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**Riffaterrean Ungrammaticality and Ricoeurian
Discourse as Performance in the Films and
Collaborations of Claire Denis**

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Abstract

This thesis seeks to interrogate the presence and purposes of intertextuality in the work of contemporary French filmmaker Claire Denis, with specific focus on Michael Riffaterre's theories of ungrammaticality, and Paul Ricoeur's work on discourse as event or performance. Neither Riffaterre nor Ricoeur's theories of intertextuality have been engaged in much depth in the study of cinema. Denis's œuvre, which is composed mainly of feature films, but also includes short films, documentaries, music videos and collaborations on exhibitions and live concerts, is vastly intertextual, engaging with other moving image media, music, visual art, philosophy, poetry and literature, and media coverage of real events. In current criticism, Denis and many of her fellow contemporary French female filmmakers are more commonly referred to through a gender-neutral prism of auteurism rather than with reference to their gender, which may be read as a means for a female director to disengage with any categorisation of her work as resolutely female-centric. The auteur label is problematic, however, as it tends to suggest a state of creative isolation and supremacy, where the author's recognizable creative voice as it appears throughout their work is more important than any other element of a film. This description sits particularly uneasily with the work of Denis, for whom collaboration and intertextual engagement with other sources is vital; this is evident in Denis's consistent highlighting of the importance of her regular collaborators' contributions to her work, and the texts with which her films engage, in interviews. Interviews with Denis, therefore, will form as important an element of my primary research material as her corpus of films and other works.

In the introduction to this thesis, I will highlight some of the main themes and concerns of Denis's work, namely foreignness, intrusion and the body, and introduce the corpus of critical work which has explored them. Such themes will certainly arise in my work, but will always be explored through the foregrounding of Riffaterre and Ricoeur's theories of intertextuality. I will then proceed to briefly examine how Denis may be read as an intertextual auteur, though

the phrase may as yet seem something of an oxymoron. The main body of the thesis thereafter will be used to search Denis's œuvre for intertexts, aligning specific films and other creative endeavours together wherever they share particular themes or may be read productively through a particular theory of intertextuality. My aim, eventually, will be to examine how this intertextual richness may lead to a re-evaluation of Denis not as an auteur in the conventional sense, but as one for whom collaboration and textual openness are crucial.

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Introduction

Claire Denis, foreignness and intrusion

“Let's dispose of the old-fashioned opening straight away – it isn't that Claire Denis has a strong case for being considered the best female film director working today; it's far more that she is one of the most intriguing and provocative film-makers of any kind.”
(David Thomson)¹

Since directing her first feature film, *Chocolat*, in 1988, French filmmaker Claire Denis has gradually come to be regarded as one of the finest living European filmmakers. Her work regularly attracts a large amount of critical and academic attention, with monographs being published on her films in the UK,² USA,³ France,⁴ Germany⁵ and Spain.⁶ Born in Paris in 1948, Denis was raised in various locations throughout colonial Africa, where her father, a French administrator, had been posted. Though she returned to Paris in her teens, and would go on to study filmmaking at the IDHEC (Institut des hautes études cinématographiques, now known as L'Ecole nationale supérieure des métiers de l'image et du son, or La Fémis), Denis's early years in Africa would have a marked effect on her career as a filmmaker, as the continent forms the setting for *Chocolat* and *White Material* (2009), and is at least referred to in several more of her films. If, in *Chocolat*, Africa is the site for the first investigation of 'foreignness' in Denis's œuvre, the place where the initially harmonious notion of belonging for the young daughter of a French civil servant in Cameroon eventually becomes difficult, ideas of intrusion, otherness and the problematization of identity are not located exclusively here. Denis's films are populated with displaced characters, who wish to revisit a romanticized 'homeland' (the word can carry several meanings in her work) or, conversely, to never return to the place

¹ David Thomson, 'Claire Denis,' *The Guardian*, 8 July 2010

<<http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2010/jul/08/claire-denis-david-thomson>> [accessed 21 June 2011].

² Martine Beugnet, *Claire Denis* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004).

³ Judith Mayne, *Claire Denis* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005a).

⁴ Cédric Mal, *Claire Denis: Cinéaste à part, et entière* (Paris: Verneuil, 2007); Rémi Fontanel (ed.), *Le Cinéma de Claire Denis, ou l'énigme des sens* (Paris: Aléas, 2008).

⁵ Michael Omasta and Isabella Reicher (eds.), *Claire Denis. Trouble Every Day* (Öster: Filmmuseum, 2005).

⁶ Álvaro Arroba, *Claire Denis: Fusión Fría* (Gijón: Ocho y Medio, 2005).

where they were born. Her films address Otherness in dealing with characters who are marginalized in society, because of their skin colour, age, provenance or sexual and social behaviour which is perceived as deviant. Denis's films constitute less a distanced look at the Other than a dissolution of the boundaries which establish foreignness and otherness. This can sometimes be a strategy which involves the welcome, cathartic union of disparate characters and elements, but it can also be a frightening, uncomfortable process where the character, and indeed the viewer, must question their tolerance for intrusions into their families, living spaces and even their bodies from outside. A wide variety of critical perspectives on postcolonial national identity for France and its formerly colonised nations, foreignness, exile and otherness exists with regard to Denis's work. Such issues are addressed by Martine Beugnet throughout her book *Claire Denis* (2004), the first book to be dedicated solely to the filmmaker, a chapter in Judith Mayne's 2005 book ('Seeing Others'⁷), also entitled *Claire Denis*, which was the first American monograph on Denis, Cédric Mal's *Claire Denis: cinéaste à part, et entière* (2007), and in a variety of critical essays. As Mal writes, "Cette altérité, elle l'appréhende souvent par le prisme de la marginalité, de l'étrangeté, ou de l'exclusion – qui induisent aussi leurs contraires: l'intégration, la familiarité et l'intrusion."⁸ As Douglas Morrey, editor of a special issue of the journal *Film Philosophy* dedicated to Denis and to philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy (whose 2000 essay *L'Intrus* inspired Denis's 2004 film of the same name) writes, within the œuvres of both we can perceive issues of foreignness and identity surrounding

[T]he history of French decolonization [...] and the destructive blow that process dealt to political and ethical certainties [...] while questions of ethnic identity and the integrity of the nation have become commonplaces in French intellectual debate in recent decades.⁹

Notions of solidarity, community, physical and national integrity and identity are all important concerns in Denis's work and, though such themes may not be the main focus of my thesis, they will certainly and inevitably arise in my discussion of Denis. My aim, specifically, will be always to address such ideas through the theoretical prism of intertextuality, an area which I

⁷ Mayne, op cit, pp.2-130.

⁸ Mal, op cit, pp.8-9.

⁹ Douglas Morrey, 'Introduction: Claire Denis and Jean-Luc Nancy,' *Film Philosophy*, vol.12, no.1 (April 2008) p.ii.

feel remains undernourished in the context of writing on Denis, and which I will discuss in greater depth below.

One of the most exciting and productive streams of recent criticism regarding Denis's work has foregrounded an emphasis on the haptic elements of her cinema, focusing on the sensations and textures of the body, and the body in motion. This has been particularly well-developed in the writings of Martine Beugnet, especially in her book *Cinema and Sensation: French Film and the Art of Transgression* (2007),¹⁰ Tim Palmer, in his essay 'Style and Sensation in the Contemporary French Cinema of the Body' (2006),¹¹ and his book *Brutal Intimacy: Analysing Contemporary French Cinema* (2011),¹² the book *Claire Denis, ou l'énigme des sens*, edited by Rémi Fontanel, and in a variety of studies by writers such as Elizabeth Newton¹³ and Laura McMahon.¹⁴ Beugnet and Palmer's writings in particular have identified, respectively, a stream of contemporary French cinema in which filmmakers attempt to suggest visually the haptic, tactile elements of the on-screen image, which can be read as a means of encouraging spectatorial engagement which goes beyond looking to reach a level of embodied, sensory viewing. This haptic approach is often read in Denis' cinema as a way of transgressing borders between the self and other, another look at foreignness and intrusion, which can be in turn erotic and unsettling.

Intertextuality, auteurism and Denis

“Je crois vraiment très fort à la déclaration des Droits de l'Homme. Je pense que c'est important que ça existe à l'intérieur des films: que tous les personnages soient libres et égaux en droits dans la fiction”¹⁵ (Claire Denis).

¹⁰ Martine Beugnet, *Cinema and Sensation: French Film and the Art of Transgression* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007).

¹¹ Tim Palmer, 'Style and Sensation in the Contemporary French Cinema of the Body,' *Journal of Film and Video*, vol.58, part 3 (2006), pp 22-32.

¹² Tim Palmer, *Brutal Intimacy: Analyzing Contemporary French Cinema* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2011).

¹³ Elizabeth Newton, 'The Phenomenology of Desire: Claire Denis' *Vendredi Soir*,' *Studies in French Cinema*, vol.8, no.1 (2008), pp 17-28.

¹⁴ Laura McMahon, *Cinema and Contact: The Withdrawal of Touch in Nancy, Bresson, Duras and Denis* (London: Modern Humanities Research Association and Maney Publishing, 2012).

¹⁵ Claire Denis, in the documentary by Sébastien Lifshitz, *Claire Denis, la vagabonde* (1995).

At the simplest level, intertextuality can be described as the process through which a text of any kind refers to other texts. As Mary Orr writes, in her 2000 book, *Intertextuality: Debates and Contexts*, “In high and popular culture, ‘intertextuality’ is the very non-frivolous name given by critical theory to inter- and intracultural dynamics and their operations.”¹⁶ In my initial stages of research, I had aimed to address intertextuality throughout Denis’s œuvre, but soon realised that this would be doubly problematic: firstly, intertextuality cannot be limited to one, overarching theory of textual referencing (various types of intertextuality have been theorized, which I will explore below); secondly, to seek out and analyse each instance of intertextuality in Denis’s work in any depth would require more space than this thesis allows.

To begin with Claire Denis, we may posit that her corpus of films is richly intertextual, according to any basic definition: influences from and engagements with the work of other filmmakers, literature, music, dance, poetry, philosophy and painting are all perceptible in her work and are indeed highlighted by the filmmaker in interviews. In this thesis, I will always use Denis’s interviews as the starting point for discussing a particular intertext, instead of arbitrarily making associations, as I feel that there is little need to do the latter when the filmmaker speaks so generously on this subject. It is worth noting here that Roland Barthes’s conception of intertextuality, unlike the theories with which this thesis will engage, does not consider a text’s author’s intentionality crucial in alluding to or quoting from other texts – the reader’s own playful deciphering of intertexts according to their own subjective reading is more important.¹⁷ This thesis, in effect, will be an intertextual work, as it will engage constantly with interviews with Denis, recognizing her position as author of her texts, but exploring the interplay between Denis and other authors and sources, which makes her authorial practice a wholly collaborative endeavour. These dialogues between Denis’s films and other texts will often reflect an openness towards other authorial voices; Denis’s rejection of the notion of an authoritarian, hegemonic discourse which is the architect of the marginalization and the barriers of otherness which so many of her films address. Indeed, Denis’s particular emphasis on collectivity, both in the importance she ascribes to the contributions of her creative team, and to the texts with which her films engage, render her a

¹⁶ Mary Orr, *Intertextuality : Debates and Contexts* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Polity, 2006).

¹⁷ See Roland Barthes, *Le Plaisir du texte* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1973).

filmmaker who does not regard her own creative voice as more important than all others in her projects.

Intertextuality's roots are to be found in the milieu of the Tel Quel school of thinkers in France in the late 1960s and early 1970s, particularly in the post-Structuralist work of Julia Kristeva¹⁸ (who is credited with first coining the term 'intertextuality')¹⁹ and Roland Barthes on literary semiotics. In particular, Kristeva's reading of Mikhail Bakhtin's notions of carnival and polyphonic discourse, which engage Russian formalism with Structuralist exploration of the components of language, were hugely influential on the earliest interrogations of the relations and intersections between texts in France. As Kristeva writes in her essay, 'Le mot, le dialogue et le roman' (1966):

Par la notion même de statut, le mot est mis en espace: il fonctionne dans trois dimensions (sujet-destinataire-contexte) comme un ensemble d'éléments sémiotiques *en dialogue* ou comme un ensemble d'éléments *ambivalents*. Partant, la tâche de la sémiotique littéraire sera de trouver les formalismes correspondant aux différents modes de jonction des mots (des séquences) dans l'espace dialogique des textes.²⁰

For Kristeva, the word is not "un *point* (une sens fixe)" but "un *croisement de surfaces textuelles*, un dialogue de plusieurs écritures, du destinataire (ou du personnage), du contexte culturel actuel ou antérieur."²¹ Kristeva thus affords more importance to the role of the author in the creation of a text than Barthes; as Mary Orr writes, Kristeva "honour[s] the author as funnel, so that textuality enters into dialogue with other determining elements. Together these produce the novel in its polyphony. [Kristeva does not posit] the reader as pivot of interpretability within or outside the text."²² Kristeva's readings of the polyphonic or carnivalesque novel as a textual space in which multiple enunciations intersect may certainly be applied to Denis's work, with its engagement of multiple textual references and openness to other authorial voices. However, to read Denis's œuvre through a prism of Kristevan intertextuality – to carefully investigate every instance of textual engagements and dialogues – is, as I argue above, an enormous task, beyond the scope of this thesis. Furthermore, in certain

¹⁸ See Julia Kristeva, 'Le texte clos,' and 'Le mot, le dialogue et le roman,' in *Semiotique* (Paris: Seuil, 1969a and b), pp.113-142 and pp.143-173, respectively.

¹⁹ See Orr, op cit, p.20.

²⁰ Kristeva (1969b), p.146.

²¹ Kristeva (1969b), p.144.

²² Orr, op cit, p.26.

examples of Denis's work or collaborations, the response of the spectator is crucial in terms of dialogue: thus, theories which honour both the reader/viewer's reception of a text, and the intention of the author, are required in this analysis. Below, I explore the specific theories of intertextuality which I believe will be of greatest use to this thesis.

Michael Riffaterre and intertextuality as ungrammaticality

"To perceive the text as a transform of an intertext is to perceive it as the ultimate word game, that is, as literary." (Michael Riffaterre)²³

For Michael Riffaterre, intertextuality constitutes the process by which a reader discerns, through certain textual markers, the intertexts hidden beneath a text's surface which, if the reader identifies them, can open up a plenitude of meaning that a simplistic reading of the text would not deliver. Riffaterre's notion of reading occurs in two stages: the first is the heuristic stage, which produces initial meaning, and the second, hermeneutic stage produces significance. In the first reading, the referential, or mimetic, is dominant; in the second, the reader identifies ungrammaticalities – aspects of the text which do not fit with the mimetic reading, "to gain an understanding of non-referential aspects such as tropes, ambiguities, contradictions, and sound patterns that create meaning,"²⁴ as Siobhan Brownlie writes. The response of the reader to a text is crucial to its intertextual networks being set in motion as, without the presence of the reader as detective who collects the textual clues which point to the deeper meanings that can only be suggested through a text's engagements with other texts, the experience of reading might only be superficial. Textuality, Riffaterre suggests, is "not only the text, but also its reader and all of the reader's possible reactions to the text."²⁵ In a 2002 essay, Kristeva describes Riffaterre's work in the 1970s as "the moment in which semiotics opened itself to subjectivity."²⁶ Though the reader is afforded a more important role by Riffaterre's work than by Kristeva's early theories, he or she is certainly not free to find

²³ Michael Riffaterre, *Semiotics of Poetry* (London: Methuen, 1980a), p.37.

²⁴ Siobhan Brownlie, 'Using Riffaterre to Rehabilitate *The Lover*,' *Literature – Film Quarterly*, vol.36, no.1, (2008), <<http://www.thefreelibrary.com/Using+Riffaterre+to+rehabilitate+The+Lover-a0177028509>> [accessed 10 June 2011].

²⁵ Michael Riffaterre, *Text Production*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), p.3.

²⁶ Kristeva, 'Nous Deux,' or a (Hi)story of Intertextuality,' *The Romanic Review*, vol. 93, nos. 1-2 (2002), p.9.

intertextual associations wherever they please. In Riffaterre's view, there is always a "correct" intertext, which the reader must work with a text's gaps, diversions and inconsistencies to find:

The implicit intertext must therefore be carefully distinguished from Roland Barthes' concept of intertext [...] which proclaims the reader's freedom to associate texts at random, as dictated by his cultural or personal idiosyncrasies – a response by definition personal, shared with others only by chance: this is hardly the disciplined reading the text in its structured entirety demands of the reader; it hardly gives the text a physiognomy readers must agree on.²⁷

Some critics have read Riffaterre's stance as overly didactic, suggesting that, in many cases, only a kind of elite super-reader would be permitted under Riffaterre's conditions to understand a text through its connections. Those who cannot identify a text's ungrammaticalities and latent intertexts will be able only to read it superficially. Of course, this conception of reading under apparently strict constraints seems at odds with the above description of Claire Denis as a filmmaker whose work refuses the notion of a singular, authoritarian narrative wherein subjects are privileged with agency only when they rank highly in social, sexual and geographical hierarchies. I would posit, however, that Riffaterre's theories do not necessarily have to be read as elitist or restrictive: his aim is not to exclude readers. Though the viewer may, of course, find intertexts in Denis's films based on nothing but their own subjective perspective, there are, in the case of every film, intertexts which the filmmaker herself confirms; these, I would posit, are the intended intertexts, to follow Riffaterre, and these are the intertexts with which this thesis will engage. I do not wish to suggest that my work will be constrained completely by what Denis says about her films, eschewing any creativity or openness on my part; rather, I aim to use the intertexts Denis mentions as starting points upon which to build my analyses, which spark curiosity and open up multiple avenues of research. Those who are willing to work towards equipping themselves with the necessary knowledge to understand a text and its implicit intertexts through identifying and deciphering its ungrammaticalities will be welcome, under Riffaterre's conditions, to do so. If the viewer of Denis's films is curious enough, they may easily and enjoyably detect ungrammaticalities within her films, which lead to intertexts suggesting different levels of meaning for the original text. Denis has always been generous when

²⁷ Riffaterre (1980a), p.195.

highlighting the intertexts with which her films engage; the viewer or reader does not have to look far to read, view or hear Denis discussing her films' influences and intertexts. As a living, working filmmaker, new interviews with Denis regularly become available on the release of a new film – in print, on websites, in online video and in DVD commentaries. A variety of video interviews with Denis are easily accessible on YouTube,²⁸ as well as on several other websites. Her print interviews, furthermore, are certainly not restricted to scholarly journals; they are, in fact, more commonly found in broadsheet newspapers and less academic film periodicals such as *Sight and Sound*. Many interviews with Denis are available free of charge online in web-based publications. To return to Riffaterre, his conception of a reader, in Mary Orr's words is "no apprentice or youthful enthusiast, nor even someone highly informed in rhetoric or linguistics, but a well-equipped reader formed in the school of accumulated experience of *reading*."²⁹ To experience Denis's films in the Riffaterrean sense, the viewer must not only watch the films, but read about them, and listen to what Denis says about them. I have, in the past, experienced heuristic viewings of Denis's films – watching many of them without spotting their intertextual connections, only to read about these later and enjoy, upon my second, hermeneutic viewing, a broader understanding of how the films' meanings are often created through engagement with other texts. When I have read interviews with Denis before watching a particular film, I have found myself capable of identifying and interrogating the intertextual circulations at work. In her interviews, Denis never conceals her films' intertextual connections and thus any viewer may, if curious enough, participate in the Riffaterrean experience of noting the ungrammaticalities which pervade Denis's films, and the intertexts they imply

I will now briefly address some of the key points of Riffaterre's theory which will be important to my exploration of Denis as an intertextual auteur, mainly his notion of textual ungrammaticality. In Riffaterrean reading, an ungrammaticality is a marker of inconsistency in a text which, if the reader returns to it in the hermeneutic stage of reading, can open a path to intertexts which may expose meanings in a text other than those which appear on the first reading. Orr describes ungrammaticalities as "a nexus of significations, not single lexical items."³⁰ As Riffaterre writes, for an ungrammaticality to reveal an intertext, "it need not be

²⁸ As a search using the terms 'Claire Denis interview' reveals.

²⁹ Orr, op cit, p.39.

³⁰ Orr, op cit, p.38.

more than a structural referent, a model authorising certain verbal connections which are unacceptable in usage.”³¹ If these ungrammaticalities can be found in lexical inconsistencies, contradictions and unusual patterns of words in the written text, where must we look for them in the film-text? They may, I would argue, lie in sequences where a break in the film’s established shot pattern connects the sequence to an intertext; an unexpected, or, to use Riffaterre’s word, “unacceptable,” juxtaposition between sound and image may also encourage the viewer to mark it as a reference to another text; particular images, sounds, or indeed casting choices which disrupt the verisimilitude of the filmic narrative, signalling latent intertextual engagements can all be read as ungrammaticalities. The sole study I could find which utilizes Riffaterre’s theories to examine filmic intertextuality is Siobhan Brownlie’s 2008 essay ‘Using Riffaterre to Rehabilitate *The Lover*,’³² which addresses connections between the dialogue in Jean-Jacques Annaud’s 1992 film and in its parent text, Marguerite Duras’ 1984 novel *L’Amant*. My analysis, unlike Brownlie’s will focus more closely on specifically cinematic language – the visual and aural – than with a film’s dialogue simply as written script. Garrett Stewart’s 2007 book, *Framed Time: Toward a Postfilmic Cinema* refers to Riffaterre, among other theorists such as Gilles Deleuze and Slavoj Žižek, to explore the treatment of time in post-1995 cinema as linked to film’s move towards digitization, suggesting that Riffaterre’s notion of “an atemporal ‘subtext’ beneath the forward movement of narrative is generated from the always unsaid ‘given’ (or ‘matrix’) of the text by the founding appearance of the ‘model’ – often, in our terms for cinema, a liminal shot.”³³ Stewart’s book, however, does not address the question of intertextuality in film, which is my central interest, with regard to analysis of Denis’s work. Within the notion of ungrammaticality, Riffaterre regularly utilizes the term syllepsis to describe the presence of intertextual connections in a text. Syllepsis, which may be defined broadly as a figure of speech wherein one word governs two others but is aligned grammatically with only one, is read by Riffaterre as “a word that has two mutually incompatible meanings, one acceptable in the context in which the word appears, the other valid only in the intertext to which the word also belongs and that it represents at the surface of the text, as the tip of an iceberg.”³⁴ Riffaterre’s notion of syllepsis generally refers to isolated words which take on a dual meaning

³¹ Riffaterre, ‘Compulsory Reader Response: The Intertextual Drive,’ in *Intertextuality: Theories and Practices*, eds. Judith Still and Michael Worton (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), p.70.

³² Brownlie, op cit.

³³ Garrett Stewart, *Framed Time: Toward a Postfilmic Cinema* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), p.64.

³⁴ Riffaterre (1990), p.71.

as the reader recognizes their intertextual weight. A single word, in Riffaterre's analysis, can suggest an entire intertext below the immediate surface of a text. In his reading of Marcel Proust's *À la Recherche du temps perdu*, in his 1987 essay 'The Intertextual Unconscious,' Riffaterre demonstrates that literary characters may also be read as sylleptic figures. He describes Proust's noblewoman Madame de Villeparisis as a "character created at a point of intersection"³⁵:

Her very character is structured as a syllepsis, since most of the subtext centred upon her can be read as the expansion of one name into a complex portrayal, but also as a sentence. The intertext of that name splits one person into two and describes the relationship between the two.³⁶

For Riffaterre, Madame de Villeparisis is not simply a single character, but a prism through which several other female characters must be read, and thus she assumes a dual role in the narrative. Madame de Villeparisis is an aged *marquise* and former schoolmate of the unnamed narrator's grandmother. In Riffaterre's reading, she becomes the prism through which certain other female characters may also be read as figurative aristocrats: a haggard toilet attendant is rumoured to actually be a marchioness of Saint-Ferréol and when Villeparisis recalls a noblewoman of that name whom no other character can remember, this prompts the reader to see the toilet attendant as aristocratic, through the agency of Madame de Villeparisis; the narrator's grandmother, like the toilet attendant, is not a noblewoman, but she seems to assume an aristocratic persona as she quotes regularly from the *Lettres* of Madame de Sevigné – the fact that Villeparisis and the grandmother share an old connection, and that Villeparisis at one point appears to exchange roles with the grandmother as she temporarily acts as protector and educator to the narrator, strengthens the notion that the grandmother too could be read as an aristocrat. For Riffaterre, Madame de Villeparisis's role in the narrative is dual, both diegetic and symbolic. This notion of the literary character as syllepsis, I would posit, is applicable to certain characters and actors in Denis' films. I will examine how individual figures in her films, like Riffaterre's single word, be they diegetic characters or actors, may also perform sylleptically: the meanings surrounding a particular actor's role in a film may be informed and expanded tremendously by their previous roles, both for Denis and for other filmmakers, as well as their personal histories, depending upon the diegetic situation in which

³⁵ Riffaterre, 'The Intertextual Unconscious,' *Critical Enquiry*, vol.13, no.2 (Winter 1987), p.375.

³⁶ Riffaterre (1987), p.376.

Denis places the particular actor and/or character. Thus, the way such figures are read in the intertext is as important as the way they are read in the initial text in question, giving them dual roles and meanings.

Paul Ricoeur and the speech event

“My experience cannot directly become your experience. An event belonging to one stream of consciousness cannot be transferred as such into another stream of consciousness. Yet, nevertheless, something passes from me to you. Something is transferred from one sphere of life to another. This something is not the experience as experienced, but its meaning.”

(Paul Ricoeur)³⁷

Paul Ricoeur’s philosophy is formed around a conception of philosophical anthropology, wherein he suggests that any attempt to understand the self must be addressed through the interconnectedness of human beings and how our selves are formed through our relations to the world around us. Ricoeur’s work after 1960 concentrates mainly on how the interpretation of language in practice – that is, discourse – may relate to the understanding of the self, and how language connects us to the world and to other human beings. Ricoeur theorizes discourse as the event of speech, a productive action taking place at a particular time, where the processes of listening and reacting are as important as speaking itself. This is, evidently, very useful for exploring intertextuality, as texts can be read not as isolated entities, but as essentially connected to the world, and meaning created by a text’s interactions with others can be considered vital to understanding the significance of the text in question. Indeed, we might argue that similarities can be drawn between Ricoeur’s focus on the interlocutory in discourse and Claire Denis’s approaches to her filmmaking, as discussed above: an openness to collaborative activity (whether this involves the recognizable imprints on the filmmaking process of her regular collaborators such as cinematographer Agnès Godard or the band Tindersticks, or those who may work only once with Denis but whose contribution impacts

³⁷ Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Texas: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), p.16. NB Ricoeur wrote this text in English, thus I reproduce his words here exactly as he wrote them, not in translation from French.

hugely on her work, such as choreographer Bernardo Montet) is vital to any reading of Denis as an author, if not an auteur. Furthermore, the intertexts with which she so regularly engages in her films, and acknowledges in her interviews, constitute part of this process of acting, listening and reacting – Denis’ chosen intertexts can assume new performative qualities when she engages them in circulation with her own texts.

To return to Ricoeur, he posits that the Ferdinand de Saussure’s structuralist language system – the code, *langue*, built upon units of *parole* – is useful in terms of understanding the semiotic codes which exist in language, but that this system of signs is ultimately reductive as it is timeless and virtual, and gives no consideration to how language develops outside the system and is affected by reference and connection to the world. We may objectively analyse texts through referring to the structuralist system, but there will still be a surplus of meaning which can only be interpreted through the relation of the specific, temporal happening of discourse to events or persons. As Ricoeur writes,

A message is individual, its code is collective [...] The message and the code do not belong to time in the same way. A message is a temporal event in the succession of events which constitute the diachronic dimension of time, while the code is in time as a set of contemporaneous elements, i.e. as a synchronic system.³⁸

Discourse, as opposed to language system, in short, “refers to a world that it claims to describe, to express, or to represent.”³⁹ Because the participation of interlocutors in a speech event is so important, there may be conflicting interpretations at work when we seek to understand a text, but this process is, in Ricoeur’s view, not so much about finding exact answers as working with one’s interlocutors to seek an agreement, even if one is never found. As Orr writes, the process privileges “listening and waiting, evoking not revoking, becoming more important than out-thinking and overcoming. This waiting with the other serves the same function as narrative ‘gaps’ where no explanation is given.”⁴⁰

Ricoeur’s notion of the speech event, where discourse is actualized temporally and spatially, in the world instead of simply as part of a system, will be important to my readings of

³⁸ Ricoeur (1976), p.3.

³⁹ Ricoeur, *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics II*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson, (London: Athlone, 1991), p.15.

⁴⁰ Orr, *op cit*, p.164.

intertextuality in some of Denis's films. In his book, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (1976), Ricoeur writes:

[D]iscourse is realised temporally and in a present moment, whereas the language system is virtual and outside of time. But this trait appears only in the movement of actualization from language to discourse. Every apology for speech as an event, therefore, is significant if, and only if, it makes visible the relation of actualization, thanks to which our linguistic competence actualizes itself in performance.⁴¹

This notion of the speech event as "performance" will be essential to my interrogation of certain intertextual elements within Denis's work. As Riffaterre's seemingly harsh restraint upon the reader to find a text's "correct" intertexts may at first seem ill-aligned with Denis's refusal of singular, authoritarian narratives, Ricoeur's address to speech as the event of communication may not seem to engage well with a corpus of films in which dialogue is often extremely limited. However, Ricoeur's notion of discourse as the temporal performance of communication particularly interests me: Denis's films, obviously taking into account the fact that every film made is a performance, by the actors, the filmmaker and every other person who contributes to its realization, are full of instances of diegetic performance, in the simplest sense of the word. Dance, for example, is a crucial element of many of her films, whether this manifests itself through organised, staged performances or simply the activity of dancing in a nightclub within a narrative film or documentary. In the construction of dance sequences, the camera will often focus not solely on the performer as, in alignment with Ricoeur's theories, the reactions of those watching, who often step out of their roles as spectators to become performers themselves, will form an important part of the sequence. Comparisons may be drawn with Marie-Claire Ropars-Wuilleumier's writings on the film work of Marguerite Duras (in particular her 1975 film *India Song*); Ropars-Wuilleumier harnesses the theories of Jacques Derrida to address the importance of words as spoken and acted out in cinema (as distinct from writing). She argues: "L'effacement de l'écriture [...] se développe dans l'échec de l'énonciation, dans l'incapacité du verbe à s'approprier l'être: c'est ce que montre au mieux le cinéma, quand il est soumis à une activité textuelle marquée."⁴² Ropars-Wuilleumier's emphasis on the live dimension of speech certainly echoes Ricoeur's work, but her project differs from mine due to my explicit focus on intertextuality and the diverse meanings of

⁴¹ Ricoeur (1976), p.11.

⁴² Marie-Claire Ropars-Wuilleumier, 'La voix écartée,' *Le texte divisé* (Paris: PUF, 1981), p.160.

performance we may discover when reading Ricoeur. Ricoeur's work on narrative has been engaged with film studies in some areas, but not with reference to intertextuality or possible meanings of performance, as I wish to explore. Dudley Andrew's 2000 article, 'Tracing Ricoeur,' brings Ricoeurian theory into contact with Deleuze's work on cinema, proposing to drag Ricoeur to the cinema, where he could have had the effect of cultivating ideas about the film image (indeed the idea of cinema) that Deleuze sowed in the first place."⁴³ Andrew compares Deleuze and Ricoeur's curious readings of ample corpora of texts and their call to readers/viewers to look beyond prescribed linguistic or philosophical systems in order to see how texts may speak their own languages, in their own ways (discourse, in Ricoeur's case, and cinema in Deleuze's). Yugin Teo's 2013 essay, 'Love, longing and danger: Memory and forgetting in early twenty-first century SF films,'⁴⁴ engages Ricoeur's work on memory and loss to trace the persistence of nostalgia as a trope in contemporary science-fiction cinema. Neither writer, however, addresses what Ricoeur's theories might bring to the study of cinematic intertextuality. I will address examples of Denis's participation in certain time and space-bound events or happenings – her curation of the exhibition *Diaspora* in 2008 and her collaboration with the band Tindersticks in 2011 to create a series of events at which images from Denis's films were screened alongside live performances by the band – as examples of discourse as performance. In the cases of diegetic performance, within narrative, and non-diegetic performance as happening, the reactions of the diegetic and non-diegetic spectator are also crucial to the meaning of any scene of performance.

Every one of Denis' films features at least one actor from her group of 'regulars,' discussed above, but she will often also cast well-known actors who are not part of this group and who already have long-established, recognizable creative reputations, and may be especially well-known for their work with a particular filmmaker or movement. This becomes particularly interesting when Denis casts actors such as Valérie Lemercier (in *Vendredi soir*) and Ingrid Caven (*35 Rhums*), who are also known as stage performers in disciplines other than acting – Lemercier is a celebrated comedian, and Caven has a well-established careers as a singer. When such actors appear in Denis's films they may be read, I would argue, more as performers than actors, certainly if we discuss their presence alongside that of Denis's regular

⁴³ Dudley Andrew, 'Tracing Ricoeur,' *Diacritics*, vol.30, no.2 (Summer 2000), p.44.

⁴⁴ Yugin Teo, 'Love, longing and danger: Memory and forgetting in early twenty-first century SF films,' *Science Fiction Film and Television*, vol.6, issue 3 (Autumn 2013), pp.349-368.

actors. Ricoeur's notion of the speech event as actualized performance of discourse may thus be utilized to interrogate such one-off 'star performances' by actors who have long been aligned with other filmmakers or disciplines as discursive happenings in Denis' œuvre, opening up intertextual and even interdisciplinary networks which bring initially unseen connotations and meanings to the film-text's surface

Intertextuality and cinema

The concept of cinematic intertextuality remains relatively young in comparison to literary intertextuality, but interesting research has been done in the field. Indeed, there may be some debate as to whether theories of literary intertextuality can actually be aligned with cinematic intertextuality, as literature and cinema are, of course, entities which are different in form, communicate and are received differently. Thomas Jefferson Kline, referencing the work of Ropars-Wuilleumier on Jean-Luc Godard in her essay 'La forme et le fond,' writes:

[T]he potential functioning of literary intertextuality in cinema is in no way limited by this idealized moment of the "indisible...instantané et éphémère" but rather operates (as it always has) in a constant mobility moving back and forth within this more visual yet equally thought-provoking sphere. As Ropars-Wuilleumier herself notes of Godard's work, "Shots ['prises de vues'] and articulations ['prises de mots'] operate in a like movement, which changes words into images and images into words."⁴⁵

Kline's reading of Ropars-Wuilleumier reflects how, as I will argue in this thesis, the visual elements of cinematic language and grammar can still be explored productively using literary terms. For example, as Riffaterre describes literary ungrammaticalities as moments of inconsistency in written texts where the reader may discover latent intertexts, I will argue that a shot, for example, which, in its disruption of the established visual style of a film or a character or actor who seems to be in the "wrong" film may be read as Riffaterrean ungrammaticalities, pointing to intertexts below the film's textual surface. As I discuss different theories of intertextuality in this thesis, I will identify the possible conflicts which

⁴⁵ Thomas Jefferson Kline, *Screening the Text: Intertextuality in French New Wave Cinema*, (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press 1992), p.190.

might arise between their status as literary theory and my application of them to film, explaining how I wish to productively engage these separate disciplines. Another interesting example of research on intertextuality and cinema is Mikhail Iampolski's 1998 book *The Memory of Tiresias: Intertextuality and Film*, which the author opens by recounting the Greek myth of the blind androgyne prophet Tiresias, who was forced to carry a memory with him forever by the gods. In Homer's *Odyssey*, when Tiresias appears to Odysseus in the underworld, he is able to recognize Odysseus and to predict his future, but when Odysseus meets his dead mother, she cannot remember him. The blind Tiresias paradoxically has greater power of vision as he has the capacity for memory, even in death. Odysseus' mother has the power of sight, but her vision is limited without memory. Relating this myth to intertextuality and cinema, Iampolski writes, "Vision, sight, seeing and looking are all concepts connected with spectacle. Many texts confront us culturally as mobile pictures [...] But the story Homer tells also serves to remind us that seeing without remembering means not understanding."⁴⁶ Iampolski thus suggests that our engagement with the cinematic image will never involve reading the image independently of prior visual associations stored in our memories. Thus, each reading of the image is basically intertextual. Iampolski often seems to favour the Barthesian model of intertextuality where the reader/spectator may make intertextual associations subjectively, regardless of the author/filmmaker's own intentions whereas I, as previously stated, will use Denis's interviews as starting points from which to grow networks of intertextual associations. However, his highlighting of the crucial role of the remembrance of other texts in cinema-viewing, allowing the viewer to understand a film in its wider context, will certainly inform my thesis.

I have chosen to engage with literary theory rather than theory which deals specifically with intertextuality in cinema mainly because it offers a diversity of approaches which are all too often absent from readings of intertextuality in film. I am less concerned with "exchanging" words for shots, or sentences for scenes, than I am with opening my research on Denis's cinema outwards, into an engagement with any theoretical perspectives which create fruitful spaces for analysis. Rather than reject literary intertextuality as irrelevant and inapplicable to film, I seek to discover what happens when these two languages – the study of the word and the study of the image – interact. Denis's own work is characterized by openness and curiosity

⁴⁶ Mikhail Iampolski, *The Memory of Tiresias: Intertextuality and Film*, trans. Harsha Ram (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1998), p.2.

towards the “foreign” or “deviant,” and thus I feel that my research reflects her spirit of engagement and invitation to discourse.

Denis is most often referred to by critics as an auteur, as opposed to a woman filmmaker. The notion of the auteur in French cinema arose with the Nouvelle Vague in the late 1950s and 1960s, with the term used to describe a filmmaker whose creative excellence could be traced through specific themes and motifs in their œuvre, whose work is widely acclaimed and regularly merits state funding. The figure of the auteur as a solitary, indomitable creative force allows such figures to be regarded almost independently of their socio-cultural milieu. In France, especially, it is regarded as a more profitable decision for female directors to welcome this auteur label, instead of presenting themselves specifically as women filmmakers, with all the connotations such a term suggests. Carrie Tarr and Brigitte Rollet write:

The figure of the auteur/artist as it has been constructed and valued in French universalist discourses, is understood to transcend the particularities of gender, sexual orientation and ethnicity, thus obviating debates on the lack of access to representation on the part of women, gays and lesbians, and ethnic minorities.⁴⁷

If a female director is categorized primarily in terms of her gender, this may suggest to audiences that her films are aimed only at women, thus enormously curtailing the size of a film’s possible audience. The term ‘woman filmmaker’ may also suggest to many that a particular director’s films deal mainly with female-centred themes, which may be considered as being of little interest or relevance to male audiences. Because of such ingrained expectations in society, it is understandable that many female filmmakers would choose not to emphasize their gender and would prefer to be regarded through the gender-neutral auteur prism. Claire Denis, like many of her French female filmmaking contemporaries, such as Catherine Breillat, very rarely discusses her own work with reference to her gender and, if she does so, it is generally to dismiss its importance. If filmmakers such as Denis seem to reject the notion of specifically feminist filmmaking, it is not due to a shared sense that the issues it addresses are redundant (female sexuality and subjectivity are enormous concerns in Denis’s work), but because they refuse to be pigeonholed within a vein of cinema seemingly aimed at addressing only ‘women’s’ concerns. Rosanna Maule suggests that the female auteur’s

⁴⁷ Carrie Tarr and Brigitte Rollet, *Cinema and the Second Sex* (London: Continuum, 2001), p10.

distancing from ‘women’s’ films can be theorized not as an oversight of the problems regarding women’s representation and subjectivity still relevant today, but as “a pragmatic strategy of disengagement from the ideological constraints that have traditionally confined women’s subject positions and professional roles in Western European cinema and society.”⁴⁸ However, this process of categorizing a director as an auteur does not necessarily please every filmmaker. In a recent interview, Denis states “I wouldn’t speak of myself as an auteur. It’s almost an insult in France,” suggesting the term implies to the wider audience that a filmmaker’s work will be “boring.”⁴⁹ Denis certainly seems to fit the auteur model as specific themes and motifs, discussed above, do recur in her work, and her films have been so widely acclaimed by critics and academics. However, the most notable recurring element in Denis’s work is her emphasis on collaboration: she has always highlighted the importance of her regular cinematographer Agnès Godard’s contribution to her filmmaking process, and she works repeatedly with the creative team of screenwriter Jean-Pol Fargeau, producer Bruno Péseroy, editor Nelly Quettier, costume designer Judy Shrewsbury and the band Tindersticks, who have supplied many of her films’ soundtracks. Equally recognizable is Denis’s desire to work regularly with a small pool of actors: to date, Denis has made 21 films (including short films, music videos and documentaries) and her most regularly featured actors are Alex Descas (nine films for Denis) and Grégoire Colin (eight films), though Isaach de Bankolé, Alice Houri, Nicolas Duvauchelle, Béatrice Dalle (all of whom have appeared in three films for Denis), Michel Subor, Richard Courcet, Vincent Gallo (four films) Laurent Grévill, Nicole Dogue and Yekaterina Golubeva (two films) have all made repeated and memorable appearances. If we are to find a particular auteurial stamp in Denis’s work, it is undoubtedly her emphasis on collaboration, which paradoxically undermines the notion of the auteur as an isolated creative figure who rejects any external influence. This collaborative approach reflects Denis’s films’ intertextual connections: her films engage with a polyphony of texts and other creative voices, refusing the notion of a hegemonic, all-powerful authorial perspective. If Denis, therefore, is not an auteur in the traditionally approved sense, she may be read as an intertextual auteur for whom collaboration and openness to other texts is vital.

⁴⁸ Rosanna Maule, *Beyond Auteurism: New Directions in Authorial Film Practices in France, Italy and Spain since the 1980s* (Bristol/Chicago: Intellect, 2008), p193.

⁴⁹ Claire Denis, in conversation with Wendy Ide and Stuart S. Staples, BFI Southbank, London (27 April 2011).

A desire not to definitively identify and categorize individuals and social groups can be perceived in Denis's films, I will argue, through the mobilization of a variety of textual voices to suggest that there is no one 'truth' to be sought in stories, whether in fiction or documentary. The porosity of Denis's texts position them as entities which may engage with 'intruder' texts, discovering what meanings can be gleaned from such engagements, rather than closing off the borders of the text to proclaim its own absolute correctness and supremacy. While themes of intrusion and otherness have already been extremely well addressed, as suggested above, the area of intertextuality in Denis' work remains undernourished. There are, indeed, some notable exceptions. The first thing that most writers note about Denis's 1999 film *Beau travail*, for example, is its intertextual connections, but this is because the film so visibly and strikingly engages with Herman Melville's novella *Billy Budd, Sailor* (1924), Benjamin Britten's opera *Billy Budd* (1951) and Jean-Luc Godard's film *Le Petit soldat* (1960). *Beau travail* does not merely refer to these texts, but bases its narrative around the Melville and Britten texts and may thus be read as a loose adaptation, and it directly lifts a character/actor (Bruno Forestier, played by Michel Subor) from Godard's film. Of all Denis's films, *Beau travail* is the one which displays its intertexts most visibly, and no writer who has addressed the film could fail to note its textual engagements. Such concentrated focus on intertextuality, however, has not been repeated in analyses of Denis' other films (or indeed her collaborations in music with Tindersticks, or the exhibition *Diaspora*, which she curated for Paris' Musée du quai Branly in 2008). This is not to say writers will never highlight intertextual connections, but they will rarely expand upon them to the degree that I wish to, or engage such instances with theory dedicated specifically to intertextuality. My work will reject the idea that any one type of intertextuality, or indeed 'intertextuality' as a blanket term to describe textual engagement, is sufficient when interrogating Denis's work. I will argue that different types of theory which come under the governance of the term intertextuality must be mobilized to engage fully with the intertextual strategies at work in Denis's œuvre. Denis's films are populated vastly with intertexts, the presence of which all too often remains under-analysed; for this reason, this thesis will seek to meticulously collect Claire Denis's intertexts, engaging them with various theories of intertextuality in order to ask why Denis makes such connections and what effect they have on meaning in her films.

Intertextual endeavours: the shape of this thesis

The main body of the thesis will comprise of detailed readings of Denis's work, in order to find their intertextual engagements, interrogate them and discuss their significance, always working from, as already stated, interviews with Denis to act as evidence for intertextual connections. The first chapter will explore Riffaterrean ungrammaticality in *J'ai pas sommeil* (1993), a film which engages textually with a real *fait divers* (the story of serial killer Thierry Paulin) and many other sources. The second chapter will discuss ungrammatical references to external texts and discourse as performance vis-à-vis sound, image and actors, in Denis's 2009 film *35 Rhums*. Chapter Three will explore the performances of Valérie Lemercier and Vincent Lindon as examples of discourse as performance in 2001's *Vendredi soir*, and investigate ungrammaticalities related to sound, image and casting. Chapter Four will examine the collaborative aspects of Denis's work with Tindersticks, referencing Ricoeur's theory of discourse as performance. Chapter Five will explore Denis's curation of the exhibition *Diaspora*, again referencing Ricoeur. The final chapter will focus on the actor Michel Subor as a source of living, breathing ungrammaticality in the films *Beau Travail* (1999), *L'Intrus* (2004) and *White Material* (2009). Denis, as I state above, has made 21 films during her career, including feature films, shorts, music videos and documentaries. Because this thesis has a tripartite aim – to explore intertextuality in Denis's work and to explore the as yet under-researched prospect of applying Riffaterrean ungrammaticality and Ricoeurian discourse as performance to filmic intertextuality – I will be using, as primary texts, only the works which present the strongest evidence for application of my theoretical research to them. The thesis, ultimately, will aim to discover how this exhaustive collecting of Denis's intertexts may be utilized productively to re-evaluate the autorial prism through which Denis's work is so often read, and to explore the possibilities inherent in the engagement of Riffaterre's and Ricoeur's theories with cinema.

Chapter One : Les liens défaits – *J'ai pas sommeil*

Thierry Paulin, Camille Moisson and the *fait divers*

Denis's third film, *J'ai pas sommeil* (1994) is inspired by real events of the mid-1980s, when Thierry Paulin, a young, gay, HIV-positive mixed-race man and transvestite dancer on the Parisian cabaret scene, whose family were from Martinique, murdered around twenty elderly women in Paris' 18th arrondissement over four years. Paulin was eventually apprehended by police and died in prison of an AIDS-related illness in 1989. Denis's film never presents itself as being 'based on' Paulin's story, but she does acknowledge its influential role on her film and most French viewers of the film, at least, would certainly align the film with the Paulin story, if they recall it. The film's Paulin character is Camille Moisson (Richard Courcet); he and his lover Raphaël (Vincent Dupont) murder elderly women, stealing their money and jewellery. The film does not, however, completely privilege Camille as the centre of the narrative: his brother Théo's (Alex Descas) difficult relationship with his wife, Mona (Béatrice Dalle), and his desire to return to Martinique, and the path of Daïga (Yekaterina Golubeva), a Lithuanian woman living in the same hotel as Camille and Raphaël, are followed in almost as much detail as Camille's narrative. In this chapter, I will examine instances of intertextual engagement in *J'ai pas sommeil* which, I feel, have not yet been explored, or analysed in any great depth, such as the significance of Denis's use of real newspapers from the Paulin case in the film's mise-en-scène, the casting of actresses Line Renaud and Yekaterina Golubeva, and the music of Jean-Louis Murat.

J'ai pas sommeil is a film which engages with a rich multitude of intertexts, as I will explore below. The first, and unavoidable, intertext to be examined must be Paulin's story. If we describe the film as 'inspired' by the Paulin case, the word might well be followed with 'loosely' or even 'partially' as Denis certainly does not attempt to factually recount the case. Paulin's crimes are generally described in France as belonging to the category of the *fait divers*, a term which, as Deborah Reisinger writes:

[D]oes not have an English counterpart. Its closest translation is ‘news item’ or ‘news brief,’ but this does not adequately describe the term, which is distinguished by its negative reputation; in popular language, for instance, we often hear ‘it’s only a minor news item.’¹

A story such as Paulin’s, of a serial killer targeting elderly women, fits the notion of the *fait divers* as a news item which pertains more to the lives of ordinary people than many of the rest of the day’s events. It can address, Reisinger explains, incidents such as “murders, suicides and accidents, as well as more humorous or odd coincidences.”² The story of the murder hunt quickly became a *fait divers à la une*, progressing to the front pages of the newspapers, at once warning readers of the dangers afoot, and encouraging a climate of fear. On 13 November 1984, the front page headline of *Le Figaro* (perceived as a more traditional, right-leaning counterpart to the more liberal *Le Monde* and *Libération*) read ‘La France a peur,’ encapsulating the atmosphere of collective fear, bordering on hysteria, which Paulin’s crimes (and, of course, the media’s coverage of them) had produced. When *J’ai pas sommeil* premièred at the Cannes Film Festival in 1994, Béatrice Dalle (who plays Mona) protested angrily at the media’s direct association of the film with the Paulin case. Tearing up a copy of the newspaper *France Soir* which features the headline ‘Paulin le tueur: Star à Cannes’ alongside a large photograph of Paulin, Dalle exclaims: “Ce n’est pas le film de Claire Denis, ça. J’ai tourné avec Richard [Courcet], avec Claire, sur un sujet [...] qui n’avait rien à voir avec Thierry Paulin.”³ Denis herself has said: “*J’ai pas sommeil* et son héros, Camille, pourraient exister sans les crimes, sans le fait divers.”⁴ She has spoken about feeling unable to tackle this *fait divers* directly – “on ne peut pas s’en approcher frontalement, il faut être policier ou juge”⁵ – and has also expressed her wishes not to make Paulin’s mother (still living in France) suffer more as a result of media attention. In a couple of scenes in *J’ai pas sommeil*, we see close-ups of newspapers whose headlines address the murder hunt; as Daïga cleans a bedroom in the hotel, the camera focuses on *Le Figaro*’s headline ‘La France a peur,’ which,

¹ Deborah S. Reisinger, ‘Murder and Banality in the Contemporary *fait divers*,’ *South Central Review*, vol.17, no.4 (Winter 2000), p.85.

² Ibid.

³ Béatrice Dalle in Nicolas Winckler, ‘Le Film *J’ai pas sommeil*,’ France 2 (16 May 1994), <<http://www.ina.fr/art-et-culture/cinema/video/CAB94049991/le-film-j-ai-pas-sommeil.fr.html>> [accessed 12 April 2011].

⁴ Denis, in Stéphane Piatszek and Olivier Séguret, ‘De telles histoires se traitent à l’aveugle, sans théorie,’ *Libération* (8 December 2004), p.3.

⁵ Denis, interviewed by Thierry Jousse, Arte Video release of *J’ai pas sommeil* (2007).

as I have mentioned, was published during the real murder hunt on 13 November 1984. Denis could have chosen to fabricate new headlines for the film's fictional manhunt, but instead she decides to show real front pages from the Paulin case. Here, the intertextual circulation between the *fait divers* and the film may allow the shots of newspapers to be perceived, I would argue, as instances of Riffaterrean ungrammaticality. For Riffaterre, as I have already discussed, unusual breaks or inconsistencies in a text's fabric which suddenly catch the reader's attention can highlight intertextual indicators between one text and another. If these ungrammaticalities can be identified, they may guide the reader toward a greater understanding of a text's meaning, which can be perceived only through its connections to other texts. The shot of *Le Figaro* is not simply an image belonging to the film's diegetic universe, but one which refers to the real events of the *fait divers*. Such shots, we might initially expect, may be placed within the film to create a greater sense of realism, to remind the viewer that Camille's story is inspired by Paulin's. However, as Camille admits to the multiple murders in a police station at the film's denouement, the dates of the murders are given as occurring in 1991. If the viewer is aware of the Paulin case (as most French viewers at the time of the film's release would have been), they will probably recall that Paulin's murders occurred between 1984 and 1987 and that he died in 1989. Thus, as depictions of objects from a real case, from the pro-filmic world, in a fictional narrative, the shots of the newspapers disturb the film's narrative fabric, or indeed its sense of verisimilitude; traditionally, the classical narrative film is expected to work to conceal any signs of a reality outside its diegetic universe, or of the filmmaking process – which means that the presence of the camera, signs of editing and indeed intrusions from a 'real world' outside the diegesis are usually hidden. As Christian Metz writes:

[T]he cinema as technical performance, as prowess, as an exploit...underlines and denounces the lack on which the whole arrangement is based (the absence of the object, replaced by its reflection), an exploit which consists at the same time of making this absence forgotten.⁶

Classical narrative cinema (which refers mainly to mainstream Hollywood cinema) strives to maintain the illusion that what the viewer sees, for the duration of the film, is real, so that the viewer will willingly 'sink into' the narrative, investing their belief, their emotions, and indeed

⁶ Christian Metz, *Cinema and Psychoanalysis: The Imaginary Signifier*, trans. Celia Britton (London: MacMillan, 1982), p.74.

their money, in it. In any case, *J'ai pas sommeil*, a low-budget French film with no hero figure or satisfying resolution, cannot be grouped alongside those examples of mainstream Hollywood cinema powered by the need to satisfy the viewer's desire for concrete explanations and, I believe, there may be reasons for Denis to signal, if quietly, to the viewer that what we are watching is indeed a narrative film, which will not completely encourage the spectator to suspend their disbelief and accept that the fiction is 'real.' Had Denis wished to truthfully represent Paulin's actions, there would have been no need to re-name him Camille, or indeed to re-name any other character (Paulin's lover and accomplice, for instance, was Jean-Thierry Maturin, whereas Camille's is Raphaël). We see Camille strangle his victims and, while this is an undeniably horrific act, Denis chooses not to draw upon the extremes of Paulin's violence (he was known to have forced some victims to drink bleach, and to have burned some victims' feet and genitals). To return to Riffaterre, his emphasis on identifying ungrammaticalities in a text may appear to fracture it but, as he suggests, these ungrammaticalities can point to a text's deeper meaning and plenitude, which is not immediately visible within the text's own boundaries, but only through its connections to others. Riffaterre writes:

The urge to understand compels readers to look to the intertext to fill out the text's gaps, spell out its implications and find out what rules of idiolectic grammar account for the text's departures from logic, from accepted usage (that is, from the sociolect), from the cause-and-effect sequence of the narrative and from verisimilitude in the descriptive.⁷

Denis's film makes no attempt to represent the Paulin case through documentary-style realism; as she has stated, Camille and his fellow characters could exist independently of the *fait divers*. However, it is impossible to ever truly disconnect the film from Paulin's story. I would argue that Denis realizes that such a story as Paulin's could never be represented 'truthfully,' and certainly not without bias. Even the number of women Paulin murdered still remains unclear, so the only person who could tell the 'true' story is the deceased Paulin himself. When read alongside the dates and events of the fictional Camille's story, these shots of real newspapers, visual signifiers of the *fait divers*, act as ungrammaticalities, rupturing the film's fiction. The impossible spatio-temporal connections between the newspaper shots and Camille's story highlight the fictionality of the film's universe: the film is a created narrative, which should

⁷Riffaterre (1990), p. 57.

not be mistaken for reality. If the press describes Paulin as a monster, Denis suggests that such a process of naming is an attempt to reassuringly fix a meaning upon Paulin, in binary opposites of good and evil, a univocal act which seeks to explain his actions. As Denis says:

Moi, je ne savais rien des tueurs en série et je n'en sais toujours rien. C'est dégueulasse de dire qu'on a compris quelque chose à un fait divers. On en sait rien. Même si c'est un arrachement, il faut savoir finir son film froidement, sans y immiscer une sorte de morale immanente.”⁸

As Camille’s motives are never explained in *J’ai pas sommeil* and he is presented as both a killer and a devoted son, we realize that Denis aims to avoid such polarizing notions, and powerfully suggests that a story like Paulin’s may only ever be explored and re-imagined, never explained and categorized.

Line Renaud: Sylleptic figure⁹

Ninon, the owner of the hotel where Camille and Raphaël live, and where Daïga is employed as a chambermaid, is played by French actress and singer Line Renaud. Born Jacqueline Enté in 1928, Renaud began her career in the Parisian cabaret Les Folies-Belleville, and was hailed as the “best new act of 1949”¹⁰ on the Parisian cabaret scene. She is well known in France for her association with composer Loulou Gasté, many of whose songs she recorded (including *Le Petit chien dans la vitrine*, a French version of *How Much is That Doggy in the Window?*), and whom she married in 1950. Renaud was (and still is) known as a glamorous blonde star, who worked mainly with light, gently humorous material, and she appeared in several French musical films in the 1950s, such as *Paris chante toujours!* (Pierre Montazel, 1951) and *Ils sont dans les vignes* (Robert Vernay, 1952). In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Renaud was best known as the leading cabaret star of the Casino de Paris and, since then, has continued to appear regularly in French stage shows and films and has been celebrated for establishing the

⁸ Denis in Piatszek and Séguet, op cit, p.3.

⁹ Elements of this section were presented as part of my paper, ‘Avec la participation exceptionnelle de: Using Riffaterre to read the ungrammatical performances of Line Renaud and Laura Betti,’ Crossings, Frictions, Fusions: 20th and 21st Century French and Francophone Studies International Colloquium, California State University (30 March 2012).

¹⁰ ‘Line Renaud,’ RFI Musique website (March 2004)

<http://www.rfimusique.com/siteen/biographie/biographie_7253.asp> [accessed 25 February 2011].

Association des Artistes Contre le Sida. Performing at the Moulin Rouge in 1954, she met the actor and comedian Bob Hope, who asked her to appear in a number of his television shows in the USA, and it was during the year she spent in America that she recorded the song *Relax Ay Voo* with Dean Martin. On the same day, she and Martin also recorded a version of the Hoagy Carmichael song, *Two Sleepy People*, which features on the soundtrack of Denis's 2002 film *Vendredi soir*.

Forty years later, *Relax Ay Voo* plays on Daïga's car radio as she drives into Paris for the first time in *J'ai pas sommeil*. In her book, *Stars and Stardom in French Cinema*, Ginette Vincendeau describes film stars as "celebrated film performers who develop a 'persona' or 'myth' composed of an amalgam of their screen image and private identities, which the audience recognizes and expects from film to film, and in turn determines which part they play."¹¹ Renaud's star image, as discussed above, seems rather at odds with a film such as *J'ai pas sommeil*, with its inevitably controversial subject matter. Gérard Lefort writes of Denis' casting of Renaud, "Autrefois pour rigoler et qualifier le maximum de l'improbable, on disait: pourquoi pas Line Renaud dans un film de [Marguerite] Duras!"¹² as if to suggest that Renaud is not known for appearing in anything other than the lightest of films. He concludes, however, that after viewers witness Renaud's performance, "On ne le dira plus. Line Renaud est dans le film de Claire Denis est c'est du sérieux tout à fait probable."¹³ Denis had been to see Renaud in a French theatre production of *All About Eve* in 1992; Renaud played Margo – a role played by Bette Davis in Joseph L Mankiewicz's 1950 film – who, incidentally, is a successful, yet ageing, Broadway actress. Denis invited the actress to dine with her afterwards; of Renaud, Denis says, "Chaque fois que je voyais cette femme à la télé, je la trouvais toujours bien, jamais bêcheuse."¹⁴ She told Renaud "vous êtes ma Ninon,"¹⁵ but had not yet written the scénario for *J'ai pas sommeil*. Renaud, who had admired Denis's first two films, responded "avec vous, Claire, je n'ai pas besoin d'un scénario."¹⁶ No indication is ever made, diegetically, to suggest that the singer of *Relax Ay Voo* and the proprietor of the hotel are, in any way, the same person (albeit on different textual levels), or that there is any connection between the singer Line Renaud and the character Ninon. Indeed, it may be fair to suggest that

¹¹ Ginette Vincendeau, *Stars and Stardom in French Cinema* (London: Continuum, 2000) p.viii.

¹² Gérard Lefort, 'Noir comme le désir,' *Libération* (17 May 1994), p.32.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Denis in Marie Colmant, 'Comme Claire Denis explore une terre inconnue,' *Libération* (17 May 1994), p.33.

¹⁵ Renaud, interviewed by Jenny Munro (23 June 2011).

¹⁶ Ibid.

only viewers who are familiar with Renaud's previous recordings would note this link, though Renaud is certainly credited both for her role as Ninon and for her contribution to *Relax Ay Voo* in the film's closing credits. Comparatively, though many viewers of the films of Denis's fellow contemporary French filmmaker Catherine Breillat may not be aware that Rocco Siffredi, who has appeared in several of her films, is an internationally famous porn star, this does not diminish the important intertextual links between Breillat's cinema and pornography that Siffredi's presence yields. In the case of Renaud in *J'ai pas sommeil*, it is equally unimportant that perhaps not every viewer will recognize the crucial connections her presence highlights between her own career and her fictional role.

Very little critical attention has been given to the significance of Renaud's presence in *J'ai pas sommeil*, and I would argue that Denis's casting of Renaud both as Ninon, and as herself as the voice on the radio may be identified as an instance of Riffaterrean ungrammaticality. Renaud's (visual) presence as Ninon and (aural) presence as herself signals a rupture in the film-text; the viewer who recognizes this inconsistency may wonder how the film's spatio-temporal universe can function. The characters inhabit a diegesis where Renaud, the singer, exists but, as characters in a filmic narrative, they cannot themselves recognize the ungrammaticality produced by Renaud's presence in the role of Ninon. Indeed, we may ask, what would Renaud's character's reaction be to hearing *Relax Ay Voo*? As she never hears it, we never know. As Riffaterre writes, "For the intertext to play its role as a supplement to the text, it need not be more than a structural referent, a model authorising certain verbal connections which are unacceptable in usage."¹⁷ We may read Denis's inclusion of Renaud's song as "unacceptable," in terms of maintaining verisimilitude within the film's narrative; the spectator who is aware of Renaud's dual 'presence' may, in recognizing its ungrammatical nature, momentarily shake off any submission to belief in the film as 'reality,' and recognize the film's fictionality: Renaud cannot be both herself and Ninon. Again, this may represent a powerful strategy to dissuade the viewer from presuming that Denis is attempting to accurately represent Paulin's story. Her decision to filter the *fait divers* through a fiction which, via Renaud's presence, occupies an interstice between the fictional and real may demonstrate her desire not to make any definitive, conclusive statements regarding Paulin. Denis refuses to attempt an accurate rendition of a case in which the easiest way for the media to deal with and

¹⁷ Riffaterre (1990), p.70.

try to understand Paulin was to name him, clearly and recognizably, as a monster; *J'ai pas sommeil* explicitly admits, through its fictionalizing, that it possesses no answers for Thierry Paulin's behaviour, and does not seek to find them. The intertextual conflict between the lyrics of *Relax Ay Voo* and the film's narrative may also be noted: almost immediately after we hear Renaud sing "We French, you'll find / Are more inclined / To relax ay voo," the radio announcer warns listeners of the serial killer on the loose. The city lives in fear of his next strike. As Renaud tells me herself, "Ça m'a beaucoup amusé d'entendre ma propre voix, et d'entendre cette chanson *Relax Ay Voo* dans un quartier où personne ne peut pas se relaxer car tour le monde a peur."¹⁸

Renaud does not appear on screen when *Relax Ay Voo* plays; the first time we see her, she does not resemble the image many French viewers would have of the woman singing on the radio. She is not introduced, as she often was in her films and music clips of the 1950s and 1960s, by a luminously-lit close-up of her face, eyeliner perfectly flicked and blonde coiffure shining, the camera luxuriating in her beauty. One example of this is the humorous clip for her 1962 song *Double Twist*,¹⁹ in which she is filmed rising from her bed in the morning, feline eyeliner already applied. When she first appears in Denis's film, she thrusts herself into a medium shot, striding forward and bellowing orders – she is the leader of a self-defence class for elderly women, dressed in a black karate suit. Though she is not framed or dressed as many viewers would expect, and Ninon's language is coarser than that which we might associate with Renaud's more wholesome image (she orders her class to aim for "les cacahuètes!"), she is still recognizable as Line Renaud – her white-blonde hair is neatly coiffed, the camera is drawn to her expressive face and shapely physique, and her distinctive, throaty voice is still in evidence: this is the moment where the knowing viewer may be jolted into recognition of Renaud's double presence.

We may identify another ungrammaticality involving Renaud if we are aware that she clearly remembers meeting Paulin on one occasion (she may well have met him several times, without knowing, as both were associated with the cabarets and nightclubs of Paris. Denis also

¹⁸ Renaud in Munro (2011a).

