The port-city, the migrant, and the (almost) inevitable dog: *Morts vivants* and authorial intervention in *cinéma monde*

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Abstract

Any plausible categorization of *cinéma monde* would have to include a body of Francophone films in which locus, language and the status of the protagonists are uncertain and/or hybridized. Thus conceived, it is possible to stage, as one aspect of *cinéma-monde*, an intertextual, place-specific conversation between Agnès Varda's recent peregrination to the port city of Le Havre (*Villages, Visages*, 2017), Aki Kaurismäki's cinematic fairy tale of child migration and community (*Le Havre*, 2011) and, by association, Marcel Carné's much earlier adventure of failed migration (*Le Quai des brumes*, 1938). The co-location and co-locution of these stylistically diverse films are achieved at the same time as they register the regionalization of France and French cinema, decentre the concept and role of the French protagonist, and destabilize the indexicality of place that the links between them seem, at first sight, to maintain. Whilst not the only port city in the work of Varda and Kaurismäki (Nantes and Helsinki feature in *Jacquot de Nantes* (1991) and *The Man Without a Past* (2002)) the status of Le Havre as a port city is a point of confluence. It allows the constellation of films considered here to look both inward and outward, either from the dim liminality of containers, or atop their magnificent piles, or from the Captain's cabin, bestowing authority on the precarious gaze of migrants and, simultaneously, invoking not only the magical power of the *auteur*, and of French cinema itself, but also what we might term the Levinasian intuition of Kaurismäki's dog.

Aki Kaurismäki's *Le Havre* (2011) tells the story of an aging former bohemian from Paris, Marcel Marx (André Wilms), who has given up his literary ambitions and moved to the port city on France's northern coast.[1] There, he scrapes a living shining shoes; his life revolves around his wife, Arletty (Kati Outinen), and the bar he haunts from day to day.[2] This quiet and somewhat joyless routine is disrupted by two events: Arletty falls seriously ill with cancer, and Marcel meets an immigrant teenager without documents, Idrissa (Blondin Miguel), who has ended up in Le Havre while being smuggled from Gabon to London in a shipping container in an attempt to join his mother. While coping with his anxiety about his wife, Marcel makes the decision to hide the boy from the police and help him with his plans to reach England.

An obvious point of reference for Kaurismäki's film was *Welcome* (2009), Philippe Lioret's study of a desperate young Iraqi Kurd, trapped near Calais, who is helped by a local swimming instructor in making plans to reach England by any means. Both films were released at a moment where the refugee experience in Europe was newsworthy, and they perhaps found soft ground for audience attention. The films establish a father-son bond between migrant child and male French citizen-host – a motif of French morality earlier played out in the relationship between saviour-priest and imperilled Jewish boys in Louis Malle's *Au Revoir les Enfants* in 1987. In both *Le Havre* and *Welcome*, too, the displaced young protagonist is caught in a temporal trap, with the result that both the duration of the story and the lived experience of extraterritoriality require the travelling child to wait or hide at the behest of others, literally or figuratively holding his breath to evade capture. In my earlier account, picking up threads from Thomas Elsaesser's intervention on post-1990s European cinema and Laura Rascaroli's superb reading of *Le Havre*, I also observed how

Kaurismäki's film achieves a poise and depth through its sensitive excavation of what Elsaesser has characterized as 'double occupancies'; that is, the multiply defined, multiply experienced and hyphenated identities and conflicting allegiances that constitute the affective reality of today's nomadic migrants, refugees and asylum seekers (Elsaesser, 2005: 109; Donald, 2018: 71-94). Rascaroli's reading goes further and includes an understanding of the Kafkaesque in the film (see also Koutsourakis 2020), with its spatio-temporal dislocations, anachronistic – but coherent - layering of place and period, and superimposition of objects and mixed cultural mores producing a 'becoming-minor' 'marginality'(Rascaroli, 2013: 326). She argues that the film's indeterminacy encompasses Europe and its histories of displacement. This is not a film about contemporary migrants so much as a film in which that theme is part of a wider statement about sustainable communities and oppositional cultures, through which to imagine a cinema that sees and respects marginalized positions.(331) Kaurismaki's 2002 film, *The Man Without a Past* is a case in point. The (non)-eponymous man is robbed of his memory by a random attack that leaves him for dead. He survives and is rescued by a poor working family living in a shipping container. He is not a migrant as far as we ascertain across the film, but he has no papers and therefore no place in the social order. He is subject to random acts of both aggression and kindness. When he 'rents' a container of his own from a local (corrupt) policeman, who tells him the last occupant died of the cold, his situatin echoes dangerous journeys of the migrants travelling in a containers across Europe, figured in the opening scene of *Le Havre*. Rascaroli's work has also been developed by Maud Ceuterick (2014) in a comparative essay on *Le Havre*'s emotional and political heart, which she explicates in terms of Mica Nava's paradigm of 'visceral cosmopolitanism' (2007). Although Ceuterick's poignant approach connects us very effectively to the honest sentimentality that suffuses Kaurismäki's leading characters, even as they face life-threatening events and trauma with deadpan introspection and Kafkaesque immedicacy and

outrage, we should remember that Nava's book characterizes visceral cosmopolitanism as an escape to London from the provinces, with the implicit intimation that cosmopolitanism has to happen there, in the metropolitan centre, and can be achieved nowhere else (Donald, 2009: 141-142). In that sense the decentred and yet resolutely provincial palette of *Le Havre* is in opposition to even visceral cosmopolitanism that would require a different, and perhaps dystopian, urban cinema.

