



Pictures only show the surface, he thought. Something quite different was going on underneath.
Henning Mankell, *The Return of the Dancing Master*

Yes, but what? Today, I'm focusing, once again sharpening my eye, framing this "memoir" about my memory and my "memories," writing in black on white the why and the how of this modest undertaking.

The how: to put in order, to classify forty years of photographs shot by a slightly near-sighted amateur, the child of a family in which photography served history; organizing and classifying the positive and negative images, the slides, some 6x9s, rediscovered in an old suitcase or album, photographs taken over the course of a life in motion, with long sojourns here and there, or sometimes even living in one place. Afterwards, making something out of these photographed depictions, adding punctuation, points of view, in close-up or brief series.

The why is simple: a strong desire, enriched by the affectionate encouragement of many people, to reconstruct a path of a life through the photographs brought together here, to highlight not only their obvious connections but also the off-center images, at times incongruous, infrequently cropped. And all that on both shores of Lac Léman, on the Mediterranean, on one coast of the Atlantic or the other, on the Left and Right Banks of the Seine. To move forward, often without progressing, early and late in my short life.

To remember, at last, the psychoanalysis that led me to love words. The word cliché [snapshot] in particular. In technical terms, this refers to the "negative," a commonplace expression today, a negative image transformed into a positive one, in the darkness of a rudimentary but essential private laboratory. To remember and remind myself that through the grace of *revelado*—in Spanish—every act of developing images is a revelation—in Greek, *apokalypsis*. I've been through that, too.

In this notebook, conceived as a book, I offer my regards, legible, visible to those who take the trouble to search for me and find me there.

Véronique Godard

The title I originally chose for my book was *Best Regards*; Agnès Varda and Luce Vïgo wrote their essays with this phrase in mind. Just as the book was about to go to press, however, I learned that the title had already been registered with the Institut national de la propriété industrielle. Filigranes Éditions and I therefore had to find a new title when it was too late for Agnès and Luce to rewrite their essays.

Thanks to Howard M. Cohn for the English translation

Hé milli ko sevem ouna ibé kéléléké,
kassoro ibasso

Think carefully about what you are fighting for,
because you might well get it.





It is always a pleasure to find, at the beginning of a series of photographs, an image of daybreak. Did I say always? No, it's rare. And this is an uncommon book that a woman with the first name of a flower and the family name of a Swiss filmmaker offers to us.

One passes from country to country, and from year to year. There's an air of disarray to these mementos that come to the mind of Véronique G. on their own—or when she summons them—but they have been transmuted into photographs, shot and printed on paper, then looked at, examined, looked at again, and recreated.

The purpose of this project is to put the photographs in order and then lay them out, for her pleasure and ours, in such a way that the facts recede into the background. The photographs reach us in pairs, and it is precisely this side-by-side arrangement on each pair of facing pages, that produces the power of this beautiful book of images.

Sometimes there is a simple similarity between the photos: a bit of light that filters in between two walls, or two houses. If it's by chance that one woman has been photographed close to the Temple of Hephaestus in Athens (is that a wrapped statue?), it's not by accident that in this album she finds herself next to a young woman in the City of London (is that a dressmaker's dummy resting on the sidewalk?). No, it is Véronique who orders her mementos, their colors, or the contrasts of their blacks and whites.

Or maybe Véronique is amusing herself. In New York, the t-shirts of a pair of twin moving men are white. In Mexico, one guy is wearing a white t-shirt, the other a pair of white pants. And they are carrying a mirror in which the street is reflected. . . . I think I catch a glimpse of white billboards, like bleached election posters hanging out to dry. . . . (When images are slightly indistinct, everyone can imagine and identify them as representing something different. The image no longer belongs to its creator.)

One has to take the time to look carefully at the connections, the rhymes, and correspondences between these pairs of images that have been selected after a meticulous sorting out. It also pleases the amateur photographer (amateur, what does that mean?) to show us the red fences of Central Park eight times. Autumn is painted on the palings, but not on the leaves on the ground.

From time to time there is a large photograph that takes over the open album and, at last, a single small image: the sea.

A look at the sea. Or rather, the Atlantic Ocean, a return.

The sky is still bright, the day isn't over, the voyage hasn't ended. Voyage as journey, as Best regards.

Agnès V.

When one writes to someone to whom one isn't especially close, it is customary to close the letter with this all-purpose English expression: Best regards. But before offering us these photos, none of them a mere tourist's snapshot, Véronique Godard seems to want to tell us something through this incongruous phrase, *best regards*. It's quite something to convey images that reveal the photographer as well as a world that she has clearly known, and where she has lived, whether in Mexico, Greece, Chile, France, or Switzerland, wherever the circumstances of her life or her personal choices have led her.

What strikes one, when one opens the book and races through it in the rush to discover everything at once—an unavoidable mistake—is one of the singular things about these images: they're alive, as if always in motion, despite the fact that the distinguishing feature of photography is to arrest motion, to freeze it in a frame. And when one looks back, one by one, through these photos, the sense of movement nearly always persists. Opening with a daybreak in Crete, where the distinctive morning light is about to illuminate the cluster of trees at the center of the photo, the book closes with an expanse of rolling waves, the Atlantic that leads Véronique Godard homeward, apparently not for the last time, possibly in Paris. Between these two images, a multitude of others carry on a dialogue among themselves, as well as speak to us, after having caught the photographer's eye. One thus watches the game of hide-and-seek, of subjects looking directly at the camera, or half-hiding—as in the photos of a little girl and of a man frozen in his uneasiness when he finds himself facing a camera held by a woman—or at the faces with smiles freely offered.

Black and white dominates, appropriate for making us feel the harshness of some of the landscapes and, in contrast, to allow the colors to burst out—for example, those of painted houses—that astonish us as much as that grayish heap that might be a large flower bed and which, looked at more closely, becomes a vast gathering of men and women. The walls, too, speak—bare or covered with slogans as in May '68.

Knowing Véronique's strong ties to the art of cinema, it's not surprising to discover, in a suburb of Mexico City, a movie theater built of corrugated metal, a makeshift ticket booth on the outside, or a more refined theater box office in Guanajuato, the cashier's head appearing, barely visible, through the wicket.

Secretive, as one knows her to be, one won't be surprised that Véronique would have waited before slipping in some family photos—the face of a child hidden by a mask, children's handplay, the profile of a man one thinks one recognizes and who stands a bit apart from the other sightseers, without attracting special attention.

Best regards, Véronique Godard. We know that these photos that are yours will become ours when we have learned to see them well, to look at them, and to abandon ourselves to our emotions and our pleasure.

Luce Vigo