all escaped from America”’ (106).

6 Townsend has drawn attention to the ways in which the early and very personal works pursue a modernist project. Aligning her with Picasso’s blue

Sarah Ruddy has described Goldin's work across her different periods as 'affective documentary' (2009, 349).<sup>7</sup> It is in her European phase that the retrospective aspects of this documentary impulse come most fully to the fore. As well as taking new pictures, Goldin looks back over her past images, finding new visual echoes and sensory connections through their rearrangement in a luxurious, historical, mythological environment. She closes in further on love, suavity, sensuality, in response to loss and pain. P. Adams Sitney cites poet Susan Howe saying, 'A documentary work is an attempt to recapture someone somewhere looking back. Looking back, Orpheus was the first known documentarist: Orpheus, or Lot's wife' (2015, 67).<sup>8</sup> In Europe, Goldin is like Orpheus looking back, calling loved ones out of the Underworld, making art of sweetness, of a lasting Spring. She makes the chapel of La Salpêtrière, the museum of the Louvre, as she has elsewhere the volcanic and Virgilian spaces of Naples and its environs, Underworld realms, both Hell-like and Elysian.<sup>9</sup>

If Goldin recalls Orpheus, her art is not immersed in regret or involved in reparation. Art does not annihilate the loved one. Looking back does not kill the other. Loved ones die, the lover is bereft. Art does not repair this loss. Simply, Goldin's love and her photography are so symbiotic, that making images as true and beautiful as possible is a way of living through this Hell-like passage of loss. Sensuous, gilded, ghost-like images emerge and creativity exists, in spite of all, and is a way of living, of staying alive, of documenting, and sharing love.

period, and other contemporary works, he writes in reference to her 1970s and 1980s material that 'Goldin manifests in much of her work a romanticized longing for the excesses and dissent from bourgeois normalcy – a "*nostalgie de la boue*" – that characterises modernist bohemia' (2008, 65). Susan Bright, looking at *Self-Portrait on the Rocks, Levanzo, Sicily*, 1999, describing it having, 'like the rest of her work from this sojourn', 'a much softer colour palette' (2010, 50).

7 Ruddy writes about Goldin: 'Love and loss, the affective counterparts of beauty and vulnerability, Goldin's presentation of history, these elements together form a new way of knowing Goldin's world' (2009, 349). Claire Raymond pursues discussion of Goldin's work in her project *Women Photographers and Feminist Aesthetics* (2017). She considers Goldin in a chapter that also discusses Nikki Lee, Catherine Opie, and Zackary Drucker (120–141).

8 Maggie Nelson compares Goldin's work with that of poet Eileen Myles, referencing documentary: 'Like the "visual diary" created by Nan Goldin's photographs, a major facet of Myles's work has been its construction of an ongoing "poetic documentary" of her life' (2007, 173).

9 Goldin's work in Naples and its environs can be seen in *Ten Years After* (1998) and *The Devil's Playground* (2001).

If classical mythology is a small part of *Sœurs, saintes et sibylles*, it is a stronger influence in *Scopophilia*, in particular the projection.<sup>10</sup> The Virgilian Underworld is the playground of her work through this phase. Equally important in *Scopophilia* is the series of narratives opened out in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* that offer Goldin's imagination forms of lability, eroticism, shifts in material states, and slippage between genders.<sup>11</sup> In *Scopophilia* her dialogues with mythology, and with figures in painting and sculpture, are proteiform, vivid, changing, and living, if they also have loss and injury at their basis.

The sense of repose, of luxuriance, which I locate in this later work looks out to my themes of reclining and horizontality. Goldin has from *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* onwards been an artist of supine lazing, of lying in bed, of making love, of reflecting, of lying drugged or melancholy. In later work, she has attended to lying in hospital and on deathbeds, yet also to floating in water, and lying in sunshine, lying on the shore. In the works in Paris, she allows self-conscious dialogues between her own pictures of reclining and images from the European tradition of painting and sculpture. Elisabeth Sussman sees this as part of a reaching out to the European that had already begun by the early 1990s. Discussing *David on my red couch, Bowery, NYC, 1990*, a photograph of Goldin's long-term friend David Armstrong reclining, Sussman writes:

The point of view switched from one that felt quintessentially American to a mellowness that seems to have come from her European experience (in those years Goldin was moving between New York and Berlin). The change is revealed in the image of Armstrong's recumbent body in *David on my red couch, Bowery, NYC (1990)*, which has dark richness of tone and a refined eroticism that recall Matisse's *Odalisque*. (1996, 41)

The arms in the image, and underarm hair, call up Matisse's *Odalisque with Raised Arms* (1923), while the abandonment and listlessness of

10 Lotte Dinse writes: 'Nan Goldin's work has changed profoundly. After forty years of solely photographing what she refers to as her "tribe," she has now been transported to another world. Upon being invited to the Louvre to create a new body of work, without any restrictions, Goldin began to photograph representations of mythological beings and saints' (2016, 155). For Glenn O'Brien, 'Like the best painters of the Renaissance, Goldin is able to locate the divine aspect in a crowd in this place in time' (2016, 79). Licia Spagnesi finds in *Scopophilia*, 'Narcissus, Eros, Psyche, Pygmalion, Galatea, Chimera, Cleopatra and Sappho' (2014, n. pag.).

11 Lability has always been part of her work. Darryl Pinckney writes: 'I associate the appearance of Nan with swirls of colorful, manic feeling' (1996, 204).

David's pose look out to Modigliani. Photographing her beautiful friend, a young man reclining, Goldin slides from the queer ball of her New York pictures to European repose and melancholy.

Goldin's attention to reclining is explored in two iterations in this chapter. Closing in on two projects which are, more or less, about girls and women, about female madness and grief, about a female-identified, bisexual artist looking at female, queer, and trans bodies, about the eroticism of those bodies, I respond to the ways in which Goldin also pursues particular non-heteronormative and female narratives in this European phase of her work.<sup>12</sup>

This attention to a female narrative was already an aspect of Goldin's work in the *Cookie Mueller* portfolio (1991) about the life and death of one of her closest friends.<sup>13</sup> The portfolio stretches between the affective poles of the two later works I explore, adoration, ecstasy, and melancholia, hard-edged grief. Goldin writes: 'Cookie was a social light, a diva, a beauty, my idol. Over the years she became a writer, a critic, my best friend, my sister' (1996, 256).<sup>14</sup> Als comments that they were not lovers 'but the pictures are filled with romance' (2016, 28). He

12 Goldin says in the film *Nan Goldin, In My Life*: 'I've been bisexual since I was about eleven [...] I grew up in the gay male world since I was about thirteen. My closest friends have been gay men most of my life and I've been very influenced by the aesthetic of gay men and drag queens. I first started hanging out with queens when I was about seventeen and I never saw them as men dressed as women. Literally, it never occurred to me that they were men dressed as women. They were a third sex. They were a beautiful revolutionary kind of answer to the struggle of gender'.

13 As Jonathan Weinberg writes, 'The *Cookie Mueller* portfolio is a sequence of seventeen photographs and text. It opens with a remembrance by Goldin in the manner of a narrator introducing the hero of the story' (2005, 1). For Costa, 'In the *Cookie* portfolio we are offered [...] a very intimate, personal story, in which even the most shocking details are tenderly conveyed' (2001a, 10).

14 Costa describes her as 'perhaps even her muse and guru' (2001a: 42). Cookie's qualities show in her writing in *Walking through Clear Water in a Pool Painted Black*. She describes her performance costume: 'When I got home I hung up my pink sequined G-string, and there it hangs to this day, gathering dust. It still sparkles just a little when the sun hits it' (Mueller, 1990, 113). She describes Fassbinder at the Berlin Film Festival (125). She writes about her loved ones lost to AIDS: 'Each friend I've lost was an extraordinary person, not just to me, but to hundreds of people who knew their work and their fight. These were the kind of people who lifted the quality of all our lives, their war was against ignorance, the bankruptcy of beauty, and the truancy of culture' (147–148).

adds poignancy to Goldin's sense that Cookie was her idol, her sister: 'Looking at the warm, playful, and wrenching photos of Mueller [...] is like seeing a ghost – the woman Barbara Goldin never got to be' (28). Goldin says, in a handwritten text, 'Part of how we grew close was through me photographing her – the photos were intimate and then we were. I was outside of her and taking her picture let me in' (1996, 256). The pictures hold live responses to Cookie's wild, neon-lit beauty.<sup>15</sup> They also mourn her early passing from AIDS-related illness. Goldin writes:

I used to think I couldn't lose anyone if I photographed them enough. I put together this series of pictures of Cookie from the 13 years I knew her in order to keep her with me. In fact they showed me how much I've lost. (256)

In her project on her sister, Goldin lays out her losses. She explores her sister's suicide, a literal act of lying down to die on a railway track, and explores also the state of prostration, of being knocked over, or floored, by events. This leads her to reflect on her own practice and its responses to moments of the lowest feeling. Reclining reaches the deepest points of indolence, restraint, despair.

The lability of Goldin's work allows her later Paris project *Scopophilia* to be saturated rather with pleasure, pleasure in looking, touching, feeling. It is a project about beauty and its seductive, hallucinatory effects. Goldin claims pleasure in looking, confronting one of the criticisms of her work, that it is voyeuristic.<sup>16</sup> For Goldin there *is*

15 Costa comments on the beauty of women who have been photographed by Goldin: 'She has always been interested in the grammar of female beauty and found in Joana a perfect example of seductive power that comes in this case more from the irregularity of her features and the magnetism of her persona and expression than from classical conventions of beauty' (2001a, 116). He writes further: 'Kathleen is a New York artist who has been Goldin's close friend since the late 1980s. In the context of the portraits of women, she represents a type of beauty of another age, full of pronounced, vibrant sensuality. It is her combination of wildness and fragility that has made her a frequent subject for Goldin, who tries to capture her melancholic features and gentle sensuality' (86).

16 Alison Dean is critical in her perspective on Goldin and voyeurism (2015, 177). She writes that Goldin 'shifts from outright denial (that her work could be considered voyeuristic, for instance) to disavowal (naming a New York exhibition of her work *Scopophilia*)' (187). For Als, 'There's an unspoken rule in photography, not to mention in art in general, that women are not supposed to be, technically speaking, voyeurs' (2016, 30).

pleasure in looking, *scopophilia*, and pleasure in looking comes without the political damage, the obsessional fixity of voyeurism.<sup>17</sup> She enjoys looking. Goldin, photographer, artist, claims looking as a sexual and intimate act.<sup>18</sup> Her visual attention is exultant, attentive, affirmative. She responds with voluptuousness, sensitivity. She responds to beauty. Glenn O'Brien writes: 'I see Nan Goldin as a fierce leader of the real art resistance. She has never given up on beauty' (2016, 79).<sup>19</sup>

This chapter responds to these double strands of melancholy and pleasure. Loss and sensuality are rich in both Paris projects, indeed through all of Goldin's projects. Goldin feels for ways of sensing and redrawing the body. Across this terrain she explores how it feels to give over the body, to expose it and endanger it, and also to take pleasure from it. She looks at vulnerability and opens up questions of its relation to damage, and to ecstasy, accessibility, and love. She explores the inability to rise out of fallen states of indolence, of illness, of grief, and at the same time the most diaphanous, mercurial, quickfire living. Rapture, *jouissance*.

### *forms*

Weinberg admits: 'I am fascinated by the way Goldin's art bestows on her friends the gift of making their everyday lives into stories resembling, in Cookie Mueller's words, "screenplays or theatre pieces"' (2005, 1). I

17 Goldin's position recalls the explorations of female pleasure in Bette Gordon's film *Variety* (1983), in which Goldin has a cameo part. After starting work in the ticket booth at a porn theatre, Christine (Sandy McLeod) begins to have erotic fantasies about the men in the theatre and the porn they watch, as a means to engaging her own sexual autonomy. Goldin created a series of still photographs of the film's scenes. These appeared in a book edited by James Crump (2009). In one reclining image, Christine is lying dreamy on a bed in a black dress, her hand just touching a porn magazine (74). Crump describes Christine's 'autoerotic, self-actualizing obsession with porn' (121). The Kino International DVD (2008) of *Variety* has as an extra an essay by Bette Gordon, '*Variety*: The Pleasure in Looking', which, in the context of 1970s and 1980s feminism, explores arguments about female pleasure in looking.

18 As Costa notes, 'She has been one of the most outspoken women artists on sexuality, photographing it in all its forms and thereby stepping into the previously exclusive domain of male photographers' (2001a, 24).

19 Dika speaks of 'the extreme beauty and pathos of Goldin's work' (2012, 110).

place Goldin in this book beside two film-makers, Varda and Breillat, responding to the affective dimensions of her work, the poetry of her images, her storytelling, to what Weinberg describes as ‘the fictive aspects’ (2005, 1) of her art. Where Goldin is not a film-maker herself, contact with film enlivens her aesthetic and her acuity of feeling. In *I’ll Be Your Mirror*, she recalls:

We saw lots of Fellini, Antonioni’s *Red Desert* and *La Notte*. Monica Vitti was a goddess. *Blow-Up* had a huge effect on me and I think was probably the beginning of my wanting to be a photographer – the whole eroticism and the glamour. (1996, 135)<sup>20</sup>

Weinberg notes, ‘With Armstrong she [...] saw the great films coming out of postwar Europe’ (2005, 14). Vera Dika offers particular insights into her relation to Italian film, arguing that ‘De Sica’s neorealism [...] inspired Goldin’s fascination with the everyday, and with the texture of real places and real people’ (2012, 108).<sup>21</sup> She continues: ‘Pasolini [...] showed her the spiritual beauty of people who live outside the mainstream’ (108). For Dika, Antonioni inspired Goldin’s interest in poses of the body and interiority (109) and her slide shows, where she explores ‘the cinematized body, its tenderness, its flesh, and the tension between its ephemeral presence and its absence, its movement and its stasis’ (107), are film-inspired.

Cinema as medium offers insight into the specificity of the forms Goldin chooses in *Sœurs, saintes et sibylles*, and *Scopophilia*, projection and grid images, and their particular capacity to allow reflection on states of body and states of mind, on seriality, motion, and metamorphosis. In these works, film is broken down to its core elements in the arrangement of images in different sequences. If those sequences in the projections are at least superficially linear, although also reordered, shifted in different shows and installations, in the grids the images are spatially arranged so that the viewer’s attention can be more multidirectional, their apprehension more open.

Projection arises early as a dominant form in Goldin’s work in the slide show *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*, initially shown in the

20 Crump also comments on the importance of *Blow-Up* for Goldin (2009, 107–108). The reference to Antonioni’s film runs a line from Varda to Goldin, for *Jane B. par Agnès V.* also reflects on the nudity in *Blow-Up*.

21 Lampert writes of her later work that it reveals ‘the kind of tolerant domestic and humorous scenes found in the films of Pedro Almodóvar’ (2001, 57).

underground contexts of clubs in New York.<sup>22</sup> Darsie Alexander writes: ‘As a performance, the piece was a document of private lives among friends’ (2005, 25–26).<sup>23</sup> Weinberg places emphasis on the domestic aspects of the show, arguing that Goldin ‘glories in its association with earlier forms of family documentation, just as scrapbooks and snapshots also fascinate her’ (2005, 14–15).

If the family slide show, this domestic screening, is a point of reference, Goldin also finds in the medium of projection some further enchantment or magic.<sup>24</sup> Alexander offers ideas about the source of this magic:

Maybe it was the scale of slide projection, which made ordinary subjects larger than life; maybe it was the sharpness of a good slide glowing in the dark on an iridescent silver screen; perhaps the magic centered on the relationships, both visual and social, the slide projection fostered. (2005, 3)

In the later projects, and certainly in the projections included in *Sœurs, saintes et sibylles* and *Scopophilia*, this magic comes too, spellbinding, in the possibility of seeing again, enlarged, glowing, now dead loved ones. The slide show is spectrally beautiful. Showing these ‘fragments of trauma and beauty’, as Kathleen Stewart describes earliest memories (2000, 407), Goldin makes present, blows up beyond life-size, images of her friends and lovers.<sup>25</sup> Through images she accesses spaces, worlds, light, beauty. In a hallucinatory fashion these slide shows bring up the dead from the Underworld and make them large. By further encircling the images with her own voice-over and with music, Goldin amplifies the aesthetic of the domestic slide show, opening her projections to a

22 Townsend argues that ‘Goldin would also radically change the mode of exhibition of the photograph: indeed, it was she, perhaps more than any other artist, who first became interested in seriality and projection as narrative devices; and further, who emphasized exhibition as a rhetorical form in its own right’ (2008, 67).

23 Alexander argues more broadly: ‘Serial and often personal, the slide shows of performance artists reflected the return to narrative entering contemporary art in the late 1970s and 1980s’ (2005, 27).

24 About thirty-six minutes into the film *I’ll Be Your Mirror*, Goldin can be seen doing a slide show. Her beatific expression looking at the blown-up slides makes her seem like a goddess, or a sibyl.