¹⁹ See <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JCqont6B0Mk>> [accessed 10 October 2013].

feels strongly that she may have met Paulin herself.)²⁰ Paulin had come to ask if Renaud she would become patron of the ‘Césars’ of the Paris cabaret scene, but she was too busy to spend much time with him, and left him alone for an hour with her 88-year old mother, Simone Boute (Renaud’s personal secretary throughout her career, who died in 1999). As Renaud recalls: “C’était maman qui l’avait reçu, vous vous rendez compte, ma pauvre maman!”²¹ Not long after this encounter, she and her mother would be shocked to see Paulin on the front pages of the French press, having been apprehended for the murders.²² Denis says of Renaud: “C’était important de trouver la bonne personne pour jouer la patronne de l’hôtel, qui allait dire, à propos des tueurs, ‘ils sont gentils, mais gentils!’ car c’est une phrase du fait divers.”²³ Though Renaud’s talent would undoubtedly have been of primary importance in Denis’s selection of her for this role, it is difficult to disregard her actual interchange with Paulin, just as Ninon meets Camille, without either woman suspecting either young man of the murders. Indeed, Denis’s highlighting of her use of a real phrase from the *fait divers* may seem to contradict my argument that Denis wishes to present a fiction and not attempt to depict ‘the truth,’ but I would argue that Denis’s statement reflects the similarities between the process of the media’s portrayal of Paulin and Denis’s creation of the fictional Camille: where we cannot understand the meanings of the killer’s actions we can only speculate, guess and, to an extent, fictionalize. The difference, however, lies in the fact that the media presumed Paulin could be ‘explained’ as a monster, whereas Denis realizes no such explanation is possible. Indeed, Renaud tells me that, though we might assume the experience of playing a role which could be seen to recall a retrospectively frightening encounter would be daunting, she never felt that she was participating in a ‘re-enactment’ of the Paulin affair: “Ce n’était pas épouvantable de jouer avec [Richard Courcet] car je savais qu’il n’était pas Thierry Paulin, et il est un très bon acteur.”²⁴ In a conversation between Renaud, Denis, Courcet and Dalle, Renaud recalls: “[Q]uand j’avais dû dire à Thierry Paulin qu’il avait une très bonne idée, mais que je ne pouvais pas l’aider, ma mère a dit, ‘c’est dommage, car il est gentil.’”²⁵ Thus Ninon’s phrase

²⁰ Thierry Jousse and Frédéric Strauss, ‘Entretien avec Claire Denis,’ *Cahiers du cinéma*, no.479/480 (May 1994), p.25.

²¹ Renaud in François Quenin, ‘Paris s’éveille,’ *Le Point* (20 May 1995) <<http://www.lepoint.fr/archives/article.php/7252>> [accessed 10 October 2010].

²² Renaud in Munro (2011a).

²³ Denis in Jousse and Strauss, op cit, p.27.

²⁴ Renaud in Munro (2011a).

²⁵ Renaud, interviewed by Michel Field and Gilles Daude, ‘Line Renaud à propos de son rencontre avec Thierry Paulin,’ *Le Cercle de minuit*, France 2 (16 May 1994), <<http://www.ina.fr/art-et-culture/cinema/video/I06076831/line-renaud-a-propos-de-sa-rencontre-avec-thierry-paulin.fr.html>> [accessed 12 April 2011].

from the film is connected not only to the *fait divers*, but to Renaud's own experience. Though the viewer, unless they have read or seen contemporary interviews with Renaud regarding *J'ai pas sommeil* (of which there are few), may not be aware of her connection to Paulin, Denis would certainly have known of it, and in fact cast Renaud's mother, Simone Boute, as Ninon's mother. This could be read as another rupture in the film-text's verisimilitude as, if we are aware of Renaud's – and Boute's – encounter with Paulin, it is difficult not to think of it as we watch Ninon smile benevolently at Camille, and as Ninon's mother/Simone Boute greets him at the hotel reception; thus perhaps we may not simply submit to the film's temporary 'reality' as we may be especially aware that we are watching an actress whose own personal history is more deeply linked to the role she plays than many other actresses' would have been, a realization which is even greater due to the presence of Renaud's real mother. It is, in fact, 'Maman' who utters the words of the film's title, '*j'ai pas sommeil*,' after Ninon instructs her to go to bed. Although, perhaps, any character might have said these words, our attention is momentarily fixed on Maman, who appears, almost obscured by a wall, in the background; this might be said to quietly emphasize the importance of her presence diegetically and Simone Boute's presence extra-textually.

We may read Renaud's presence in *J'ai pas sommeil* as an example of syllepsis, which Riffaterre describes thus:

Syllepsis is a trope consisting in the simultaneous presence of two meanings for one word. I modify this definition thus: the meaning required by the context represses the one incompatible with that context. Repression, however, entails a compensation: it generates a syntagm or even a text in which the repressed meaning reappears in various guises.²⁶

If Renaud can be read as a sylleptic figure, it is because her presence acts as the connective between *J'ai pas sommeil* and her own real encounter with Paulin; she is initially read and accepted by the viewer as Ninon, and might only ever be read this way by many viewers, thus her other, less instantly acceptable meaning in the text – as Renaud herself, her visual presence and aural presence on the soundtrack remaining unnoticed by the diegetic characters – might be perceived as a repressed meaning, but one which, if the viewer recognizes it, surfaces and

²⁶ Riffaterre (1987), p.375.

strongly affects any reading of the text. Had another actress been cast in the role, such intertextual links would not have existed. As I mention above, I would argue that Denis's casting of Renaud (and her mother) creates a rupture in the film's apparent 'reality,' weakening this illusion. And, as I have also suggested, we may argue that Denis does so to highlight the fact that *J'ai pas sommeil* is a narrative film, and that it does not aim to represent the exact facts of the story of Paulin and his victims. Had Denis wished to simply re-tell Paulin's story (as opposed to Camille's), she could have cast Line Renaud as herself, re-creating the encounter between Paulin, the actress and her mother (indeed, Denis had planned to cast French singer Mylène Farmer and couturier Jean-Paul Gaultier as themselves, as 'faces' of the Parisian clubs frequented by Camille, but eventually decided against this). However, Renaud is utilized as an implement of narrativization, embodying a fictional character, which demonstrates that Denis's film has no aspirations to documentary-style realism. In a case such as Paulin's, it is difficult to forget the media's representation of him as a monster. For such deeply emotive and already established conclusions to be avoided, Denis must explicitly fictionalize the narrative, allowing space for Camille to be developed as simply one of many characters whose lives intertwine in this film. Indeed, Daïga's disappointing journey to and throughout Paris, and Camille's brother Théo's desire to leave Paris, are explored in as much detail as Camille's crimes. The Riffaterrean ungrammaticality of Renaud's presence, as it jolts the knowing spectator into the recognition of Renaud herself, and not simply Ninon, serves to highlight the film's fictionalizing: it must be clear that *J'ai pas sommeil* is a cinematic imagining which never claims to know or understand Paulin and his motives. This reflects the difficulty in positioning Denis as an auteur in the conventional sense: her attitude towards the stories of Camille and Paulin, never claiming to know the motives for either man's actions, is presented through a polyphony of intertexts, which I will continue to discuss below, and the notion of hegemonic authorial supremacy and omniscience is thoroughly absent from the film.

Féroce, enraciné: performance and artificiality

In one scene, Camille performs in a nightclub, watched by a crowd of men, as he mimes to French singer Jean-Louis Murat's song, *Le Lien défait*, which first appeared on Murat's 1991 album *Le Manteau de la pluie*. As well as contributing this track, Murat composed a track,

J'ai pas sommeil, especially for the film (currently available only as a rare CD/cassette single, and only some of the lyrics are available online). Murat has connections to French cinema, outwith his work for Denis: in 1989 he was cast by French filmmaker Jacques Doillon alongside Béatrice Dalle and Isabelle Huppert (both actresses who have worked with Denis) in *La Vengeance d'une femme* and, in 2001, he recorded an album of the poetry of 17th century French poet Madame Deshoulières, read and sung with Huppert. *Le Lien défait* is a gently paced, elegiac song, whose title and lyrics speak of untied bonds between lovers. The song evokes an atmosphere of sacredness, as the singer compares his lover to Jeanne de France (canonized in the Catholic Church as Sainte Jeanne de Valois); as Fabrice Fuentes writes, “La préciosité anachronique du vocabulaire employé est celle d'un trouvère désespéré.”²⁷ Camille himself does not seem to be this “trouvère désespéré”: his actions do not appear to be driven by desperate compulsion and he usually appears impassive and untroubled. The song speaks of cut bonds but, conversely, forms an intertextual bond with the filmic narrative of *J'ai pas sommeil*, which emphasizes Denis's authorial position as one which is established through collaboration and openness to other voices. Even if the words of *Le lien défait* are crucial in exploring themes of broken ties, Camille still only mimes to the lyrics, and Murat's voice is the one we hear; Murat in turn is inspired by the themes of the film and writes the song *J'ai pas sommeil*, establishing a reciprocal circulation of creative voices. Of *Le lien défait*, Denis states: “The lyrics say, ‘The link is cut, there's no more connection.’ I thought that this was the film's central theme because a society and a city work best when the links are tight. For me, life is a story of connections – without them society will self-destruct.”²⁸ This film is indeed a “story of connections,” but they are loose bonds, where true unions or resolutions are never truly achieved. Murat's song contains the verse “On se croit d'amour / On se sent féroce, enraciné/ Mais revient toujours / Le temps du lien défait.” The phrase “féroce, enraciné,” contrasted with “le temps du lien défait” seems particularly appropriate as regards *J'ai pas sommeil*: there are certainly important links and notions of responsibility between characters (Daïga's great-aunt Ira approaches her Lithuanian friends to find Daïga a home; Camille spends some of the money he steals on champagne for his mother's birthday) but they cannot lead to happy resolutions: Daïga will eventually leave Paris without bidding anyone goodbye; Camille's devotion to his mother will not dissuade him from murdering women older and

²⁷ Fabrice Fuentes, ‘La Fibre musicale,’ *Le Cinéma de Claire Denis, ou l'énigme des sens*, ed. Rémi Fontanel (Paris: Aléas, 2008), p.217, n.241.

²⁸ Denis in Mark A. Reid, ‘Colonial Observations: Claire Denis Interviewed,’ *Jump Cut*, no.40 (March 1996), p.69.

more vulnerable than she is. Though it is Daïga who first discovers Camille's crimes, it is not her knowledge that leads directly to his arrest and she leaves Paris, having revealed nothing. When Camille is arrested, his mother tearfully pleads with him for answers in their native Créole, but he responds by asking her in French simply to bring him his belongings: the link of common provenance, language and family responsibility has been severed.

One of the most interesting aspects of Camille's performance is his refusal to adopt any particular gendered identity. Camille may wear a long, black velvet dress and lipstick, but this is certainly not a drag performance: his flat, male chest and lean, muscular upper body are displayed clearly. As Judith Mayne writes, "Camille inhabits his drag persona, but seems distant from it at the same time."²⁹ Though I would disagree with Mayne's use of the word "drag" here, it is certainly true that the sense of distance Camille seems to maintain from the gendered aspects of his performance is crucial. Judith Butler theorizes gender as performative, proposing that "there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender [...] identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results."³⁰ Camille's performance, it could be argued, constitutes an interstitial, or indeed intertextual, instance where images of femininity and masculinity drift alongside each other, but neither is truly embraced: as Camille, a gay man wearing women's clothes, sings a song addressing a woman from a heterosexual male perspective, a dizzying array of gendered personae circulate, but all are ruptured and unfinished. Furthermore, the fact that Camille mimes (and not always terribly well) again creates a rupture between himself and the music of his performance. I would add, also, that the mimed track equally establishes a boundary between Camille and the men watching; he dances for them, but hides behind recorded vocals. This is reflected visually at one point as we see close-ups of some of the assembled group watching Camille through a grille. As Denis says: "Je voulais cette chanson absolument parce que le lien défait, c'est [...] ce que je suis sûr d'avoir ressenti physiquement dans la ville."³¹ The song's title, *Le Lien défait*, reflects Riffaterre's notion of ungrammaticalities: a text may be full of broken links, ruptures which signal intertextual connections. Indeed, there are broken links between all of the characters, but we may also identify cut links, or indeed ungrammaticalities in the film-text, as Camille's miming may reflect. As Riffaterre states, "Such features, lexical or phrasal, are

²⁹ Mayne (2005), p83.

³⁰ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York / London: Routledge, 1990), p25.

³¹ Denis, in Jousse, op cit.

distinguished from their context by their dual nature. They are both the problem, when seen from the text, and the solution to that problem, where their other, intertextual side is revealed.”³² Momentarily, it may not be completely obvious that Camille is miming but, as he stumbles over words and we hear electronic backing music, the viewer notes the strange artifice of the performance, perhaps questioning why Camille would choose to mime. We may also note further ideas of artifice and performance in the scene where Line Renaud first appears, as a teacher of self-defence classes to elderly women: she encourages the class to imagine they have encountered the murderer and attack this invisible enemy, reflecting, on a different textual level, how the actors of the film have been instructed to pretend they have encountered a killer. As I argued for the case of Renaud’s diegetic role as Ninon and actual connections to Paulin, the ungrammaticality of Camille’s mimed performance may be said to reflect the film’s fictionality: Denis demonstrates that *J’ai pas sommeil* is not intended to be a faithful rendering of Paulin’s story or an attempt to understand what cannot be understood, but a narrative imagining of a fictional character’s life, inspired by Paulin. There are powerful intertextual connections at work between this scene (and the film in general) and the lyrics of *Le Lien défait*. The ‘unfinished’ aspects of Camille’s gendered performance reflect the incomplete narratives and unresolved relationships within the film, and Camille’s detached mime may highlight the distance at which this narrative film holds itself from attempting to discover the ‘truth’ about Thierry Paulin, just as Murat’s song speaks of rupture and broken connections.

Daïga Bartas meets Yekaterina Golubeva, Grandfather Sharunas meets Sharunas Bartas

Another ungrammaticality surfaces in *J’ai pas sommeil* through the character of Daïga, played by Russian actress Yekaterina Golubeva (who is often credited as either Katia or Katerina Golubeva elsewhere). In 1991, Claire Denis saw the début film of a young Lithuanian director, Sharunas Bartas, *Trys Dienos (Three Days)*. In the film, two young Lithuanian men journey to the bleak, post-Soviet Russian city of Kaliningrad; there, they meet a young woman who remains nameless throughout the film, played by Golubeva. For three days, the two men and

³² Riffaterre (1990), p.58.

the woman wander, almost in silence, through the city, trying to find places to sleep, drink, stay warm and have sex. One of the men is attacked by locals and is not seen again in the film, while the other eventually returns alone to the Lithuanian countryside. No clarification is given as to the aim of the men's journey, their background, or the background of the girl they meet and who is, eventually, left alone in Kaliningrad. Describing her first encounter with Golubeva in *Trys Dienos*, Denis remarks "Je la trouvais belle, bien sûr, mais dure aussi: à la fois madone et gymnaste."³³ In Bartas' film, we see lingering close-ups and medium shots of Golubeva's face, undeniably beautiful in its symmetry, with heavy-lidded blue eyes, but also inscrutable. Throughout the film, she appears quiet, nonchalant, with an air of fatigue.

For several years, Golubeva and Bartas were a couple and worked together regularly. After *Trys Dienos*, she appeared in his films *Koridorius* (*The Corridor*, 1995) and *Few of Us* (1996), and co-wrote the screenplay for his film *A Casa* (*The House*, 1997). In *J'ai pas sommeil*, when Daïga first appears, driving into Paris, we do not know who she is or why she has come. We sense she is a foreigner because of the enormous map of the city, which she unfolds as she drives, and her ramshackle car with Russian licence plate. She speaks in halting French to the police officers she encounters, who respond to her mockingly in basic Russian. She arrives at her aunt Ira's house and introduces herself to the elderly lady as "Daïga, Sharunas granddaughter." Later, when she telephones Alexandre Chimetov, a theatre director she met in Vilnius, who has promised her work as an actress, she refers to herself as "Daïga Bartas." The viewer who is unaware of Golubeva's work with Bartas, or its importance to Denis's decision to work with the actress, will most likely perceive no significance in the name 'Daïga Bartas.' However, these links have the potential to affect a rupture in the film's diegetic world. Cédric Mal describes the name as "un amical clin d'œil"³⁴ to Sharunas Bartas, but I would assign greater significance to it, as a Riffaterrean ungrammaticality. As real newspapers from the Paulin case are used to depict the coverage of the fictional Camille's crimes, as Line Renaud appears doubly in the film, as herself (on the radio) and as Ninon, this nod to a 'real' world outside the filmic universe has the potential to unsettle the spectator's engagement with the narrative. Of course, *J'ai pas sommeil's* characters could exist in a universe where the director Sharunas Bartas also exists. However, by linking Daïga to the name Sharunas Bartas, the connection that Katerina Golubeva has with the Lithuanian filmmaker comes to light. While

³³ Denis in Colmant, op cit, p.33.

³⁴ Mal, op cit, p.193.

Daïga Bartas is “Sharunas’ granddaughter,” in the pro-filmic temporal context of *J’ai pas sommeil*, Katerina Golubeva is Sharunas Bartas’ muse and partner. Thus Denis creates a rupture between Camille’s narrative and the pro-filmic time of Thierry Paulin, by summoning forth the real moment in 1991 when she first saw Golubeva in Bartas’ film and when Paulin had already been dead for two years. This draws attention, again, to the clash between filmic narrative and pro-filmic reality, destroying any possibility that *J’ai pas sommeil* might be an attempt at truthfully depicting the Paulin case.

As Ninon and Line Renaud cannot inhabit the same diegesis, nor can Daïga Bartas and Katerina Golubeva. Like Renaud, Golubeva becomes a sylleptic figure; she can be read, using Riffaterre’s definition of syllepsis, “in two different ways at once, as *contextual* meaning, and as *intertextual* meaning.”³⁵ She plays and thus embodies Daïga (contextual meaning), but she also acts as a reminder of the pro-filmic world (intertextual meaning). Golubeva, as syllepsis “symbolizes the compatibility, at the significance level, between a text and an intertext incompatible at the level of meaning.”³⁶ There is as little definitive ‘truth’ in the French media’s cathartic categorization of Paulin as inhuman as there is in Denis’s scripted fiction film, with its invented characters. Considering *J’ai pas sommeil* is inspired by the story of one of France’s most vilified serial killers, it is striking how much narrative attention is focused not on the killer, but on Théo and Daïga. Théo knows nothing of Camille’s crimes until the film’s end, but has a strong connection to Camille as his brother. If we know the Paulin story before watching the film, we wonder why the narrative of Daïga, who seems to have no real connection to Camille, is afforded so much space, why the film opens with her journey into Paris. Daïga, like Camille and Théo, is an outsider: Camille’s sexuality, race, HIV-positive status, transvestitism and, of course, his murders, render him a locus of circulating forms of Otherness; Théo takes black market delivery jobs to survive, suffers racist abuse and does not see himself as belonging to Paris, but to Martinique; Daïga is an illegal immigrant who struggles to communicate in French. As Martine Beugnet writes, “Par sa présence silencieuse et son isolement, elle dénonce le mythe d’une société blanche ‘déracialisée,’ homogène [...] avec la fin de la guerre froide, l’immigration a changé de teinte.”³⁷ All act outside the law, but Daïga, despite her white skin and beauty, is perhaps the film’s greatest outsider. Her inability

³⁵ Riffaterre, ‘Syllepsis,’ *Critical Enquiry*, vol.6, no.4 (Summer 1980b), p.637.

³⁶ Ibid, p.629.

³⁷ Martine Beugnet, *Marginalité, sexualité, contrôle dans le cinéma français contemporain* (Paris: Harmattan, 2000), p.264.

to communicate isolates her, and her silent observations of Camille affect a crucial narrative shift: in one scene, near the film's end, Daïga follows Camille to a bar and, in close-up, their hands touch, briefly. This single, silent moment tells us that she knows what he has done and, though she does not reveal her knowledge, we sense that the discovery of Camille is imminent.

Referring to theatre, Marvin Carlson describes the associations spectators form regarding certain actors, the parts in which they are likely to be cast, and the effect such associations have on our readings of the roles they play as “performance intertextuality,” suggesting that “like literary intertextuality, but perhaps even more strikingly, it may be a source of distraction, a valuable tool for interpretation, or a source of enrichment and deepened pleasure in the work.”³⁸ In cinema, equally, the significance of an actor's choice of roles and the viewer's positing of connections between these has been addressed vis-à-vis actors with recognizable star personae by theorists of star studies, which has its Francophone roots in Edgar Morin's *Les Stars* (1957) and Anglophone beginnings in Richard Dyer's book *Stars* (1979). Though Golubeva would not generally be viewed as a ‘star,’ it is interesting to examine the connections (or performance intertextuality) between the roles she has played. Denis's casting of Golubeva may be read as an example of Ricoeurian discourse as performance, or an event of speech between Denis's own œuvre and that of Sharunas Bartas. Ricoeur's notion of the speech event is particularly appropriate in this context as it emphasizes *performance* as the real happening or event of discourse, but also openness towards the interlocutor. Denis's casting and direction of Golubeva may be read as paying tribute to Bartas, but it also opens an intertextual pathway towards his work; a discursive circulation between the two filmmakers is set in motion, echoing the Ricoeurian notion of discourse as a performative event, where two different acting ‘languages’ and cinematic heritages interact. We never discover the name of Golubeva's character in *Trys Dienos*; we know she lives in Kaliningrad, but not if it is her permanent home. Certainly, she seems to have no fixed abode, climbing exterior walls of buildings to sneak inside with the two young men, eager for a warm place to stay. She does not appear to have a job, free as she is to wander the city for three days. I would argue that Daïga may be read as Denis's imagining of the Kaliningrad girl, a few years later. We know, in *J'ai pas sommeil*, that Daïga has left the post-Soviet East for a ‘better’ future in the West; in *Trys Dienos*, the girl has nothing to leave behind – no home, no work, no family – and thus,

³⁸ Marvin Carlson, ‘Invisible Presences – Performance Intertextuality,’ *Theatre Research International*, vol.19, no.2 (1997), p.113.

we may imagine, would leave Kaliningrad if she could. The girl of *Trys Dienos*, perhaps, journeys to Lithuania, where she meets the director Chimetov, and comes to Paris, which proves no more satisfying than the Eastern Bloc as she fails to find work as an actress and continues her hopeless, rootless trudge through Europe. We do not know her name – why should it not be Daīga?

Golubeva's performances in both films are similar: a tired, heavy gait and almost catatonic nonchalance, splintered occasionally by bursts of emotion and movement. The girl of Bartas' film and Daīga are united in their fatigue – the girl, with her male companions, is constantly seeking somewhere to sleep; Daīga, after driving all night, does not find a bed with her aunt or in the house of illegal Eastern immigrants to which her aunt brings her. As they visit each potential lodging, she lies down on any available surface, her eyes closing. In *Trys Dienos*, she is silent for much of the film. When she and one of the men attempt to rent a room in a run-down hotel, the concierge recognizes her, spitting "You again? Get out of here." The girl reacts by slamming the reception door with great force and marching out. When the men find her, she looks upset but begins to laugh uncontrollably, if joylessly. Near the end of the film, she lies in bed with one of the men (both fully clothed) and, as he holds her, begins to weep. In *J'ai pas sommeil*, Daīga is an often silent observer. Much of her silence comes, obviously, from the fact that she hardly speaks French (indeed, Denis recalls that Golubeva herself knew little French when she filmed *J'ai pas sommeil*),³⁹ but the moments in which she bursts into manic activity and unrestrained displays of emotion remain jarring. When she sees Chimetov in the street, she attacks him and his vehicle, violently (yet rather gleefully); after she is pursued through the streets by a lecherous man, she hides in a cinema, and laughs wildly when she realizes she has wandered into a porn cinema.

Her bursts of laughter in each film, however, carry different meanings. In *Trys Dienos*, her outbursts puncture an oppressive (or depressive) stasis: very little happens in the narrative, and there seems to be no hope for these disaffected, poor people, losing themselves in alcohol. These moments do not seem to free her character, or any other, from stillness or repetitive wandering, but rather to express deep frustration at the unlikelihood of change. At the end of the film, the Lithuanian man may return home, but she will remain in Kaliningrad. In *J'ai pas*

³⁹ Denis, Lisbon and Estoril Film Festival, 'Masterclass: Claire Denis and Leos Carax' (7 November 2011) <<http://www.leffest.com/en/edicoes/2011-edition/videos/claire-denis-and-leos-carax>> [accessed 14 June 2013].

sommeil, however, we may read Daïga's moments of fury or amusement as less hopeless: her burst of laughter after she realizes she has mistakenly entered a porn cinema alleviates some of the tension which builds during her flight from her pursuer. As Mayne writes, the men in the cinema "look at her as if she were an alien creature,"⁴⁰ reinforcing her outsider status, but she is not intimidated. Nicolas Azalbert writes, "Le bloc de pierre s'effrite au contact d'une tendresse humaine et va même [...] jusqu'à éclater de rire, fait unique dans sa trajectoire – telle Greta Garbo dans *Ninotchka*."⁴¹ Azalbert's comparison of Golubeva in *J'ai pas sommeil* to Garbo in *Ninotchka* (Ernst Lubitsch's 1939 American film about a female Soviet emissary who travels to the capitalist West to convince an exiled Russian aristocrat to sell her jewels for the benefit of the starving Russian people) reflects the still present clichés in how Russian women are presented in Hollywood cinema: as beautiful but serious, exotic but solemn. As Jeremy Mindich writes, *Ninotchka* was publicized as the first film in which "Garbo laughs," fetishizing the 'stereotypical' Russian woman as almost comedically gloomy, yet ignoring the fact that "if *Ninotchka* seems absurdly serious and pragmatic, it is because she feels a total responsibility to serve her people."⁴² Contrary to Azalbert's statement, *J'ai pas sommeil* does not mark the sole instance of Golubeva laughing in a film, but in *Trys Dienos*, the laughter is desperate, insular and manic, whereas Daïga's laughter seems to arise from genuine amusement. Azalbert's description of Golubeva as a "*bloc de pierre*" is troubling: Golubeva, very often, has been cast as melancholic, mysterious, beautiful figures by male directors. Her characters are often objects of desire and fascination, but we are rarely party to their subjectivity. In *Trys Dienos*, we travel with the young men to and from Kaliningrad, leaving Golubeva's character behind at the film's denouement, still trapped in the funereal stillness of the city; Bartas films her adoringly, in close-ups of her face, but we do not see her alone in the film – we do not know how she lives when the Lithuanian men are not there. Rather, we share the male protagonists' perspective.

Golubeva died in August 2011, at the age of 44. No official cause of death was made public, but various sources suggest that she committed suicide after a long struggle with depression.⁴³

⁴⁰ Mayne, op cit, p.135.

⁴¹ Nicolas Azalbert, 'Disparitions: Katerina Golubeva,' *Cahiers du cinema* (October 2011), p.67.

⁴² Jeremy Mindich, 'Re-reading *Ninotchka*: A Misread commentary on social and economic systems,' *Film and History: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Film and Television Studies*, vol.20, no.1 (February 1990), p.12.

⁴³ See David Thomson, 'Obituary: Yekaterina Golubeva,' BFI, (20 March 2012)

<<https://www.bfi.org.uk/news/obituary-yekaterina-golubeva-1966-2011>> [accessed 2 July 2013]; Jacques Morice, 'L'alter Leos,' *Télérama* (19 May 2012), p.66; Laure Costey, 'Leos Carax, réalisateur à femmes,' *Gala* (23 May

A common factor between most of the notices of Golubeva's death is the highlighting of her physical beauty over her achievements in cinema. Her obituary in *France Soir* reads: "Son nom est peut-être inconnu du grand public. Son visage sans doute un peu moins."⁴⁴ Jacques Mandelbaum writes, "Elle aura donc quitté ce monde comme elle l'aura habité: dans le mystère et la discrétion [...] Elle y tint à peu près un seul rôle, inoubliable: celui d'une jeune femme dont la beauté envoûtante semblait procéder d'un pacte secret avec une infinie mélancolie."⁴⁵ Most of her obituaries assign her an otherworldly quality, as if she possessed some unearthly knowledge. Mandelbaum adds to this air of mystery surrounding Golubeva by describing her "présence de Joconde slave."⁴⁶ Thus, she is triply mysterious, in her foreignness, her death and her inscrutable Mona Lisa regard – we look upon her and are transfixed by her 'knowing' gaze. Richard Brock highlights Western society's "continuing preoccupation with 'the' narrative behind the enigmatic smile of Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*, which seems to have left no corner of high or popular art untouched."⁴⁷ Ruth Schwartz Cowan, however, provides a reading, which eschews mystery in favour of a more humanist perspective: after reading the chapter 'Jests' in da Vinci's notebooks, she was disappointed to find examples of the artist's misogynist humour. She writes:

Enigmatic, my foot! The next time you're in the Louvre, stand very still in front of that famous portrait and ask yourself how a pleasant, not particularly sophisticated young lady might look if she had to sit absolutely motionless for hours at a time while some pompous painter who fancied himself God's gift to the human race made bad jokes at her expense. The *Mona Lisa*, I submit, is smiling to herself in order to keep from hauling him off and landing him one.⁴⁸

Schwartz's statement is, of course, intended to be humorous, but raises a serious point about the assigned 'enigmatic' qualities of beautiful women, effectively de-humanizing and de-subjectifying them. Jacques Morice notes Golubeva's "présence de medium," and "féminité

2012) <http://www.gala.fr/l_actu/news_de_stars/leos_carax_realisateur_a_femmes_261127> [accessed 11 June 2013].

⁴⁴ Anon, 'Disparition: Katerina Golubeva est morte,' *France Soir* (18 August 2011) <<http://www.francesoir.fr/loisirs/cine/disparition-katerina-golubeva-est-morte-128866.html>> [accessed 11 June 2013].

⁴⁵ Jacques Mandelbaum, 'Katerina Golubeva,' *Le Monde* (24 August 2011), p.25.

⁴⁶ Jacques Mandelbaum, 'Le tour du propriétaire,' *Le Monde* (16 May 1997), p.31.

⁴⁷ Richard Brock, 'Framing Theory: Toward an Ekphrastic Postcolonial Methodology,' *Cultural Critique*, no.77 (Winter 2011), p.102.

⁴⁸ Ruth Schwartz Cowan, 'On the Meaning of the Mona Lisa's Smile,' *Technology and Culture*, vol.39, no.3 (1998), p.524.

fantomatique.”⁴⁹ Azalbert’s comparison between Golubeva and Garbo, above, is telling: in his *Mythologies*, Roland Barthes describes Garbo in terms which echo those used in Golubeva’s obituaries:

Son surnom de *Divine* visait moins sans doute à rendre un état superlatif de la beauté, que l’essence de sa personne corporelle, descendue d’un ciel où les choses sont formées et finies dans la plus grande clarté [...] il fallait que son visage n’eût jamais d’autre réalité que celle de sa perfection intellectuelle, plus encore que plastique.⁵⁰

Both Garbo and Golubeva are enshrined in a kind of mystery and unreality which comes from possessing extreme, yet inaccessible, beauty, and an almost silent, melancholic screen persona. After Garbo began to appear in sound films, following great success in silent cinema, audiences were struck by the depth and ‘foreignness’ of her voice. Golubeva, when she breaks her silence to speak, also speaks with an unexpectedly deep voice which sounds markedly ‘foreign’ in French films.

After *J’ai pas sommeil*, Golubeva’s next high profile role in French cinema would be in Leos Carax’s *Pola X* (1999). Based loosely on Herman Melville’s 1852 novel *Pierre, or the Ambiguities*, *Pola X* is the story of Pierre (Guillaume Depardieu), a young, bourgeois writer who is engaged to be married and lives with his mother (Catherine Deneuve) in a chateau in Normandy. The arrival of Isabelle (Golubeva), a woman who appears suddenly in the forest surrounding the chateau, disrupts Pierre’s life: she claims to be his half-sister, fathered by his deceased diplomat father in Eastern Europe. Pierre leaves his fiancée, mother and home for Paris and commences a sexual relationship with Isabelle. As Pierre is disinherited by his family, he and Isabelle live in a disused factory, inhabited by a paramilitary group (led by a blond man, played by Sharunas Bartas – one might argue that *Pola X* marks a ‘handover’ of Golubeva from Bartas to Carax. She would become the latter’s muse and partner, as she had been for the former) and he struggles to write. Eventually, he is arrested for shooting his cousin, and Isabelle throws herself in front of a truck.

Golubeva’s apparently “*fantômatique*” qualities are emphasized more than ever in this film: her face is pale, shot in shadowy close-ups, or appearing eerily from the margins of medium

⁴⁹ Jacques Morice, ‘Katerina Golubeva,’ *Télérama* (10 September 2011), p.49.

⁵⁰ Barthes, ‘Le visage de Garbo,’ *Mythologies* (Paris: Seuil, 1957), pp.70-71.

shots, her blonde hair is dyed black, she is incredibly thin and wears shabby, dark clothes (in contrast to the blond, healthy Pierre, with his white suits). Stephen Holden describes her as a “grim, vampirish creature of darkness who dresses like a peasant.”⁵¹ Olivier Séguret writes: “Dans cette scène jaillie d'un conte ancien, Isabelle (Katerina Golubeva, évidente), [est] à la fois sorcière et Cendrillon, fée fétide et en haillons.”⁵² “Katerina Golubeva, évidente”: Séguret’s phrase speaks volumes about conceptions of Golubeva’s filmic (and public) persona – she represents melancholy, strangeness, unreality. She speaks French with a strong Eastern European accent, her voice deep, slow and moaning, as if she is in pain. In a long monologue, filmed in almost complete darkness, Isabelle describes for Pierre the horrors of war which she has witnessed, as they wander through the woods. Fergus Daly and Garin Dowd describe Isabelle’s character as “*unheimlich*,”⁵³ a term utilized by Freud to describe the uncanny (literally, “unhomely”), and Carax, who had dreamed of graveyards being bombed in Bosnia (and translated this dream into *Pola X*’s opening sequence as the bombing of a French cemetery during the Second World War), states that “on pourrait penser qu’Isabelle sort d’une de ces tombes bombardées [...] C’est un peu ce fantôme-là, elle est.”⁵⁴ Isabelle speaks more than most of Golubeva’s characters, but she retains an ethereal quality: the camera lingers upon her heavy-lidded eyes, as if mesmerized by her. She is never at ease, always on edge, haunted by things Pierre has not seen. Initially, it seems she could be an apparition, but her humanness and marginal social standing become painfully obvious when she and Pierre are refused entry to a hotel because of her *sans papiers* status (we see a common link between Golubeva’s characters here – refusal to be admitted to places of safety, being left to wander). She is an eerie presence, a foreign interloper in Pierre’s life, but also a foreigner in the geographical sense – a refugee.

The story centres around Pierre’s subjectivity; Isabelle’s purpose in the narrative is to find him, to become his ‘missing’ half, his sister and lover. She seems to drain him of energy, health and creativity, but is dependent on him. When his former fiancée, Lucie, arrives in Paris to reconcile with Pierre, Isabelle attempts to commit suicide. Finally, when Pierre is arrested for his cousin’s murder, Isabelle throws herself in front of a truck: she cannot live without him.

⁵¹ Stephen Holden, ‘So Who is She? His Lover, his Muse or his Nightmare?’ *New York Times* (8 September 2000), unpaginated.

⁵² Olivier Séguret, ‘Leos Carax disloque la figure de l’artiste au XXème siècle,’ *Libération* (14 May 1999), p.31.

⁵³ Fergus Daly and Garin Dowd, *Leos Carax* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p.150.

⁵⁴ Carax in Daly and Dowd, op cit, p.153.

Carax himself says, “cela [Isabelle] va le [Pierre] mener à une autre conscience du monde,”⁵⁵ but this opening of his consciousness beyond his privileged upbringing yields only destructive results. Isabelle does not surmount her traumatic past – when Pierre, her reason to live, is taken from her, she chooses to die.

Golubeva’s next high profile role would be in French filmmaker Bruno Dumont’s *Twentynine Palms* (2003). She plays Katia, the Russian-speaking girlfriend of an American photographer, David (David Wissak), who travels with him through the Californian desert. Again, various reviews highlight Golubeva’s seemingly transcendent beauty (Mandelbaum describes her as “[une] icône de beauté slave”⁵⁶) and, again, her character is positioned firmly as Other: she is Eastern, she speaks no English (and David does not speak Russian) and she is emotionally unstable, displaying terror at being without David, losing her temper and crying at the slightest provocation. Her Otherness is highlighted in the difficulty in communication between her and David (both speak a little French):⁵⁷ in one scene, he says: “You say something, you say something else and I have no idea what you’re saying. It’s a completely dysfunctional conversation.” The camera cuts to a medium-shot of Katia, her blonde hair tousled by the breeze; she smiles and replies: “*Je t’aime*.” She depends on David to protect and feed her, to help her understand what is happening; exhausted with her unpredictable behavior, he tries to leave her, but cannot. The sex between them is violent, animalistic, conducted in cheap motels and on arid, rocky outcrops in the desert, in graphic close-ups. Katia’s face and slim body are often shot in highly explicit close-up during their lovemaking: she is, like Isabelle in *Pola X*, beautiful but toxic. Ed Gonzalez writes: “David Wissak is the Adam to Katia Golubeva’s Eve [...] No one else exists, and their isolation not only alludes to Adam and Eve and their original sin, but it intensifies the threat of the outside world.”⁵⁸ Of course, any analogy of David and Katia as Adam and Eve must recognize the fact that Eve was said to be to blame for the Fall of Man. Indeed, the film seems to suggest that Katia and David’s trajectory is towards disaster (at the end, David is beaten and raped and, humiliated, he shoots Katia, then himself) and that it is Katia’s presence which leads them along this way: he cannot communicate with her through words, so develops a new way of communicating, not through understanding, but through

⁵⁵ Carax in Jean-Michel Frodon, ‘Je suis passé par des antichambres étranges,’ *Le Monde* (13 May 1999), p.31.

⁵⁶ Jacques Mandelbaum, ‘La chute originelle relue par Bruno Dumont,’ *Le Monde* (17 September 2003), p.29.

⁵⁷ See Palmer (2006), p.30 and Pierre Murat, ‘Twentynine Palms,’ *Télérama* (20 September 2003), p.50.

⁵⁸ Ed Gonzales, ‘Twentynine Palms: Film Review,’ *Slant Magazine* (27 February 2004)

<<http://www.slantmagazine.com/film/review/twentynine-palms>> [accessed 23 July 2013].

reacting to immediate sensations, as she does – arousal, anger or hunger. Katia dies first, for their ‘sins,’ and David follows. She has no control over her own fate, and her erratic behavior, along with David’s uncontrollable desire for her, eventually lead them both to ruin (echoing the fates of Isabelle and Pierre in *Pola X*).

Twentynine Palms capitalizes on the public image of Golubeva as foreign, strange and wild. Golubeva’s own poor grasp of English and French frustrated her and made her seem all the more tantalizingly indecipherable to observers and critics. As Norman Provencher writes, of a photocall for *Pola X* at the 1999 Cannes Film Festival:

Elle fixait quelque chose devant elle et cette chose n'était pas dans cette galaxie [...] [Elle] a marmonné trois ou quatre mots absolument incompréhensibles. Quelque chose en français, mais qui, en langage slave, devait rassembler à ‘Allez-vous faire foutre, connards.’ On cherche encore à comprendre.⁵⁹

It is this constant search for the ‘meaning’ of Yekaterina Golubeva which reduces her to a fascinating image, as her obituaries demonstrate. This repeated ‘Othering’ of Golubeva causes the identity of the beautiful, often unpredictable Slavic actor who did not court publicity to be subsumed by the identities of the beautiful, unpredictable, Slavic characters she plays. It is telling that Golubeva’s character in Dumont’s film bears a name (Katia) by which the actor was often known. David Thomson writes:

Dumont has said he cast Golubeva [in *Twentynine Palms*] because she was so much the character, who in his eyes was a wildly temperamental young woman with a slight grasp of French and even less of English, and whose mood swings made her the girlfriend from hell. While gallantly performing scenes of highly vocal sex, nevertheless, she seemed perhaps to be revealing how unhappy she was as a foreign actress playing out the fantasies of very singular French male directors [...] her fate was usually to be asked to perform roles that played more on her tortured, mournful side. From what little is known publicly of Golubeva’s private life, her move to Paris was never fully resolved.⁶⁰

Sadly, the unclear circumstances surrounding Golubeva’s death only furthered public conception of her as mysterious and tortured. Her roles for Denis, I would argue, allowed her

⁵⁹ Norman Provencher, ‘Ils ont en fumé du bon,’ *Le Soleil* (14 May 1999), p.1.

⁶⁰ Thomson (2012).

to break away from this persona. In Golubeva's final performance for Denis in 2004's *L'Intrus*, she plays an unnamed Russian woman who facilitates a black market heart transplant (for which murder is committed) for Louis Trébor (Michel Subor), an ageing man with a violent past who lives in the Jura countryside. His new heart in place, Trébor travels to the South Seas to seek out a son he fathered many years ago. Golubeva's character follows him around the world on this journey. The film opens, before the credits, with a medium shot of Golubeva's character, standing in a dark, wooded area, smoking and looking directly at the camera. In voiceover, she says, "tes pires ennemis sont à l'intérieur, cachés dans l'ombre, cachés dans ton cœur." This opening might lead us to believe that Golubeva, again, is playing a shadowy, Eastern figure, emerging from the forest as Isabelle does in *Pola X*, but her unflinching gaze, trained upon the camera, possesses none of Isabelle's fear or desperation. Initially, it is not inconceivable that the Russian woman might be an apparition, a personification of Trébor's heavy conscience, as she seems to know exactly where he is in each country he visits, and haunts him. She does not, however, seem to be dependent on Trébor to appear, or only visible to him. In one scene, when Trébor is in South Korea, he sees the Russian woman standing in an elevator, close to him. She fingers a cigarette, and the doorman addresses her in Russian: "No smoking in the lift." She replies, simply: "Was I smoking?" Near the film's end, as Trébor lies in hospital in Tahiti and his body begins to reject the illegal transplant, a nurse tells him he has a visitor. The scene cuts from his hospital room to a shot of a cigarette being dropped and extinguished upon the ground outside. The camera pans up the body of the smoker, we see a woman's legs, a dress and then the nonchalantly smiling face of the Russian woman. Golubeva's character in *L'Intrus* is Eastern, but this does not render her 'foreign' as it does in *Pola X* or *Twentynine Palms*. Trébor himself is Russian or at least has roots there (we see him burning his Russian passport in one scene); he communicates with Golubeva's character in Russian. She is not a 'stranger' to Trébor: she is his countrywoman, his associate in this secret transaction.

From the first shot of the Russian woman which opens the film, Denis will repeatedly show Golubeva's face in lingering close-up, her knowing half-smile. She may seem to possess the ethereal quality of Isabelle in *Pola X*, or the quiet knowingness of the girl in *Trys Dienos*, but she has something which Golubeva's characters in those films, and *Twentynine Palms*, lack: control. There is no sense of desperation in this character, or a need to be saved – it is she who opens the film, hinting at the lesson which Trébor must learn, and who is always there to show

Trébor his fate. Daïga in *J'ai pas sommeil*, however, is undoubtedly the character with the most agency and control of her fate in all of Golubeva's films. In a story about a serial killer, it is the seemingly unconnected Daïga who opens the narrative with her journey to Paris. She has relied on a man to provide her with a job, a reason to be in Paris, but when he disappoints her, she takes action and smashes his car. She laughs uproariously, through genuine amusement, not as a demonstration of emotional instability. Thomson writes, comparing Golubeva's roles for Denis to her roles in the films of Bartas, Carax and Dumont: "At least Denis allowed her to express humour and illuminated her beauty in a gentler fashion."⁶¹ Indeed, it would be difficult for Denis to portray Golubeva as anything but beautiful, but her body is not displayed in explicit close-ups as it is in *Pola X* and *Twentynine Palms*. As I state above, it is Daïga who first realizes that Camille is the killer. After Camille is arrested, Daïga enters his hotel room, stealing the proceeds of his crimes. She gets back into her Russian car (which she has decided to keep), and leaves Paris. We do not know where she will go, but the film's final shot is a freeze-frame of Daïga in medium shot, smiling, smoking and driving away. She has not died for leading a male protagonist into a destructive sexual and violent milieu, as in *Pola X* and *Twentynine Palms*, nor has she been abandoned in a hopeless place by a male protagonist, as in *Trys Dienos*. In *J'ai pas sommeil*, it is she who escapes, who closes the narrative, and who does not depend on anyone else.

⁶¹ Thomson (2012).

Chapter Two: 35 Rhums, A Family Story

35 Rhums, released in 2008, is the story of a widowed train driver, Lionel (Alex Descas), and his only daughter, Joséphine (Mati Diop), a student in her early twenties. The two live together peacefully, but Lionel realizes that Joséphine must soon leave him and live independently, which is emphasized by the arrival of Noé (Grégoire Colin), who is suggested to be Joséphine's sometime lover, and who she will eventually marry at the film's denouement. Again, in this chapter, I will seek out the possible instances of intertextuality at work in the film which have either not been recognized, or perhaps given only a cursory glance in previous scholarship; namely the latent presence of Goethe's lied *Der Erlkönig* in the narrative, the significance of spectacle and performance shared by *35 Rhums* and Ozu Yasujiro's 1949 film *Banshun*, further connections opened up with Ozu's film *Ohayo* (1959), the significance of the presence of Fritz Zorn's memoir *Mars* in the film and the casting of actress Ingrid Caven.

“Who rides there so late?”: *Der Erlkönig* and Riffaterrean ungrammaticality

In one scene, the viewer shares the train driver's cabin with Lionel, and his now-retired colleague, René, who has come to visit him. As René hints at his burgeoning feelings of hopelessness, Lionel tells him that when he has dark thoughts, he thinks of his daughter. This remark is followed by a cut from the driver's cabin to a sequence in which Lionel and Joséphine ride together on horseback, her arm wrapped around his neck. The scene differs visually from the rest of the film in that the obviously hand-held camera moves, shakily, with the rise and fall of the horse's movements whilst, for the most part, Agnès Godard's cinematography in this film is categorized by use of a static camera in front of which the protagonists pass, or extremely fluid camera movements. Here, at times, the camera fails to fully catch Lionel and Joséphine, as the horse's uneven movements jolt the pair out of the frame. This difference in visual style, paired with the unusualness (certainly in the context of the film) of the image of the horse on train tracks, contributes to the general reading of this

short scene as a daydream sequence, as opposed to a memory, as Lionel's mind drifts from his work to Joséphine.

The intertextual link which Denis describes in connection with this sequence is with Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's poem, *Der Erlkönig*, written in 1782. The poem has been used many times as the text for *lieder* – Germanic songs designed for voice and piano accompaniment, especially of the Romantic period – the most famous of which is Franz Schubert's version, composed in 1815. Denis's 'own' version of the Schubert *lied* was famously sung by German baritone Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau.¹ In the poem/*lied*'s text, a father carries his sick son through a forest on horseback, desperately trying to find help. As the poem progresses, the boy fearfully tells his father that he can see the *Erlkönig* (variously referred to in English as the Erl King, Elf King or Alder King) of the title, trying to tempt him away, whilst the father tries to allay the boy's fears by telling him he only imagines what he sees. Finally, the boy cries out that the Erl King has struck him, and the father sees that his son is dead. Whether the boy truly sees the Erl King, or is only hallucinating due to fever, is not clearly expressed in the poem, but the father's desperate desire to save his son reflects, as Denis suggests, the depth of Lionel's love for Joséphine, and his fear of losing her, despite his wishes to see her live independently. Denis says:

I loved that *lied* so much. It's a poem. It's like a prayer. Oh, my child, my *kind*, please don't die. It's full of fear and anxiety [...] I think it was always in my mind that being a father, especially of one child that he will take care of on his own, makes her in his mind in more danger than if he has a wife and a few children.²

Indeed, in Goethe's poem, the father's desire to save his son becomes all the more intense as the child grows sicker; similarly, though Lionel tells Joséphine he wishes her to be free, the knowledge that she may soon leave him makes his need to protect her even stronger. At one point, for example, he arrives unexpectedly to pick her up from work (Joséphine works part-time at Virgin Megastore – Denis filmed this scene in the chain's Saint-Denis branch) on his motorbike, and their position on the bike – Joséphine clutching Lionel's waist – mirrors the way Lionel imagines them together on horseback. Denis also states: "This was something I did

¹ Fischer-Dieskau can be viewed performing the song at <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5XP5RP6OEJI>> [accessed 10 April 2011].

² Denis in Robert Davis, 'Interview: Claire Denis on *35 Shots of Rum*,' *Daily Plastic* (10 March 2009) <<http://www.dailyplastic.com/2009/03/interview-claire-denis-on-35-shots-of-rum/>> [accessed 29 February 2011].

because [Lionel's] dead wife was German, and there was this plan for father and daughter to go to Germany."³ Denis' visualization of the *lied* through Lionel's imagination, therefore, reflects not only the return of his thoughts to Joséphine's early childhood and to her German mother (we do not know exactly when Mechtilde died, but from photographs we may discern that she was alive when Joséphine was around one year old), but it also has connotations of death: as Lionel's bond with Mechtilde was severed, he fears that the time of intimacy between him and Joséphine will end. Several writers have noted Denis's description of the connection between *Der Erbkönig* and *35 Rhums*' dream sequence,⁴ but none so far have explored how the structure and characterization within the poem/*lied* engage with these elements in Denis's film, or why she might choose to play Tindersticks' music over her *Erbkönig* sequence, instead of Schubert's. James S. Williams describes the sequence's link to *Der Erbkönig* as one of the film's several "missed intertextual connections,"⁵ stating that "it adds weight to Joséphine's German background, yet for this viewer the link is too vague and fleeting to have any thematic value, all the more so because divorced from the Schubert *lied* by which it is best known."⁶ Williams wisely points out that Schubert's music, which would have produced far stronger connections for many viewers to the themes of the *lied*, is never utilized in the film. Instead, we hear Tindersticks' music – a slower variation on one of the film's two main musical themes, the original form of which has previously been associated with scenes in which characters travel by train, whether this means Lionel as driver or Joséphine as passenger. Any dream sequence may naturally be perceived as a jolt out of a film's narrative continuity: this sequence's strangeness lies in the shakiness of its camerawork, and in its depiction of Lionel and Joséphine on horseback, riding along railway tracks, as the presentation of the two as characters from the *banlieue* and not the centre of Paris, and of the milieu in which Lionel works and socializes, has been determined by images of train journeys. Images of modern transport are important in developing the bond between father and daughter, as she is pictured riding behind him on his motorbike. As Riffaterre writes of the dreamlike imagery of French poet Joachim du Bellay's 1558 collection of sonnets, *Songe*: "We know it is programmed for a double reading, since a *songe*, a dream, is defined as a vision to be

³ Ibid.

⁴ See Andrew Asibong, 'Claire Denis' Flickering Spaces of Hospitality,' *L'Esprit créateur*, vol.51, no.1 (Spring 2011), p.167; Yvette Biro, 'A Subtle Story: *35 Shots of Rum*,' *Film Quarterly*, vol.63, no.2 (Winter 2009), p.42-43; James S. Williams, 'Romancing the Father in Claire Denis' *35 Shots of Rum*,' *Film Quarterly*, vol.63 no.2 (Winter 2009), p.47-48.

⁵ Williams (2009), p.48.

⁶ Williams (2009), p.47-48.

deciphered, as an exemplum, in which each isolated detail has its own individual meaning but the details taken as a whole partake of the same significance.”⁷ The dream sequence introduces a strangeness, a sense of brief narrative interruption and diversion. As Riffaterre encourages the reader of Bellay’s poetry to decipher the significance of its strange details to the set of sonnets as a whole, we may explore how the ungrammaticalities of this short scene in *35 Rhums* might open up deeper meanings regarding the film’s entire narrative. If the viewer is familiar with *Der Erlkönig* and recognizes Denis’ reference to it, it may seem odd that she does not utilize Schubert’s own music in this instance (and this would not have been unimaginable; though the film is scored by Tindersticks, soul, lovers’ rock and easy listening tracks are all important textual elements of certain scenes). The Tindersticks track may seem to rupture the connections between the sequence’s images and *Der Erlkönig*, but I would posit that this apparent break may in fact allow us to evaluate *Der Erlkönig*’s connections to *35 Rhums* in a different way to what we might expect. As Riffaterre writes, of textual ungrammaticalities:

Each episode is an enigma, since each scene can be read only in relation to the neighbouring scenes and, after backwards and forwards comparison, must be transposed into an analogical discourse. The obscurity lies less in the difficulty of translating than in the very necessity of doing so: the text conceals only in order to reveal, but we must still go through the ritual lifting of the veil.⁸

Denis’s reference to *Der Erlkönig*, veiled beneath Tindersticks’ music, to paraphrase Riffaterre, will reveal possibilities for reading the poem/*lied* other than that which seems to be the first, most obvious conclusion, that *Der Erlkönig* mirrors the death of Lionel and Joséphine’s relationship, despite his desire to protect her. The Tindersticks track, importantly, is entitled *René’s Death*, and indeed the dream sequence quickly segues into shots of Lionel spotting his friend’s body upon the railway tracks. Therefore, Denis chooses to replace one piece of music associated with death (Schubert’s) for another (Tindersticks’); but the Tindersticks piece accompanies the death of René, not of the child. I would argue here that, by not using the Schubert *lied*, Denis transposes death from the child (the son in *Der Erlkönig*, Joséphine in *35 Rhums*), or at least the notion of the death of their relationship, onto René.

⁷ Riffaterre, ‘Intertextual Semiosis: Du Bellay’s “Songe,” VII,’ *Text Production* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), p.112.

⁸ Riffaterre (1983), p.111.

Denis describes René as a “character condemned to death” acting only as an “alarm clock”⁹ in the film. René’s death, coinciding almost with Joséphine’s visiting Noé (when they decide to get married, we may assume), marks the end of the discord which has grown between father and daughter; they seem to become even closer, despite the knowledge, even if we do not realize it at this point, that Joséphine will soon leave Lionel. Thus, *Der Erlkönig*’s ending is defeated: the relationship between Lionel and Joséphine as they know it will end, but they will not be completely driven apart. This is suggested by the fact that father and daughter appear to progress peacefully towards change which, perhaps, may not even be too drastic if Noé and Joséphine continue to live in Noé’s flat, in the same building as Lionel. The ungrammatical presence of Tindersticks’ music in place of Schubert’s does not destroy intertextual connections with *Der Erlkönig*, but allows them to be re-evaluated. Tindersticks’ track may seem to ‘hide’ Schubert’s music, but rather it allows us to re-address the *lied* and re-imagine its ending: the consequences of 35 Rhums’ *Erlkönig* sequence will not be as tragic for Lionel and Joséphine as they are for Goethe/Schubert’s father and child. There will be a death, certainly (René’s), but it will not signify the irrevocable separation of father and child. If *Der Erlkonig* as text is repressed in the narrative, it is in the ungrammatical visualization of its verses alongside music from Tindersticks which points to the greater meaning of these connections, as Denis’s film may be said to save the child from his or her original fate. As with her approach to a polyphony of textual influences in her other films, Denis’s engagement with *Der Erlkönig* emphasizes the importance of an openness to multivocality in her authorial position but here, more importantly, she allows the Goethe/Schubert text to assume a new, performative role, where it can be re-imagined through the dialogue with her filmic images and Tindersticks’ music. Her role as author is not to silence and appropriate the *Erlkönig* intertext, asserting her own text’s supremacy, but to allow it to speak again, to open it to a different reading.

As stated above, I am also interested in how the structure of Goethe’s poem and Schubert’s *lied* may in fact be addressed alongside the characterization and narrative structure of Denis’s film as a whole. In her article, ‘Schubert’s *Erlkönig*: Motivic Parallelism and Motivic Transformation,’ Deborah Stein examines the musical motives associated with each protagonist in *Der Erlkönig*, and how these develop throughout the narrative. *Der Erlkönig*

⁹ Denis in Williams, op cit, p.47.

features four speakers – the unnamed narrator whose observations of the father and child open and complete the poem, the son, the father and the Erl King. Interestingly, *35 Rhums* also features four main protagonists – Lionel, Joséphine, their friend and Lionel’s former lover Gabrielle, and Noé – but, as in *Der Erlkönig*, the parent and child figures are centrally linked and share a bond which excludes the other characters. As Stein writes:

[W]hile the dramatic narrative is conveyed through an ongoing musical progression, the setting ultimately has to cohere as a unified musical structure. Schubert solved all these textual issues by associating specific musical ideas with each of the four characters and then deftly manipulating these ideas to convey the unfolding drama of the son's death.¹⁰

The unnamed narrator of *Der Erlkönig*, whose voice is heralded by an insistent piano motif, may be aligned with Gabrielle, Lionel’s former lover who lives in the same building as him: the narrator observes the action, but cannot interrupt or change its progress; Gabrielle, similarly, is an outsider – she observes Lionel and Joséphine’s relationship and longs to participate in it more intimately but her desire to join their family is not reciprocated. While *35 Rhums* does not commence with Gabrielle watching Lionel and Joséphine, as *Der Erlkönig* opens with the narrator observing father and son, when she is introduced she is immediately established as an external observer, as she waits for Lionel on her balcony and Joséphine gently refuses her invitation to visit. The piano motif which opens the *lied* will again be heard as the narrator’s voice re-appears in the final verse, observing the child’s death; Gabrielle’s outsider status, similarly, will be reinforced at the end of *35 Rhums*, as she knocks on Lionel’s door, only to be told that he and Joséphine wish to be left alone as she dresses for the wedding. After the narrator’s opening stanza in *Der Erlkönig*, stanzas two to seven establish a conflict of voices between the father, the son and the Erl King. Initially, the father tries to calm his son, and tells him he does not really see the Erl King; the Erl King’s voice then enters the narrative, offering the child great delights if he comes with him. Noé, then, may be aligned with the figure of the Erl King; while I do not suggest that Noé is malevolent, I would argue that Denis initially (if only briefly) presents him as a threatening, or certainly ambiguous, figure. When Noé first appears onscreen, he stands in the darkened staircase outside Joséphine and Lionel’s door, his face in shadow; as he looks down the hallway, the camera pans very slowly towards two adjacent doors, one of which conceals Lionel and Joséphine, but he does not approach it.

¹⁰ Deborah Stein, ‘Schubert’s *Erlkönig*: Motivic Parallelism and Motivic Transformation,’ *19th Century Music*, vol.3, no.2 (Autumn 1989), p.148.

When Lionel sees Noé for the first time following his return, they catch each other's gazes in a shot reverse-shot formation, but do not greet one another, establishing an atmosphere of tension; this slightly ominous presentation of Noé might well relate to *Der Erlkönig*, as it is only the father/Lionel who sees this figure as an unambiguous threat. I would add that Grégoire Colin's physical appearance is markedly different in *35 Rhums* in comparison to his appearance in Denis's previous films. In *US Go Home* (shot when he was nineteen years old), *Nénette et Boni*, *Beau travail* and *L'Intrus*, Colin is youthful, short-haired and clean shaven. In *35 Rhums*, conversely, his hair is longer, falling across his face, and he has facial hair for the first time; the quick, energetic movements which characterized his earlier performances for Denis are replaced with a slower, more resigned gait – in short, he appears less youthfully 'innocent.' As Olivier Séguret writes: "il est celui des acteurs de Claire Denis dont la transformation a connu la plus forte amplitude."¹¹ Both Noé and the Erl King are associated with foreign places: Noé regularly 'disappears,' travelling for work, and suggests that Joséphine accompany him; the Erl King tries to tempt the child to his realm where "many fair flowers are on the shore."¹² The clearest connection we may find between Noé and The Erl King is his position as the character who will, apparently, take the child from the father. However, as I have already argued, if Denis' engagement with *Der Erlkönig* as text lies hidden in the narrative, due to the rupture created by the images' ungrammatical engagement with Tindersticks' music, this allows the *lied* not to dominate and prophesize, but instead to be re-told. Mary Orr writes, "as Riffaterre realized, to ignore the references in culture, the 'ungrammaticalities' or traces that disrupt smooth reading or translation of words is to ignore the ways in which text retranslates itself over time."¹³ Thus, Noé's Erl King role may be retranslated: his presence may bring about the end of Lionel and Joséphine's current relationship, but Joséphine will go willingly to him; the transition, ultimately, appears to be a peaceful one and Lionel will not lose his daughter completely.

Without sufficient knowledge of musical theory to provide a detailed description of the musical motives used in Schubert's *lied*, I may at least address one interesting factor of its structure, and how it interacts intertextually with Denis' film: as Stein highlights, the father's words to his son are initially set in G minor, but "as the struggle over the child unfolds, the

¹¹ Olivier Séguret, *35 Rhums pour la route*, *Libération* (18 February 2009), p.22.

¹² Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Der Erlkönig*, trans. George Bird and Richard Stokes, in Stein (1989), p.146.

¹³ Orr, op cit, p.158.

father's tonal regions become increasingly remote from the tonic G minor, while the Erl King's final appropriation, at the moment when the child can sing no longer, is the tonic key itself."¹⁴ The Erl King's shift into a key associated initially with the father thus posits distance between father and child, who has now been taken by the Erl King. This motivic transformation might be said to reflect the shift in relationships between characters in *35 Rhums*. When Joséphine visits Noé, though we are not instantly aware of it, some change occurs which we can identify at least retrospectively as her decision to marry him. Importantly, the dream or *Erlkönig* sequence almost immediately follows this scene – it is certainly the first scene in which we see Joséphine and Lionel together after she visits Noé. Therefore, the *Erlkönig* sequence performs a completely different narrative role to that which we might expect. Though we are not immediately aware of a shift among these three characters' relationships, the *lied*, through Denis's apparent concealment of it under the music of *Tindersticks*, can in fact be re-addressed, becoming the text which informs us not of irreversible death or the death of love, but the fact that Joséphine may have begun to welcome her desire to be with Noé. As Andrew Asibong writes, "it is precisely because of the possibility of non-violent separation and forward movement for father and daughter that growth and movement within the terms of the film can actually take place."¹⁵ Joséphine and Lionel, we may expect, can perhaps move more peacefully than expected towards change.

Spaces for performance: Denis, Ozu and the Ricoeurian speech event

The most widely acknowledged intertext to be associated with *35 Rhums* is Ozu Yasujiro's film *Banshun* (*Late Spring*, Japan, 1949),¹⁶ and I will briefly list some of the major connections between the films below. Regarding narrative, both films depict a widowed father and his only daughter reaching the stage in their relationship when the daughter will leave the father. In *Banshun*, as in *35 Rhums*, the father, Professor Somiya (Ryu Chishu) will encourage his unwilling and devoted daughter Noriko (Hara Setsuko) to leave him and marry. Pretending that he plans to remarry and will thus no longer need Noriko, Somiya, with Noriko's aunt, effectively dupes his daughter into marrying, though it is clear that he acts not out of malice,

¹⁴ Stein, op cit, p.149.

¹⁵ Asibong, op cit, p.163.

¹⁶ See Asibong, op cit, p.165, Biro, op cit, p.38 and Williams, op cit, p.48.

but because he could never have ordered her to marry – she must feel that he will survive without her before she leaves. *35 Rhums* does not share *Banshun*'s narrative of deception, but Lionel does constantly tell Joséphine that she need no longer look after him, encouraging her to be free. Both films also feature a sequence in which the father shows an interest in a potential new partner (which I will discuss below), thus signalling a shift in the dynamics of his relationship with his daughter. At *Banshun*'s denouement, Somiya returns to his empty house alone after Noriko's marriage, a scene which is mirrored in *35 Rhums* by a shot of Lionel alone after Joséphine's wedding, unpacking a rice cooker which Joséphine had bought at the beginning of the film (and which she then hid upon realizing Lionel had already bought her one); the presence of the object makes Joséphine's absence even more palpable. *35 Rhums*' mise-en-scène has obviously been influenced by that of *Banshun*: we often see Lionel and Joséphine in medium shot, viewed from a static perspective as they meet and pass each other in the corridor of their apartment, which echoes Ozu's use of a static camera to show Somiya and Noriko passing through the entrance hallway of their house, as if oblivious to the gazes of any other, and immune to pursuit from the camera. Importantly, however, Denis does not go so far as to adopt Ozu's favourite camera angle, at around three feet from the ground, though of course when the Japanese families Ozu presents sit upon *tatami* cushions on the floor to eat, this angle seems completely appropriate. Denis says, of her film's camera angles: "I did as much as I could to indicate Ozu as an inspiration while not using that framing, because that's not me. I wanted it from my point of view, in a French apartment."¹⁷ Father and daughter are regularly pictured eating together in both films; furthermore, both Ozu and Denis's films begin with shots of trains and railway tracks, though while in *35 Rhums*, we initially experience the train driver's perspective of the railways lines as the train moves, *Banshun* opens to a shot of the empty Kitakamakura station, with no trains in sight. Later, however, the train will become an important motif as it carries Noriko and her father to Tokyo, away from the enclosed sanctuary of their home, while in *35 Rhums* the trains appear to serve as a symbol of constancy in Lionel's life, as he drives the same routes each day. It would seem that the process of influence runs direct and uninterrupted from Ozu's film to Denis's, but another intertext enters the circuit: Denis mentions also her memories of her mother's stories about her own father, Denis's grandfather, a widower who raised her alone, whom Denis describes as "un grand-

¹⁷ Denis in James Bell, 'All in the Family,' *Sight and Sound*, vol.19, no.8 (August 2009), p.44

père magique qui avait élevé seul sa fille et qu'elle avait eu du mal à quitter.”¹⁸ Denis recalls bringing her mother to see *Banshun*, remembering that “she really had a sort of shock to see that film [...] I told her, ‘Maybe, once, I will try to make a film like that for you.’”¹⁹ Thus, Denis’s film’s intertextual engagement with *Banshun* is less part of a direct process of influence, than a circulation of texts in which Denis’s own memories are part of the network. Again, this reflects the porosity of Denis’s authorial approach: her own dearly held memories do not simply form the base for *35 Rhums*’ narrative, but engage textually with Ozu’s film.

