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## **The Sensual, the Monstrous, and the Everyday in the Cinemas of Claire Denis and François Ozon**

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I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Amy E. Bertram entitled "The Sensual, the Monstrous, and the Everyday in the Cinemas of Claire Denis and François Ozon." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in French.

Christine A. Holmlund, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

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Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

**The Sensual, the Monstrous, and the Everyday in the Cinemas of Claire Denis and  
François Ozon**

A Dissertation Presented for  
The Doctor of Philosophy  
Degree  
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Amy E. Bertram  
May 2014

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## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Phil and Kathy Bertram, for their unconditional love and support. I dedicate it in loving memory to my grandparents, Thelma and Marshall Bertram, whose service to higher education inspired me to become a teacher. I also dedicate it to Frida Kahlo, my sweet cat who almost lived long enough to see it through, and to my dear canine companion, Rusty Shiitake, who came in to my life as PhD coursework began.

## **Acknowledgements**

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## **Abstract**

Claire Denis and François Ozon create thought-provoking, compelling, sensual films that intersect in terms of theme, genre play, and adaptation. The purpose of this study is to examine their work for points of connectivity. Phenomenology, postcolonial theory, queer theory, and globalization studies inform the analysis. As French filmmakers whose careers began at about the same time, Denis and Ozon have both produced almost a film a year. They continue to make new films. They have been grouped with other contemporary French filmmakers under labels such as New French Cinema, New French Extremity, or French Queer Cinema, yet their films have rarely been examined together. This study does just that, providing detailed analyses of fourteen films that reveal deep affinities between the two. They share narrative, thematic, and cinematic choices. Their films similarly immerse spectators in haptic experiences. They concentrate on desire, sexuality, and relationships; on violence and horrific acts; on death and dying. While Denis's films are often concerned with the repercussions of globalized life, focusing on outsiders in urban settings in France and in formerly colonized countries around the world, and Ozon's films frequently take place in rural locations in France, both bear witness to the complex and contradictory aspects of the quotidian lives of ordinary people. The fourteen films studied here may often provoke a sense of malaise, or melancholia, yet they also proffer enchantment, sensuality, and rare moments of beauty.

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## Introduction: Denis-Ozon Connections

Claire Denis and François Ozon are distinctly different filmmakers. Yet, certain of their films pair well together. They have both sustained the prolific production of nearly one film a year. Numerous critical studies in scholarly journals and book-length auteur studies (two for Denis [Beugnet and Mayne] and two for Ozon [Schilt and Rees-Roberts]) secure their status as important contemporary filmmakers. François Ozon's work is more readily and widely accessible. Still, both his and Denis's films are typically marketed inside and outside France as auteur films and as art house fare.

In this dissertation, I will analyze narrative and cinematic components of several films by Denis and Ozon in chapters that are thematically organized. Each chapter considers a pairing or a group of three films. Points of connectivity between Denis and Ozon include the use of adaptation, creation of haptic spaces, portrayal of desire, sexuality, and relationships, inclusion of intertextual references, consideration of the human capacity for violence and monstrous acts, and depiction of death and dying that is unrelated to murder. I will engage with postcolonial, phenomenological, and queer theories in order to analyze their works. In certain chapters, I will also discuss genre and reference ongoing collaborations with screenwriters, editors, directors of photography, cinematographers, and actors.

Without knowledge of French culture and history, especially about the often-thorny relationships between France and her former colonial dependents, pre- and post-Independence, one cannot fully appreciate the narrative content of many of Denis's films. Her films have received limited distribution, usually screening only on festival circuits

and in art house theaters.<sup>1</sup> She often chooses difficult subject matter, employs ambiguous and elliptical narratives, and produces a complex cinematic style. Her protagonists are typically marginal figures who, in passing, reveal what contemporary, urban, globalized life is for many in France and abroad. Some of her films are set in Paris or Marseilles, while others take place in formerly colonized countries such as Cameroon, Djibouti, or Tahiti. Certain of her films have garnered a lot of critical attention from both Anglophone and Francophone scholars, most notably *Beau travail* (*Good Work*).

Ozon's films are generally easier to understand on a surface level, but they also reveal layers of complexity, making the experience of his films more meaningful with greater familiarity of French culture, history, and politics. More accessible to Anglophone audiences due to his frequent use of theatrical and comedic elements, not to mention English-speaking actors, his films have received critical attention from especially British and American scholars. By contrast with Denis, almost all his protagonists are white. His settings are typically in France and often rural.