25 This recalls once more *Blow-Up* and its explorations of the capacities and failures of image-making and technology to give access to knowledge.

relay of meanings between lyrics and images, allowing suggestion, a hazy imagining of reference, forms of ventriloquism, and animation.<sup>26</sup>

Capturing the pathos of her projects, Alexander comments: 'It seems appropriate [...] that Goldin's images of people's fantasies and sorrows should be realized as short-lived projections' (2005, 26). The slide show, which can be reinvented each time it is shown, offers a mobile form to hold feelings. For Dika, Goldin selects 'the sequence of slides to reflect her emotional responses to the people pictured there, corresponding to her memories of the past, and to her present involvements' (2012, 111). Weinberg sees the form allowing for changing, mutable emotions: 'Movement and the passing of time are simulated less by capturing gestures in motion, the so-called "decisive moment", than by *moving* the picture into different series' (2005, 9–11).

Critics see the return of images and poses, and in particular the return of particular friends and lovers, leading to a narrative complexity. Sussman writes: 'Although an individual image may be devastating in its intensity and beauty, Goldin, like a novelist or filmmaker, thinks of both single images and of sequences of linked images that form a narrative' (1996, 25). Lampert argues: 'Goldin has followed several of her friends from within their daily lives over a long period of time. As with the heroines of great novels, we begin to feel we "know" and can identify with them' (2001, 56). Yet important in these slide shows too is the momentary, the instantaneous, the dominance of flashes of feeling or emotion, the move through shards and fragments which remind us of how little is held, and of all that is lost.<sup>27</sup>

Weinberg argues: 'Throughout her career, Goldin has been obsessed with arranging and rearranging her pictures, so that their meanings are always dependent on interrelationships' (2005, 3). These interrelationships are personal as well as formal. Yet in the European phase of her career, those rearrangements, and interrelationships, can also be seen to extend

26 Dika describes the effect in Goldin's work of the slide show form, saying, 'the photographs should flow like memory' (2012, 111) and 'the colors bleed from image to image, shifting the figures, and imperceptibly decomposing the body, making it diaphanous, as it moves in time' (111).

27 For Weinberg, 'Goldin's conception of portraiture as multiple and ongoing recalls Alfred Stieglitz's extraordinary photographic "portrait" of Georgia O'Keefe, which he claimed was composed of all the pictures he took of her over the span of their thirty-year relationship' (2005, 12). Joachim Sartorius, discussing Goldin, references artists who undo the sense of self and self-portraiture: 'Cindy Sherman, Sophie Calle, and their forerunner Claude Cahun' (1996, 322).

to an interest in patterning, in seriality, in the return and metamorphosis of different poses, moves, feelings.<sup>28</sup> For Costa, this thematic orientation was already there from the earliest slide shows. He argues:

The individual shots making up *The Ballad* are like ‘frames’ (in the cinematic sense) belonging to a more complex narrative, arranged thematically – female nudes, images of women in front of a mirror, couples in bed, club scenes, sex etc. – but inseparable from the work’s greater schema. (2001a, 9)<sup>29</sup>

This emphasis on rearrangement and interrelationship is, if anything, still further apparent in the grid pictures, which allow the simultaneous juxtaposition of a number of images which may be viewed in sequence, serially, but also in alternative, less linear and chronological alignments.<sup>30</sup> The grid moves beyond individuality and singularity, showing instead serial images of a single self or images of diverse selves or poses, gestures, settings, allowing kinship, likeness, resemblance to be opened and rethought.

In *Sœurs, saintes et sibylles*, there is a grid of images of Saint Barbara and there are several grids of images of Barbara as a child, the grid layout recalling the multiple frames of a photograph album page. There are also a number of careful juxtapositions of pairs or trios of images. In *Scopophilia*, as it was realised for the gallery, the grid form is used more lavishly and with attention to the return of particular poses and textures. The grids which make up the show, together with the projection, have been recomposed in new variations in different galleries. They move

28 David Armstrong says: ‘Nan is an artist, she has a clearly developed style that involves a lot of formal things, too. They have to do with color, composition, and with her own way of balancing things. They have to do with light and with what any formal aspects of any work of art are. The structure of the photographs is informal. It seems they’re not classically composed. However, some of them are, there are variations within that too’ (Goldin, 1996, 452–453).

29 In a later study Costa explicitly draws a line from *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* to *Scopophilia*: ‘*The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* (and not just the *Ballad*, given that the same disorienting effect can be felt in all her most successful cycles, up to and including *Scopophilia*, exhibited at the Louvre two years ago) has the capacity to arrive at depths of meaning greater than the sum of its individual parts, owing to its perfectly composed narrative structure’ (2014, 377–378).

30 Ruddy looks at the *Positive Grids* that Goldin produced in the 2000s, representing friends who are HIV positive, and argues: ‘The grids work to imagine kinship visually and structurally’ (2009, 371). She says further that Goldin works to de-essentialize in her images of ‘re-positioned human bodies, friends’ (371).

closer to poetry than to narrative, to the display of iridescent moments, shapes, connections. In the very form of her work, where Goldin offers repeatedly reworked and transforming slide shows, and newly arranged grids of photographs, she reveals her interest in the syncopated, estranged unfolding of a life. She calibrates her work to instabilities.

To think about the double valence of the slide shows and grid images, I want to recall *The Optical Unconscious*. Krauss writes about Max Ernst's collage text, *La femme 100 têtes* [*The Hundred Headless Woman*] (1929):

*And in the grip of the art-historical imagination? That imagination is determined to 'read' Ernst's novel, to narrativize it, to give it a shape, a story line. It has chapters after all, does it not? It is a Bildungsroman, goes one explanation. Conception, infancy, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, senescence.* (1993, 35)

She sees the urge to narrativise the syncopated cut-and-paste text, but in her own reading opens it differently to affect, to the imagination, to the possibility of seizing again childhood feeling, rather than narrating a line from innocence to experience. She speaks of the project holding '[images] which Ernst as a child must already have sensed as archaic, and strange, and wonderful' (34). She continues:

And if the child stirs in the images, if the memory of having been so little is nudged into being by them, then that is something potentially powerful working against the abstracted, flattened uniformity of a technologized world, a world from which time is all but erased. (34)

Krauss's words take me back to the enchantment of the slide show, to the capacity of the images blown-up large to recreate a childish self, a self looking at a sister, at a beloved friend existing, still alive. Also looking back to *The Optical Unconscious* I find a precursor for Goldin's grid pictures, in Dalí's *Phénomène de l'extase*, his serial images of falling and inclined women, not a narrative but a composite image, a grid, expressing, giving rise to, a sensation, an affect, a state of mind.

### *Intimacy*

For Sussman, 'Nan Goldin is the impassioned historian of love in the age of fluid sexuality, glamour, beauty, violence, death, intoxication, and masquerade' (1996, 25). Goldin's interest in reclining is involved in this career-long focus on love and its states of being. Reclining as

pose, as trope, offers images of prostration and languishing, of ecstasy and rapture, and of idling and nestling, which are part of the array of emotions and bodily expressions attaching to love.<sup>31</sup> Love is part of Goldin's process of taking photographs, as she specifies in the film *Nan Goldin, In My Life*:

Generally, the relationship comes first and then the photograph. And so the choices aren't made aesthetically, they're made emotionally. It's about love and wanting to show the person how beautiful they are and wanting to give them access to parts of themselves they might not see in themselves.<sup>32</sup>

In a conversation with David Armstrong and Walter Keller, she says:

For me it is not a detachment to take a picture. It's a way of touching somebody – it's a caress. I'm looking with a warm eye, not a cold eye. I'm not analysing what's going on – I just get inspired to take a picture by the beauty and vulnerability of my friends. (Goldin, 1996, 452)<sup>33</sup>

She says, further, 'I photograph out of love ... and out of my idea of beauty and out of desire' (452). Her work depends on the binding up of feeling and art. She is lying down with her friends and lovers, close to them, in bed with them, by their side. Reclining, lounging, in domestic space, in hotels, in beds, on sofas.<sup>34</sup>

31 Commentators often lay emphasis on death as well as love in her work, seeing the two as indivisible. For Townsend, 'Goldin's "postmodern" treatment of death [...] I would argue is a profound work of love' (2008, 70). Dika, speaking about tenderness in Goldin, sees her work exploring 'love and death, and how the two are closely intertwined' (2012, 112). F. C. Gundlach speaks about Goldin showing 'the urges of lust, the violence of love, and the vulnerability of those who desire one another' (1998, 16).

32 Darryl Pinckney recalls: 'She was famous on campus as a muse. She had a masochistic brilliance for sympathy' (1996, 204). Luc Sante says in retrospect: 'Nan's slides made us aware, however subliminally, of the fragility of our eggshell bodies, the transience of our fun, the vulnerability of our bonds' (1996, 102).

33 Costa argues: 'Goldin's work is driven by empathy, by the desire to share the other's experience' (2001a, 48).

34 This intermingling of lived experience with art, making pictures in domestic spaces and collaborating with loved ones, is also part of Maya Deren's aesthetic. John David Rhodes envisions 'Deren's and Hammid's domestic life as an intimate, agonisingly erotic and agonistically collaborative adventure' (2011, 45). Barbara Hammer responds to the domestic locations of Deren's work in downtown Manhattan in her film *Maya Deren's Sink* (2011), where she projects Deren's reclining image onto the porcelain of the film-maker's real domestic sink.

Goldin's attention to love is linked to the eroticism of her work, to her claiming of pleasure in looking. Yet all the acts of lying down she charts speak of more than sex. As Alexander writes, 'Occasionally she showed people having sex, but more often her images revealed the emotional side of intimacy' (2005, 107). In her 1997 film with Tschinkel, Goldin says: 'I think the newer work is more about people's internal lives and about real intimacy'. Archiving intimacy is one of her projects, her photographs offering a stream of moments of closeness.<sup>35</sup> This work may capture something of her affective life, but it also opens out a repertoire of images of non-heteronormative ways of living intimacy. Variations and shifts in the forms of her slide shows and grid pictures mirror the multidirectional loves that are her subject. These reclining pictures are part of a bigger project about reimagined attachments. I see Goldin's projects in line with and illuminated by Lauren Berlant's thinking on intimacy, her reckoning with the particular sorrows and raptures of Goldin's generation. Berlant's work underlines the political force of Goldin's apprehension of the diversity of attachment, the lability of affect.

In *Intimacy*, Berlant speaks of a generation 'no longer defined by procreational chronology, but marked by trauma and death' (2000, 7).<sup>36</sup> Her words inform my sense of Goldin finding more mobile, less linear, less chronological forms for representing intimacy and eroticism. The effect of AIDS and its losses, and queerness, the unsettling of family genealogies, finds expression in Goldin's reimagining of domestic imaging, photography, projection. Mobile forms offer different, undone, narratives of living. Beyond the couple or conventional family form, Goldin explores looser but no less affectionate and erotic patterns of kinship.

Exploring the intersection between individual attachments and the narratives of intimacy offered in the public sphere, Berlant writes: "I

35 Alison Dean also looks at intimacy in Goldin, comparing her work to the photographs of Rineke Dijkstra. She specifies that her 'interest in the photography of Goldin and Dijkstra points toward the way intimacy is represented through – the way it works on and with – the surfaces of the skin and the pregnant or maternal body' (2015, 178). For further discussion of Goldin with Dijkstra, see Visser (2004).

36 These are the reasons Berlant gives for this shift, 'because of AIDS, globally high mortality rates among national minorities, environmental toxins, virulent transnational exploitation, ongoing military and starvation genocides, and other ongoing sources of destruction' (2000, 7).

didn't think it would turn out this way" is the secret epitaph of intimacy' (2000, 1). She says that 'intimacy [...] involves an aspiration for a narrative about something shared, a story about both oneself and others that will turn out in a particular way' (1). She sees that story existing within familiar and comfortable parameters: 'friendship, the couple, and the family' (1). If these forms of love and bonding seem, in her words, 'inward', they are also part of a public discourse: 'People consent to trust their desire for "a life" to institutions of intimacy; and it is hoped that the relations formed within those frames will turn out beautifully' (1). Berlant's perspective, close to Goldin's, is to unsettle faith in the surety and rightness of those institutions and thus their power to order narratives of intimacy. She points out the heartbreak, inconsistency, intensity, and strangeness of love, arguing:

Romance and friendship inevitably meet the instabilities of sexuality, money, expectation, and exhaustion, producing, at the extreme, moral dramas of estrangement and betrayal, along with terrible spectacles of neglect and violence even where desire, perhaps, endures. (1)

For Berlant, as for Goldin, sexuality and desire are mercurial, rearing up even in situations of damage, evanescent, extreme, burning and resistant, beautiful. Attachments can be aleatory, broken by circumstance, yet also, like Goldin's love of her sister, dramatic, unceasing. Berlant's project in the collected volume is to see intimacy differently. She contends that 'While the fantasies associated with intimacy usually end up occupying the space of convention, in practice the drive toward it is a kind of wild thing that is not necessarily organized that way, or any way' (4).

From her earliest work, Goldin has been capturing images on the wilder shores of love. This wildness is felt in her honest openness to 'unavoidable troubles' (1) of which Berlant speaks, to love as consuming, violent, bruising, and yet also, in different iterations, giving and tender.<sup>37</sup> She looks at opening, at yielding, at being involved, at being given over. She looks beyond categories of queer and straight, male and female, cisgender and trans. She is interested in the unexpected and the estranged, letting her photos cultivate unknown dimensions of her loved

37 As Katherine A. Bussard notes, looking at Goldin's *Empty Beds*, *Lexington, Massachusetts*, 1979, 'In Goldin's portrayal of an empty, rumpled bed [...] we may be reminded of the ephemeral quality of everyday life, an aching for the intimacy the bed suggests, or the absence created by lost love' (2006, 16).

ones and subjects. For Als: ‘What interests Goldin is the random gestures and colors of the universe of sex and dreams, longing and breakups – the electric reds and pinks, deep blacks and blues’ (2016, 26).<sup>38</sup>

Berlant asks: ‘What happens to the energy of attachment when it has no designated place? To the glances, gestures, encounters, collaborations, or fantasies that have no canon?’ (2000, 5).<sup>39</sup> These are the gestures, the fantasies, that Goldin makes her subject across her works. She reimagines friendship, fascination, love, her images challenging the norms of kinship, gender, and sexuality. Goldin’s work is about rapture, the pouring out of feeling, its wild circling, feeling for a naked lover, for a lost sister, for a goddess in a painting. She makes places mobile, letting them shift and be rearranged. She lets her subjects slip from the vertical into a more ambiguous, open, animal, erotic, affective realm of horizontality, of reclining, of undone love.

### *Barbara*

*Sœurs, saintes et sibylles* was an installation commissioned for the chapel of La Salpêtrière, the hospital in the thirteenth *arrondissement* in Paris associated with Charcot’s explorations of hysteria.<sup>40</sup> It is Goldin’s most sustained work to date commemorating her sister Barbara Holly Goldin who committed suicide in 1965 at age eighteen. The project comprised a three-channel projection with still and moving images,

38 Weinberg comments on her use of ‘the heightened colour of cibachrome’ (2005, 21).

39 Berlant explains further: ‘The kinds of connections that *impact* on people, and on which they depend for living (if not ‘a life’), do not always respect the predictable forms: nations and citizens, churches and the faithful, workers at work, writers and readers, memorizers of songs, people who walk dogs or swim at the same time each day, fetishists and their objects, teachers and students, serial lovers, sports lovers, listeners to voices who explain things manageably (on the radio, at conferences, on television screens, on line, in therapy), fans and celebrities – I (or you) could go on’ (2000, 4).

40 This is also the hospital Cléo attends at the end of *Cléo de 5 à 7*. Goldin describes it to Stuart Comer in *Nan Goldin: Artist’s Talk* (2007) as the ‘first hospital to treat women and prostitutes, the disenfranchised, urban bohemians, people who are very visibly suffering a great deal of pain in their lives’ and explains about the commission that it was ‘obvious to [her] that it had to be about [her] sister’.

voice-over and soundtrack, and two sculptural installations, one a model of a naked hysteric face up and tied down, and one of a man struck by lightning.<sup>41</sup> The project was part of the cultural programme of Paris's Festival de l'automne in 2004 and it also led to a bilingual book of photographs and text, of the same title, published by Editions du Regard in 2005.<sup>42</sup>

*Sœurs, saintes et sibylles* is a project which draws together family photography and Goldin's professional images, creating a narrative about her sister, a tribute of love, which also tells of the initiation of Goldin's practice as an artist and resonates with wider histories of female madness and alienation. The deep purple cover of the book is padded so that it takes on the touch of a personal diary or prayer book. Its intimate and devotional qualities are enhanced by its compact size, 15 by 20 cm. The project pursues Goldin's interest in crossing boundaries between life and art.<sup>43</sup> The published book is my subject, though I also draw on memories of seeing the installation in La Salpêtrière.

Barbara has always been a point of reference in Goldin's work. In *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*, the project Goldin calls 'the diary I let people read' (Goldin, 2012 [1986], 6), she recalls her sister's death after detailing the physical abuse committed by her lover Brian. She writes: 'One night, he battered me severely, almost blinding me. He burned a number of my diaries' (8). She took a photo of her own damaged face to remind her never to go back to her lover. She writes: 'Despite all the destruction, I could still crave that love. I had to face the irreconcilable

41 Martine Delvaux and Jamie Herd describe the installation: 'une installation de sons et d'images – diaporamas, séquences vidéos, voix *off*, musique [...] Perché au-dessus de la scène, sur un balcon-passerelle, le public se trouvait devant trois écrans, sur lesquels étaient projetées des diapositives, et surplombait une femme de cire couchée dans un lit' (2007, 39) ['an installation of sounds and images – slide shows, video sequences, soundtrack, music (...) Perched above the stage, on a balcony-bridge, the public were placed before three screens, on which slides were projected, and looking over a wax woman lying on a bed'].