The influence of *Banshun* on *35 Rhums*, which is clear to anyone who has seen both films, has already been fairly widely noted, so I would like here to focus specifically on notions of performance in and the intertextual connections between two scenes which, in each of their respective films, may be read as narrative turning points and which have not previously been highlighted. I will address the intertextual interplay of these two scenes alongside Ricoeur’s notions of discourse (as opposed to language system) as an event which occurs due to the reciprocal processes of listening and reacting. Ricoeur focuses on the temporal actualization of discourse, stating that “Every apology for speech as an event, therefore, is significant if, and only if, it makes visible the relation of actualization, thanks to which our linguistic competence actualizes itself in performance.”²⁰ Vital to the event of performance or speech, and to this analysis, is the necessity of reception and reaction, enabling discursive circulation. In *Banshun*, Somiya and Noriko watch a Noh play together, during which Noriko sees Somiya share a glance with widow Mrs Miya, whom her aunt has told her Somiya may marry, and she dejectedly assumes that her father no longer needs her. Of course, it is only retrospectively that we realize Somiya does not actually intend to remarry. In *35 Rhums*, Lionel, Joséphine, Gabrielle and Noé shelter in a bar after their car breaks down on the way to a concert; the four characters dance with each other and, crucially, in front of or indeed ‘for’ each other; when each member of the quartet dances with another, they have an audience, which is certainly not impartial or detached, in the form of the other characters. The Noh play that Somiya and Noriko watch is *Morikawa*, which depicts the distress of a woman after the loss of her lover.

Japanese Noh theatre

¹⁸ Denis in Romain le Vern, ‘Claire Denis: Interview (*35 Rhums*)’ (16 February 2009) <<http://www.excessif.com/cinema/actu-cinema/news/claire-denis-interview-35-rhums-4995034-760.html>> [accessed 10 March 2011].

¹⁹ Denis in Davis (2009).

²⁰ Ricoeur (1976), p.11.

[I]s structured around song and dance. Its most obvious characteristic is that the main actor performs while wearing a mask of exceptional beauty. Its themes are more concerned with human destiny than with events, and it developed into a highly stylised and refined performing art that takes place upon a very simple stage.²¹

The significance of facial expression in Noh theatre is crucial – the mask worn by an actor defines their role and, the actor’s movements of the mask under light and shadow are vital to establishing narrative development. During the Noh performance, Somiya, Noriko and Mrs Miwa exchange no words, but the shift in their relationships, and thus in the narrative trajectory, is visualized by changes in facial expression. The unhappiness of the female protagonist in *Morikawa*, as David Bordwell notes, “presents an explicit parallel”²² with Noriko’s own sadness, creating another loop in this intertextual network. Noriko will not admit the cause of her sadness to her father; it is, by proxy, visualized and performed by the music and the movements of *Morikawa*’s central protagonist. Though the spectator witnesses Noriko’s distress, she chooses to hide this from her father, refusing to admit what has upset her; Ozu’s close-ups of the changes in Noriko’s facial expression are vital in registering her moment of false recognition as a narrative turning point. The shots of Somiya and Mrs Miwa’s smiles are also crucial in establishing a juncture in the narrative, as they show the cause of Noriko’s distress. The circulation of looks between Somiya and Mrs Miwa, and Noriko’s reaction to this, may be aligned with Ricoeurian notions of discourse as event: the succession of shots of facial expressions is akin to a speech event, a ‘performance’ (indeed, the exchange takes place in a theatre) where shots instead of words form a ‘sentence,’ and where the ‘answering’ shot of Noriko’s reaction to those shots of Somiya and Mrs Miwa is deeply important to how we grasp the meaning of the sequence. The characters’ facial expressions are as important to the narrative development of the film as the mask is to the Noh play. Somiya is only ‘performing’ his intention to remarry for Noriko’s benefit, and indeed, though he may not expressly intend for Noriko to witness this exchange between him and Mrs Miwa, the notion of Somiya remarrying is, in the context of the entire film, merely a performance. The significance of the Noh play to the film’s overall narrative is emphasized as the scene ends,

²¹ Japan Arts Council website for Noh and Kyogen, <<http://www2.ntj.jac.go.jp/unesco/noh/en/>> [accessed 29 April 2011].

²² David Bordwell, *Ozu and the Poetics of Cinema* (London: BFI, 1988), p.310.

and the Noh music continues to play, briefly, mixing with the film's non-diegetic score after the cut to a shot of a leafless tree outside. As Bordwell states, this shot

[...]recalls Noh tradition (a stylized painted pine is part of a Noh set) and [...] picks up the tree motif from the first part [...] This remarkable shot not only serves as a transition out of the theatre but also privileges the Noh scene as the turning point of Noriko's emotional response.²³

The "tree motif" to which Bordwell refers is the shot of a tree in bloom near the film's opening, as Noriko cycles past, which is then almost repeated in a shot of another tree after Noriko exits the theatre, but this time the leaves are falling, suggesting, perhaps, the inevitable change coming in Noriko's life. The aural presence of the Noh music alongside the visual image of the tree outside the theatre thus stages the textual intertwining and overlap of the play with the film's diegesis. The notion of performance functions at various levels in this scene: we have the glance which symbolizes Somya's deception of Noriko, his own 'performance'; the succession of shots of facial expressions which establish the shifts in the narrative and may be viewed as a performative event of discourse, especially as they take place in a theatre, sharing the importance of facial expression with the Noh narrative which plays out on stage; and *Morikawa* itself becomes the proxy for Noriko's own distress, which she hides from her father.

In *35 Rhums*, when the Commodores' song *Nightshift* (1985), a tribute to deceased soul singers Marvin Gaye and Jackie Wilson, begins to play in the bar, Lionel and Joséphine initially dance together. However, Noé rises to his feet and takes Lionel's place to dance with Joséphine; Lionel walks away, smiling, but the smile appears forced, and will quickly become an uneasy frown as he watches Noé kiss his daughter. Joséphine, who is more likely, perhaps, to be unwilling to have this intimate moment watched than unwilling to kiss Noé, stops the kiss midway. Lionel, however, will spend the rest of the song dancing closely with the bar's attractive *patronne*, watched by a dejected Gabrielle. We will not see the culmination of this dance, but as the song abruptly stops with a cut to Joséphine, Noé and Gabrielle travelling home by bus, we can assume that Lionel has chosen to spend the night with the *patronne*. Of *Nightshift*, Denis says: "For me, it was a very important song [...] the first idea of *Nightshift*

²³ Ibid.

[...] came because I thought there was a sort of ‘night shift’ happening in the scene.”²⁴ Indeed, a change in the relational dynamics between characters occurs and, as in *Banshun*, it is established through shots of the characters’ facial expressions. As I argue above, the importance of the masks of *Morikawa* to the play’s narrative reflects the significance of facial expressions in the narrative shift in *Banshun*. As the friendly looks between Somiya and Mrs Miwa are misinterpreted by Noriko, whose face then registers the sadness which she will not explain to her father, so we witness the change in Lionel’s expression as Joséphine and Noé dance before him: Denis’s single close-up of Lionel’s uneasy expression is more of a narrative juncture than even the shot of the kiss itself – immediately, we understand how deeply Lionel fears losing his daughter, despite his protests. *Banshun*’s Noh play is a performance in the clearest sense of the word – the actors’ intention is to be watched – but we may also read the protagonists of *35 Rhums* as performers. To follow Ricoeur again, the series of shots which establishes the performativity of this dance scene (the close-ups on those watching add to the notion that those dancing are performers) can be read as a discursive event, where actions and reactions are equally important in the narrative’s development. Noé invites Joséphine to step out of the role of daughter and into the role of his lover, almost as if to deliberately present this relationship to those watching them (most young couples, I would posit, would not wish a parent or prospective parent-in-law to watch them kiss intimately). Joséphine, however, is unwilling to take part in this performance, to assume this change of role at this time, especially with her father watching. When Lionel dances with the *patronne*, he knows that his friends and daughter are watching, and his performance shows Joséphine and Gabrielle that he can be independent. If we follow Butler’s notion of gender as performance – that “there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender [...] identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results”²⁵ – we might say that Joséphine, in rejecting Noé’s advances, is reluctant to don the gendered persona of sexual adult woman, more comfortable with remaining her father’s daughter. Lionel, as if to expressly emphasize that he too can be independent, dances with the *patronne*, also aware that the three other members of his group are looking on. Thus Lionel could be said to shake off the role of father here, in favour of presenting himself as a vital, attractive, single man. As Denis says: “He’s saying ‘Don’t expect me to be the leader of the pack.’ It’s a message to [...] Gabrielle, to his daughter

²⁴ Denis in Darren Hughes, ‘Dancing Reveals So Much: An Interview with Claire Denis,’ *Senses of Cinema*, issue 58 (2009) <<http://www.sensesofcinema.com/2009/50/claire-denis-interview/>> [accessed 1 April 2011].

²⁵ Butler, *op cit*, p.25.

and to Noé, ‘This is your life, don’t wait for me.’ He decides to have his own private night.”²⁶ Crucially, Lionel is no longer the ‘audience.’ Denis provides a close-up of Gabrielle’s face where her expression, and the framing, echoes the earlier shot of Lionel’s reaction to Joséphine and Noé dancing. It is now Gabrielle’s expression which wordlessly demonstrates the effect of Lionel’s ‘performance.’ this shot acts like a punctuation mark, beginning a new chapter in the narrative, after Lionel has asserted his independence. Denis’s decision to engage with Ozu’s film intertextually is in itself a discursive event: she creates a new text which is in dialogue with Ozu’s. As Ricoeur writes, “Text implies texture, that is, complexity of composition. Text also implies work, that is, labour in forming a language.”²⁷ The shared language is not a spoken one – there is no need for translation between French and Japanese – but one based, narratively, around looks and, technically, around shot patterns. That Denis chooses to stage this narrative turning point in a space of performance, upon a dancefloor where characters know they will be observed, mirrors Ozu’s decision to stage *Banshun*’s crucial narrative shift in a theatre, and this emphasis on performativity establishes the creation of a discursive event through shots of characters’ actions and reactions.

If, as Bordwell argues, the sadness of *Morikawa*’s central protagonist directly reflects Noriko’s sadness, we might also examine the intertextual links between 35 *Rhums* and the song *Nightshift*. Interestingly, the song has intertexts of its own: its writers (Walter Orange, Dennis Lambert and Franne Golde of the Commodores) lift lyrics by the singers to whom it pays tribute. From the chorus of Marvin Gaye’s 1971 song *What’s Going On*, *Nightshift*’s chorus uses the words “talk to me / so you can see/ what’s going on.” From Jackie Wilson’s 1967 single (*Your Love Keeps Lifting Me*) *Higher and Higher*, “Your love keeps on lifting me / higher and higher” becomes “your loving lifted us / higher and higher.” The song imagines that Gaye and Wilson, after death, are still making music “on the nightshift,” thus denying death as final and irrevocable; the tone is celebratory rather than mournful. The unease of Lionel, Joséphine and Gabrielle when faced with change seems ill-aligned with the warmth and hopefulness of the song’s lyrics, but perhaps, intertextually, the song may suggest a happier future which the characters do not yet perceive, if the ‘shift’ of the song’s title is as important as Denis states. *Nightshift* imagines the movement from life into death and then to

²⁶ Denis in Bell (2009), p.44.

²⁷ Ricoeur, ‘A Response by Paul Ricoeur,’ *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, ed. and trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p.37.

an afterlife as peaceful, whilst the shift in relationships in *35 Rhums* seems traumatic in the bar scene. However, perhaps the song could be said to do the opposite, intertextually, of what *Der Erlkönig* threatens to do in the scene I discuss above. *Der Erlkönig*'s prophecy of death, or at least the harrowing, definitive separation of father and child, is not realized, as Lionel and Joséphine accept the change in their relationship more peacefully than expected; *Nightshift*, if it can be said to prophesize, does so more positively, and eventually its lyrics, suggesting peaceful change, seem appropriate to the changed relationships among characters. The song becomes part of the performance of dancing and gazes, and engagement between the song's lyrics, Denis's framing of the characters' expressions and the narrative trajectory form another Ricoeurian speech event. If, as I argue, the lyrics constitute a prophetic reflection of a happier future, then *Nightshift*'s engagement with *35 Rhums*' narrative extends beyond its brief role as diegetic sound – it continues to work as part of a discursive speech event with the narrative until the film ends. The song's words, "you've found another home, I know you're not alone," seem particularly appropriate for Lionel's acceptance of Joséphine's impending marriage towards the end of the film, and Lionel, we may argue, has shown that he might independently find another companion, if he needs one.

The rebellious fart: *Ohayo*

There is another important link between *35 Rhums* and an Ozu film, which Denis mentions in a 2010 filmed lecture at the European Graduate School in Switzerland, where she is a professor of film. This link has not, as yet, attracted any critical attention. In one scene, Lionel goes to Noé's empty flat to close an open window. Alone in the spacious, darkened living room, he reclines on the sofa, opens his legs and farts noisily. The scene initially seems odd: a vulgar, loud moment in a film in which subtlety – of gesture, dialogue and of the camera's capture of expressions and movements – is privileged. But for Denis this scene provides an important link between *35 Rhums* and Ozu's film *Ohayo* (*Good Morning, Japan*, 1959). She describes this scene as "a sort of homage"²⁸ to *Ohayo*, a film in which farting is a persistent motif: young boys have farting competitions; one boy, Zen, is proud of his father's ability to

²⁸ Denis in 'Claire Denis: Characters, Past, Present and *35 Shots of Rum*, 2010,' Public lecture open for the students and faculty of the European Graduate School Media and Communication Studies department programme, Saas-Fee, Switzerland (2010) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Fi3Flja3N0> [accessed 1 May 2011].

fart loudly (his mother often thinks it is the sound of him calling her, and his farts echo the rhythm of the film's score when he is exercising); and when two young brothers, Minoru and Isamu, decide not to speak until their parents buy them a television, the only noise they allow themselves to make is to fart. For Lionel, Denis suggests, the fart signifies, unsurprisingly, a release, "as if it's the kind of thing he would never do at home with his daughter."²⁹

Farting, in literature, drama, poetry and film, occupies the area of the scatological, which can be defined as the textual exploration of obscene matter, often acts of defecating or urinating. Any excretion which passes the boundaries of the body, in Kristeva's analysis, may be read as an abject quantity, as "what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These bodily fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death."³⁰ The process of abjection, Kristeva argues, is something society demands we do as part of our socialization; it constitutes our conscious separation of ourselves from what is undesirable or harmful. We continue to regard the abject with fear as, after it has been rejected, it signifies death: the corpse and faecal matter are separate from our living bodies and we wish to remain distant from them and the states of death or uselessness of which they remind us. Farting, like defecating or urinating, has its positive purpose, namely in relieving our bodies of wind. But, like urine or faecal matter, the fart itself, if it is any kind of quantity, even an intangible one, is useless, with negative connotations of unpleasant odour. Georges Bataille discusses *l'informe*, or the formless: that which is undifferentiated, unnameable and unproductive.³¹ As Yves-Alain Bois and Rosalind E. Krauss write, "Bataille's 'matter' is shit or laughter or an obscene word or madness: whatever cuts all discussion short."³² The fart possesses exactly this formless quality – an expulsion of unpleasant odour which has no tangible shape or use (once expelled). But does Denis intend Lionel's fart to be abject, to be repellent? It may, rather, be read in terms of Bataillean sovereignty, which denotes behaviour that rejects notions of capitalist usefulness and appears to serve no productive ends. As Bataille writes, sovereignty is "une splendeur inutile [...] excéder en ce point la misère de l'utilité [...] Jamais rien de souverain ne devait s'asservir à l'utile."³³ Lionel's fart seems to have no advancing quality in the narrative but, as Denis suggests, it is a moment of release for

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Kristeva, 'Powers of Horror,' *The Portable Kristeva*, ed. and trans. Kelly Oliver (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p.231

³¹ See Georges Bataille, 'L'Informe,' *Documents*, vol.1, no.1 (1929), p.382.

³² Yves-Alain Bois and Rosalind E. Krauss, *Formless: A User's Guide* (New York: Zone, 1997), p.29.

³³ Bataille, 'La part maudite: La souveraineté,' *Œuvres complètes*, vol.8 (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), p.273.

him, an expenditure of energy with no productive value other than to signify Lionel's contentment at being able to relax. It signifies a moment where he does not have to be fatherly or respectable: he enjoys the emptiness of the house and the space it gives him to stage a minute rebellion against expectations of polite behaviour. Barbara C. Bowen examines a selection of 'fart jokes' from Renaissance literature and finds that

[P]leasure in making gross fun of scholastic rhetoric and logic persists well into the seventeenth century [...] besides provoking laughter in the audience or the readers, farting can be useful or profitable: it can help to cure illness, amuse and conciliate a patron, save a man from the Devil, or even (in Rabelais) engender pygmies.³⁴

The fart in the literature Bowen studies, then, can be read as a moment of release both for its potential to relieve the farter's wind, and to make the reader laugh. In *Ohayo*, certainly, the flatulence of the young boys and Zen's father is intended to amuse the audience, but it also has its place in the wider field of Japanese culture. As Bordwell notes:

The fart (*onara*, or *hé*) is a staple of Japanese art and literature, celebrated in scrolls depicting farting contests and in *senryu* poems [...] It may be relevant to *Ohayo* that there are now farting contests in Japanese television, and that a genre of children's comics is devoted to farting.³⁵

In Ozu's case, Bordwell states, the instances of jokes based around bodily functions in his films (Bordwell also mentions a scene in *Tokyo no gassho* (*Tokyo Chorus*, 1931) in which a man drops his wages into a urinal)³⁶, including the farts in *Ohayo*, are references to *nansensu* humour, which regularly referenced the scatological. *Ero-guro-nansensu* (erotic-grotesque-nonsense) was a Japanese cultural phenomenon which flourished around the 1920s and early 1930s, and "devoted itself to explorations of the deviant, the bizarre and the ridiculous."³⁷ *Nansensu*, deriving from the English 'nonsense,' generally describes the irreverent images which artists and writers created as a means of exploring the social and political instability of this pre-war period of capitalist growth and urban development. In *Ohayo*, the brothers'

³⁴ Barbara C. Bowen, 'The "Honourable Act of Farting" in Continental Renaissance Literature,' *Faecal Matters in Early Modern Literature and Art*, eds. Jeff Persels and Russell Gamin (Aldershot/Burlington: Ashgate, 2004), p.12,

³⁵ Bordwell, op cit, p.350.

³⁶ Bordwell, op cit, p.154.

³⁷ Edogawa Rampo and Jim Reichert, 'Deviance and Social Darwinism in Edogawa Rampo's Erotic-grotesque thriller "Kotō no oni,"' *Journal of Japanese Studies*, vol.27, no.1 (Winter 2001), p.114.

flatulence is, of course, humorous, but it also acts as a form of protest: the older boy, Minoru, is angry with his parents, and adults in general, for their constant use of what he regards as pointless pleasantries, and thus not speaking (and farting instead) separates the boys from the adult world which they resent and gives them their own (rather limited) language. Lionel's fart in *35 Rhums* might also be described as a kind of small retaliation, as I suggest above, against the rules of polite society, when he finds himself alone, with no one else to please. Dialogue in Denis's films is generally limited – communication is more often represented through exchanged looks and touches – and thus Lionel's fart is not too alien in Denis's universe, as it is a sort of bodily, non-verbal communication.

The brothers' farting in *Ohayo* may also be read as a kind of social performance: they try to impress each other with the volume of their flatulence. The youngest boy, Isamu, wishes to emulate the older boys as being able to fart loudly is, to him, proof of playground supremacy. The notion of flatulence as performance is not a new one: Joseph Pujol (1857-1945) was a performing 'farter' with the stage name 'Le Pétomane.' He became hugely popular at Paris' Moulin Rouge, claiming he could inhale air through his anus which he would then expel in a variety of entertaining ways. The English writer John Derricke, in his account of Irish life in the 16th century (*The Image of Irelande*) describes a professional 'farter,' *Braigetóir*, who entertained guests at banquets.³⁸ Lionel's flatulence in *35 Rhums* may be read, I propose, along the lines of Ricoeurian discourse as performance, and a performative intertextual discourse may be said to arise between the film and *Ohayo*. In Ricoeur's notion of the event of discourse, the process of reaction is important in establishing the actualized happening of speech as event, and yet Lionel has no respondent, no one who might react to his action. The very lack of an interlocutor, however, is important in this discourse. It is the emptiness which Lionel reacts to, a friendly, accepting audience which happens to contain no subjective persons. He cannot 'misbehave' in the company of his daughter and close friends without shame (his decision to dance with and then sleep with the *patronne* of the bar is an example of him rebelling against their expectations), and thus his small act of rebellion, we might say, brings their presence to the room, despite their absence. I would also argue that the Ricoeurian notion of discourse as performance may help us to interrogate the intertextual connections between *35 Rhums* and *Ohayo*. If, diegetically, Lionel's fart is aimed at his absent audience of

³⁸ See Greer Ramsey, 'A Breath of Fresh Air: Rectal Music in Gaelic Ireland,' *Archaeology Ireland*, vol.16, no.1 (Spring 2002), p.22.

friends and family or towards the comforting silence of Noé's apartment, then extra-textually the fart sequence may be aimed directly towards *Ohayo*, as a "homage," as Denis says. Minoru and Isamu perceive their parents as harsh and unjust, and reject their spoken language by farting; in Lionel, we find, conversely, a parent who farts as an act of rebellion. Lionel's fart scene in *35 Rhums*, then, acts as a kind of response to a call in *Ohayo* for parents to be less rigid in their discipline, and less irritatingly polite. The fart which sets the "intersubjective exchange itself, the happening in dialogue,"³⁹ between the two films in motion is, crucially, a non-verbal sound. In the English comical-political poem, *The Censure of the Parliament Fart*, which first appeared in 1655, a sudden fart in the House of Commons by an MP disrupts proceedings – the fart is readable as an expression of rebellion by the opposition members against the policies of the king and his ministers: it becomes a form of non-verbal dissent. As Michelle O'Callaghan writes, "As a part of speech, the interjection is a 'natural ejaculation' expressing feeling or emotion, without a grammatical connection with surrounding sentences, clauses, or words. The crudely interjecting fart is thus a natural force, free from restraint."⁴⁰ O'Callaghan draws on Bruce Smith's notion of "speech communities as acoustic communities. Sound draws attention to the spatial and temporal dimension of a community whose 'identity is maintained not only by what its members *say* in common but what they *hear* in common."⁴¹ There is no need for translation in the interchange between the Japanese film and the French one, as the means of communication in this intertextual performance is a recognizable sound, performed by every human body.

Denis, Ozu, Fassbinder and actors⁴²

Another interesting intertextual link between Ozu's and Denis's œuvres is both filmmakers' repeated casting of a 'family' of actors (I list Denis's most regularly cast actors in my introduction). Hara Setsuko, who plays Noriko in *Banshun*, would become, as James Bell

³⁹ Ricoeur (1976), p.16.

⁴⁰ Michelle O'Callaghan, 'Performing Politics: The Circulation of the 'Parliament Fart,'' *Huntington Library Quarterly*, vol.61, no.1 (March 2006), p.137.

⁴¹ O'Callaghan, op cit, p.125.

⁴² Parts of this section have been published in my article 'Denis, Caven, Fassbinder: Reading Performance Intertextuality in *35 Rhums* (2008),' *Studies in French Cinema*, vol.13, no.1 (2012a), pp.61-74.

states, “Ozu’s female muse,”⁴³ appearing in many of his films after 1949, including the ‘Noriko trilogy’ of *Banshun*, *Bakushū* (*Early Summer*, 1951) and *Tōkyō monogatari* (*Tokyo Story*, 1953) in all of which she would play unmarried or widowed characters named Noriko alongside Ryu Chishu (*Banshun*’s Somiya). Ryu began his relationship with Ozu as an extra in the director’s earlier films, but would go on to play lead roles in most of them after *Banshun*. Alex Descas (Lionel) and Grégoire Colin (Noé) had both appeared in numerous films by Denis before *35 Rhums*: Descas first appeared in Denis’s *S’en fout la mort* (1990), and then in *J’ai pas sommeil* (1994), *Nénette et Boni* (1996), *Trouble Every Day* (2001), the short film *Vers Nancy* (2002) and *L’Intrus* (2004); he has since appeared in *Les Salauds* (2013). Colin first appeared in Denis’s short film *US Go Home* (1994), and has since featured in the short *Nice Very Nice* (1995), *Nénette et Boni*, *Beau travail* (1999), *Vendredi soir* (2002) and *L’Intrus*. As if to emphasize the atmosphere of almost familial intimacy among many of those who worked on *35 Rhums*, Denis points out that she chose Julieth Mars-Toussaint to play Lionel’s best friend René because he was, in reality, an old friend of Descas’ – they completed military service together.⁴⁴ Of course both Descas and Colin have appeared in numerous films outside Denis’ œuvre, but there are interesting overlaps: Denis introduced Descas to American filmmaker Jim Jarmusch, for whom she had worked as an assistant director, who later cast Descas in his film *Coffee and Cigarettes* (USA, 2003); Colin appears in *Sex is Comedy* (France, 2002) a film by Catherine Breillat, whose work has regularly been discussed alongside Denis’s – especially with regard to the connotations of a female director filming the male body – and with whom Denis has been interviewed;⁴⁵ he also appears in Erick Zonca’s film *La Vie rêvée des anges* (France, 1998), where Agnès Godard, Denis regular director of photography, was one of two cinematographers. Particularly interesting is the connection which Denis perceives between Ryu and Descas. Descas’s characters in Denis’s films may often be described as conflicted paternal figures, whether this is Dr. Léo Semeneau of *Trouble Every Day*, nursing his wife through a horrendous addiction which leads her to kill – and which she probably contracted because of his scientific research – or indeed Théo, the father of a young son in *J’ai pas sommeil* who wishes to emigrate to Martinique against the wishes of the child’s mother. Of course, there is Lionel in the widowed father in *35 Rhums* who knows he should encourage his daughter to leave him and live independently, but laments this

⁴³ James Bell, ‘Late Spring and The Only Son,’ Notes to BFI release of *Late Spring* and *The Only Son* (2010), p.4.

⁴⁴ Anon, ‘Toutes les familles de Claire Denis,’ *Ouest-France* (21 January 2009), p.11.

⁴⁵ See Catherine Breillat and Claire Denis, ‘Le Ravisement de Marie: Dialogue entre Catherine Breillat et Claire Denis,’ *Cahiers du Cinéma*, no.534 (April 1999), pp.42-47.

prospect. Of Descas, Denis says “I told him, ‘I have the feeling I’m going to work often with you, because there is something in you that is so calm, that [...] helps me to create a character with you.’ [...] Like Chishu Ryu.”⁴⁶ On a basic narrative level, we see strong connections between Descas’s character in *35 Rhums* and Ryu’s similar role as a father who must relinquish his daughter’s companionship so she may marry in Ozu’s *Banshun*. There are also similarities in terms of performance intertextuality between the two actors’ positions in their respective directors’ œuvres. As I have suggested, Descas’ characters may often be read as paternal figures, and Ryu plays fathers in many of Ozu’s films after *Banshun*.

As Denis says: “Quand je fais un film, j’ai le sentiment que ma vraie vie s’y trouve [...] Avec l’idée de ce qu’est une vraie famille.”⁴⁷ Her fidelity to certain actors reflects an investment in engaging repeatedly with them, and observing how they develop throughout their shared projects. Appearances by her ‘stock’ actors in her films become markers of time, where we may notice the difference between the gait and physical appearance of, for example, the hyperactive nineteen-year-old Grégoire Colin in the short *US Go Home* (1994) and the slower, more worn 33-year-old Colin in *35 Rhums*. Colin’s characters in Denis’s films are often restless, whether this refers to the sexually frustrated teenage pizza chef of *Nénette et Boni* (1995), or Noé in *35 Rhums*, a man, probably in his late twenties, who is unable to settle anywhere. But what is the effect on the somewhat enclosed familial atmosphere in Denis’s work when an interloper enters the fold? Naturally, certain actors will only ever appear once in Denis’s films; they may simply be appropriate for a given role. Mati Diop (Joséphine), for example, a filmmaking student at the time and the niece of late Senegalese filmmaker Djibril Diop Mambéty had not worked with Denis before *35 Rhums* and has not since; French comedian Valérie Lemercier has appeared in only one of Denis’s films, 2002’s *Vendredi soir*. But what if such ‘one-off’ actors carry strong connotations of an elsewhere outside the Denisian universe? As I will argue below, when an actor embodies specific cultural and textual connotations, this can prompt intertextual engagements between Denis’s films and other texts.

German actress and singer Ingrid Caven (born 1938), has a brief but striking role in *35 Rhums*. Caven has a recognizable star image, as a glamorous, physically expressive performer who

⁴⁶ Denis in Davis (2009).

⁴⁷ Marc-André Lussier, ‘La vraie vie fait son cinéma,’ *La Presse* (11 July 2009), p.4.

leans away from mainstream cinema and, importantly, is best known for her association with German filmmaker Rainer Werner Fassbinder, one of the most subversive figures of the postwar New German Cinema between the 1960s and 1980s. In *35 Rhums*, Caven plays the German aunt of Joséphine and appears only briefly in the film, when father and daughter go to Germany to lay flowers on Joséphine's mother's grave. In a film in which narrative and character development is generally affected through close-ups of subtle gestures, slight changes in facial expression and sparse dialogue, Caven's performance is notable for being the most flamboyant, in terms of her speech, facial expressions and gestures. Before addressing Caven's role in *35 Rhums*, I will examine connections between the work of Denis and Fassbinder. Both filmmakers are known for regularly working with 'families' of actors: as Descas and Colin are part of Denis's group, so Caven is part of Fassbinder's. Fassbinder is known for his loyalty to (or, perhaps, his stranglehold over) his creative team. To cite some examples, Peer Raben was usually responsible for his films' music, Kurt Raab for his sets, Barbara Baum for costumes, and many of the technical staff doubled as actors. Denis, similarly, has surrounded herself with a regular production team throughout her career, including cinematographer Agnès Godard, screenwriter Jean-Pol Fargeau and editor Nelly Quettier, plus the music for six of her films has been composed by Tindersticks, or various members of the band. Fassbinder's company of actresses included, for example, Hanna Schygulla, Irm Hermann and Caven. A different dynamic exists in Denis's and Fassbinder's relationships with their actors; whilst Fassbinder is known for manipulative behaviour – his methods for directing Kurt Raab and Irm Hermann apparently involved making them cry⁴⁸ – Denis's actors speak positively of their experiences of working with her. Descas praises Denis for creating interesting roles for black actors, which do not centre on their colour, saying his meeting with her was “la vraie pierre de fondation”⁴⁹ of his career. Denis says: “I would hate people to feel we are the family and they cannot say no [to joining the next project] [...] I want everyone to be free, but the ritual is ‘Are you ready for this one? Are you in?’ [...] let's try, you know?”⁵⁰ Contextually, the engagement between Denis's and Fassbinder's œuvres is not necessarily a smooth one without conflict, but there are similarities to be found between the filmmakers' work.

⁴⁸ See Ronald Hayman, *Fassbinder: Film Maker* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1984), p.16.

⁴⁹ Descas in Jacques Mandelbaum, ‘Claire filme d'abord les êtres, non leur couleur de peau,’ *Le Monde* (18 February 2009), p.21.

⁵⁰ Denis in Davis, op cit.

Speaking about the influence of Fassbinder on *J'ai pas sommeil*, Denis says:

Ce qui reste, je crois de l'énergie des films de Fassbinder [in *J'ai pas sommeil*], c'est peut-être une forme de lucidité par rapport au désir de ne pas s'embarquer dans une recherche formelle excessive [...] Il suffit de penser à Fassbinder et voilà, on reste simple.⁵¹

J'ai pas sommeil might be read as a re-working of the film noir genre, with its focus on the darker elements of life in the urban environment, but there is no voiceover-led narration to reveal the motives of killer Camille, and he is not portrayed as a tortured sinner (voiceover and the inclusion of a conflicted central male protagonist being generic traits of film noir). Camille's crimes are depicted without the dramatic editing and music which is so often responsible for establishing atmospheres of intrigue in film noir, thus the film distances itself from restrictive generic or formal frameworks. Beugnet also explores the influence of Fassbinder on Denis's cinema, as regards genre:

[E]choed in Denis's work are Fassbinder's play on established genres to attack the conventions of bourgeois culture, his denunciation of the new cult for money and economic power that filled the gaps left by the erasure of history and the failure of the traditional system of values.⁵²

As Beugnet suggests, both filmmakers explore and subvert generic conventions. In the case of film noir, Fassbinder re-works the genre to displace white heterosexual male characters as the central agents of narrative, and rejects the notion of female or homosexual characters as secondary subjects without narrative agency (as indeed Denis does in *J'ai pas sommeil*, where Camille is mixed race and gay). In *Faustrecht der Freiheit* (*Fox and his Friends*, 1975), Fassbinder himself portrays Franz Biberkopf, a petty criminal with a troublesome relationship to a crime syndicate from which he seeks independence. Such themes of organized urban crime and the conflicted male protagonist's search for autonomy are prevalent in Hollywood film noir, but Fassbinder's Franz is not an average film noir protagonist: he is a homosexual rentboy. Of Franz's sexuality, Fassbinder says, "In films, plays or novels, if homosexuals appear, then homosexuality was the problem, or it was a comic turn. But here homosexuality

⁵¹ Denis in Jousse and Strauss, op cit, p.28.

⁵² Beugnet (2004), p.19.

is shown as completely normal, and the problem is something quite different.”⁵³ If we examine also Denis’s film *Trouble Every Day*, we see the subversion of the conventions of the horror genre: as Coré (Béatrice Dalle) and Shane (Vincent Gallo) submit to an addiction which compels them to maim the flesh of their sexual partners, but remain capable of tenderness, there is no clear definition between human and ‘monster,’ which opposes the ultimately cathartic definitions (these monsters are not like ‘us’) proposed by many conventional horror films. As Beugnet suggests, Denis’s spectrum of influences, and especially Fassbinder, demonstrates her attraction to “writers, filmmakers and artists whose production belongs to the art of the outcast and the subversive, to the social, cultural, racial and sexual margins.”⁵⁴ In Denis’s films, as in Fassbinder’s, narrative agency never belongs to a heroic, white, heterosexual male who will lead the story to a satisfying resolution. Fassbinder’s narratives are led by alienated characters at societal margins, who would not often have been privileged with subjective agency in mainstream cinema of the 1970s, when Fassbinder produced most of his output (and still, in many cases, today): immigrant workers, elderly women and transsexuals all feature as central protagonists. In his 1974 film, *Angst essen Seele auf* (*Ali: Fear Eats the Soul*), Ali (played by Fassbinder’s then lover, El Hedi ben Salem, who appears in several of his films), a Berber immigrant worker in his thirties falls in love with Emmi (Brigitte Mira – another Fassbinder regular), a German woman in her sixties, in the new West Germany, suddenly open (though not without hostility) to foreigners, but both characters eventually begin to struggle with the prejudices of others and how this new coupling affects their own conceptions of identity. Ali is a young man, who wants to drink with his friends and to remain immersed in Arab culture, whilst Emmi has long been a respectable German widow who wishes to lead a quiet life. In *35 Rhums*, the fact that Lionel’s daughter Joséphine is mixed race barely registers with the viewer until we see her blonde aunt (Caven), but the aunt/Caven’s presence in the film, through a chain of links leading to Fassbinder, may prompt us to consider both filmmakers’ portrayals of mixed race relationships. Ali and Emmi’s unusual (both in terms of racial and age differences) relationship is problematic from the outset, but in *35 Rhums*, no indication is given to suggest that the question of race was ever difficult for Lionel and Joséphine’s mother, Mechtilde. I would add, though, that harmonious relationships such as Lionel and Joséphine’s are rare, even nonexistent, in Fassbinder’s

⁵³ Fassbinder in Christian Braad Thomsen, *Fassbinder: The life and work of a provocative genius*, trans. Martin Chalmers (London: Faber and Faber, 1997), p.180.

⁵⁴ Beugnet (2004), p.14.

narratives. Examining mixed race relationships through these two films may then seem only to give rise to a discourse of disagreement. But race in Denis's cinema is never really incidental and, despite the fact that it does not form a crucial source of conflict in *35 Rhums*, the viewer will undoubtedly note that almost all of the characters are black, or mixed race. Denis says "my main desire was to make it simple and solid...calm, since all the characters are black, and I wanted to make it very clear that they do not live like clandestines. They have real lives, they are settled, they are French."⁵⁵ Portrayals of settled, happy non-white communities in Europe, untroubled by prejudice or poverty, are still somewhat rare in film, as Denis's statement suggests. When Joséphine gives a presentation on third world debt at university, to a classroom with a large number of black students, she claims that "you can discuss debt without getting all emotional," and is accused of being pedantic and ill-prepared. One of her classmates retorts, "Why not demand restitution for the slave trade? [...] Blacks get flushed down the drain." By including the classroom scene alongside her portrayal of the lives of Lionel, Joséphine and their friends (wherein race never seems to be an issue), Denis posits that, when race becomes a question, it can still be problematic, as it was when Fassbinder made *Angst essen Seele auf* in 1974. Such shared subversive attitudes to generic conventions and engagement with notions of racial harmony and tension thus open up a discourse between Fassbinder and Denis's œuvres.

I will now explore the particular engagements opened up between *35 Rhums* and certain films by Fassbinder through Denis's casting of Caven. As I state above, Caven's performance as Joséphine's German aunt is striking in its theatricality and the flamboyant expressivity of her gestures, especially when contrasted with the quieter, subtler performances of the film's other actors. This interchange between Robert Davis and Denis addresses Caven's role:

Davis: When they go to Germany, Joséphine's aunt almost seems a little bit theatrical in the way she describes what happened. It's an interesting performance.

Denis: Ingrid Caven is Ingrid Caven, no? You – I would not – I love her the way it is. I thought the way she – she's like a queen. In my mind she is a queen.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Biro, op cit, p.38.

⁵⁶ Davis, op cit.

Denis's statement does not tell us much about her specific reasons for casting Caven, but the word "queen" deserves attention: the term suggests a sense of femininity as power and importance. It is worth noting that Davis' interview with Denis was conducted in English, not her native French; thus we may assume that Denis does not use "queen" in any ironic sense – referring to Caven as camp 'old queen,' past her best, perhaps – as the French '*reine*' does not possess this kind of meaning. Denis may well be referring to Caven's position in European film 'royalty' as Fassbinder's associate and indeed his wife for a brief period (1970-1972). Various reviews of *35 Rhums* align Caven with the German filmmaker, describing her as the "muse mythique de Fassbinder,"⁵⁷ and the "ex-Fassbinder diva."⁵⁸ Caven made her cinematic debut with a small part in Fassbinder's film *Liebe ist kälter als der Tod* (*Love is Colder Than Death*) (1969). She has since appeared in more than fifty films and, significantly, twenty of these have been Fassbinder's. Even taking into account the fact that Fassbinder was an unusually prolific filmmaker, this still constitutes a large part of Caven's corpus of work. Fassbinder regularly cast Caven as highly sexual, extravagantly dressed 'bombshells,' whether these were club singers or wealthy mistresses. The reputation as a melodramatically expressive performer which she developed in her work for Fassbinder extends also to her singing career – she has been performing and recording well-known French and German 'torch songs' since the 1970s and has been especially popular in France, where she now lives. Caven has released six albums, including a live recording of her interpretations of Edith Piaf songs, *Ingrid Caven chante Piaf, en public* (1988). Regarding her private life, Caven is especially famous for being Fassbinder's wife, though he was openly homosexual. He had several male lovers during their marriage and, on one occasion, thought it would be amusing to challenge his lover, El Hedi ben Salem, to chop off Caven's hair. But Caven was an assertive, independent woman who does not appear to have been traumatized by Fassbinder's often sadistic behaviour (both as husband and as director) and did not allow herself to be manipulated. She says, "I benefited quite considerably from it, from this energy, this power, which was also a way of seeing people, a moral position. The belief that every human being has poetic potential is still so strong in me today."⁵⁹ Of Caven, Fassbinder says, "Of all the actresses and actors I've been involved with, Ingrid is the least willing to let herself be

⁵⁷ François Lévesque, 'Un des meilleurs films de Claire Denis,' *Le Devoir* (11 July 2009), p.e9.

⁵⁸ Nigel Andrews, 'Danger: Satirist on the Loose,' *Financial Times* (9 July 2009), p.11.

⁵⁹ Caven in Katja Nicodemus, 'No Morals without Style,' *Sign and Sight* (31 May 2007)

<<http://www.signandsight.com/features/1372.html>> [accessed 20 May 2011].

reduced to being an actress,”⁶⁰ suggesting that he knew he could not dominate her as easily as his other actresses, such as Hanna Schygulla, whom he termed “very ‘obedient.’”⁶¹ In 2000, Caven’s partner Jean-Jacques Schuhl won the Prix Goncourt for his book, *Ingrid Caven: roman*, not a conventional biography but an imaginative re-telling of pivotal events in her life. Schuhl quotes from Fassbinder’s working notes, which show how deeply the director valued Caven’s talent: “De tous ces gens avec qui j’ai travaillé, qui ont, en commun, commencé à apporter la preuve d’une utopie concrète, il reste aujourd’hui, à part Peer Raben et moi, seulement peut-être encore Ingrid Caven.”⁶² The book addresses Caven’s status as a muse to both Fassbinder and couturier Yves Saint-Laurent, highlighting the importance of her place in the annals of 20th century European popular cultural history. Thus, when Denis cast Caven, she already possessed an established star image, developed through, as Vincendeau’s definition of a star would suggest, an “amalgam of [her] screen image and private [identity].”⁶³

Caven’s acting style may be another reason for Denis’s use of the word ‘queen’: her performances for Fassbinder are usually extravagant in gesture, her characters wield sexual power over men, pulling haughty expressions with heavily made-up faces. In Fassbinder’s 1975 film *Mutter Küsters’ Fahrt zum Himmel* (*Mother Küsters Goes to Heaven*), Caven plays singer Corrina Coren, daughter of Hermann Küsters, who kills his boss and commits suicide on the factory floor, and of Emma (Mutter Küsters of the title, played again by Brigitte Mira), who seeks to save her husband’s reputation. Corrina, immaculately coiffured and dressed in expensive clothes, is visually different from her dowdier mother and sister-in-law. She arrives to comfort Emma but soon realizes that the publicity generated by her father’s death could further her singing career, and begins a sexual relationship with a journalist, feeding him exaggerated information about her father. Corrina invites her mother and brother to watch her sing at a nightclub, and does not object when the compere introduces her as “the daughter of the factory murderer.” As she performs her song, she is captured in medium shot under a spotlight, a haughty figure wearing an elegant black dress, gesturing theatrically. In *Händler der vier Jahreszeiten* (*The Merchant of Four Seasons*) (1971), Caven plays the unnamed lover of Hans, a fruit seller. She first appears in a high window, entreating him to come to her, a

⁶⁰ Hayman, op cit, p.96.

⁶¹ Hayman, op cit, p.97.

⁶² Fassbinder in Jean-Jacques Schuhl, *Ingrid Caven: roman* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000), p.123. Schuhl’s text is in French, though Fassbinder’s original notes were in German.

⁶³ Vincendeau (2000), p.viii.

distant melange of striking colours, the sources of which only become clear when the camera pans towards her – dyed red hair, bright red lips and a white lace dress, in striking contrast to the muted colours of Hans’ wife’s sensible clothing and mousey hair. We see her in a garden of red roses, telling Hans she cannot marry him as her wealthy father would disapprove and, after Hans’ death at the film’s end, she appears in the background at his funeral but says nothing, and walks out of the frame. The overall impression of “the love of Hans’ life” is that she is regal, distant and untouchable, reflected by her positioning at the film’s opening as a face in a high window.

In *Satansbraten* (*Satan’s Brew*) (1976), Caven plays Lisa, a lover of underachieving author Walter Krantz, who begs her for sex, but is denied and mocked both as a lover and a writer. She wears heavy make-up, a fur coat and rollers in her hair (outside); her demeanour shifts between dismissive *froideur* and fierce anger, when she screams at Krantz and beats him. Reading Caven’s roles in these three films, we see her as embodying an extreme form of eroticized femininity: her physical movements may be wild, as they often are in *Mutter Küsters* and *Satansbraten*, or she may simply elongate her body sensuously to attract her lover, as she does in *Händler der vier Jahreszeiten*, but these movements are always deliberate and exaggerated. This performance intertextuality between Caven’s roles for Fassbinder may be read as extending into her work for Denis in *35 Rhums*. In contrast to *35 Rhums*’ other protagonists (communication between them is generally expressed through close-ups of looks, touches and the briefest dialogue), the German aunt is loud and talkative (speaking a mixture of German and French). Her demeanour sways between a knowing *hauteur* and coquettish invitations to other characters to drink with her. Her movements and facial expressions are dramatic; she is pictured not in intimate close-ups (a common feature of Denis’s films) but at the centre of medium shots, with the spectator and every other character’s gaze directed towards her. She recalls happy times in the past, but also (we assume) alludes to Joséphine’s mother’s death by drowning; her eyes widen, she stretches out her arms and hands. Her gestures, facial expressions and her position ‘centre-stage’ echo her performance and framing when Caven, as Corrina Coren, performs on a darkened stage in *Mutter Küsters*. She uses elaborate, elegiac language: “We basked in the sun, lost in the dunes”; “I’m [...] scared of that sea. So vast, so wide. And when you scream no one hears you.”⁶⁴ In alluding to a past which is

⁶⁴ These passages are the English translations of German dialogue from the 2007 New Wave Films DVD release of *35 Rhums*.

both traumatic and romantic, the German aunt's characterization reflects Caven's own position as an actress with a significant past, as a symbol of glamour, decadence and often treachery in Fassbinder's work. Furthermore, the spoken German language enters the film for the first time here through Caven's character, and Joséphine, it emerges, speaks German competently and can converse with her aunt. Lionel, played by Descas – the most recognizable Denis 'veteran' in the film – barely speaks German, which reflects how much Caven is a stranger in this universe.

Caven's performance in Denis's film could be argued to be Fassbinderian, rather than Denisian. She enters this universe of familiar actors, playing familiar roles (Descas as father, Colin as unsettled, boyish man), and her performance style and the way she is framed posit her as an outsider. The performance intertextuality between Caven's role for Denis and her work for Fassbinder may be read through the prism of Ricoeur's theory of discourse as event of speech, where intertextual dialogue can be read as "the relation of actualization, thanks to which our linguistic competence actualizes itself in performance."⁶⁵ When Caven appears in *35 Rhums* she may be read more as a performer than as an actor, certainly if we compare her appearance to that of Denis's regular cast members in the film. Caven's presence is a textual deviation actively pointing to an elsewhere through an alien performance style. Through casting Caven, and presenting her as a Fassbinderian outsider, rather than directing or filming her in a way which would insert her neatly into *35 Rhums*' filmic world, Denis is not simply appropriating from Fassbinder, but rather mobilizing a discourse between her work and that of the German filmmaker. Ricoeur's notion of the speech event is particularly appropriate in this context as it emphasizes *performance* as the real happening or event of discourse, but also openness towards the interlocutor. Denis's casting and direction of Caven does not just pay tribute to Fassbinder, but rather opens an intertextual pathway towards his work by contrasting the flamboyant Caven/German aunt with Denis's own actors/characters; a discursive circulation between the two filmmakers is set in motion, echoing the Ricoeurian notion of discourse as a performative event, where two different acting 'languages' and cinematic heritages interact. We might ask if every cameo appearance by a star in a film could be read as a Ricoeurian speech-event, but I would argue that Ricoeur's emphasis on *performance* is most relevant when the star's performance style deviates strikingly from those of the film's other

⁶⁵ Ricoeur (1976), p.11.

actors, as Caven's does in *35 Rhums*. Caven's roles for Fassbinder may be read as constructions of an exaggeratedly sexual, haughty femininity – her heavy make-up, dramatically styled hair, and of course the commanding, often outlandish, sexuality of her performances and the boldness of her gestures establish an image of an extreme, 'bombshell' femininity. In *35 Rhums*, while Caven is no longer a youngish *femme fatale*, she still presents a kind of femininity not apparent in the film's other female characters. Joséphine, for example, wears men's shirts and no make-up, and brushes off Lionel's questions about her romantic life, as if she is unwilling to don the role of adult woman which she will have to assume when she leaves her father. Gabrielle performs a role which is generally read as masculine in her employment as a taxi driver. The German aunt, with her lacquered blonde hair, lipstick and coquettish gestures, conversely, performs a kind of glamorous, extravagant femininity. Thus, if we align Butler with Ricoeur, the intertextual discourse between *35 Rhums* and Caven's work for Fassbinder can be read as one in which performance is crucial, not only in terms of acting style, but in how specific gendered roles are 'acted out.'

Ricoeur's theory of discourse as performance may also be extended to apply to the dance scene in *35 Rhums* and a similar scene in *Mutter Küsters*, in which diegetic instances of performance can be read as vital links between the two films. *35 Rhums* and *Mutter Küsters* provide very different representations of both films' central theme of family loyalty: the intimate devotion shared by Lionel and Joséphine is wholly absent in Emma Küsters' children's conduct towards her. We may, however, find connections between the two films as regards social performances of familial roles, in scenes where the onlookers' reactions are as important as the actions of the performers. In *Mutter Küsters*, when Corrina invites her mother and brother to watch her musical routine at a Frankfurt nightclub and she proudly bears the title of "the daughter of the factory murderer," a close-up of Emma's shocked expression, tears streaming down her face, affects a definitive shift in the film's narrative, as Emma realizes she cannot trust her daughter and will have to turn away from her family for support, which will end disastrously. The juxtaposition of the close-ups of the bereft Emma with medium shots (positioning the spectator as if they were in the nightclub, sitting by the stage) of Corrina's haughty, dramatic performance signal how deep the rupture between mother and daughter has become, in the gulf between their reactions to Hermann's death. A similarly crucial narrative shift is affected in the 'performance' sequence in *35 Rhums*, when Lionel, Joséphine, Gabrielle and Noé take to the floor.

The makeshift dancing space of *35 Rhums* is evidently not as clear a locus of performance as the nightclub stage in *Mutter Küsters* but nonetheless, as Joséphine and Noé dance together, Joséphine's self-conscious withdrawal when he kisses her shows that she is fully aware that she is being watched by her father, that a kind of social performance of adult womanhood is being acted out. As in *Mutter Küsters*, close-ups on the onlookers' faces, interspersed with the 'performances,' are pivotal moments in the narrative's development. Caven does not appear in the bar scene in *35 Rhums*, but strong intertextual links can be read between that film and *Mutter Küsters*' scenes of performance. As performance style is crucial in positing Caven as an outsider, and therefore setting a Ricoeurian event of discourse in motion between Denis's film and Caven's work for Fassbinder, so the diegetic instance of performance in *35 Rhums* establishes an intertextual dialogue between the film and *Mutter Küsters*. If we need a linking prism through which to connect Denis's and Fassbinder's films, we may find it in Denis's decision to cast Caven herself, whose Fassbinderian performance creates a textual rupture in *35 Rhums*, and points towards the elsewhere of the German filmmaker's œuvre.

Caven's short appearance in *35 Rhums* (lasting around four minutes) has merited only brief mentions in reviews and analysis. Where it is discussed, this tends to be for the 'theatricality' of her performance, and this noticeable shift away from the subtler acting styles of the other actors is not always regarded positively. In Nigel Andrews' opinion, "Ingrid Caven [...] turns kitchen-sink realism to kitsch and surrealism, Europudding-style. Credits reveal that the film had German co-funding. Sometimes money talks and the language is Gobbledegook."⁶⁶ I disagree with Andrews that Caven's appearance in *35 Rhums* is one of the "less magisterial moments"⁶⁷ in Denis's film (Denis certainly disagrees – Caven, after all, is a "queen"), but I find his highlighting of the notion of language and comprehensibility interesting: the language *35 Rhums* speaks, when Caven appears, is not "Gobbledegook," but a language in process, in action – in performance. Caven's 'alien' performance style and the connections between the diegetic instances of performance in *35 Rhums* and *Mutter Küsters* draw Denis's film into an event of discourse with Caven's past as a performer and, especially, with the work of Denis's great twin and opposite, Rainer Werner Fassbinder.

⁶⁶ Andrews, op cit, p.11.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

Swallowed Tears: René, Fritz Zorn's *Mars* and *Lectures du rail*

In one scene, after René has retired, he returns to Lionel a book which he had borrowed. The exchange happens very quickly, and it is difficult to see the book's title or author's name. However, if one pays close attention, or even pauses the film, if this is possible, it becomes clear that the book is *Mars* by Swiss-German author Fritz Zorn. According to James S. Williams, the fact that the title of the book "lies tantalizingly just out of vision" means that "potentially fertile textual connections are curtailed."⁶⁸ As yet, no work interrogating the intertextual connections between *35 Rhums* and *Mars* has been done. However, if we do not rely alone on what the film shows us, and consult interviews Denis has given, we find the roots of her decision to choose *Mars* as the book shared by Lionel and René, and may explore the intertextual engagement set in motion. First published in Switzerland in 1976, *Mars* is the author's account of his cancer diagnosis in his early thirties, and of the life which he believes caused him to contract the disease. Raised in a wealthy lakeside area of Zurich, Zorn (a pseudonym meaning 'anger' in German – his real name was Angst, meaning 'fear' or 'anxiety') concludes that the tumour on his neck is "an accumulation of 'swallowed tears' [...] all the tears I had not wept and had not wanted to weep in my lifetime had gathered in my neck and formed this tumour because they had not been able to fulfil their true function, which was to be wept."⁶⁹ Zorn blames his parents' emphasis on 'correct' behaviour for his illness and describes life with them as oppressive – in their home no one is permitted to discuss problems, to argue, or to talk about sexuality or any other remotely contentious issue – their harmony must never be ruptured. At one point he states "my parents are my cancer."⁷⁰ At school, Zorn is an excellent but isolated student, who engages only with "higher things" – classical music and literature. At university, his loneliness and inability to express his feelings worsen, and he begins to identify as depressive. When he dies at 32 years of age, after completing a PhD and becoming a teacher, he has never had a sexual encounter, feels incapable of expressing desire, and concludes that he has led a suppressed half-life. As the pseudonym he assumes demonstrates, however, he adopts a combative attitude in his final months. If he is to die from

⁶⁸ Williams, op cit, p.47.

⁶⁹ Fritz Zorn, *Mars*, trans. Robert and Rita Kimber (London: Picador, 1982) p.118.

⁷⁰ Zorn, op cit, p.179.

cancer, he wants first to rid himself of the passivity, the “psychic illness,”⁷¹ which he feels his parents bred in him, and declares himself, at the book’s end, “in a state of total war.”⁷²

In several interviews, Denis highlights a radio broadcast which inspired elements of *35 Rhums*, in which an interviewer, in the driver’s cabin of a train, asks the driver what he likes to read, and what it means to him. As Denis recalls, “not only did [the driver] like to read but [...] it was a very sensual thing for him. He used words I had never heard on the radio. He said ‘ma condition d’homme’ [...] is so bad that if I had no books, I would be dead by now.”⁷³ Denis highlights the loneliness of the driver’s cabin, as described in the broadcast, the sense of responsibility and need for concentration. Deeply moved by the broadcast, she ordered a recording of it, which she listened to many times. She contacted Paris’ RER offices and asked to spend a day with a train driver in his cabin, concluding that “it was just what I wanted for [Lionel]: a solid job that made him responsible.”⁷⁴ Denis, in fact, spent time travelling with several different drivers in order to choose the right line for Lionel. The repetitive process of driving a train, of always being guided by tracks seems particularly appropriate as a reflection of Lionel and Joséphine’s relationship, particularly in the film’s early scenes: a steady, unchanging life where the prospect of diversion does not yet seem apparent. We can imagine, too, the disruption brought to René’s life when he is forced to retire and is no longer anchored to the tracks. As Denis says, “the track [...] brings you back to yourself.”⁷⁵ In my survey of the interviews in which Denis speaks about this radio broadcast around the time of *35 Rhums*’ release, I found no mention of the name of the programme. However, a 1994 interview which she gave on the release of *J’ai pas sommeil* in France, indicates that the story of the train driver who loves to read is older than we might imagine. Denis describes hearing an edition of broadcaster Daniel Mermet’s programme *Là-bas, si j’y suis* on radio station France Inter. The programme, *Lectures du rail*,⁷⁶ features interviewer Hervé Pochon asking passengers on a train which books they are reading as they travel and why. When he speaks to the driver, the driver tells him he loves to read, but cannot while he is working: the need for concentration is too great. It is clear that this is the programme to which Denis refers – in the end credits of *35*

⁷¹ Zorn, op cit, p.165.

⁷² Zorn, op cit, p.215.

⁷³ Denis, European Graduate School Lecture, op cit.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ A re-broadcast of *Lectures du rail* is available on the unofficial *Là-bas, si j’y suis* archive website, <http://www.la-bas.org/article.php3?id_article=507&var_recherche=lectures > [accessed 12 October 2011].

Rhums, she offers thanks to Daniel Mermet. This sense of responsibility is reflected in Lionel, a man who has raised his daughter alone and values her happiness above all else – a solid, dependable character (who shrugs off this role momentarily by farting in Noé’s apartment, and more committedly when he dances with the bar’s *patronne*). As Denis recalls, “[Pochon] sort un livre de son cabas et commence à lui lire un passage, c’était *Mars* de Fritz Zorn. Soudain, la voix du conducteur du RER rejoint la sienne, il connaissait le texte par cœur.”⁷⁷ The viewer who spots the cover of *Mars*, and is familiar with the book, may immediately conclude that Denis proposes a connection between Zorn and René: both seem to be in depressive states, and are unhappy with life, though there are differences – Zorn has cancer and will unwillingly die young whereas René retires in good physical health, wishing he had died young; Zorn rages against death, whilst René commits suicide. On a train journey home with Lionel after his retirement party, René says: “vivre cette condition d’homme, c’est ça qui est dur” – he may be referring to the situation of being retired sooner than he wishes or, quite simply, a feeling of inability to cope with life. Zorn describes his life as defined by his “depressive and hopeless condition.”⁷⁸ But this is also reflected in the unhappy “condition d’homme” of Pochon’s train driver. In fact, listening to Pochon’s interview reveals that much of René’s dialogue in 35 *Rhums* has been directly lifted, or at least paraphrased, from Pochon’s driver’s words. The driver says “le métro et tout ça, c’est dur [...] je me reconnais pas dans ce monde, pas du tout.”⁷⁹ René tells Lionel, “tu vois que je suis pas fait pour cette vie, le métro, tout ça.” Pochon’s driver says “je pensais que j’aurais eu la chance de mourir jeune mais ce n’est pas arrivé.” René says this exact phrase to Lionel. Both René and the driver describe themselves as having “une santé de fer,” and lament the fact that they will probably live to be a hundred. Pochon’s driver says he has considered suicide in the past (though finding Buddhism has helped him); René expresses no such urge but kills himself before the film ends. Because *Mars*’ visual appearance in the film is so fleeting, I would argue that it momentarily disrupts the viewer’s engagement with the narrative: we imagine that this text is significant but, if we cannot see what it is, we are compelled to watch the film again, or to rewind and pause it. Thus, the reference to *Mars* may be read as Riffaterrean ungrammaticality – it possesses great significance, but passes misleadingly in front of us as if it does not, and attempting to identify the book ruptures the spectator’s submersion within the diegesis. If the viewer is aware of

⁷⁷ Denis in Jousse and Strauss, op cit, p.30.

⁷⁸ Zorn, op cit, p.92.

⁷⁹ Pochon, op cit.

Mars' connection to Pochon's interview, the book's presence assumes another layer of significance in the film. Undoubtedly, Denis must have been moved by Zorn's words, as spoken by the train driver and Pochon, words which may have contributed to the development of René as a distressed, hopeless character, but the level of ungrammaticality in this reference is multi-layered as, if we identify the book, we will probably assume that the content of *Mars* is of primary importance in its intertextual connection to René. We are, however, misled as, only if we have read Denis's 1994 interview on the subject, we realize that the book is significant mainly because of its connection to the train driver who has clearly inspired Denis's characterization of René. Riffaterre's analysis of an example of periphrasis – the use of a circumlocutory or indirect phrase – in du Bellay's *Songe* seems particularly appropriate to describe *Mars*' brief appearance in *35 Rhums*: "since it takes the form of an enigma, it also has the enigma's delaying effect. Even if it is quickly deciphered, it nonetheless commands our attention by the kind of detour it forces us to take."⁸⁰ We must also remember that the book initially belonged to Lionel, which emphasizes that its status as a 'train driver's book' is perhaps more important than its content. Denis recalls the driver saying "if I had no books, I'd be dead by now." Indeed, it is significant that, after René returns the book, which means so much to his real-life counterpart, that he chooses to die. Why does Denis place *Mars* within her film-text so ungrammatically, when its significance is clear in interviews? Denis never travelled with Pochon's driver; his name is never mentioned in Pochon's interview, or by Denis, who might well have wished to find him. The reference to *Mars* in *35 Rhums* is a brief, almost secretive one and perhaps this mirrors the fact that the identity of Pochon's driver, who loves books and speaks so frankly about suffering with "l'angoisse d'être homme,"⁸¹ remains private. If we have heard his interview, his connection to *35 Rhums* is very clear but his representation in the film-text as a brief, fleeting reference through the proxy of *Mars* preserves his anonymity, as he would no doubt wish – Denis's tribute to him is quiet, almost invisible, and unintrusive.

⁸⁰ Riffaterre (1983), p.115.

⁸¹ Pochon, op cit.

Chapter Three: *Vendredi soir*, Intertexts in the embouteillage

Vendredi soir, released in 2002, is the story of Laure (Valérie Lemercier), a middle class Parisian woman in her thirties, whom we meet on a Friday night, before she is due to leave her own apartment to move in with her boyfriend, François (whom we never see in the film). After packing her belongings, she sets off in her car for dinner at her friends' home, but soon realizes that, due to a transport workers' strike, she is in the middle of an enormous traffic jam. She ends up sharing her car with a stranger, Jean (Vincent Lindon), and the two spend the night together, having sex in a hotel. At the film's conclusion, Laure awakens in bed with Jean early on Saturday morning, and runs back to her car, smiling, without bidding Jean goodbye. The film is based on Emmanuelle Bernheim's novel, *Vendredi soir* (1998), which in turn was inspired by transport workers' strikes in Paris in 1995. In this chapter, I will explore the intertextual significance of Denis's casting of actors Grégoire Colin, Valérie Lemercier and Vincent Lindon, and the film's unusual uses of sound and animation.