In this article, my focus is on the cinematic resonances of the great port-cities of France within the cinéma-monde discourse of regionality and mobility. Le Havre is the main exemplar in three Francophone films, a city that is both an effective location for stories of the intersection between precarity, mobility and working class life, which nonetheless functions as an extra-territorial cinematic environs recalling other ports in the directors' trajectories. I want to show how Le Havre does more than provide an evocative backdrop to the action not only of Kaurismäki's *Le Havre,* but also of Agnès Varda's *Villages, Visages* (2017) and Marcel Carné's poetic realist classic, *Le Quai des brumes* (1938). My argument is that the maritime city operates as a significant actor in their narratives, highlighting its role as a point of interchange and articulation between France and the world beyond. It links the French rural and regional interior into a compound narrative of cinematic continuity, with an especial focus on working class solidarity. In Varda, this is the port's ineluctable connection to the hinterlands of French working class life and production, and for Kaurismäki, it is the hopeful solidarity of the poor, who are both emotionally freed and contained by the proximity of the sea. In revisiting *Le Havre*, I explore how the film echoes and reworks themes from the director's earlier oeuvre – most obviously perhaps the character of Marcel Marx, a nominal splicing of Karl Marx with Marcel Carné, who first appeared, already played by André Wilms, in Kaurismäki's *La Vie de Bohème* in 1993. But also the reappearance of the dog, Laika, named after the famous Soviet space dog and whose animal-presence seems to trot

from one film to another, as though the collapse of time and place may be most easily encountered by becoming-animal and thus becoming-minor, with human actors following their dogs into space (also explored in the heart-breaking *Space Dogs*, [2019]).

Le Havre

Le Havre is France's second largest port-city, after Marseille, and has been the nation's leading container port since the revolution in shipping technologies in the 1960s and 1970s (Martin, 2016). As a point of entry and exit for goods, services and people, Le Havre, like all ports, can claim to be the centre of many centres, one terminus in the multi-nodal network of global trade. The scale of its activities and its economic power, like those of any port, have risen and fallen in response to global shifts in labour, politics and exchange rates. Slavery, European colonialism, the rise of China, and the decline of manufacturing industries in the West are among the historical circumstances that have sustained, inflated or undermined its fluctuating prosperity. Beyond its working port, which might appear today to be no more than a heap of metal containers, the hinterland of Le Havre turns out to be a fragile environment in which some people may experience themselves as being either provincial, stuck, or in a safe harbour. At the same time, Le Havre is also a place of transition. From here, people purposefully seek out new lives for themselves elsewhere, as they hope to re-centre, or de-centre, their futures.

Le Havre is a city located on the Channel at the mouth of the Seine, and opening onto the Atlantic Ocean. The uniqueness of Le Havre as a place is tempered by its typicality as a port and, as Rascaroli points out (334), in Kaurismäki's treatment there are constant references to its interconnections with other ports and routes and indeed deeper history. At least in its representations on film, the port of Le Havre has thus achieved a complex symbolic and even mythical significance. As urban location, it functions as a site of regional

adventure within the geo-political boundaries of the nation-state. At the same time, as a liminal and imagined space, it evokes and accommodates spatial and temporal layers of romance, criminality, impoverishment, and labour that characterize its activities and its environs. This cinematic evocation of place, in its recent manifestations, may be in large measure a legacy of the aesthetics and sensibilities of the New Wave, which, Matthew Lazen has argued, not only 'foregrounded place' but 'even displayed a certain proto-regionalism.' Most notably, Jacques Demy was born in the port city of Nantes, and he used it as the location of his first film, *Lola* (1961). In his final months, his wife Agnès Varda made a film about his early life, which she titled *Jacquot de Nantes/Jacquot* (1991). The shoot finished on October 17th 1990 and Demy died of AIDS on October 27th. Varda described it not as a film about his impending death however but simply as a film made 'avec Jacques malade'. The main location for *Jacquot* is the family home next to the Demy garage (his father was a mechanic), on the Quai des Tanneurs. There are occasional shots of the port and the water, generally related to moments of leisure – a family Sunday outing on bicycles before the war – or to the growing introspection of the frustrated cinéaste (Demy on a boardwalk truculently considering his future as a film-maker rather than a toolmaker). The second main location is the clogmaker's (*le sabatier*) home in the countryside, where Demy and his siblings were relocated during the invasion of France in 1941. But with all films about childhood, there is of course the sense of the living and the dead merging as light on screen, *les morts vivants*.

However much their styles may have differed, Demy shared with other new wave film-makers, such as Louis Malle and Claude Chabrol, 'a dialectical embrace of location and mobility and an attachment to childhood haunts and cinematic precursors imbued with a desire to capture the pulse and energy of their time and place with its restless modernism and open identities' (Lazen 2004: 188). And yet, despite this generalized power of place as an evocation of childhood or an imagined retreat for artists, the connections between the French

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port and the French hinterland render 'open identities' as always French and working class in origin and return, whilst Demy's youthful urge to becoine modern and work in film noinetheless ecjhgoes the patience of his father's skills as a mechanic and the steady craft of the clogmaker.

Nantes, four hundred kilometres distant on the Atlantic coast, has been through many of the same changes as Le Havre over the years. In order to convey the sense of the vacant wasteland that has replaced a once bustling harbour there, Bill Marshall invokes Gilles Deleuze's characterization of an '*espace quelconque*', or 'any-space-whatever': 'a space that has lost its *raison d'être*, its connections, its homogeneity, "a space of virtual conjunction, grasped as pure locus of the possible"' (Marshall 2009: 124; Deleuze 2005: 109). Marshall's observation on Nantes ties in of course with Rascaroli's use of Deleuze's notion of becoming-minor in *Le Havre*. The resonances make sense of the indeterminacy of both whilst reiterating how deeply the idea of a port takes hold in films that explore the margins of existence. Nantes has also to recuperate its reputation by becoming-minor and acknowledging the human marginality of its main trade in the 18th century, enslaved peoples. The Gabonese who arrive as unwelcome migrants in a shipping container in *Le Havre* (Rascaroli, 330) are in a slipstream to previous forced arrivals and departures in the European port-cities of the slave-trade, including Le Havre. An analysis of the top French slaving families in the eighteenth century reveal that of twenty two, eight were from Nantes and six from Le Havre, and four from La Rochelle (the others in St Malo, Honfleur and Bordeaux) (Stein, 1979: 153).