42 The book is unpaginated but I give notional page references in square brackets.

43 I see the work in line with moves to write a diary or memoir of oneself, of another, or oneself as another, recalling Gertrude Stein, Anaïs Nin, or indeed Deren who, as Rhodes points out, herself wrote a different kind of diary: 'a series of letters to "A. E." or "Alter Ego". These are diary entries, really' (2011, 27). Costa says of Nan that 'she has filled dozens of notebooks, all exactly the same size, shape and colour' (2001a, 58).

loss' (8). She then recalls: 'I was eleven when my sister committed suicide' (8). She continues:

I saw the role that her sexuality and its repression played in her destruction. Because of the times, the early sixties, women who were angry and sexual were frightening, outside the range of acceptable behavior, beyond control. By the time she was eighteen, she saw that her only way to get out was to lie down on the tracks of the commuter train outside of Washington, D.C. (8)

Goldin herself was 'seduced by an older man' in the week that followed her sister's death. She continues: 'During this period of greatest pain and loss, I was simultaneously awakened to intense sexual excitement' (8). For Goldin, this understanding of the power of sexuality has defined her work.

Barbara appears in one picture in *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*. Als writes:

one of the many images that haunt me, in addition to those of Goldin's chosen family, is a snapshot of a member of her biological family: Barbara. Color-dense and taken from far away, it shows Barbara by the front door of the family house, looking off into a distance we can't see. In that photograph of Goldin's absent sister, there is death, and also hope – hope that the voodoo of love can make a difference. (2016, 31)<sup>44</sup>

Barbara's place in Goldin's formation as a lover and an artist, the continuation of her love for her sister, was further emphasised a decade later in Goldin's retrospective *I'll Be Your Mirror* at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1996, and in the accompanying film of the same title (Nan Goldin and Edouard Coulthard, 1996). The exhibition catalogue is dedicated: 'For my sister, Barbara Holly Goldin, May 21, 1946–April 12, 1965'. Its first two images are snapshots of Barbara, first dancing with a boyfriend, and then sitting at dinner with her parents, Nan standing behind her (Goldin, 1996, 17). These images precede the compiled black-and-white shots that mark out Goldin's start in life as a photographer and initiate the retrospective. The photos of Barbara are creased, torn at the top, damaged, coming from a different layer of the past.

In the film *I'll Be Your Mirror*, it feels as if there is an early rehearsal of the project *Sœurs, saintes et sibylles*, and a sifting of images of Barbara. There is a first childhood image as Goldin says in voice-over:

44 The image of Barbara in *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* is also discussed in relation to memory and mourning in Oksman (2009).

'Other people have their versions of my story'. She continues, while another childhood image is seen: 'I wanted to leave a record of my life that no one could revise'. Over a photograph that is also seen in *Sœurs, saintes et sibylles*, Goldin says: 'My sister Barbara was seven years older and she liked to mother me'. An infant Goldin is sitting on Barbara's lap. Goldin says: 'I was the youngest, but I was the one she confided in'. Her voice full of emotion, she shows images where they are together.<sup>45</sup> Goldin continues: 'But Barbara grew up rebelling against suburbia. I witnessed her growing anger and her pain'.<sup>46</sup> Against a creased photograph of Barbara with a boyfriend, which appears undamaged in the book of the later project, Goldin says: 'At the age of 18 she felt that the only way to get out was to commit suicide'. She continues, with great sadness: 'She lay down on the traintracks outside of Washington DC'. The film cuts to moving footage of the house where Goldin lived with her family and where her parents received the news of Barbara's suicide. Goldin says: 'I was 11. I was afraid that history would repeat itself'.

The story of Barbara is bound up with questions of truth. In his 2001 study of Goldin, Guido Costa tells Barbara's story:

On 12 April 1965, Barbara, aged eighteen, decided to end her life violently, and it was as if life had come to an end for the whole family. Her parents refused to deal with the guilt and loss, and denial became a way of survival. The most important thing was that the neighbours shouldn't know anything. They also tried to keep Nancy in the dark, telling her that Barbara had had a terrible accident, but sensitive and traumatised as she was, she immediately realised what had happened. (2001a, 5)

He makes the link to Goldin's aesthetic as an artist: 'This is perhaps the origin of her voracious appetite for the truth, no matter what, and her disregard for the fact that what is true can also be uncomfortable, tiresome, compromising' (5).

Barbara's history, revisited a third time, is fully Goldin's subject in *Sœurs, saintes et sibylles*. The story seems to have been less insistent in Goldin's more recent projects, or perhaps merely present in less overt

45 Roberta Smith describes Goldin's voice as 'laced with pain' in the voice-over to the projection shown in New York (2006, n. pag.).

46 Goldin's representation of the relation between the sisters might be compared to Catherine Breillat's *A ma sœur!* where the young girls are part of their own alliance, but Goldin, unlike Breillat, does not confront the elder sister's sexuality as disturbing to the younger sister. In both works, the sexual and affective intensity, and complexity, of the bond between sisters is felt.

ways. In 2014, Goldin published a large compilation of photographs *Eden and After*, created with Costa.<sup>47</sup> This draws together images of children from her corpus, with images dating from the 1970s through to recent pictures of the children of her friends, including Costa's daughter Isabella.<sup>48</sup> This book is dedicated to Goldin's parents. It is an album of children. In an accompanying essay, Costa calls them a 'secret family' (2014, 374). This is a gift from a child who has not had her own children.<sup>49</sup> It is also a further reflection on Barbara. Costa writes of the children in the photographs: 'Some gaze out at us from the past, frozen in a one far-off, solitary shot' (374). He says, 'to an attentive biographer, these seemingly incidental pictures of children provide so many guideposts for a private history of Nan Goldin that has yet to be written' (374). He leaves unanswered whether these images of children are markers of Goldin's own affective life, or whether they gesture to feelings about her childhood in the past. For Costa, more broadly, 'Children unsettle us [...]: they mark [...] the most fragile point in our emotional landscape' (374). For Goldin, the book 'shows children as autonomous beings; it's not about children as invented by adults' (Alexander, 2014, n. pag.).

Included in the book is an image *Tattoo of Daughter, LA*, 2012. A drawing of a little girl with long hair, large eyes, and an open mouth is etched forever on hairy skin. The daughter is always a child on her father's body. The words 'Beloved Daughter' are raised on the surface of Barbara's grave, included as an image in *Sœurs, saintes et sibylles*. On the preceding page is a photograph of a gravestone with a single word 'Sister', *Sister Grave*, 2004. Costa speaks of Goldin's *Eden and After* as 'her first storybook: a Grimm's fairy tale of sorts' (2014, 378). Another storybook, a fairy tale about parents, sisters, and daughters, a saint's life, a personal diary, is her earlier *Sœurs, saintes et sibylles*.

One of the issues that the Paris installation and book project address, going beyond *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* and *I'll Be Your Mirror*, and in anticipation of *Eden and After*, is the relation of Barbara's

47 See Alexander (2014) for a positive review of the project.

48 Goldin had already created the exhibition *Children 1976–1996* in New York, at the Matthew Marks Gallery in 1996, a show about children, for children, with the photos hung at child's-eye level. More recently, she had created a slide show comprised entirely of children with a soundtrack of songs sung by children, *Fireleap*. This was shown at the Sprovieri Gallery in London in 2011.

49 Goldin says in her 'Acknowledgements' at the end of the book: 'Never a mother, always a godmother, I would like to canonize my brood' (2014, 380).

story to other histories of childhood, female sexuality, suffering, and prostration.<sup>50</sup> After the title page, there is a double spread filling two pages with no text, a colour image of a bookshelf in Goldin's atelier. The following titles are visible: Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*; Marta Moreno Vega's *The Altar of My Soul: The Living Traditions of Santería*; a collection of poems, *Staying Alive: Real Poems for Unreal Times*; *The Institutional Care of the Insane in the United States and Canada*; Jorge Amado's *The War of the Saints*; Sylvia Plath's *Selected Poems*; Durkheim's *Suicide*; Georges Didi-Huberman's *Invention de l'hystérie*; and Fritz Zorn's *Mars*. The following page is filled by a black-and-white snapshot of Barbara, *Barbara in Mask, Washington D.C., 1953* by Hyman Goldin. The book is dedicated on its final page, 'Always and above all for my beloved sister: Barbara Holly Goldin 1946–1965'.

The image of Barbara in a mask, a Venetian carnival mask, is linked to the idiom of domestic photography and its charting of birthdays, holidays, weddings, and, as here, celebrations such as Hallowe'en.<sup>51</sup> In another masked image in a grid of nine photographs, *Barbara age 5 to 7 years, Washington D.C., 1951–1953* (Goldin, 2005, [19]), two Goldin children are seen dressed up in costumes and masks with their smiling mother. They hold pumpkin lanterns on their heads and stand on the driveway of the suburban house. If this snapshot offers a context, an anodyne reading of the mask, the photo of Barbara in her mask at the start also differs. She stands alone, anyone accompanying her almost fully cropped out.<sup>52</sup> The mask covers Barbara's face from her forehead to her upper lip. It is edged in tape. It flattens and deforms her features. The

50 Delvaux and Herd, comparing Goldin's *Sœurs, saintes et sibylles* to Marie NDiaye's text with photographs *Autoportrait en vert*, find in both, 'thèmes qui tournent autour du féminin, de cette figure invisible, inimaginable, en somme infigurable, qu'est la femme' ['themes which revolve around the feminine, that invisible, unimaginable, in short, unrepresentable figure that is woman'] (2007, 29).

51 The image of Barbara also bears comparison with the idiom of Goldin's own photography where, in her earliest work, as Sussman puts it, 'In small black-and-white photographs and Polaroids, she captured the pulse of her own life' (Goldin, 1996, 27).

52 The domestic photo is reminiscent of images by Diane Arbus, in the black-and-white monochrome, the motif of the mask, the standing frontal pose, and the environment of 1950s suburbia. Arbus is often cited as a point of reference for Goldin (Costa, 2001a, 6; Goldin, 1996, 30) and Goldin seems to find one of her precursor's images in her own family album. (Roberta Smith notes: 'An image of Barbara in a lopsided Halloween mask evokes Helen Levitt or Diane Arbus' (2006).)

mask fits imperfectly so Barbara's eyes hardly appear in the eyeholes. The tape of the mask is low enough on her face to appear to gag her. The mask seems to hide some vulnerability. This is in part the effect of the imperfect fitting of the moulded matter, leaving her muzzled in an adult mask. It leaves no place for her to breathe. Her arms are poised in readiness but her face is hidden. The mask seems to connote sexuality, physical deformity, and deadness, the death mask.<sup>53</sup> This family snapshot holds a point of disorganisation, of disquiet.<sup>54</sup> The prop covering the face scores the other as opaque, withheld. The detail – the mask – is also proleptic, speaking to a future that has not yet occurred.<sup>55</sup>

53 In her volume of poetry *Nox* (2010), also addressed to a dead sibling, Anne Carson uses a cover image of her brother with his face half covered by thick-framed goggles. Delvaux and Herd also see death in the image: 'Il faut voir dans ce portrait une métaphore de ce que représentera pour Nan la pratique photographique: le lendemain éternel du suicide. Nature morte, *vanitas*, tête de mort' ['One needs to see in this portrait a metaphor of what photographic practice will represent for Nan: the eternal time after the suicide. Still life, *vanitas*, a death's head'] (2007, 34).

54 This is not necessarily the case with Goldin's other images of masked children. In *Max with a Gun, Provincetown, MA*, 1976, included in *Eden and After* (2014, 229), Cookie Mueller's son Max looks at the camera in a black leather mask, similar to Barbara's. His eyes are more clearly visible and the mask is higher over his face. He stares out pointing a flashlight and a toy pistol. His unsettled expression makes him resemble Barbara but he seems more present and composed in the picture. He wears the same mask, but pushed up so that his face is visible, as he sits on Cookie's lap in *Cookie with Max at My Birthday Party, Provincetown, MA*, 1976 (298). Chloé Griffin's *Edgewise: A Picture of Cookie Mueller* (2014) offers narratives of Max Mueller's childhood and of Cookie's great love for her son. Cookie herself gives an account of his birth: 'The night Max was born mongrels roamed in packs. The moon had turned to blood and the hungry hounds were howling for it in wild lunar lust' (1990, 63). She writes of her interior experience: 'I was in pain in the maternity ward of the Hyannis Hospital, but this wasn't plain pain, no; this was the kind of pain that for reasons of sanity, the mind doesn't allow a woman to remember. It was relentless, unbearable, hideous, appalling, horrifying. I was undergoing internal gut ripping tubal wringing, organ stretching, muscle pummeling, bone cracking. I was the grand martyr. Prometheus knew no pain like this. Lamaze had lied' (63). Then she adds, with all love for Max: 'This kid had better be as formidable as the pain. This kid had better come out of the womb speaking quantum physics, or be telekinetic, or have white hair and purple eyes, or be able to levitate, or have a blue aura, or be the new messiah, or be clutching gold in his little fists, or at least speak like the dolphins speak' (68).

55 Joyce Carol Oates writes about how, in autobiographical writing, 'the shadow of what's-to-come falls over the subject' (2016, 150).

Goldin gives her sister priority, placing her at the start. She takes her out of her context and enlarges her so that she appears as the subject of the book. Barbara waiting at the start seems to turn towards the viewer to take her arm. The image invokes the third part of the project's title. If sisters and saints are evident points of reference, the figure of the sibyl, prophetic priestess of the ancient Greeks and Romans, is more elusive. For me, Barbara is imaged as a sibyl at the start. She is a guide to the Underworld, like the Cumaean Sibyl for Aeneas in Book 6 of the *Aeneid*. Barbara is a docent in her own *descente aux enfers* ['descent into Hell'], that is at once the Hell of her own unhappiness, incarceration, and suicide, and a Hell, a *città dolorosa* ['city of sorrows'], to borrow the words Didi-Huberman uses to describe La Salpêtrière, of many other suffering women (1982, 4).

Another question the book raises in this figure of Barbara as sibyl is the extent to which she foresees or foreshadows Goldin's own experiences. Goldin writes: 'My sister told me her psychiatrist said I would end up like her. I thought I had to kill myself' (2005, [77]). Barbara is seen to prophesy to Goldin. Her life and choices predict Goldin's. This prophecy is dissipated in Goldin's survival. She leaves home at fourteen, she takes up photography, and, as she puts it, shoots dope, and shoots pictures. Yet its shadow is felt in the pieces from her own life which Goldin rescues in *Sœurs, saintes et sibylles*, photographs from her breakdown after physical violence in 1984 and after, and her period of relapse and madness 2002–2003, just prior to the work on the project.

Words from Joseph Conrad were found in Barbara's purse after her suicide: 'Droll thing that life is, that mysterious arrangement of merciless logic for future purpose. The most you can hope for is some knowledge of yourself that comes too late – a crop of inextinguishable regrets' ([73]). In *Sœurs, saintes et sibylles*, honouring her deep love for her sister, Goldin looks at the knowledge that Barbara's story makes apparent, about young women and girls, about families and damage. Barbara is not an object regarded, despite the clay-like stasis of her mask. She is a child prophetess, a seer, oracular. Her hair is floating in the picture, catching some movement, a turn, transience.<sup>56</sup> Appearing at

56 Although this is a still photograph rather than home movie footage, this trace of movement in the image reminds me of Michelle Citron's search for the living in domestic film: 'I watch a home-movie snippet shot by my father in 1956. It is a living moment, more than forty years old, fixed onto a slender thread of

the start of the book like this, Barbara is also a witness to what follows, a witness to Goldin's life as it unfolds after her own death.

A reminder of the mask image is found in a double-page spread which features further into the book, *Nan at the Hospital, Berlin*, 1984. This is one of the images of Goldin where she charts her physical abuse by her lover Brian.<sup>57</sup> In *Sœurs, saintes et sibylles* it immediately follows an image of Goldin and her lover, *Nan and Brian in Bed, NYC*, 1983, that appears on the cover of *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*. In *Nan at the Hospital, Berlin*, 1984, the bruising under her eyes and over her left eye socket inversely recalls the shading of the mask round Barbara's eyes. Goldin's eyes resemble Barbara's, refocusing the address, and the vulnerability, of the liminal image. The two images resemble each other also in the geometric shapes of buildings and vehicles, and in the verticality of lamps and trees in the background. Goldin is closer to the camera and she does not wear a mask. But her melancholy and the stray movement of her hair call up visual memories of her sister.<sup>58</sup>

In Sylvia Plath's novel *The Bell Jar*, her heroine Esther narrates:

Sometimes I wondered if I had made Joan up. Other times I wondered if she would continue to pop in at every crisis of my life to remind me of what I had been, and what I had been through, and carry on her own separate but similar crisis under my nose.