Grégoire Colin and syllepsis

As Laure switches on her car radio, she hears the announcer say that the transport strike has led to people being stranded all over the city, and realizes that a man who knocked on her car window was not threatening her, but simply seeking shelter. The announcer suggests that motorists give weary pedestrians lifts in their cars and the remorseful Laure decides to act on this advice. We see a close-up of the back of a young man's head and, as he turns to the right, we see that the character is played by Grégoire Colin, one of Denis's most regular actors who, at this point, had appeared in leading or significant roles in several shorts and features for her. Laure steps out of her car and calls to Colin's character (he is only named "Le jeune homme au parka" in the credits), offering him a lift. The young man, however, turns her down, telling her he will be quicker on foot, and walks out of the frame and back into the anonymous darkness of the night. At the time of writing, Colin has appeared in seven films (including shorts) for Denis, out of the twenty film projects she has thus far completed: before *Vendredi*

soir, in *US Go Home* (1994), he plays exuberant teenager Alain; in 1995 an adolescent killer in the short *Nice, Very Nice*; in 1996 he had his first leading role in a full-length feature for Denis as sexually frustrated teenage pizza chef Boni in *Nénette et Boni* (for which he won a Special Prize at the 1996 Locarno Film Festival) and, in 1999, he appears as Gilles Sentain, a pivotal character in *Beau travail* who invokes extreme jealousy in commander Galoup. *Beau travail* was, on its release, the most high profile of Denis's films. It was more widely screened and reviewed internationally than any of her previous features had been, thus even the viewer who had had only the briefest contact with Denis's œuvre prior to *Vendredi soir*, through *Beau travail*, would be more likely to recognize Colin than they would many of her other regular actors in her less widely screened earlier films such as, for example, Richard Courcet, who plays Camille, the lead in *J'ai pas sommeil* and has a small role in *Beau travail*.

With his firmly established Denisian background, it seems odd that Colin enters and exits the narrative of *Vendredi soir* so quickly. This is not to say that Colin's reputation as a well-known actor in French cinema is confined to Denis's œuvre: as his biography on the *Evene* culture website states, after beginning his acting career in theatre as a child, and having a few roles in French films, Colin became regarded as "la figure de l'adolescent du cinéma français,"¹ with a high-profile role as a disturbed teenager in Agnieszka Holland's *Olivier, Olivier* (1992). In his twenties, his roles included the part of Chriss, a wealthy seducer in Erick Zonca's *La Vie revêe des anges* (1998) and a leading part as an arrogant actor in Catherine Breillat's *Sex is Comedy* (2002). Still, the link between Colin and Denis in the public and critical imagination is undeniably strong. As Sabrina Champenois writes: "Depuis *Nénette et Boni* [...] on guette sa silhouette racée, son nez busqué, ses yeux noirs, si en amande qu'on l'imaginerait d'ascendance asiatique; au total, une présence quoi qu'il arrive singulière, intrigante."² Indeed, Champenois' reference to *Nénette et Boni* suggests the strength of the connection between actor and director, and also how recognizable Colin's distinctive face is from Denis's work. The regularity of Colin's appearances for Denis is often mentioned in articles about him (though his slight role in *Vendredi soir* is barely ever noted). He is described as one of Denis's "acteurs fétiches" by Odile Tremblay³ and Louis Guichard.⁴ The

¹ Anon, 'Grégoire Colin – Biographie,' *Evène* (24 May 2009) <<http://www.evene.fr/tout/gregoire-colin>> [accessed 15 March 2012].

² Sabrina Champenois, 'La Tangente Grégoire Colin,' *Libération* (17 May 2006), p.11.

³ Odile Tremblay, 'La cinéaste de la subtilité,' *Le Devoir* (11 October 2007), p.b7.

shot of Colin's profile is what triggers our moment of recognition in *Vendredi soir*: in *Nénette et Boni*, we are first introduced to him via a profile shot, viewed from the backseat of a car in which he is travelling; in *Beau travail*, he walks into shot in profile, in a crowded nightclub, wearing Sentain's legionnaire's uniform. The camera lingers upon his face, but he walks out of the frame. This brief introduction marks him as a solitary figure, as he is the only member of his regiment who is pictured alone in the club, not dancing with the local women. Any shot of Colin's thin, memorable face, with his long nose and dark eyes, usually signifies the beginning of his crucial involvement in one of Denis's narratives: we remember this face, and it will fill the screen on several occasions throughout almost any of her films in which he appears. Why, then, does Denis introduce one of her most recognizable actors into *Vendredi soir*'s narrative, only to dismiss him after a few minutes?

Colin as actor is probably not readable as possessing a star persona (unlike Line Renaud or Ingrid Caven, whose long-established careers, fairly public private lives and performances in Denis's films I address above) in the sense Guy Austin describes: "Stars are not 'just' people, they are also commodities, brand names, whose capital is their face, their body, their clothing, their acting or their lifestyle."⁵ Colin is certainly well known in France but he is not an actor whose personal life is followed closely by the media, and he is not generally presented as a "brand" through which a film can be sold to the viewing public. His relationships and lifestyle are usually not mentioned when his film roles are discussed. However, within Denis's small group of regular actors, his is a highly recognizable face and, though his roles are diverse enough that he is never truly typecast, he repeatedly plays solitary, restless characters in Denis's films, who are associated with intense sexual desire. If Colin does not possess a star persona, we might at least read his repeated presence in Denis's work as demonstrating a kind of "performance intertextuality," to use Marvin Carlson's term again.⁶ As Colin arrives onscreen in *Vendredi soir*, we may expect that he is likely to play a pivotal role in the film, but his sudden departure confounds this. Indeed, as Beugnet writes: "The viewer who recognizes Grégoire Colin may pre-empt the beginning of a fiction from the presence of an actor and type of character familiar in Denis's story worlds."⁷ There is, we may assume, nothing incidental

⁴ Louis Guichard, 'La vie est là, simple et limpide – 35 rhums. De Claire Denis,' *Télérama* (21 February 2009), p.43.

⁵ Guy Austin, *Stars in Modern French Film* (London: Arnold, 2003), p.2.

⁶ Carlson, op cit, p.113.

⁷ Beugnet (2004), p.187.

about Denis's casting of Colin and the brevity of his performance; he is undoubtedly one of her most valued actors. Denis has said, jokingly: "They [her regular actors] are like mine. And I hate it when they work on other films! [...] When Grégoire is in a film, and I think he's badly lit, I think he's not like that, he's much better than that."⁸ I would propose, then, that, instead of barely noting Colin's presence in *Vendredi soir*, the viewer is in fact encouraged to recognize the oddness of his brief role. We may read it as a Riffaterrean ungrammaticality, a moment in the text which, in its strangeness, diverts the viewer from their engagement with the diegesis and points them towards an intertext which reveals the significance of the ungrammaticality in the primary text. As he exits as quickly as he arrived, it is Colin's status as *actor*, not as character, which comes to the fore, and this is the intertext which may explain his presence in *Vendredi soir*: our attention is drawn not so much to why the character disappears, as to why *Colin* does. Why does this actor, so recognizable from Denis's œuvre, not fulfill the type of role we would expect of him? As with Line Renaud's ungrammatical double presence (as a character and as herself) in *J'ai pas sommeil*, the viewer is jolted from engagement with the film's narrative into recognition of the pro-filmic world outside the diegesis, and the film's real shooting and casting processes. Colin, like Renaud, is readable as a sylleptic figure, to refer to Riffaterre, who writes, "syllepsis consists in the understanding of the same word in two different ways at once, as *contextual* meaning and as *intertextual* meaning."⁹ Colin's double or sylleptic role in the film consists of embodying 'le jeune homme au parka' (the contextual meaning) but also of being Grégoire Colin, an ungrammatical interloper who marks the film not simply as story, but as pro-filmic construction (the intertextual meaning). The intertext which the syllepsis refers to is simply the pro-filmic environment and conditions which produced the film, where we recognize Grégoire Colin as actor, and not the diegetic world where he embodies a character.

As I argue above, ungrammaticality which directs our attention to the pro-filmic may be read as a means of encouraging more critical awareness from the viewer, instead of allowing them to submit to belief in the diegetic narrative as temporary reality; rupturing the smooth trajectory of the fiction with intrusions from outside may prompt the viewer to engage with the real social context into which a narrative film enters. The ungrammaticality of Colin's

⁸ Denis in Eric Hynes, 'Claire Denis: Dialogue with Eric Hynes,' Walker Art Centre (15 July 2013) <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=onYtE01KmFE>> [accessed 1 October 2013].

⁹ Riffaterre (1980b), p.637.

appearance in *Vendredi soir* draws attention to the way we look at actors and characters, and the expectations we form regarding them. Colin's high profile roles as playboy Chriss in Zonca's *La Vie rêvée des anges* and a conceited actor in Breillat's *Sex is Comedy* centre around his respective characters' macho, posturing sexuality. Indeed, his roles for Denis before *Vendredi soir* are characterized by a febrile, often frustrated sexuality: we see the teenage Boni in *Nénette et Boni* masturbating and fantasizing about the wife of the local baker; in *Beau travail*, Colin's Sentain becomes the object of intense fascination as the camera lingers over his slim, smooth muscles in close up, visualizing Sergeant Galoup's jealous obsession with him, somewhere between deep hatred and desire. Cintra Wilson notes the likelihood of viewers familiar with Colin seeing him as an actor associated with sex, referring to him as a "French stud-boy" who is "usually too hot to keep clothed,"¹⁰ though she does also suggest that he presents more interesting alternatives to the characters often played by Hollywood leading men, whom she perceives as banal and uncomplicated. Thus, it would not be unexpected if Colin's character was placed in *Vendredi soir*'s narrative as an object of erotic fascination for Laure and a potential sexual partner. Does Denis, however, wish Colin to always be read in this way in her work? Her decision to cut short any sexual story featuring Colin in this film may be read as a means of working against the associations viewers could well have formed about the actor, both from his performances in her own work, and in his high profile roles elsewhere. She describes him thus: "Grégoire est un acteur tellement formidable, hors normes, intemporel, il n'aura aucun problème pour durer parce qu'il n'est pas le type à la mode qui a eu la chance d'avoir un rôle à succès qui collait à l'air du temps."¹¹ The terms "hors normes" and "intemporel" suggest Denis's conviction that Colin is an actor who can work outside the boundaries of categorization: even if his characters are often especially lustful or objects of desire, in a narrative like *Vendredi soir*'s, which is specifically about the sexual encounter, he can still elude our expectations of him.

Denis's refusal to present a character who conforms to any idea of a 'typically' sexualized archetype in her cinema may be read as a prologue to *Vendredi soir*'s deconstruction of the ways in which sex, desired and desiring bodies are presented onscreen. On accepting the role of Jean, Vincent Lindon (a more famous actor than Colin in France, the casting of whom I

¹⁰ Cintra Wilson, 'The Invariably Naked Grégoire Colin,' *Salon* (2005)

<http://www.salon.com/2005/05/05/gregoire_colin/> [accessed 3 April 2012].

¹¹ Denis in François Cohendy, 'Les surdoués de la composition,' *Le Progrès* (25 January 1997), unpaginated.

address below) states: “Ce qui m’a intéressé, c’est d’être l’objet du désir d’une femme, d’incarner le fantasme, d’être l’instrument de ce film, rien de plus. C’est très intéressant de travailler un personnage en évacuant toutes les questions du genre ‘d’où vient-il? A-t-il des enfants? Est-il marié?’”¹² As Jean is constructed for the viewer completely through Laure's subjectivity (we know nothing of his background), it would be tempting to view *Vendredi soir* as a reversal of, as Mayne writes, “how much cinema has relied on the objectification of women and how the representation of a woman’s subjectivity in film involves her ‘looks,’ in both senses of the term.”¹³ What the film reverses, however, is not the notion of the male character (or indeed spectator) as sole bearer of the desiring gaze, but rather the notion that vision is the primary means of provoking and representing sexual desire in cinematic narratives. Film, of course, is a visual medium but, in *Vendredi soir*, Denis works at appealing also to our senses of touch and smell in our perception of environments and characters. The primacy of the visual is undermined on many occasions in the film: as both Beugnet¹⁴ and Mayne¹⁵ note, when Jean first appears onscreen, a pedestrian in the midst of the traffic jam, a shot-reverse shot sequence between Laure, Jean and an attractive blonde woman applying make-up in her car (who is unaware that she is being watched by Laure) tells us that Laure seems to think that Jean is looking at the blonde woman, as if she imagines some connection between them. However, Laure’s is the car that Jean approaches, thus connection and understanding premised on vision are denounced as fallible. When Jean enters Laure’s car, he is presented as a series of sensations and textures: we hear the sound of his body moving in the leather car seat, suggesting the weight and volume he has brought to this confined space; the part of his body which is granted the most screen time in this scene is the rough skin of his hands, and we see his cigarette smoke drifting from Laure’s window, strongly invoking how this character would smell. When Jean and Laure make love in their hotel room, as Mayne writes, “often it is difficult to know exactly which body part belongs to whom [...] and the scenes are shot at very close range, emphasizing sensual and sexual connection less than specific sexual acts.”¹⁶ *Vendredi soir*’s portrait of Laure’s subjective desire does not centre around a polemic reversal of any long-standing erotic objectification of women in cinema: rather, in emphasizing both characters as constructed of texture, weight and sensation, it defies

¹² Lindon in Beugnet (2004), p.192.

¹³ Mayne, op cit, p.120.

¹⁴ Beugnet (2004), p.187.

¹⁵ Mayne, op cit, p.124.

¹⁶ Mayne, op cit, pp.122-3.

vision its objectifying potential. As Fabienne Bradfer writes, *Vendredi soir* is a film “de femme qui parle de femme mais touche les deux sexes.”¹⁷ The film’s focus on sensory dimensions above the visual in invoking male and female bodies and presenting sexual acts has been addressed eloquently by Beugnet¹⁸ and Mayne,¹⁹ but Grégoire Colin’s brief, though important, role in confounding the primacy of vision has not yet been explored in any depth. A close-up of his profile allows us a moment of recognition, and we may then believe that his character will be associated with sex and erotic fascination, if we recall his earlier roles for Denis, but we are denied fulfilment of such expectations. His presence is an ungrammaticality which jolts the viewer out of the narrative and leads us to recognition of the pro-filmic, as we ask why Colin disappears so quickly. The moment of visual recognition which occurs when we see Colin’s face is a false promise; it demonstrates that we cannot necessarily understand the important connections in the narrative through what we see, and what we expect to see. Denis defies the associations we may have made between Colin and sexual desire in her cinema through a shot which misleads us, and then disrupts any notions we have about sex and desire in her film as the territory of the visual, presenting us with a portrait of sex in which there is no space for voyeuristic objectification, only the gradual sensual invocation of bodies.

Ungrammaticality, Sound and Image

Several instances of ungrammaticality involving sound occur in *Vendredi soir*. In one scene, Laure allows Jean to drive her car along a short-cut, and she becomes alarmed at the speed of his driving. She tells him she wants to get out, but he leaves the car instead. After calming herself, Laure exits her car to look for Jean in the quiet back streets: occasional noises from the traffic jam are audible but distant, rather than providing a constant sonic backdrop as they do in previous scenes of Laure in the midst of the commotion. As she walks around, we hear the faint sound of bird song, though the scene is meant, diegetically, to take place at around 10pm. The sequence was, in fact, filmed at 4am, thus the first noises of the dawn chorus appear on the sound recording. As Denis says: “D’abord, bien sûr, on se dit, ‘il faut gommer, ce n’est pas logique des oiseaux un soir d’hiver à Paris’. Pourtant, ils appartiennent

¹⁷ Fabienne Bradfer, ‘*Vendredi soir*,’ *Le Soir* (20 November 2002), unpaginated.

¹⁸ See Beugnet (2004), pp.191-196.

¹⁹ See Mayne, *op cit*, pp.120-127.

émotionnellement à la séquence et on a fini par les garder.”²⁰ Like Colin’s strangely brief appearance in the film, the sound of birdsong at a diegetic hour to which it does not belong may draw the viewer out of submersion within the filmic narrative, and into recognition of the pro-filmic conditions of shooting. We might ask what Denis means by saying that the sounds of the birds “appartiennent émotionnellement” to the sequence. Indeed, it could be argued that the sound of the city waking during the night suggests an awakening in Laure, as she realizes that she is drawn to Jean, rather than frightened by him. It may even be tempting to say that the birdsong is a metaphor for Laure’s sexual awakening, as she leaves, temporarily, her role as an attached woman – settling into a life of co-habitation with her boyfriend – to spend an unplanned evening of sex with a stranger. But, as Mary Orr writes, “It is ‘indirection,’ the production of meaning by displacement,”²¹ which is crucial to the process of investigating Riffaterrean ungrammaticalities, and we may find the significance of the birdsong not through seeking its meaning within the text, but rather outside the text, in the pro-filmic world. I would propose that this use of atemporal birdsong as ungrammaticality is an indication that the film is not attempting to represent any kind of objective reality. Comparisons may be drawn here with the instances of ungrammaticality in *J’ai pas sommeil*: Line Renaud cannot exist as both herself (as her duet with Dean Martin, *Relax Ay Voo*, plays on the radio) and as her character, Ninon, in the same spatio-temporal universe; the newspapers we see which detail real killer Thierry Paulin’s crimes cannot be contemporary, as they are presented, to the murders of the fictional Camille which, in any case, take place some years after Paulin’s. These examples of ungrammaticality show powerfully that *J’ai pas sommeil* cannot possibly represent truth, and is not an attempt at unravelling the real story of Paulin. With *Vendredi soir*, there is also a need to demonstrate that the film is no attempt at documentary-style realism, but for different reasons. Indeed, the Paris transport strikes of 1995 were an inspiration for Bernheim’s book, and Denis emphasizes the fact that encounters like Jean and Laure’s may well have occurred during that period: “This really happened during the huge ‘95 strike [...] It was November, very cold, and there were a lot of brief encounters. People fell in love.”²² In the case of *J’ai pas sommeil*, Denis expressed an urgent need for audiences to understand that the film was not intended to reflect the true story of Paulin, and that such events could never really be

²⁰ Denis in Didier Peron, ‘Un film peut naître d’une musique,’ *Libération* (11 September 2002), p.4.

²¹ Orr, op cit, p.38.

²² Denis in Karen Durbin, ‘Quietly Celebrating a One-Night Stand,’ *The New York Times* (29 June 2003), p.21.

understood, no matter how much the media might try to categorize him satisfyingly as a monster.²³

As regards *Vendredi soir*, however, ungrammaticalities such as the birdsong do not serve to separate the film from any real events which may have inspired it, but rather to emphasize how much the narrative is built around Laure's subjectivity, her experience of sensations and her imagination. As Denis says: "Mon cinéma n'est pas forcément réaliste, j'aime bien osciller entre réalité et imaginaire, sans trancher."²⁴ This process of oscillation mentioned by Denis is crucial not only to the representation of Laure's experience and the film's sense of time as governed by Laure's subjectivity, but to the experience of the viewer. The birdsong, a small intrusion on the diegesis by the real situation of the film's shooting, disturbs our engagement with the narrative's trajectory and any sense of time as linear. As Beugnet writes: "it is precisely by eschewing plot development to construct, instead, a temporal space that is like a suspended moment, an 'enchanted parenthesis,' that Denis can, in turn, create the vividly sensuous world that is *Vendredi soir*."²⁵ Jean-Michel Frodon also emphasizes the parenthetical state of the film's nocturnal narrative, with Laure between two homes and two stages of life, describing the film's chronotope as a "soirée de transition," a "moment de stase" and an "espace crépusculaire qui sépare la veille du sommeil."²⁶ The moments of ungrammaticality in the film where viewers may potentially be jolted into awareness of the shooting process may be read as reflecting this notion of parenthesis: the viewer shifts between recognition of the pro-filmic and immersion within the narrative, thus we enter an interstitial space where the rules of storytelling are broken down and reworked. Denis describes her desire to capture, in the film, the experience of the present progressively being invoked, not the memory of the past. She opted not to use a voiceover to depict Laure's perspective because "la voix 'off' évacue le présent, amène une espèce de nostalgie et l'homme, au lieu de surgir dans l'instant, allait devenir un souvenir d'homme."²⁷ The viewer's experience of the narrative is reflected in its presentation through Laure's subjective experience, which is characterized by a sense of gradual development: Laure slowly comes to know Jean (if she can be said to know him at all), through the progressive experience of the textures and smells of him, and the sensations he

²³ See Denis in Piatszek and Séguret, op cit, p.3.

²⁴ Denis, in Clémentine Caillot, 'Claire Denis,' *Cinélycée* (2002) <<http://www.objectif-cinema.com/interviews/162.php>> [accessed 19 April 2012].

²⁵ Beugnet (2007), pp.80-81.

²⁶ Jean-Michel Frodon, 'Songe érotique d'une nuit de grève des transports,' *Le Monde* (11 September 2002), p.31.

²⁷ Denis in Michel Guilloux, 'On a tous croisé un regard, un jour,' *L'Humanité* (14 September 2002), p.46.

provokes in her own body. There is no sense that she is recalling this evening in retrospect, and possesses any knowledge of him that the viewer does not also come to share. The viewer oscillates between the pro-filmic and diegetic, in a parenthetical space where we drift in and out of the narrative, as if we are watching it being constructed progressively in the present, as a series of thoughts and sensations. Everything that Laure hears and sees in the film, thus everything the viewer hears and sees too, is governed by her subjectivity: her perception completely guides the narrative. This is not to say that each shot is constructed from her physical viewpoint – the viewer often watches Laure watching others – but the film’s meandering depiction of time and its focus on exploring Laure’s sensory experience do posit her as the conduit through which we receive most of the narrative. The birdsong may be read as something which is imagined by Laure, in a confused state between sunset and dawn, between two states (living alone and co-habiting), as she seeks Jean, a stranger, in the streets, with no idea what may happen before the sun rises. Conventional time is replaced by Laure’s subjective impression of time: at the beginning of the film, the camera drifts above Paris’ rooftops, seemingly in real time, but as the shot pans out we see that the footage has in fact been speeded up, as the passing cars in the street below shoot past at an unnaturally quick pace, as if to suggest that Laure wishes to slow down her final evening in her own apartment, the frantic pace of life outside a reflection of the inevitable changes towards which she is moving. Later, as she encounters Jean on the stairs of a bar, slow-motion footage is used to depict the intensity of this near embrace, as if each second of it is savoured slowly by Laure.

The influence of Laure’s subjectivity is also evident in the film’s brief animated sequences. As Laure daydreams in her car, the letters forming the car in front’s rear logo become animated and dance around; when Laure and Jean go for a meal after having sex, Laure’s pizza’s toppings move into the shape of a smiling face. As Rémi Fontanel suggests, it might be tempting to read the animations as visualizations of characters’ emotions; for example, when Laure imagines the ‘S’ jumping to the end of the word ‘VALVE’ on the back of the car, this could reflect her impatience and desire to move through the traffic jam; when the pizza toppings move into a smile, followed by a shot of Jean smiling, this could reflect his contentment²⁸ (in any case, I would argue that Laure’s is truly the only subjective perspective which we share in the film). However, I would agree with Fontanel that this is rather an

²⁸ Rémi Fontanel, ‘La Narration Plastique,’ *Le Cinéma de Claire Denis, ou l’énigme des sens* (Paris: Aléas, 2008), p.83.

artificial reading, and that the animations have greater significance for the film as a whole; he writes:

[C]es instants assez brefs où l'image s'anime de *l'intérieur* relèvent d'abord une posture (de la cinéaste) qui vise à faire exister aussi le monde (en l'occurrence ici, des objets) *dans* ses personnages. Laure et Jean ont une influence sur leur environnement (sur l'espace et le temps mais aussi sur les objets habituellement inanimés qui les entourent) car ils savent les regarder, les toucher des yeux et établir ainsi une véritable relation intime avec ce qui les entoure.²⁹

The animations may be read as emphasizing how deeply the narrative is governed by Laure's subjectivity, and the sensations she experiences, as we share her daydreams with her. Elsewhere in the film, Laure imagines Jean and herself spending the evening with her friends Bernard and Marie (it will be an awkward evening, she supposes, as Jean will not be allowed to smoke around her friends' baby), and this sequence is visualized in an iris shot, a technique which, like animation, Denis had never used before and has not since. For Cédric Mal, such sequences constitute a "manière de nous faire physiquement reconnaître, et effleurer, l'imagination de l'héroïne du film [...] Réel et imaginaire s'interpénètrent sans que l'on puisse tout à fait discerner l'un de l'autre."³⁰ But I would extend this notion to argue that the animations and other manipulations of the film's visual appearance may be viewed as ungrammaticalities in terms of the film's formal construction. Reading Joachim du Bellay's sonnet, *Songe VII*, Riffaterre describes, in a quote which has already been useful for analysis of *35 Rhums*' dream sequence, a dreamlike sequence in the text as "programmed for a double reading, since a *songe*, a dream, is defined as a vision to be deciphered, as an exemplum, in which each isolated detail has its own individual meaning but the details taken as a whole partake of the same significance."³¹ For Riffaterre, representations of dreams in texts are ripe territories for finding ungrammaticalities as they are diversions from the interior 'reality' of the narrative and its chronotope, pointing towards layers of meaning which are elusive but which may be grasped through connecting the text to its intertexts. Laure's daydreams are moments of diversion from the narrative as it unfolds for the viewer, but they are also important for our reading of the film in its entirety as a kind of diversion from normal time and

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Riffaterre (1983), p.112.

life, where daydream and reality merge. Crucially, the animations do not simply divert us from the 'reality' (which is never intended to be objective, given that we experience it through Laure's subjectivity) of the narrative, but they disturb the film's formal structure.

As Mal writes, the use of animation is "très inhabituel dans le cinéma de Claire Denis."³² The viewer who has seen any of Denis's other films will probably note this; indeed, such animated intrusions are wholly alien to her visual language, which is generally characterized by Agnès Godard's slow, tactile cinematography. Godard's images in this and many of Denis's films can drift towards the painterly and abstract, such as the extreme close-ups of Laure and Jean's naked bodies, in which their forms appear indistinguishable (we might also consider the extreme close-ups of the marks left by Camille and Raphael's fingers on each other's bodies in *J'ai pas sommeil*, or the strange, abstract shot of Nénette's hair floating in the swimming pool at the start of *Nénette et Boni*) but such images are always achieved through working with the filmed image itself – using the camera and filters to alter a shot's graphic qualities rather than any digital animations or additions. There is nothing smooth or sophisticated about the aesthetic of the animations – they seem rather clunky next to Godard's sensuous cinematography. Discussing the advancements in digital animation demonstrated by Disney/Pixar studio films such as *Toy Story* (John Lasseter, USA, 1995), Pixar founder Ed Catmull states: "The problem is, the closer you get to reality, that's when the brain starts to kick in with its auto-recognizers, and thinks something is a little weird."³³ The animations in Denis's film reflect Catmull's statement: elements of the 'real,' filmed mise-en-scène appear in the sequences and are manipulated, but they still look distinct from the rest of the film's aesthetics: the moving 'S' on the car is obviously a digital creation, as are the pizza toppings. This jolts us into questioning the way they are constructed, thus diverting us from our engagement with the diegesis. The relative clunkiness and unreality of the animations does not necessarily mean that the viewer's pleasure in the image is curtailed. Discussing the work of early cinema pioneer Georges Méliès who, between 1896 and 1913, made hundreds of films which often contained fantastical elements created using stop motion-animation to make it seem as if characters had suddenly, magically, appeared or vanished, J.P. Telotte writes:

³² Mal, op cit, p.242.

³³ Ed Catmull, in J.P. Telotte, 'Better than real: digital Disney, Pixar and beyond,' *The Mouse Machine: Disney and Technology*, Chicago, University of Illinois Press (2008), p.160.

For all of their often startling images and sudden transformations, his films ultimately relied upon the real as a measure of their magic, using it as a point of reference, gauging it through its very absence. In the process they underscored how much the real always bears traces of what is not simply surface, not even captured on film, something a bit wondrous.³⁴

Even if, in Denis's film, the animations could be said to disrupt the tactile beauty of Godard's images, they still depend on comparison with the sensuous cinematographic capture of real textures and bodies to give them their strangeness. They do not provoke a sense of wonder in us, as Méliès' stop-motion tricks would have done for early cinema viewers, but they do provoke our curiosity. Both the animated sequences and Godard's haptic capture of the actual *mise-en-scène* suggest in their different ways how deeply the film relies on Laure's wandering imagination and perception for its images, but the formal differences between them are important. In the context of Denis's œuvre and its visual style, the animations constitute ungrammaticalities which prompt the viewer to question why the film has been constructed in this way, temporarily departing from engagement with the diegesis. It is not sufficient to suggest that playful image manipulation especially suits this film as it is less sober in tone than the rest of her work: humorous moments arise even in *J'ai pas sommeil*, when Daïga, being chased by an aggressive man, accidentally walks into a porn theatre and bursts out laughing. A diversion towards the playful and even absurd is present in *Beau travail* as Galoup contemplates suicide and then dreams of himself dancing outlandishly to Corona's 1993 Euro-dance single *Rhythm of the Night*. The animations and iris shots are ungrammatical in that they signify diversions into subjective daydreams, but also as they momentarily eject the viewer from the narrative, placing the viewer in an interstitial position, moving between engagement with the diegesis and recognition of its constructedness, and this is crucial to our reading of *Vendredi soir* as occupying an in-between space of what may be read as 'reality,' which any character in the film might experience, and moments which are definitely Laure's daydreams.

An interesting link between *Vendredi soir* and *J'ai pas sommeil* arises when we hear Line Renaud and Dean Martin's version of the Hoagy Carmichael song, *Two Sleepy People*, recorded in 1955 at the same time as their duet *Relax Ay Voo*, an important source of

³⁴ Telotte (2008), p.161.

ungrammaticality in the earlier film (it signals Renaud's appearance in the film as 'herself' as well as Ninon). The presence of *Two Sleepy People* on the soundtrack may be read as ungrammatical not because it is somehow unacceptable or immediately strange in the diegesis, but rather because it would seem to point us in one direction in terms of reading its significance, when in fact it draws us out of this film's narrative towards *J'ai pas sommeil*, in connection with which its greater significance can be found. As Jean and Laure sit together in her car, soon after meeting, Laure flicks through different radio stations, before settling on *Two Sleepy People*. Renaud and Martin's song lyrics may appear simply to capture the mood of incipient attraction and fatigue shared by Laure and Jean ("Two sleepy people, by dawn's early light / And too much in love to say goodnight"). *Two Sleepy People*'s presence does not seem to disrupt the trajectory of the narrative (though it does precede the film's diversion into Laure's daydream of her and Jean visiting Bernard and Marie), but it has the potential to do so if the viewer connects it to *J'ai pas sommeil*, therefore taking the viewer out of the narrative and encouraging them to interrogate the similarities and differences between the two films. Louis Scorecki certainly seems to note the Renaud and Martin connection in his review of *Vendredi soir*, writing "La chanson dit que Claire Denis n'a pas sommeil."³⁵ Cédric Mal suggests that *Vendredi soir* might well have suited the title *J'ai pas sommeil*,³⁶ and indeed it would seem to describe aptly the hazy progress of the fatigued Laure and Jean through the night, in cafés and restaurants, towards their hotel, the dawn and each other, and also the dreamlike presentation of the narrative through Laure's subjectivity. Through Renaud and Martin's duet, we might examine *Vendredi soir* as a companion piece to *J'ai pas sommeil*, though the two films may seem opposed on many levels. *Vendredi soir* is a story of a passionate one night stand, the female protagonist of which smiles as she leaves her lover; *J'ai pas sommeil*, conversely, depicts a serial killer who is eventually arrested, devastating those around him. There are, however, similarities to be found: the man Laure meets may be handsome and gentlemanly, but he is also mysterious and could have any kind of undesirable background; Camille, in *J'ai pas sommeil*, is described by those who know him as "gentil," because nobody suspects that he could be a murderer. This is not to suggest that Jean could be a malevolent figure (though Laure does become afraid when he speeds through the streets in her car), but rather to examine the fluidity of identity in Paris' nocturnal world – Camille wears a dress and make-up to perform at a nightclub, but does not attempt to hide his male

³⁵ Louis Scorecki, 'Vendredi soir,' *Libération* (22 October 2003), p.30.

³⁶ Mal, op cit, p.125.

chest, thus occupying an interstice between masculine and feminine, submitting fully to neither gendered image; he is portrayed both as a gentle, loving son and a killer. Equally, Jean could be anyone; we have no idea of his history or background and the impressions of him we do have are constructed solely through Laure's subjective sensory perceptions of him, and her meandering daydreams of him.

Both films, interestingly, feature lone women in cars as central figures (other characters will join the women in their cars, but they begin and end their journeys alone): Laure's counterpart in *J'ai pas sommeil* is Daïga, the Lithuanian immigrant who drives alone to Paris. Like Laure, Daïga is between stages of life and physical spaces as she drives – she has left Lithuania to become an actress but has no guaranteed work, and no confirmed accommodation in Paris. When she does find somewhere to stay, it is the hotel run by Ninon, where Camille lives, itself something of an interstitial space, where tourists stay on a break from their everyday lives. Importantly, both Laure and Daïga are trying to sell their cars, the vehicles which permit them solitary movement, a degree of safety, and separate them from the outside world. Once they have sold their cars, this will indicate that they have come to settle at a planned destination – Daïga in Paris with (she hopes) paid employment, and Laure at François's apartment, where she will now live and from which she will take the subway to work. In the course of both films' narratives, however, neither woman manages to sell her car or reaches the expected end of their journey: Laure is refused a sale, feels rather emotional about the prospect of letting her car go, and is seen running back to the car after her night with Jean, never having reached her friends' home for dinner. As *J'ai pas sommeil*'s closing credits begin, Daïga drives away from Paris (perhaps back to Lithuania, perhaps not), her bag full of the money she has stolen from Camille: she has not achieved her dream of becoming an actress, but leaves much wealthier than she arrived. During the course of the films, neither reaches a final, solid point of settlement and each returns to the relative sanctuary and solitude of their cars. *Vendredi soir*'s Paris may appear more picturesque than *J'ai pas sommeil*'s: we see long shots of the Eiffel Tower spreading its floodlights, and Laure's apartment is in a well-maintained boulevard. Famous landmarks are barely seen among *J'ai pas sommeil*'s shabby north-eastern arrondissements and modernist flats, but in both films we do see the Sacré-Cœur in longshot, reminding us that, despite the different narratives and atmospheres of the films, we are in the same city. In both films, it is the subjective perspective of the lone woman in her car which visually describes Paris for us, and Paris, like each female protagonist, possesses an identity in

flux. France's capital is dangerous in both films, but is never depicted completely as such: the opening scene of *J'ai pas sommeil* depicts two policemen laughing merrily in a helicopter, unperturbed by the murder hunt which is underway below them; Camille murders elderly women, but does so in the afternoon sunshine; Daïga is pursued by an aggressive man into a cinema, but laughs when she realizes it is a porn theatre. In *Vendredi soir*, Laure fears aggression from a man who knocks on her car window, but he only wants shelter from the cold; she thinks Jean has stolen her car, but he has simply moved it. Louis Scorecki describes *Vendredi soir* as "un film entropique, purement Haribo, purement inutile,"³⁷ as if it is somehow too whimsical, too light to possess the same degree of emotional resonance as Denis's previous work, yet I would argue that it never completely presents itself as a warm, romantic tale: its playfulness is balanced by its brief segues into danger and the sense that, even if Laure never sees Jean again, for this night she is moving towards the unknown. Paris is often dazzling and romantic in both films: Daïga arrives there with dreams of being an actress, and Camille seduces entire audiences in a glamorous dress at an underground club; the city lights up festively outside Laure's apartment window and the cheap hotel and restaurant she goes to with Jean become spaces where daydreams play out, and banal, everyday surfaces become enticing sensory textures. Like the city, Laure and Daïga are between identities, between spaces, never truly settling. The Renaud-Martin song draws us out of *Vendredi soir* back to *J'ai pas sommeil*, and the memory of another woman who sets out alone in her car, subjectively building a portrait of the city which unfolds around her: the city in question is one of fluid identity, and it is moulded by the imagination of the observing woman who moves through it without settling. As in both films Paris is an interstitial space where the female protagonists wander, observe, and never reach final destinations, the viewer also oscillates between immersion in *Vendredi soir*'s narrative and a diversion towards *J'ai pas sommeil*, which sets up a reciprocal dialogue between the two films, creating a portrait of Paris as mutable and changing. *Vendredi soir* plays out not as a closed story which we receive passively, but rather, on a diegetic level, as a narrative occurring in the present (not as memory) with which we may engage through moments of awareness of the way it is constructed pro-filmically, our knowledge of Laure's world growing as her own does.

³⁷ Scorecki, op cit, p.30.

Valérie Lemerrier: Contre-emploi?

For many viewers, Denis's casting of Valérie Lemerrier in *Vendredi soir* may have seemed an unusual decision. Denis, as I state above, is well known for working with a regular group of actors and, by the time *Vendredi soir* was released, the viewer who was aware of Denis's work may have noted the regularity with which certain actors were being cast in her films: Grégoire Colin, as I mention above, had appeared in four, Alex Descas also in four and, perhaps to a less noticeable extent, Béatrice Dalle, Richard Courcet and Alice Houri had each appeared in two films. Dalle, when she appeared in *J'ai pas sommeil* in 1993, was (and is) still extremely famous in France and recognized internationally for her role in Jean-Jacques Beineix's *37° 2 le matin*, and her performance in Denis's film as the unpredictable Mona who fights physically with her husband, Théo displays elements of the performance style she became known for in Beineix's film: extreme physicality and passionate, noisy displays of temper. Dalle was undoubtedly the most famous actor whom Denis had cast at that point, but the fact that she later went on to play roles as a sensual, murderous woman in *Trouble Every Day* (2001) and as a tough dog trainer in *L'Intrus* (2004) suggests that she may now be read as part of Denis's set of regular actors. Valérie Lemerrier, on the other hand, has only appeared for Denis in *Vendredi soir*, and has not worked with her since. Lemerrier, though not internationally famous, was, and remains, extremely popular in France, for her one-woman comic stage shows, roles in television comedy sketches and in several comedy films, such as Jean-Marie Poiré's time travel comedy *Les Visiteurs* (1993), in which she plays a medieval princess and her 1990s descendant, and *La Derrière* (1999), which Lemerrier directed herself, where she plays a young woman masquerading as a gay man. Certainly, she had never been cast in a non-comic role by any director. As Marie-Noëlle Tranchant writes, "On la connaît drôle, pleine d'abattage et d'insolence, fine mouche de la caricature légère au trait parfois grinçant mais jamais chargé. On la découvre sérieuse, silencieuse, décontenancée [...] dans le film de Claire Denis."³⁸ Lemerrier had long admired Denis's films, but could not see herself appearing in one: "Je me souviens même, après avoir vu *J'ai pas sommeil*, m'être dit: 'Qu'est-ce que j'aimerais tourner avec cette femme!' J'aimais le scénario, j'avais envie de voir le film qu'on pouvait en faire, mais ... pas avec moi."³⁹ One major difference between Lemerrier's

³⁸ Marie-Noëlle Tranchant, 'La petite fille du placard,' *Le Figaro* (9 September 2002), p.34.

³⁹ Lemerrier in Pierre Vavasseur, 'Valérie Lemerrier à contre-emploi,' *Le Parisien* (11 September 2002), p.31.

role in *Vendredi soir* and her comic roles is the level of dialogue; as noted by Beugnet, Lemerrier is “known for her wordy performances, and for impersonations that occasionally hinge on caricature. In *Vendredi soir*, however, she gives an understated, impressionistic performance, portraying a discreet and predominantly silent character.”⁴⁰ Lemerrier’s decision to take the role could be seen as risky, especially considering the loyalty of her following in France. As Sylvain, a 50 year old fan of hers said, after seeing *Vendredi soir*,

Je suis venu voir le film parce que j'adore Valérie Lemerrier. J'étais très excité à l'idée de la voir dans une histoire d'amour. Or, là, je la trouve complètement coincée. Elle aurait dû carrément se lâcher. J'ai le sentiment aussi que son partenaire, Vincent Lindon, n'était pas franchement amoureux d'elle. Du coup [...] je ne suis pas parvenu à croire à leur coup de foudre.⁴¹

Part of the issue, other than the non-comic and dialogue-light nature of the role of Laure, seems to be that certain viewers and critics do not find Lemerrier a credible romantic heroine. As well as serious romantic roles not being part of her previous repertoire, she is not conventionally beautiful – her face is famous in France for its malleability and potential to personify different characters, not for its attractiveness. Even Lemerrier says, “Je ne comprends toujours pas pourquoi [Denis] m’a choisie. Quand je me vois, j’ai l’impression de voir Michel Aumont.”⁴² Aumont (born 1936) is an elderly French stage and screen actor, known for both dramatic and comedic roles. He is, according to the *Première* website’s database of French actors, an “immense acteur,” but also “l’éternel second rôle du cinéma français,”⁴³ usually appearing in supporting roles. He was directed by Lemerrier in her 2005 comedy film, *Palais Royal!* and is described as having a physique “à la Gabin, en moins imposant”⁴⁴ – a character actor, rather than a star. Aumont is known for his expressive, weathered (not conventionally handsome) face and Lemerrier probably connects herself to him to suggest that she does not see herself, and does not expect to be seen, as glamorous or sexually attractive, but her comment also (even unintentionally) reflects Aumont’s and her own diverse capabilities as actors. As Aumont is equally well-regarded for comedy and drama

⁴⁰ Beugnet (2004), p.191.

⁴¹ Bruno Courtois and Alain Grasset, ‘Charmés par la beauté des *Sentiers*,’ *Le Parisien* (12 September 2002), p.35.

⁴² Lemerrier in Thomas Sotinel, ‘Valérie Lemerrier: vous, mais en pire,’ *Le Monde* (10 September 2002), p.34.

⁴³ ‘Michel Aumont,’ *Première* <<http://www.premiere.fr/Star/Michel-Aumont-79501>> [accessed 26 April 2012.]

⁴⁴ Ibid.

– “à la fois drôle et mélancolique”⁴⁵ – so Lemer cier, as some critics (to whom I refer below) suggested after seeing *Vendredi soir*, is capable of playing a serious, dramatic role. Lemer cier is surely aware that, being as famous as she is in France, her name carries star power and the promise of high box-office takings, but she knows that viewers generally come to see her to be amused. She seems aware that, if she does not possess the conventional romantic heroine’s desirable beauty, that she at least (like Aumont) has the ability to mould herself convincingly into many different characters in diverse genres.

It is interesting to note the differences in reactions to Lemer cier’s performance in *Vendredi soir* with regard to French and non-French audiences. As the above comment from Sylvain indicates, French viewers who came to see the film without being able to relinquish associations of Lemer cier with her comic persona may have been disappointed. For non-French critics, or at least those who do not see Lemer cier and Lindon as stars, the response can be rather different. American writer Stephen Holden seems to pine for a more ‘golden’ age of French, or at least European, cinema when he argues that Lemer cier and Lindon “lack the charisma and erotic chemistry to set the screen ablaze.”⁴⁶ Holden adds:

[A]s Ms. Lemer cier [...] and Mr. Lindon (whose mature gravity has a vague resemblance to Jean Gabin) go through their poker-faced, tight-lipped paces, you may find yourself frustratedly substituting other pairs of actors in your mind for these two. If Jeanne Moreau and Marcello Mastroianni of the late 1960’s played the same roles, for instance, the corners of the screen would be curling up in flame.⁴⁷

This seems rather a reductive view of European cinema in general – Holden is not the only writer to compare Lindon to Gabin, but to compare Lemer cier and Lindon to Moreau and Mastroianni in a pejorative sense suggests that the portrayal of heterosexual sex in European cinema reached its peak in the 1960s. Moreau and Mastroianni appear together in Michelangelo Antonioni’s 1961 film *La Notte* (*The Night*), as a married couple whose relationship has become stale. Sexual tension is a near constant presence in the film, with Giovanni (Mastroianni) having illicit sexual encounters with a disturbed young woman in a hospital and the 22-year-old daughter of an acquaintance. In one scene, the couple watch the

⁴⁵ Ibid

⁴⁶ Stephen Holden, ‘For Strangers in the Night, Gridlock is an Opportunity,’ *New York Times* (11 October 2002), p.E24.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

long, slow routine of a stripper in a bar, and her body is filmed in lingering close-ups, stoking sexual tension: each shot demonstrates the intense focus of Giovanni's attention, as he ignores his wife. During a party, Lidia (Moreau) exchanges looks with a dark, unnamed man in a suit and drives away with him to have sex, but eventually spurns him. In some ways, both *La Notte* and *Vendredi soir* can be read as films about adultery: Giovanni and Lidia are tempted by sexual encounters outside their marriage, and Laure spends a night having sex with Jean, not her boyfriend François. The atmospheres of the two films, however, are vastly different. In *La Notte*, adulterous sex is presented as physically exciting, but ultimately sordid and emotionless, whereas sex in *Vendredi soir* is treated with more lightness: Laure and Jean find pleasure in each other's bodies and company but we have no sense that it will be difficult for them to part, or that Laure will feel any guilt after her night with Jean. Close-ups of Laure and Jean's bodies emphasize the sensory joy shared between them, rather than any sense of sexual attraction as betrayal and source of conflict, as in *La Notte*. To compare Valérie Lemercier to Jeanne Moreau is to compare actors with extremely different star personae: Moreau is star who has, since the beginning of her career, been associated with passionate, uninhibited sexuality. As Guy Austin writes:

The archetype of the prostitute – an avatar of the sexualized, threatening woman – has consistently informed Jeanne Moreau's star image. She has played prostitutes, strippers or madams in numerous films. [...] Part of her childhood was spent in a cheap Parisian hotel 'with whores and so on'; when she told her father she wanted to act, he replied that 'To be an actress was to be a whore.'⁴⁸

One of Moreau's most famous and controversial roles was as a young, married mother who has an affair with a man, Bernard, in Louis Malle's *Les Amants* (1958), a film which cemented the actress's eroticized image. In one much-discussed scene, Jeanne (Moreau) lies naked on a bed and has a rapturous orgasm when, it appears (Bernard's head disappears off screen), her lover performs cunnilingus on her. Austin refers to Moreau's "frank attitude to sex both on and off screen"⁴⁹ and the fact that "eroticized bodily display"⁵⁰ is absolutely part of her star persona. None of this can be attributed to Lemercier: her star image is constructed around her ability to make audiences laugh, to assume roles of varying genders and ages. If sexuality is

⁴⁸ Austin, op cit, p.35.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Austin, op cit, p.36.

ever part of her stage act, it is for comic purposes, as she plays characters like, for instance a “veuf libidineux qui raconte par le menu à son fiston comment maman vivait l'orgasme.”⁵¹ Lemer cier was initially reluctant to accept the role of Laure, considering herself too “pudique”⁵² to perform sex scenes. In short, when Holden compares Lemer cier to Moreau, he misunderstands what sort of actress she is, and also what sort of film *Vendredi soir* is. Unlike *La Notte*, there is no suggestion that sex is sordid and destructive; nor is there any sense of the power of sex to shock, as there is in *Les Amants*. Laure’s night with Jean is readable more as a parenthetical diversion from the everyday, which will probably leave no great impact on her life, than as a depiction of a woman freeing herself from a constraining sexual role. Of the film’s end, when we see a shot of Laure smiling as she runs back to her car, Denis says “Ce n’est pas un sourire de liberté ou de libération, d’ailleurs je ne sais pas ce qu’est la libération, ce mot me fait peur, je l’ai trop entendu dans ma jeunesse. C’est un sourire qui correspond uniquement à ce moment-là, et qui ne vaut que pour elle-même, pour ce choix qu’elle a fait à un moment de sa vie.”⁵³

Holden’s fellow *New York Times* critic Karen Durbin reacts more positively to *Vendredi soir*, but still states that “Ms. Lemer cier and Mr. Lindon are just unstarlike enough that they could be any of us,”⁵⁴ suggesting that non-French audiences simply do not perceive the two actors in the same way as French audiences do. Both are undoubtedly stars in France (Lemer cier is described as “une héroïne française”⁵⁵ by Anne Chaon and “un phénomène”⁵⁶ by Olivier de Bruyn) but stars with particular connotations. For Thierry Jobin, the associations viewers may have already formed regarding Lemer cier and Lindon vis-à-vis their respective careers may be too distracting for their performances to feel convincing: “Et leur renommée précède toute abstraction ou impressionnisme: un carré de peau de Valérie Lemer cier ou de Vincent Lindon n’évoque guère qu’un carré de peau de Valérie Lemer cier ou de Vincent Lindon, tous deux très appliqués.”⁵⁷ If this is the case, and the two actors’ reputations are simply too strong in the viewer’s mind for them to be regarded as convincing characters, should Denis’s decision to cast them be viewed as ungrammatical, in the sense that, when we see Grégoire Colin appear

⁵¹ Olivier de Bruyn, ‘Valérie Lemer cier: ‘J’aime le pire!’’ *Le Point* (20 October 2000), p.138.

⁵² Lemer cier in Sotinel, op cit, p.34.

⁵³ Denis in Caillot, op cit.

⁵⁴ Durbin, op cit, p.21.

⁵⁵ Anne Chaon, ‘Drôle de dame, *Vogue Paris* (September 2011), p.365.

⁵⁶ Bruyn, op cit, p.138.

⁵⁷ Thierry Jobin, ‘Claire Denis s’égare un Vendredi soir,’ *Le Temps* (12 September 2002), page number missing.

briefly in the film, we may see Colin himself and not his character? I would argue for the contrary: primarily, an ungrammaticality is characterized by its brevity – it is a jolting diversion from the text. As Riffaterre writes, “Even if it is quickly deciphered, it nonetheless commands our attention by the kind of detour it forces us to take.”⁵⁸ Lemercier and Lindon, conversely, occupy the screen for most of this film, and become part of its universe – their skin and the textures of their bodies are explored with the same tactile gaze that is applied to inanimate surfaces, like bed linen and wallpaper.

Even if the viewer is distracted by prior knowledge of Lemercier’s comic star persona, this does not mean that she does not utilize elements of the performance style for which she is best known in *Vendredi soir*. As Denis says, “j’entends souvent ce mot de contre-emploi, à propos de ces deux acteurs. J’y ai réfléchi: il n’y a pas de contre-emploi, ça n’existe pas! Quand j’allais voir les spectacles de Valérie, je voyais déjà ce personnage qui ressemble à Laure.”⁵⁹ The idea of Lemercier acting “contre-emploi” is what seems to preoccupy those critics and viewers who feel that she does not belong in *Vendredi soir*, but I would argue, with Denis, that she is not necessarily playing against type at all, and it may be productive to read Lemercier’s performance as participating in a dialogue with her previous work, using Ricoeur’s theory of discourse as actualized event or performance of speech which involves both performer/speaker and interlocutor. Denis did not cast Lemercier because of any desire to shock audiences or reverse the actor’s public image, and she speaks highly of Lemercier’s work in comedy: “[A]ll these years I’d been going to see Valérie’s shows, her films [...] She seduced me enormously. I’m a bit of a Valérie Lemercier groupie [...] I told myself that for that particular role, there was a certain logic.”⁶⁰ Nowhere does Denis expand on the “logic” behind the casting, other than to defend her choice and emphasize her admiration for the actor. Ricoeur emphasizes the reciprocal processes of listening and reacting, as well as performing or speaking, in the circulation that constitutes discourse, and thus we should not necessarily see Lemercier’s previous work as something we have to forget when we watch *Vendredi soir*, but rather as being in dialogue with the film. Ricoeur’s notion of the speech event is particularly appropriate in this context as it highlights *performance* as the happening or event of discourse.

⁵⁸ Riffaterre (1983), p.115.

⁵⁹ Denis in Caillot, op cit.

⁶⁰ Denis in Aimé Ancian, ‘Making Contact: Claire Denis’ *Vendredi soir*,’ *Senses of Cinema*, issue 23 (12 December 2002a) < <http://www.sensesofcinema.com/2002/23/vendredi/> > [accessed 1 March 2011].

If Denis believes Lemercier is not cast against type, we may ask, does she *perform* against type? Denis's films are known for the subtlety or quietness of their actors' performances – communication is often established through long close-ups of characters' bodies touching (such as the moment where Daïga and Camille's hands brush in *J'ai pas sommeil*), or shot reverse-shot patterns focusing on silent looks between characters (the scene in *35 Rhums* where Lionel watches his daughter dance with Noé and realizes that her life is changing beyond his control comes to mind): dialogue is rarely the main means of establishing links between characters. But this does not mean that the notion of the body as spectacle is never present in Denis's work, as it often is in Lemercier's. Galoup's frantic, solitary dance at the end of *Beau travail* may initially seem graceful, but as his movements become more frantic, there is a poignant ugliness to them, and this tells us more about his desperation after being ejected from the military than any dialogue in the film. In *J'ai pas sommeil*, Camille displays his body as an object of desire, but also of strangeness, as he mimes languidly to Jean-Louis Murat's song *Le lien défait*, dressed neither as man nor as woman, impenetrable and mysterious, in an underground gay club. In Denis's film, Lemercier uses her physicality rather than words to convey Laure's feelings, and her body is filmed as a vector of sensation, thus her performance may be read not as a complete rejection of her comic work, but rather as being in dialogue with the extremely physical performance style which emerges in her previous roles. Bodily sensation and the notion of being part of a tactile world are crucial to the way Denis films Lemercier as Laure, and the way Lemercier inhabits the character. As Beugnet writes, "the film constructs a vivid sensory world to which corresponds a web of emotions as well as internal reflections."⁶¹ When we see Laure in the bath near the film's beginning, the scene is not designed to arouse the viewer, but rather to demonstrate her tactile connection to her physical environment: the camera closes up on a blob of shampoo lather which slides down Laure's back, and the shot prompts the viewer to identify with how she would experience this sensation. As Laure clumsily tries to dry her unruly, wet hair with her car heater, a close-up emphasizes the weightiness of her hair and her desire for warmth on this cold night. As she and Jean make love, their bodies are often shot in extreme close-up, giving the viewer sensory impressions of how the skin of the lovers would feel (to each other).

⁶¹ Beugnet (2007), p.82.

Though, as Beugnet correctly states, Lemerrier is “known for her wordy performances,”⁶² physicality and the notion of interacting with one’s environment (costumes, props, sets) are crucial in Lemerrier’s comedy (she will not allow her stage shows to be filmed, thus I will refer to her televised sketches and film appearances). In an early 1990s television sketch named *L’École du fan* (from French comedy troupe Les Nuls’ programme *Les Nuls l’émission*), a parody of long-running French television show, *L’École des fans*, Lemerrier appears as Odeline, a girl of around five years old. She pulls at her bedraggled wig and child’s dress and spends the sketch on her knees to hide her real height.⁶³ In another sketch with Les Nuls from the 1990s (first broadcast on French television programme *Samedi soir en direct*), *Les Infiniments cons*, a parody of a documentary about the insect world, she and the other comedians are dressed as enormous, grotesque insects. Lemerrier, a grasshopper, wears a bulky green outfit, which makes her shuffle awkwardly and the head of which covers her eyes, but still allows the audience to see the exaggerated chewing movements of her mouth. In one of her most popular television sketches from the mid-1990s, *Les Tocs*, (also broadcast on *Samedi soir en direct*) a parody of topical discussion programme, *Ça se discute*, she appears with comedian Kad Merad (with whom she has performed on many occasions), playing a young girl in a long dark wig, who bursts into song at the mention of the words “Saigon” or “Indochine,” pulls at her mouth, throws chairs and food around and clumsily slaps a postwoman.⁶⁴ Danièle Thompson, who directed Lemerrier in the 2006 film *Fauteuils d’orchestre*, states that the actor is “très physique, elle a une drôlerie gestuelle qu’on ne trouve chez aucune autre femme,” but also that she is “une bonne comédienne. C’est si rare de savoir combiner les deux, comique et comédie.”⁶⁵ Lemerrier states that “Le rire c’est viscéral, c’est physique [...] J’aime que ça n’ait pas l’air d’être écrit et que ça ne nécessite pas d’explication, jamais.”⁶⁶ Contrary to the opinions of Jobin, who believes that Lemerrier’s star persona renders her performance in *Vendredi soir* unbelievable, Jean-Michel Frodon writes, “Il n’importe guère qu’on reconnaisse ou pas Valérie Lemerrier [...] Tout ce qui compte est cette courbe du cou, cette cuisse mise en valeur par une jupe, ces fesses qui laissent leur empreinte dans le matelas, ces cheveux séchés au chauffage de la voiture.”⁶⁷ It would be too simple to separate Lemerrier’s more wordy stage and screen roles as ‘Lemerrierian’ and her quieter

⁶² Beugnet (2004), p.191.

⁶³ See <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YOU1wNYcHYM>> [accessed 8 May 2012].

⁶⁴ See <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RV6gauLO5Eo>> [accessed 8 May 2012].

⁶⁵ François-Guillaume Lorrain, ‘La princesse se rebiffe,’ *Le Point* (16 November 2005), p.118.

⁶⁶ Lemerrier in Chaon, op cit, p.365.

⁶⁷ Frodon (2002), p.31.

performance in *Vendredi soir* as ‘Denisian,’ without recognizing the physicality of both types of performance. As Ricoeur writes, “The event is not only the experience as expressed and communicated, but also the intersubjective exchange itself, the happening in dialogue.”⁶⁸ Lemercier’s performance in *Vendredi soir* encompasses elements of Denis’s cinematic world, and what we expect from her actors, but also elements of Lemercier’s own established performance style. Despite initial reservations about accepting the role of Laure, Lemercier would later deny that the part was a means of moving away from her comic star persona: “Je ne l’ai pas fait en me disant ‘Chic! Je vais casser mon image de comique.’ Ça me semble naturel de faire à la fois *Les Visiteurs* et ce film.”⁶⁹ It would seem initially that *Les Visiteurs*, a slapstick comedy about a medieval knight and his servant who travel through time to the 1990s, has little in common with *Vendredi soir*. Again, however, like so much of Lemercier’s work, *Les Visiteurs*’ comedy is physical as well as verbal. Many of the film’s jokes reference long-established traditions of physical, slapstick humour: bowls of soup land on characters’ heads, the time travellers clumsily wreck cars and dinner sets, and wash their faces in toilet bowls. Lemercier plays two roles: the medieval princess Frénégonde and her 1990s descendant, Countess Béatrice de Montmirail. Part of the humour of Lemercier’s performance as Béatrice comes from dialogue – her clipped bourgeois accent and affected use of ‘franglais’ – but she also uses her body to inhabit the character physically, adopting an exaggeratedly upright, haughty posture and mincing walk. As Lemercier says, “Je suis attirée par le transformisme.”⁷⁰ The fact that Lemercier plays two roles in *Les Visiteurs*, and has assumed so many diverse characters throughout her career, enables us to read her as a performer of extreme changeability – the role of Laure in *Vendredi soir* does not have to be read as a diversion from the rest of her career, but as an example of Lemercier’s continuous, developing versatility.

Vincent Lindon: notre semblable, notre frère

If Lemercier seemed a strange choice for the role of Laure, Vincent Lindon might be viewed as less surprising. Lindon is a highly regarded film actor, well-known for his repeated

⁶⁸ Ricoeur (1976), p.16.

⁶⁹ Lemercier in Vavasseur, op cit, p.31.

⁷⁰ Lemercier in Lorrain (2005), p.118.

collaborations with auteur filmmakers such as Benoît Jacquot and Coline Serreau. Where Lemercier's status as a credible romantic heroine has been questioned, no such questions are asked of Lindon: he has been cast as lovers opposite French actresses renowned for their beauty on several occasions. His first prominent role was the handsome musician lover of Sophie Marceau in Claude Pinoteau's *L'Étudiante* (1988), though this is often regarded as something of a false start to Lindon's career: "Difficile de juger de ses compétences dans cette bluette, mais le film contribue à le faire connaître."⁷¹ The lightweight sentimentality of *L'Étudiante* and Lindon's high-profile relationship with Princess Caroline of Monaco in the early 1990s, which made him a fixture of the French gossip press, posited him as a star associated with glamour and romance. He would soon move consciously away from this persona, developing an image which centred around his ability to portray the suffering French 'everyman,' conventionally masculine figures who encountered crises regarding their positions in society. He is described as:

Attachant, tendre, vulnérable, dépassé, imprévisible. Notre semblable, notre frère [...] À force de jouer les quidams qui se battent contre les aléas de la vie quotidienne, Vincent Lindon, auquel l'âge et l'expérience ont apporté densité et intensité, a réussi à inventer un vrai personnage dans le cinéma français.⁷²

He is both a credible romantic hero and an actor who can embody a relatable kind of masculinity. The phrase "notre semblable, notre frère," suggests that the viewing public can identify with him, but is also likely to be a reference to the phrase "mon semblable, mon frère" from Charles Baudelaire's 1857 poem, *Au Lecteur*, which, while the content of Baudelaire's damning address to hypocrites has little to do with Lindon's persona, suggests a specific, recognizable Frenchness in him. His face is handsome, yet worn and melancholic; his characters have normal, relatable problems, but also have passionate affairs with beautiful women. He has been cast often as characters who undergo crises which lead the viewer to question the role of men in modern society: in Coline Serreau's *La Crise* (1992), he plays Victor, a wealthy man who loses his job, on the same day that his wife leaves him, along with any sense of what constitutes his identity, and comes to realize that he has been neglecting the people who love him; in Pierre Jolivet's *Fred* (1997), Lindon (who gained weight for the role)

⁷¹ Anon, 'Vincent Lindon, fidèle et engagé,' *Tribune de Genève* (11 March 2009), p.18.

⁷² Anon, 'Vincent Lindon,' *Studio Magazine*, no.166 (March 2001)

<http://www.lexpress.fr/culture/cinema/vincent-lindon_816560.html> [accessed 10 August 2011].

plays a bored, unemployed former crane driver who tries to support his lover and her child, but becomes involved in crime and is wrongly accused of murder. As with Lemercier, Denis does not believe that, in *Vendredi soir*, Lindon was cast against type (such suggestions from critics are also far less common), but she does point out that “Vincent est très actif dans ses films d’habitude, là il est différent.”⁷³ Indeed, in films such as *La Crise* or *Fred*, the viewer is supposed to identify with Lindon’s character’s subjectivity, and to understand his psychological turmoil, but Laure is truly the main protagonist in *Vendredi soir* – we are granted no indication of Jean’s background or his own thoughts.

As Lemercier’s performance can be read as a discourse between different texts, following Ricoeur, Lindon’s can be seen as a performance of discourse between different influences and performance styles. Discussing her casting of Lindon, Denis cites his 1997 performance for Benoît Jacquot as important: “I thought again of his role in *Le Septième ciel* and I found that Vincent was so much like that man.”⁷⁴ Why, we might ask, did Denis reflect on *Le Septième ciel* when seeking an actor to play Jean? Though we know so little about Jean in Denis’s film, we might draw comparisons between him and Lindon’s character in Jacquot’s film, Nico, who is a wealthy Parisian surgeon, married to a lawyer, Mathilde (Sandrine Kiberlain, to whom Lindon was once married). Mathilde is suffering an emotional crisis – she is unable to climax sexually, stops going to work, shoplifts and faints regularly, while her husband tries to help her by providing her with medicine. Thus far, there are no similarities. I would argue, however, that Nico and Jean can be connected by the fact that both are wanderers: Nico does not begin Jacquot’s film this way but, after his wife is cured of her malady by an eccentric hypnotherapist, Nico begins to doubt his own importance in his wife’s life and suffers a crisis himself. As Mathilde returns to her job, Nico starts leaving his in the middle of the day, smoking cigarettes in bars and wandering aimlessly as if seeking answers to his questions. He is initially tormented by his wife’s inability to orgasm but, after she is ‘cured,’ is frightened by her sexual advances. Jean, too, is a wanderer: he seems to have no destination when he gets into Laure’s car, telling her to drop him wherever she likes. Visually, both Nico and Jean are often pictured alone, in close-up, smoking cigarettes pensively as clouds of smoke drift around them, screening them in their solitude. Nico wears a long black wool coat, visually identical to that worn by Jean in *Vendredi soir*, and both often wear the collars turned up, again as if to

⁷³ Denis in Caillot, op cit.

⁷⁴ Denis in Ancian (2002a).

isolate them and their thoughts or intentions from the rest of the world. In terms of performance style, Lindon plays Nico initially as a vital, energetic character – he performs handstands at parties – but after his wife’s recovery, his movements become more lethargic. This contrast is characteristic of Lindon’s performances – many of his characters’ broken spirits and slowness are offset by sudden bursts of anger or passion. We may, I would propose, read Jean as something of an extension of the character of Nico, perhaps at the deepest moment of the latter’s crisis, where he wanders around the city. Jean’s movements are generally slow, with something of an air of melancholy, but he has occasional, passionate bursts of energy. Furthermore, the fact that Nico’s identity – as a surgeon, husband and father – suddenly seems to him to be uncertain is comparable to the fact that, in *Vendredi soir*, we have no idea who Jean is, if he is married or employed. Through connecting the two films, we might read Jean as Nico at the moment of extreme identity crisis: Laure has no idea who is, but does he know himself? The change in name might be navigated by the fact that we (and Laure) do not even know if Jean is the real name of the man she meets. Indeed, the character’s name changes between the literary and film versions of *Vendredi soir* (he was initially called Frédéric), suggesting a fluidity of identity, the creation of a persona where the old, established one is being broken down. In *Vendredi soir*, the notion of a parenthetical temporal space, where Laure lingers between night and morning, and two distinct stages of life, might be drawn upon further to establish a parenthetical textual space between *Vendredi soir* and *Le Septième ciel*, where Jean’s experiences may be comparable to a moment of hiatus and uncertainty in the life of Nico. Confused by his wife’s changeable feelings about sex, he wanders into the city, with no destination in mind, and seeks comfort and sexual satisfaction with a woman he does not know, to whom he has no painful emotional attachments.