Every port has its own equivalent to the Casbah of Algiers, an enclave in which to get lost or disappear, or from which to emerge in triumph. Every harbour, too, has its ships and boats moored by its docks, carrying the scars of journeys past and the promise of freedom to

come. A port-city thus appears to offer a mixture of nostalgic familiarity, anonymity, and a fantasy of escape. In the case of Le Havre today, however, as Kaurismäki and Varda both demonstrate, this aura is being subverted by a new geography of migration. Whereas, in the days of the quintessential Casbah film, Julien Duvivier's *Pépé le Moko* (1937) or *Le Quai des brumes*, the hinterland of a port-city was tucked away from the ships and huddled in back streets or wasteland, the port itself has now become a Casbah of containers, a metal high rise, with few conveniences and an overwhelming sense of modern precarity.

Containment

Shipping containers were an American invention of the streamlining mid-nineteen-fifties. Although at first they may have seemed to offer little more than an efficient way of packing goods for international transportation, over the following decades they radically transformed both the life and landscape of port-cities around the world. They did so by making a whole new automated technology for loading and unloading cargo vessels possible. Marxist economists call this altering the organic composition of capital: in this case, replacing the 'living' labour of dockers and stevedores with the 'dead' labour of computer-controlled cranes, gantries, pulleys and container trucks. The history of the container has been elegantly written in Martin, Bogost and Shaberg's *Shipping Container* (2016), with due attention to its recent incarnation as a fatal people carrier in the migration trade (80-82).

The change has inevitably and irrevocably altered the working cultures and demography of ports, and mountain ranges of containers are now an established feature of their skylines around the globe. At the same time, shipping containers appear to have taken on an economic and cultural afterlife of their own. Recycled and repurposed, they are now offered for sale not only as storage units or sheds, but as pop-up shops or bars, instant offices,

and even makeshift homes. They provide a dramatic image of the transience of location, even of home, in our precarious times.

The idea of *containment*, or of *being contained*, has a number of connotations. A glass of water, for example, only exists as such because of the way that the receptacle not only contains the liquid but provides an 'outside' for something that otherwise would be amorphous. The glass defines a new relationship of the water to its surroundings, in the same way that a random collection of goods becomes 'a consignment' when packed into a shipping container. Containment can be disciplinary (prisoners contained in a prison) or nurturing (a foetus contained in the womb, or the enclosing safety of 'home'). By establishing an exterior conceptual boundary as well as a physical enclosure, containment can both put limits to what is on the inside: the idea of containing a fire or an epidemic, for example. This ambivalence exists in *Man Without a Past* where his over-priced container is made habitable by his attention to home-making, and by the company of a dog. That the poor make their own containment habitable from necessity is perhaps a non-celebratory way of describing the optimistic solidarity in Kaurismäki's oeuvre.

As the philosopher Jeff Malpas has shown, *containment* is just one of several overlapping and ambiguous terms that figure in Heidegger's thinking about space, place and the *situated* nature of being. Containment contributes to an understanding of place by establishing relations of inside and outside: 'relations that are directly tied to the essential connection between place and boundary or limit.' To be located is thus to be 'within', to be somehow enclosed or contained, 'but in a way that that at the same time opens up, that makes possible.' For Malpas, the principle that containment is integral to any thinking of place entails a certain line of thinking: it points towards 'ideas of opening and closing, of concealing and revealing, of focus and horizon, of finitude and "transcendence," of limit and possibility, of mutual relationality and coconstruction' (Malpas 2012: 2).

In a thought-provoking article on the representation of port cities in Israeli cinema, the architect Aya Peri-Bader argues that the introverted focus of Israeli life – the anxiety of being surrounded or 'contained' by hostile neighbours – is given expression not just thematically but formally, in the framing of shots. Whereas a port is supposed to be a place of movement, transportation and energy, opening onto distant horizons, she finds that its representations in Israeli cinema 'portray it as a place of impotence, impediment, and even death' (2016:18). Often in the films she studies, distorting obstructions are introduced into the cinematic frame: 'windows, iron grates, meshes, railings and barriers … stand between the viewer and the open horizon, which is the port and the sea beyond it.' As a result, the port comes to be seen from the banal reality of everyday life in the residential city as 'a barrier preventing access to the sea,' a constraining and confining boundary rather than a transitional margin of movement, change and possibility: 'the port in Israeli cinema is represented repeatedly as a place blocking all action, and as useless due to its failure to propel the protagonists forward out of their confining place' (2016:20, 25). Although Peri-Bader is offering a polemical comment on a geographically and historically specific refusal to live with porosity and a fear of the unknown that must travel in and amongst the multi-ethnic populations of Haifa, Ashdod, Jaffa and Acre, her particular analysis touches on the condition of every port, and the condition of the local protagonist in port-films. Characters arrive but they seldom leave, while the divisions between populations in the contemporary port city, in Europe as in Israel, are no longer porous. The port city makes its own ghosts, les morts vivants.

For all the director's deadpan fatalism and despite reference to the fascist past of French wartime collaborators and night time removals, Kaurismäki's *Le Havre* offers a more optimistic take. The film can be read as a fairy tale of redemption – through an escape to England in Idrissa's case, and, in Marcel's case, through the new capacity for relationality

created by his decision to help and protect the boy. The idea of the port as a place of containment, as both closed and open, is conveyed, positively, through the film's presentation of Idrissa being enfolded into Marcel and Arletty's safe house in the nostalgic back streets of Le Havre and, critically, in the stark image of a container filled with undocumented migrants. Marcel's retreat from Paris to Le Havre seems to exemplify Lazen's perspective on regionalisation in France as another instance of containment, or of being situated in a place. His move might be seen as exemplifying the possibility of a certain liberation – freedom from the fixed idea of the metropolitan centre – but it also imposes its own limitations, as he finds himself in yet another space in which opportunity shrivels in the face of parochialism and (post)imperial law. When Idrissa finally sails away, his exodus is, quite simply, a miracle, a redrawing of boundaries and limits through film magic that no-one in the audience really believes, made possible through selfless acts of generosity and imagination that seem far removed from the actual workings of immigration law and practice. We accept Idrissa's escape over the sea as the only alternative to the home-made cruelty of the more likely outcome in such a case: the child being lost in the Calais 'Jungle' (Garland, 2021, 112-116) or deported back to Gabon at the risk of his life[3].