'I don't see what women see in other women,' I'd told Doctor Nolan in my interview that noon. 'What does a woman see in a woman that she can't see in a man?'

Doctor Nolan paused. Then she said, 'tenderness.' That shut me up. (1996 [1963], 210)

Plath's novel was published in 1963. Goldin's sister Barbara committed suicide one year later. Part of the novel's subject matter is a young woman's

film: My mother holds my sister's and my hand as we walk away from and then toward the camera' (1999, 2).

57 In *Agnès Varda de ci de là*, Varda shows *Unos cuantos piquetitos* [*A Few Small Nips*] (1935), a painting that displays the knifed body of a woman stretched out on a bed, her murderer beside her. The nude who lies on the bed in Kahlo's painting offers a plangent image of the horizontal body, abused, bleeding, recalling imagery of domestic violence. Kahlo animates meanings about passivity, erotic display, animality, pathos. Reclining in Kahlo's work is about numbness and grief, as it is also about beauty, self-regarding, and an estranged dream world.

58 David A. Ross also speaks of Goldin's generation as 'bruised far deeper than surface wounds reveal' (1996, 15).

breakdown and suicide attempt in suburban America. Plath's sensitivity to the binding of social constraints around Esther is as acute as Goldin's to the effect of family and milieu on Barbara. In the passage cited, she works, like Goldin, to understand the involvements, the mirrorings, between individual women's lives. She shows Esther's wariness of Joan, who seems to mimic and reiterate her own experiences, as if she were her double, a delusion, or an imaginary persona. The text is also open differently to women's attention to each other. Esther's psychiatrist, Dr Nolan, lights on 'tenderness' to describe what women see in each other. Esther silently takes it in.

Goldin too offers tenderness as a mode of response to mania, despair, and suicidal feeling, tenderness as a mode of relating, and of commemorating. Goldin's love for her sister, in *Sœurs, saintes et sibylles* and in her statements about her, is overwhelming. This tenderness to Barbara, an overriding love, is part of the attention to women, both trans and cisgender, as friends and as lovers, which returns throughout her projects.

The resemblances between Goldin and Barbara are visceral as the family likeness returns in photographs. Yet, as the mask image suggests, Barbara is also in some way alien to Goldin, opaque. Goldin reaches out for her and cannot hold her. This wistfulness, and desperate love, is also part of her photography. In interview with Alexander on the publication of *Eden and After*, Goldin says:

When I take a really good picture, it's like a high – this moment of euphoria. But the best of my work is about empathy, trying to feel what it is to be in another person's body; to break that glass. I don't think any of us understand the other person well enough. Or maybe that's just me. I'd always like to know what it is to be inside other people. (Alexander, 2014, n. pag.)

*Sœurs, saintes et sibylles* is about trying to feel what it is to be in Barbara's body. Amongst its various possible referents, of looking glass, or window, the image of breaking glass looks out also to the glass coffin of the corpse or sleeping beauty, the case where the anatomical model or fairy figure enchanted lies dead or sleeping.

The intimacy of the relation to Barbara does not prevent the project also reaching outwards to other histories and narratives. Goldin understands her life and Barbara's, their sexuality, their madness and diversities, in relation to a broader shaping and policing of female bodies, reaching back to the virgin saints and martyrs and forward to the nineteenth-century hysterics. Following the first image of Barbara is a text telling the story

of Saint Barbara, who lives with her father Dioscuro. She reaches the age of puberty. She is so beautiful and has so many suitors that ‘her father is obsessed and decides to build a tower with two windows to lock her in until she is married’ (2005, [6]). Locked in the tower, introspective, Barbara awakens to Christianity and tells her father that she will devote her life to God. He tries to stab her but she escapes. She is ‘captured, tortured, humiliated, flogged and mutilated’ ([6]) but refuses to give up her faith. She is beheaded by her father. He is instantly struck by a lightning bolt and ‘reduced to a small heap of ashes’ ([6]).

Accompanying this text is a grid of nine images of the legend of Saint Barbara taken from different paintings and statues. Images from art history have been points of reference in Goldin’s photographs, but *Sœurs, saintes et sibylles*, in this French historic space, is the first project to compose with paintings, in this way predating and anticipating *Scopophilia*. In the grid ‘The Story of Saint Barbara, Date of Birth, December 4, 253, Nicodemia, Turkey’, there are serial representations of Barbara from illuminated manuscripts, paintings from various periods, and one sculpture. Barbara appears at first as a daughter with her father and then as a girl with a book open in her lap. In the sculpture and in a panel from Wilhelm Kalteysen’s *Saint Barbara Altarpiece* (1447) in the National Museum in Warsaw, she carries a model of her tower. In the bottom row is a further panel from this altarpiece showing her martyrdom. She is bared to the waist with ropes under her breasts and her wrists tied. Her head is held back as blood runs down her forehead. Her father prepares the blade to behead her. She is taut as her body is butchered.

The grid of images goes to the extremes of Saint Barbara’s story. It also shows her father falling from the tower, struck by lightning, seen in Lorenzo Lotto’s fresco of Barbara’s story. In the last square Barbara’s body is laid out, illuminated. Goldin chooses various shapes and poses of her martyred body and of the fallen body of her father. She anticipates the shapes and gestures of the visual narrative to follow, working with feelings of despair and proneness through a visual imaginary.

After the Barbara grid, the project opens into an album of family photos.<sup>59</sup> It starts with a black-and-white image of Goldin’s parents in evening dress: ‘My parents were married on September 3, 1939, the same day war was declared’ ([8]). Goldin’s mother is in a pale dress. Her

<sup>59</sup> Smith comments, linking Goldin’s art to her family’s social practice: ‘The family snapshots suggest a genetic ease with cameras and a desire to use them on all occasions’ (2006, n. pag.).

arms are folded, their pallor and thinness recalling childhood. They are perfect, fragile, unharmed. She appears in a subsequent colour photo holding a very large balloon, coupled with the text: 'My father wanted his first child to be a boy' ([9]). Barbara is seen in her childhood pictures, a ribbon in her hair, her coat buttoned. She is in her nappy, a bathing suit, a smocked dress. She rides a tricycle and stands on a swing. She is a 'precocious child' ([13]) but she stops speaking at one and a half years old. The images show the arrival of the Goldins' second child, a boy. He holds a Harvard flag.

Goldin shows these images of Barbara's childhood before she, Nancy, was born. There is a jolt in seeing Barbara alive. In the corner of one grid she holds Nan on her lap. The project charts the tenderness of the sisters' love. In a variation on the text used in the film *I'll Be Your Mirror*, Goldin writes: 'My sister taught me to watch the sunset. She washed my hair. She used to play *Moonlight Sonata at Midnight*, when she had to babysit for me. She liked to mother me. I was her confidante' ([21]). Barbara holds her baby sister on her hip. Elsewhere the two girls are seen arm in arm.

As Barbara reaches twelve, she begins fighting with her mother. Goldin writes that 'there was a lot of violence in the house' ([23]).<sup>60</sup> There is a picture of Barbara at Salem with her wrists padlocked in iron cuffs. The image is playful, but its reference to the witch trials of Salem and the false accusation of young women is resonant. It looks forward to a drawing of a girl in chains Goldin photographs at the Sheppard Pratt Hospital in Baltimore in 2004 as she visits in the present moment hospitals where Barbara was locked up. The drawing shows a figure recalling Andromeda with long dark hair and a carmine dress. Both images look forward to the physical model included in the installation at La Salpêtrière and photographed in the book, *Wax Figure of Girl in Hospital Being Restrained*. In this a figure lies prone, her arms tied to the bed. In Barbara's photograph at Salem, where her arms are stretched out in the light, her smile is hidden but her defiance and sexual energy are present proleptically. The reference to Salem and the preview of the hospital image and the installation offer a context of the disciplining of female adolescence.

60 Als contacted Goldin's brother Stephen Goldin, who is a psychiatrist: '[Barbara] was, according to Stephen, often violent at home, breaking windows and throwing knives – and her parents had her committed to mental hospitals, on and off, for six years' (2016, 27).

Goldin charts her parents' fear of Barbara's sexuality, their horror that she will get pregnant or become a prostitute. The project dwells on her hospitalisation in Bellefaire School for Wayward Children. The text is intercut with images from Bellefaire in 2004 where Goldin shows empty beds at this centre where children are still sent for residential treatment. A toy creature sits on a flowered pillow. Goldin tells how Barbara would sometimes be put in a locked room: 'She showed self-destructive tendencies in that she often cut herself on the hands, face and legs with a razor' ([37]). This image recalls the perfect white arms of her mother in the early picture. It also looks forward to two of the most savage pictures in the album, *Self-Mutilation, The Priory Hospital, London, 2003* and *Nurses Bandaging Wounds, The Priory Hospital, London, 2003*. Goldin shows herself burning her arm with cigarettes. In the second image, her scarred forearm is visible with red swellings around the burns. The project shows a repetition of self-harm, a return to damaged limbs, leaving unclear whether this is involuntary or a commemoration of Barbara in Goldin's body. By way of text, she cites the song 'Hurt' which played in the projection in a cover version by Johnny Cash: 'I hurt myself today to see if I still feel / I focus on the pain, the only thing that's real'.

Barbara is discharged from Bellefaire after setting fire to her mattress and curtains. Goldin follows her to Sheppard Pratt Hospital in Baltimore, where her sexual feelings are described: 'She also has some feelings about becoming a queer, and described how she was attracted to other girls' ([48]). The book opens onto a double-spread image of a mattress from the hospital in a white room. The empty bed seems to signal the absence of Barbara as it also signals that girls are still sleeping in these beds in orphanages, mental homes, and hospitals. Goldin reproduces typed text from a report: 'The outlook at the time of this note is one of hopeless anguish and yet occasionally, she will describe happy experiences' ([52]). There is no description of what it feels like for Goldin, then or now, to be close to Barbara's despair. The book leaves out the continued family life in Barbara's absence. The times recorded are those of her return home and violence, as reported by the National Institute of Mental Health in Washington: 'On one occasion, she unprovokedly assaulted her mother, eventuating in a minor fracture in one of her mother's fingers' ([59]).

The last photo of Barbara, the one singled out by Als, shows her standing outside the family house.<sup>61</sup> She looks as if she is departing from

61 Als reports Goldin's words: 'Barbara said, "All I want to do is go home"' (2016, 27). Showing Barbara and the family home, Goldin mounts a critique of

it. The narration runs as follows: ‘On April 12, 1965, she was given a pass in the morning to look for employment in the community, and possibly to stop at home to pick up some clothes’ ([61]). The book moves on to two double-spread images taken by Goldin: *Woods Near Grace Church Road, Silver Spring, Maryland, 2004* and *Train Tracks Near Grace Church Road, Silver Spring, Maryland, 2004*. In these two pictures photographed some forty years after her death, Goldin adopts her sister’s point of view, capturing images of the woods where she wandered and the train tracks where she lay down to die.<sup>62</sup> The photograph of the woods is deliberately blurred. The track image, by contrast, is sharper, illuminated by a manic golden light. Goldin quotes a report:

Shortly before 5:30pm, persons said Miss Goldin put her pocketbook on the ground next to the tracks, then laid down across the tracks as the ‘Capitol Limited’ approached. The train’s engineers told police they saw her and nailed the brakes, but were unable to stop the train. Police said the train ran over the girl and dragged her body about 300 feet. Pathological examiners ruled her death as a suicide. ([66])

The train tracks run empty into the distance, fissuring the image. Barbara’s act of lying down and waiting for the train is missing. It is savage and disorienting to see this empty site, a descent into the Underworld, a breach. Further into the book, Goldin includes a portrait of herself, *Self-Portrait on the Train Boston-New Haven, 1997*, looking out at tracks. It is as if the scenario of Barbara’s death is always beyond the window in her images.<sup>63</sup>

The next two photographs are of the family home with Barbara no longer outside. After a double-page spread of a magnolia tree, Goldin

1950s suburbia. Her work seems in line with Duras’s sense that a house may represent security and reassurance, but ‘Dans une maison, il y a aussi l’horreur de la famille qui est inscrite, le besoin de fuite, toutes les humeurs suicidaires’ [‘In a house, horror of the family is also inscribed, the need for retreat, a whole set of suicidal feelings’] (Duras and Porte, 1977, 16).

62 Corina Larkin describes film footage shown in the projection in *Chasing a Ghost*: ‘The camera takes us on a haunting walk through the woods near the scene of Barbara’s suicide. We wander through the dry, brittle woods and along the train tracks, looking down at a carpet of dead leaves and then up at a bridge over the tracks’ (2006, n. pag.).

63 My inspiration for this came in listening to Nina Simone’s version of the 1924 song ‘Trouble in Mind’ with the lyrics: ‘I’m gonna lay my head down / On some lonesome railroad line / And let the two nineteen / Pacify my mind’.

herself comes into focus. The first image of her, from 1969, in woodland, is blurred at the edges so she appears in the centre like an apparition. The rest of Goldin's life at home is shown briefly before she escapes into drugs and photography. This time of grief is also the inception of her sexual life, as she recounted in *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*.<sup>64</sup> This will lead later to her search for a new family of friends, a tribe, and new non-biological family photographs.

The narrative of her life and photography shows returns to the prostration of grief at Barbara's death. In *Sœurs, saintes et sibylles*, Goldin pursues previous work in *The Devil's Playground* (2001), showing photographs taken during moments of detox and recovery. Costa comments on 'The Priority Series' in *The Devil's Playground* that it tells 'a story of loneliness and private demons' (2001c, 440). Several of its images are reproduced in *Sœurs, saintes et sibylles*, including *Self-Portrait on the Bridge, Golden River, Silver Hill Hospital, Connecticut*, 1998, which has the same crazy light and expanse as the rail track image, but a different affect, with more exultance, the teeming of life.<sup>65</sup> *Saintes, sœurs et sibylles* is syncopated as it goes forwards moving between entropy, life, relapse, and re-emergence. It plays this out across reclining images.

Goldin's project takes us to the most desperate image of reclining, the suicidal young woman who lies down to die on the train tracks. In text close to the end of the volume she writes: 'I was told she lay down and waited the death, record says she lay down and waited the death' ([136]). If the image is missing, its affect and prostration return in the volume. In a trio of images charting her own first emergence from drug addiction, there is an image of Nan lying on her front in a hospital shift. Her face is not made up. Sunlight falls in squares from windowpanes across her body and she looks up, a square of light across her eyes bisecting her face like a mask. She is propped on her shoulders but otherwise stretched out, supine. The image is one of slow awakening, stillness, emergence from a cocoon. Her legs lie flat. The colours of the image, pale flesh, white

64 Again Als offers further detail: 'Her seducer, Goldin told me, was an older relative who promised to marry her; later, he said he'd really been in love with her sister' (2016, 27).

65 For Costa: 'The golden river (with its play on the artist's name) and the shadow in the foreground, drawing the camera in, are powerful symbols suggesting a new emotional state, with more detachment and greater powers of reflection' (2001b, 84).

sheets, dark hair, golden illumination, look forward to the bound figure of the hysteric at the end of the book.

Further on, as she charts her recovery, Goldin includes a picture of a man reclining, *Jabalowe with Pair of Cacti, Hotel Il Gabbiano, Chia, Sardinia*, 2003. A man lies on his stomach. His face turned to one side is reflective as he looks towards two cacti, prickly pears, on a plate. His torso is bare. His naked elbow presses on the white sheet. The affect of the image is erotic and still, melancholy, dejected, as he stares at the plucked cactus fruit, as the image speaks of his reclining as a form of prostration, being laid out, viewed. Similar affect comes in the very beautiful *Jabalowe under the Mosquito Net Looking at Me*, 2003 (not included in *Sœurs, saintes et sibylles* but found in one of the grids of *Scopophilia*), where Jabalowe's body, his hand on his upper thigh, is held ethereal under the white gauze of the net, a veil, a trap. In the Sardinia image it is his reclining pose that insists and that foreshadows three further images that appear in *Sœurs, saintes et sibylles*, gesturally mapping Barbara's story, its affect and impact.

In one of the most intimate pairings of the project, Goldin aligns two images of her parents. The first is of her mother, *My Mother Laying on her Bed, Salem, Massachusetts*, 2004. This is an image of closeness and tenderness as Goldin's mother, daydreaming, reflecting, in complete repose before her daughter's camera, lies back on the bed. The pose recalls a deathbed, but the affect is different and Goldin's mother is alive, her hair is soft against the bedcover, her cheek smooth, her expression vivid. Her white blouse, perfect, clean, ironed, echoes the texture of a white pillow behind her. The presence of the image in this collection recalls Barbara's lying down to die. It calls up images of a mother knocked off her vertical axis by this shock and now lying, impassive, watched over by a surviving child. It is an image of closeness and inscrutability all at once. The mother lies on her bed. The daughter captures her image and is let in and is also not. The mother is alert but dreaming, lying, detached. It is an aftermath image, one of rest and tranquillity. It is strange to look back in the book and recognise the mother's features in the earlier family photos, to encounter these images that are also part of her memory and consciousness, which is nevertheless also withheld. The mother's body stretches across the decades surviving from those early photos until this present time. The time of the book is encompassed in this bodily memory and consciousness and *Sœurs, saintes et sibylles* was made while Goldin's parents were alive, so they too, now, are part of her remembering of Barbara.