The name Jean, in fact, is crucial to another intertextual element of Lindon’s character in *Vendredi soir*: as Denis says: “It was Vincent who did not want to be called Frédéric [...] we chose ‘Jean’ because I told him he looked like Jean Gabin in profile with his cigarette.”⁷⁵ Visually, there are similarities between Lindon and Gabin; both are broad, well-built actors with handsome if somewhat weathered faces. As Holden writes (of Lindon’s role in Philippe Lioret’s 2009 film *Welcome*): “Granite-faced and baggy-eyed, his mouth set in a tight line, Mr. Lindon’s Simon epitomizes a solid, stoic Gallic masculinity in the mould of Jean Gabin.”⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Stephen Holden, ‘Channel Crossing of the Urgent Kind,’ *New York Times* (7 May 2010), p.6.

The shadow of Gabin has followed Lindon throughout his career, beginning with his winning of the prestigious Prix Jean Gabin (awarded to male actors regarded as ‘great hopes’ for French cinema) in 1989 for his role in *L’Étudiante*. Lindon has mentioned the influence of Gabin on his career many times, saying “Le cinéma français d’aujourd’hui manque de [Yves] Montand, [Lino] Ventura, Gabin [...] Des quinquas séducteurs avec qui on ferait le tour du monde en sachant qu’ils vous protégeront.”⁷⁷ When asked if he is flattered by comparisons to Gabin, he replies: “I am very proud. I love Jean Gabin.”⁷⁸ In one interview, Lindon even shows his interviewer a monogram on his shirt – J.G.; the shirt belonged to Gabin and was given to Lindon by the actor’s daughter. Samuel Blumenfeld writes that, after his role in *Fred*, Lindon became “l’héritier de Jean Gabin [...] l’incarnation d’un héros populaire, un chômeur en l’occurrence, impliqué dans une machination qui le dépassait totalement.”⁷⁹ Indeed, Gabin’s most celebrated roles were in pre-World War Two French films as men who railed against oppressive authority, working class (anti)heroes who fought for their autonomy. In Julien Duvivier’s *Pépé le Moko* (1937), he plays the titular gangster-cum-cabinet maker who evades the police by hiding out amongst the thieves, prostitutes and social outcasts of the Casbah in Algiers, but is eventually arrested and commits suicide after falling in love with a wealthy woman; in Jean Renoir’s *La bête humaine* (1938), Gabin plays Jacques Lantier, a melancholic train driver who feels that his attacks of depression and mania are punishment for the sins of his alcoholic forebears, and eventually kills himself; in Marcel Carné’s *Le Quai des brumes* (1938), Gabin plays Jean (we can only assume this is his real name), a deserter from the army who comes to Le Havre to disappear, but falls in love with a troubled young woman and is shot dead. Gabin’s star image, like Lindon’s, is one which encompasses dichotomies: he is described as a “tough but tender Frenchman,”⁸⁰ and as a “proletarian hero [who] oscillates between the good natured worker and the sinister criminal (or pimp), but often includes elements of both in varying proportions.”⁸¹ Lindon’s roles as men who suffer bravely against forces beyond their control, but often act illegally or irresponsibly, in *Fred*, for example, and more recently in *Welcome*, where he plays a depressed swimming teacher who agrees to help an immigrant boy swim the channel illicitly, are comparable to Gabin’s most famous

⁷⁷ Lindon in Luc Honorez, ‘Mieux vaut un tiens que deux tu l’auras,’ *Le Soir* (4 September 2002), unpaginated.

⁷⁸ Lindon in James van Maanen ‘Welcome opens via Film Movement ; Interview with star Vincent Lindon,’ *Trust Movies* (4 May 2010) <<http://trustmovies.blogspot.com/2010/05/welcome-opens-via-film-movement.html>> [accessed 10 August 2011].

⁷⁹ Samuel Blumenfeld, ‘Vincent Lindon, qui grimpe aux mots,’ *Le Monde* (14 March 2002), p.36.

⁸⁰ D. Powell in Ginette Vincendeau, ‘Community, Nostalgia and the Spectacle of Masculinity,’ in Will Higbee and Sarah Leahy (eds.), *Studies in French Cinema: UK Perspectives, 1985-2010* (Bristol: Intellect, 2011), p.97.

⁸¹ Vincendeau (2011), p.99.

characters – these men are ultimately decent and loyal to family and friends (though they will not accept responsibilities placed on them by systems which they consider oppressive), and they portray the destiny of the working man as often beyond his control.

In *Vendredi soir*, however, there is no suggestion that Jean is specifically a Gabinian working class character, walking away from any kind of authority or oppressive life. We might connect the tendency of Gabin to be displayed as object of the gaze of the viewer and diegetic characters within many of his films (of “to-be-looked-at-ness,”⁸² to quote Laura Mulvey’s work on the objectification of women in cinema) with the way Lindon is presented in *Vendredi soir*. In *Pépé le Moko*, when Pépé is first introduced, we see his hands and hear his voice before the camera pans up to a close-up of his illuminated face; later, when he first meets Gaby, with whom he will fall in love, she expresses desire for him as the camera lingers upon his face. In *Le Quai des brumes*, we first see Jean with his back to us, walking down a dark road at night; when he turns, his face and entire body are fully illuminated by a truck’s headlights, providing the viewer with a focus for their gaze – upon the star. In *Vendredi soir*, when Jean first appears in the street, we see him, it seems, through Laure’s gaze, in medium-shot as the traffic jam rages around him – our experience of Jean is filtered through Laure’s perspective. Vincent Lindon himself argues that Jean is simply “l’objet du désir d’une femme [...] rien de plus.”⁸³ I would not agree, however, that Jean is simply an object of desire: if anything, the way he is presented – gradually evoked through Laure’s sensory experience of his smells, the weight and textures of his body – suggests that visual objectification is altogether redundant in the film. Furthermore, Laure’s moment of recognition when Jean appears is deceptive, as she assumes he is looking at another woman, when he has in fact spotted her. Lindon, though an immensely popular and critically acclaimed actor, whose romantic life with high profile women has long interested the gossip press, does not possess the legendary status that Gabin does (we might argue that no other French actor does). As Vincendeau writes of Gabin’s introduction in *Pépé le Moko*, “Being delayed, [his] entrance is made more *spectacular*.”⁸⁴ We can assume that Denis’s delay in introducing Lindon in *Vendredi soir* is not a device to draw out the spectator’s anticipation, but requisite for the

⁸² Laura Mulvey, ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,’ (1975), *Visual and Other Pleasures* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 1989), p18.

⁸³ Lindon in Beugnet (2004), p.192.

⁸⁴ Vincendeau (2011), p.102.

narrative. Indeed in both Bernheim's book and Denis's film, the establishment of Laure as the subjective protagonist with whom we identify from the beginning is crucial.

The similarities between Lindon's characterization of Jean and the archetypal Gabin character are to be found elsewhere. We may read the links between the Gabin and Lindon protagonists of social dramas as an intertextual discourse, but the connections between Lindon in *Vendredi soir* and Gabin in his most famous roles can be read, following Ricoeur, as an event of discourse in which performance is key. Both actors are known for the intense physicality of their performances. As Lindon says, "Je m'intéresse de plus en plus au côté physique des choses. Regardez ce que fait Gabin en conducteur de locomotive dans *La bête humaine*."⁸⁵ *La bête humaine* is a strong example of the way Gabin uses his body when he performs. When his character, Jacques, is first introduced, his face is covered in soot: we know, however, that we are watching Gabin because of the way Renoir captures his broad frame in medium-shot, as his limbs strain against the controls and he uses the weight of his entire body. Any verbal communication between Jacques and his fellow driver is drowned out by the roar of the train in motion. Later, Jacques will passionately embrace two different women, but as mania comes over him, Renoir frames his wide eyes, then his contorted hands in close-up, with no dialogue present to explain his actions. In *Pépé le Moko*, as Pépé desperately pushes himself against the bars of a gate which separates him from his lover, he stabs himself. We do not see the wound being inflicted, but Gabin's entire body shows his pain – his broad shoulders slump, his face drips with sweat and he collapses. In *Vendredi soir*, physicality is crucial to Lindon's portrayal of Jean. He says very little but, for example, when he sits in Laure's car, the camera captures him in close-up from behind, he shifts his body around and we hear the creaking of the leather seat, giving us an idea of the physical weight and volume of the character. Later, we see a close-up on a blister on Jean's foot after he and Laure have made love, an isolated moment which tells us, if we know nothing else about Jean, that he has been wandering for a long time. He says nothing of his feelings towards Laure, but, when they make love, a brief close-up of his half-closed eyes and the heavy sound of his breathing indicate his physical pleasure. Another connection I would make between Lindon's Jean and certain Gabin characters is the way in which their elusiveness contrasts with their physical solidity. In *Pépé le Moko*, Gabin's instantly recognizable features compel the viewer's gaze, and he leaves his physical

⁸⁵ Lindon, in Anon, 'Vincent Lindon et Sandrine Kiberlain réunis dans *Mademoiselle Chambon*,' *Ouest-France* (11 October 2009), p.8.

impressions on his surroundings through violent outbursts, but the key element of his character is his ability to disappear. He vanishes into the Casbah, we know him only by his nickname, and it is only when he renders himself visible to the police that he is captured and dies. In *Le Quai des brumes*, Gabin's Jean physically attacks local gangsters and is a dominating physical presence against the delicate actress Michèle Morgan, but we know little of his background – he has left the army and now intends to disappear. Like Lindon's Jean, he is a wanderer. Gabin's physical strength and broadness are unmistakable, but in many of his films he is simply an outsider, with an unclear past, destined never to find a solid, happy identity as part of functioning society, who often dies and vanishes from the physical world. As André Bazin asks, "[C]an you see Gabin as a family man? [...] No, it is impossible. The public that swallows many affronts would undoubtedly feel that they were being taken for a ride if screenwriters presented them with a happy ending for Jean Gabin."⁸⁶ An archetypal Gabin character, Bazin, suggests, is forever destined to remain unsettled. Lindon's Jean, similarly, is a stranger: he walks into Laure's life with no explanation, we become familiar with his movements and physical dimensions but this is all. He wanders the streets at night alone, with no destination (as Nico does in *Le Septième ciel*). He is also unpredictable – at the beginning of the film, he makes no sudden or quick movements, but when he takes the wheel of Laure's car, the aggression of his driving frightens her. Later, when they are making love, he bites her shoulder and she draws away from him. Lindon's movements become more aggressive; we are made aware of Jean's strength and the physical threat that he could pose to Laure. Thus, Lindon's performance in *Vendredi soir*, with its balance of physicality and elusiveness, its references to his role in *Le Septième ciel* and his admiration of Gabin, may be read as a performance of intertextual discourse, where different texts communicate but never entirely tell us who Jean is.

⁸⁶ André Bazin, 'The Destiny of Jean Gabin,' in Mary Lea Bandy (ed.), *Rediscovering French Film* (Museum of Modern Art, New York: 1983), p.123.

Chapter Four: Tindersticks and Denis, Translations/Traductions

Since 1996, the Nottingham band Tindersticks, or various members of the band, have created the soundtracks for six of Claire Denis's films. In 2011, the band released a box set of these scores (*Claire Denis Film Scores: 1996 – 2009*), illustrated with a booklet of images from the films. Denis first met the band after they had played a show in Paris in 1995; she had heard their second album, (I will refer to this as *Tindersticks 2*, as both their first and second albums were self-titled) and asked if they wished to be involved with the music for her forthcoming film, *Nénette et Boni* (1996). Since that collaboration, Tindersticks have created soundtracks for *Trouble Every Day* (2001), *35 Rhums* (2008), *White Material* (2009) and *Les Salauds* (2013);¹ the band's singer Stuart Staples has composed the soundtrack for *L'Intrus* (2004) and violinist Dickon Hinchliffe (who has now left the band) created the soundtrack for *Vendredi soir* (2002). The relationship between Denis and Tindersticks has always been one of mutual inspiration, as Stuart Staples suggests:

Having this long term relationship with Claire has been a big factor in keeping us fresh in our approach to our music. She asks us to go somewhere and when we come back, we've changed through the process. I think it has a lot to do with why we still have a collective desire to keep on making music and why we don't run out of steam.²

As Denis states, despite her enjoyment of working with Tindersticks, there is no sense of pressure or necessity to carry on doing so: "Pour moi, la relation que j'entretiens avec eux n'a rien à voir avec la fidélité [...] je pense que [Staples] sait voir son propre intérêt pour explorer d'autres territoires. Je n'aime pas le mot 'fidélité' car au fond, ce serait dire qu'il n'y a plus de curiosité."³ On 11 April 2011 in Istanbul, Tindersticks staged the first of a series of concerts in

¹ As *Les Salauds* has not yet been released in the UK, and did not feature in Tindersticks' live shows, I will not be addressing its soundtrack here.

² Stuart Staples, interviewed by Jenny Munro (6 October 2011b). Sections of my interviews with Stuart Staples and David Boulter appear in my article, 'A Little Night Music: Tindersticks and Claire Denis,' *The Skinny* (12 October 2011d) <http://www.theskinny.co.uk/film/features/300460-a_little_night_music_tindersticks_claire_denis> [accessed 1 July 2013].

³ Romain Le Vern, 'White Material: interview Claire Denis' (24 March 2010) <<http://www.excessif.com/cinema/actu-cinema/dossiers/white-material-interview-claire-denis-5782707-760.html>> [accessed 10 March 2011].

which they would play live selections from their Denis soundtracks, accompanied by projected scenes from the films on a cinema-size screen. On 26 April that year, they played their first British date in this tour, a show which I attended at London's Queen Elizabeth Hall. In this section, I will explore the band's live shows as examples of Ricoeurian discourse as performance, where the engagement between Denis and Tindersticks, her images and their music, in the specific context of a live event can be read as renderings of intertextuality as a live process. To return to a statement from Ricoeur which has proved useful throughout this thesis:

[D]iscourse is realized temporally and in a present moment, whereas the language system is virtual and outside of time. But this trait appears only in the movement of actualization from language to discourse. Every apology for speech as an event, therefore, is significant if, and only if, it makes visible the relation of actualization, thanks to which our linguistic competence actualizes itself in performance.⁴

The Tindersticks/Denis live shows, I will argue, are excellent examples of discourse being "realized temporally and in a present moment" – they demonstrate the engagement between Denis's moving images and Tindersticks' music, but each show is an ephemeral, fleeting moment which can never be exactly recreated. The setting in which the music and images play, the timing of the musicians – any number of external factors make each show a different entity. I spoke to Tindersticks' keyboardist David Boulter about the process of devising the programme of shows:

We've both been growing together over the years, Claire in her reputation as a filmmaker and the band in our music. The guy who organized the San Francisco film festival approached us a couple of years ago about playing music along with an old silent film, but we decided we didn't want to just play live music over a silent film, we wanted to do something different. It grew into an idea, of making something more like a show, like a concert.⁵

Boulter's statement suggests that Tindersticks desired to create a new, audio-visual product from their work with Denis, and not simply to present the music and images as separate. After viewing the London show, Denis remarked, "I don't like to watch my films. It's very painful.

⁴ Ricoeur (1976), p.11.

⁵ David Boulter interviewed by author (5 October 2011a).

But the show yesterday, I enjoyed so much. Because it does not belong to the film anymore. The way the music grows, it builds something completely different.”⁶ What the audience witnesses in the live show (I will refer throughout to my own experience of the London show) is not a Tindersticks concert, or a screening of segments of Denis’ films with accompaniment, but a live rendering of the very process of discourse itself.

Nénette et Boni

Tindersticks 2 was released in 1995 to warm reviews, and saw the band introduce denser, more orchestral textures to their guitar-led work. One of the album’s sixteen tracks, *My Sister*, Denis says “completely nourished [*Nénette et Boni*] at the very beginning when we were writing the script [...] In a weird way it was there all the time, but I was lucky enough to be able to ask [Tindersticks] to be there.”⁷ *My Sister*, a spoken word track placed over light, playful glockenspiel and string melodies, recounts the story of the life and death of its narrator’s wayward sister, (it begins, “You remember my sister. How many mistakes did she make with those never-blinking eyes?”). Indeed, in *Nénette et Boni* it is the arrival of Boni’s (Grégoire Colin) pregnant and unpredictable younger sister Nénette (Alice Houri) in their dead mother’s house in Marseilles (which Boni inhabits with a few friends) that drives the narrative, though the stories of *My Sister* and *Nénette et Boni* are distinct. The sister of the Tindersticks song goes blind at five, drinks heavily at thirteen and moves in with an older gym teacher at fifteen, before dying at 35; Nénette becomes pregnant at fifteen (possibly by her father) and runs away from her girls’ school to live in secret with her brother. As Denis says: “The story in *My Sister* and in the script were different but there was something about the song [...] I was listening to it every day as I was working.”⁸ *My Sister* does not feature on the film’s soundtrack, but was rewritten by the band as an instrumental, incorporating much of the original melody, still using the breezy sounds of glockenspiel, strings and light percussion, and titled *Ma Sœur*. When I spoke to Staples and Boulter, I was curious as to why *My Sister* did

⁶ Denis in Luke Seomore, ‘Claire Denis and Tindersticks,’ *Dazed Digital* (October 2011) <<http://www.dazeddigital.com/music/article/11577/1/claire-denis-tindersticks>> [accessed 24 August 2012].

⁷ Jonathan Romney, ‘Interview with Claire Denis, Part 2,’ *The Guardian* (28 June 2000b) <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2000/jun/28/guardianinterviewsatbfisouthbank1?INTCMP=SRCH>> [accessed 4 July 2012].

⁸ Denis in Michael Hill, sleeve notes for *Tindersticks: Claire Denis Film Scores 1996 – 2009* (2011).

not appear in its original form in the film. Staples told me that “the song felt like it was inside the film already, and it gave us a way into the film,”⁹ but Boulter adds that “certain things were too ingrained in the music, so we wanted to produce variations, something original.”¹⁰ *Ma Sœur* plays in *Nénette et Boni*’s opening sequence, as Nénette floats on her back in a swimming pool, in medium shot, and her long hair drifts around her. Thus a process of dialogue is set in motion; the song, *My Sister*, is not simply placed over images from the film, but rather it grows into a different product, still maintaining its basic melody, but engaging directly with the film’s images. The discourse between Denis and Tindersticks creates a new intertextual entity. Ricoeur’s emphasis on discourse as the real performance of language in action, however, becomes most useful when we refer to the live show. At the opening of their show, Tindersticks perform *Ma Sœur* live, with the projected opening scene of *Nénette et Boni* playing behind the band. Neither image nor sound is truly privileged: the raised cinema-size screen shows the film’s images, with Houri floating in the swimming pool; the band do not stand in front of the screen, but on a slightly lower stage, still highly visible to the audience; the scene’s dialogue (Nénette being ordered out of the pool by a teacher) is played, so we have a mix of live and recorded sound. Different musicians are spot-lit as they play their particular sections along with the images. The song *Ma Sœur* was born from engagement between *My Sister* and Denis’s images, and the live performance may almost be read as a real-time evocation of this intertextuality.

Another track from *Tindersticks 2* which inspired elements of *Nénette et Boni* was the mournful love song, *Tiny Tears*. Denis wanted to use the original album recording to accompany a scene where the object of Boni’s desire, a baker’s wife (Valéria Bruni-Tedeschi) dances with her husband Vincenzo (Vincent Gallo) and the scene then cuts to Boni watching the woman in a shopping centre. Emotionally, the song’s music and words (such as “when that water breaks / you know you’re going to cry and cry”) do echo the content of the narrative – the scene occurs just after we have seen the lonely Boni in tears, distressed at the thought of Nénette abandoning her baby. Though the baker and his wife look happy as they dance together, holding a baby which we may assume is theirs, this scene may be read as a moment of fantasy for Boni. He is no longer dreaming about the baker’s wife as a sex object, but as part of a loving family, which he lacks himself. The fact that there is no diegetic sound as the

⁹ Staples in Munro (2011c).

¹⁰ Boulter in Munro (2011b).

track plays might also support the idea that we are watching Boni's daydream. Certainly, as the tracks draws to a close, and the scene cuts to the shopping centre where Boni is watching the baker's wife, there is still no diegetic sound before she approaches and speaks to him, interrupting his reverie. Before Tindersticks provided Denis with any new music for *Nénette et Boni*, she gave them an early cut of the film, edited with tracks from *Tindersticks 2*, including *Tiny Tears*. Denis recalls: "It was already programmed in the film, something I cannot describe."¹¹ During filming, Denis played this track in the shopping centre where she was shooting to give the actors an idea of the atmosphere she wished to create. When it came to preparation of the film's soundtrack, however, Tindersticks chose to record a new, more orchestral version of the song, which was eventually featured in this scene. Again, we see a new piece of music being born out of dialogue between Tindersticks and Denis, and this version of *Tiny Tears* was released on Tindersticks' 1998 compilation of previously unreleased tracks, *Donkeys 92-97*. Staples says: "I think it's the definitive version. I always think the version we did for *Nénette et Boni* helped us to get to something we'd missed. It helped us to see the song in a different way, and to make it more tender."¹² Boulter adds: "It didn't change its meaning, but we did feel like the song had found itself, in a way [...] When we re-recorded it, it felt like we'd reached the way the song was meant to be for the first time."¹³ Like *My Sister/Ma Sœur*, *Tiny Tears* was given a French title, *Petites gouttes d'eau*, for the film's soundtrack. Staples generally sings in English, Denis's own English is not fluent (of her first meeting with Staples, she recalls: "I was not sure I understood every word because his English was so strongly accented and he was speaking very fast. It made me shy"¹⁴), and Denis always send Tindersticks her films' scripts translated into English before they begin working on music. The dialogue between Denis and Tindersticks mixes not only sound and images, but languages too. The fact that *Nénette et Boni*'s version of *Tiny Tears* was retitled in French indicates that it is no longer the song from *Tindersticks 2*, but rather a new product which has been changed by the influence of and its application to a French language context. For the live performance, again the band constitute an important visual element of what we see; the scene plays on the cinema screen, and the band are lit with a pink light which matches the colour of the baker's wife's blouse. The song carries on for longer than the scene lasts and, whilst in the film it fades out, in the live show the band continue to play, but the song now

¹¹ Denis in Ide, op cit.

¹² Staples in Munro (2011c).

¹³ Boulter in Munro (2011b).

¹⁴ Denis in Hill, op cit.

accompanies images from the film's following scene, an extended close-up of Boni kissing a lump of pizza dough, and kneading it vigorously. When the song ends, the screen continues to show Boni kneading the dough, but the diegetic sound of Boni making orgasmic noises also enters. Thus, by making the discourse between *Nénette and Boni* and Tindersticks' music an event of performance, *Tiny Tears* is removed even further from its original role as a track on *Tindersticks 2* and becomes part of a new intertextual circulation between the song and images which it never previously accompanied. The song's tender melancholy allows us to re-read the scene as indicative not simply of Boni's sexual excitement (as it can be read in the film) but of his loneliness and desire for intimacy.

Trouble Every Day

After *Nénette et Boni*, Tindersticks composed the soundtrack for Denis's 2001 film *Trouble Every Day*. The film depicts a quartet of people in Paris – American honeymooners Shane (Vincent Gallo) and June (Tricia Vessey) and French doctor Léo (Alex Descas) and his wife Coré (Béatrice Dalle). Shane and Léo worked together on a scientific research project in Guyana and, though it is never explicitly stated, we can assume that their work has led to both Shane and Coré contracting a disease which compels them to bite and maim the flesh of their sexual partners. This remains Denis's only film for which Tindersticks wrote an entirely new song with vocals, entitled *Trouble Every Day*. The track has its roots in a piece of music which the band wrote for their 1997 album, *Curtains*, but did not use, and they performed the song as part of their live sets for some months before the film was released. Again, as with *Tiny Tears*, an old composition which has not reached its potential grows into something new via engagement with Denis's work. As Staples says,

It was the only [track] that asked for [vocals]. I think you have to be really careful with singing and words with films in general. You spend so long trying not to be clumsy with words because they can take away more than they bring to a film. But the feeling of this film got inside me and made me want to write a song, in a way I haven't felt with any of the other films.¹⁵

¹⁵ Staples in Munro (2011c).

Staples read the film's script before writing the song's lyrics, and we may posit connections between these and the film's narrative. The song opens: "Look into my eyes / You see trouble every day / It's on the inside / So don't try to understand." We may read the perspective in the song as Shane's – he has a frightening illness which is invisible to onlookers and which, we assume, his wife is not fully aware of (it is difficult to guess how much June knows – her frantic searches through his medicine case and distress when he will not allow himself to orgasm with her suggests she is unaware of his problem. However, her calm reaction to finding Shane showering off the blood of Christelle (Florence Loiret-Caille), a chambermaid in the hotel in which they are staying in Paris, whom he has killed, suggests that she may know more than we think). The first verse continues, "I get on the inside of you / And you can blow it all away / Just the slightest breath / And I know who I am." These lines may be interpreted as expressing Shane's desire for intimacy with June which will not end in her death, or rather a more realistic description of the satisfaction of his cravings – calm comes over him only when he has had sex and brutalized his partner (he "get[s] on the inside of" his partner not necessarily through penetrative sex, but through opening their flesh with his teeth and hands). The importance of the film's narrative to the song's words is reflected in former *Tindersticks*' violinist Dickon Hinchliffe's statement about Denis' process of direction for the band: "Claire said to us that the film was about when a kiss becomes a bite. [...] It's quite an abstract comment to take on, but I found it to be amazing direction musically – it told me all I needed to know."¹⁶ Both the film and the song address the balancing of a desire for intimacy with the knowledge that closeness to a sexual partner would end in their death. As Denis reflects: "Stuart [Staples] is an English man with a lot more humour than I have, but he has a rapport with the body, with flesh, with desire which is very close to mine."¹⁷

The first verse of the song plays over the film's opening sequence, which shows a young couple (who never reappear in the film) kissing in a car at night, shot in close-up. The scene fades to black after we see the boy touch the girl's neck, and then fades into an image of light reflecting over the Seine at night, followed by a shot of the sunrise over Paris and the opening credits. The song was originally intended to accompany the film's closing credits but, when Denis heard it, she placed it at the beginning. She had planned to open the film with a scene

¹⁶ Dickon Hinchliffe in James Bell, 'Nine Shots of *Tindersticks*,' *Sight and Sound*, vol.21, issue 5, (May 2011), p.17.

¹⁷ Denis in Aimé Ancian, 'Claire Denis: An Interview,' *Senses of Cinema*, issue 23 (12 December 2002b), <http://www.sensesofcinema.com/2002/23/denis_interview/> [accessed 25 June 2012].

showing Shane and June travelling by aeroplane from America to Paris, but chose instead the sequence with the kissing couple. Denis says: “We changed completely the opening of the film for the song, as if the film was expecting it [...] It has no meaning at the end [...] There is this contrast of a grand kissing scene with a small shot.”¹⁸ The song begins quietly, with a plucked bass note, an ominous sound which adds to the sense that some predatory diegetic character (and indeed the viewer) is intruding on this couple, shot through their car window. The addition of a piano refrain, then the orchestral swell of strings, followed by shots of light reflecting across the Seine and a long shot of Paris’ horizon, with Notre Dame in the centre, are all more akin to films which use Paris as the locus for grand love stories, not the uncomfortable realism of this opening shot.

The film’s title is taken from a 1965 song by American musician Frank Zappa’s band, The Mothers of Invention, which Zappa was inspired to write after the Watts riots in Los Angeles in 1965, focusing on issues of racial violence, social injustice, and sensationalist journalism. As Denis says, however, only the song’s title is relevant to the film, as “*Trouble Every Day* is to do with love, not riots.”¹⁹ Staples states: “The way she talked about it was romantic. You ended up with a very romantic scene for a tough film and it was against it, in a special way.”²⁰ *Trouble Every Day* is undoubtedly Denis’s goriest and most violent film (gore is not a staple of her films, though we do see violence and spilled blood in *S’en fout la mort*, *L’Intrus* and *White Material*), but it remains a film about love – Shane’s desire for closeness to June coupled with his wish not to hurt her, Léo’s need to protect Coré and keep her alive, despite the hopelessness of her illness – and about the transgressive moments where a lover’s embrace becomes devouring. Denis says: “[In the original screenplay] that kiss [...] was elsewhere, during a nocturnal ramble by Vincent Gallo, which incidentally wasn’t filmed. But I still wanted to shoot the kiss because the kiss is the film.”²¹ The lush string music, sweeping view of Paris and extended shot of the couple kissing invite us to view *Trouble Every Day* as a romantic film about passionate love, and this informs our reading of the rest of the film – as the violence becomes bloodier, we still recognize tenderness in the characters who perpetrate it, and regard their murderous acts as born of a desire for closeness to another person.

¹⁸ Denis in Ide, op cit.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Staples in Ide, op cit.

²¹ Denis in Ancian (2002b).

At Tindersticks' live show, the full opening sequence is not played, nor does the song stop after the first verse. Rather, the sequence featuring the kissing couple runs on a loop as the band plays the entire song. Again, when the discourse between Denis's images and Tindersticks' music is enacted as performance, a new intertextual assemblage of sound and image is created, in a specific moment and environment. A spotlight falls on Staples as he sings. The fact that we do not see any of the film's main protagonists, those for whom the "trouble" of the song is relevant, draws us towards seeing sexual intimacy itself as troubling – the boy's hand on the girl's neck exposes it as a vulnerable surface, and the boundary between sexual touching and violence becomes fluid. This fleeting moment plays repeatedly before us and the sense of threat that is present in each kiss shared by Shane and June, or between Coré and the various men she meets, becomes a more universal idea of the inability to restrain one's desire and the fragility of the body when it is exposed to another in the sexual act.

One of the tracks Tindersticks play at the live show is *Killing Theme* which, both in the film and the show, accompanies a long scene showing Coré meeting, having sex with and killing an adolescent boy (Nicolas Duvauchelle). In the live show, the scene opens with close-ups of Coré and the boy peering at each other through the boards which Léo has used to block her bedroom door. As they touch each other's bodies through the boards, we hear the amplified, diegetic noises of their heavy breathing (the breathing at the start of the scene is included in the version of *Killing Theme* which appears on the CD release of *Trouble Every Day*'s soundtrack). At this point, we are basically watching the scene exactly as it plays in the film (and indeed on a cinema-size screen), but as the boy begins to rip away the boards from Coré's door, a slow, rhythmic drum beat begins. This is how the sound plays out in the film but, in the live context, as the percussionist is suddenly highlighted before us, it re-awakens the viewer to the fact that the musicians are present; the abrupt intrusion of the sound in our immediate vicinity adds to the atmosphere of tension and claustrophobia evoked by the extreme close-ups of Coré and the boy as their desire becomes more intense, and we know their meeting will end in his death. As Chris Mugan, reviewing the London show, writes: "Over long tracking shots, you luxuriate in the band's interactions, while in action sequences you forget they are there."²² We may understand "action sequences" as those where the focus

²² Chris Mugan, 'Tindersticks, Queen Elizabeth Hall, London,' *The Independent* (28 April 2011) <<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/music/reviews/tindersticks-queen-elizabeth-hall-london-2275665.html>> [accessed 25 September 2012].

is not on reverie or contemplation, but rather on building tension, or even violence. *Trouble Every Day*'s sonic landscape is filled with non-musical rhythms and sounds which were influential in Tindersticks' shaping of the soundtrack. As Boulter tells me:

There were certain creaks, general noises, all those people locked in hotel rooms, and the maids walking down the corridors. We always try to use some of the source sounds from the film in the music [...] There's so little dialogue in Claire's films that these sounds can help you through the film [...] The sound of footsteps moving down a corridor is a way of getting down that corridor yourself when you're watching the film.²³

Tindersticks' musical compositions are not only in dialogue with the images of *Trouble Every Day*, but with its diegetic sonic landscape. As Denis says: "Stuart helped me listen to the film. Suddenly it gave me and the editor more space to listen to the film. A space doesn't have to be made for music but a space is open with all these sounds, waiting to be listened to."²⁴ In one of the film's final scenes, we see Christelle, the chambermaid, pushing her trolley along a corridor (she is observed doing this on several occasions, the camera always in close-up on the back of her neck – an indication that Shane is watching her, and of the vulnerability of her exposed flesh). The rumble of the wheels becomes part of the constant hum of noise present in the hotel. We also hear the buzzing of electric lights and the creaking and banging of metal doors in the basement. In this scene, with these diegetic sounds, appears the film's *Maid Theme*, a slow, melancholic harp refrain. This is used to soundtrack Christelle's presence at several points in the film, but in Christelle's last scene, when she finds Shane watching her undress in the hotel's locker room, and they begin to have sex which will culminate in her death, a low, ominous trumpet note and slowly plucked bass note also appear. In the live show, as with Coré's killing scene, the diegetic sounds are all we hear initially, before the harp refrain enters. Again, this disturbs the viewer – the musicians have been in shadow and we have been immersed in watching and listening to the scene play out as if we were in a cinema, but when the harpist is highlighted as he begins to play, the proximity of the musicians brings us closer to a yet more immersive experience of the scene. The sense of threat in the images feels closer because its soundtrack plays in our present environment. Thus, when the dialogue between Denis's films' images and Tindersticks' music is enacted as live performance, our physical surroundings and the proximity of the musicians to us may affect our reading of the

²³ Boulter in Munro (2011b).

²⁴ Denis in Ide, op cit.

content of the scenes we view: this is a discourse not only between sound and image, but between live sound, recorded sound, filmic image and place of exhibition.

Vendredi soir

Former Tindersticks' violinist Dickon Hinchliffe composed the soundtrack to 2002's *Vendredi soir* alone, as the rest of the band completed the album *Waiting for the Moon* (2003).

Hinchliffe has since composed the scores for, among others, Sophie Barthes' film *Cold Souls* (USA, 2008), Debra Granik's *Winter's Bone* (USA, 2010) and James Marsh's British television serial *Red Riding* (2009). As Hinchliffe no longer plays with the band, they did not play any of his compositions for *Vendredi soir* in their live show, but the assemblage²⁵ of Hinchliffe's music with Denis's images in the film remains interesting. As stated in the previous chapter, the film depicts Laure, a Parisian woman who, the evening before she is due to move in with her boyfriend, gets stuck in a traffic jam due to transport strikes in Paris, and ends up spending the night with a stranger, Jean (Vincent Lindon).

Denis's initial thoughts about music for *Vendredi soir* centred around American techno DJ and producer Jeff Mills' 2000 soundtrack for Fritz Lang's 1927 film *Metropolis*. As Denis says:

[L]'ouverture de sa BO pour *Metropolis*, j'en ai eu besoin dès l'écriture du scénario. Dans la première scène du livre, Laure ferme les derniers cartons de son déménagement. Je me suis dit, je vais me mettre derrière une vitre pour la regarder d'un peu loin, on ne peut pas être avec elle d'emblée. Je retravaillais la scène, ça ne collait pas. J'ai commencé alors à décrire un toit parisien, le son des roues des poubelles qu'on entend dans les cours d'immeuble à la tombée du jour [...] En écoutant Jeff Mills, j'ai vu et senti le plan, l'espace de la ville, le regroupement humain en elle.²⁶

²⁵ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari also describe the concept of assemblage, as the ongoing process of subjects or formations establishing new, shifting identities as they connect with each other, in their book *Capitalisme et schizophrénie 2: mille plateaux* (Paris: Minuit, 1980). Martine Beugnet addresses the fluidity between filmic subject and visual surfaces, referencing Deleuze and Guattari's work, in her 2007 book, *Cinema and Sensation*.

²⁶ Denis in Peron, op cit, p.4.

The film opens to a black screen, with opening titles and the cool, electronic synthesizer notes of Mills' *Entrance to Metropolis*, not following any solid melody. The image dissolves into the interior of Laure's home at dusk, boxes piled high. The image then fades to black again, showing the names of the two lead actors, with Mills' music still playing, and blurred glimpses of what may be car headlights moving across the dark screen. When the scene changes to a longshot of Paris' rooftops, we see the sky darkening as night falls and Mills' music moves into minor key, the synthesizer notes beginning to sound uneasy, even threatening. The image cuts to Laure tidying her apartment and looking out over the city; we then see the Sacré-Cœur light up, in time to a chord change in Mills' music. No official cut of *Metropolis* with Mills' soundtrack has ever been released (he exhibited his version at the Centre Pompidou in Paris in 2000), and it is difficult to say exactly which images in the film *Entrance to Metropolis* would accompany, as Mills edited the film around the soundtrack. We can certainly compare the shots of cityscapes in *Metropolis* and *Vendredi soir*, however. The longshots of the city in *Metropolis* depict it as a sprawling, futuristic entity, filled with tall, angular buildings and transport systems which seem emptied of living people. The music's cold tone reflects the film's themes of industry and wealth taking precedence over human life in the city. Though Paris' Haussmannian boulevards and the Sacré-Cœur bear no visual resemblance to Lang's constructed city, there is still a sense, for the viewer, of floating above a fast-moving cityscape where buildings dwarf anonymous inhabitants. As night falls over Paris, and Mills' music drifts into a more ominous key, there is a sense of the threat of the unknown: Laure is leaving the home she has known for years and looks out onto a city which she will experience differently from the following day. The unknown will be a source of fear to her (when a stranger knocks on her car window and she drives quickly away) but will also become a source of pleasure when she spends the night with Jean, about whom she knows nothing. When the camera descends closer to the city's streets, Hinchliffe's track, *Nightfall*, begins to play. It possesses some of the same sense of floating non-progression as Mills' track, but is much warmer in tone and, arguably, more organic and human (played on strings and glockenspiel instead of electronic instruments). In this first shot with Hinchliffe's music, we see a long shot of people and cars moving in the street, but their movements are speeded up. At this point, we begin to see the film as visualized through Laure's subjectivity, as if she imagines the world below her speeding past, the time that she has left in her own home running out (see Chapter Four for deeper analysis of the role of Laure's subjective perspective in the film).

As Hinchliffe reflects:

[Denis] wanted the music to feel like it was floating in the air, drifting on to the streets at night, through people's car windows and from cafés and restaurants to create this strange, slightly magical, eerie world. It was to say that a night like this only happens once in a generation. I responded to that by using a lot of high strings and celeste and piano.²⁷

The delicate strings and piano sound extremely different from the droning synthesizer and atonal guitar in Denis's films *L'Intrus* (2004) or the broken harmonium in *White Material* (2009) (I discuss both soundtracks below), but in all cases rhythm and the textures of the sounds are crucial in reflecting narrative. In the case of *Vendredi soir*, as Hinchliffe says, the music is often light and airy, with little sense of percussive rhythm. *Falling Asleep*, another violin and glockenspiel piece which soundtracks Laure's shift into sleep as she sits in her car with Jean, the traffic not moving, reflects Laure's sense of drifting – between two homes, two stages of life, and towards Jean, a man who piques her curiosity but of whom she has no knowledge. Hinchliffe's track *Le Rallye* soundtracks a scene where Laure and Jean have a coffee in a bar and we realize, if we have not already done so, that they will spend the night together. *Le Rallye* begins as a succession of softly plucked violin notes, gradually building to incorporate another layer of warm string melody and soft trumpet notes, as Jean and Laure touch hands for the first time in the bar and regard one another in a series of reverse-shots. Hinchliffe says:

[T]his probably has more rhythm than any other piece in the film. Claire used it at a point where things start to shift in the relationship between the two main characters. I wanted the track to suggest that sense of progression and also the sensuality – things are still quite fragile, and you're not sure where they're going, so it has that suspended feel.²⁸

When *Le Rallye* first enters the scene, we still hear diegetic sounds, such as the electronic noises of a pinball machine being played by a young woman (Florence Loiret-Caille). As the track builds, however, Laure and Jean brush past each other on the stairs by the bar's bathroom (she has just realized that he has bought condoms), and this moment of physical closeness is visualized in slow motion, the diegetic sounds disappearing and Hinchliffe's

²⁷ Hinchliffe in Bell (2011), p.17.

²⁸ Ibid.

music becoming louder. We experience this moment entirely through Laure's subjectivity; the sensation of touching Jean is so momentous that time appears to slow down, and the rest of the world seems to disappear in this moment, hence the dominance of the music. Interestingly, Hinchliffe's piano and string music often precedes or plays for only part of the film's sex scenes. When Laure and Jean make love for the second time in the hotel, a warm string melody and delicate piano notes soundtrack close-ups of them undressing each other, but as they lie in bed naked together, we see extreme close-ups of their skin and the music fades out to make way for the sounds of their breathing, their bodies moving on the mattress, and the hum of the electric heater. As the music only plays as they prepare for or begin to have sex, we might argue that the perspective of Laure's that we are being shown at these stages is emotional and psychological – she sees her night with Jean as if it were a dream, or only happening in her imagination. However, when the music stops, there is a shift to the immediately physical sounds of sex; in these moments it is Laure's body and the sensations it feels, rather than just her mind, which communicate her experience to us.

The notion of intertextuality as performance of discourse only really becomes important vis-à-vis *Vendredi soir* when we examine how Tindersticks incorporate images from the film into their live show, in the absence of Hinchliffe's music. In the show, we see a scene from near the end of the film which depicts Laure from the back in medium-shot, naked and looking into the hotel room's wardrobe. She picks out Jean's heavy coat and puts it on; she also dons his socks and wanders to the open window. There is no music playing at this stage. We see a close-up of the window's white curtain moving in the wind, and of Laure's car in the street outside, and the quiet, playful glockenspiel refrain that we hear as Laure drifts off to sleep in her car earlier in the film begins to play. She lets herself fall backwards onto the bed, looking at Jean, and the warmer, stronger piano melody that we hear when she and Jean undress each other in an earlier scene plays. As with the film's other sex scenes, the music fades out and is replaced with the sounds of their breathing as they make love. In the live show, Tindersticks play Stuart Staples' track *Friday Night* from his solo album, *Lucky Dog Recordings 03 – 04* (2005) over this entire scene, from Laure's donning of Jean's coat to their lovemaking. Boulter recalls: "Stuart's song was always influenced by the film, by the feelings within the film, and of course we might have been a part of the film if we'd done the soundtrack. The images and

song just felt right together.”²⁹ Staples adds: “*Vendredi soir* was something we started to think about as a band, but it coincided with us making [...] *Waiting For the Moon* and I felt we couldn’t do both well enough. It’s been nice to bring the song and the images back together again.”³⁰ In its tone and instrumentation, *Friday Night* differs greatly from Hinchliffe’s compositions for the film. There is no violin, glockenspiel or complex arrangements, but simply an old organ clicking out a slow rumba rhythm and a simple, mournful melody. Staples recalls of his recording of the *Lucky Dog* album:

Accidental piano loops, old trombone ideas, snippets of rhythms and drones, a recent purchase of an old Lowrey organ, all seemed to hold something new for me. I didn’t know what I wanted, but I knew what I didn’t. After years of making beautifully crafted music with the band, I felt more than ready to appreciate the ugly and awkward.³¹

Reading this scene with *Friday Night* as its soundtrack rather than Hinchliffe’s music produces entirely different results. Hinchliffe’s airy, dreamy strings and glockenspiel posit the scene as part of Laure’s adventure, her drift away from life for one evening, with no ties. Her wearing of Jean’s clothes seems playful and sensuous. *Friday Night*’s sparse minor key melody and arrangement are more sombre, seeming to soundtrack a moment of reflection, and perhaps, unease for Laure. Staples’ voice is hushed as he sings: “Something’s coming this way, I know it.” What is coming, inevitably, is dawn, and Laure’s return to her everyday life, and partner. As she stands at the window, we see close-ups of the wind moving through her hair and the curtains, as if disrupting the stillness of her night with Jean. She looks at Jean as he sleeps, and she does not smile. With Hinchliffe’s music, this look seems not completely irrelevant, but at least not ominous. With Staples’ music, the mournful melody and sense of worry in the lyrics fill Laure’s look at Jean with sadness and even fear – she knows this night must end. As she puts on Jean’s clothes, it seems she is trying to linger in his scents and the textures of garments which have touched his body as long as she can before she departs. Any doubts that the perspective in *Friday Night*’s lyrics is Laure’s may be put aside by the lines: “I can’t read signs / Just took a ride on Friday night.” Laure knows she stopped following her designated route (with regard to both her journey that evening and her life) when she met Jean;

²⁹ Boulter in Munro (2011b).

³⁰ Staples in Munro (2011c).

³¹ Staples, *Lucky Dog Recordings 03-04* notes <<http://www.tindersticks.co.uk/discography/lucky-dog-recordings-03-04/>> [accessed 20 August 2012.]

she had no intention of spending a night with a stranger when she left her home, and now the chill of reality sets in. Staples sings: “Go on and wake this heart / If you can take it / Where there’s no feeling / Where there’s no pain.” Laure’s night with Jean has of course been full of “feeling,” full of joyous physical sensation, but as the scene progresses, and Laure and Jean make love, Jean tries to bite her shoulder and she swiftly pulls away. As Beugnet writes: “This instinctive reaction of defence recalls *Trouble Every Day*’s evocation of desire’s darker dimension. In Laure’s case, however, it is also a reminder of the proximity of her ‘other’ life, a reality where she cannot afford to carry the visible memory of the embrace.”³²

Staples’ doleful music imbues this moment with an even greater threat of reality in the live show than in the film, where it happens with no musical accompaniment (after Hinchliffe’s music has faded out some minutes earlier). Laure’s night with Jean has been one of “no pain,” but now a brief moment of physical discomfort reminds her that this encounter must leave no trace upon her. The close-up of Laure’s car parked in the street below, when soundtracked with Hinchliffe’s music, reminds us that this is where the liaison between Laure and Jean began – the car served as a parenthetical space in which Laure could drift temporarily away from her daily life and identity. With Staples’ music, however, the car becomes a vehicle that will take her back to her life; it is unoccupied, empty of the warmth of their bodies and the fug of Jean’s cigarette smoke. *Vendredi soir*’s final shot is a still of Laure smiling as she runs through the streets towards her car in the morning, suggesting that she does not feel regret or worry after her night with Jean, but this does not mean that we cannot read the earlier scene, soundtracked by *Friday Night*, as a moment of tension and unease. Tindersticks’ joining of *Friday Night* and *Vendredi soir* does not exist in any form as a recorded, viewable document, and is a particularly interesting example of how Ricoeur’s notion of discourse as event may be applied to live shows where dialogue between texts is actualized only in performance, is fleeting and attached to a particular time and space.

The translation of *Vendredi soir*’s title into English for Staples’ song recalls the French re-naming of Tindersticks’ songs *My Sister* and *Tiny Tears* in their different versions on the *Nénette et Boni* soundtrack. It acts almost as a metaphor for the dialogue between Denis, a French speaker, and Staples, an English speaker, but also for their ongoing process of

³² Beugnet (2004), p.194.

engagement. As Tindersticks re-worked and re-titled their songs for the context of a French film, leading to the songs becoming products of creative engagement with Denis, and no longer the songs they were on the album *Tindersticks 2*, in the case of Tindersticks' live performance of *Friday Night*, the assemblage of Denis's film's images and Staples' English lyrics create a new product. The translation to English does not signal reversal (Staples 're-Anglicizing' his music's relation to Denis's work, after it has been 'made French') but rather the continuing reciprocity of inspiration between the two artists.

L'Intrus

The soundtrack for *L'Intrus* (2004) is the only one which Stuart Staples composed alone for Denis. The film's narrative centres around Louis Trébor, (Michel Subor) an ageing man who lives alone in the Jura mountains in France and needs a heart transplant. This operation is eventually arranged through a black market transaction (Trébor wants to be sure that he receives a young man's heart), facilitated by an unnamed Russian woman (Yekaterina Golubeva), which takes place in Pusan, South Korea. Trébor then travels to Tahiti to seek a son he fathered long ago, but does not find him. Near the film's end, he realizes that his other son, Sidney (Grégoire Colin), of whose whereabouts in France he was aware, has been killed to provide his new heart. The film was inspired by philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy's text on his own transplant, *L'Intrus*, published in 2000.

L'Intrus's narrative is disjointed and perplexing, moving between different locations and between diegetic reality and what we may read as the dreams or nightmares of Trébor, without any clear reasons for these shifts provided for the viewer. As Staples recalls: "I just didn't feel any melody from the film [...] I started off trying to find broken rhythms with drum machines, and the drummer, Thomas Belhom, was naturally able to play in broken rhythms."³³ The music Staples produced for the film is characterized by a looping pattern of minor-key electric guitar notes, backed by a single, droning synthesizer note, with occasional, atonal penetrations from a trumpet and arrhythmic drumbeats. This group of instruments is used for each musical piece, with some variations, such as the drums dominating in certain scenes. One scene which

³³ Staples in Ide, op cit.

depicts what may be read as Trébor's nightmare features two figures on horseback, dragging an object through the snowy Jura landscape; the shaky movements of the handheld camera fail to catch fully the faces of the riders or to clarify what is being dragged. Belhom plays arrhythmic, fast drum beats to accompany the quick movements of the horses, augmented by stabbing guitar notes and the low background hum of the synthesizer. Onscreen, the horses are brought to a stop, and the riders are revealed as the Russian woman (Golubeva) and an unnamed young man. The horses have in fact been dragging Trébor through the snow at high speed; he is alive, but injured, his face bloody. He tells the Russian woman he has "already paid" (in Russian) and she answers "No, you'll never pay enough." This, we would imagine, is a representation of a nightmare – the Russian woman haunts Trébor as he travels the world, and it is difficult to discern whether she is real or a manifestation of his guilt and fear. The lack of recognizable rhythm or melody in this scene, and in every other scene with Staples' music, reflects the disjointedness of the story and the loss of fluid communication of knowledge between characters – Trébor does not find out about Sidney's death until the end, the Tahitian people he visits are unable to find his son and attempt to fool him with an impostor – but it also reflects, Staples says, "the idea of the heart transplant [...] a failing heart. A kind of broken rhythm that sounds hurt and taut as a beat."³⁴ Trébor's failing heart is the central focus of the narrative – the need for the operation takes him to Pusan, and it is for his new heart that his son dies. As Trébor is dragged through the snow, the diegetic sound of his ragged, uneven breathing creates another clashing layer of non-flowing sound. The lack of progressive melody or smooth, organized rhythm in Staples' music is emphasized by its contrast with the warm, tuneful music played and listened to by the Tahitian people in the film, who lead a life built around family and community, which is completely alien to Trébor's solitary, isolated existence.

In the early stages of planning the film, Denis instructed Michel Subor to look at images of Johnny Cash and to listen to Cash's music to prepare for playing Trébor. The reference to Cash, a monolithic figure of angry, melancholic masculinity, dressed in black, reflects the characterization of Trébor as an ageing man, living alone, weary with the world, but still filled with anger and violence. In one scene, Trébor strums an acoustic guitar, as if this were a reference to Cash, but Staples' assertion that melody is absent from the film holds true as

³⁴ Staples in Munro (2011c).

Trébor's notes do not form any kind of tune. As Denis recalls, when Staples saw the daily edits of the film, he said: "If I create too much of a melody, we're going to lose this inside trip [experience] of Trébor [...] I feel like [the music] should be a drill in the film."³⁵ What Staples suggested, Denis emphasizes, was that the music should be a constant loop at the film's core, an atonal, broken sound rather than a progressive melody. The sparse stabs of electric guitar bear no relation to even the simplest melodies of Johnny Cash, and the death of Cash during filming in 2003 confirmed, Denis suggests, that there should be no melody in the music.³⁶

One portion of the live show which truly demonstrates the actualization of the dialogue between Denis and Tindersticks in performance occurs when a scene from *L'Intrus* is played on the screen. When Trébor leaves Pusan for Tahiti, we see a shot of the sea at twilight, with a purple sky, the camera moving gently with the bobbing of a boat. In the film, this sequence lasts only one minute, and is accompanied by Staples' broken drum rhythms, guitar notes and low synthesizer note. In the live show, however, this scene is looped, like the opening shot of the couple kissing in *Trouble Every Day*, and is on the screen for just over four minutes. To accompany this image, the band do not play the music from the film, but rather a Tindersticks song, *The Other Side of the World*, from their 2008 album, *The Hungry Saw*. Staples reflects: "*The Other Side of the World* sort of came from sitting in front of that clip from *L'Intrus* for hours and that's very much there in the rhythm of the song and the feeling of it. It's good to bring them both back together."³⁷ Boulter gives more detail on the connection between film and song: "The images and song just felt right together. Stuart wrote [the song] just after he'd done the soundtrack for *L'Intrus* so he was thinking a lot about the film, the ocean swaying and the purple sky."³⁸ On the band's website, Staples describes trying "to find the elusive seascape of *The Other Side of the World*."³⁹ There are differences between the film's narrative and the song's lyrics: Staples sings of the other side of the world being "an island the shape of a woman," whereas Trébor travels to Tahiti in search of his son, not a woman. Staples sings of loving a woman dearly, but of sadness at knowing that if she held him "too tight [...] she would break me / too loose [...] I would slip away." However, there is a shared sense that "the other side of the world" is a place which transfixes both the narrator of Tindersticks' song and

³⁵ Denis in Jonathan Romney, 'Interview with Claire Denis,' Tartan Video DVD release of *L'Intrus* (2005a).

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Staples, interviewed by author (2011).

³⁸ Boulter, interviewed by author (2011).

³⁹ Staples, *The Hungry Saw* notes <<http://www.tindersticks.co.uk/discography/the-hungry-saw/>> [accessed 6 August 2012].

Trébor. They are desperate to reach it, but apprehensive of what they might find there and of the memories this place holds. Staples sings: “From there, there is no escape,” and indeed Trébor’s memories and obsessions are rooted in Tahiti, where his elusive son hides. He builds himself a shelter on the beach and tries to live there; we get the impression that he has lived like this as a young man, but is now too old and ill to do so.⁴⁰ The slow waltz rhythm of Tindersticks’ song contrasts greatly with the disjointed rhythm of Staples’ own composition which accompanies the scene in the film. In the film, the harsh, ominous music renders the purple sky a locus of threat – at this stage, we do not know where Trébor is going, or why, and the emptiness of the horizon suggests a loss of direction and safety. When accompanied by *The Other Side of the World*, however, with its melancholic guitar and lilting piano, the scene seems elegiac; we are placed on a gently rocking boat, looking at a beautiful sky imbued with sadness. Staples does not say whether the subjective perspective of his song is Trébor’s (perhaps a gentler look at his solitude than the tough tone of *L’Intrus* allows), but what is crucial is that, in the context of the live show, we see not only an enactment of the discourse between Tindersticks and Denis, but the ongoing happening and continuation of that discourse in new music. When Staples recorded the soundtrack for *L’Intrus*, Tindersticks as a band were in disarray – Dickon Hinchliffe would leave after 2003’s album *Waiting For the Moon*, and the band would not record again (with some new members) until 2008’s *The Hungry Saw*, whilst Staples worked on solo projects – thus, until preparation for the live shows, Tindersticks had never played *L’Intrus*’s soundtrack. Staples says: “*L’Intrus* is still alive in my mind, it still fascinates me. One of the best things is the way *L’Intrus*’s music has grown with the band. There was a gradual rebuilding of the band into what it is now, it was changing, morphing into something else.”⁴¹ This discourse as performance is still capable of changing and growing, as both interlocutors remain open to the other’s work.

35 Rhums

In 2008, Denis released the film *35 Rhums*, again with a soundtrack by Tindersticks. The film, as I describe in Chapter Two, depicts a father, Lionel, and his university student daughter,

⁴⁰ See Chapter Six for my reading of Trébor’s ‘past’ in Tahiti, in relation to Paul Gégauff’s 1962 film *Le Reflux*.

⁴¹ Staples in Munro (2011c).

Joséphine, who live together in the Parisian *banlieue*, years after the death of Joséphine's mother. The return of Noé, Joséphine's sometime boyfriend, disturbs the peaceful equilibrium of their shared life, as both begin to recognize that Joséphine will eventually leave her father. The film opens with a black screen, displaying credits, and the track *Opening*, which begins with the high, wavering sound of an Ondes Martenot (an early electronic musical instrument, similar in sound to the theremin), and is augmented by soft strings and a warm melody played on keyboard and melodica (a small reed instrument with keys, somewhat to a harmonica) when the image cuts to a shot of rail tracks, viewed from the driver's cabin of a moving train, in the soft light of an autumn afternoon. In the live show, the band begins to play *Opening* while the screen behind them is still dark. No credits are shown, and we see the musicians highlighted in blue as the Ondes Martenot sound begins. The screen then brightens and the image of the rail tracks appears as the keyboard and strings join in. For Boulter, the melodica in particular was an important component of the film's music:

We thought about using an accordion, but then would people think it was trying to sound too French? The melodica has something of the accordion about it, it sounds slightly old. [*Opening*] was a song I'd done at home, which I'd intended for *Songs for the Young at Heart*, but it never made it in the end, so it was left over. The main theme of the film is the father's connection with his daughter, so there's a kind of childish feel to some of the music.⁴²

Songs for the Young at Heart refers to an album of music for children which Boulter and Staples put together in 2007, featuring contributions from both musicians, as well as from singers such as Jarvis Cocker and Robert Forster. The melodica is used on several occasions on that album. Boulter reflects on *Songs for the Young at Heart*'s creation:

After the birth of my son, I began thinking of songs and nursery rhymes from my own childhood to play to him. I realized there was a lot of interesting and almost forgotten music, from the schoolroom, the radio and television, that maybe it was the reason I'd begun to make my own music in the first place. Hearing the theme from *Robinson Crusoe* or the song from *White Horses* takes me back to a world less complicated. Or

⁴² Boulter in Munro (2011b).

was it? There's sadness in *Puff the Magic Dragon*, a sense of loss, change, time moving on that's always haunted me.⁴³

Loss, change and time's passage are vital themes in *35 Rhums*; the balance between a fondness for childhood's simplicity with a melancholic longing for a lost time is expressed in several of *Songs for the Young at Heart*'s tracks, especially *Puff the Magic Dragon*, the story of a young boy who loves his dragon friend, but abandons him as he grows older. There are also similarities between the gentle keyboard arrangements and melodies of Staples and Boulter's *Theme for the Young at Heart*, which opens the album, of *Puff the Magic Dragon* and of *35 Rhums*' *Opening*. In *35 Rhums*, Joséphine is an adult, but at certain moments she displays a desire to stay safe in her father's care as she has done since childhood: she jokingly calls Lionel 'Papa' near the beginning of the film, but will use the term again without irony after he tells her she need not feel she should look after him. When the two travel to Germany to visit Joséphine's mother's grave, they camp on the beach and we see a group of children walking past, singing a simple song and holding bright paper lanterns. Joséphine tells her father that she likes being with him and that they could live like this forever. The images of the children with their lanterns at dusk occur at a point not long before (we will understand retrospectively) Joséphine will leave her father to marry Noé, and create poignant parallels between the children's easy, unselfconscious joy and the simple happiness shared by father and daughter. As with *Trouble Every Day*, in *35 Rhums*, an older piece of music, rejected for another project, finds new use and meaning in the context of a Denis film's themes and images. Tindersticks decided against using instruments which referred too strongly to the film's geographic setting; this is indeed a film set in Paris, but we do not see famous landmarks to identify it as such. Most of the narrative plays out in the *banlieue*, in places which most visitors to the city do not see. We might think, initially, that an accordion is being played in *Opening*, but we realize that the melodica sound is smaller, less layered than that of the accordion. It does not possess the accordion's postcard 'Frenchness,' but rather creates a quieter sound, reflecting the intimacy of the film's atmosphere.

As in the film, in the live show, the warm, gentle sound of *Opening* fades out after a few minutes of the moving view from the driver's cabin and is replaced with diegetic sounds of

⁴³ Boulter, *Songs for the Young at Heart* notes <<http://www.songsfortheyoungatheart.co.uk/>> [accessed 28 August 2012].

trains in movement. We cut from the driver's cabin to a location near the railway tracks, where Lionel is standing in the dusk, smoking a cigarette. After he extinguishes this, the more melancholic, minor key track *Train Montage* begins to play, as Lionel drives off on his motorbike, and the scene cuts to Joséphine taking the train home. We do not know on first viewing of the film how the two characters are connected, but may assume that the man has been waiting for the younger woman. The track begins with an insistently plucked acoustic guitar melody which, after the softness of *Opening*, seems to change the film's mood to one of tension, but when this is augmented by a meandering flute tune and a wistful melody played on the melodica, it is not threat that we sense, but again a more gentle sadness. This arrangement is accompanied in both the film and the live show by the diegetic rumblings of the trains in motion. Variations of *Train Montage* play throughout the film, mostly at points when characters are travelling, by train or otherwise. For Boulter, the theme of travelling in the narrative was important to the structure of the music: "We were thinking of the film *Genevieve*, with the car race and Larry Adler's harmonica. It's jaunty music, travelling music, and we wanted to do something like that, but in a *Tindersticks* sad kind of way."⁴⁴ Henry Cornelius' 1953 British film *Genevieve* depicts a race between two owners of vintage cars made in 1904. Main protagonist Alan is deeply attached to his Darracq car, which he calls *Genevieve*, and is desperate to win this race, as he will lose the car if he does not. When the race's end is almost in sight, Alan is stopped by an elderly man, who lovingly describes his memories of taking his wife out in his own Darracq when he was young. Alan realizes he will lose the race, but does not wish to hurt the man's feelings, so stays to talk to him. Eventually Alan does win the race, and we see that his kindness has not prevented him from doing so. *Genevieve* is a comedy film but, like *35 Rhums*, has a sense of wistfulness for the past: Alan's beloved car may not be particularly efficient, but the elderly man's words remind him of a gentler England, where politeness and respect seemed more important. *Genevieve* is also a film in which the threat of loss is always present: Alan fears he will lose the car which, to him, is a symbol of the memories he shares with his wife, Wendy. In *35 Rhums*, Lionel is afraid of Joséphine inevitably leaving him.⁴⁵ Larry Adler's harmonica-led score for *Genevieve* is largely more cheerful than *Tindersticks*' *Train Montage*, but comparisons can be drawn between how both evoke aurally the movement of vehicles onscreen. Adler's bright melodies, with their

⁴⁴ Boulter in Munro (2011b).

⁴⁵ See Chapter Two for reference to influence of Ozu Yasujiro's 1949 film *Banshun* on Denis's portrayal of the fear of loss in the father-daughter relationship

twists and changes in tempo, reflect the erratic course of the race, with its comedic diversions, but after Alan drives off after meeting the elderly man, the harmonica music becomes gentle and wistful: Alan has not yet taken the car to its full speed, still reflecting on the encounter.

Tindersticks' *Train Montage* is, at its opening, more organized in its rhythm than Adler's music, with the plucked guitar echoing the repetitive sounds of the train in motion. As Boulter says: "We wanted something that had this sense of progression, and suggested a train moving."⁴⁶ Reflecting on the shift from *Opening* into *Train Montage* in the film, Staples recalls: "The last note coincides with the squeak of the brakes and it changes."⁴⁷ Though *Opening* was not written with *35 Rhums* in mind, its final note coinciding with the sound of a train braking establishes the importance of the relation of diegetic sounds to the film's music (in both film and live show), which is continued in the rhythmic echoes between *Train Montage* and the sounds of trains moving. In one scene (not featured in the live show), Lionel travels home by train at night with his friend René, a fellow driver who has just retired; this scene, in which René laments his lack of purpose in life,⁴⁸ is accompanied by the track *Night Train*, a slower, more mournful variation on *Train Montage*, with the rhythm led by low bass guitar notes, soft strums of electric guitar and no melodica. As the train pulls into a station, we hear what sounds like a low note played on a woodwind instrument, seeming to be perfectly in harmony with the rest of the music. It becomes clear, however, that this is in fact the sound of the train braking. As Denis says: "Before, I wasn't even thinking of having music. The train and track sounds were so great, then you [Staples] sent your music and immediately it changed completely."⁴⁹ Staples recalls:

I didn't say anything but asked if I could have a QuickTime [video file]. I brought it back home and put the two things [the opening scene and the track which would become *Opening*] together and it was the perfect length as well. It was as if these two things were waiting for each other, to become the opening piece of *35 Rhums* [...] So I played it for Claire and she was like, well, I never expected this, and it just rolled on from there.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Boulter in Bell (2011), p.16.

⁴⁷ Staples in Ide, op cit.