Although this dissertation will not discuss other filmmakers, it is important to note that Denis and Ozon have been considered together with other of their contemporaries, especially Catherine Breillat. Schilt pairs Ozon and Breillat, Breillat and Denis have been interviewed together, and Beugnet also links them.<sup>2</sup> Denis's and Ozon's films, minus a few exceptions, do not leave one with the sort of unsettled, bleak feeling

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<sup>1</sup> A majority of both Denis's and Ozon's feature films are now available through mainstream rental companies such as Netflix. However, Denis's documentaries and short films are harder to come by, for purchase or for rent, in either the U.S. or France. Both directors' films can be seen occasionally on French television or at international film festivals, and now such streaming services as mubi.com have some available for rent. Most of their feature-length films have had theatrical releases in the U.S.

<sup>2</sup> For example, see Sklar.

that many of Breillat's films do. A few examples of their films that do challenge spectators in that way include Denis' *Trouble Every Day*, *S'en fout la mort* (*No Fear No Die*), and *White Material*, and Ozon's *Les amants criminels* (*Criminal Lovers*) and the beginning of *Le Refuge* (*Hideaway*).<sup>3</sup> While Ozon and Denis produce works that are often considered erotic or which overtly explore sexuality, their films would not be categorized as pornographic; Breillat's films have often been linked directly to pornography.<sup>4</sup>

Certain aspects of Denis's and Ozon's formations and personal histories are indispensable to the study of their works. Both began with formal training at the prestigious French film school. Known as la FÉMIS, an acronym for *Fondation européenne pour les métiers de l'image et du son*, when Ozon graduated in 1992, though it was still known as the IDHEC, for *Institut des hautes études cinématographiques*, when Denis received her diploma in 1972.<sup>5</sup> Denis immediately began working in film production. She had almost twenty years experience as first assistant to such well-known filmmakers (important independent auteurs) as Dušan Makavejev, Jacques Rivette, Wim Wenders, Jim Jarmusch, and Costa Gavras, before she directed her first feature, *Chocolat*, in 1985.

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<sup>3</sup> The two Denis titles given in English are originally in English, not French.

<sup>4</sup> Only a few images can even be classified as overly provocative in Ozon's work, such as the inclusion of an erect penis in *Sitcom*. While Breillat's work is closer to pornography in that it contains raw images of sexual encounters, her work is, in my mind, hard to classify as pornographic. Devoid of any erotic charge, it is, in fact, anti-pornographic, instead overtly critiquing male/female power relationships. As Tim Palmer notes, Breillat's films "use sex to emblemize the power struggles that arise within patriarchal societies, gender duels which Breillat intensifies through deliberate casting mismatches" (62).

<sup>5</sup> The French film school is now known as *l'École nationale supérieure des métiers de l'image et du son*.

Both Claire Denis and Francois Ozon are “auteurs”—in the multiple artistic and economic senses the term carries in France. As such, each of them has carved out a unique style, a recognizable signature seen across their films. The designation usually means that filmmakers have procured independent financing, ensuring that they maintain control of their final products. Filmmaking, by its very nature however, is a collaborative art, though the notion of the auteur denotes an overarching control of the process by the key figure of the filmmaker. Denis and Ozon serve as contemporary examples of filmmakers who maintain control over their films, from concept to final cut.

Auteur theory took shape in France in the late 1940s, Alexandre Astruc’s notion of *cinéécriture* and the *caméra-stylo* in his article “The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: The Caméra-stylo” (1948) is the foundational manifesto. Subsequently, in the early 1950s, André Bazin coined the term “auteur” in his two influential collections of essays, *Qu’est-ce que le cinéma?* (published posthumously), citing such examples as Jean Renoir for French cinema and Alfred Hitchcock for Hollywood cinema. For him, an auteur signified a self-styled, independent, creative force in charge of a film.

François Truffaut further developed the theory in 1954 in his landmark article “Une certaine tendance du cinéma français,” where he invented the term the “politique des auteurs.”<sup>6</sup> Susan Hayward explains Andrew Sarris’s mistranslation of the *politique des auteurs* that resulted in the term “auteur theory: “What had been a ‘mere’ polemic now became a full-blown theory. Sarris used auteurism to nationalistic and chauvinistic

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<sup>6</sup> Truffaut’s article originally appeared in *Cahiers du cinéma* in 1954, but has subsequently been republished in film theory anthologies.

ends to elevate American/Hollywood cinema to the status of the ‘only good cinema’, [sic] with but one or two European art films worthy of mention” (22).<sup>7</sup>