The mother image is accompanied by *My Father Napping, Salem, Massachusetts*, 1998. Goldin's father reclines in a chair and footstool. He has a teal blanket stretched over him from his head to his shins so he appears an amorphous mass with just his jumpered arms and soft shoes visible. His face and person seem to be wiped out by the blanket, blurred out of the image, blotted, absented, unknown. This picture, apparently anodyne, like Barbara in the mask, shows a man napping, cocooned. Its connotations resonate with those in the mother image. This man seems knocked out, floored, smothered. Later in the book Goldin describes her father howling like a wounded animal: 'Inconsolable sound from beneath the deepest recess of the soul, beyond any human sound I've heard since, way beyond the sound barrier beyond language or tears, tearing the body to shreds, piercing the air' ([137]). He is unknown behind the blanket and his feelings are absent.<sup>66</sup> The image is tender, private, like that of the mother. Both images recall other loving pictures Goldin took of her parents in the same period, for example *My Parents Kissing on their Bed, Salem, Massachusetts*, 2004, where the same bed linen can be glimpsed. But in *Sœurs, saintes et sibylles* these two images of proneness also speak of withholding, exhaustion, a blanching of feeling.

The book turns from the images of her parents to a further image of Goldin herself, *Self-Portrait in a Taxi, Paris*, 2004. Goldin looks healthy and beautiful. The composition of the shot recalls her previous self-portrait on a train but here she looks directly into the camera and the railway tracks are no longer outside the window. The shot is paired with *Sister Grave*, 2004. In the last page of text in the volume, Goldin writes: 'When the police came to inform us I knew. A Monday night, dinnertime I'd been waiting all my conscious life for this moment because I always believed her' ([137]). Inscrutable in the images, despite the book's anguish, is the experience of loving her sister so closely, of knowing her sister's death in advance, and of losing her. The project looks at its close at the need for truth, expressing Goldin's horror that

66 Ruddy draws attention to Goldin's interest in unknowing where she writes of another reclining image, *Ryan in the Tub, Provincetown*, 1976: 'We can barely tell if Ryan is female or male, nor can we decipher what comprises her surroundings other than the chipped enamel bathtub. We cannot know who Ryan is or what she does, and yet it is of fundamental importance that Goldin captures her as a semicorpse, disappearing into the dim reaches of the water as her exhaustion dissolves into and infuses the air of the frame' (2009, 347).

her mother would wish to pretend that Barbara's death was an accident. Goldin claims the truth of this history.<sup>67</sup>

*Sœurs, saintes et sibylles* ends with three images from the installation in the chapel of La Salpêtrière. The first is *Set of Clinic*, where in a contemporary setting, with cans of drink, an ash tray, CDs, and pills at her bedside, a wax girl lies on her bed. She is seen closer to in a following double spread. Her breasts are bare and her dark hair lies long down her arms. Her face seems frozen and still in anguish. She is not just lying down but tied to the bed, prostrate, restrained. The white sheets are tucked up to her waist. She seems almost to be pressed against the white folds of the mattress. In the following shot, pursuing her relay of male and female reclining figures in this book, Goldin shows *Man Hit by Lightning*. A man lies flat, his trousers up to his waist and the deep burning bruise of the lightning strike disfiguring his bare chest and arm. His eyes are closed. He figures the dead father of Saint Barbara struck by lightning as the book itself comes to a close.

These reclining images are attempts to feel what it is to be in another's body, to break the glass, as Goldin revisits the sites of Barbara's captivity and death, as she approaches her supine parents, as she stages the reclining models. All these figures return images of unknowability, inscrutability. Yet love, love for Barbara, openness to the truth of her loss, her livewire suffering, threads nerves and arteries, points of contact, connectivity, recall, and sensitivity, throughout Goldin's work, and through these reclining images too.

As he studies Charcot's photographs from La Salpêtrière, Didi-Huberman explores what he sees as the complicity of the hysterics with their doctors, where they use their bodies to figure the doctors' desire, consenting, participating in a theatrical spectacle. He acknowledges that in his own enterprise, as he studies the gestures and poses of the women in the photographs, he himself is inclined in his work, with whatever pain, whatever caveats, to treat hysteria as a chapter in the history of art. Of Augustine (Louise Augustine Gleizes), one of Charcot's patients, Didi-Huberman writes: 'Corps tout offert, elle devenait ainsi comme belle au bois dormant' ['With her body all on offer, she thus

67 For me, the commitment to love, and truth-telling, shine through the project. But its reception has been ambivalent. Smith describes *Chasing a Ghost* as 'flawed if riveting' and sums up her thoughts: 'this work has a no-holds-barred emotional grip that feels alternately raw and manipulative, and a contrast between harsh realism and lushly beautiful Romantic imagery' (2006, n. pag.).

became like sleeping beauty’] (1982, 179). In *Saintes, sœurs et sibylles*, in her project of making an installation in the chapel of La Salpêtrière, Goldin is opening up issues that Didi-Huberman approaches about the theatricality of suffering, about a ‘spectacle de la douleur’ [‘spectacle of pain’] (1982, 9). She summons too, however subliminally, the figure of a sleeping beauty, in her reclining images. Yet Goldin’s work presses towards knowing a truth of her sister’s pain, of her parents’ pain, of her own pain. She uses the model of a hysteric and shows her tied up, tied down, flattened, unconsenting. She shows Barbara’s suicide as a gesture of refusal and despair. Goldin’s love for Barbara is commemorated in a series of comparisons with paintings, a series of gestures and poses, that do not aestheticize her dead sister but which call to mind rather the sexual energy, the rage, the grief, the bloodletting, the self-harm of hysteria and other modes of female madness and insurrection. She gives back a visceral Barbara, a sexual nymph whose blood flows as she dies lying on the railway tracks. Goldin makes art out of her grief, so occupying the space of the chapel and so commemorating her sister. As well as gifting the project first and foremost to Barbara, she further dedicates the book: ‘To all our sisters who have committed suicide or have been institutionalized for their rebellion’.<sup>68</sup>

### *Scopophilia*

*Scopophilia* was first conceived as part of Patrice Chéreau’s series of commissioned projects *Les Visages et les corps* [*Faces and Bodies*] which were shown in the Musée du Louvre from 2 November 2010 to 31 January 2011.<sup>69</sup> Goldin’s contribution was a projection correlating her photographs of paintings from the Louvre and other collections, her

68 The work of collecting and remembering in Goldin’s project on sisters can be compared to the emotional labour shown in the latter parts of Margarethe von Trotta’s *Die Bleierne Zeit* [*Marianne & Julianne*] (1981), where surviving sister Julianne (Jutta Lampe) pieces together evidence of her dead sister’s memory.

69 Chéreau worked as a theatre and opera director, a film-maker, an actor and producer, and, in the Louvre project, as curator. *Les Visages et les corps* involved a central exhibition of selected works from the Louvre collection and Musée d’Orsay interspersed with photographs by Nan Goldin. Chéreau also arranged a series of productions in the Louvre, directing the play *Rêve d’automne* [*Dream of Autumn*] by Jon Fosse, inviting Waltraud Meier to sing the *Wesendonck Lieder* in the rooms of Spanish paintings, reading *Coma* by Pierre Guyotat, inviting dance

own images of friends and loved ones, and a soundtrack she voiced.<sup>70</sup> Her photographs were also included in an exhibition which Chéreau curated including actual paintings from the Louvre shown in the museum. This initial work commissioned by Chéreau then gave rise to further related gallery projects in different museums. These exhibitions included a projection, a series of grid pictures, and variously paired photographs.

Preparing for this project, Goldin took photographs of paintings in the Louvre over eight months. She was given access to the museum on Tuesdays, when it is closed to the public. Two assistants and a guard accompanied her. She says: 'it turned out to be one of the most exciting and overwhelming experiences that I have ever had in my life' (Spagnesi, 2014, n. pag.). Like this she responded to the beauty of the paintings. She says: 'There were my favourite artists: Caravaggio, David, de La Tour, Courbet, *Young Orphan Girl in the Cemetery* by Delacroix as well as some anonymous Masters' (Spagnesi, 2014, n. pag.). But the experience was also affective, erotic, merging the existential and the aesthetic, becoming a way of pursuing different attachments. She told Spagnesi: 'One day, while I was walking through the rooms on the upper floors, I saw a painting by an anonymous artist of a beautiful woman. I fell madly in love with that woman and I kept on visiting her every time I was there. She became my friend, my lover' (2014, n. pag.). Derek Blasberg quotes her further:

When I was alone in the museum I would find paintings and fall completely in love. That was the beginning, then I started to see my friends. I started to see my lovers. I started to find the myths and I became fascinated to see how they relate to the history of humanity. Then we found lots of old pictures of mine, from the 1970s through 2011, which related to the pictures that I'd fallen in love with. (2014, n. pag.)

Goldin finds living experiences in the Louvre, a relation to painting that extends and rarefies her previous experiences of pleasure in looking. Her work is about joy, *jouissance*, and she finds and shares in this repository of European painting an exultant resource for feeling pleasure.<sup>71</sup>

choreographers including Thierry Thieû Niang, Mathilde Monnier, showing films by Nuri Bilge Ceylan, Tsai Ming-liang, Arnaud des Pallières, and Steve McQueen.  
70 See Dinse (2016, 155) for further situating of the *Scopophilia* project.

71 Goldin's work in sensing pleasure and the erotic in the Louvre might be compared to Pascal Quignard's in his inventory of images in *La Nuit sexuelle*. But Quignard's attitude is very different from Goldin's. He writes: 'Quand on sonde le

Chéreau explains his collaboration with Goldin:

Nan Goldin, parce qu'il y a là une œuvre et qu'il y a du récit dans ses photos. Pas de photos qui singeraient la peinture mais celles qui en augmentent la dimension érotique par les seuls moyens de la photographie. (2010a, 29)

[Nan Goldin, because she has created a body of work and there are narratives in her photos. They are not photos that seek to imitate painting but rather they augment its erotic dimension solely by the means of photography.]

His project was accompanied by a text of the same name, with images and critical essays. His own written contribution is a working journal of about thirty-five pages which runs a long year from an opening entry on 19 February 2009, with the invitation to the Louvre as its inception, to Palm Sunday, 28 March 2010. At the end, Chéreau is in Seville watching the procession of Christ. He describes his first thoughts about the Louvre project as images run through his mind, particularly contemporary images of the drug-related massacres in Ciudad Juárez in Mexico in December 2008. *Les Visages et les corps* pursues his fascination with choreographing the body, with affect and gesture, which has been part of his film, opera, and theatre work. If his interest has, in the words of Julianne Pidduck, been 'the body in its extreme states – suffering, *jouissance*, illness and death' (2007, 196),<sup>72</sup> in *Les Visages et les corps*, and in particular in his collaboration with Goldin, he also gives free rein to his erotic interests, to pleasure in the darkness of the museum. This scopophilia is, for both Chéreau and Goldin, memorial, retrospective, intensified by recall of the dead as they were once living, by the recapture of vivid feeling. For Chéreau, Goldin's images provide new glimpses of intimacy, a new lovers' discourse. His project becomes a form of erotic life-imaging, of recall in pictures, fusing the visual and the existential. Chéreau describes how images, like a deck of cards, are shuffled and fall into different formations as he creates and curates. He speaks of 'tout ce musée imaginaire que

fond de son cœur dans le silence de la nuit on a honte de l'indigence des images que nous sommes formées sur la joie' ['When one sounds the depths of one's heart in the silence of the night, one is ashamed of the paucity of the images of joy we have created for ourselves'] (2007, 11).

<sup>72</sup> For Gualdoni, Goldin focuses on 'the desolate evidence of the body in extreme situations' (2012, 134).

je recompose à chaque fois quand je répète ou je filme' ['this whole imaginary museum I rearrange each time when I rehearse or film'] (2010a, 43). He suggests that painting, its influence, has allowed him as a film-maker to choreograph the real, 'des corps, des peaux, des poils, des sexes' ['bodies, skins, hair, genitals'] (57). A series of fleeting moments, textures, flashes in his writing, as he sees body hair, fur, skin in darkness. Drawing a visual thread from a bronze-painted statue of the god Osiris to the reclining body of a sleeping hermaphrodite, Chéreau recalls 'les corps des garçons que j'ai aimés, ceux des acteurs que j'ai désirés, des actrices qui m'ont séduit' ['the bodies of the boys I've loved, those of the actors I've desired, the actresses who have seduced me'] (40–41). He choreographs sense memories: 'Des peaux, des odeurs, des corps cachés dans les vêtements, ces vêtements dont je pense qu'ils ne me dévoileront jamais les corps qui s'y blottissent et que je désire en silence' ['Skin, smells, bodies hidden in clothes, clothes which I think will never unveil the bodies snuggled in them and that I desire in silence'] (52). Bodies and faces pass in an act of hallucinatory animation and recall. The museum is a mausoleum for Chéreau.<sup>73</sup> In this retrospective the Louvre allows the cohabitation of the loved and the dead. For Goldin this space, still melancholy, still full of memories of lost loved ones, is more fully a space of rapture. This is what her erotic imaging, her apprehension of the paintings in the Louvre, adds to Chéreau's project.

In the catalogue *I'll Be Your Mirror*, David A. Ross writes: 'She reveals herself as a woman loved by her world, and unafraid to live her life as fully as she can. She shares her life with us, shares her need for a release, and her expectations of the sublime' (1996, 15). In *Scopophilia*, reaching for the sublime, Goldin finds an unpredictable form of desire, an erotic narrative as she indulges the Eros in her own pleasure in looking at paintings. In the projection, describing her experience of looking in the Louvre, she avows:

My head thrown back, I let my gaze dwell on the ceiling. I underwent the profoundest experience of ecstasy I have ever encountered. I had obtained that supreme degree of sensibility where the divine intimations of art

73 Chéreau came upon Jon Fosse's play *Rêve d'automne* by chance when he was exploring the spaces of the Louvre. A man and woman, who rediscover each other after many years, meet in a cemetery. Chéreau finds: 'les ombres du désir et du deuil qui célèbrent leur union dans un même mausolée' ['the shades of desire and grief celebrating their union in the same mausoleum'] (2010a, 62).

merge with the impassioned sensuality of emotion. Between them and me, telepathic exchanges, divination.<sup>74</sup>

As these words are heard, slides become visible of Ingres's *Oedipus and the Sphinx* (1808), Dürer's *Self-Portrait* (1493), Raphael's *Self-Portrait with Giulio Romano* (1519–1520). There is a close-up on the smooth shoulder of the *Sleeping Hermaphrodite*, then Raphael's sumptuous red-velvet image of Joanna of Aragon (1518), then images of Goldin's former lover Siobhan in the bath.

Goldin says of *Scopophilia*: 'Desire awoken by images is the project's true starting point. It is about the idea of taking a picture of a sculpture or a painting in an attempt to bring it to life' (2011). Describing his exhibition, Chéreau speaks of:

Tous ces corps et les visages que je veux partager avec le public du Louvre et, encore une fois, cette façon singulière de raconter le monde à travers mon propre désir, celui qui me fait aimer le corps d'un acteur autant qu'un tableau, le regard d'une actrice ou la nudité obscène, la chasteté d'un corps qui se refuse. Ce travail que chaque visiteur fait sans doute en secret, cette façon de relier les œuvres d'art à ses propres émotions, à ses souvenirs les plus intimes, et que je voudrais donner à voir. (2010b)

[All these bodies and the faces that I want to share with the public of the Louvre and, again, this singular way of describing the world through my own desire, which makes me love an actor's body as much as a painting, an actress's glance or obscene nudity, the chastity of a body withheld. This work which each visitor doubtless does in secret, this way of linking works of art to one's own emotions, one's most intimate memories, and that I would like to make visible.]

Exploring desire awoken by images, in the exhibition and book of *Les Visages et les corps*, Chéreau includes two reproduced photographs by Goldin, *David in Bed, Leipzig, Germany, 1992* and *Clemens in My Hall, Paris, 2001*.<sup>75</sup> They are seen in a run of other images: Philippe

74 Goldin figures her ecstasy in terms that recall for me Anne Carson on Eros. Writing about the Greek lyric poets, she argues: 'For individuals to whom self-possession has become important, the influx of a sudden, strong emotion from without cannot be an unalarming event' (1986, 44–45). Carson writes of Eros as assault or invasion, as struggle of will and physique: 'The poets record this struggle from within a consciousness – perhaps new in the world – of the body as a unity of limbs, senses and self, amazed at its vulnerability' (45).

75 This last image also appears in Goldin's projection as she speaks about Narcissus: 'Narcissus came upon a pool where he saw his reflection for the first

de Champagne's *Le Christ mort couché sur son linceul* [*The Dead Christ on his Shroud*] (before 1654), Caillebotte's *Les Raboteurs de parquet* [*The Floor Scrapers*] (1875), then Titian's *Portrait of a Man called Man with a Glove* (1520), Pierre Bonnard's *Le Boxeur* [*The Boxer*] (1931), Géricault's *La Folle Monomane du jeu* [*The Woman with a Gambling Mania*] (1820), and finally Courbet's *L'Origine du monde*. These juxtapositions announce the exchanges between painting and photograph, between painted and photographed subjects, in the desiring gaze of the artist, that Goldin will continue to explore across the *Scopophilia* projects.