⁴⁸ See Chapter Two for my reading of the influence of the radio programme *Lectures du rail* on René's dialogue in this scene.

⁴⁹ Denis in Ide, op cit.

⁵⁰ Staples in Hill, op cit.

The importance of reciprocal influence between Denis and Tindersticks is key here: Staples' suggestion of an old piece of music makes Denis see her film's soundscape differently, and the centrality of trains and their movements to the narrative informs the way Tindersticks write the remainder of the film's music.

The next sequence which we see in the live show opens with a shot of Joséphine fighting her way through a crowd of protesting anthropology students, with no musical accompaniment, and no musicians highlighted. As the tussle continues, a soft, insistent rhythm played on maracas begins, and is accompanied by the plucked guitar melody, flute and melodica from *Train Montage*, as the scene cuts to a close-up of Lionel driving his train, viewed from inside the driver's cabin. He receives a text message from Joséphine (we see in close-up that she is telling him she will be home late) and smiles. This track is *Train Montage 2*, a gentler variation on the first. In both the film and live show, we again hear the diegetic sounds of the train. In the live show, the screen fades to black at the end of this scene, and then reopens with Lionel's daydream sequence, featuring himself and Joséphine riding a horse (her arms around his waist) over train tracks. The scene opens on the screen with only the diegetic sounds of the horse's hooves on stone, and no musicians highlighted, but music soon enters: the track is entitled *René's Death*, a much slower, sparser variation on *Train Montage*, with only the bare bones of the melody plucked out on acoustic guitar, joined by low, mournful notes played on the melodica. Boulter on melodica and Staples on guitar are highlighted in blue light. The track's title refers to the suicide of René, which occurs after the daydream sequence. These scenes do not follow each other in the film: between them, several important sequences occur – René sinks further into depression, Noé kisses Joséphine as they dance together in a bar and Lionel, obviously unsettled after witnessing this, decides to sleep with a woman. By joining the two scenes, Tindersticks choose to emphasize the importance of the connection between father and daughter, irrespective of all other characters. Lionel receives a message from Joséphine while driving alone and then, in Tindersticks' montage, we see a visualization of his mind drifting to his daughter; as I describe in Chapter Two, the scene was inspired by Goethe's 18th century poem *Der Erlkönig*, set to music by Franz Schubert, which recounts the story of a father and son, riding through a forest on horseback as the father attempts to bring the son to safety. Denis was inspired by the *lied* as it emphasized the desperate desire of a father to protect his child, something which she wished Lionel to share. Tindersticks capitalize on this theme by following the sequence in which Joséphine informs Lionel she will work late

with a scene which visualizes his desire to keep her safe, with him. This montage is not simply an edit of Denis's film, but a new assemblage, where Denis's visuals are re-read by Tindersticks, who also re-work their own music so two pieces which do not follow each other in the film affect a different narrative progression in their union, in the specific context of their live performance.

White Material

Tindersticks' next soundtrack for Denis would be for 2009's *White Material*. Isabelle Huppert, in her first role for Denis, plays Maria Vial, the co-owner of a coffee plantation (with her ex-husband, André, played by Christophe Lambert) in an unnamed African country where civil war is breaking out, and white farmers like the Vials are being urged to leave. Maria refuses to go and, as the violence worsens, André and her son Manuel (Nicolas Duvauchelle) are killed and she is left alone, trying to escape.

As with *Trouble Every Day*, the non-musical sounds of the location on which the film was shot were important as a starting point for the soundtrack, as Staples states: "The first thing I asked was to hear background source sounds from the location in Africa. [...] Non-musical sounds are a starting point and you can build a connection with the film from there."⁵¹ *White Material*'s sonic landscape, like *Trouble Every Day*'s, often seems to be filled with silences, but neither film is ever completely quiet – in *White Material*, we hear the constant hum of crickets, the sounds of birds, and often the buzzing of machinery in the coffee plantation. We regularly hear updates from a rebel radio DJ who encourages listeners to take back the country from the white farmers and ruling militia, and even when he is killed we still hear the hum of static from listeners' radios, and his voice is then replaced by that of one of the regime's soldiers. In the live show, the band accompanies the film's opening scene. Staples, highlighted, begins to tap a wine glass rhythmically, before any image appears on the screen. A tapping sound appears regularly throughout the film and was achieved, Staples says, with "a Lucky Cat [a Japanese toy cat which moves its arm up and down], hitting a wine glass. Because of

⁵¹ Ibid.

any tiny movements, it changes and misses [...] like an alarm, but strange, it just taps away.”⁵² The use of a Japanese toy might seem incongruous in an African setting, but as Boulter says: “[A]lthough this is a film set in Africa, the music shouldn’t have anything to do with African music. The film is about Europeans who are somewhere they don’t really belong. Even though generations have lived there, in some way they’re still the invaders.”⁵³ The Lucky Cat’s tapping sound, which becomes the sound of Staples tapping a glass in the live show, runs through the film, as if emphasizing the atmosphere of constant tension and the characters’ progress towards danger. The fact that it sometimes misses the glass, and breaks the rhythm, can be related to *L’Intrus*’ soundtrack’s use of disjointed rhythms – in both films, there is a sense of the flow of communication being disturbed. Trébor and Maria are isolated, stubborn characters who refuse to heed warnings about the possible outcomes of their actions. In the live show, as Staples taps the glass, we see the film’s opening sequence unfold on the screen: dogs run across a dark road, and the low, queasy notes of a harmonium enter. Soldiers shine a torch around a house (which we later learn is Maria’s). They see a dead body and confirm, “C’est le Boxeur” (a famous rebel soldier, played by Isaach de Bankolé, who also appears in Denis’ films *Chocolat* (1988) and *S’en fout la mort* (1990)). One of them sees an adolescent boy with a shaved head, struggling to breathe as the house is engulfed in flames (we will learn that this is Manuel) and closes the door, leaving him to die. The scene then cuts to Maria, on a dust road in daylight, with the music replaced by the sound of crickets. At first, we may not recognize that Maria’s story is now being told in flashback after the opening scene – there is no dialogue or voiceover which would highlight this. The harmonium is a crucial element of Tindersticks’ music for this film. As Boulter says:

I had an old harmonium that was falling to pieces which reflects this decaying of the old power. It made me think of how the first Europeans who came to Africa were missionaries who would carry instruments like this harmonium with them and play religious songs to people, and the instrument is now so old that it’s falling apart.⁵⁴

Staples adds: “This sense of something dying came off it.”⁵⁵ Though the minor key notes played on the harmonium sound ominous, the melody seems less important than the physical state of the instrument which produces them. The connotations of the old harmonium reflect

⁵² Staples in Ide, op cit.

⁵³ Boulter in Bell (2011), p.16.

⁵⁴ Boulter in Munro (2011b).

⁵⁵ Staples, in Bell (2011), p.16.

the film's narrative – the life Maria knows as a wealthy white woman employing poor Africans is coming to an end. She is not a missionary, there is no question of religion in her relationship with the African people, but her words are no longer of any importance to them. They do not see her as a leader or their superior, but despise what they see as her stupidity for trying to stay in Africa. The wheezy, broken sounds of the harmonium reflect the futility of Maria's words and her attempts to convince her African workers that she is right. This is also reflected in Staples' assertion that the sound of "something dying" emanates from the harmonium. Denis herself says: "I loved the harmonium [...] I knew it was going to be like the breathing of the film [...] The Boxer is almost dead."⁵⁶ Throughout the film, we progress towards not only the end of Maria's time in Africa and her miserable defeat, but also the end of the Boxer's life and his time as a figurehead for the rebels. When we first encounter him at the start of the film, he is already dead, but as the narrative which led him to this point plays before us in Maria's memory, we see him gradually dying. At his first appearance when he is still alive, hiding out in the forest and in one of Maria's outbuildings, he has been shot or stabbed and is bleeding to death. As the film progresses, he becomes weaker and more immobile, as we hear the sound of the harmonium wheezing and breaking down.

During the live show, we also see a scene in which a group of rebel child soldiers emerge from the forest, and find the Boxer hiding. The scene opens on the screen with the diegetic sounds of crickets. Tindersticks' flautist, trumpeter, guitarist (Staples) and keyboardist (Boulter) are then highlighted. Gentle, melancholic notes are played on the guitar and flute. As Staples recalls: "We tried to find a certain kind of lyricism and naivety in the [*Children's Theme*]. It was able to stand up as a moment of release within the film."⁵⁷ The melody played by the flute and guitar at this stage is softer, more meandering than the droning hum of the harmonium that we hear in the film's opening scene. We may even draw connections between the wandering melodies of the flute in *White Material* and in *35 Rhums*, a film in which issues of looking back at childhood as a simpler time are presented. The sounds the flute makes in both films, in terms of volume and strength, are notably delicate. Staples' choice of the word "naivety" to describe the *Children's Theme* reflects the fact that these soldiers are children first: they are dwarfed by their rifles and run around, laughing and shouting, as they raid houses and businesses. However, the music strengthens as more children emerge from the forest – the

⁵⁶ Denis in Ide, op cit.

⁵⁷ Staples in Bell (2011), p.17.

harmonium's drone enters and the sounds made by the electric guitar are louder and more aggressive. As their group grows in number, steady drums enter the music, as well as a low, ominous trumpet, and the sounds of the children's feet cracking the brush underfoot in the forest becomes louder. These may be children, but they are many, they are armed, and present a real threat. The flute continues to play alongside the other instruments, not drowned out, but still suggesting the uneasy balance between the youthful playfulness of these child soldiers and their capacity for violence. Staples reflects on the notion of different instruments and the way they are played representing the film's various characters: "*White Material* has a strange balance of sounds, all those characters that get involved and have an impact."⁵⁸ As with *L'Intrus* and *Trouble Every Day*, I would argue, the practice of allowing scenes from *White Material* to play unaccompanied for a short while, with their diegetic sounds, jolts the viewer into greater awareness of the threat and tension inherent in certain scenes when the sounds created by the musicians arrive in our immediate vicinity, and light falls upon them, emphasizing their physical presence.

Both Staples and Boulter see *White Material*'s soundtrack as a process of dialogue between different sounds, musical and non-musical. As Boulter states: "It was like making a collage instead of a soundtrack."⁵⁹ Staples adds: "The music was part of those sounds, the earth and the trees, the fabric of the space [...] it wasn't really musical, it was just a sound, [it] sang with this kind of environment."⁶⁰ The notion of *White Material*'s soundtrack as sound instead of melody is reflected, as I have argued, in *Tindersticks*' use of a broken harmonium to signify the breaking down of white power in Africa, and in the use of the tapping Lucky Cat toy as an unsteady beat throughout the film which builds tension and occasionally causes the rhythms to become disjointed. In the live show, the harmonium's sounds are evoked by a keyboard, played by Boulter, and the Lucky Cat's sounds by Staples tapping a wine glass with a drumstick. This means that the sounds we hear in the live context are not exactly those of the actual soundtrack – but then none of the live sounds created by the band can be identical to those recorded and mixed for any of the films' soundtracks. As Boulter and Staples speak of *White Material*'s soundtrack as a collage of sounds, the process of performing the soundtracks live is not a process of recreation, but rather one of assemblage, of bringing together Denis's

⁵⁸ Staples in Ide, op cit.

⁵⁹ Boulter in Munro (2011b).

⁶⁰ Staples in Munro (2011c).

films' images and diegetic sounds with Tindersticks' music *as it is played* on the specific occasion, and the intertextual dialogue arises from the very practice of performance itself.

We might ask how Denis feels vis-à-vis ownership and authorship when she watches her film's images being presented by Tindersticks who, as I describe above, sometimes change the music which Denis herself approved for certain scenes, and edit sequences of images. To re-cite Denis's reflections on the London show, "[The image] does not belong to the film anymore. The way the music grows, it builds something completely different."⁶¹ Denis's statement confirms what I have argued thus far – the live show is not an exhibition of Denis's images with background accompaniment, nor is it a Tindersticks concert with visuals 'by' Denis. Admirers of Tindersticks may even have discovered Denis's films through attending one of the live shows or purchasing the box-set (it is probably likely that admirers of Denis's films would already be aware of Tindersticks, given the recurring presence of their music in her work). Reviewing the band's show at the Luckman Theater, Los Angeles, on 30 April 2011, Calvin Henely writes, "Likely more people were there for the Tindersticks than Denis, but the surprise at the quality of the visuals accompanying the music gave way to the magnetism of the sensuous images soaked in the red wine of the music."⁶² Each performance is a new actualization of the discourse between Tindersticks and Denis. Staples recalls: "Claire was very much involved as we put the show together and tried to find a shape for it. She'd tell us if she needed more context or if this or that needed to happen."⁶³ Each specific intertextual conversation, between Tindersticks and Denis, between image and music, between diegetic sound and live music, can never be repeated in exactly the same form. The set list remained constant throughout the tour, but no band, regardless of skill, can replicate exactly in a live context the sound of a piece of recorded music.⁶⁴ The acoustics of a space, the positions and timing of the musicians, the sounds made by the audience – many factors can affect the audience's reception of the music and images. As I write above, there exists no official recording of any of the Tindersticks/Denis shows; on YouTube, however, there are a few amateur videos shot on handheld camera. In one,⁶⁵ filmed at the Église Saint-Eustache in Paris

⁶¹ Denis in Seomore (2011).

⁶² Calvin Henely, 'Interview and Live Review: Tindersticks,' *Slant Magazine* (2 May 2011) <<http://www.slantmagazine.com/house/2011/05/interview-live-review-the-tindersticks/#more-21479>> [accessed 24 September 2012].

⁶³ Staples in Munro (2011c).

⁶⁴ See <<http://www.tindersticks.co.uk/gigography/concerts-2011/>> for the tour's setlists.

⁶⁵ See <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XHgolIxBx2o>> [accessed 30 August 2012].

on 28 April 2011, we see Tindersticks playing *Train Montage* as the corresponding scene from *35 Rhums* plays on a large screen behind them. 44 seconds into the track, Staples plays a wrong note on the melodica, but quickly reverts back to the correct melody – perhaps he often plays this note incorrectly, perhaps he does not. But during the tour, he plays the melody in a different physical space, with a different audience, each night – no set of circumstances is ever exactly replicated.

Tindersticks' live shows occupy a lineage of moments of musicians playing soundtracks to film images in live contexts. In some cases, as in that of Jeff Mills and *Metropolis*, the film's maker could never approve the soundtrack, but similarities may be drawn with the Tindersticks project as the live events were never recorded and thus remain ephemeral instances of discourse as performance. In my paper, 'Ower in the wids: Enrico Coccozza's *Chick's Day*, music, silence and performance' (presented at the *Screen Conference*, University of Glasgow, 2012), I apply Ricoeur's theory of discourse as performance to another example of musicians playing a live soundtrack to film images. In 2009, Glaswegian band Butcher Boy wrote and played live a completely new soundtrack to Scots-Italian amateur filmmaker Enrico Coccozza's 1951 film *Chick's Day* (which exists in an original silent version and a later cut with a voiceover and jazz soundtrack) at the Glasgow Film Theatre. Coccozza died in 1997, and thus could never approve Butcher Boy's new score as Denis could Tindersticks' music. A statement from the band's songwriter John Hunt, however, relates extremely well to the process of intertextuality which happens in the Tindersticks/Denis shows: "I wanted this to be something really special that was not going to exist beyond that evening, so you had to be there to see it. I didn't want to record it; I wanted it to be purely as it happened on that night."⁶⁶ In both cases, the discourse between film images and music as it is played live is a moment of intertextuality *happening*, completely dependent on the performance context. As Stuart Staples emphasizes: "[Denis and Tindersticks] go back and forth, from the first assembly to the final cut. It's a gradual process, a conversation."⁶⁷ Denis's films are all "conversations," as I argue throughout this thesis, between her narratives, images, sounds and the multitude of other texts which she chooses to engage with her own. In the case of Tindersticks' music, she even says: "Some takes I choose [when editing my films] because of

⁶⁶ John Hunt, interviewed by Jenny Munro (June 2012).

⁶⁷ Staples in *Ide*, op cit.

what happened with the soundtrack.”⁶⁸ Tindersticks’ relationship with Denis is one of reciprocity, of trust in each other’s ideas.

⁶⁸ Denis in Ide, op cit.

Chapter Five: Diaspora – Voices in (Dis)harmony

In 2007, Denis was responsible for bringing together a diverse group of artists for the exhibition *Diaspora* at the Musée du quai Branly in Paris. *Diaspora* was the first exhibition of contemporary work at the recently-opened museum, and occupied the Galerie jardin between October 2007 and January 2008, featuring works in various media by filmmakers Jean-Pierre Bekolo, Yousry Nasrallah and Mahamat-Saleh Haroun; choreographer Mathilde Monnier (with whom Denis made the documentary *Vers Mathilde* in 2005); radio journalist Caroline Cartier; fashion designer John Galliano; Denis's regular cinematographer Agnès Godard; DJ Jeff Mills with sound engineer Brice Leboucq; and an interview with footballer and anti-racism campaigner Lilian Thuram, filmed by Denis. The aim of the exhibition was to explore the different connotations of the word 'diaspora' and the movement of African diaspora through various artforms. As Denis states:

Je souhaitais avant tout proposer un mouvement, celui des peuples d'Afrique vers les autres continents, en référence au peuplement premier de la terre. Il ne s'agit pas de traiter la question du migrant, ni que l'exposition soit comme une zone de douane où les gens sont parqués.¹

Ideas of movement and displacement from or towards other continents recur in Denis's films, but even more interesting for this thesis is the notion of collaboration between Denis and the other artists as a kind of diasporic movement itself, a productive, multi-vocal discourse in motion. As Denis states, her intention with this project was to "me lancer vers une idée que je ne pouvais pas aborder seule, qui en soi déjà ne pouvait pas appartenir à une seule personne, ni à un commissaire qui a collectionné des œuvres, mais plutôt à une démarche en mouvement [...] Je savais que c'était quelque chose qu'on partagerait bien."² The exhibition was not to be a collection of artifacts representing Africa, but rather a new look at the effects that the movement of native Africans has had on our global past, continues to have on our present, and

¹ Denis, *Diaspora* exhibition notes, Musée du Quai Branly <http://www.quaibranly.fr/uploads/tx_gayafeespacepresse/MQB-DP-Diaspora-exposition-sensorielle-FR.pdf> [accessed 31 August 2012], p.5.

² Denis in *Parole à Claire Denis* (Riff Productions, 2007) <http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x3k7xe_parole-a-claire-denis_news> [accessed 25 September 2012].

may have in future. This movement of dialogues may be read, like the *Tindersticks* shows, as a discourse in performance, an event of speech, in Ricoeur's terms, because each artist's voice is crucial to the visitor's own conception of the meaning of 'diaspora'; furthermore, this polyphonic dialogue was time and space-bound, and is no longer available for any visitor to experience as it was in the Musée du quai Branly. We may see images and films from the exhibition online,³ but the set of circumstances, physical and temporal, in which this polyphony of artists' voices interacted no longer exist. In any case, every visitor's relation to *Diaspora* would have been different, depending on factors such as their prior conceptions of the meaning of 'diaspora,' their perceptions of what they experienced in the exhibition, how they navigated the space and how long they spent with each exhibit: this adds to the fleeting, time-bound quality which I perceive. Cédric Mal writes:

L'espace de l'exposition a ainsi été conçu comme un territoire étrange(r), sombre et peu déchiffrable. Aucune signalétique ne sert de repère: comme l'exilé, le parcours du promeneur ne répond qu'à sa libre inspiration. Il vogue entre les blocs qui abritent les créations avec la déambulation d'un migrant perdu dans l'univers illisible.⁴

As I did not begin my own work on Denis until 2009, I did not experience the exhibition, and thus cannot give a personal account, as I could with the *Tindersticks* shows. Therefore, my writing on *Diaspora* will be informed by journalistic accounts, artists' statements and digital media produced by the museum's staff and by visitors.

Like the theatres and auditoriums with cinema-size screens in which *Tindersticks* played their Denis soundtrack shows, space and place were important factors in *Diaspora*'s construction. The Musée du quai Branly opened in 2006 and was intended to be a modern space dedicated to showcasing artifacts made by indigenous peoples from Africa, Asia, Oceania and the Americas. The museum holds the collections of Paris' now closed Musée national des arts d'Afrique and the ethnographic section of the Musée de l'homme. Jacques Chirac, then French President, said at museum's inauguration:

Il s'agissait pour la France de rendre l'hommage qui leur est dû à des peuples auxquels, au fil des âges, l'histoire a trop souvent fait violence. Peuples brutalisés, exterminés par

³ See <<http://www.quaibranly.fr/fr/programmation/expositions/expositions-passees/diaspora.html>> [accessed 9 October 2012] for links to the exhibition's digital platforms on websites YouTube, Dailymotion, Flickr and MySpace.

⁴ Mal, op cit, p.162.

des conquérants avides et brutaux. Peuples humiliés et méprisés, auxquels on allait jusqu'à dénier qu'ils eussent une histoire. Peuples aujourd'hui encore souvent marginalisés, fragilisés, menacés par l'avancée inexorable de la modernité. Peuples qui veulent néanmoins voir leur dignité restaurée et reconnue.⁵

Of course, the “conquérants avides et brutaux” of which Chirac speaks include his French predecessors, whose colonizing rule would eventually be responsible for Denis's own presence in Africa as a child, as her father was a colonial administrator. As Chirac emphasizes, however, the museum is not simply intended to offer a solemn apology to former colonies:

En montrant qu'il existe d'autres manières d'agir et de penser, d'autres relations entre les êtres, d'autres rapports au monde, le musée du quai Branly célèbre la luxuriante, fascinante et magnifique variété des œuvres de l'homme. Il proclame qu'aucun peuple, aucune nation, aucune civilisation n'épuise ni ne résume le génie humain. Chaque culture l'enrichit de sa part de beauté et de vérité, et c'est seulement dans leurs expressions toujours renouvelées que s'entrevoit l'universel qui nous rassemble.⁶

Chirac's repeated use of the word “autre” may seem problematic – as if the non-European peoples whose art is represented in the museum are somehow essentially ‘different’ to Westerners, their work to be viewed as curios. The museum has attracted criticism, mainly due to its emphasis on objects' visual qualities as opposed to the colonial context in which they were amassed. Alexandra Sauvage asks: “how was the museum supposed to achieve such an objective [of dismantling Western hegemony] if it emphasized only visual appeal and ignored the historical context of the objects on display?”⁷ An article in the *New York Times*, written shortly after the museum opened, focuses on reactions of visitors born (or descended from families born) in formerly colonized regions. Patricia Mouvougou, a Parisian woman born in the Congo, reflects: “It makes me think about my child, who doesn't know about these things, and about the children born here who have never left [...] It will help them know where they

⁵ Jacques Chirac, ‘Allocution de M. Jacques Chirac, Président de la République, à l'occasion de l'inauguration du Musée du quai Branly, le 20 juin 2006’ <<http://www.quaibranly.fr/en/actualites/news/files-of-current-events/m-jacques-chirac-president-de-la-republique-a-inaugure-le-musee-du-quai-branly/short-speech-of-mr-jacques-chirac.html>> [accessed 26 September 2012].

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Alexandra Sauvage, ‘Narratives of colonization: The Musée du quai Branly in context,’ *Recollections*, vol.2, no.2 (September 2007), p.143.

are from.”⁸ This positive reaction is counterbalanced, however, by that of Fato Bidaye, an architectural designer from Senegal: “It makes me realize that on the African continent there is nothing left [...] and that everything that was a treasure can be found in this museum.”⁹ The disparity between these statements reflects the difficulties faced by the Musée du quai Branly: how to present non-Western art as worthy of the same respect as that of the West, whilst acknowledging the violence and inequality of the circumstances in which many of these objects were collected? Eight months after *Diaspora* closed, the museum’s director of collections, Yves le Fur, stated that he did not wish the museum to stage “uniquement des expos d’ethnographie ou d’anthropologie. Ce qui étonne au niveau international où on n’imagine pas que mes collections puissent être vues sous un autre angle que cela.”¹⁰ Le Fur cites *Diaspora* as an example of the museum’s progressive stance on the creative work of diasporic peoples, along with exhibitions which were in development and would be staged in 2009: *Le Siècle du jazz*, a show about the African, European and American developments of jazz music curated by philosopher and art critic Daniel Soutif, and *Présence africaine*, an exhibition showcasing the work of the Parisian, African literature-focused publishing house of the same name. Le Fur says “Nous faisons appel à des commissaires extérieurs à notre domaine, qui peuvent avoir des parcours très différents.”¹¹ The museum’s slogan is “Là où dialoguent les cultures,” emphasizing that Le Fur wishes the Musée du quai Branly to be regarded not as a Western institution which participates in a one-way process of looking – the West examines and studies the art of the ‘other’ – but rather a platform for discussion and interplay between different cultures. From Denis’s words, it is clear that the exhibition’s purpose was not to ‘showcase’ the art of African diaspora, but to use the term ‘diaspora’ as a catalyst for new ideas and investigations:

Il fallait une proposition vivante, contemporaine de créations inventées spécifiquement et qui soit absolument non collectionnables [...] Je l’ai [la question de l’immigration]

⁸ Caroline Brothers, ‘Immigrants Flock Proudly to Musée du Quai Branly,’ *New York Times* (August 21 2006) <<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/08/21/arts/design/21muse.html?fta=y&pagewanted=print>> [accessed 27 September 2012].

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Yves le Fur in Ariane Bavelier, Marie-Hélène Jacquier, Thierry Hilleriteau, ‘Notre esprit d’ouverture étonne le monde entier,’ *Le Figaro* (10 September 2008) <<http://www.lefigaro.fr/scope/articles-enquete/2008/09/10/08002-20080910ARTFIG00577-notre-esprit-d-ouverture-etonne-le-monde-entier-.php>> [accessed 24 September 2012].

¹¹ Ibid.

pris en compte depuis toujours. Quant à cette expo, elle ouvre aujourd'hui, et c'est bien. C'est tous ce que je peux dire. La fermeture et l'immobilité c'est la déconfiture.¹²

The group of artists with whom Denis worked was composed of individuals of African origin or descent, and artists who had always lived in the West. There is no notion that white choreographer Mathilde Monnier, born in Northern France, is less able to address the subject than, for example, Egyptian filmmaker Yousry Nasrallah. The exhibition is less about what it might mean to be essentially 'African' than the processes of cross-fertilization and reciprocal influence which occur when different peoples and cultures come into contact.

Jeff Mills: African Innervations

Diaspora marked the continuing engagement between Denis and Detroit-born, African-American DJ and composer Jeff Mills, whose soundtrack for *Metropolis* nourished *Vendredi soir*. With Mills and architect David Serero, Denis envisioned creating a space like an airport corridor within the museum which would lead visitors from the artifacts of the permanent collections towards the exhibition.¹³ Mills devised an original musical composition, entitled *African Innervations*, described as "sound architecture,"¹⁴ with sound engineer and composer Brice Leboucq, which would play in this corridor and throughout the exhibition space whilst viewers wandered around it. *African Innervations* marked the first (and, thus far, sole) instance of Mills addressing what it means to be black or African in his work; he states that such issues have never informed his practice: "I dropped most of my impressions of the differences between black and white some time ago."¹⁵ Mills' music was engineered to soundtrack the viewer's movement around the various elements of the space. In his statement for *Diaspora*, Mills writes:

If we in the Eastern and Western cultures hold any value to tradition, then Africa must be our most precious asset. The 'Motherland' holds the most clues and answers to who

¹² Denis in Sylvain Bourmeau, 'Claire Denis à la tête de l'expo Diaspora,' *Les Inrockuptibles* website (15 October 2007) <<http://www.lesinrocks.com/2007/10/15/musique/concerts/claire-denis-a-la-tete-de-lexpo-diaspora-1162373/>> [accessed 3 September 2012].

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Mills, *Diaspora* notes, op cit, p.19.

¹⁵ Mills in David Stubbs, 'Different Atmospheres, New Locations: Jeff Mills Interviewed,' *The Quietus*, (13 August 2012) <<http://thequietus.com/articles/09661-jeff-mills-interview-axis>> [accessed 4 December 2012].

and what we are, where we come from and most importantly, where we could be headed as a species [...] it is important to not only look to the past, but also the future. To explore what position and role Africa will have in the world to come, we must look within ourselves and our own societies to point out the foundations that we deem as necessary or crucial to the survival of mankind.¹⁶

Mills describes the soundtrack thus:

The soundtrack bares [sic] resemblance to tribal rhythms and beats, but there are also complex underlying sequences that represent how I envision the mentality of Africa through the changes of New Technology and Science. [...] The scope and depth of the African diaspora is far from being contained because it lies within each and every one of us.¹⁷

Mills' soundtrack is not a pastiche of African tribal music, but rather a sonic representation of the movement of the African diaspora from humanity's beginnings, looking to the future, using electronic instruments; as humanity's roots are to be found in Africa, he sees each person, regardless of ethnicity, as being connected to the early diasporic movements. Visitors arriving through the 'airport' corridor do not come to the exhibition to experience the world of the travelling Other, but to become travellers themselves, to participate in movement. Denis states, "On se sent étranger à partir du moment où l'on a une fois, une seule fois suffit, quitté sa base [...] Dans cette peur-espoir, quelque chose se cristallise, et pour toujours après, on est un peu étranger."¹⁸ The architecture of the corridor proposes to "changer radicalement l'environnement du visiteur, de le 'déstabiliser' dans ses repères et dans son corps [...] Il s'agit de reproduire à la fois la sensation du passage et la précipitation dans un monde autre."¹⁹ The main exhibition space, beyond the corridor, is described as: "Cet ailleurs absolu [...] Pénétrer dans l'espace de l'exposition fait perdre pied avec la réalité de l'environnement du musée, de la ville, du pays. Ce passage se renouvelle pour chaque 'rencontre' avec les œuvres [...] qui plongent le visiteur dans l'univers de l'artiste."²⁰ Denis's films have long explored the notion of destabilizing fixed positions of identity and doing away with terms such as the

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Denis, *Diaspora* notes, op cit, p.4.

¹⁹ *Diaspora* notes, op cit, p.27.

²⁰ Ibid.

‘Other’: in *J’ai pas sommeil*, Camille is mixed race, gay, HIV-positive and a killer (all aspects of Thierry Paulin’s character which led him to be portrayed as wholly other in the press) but he is still presented as a loving son who participates in family life; in *Trouble Every Day*, Coré and Shane kill their sexual partners after contracting a mysterious illness in Guyana, but both are capable of, and seek, tenderness. Mills explored each exhibit before creating his soundtrack, rejecting the idea of using melody, describing notes and chords as sounding “obsolete,” and sought to create sound which produced a linking thread between the exhibits:

[T]here is an underlying [...] almost continuous type of sound whether it be a frequency or some very thickly created string arrangement and that [...] symbolize[s] the ever-expanding universe in which we are actually occupied. It never stops and it just continues on. And then on top of that you hear different sounds, frequencies, representing colour and shape, texture and other things that are not so easy to distinguish.²¹

In a clip showing the construction of the ‘airport’ corridor, we see light flashing in a narrow walkway with openings at either end, and hear Mills’ music, a stream of electronic sounds, not creating any melody, augmented by the sounds of hands slapping drums rhythmically.²² Denis describes Mills’ soundtrack as the “liquide amniotique sonore”²³ of the exhibition, which reflects not only the idea that Africa is the birthplace of humanity, but also that Mills’ music nourishes and flows amongst the different elements of *Diaspora*. She adds: “Sa musique évacue tout ce qui pourrait être la nostalgie d’un ‘avant avant avant,’ elle est résolument issue de la ville. Elle souligne quelque chose qui, pour moi, est fondamental: nos villes n’excluent pas seulement, elles rassemblent également.”²⁴ The electronic sounds, assembled with tribal rhythms, posit the music as being linked to African culture, but that this culture is happening and developing now in our cities, as it meets with others. The playing of Mills’ soundtrack in the exhibition space can be read as a performance of discourse as event: his reaction to the other works, and to Denis’s proposal, sets off an intertextual discourse which was enacted in a specific space over a finite period, and the assemblage between the different elements no longer exists.

²¹ Jeff Mills in *Parole à Jeff Mills* (Riff Productions, 2007) <http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x3lr7j_parole-a-jeff-mills_news> [accessed 24 September 2012].

²² See <http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x3db9k_le-sas_news> [accessed 9 October 2012].

²³ Denis in Mal, op cit, p.163.

²⁴ Ibid.

The visitor's reaction to the soundtrack and the space is also crucial to the notion of a fleeting, fluid performance. Mills reflects:

[T]here's a special relationship between time and sound and I think the longer that you stayed to listen to it, the more things you would be attracted to [...] The sound is designed [...] so you could hear the same sound in the same portion of the track, but hear different frequencies.²⁵

Thus, the viewer participates in the time and space-bound happening of discourse – their reception of the sound is affected by how long they choose to stay in a certain space, what piques their interest, how much they concentrate on the sound and indeed their hearing capabilities. This reflects my suggestion that each attendee's reception of Denis's images and Tindersticks' music in the live shows will be different, depending on the date and place in which they attend, their own tastes and perceptions. The dialogue between Denis and Mills, which began with *Vendredi soir*, does not end with *Diaspora*. In 2008, they reunited for a German-made documentary, directed by Armin Toerkell, *Durch die Nacht mit Claire Denis and Jeff Mills (Into the Night with Claire Denis and Jeff Mills)*. The hour-long programme was broadcast in France in 2008 by Arte, with the title *Au cœur de la nuit avec Claire Denis et Jeff Mills*. During an evening in Paris, Mills and Denis discuss the similarities and differences in their work, and view Mills' sound and video installations at the Centre Pompidou for the exhibition *Le Futurisme à Paris: une avant-garde explosive*. Rather than an in-depth look at the connections between Mills' and Denis's work, the programme is a meandering conversation between the pair as they drink wine and travel in a limousine. After they watch a segment from *Beau travail* in the Cinémathèque française, Mills highlights one of the greatest similarities between their œuvres – the paucity of spoken words in Denis's films, and the lack of vocals in his music: "The way you use music, you use it almost like another character [...] You really don't need dialogue. The images are so strong."²⁶ He adds: "[T]hat's why we don't use vocals, that's why we don't say so much [...] for the listener to be able to perceive it from many perspectives."²⁷ Denis answers: "[Dialogues] give you only one angle to read [...] they

²⁵ Mills in *Parole à Jeff Mills*, op cit.

²⁶ Mills in *Durch die Nacht mit Claire Denis und Jeff Mills*, dir. Armin Toerkell, Germany (2009). My thanks to Arte France for providing me with a copy of this film.

²⁷ Ibid.

make it here and now. In silent films, it's a more multi-angle way to watch a film."²⁸ Mills intends his sound compositions to allow space for the listener to engage subjectively with what they hear and not to be guided by words; equally, Denis's films, as I explore in previous chapters, are full of wordless space, in which the intentions and feelings of characters are not always clear, and communication is affected through looks and touches. The primacy of the listener's reaction to Mills music is similar to the importance of collaboration in Denis's work, as this thesis as a whole aims to communicate: her regular collaborators contribute to the language of each of her films, and references to and engagements with other texts circulate throughout her œuvre.

Mathilde Monnier: Dans tes cheveux

Denis had admired French choreographer Mathilde Monnier for many years, and directed *Vers Mathilde*, a meditative documentation of Monnier and her dance troupe's rehearsals in 2005. Denis says of Monnier: "Elle nous a acceptée sans que nous nous sentions des intrus. De mon côté, je ne voulais pas la déranger. Elle m'intimide. Elle est forte, mais elle vibre."²⁹ The film's tactile cinematography moves as if dancing with Monnier (not intruding, as Denis suggests), mirroring her fluid movements. Monnier's contribution to *Diaspora* was a video piece, *Dans tes cheveux*, filmed by Karim Zeriahen, composed of four screens, each showing the silhouette of dancer Corrine Garcia, performing different types of dance, all of which originated in African and African-American communities. Garcia begins each dance by moving her head, with her hairstyle an important factor: in one piece, she has an Afro, in another a chignon, in another a plaited wig and in another a structured wig "comme une princesse africaine."³⁰ It was important, Monnier emphasizes, that the dancer be represented as a silhouette, to "entretenir une ambiguïté sur la couleur de peau de la danseuse."³¹ Her hairstyles might posit her as African, or of African descent, but then such hairstyles have also been adopted and altered by women in the West. Monnier's aim was to depict the importance of the movement of African diaspora to contemporary dance, citing jazz, tap and hip-hop styles as deeply

²⁸ Denis in Ibid.

²⁹ Denis in Rosita Boisseau, 'Mathilde Monnier, le désir,' *Le Monde* (5 July 2005), p.9.

³⁰ Monnier, *Diaspora* notes, op cit, p.22.

³¹ Ibid.

indebted to the dances of African and African American culture. *Dans tes cheveux* is no simple representation of the history of dance and its links to Africa, but rather a look at the contagiousness of movement, of how routines and steps are inherited, re-worked and engaged with differently between generations and places. As Monnier states: “Le mouvement est migrant, on le sait, plus que les corps eux-mêmes. C’est le mouvement et souvent la danse qui en transformant, transforme les corps, les techniques de travail, les esthétiques.”³² The movement of people between locations leads to their sharing and discovering of different kinds of dance, and to the formation of new styles of moving. The four screens showing Garcia dance face each other, so the visitor may stand among them. As Monnier says, they are “images qui doivent avoir la taille d’une personne debout afin que le spectateur se sente lui-même en position d’une transmission qui lui est faite en direct. Il est face à la danseuse et peut danser avec elle, se fondre dans le mouvement.”³³ Though there is no dancer performing in situ, Monnier wishes the visitor to feel as if there is, as if he or she is part of the environment in which Garcia dances; inclined, possibly, to dance his or herself. As with Mills’ sound piece, the visitor’s engagement with *Dans tes cheveux* and the space it occupies is crucial. Ricoeur’s theory of discourse as performance is again applicable: the visitor’s feeling that they are in the same space as the dancer(s) leads them into a participatory dialogue with Monnier’s work. Furthermore, *Dans tes cheveux* cannot now be experienced as it was exactly in *Diaspora*: even if the installation was rebuilt in another location, still the connections between it and the other pieces are important to the viewer’s experience (for instance, both Monnier’s and Mills’ pieces suggest diasporic movement as an ongoing process which sparks new ideas, and the sounds of Mills’ music would intersperse with the music from Monnier’s piece). We may view extracts of *Dans tes cheveux* online: in one video from *Diaspora*’s Dailymotion site, we see a screen split into four squares, as Garcia, in silhouette, moves across each of them. The four screens then show different examples of dance from the piece. After this, the video cuts to a handheld camera moving through the physical space of the exhibit, so we see the four screens positioned almost as the visitor would.³⁴ The museum encouraged visitors to upload their own responses to the exhibition in various media to its digital catalogue; one example of this is a video on

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ See quaiabranly, ‘Dans tes cheveux de Mathilde Monnier’ <http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x36op0_dans-tes-cheveux-de-mathilde-monni_news> [accessed 10 October 2012].

Dailymotion showing a segment of *Dans tes cheveux*, shot and uploaded by user alex_d_aix.³⁵ This video shows two of the exhibit's screens, with Garcia wearing a tall, structured wig and dancing slowly; the other shows her with braided hair, pounding the floor insistently. Though this cannot give an online viewer the full sensory experience of *Dans tes cheveux*, it emphasizes the importance of visitor participation: this user shoots a film (his response to what is presented – selecting a specific segment of the piece) and uploads it to a digital platform where it can then be viewed by others. We cannot now experience the exhibit as this visitor did: no matter what size of screen we watch it on (a PC screen, in my case), we always experience the piece, its sounds and images, through a barrier of displacement, of not having the space of the museum and its unfiltered sounds around us. Thus, the activity of being physically among the four screens at a specific moment renders the true experience of *Dans tes cheveux* an event of discourse, a happening between exposition and viewer perception, which prompts another discourse as visitors upload their own responses online.

Jean-Pierre Bekolo: Une Africaine dans l'espace

Cameroonian filmmaker Jean-Pierre Bekolo's video exhibit for *Diaspora* was entitled *Une Africaine dans l'espace*. Bekolo's best-known films, *Quartier Mozart* (1992) and *Le complot d'Aristote* (1996) are celebrated for their playful, visually stylish narratives of modern African life, addressing sexual politics and the trials of filmmaking in Africa. Like Monnier's work, *Une Africaine dans l'espace* was also visualized on multiple screens. On the ceiling, a screen displaying footage of a young African woman floating in space was positioned; the visitor, standing under this, would see a circle of screens in the centre of the room, each facing outwards and showing short filmed interviews with people of African origin who have successfully made lives for themselves in New York, but now wish to return to Africa. Bekolo does not, however, perceive their desire to return as melancholic, but hopeful: "Ces interviews m'ont renforcé dans l'idée encourageante que l'Afrique est devant nous: dans le voyage, et au bout."³⁶ Bekolo says: "on parle de l'Afrique au passé, ou au présent: le passé, un peu

³⁵ See alex_d_aix, 'Danse africaine au Musée du quai Branly'

<<http://www.dailymotion.com/group/diaspora/2?mode=playlist#video=x3bjyn>> [accessed 10 October 2012].

³⁶ Bekolo in Emmanuelle Lequeux, 'Errance poétique au cœur de la diaspora africaine, *Le Monde* (1 November 2007), p.25.

nostalgique, le présent, pas très beau [...] L’Afrique devient prisonnière, qui se soit du news [...] du cinéma [...] de la littérature, qui l’enferme au passé ou dans le présent.”³⁷ Bekolo points out that there are many people of African descent working for NASA (in fact, sixteen African-American astronauts have been employed by the organization).³⁸ The first black African to enter space will be South African DJ Mandla Maseko, the winner of a contest, who will embark on a one hour long sub-orbital trip in 2015³⁹ – a white South African entrepreneur, Mark Shuttleworth, funded his own voyage into space in 2002. Outer space and the USA are both presented as frontiers, spaces which have presented or may present new possibilities for engagement with different ideas. Space travel, he writes, “redéfinit le cosmos comme un espace ‘africain,’ faisant de nous tous des Africains, des individus en quête d’un monde plus humain.”⁴⁰ Bekolo evidently sees space as being like the Africa from which all humanity originated – a place where we are not divided by national or cultural differences. We may perceive a dialogue with Mills’ project, which posits Africa as the locus of humanity’s origin and uses electronic instruments to reflect the technological possibilities for the Africa of the future. Bekolo adds, “Le problème, c’est [...] le projet collectif [...] c’est le projet qui manque, le projet de faire quelque chose pour L’Afrique.”⁴¹ His emphasis on collective endeavour is emphasized by the polyphony of voices which speak in his interviews; collectivity is, of course, at the heart of *Diaspora*’s project, which seeks to enable dialogue among different artists and museum visitors.

It is perhaps even more difficult to imagine the experience of seeing *Une africaine dans l’espace* than *Dans tes cheveux* in situ. We may view snippets of Bekolo’s interviews with African New Yorkers online in the exhibition’s *bande-annonce*;⁴² we see footage of an African woman saying “la culture africaine, c’est forte.” On YouTube, we can see 1.5 minutes

³⁷ Bekolo, in *Parole à Jean-Pierre Bekolo* (Riff Productions, 2007)

<<http://www.dailymotion.com/group/61587#video=x3k8ml>> [accessed 11 October 2012].

³⁸ See NASA web materials for teachers

<http://www.nasa.gov/pdf/286592main_African_American_Astronauts_FS.pdf> [accessed 12 October 2012].

³⁹ Mandla Maseko, ‘The First Black African Heading into Space,’ *BBC News* (26 January 2014)

<<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-25844863>> [accessed 27 January 2014].

⁴⁰ Bekolo, *Diaspora* notes, op cit, p.9.

⁴¹ Bekolo in *Parole à Jean-Pierre Bekolo*, op cit.

⁴² See quaibrantly, ‘Bande-annonce de l’exposition Diaspora’

<http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x2ye3m_bande-annonce-de-l-exposition-diasp_news> [accessed 10 October 2012].

of the footage of the African woman in space.⁴³ But the interviews and space footage were never intended to be viewed separately: the construction of the area into which the visitor enters, where the space footage floats above them, represents a future which is currently not the domain of most individuals (regardless of race) but may be made accessible through technology; the interviews with immigrants to the USA are viewable at ground level, rooted in the present. This physical assemblage is crucial to the visitor's perception of Bekolo's comparison of the hopes of African immigrants that, having been successful in America, they may return to Africa, and of his own ideas that space may be a frontier wherein inequalities among human beings disappear.

John Galliano: Robes Massai

Gibraltar-born British fashion designer John Galliano presented three dresses – ornate haute-couture pieces utilizing elements of traditional Massai dress – from his first collection for Christian Dior (made in 1997) at *Diaspora*, entitled *Robes Massai*, to express the influence that African dress has had on Western fashion. Though Denis herself chose Galliano to participate in the exhibition, his contribution may be viewed as more controversial than others (this obviously precedes recent controversy surrounding Galliano's conviction and dismissal from Dior for racist abuse in 2012). The exhibition notes highlight his “attirance pour l'exotisme lié aux voyages,”⁴⁴ stating that his dresses “donne à la femme Dior l'allure altière et le mystère exotique des élégantes d'une tribu Massai.”⁴⁵ Words like “exotisme” and “mystère” seem to do what Denis's filmmaking as a whole seeks not to: to posit African people as essentially Other, traditional Massai clothing a source of curiosity for wealthy Westerners. On the website *Africultures*, which discusses contemporary African art and culture, and related topics, Virginie Andriamirado writes: “Les mannequins richement parés de John Galliano [...] semblent tomber comme un cheveu sur la soupe, tant leur présence dans l'exposition paraît incongrue.”⁴⁶ The dresses are referred to elsewhere as being “marqué par un

⁴³ See Jean-Pierre Bekolo, ‘Une Africaine dans l'espace’ <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WMzjKWYBK4o>> [accessed 10 October 2012].

⁴⁴ *Diaspora* notes, op cit, p.13.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Virginie Andriamirado, ‘Diaspora Africaine: La Vie dans les plis,’ *Africultures* (2007) <<http://www.africultures.com/php/index.php?nav=article&no=7055>> [accessed 24 September 2012].

exotisme flamboyant mais parfois caricatural.”⁴⁷ Another reviewer considers Denis’s selection of Galliano as “surprenante,” describing his work as “un travail d’orfèvre pour des pièces à l’esthétique irréprochable. Mais le tout s’inscrit mal dans le déroulé de l’exposition et semble en desservir le propos.”⁴⁸ It is helpful to reflect on the “propos” which Galliano’s work is intended to serve: as Denis states, “Je souhaitais avant tout proposer un mouvement, celui des peuples d’Afrique vers les autres continents.”⁴⁹ Is this movement as evident in Galliano’s work as it is Monnier’s or Bekolo’s? One problem which arises regularly in relation to Western fashion’s appropriation of African dress is that the garments are rarely made by the African people whose work they reference; skilled makers receive neither recognition nor remuneration. In any case, haute-couture garments are produced for an extremely small, wealthy market – they communicate a sense of exclusion and hierarchy, positing those who cannot afford them as intrinsically different from those who can. Rafael Flores, on American blog *Racialicious*, which focuses on the engagements between racial issues and popular culture, asks “how can fashion create a better relationship with Africa?”⁵⁰ Flores writes:

The image of Africa on runways is almost entirely created by Western design teams that convey a shallow knowledge or appreciation for the communities they are referencing. To counter this, if designers want to utilize African culture in a responsible way, [fashion] must rethink the way it interacts with Africa itself.⁵¹

Diaspora’s exhibition notes tell us nothing about the origins of the techniques referenced by Galliano, the makers of Massaï robes, or how or why they wear them. Flores suggests that Western designers might counter the sense that they are exploiting Africa by providing information about “what Masai [sic] prints signify and how they became so prominent among Masai tribes. The information could be placed in a pamphlet that accompanies the show’s gift bags or sits on each seat in the audience.”⁵² Flores adds that investment in African textiles and makers would not only aid local African economies (and reduce manufacturing costs for

⁴⁷ *Première*, ‘Expo Diaspora au Quai Branly’ <<http://fluctuat.premiere.fr/Expos/News/Expo-Diaspora-au-Quai-Branly-3253722>> [accessed 24 September 2012].

⁴⁸ GB, ‘Diaspora: métissage artistique,’ *L’Hémicycle*, 6 November 2007, unpaginated.

⁴⁹ Denis in Emmanuelle Lequeux, *Diaspora* notes, op cit, p.4.

⁵⁰ Rafael Flores, ‘How Can Fashion Create a Better Relationship with Africa?’ (28 September 2011) <<http://www.racialicious.com/2011/09/28/how-can-fashion-create-a-better-relationship-with-africa/>> [accessed 11 October 2012].

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

designers), but also create a more equal, reciprocal engagement between Africa and the West.⁵³

In interviews, Denis does not address any of these issues, saying “les robes de Galliano ont quelque chose de pugnace. Je ne voulais rien qui ressemble à un décor genre savane africaine. Il fallait que cela soit urbain.”⁵⁴ Still, to many people, there is little difference between a Western fashion designer’s appropriation of African styles for an expensive piece of haute-couture and mass-produced, cheap versions of ‘African’ décor in the home. Denis suggests that Galliano engages with African dress in a progressive, modern context, but this still does not address the issue of reciprocity and dialogue versus Western appropriation. Cédric Mal describes Galliano’s exhibit as an “alliance des continents, des matériaux, et des cultures,”⁵⁵ but where is the alliance if there is no participation from the African makers, if this is not an exchange of ideas? The notion of dialogue between creative voices and texts in Denis’s filmmaking seems absent from Galliano’s work but, like the exhibits I address above, there is at least the sense that the visitor takes part in an event of discourse as they view the dresses: their reaction to the exhibit would undoubtedly be informed by the other pieces viewed in the exhibition, perhaps encouraging them to question the appropriateness of this selection.

Agnès Godard: Des femmes, des hommes, des enfants

Agnès Godard, director of photography for thirteen of Denis’s films, produced a 48-foot-long digital photomontage, displayed on a lightbox, entitled *Des femmes, des hommes, des enfants* for *Diaspora*, displaying the life-size figures of various of African men, women and children now resident in Paris, photographed in different stages of movement across the camera’s lens. The photographs taken of these people are not exhibited separately, but rather blend into one long image, showing each small stage of their movements. Some of the figures wear visibly African clothing, while others wear more anonymously ‘Western’ garments. Mal describes the

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Denis, in Bourmeau, op cit.

⁵⁵ Mal, op cit, p.163.

people featured as “certaines victimes potentielles de ce racisme en France”⁵⁶ and, though this is true, we must ask how important this notion is to Godard’s piece. Godard herself writes:

J’ai été amenée à considérer qu’un mouvement suppose un avant et un après et que l’arrêt sur image saisit ce temps donné du mouvement de la vie. MUSÉE: un lieu de rencontre. Une rencontre de regardants et regardés dans une égalité de taille et de mouvement, une rencontre dans les miroirs, multipliant le nombre et mélangeant visiteurs et visités dans l’image réfléchie, images à facettes créées à chaque pas.⁵⁷

On the Musée du quai Branly’s Flickr website (which opens discussions about *Diaspora* to its users) her piece is described as “la seule œuvre photographique de l’exposition,”⁵⁸ suggesting that it is an example of still photography (compared to the films by Bekolo, Yousry Nasrallah, Mahamat-Saleh Haroun and Monnier and Zeriahen), but it privileges movement above all. Godard’s statement can be engaged productively with Ricoeur’s notion of discourse as time-bound, location-specific performance: each fleeting moment of interaction between the subjects and the camera is a dialogue, captured in meticulous detail, showing the process of each subject’s movement towards, reaction to, and movement away from Godard’s camera. More than an ordinary still photograph could, Godard’s piece captures “ce temps donné du mouvement de la vie.” The viewer, too, participates in this performance of motion as, moving across the image, they do not leave behind particular figures, stranded in still images, but the figures move with them; the viewer becomes conscious of the intricacies of their own movements, as those of the Godard’s subjects are captured in such rare detail. As the English notes for *Diaspora* state, “The visitor’s movement is like crossing through a forest of mirrors, all facing the photographed images, thus drawing the visitor into the story.”⁵⁹ The location and dimensions of Godard’s work are crucial to the visitor’s reaction – sections of the piece can be viewed online⁶⁰ but at eight feet by forty-eight feet, the image is too large to be viewed in anything close to its entirety on a computer screen. The figures are pictured as life-size, which is vital to the viewer’s sense of mirroring between their own body and those they see. Does Godard address the question of “victimes potentielles de racisme” which Mal suggests? It is

⁵⁶ Mal, op cit, p.166.

⁵⁷ Agnès Godard, in *Diaspora* notes, op cit, p.15.

⁵⁸ Musée du quai branly (user) <<http://www.flickr.com/groups/diaspora/discuss/72157602969926745/>> [accessed 17 October 2012].

⁵⁹ *Diaspora* exhibition notes (shortened English version)

<http://www.quaibranly.fr/uploads/tx_gayafeespacepresse/MQB-CP-Diaspora-exposition-sensorielle-EN.pdf> [accessed 17 October 2012], p.3.

⁶⁰ See *Diaspora* notes, op cit, p.15.

perhaps not racism or oppression which Godard highlights, but rather the potentialities of diasporic movement. The African people we see are pictured in a process of motion and development, not as finite images caught in time. Godard provides a quote from Gilles Deleuze in the exhibition notes: “Le peuple, c’est toujours une nouvelle vague, un nouveau pli dans le tissu social.”⁶¹ Addressing Denis’s film, *Trouble Every Day*, Douglas Morrey reads the filmmaker’s interest in the visual representation of textures (in Godard’s cinematography) through Deleuze’s concept of *le pli*, or the fold:

This predilection for the pleats and wrinkles of tissue and fabric may be interpreted [...] through an appeal to Deleuze’s notion of the fold in his study of the baroque [...] Deleuze argues that matter is infinitely divisible, but not into discrete points on a linear scale: rather matter divides into folds within folds [...] The formation of organisms is considerably more probable, Deleuze suggests, if it is conceived as a kind of infolding through a series of intermediary states of matter, rather than through the division of matter into an infinite series of independent points [...] This conception allows Deleuze to create a picture of matter teeming with life.⁶²

Godard’s tactile cinematography, Morrey suggests, presents the ambiguous and mutable horror present in *Trouble Every Day*’s material world, wherein folds of skin and creases in fabric are pictured with the same haptic gaze, all suggesting fears which are not rooted in psychology, but firmly in the physical world. Godard’s photomontage creates visual representations of folds in time and space, the traces of the gestures, not represented in still photography and fleeting in moving images, of which movements are composed. Her work does not reflect a one-way passage of persons from Africa to France, but rather a process of continuous movement, where identity is not fixed: her different subjects may consider themselves African, French, or both, but their movement across (and beyond) the image suggests that identity fluctuates and changes within different situations and environments. Godard’s work, like Mills’ and Bekolo’s, examines diasporic movement not as something which is the result of conflict or suffering, but as a productive change which leads to new engagements between people, identities in flux (rather than fixed as Westerner and Other), and new creative possibilities.

⁶¹ Gilles Deleuze in *Diaspora* notes, op cit, p.15.

⁶² Douglas Morrey, ‘Textures of Terror: Claire Denis’s *Trouble Every Day*,’ *Belphégor*, vol. 3, no.2 (April 2004) <http://etc.dal.ca/belphegor/vol3_no2/articles/03_02_Morrey_textur_en_cont.html > [accessed 17 October 2012]. See also Beugnet (2007) pp.43-44, 62 and Deleuze, *Le pli: Leibniz et le Baroque* (Paris: Minuit, 1988).

Caroline Cartier: Goguma

Award-winning radio journalist Caroline Cartier created a sound installation, *Goguma*, for *Diaspora*. Cartier's radio programmes (she broadcasts a three-minute programme from Mondays to Thursdays on radio station France Inter, titled *Cartier Libre*) are generally composed of segments of recorded sound, including voices and ambient noise, edited together in a sort of collage. Though Cartier's editing may seem to render her the author of the finished piece, she considers her participants' agency to be the factor which sets her creative process in motion: "J'attends qu'il se passe quelque chose. Parfois, quand il ne se passe rien, c'est déjà quelque chose [...] Je ne pose pas de questions [...] J'attends qu'on me raconte une histoire, son histoire. À la différence d'une journaliste, je privilégie le moment à l'info."⁶³ She is also wary of editing sound in a way that would imbue it with meanings unintended by speakers: "Je choisis, mais j'essaie de ne pas serrer [...] de ne pas remplir [...] de ne pas trop couper dans les respirations. Je monte mes trois minutes comme une partition, en essayant de varier les rythmes."⁶⁴ Cartier's statements recall Denis's own modes of working – of bringing her creative agency into dialogue with that of others: an example would be Denis's engagement with *Der Erlkönig* in *35 Rhums*, when she does not simply appropriate the *lied* but prompts it to be understood differently as it interacts with her narrative.

For *Goguma*, Cartier invited the visitor into a small room in which recordings of the voices of children and teenagers born in Africa or of African descent, now resident in France, could be heard. At one side of the space, a faint light emanated from a television set, facing the wall. The television played children's cartoons, which visitors could hear, but not see. Electronic speakers played Cartier's recordings of black children and teenagers' reflections on their colour, their roots, their languages and their identities, drawing the visitor into these narratives, whilst other speakers played blasts of loud music, designed to repel the visitor. The title, *Goguma*, comes from the testimony of one child, who recalls "En soninké, [a Mande language spoken by the West African Soninke people] 'Goguma' ça veut dire pleure pas. Et là, même si je suis grande, quand je pleure ma maman elle me prend dans ses bras et elle me dit encore:

⁶³ Caroline Cartier in Tiphaine Réto, 'Caroline Cartier: les bruits de la vie,' *Le Monde* (20 June 2005), p.6.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

‘goguma.’”⁶⁵ A transcript of the child’s words appears in the *Diaspora* exhibition notes, but we may also hear them in a video (showing only a cartoon image of a yellow beetle) featuring an extract from Cartier’s recordings on the exhibition’s Dailymotion site.⁶⁶ In print sources, we find more transcriptions of the recordings; for example: “Je ne suis pas noire. Je suis marron ... marron clair même. Et quand je serai grande, je serai plus claire encore! Car beaucoup de gens pensent que noir, c’est une couleur de peau trop foncée”⁶⁷ (these words are from the child quoted above, whose age seems to be between four and ten) and “Je suis noir, j’aime être noir, je déteste être noir, j’ai le nez de mon père, les yeux de ma mère”⁶⁸ (it is harder to judge the age of this speaker if one does not hear the recording, but I would assume they are older than the first because of the more reflective tone). Cartier does not provide any reflections on the children’s words in the exhibition notes, or in interviews (a strategy, perhaps, to allow the recordings to speak for themselves without her explication?), but we can see from segments such as those above that some of the participants feel uneasy vis-à-vis their identities. The first speaker rejects the term ‘black,’ describing herself as ‘brown;’ the second speaker seems to accept that ‘blackness’ is part of his identity, but cannot reconcile himself completely to this.

We find reflections with Denis’s filmmaking here – as far back as *Chocolat* (1988); France, a white French child, sees no reason why she should not be friends with a black Cameroonian man Protée, but nonetheless he, the other adult protagonists and the viewer are aware that his lowly position as a houseboy for her wealthy French family is tied to his colour, and that he is tormented by his feelings of both warmth and anger towards this family. In *35 Rhums*, where almost all of the main characters are black or mixed race, the question of race may seem unimportant, but the scene where Joséphine’s university class discusses racial issues reminds us that this question remains contentious. Denis’s cinema and *Diaspora* do not attempt to suggest that complete racial harmony has been achieved or, conversely, that it is impossible but rather that debates surrounding race and identity are still fluid, and in motion.

Andriamirado describes *Goguma* as an “installation cacophonique,” stating that, alongside

⁶⁵ *Diaspora* notes, op cit, p.11.

⁶⁶ See quai Branly, ‘*Goguma* de Caroline Cartier (extrait),’ <http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x35pkv_goguma-de-caroline-cartier-extrait_news> [accessed 22 November 2012].

⁶⁷ ‘Expo Diaspora au quai Branly,’ op cit.

⁶⁸ *Diaspora* notes, op cit, p.12.

Galliano's pieces, its presence in the exhibition seems incongruous.⁶⁹ The "cacophonique" element surely comes from the fact that it would not have been easy to hear everything said by the young people (this set of recordings is described in the exhibition notes as *l'enfance*), because of the loud music (described as *le passage au monde adulte*) which blared from the other speakers. Though Cartier does not say so herself, we might assume that the loud music is meant to encourage the visitor to listen more intently to the children: in media discourses on race, the meandering, playful thoughts of children on their own identities are rarely heard. Cartier's piece, I would argue, is not "cacophonique," but "polyphonique": it is a dialogue between the voices of black children and the overpowering noise of the adult world in which they can be lost. Were we to hear *Goguma*'s recordings of children in their entirety online, we would still not experience the physical difficulty in hearing these whilst the abrasive music played, with the tempting distractions of the television sets with their unviewable images: as with most of the other exhibits I address, the visitor's participation in *Goguma*, time and space-bound, is crucial to its effective communication.

Mahamat-Saleh Haroun: Ombres

Chadian filmmaker Mahamat-Saleh Haroun's contribution to *Diaspora* was a triptych of films, entitled *Ombres*. His best-known film, internationally, is 2010's *Un homme qui crie*, set in present-day Chad, in which Adam, a retired pool attendant sacrifices his son for the war effort. Comparisons may be drawn between *Un homme qui crie* and Denis's *White Material* – both focus on the human cost of civil war in contemporary Africa, but Haroun's central protagonists are native Chadians, unlike Denis's white Frenchwoman, Maria, thus the question of aligning Frenchness or Africanness with Otherness does not arise in Haroun's film. However, both address loss of identity – Maria's livelihood and reason to stay in Africa are tied to her family's coffee plantation and she fights fiercely against those who tell her to leave, while Haroun's Adam has been made redundant from his job at the swimming pool, becoming depressed and resentful of his son, who is hired in his place.

⁶⁹ Andriamirado, op cit.

Ombres was a meditation on wandering, which Haroun describes as a “partie intégrante de toute vie humaine,”⁷⁰ thus suggesting, like Mills, that diasporic movement forms part of all of our personal histories, not only those of African migrants. The first film displayed nocturnal images, filmed in urban locations in London, Paris, Lisbon and Haiti, superimposed over and blending into each other; the second displayed a series of abstract images; the third presented close-ups of water, from which faces of black African people emerged, blending into each other. Each film occupied one of three large screens. Over all three films, the viewer would see two figures, in silhouette, walking back and forth across the screens. The exhibition notes include a poem by Haroun, entitled *Ombres*: “Ces âmes errantes / toujours en mouvement / malgré les heures vides... / Ombres / des héros oubliés / Des petites mains habiles / Des destins en attente... / ICI / LÀ / MAINTENANT.”⁷¹ His phrase “toujours en mouvement” echoes Denis’s conception of the exhibition as “une démarche en mouvement,”⁷² a look at diaspora as a constant process wherein new identities and ideas can be formed by the meeting of different cultures. This is reflected visually in the blending and intermingling of images in Haroun’s piece – they present movement and change as integral to identity, but also identity as never fixed, always in flux. There is also a certain melancholy to Haroun’s conception of movement. He chose the title *Ombres* for the piece:

[C]ar l’ombre, c’est ce qui hante, la trace d’une existence. Il y a ombre parce qu’il y a vie. L’histoire d’Afrique hante la planète entière. Ces figures semblent en errance, déracinées, pas ancrées. Être dans la Diaspora, c’est ne pas avoir de terre [...] Ne pas savoir exactement de quelle terre leurs ancêtres sont partis, tel est le traumatisme originel, ineffaçable.⁷³

The final verse of his poem reads: “Ombres / Des histoires tues / Des mémoires résiduelles / Des chers disparus / HIER / AUJOURD’HUI / DEMAIN / ‘Car les morts ne sont pas morts.’”⁷⁴ As well as migrants, the wanderers of Haroun’s poetry and films might also be unquiet souls of the dead, those who left their home nations for the West, and suffered poverty and discrimination as a result, or even those removed forcibly from their homes during the slave trade; certainly the fact that the cities we see are filmed at night support this idea of

⁷⁰ Mahamat Saleh-Haroun, *Diaspora* notes, op cit, p.18.

⁷¹ *Diaspora* notes, op cit, p.17.

⁷² Denis in *Parole à Claire Denis*, op cit.

⁷³ Haroun in Mal, op cit, p.167.