The fantasy ending to a fairytale that re-imagines and re-invents Europe in the backstreets of Le Havre is achieved through a particular strategy of *cinéma-monde*: that is, flattening out a Francosphere into a cinematic world in which protagonists and ideas slip from one screen to another. This interpretation draws on a perspective and methodology developed by the geographer Nicola Ansell. Ansell adopts a child's eye view, rather than a globally hierarchical or historical perspective, in order to understand the nature and limits of children's spaces of perception and action. This, she argues, provides a more effective way of affording children opportunities to comment on, or intervene in, the events, processes and decisions that shape their own lives (Ansell 2009). Adapting this approach, it is possible to

see how Kaurismäki integrates characters and performers across his films, weakening the boundaries between inside and outside, here and there, or near and far. In doing so, he decentres the moral high ground of individuals from one narrative to another, while also producing a sense of global scale along a flattened ontological perspective. Not unlike port cities, one might say, these characters are globally networked, interdependent and vulnerable to shifts in the politics of the day – and also to the whims of the auteur. Thus Idrissa, the boy migrant stranded in the French port for the duration of the film, is determined to get to London. In that sense, he can be seen as part of the global phenomenon of child migration. But he does not want to get there because it is the centre of anywhere in particular. Idrissa's view is globally ambitious –it's a long way from Gabon to London – but what he wants is simultaneously and stubbornly local. At an affective level, he is motivated by the desire to find his mother's address, whether it happens to be in the next street or on the other side of the world. He wants to live with her, and will travel to wherever she is, regardless of distance or scale.

Another flattened perspective is provided through Kaurismäki's play with cinematic intertextuality, which slyly subverts the boundaries between individual films. Meaning is derived from references across films, within auteurship and in subtle and wry connections to the works and lives of icons of French cinema – naming characters after Arletty, the star of Carné's *Les Enfants du paradis* in 1945, and Jacques Becker, the director and long-serving assistant to Jean Renoir, for example, or casting Truffaut's regular lead Jean-Pierre Léaud as the neighbour who denounces Idrissa and the comedy actor-director (and Jacques Tati's collaborator) Pierre Étaix as 'Doctor Becker'. (There is complicated joke implicit in naming the good wife Arletty. As well as being a great French actress, she was also known for spending time in jail and under house arrest after the Liberation because a sexual affair with a German officer constituted 'collaboration'. Her disconcerting riposte to such accusations was

a line in fact written by the journalist, and screenwriter of *Pépé le Moko*, Henri Jeanson: '*Mon cœur est français, mais mon cul est international.*' In *Le Havre*, Arletty is played by a stalwart of Kaurismaki's films since the nineteen eighties, Katie Outinen; the pronounced Finnish accent of the actor subtly subverts the solid working-class Frenchness of the character. Outinen's presence also recalls her 2002 role as the deeply ethical woman who brings the Man (without a past) (Markku Peltola) back towards love and a future.

The ethical dog

A third flattening perspective, one that is repeated across Kaurismäki's work, is provided by the presence of dogs, who will invariably attach themselves to the best possible character, or the one that needs the dog most – in turn either a migrant, or an outsider by some other token. The Man (without a past) gains access to the container in part because he cares for the policeman's dog. In Kaurismäki's later film *Lights in the Dusk* (2006), for example, a night-watchman (Janne Hyytiäinen) inherits a dog, credited as 'Paju', and a small child looks out for both of them. The child and dog eventually save his life, or that is the hope, when he has been left by the dock having been beaten by criminal thugs. In the more recent *On the Other Side of Hope* (2017), the dog is carried by a Syrian asylum seeker in Helsinki (Shirwan Haji) in an attempt to evade health inspectors, and it comforts him in the film's last scene, as he slumps by the riverside after being stabbed. In *Le Havre*, the dog is Laika, named for the Moscow stray fatally sent into space in Sputnik 2 in 1957.[4] (Sputnik Oy is the name of Kaurismäki's production company.) Laika belongs to the older man, Marcel Marx, but she guards and accompanies Idrissa during his sojourn. In all these cases, the dog makes its choice on the basis of canine-perceived goodness, human need, and nothing more; surely the perfect destabilization of social and global hierarchies.

Laika, like the character Marcel Marx, made her first screen appearance in Kaurismäki's *La Vie de Bohème* in 1992. In this earlier film, Marcel is one of three bohemians, a writer living hand-to-mouth in Paris with two companions, Schaunard (Kari Väänänen), a composer, and Rodolfo (Matti Pellonpää) an artist from Albania, who is also an undocumented migrant. In this first incarnation, Laika belongs not to Marcel but to Rodolfo. Although a good enough friend, the young Marcel is a fairly shiftless character. His bohemianism is Parisian through and through, his writing is intellectually obtuse, and his moral attitude to women, money and the law is under-developed. In Kaurismäki's films, dogs attach themselves to the outsider, and Marcel's character does not yet warrant a dog's trust; nor, indeed, does he need a dog's support. Rodolfo, on the other hand, is an outsider by virtue of his extra-territorial status – or lack of it. He exhibits honesty, commitment and a certain sentimental nobility throughout the film, a nobility that is inherited to a degree by the older Marx in *Le Havre*. Marx and Rodolfo have a steady relationship, with, respectively, Musette (Christine Murillo) and Mimi (Evelyne Didi – who re-appears in *Le Havre* as Yvette). Both women desert their men, because of their hopelessly bohemian approach to everyday living. Yet, while Marx's partner stays away and in fact removes herself to the regions, Mimi stays in Paris and returns to Rodolpho twice: first, after he smuggles himself back into France after a deportation and, secondly, after she falls sick. With his friends' help, Rodolfo pays for Mimi to stay in a private hospital room and remains by her side until she dies. (So does Laika the dog.) In a scene that foreshadows the later film, Rodolfo opens Mimi's hospital window and they wonder at the cherry blossom outside. Mimi sends Rudolfo out to pick her some flowers, but she is dead by the time he returns. In *Le Havre*, a film which insists on a register of impossible optimism, the cherry blossom flowers out of season after Arletty, the older Marcel's wife, has recovered from inoperable cancer. The couple walk back to their little home and look up at the blossom with their hands on their garden gate.