In *David in Bed, Leipzig*, 1992, the image is *flou*, out of focus behind the incandescent light hanging in the centre. The softness of the image, its blur, is in line with the warmth of its colours, the impressionability of the slept-in sheets, the naked thigh in lazy contact with the covers. This is an image of intimacy, in its casualness, its half-awake haze. Aligned with Titian's *Man with a Glove* and Bonnard's *Boxeur*, it offers something of the underbelly of these images, their opening in the erotic imagination. In *I'll Be Your Mirror*, David is placed next to a further image *David in the Van, Bad Herzfeld, Germany*, 1992 and Goldin moves towards a different narrative from David in bed to David in the van, closing in on his dreaming face, an after-image of his collecting of himself, and moving on.<sup>76</sup>

Chéreau's second Goldin image, *Clemens in My Hall, Paris*, 2001, is striking in its frontal nudity. Its composition recalls the formal portraits with which Chéreau groups it. Placing the image in a sequence in *The Devil's Playground*, Goldin shows Clemens, naked, initiating a series of images of lovemaking: *Jens Smoking on My Bed, Paris*, 2001; *Clemens Lighting Jens' Cigarette, Paris*, 2001; *Jens and Clemens Kissing, Paris*, 2001; *Clemens Squeezing Jens' Nipples, Paris*, 2001; *Clemens and Jens*

time in his life and fell in love with the beautiful boy he was looking at, not realizing it was himself. Eventually realizing it was himself, he died of unrequited love'.

<sup>76</sup> Weinberg writes brilliantly about the emotional complexity of Goldin's images of men: 'Nan Goldin also has been capable of a brutal honesty about men's bodies. Her photograph of her friend Bobby masturbating (1980) in her most famous series, *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* (1986), may show his penis erect, but not as a symbol of potency or domination. Instead, his face looks almost tragic as he fondles himself, with little sense that the results will be satisfying. The ostensible theme of Goldin's *Ballad* is the difficulty men and women have loving and sustaining each other, but this image suggests that self-loving is equally difficult, a desperate and repetitive search for gratification and pleasure' (2012, 95).

*Making Out in My Bed, Toes Curled, Paris, 2001; Clemens Lying on His Back, Paris, 2001; Jens Inside Clemens, Paris, 2001; Jens' Hand on Clemens' Back, Paris, 2001; Clemens and Jens Making Love, Clemens Ecstatic, Paris, 2001; Clemens and Jens Embraced in My Hall, Paris, 2001.* Clemens, naked in the Louvre, his body taut, erotic, announces a sequence of images that recall animal motion studies. Goldin's serial images go into the quick of lovemaking, sex acts.

She pursues this reference outwards to motion studies in grid pictures as she develops *Scopophilia* as a gallery project. She creates panels of correlated paintings and photographs organised around specific themes, such as the odalisque, hair, veils, or water. She explains: 'I created "grids" with multiple images, grouped by subject: the water, the veil, the hair and some parts of the body, *Odalisque, Fallen Angel*' (Spagnesi, 2014, n. pag.). In these groupings, Goldin realises and makes apparent a trend in her work towards the return of particular poses and settings.<sup>77</sup> Heiferman notes this trend in *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*:

early in the slide show [...] there is a moment when the frayed voice of Maria Callas soars above and then wraps itself around a quiet, exquisite sequence of Nan Goldin's images. Each one shows different images of women alone: sitting on cots with thin, old mattresses, hair wrapped in turbans of towels, like forties film goddesses; in big hotel beds; in darkened rooms, looking through smudged windows, faces lit by soft muffled colors of sunlight or the sharp yellow gleam of street lamps. (1996, 277)<sup>78</sup>

For Sussman, this attention to images of women was already about pleasure: 'Goldin's gaze allows the pleasure to emerge in the beauty of the color, light, and space of the settings and in the intimate expressions of the women with whom she has been close enough to record' (1996, 36). Likewise, Dika speaks of 'Goldin's sumptuous color photographs of

<sup>77</sup> Goldin said herself, at the moment of her first retrospective, 'Only now, looking back on twenty-five years, I see that there are these repeated motifs: women in water; men inside looking out at the world, from within an enclosed space; people in trains; and, particularly, people looking at themselves in mirrors' (1996, 449).

<sup>78</sup> Heiferman continues: 'The aria that Callas sings – "Casta Diva" from Bellini's opera *Norma* – implores the goddess of the moon to use the power and beauty of light to reveal truth, to soothe pain, to strengthen character, to illuminate a path to peace' (1996, 277).

naked torsos and intimate poses' (2012, 110). Laing inventories Goldin's images:

Naked flesh is everywhere in Goldin's work, sometimes bruised or sweating, the near-translucent white of the professionally nocturnal. Bodies sleeping, bodies fucking, bodies embracing, estranged bodies, battered bodies, bodies bent on getting high. Her subjects, identified by first names only, are often half-dressed, stripping out of or climbing into clothes, washing or painting a face on in the mirror. (2016, 128–129)<sup>79</sup>

Laing's list looks towards two returning series in Goldin's work which are later crystallised in *Scopophilia*: images of women in water, bathing and swimming, and images of beds, of lying down, of making love.<sup>80</sup> For Alexander, both are about intimacy: 'She took photographs where the nuances of human interaction were the most palpable and open – bedrooms, baths, clubs, and lounges' (2005, 107). Looking at the water images, Costa observes: 'She has always been and still is drawn to water, as can be seen in her later landscape and portrait work. It can be read as evocative of the womb or sleep, or birth and death' (2001a, 20). Weinberg sees an evolution in these images: 'Bathing, for example, always fascinated Goldin, but in her early work people wash themselves in bathtubs. Now they swim' (2005, 21). For Lampert it is the sensuality of swimming that the pictures hold: 'the marvelous sense of swimming in a liquid that makes the skin tremble' (2001, 57). The images of lying down draw attention to the sphere of the bedroom. For Weinberg, 'The bedroom is Goldin's quintessential setting, signaling our entrance into a private sphere of personal interactions' (2005, 12), while Costa describes 'photographs she has made of hotel interiors and the private rituals that are performed in them' (2001a, 92).<sup>81</sup>

The bathing and bedroom images, as recalled and sometimes rearranged in the *Scopophilia* grids, are part of Goldin's prolonged interest in images of horizontality and reclining. *Scopophilia* allows her to explore the connection of those works in her corpus with the broader

79 Laing too associates poses with emotions: 'Her people pass through moods, outfits, lovers, states of intoxication' (2016, 129). She sees these people in 'states of solitude and longing, lounging on beds or gazing through windows' (130).

80 Weinberg notes: 'She was impressed by [Andrew] Noren's *Kodak Ghost Poems* for the way it simply records the filmmaker's friends taking a bath or having sex' (2005, 14).

81 Speaking about *Empty Beds, Boston, USA*, 1979, Costa says: 'This image was taken right after lovemaking. For Goldin, a picture of a room is a form of

history of art, its imaging of women and in particular its imaging of passive, vulnerable, and sexually available women. Goldin's work on the project shows how her photographs have always, however unwittingly or silently, emerged from a tradition, a historical range of paintings. It shows how she has rethought, reimagined, re-felt the odalisque, the nude, and the bather in her own photographs. It shows how her pleasure in viewing and her new juxtapositions may, like Varda's and Breillat's returns to the reclining nude, revivify that image of reclining and allow its affect, its politics, to be brought into question. *Scopophilia* is in this sense the project of Goldin's that has offered her most trenchant engagement with images of nakedness to date. She explores this in the context of the museum, of the history of art.

I see Goldin's grid pictures as offering new, female-authored, pleasure-seeking iterations of the phenomenon of ecstasy. Hers are newly cathected, affective panels of *Ninfa* images. As she returns to these falling, fragile, floating, and erotic women, she engages thought about looking, about passivity, about possession and self-possession, about trans. She leaves behind a memory, a sense that these naked women, these nymphs, are women she has been close to. They are women (white women) she has held, she has slept with. This knowledge, this intimacy, is electric in the grid images, where photographs animate, eroticise, sit side by side with, the suave paintings and sculptures of Goldin's personal tour through the Louvre. The title of the exhibition *Scopophilia* is written on the wall, at both Matthew Marks Gallery and Gagosian Gallery, in an antique curving script, the word acting as Goldin's invitation into her stately pleasure dome.

portraiture. Empty beds, whether unmade or made, squalid or luxurious, are a recurrent subject in her work' (2001a, 32). He also draws attention to a series of images taken in bedrooms in L'Hôtel in Paris in 1999, where he finds 'a strong emphasis on sensuality and seduction' and 'a distillation of Goldin's familiar motifs in depicting the feminine world, from the idea of the reflection in the mirror to intimacy between women'. He continues: 'The red tones (with their sophisticated flavour of the boudoir) that dominate the cycle heighten the aura of feminine mystery that is to some extent the subtext of all these images' (114).

### *Odalisque*

At both Matthew Marks and Gagosian, Goldin showed the 114 × 169 cm chromogenic print *Odalisque*, 2011. The grid picture is made up of sixteen frames, eight taken from Goldin's photographing of paintings and eight from her own previous works. It is her most explicit picture about reclining. It is a work that reimagines these odalisque images, originally connoting the harem, and their possible appeal for female eroticism, for gauging, imaging affect and intimacy.

In New York, *Odalisque* hung in a prominent position on the right of a doorway that opened to two further gallery rooms. On the left-hand side of the doorway hung a further grid, *Crazy Scary*, 2011, avowedly one of Goldin's favourites from the series, a post-apocalyptic, Bosch-like grid about love and death, with a kiss from Delacroix's *Les Massacres de Scio* [*Scenes of the Massacres of Scio*] (1824) at its centre, the recumbent figure and red robes of Caravaggio's *Death of the Virgin* (1601–1605/1606), an image of Atala's shrouded corpse clasped by her chaste lover Chactas, from Girodet's *Atala au tombeau* [*The Funeral of Atala*] (1808), and her own image of Gilles, painfully ill, and his lover Gotscho holding hands across white bedsheets. *Crazy Scary* offers a melancholy counterpart to *Odalisque*, further reflecting the latter's theme of reclining.

Adjacent to *Odalisque*, on the right, was another grid, *Veiled*, 2011. In this Goldin includes a detail from her 1986 photograph, *Cookie and Vittorio's Wedding*, surrounding Cookie, cocooning her image. To her left and below her are photographs Goldin took in the Louvre of a veiled woman, possibly Faith, by Antonio Corradini, a sculptor who died in Naples in 1752. The wedding photo holds a live memory, an image of vulnerability, the convulsion of laughing and crying. Cookie is in satin and a tremulous veil. The grid conjures the bridal, the erotic, the diaphanous, ivory that can feel, soft embalming.<sup>82</sup>

Through the entrance to the next rooms, beyond *Odalisque*, is Goldin's *Origin of the World*, 2011, a reflection on Courbet's image.

82 Goldin took photos of Cookie in her coffin three years later. James Bennett tells Griffin: 'There was something haunting about Cookie. The images of her that flash through – and that last image of her in an open casket – she just looked so pretty' (2014, 293). Peyton Smith speaks about Max at the funeral: 'At the end Max went up and knelt beside the coffin and held her hand and kissed her. He did it in front of everyone and it was so beautiful because he never really expressed much' (Griffin, 2014, 293).

This glimpse of the Courbet beyond the odalisque images repeats Breillat's moves in her films from the smooth surface of the reclining nude to the real of her sex exposed. Arcing round behind the Courbet is the *Saints* series where Goldin pairs a photograph of one of her friends with a portrait from the Louvre, her most sustained exercise in the correlation of paintings and photographs and a coruscating, affective multiple portrait of her loved ones.<sup>83</sup> The multidirectional emotions of these images, Courbet and the *Saints*, their conjuring of the real of the body, of the emotions of Goldin's friends, embed and reflect the *Odalisque*.

At Gagosian, *Odalisque* is placed as one of a series of grid pictures along a stretch of wall. It is hung with *The Back*, 2011–2014, on its left-hand side. *The Back* is the one grid in *Scopophilia* where images of male bodies are central. In the upper squares there are a number of vertical images of male nakedness, including, in line with the Underworld theme of the show as a whole, Subleyras's *Charon passant les ombres* [*Charon Ferrying the Shades*] (1735–1744) and Géricault's *Etude de dos pour Le Radeau de la Méduse* [*Study of a Man's Back for Raft of the Medusa*] (c. 1818). But below, the images slip to horizontality in the inclusion of two differently posed photographs of the *Sleeping Hermaphrodite*, the ancient statue that was also Goldin's subject in a single photograph *Young Hermaphrodite Sleeping, Le Louvre*, 2010 shown at Matthew Marks.<sup>84</sup> Hung next to *Odalisque* at Gagosian, *The Back* seems to draw attention to questions of gender, verticality, and horizontality. The nonbinary statue, this sleeping figure, marble, young, sexual, seems like a model for the images of female horizontality that thread Goldin's corpus. In her voice-over to the projection *Scopophilia*, over images of the *Sleeping Hermaphrodite*, Goldin says:

83 Dinse has written beautifully about this series: 'Goldin has chosen, in an intensive and prolonged process of observation, a sort of alter ego for a selection of her friends in the form of a photographed painted portrait' (2016, 155). She puts particular emphasis on affect: 'the pairs of photographs that move the observer most are those where the facial expression and charisma of the portrayed are so similar that both subjects seem to find themselves in a similar life or emotional situation but in different epochs, or those pairs who at first glance seem to contradict each other' (157). She sums up: 'the impression created is that the painted faces each represent a further aspect of the personality of Goldin's friends and lovers, one which was not caught in the individual photograph' (157).

84 The New York exhibition also included a related grid, *The Back*, 2011.

Tiresias was a prophet. He displeased the gods and was transformed into a woman. After seven years he was released from his sentence and permitted to regain his masculinity. He argued with Zeus on the theme of who has more pleasure in sex, the man or the woman, as Tiresias had experienced both. Tiresias replied: ‘Of ten parts, a man enjoys only one’.

The story of Tiresias, told in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, is one that embraces nonbinary gender as Tiresias moves between male and female, remembering his erotic encounters in each guise, but one that privileges female pleasure, and pleasure in female morphology. I see Goldin’s work as invested in nonbinary, non-essentialist, non-normative narratives of gender, but in this phase opening to the feminine as pleasurable, as beautiful, as pleasure-giving. That femininity may be sourced in androgyny, in the curved hips, the soft skin, and childlike face of the *Sleeping Hermaphrodite*. If trans identities are not a clear focus in Goldin’s later work as they were in her earlier pieces, there is a continuity in her adoration of nonbinary identities, and of female bodies cisgender and trans, with the particular nymph images her photographs conjure. In the film *I’ll Be Your Mirror*, she speaks of her friend Greer, ‘who I first met when she was a boy’. She shows beautiful images of Greer naked, saying ‘there she is’, ‘my little ballerina’. Greer appears naked in the film. Her skin is an unreal pearl white, like an odalisque. Goldin says, ‘your body looks gorgeous Greer’. Greer’s sublime femininity, her liteness, makes her resemble the erotic images of *Odalisque*.

At Gagolian, a further sense of the grid pictures as a continuous and interrelated series, as studies in motion, emotions, poses, and gestures, emerges as Goldin runs from *The Back* to *Odalisque* and on to another Rome variation on an earlier work, *Veils*, 2011–2014, with Cookie now missing.<sup>85</sup> This is followed by *Hair*, 2011–2014, a variation on *Hair*, 2011, shown in New York. A series of horizontal images runs across the centre of the grid, including a detail from Courbet’s *La Femme au perroquet* [*Woman with a Parrot*] (1866) from the Metropolitan Museum. In the grid the abundant hair, thick tresses tended and wild, speaks of animality, of an erotic continuity from the high Renaissance images by Titian, *Woman with a Mirror* (1512–1515), and Paris Bordon, *Flora* (c. 1540), to Goldin’s own focus on the hair of Joana and other models. Long hair, loose, wild,

85 Blasberg spoke to Bob Monk, who curated the show in Rome: “What’s so remarkable about the works in Rome, why they are so beautiful, is that even though she is recognized as a great artist, she is also still evolving,” Monk explains. “She continues moving forward, pushing her own experience” (2014, n. pag.).

speaks of sexual freedom, of a flow of feelings, as Goldin seems again to release new energy to picture ecstasy, a swirl, a fall.<sup>86</sup> The series of grid pictures at Gagosian ends, after *Hair*, with a pairing, *The Nap, Paris*, 2010, which was also shown in New York. Side by side in the single frame, Goldin shows a detail from Courbet's *Le Sommeil* (1866) where two naked women lie in an embrace and a photograph of her friends Raymonde and Babeth cradled in each other's arms lying in sunlight. The juxtaposition, where Courbet's women lie next to contemporary lovers, their images in the same scale, their embrace the focus, rescues the Courbet image for a female erotic imagination. It also makes reclining a less solitary, autoerotic act, and intimates how images of reclining women find their place in an archive of intimacy.