⁷⁴ Haroun, *Diaspora* notes, op cit, p.17.

wandering ghosts. The notion of restless phantoms might also be applied to the living experience of those African people who travel to the West and find themselves living in poverty, barely noticed by those who pass them in the streets, their identities seemingly caught between their homeland and a place in which they do not feel settled. Pascale Vergereau describes the shadowy figures as “silhouettes africaines perdues dans des villes tentaculaires.”⁷⁵ Haroun’s phrase “les morts ne sont pas morts” could be a reminder not only that the dead, and the pain suffered by them, live on in memory, but that Western cities are still populated by disenfranchised, unheard migrant people. In Denis’s *S’en fout la mort* (1990), two young black men – Dah, from Bénin (Isaach de Bankolé), and Jocelyn, from the West Indies (Alex Descas), work illegally for meagre wages as cock-fighting trainers in the grim Parisian suburb of Rungis. Their unhappy subterranean existence eventually crushes Jocelyn, who commits suicide. As regards painful displacement, in *J’ai pas sommeil*, Théo longs to return to a distant, idealized Martinique from Paris, where he performs black market jobs for low wages; in *White Material*, Maria is desperate to stay in Africa – though she is white, she was born there, and feels she would not belong in France.

We may view a short film on *Diaspora*’s Dailymotion⁷⁶ and Youtube⁷⁷ sites which shows segments of *Ombres*, and footage shot in the gallery, which presents longshots of visitors viewing the piece. This emphasizes how much of the experience of viewing *Ombres* was dependent on doing so in situ: from a distance, it is easy to confuse the silhouettes traversing the screens with those of visitors viewing the films. Andriamirado describes “une diaspora inscrite dans le mouvement du devenir. Les ombres ainsi composées se croisent et se mêlent par un jeu de transparence à celles des visiteurs.”⁷⁸ Thus the visitor participates in this visual performance of the blending of images and cross-fertilization of identity in diasporic movement, becoming a shadow his or herself (to those watching) as he or she walks in front of the screen. We may observe this process in online videos, but we cannot participate, cannot become these shadows ourselves (which is undoubtedly an important element of Haroun’s piece – that we empathize and identify with the experiences of the migrant figures onscreen) if we have not been in the environment of exhibition. Furthermore, connections between

⁷⁵ Pascale Vergereau, ‘La diaspora africaine s’ancre quai Branly,’ *Ouest-France* (22 October 2007), p.1.

⁷⁶ See quaibranly ‘*Ombres* par Mahamat-Saleh Haroun’ <http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x39u89_ombres-par-mahamat-saleh-haroun_creation> [accessed 25 November 2012].

⁷⁷ See quaibranly, ‘*Ombres* par Mahamat-saleh Haroun’ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NxBf_w3NBTU> [accessed 22 November 2012].

⁷⁸ Andriamirado, op cit.

Haroun's work and the exhibition's other pieces are important, as this melancholic piece contrasts sharply with those more celebratory, optimistic works of Bekolo and Monnier, for example. Diasporic movement is collective and unstable, as *Diaspora*, the exhibition, is a collection of different, sometimes conflicting voices.

Yousry Nasrallah: Le fond du lac

Egyptian filmmaker Yousry Nasrallah's contribution to *Diaspora* was a film installation entitled *Le fond du lac*. Nasrallah's work often concerns life in Egypt, past and present, and his most successful film to date is 2012's *Baad el Mawkeaa (After the Battle)*, which focuses on the repercussions for a young man after he joins the armed groups who attacked protestors in Cairo's Tahrir Square in 2011. *Le fond du lac* was inspired by the experiences of the 50,000 Nubian people in southern Egypt who, in the 1960s, were resettled to make way for the construction of Lake Nasser, one of the largest manmade reservoirs in the world. At the time, the construction of the lake was regarded by the Egyptian government as a necessary step in protecting the country from drought, thus the movement of the Nubians was seen as a sacrifice for Egypt's benefit. Whole villages were emptied of inhabitants and flooded, along with ancient archeological sites (some of which were accessed and rebuilt along the banks of the Nile). Nasrallah states:

Je ne crois pas que les Nubiens [...] aient eu beaucoup le choix. Le Haut-Barrage d'Assouan était un projet phare de l'Égypte indépendante. La nationalisation du Canal de Suez avait été effectuée justement pour financer ce projet après le retrait de la Banque mondiale. Donc, l'état d'esprit des Égyptiens était tout à fait pour la construction du barrage. Les Nubiens – qui sont des Égyptiens, historiquement défavorisés – étaient en principe favorables au projet; surtout que le gouvernement nassérien [the government under President Gamal Abdel Nasser] leur avait promis travail, dédommagement et des logements près du Nil. Promesses qui n'ont pas été tenues.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Yousry Nasrallah, in Antoinette Delafin, 'Exposition 'Diaspora' au Musée du Quai Branly: Yousry Nasrallah: Comme une grande blessure jamais cicatrisée,' *Ordispace* (4 December 2007) <http://www.ordispace.com/en/exposition-diaspora-au-musee-du-quai-branly-yousry-nasrallah-comme-une-grande-blessure-jamais-cicatrisee.php?id_page=863> [accessed 25 November 2012].

The issue of the forcible resettlement of the Nubians remains contentious in Egyptian politics. In April 2012, after many years of campaigning by Nubian activists, Egyptian minister for planning and international cooperation, Fayza Abul Naga, stated that compensation in the form of new farmland and villages would soon be given to the Nubians.⁸⁰ In September 2013, however, the Egyptian government had not delivered on its promises, and Nubian representatives demanded that their people's right to compensation be recognized by the government committee in charge of Nubian affairs.⁸¹ Of course, when Nasrallah presented his work in 2007, these recent developments had not occurred, but the question of necessary sacrifice for the good of the country versus the forced uprooting of a people still informs *Le fond du lac*.

The piece was composed of a set of five large screens, creating a cube into which the visitor entered. On the screen facing the visitor was footage of the waters of Lake Nasser, shot from a boat, with nothing on the horizon. After a few minutes, the camera would tilt towards the water, and the surrounding screens would fill with images of the lake, shot from below its surface, as if the visitor had plunged into it. The visitor would then hear the loud sound of a splash above their head, and on the screen on the ceiling appeared an image of a boy jumping into the water. Also featured on the screens were images of Nubian people drawing their hands through the lake's waters and bathing in it, along with images showing Nasrallah's imaginings of the submerged villages, with a boy swimming around them, created by superimposing images of the swimming figure in water over images of a desert village. Sound was a crucial part of the exhibit: very little noise emanated from the films themselves, but the space was furnished with a set of microphones which recorded any sounds made by the visitor and relayed them back through speakers with echoing underwater sound effects.

A similarly haunted quality links Haroun's work and Nasrallah's – like the shadowy figures of *Ombres*, the swimmer in *Le fond du lac* appears as an intangible presence, floating through deserted territory. Nasrallah describes the abandoned Nubian villages as otherworldly: “Un étrange désert aquatique [...] presque lunaire. Sous l'eau, on le sait, il y a peut-être les restes

⁸⁰ Khaled Diab, 'Hope for the Egyptian Nubians damned by the dam,' *The Guardian* (21 April 2012) <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/apr/21/egypt-nubians-dam>> [accessed 26 November 2012].

⁸¹ See Al-Masry Al-Youm, 'Displaced Nubians Demand Right of Return in New Constitution,' *Egypt Independent* (26 September 2013) <<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/displaced-nubians-demand-right-return-new-constitution>> [accessed 27 January 2014].

de centaines de villages. Peut-être pas. Les maisons en terre crue ont dû fondre depuis.”⁸² We may read Nasrallah’s swimmer as representing the ghosts of uprooted Nubians, returning to their homes. Again, the idea of displaced, wandering people as spectres draws links with the notion of their disappearance from public consciousness. Nasrallah states:

[Les Nubiens] continuent à faire partie des populations les moins favorisées d’Egypte et malgré les discours officiels – les leurs aussi – sur leur intégration totale dans la société égyptienne, ils ne le sont pas. Exemple: il n’y a pratiquement aucun speaker ou speakerine nubien à la télé égyptienne.⁸³

To the filmmaker, Egypt’s decision not to provide the Nubian people with space to speak does not end with Lake Nasser, but continues today – with their distinct heritage and language, they do not comply with the notion of a unified Egypt and are thus sidelined in media and political discourse. As with Haroun’s work, we see echoes of Denis’s focus on the desire for a lost homeland (in *J’ai pas sommeil* and *White Material*, especially) in Nasrallah’s. However, Nasrallah emphasizes that Lake Nasser and the term ‘diaspora,’ to him, are laden with ambiguity. He regards the displacement of the Nubians as “une réalité très, très douloureuse, mais à l’intérieur de cette réalité, il y a une vie,”⁸⁴ and sees Lake Nasser as “un lieu tellement chargé de vie, de vécu.”⁸⁵ In his Dailymotion interview, he points to the face of an elderly Nubian woman on the screen, describing her as beautiful, and stating that his work is not simply about loss, but about the living people who suffered this loss who continue to live and work. Haroun’s piece is more unambiguous in its melancholy while Nasrallah’s, as well as mourning the lost Nubian land, still posits the people who once had the right to inhabit the land as full of vitality. Perhaps more than any other exhibit in *Diaspora*, the visitor’s experience of *Le fond du lac* is dependent on them being in the space of exposition. We may see segments of Nasrallah’s film online, but we cannot experience the sensory effect of being surrounded by water in three dimensions. Furthermore, the sounds of the space are created by the visitor, to heighten this immersive effect. Thus, *Le fond du lac* is absolutely an example of Ricoeurian discourse as performance – the visitor’s own movements and the sounds they make

⁸² Nasrallah, *Diaspora* notes, op cit, p.25.

⁸³ Nasrallah in Delafin, op cit.

⁸⁴ Nasrallah, in *Parole à Yousry Nasrallah* <http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x3lq3l_parole-a-yousry-nasrallah_news> [accessed 27 November 2012].

⁸⁵ Ibid.

are crucial to the exhibit's communication of its sensory language, each visitor's reaction a different dialogue with the work.

Claire Denis and Lilian Thuram: La diaspora selon Lilian Thuram

The final element of *Diaspora* which I will address is the collaboration between Denis and retired Guadeloupe-born French footballer Lilian Thuram. For her short film, *La Diaspora selon Lilian Thuram*, Denis filmed Thuram discussing his thoughts regarding, and experiences of, racism, and his ideas for how society may move forward. Edited into twelve segments, the interview was shown at different points throughout the exhibition space on small screens, creating “un lien entre les différentes propositions.”⁸⁶ The unlikely pairing of Denis and Thuram has been remarked upon: Luc le Vaillant asks: “Qu'est-ce qu'ils font là tous les deux, la petite cinéaste blonde au timbre rauque et le grand footballeur guadeloupéen au phrasé impavide? Comment peut-elle l'Afrique réunir des êtres aux apparences et aux trajectoires aussi dissemblables?”⁸⁷ Certainly, Denis knew little of football, and Thuram was not familiar with her films. Denis says: “Aujourd'hui lorsqu'on parle des africains en France c'est souvent à propos du sport, il me fallait impérativement faire une place au sport.”⁸⁸ The connection between Denis and Thuram, however, is about far more than the representation of sport in the exhibition: Denis was aware of Thuram's public insistence that racist attitudes in France be challenged. Thuram is one of the most admired figures in French football, part of the World Cup-winning team of 1998, and among the highest-performing players in the country's history. In 2003, he was appointed as an adviser to the Haut conseil d'intégration, a think-tank which reports to the French government on race issues. In 2005, France's then Minister of the Interior, Nicolas Sarkozy (French President between 2007 and 2012), described rioting youths in Paris' *banlieues*, a large percentage of whom were of African origins, as “racailles,” suggesting that the *banlieues* should be cleaned out with a powerful hose.⁸⁹ Thuram responded: “Faire croire que tous les jeunes de banlieue sont des ‘racailles,’ c'est attiser le racisme,”⁹⁰ protesting that Sarkozy, who, unlike Thuram, had never lived in the *banlieues*, was ill-

⁸⁶ *Diaspora* notes, op cit, p.7.

⁸⁷ Luc le Vaillant, ‘Fondus au noir,’ *Libération* (2 November 2007), p.36.

⁸⁸ Denis in Bourmeau, op cit.

⁸⁹ See Carl Meeus and Catherine Pégard, ‘Le récit secret d’une crise,’ *Le Point* (10 November 2005), p.30.

⁹⁰ Thuram in Alexandre Fache, ‘Lilian Thuram: Voter est une force,’ *L’Humanité* (21 December 2005), p.2.

informed about life in these areas. Denis remarks, “Lilian est un homme qui a beaucoup de violence en lui, mais qui a mis de l’ordre dans tout ça. Il affiche une ligne claire, car il a franchi beaucoup de zones d’ombre. Il fait du courage pour mettre ses idées au net.”⁹¹

Thuram is a vocal opponent of anti-immigration politics in France, establishing the *Fondation Lilian Thuram* for education against racism in 2008 and, in 2010, writing a book of portraits of black men and women whom he admires, entitled *Mes étoiles noires: De Lucy à Barack Obama*.⁹² In Denis’s interview with Thuram,⁹³ he recalls that he had never considered the colour of his skin as problematic until he arrived in France at the age of nine and encountered prejudice. Thuram does not consider racism shocking, rather the inevitable product of centuries-old thought which has educated people to believe that to be white was to be superior:

Je comprends ceux qui sont racistes. C’est normal qu’il y ait des problématiques dans la société pour un Noir, c’est tout à fait normal: c’est le poids de l’histoire. La vraie question, c’est: comment voyons-nous l’autre? Est-ce que nous le voyons comme notre égal? Est-ce que nous le voyons avec un sentiment de paternalisme: ‘sans moi, il ne peut pas s’en sortir?’ L’esclavage c’est, quelque part, avoir honte de soi-même.⁹⁴

Though racial inequality is not addressed expressly in all of *Diaspora*’s exhibits, a thread privileging the importance of collaboration, of multi-vocal, reciprocal discourse, runs through most of the works, rejecting this “sentiment de paternalisme” which silences the voice of the non-Western ‘Other’ and creates hierarchies. Thuram suggests, in another interview, that the only way to emerge from a social state wherein racism has been and often remains normalized is via education:

Tout passe par l’éducation, et il reste donc possible de faire comprendre les choses par une éducation contraire. [...] Quand vous prenez une position de victime, vous ne donnez pas envie d’être écouté. Parce que vous faites de votre interlocuteur, indirectement, un coupable. Le ressentiment mène au blocage.⁹⁵

⁹¹ Denis in Vaillant, op cit, p.36.

⁹² Lilian Thuram, *Mes étoiles noires: De Lucy à Barack Obama* (Paris: Philippe Rey, 2010).

⁹³ An extract of the interview is available at <http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x34o90_lilian-thuram-par-claire-denis_news> [accessed 5 December 2012].

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Charlotte Moreau, ‘Contre le racisme, tout passe par l’éducation,’ *Le Parisien* (4 October 2007), p.31.

As Thuram argues, re-evaluation of old prejudices is not simply essential for allowing victims of racism to speak, but to allow discourse to occur, to do away with positions of inequality which prevent reciprocal communication. Of course, this ‘re-education’ is still very much in progress; racial tensions still cause riots and political disputes throughout the world. We see Denis refer to racial disharmony and its effects on the lives of individual characters in several of her films, but most the most pointed reference to political discourse in the classroom scene (cited in Chapter Two) in *35 Rhums*, an otherwise (racially) harmonious portrait of a group of black and mixed-race individuals in contemporary Paris.

Despite praising Thuram’s reflections as “spontanés et sensibles,” Virginie Andriamirado concludes that the interview’s inescapable presence throughout the exhibition space “finit par être envahissante et par desservir les œuvres qu’elles sont (peut-être?) censées introduire [...] sont-ils [les films] un fil conducteur suffisant à une exposition ambitieuse et initialement porteuse de projets forts?”⁹⁶ Elsewhere we read: “L’omniprésence de l’installation finit par lasser. Rapidement, les autres œuvres présentées apparaissent alors comme des respirations... plus ou moins pertinentes.”⁹⁷ Not having visited the exhibition, I cannot offer an opinion on the effectiveness of the placement of Denis’s Thuram interviews – whether they were distracting or too heavy in tone (compared to the creative work of the other practitioners), as the above writers suggest. Denis herself says: “Je voulais que les gens puissent bouger, revenir. Je trouvais agréable la sensation que Lilian soit partout de manière non intrusive mais intelligente.”⁹⁸ The contrast between Thuram’s serious, often melancholic reflections and, for example, Monnier’s celebratory, vibrant *Dans tes cheveux*, is necessary for *Diaspora* to act as the dialogue that it was intended to be. *Diaspora*, as a time and space-bound discourse in performance requires the interaction of disparate voices in a space where they may complement or conflict with each other, of positive and mournful reflections on what the term ‘diaspora’ means today, of visitors’ different negotiations of and reactions to the exhibits and the space. The Thuram interviews may be read as halting the visitor’s physical progress throughout the exhibition space, as distracting in the same way that the loud music of Caroline Cartier’s *Goguma* renders the recorded voices of children difficult to hear. The interviews, I would argue, should not be viewed as a separate “fil conducteur” to guide the visitor around

⁹⁶ Andriamirado, op cit.

⁹⁷ GB, op cit.

⁹⁸ Denis in MpM, ‘Claire Denis,’ *Écran noir* <<http://www.ecran noir.fr/entrevues/entrevue.php?e=181>> [accessed 1 December 2012].

the exhibition, but rather as part of the polyphony of voices at work. To create a state of homogeneity in the exhibition space, of total ease of movement, seeing and hearing, where each exhibit agrees on the meaning of ‘diaspora’ and elicits a similar reaction from every visitor, would be to reflect a social state which does not exist: racial disharmony remains a crucial contemporary issue not only in France but throughout the world; the term ‘diaspora’ remains loaded with both joy and suffering.

The discourse between Denis and Thuram does not finish with *Diaspora*. In 2008 he was a guest at the première of *35 Rhums* at Paris’ Centre Pompidou. Speaking to a journalist from *Le Parisien* after the screening, he praised the film, saying:

Certains des personnages me rappellent ma mère, dans la peine qu'ils ont ressentie en s'exilant pour un travail qu'il n'avaient pas choisi. On pense à ces Antillais-là, mais aussi à beaucoup de gens qui se battent pour survivre. C'est un thème universel. La peur de perdre son emploi, sa maison, beaucoup de gens l'éprouvent aujourd'hui.⁹⁹

Despite not having seen any of Denis’s films before she approached him for *Diaspora*, after they had worked together Thuram could see reflections between his own experiences, and Denis’s portrayal of black characters living in Paris’ *banlieues*. *35 Rhums*, we might suggest, is even an indirect answer to Sarkozy’s idea that the *banlieues* are filled with ‘racailles,’ with its portrait of working class black and mixed-race people whose narratives are not centred around poverty or violence. Thuram adds: “C'est nécessaire pour changer l'imaginaire des gens. Car c'est de l'imaginaire que naît le racisme. Voir des Noirs dans d'autres domaines que dans le sport, c'est ça qui fera évoluer les mentalités. Et Claire Denis y contribue dans le cinéma.”¹⁰⁰ Thuram’s reactions to *35 Rhums* show that he regards Denis not simply as someone with whom he once worked, but as his interlocutor in an ongoing dialogue about how modern society may re-educate itself against racial hierarchies. Thuram’s involvement with the Musée du quai Branly continued in 2011, when he was general curator for the exhibition *Human Zoos: L'invention du sauvage*, which addressed the practice (popular between 1800 and the 1930s) of Western circus and travelling show owners bringing indigenous people from Africa, Asia, Oceania and the Americas to the West to be exhibited in ‘human zoos.’ With scientific curators Pascal Blanchard and Nanette Jacomijn Snoep, Thuram brought to the museum a

⁹⁹ Thuram in Hubert Lizé, ‘La douce chaleur de 35 Rhums,’ *Le Parisien* (19 February 2009), p.31.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

collection of objects and archival films which documented the live exhibition of non-Western people as ‘freaks’ or ‘exotics.’ In the exhibition’s *bande-annonce*,¹⁰¹ we see Thuram highlight a piece of apparatus which was designed to measure the skulls of the inhabitants of these ‘human zoos,’ showing their essential ‘difference’ or animalistic qualities, in comparison to ‘civilized’ Westerners. Thuram’s exhibition, like *Diaspora*, focused on the issue of non-Western people leaving their native countries but there was, unsurprisingly, none of the celebratory atmosphere which *Diaspora* possessed at certain points. While Denis’s aim with *Diaspora* was to establish a movement of creative dialogue, *Human Zoos* looks backwards to a shameful colonialist past. As Thuram states, however, in the exhibition notes, “These images that, yesterday, ‘invented the savage,’ must today be used to deconstruct those patterns of thought which propagate the belief in the existence of types of human being that are superior to others.”¹⁰² Thuram’s exhibition then, like *Diaspora*, *does* look forward, emphasizing that it is necessary for visitors to see and to be shocked by the images of ‘human zoos’: if we accept that racism today stems from practices and beliefs which we now deem horrendous, we may de-normalize the manifestations of racism in today’s society as similarly absurd and harmful.

During an address to the University of Dakar, Senegal, in 2007, then French president Sarkozy stated:

[L]’homme africain n’est pas assez entré dans l’histoire [...] depuis des millénaires, [il] vit avec les saisons, dont l’idéal de vie est d’être en harmonie avec la nature, ne connaît que l’éternel recommencement du temps rythmé par la répétition sans fin des mêmes gestes et des mêmes paroles [...] Dans cet imaginaire où tout recommence toujours, il n’y a de place ni pour l’aventure humaine, ni pour l’idée de progrès [...] Jamais l’homme ne s’élance vers l’avenir. Jamais il ne lui vient à l’idée de sortir de la répétition pour s’inventer un destin.¹⁰³

As if in reaction to this statement, Denis, a few months later, would describe her intentions for *Diaspora* thus: “Je ne voulais pas de quelque chose de nostalgique ou de restrictif. Je voulais

¹⁰¹ See <<http://www.quaibranly.fr/en/programmation/exhibitions/last-exhibitions/human-zoos.html>> [accessed 10 December 2012].

¹⁰² Thuram in *Human Zoos, l’invention du sauvage* exhibition notes <http://www.quaibranly.fr/uploads/tx_gayafeespacepresse/MQB_DP_HUMAN_ZOOS.pdf> [accessed 10 December 2012].

¹⁰³ Nicolas Sarkozy, ‘Discours de Dakar,’ *Nouvel Observateur* (22 November 2012) <<http://tempsreel.nouvelobs.com/politique/20121122.OBS0195/1-integralite-du-discours-de-dakar-prononce-par-nicolas-sarkozy.html>> [accessed 20 October 2013].

du mouvement, comme la diaspora elle-même, finalement [...] on ne peut pas vouloir d'un monde qui serait figé, immuable. De tous temps, le monde s'est construit à partir de flux migratoires.”¹⁰⁴ The exhibition was not simply a celebratory look at how, contrary to Sarkozy's opinion, there is space for optimism about the future in the African imaginary, nor was it an entirely melancholic reflection on the suffering of many displaced peoples. Several critics and bloggers mourn what they see as the lack of cohesion in the exhibition's message. Laurence Gramard writes: “Le visiteur cherche en vain l'unité de l'exposition qui donne l'impression d'un mélange bien intentionné qui aurait oublié, dans sa vision occidentalo-centrée, que la diaspora africaine est beaucoup plus qu'une simple influence dans l'art occidental.”¹⁰⁵ In any case, it is unjust to refer to *Diaspora* as “occidentalo-centrée,” when its cohort of artists was composed of a mixture of individuals born in Africa, of African descent and white Westerners who had never lived in Africa. It is also, I would argue, unhelpful to seek a unifying thread in the exhibition, which would present the visitor with a clear conclusion on the meanings and connotations of the term ‘diaspora,’ as *Diaspora* was a conversation, a polyphony of different voices at work which sometimes disagreed. The exhibition itself was a discourse in time and space-bound performance, an actualization of various artistic interpretations meeting each other, along with the interpretations of each visitor. Discussing filmmaker Agnès Varda's video and sculptural installation *Les veuves de Noirmoutier*, Jenny Chamarette writes: “One space exists in the delineated time of the installation, at the Fondation Cartier in Paris in 2006, and one in the recorded pasts of the island [of Noirmoutier], on film and in photographic or pictorial form.”¹⁰⁶ In the case of *Diaspora*, there is the “delineated time” of the dialogue between artists, visitors and exhibition space, but there is also the more disparate discourse mobilized by the museum's encouragement of visitors to post their reactions to the exhibition online, in words, images or video. *Diaspora* as discourse cannot be termed a work “by” Denis, but it should not be viewed as entirely separate from the rest of her œuvre, wherein each film is a conversation between disparate texts and different creative voices.

¹⁰⁴ Denis in MpM, op cit.

¹⁰⁵ Laurence Gramard, ‘Diaspora dispersion,’ *Il était une fois le cinéma* <<http://www.iletaitunefoislecinema.com/exposition/1535/exposition-diaspora-au-musee-du-quai-branlydiaspora-dispersion>> [accessed 24 September 2012].

¹⁰⁶ Jenny Chamarette, ‘Spectral bodies, temporalized spaces: Agnès Varda's motile gestures of mourning and memorial,’ *Image and Narrative*, vol.12, no.2 (2011), p.36.

Chapter Six: Un revenant du cinéma – Michel Subor and the films of Claire Denis

Perhaps the greatest source of living, breathing, ageing ungrammaticality in Denis's cinema is the actor Michel Subor. Subor has appeared in four of Denis's films: *Beau travail*, *L'Intrus*, *White Material* and *Les Salauds* (I will address the first three below). Mischa Subotkiof (who would become Michel Subor) was born in Paris in 1935, to anti-Bolshevik Russian émigré parents. Having worked as a theatre actor, the twenty-six year old Subor was distributing his headshot photograph around Paris film offices when he met Jean-Luc Godard, who had seen him in a 1959 production of Sartre's play, *Les Séquestrés d'Altona*, and cast him in the lead role of Bruno Forestier in his 1960 film *Le Petit soldat*. Subor would go on to appear in several high-profile films of the era, including Roger Vadim's *La Bride sur le cou* (1961) and Alfred Hitchcock's *Topaz* (1969). Between the 1970s and late 1990s, Subor all but disappeared from French public life, or any recognized pantheon of French film 'stars,' appearing sporadically in television roles.

Bruno Forestier: un homme sans idéal

Le Petit soldat's Bruno Forestier is a young man who has deserted the French army during the Algerian war and now works as an agent for a right-wing, anti-Algerian organization. Forestier is assigned the assassination of Palivoda, a perceived Algerian sympathiser in Geneva, but refuses to carry it out, not for political reasons – simply because he does not wish to do it; Godard reflects: “[Forestier] is someone who is asked to do something and doesn't want to. Simply doesn't want; and he digs his heels in, on principle. This is liberty as I see it: from a practical point of view. Being free is being able to do what you like, when you like.”¹ He becomes romantically involved with Veronika Dreyer (Anna Karina), an agent for the Front de Libération Nationale or FLN (Algerian Liberation Front) and finds himself hunted by agents from both sides of the conflict. He eventually kills Palivoda in exchange for visas for

¹ Jean-Luc Godard in Tom Milne (ed. and trans.), *Godard on Godard* (New York: Da Capo, 1986), p.177.

himself and Veronika to travel to Brazil, but Veronika is tortured and killed by the right-wing agents who employed Forestier. Claire Denis recalls her first viewing of the film thus:

Un jour de septembre, années 1970. Je vois, à l'Action [cinéma in Paris], le *Petit Soldat* de Godard. Ce film n'avait pas bonne réputation, raciste, facho, pas net... J'ai été le voir comme si je m'apprêtais à recevoir un coup. Et Subor m'a réconcilié avec lui. Ce fut une expérience douloureuse: film extralucide, limpide, impitoyable, déchirant. Il s'est conclu comme un pacte secret entre le film et moi, entre Subor et moi: je me suis dit que je travaillerais un jour avec lui. J'ai élu ce film, j'ai choisi Subor, ce petit soldat qui fuyait son destin. Depuis, je connais par cœur la voix-off du film.²

During the 1990s, Denis began developing *Beau travail*, with her co-scenarist Jean-Pol Fargeau. The film is inspired by, if not truly 'adapted from,' Herman Melville's novella *Billy Budd, Sailor* (1924) and Benjamin Britten's opera based on the text, with a libretto by E.M. Forster and Eric Crozier, which premiered in London in 1951. Britten's piece, "O, heave away,' from the opera's first act, in fact soundtracks scenes of the men at work in *Beau travail*. Melville's novella is the story of Billy, a charismatic, naive sailor who joins the ranks of the HMS *Bellipotent* in 1797 and becomes popular among his fellow men. He attracts the resentment, however, of the ship's master-at-arms, John Claggart, who falsely reports him to the ship's captain, Edward Vere, for conspiracy to mutiny. Due to a stutter, Billy finds himself unable to respond to Claggart's charges during a meeting with the Captain, and strikes Claggart, inadvertently killing him. Billy is then tried and hanged for his offence.

Denis re-imagines Melville's narrative as taking place in the deserts of Djibouti, a former French colony in North Africa, which became independent in 1977. The sailors of the *Bellipotent* become soldiers of the French Foreign Legion (which still has bases in Djibouti) who, in the absence of war, are seen doing laundry, dancing in local nightclubs and exercising. Claggart becomes Galoup, a dedicated senior legionnaire (the film's title, *Beau travail*, comes from a French translation of *Billy Budd*, in which Claggart comments sarcastically on Billy spilling soup – "Handsomely done, my lad!"³), played by Denis Lavant. Billy becomes Gilles Sentain (Grégoire Colin), a charismatic new recruit who is popular with his fellow troops and

² Denis, 'Mes dates clés,' *Libération*, 4 May 2005, pp.2-3.

³ Herman Melville, *Billy Budd, Sailor* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University, Electronic Classics Series, 2012), p.31. See Norbert Creutz, 'Claire Denis travaille le beau pour mieux saisir la soldatesque,' *Le Temps* (13 May 2000), unpaginated, for Denis's reference to the film's title.

saves another soldier's life. Like Claggart, Galoup longs for his superior officer to hold him in high esteem, and feels threatened by the humble, brave Sentain. Captain Vere becomes a character whose textual history has roots not only in Melville, but in Godard – he is named Bruno Forestier, and is played by Michel Subor, like his namesake (or earlier incarnation) in *Le Petit soldat*. Regarding the link between Subor's roles, Denis says: "In *Le Petit soldat*, Michel Subor's character has deserted from the French army – he's killed a member of the FLN in Geneva – so it seemed logical he should resurface in the Foreign Legion."⁴ Subor reflects: "It was the same man who acted, so it is the same character, I guess."⁵ Subor, at this time, did not have an agent, and Denis did not expect to find him easily; she recalls: "It was almost as if he had disappeared as an actor [...] I hadn't seen him since he had a part in Hitchcock's *Topaz*."⁶ She was, however, surprised, by how easily she found him:

Je trouve, par Minitel [French computerized telephone directory], le numéro de Michel Subor. Il habite dans le Loir-et-Cher et je l'appelle, ahurie: "Je viens..." Il me répond: "Oh! non, c'est moi qui viens..." Il est arrivé en voiture, à une terrasse de café, près de la porte d'Orléans, restant accoudé à la porte de son break, un chien à l'arrière, très bronzé, comme un homme qui vit dehors. Il a fallu que je déchiffre le visage du Petit Soldat dans ce visage-là. On était très gai, on a bu des bières. Je me suis dit: "Ça marchera jamais, je suis folle..." et je lui ai donné le scénario de *Beau Travail*, qu'il a accepté à condition de le prendre comme il était. Je lui ai juste dit: "Faut maigrir un peu, c'est un commandant de la Légion..."⁷

Subor himself recalls:

J'arrive, Claire me dit "Voilà, je cherche un personnage comme ceci, comme cela, un commandant de la Légion." Un type m'a alors tiré le portrait; il y avait déjà des portraits de tout le peloton accrochés au mur. Puis Claire continue. "Le personnage est un commandant un peu curieux, inspiré par le *Billy Budd* de Melville... Je [ne] sais pas, je réfléchis, parfois vous correspondez au personnage, parfois je ne sais pas." Je lui dis

⁴ Denis in Chris Darke, 'Desire is Violence,' *Sight and Sound* (July 2000), p.18.

⁵ Michel Subor in Jonathan Romney, 'Claire Denis Interviewed,' *The Guardian* (28 June 2000a) <<http://film.guardian.co.uk/interview/interviewpages/0,6737,338784,00.html>> [accessed 14 March 2013].

⁶ Denis in Ramsey, op cit.

⁷ Denis (2005b), p.3.

“Ecoutez, ça me fait plaisir d’être passé, je ne me suis pas déplacé exprès pour vous, si je ne conviens pas, dites-le, prenez pas de pincettes, je ne me formaliserai pas!”⁸

Bruno Forestier, in Denis’s narrative, is a character composed of shifting layers of other characters and narratives. On the one hand, he is Melville’s (and Britten’s) Captain Vere, the superior officer whose approval Galoup/Claggart craves. On another, he is Godard’s Forestier, forty years after the diegetic events of *Le Petit soldat*. On yet another, he is Michel Subor – an actor who had fascinated Denis since she first saw *Le Petit soldat*, and whose disappearance from public life perplexed her.

In an early scene from *Beau travail*, when we are first introduced to Forestier, we see him in medium-shot, washing his face in front of a mirror. His skin is weathered, his hair grey and his physique, though strong, is slightly plump: he is no longer the slim, dark haired young man he once was. Galoup’s narration, in voiceover, tells us that Forestier has been followed by “un rumeur sur lui depuis la guerre d’Algérie.” Near the beginning of *Billy Budd*, we find the lines:

Among certain grizzled sea gossips of the gun decks and forecastle went a rumour
perdue that the master-at-arms was a *chevalier* who had volunteered into the King’s
navy by way of compounding for some mysterious swindle whereof he had been
arraigned at the King’s Bench.⁹

At first glance, we see a clear connection between Melville’s Captain Vere and Commandant Forestier; but on closer inspection, we realize that these words do not in fact describe Vere, but Claggart, the Galoup figure. Furthermore, the reference to “la guerre d’ Algérie” calls to mind Godard’s Forestier, the secret agent. As Roland-François Lack writes, this shift signals “the composite nature of Forestier’s character in *Beau travail*: he is largely Captain Vere, but has parts from other characters.”¹⁰ Immediately after we hear of the “rumour” that follows Forestier, we see a shot of him standing in front of the mirror, drawing his hands over his face, and then slowly drawing them apart to view his reflection. If the scene’s aural content swings

⁸ Michel Subor in Serge Kaganski, ‘Michel Subor, un dilettante,’ *Les Inrockuptibles* (30 April 2000) <<http://www.lesinrocks.com/2000/04/30/cinema/actualite-cinema/michel-subor-un-dilettante-11219927/>> [accessed 5 March 2013].

⁹ Melville, op cit, p.24.

¹⁰ Roland-François Lack, ‘Good Work, Little Soldier: Text and Pretext,’ *Journal of European Studies*, vol.34, no.1-2 (March-June 2004), p.39. See Lack’s essay for thorough analysis of the connections between the dialogues in *Billy Budd*, *Sailor* and *Beau travail*.

between references to *Billy Budd* and *Le Petit soldat*, its visual content refers clearly to Godard's film: near the denouement of *Le Petit soldat*, when Forestier still holds hope of escape for himself and Veronika, he stands in front of a mirror in her apartment, and says (as much to himself as to her), "Mais peut-être c'est ce qui est important: arriver à connaître le son de sa propre voix, et la forme de son visage. De l'intérieur, il est comme ça [he draws his hands over his face]. Et quand je le regarde, il est comme ça [he moves his hands from his face]." The Forestier of *Le Petit soldat* is talkative, volatile, intense: he struggles to know himself and searches for any sign of what constitutes his true self in the mirror. In *Beau travail*, Beugnet argues, "[Subor's mirror gesture] dramatizes the split between inner and outer being: Forestier is a legionnaire without an ideal, a man conscious of the absurdity of the military world he belongs to."¹¹ The Forestier of *Beau travail*, as well as being older, speaks little. He does not dash in and out of frames, always looking behind him as Godard's Forestier does; rather, he reclines in the shade, watching his troops from the corners of shots, or pictured in frontal medium-shots, from Galoup's perspective, and chews *qat* (a herbal stimulant) every night. The camera meditates on Forestier watching his regiment languidly. Denis reflects:

I wanted the commandant not to be weak, but he doesn't care. He doesn't give a damn about poor [Galoup] who is so much on the edge of duty and justice [...] He might be attracted to the young soldier [Sentain] but he doesn't want to deal with all these things. I don't think it's weakness. It's just boredom for me. Or vagueness, not boredom.¹²

Forestier, forty years on, is no longer seeking escape or answers – he has already escaped, and is safe (he thinks) from engaging with the concerns of the world outside the Legion.

Bruno Forestier is a sylleptic figure in *Beau travail*: he is at once Melville's Captain Vere, Godard's Forestier, Denis's Forestier, but he is always, jarringly, Michel Subor. In the terms Riffaterre uses to describe Madame de Villeparisis in Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*,¹³ the Forestier of *Beau travail* is a "character created at a point of intersection [of] several associational sequences, the significances of which are now combined and embodied in that [character]."¹⁴ Her role in the text is both diegetic and symbolic – other female characters are read, through Villeparisis's presence, as noblewomen. If *Beau travail*'s Forestier were composed simply of references to Captain Vere and Godard's Forestier, we

¹¹ Beugnet (2004), p.113.

¹² Denis, 'Claire Denis: Masterclass at the French Institute,' *Les Conférences de l'IFRU* (2005a).

¹³ As discussed in relation to Denis's casting of Line Renaud in Chapter One.

¹⁴ Riffaterre, (1987), p.375.

would be dealing primarily with a character constructed through, perhaps Kristevan, intertextuality. But several scenes in *Beau travail* rupture any illusion of narrative verisimilitude, in bringing Michel Subor himself to the fore and rendering his intertextual presence ungrammatical.

In the scene described above, when Galoup first introduces Forestier in voiceover, we are shown a close-up of a photograph of “Bruno Forestier.” It is unclear whether this photograph is in Galoup’s possession or Forestier’s, but this is not a military-issue image of a young Forestier; it is a posed, studio headshot of Subor (perhaps the one he passed around film offices in Paris as a youth?). This close-up jolts us from immersion within the narrative, in passive acceptance of the fact that it is Bruno Forestier, the character, whom we see onscreen. For the viewer familiar with Subor’s previous film work, and aware of his disappearance from the cinema, the image prompts us to ask what became of the young actor in that photograph; where has he been for forty years? As Lack writes:

[G]iven that, prior to *Beau travail*, Subor had made only about twenty films, almost all of them mediocre – the highlights are a starring role in Vadim’s *Le Bride sur le cou* (1961), opposite Brigitte Bardot, and a supporting role in Hitchcock’s *Topaz* (1969) – this cinematic past was, effectively, *Le Petit soldat*, and nothing else.¹⁵

In another scene, Forestier speaks to a new recruit to the Legion, a Russian man. This scene appears, initially, to have little import in terms of narrative progression (it certainly has no counterpart in Melville’s text). In medium-shot, we see Forestier sitting, focusing downwards on some object we cannot see. The scene cuts to a shot of the younger soldier looking up at Forestier, and we realize that he is the object of the commandant’s gaze, his interlocutor. In Russian, Forestier asks: “Why did you join the Legion?” The soldier replies: “Commandant, you know what it’s like in Russia. No money, no work. It’s impossible to fight for an ideal. An ideal that keeps changing.” We cut to Forestier: “What ideal?” The content of this scene’s dialogue references *Le Petit soldat*: in that film, the young Forestier describes himself, in voiceover, as “un type sans idéal,” While he is being tortured by members of the FLN, he refuses to confess any details of his involvement in the right-wing French group, but still reflects (in voiceover), “Je n’avais pas d’idéal.” Near the film’s end, before he leaves

¹⁵ Lack, op cit, p.36.

Veronika to kill Palivoda, she tells him: “Il faut avoir un idéal, c’est très important.” He voices his disagreement: “Il y a quelque chose de plus important d’avoir un idéal, mais quoi ? [...] Tout le monde a un idéal. Il y a donc quelque chose de plus important que tout le monde n’a pas. À part de nous-mêmes, notre propre visage et notre propre voix, nous n’avons rien.” This dialogue immediately proceeds the sequence wherein Forestier gazes upon his own face in the mirror. Forty years later, Forestier is still without ideal – all he has of the past and the present is himself, his own face, his own voice. And that face, when, in *Beau travail*, we cut from the older Forestier gazing into the mirror to the photograph of ‘him,’ is the face of Michel Subor.

The fact that Forestier, in *Beau travail*, speaks fluent Russian does not seem incidental; indeed, it draws us further into the ungrammaticality of Forestier/Subor’s role in the film. Subor, of course, was born to Russian parents, with a Russian name. Bruno Forestier might have learned to speak Russian fluently, but how does he, as the soldier says, pointedly, “know how it is in Russia?” Denis’s Forestier, a character who has drifted into the Legion after fleeing Geneva and whose past is mysterious, is influenced by her imagining of Subor himself, of the time he spent in the ‘wilderness,’ away from cinema. Questions of his whereabouts between the late 1960s and 1990s, and his reasons for ‘disappearing,’ are often raised in articles on his films for Denis. Jacques Mandelbaum describes his elusiveness: “L’art de vivre selon Michel Subotzki, c’est avant tout l’art du jeu et du mouvement. Changer de place, découvrir d’autres mondes, n’être jamais là où on l’attend.”¹⁶ Interestingly, there seems to be some doubt over Subor’s birth name – Mischa Subotkiof¹⁷ or Michel Subotzki? Serge Kaganski writes: “La trajectoire de Subor va prendre une courbe plus secrète, plus détachée que celle de ses pairs.”¹⁸ Denis says: “He couldn’t be satisfied – he’s the sort that’s always in search of something. It’s just as well he didn’t stay an actor: it would have killed him or he’d have ended up killing a director. He was already famous for taking a swing at [filmmaker] Claude Berri. He’s a Slav straight out of Dostoevsky.”¹⁹ The key traits of a Dostoevskian male protagonist could be described as boundlessness, unpredictability, fits of love of humanity and paralyzing despair, transgression and self-destruction, encapsulated, perhaps, in the character Dmitri Karamazov (of

¹⁶ Jacques Mandelbaum, ‘Michel Subor, *Petit soldat* pour Godard, n’a jamais pu se résoudre au mercenariat,’ *Le Monde* (4 May 2005), p.26.

¹⁷ As Subor’s birth name is given in the press release for Rialto Pictures’ 2013 re-release of *Le Petit soldat* in the USA < http://www.rialtopictures.com/FTP/FTP_petit/PSPressbook.pdf > [accessed 27 September 2013].

¹⁸ Kaganski, op cit.

¹⁹ Denis in Jonathan Romney, ‘Alien Heart,’ *Sight and Sound* (September 2005b), p.42.

Dostoevsky's final novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*, published in 1880),²⁰ a volatile, hedonistic man who lives according to his desires and clashes with his father. To describe Subor as a Dostoevskian figure is to imagine him as unpredictable, restless and transgressive. Subor's Russian-ness will become yet more important to Denis's presentation of him in *L'Intrus*, as I explore below. His Russian dialogue in *Beau travail* disrupts the image of Forestier as a French legionnaire and allows the history of Subor himself to rupture the narrative fabric. It invites us to question not simply the past of Bruno Forestier, but of Michel Subor. In *Le Petit soldat*, Forestier identifies as French; he requests two passports for himself and Veronika, "pour un français et une russe." Forestier details his reasons for loving France: "Moi, je suis très fier d'être un français, mais je suis contre le nationalisme [...] J'aime la France parce que j'aime Joachim du Bellay et Louis Aragon." But he also states his reasons for loving, or hating, other countries – not related to national pride, but to the pleasure or displeasure that their characteristics bring to him, personally. This suggests a lack of longstanding attachment to a particular place – something Denis sees, I would suggest, in Subor. Subor himself ascribes less mystery and significance to his absence, but refrains from providing many details of his life during this period:

J'ai pris mes distances par rapport à tout ça, le milieu du cinéma, etc. C'est difficile d'expliquer comment je suis sorti du circuit, c'est un processus complexe, comme une réaction chimique en chaîne. J'ai tout fait dans ce secteur, et on finit par être encoconné dans quelque chose d'artificiel, qui n'a plus rien à voir avec la vie, qui a tout à voir avec son nombril par rapport à celui des autres [...] Je n'ai jamais cherché à m'accrocher et c'est peut-être une forme d'orgueil... sûrement même. Je me suis éloigné de ce milieu pour ces raisons et puis parce que je me suis intéressé à d'autres choses, à d'autres gens qui me renvoyaient la balle [...] Pendant les vingt ans à éclipses, j'ai voyagé, j'ai fait des affaires... Je n'ai pas perdu tout contact avec le cinéma, j'ai fait quelques rôles et puis je suis toujours resté spectateur.²¹

We know, then, that Subor distanced himself from acting (save for a few roles in TV films), had no desire to be a star, travelled and conducted some kind of business (the nature of which he does not expose). This gives us an image of a secretive, itinerant individual and Denis

²⁰ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* (New York/London: Knopf, 1997).

²¹ Subor in Kaganski, op cit.

capitalizes on this and Subor's long absence to imbue him with a kind of mystery which breaks through the verisimilitude of *Beau travail* at points.

I would argue that Denis explores Subor/Forestier as an ungrammatical figure who ruptures narrative suture because, as with so many of the examples of ungrammaticality I provide above, she seeks to prevent the viewer from slipping into any position of passivity. This textual ricochet between perception of the 'real' Subor and 'fictional' Forestier may encourage the viewer to consider the real social circumstances surrounding *Beau travail*'s extensive context and creation. *Le Petit soldat*'s background is the Algerian War, a conflict arising from the Algerian people's stance against French colonial rule in that country. By the time of *Beau travail*, the war is over, the Legion practically redundant, but this regiment is still stationed in a former colonial outpost, and the Legion's very presence in Africa – a foreign presence – is a reminder of colonial rule. When Godard was filming *Le Petit soldat* in the summer of 1960, the Algerian conflict was at its height (Algeria would be granted independence in 1962); fear and suspicion of terrorist activity was rife in France and, to a lesser extent, in 'neutral' Switzerland, where the film was shot. For the sequence of Palivoda's murder by Forestier, Subor recalls: "We did it in the street with the camera hidden far away. I had a gun that was loaded with blanks. I fired. I fled. I was followed. A man cornered me. I pointed the gun at him. He stopped. I said, 'It's a movie.' He said, 'You should have said so.'"²² For Godard, like Denis, this slippage between the real and the fictional was important in terms of encouraging viewers to interrogate the film's social context. As Richard Brody writes:

Godard radically integrated documentary into fiction in some of his most critical indoor scenes as well: while filming the torture of Bruno, Godard subjected Subor to near-asphyxiation with a water-soaked shirt wrapped around his face, telling the actor, "We're going to do it, but not for long."²³

Brody also cites the testimony of a journalist, Michèle Manceaux, who recalls meeting Subor shortly after shooting ended: "I saw Michel Subor still bearing the marks from the electrodes on his wrists and ankles."²⁴ The physical marks of torture left on Subor's body, and the reaction of the public in Geneva to the 'murder,' position Subor as one who, during filming,

²² Subor in Richard Brody, *Everything is Cinema: The Working Life of Jean-Luc Godard* (London: Faber and Faber, 2008), p.89.

²³ Brody, op cit, pp.89-90.

²⁴ Michèle Manceaux in Brody, op cit, p.90.

was a presence who manifested the intrusion of the real upon the narrative. During filming of *Beau travail*, Denis recalls, all of the actors playing legionnaires only wore their uniforms during filming, “except Michel, who was wearing it all the time. Djibouti is full of real legionnaires. A lot of people thought he was really a commandant.”²⁵

Louis Trébor: The hunter and the hunted

Subor’s next project with Denis would be 2004’s *L’Intrus*. The film is inspired loosely by an essay by Jean-Luc Nancy, also entitled *L’Intrus*, in which the philosopher describes his experience of a heart transplant, recovery and his resulting thoughts of the new heart as alien in his body. Denis was introduced to Nancy after reading his essay on *Beau travail*, ‘L’areligion,’²⁶ and she asked if he would permit her to use *L’Intrus* in some way in her filmmaking.²⁷ Nancy has said: “Claire Denis n’a pas adapté mon livre, elle l’a adopté,”²⁸ and indeed the film is no faithful adaptation of Nancy’s text. The film’s central character, Louis Trébor (played by Subor) does have a heart transplant, but this is only part of the narrative, which deals with various meanings of the word ‘intrusion’: the foreign heart, the Northerner who travels to the Southern hemisphere, the father who attempts to become involved in the life of a son he abandoned long ago. Trébor, a man in his late sixties or early seventies, lives in the woods of Jura in Northern France, near the Swiss border, alone, save for two wolfhounds. He is active (we see him swimming and cycling) but his health is failing and he needs a heart transplant. He secures a heart through a black market transaction facilitated by a unnamed Russian woman (he demands a young man’s heart – not an old man’s or a woman’s). He travels to Geneva to access money he has placed in a bank, to South Korea to have his operation and purchase a boat, and then to Tahiti to seek his estranged son, whom he fathered there with a local woman many years ago. He does not find his lost son, but learns, at the film’s end, that Sidney (his son who lives in Jura with his young family, whom he sees

²⁵ Denis (2005a).

²⁶ Jean-Luc Nancy, ‘L’areligion,’ *Vacarme*, no.14 (Winter 2001) <<http://www.vacarme.org/article81.html>> [accessed 7 March 2013].

²⁷ Denis in Romney (2005a).

²⁸ Jean-Luc Nancy, ‘*L’Intrus* selon Claire Denis,’ *Lettres de la Magdelaine* (May 2005), pp.1-6 <http://www.lettre-de-la-magdelaine.net/IMG/pdf/_Jean-Luc_Nancy_L_Intrus_selon_Claire_Denis.pdf> [accessed 9 October 2013], p.1.

occasionally) has been killed to provide his new heart. Sidney is played by *Beau travail*'s Sentain, Grégoire Colin.

In addition to Nancy's text, Denis also drew inspiration from Robert Louis Stevenson's stories of the South Seas, and Paul Gauguin's journals and paintings documenting his time spent in French Polynesia: "Refaire une autre plage de vie, c'est un désir d'homme du nord que l'on retrouve chez Stevenson et Gauguin."²⁹ As with *Beau travail*, however, these intertexts circulate around one major source of inspiration: Michel Subor. As Denis says:

L'Intrus est né au point de convergence de ces deux sources. Non, trois: Michel Subor. Toutes les fictions que j'imaginai avec Jean-Pol Fargeau [...] partaient de lui, ou y menaient, je ne sais pas. En lisant le livre, je me disais: si ce n'est pas le corps de Nancy, c'est le mien. Mais c'était celui de Michel.³⁰

Denis's casting of Subor in *Beau travail* had revived his career: after this, he was cast in high-profile roles in Gérard Blain's *Ainsi soit-il* (1999) and Philippe Garrel's *Sauvage Innocence* (2000). Denis had hoped to work with Subor again, but waited until she could develop a suitable project.³¹ Subor's role as Trébor, the ageing adventurer living in the woods, isolated (and, in his eyes, protected) from the rest of society has been read as a continuation of his role as Bruno Forestier in *Beau travail* and, by turn, in *Le Petit soldat*. Douglas Morrey suggests that:

Forestier lives a quiet life, hiding out in the woods near the Geneva of his youth (and Denis shoots the Swiss city with an eye to Godard's 1960 film, a series of brief, jittery, low-angle establishing shots up at lettering denoting international banks and hotels). He lives under an assumed name, Louis Trébor, which is itself rather suspicious (Nancy (2005) suggests that, phonetically and etymologically, the name evokes "trouver," to find, while it is also a reversal of Robert). Meanwhile, he keeps an eye on the resurrected Sentain [...] [who] lives on the French-Swiss border with a young family. Most commentators on the film, including Nancy, interpret this character as Trébor's son, but

²⁹ Denis in Olivier Bombarda, 'Interview exclusive de Claire Denis à propos de son dernier film, *L'Intrus*,' Arté website, (27 July 2008) <<http://www.arte.tv/fr/l-intrus-de-claire-denis/838696.html>> [accessed 5 June 2013].

³⁰ Denis in Jean-Michel Frodon, 'Trajectoires de l'Intrus,' *Cahiers du cinéma* (May 2005), p.45.

³¹ Denis in Brigitte Baudin, 'Claire Denis, au cœur de l'autre,' *Le Figaro*, 4 May 2005, p.24.

Trébor's one direct appellation of him as such – "Fils" – is so casual it could easily be dismissed as a term of endearment from a former commanding officer.³²

Indeed, as it is Grégoire Colin who plays Trébor's son and, as we know from *Beau travail*, Forestier has a mysterious past which could well translate into a secretive present, it is tempting to read *L'Intrus* as a kind of sequel to *Beau travail*. Unlike Melville's Billy Budd, Sentain does not die for striking Galoup/Claggart, and his only known father figure, his commandant, may have followed him to Jura. However, as with *Beau travail*, Subor and his cinematic past, and the way they affect an ungrammatical rupture in the narrative fabric, are more important to *L'Intrus* than the characters he has played or, rather, the spectator's belief in them as figures who exist in a narrative vacuum, independent of the real figure of Michel Subor. Denis herself says: "I couldn't imagine Michel having a son in the Jura who wasn't part of the *Beau travail* family: it could have been either Denis Lavant or Grégoire Colin,"³³ but we may note that she does not say "Trébor"; she says "Michel." Denis mentions the centrality of Subor himself to *L'Intrus* on numerous occasions: "It is a biography of Michel",³⁴ "Michel was not an actor in the film. He was already himself in a way. You could see how much of himself – I think he was a good actor, Michel, but he would not believe in a character unless it was himself."³⁵ As in all of Denis's films, bodies' textures, volumes and sensations are key to the visualization of characters and events, and the dimensions, weight and sensations of Subor's body are captured with a lingering, haptic gaze by Agnès Godard's camera: we may note that he has aged since appearing in *Beau travail*, and certainly since *Le Petit soldat*. The wrinkles and liver spots around his eyes are depicted in close-up, his naked, sun-burnished torso and wide belly, dappled with white hairs, are markers of the time that has passed. Trébor is active for a man of his age (we see him cycling arduous roads and swimming in the lake near his home) but the failing health that age has brought him is clear in one of the film's earliest scenes, as he suffers a heart attack after swimming. If he is indeed (or once was) Bruno Forestier, he is certainly no longer the lean, speedy young man who threw himself from the window of the flat in which he was being tortured by the FLN, surviving almost unharmed. But still, as the young Subor wore the marks of Godard's torture in *Le Petit soldat* on his skin,

³² Douglas Morrey, 'Open Wounds: Body and Image in Jean-Luc Nancy and Claire Denis,' *Film Philosophy*, vol.12, no.1 (April 2008b), pp.27-28.

³³ Denis in Romney (2005b), p.42.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Denis in Robert Davis, 'Outtakes from Claire Denis Interview,' *Errata*, 28 April 2005
<http://www.erratamag.com/archives/2005/04/outtakes_from_c.html> [accessed 5 June 2013].

the changes in the actor's body 45 years later may draw us, momentarily, from immersion within the narrative to perception of how the real body of this man has aged. As Jonathan Romney writes: "In such scenes [the film] becomes an essay on Subor's physicality but also on his mortality, despite his character's dream of rebirth through a heart transplant."³⁶

Again, Subor's own past (or indeed Denis's lack of knowledge of and fascination with his past) factors in the development of the fictional character he plays. Before Trébor leaves Jura for Geneva (after having killed a young man whom he found wandering outside his home, and setting up the transaction for his heart transplant), he lights a fire, in which he burns two passports – one Swiss and one Russian. This suggests some secrecy, some fluidity of identity in his past, as with Bruno Forestier in *Beau travail*, and the Swiss passport recalls Godard's Forestier's residence in Switzerland in the 1960s. But the Russian passport, in particular, draws our attention to the past of Michel Subor; when he completes the online transaction to secure his transplant, the email confirming initiation of the procedure is written in Russian. As I discuss in Chapter Two, on *J'ai pas sommeil*, Russian actress Yekaterina Golubeva plays, in *L'Intrus*, a figure who haunts Trébor, following him around the world to remind him of his guilt, and they speak Russian to each other: she knows of Trébor's secrets and selfishness and speaks in possibly his, definitely Subor's, mother tongue to emphasize this. As in the scene where Bruno Forestier speaks fluent Russian in *Beau travail*, each example of Trébor's Russian past in *L'Intrus* is ungrammatical – breaking into our engagement with the fiction in order to draw us into questioning the real, secretive past of Subor.

Subor's past becomes yet more involved in the narrative when Trébor arrives in Tahiti to seek his lost son. He enters the forest, seeking, we discover, a shelter he once built there; a Tahitian man, of around Trébor's age, approaches him from behind, and says: "Louis. T'es revenu?" Trébor smiles wryly and turns to greet his old friend Henri. At this point, the scene cuts to a slightly grainy image, in bright colours, of a small boat, seen from the shore of an island; we then cut to a close-up on the face of a dark-eyed, dark haired young man, aboard the boat, looking out at a shoreline which is strikingly similar to that on which Trébor now stands. This footage shows a young Subor, starring in Paul Gégau's 1963 film, *Le Reflux*, an adaptation of *The Ebb Tide: A Trio and Quartette*, a novella written by Robert Louis Stevenson and his

³⁶ Romney (2005b), p.41.

stepson, Lloyd Osborne in 1894. In Stevenson's narrative, three men – Herrick, Davis and Huish – all fleeing disgrace in some way, live destitute in the port of Papeete in Tahiti (to which Trébor returns in *L'Intrus*). They board a ship, whose crew has been decimated by smallpox (no other sailors will take on the ship, for fear of infection), intending to steal it, sail to Peru and sell the ship and its cargo. They discover that the ship's cargo is champagne, and assume they will make an even greater profit than imagined, but soon realize that much of the cargo is in fact water and that the ship's previous occupants had meant to swindle buyers. The narrative's central protagonist, Robert Herrick, is fleeing his past disgraces and failures in his native England; he shows far more unease at the prospect of illegal activities than his shipmates, and is troubled by his conscience. He is a hopeless figure, unwilling to commit crime but unable to see any other way of surviving. Gégauff's adaptation follows more or less the same narrative as Stevenson's text, though it is set in the 1960s, with some deviations; by the film's end, Subor's character (the Herrick character) has become romantically involved with a Polynesian woman who asks him to stay with her, which he refuses to do because, he says, "I'm doomed."³⁷

Le Reflux was never completed by Gégauff and was never released; it was supposed to be his directorial debut. Gégauff, a prolific, highly respected screenwriter between the 1950s and 1980s (he was stabbed to death by his second wife in 1983), had neglected to secure the rights to Stevenson's story, and abandoned the project after much of the film had been edited. *Le Reflux* was later completed by director Roger Vadim (who also acts in the film) but has remained largely unseen by the film-going public. When Denis approached Subor about *L'Intrus*, she mentioned that some of the filming would take place in Tahiti:

Je ne savais rien alors du *Reflux*, ce film qu'il avait tourné en Polynésie, au début des années 60, écrit, réalisé et inachevé par Paul Gégauff, terminé par Vadim et Jacques Poitrenaud en voix-off, inédit. Je lui parlerais des Tuamotu, il disait "oui, oui, je connais," je croyais qu'il était juste blasé, mais il connaissait vraiment. Et ce film ignoré était une pièce évidente et imprévue du nouveau film.³⁸

³⁷ Denis in Damon Smith, 'L'Intrus: An Interview with Claire Denis,' *Senses of Cinema*, Issue 35, April 2005 <http://sensesofcinema.com/2005/35/claire_denis_interview/> [accessed 17 June].

³⁸ Denis in Frodon (2005), p.45.

This fortuitous exchange led Denis to seek out what existed of *Le Reflux*. For over a year, her search was fruitless but she discovered, eventually, that French film and television company Canal + had recently purchased rights to the film and would only allow sections of it to be used in *L'Intrus* for a high price.³⁹

As Beugnet observes, the engagement Denis creates between these sections of *Le Reflux* with her own film, narratively and visually, may be read as a commentary on *L'Intrus* central theme of transplantation:

Within this hybrid fictional universe, the presence of the sequences drawn from Gégauff's 1965 film may be understood as the visualization of Trébor's reminiscences; as filmic matter however – as extracts of related but older material inserted in the body of the more recent film – they are like pieces of tissue transplanted onto a strange body and, in spite of their similarities, only imperfectly integrated [...] The image of Trébor/Subor as a young man in Polynesia thus creates an uncanny sense of recognizance, and a forceful evocation of the porosity of transplanting *L'Intrus* to the screen. Denis effectively co-opts Nancy's writing to feed it into her filmmaking agenda: cinema envisaged as a practice of foreignness. Underpinning such a project is the willingness to explore forms of embodiment that move beyond the mapping of abstract concepts onto actors' bodies, to the materialization of the same concepts within the form and material texture (the "flesh" as it were) of the film itself.⁴⁰

Indeed, the transplanting or grafting of sections of Gégauff's film into *L'Intrus* reflects the process of transplantation which Nancy and Trébor undergo – their new hearts sit uneasily within their bodies, which begin to reject the organs; as Beugnet argues, the haptic visual quality of the excerpts of *Le Reflux* – grainy and faded – presents a jarring contrast with the clarity of Agnès Godard's photography in *L'Intrus*. The grafting of Nancy's text into Denis's film, furthermore, is no simple process – the two narratives are interlinked but divergent.

As I argue above, the greying of Subor's hair, the loosening of his skin and increasing girth in *Beau travail* and *L'Intrus* (when compared to his lean physique and dark hair in *Le Petit soldat*

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Martine Beugnet, 'The Practice of Strangeness: *L'Intrus* – Claire Denis (2004) and Jean-Luc Nancy (2000),' *Film Philosophy*, vol.12, no.1 (April 2008), pp.45-46.

and *Le Reflux*) draw our attention to the real passage of time which has affected the actor's body. We might suggest that the man Subor portrays in *Le Reflux* is a young Louis Trébor: as Douglas Morrey writes, the name 'Trébor' is "a reversal of Robert,"⁴¹ and Subor's character in *Le Reflux* (though I have not been able to find a complete list of character names) is an avatar of Stevenson's Robert Herrick. Certainly, comparisons can be drawn between Herrick's dubious past – his desertion of his family, abandonment of every job he has had and collection of aliases – and the itinerant, mysterious life which has led Trébor to form connections with the criminal underworld and to be a proficient killer. Stevenson describes Herrick thus:

Doubtless there were fortunes to be made in pearl and copra; doubtless others not more gifted than himself had climbed in the island world to be queen's consorts and king's ministers. But if Herrick had gone there with any manful purpose, he would have kept his father's name; the alias betrayed his moral bankruptcy; he had struck his flag; he entertained no hope to reinstate himself or help his straitened family; and he came to the islands (where he knew the climate to be soft, bread cheap, and manners easy) a skulker from life's battle and his own immediate duty. Failure, he had said, was his portion; let it be a pleasant failure.⁴²

If Herrick and Trébor are connected, then we may also draw links with Bruno Forestier, the deserter who becomes a spy, kills for his organization and surfaces years later in the Legion, separate from the concerns of the world and his previous life, as he wanders intertextually between Godard's and Denis's texts. However, as I argue vis-à-vis *Beau travail*, Subor is the vital intertext in *L'Intrus*. Denis states:

La véritable dimension de cette question s'est imposée d'emblée à travers le corps de Michel. Il ne s'agissait pas de filmer un vieil acteur. C'était un homme qui trimbalait un morceau de sa vie avec lui et ça n'avait rien à voir avec la vieillesse mais avec le passé. Et à partir de ce moment-là, je me suis rendu compte qu'il y avait tout une part de ce passé qui me manquait. Entre le tournage de *l'Intrus* et le *Reflux* de Paul Gégauff, il y a quarante années de vie qui ne m'appartiennent pas. Elles appartiennent à Michel (et je suis en intrusion vis-à-vis de ce passé).⁴³

⁴¹ Morrey (2008b), p.27.

⁴² Robert Louis Stevenson and Lloyd Osborne, *The Ebb-Tide: A Trio and Quartette*, Project Gutenberg Electronic Publishing (2012) <<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1604/1604-h/1604-h.htm#link2HCH0005>> [accessed 7 October 2013].

⁴³ Denis in Bombarda, op cit.