When Rodolfo walks away from the hospital where Mimi lies dead, he tells his friends he needs to be alone. Laika the dog leaves with him, and indeed another stray dog runs into the final shot, from an undefined place off-screen. The film ends with Rudolfo's back, along with the scampering dogs, disappearing through an archway.

Kaurismäki's dogs have a pedigree that is both cinematic and philosophical. The most direct cinematic point of reference is Carné's *Le Quai des Brumes*, in which a stray dog adopts the outsider, Jean Gabin as an army deserter on the run, by the time he reaches Le Havre. The soldier had earlier prevented a truck driver, with whom he had hitched a ride, from running over the animal on the road into town. The stray therefore cleaves to him as a fellow stray, but also as a good man. In the course of the film, Gabin has encountered the criminality rife in the city, a wickedness (embodied by Michel Simon) that reaches from the wastelands around the docks into the bourgeois gentility of a trinkets shop. The film's climax is the soldier's murder, but the final sequence is given to the dog running away from the ship where he has been left and back into the dark streets of Le Havre. The shot of his disappearing tail blends nicely with the second dog following Rodolfo into the archway.

The most pertinent philosophical point of reference is Emmanuel Levinas's affecting recollection of an experience as a prisoner in Camp 1492 during World War II. In a short essay, 'The Name of a Dog, or Natural Rights', Levinas acknowledges that its seventy Jewish inmates were protected from the worst of 'Hitlerian violence' by their French military uniforms, but describes how they were bestialized by their Nazi guards and the civilians with whom they had dealings (152). They 'stripped us of our human skin,' Levinas recalls. 'We were subhumans, a gang of apes. … We were beings entrapped in their species … beings without language.' This spiral of dehumanization was broken when a stray dog made an appearance in the camp. The prisoners soon domesticated him by giving him the 'exotic name', Bobby. The dog, in turn, 'would appear at morning assembly and was waiting for us

as we returned, jumping up and down and barking in delight.' In such ways, Bobby showed that: 'For him, there was no doubt that we were men.' Bobby's act of recognition, his affirmation of the prisoners' humanity, prompts Levinas to declare that: 'This dog was the last Kantian in Nazi Germany' (153).

Levinas wonders whether the ethical Bobby in the prison camp might be a descendant of the faithful dog that recognized Ulysses beneath his disguise, when he returned to Ithaca after his Odyssey over the seas. There was a crucial difference, however. Ithaca was Ulysses' home port, whereas 'we were nowhere.' To be sequestered from the world and deprived of language is a particularly dehumanizing form of confinement or containment. Anti-Semitism, argues Levinas, is 'the archetype of all internment', a model for any form of 'social aggression' that 'shuts people away in a class, deprives them of expression and condemns them to being "signifiers without a signified"' (153).

In testimony to the Australian Senate in 2002, the Director of Defence Communication Strategies admitted that, in the previous September, the Defence Minister's media advisor had ordered military photographers not to take pictures of asylum seekers. As if in witness to, or in fear of, Levinas's insistence on the ethical power of the human face, this advisor wanted to ensure that 'no personalising or humanising images' of refugees would find their way into public circulation (*The Age*, 18 April 2002). Writing soon after the end of the war, Hannah Arendt commented on the likely fate of insignificant, or at least unsignified, humans and dogs:

> Only fame will eventually answer the repeated complaint of refugees of all social strata that 'nobody here knows who I am'; and it is true that the chances of the famous refugee are improved just as a dog with a name has a better chance to survive than a stray dog who is just dog in general. (Arendt 1985: 287)

In naming the dog Bobby, however sentimental an act it may have been, Levinas and his fellow prisoners reminded themselves of their humanity. When Bobby sees them and bounds about, he reaffirms that humanity. The ending of *Quai des brumes* plays on that same logic. Gabin's character was not just 'a deserter', he was a human being. So too in Kaurismäki's films, dogs recognise, and bear witness to, the down-at-heel humanity of at least some of his characters.

Becoming-minor

Laura Rascaroli has already shown how, in *Le Havre*, film-language decentres European cinema by operating in what she calls a minor key; or, as mentioned earlier in this paper, following Deleuze and Guattari (1986; 1987) and in line with Rosi Braidotti (2006), by 'becoming-minor'. The approach is collaborative, even as it contests the centre and acknowledges the liminal voice and flattened perspective of outsiders coming in, and looking out. 'Major and minor do not correspond to two different languages, a 'high' and a 'low' one,' writes Rascaroli, 'but to two ways of speaking the same language (2013: 325). Part of her argument is that *Le Havre* is becoming-minor through its embrace of the provincial, a view that connects to Lazen's understanding of the regionalization of French film through the New Wave, and also resonates with Alison Smith's observation that, in films like Lioret's *Welcome* and Rachid Bouchareb's *London River*, migration speaks in a third language (2013). *Le Havre* celebrates socially marginal characters, anti-centrist politics, unfashionable music and non-chic places whilst nonetheless deploying a confident and bold use of film language, accentuated colour, magic realism, and framing (Rascaroli 2013: 328). While the cherry blossom sequence recalls Kaurismäki's own earlier film and recasts it as a sign of hope, it references the bitter-sweet nostalgia of cherry blossom in the films of Yasujiro Ozu