If this is its visual context in the spaces of the two galleries, in its internal references this grid picture *Odalisque* encounters the odalisques of nineteenth-century art.<sup>87</sup> Variations on a reclining pose are seen

86 The sensual touching of hair seems to draw meanings about women's attention to women. Maria Pramaggiore moves towards a bisexual reading of Deren, for example, arising from the erotic caressing of hair in *At Land*: 'Deren's films allow one to imagine eroticism beyond the confines of the coupled resolution' (2001, 257).

87 Missing is Manet's *Olympia*, which has been the focus of many feminist revisions. In 2013, Robert Storr and Carol Armstrong created an exhibition at Yale, *Lunch with Olympia*, which celebrated the hundred and fiftieth anniversary of both Manet's *Olympia* and his *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* [*Luncheon on the Grass*], amongst whose exhibits was included French-Swiss artist Agnès Thurnauer's *Olympia #2* (2012). This offers a blanched and rouged rendition of Manet's painting with, superimposed, a series of endearments: 'mon trésor ma dulcinée ma bien-aimée' ['my treasure my lady love my beloved'], 'ma mie ma chatte mon cœur' ['my sweet love my pussycat my dear heart'], 'ma maîtresse mon amante mon épouse ma femme' ['my mistress my lover my wife my woman'], and in the furthest corner, 'mon amour' ['my love']. Thurnauer casts a veil of words, a net, a grid, over the familiar, re-presented image. In her overwritten *Olympia*, the endearments reference the amorous miniaturisation, belittlement, and glossing of the female subject, the naming of her as erotic creature, child, or animal. *Olympia* recedes behind this thesaurus of pet names. The effect of the names on the image is strong and their abundance speaks of the numerous iterations of *Olympia*, of the mistress, the prostitute, the girlfriend, the sweetheart, adorned, adored, more or less. This strategy is also found in her image *Original World* (2006), shown in the exhibition *Cet Obscur Objet de Désirs: Autour de L'Origine du monde* [*That Obscure Object of Desires: Around The Origin of the World*] at Ornans in 2014. In different planes across the image she writes the names of famous artists of Western modernity, feminised, as she imagines Estelle Manet, Katia Malevich. The floating names intercept a view of the open thighs and abundant hair.

across the grid. This is the grid picture that is most closely organised around a specific pose and genre, most intimately correlating images from the art historical past with Goldin's images from an erotic present. The return of the pose, yet variations from image to image, creates an effect, ironically for this image of stillness, of turning and movement. If there is serenity, pleasure in basking, across the grid, the overall effect is one of variation, of languid movement, of the turns of making love, of moving across sheets, to reach a more tranquil, soothing position.

Dominant across the grid is Ingres's *La Grande Odalisque* from 1814, painted in Rome and now hanging in the Louvre.<sup>88</sup> In displaying her *Odalisque* at Gagosian, Goldin takes the Ingres odalisque back to Rome, commemorating its creation there, and also sets her own Italian work, in Naples and Amalfi, in Venice, and in exhibition in Rome, in a lineage of stranger art exploring sensuality in Italy.

*La Grande Odalisque* appears in the grid in the upper left-hand corner. The photograph crops the painting so that Goldin closes in on the woman's skin and shape more than her silky surroundings. The cropping makes the intimacy and actuality of her body, its smoothness, the roundness of her breast, more apparent. The focus can be more on touch, proximity, lived apprehension of her sensations. She is propped on her elbow, looking round, looking beyond the viewer. There is near darkness in the frame behind her.

Her image recurs, drained of colour, as Goldin includes, in the third row of the second column, the *Odalisque en grisaille* (1824–1834) from the Metropolitan Museum. This variation adds to the sense of seriality and draws attention to the pallor that cuts across the whole composition, here at its most extreme as the image is entirely bleached. A similar unearthly whiteness returns in the reclining figures in the third and fourth images in the first row, photographs of Correggio's *Venus, Satyr and Cupid*, an allegory of earthly love where the whiteness of the body is contrasted by the blush of Venus's cheeks, and Prud'hon's *L'Enlèvement de Psyché* [*The Abduction of Psyche*] (1808), where Psyche's body seems to shimmer, like Greer's.

*La Grande Odalisque* returns in the final square on the right. The photograph is at a further remove, showing more of her setting. The lapis lazuli of the cushions of her couch, of her silk brocade curtains, matches the blue drapes where Correggio's Venus lies asleep. The colour cuts across the different squares of the grid creating the effect of

88 Ingres also painted *La Baigneuse de Valpinçon* in Rome earlier in 1808.

continuity, return to a particular setting. This same effect is repeated in the return of green, where the grass on which Ingres's Antiope lies in his *Jupiter et Antiope* [*Jupiter and Antiope*] (1851) placed at the far end of the second row is matched with the jade bedcover in a hotel room in the bottom row. Similarly, the red-and-gold drapes in Delacroix's *Etude de femme nue, couchée sur un divan* [*Female Nude Reclining on a Divan*] (1830), placed at the left-hand side of the second row, seem to fall down into *Amanda on my Fortuny, Berlin*, 1993. The colours seem to offset the figures in both images. Delacroix's nude stretches out, her arms raised as in Matisse's *Odalisque with Raised Arms*, her legs crossed. Amanda is lying sideways, one hand cradling her head, the other pressing her thigh. There is a physical resemblance between the nude and Amanda, the delicate bones of the nude's ankles and feet finding reflection in Amanda's long arm. This patterning returns in the placing of another Goldin image below Amanda, where the lean stretch of the body is emphasised by the black dress with bare flesh showing at the elbow. Down the column Goldin pursues a series of images of elongated and stretched women, as if reflecting on the apparently abnormal anatomy of *La Grande Odalisque*, and placing it in a comparable series of variations on female sinuousness, stretchiness, feeling the eroticism of irregular morphology.

A further effect is created across the whole grid in the return of images of whiteness, the flesh of the models, but also more lavishly the whiteness of sheets and the small contrast of white skin and white fabric.<sup>89</sup> Goldin returns to the aesthetic that Breillat explores, via odalisque images, in *Anatomie de l'enfer* and creates her own scenarios where relationality is transacted. If Breillat pushes to an almost chalky rigour, Goldin is concerned more with the charting of sensation, of sensory impressions and their affective immediacy. Goldin recalls bodily experiences in her images as she shows the press of naked skin on white sheets, where

89 Didi-Huberman, looking at hermaphrodite images of transition and metamorphosis, draws attention to flesh and drapery: 'Dans cette casuistique des *corps ambivalents* – fermés-offerts, féminins-masculins, pudiques-érotiques, chrétiens-païens –, la draperie joue un rôle éminent: elle donne l'*opérateur de conversion*, l'interface subtile, quelquefois neutre, quelquefois sublime, de toutes les contradictions où jouent ensemble le *spectacle* et la *chute* des corps' ['In this logic of *ambivalent bodies* – closed/on offer, feminine/masculine, modest/erotic, Christian/Pagan – drapery plays an eminent role: it gives the *operator of conversion*, the subtle interface, sometimes neutral, sometimes sublime, of all the contradictions where the *spectacle* and the *fall* of bodies are played out together'] (2002, 36–37).

Amanda lies out, her torso against a pillow, or the amniotic holding of the body as Siobhan lies asleep in bed, or in pale turquoise water.

The series of white sheets in *Odalisque* returns in the grid in Corot's *Marietta, dite L'odalisque romaine* [*Marietta, or Roman Odalisque*] (1843) from the Petit Palais in Paris. This picture was painted on Corot's third and last trip to Rome. Its inclusion pursues the tribute to Rome across the grid. The pose of *Marietta*, in its informality, its intimacy, is closer to the poses in Goldin's own photographs than it is to the more idealised nudes of Ingres or Prud'hon. *Marietta*'s anatomy is recognisable, her skin tone is fleshier, her curves feel real. If the image has the reticence and timelessness of Corot's portraits, it also anticipates Manet's work in *Olympia* in showing the odalisque as a model in a studio or bedroom. Showing *Marietta* with her own images of Amanda, of Siobhan, who lies in her bath next to *Marietta*, Goldin creates a dialogue between images of women she has loved and an image of a loved or desired woman in nineteenth-century Rome. She reveals retrospectively the intimacy in the painting, realising it as an image which pursues imagining of the odalisque, the woman reclining, sleeping or bathing, and also looks forward to realist apprehension of the body, its shapes and weight, that will inform the work of Courbet, Manet's images of Victorine Meurent, the bathers of Degas, as well as Goldin's own erotic images of women. *Marietta* and Siobhan are shown at the same size, in the same scale, their features sufficiently similar that there seems an uninterrupted continuity between the Corot and the grid's two images of Siobhan.

In a further picture shown at Matthew Marks, already mentioned, *Origin of the World*, Goldin juxtaposes four differently framed photographs she took of Courbet's *L'Origine du monde*.<sup>90</sup> This serial representation seems to be moving towards the cinematic, unfixing the iconic image, making it part of a more mobile, lush, textured exploration of pleasure in viewing.<sup>91</sup> Just as the repeated images of

90 The painting was also included in Chéreau's exhibition in the Louvre.

91 Thinking about the cinematic aspects of this reframing, I look back to the Italian films that are so important for Goldin. Sitney looks at Pasolini's interpretation of reframings in *Red Desert* (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1964): 'But Pasolini's attention to the reframing of the flowers and their reappearance later (actually in the background) is an astute observation of Antonioni's use of details; his interpretation of the reframing as neurotic obsession is a brilliant piece of criticism. The same can be said of [...] the shift of colour stock for what he calls a dream sequence, which may be that or Giuliana's recollection as she tells a story from childhood to her son' (2015, 24).

*La Grande Odalisque* appear in various scales, Goldin's reproduction of the Courbet painting varies. In the upper left-hand corner, it is at its closest, before she moves through her three further iterations, showing the fullest and most distanced photograph of the painting in the lower right-hand corner. The effect conjures movement. The play of closeness and distance seems to speak of different apprehensions of a lover's body.

Like Breillat, Goldin also opens the image to questions of touch and feeling, making this about having a vulva, as much as seeing one. To approach tactility, Goldin focuses on sheen, on surface texture.<sup>92</sup> The right-hand upper image has a sheen over part of its surface that recalls sweat, the body glistening, but also veiling or frosting. For Anne Cheng, writing about Josephine Baker, 'Sheen, as that which both attracts and repels vision, plays hide-and-seek with visual satisfaction and produces a sexy interplay between the scopic and the haptic: are we looking or are we feeling?' (2011, 116). This hesitation, interplay, is what Goldin seeks as she makes the woman's sex several times available, yet also partially veils or withholds it.

Further, her close-up closes in on the textures of the hair abundantly filling the corner of the image, recalling the tactile animal fur, the soft peacock feathers, the long dark tresses that appear displaced in the Ingres and Correggio, where no pubic hair is shown. In dialogue with *Odalisque*, *Origin of the World* sensitises the viewer to the eroticism, the animal trailing touch of its fabrics and materials. The relay between the fabrics surrounding the naked odalisques and the textures of the living vulva and hair creates some shudder of recognition and shared sensibility. Cheng looks at 'feminized/animalized/fluid surfaces (skin, cloth, hair)' (111), arguing that 'fabrics like silk and fur in turn aim to simulate skin and render a kind of tangible and emotional hypersensitivity' (115).<sup>93</sup>

In her embrace of hypersensitivity and tactility, Goldin, more than Varda or Breillat, explores the pleasure in reclining, the luxuriance

92 I'm grateful to Micky Sheringham for his comments on this in conversation about Breillat and Goldin in Oxford.

93 Katya Berger Andreadakis argues likewise that Titian's *Girl in a Fur* (1535), in its play of materials, yields meanings about openness and pleasure: 'The paleness of flesh against the darkness of fur, hair married to the pearls within it, the breast with its scarcely visible transparency and its discretion, which is nothing else but invitation, the eyes darker than jewels, and, finally, the slash in the sleeve, whose opening, pointed at by her fingers, is luminous and curly, artless and affected. Everything here implies pleasure – including the ring on the finger and the metal bracelet round the plump wrist' (Berger and Berger, 2003, 34).

and sensual autonomy which the pose allows. Correggio's Venus and Prud'hon's Psyche both languish, their blissful sleep, their thrown-back heads, their expression of ecstasy recalling Bernini's *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*, while their images, their faces fallen from the vertical, also tease out further the connection of Goldin's grids to Dalí's *Le Phénomène de l'extase*. But Goldin, unlike Dalí, lets more of each serial image be visible, leaving too a certain space for the bodily uniqueness of each loved woman, despite the connections formally across the various frames. These are images that focus on each sensory moment. They show the erotic loveliness of each woman, but also pay attention to inscrutability, autonomy, in the states of *rêverie*, the unknown shades, held in the pictures.

Goldin's photographs, achieved in an art practice that avowedly dissolves divisions between art and life, offer a frame of intimacy and privacy for these earlier images of nakedness. Goldin reappropriates the paintings of the odalisque, of Venus and Psyche, making them part of a continuous series of images of lovers and friends. She reclaims these images of nakedness for female pleasure, showing how they can feed the imagination and equally foster a sense of the timelessness and aesthetic beauty of the most casual contemporary shots. The relay of feelings across the photographed paintings and intimate contemporary images is multidirectional and the meanings found in reclining are diverse. The pose is re-viewed not solely as a mode of display, spectacle, associated with possession and passivity, but also as an intimate pose, glimpsed in intimacy.

One personal aspect of *Scopophilia* is the liberal return of images of Goldin's lover Siobhan Liddell. Als recounts how, after rehab in 1989, 'she reconnected with a former lover, a sculptor named Siobhan Liddell' (2016, 31). He says: 'Her portraits of that new, sober love are among the most beautiful that she took in the late eighties and early nineties' (31).<sup>94</sup> In the film *Nan Goldin, In My Life*, Goldin says:

She was my lover for five years and at the time it was a big part of our relationship for me to photograph her. It was important in our

94 For Costa too, 'Some of Nan Goldin's most tender and beautiful images are devoted to Siobhan' (2001a, 60). Dika lovingly describes the photograph *Siobhan at the A-House, Nude, Provincetown, 1990*: 'Siobhan simply gazes at us/at Goldin with eyes that are young, liquid, but with an attitude that is complicit. She shows herself, her smooth body, unadorned, except for the crossing of one nude arm across her torso, a silver bracelet on her wrist. Siobhan's body is full, living' (2012, 114).

relationship and it was a time when I was newly sober and I had never had a relationship sober before and I really wanted to understand how close you could get to another person, what it was like to touch another person's flesh, in this state of intensified vulnerability that I was in.

The images of Siobhan draw attention to the eroticism of Goldin's attention to women and to the ways in which this is connected to vulnerability, to knowing and not knowing, to lying down with someone, and for someone. As she narrates their love, Goldin also makes it about art. The act of photographing Siobhan is erotic, an act of love infused with an awareness of pleasure in looking. *Scopophilia* is one way of recalling that intensity.

In the *Saints* series in Matthew Marks, Goldin pairs a photograph of Siobhan, *Siobhan, Berlin*, 1994, with Guérin's *Half-length Portrait of a Girl* (c. 1794), where a girl is naked, her hands on her breasts, the nipples appearing between her fingers. Siobhan is almost entirely covered in the photograph, hard, in black clothes. The image of a girl, her body resembling Siobhan's seen in other naked shots, speaks of the intimacy, the vulnerability, the strange childishness, of being naked. In *Morpheus*, 2014, named after the Greek god of dreams, and shown at Gagosian, Goldin shows three photographs of Siobhan naked asleep, her elbow crooked and her breast showing in one, her body tucked up in a sheet in another, and in the third, where she is most deeply asleep, her hands clasped between her thighs. These are images that might be taken by a lover, or a mother. Elsewhere Siobhan is often in water, showering several times in the amniotic *Water*, 2011, as she is also in the bath in *Odalisque*.

*Odalisque* works as an act of reclaiming pleasure in looking at erotic images and seeing them in a continuous relation with tender images of love in the present. Varda and Breillat respond to the beauty in the reclining nude but it is less clear that their pleasure in looking is erotic. With Goldin, it is different. Claiming open, multidirectional love for beautiful bodies painted and photographed, aligning moments of aesthetic appreciation with moments of recalled or imagined intimacy with women, seeing continuity between aesthetic and erotic response, is part of her project in *Scopophilia*. The sexual energy of male-authored representations of erotic women is redirected, its politics of ownership and oppression undone.

This act of reimagining is particularly charged in relation to odalisque images that derive from an imagination that is colonialist and racist as well as misogynist. As Gualdoni specifies, 'Even the most intransigent defenders of decorum believed the exhibition of *nègre* and Oriental

nudity was acceptable, as it did not represent what was normally considered to be human' (2012, 111). Achille Mbembe explores the ways in which the figure of the black woman, as found in literature, painting, and dance, holds 'une fonction clé dans l'articulation du racisme, de la frivolité et du libertinage en France' ['a key function in the articulation of racism, frivolity, and libertinism in France'] (2013, 106). He shows the ways in which passivity and submission had a nefarious set of associations in nineteenth-century France:

Par ailleurs, les 'beautés noires' seraient des femmes indolentes, disponibles et soumises. C'est en tant qu'exemples vivants du triomphe de la lubricité qu'elles déclenchent les pulsions fantasmatiques du mâle français. Du coup, ce dernier s' imagine en explorateur blanc aux confins de la civilisation. (106)

[Furthermore, these 'black beauties' would be indolent, available, and submissive women. It is as living examples of the triumph of lust that they release the fantasmatic drives of the French male. In an instant, he imagines himself a white explorer at the borders of civilisation.]