These “quarante années qui ne m’appartient pas,” Subor’s ‘lost’ years, are what fascinate Denis. Riffaterre’s reading of the sylleptic figure of Proust’s Madame de Villeparis as a figure whose significance exists not only in her current incarnation in the text but in her past, again seems relevant: “She comes pre-aged, as it were, an immutable figure with a past, deriving her significance from the legacy of that chequered past.”⁴⁴ Subor’s double presence in *L’Intrus* draws the spectator out of the narrative, inviting them to see not Louis Trébor, not Robert Herrick, but Michel Subor, the actor who embodies these roles. As Antoine de Baecque writes, Subor “porte sur son corps une mémoire du cinéma”;⁴⁵ some of these memories are known to us – Godard’s Forestier, Denis’s Forestier – but these missing years fascinate critics. Jacques Mandelbaum writes:

A l’image du film de Claire Denis, le parcours cinématographique de Subor, tout en glorieux pointillé, en acquiert une charge mythologique d’autant plus impressionnante. Elle fait de lui, selon l’expression consacrée, un grand fauve, un de ceux - ceci expliquant peut-être cela – qui n’aura jamais consenti à se laisser enfermer dans une cage dorée ou à capitaliser, en gros matou matois, sur une sauvagerie défunte.⁴⁶

As Subor suggests himself, there is no great ‘mystery’ to be unravelled but, as Mandelbaum suggests, his reticence to discuss his past creates an impression of Subor as the embodiment of “pudeur extrême, secret maximal, mystère incarné [...] un roman d’espionnage à lui tout seul.”⁴⁷ Subor’s early change of name (which, of course, is not an unusual practice for any actor) and the differing accounts as to his birth name only add to this sense of secrecy. And Subor’s history, cinematically, has revolved around playing roles in narratives which engage with subjects of colonialism and conflict. *L’Intrus*’ critique of colonialism and imperialism is clearest when Trébor goes to Tahiti; he wishes to buy the love of a son he abandoned; he wishes to live in a shelter on the beach (which we know he has occupied in the past, as we watch him remove a gun from beneath its foundations). As Denis says: “He has this selfishness. He can buy new items, new time, a better heart, a better life. He has the dream of many occidental white men, which is to live in a so-called island paradise. But, of course, this kind of thing never works. You always come back to the point where you have to face

⁴⁴ Riffaterre (1987), p.376.

⁴⁵ Antoine de Baecque, ‘J’aime que des cinéastes me lancent dans leur univers,’ *Libération* (4 May 2005), p.3.

⁴⁶ Mandelbaum (2005), p.26.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

yourself.”⁴⁸ His wealth is most likely ill-gotten: “Let’s just say he’s had a busy life. As soon as you see he has money in a Swiss strongroom, you know it has to be dirty money.”⁴⁹ Trébor personifies the wealthy Northern ‘adventurer’ who comes to the ‘primitive’ South, to take (or buy) what he desires which, in *L’Intrus*, is his son. While I would not suggest that Denis believes Subor himself has had a dubious, even criminal past, with connections to colonialist practices, the characters that he has most memorably played are linked by such themes. In Stevenson’s South Seas fiction, there runs a thread of “devastating critique of the effects of imperialist practice [...] a masculinity and an imperialism riven by uncertainty and conflict,”⁵⁰ as Guy Davidson writes, and to discover that Subor had appeared in a filmed adaptation of *The Ebb-Tide* would certainly have brought yet another dimension of colonial conflict and disillusionment to the mythology Denis was already creating for the actor. The forty ‘missing’ years of Subor’s life form the unspoken intertext in *L’Intrus*, allowing Denis to imagine the past of a figure who has embodied Bruno Forestier, Robert Herrick and Louis Trébor, but always carries with him the physical marks of time and secrecy of Michel Subor.

Henri Vial: Dismantled King

Subor’s next role for Denis was the ageing ex-proprietor of a coffee plantation in an unnamed African country in 2009’s *White Material*, when he was 74 years old. Henri Vial is in poor health, and has passed control of the plantation to his son, André, and former daughter-in-law, Maria (who is far more active in running the site than her ex-husband). Civil war is breaking out, and the Vials are warned by the French army to leave, but Maria refuses, desperate to finish her last order of coffee. Henri is a largely peripheral figure – genial, nonchalant and seemingly uninterested in the plantation or war. Even as tension rises and Maria’s son, Manuel, is subjected to a violent attack, Maria refuses to leave. At the film’s end, André has been killed by soldiers, Manuel has been killed in a fire and only Henri and Maria remain alive. Maria attacks and kills Henri with a machete. Isabelle Huppert, who plays Maria, had proposed that Denis adapt Doris Lessing’s 1950 novel, *The Grass is Singing*, set in former south Rhodesia

⁴⁸ Denis in Jason Anderson, ‘Interview: Claire Denis,’ *Eye Weekly*, 28 September 2006
<http://contests.eyeweekly.com/eye/issue/issue_09.28.06/film/interview.php> [accessed 6 June 2013].

⁴⁹ Denis in Romney (2005b). p.42.

⁵⁰ Guy Davidson, ‘Homosocial Relations, Masculine Embodiment and Imperialism in Stevenson’s *The Ebb-Tide*,’ *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920*, vol.47, no.2 (2004), p.138.

(now Zimbabwe) during the 1940s, when the country was still a British colony. The novel begins with a newspaper announcement of the murder of a white woman, Mary Turner, by her black servant, Moses. What follows is a flashback of the events leading to Mary's death: she marries a white farmer, Dick, and they live together on a farm which grows steadily less profitable, and Dick becomes ill. Mary believes firmly in white superiority, and treats her black servants cruelly. She is drawn, particularly, to one servant, Moses, whom she treats with more distaste than the rest of her staff, but eventually, as she sinks deeper into poverty and depression, begins to find his presence comforting and to depend on him. Moses, disturbed by her erratic behavior, and unable to withstand any more humiliation, kills her.

Initially, we may perceive connections between *White Material* and *The Grass is Singing*, narratively: both open with the end of the story which is about to be told, and proceed in flashback; the white woman of the farm/plantation is a more determined character than any of her male counterparts, she refuses to leave her home when faced with ruin or danger; the naming of Lessing's Mary and Denis's Maria recalls the figure of the Virgin Mary, a symbol of purity and maternity. In this respect, the names are particularly ill-fitting – Mary is not a mother, and she exerts great cruelty over her black servants; Maria does not behave tenderly to her son, voicing her disappointment in his laziness, and is willing to jeopardize her family's safety for profit. In both cases, the name Mary/Maria suggests the self-perceived purity and moral superiority of white settlers in Africa. Denis, however, did not wish to adapt Lessing's novel:

C'est un livre que je connaissais depuis longtemps. Je l'avais en tête à l'époque de *Chocolat* [...] Mais quand Isabelle Huppert m'en a reparlé, il n'était pas question de faire un film dont l'action se déroule dans les années 30 en Afrique du Sud, traitant d'un problème si lointain aujourd'hui. Par contre, je lui ai proposé de raconter une histoire plus contemporaine. Dans le journal télévisé, je voyais l'armée française qui évacuait des expatriés de Côte d'Ivoire... J'avais vu la scène de l'hélicoptère avec des blancs qui refusaient de partir.⁵¹

Instead, Denis chose to develop a story inspired partly by the civil war in the Ivory Coast, a former French colony, in 2002. After violent protests preceding the country's presidential

⁵¹ Denis in Falila Gbadamassi, 'White Material: les derniers feux d'une domination blanche,' *Afrik* (24 March 2010) <<http://www.afrik.com/article19316.html>> [accessed 3 September 2013].

election in 2000, troops who were to be demobilized mutinied, and the French army were deployed from their base in the country to hold back rebel forces. White inhabitants of the region, the economy of which is largely supported by agriculture, including the farming of cocoa and coffee, were advised to leave for their own safety. Denis co-wrote *White Material*'s scenario with French writer Marie NDiaye, whose Senegalese father returned to Africa when she was a baby. NDiaye published her first novel, *Quant au riche avenir*, in 1985, at the age of 18. Her 2001 novel, *Rosie Carpe*, which won the Prix Femina that year, tells the story of Rosie, a white woman in her twenties who, pregnant and already the mother of a five year old son, comes to Guadeloupe to seek her wayward brother, Lazare. The novel deals with themes common to Denis's work, most clearly the intruding presence of a white woman in a mostly black (formerly colonized) milieu (as we observe in both *Chocolat* and *White Material*).

Henri Vial, it would seem, has none of Trébor's rapacious desire for consumption. He is described variously as "sick, amiable – and fatally disillusioned,"⁵² "an oddly passive, even benign, presence (frequently seen near-naked),"⁵³ a figure who "pads around in kimonos like a deposed king."⁵⁴ When we first encounter him, he is lying in a bathtub, shot from behind in medium close-up, which places him in a vulnerable position – attacks in this film almost always come from behind. Maria dashes around the plantation in search of André, to inform him that their workers have fled; oblivious to her anger (or deliberately ignoring it), Henri mimics Maria's cries, muttering "André! André!" as he soaks in the bath. Subor looks even older and notably thinner than he does in *L'Intrus*, five years previously. The next time Henri appears is in a flashback (within the extended flashback that forms the film's narrative), after Maria has secured a new group of workers to continue harvesting the coffee and is asked by one of them if she is the plantation's owner; her mind drifts, and the scene cuts to Henri, lying in a hospital bed, attached to a drip. His breathing is ragged and he seems very ill. We cut to a shot of Maria (with shorter hair, possibly a few years ago), from the back, observing him. She says, "Vous m'avez fait peur." He responds, weakly, "Maria, je suis né ici, moi. La vieille baraque, c'est ma maison. C'est là où je suis bien. La plantation est à toi. Tout est à toi." In both scenes, it is notable that Henri is pictured reclining, shot from a slightly higher

⁵² Asibong, op cit, p.162.

⁵³ Adrian Martin, 'Film of the Month: White Material,' *Sight and Sound* (July 2010), p.50.

⁵⁴ Fernando F. Croce, 'White Material,' *Slant Magazine* (11 October 2009)

<<http://www.slantmagazine.com/film/review/white-material/4503>> [accessed 29 August 2013].

perspective – this emphasizes his physical vulnerability and weakness. And yet, in his nonchalance in the first scene, and his expression of authority to leave the plantation to Maria in the second, he asserts some control over his situation and environment. Henri stating that he was born in Africa would appear to defeat any notion that ‘Henri Vial’ is yet another alias of Bruno Forestier, the deserter who remains a white, Northern intruder as he traverses the southern hemisphere. If we look at Subor’s presence in *White Material* as yet another ungrammaticality, a breaking through of the narrative fabric to reveal the real presence of the actor, then Henri Vial becomes a continuation of Denis’s use of Subor, his cinematic past and his body, as markers of time, as personifications of the conflicts of the 20th century between France and its colonies. He wears a gold watch as he lies in his hospital bed, which recalls a scene in *L’Intrus* where Trébor purchases an expensive watch for himself in Geneva, a symbol of wealth and power, but also an attempt to buy ‘more time,’ as his body fails him. Maria also addresses him as “vous,” despite having been his daughter-in-law for some years (he addresses her as ‘tu’) – establishing that Henri remains the symbol of white, paternal control (even as it is deteriorating) in this narrative.

When Maria’s son, Manuel, strides into Henri and André’s home, steals a gun and attacks the black maid, Elisabeth, Henri approaches him, saying “tire-toi, petite merde,” but Manuel responds by pulling a grotesque face. Elisabeth turns to Henri and shouts: “les patriots vont tout vous tuer de toute façon – tous!” Henri is pictured in the foreground, out of focus, as she marches away, the blurring of his image emphasizing the weakness of his influence on the younger generation – the furious, humiliated Manuel whose white ‘authority’ has been undermined by the two black children who attacked him, and Elisabeth, the black maid who no longer needs to show respect to her white employers. For most of the film, Henri wears a purple dressing gown, as he lounges around his home; we never see him in ‘daytime’ clothing. Manuel steals this dressing gown after attacking Elisabeth, and brings the army of child soldiers to the plantation. As Ignatiy Vishnevetsky writes, “[Henri] remains an outsider to the people of the surrounding communities, a foreign (‘French’) authority regardless of his birthplace. When [Manuel], in his madness, decides to destroy that power, he does so by stealing and donning Subor’s patrician purple robe.”⁵⁵ Frantically consuming pills stolen from

⁵⁵ Ignatiy Vishnevetsky, ‘A Guide to the Things of White Material,’ *Notebook* (21 November 2010) <<http://mubi.com/notebook/posts/images-of-the-day-records-of-material-objects-in-cinema-6-a-guide-to-the-things-of-white-material--2>> [accessed 29 August 2013].

the pharmacy and sweets from the plantation's larder, his wearing of Henri's gown (also over a bare chest) symbolizes the rotting and irrelevance of white authority and what it has become – weak, humiliated, frantic and hopeless.

At the film's denouement, André has been killed, possibly by the rebel child soldiers, possibly by Manuel; Manuel himself burns to death in an outbuilding, locked inside by government soldiers. Henri walks around the smoking building, shirtless and slow; he is attacked from behind by Maria, who repeatedly batters him with a machete, covering her own face in his blood, as we see in a close-up shot. Denis recalls:

Quant à la mort du beau-père, avec Marie on en a imaginé plusieurs et on a toujours aimé qu'il se fasse couper la tête. Je crois qu'au fond on a toujours pensé que c'était lui la racine du mal et qu'il fallait bien arracher la dent une fois pour toutes, qu'on en finisse vraiment. Chaque fois qu'on écrivait une fin où le vieux sortait, on trouvait, Marie et moi, que c'était dégueulasse.⁵⁶

Henri is all that remains of Maria's life, work and sense of identity in Africa – it was his enterprise which first brought her here. Killing him, as Denis suggests, may be read as an attempt to destroy the rot which has plagued the foundations of her life, an attempt to start afresh in, perhaps a different country, with a new plantation, an opportunity to re-establish the life she knew. But this cannot happen – Maria is now penniless, even leaving this country is a dangerous, difficult prospect, let alone setting up roots elsewhere, and the old, long-established practices of white business being supported by Africans is deteriorating. Nicolas Azalbert suggests: "La décapitation de son beau-père [...] geste aussi fou et incohérent qu'il puisse sembler, représente pour Maria la part blanche d'elle-même qu'elle doit éliminer."⁵⁷ If Maria seeks to eliminate her whiteness, this clear visual signal that she is an intruder, her act is equally pointless. She remains white, a plantation owner who came to Africa on the trail of colonialists, and this cannot be changed. Until this scene, none of Subor's characters had died in a Denis film (or indeed in *Le Petit soldat*). Following the logic of Bruno Forestier-as-Trébor-as-Henri, Henri's beheading would mark the end of this identity-shifting, secretive character. However, if we consider Henri in the same way as I do Forestier and Trébor above

⁵⁶ Denis in Nicolas Azalbert and Stéphane Delworme, 'Trois femmes puissantes: Entretien avec Claire Denis,' *Cahiers du cinéma* (March 2010), pp.22-23.

⁵⁷ Nicolas Azalbert, 'Terre d'asile,' *Cahiers du cinéma* (March 2010), pp.17-18.

– as a sylleptic figure who is at once a diegetic character and the actor Michel Subor – then the story has not come to a close. Subor may yet embody another character in this lineage, and this reflects Denis’s argument that the legacy of colonialism cannot be exorcized with one blow. She says: “Colonialism exists. It’s not something I bring. It’s there, it exists, a part of history. It left traces and scars, you know? I don’t need to think about it. It’s there.”⁵⁸ There can be no easy ‘reconciliation’ between Africa and those who came to be there because of imperialist practice by simply expressing a love for the continent, a desire to remain there: “A love letter to Africa in a story like that would be terribly naive and stupid [...] Africa doesn’t give a damn about that [...] I say ‘fuck love letters.’ Honestly, it’s disgusting.”⁵⁹ Subor’s repeated presence in Denis’s films circulates around his embodiment of the legacy of colonialism – the conflict, secrecy and intrusion of white Northerners in countries which are not their own. His own ‘missing’ years and his visual ageing with each film allow him to act as a conduit for the secret histories of the 20th century and continued existence of these histories in the contemporary world.

⁵⁸ Denis in Megan Conway, ‘French Director Claire Denis on White Material,’ *Black Book* (19 November 2010) <<http://www.blackbookmag.com/nightlife/claire-denis-white-material-1.36061> > [accessed 28 August 2013].

⁵⁹ Denis in Marc Lee, ‘White Material: Director Claire Denis Interview,’ *The Telegraph* (1 July 2010) <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/culturevideo/filmvideo/7866813/White-Material-director-Claire-Denis-interview.html>> [accessed 29 August 2013].

Conclusion

“Each film is different. The film is already secretly dictating something you know, even when the script is not written. And the film is not your child. I hate when people say, “Oh, your films are like your children, yah, yah, yah.” It’s not at all the same process. The process of creation is completely different. Sometimes I feel for a long time that I’m the only one who knows, I’m the only one who can follow the track of the film. And sometimes the film comes through a hint, and it’s as if my process is about looking for the trace of something that will crystallize and convince me I’m not wrong.”¹

(Claire Denis)

Approaching the end of this thesis, I recognize that my work can only be regarded as part of a wider, ongoing body of scholarship on the work of Claire Denis, rather than a definitive analysis of certain aspects. As long as Denis continues to make films, there will be many cross-pollinating areas for research and analysis, carried out in the very spirit of openness and curiosity which Denis brings to her practice. As stated in my introduction, to investigate fully even just one area of Denis’s work, such as intertextuality, would be beyond the scope of a PhD thesis; indeed, I hesitate to use the word ‘fully,’ because the corpus of films addressed here can still yield secrets and unanswered questions for researchers. In any case, I have not addressed every film of Denis’s, or all of her collaborative projects, choosing instead to work with the texts which may be best illuminated through engagement with the theoretical work of Riffaterre and Ricoeur. There are no solid ‘ends’ to the narratives in Denis’s films: shadows of characters past flit across the faces of new characters, as the actors who portray them age and change before us; we find no easy resolutions for Sergeant Galoup, Louis Trebor, Maria Vial or any of Denis’s protagonists – we always leave them when they are still travelling, still chasing or fleeing something. Yekaterina Golubeva will never appear in another film by Denis, but she remains bold and bright, caught mid-flight from Paris as Daïga at the end of *J’ai pas*

¹ Denis in Elena Oumano, *Cinema Today: A Conversation with Thirty Nine Filmmakers from around the World*, (New Brunswick/London: Rutgers University Press, 2011), p.108.

sommeil. Equally, the conversation between Denis and Tindersticks is not over; after releasing what might have seemed a definitive collection of their music for Denis in 2011, they engaged with her once again, creating the soundtrack for her 2013 film, *Les Salauds* (I refrain from addressing *Les Salauds* in this thesis because I have not yet been able to view it and it will not be released in the UK until later this year; I also feel that, given the infinite possibilities for further exploration of Denis's work, that this thesis must reach a natural end). The aim of this thesis has been tripartite: to explore the under-investigated areas of intertextuality in the work of Claire Denis and to do so by engaging anew with the theories of Michael Riffaterre and Paul Ricoeur which have not previously been applied to filmic intertextuality.

I wished, initially, to survey and analyse 'Intertextuality,' as a whole, in Denis's films, but discovered during the process, however, that to position intertextuality as a static construct, a monolithic term with a capital 'I' which covers all interactions between texts, is to ignore the plenitude of enriching, often conflicting, approaches which we might use to explore textual engagement. Barthesian intertextuality, for instance, with its emphasis on the playful reader prompting the death of the author through utilizing their own subjective perspective to draw apart a text, bears little resemblance to the Riffaterrean variety, which encourages the reader to collect clues to decipher the puzzle of a text's engagements, and insists that authorial intentionality should be engaged with.

After reading widely on the various theories of intertextuality, I settled first on Riffaterre's theory of ungrammaticality, wherein the reader must seek out lexical inconsistencies in a text to guide them to intertexts which will then illuminate their understanding of the primary text. I was unsure, initially, how I might use ungrammaticality with regard to Denis (or to cinema at all), but found an affinity between the recurrence of meaningful gaps and inconsistencies in her narratives and, especially, their tendency to disrupt verisimilitude, and Riffaterre's theories. As Riffaterre writes, in 'Compulsory Reader Response':

The urge to understand compels readers to look to the intertext to fill out the text's gaps, spell out its implications and find out what rules of idiolectic grammar account for the

text's departures from logic, from accepted usage (that is, from the sociolect), from the cause-and-effect sequence of the narrative and from verisimilitude in the descriptive.²

Initially, we might imagine the 'grammar' of cinema to be the way in which narrative sense is made from the order of shots, perhaps referencing Christian Metz's syntagmatic analysis of the segments of Jacques Rozier's 1962 film, *Adieu Philippine*, in his *Essais sur la signification au cinéma*.³ However, the project would become more complex. The notion of reading the casting of actors as ungrammatical arose after I viewed John Schlesinger's 1979 film, *Yanks*, the story of a group of American soldiers stationed in a northern English town during the Second World War. The central male protagonist, Matt Dyson, is a young soldier who falls in love with a local girl who initially rejects him; Dyson is played by Richard Gere. I asked a friend, jokingly, how the girl could resist his advances, with Richard Gere being one of Hollywood's most successful leading men at the time of the film's release; my friend responded: "Well, she doesn't know it's Richard Gere. To her, he's just an average GI. If she knew he was Richard Gere... well, things would be quite different." This prompted me to recall Denis's double casting of Line Renaud in *J'ai pas sommeil* – as Ninon, and as herself, singing on the soundtrack. We must consider the following questions: what are the consequences for filmic storytelling when we, the spectators, maintain our awareness of the pro-filmic situation whilst viewing the film? What are the results of this slippage between fiction and reality, when an actor, shot or any other part of the *mise-en-scène* upsets the grammar of the film, which has been holding the narrative together, encouraging us to submit to belief in this fiction as temporary, credible reality? Through my research, I discovered several other examples of ungrammatical casting in Denis's films – in *J'ai pas sommeil*, in addition to Renaud/Ninon, we find Yekaterina Golubeva as Daïga Bartas, whose name links her directly to the pro-filmic world, as a reference to director Sharunas Bartas. In *Vendredi soir*, Grégoire Colin is not only the unnamed 'jeune homme au parka,' but still, always, Grégoire Colin, due to the jarring brevity of his appearance, which prompts the viewer to ask not why the character disappears so swiftly, but why Colin, one of Denis's most regular actors, does. And Michel Subor wanders ungrammatically throughout Denis's work, perhaps always more Subor than any of the characters he plays, repeatedly disrupting linear narrative and verisimilitude.

² Riffaterre (1990), p.57.

³ Christian Metz, *Essais sur la signification au cinéma* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1972).

The grammar of Denis's cinema is more complex than shots as words and scenes as sentences though, on occasion, it will be a particular shot which ruptures a scene's grammar, rather than the presence of an actor or other factor. In *J'ai pas sommeil*, a shot of a newspaper bearing the headline 'La France a peur,' used as a real headline by *Le Figaro* in the Paulin case, is a jolting reminder that Camille's story is not Paulin's and cannot be – it takes place after Paulin's death. In *35 Rhums*, a brief shot of Fritz Zorn's memoir, *Mars*, passed from René to Lionel, causes the viewer to pause, to ask what book is this, which might offer another layer of significance to the narrative? But we are misled – it is not the book itself which is vital, but a deeper, more secretive layer of significance in the connection it holds with the unnamed train driver of Hervé Pochon's *Lectures du rail*. Sound, furthermore, or, more precisely, the combination of it with image, also yields moments of ungrammaticality. In *J'ai pas sommeil*, Camille's ill-timed miming to Jean-Louis Murat's song *Le lien défait* highlights the artificiality of his performance and, in turn, the narrative's fictionality. In *35 Rhums*, the absence of 'correct' soundtrack could be perplexing, as Lionel and Joséphine re-enact, loosely, the narrative of Goethe's *Der Erlkönig*, but Schubert's music is replaced with *Tindersticks*'; we find that the *Tindersticks* track, *René's Death*, allows us to re-evaluate the important relation of *Der Erlkönig* to *35 Rhums*. In *Vendredi soir*, the sound of birdsong, a remnant from the film's shooting in dark, early morning Paris, is heard in a scene which, diegetically, occurs at night, drawing attention to the pro-filmic situation, and emphasizing how deeply the narrative is governed by Laure's subjectivity; as Line Renaud and Dean Martin's duet, *Two Sleepy People*, plays in Laure's car, this draws the narrative towards *J'ai pas sommeil*, and the dangers of Paris, but also the freedom and self-determination a woman may find in her car. In *Vendredi soir* also, instances of animation disturb the visual grammar of the film (and of Denis's cinema in general, with its tendency to meditate so haptically on the raw materials of actors' bodies and textural surfaces), leading us to share Laure's perspective, all her observations and imaginings.

Denis's work is filled with references to other texts which are often quietly placed, difficult, initially, to understand, and are always more than mere *clins d'oeil*. Denis does not make 'easy' films – as viewers, we are never permitted to relax into passive consumption of narrative, entertained yet unquestioning. Of course, much of this arises from the themes she tackles – murder, desire which is perceived as deviant, colonialism's legacy – but as an artist of film,

she harnesses its visual language in a way which uneases us, ruptures verisimilitude and foregrounds the unreality of fictional narrative, encouraging us to question *why* she does these things.

I arrived at Paul Ricoeur's work initially through Mary Orr's invaluable book, *Intertextuality: Debates and Contexts*. Ricoeur's emphasis on discourse as an event or performance, in which interlocutors are open and receptive to each other, as Orr writes, "listening and waiting, evoking not revoking, becoming more important than out-thinking and overcoming,"⁴ reflects the curiosity with which Denis engages with intertexts, her willingness to invite them into discourse with her own work, not simply to appropriate them. Orr continues: "This waiting with the other serves the same function as narrative 'gaps' where no explanation is given." Indeed, Denis's films' narrative gaps and absences of solid, cathartic explanations or 'truths' allows space for other texts to circulate with the narrative and visual fabric of her own, prompting questions from the spectator and opening fascinating textual connections. However, it was Ricoeur's emphasis on the performance of discourse which would prove most inspiring when connected to Denis. As Ricoeur writes, in *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*:

[D]iscourse is realized temporally and in a present moment, whereas the [Saussurian] language system is virtual and outside of time. But this trait appears only in the movement of actualisation from language to discourse. Every apology for speech as an event, therefore, is significant if, and only if, it makes visible the relation of actualisation, thanks to which our linguistic competence actualises itself in performance.⁵

Of course, each film is a performance itself; from the actors' personification of their characters in front of the camera when shooting, to the set-up of the *mise-en-scène*, to the projection of the film itself in cinemas. But the term 'performance' is not static; it has various meanings and connotations. I wished, referencing Ricoeur, to identify different types of performance which bring about intertextual dialogue in Denis's cinema, and not to subscribe to one simple definition.

⁴ Orr, p.164.

⁵ Ricoeur (1976), p.11.

Firstly, there is the question of an actor's performance style. Referencing Marvin Carlson's concept of performance intertextuality, this thesis assessed how certain actors' performances in Denis's films could be read as creating discourse – specifically through how and what they perform – with other texts, and the consequences of these connections on reading the initial text in question. Yekaterina Golubeva's performance in *J'ai pas sommeil*, for example, recalls in many ways her role as the unnamed girl in Sharunas Bartas' *Trys Dienos*, the film in which Denis first saw her; in both films, she speaks little, shifts between heavy slowness or violent outbursts, and wanders between locations, appearing to have no fixed abode. We see similar shots in both films, close-ups of her face, with hooded blue eyes, always observing. But there are crucial differences: the girl in *Trys Dienos* seems hopeless, bursting into manic, joyless laughter and being left alone in Kaliningrad at the film's end, whereas Daïga, despite her meagre means, controls her own fate, laughs with genuine mirth and speeds away from Paris as the credits appear – newly wealthy and free, if directionless. In my analysis, Daïga could well be the girl of *Trys Dienos*, escaping her isolation, in search of a better life; she is initially disappointed, but still chooses to leave of her own accord in the end – alone, but not desperately so. German actress and singer Ingrid Caven's role in *35 Rhums* may be read as an instance of discourse with the work of Rainer Werner Fassbinder, through her 'Fassbinderian' performance style: her flamboyant gestures, dramatic expressions, positioning of her in the centre of each frame and her verbosity all mark her out as Other in the 'Denisian' universe (where the language is composed of intimate close-ups, silences and communication via touches rather than words). Denis allows Caven to stand out, I suggest, to purposely create a dialogue between her own work and Fassbinder's; to emphasize that, despite their differences in filmmaking style and the performances of their actors, many of their basic concerns – to open up to the voice of the marginalised or the outsider, to question bourgeois satisfaction with unjust society and to work innovatively with visual and aural film language – are the same. When we come to *Vendredi soir*, Valérie Lemercier, the well-known French comedian, might appear initially to have been cast '*contre-emploi*,' but her performance, where she uses her body to communicate her character's thoughts and sensations subtly, can be read as engaging with the kind of physical comedy for which she is most famous, in slapstick roles. Equally, Vincent Lindon's role as Jean in the film can be viewed as creating a dialogue with Benoît Jacquot's film, *Le Septième ciel*: Denis was inspired by Lindon's role in Jacquot's film as Nico, a wandering, bereft husband and, through Lindon's performance – his silent, slow movements, punctuated by unpredictable outbursts, his melancholy smoking and hiding inside

the collar of his coat – we may read the history-less Jean (which may well be an assumed name) as Nico, at a moment of identity crisis.

There is also the question of performance within the diegesis, and how such instances establish connections with other texts. In *35 Rhums*, Lionel's irreverent flatulence, as he sits alone in Noé's flat, is a kind of social, bodily performance, asserting his right to be improper, away from his responsibilities as a father. But it also connects the narrative to Ozu's film *Ohayo*, in which young boys fart as a means of rebellious, secretive communication. Also in *35 Rhums*, as we witness the interplay between Joséphine, Lionel and Gabrielle as they dance in the bar, we are aware of the roles that each 'performs' – Joséphine struggles to maintain her role as dutiful daughter and Lionel deliberately rejects his role as responsible father. Again, this performing of social/familial roles opens up dialogue with an Ozu film, *Banshun*. The scene echoes a sequence in *Banshun* in which Noriko, while viewing a Noh play, witnesses her father assume the role of a bachelor interested in a new relationship which, it transpires, is a farce; he has no intention of re-marrying but means for her to see this exchange and choose marriage over remaining with him. In both scenes, the social performances take place in loci arranged for onlookers and subjects of the gaze – a dancefloor in *35 Rhums* and a theatre stage in *Banshun*.

On the other hand, Ricoeur's theory has also proved useful in investigating instances of live performance or exposition in which Denis has acted as an interlocutor to other artists: dialogue through time-based, space-specific happening is, I would argue, the most potent example of discourse being enacted as performance. Ricoeur focuses on moving away from language as virtual system or code towards understanding how it functions through use in the world, in real time and space. The series of live shows staged by Tindersticks with Denis's cooperation in 2011 demonstrate the long dialogue between them, but not simply as a retrospective, complete conversation: the band, working with Denis, selected images from her films to be projected, but these were not always accompanied by the fragments of soundtrack with which they appear in the films. The band played compositions which were inspired by certain scenes and the images onscreen were sometimes manipulated to create a new assemblage with the music. The very liveness of these happenings, in which no piece of music could ever be played exactly as it sounds on record, and differing factors such as acoustics, audience reception and even mistakes made by the musicians made each show a realization in real time and space of

the discourse between Denis and Tindersticks, how it has developed and how it continues. Similarly, it is useful to read the exhibition *Diaspora*, which Denis curated at the Musée du quai Branly in 2008, as a time and space-bound happening of discourse. Though live performance in the mode of the Tindersticks shows was not part of *Diaspora*, still we may read it as a finite happening, as the exhibition is now closed and is unlikely to exist again in the exact form it held in the museum. Many of the exhibits encouraged the viewer's interaction: for example, Yousry Nasrallah's film, *Le fond du lac*, had equipment for recording the sounds made by visitors and played these sounds back into the space, muffled as if under water; Caroline Cartier's audio installation, *Goguma*, encouraged the viewer to strain to make out the voices of children discussing their own identities beneath cacophonous sound interference. Denis's own piece, a series of filmed interviews with footballer and anti-racism campaigner Lilian Thuram, was present in the exhibition space as a series of clips, on screens spread throughout the space, prompting constant engagement between her piece and others. The visitor's own interaction with and reaction to each piece formed part of the performance of this discourse: as in Denis's cinema, visitors were not left to passively admire the pieces, but to interrogate their meanings and how they related to each other.

As Denis continues to make films, there will be more scope for analysis of her work. Her latest film, *Les Salauds*, was released in French cinemas in late 2013; as stated above, I refrain from addressing *Les Salauds* in this thesis firstly because I have not yet been able to view it, but also because there is, simply, insufficient space for more detailed research in this particular thesis. This film may or may not present more ungrammaticalities, but the casting of Michel Subor as Edouard Laporte, a corrupt businessman, and Vincent Lindon as Marco, a melancholic, private man who becomes embroiled in Laporte's dealings, suggests that there will certainly be further scope for reading Subor and Lindon's presences in Denis's œuvre as part of a discourse of performance. Furthermore, Tindersticks provide the film's soundtrack, and their engagement with Denis's images, again, will undoubtedly form another interesting conversation in their sustained dialogue. A full, meticulously detailed book on the multitude of types of intertextuality in Denis's work is a project which I would aim to undertake in the future, building upon the excellent work on Denis which exists already, especially the monographs by Martine Beugnet, Judith Mayne and Cédric Mal. As my bibliography demonstrates, Denis's work has been the subject of scholarly analysis on an international scale over the past decade; I hope, with this thesis, that I have added some original insights to this

corpus of work. This project demonstrates originality through the bringing together of Riffaterre and Ricoeur with Denis, as this particular assemblage of primary texts and theoretical texts has not been explored previously and, in any case, very little scholarship engaging the work of Riffaterre and Ricoeur with cinema exists currently.

Riffaterre himself never wrote about cinema – poetry was his central subject. As highlighted in my introduction, Siobhan Brownlie’s 2008 essay ‘Using Riffaterre to Rehabilitate *The Lover*,’ does explore the intertextual links between Jean-Jacques Annaud’s 1992 film, *The Lover*, and its source text, Marguerite Duras’s 1984 novel *L’Amant*; but Brownlie’s essay addresses language as written and spoken (examining script and novel), not the specific visual and aural language of cinema. Garrett Stewart’s 2007 book, *Framed Time: Toward a Postfilmic Cinema* refers to Riffaterre’s notion of an atemporal subtext, among theories by other writers such as Deleuze and Žižek, to explore the treatment of time in post-1995 cinema as linked to film’s move towards digitization. Both approaches are interesting, given there exists so little work on Riffaterre and film, but neither takes my approach of addressing how intertextuality manifests in cinema.

A particular area which merits greater investigation is the actor as ungrammaticality, which may well follow from studies of against-type casting. The possibilities for such analysis extend back much further than the contemporary period addressed above. In 1936, the French *chanteuse* Fréhel, a singer of both bright and melancholic accordion-led songs about Paris, often regarded as a precursor to Édith Piaf, played Tania, an overweight, forgotten singer, living in Algiers, in Duvivier’s *Pépé le Moko*. In one scene, Tania laments her days as a young, adored star and plays a record, which she describes as one of her own songs. The song we hear is in fact Fréhel’s 1926 recording of the song *Où est-il donc?* The song’s lyrics describe a distant, idealized Paris, full of love and hope. Many French viewers of the time would have recognized Tania’s song as a younger Fréhel’s and this moment of realization would draw the viewer out of the film’s narrative, leading them to see not the mournful Tania on screen, but Fréhel herself. The ungrammatical presence of Fréhel’s song points to the pro-filmic exterior, wherein the very real, visible decline of the singer, overweight and addicted to drugs and alcohol, was well known by the French public. Looking to American cinema, we may note Sam Peckinpah’s elegiac 1973 western, *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*, where disillusioned Sheriff Garrett (James Coburn) is charged with bringing down his old friend, the outlaw Billy

(Kris Kristofferson). Music by Bob Dylan (written especially for the soundtrack) plays throughout the film, and Dylan himself plays the (almost silent) character Alias. Dylan's music is the catalyst which tempts the viewer to see not Alias the character but, we might say, the character's alias: the well-known, socially conscious singer himself. This reflects how the film's portrayal of an American West wherein there are no unambiguous heroes, and the binaries of good and evil of old westerns no longer exist, encourages the viewer to consider the social landscape of 1970s America. As David Lusted writes: "Billy represents an Old West that must be killed off because of the threat it poses to the modern corporate world"⁶ – the film entered into a world where, with the horror of the Vietnam War, the Watergate scandal and a general loss of faith in authority, the traditional notions of American ambition, drive and vision no longer seemed true. In each of the films I cite, the strange doublings of actors can be read as possessing the potential to awaken the viewer's interrogative faculties and to discourage passive submission to the film image.

Ricoeur, like Riffaterre, did not write about cinema. His work on narrative has been engaged with film studies on occasion, but not as a means to explore intertextuality or performance. As noted in my introduction, Dudley Andrew's 2000 article, 'Tracing Ricoeur,' engages Ricoeurian theory with Deleuze's work on cinema, comparing Deleuze and Ricoeur's curiosity with regard to a wide range of texts and their emphasis on not relying on accepted philosophy or prescribed systems alone to make sense of texts. Yugin Teo's 2013 essay, 'Love, longing and danger: Memory and forgetting in early twenty-first century SF films,' uses Ricoeur to explore the recurrence of nostalgia as a trope in recent science-fiction film. My emphasis on discourse as performance (and, in turn, performance as discourse) is, I feel, an original engagement of Ricoeurian theory with cinema.

There is scope to continue using Ricoeur's theory of discourse as event to interrogate the various meanings and connotations of the term 'performance' in relation to cinema. We might look, as I have done vis-à-vis Ingrid Caven and Valérie Lemercier, at how an actor's sustained association with a particular director or performance style creates a dialogue with different kinds of films or performance styles. For a recent example, British filmmaker and artist Steve McQueen has cast Irish actor Michael Fassbender in leading or pivotal roles in each of his

⁶ David Lusted, *The Western* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2003), p.223.

three feature films – as IRA hunger striker Bobby Sands in *Hunger* (2008), a sex addict in *Shame* (2011) and a sadistic slave owner, Edwin Epps, in *Twelve Years a Slave* (2013). In each of these roles, he displays a recognizable performance style, using the movements and tension of his body as a vector for communication over words. The camera focuses on his hollow chest, rising and falling with his ragged breathing (in *Hunger*) or his damp brow and shaking hands (in *Twelve Years a Slave*), these shots illuminating his characters' emotions when dialogue does not. His roles with McQueen see him engage repeatedly and explicitly with the body's connection to the abject – excrement, blood and bile in *Hunger*, semen in *Shame*, blood and sweat in *Twelve Years a Slave*. It might seem unusual, then (*contre-emploi?*), for Fassbender to play Charlotte Brontë's Rochester in a gently lit, slowly paced contemporary adaptation of *Jane Eyre* (Cary Joji Fukunaga, 2011), a role which traditionally blends witty verbosity with physical desire which is never realized in the text; Fassbender's Rochester is a frustrated figure whose inner violence and misery is always painfully close to the surface, visualized through intense close-ups of the tension and contortions of his features and limbs. Thus, like Valérie Lemercier in *Vendredi soir*, Fassbender's intensely physical performance style and his way of communicating with his body create discourse between his roles in both political and romantic drama. Equally, we might explore Patrick Swayze's 'against-type' role in *Donnie Darko* (Richard Kelly, USA, 2001). Swayze had become, by this point, most famous for playing all-American romantic leads in films with simple, linear narratives of conflict and resolution, such as *Dirty Dancing* (Emile Ardolino, 1987) and *Ghost* (Jerry Zucker, 1990); in *Donnie Darko*, he plays a corrupt motivational speaker who secretly views child pornography. This would seem an instance of deliberately provocative, against-type casting, but if we examine Swayze's performance style in the film, it may well be read as akin to his appearances in more mainstream Hollywood cinema. His wide, confident movements, his impassioned, charismatic delivery of dialogue which suggests a fight for heroic self-determination against an oppressive force in *Donnie Darko* (he seeks to 'convert' the skeptical minority who question his intentions) echo the characteristics of his role as a good, honest banker who returns from the dead to avenge his corrupt murderers in *Ghost*, or even the working class boy who wins the heart of a wealthy girl in *Dirty Dancing*, combatting oppressive social structures through love. Kelly's casting of Swayze is not shocking because he is cast 'against type,' but because his charismatic, reassuringly Hollywoodian performance style is the same when he plays the embodiment of what is good and desirable in the American mainstream cinematic imagination, and what is rotten.

Equally, Ricoeur's theory may be further used to explore the meanings of diegetic performances within film narrative. In British director Peter Strickland's 2012 film, *Berberian Sound Studio*, a shy English sound engineer, Gilderoy, (Toby Jones) comes to a Roman film studio to record sound for a horror film. Italian actresses perform the dialogue of the film's female protagonists (some murderous witches, some terrified victims) in sound booths, but the sadistic director inspires real distress in them, as we see (and hear) when he demands that the feedback on one set of headphones be turned up to cause real pain and terror in an actress' screams; he also sexually harasses them. This performing of terror both in the film's narrative and metanarrative prompts dialogue with the Italian *gialli* horror films of the late 20th century which Strickland's film references, and their often voyeuristic representations of women; female sexuality, if it is anything other than heterosexual or passive, is frequently portrayed as deviant, often punishable by death. In Mario Bava's *La maschera del demonio* (*Black Sunday*, 1960), for example, the opening scene shows the nude back of witch Asa Vадja (Barbara Steele) being branded with the 'mark of Satan' in close-up, as she is restrained by two men. As she arches her back and screams, the scene suggests that her death throes are akin to orgasm. In Lucio Fulci's *Una lucertola con la pelle di donna* (*Lizard in a Woman's Skin*, 1971) Carol (Florinda Bolkan), a married, heterosexual woman dreams that she is having sex with hedonistic, drug-taking lesbian Julia (Anita Strindberg), which culminates in Carol stabbing the topless Julia to death as she caresses her. The scene features lingering close-ups of Julia's breasts and lascivious expression, and her screams as she dies are shot in slow-motion, her thread thrown back as if she has reached a sexual climax. We do not see naked female bodies (or indeed any footage of the film being made) in *Berberian Sound Studio*, but the traumatized aural performances of the actresses create dialogue with the voyeuristic, often misogynistic, representations women in *gialli*.

Furthermore, as I state in Chapters Four and Five, Ricoeur's theory of discourse as performance may be applied to instances of live performance, where factors including time, space, audience, performers and material performed come together to create a discourse in motion. There is especially ample scope for investigating how a film's images and meanings can be read anew when engaged with different sounds and music in a live context. I have already discussed Jeff Mills' presentation of Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* with his own soundtrack and Butcher Boy's screening of Enrico Coccozza's *Chick's Day* while performing a specially

written live score. There are many more examples which would benefit from application of Ricoeurian theory: Abel Gance's 1927 silent film *Napoleon* has been screened many times with live music written and performed by a variety of artists (for example, in 2000, the film was screened in London at a rate of 20 frames per second, at a duration of five hours and 32 minutes, accompanied by a live score composed and conducted by British composer Carl Davis); in 2004, Sergei Eisenstein's 1925 silent film *Bronenosets Potemkin* (*Battleship Potemkin*) was projected in London's Trafalgar Square, with live music composed by British electronica group The Pet Shop Boys, performed by the Dresdner Sinfoniker orchestra. One of the most interesting recent examples occurred in 2012, when British dub and electronica group Asian Dub Foundation were invited to create a new score for Mathieu Kassovitz's 1995 *La Haine*, a narrative of violence and disillusioned youth in a deprived Parisian *banlieue*, by interactive film company Secret Cinema. The show took place in London's notoriously violent Broadwater Farm housing estate on the eve of the city's mayoral elections. Following the shooting of Broadwater Farm resident Mark Duggan by police, riots broke out and attempts were made by police and the local council to cancel the event; it proceeded regardless and was staged again at Le Trianon in Paris on the eve of the French presidential election. Kassovitz had been involved in a tense debate with then president Sarkozy, who famously described rioting youths in Paris in 2005 as "*racaille*,"⁷ and this raised the event's profile in the press significantly.

As long as Claire Denis continues to make films which provoke debate, challenge spectators' conceptions of the cinema-going experience and pose questions about the meanings of community, identity and communication in the contemporary world, there will be ample scope for researchers to draw upon this spirit of curiosity to explore and analyse Denis's work in creative ways. I hope that, with this piece of work, I have contributed some original and productive insights to the already existing corpus of work surrounding Denis. The theories of Riffaterre and Ricoeur also present boundless opportunities for re-evaluation when engaged with cinema and I am pleased to have spent so long listening to and working to understand the voices of these very different theorists. Denis's thoughts on dialogue in cinema reflect much of this thesis' exploration of discourse and engagement with other voices and texts: "The type of story I like to tell is another sort of dialogue – it's the dialogue between sound and

⁷ Meeus and Pégard, p.30.

movement, and feelings and emotion. And I think a lot of films now are full of verbiage – probably because of TV [...] And I think in cinema we still have the choice to take our time.”⁸ Denis’s practice of opening her creative voice out towards other texts, authors personal histories and perspectives, rather than appropriating or silencing them, reflects the themes which recur in her corpus of work and demonstrate her ethical and political project: a desire to understand why certain voices were and continue to be silenced and appropriated by those with greater power (especially with regard to peoples of former European colonies) and an understanding that she cannot and does not wish to speak for the marginalized or oppressed, but to hear their voices, to listen intently and invite them into a journey of discourse, as fellow travellers.

⁸ Denis in Kira Cochrane, ‘I’m not interested in making conclusions,’ *The Guardian* (3 July 2009) <<http://www.theguardian.com/film/2009/jul/03/claude-denis-french-director-interview>> [accessed 14 January 2014].

Appendices

Appendix I

Jenny Munro, Interview with Mme. Line Renaud, 23 June 2011.

1. Comment Claire Denis vous a-t-elle approchée pour le film ?

Elle est venue à me voir dans une production de *All About Eve* au théâtre à Paris en 1992 – j’ai joué le rôle de Bette Davis. Je suis allée dîner avec Claire, et elle m’a dit “Vous êtes ma Ninon.” Elle n’avait pas de scénario et j’ai dit “Mais avec vous, Claire, je n’ai pas besoin d’un scénario.”

2. Votre mère, Simone, a joué tellement bien la mère de Ninon, votre personnage, dans le film. C’était l’idée de Claire Denis ?

C’était très drôle. Claire a dit à mon agent, Dominique, qu’elle doit trouver quelqu’un pour jouer la mère de Ninon, et Dominique a répondu “Mais Line a une maman!” [Renaud continues in English] You could see that she was my mother, it was very funny. She had no lines in the scenes when we were working with extras at the hotel reception, but she spoke anyway, that was the way she was. And when the filming stopped, she continued to give keys to the real tourists who came in, so she was speaking to English people, German people, Americans...! It was so much fun.

3. Vous avez rencontré Thierry Paulin vous-même. C’était difficile à filmer les scènes entre Ninon et Camille, le tueur, sans penser à cette rencontre?

Oui, j’ai même laissé Thierry Paulin avec ma maman pendant quarante minutes! Il m’a proposé un projet. Maman m’a dit qu’il était un garçon très gentil, mais quelques jours après nous l’avons vu sur les premières pages. Mais ce n’était pas épouvantable de jouer ce rôle parce que Richard Courcet n’est pas Thierry Paulin. Il est un très bon acteur, extraordinaire.

- 4. Est-ce que vous pensez que c'était un peu bizarre que Claire Denis a choisi votre chanson *Relax Ay Voo* (avec Dean Martin) pour le film? Qu'est-ce que vous avez pensé quand vous avez entendu la chanson dans le film, quand vous avez entendu votre propre voix ?**

Ça m'a beaucoup amusé d'entendre ma propre voix, et d'entendre cette chanson *Relax Ay Voo* dans un quartier où personne ne peut pas se relaxer car tout le monde a peur.

Appendix II

Jenny Munro, Interview with David Boulter (Tindersticks), 5 October 2011.

1. How did Claire [Denis] first approach you? Were you aware of her work?

Not really. She approached us when she was making her second film. We were going to play in Paris and she wanted to meet us. We found her first film, *Chocolat*, in the local video store and we liked it, so we met her backstage at our show and things grew from there.

2. Where did you get the idea for this whole project [the 2011 programme of live performances of the band's Denis soundtracks]? How did it develop?

It tied in with a few things. It felt like the right time. We've both been growing together over the years, Claire in her reputation as a filmmaker and the band in our music. The guy who organised the San Francisco film festival approached us a couple of years ago about playing music along with an old silent film, but we decided we didn't want to just play live music over a silent film, we wanted to do something different. It grew into an idea, of making something more like a show, like a concert.

3. At what stage in the filmmaking process does Claire approach you about providing a soundtrack? Does she provide you with details of the narrative, of which actors will be featuring in the film, or does she show you images from the film?

It usually starts with her sending us a script or talking about an idea, sometimes even before she's decided who's going to be in the film. Though if she has particular actors in mind, she'll tell us, so we have an idea of what a character might look like. The musical idea develops kind of like a character.

4. How specific is Claire in terms of what sort of sound she would like for a particular film? Do you suggest different ideas to her?

She generally trusts us to come up with something interesting. She might say that a piece of music looks better with a different scene. She might say that a certain piece of music is never going to work, but then we she sees image and sound together, it starts to make

sense. She's very open to suggestions. The initial feeling we have is often so strong that the first idea we come up with is often the best.

- 5. When you create a soundtrack for one of Claire's films, do you think about how it fits into the larger corpus of soundtracks you have already created for her, or do you view each as a completely new venture?**

Generally, a new venture. The most important thing is that the music compliments and works with the film. You also think, does it make sense without the images? We felt there were a few little things that didn't stand up, so putting everything into the whole package allowed us to see how the soundtracks worked as pieces of music.

- 6. On the same note, how do you think your Denis soundtracks fit into or diversify from Tindersticks' body of work as a whole?**

It's always a good side thing to do, a kind of diversion. We tend to use very different sounds (compared to what we use for Tindersticks) and take a different approach. We want to do something that feels like a voice or a character, rather than Tindersticks.

- 7. I know that *My Sister* was a strong source of inspiration for *Nénette et Boni*, but with a track like the instrumental *Ma Sœur* were you explicitly asked to create a variation on the existing song, or did you decide this yourself?**

We decided ourselves. Claire used some of the songs from the second album while shooting the film to give the actors a feel of what the sound was going to be like, and also to give herself a feel of how she would edit the film. Certain things were too ingrained in the music, so we wanted to produce variations, something original.

- 8. Did hearing *Tiny Tears* alongside the images of the film's actors affect your 'reading' of the song, or make you consider it differently? It is entitled *Petites Gouttes d'Eau* on the film's soundtrack: do you consider it a different piece to *Tiny Tears* on Tindersticks' second album, in terms of its meaning and connotations for you?**

It didn't change its meaning, but we did feel like the song had found itself, in a way, in that scene with the two people dancing, which shows that they're in love. When we re-recorded it, it felt like we'd reached the way the song was meant to be for the first time.

- 9. Claire has mentioned that the Tindersticks' songs *Seaweed* and *My Sister* have been sources of inspiration for parts of *Trouble Every Day* and *Nénette et Boni*. Are you aware of any other Tindersticks songs directly inspiring her films?**

She gets inspired by a lot of things and she's always open to different suggestions.

Sometimes she'll have a conversation with us, and that will change her idea of what she felt the song meant. But she never really discusses her other inspirations with us.

- 10. What were your main ideas when developing the soundtrack for *Trouble Every Day*?**

A lot of non-musical sounds are used, from the hotel, for instance.

Just watching the film. There were certain creaks, general noises, all those people locked in hotel rooms, and the maids walking down the corridors. We always try to use some of the source sounds from the film in the music, like trains or a coffee percolator. There's so little dialogue in Claire's films that these sounds can help you through the film. The soundtrack shouldn't just be background noise, but it shouldn't be too in your face either. The sound of footsteps moving down a corridor is a way of getting down that corridor yourself when you're watching the film.

- 11. Is there a particular reason that *Trouble Every Day* is the only film for which Tindersticks created a new song with vocals?**

We read the script and it sparked an idea in Stuart's mind, it felt like the right film to have a song. We were playing *Trouble Every Day* 18 months before the film came out. The last few soundtracks we've done have all been instrumental, and we wanted to have another song at the opening of *35 Rhums*, but in the end the piece of music we had just fitted that opening scene so well.

- 12. For me, the connection between Claire's films and Tindersticks' music is in their shared sensuality. Her films are very much about physical texture and sensation, and I find the sounds and vibrations in your work similarly evocative. Is this a connection you perceive yourselves?**

In Claire's films, it's not so important to tell the story with the beginning, middle and end, and similarly making music doesn't have to make sense: it doesn't have to be based around verse, chorus, verse, it can be led by feeling and emotion. In Claire's films you get

these shots of colours and movements, instead of just the structure of a story, which makes it closer to a pure art-form.

13. What sort of atmosphere did you wish to evoke with the *35 Rhums* soundtrack? The melodica has an old-fashioned French feel.

We were thinking of the film *Genevieve* [a British film directed by Henry Cornelius] with the car race and Larry Adler's harmonica. It's jaunty music, travelling music, and we wanted to do something like that, but in a Tindersticks sad kind of way. We thought about using an accordion, but then would people think it was trying to sound too French? The melodica has something of the accordion about it, it sounds slightly old. It [the intro song for *35 Rhums*] was a song I'd done at home, which I'd intended for *Songs for the Young at Heart* [an album of songs for children, compiled by Boulter and Staples, featuring various artists, released in 2007] but it never made it in the end, so it was left over. The main theme of the film is the father's connection with his daughter, so there's a kind of childish feel to some of the music.

14. Claire often chooses wonderful pop songs for her films, like the Commodores' *Nightshift* in the case of *35 Rhums*. How do you feel these songs engage with or sit alongside the soundtracks you create?

They usually work well together. Sometimes Claire can't get permission to use a song, so she chooses something else that has a similar feeling, something that evokes a similar feeling from a moment in her past, it's very personal. We've only discussed (her choice of pop songs) once or twice, it's not something we usually do.

15. Again there are non-musical sounds used in the soundtrack for *White Material*, as well as Terry Edwards' [an English musician who has played trumpet with Tindersticks on numerous occasions] wonderful horn-playing. What were your thoughts and inspirations for this soundtrack?

We were thinking of a group of Europeans coming to the end of their time in Africa, the people are taking the land back and this European mastery is losing its hold and decaying. We didn't want to do anything that had any connection with African music. I had an old harmonium that was falling to pieces which reflects this decaying of the old power. It made me think of how the first Europeans who came to Africa were missionaries who

would carry instruments like this harmonium with them and play religious songs to people, and the instrument is now so old that it's falling apart. Musically, *White Material* is my favourite film, it was like making a collage instead of a soundtrack.

16. In the band's live performance of the soundtracks in London, you showed a clip from *Vendredi soir* accompanied by Stuart's solo song *Friday Night* [from Staples' solo album, *Lucky Dog Recordings 03-04*, released in 2005] and a clip from *L'Intrus* with Tindersticks' song *The Other Side of the World* [from Tindersticks' 2007 album, *The Hungry Saw*]. Why did you make these choices, and did you consult Claire about them in advance?

Yes, well we had to get the images from Claire. Claire asked us about doing the soundtrack for *Vendredi soir*, but we didn't feel we could approach it in the right way. It was a difficult time as we were finishing an album [2003's *Waiting for the Moon*], and a difficult time for the band in general, so Dickon did it on his own. Stuart's song was always influenced by the film, by the feelings within the film, and of course we might have been a part of the film if we'd done the soundtrack. The images and song just felt right together. Stuart wrote *The Other Side of the World* just after he'd done the soundtrack for *The Intruder* [*L'Intrus*] so he was thinking a lot about the film, the ocean swaying and the purple sky.

17. Do you have any more projects lined up with Claire Denis? What are Tindersticks working on?

Claire's always got fresh ideas, she phones Stuart every three or four months, saying she might be planning a musical or a sci-fi. We've been on a long journey with Claire and it feels like we're putting a full stop under a certain part of our work. If we were going to do a score now with Claire, it would have to be something completely different. Tindersticks are just getting to the end of making an album, which we'll be mixing and then touring later.

Appendix III

Jenny Munro, Interview with Stuart Staples (6 October 2011).

1. Stuart, how did Claire first approach you? Were you aware of her work?

We weren't at the time – though I don't think we were aware of very much in general at the time! It was a long time ago now, 1994. She introduced herself after a show we played in Paris. She had gotten really into our second album and was getting something from it, so she asked if we'd like to be involved with *Nénette et Boni*. At the time I wasn't expecting us to have such a long relationship.

2. Where did the idea for this project first come from? How did it develop?

When we'd been working on *White Material*, we had a feeling about playing live music with images from the film, purely just from *White Material*. But then the idea kind of grew and it seemed a shame to limit it to one film. It grew into a monster that we've been wrestling with. I think the concert crosses different zones: sometimes we step back and it's more about pure cinema, then we'll come forward and it's more a musical show. It's grown very organically, I don't think we thought it would get so complicated.

3. At what stage in the filmmaking process does Claire approach you about providing a film's soundtrack? Does she provide you with details of the narrative, of which actors will be featuring in the film, or does she show you images from the film?

It starts with her sending us the script, and if it's in French she'll have it translated for us. She'll sometimes send us occasional dailies and stills. But the biggest information probably just comes through conversation, and Claire letting us know what she's thinking about. We have the luxury of having this long relationship together, and a depth of knowledge about each other's work. I think having a rough idea of the film, the speed, the pace, the colours, those are probably the elements that are most inspiring.

4. How specific is Claire in terms of what sort of sound she would like for a particular film? Do you suggest different ideas to her?

The greatest thing and the hardest thing is that it's often like a blank canvas. She never says I want sound here and here or it has to sound like this. It's totally up to us to react. So

it feels like we're having a real conversation in that way, and we never feel inhibited. The decisions Claire makes in the editing process can affect how we feel and react to the film, but equally what we do can affect her decisions in the editing process.

- 5. When you create a soundtrack for one of Claire's films, do you think about how it fits into the larger corpus of soundtracks you have already created for her, or do you view each as a completely new venture?**

I think they've all been really new things for us. Each one has asked something different from us, and we've had to find the film musically. Each film involves a radically different palette of sounds, it's just about letting the film get inside you.

- 6. On the same note, how do you think your Denis soundtracks fit into or diversify from Tindersticks' body of work as a whole?**

It's having the opportunity and desire to step outside of our own little world, where we're just chasing our own ideas. Having this long term relationship with Claire has been a big factor in keeping us fresh in our approach to our music. She asks us to go somewhere and when we come back, we've changed through the process. I think it has a lot to do with why we still have a collective desire to keep on making music and why we don't run out of steam.

- 7. I know that *My Sister* was a strong source of inspiration for *Nénette et Boni*, but with a track like the instrumental *Ma Sœur*, were you explicitly asked to create a variation on the existing song, or did you decide this yourself?**

The song felt like it was inside the film already, and it gave us a way into the film.

Musically, *My Sister* is so playful and colourful, and so is *Nénette et Boni* as a film. It gave us a starting point to explore the rest of the film. I can't think of any other examples where that's happened.

- 8. Did hearing the song *Tiny Tears* alongside the images of the film's actors affect your 'reading' of the song, or make you consider it differently? It is entitled *Petites Gouttes d'Eau* on the film's soundtrack: do you consider it a different piece to *Tiny Tears* on Tindersticks' second album, in terms of its meaning and connotations for you?**

I think it's the definitive version. I always think the version we did for *Nénette et Boni* helped us to get to something we'd missed. It helped us to see the song in a different way, and to make it more tender, in a way.

- 9. Claire has mentioned that Tindersticks' songs *Seaweed* and *My Sister* have been sources of inspiration for parts of *Trouble Every Day* and *Nénette et Boni*. Are you aware of any other Tindersticks songs directly or indirectly influencing her work?**

Before she even wrote the script, the things Claire was interested in for *Trouble Every Day* sowed the seeds for the song. And the song had a big effect on her, and the way she went about finishing *Trouble Every Day*. I don't think she had expected to start the film with a song. The song is very much about desire [...] against a film that's quite tough and brutal. The music and the song helped to structure the film.

- 10. What was your main source of inspiration for the *Trouble Every Day* soundtrack? A lot of non-musical sounds are used, such as sounds from the hotel.**

When you're working on a soundtrack, non-musical sounds become so important, because they're just as much part of the music. It's something that runs through all the work. For *White Material*, the first thing I asked was to hear background source sounds from the location in Africa. You think, how do we get inside the film? Non-musical sounds are a starting point and you can build a connection with the film from there.

- 11. Is there a particular reason that *Trouble Every Day* is the only film for which Tindersticks created a new song with vocals?**

It was the only one that asked for it. I think you have to be really careful with singing and words with films in general. You spend so long trying not to be clumsy with words because they can take away more than they bring to a film. But the feeling of this film got inside me and made me want to write a song, in a way I haven't felt with any of the other films.

- 12. For me, the connection between Claire's films and Tindersticks' music is in their shared sensuality. Her films are very much about physical texture and sensation, and I find the sounds and vibrations in your work similarly evocative. Is this a connection you perceive yourselves?**

The biggest connection is a sense of space, not just a physical sense of space, but within ideas. A film or piece of music doesn't just have to be one thing at one time, there's so much ambiguity. You can find your own way through it, and it doesn't have to be straight and obvious.

13. What sort of atmosphere did you want to evoke on your solo soundtrack for *L'Intrus*?

It's much harder, less melodic than *Nénette et Boni* or *Trouble Every Day*. Why did you approach this as a solo project?

The band was kind of in disarray and I was working on my first solo album. I didn't feel any kind of melody from the Michel Subor character [Louis Trebor] at all, which was a difficult point to start from. Then there's the idea of the heart transplant [...] a failing heart. A kind of broken rhythm that sounds hurt and taut as a beat. I found the main guitar figure and built it from there but I hadn't set out to make it tough and hard.

14. What sort of atmosphere did you wish to evoke with the *35 Rhums* soundtrack? The melodica has an old-fashioned French feel.

It was kind of a coincidence. There was an idea of David's, a piece of music that he'd been working on. I arranged to meet Claire to talk about *White Material*, as she edited *35 Rhums* and *White Material* back to back. She showed me the opening credits of *35 Rhums* which she'd just put together and it was one of those moments, there was a tremendous connection. I had a file of the opening credits so I took it home and put it with the music and it just fitted perfectly with the rhythm, the change in pace.

15. Claire often chooses wonderful pop songs for her films' soundtracks, such as the commodores' *Nightshift* in *35 Rhums*. How do you feel your own music for the films fits around and engages with such pop songs?

The music in *35 Rhums* is kind of internal. It always feels kind of separate to me, I don't feel any obligation to react with it. The songs take you out of the internal world. Claire never overlays these songs, she always puts them in real settings, with *God Only Knows* [by the Beach Boys] and the jukebox in *Nénette et Boni* and *Nightshift* in the bar in *35 Rhums*.

16. Again there are non-musical sounds used in the soundtrack for *White Material*, as well as Terry Edwards' wonderful horn-playing. What were your ideas regarding this soundtrack?

We saw the rough edit, and David and I were going in different directions. It made me want to experiment with sounds [...] abstract rough sketches. The first sound I had was a wine glass being tapped by a lucky cat, and that formed the basis of the soundtrack, it's all the way through it. I wanted to find the music of the earth, the earth in pain itself, in a way. The essence of the music is in the earth, in the trees, it's not character-based.

17. Stuart, in the band's live performance of the soundtracks in London, you showed a clip from *Vendredi soir* along with your solo record *Friday Night*. Did the film inspire the song?

Vendredi soir was something we started to think about as a band, but it coincided with us making the album *Waiting for the Moon* and I felt we couldn't do both well enough. It's been nice to bring the song and the images back together again, it feels like finishing a circle.

18. And you also showed a clip from *L'Intrus* with Tindersticks' song *The Other Side of the World*. Why did you choose these songs and these images? Did you consult Claire beforehand?

Claire was very much involved as we put the show together and tried to find a shape for it. She'd tell us if she needed more context or if this or that needed to happen. *The Other Side of the World* sort of came from sitting in front of that clip from *L'Intrus* for hours and that's very much there in the rhythm of the song and the feeling of it. It's good to bring them both back together.

19. Have you any projects lined up with Claire that you can speak about? And what's next for Tindersticks and yourself?

We're just finishing off our new album. Claire has many, many ideas, I don't know which way she'll go next. The funny thing was that after fifteen years of working together, we'd never examined or talked about what we'd done. Releasing this box set sort of forces us to look backwards and weigh up our relationship.

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