and even – perhaps – the triumphant use of the same flower in Chinese film after Liberation. *The White-Haired Girl* (1950), for example, might be seen, at least from the perspective of *Le Havre*, as a magical realist Marxist ghost story. A girl escapes the sexual torture of capitalists by hiding in a mountain cave and living off berries that turn her hair white. She becomes a 'living ghost' (*morte vivante*). When the revolution is won, she returns to the valley of the living as an ordinary girl, with renewed black hair and a suitable husband. Her becoming has retracted back to a new and better, but nonetheless stable, formulation of the patriarchy that she had escaped. And, in *The White Haired Girl*, the cherry blossom blooms as the credits roll. Living ghost (or living dead, *les morts vivants*) is the term used by a French port worker in *Le Havre* to refer to the undocumented migrants he discovers in the shipping container. This is a speculative link on my part, but it does make the point that, while the living dead, *les morts vivants*, disturb us with their uncanny appearances – whether in a Chinese mountain cave or in a bank of shipping containers – the magic that brings them into view does not alter the system of oppression that forced them there in the first place.

In her analysis of Braidotti's feminist attachment to a minor or micro politics of becoming, Iveta Jusová notes Deleuze and Guattari's scepticism about the capacity of 'a direct macropolitical confrontation' to undermine what they call molar dichotomies – roughly, conventional ideological binaries or identities. Rather, they put their faith in the disruptive potential of a 'line of becoming', an interruption of commonsense categories 'from elsewhere' (Jusová, 2011: 57). Waiting in this 'elsewhere', argues Braidotti, are to be found all those 'minorities' who, unlike the majority (male) subjects, have never achieved 'full subjectivity, with human and citizenship rights' (Braidotti, 2003: 49); women, but also people of colour, postcolonial subjects, migrants and others. Given this structural, political and perhaps even ontological imbalance, the implication of Braidotti's argument is that 'it would be a mistake for feminists to pursue a dissolution of the female subject at this point, as much

as it would be a mistake for (…) other minorities to pursue an equivalent dissolution' (Jusová, 2011: 59).

This approach suggests that, although the language of 'becoming' may loosen the chained historical certainties of patriarchal and militarized social power, it is not sufficient to deal with the inequalities of class and labour that fix people in poverty or subservience. In fact, it is probably dangerous to yield to such subjective uncertainty when the certainty of the centre has already fixed one in a nebulous relationship to the heterosexual male norm – even its more bohemian manifestations. In my terms, the danger is that of being caught up as a kind of subjectively moral living ghost: as when undocumented migrants in France are described as 'the living dead'. The lives of these displaced people are held in suspension. As I have said elsewhere, they are 'breathless' (Donald 2018, ch.3).

This sense of the uncertain or in-between existence of undocumented migrants explains my unease about the fact that, in *Le Havre*, it is the failed French writer Marcel Marx, and not the 'illegal' Albanian, Rudolfo, who returns. One might say that Marx can become Rudolfo in the twenty-year hiatus between *La Vie de Bohème* and *Le Havre*, but Rudolfo still does not have the power and authority to re-enter our consciousness as Marx. It is only the dog Laika that slips between the frames, ghosting her path from one good migrant to another.

The geographer Helen Wilson has argued that the politics of the encounter is precious theoretical cargo, and that its purchase lies in atemporality and repetition (Wilson, 2017: 462-463). An encounter is both fleeting and layered with meanings drawn from other human experience, from place and from geo-political situatedness. Although Wilson is not talking about cinematic encounters in her article, her position not only throws an interesting light on the position of migrants passing into and out of port cities of the colonial powers, but also directs our attention nicely to the implied conversation that is *cinéma-monde*, in which these

stories play out and mutate. In *La Vie de Bohème*, the language spoken is French, but two of the protagonists speak with heavy Finnish accents, and one of these is playing an Albanian. This is a literal performance of the minor key whereby the major language (French) is spoken with a deliberate heaviness and off-centre emphasis. Marx's fluent French sounds skittish in comparison with Rudolfo's words of love and art. In *Le Havre*, as I have said, Arletty's accent is similarly measured in slow syllables, with careful attention to the details of precarious life. (When the doctor treating her cancer says, encouragingly, 'Miracles happen,' Arletty replies: '*Pas dans mon quartier*.') In *La Vie de Bohème*, Rodolfo's paintings and Schaunard's discordant music embody a bastardized mimicry of the modernist greats, but as such they contribute to the process of repetition and hybridisation, taking Paris out of itself.

In similar vein, Rascaroli suggests that the six shots used to chart Idrissa's escape from the immigration police who open up the shipping container from Gabon near the beginning of *Le Havre* both parody and subvert film language in a major key, refusing to deliver the pace or suspense that would be found in a conventional noir or gangster film, and at the same time radically deconstruct the mainstream illusion of a spatiotemporal continuum (Rascaroli, 2013: 330-331). That is a persuasive reading, but there is also an echo here of the cinema of Theo Angelopoulos, and in particular the sequence in *Landscape in the Mist* (1988) in which children escape in a snowstorm. The snow is just as out of season as the cherry blossom in *Le Havre*. Its magical manifestation stops adults in their tracks and it affords child-life a potency on screen that is also in the realm of a flattened ontological perspective. The authorial intervention in these films is as a cinematic hand of God that disrupts verisimilitude if that is necessary to save the child. The director remotely accesses, hacks, Inspector Monet's hand restraining the immigration officer who aims his gun at Idrissa in the container sequence. It happens again in the hand of Chang, another illegally documented migrant, which explodes into the frame to loosen the grip of the collaborator

neighbour (Léaud) when he tries to apprehend Idrissa, whom he sees taking Marcel's place as a shoeshine man in Le Havre's railway station. Again, magically, the boy escapes.