Mbembe moves from the stillness and lethargy of the reclining nude to associated meanings of sexual availability and disposability, as well as compulsory submission and lack of agency. He sees this passivity, this conquered state, sickly feeding the sexual drive of French men, aligning the desire to conquer women with the colonialist impulse to appropriate territory, placing those women outside the bounds of the human and the civilised world.

This heritage and history is not Goldin's subject in *Odalisque*, though Mbembe's words give pause about any project that attempts to enter the sexual imagination of nineteenth-century France. Goldin only rarely includes images of people of colour. As Als puts it about her earlier work, "The Ballad" is about a mostly white bohemia' (2016, 31). But the tradition of the odalisque reaches back to the Turkish harem and such Orientalist images also connect to France's past as a coloniser first in Algeria and later elsewhere in Africa. The term 'odalisque' cannot but bring with it senses of the harem and seraglio, these non-Western locations that are spaces in which the representation of the nude is reimagined.

If Goldin does not make racial diversity or slavery her subject in *Scopophilia*, her work of placing these nineteenth-century images in dialogue with the pictures of intimacy, of love, of sexual freedom and autonomy from her own corpus also works, with whatever utopian

vision, towards imagining the women in these nineteenth-century paintings as sentient subjects. Assia Djébar speaks of the difficulty of this in a racialised context. In an essay on Delacroix and Picasso, Djébar looks closely at Delacroix's image *Les Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement* [*Women of Algiers in their Apartment*]. Like Cixous looking at Bathsheba, she speaks of the affect of the Algerian women in the painting, acknowledging their specific condition of captivity:

Prisonnières résignées d'un lieu clos qui s'éclaire d'une sorte de lumière de rêve venue de nulle part – lumière de serre ou d'aquarium – le génie de Delacroix nous les rend à la fois présentes et lointaines, énigmatiques au plus haut point. (1980, 148)

[Resigned prisoners in a closed place that is lit by a kind of dreamlike light coming from nowhere—a hothouse light or that of an aquarium—Delacroix's genius makes them both near and distant to us at the same time, enigmatic to the highest degree. (1992, 135–136)]

She speaks of the uniqueness of the picture as an approach to a feminine version of the Orient. She explores its aptness for *rêverie* and its connection to the spectator's dreams of sensuality:

Le rêve lointain et proche dans les yeux perdus des trois Algéroises, si nous tentons d'en saisir la nature: nostalgie ou douceur vague, c'est pour, à partir de leur absence si manifeste, rêver à notre tour la sensualité. (1980, 149)

[The distant and familiar dream in the faraway eyes of the three Algerian women, if we make an attempt to grasp its nature, makes us in turn dream of sensuality: a nostalgia or vague softness, triggered by their so obvious absence. (1992, 137)]

Djébar's writing here and in her fiction reclaims female sensuality in Algeria, that of the other women she imagines, and her own, that of the past of the nineteenth century and that of twentieth-century Algeria. Like Goldin, she crosses between prior representations and forms of life writing (or, in Goldin's case, diaristic photography). In her approach to the painting, Djébar is sensitive to the rare document of female embodied life in Algeria that Delacroix offers, yet also to the horror and melancholy of the women's enslavement, a state of captivity and indolence which stills not only their bodies but their feelings. Djébar writes:

Ces femmes, est-ce parce qu'elles rêvent qu'elles ne nous regardent pas, ou est-ce parce que, enfermées sans recours, elles ne peuvent même plus nous entrevoir? Rien ne se devine de l'âme de ces dolentes assises, comme

noyées dans ce qui les entoure. Elles demeurent absentes à elles-mêmes, à leurs corps, à leur sensualité, à leur bonheur. (1980, 150)

[Is it because these women are dreaming that they do not look at us, or is it that they can no longer even glimpse us because they are enclosed without recourse? Nothing can be guessed about the soul of these doleful figures, seated as if drowning in all that surrounds them. They remain absent to themselves, to their body, to their sensuality, to their happiness. (1992, 137)]

She picks up her aquarium image but sees in it women drowning. The capacity for pleasure, for dream, is missing. She continues, thinking again about their stillness:

Ces femmes d'Alger – celles qui demeurent immobiles depuis 1832 sur le tableau de Delacroix –, s'il était possible hier de trouver dans leur fixité l'expression nostalgique du bonheur ou celle de la douceur de la soumission, aujourd'hui cependant, nous frappe au plus sensible leur amertume désespérée. (1980, 153)

[These women of Algiers – those who have remained motionless in Delacroix's painting since 1832 – if it was possible yesterday to see in their frozen stare the nostalgic expression of happiness or of the softness of submission, today their desperate bitterness is what must strike our most sensitive nerve. (1992, 140)]<sup>95</sup>

Goldin in her art is no stranger to pain and suffering. She has explored the entrapment of addiction, of abusive relationships, and the debilitating illness, foreshortened lives, and immeasurable personal losses of the AIDS crisis. Her work in *Scopophilia* emerges out of these contexts and uses and redirects some of her more melancholy early images as she feels her way towards pleasure in looking.

Before *Scopophilia*, Goldin's work already made reference to the odalisque, as seen in the example of *David on My Red Couch, Bowery*, NYC, 1990. Lampert writes that in her photographs 'the subjects' naked feelings are moderated by an almost Oriental delicacy' (2001, 57) and she expands her idea with relation to tropes that speak of the figure of the odalisque in painting, claiming, 'This appears literally in the

95 Maria Flood, referencing Emer O'Beirne (2013), points out that Djébar's account ignores the black slave in the image: 'It seems that Djébar's desire for the Algerian women whose voices and bodies she so desires to free, has blinded her to an individual whose social marginalization, gender, and race might offer a potent and fruitful point of comparison' (2017, 74).

embroidered antique fabrics, visually in the lustrous skin and sparkling water, and metaphorically in the “wasted” time of the pleasure houses’ (57). In a project with sustained focus on non-white subjects, the collaborative volume with Nobuyoshi Araki, *Tokyo Love*, Goldin also looks out briefly to an odalisque image. She includes a photograph, *Nyoro on Her Sofa* (Araki and Goldin, 1995, 36). Nyoro reclines in a kimono. Sun comes through the blinds of the window falling on her foot, on her forearm, on her languid wrist. The faded blue of her kimono is patterned with white flowers and leaves. Her face, shaded but glowing in the golden light of the apartment, is sensual. The image speaks of her voluptuousness, her stillness. She is like liquid, wax, poured out, intimate, withheld, impressionable. The image plays with Orientalism in the reclining pose, the kimono, but is contrasted with an accompanying photograph, *Nyoro and Raymond*, where Nyoro sits in Raymond’s arms as he smokes, her drowsy expression speaking of sex, the contemporary. Goldin herself appears in a kimono in *Self-Portrait in Kimono with Brian, New York City*, 1983. Indolent, sad, her head propped on her elbow, Goldin sits beside Brian, the man who will later batter her, leaving the bruising seen in *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*.

Goldin does not claim the parity of different struggles against oppression. The ties of her work to her own sphere of intimacy and experience leave out other communities. But her engagement with pleasure in looking at the odalisque is part of an ongoing exploration of sexuality in her work which embraces and repurposes images of oppression.

In a brilliant reading of Marina de Van’s 2002 film *Dans ma peau* [*In My Skin*], Nikolaj Lübecker considers the obsession of the protagonist, Esther (Marina de Van), with harming her own body. Lübecker looks closely at the end of the film and writes of it ‘falling to rest in a still image of de Van as a bruised odalisque – a nature morte’ (2014, 133). He concludes that the ending conjures an oxymoronic concept of ‘in-your-face-passivity’ (134). Goldin shows herself as a bruised odalisque. She emerges from this state of battering, damage, and self-harm, through her art and in her claiming of pleasure in looking, the pleasure even of looking at images that record women’s stilling, their absenting from themselves. She explores how images of passivity, of slipping from the vertical, may be beautiful, expressive, cathartic. She adopts a feminist politics of hedonism and inactivity, motivated by an expansive approach to the repository of images of Western art, and a sensitive, pro-neurodiverse, post-traumatic apprehension of the possibilities encompassed in pleasure and love.

*Diving for Pearls*

In an essay at the end of *Diving for Pearls*, Goldin writes: ‘*The pictures I remember best are the ones when I forgot to load the camera or the film came out black*’ (2016, 201, original italics). She speaks of images imagined or that might have been. She tells a story of a train ride to New Orleans with Cookie and Max: ‘There was an old-school Southern Afro-American funeral on the train, complete with the body’ (201). They partied all night with the funeral guests and stayed on in New Orleans. Goldin photographed all the while, but in all the thirty rolls of shot film only a single image survived: ‘*Cookie looking in a mirror with the word “Angel” written on the wall next to her. My pearl*’ (201, original italics).

Goldin compares photography to diving for pearls. Her book of the same title takes stock of the risks and horrors of diving, focusing on the labour of Japanese women engaged for this task:

Pearl diving was dangerous, often fatal. The diver had to descend over 100 feet on one breath. Many deaths were caused by sea creatures, by drowning due to shallow-water blackout upon resurfacing, along with large amounts of eye damage. (201)

She adds: ‘Pearl diving was a task solely reserved for women’ (201). She includes at the end of the book three images taken by Italian photographer and anthropologist Fosco Maraini.<sup>96</sup> The first shows a woman diver smiling. She is bare to the waist, a scarf on her head and a rope tied round her body. Her nakedness looks forward to Goldin’s most tender images of Siobhan. The second and third images were taken underwater. In the second, amniotic, a naked woman attached by a rope reaches down into the thick sea foliage for oysters. Her body is long, stretched out, naked, its presence in the underwater depths recalling the collage effects of Ernst’s *La Puberté proche*. The third image shows a woman suspended upside down, hanging from a rope. The image captures her poise as a swimmer, the careful alignment of her body. Yet the suspension, her hanging in the depths and dark water, speaks too of abandonment and death, the despair of Barbara’s exit, a state of self-abnegation, risk, annihilation. It is with these strange sensual images that Goldin closes the book.

96 Maraini is the father of novelist Dacia Maraini, who was the partner of Alberto Moravia.



## *India Song*

In Duras's film *India Song* (1975) there is a scene showing Anne-Marie Stretter (Delphine Seyrig) in black satin reclining, her torso bare. Light touches her skin and its surface is iridescent. The infinite softness of the breast, like a hothouse flower, its moisture as Seyrig sweats, dissolve feeling, disarm. The breast's fragility in the night air, its sensitivity, are apparent as Duras films breath, breathing. The shot gathers meanings about those liminal states between waking and sleeping, the agony and horror of a colonial world.<sup>1</sup>

In *La Couleur des mots* [*The Colour of Words*] (Jérôme Beaujour and Jean Mascolo, 1984), a filmed interview between Marguerite Duras and Dominique Noguez, Bruno Nuytten speaks of Duras's images:

Pour moi ce tournage, c'était une découverte, enfin, cela a orienté mon regard sur la femme. J'ai revu l'autre jour le plan du sein de Delphine Seyrig. C'est la première fois dans ma vie qu'une femme m'a incité de filmer une femme de cette manière. Le regard sur un corps était très différent de celui qu'on m'avait enseigné enfin. J'avais l'intuition de quelque chose mais pas vraiment. A revoir des morceaux du film, j'ai encore des sensations érotiques très vives.

[Working on the film taught me something else. It changed my view of women. I saw the shot of Delphine's breast again recently. It was the first time a woman had told me to film another woman like that. That way of looking at a body was very different from what I'd been taught. I may have intuited something but not much. When I see some parts of the film again, I still find them very erotic.]

Nuytten registers the novelty of Duras's gesture as a female film-maker looking at another woman. The shots of Seyrig lying with her breast

<sup>1</sup> See McMahon (2012, 74–114) for further discussion of this shot within a broader argument about Duras and contact.

naked are seen at this moment in the documentary, with Nuytten's and Duras's words over them. Duras goes on: 'Il n'y a pas seulement le sein. Tu as sous le sein. Tu as la respiration' ['There's not only the breast. There's what's under it. Breathing']. Nuytten repeats after her: 'La respiration'. She continues: 'Donc la vie' ['Thus, life']. She concludes: 'Donc la mortalité' ['Thus, mortality'].<sup>2</sup> These are the same meanings that I find in the figure of the reclining nude returning in the work of women artists.

Georges Didi-Huberman, looking at figures of flowers adrift in water, in film and photography, refers to Cuban-born artist Ana Mendieta as a *ninfa* figure at the end of his volume *Ninfa fluida*:

Comment s'étonner que le bouquet de fleurs entraîné par le courant, dans *L'Atalante* de Jean Vigo, nous évoque quelque métamorphose ou cérémonie immémoriale mais, en même temps, fasse signe vers les performances et les films d'Ana Mendieta, cette *Ninfa* contemporaine qui voulut dissoudre son désir – et son corps même – dans la fluidité du monde. (2015, 166)

[How can one be surprised that the bouquet of flowers carried adrift by the current in Jean Vigo's *L'Atalante* evokes some metamorphosis or immemorial ceremony but, at the same time, seems to point to the performances and films of Ana Mendieta, this contemporary *Ninfa* who wanted to dissolve her desire – and her body itself – in the fluidity of the world?]

The flow of Didi-Huberman's images in these closing parts of *Ninfa fluida* is beautiful, compelling, as he runs from André Rogi's image *Jacqueline Lamba dans un aquarium* [*Jacqueline Lamba in an Aquarium*] (1934), to Painlevé's pale vulval picture of a male seahorse's pouch, to stills from Victor Sjöström's *The Wind* (1928), and Roberto Rossellini's *Stromboli* (1949). *Ninfa*, the dissolving, fluid image, is traced across these shots. Didi-Huberman's close with Mendieta gives pause to this flow. Mendieta, through her performances, stages a series of dissolutions, disappearances, burnings. Her early death, accidental or not, returns as savage erasure, rendering the works the more urgent. Her work contests eradication, dissolution, the loss of trace, exactly as it makes use of evanescent materials. It acquires force in Mendieta's use of her own body, and its contours, its shape, like Maya Deren's filming of herself, closing the divide between artist and model.

2 Duras also creates lavish reclining images in *Baxter, Vera Baxter* (1977). I am grateful to Katie Fleming for reminding me of these.

In a project for the feminist art journal *Heresies*, Mendieta aligned an image from her *Silueta Series* (1980) in earth and gunpowder, with a text about la Venus Negra ['Black Venus'] based on a Cuban legend.<sup>3</sup> Detailing the legend, Mendieta describes la Venus Negra:

She was a young Black woman, nude except for necklace and bracelets of seeds and seashells, and so lovely that 'the most demanding artist would have considered her an example of perfect female beauty'. She was a survivor of innumerable generations of the Siboney Indians, who had been extinguished by colonization. (Blocker, 1999, 114)

Mendieta recounts how one of the colonists took her home with him, gave her food and clothing, and expected her to work for him and to 'please' him. She continues: 'taken from her island freedom, and unable to speak, she nestled in a corner, refusing to get up, work or eat' (114).

In her 1974 film *Ocean Bird Washup*, Mendieta, a woman of colour, floats on her back, naked apart from white feathers across her body. She is moved by the waves, suspended, adrift between living and dying. Laying herself out, exposing herself in the ocean, she intensifies the emotional grip and strangeness of the image, its echoes of the amniotic, of death by drowning, those images that have returned through my readings. Affective lability, naked exposure, all the turns and opacities in images of lying, suspension, reclining, deepen her work. She summons the pleasure and pathos in being given over, in lying out, and displays the living energy and beauty of her body even as she stages its disappearance.

For Mendieta, as for the artists explored here, the reclining nude is a figure for feeling and for protest. The works examined through this book use an image of horizontality, of floating, in a feminist, political gesture. In returns to this figure, artists open up imagining of autonomy, of involvement, of refusal. They open to sensuality, tenderness, and also to masochism, grief, and neurodiversity, to offer incandescent, newly vivid, visual responses to the stillness and the radiance of female-identified bodies.

3 Jane Blocker describes *Silueta* as follows: 'In this series, she first used her own body and later a plywood cutout as its surrogate to mark her silhouette on dirt, grass, sand, mud, snow, or ice' (1999, 17).



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Plate 1. Still from *L'Opéra-Mouffe*.



Plate 2. Still from *L'Opéra-Mouffe*.



Plate 3. Still from *L'Opéra-Mouffe*.



Plate 4. Still from *Agnès de ci de là Varda*.



Plate 5. Still from *Documenteur*.



Plate 6. Still from *Jane B. par Agnès V.*



Plate 7. Still from *Sex Is Comedy*.



Plate 8. Still from *Sex Is Comedy*.



Plate 9. Still from *Romance*.



Plate 10. Still from *Romance*.



Plate 11. Still from *Anatomie de l'enfer*.



Plate 12. Still from *Anatomie de l'enfer*.



Plate 13. Still from *Romance*.



Plate 14. Still from *Anatomie de l'enfer*.



Plate 15. Still from *Anatomie de l'enfer*.



Plate 16. Still from *Anatomie de l'enfer*.