In an adjacent sequence to Idrissa's first escape, Rascaroli notes the dissonance of using 'striking, static close-ups' of the Gabonese migrants found in the shipping container. She points out that this kind of attention is usually paid to the entrance of a star in a classic film (Rascaroli 2013: 330). This brings to mind the strategy of Jia Zhangke in *24 City* (2008), where he too affords so-called ordinary people, mainly factory workers, a long moment of respectful portraiture. The mixture of accents in Jia's film and his blurring of the boundary between fact and fiction creates what I have termed 'an unstable poetics of past and present'(Donald 2014: 269), but which Alison Smith might lead us to see as a third language of migration and communication across borders (Smith, 2014). Both approaches reinforce a 'minoritarian' understanding of *Le Havre* as a film gesturing outwards, to a *cinéma-monde* in which locus, language and the status of the protagonists are uncertain and hybridized.

Although he claims that he chose Le Havre as a location because of its music and light, Kaurismäki's use of the port city can simultaneously be read as his homage to Carné. But it's also a statement of the obvious. Idrissa arrives in a container that has been wrongly offloaded in the port when it was supposed to have continued to Tilbury Docks and London. Idrissa is a well-educated and well-dressed boy courageously looking for his family. His assured presence resonates with the thousands of young West Africans trafficked in earlier centuries, suggesting their human value where none was accorded at the time of their enslavement (Diptee, 2006). Idrissa is the one who belongs least in the city, particularly as a middle class boy, and who magically escapes. In *Le Quai des brumes* Le Havre is a place of transit, but the magic fails. Jean Gabin's soldier (who has to pretend to be a tortured modern artist, Michel, as a borrowed identity – suggesting yet another nod from Kaurismäki) wants to board a ship to anywhere at all: he has finally secured a passage to Venezuela when he is shot. For Marcel

Marx, Le Havre has become his home since his young bohemian days. The port is a place where he may have a sense of belonging without compromising his resistance to conformity whilst being cared for by a woman who can tolerate his dependency with love (rather as Mimi tolerated Rodolfo and vice versa). Le Havre is the place where protagonists enunciate each other across and between films, never quite leaving the confines of their double occupancy within French cinema itself.

Like Michel Poiccard in *À bout de souffle/Breathless* (Godard, 1960) imitating Humphrey Bogart or Cléo in Varda's *Cléo de 5 à 7/Cleo from 5 to 7* (1961), the self in the new French society of the spectacle is image, modelled in the image of others, as image for others (Lazen, 193).

Vagabonde

Villages Visages (2017) is Agnès Varda's last cinematic peregrination around France, undertaken with the younger photographer and graffiti artist JR. Apparently an odd couple, they journey through the French countryside together for much of the film, taking photographs of people they encounter and then using these portaits to create monumental accolades to the ordinary men and women of the French regions. The two image-makers self-consciously play out a fairytale of the handing over of the baton of French cultural production. JR wears dark spectacles, that recall for Varda her contemporary and erstwhile friend, Jean Paul Godard, although the likeness does not reach deeper. Whilst Godard is elusive and cruel (deliberately avoiding Varda's visit), JR is teasing, caring, and present to her as an older muse. Perhaps the similarity between JR and Varda's generation is actually with Varda herself. Shots of what Varda recognised as 'terrible tenderness' in *Jacquot* (her close-ups of his neck, ear, skin and his eyes) are recalled when JR takes pictures of Varda's

ageing eyes and toes and turns them into monumental posters on an intercity freight train. The self becomes an 'image for others', as Varda plays *vagabonde* in a farewell tour of the regions first encountered in the 1960s and 1970s, through the work of Demy, Godard and herself. Varda and JR drive to sites of de-industrialization and places where, conversely but as part of the same process of globalization, mechanization has removed sociality.

The Varda scholar, Delphine Bénézet,, has given us detail of the pair's rural and industrial stopping points, and has located these decisions in Varda's own life and other moments of auto-biography (Bénézet, 2018). They end up at Le Havre, at the container port within the port which is inextricably tied to the histories of French agricultural and industrial production visited across their journey, but also an indeterminate 'any-space-whatever', filled only with shipping containers and the trucks and equipment to onload, offload and reload them: the modern structures of indeterminacy, precarious transition, and labour.

In *Villages Visages*, the hyper-masculine port-workers are indexical to the port. So, Varda invites three women, all married to port-workers, to talk about themselves, their relationship to the container port and to the union that scaffolds their husbands' employment. One of the women is a truck driver with a heavy goods license, and so she is physically engaged with moving the containers. Another works for the transport authority, and the third is a beautician. The women are photographed, the images are enlarged in JR's magic travelling printer, and then they are stuck onto a tall bank of containers. The women are invited to sit in three of the containers, very high up, bravely looking out from the print-outs of their own monumental selves. Each container comes from somewhere and will leave for somewhere else. Watching *Villages Visages*, and looking at all those containers, and the women perched improbably inside them, we might for a moment wonder (prosaically) whether any of them is the container from which Idrissa escapes, and in which his compatriots sit so patiently looking back at the European welcome: armed French police,

immigration officers, press and port-workers. There is the inspector, there are the armed police; here are the press, here are the dock workers. Will any of these containers end up on a Helsinki shoreline, serving as a treacherous home for a lost metal worker (as the man without a past turns out to be)? As Kaurismäki, Jia Zhangke and Varda already know, the film is in quotation marks: '*les paysans qui paysannent*'. One of the dockers in *Le Havre* asks another what is happening. He is told that *les morts vivants* are inside a container. The living dead are waiting to be found. In a world where *tout va bien*, they will in any case remain dead to the authorities and the people who would rather they never came at all.

The homage to the women in *Villages Visages* re-genders the face of the port, of course, and that is the main point of Varda's intervention. As Delphine Bénézet notes, Varda has never been shy of insisting on asking for the women (2014: 11), nor above teasing the men when they are the only show in town: 'Salut les révolutionnaires au mal de mer!' (*Salut les Cubains*, 1964). The film also creates an internal cinematic encounter for Varda between her earlier work on murals/wall paintings in *Mur Murs* (1981), whilst recalling that she – like JR but so many decades earlier – transitioned from photography to the cinema in *Salut les Cubains!* Describing Varda's work as 'cinema as a co-operative practice based on encounters', Bénézet makes a strong case for such encounters constituting an ethics as much as a practice. Varda values 'testimony and exchange' as highly as politics and activism (Bénézet, 2014: 100, 101). That insight makes absolute sense of *Villages Visages*, where people encountered along the route are respected, listened to, and celebrated for doing precisely what they do and where they do it. Being situated in place and being open to an encounter define the terms of the mutual relationship between Varda and her subjects. She is the *cinéaste passeur*, sharing the 'spontaneity of her encounters' with viewers (Bénézet, 2014: 103). Before, the murals she had explored in *Mur Murs* had been the thread that guided her through Los Angeles. Now, in *Villages Visages*, the people she encounters in their

various French destinations are the ones whose spirit leads her and her collaborator towards the appropriate image. The murals follow the encounter. The murals in *Mur Murs* are preserved in the film, and the photographs, made into murals by JR's massive mobile printer, are also preserved in *Villages Visages*.

Both the women of Le Havre and their husbands expressed themselves as moved and liberated by Varda and JR's attention and by this massive expression of their interdependence and their place in the work of the port. The port is of course any-space-whatever only by dint of their work. The strategic port blockades of 2015 and 2017 by French truckers arose from this commonplace of global trade and national survival. Varda's newest, living, mural reiterates that the people of the port city hold it all in place: every arrival, every entry and every exit. They keep open the possibility for anywhere else in France to be part of the globalization, for good and ill, that she has been observing on her strangely affecting journey. These are fully employed and robustly modern individuals, different from the romantic and timeless characters in Kaurismäki's fairytale. Yet, here too, as in Jia Zhangke's gentle portraits of factory workers, and as in the quietly majestic shots of the migrants from Gabon discovered in the container, the image is rehearsing a new human heroism, the right and capacity to be seen as ordinary and precariously situated, as we are, in the world. Varda sets up an encounter between the city and its female self, between the audience and the port city that sustains its lifestyle, and between France and its fragmented cinematic selves.

The flattened cinematic relationality of Varda's work suggests that she has internalized becoming-minor into her practice over the decades of her practice. Since the release of *Villages:Visages*, Varda has died. She kept warning us that this would happen. She places an images of her friend on the lookout structure on the beach of her youth. It is washed away by morning. She visits Godard, expectantly, and he decides not to be at home despite knowing that she is expected. She leaves a note as though this might be the last

communication between them. As hard and generously as she looks at the living subjects, it is the people in a minor key, of the film's villages, whose poignancy lies in these other, personal points of transience and loss.

Conclusion

This paper has sought to explore connections between the hinterland and the port city in French cinema, in film-making as a European narrative of working class solidarity and migrant homelessness, and in a hybridized and non-specific rural -regional flow of belonging. I have thought aloud that the *morts vivants* of modern migration passages are companions to the liminal souls of the port city, and the disappearing histories of labour and life lived in factories, workshops and in the fields of France (but also in China, Finland, and wherever the containers are brought to port). Theoretically I have drawn on Levinasian ethics, on Rascaroli's concept of becoming-minor, and on the concept of *cinéma monde*. I have suggested that the figure of the dog recurs as an atemporal and trans-local ethical presence, darting in and across the screen to maintain both hope and a belief in cinema itself. Whilst making *Jacquot*, the crew discovered some old stock from a film Demy had made as a teenager, *Attaque Nocturne* (1948). The animated short film, so painstakingly drawn and made by the young Demy, is his teenage masterwork. In the sequence where the masked robber / attacker escapes the scene of the crime, a dog is presented by the harbour wall. This is the only 'shot' of the harbour and the only shot of the dog. It is, we surmise, a good dog, a port dog, and it sees off the attacker, whence he falls into a sewer. Like Carné's visiteurs du soir and the cinema's petty criminals looking for escape to a world away over water, Demy's attacker does not escape the port. Varda bids us goodbye, and in the last shot in *La Vie de Bohème* Rodolfo and the two dogs walk, and trot, back into the city. Yes, in *Le Havre*, the child Idrissa – the traveller, the bearer of the impossible *once upon a time* and hope for

redemption – does escape across the Channel, but the French characters, and Marcel's dog stay forever in streets running parallel to the sea.

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Biography

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[1] When I first wrote about Aki Kaurismäki's 2011 film *Le Havre*, in my monograph *There's No Place Like Home: The Migrant Child in World Cinema* (2018), my primary aim was to compare it with other films that feature child migrants as protagonists in order to address the question of forced migration, refuge and asylum in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. I neglected the dimensions of class and I did not pay sufficient attention to the dog, as the child as well as the man in many of these films is linked directly to the dog's loyalty and courage.

[2] Arletty is also no doubt a reference to (Marcel) Carné (although Arletty is not in *Le Quai des brumes*, she starred in Carné classics *L'Hôtel du Nord* 1938, and *Les Enfants du Paradis* 1945, and, perhaps most resonant with the collaborator in the darkness theme in *Le Havre*, in *Les Visiteurs du Soir*, 1942). She is also referenced in Jacquot when the family go to see *Les Enfants du Paradis* (1945), and Jacques' mother comments approvingly that Arletty is a real French working woman, the daughter of a laundry woman.

[3] The Jungle is a term that is recognised (hence used here) as the name for the camps and unplanned informal urbanisations on Calais' outskirts from 1999-2016, but noticeably racist and postcolonial in intention and application (hence the inverted commas).