A new generation of independent filmmakers, many of whom started as film critics for *Cahiers du cinéma*, succeeded in becoming auteurs. Their art challenged previously conceived notions of what constitutes cinema. Rejecting the cinematic and narrative conventions of the *cinéma du papa* of the 1950s, these young filmmakers drew inspiration from popular genres, including pulp fiction, film noir, and Hollywood B-movies. Without the usual period of apprenticeship, this “new wave” of directors started making films, using new technologies such as lighter, handheld cameras. Privileging everyday settings, natural light, non-professional actors, and new editing styles favoring jump cuts over smooth transitions, they created self-reflexive, loose narratives with open endings. Denis and Ozon benefit from this heritage and from the French government’s various funding opportunities afforded directors in recent decades.<sup>8</sup>

Thanks to her childhood spent in late-colonial and newly independent parts of Africa (Cameroon, Burkina Faso, Djibouti), Denis has consistently demonstrated a keen interest in portrayals of white people in Africa, of black Africans in France, and of interracial relations and relationships.<sup>9</sup> In an interview with Mark A. Reid, Denis

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<sup>7</sup> Hayward also presents a diagram detailing the changes and expansions of auteur theory from the 1950s’ *politique des auteurs* (where the auteur is the key producer of meaning) to 1960s structuralism (where multiple factors produce meaning, including linguistic, social, and institutional structures), through post-structuralism of the 1970s (all aspects are important: the text/ideology, the auteur and the spectator, and the context/intertextuality with other films and literary texts (23).

<sup>8</sup> The French government has offered subsidies for directors as well as helped with distribution of films since the 1950s. This aspect of filmmaking particular to France is too complicated to address here.

<sup>9</sup> Denis’s father was a colonial administrator. As Beugnet explains, Denis “spent her childhood in West Africa with her parents and her sister, moving country wherever her

expresses the impact Fanon had on her as a teenager and on her development of the screenplay for *Chocolat*.<sup>10</sup> She states, “It’s a film that’s influenced by Frantz Fanon’s *Peaux noires* [sic], *Masques blancs*...I am a very sensitive person who can’t stand the feeling of humiliation, regardless if blacks or whites are the objects of this humiliation. ...When I read *Les Damnés de la terre* (*The Wretched of the Earth*), it increased my anger over the social inequities that groups and individuals are forced to endure” (70).

As Martine Beugnet relates: “Explicitly present in her first feature, *Chocolat*, the director’s early experiences made her sensitive to certain issues and spurred her interest in themes that she continued to explore in subsequent films: oppression and misappropriation, exile and racism, alienation and transgression” (*Claire Denis* 7). As Denis has explained in interviews (Ancian, D. Smith, G. Smith), she has always felt like an outsider, both in Africa and in France. *Chocolat* is not among the films in this dissertation, but serves as an important backdrop for Denis’s filmmaking. Her work is, thus, easily approachable through the lens of postcolonial theory because Denis’s film also redefines the center and the periphery, reconsiders notions of exile and foreignness, and constructs new ways of understanding the self and the Other. More recent studies have investigated Denis’s (re)presentations of postcolonial experiences, especially in her

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father’s post required the family to settle. She thus lived on colonial soil during the last ten years of the French rule, as the movements of independence gathered momentum” (*Claire Denis* 8).

<sup>10</sup> Dina Sherzer investigates the African colonial experience in film, briefly citing Denis’s examination of the end of colonialism and the interracial sexual tensions witnessed in *Chocolat*. Sherzer notes that certain French films by female directors “bear witness to the dynamism of a cinema of memory, a kind of colonial feminine, in which border crossings translate into a *mise-en-scène* that destabilizes hegemonic ideas of nationality, sexuality, and the family” (81).

best-known and most-acclaimed film, *Beau Travail*.<sup>11</sup> She is quite sensitive about not trying to portray the Other's experience, but only to show things from her perspective, as an outsider considering certain situations.

The same cannot be said of Ozon, whose background as a gay man makes queer theory a more appropriate fit. Twenty years Denis's junior, Ozon began making short films as an adolescent before beginning film school. Instead of apprenticing, he turned immediately to directing his own films after finishing his degree at FÉMIS in 1995. Prior to making his first feature, *Sitcom* (1998), Ozon "tested his skills with an impressive number of shorts (a total of fourteen), and a 52-minute film (*Regarde la mer* [*See the Sea*])" (Schilt 192). He has released at least one feature a year since 1998. As a homosexual, Ozon has gravitated more toward queer topics than postcolonial subjects. However, as we will see, these two theories share common concerns and intersect in several ways. Important to both directors are considerations of marginality, urban (im)migration to the *métropole* and the *banlieue*, destabilizing notions of gender, sexuality, race and class, and studying institutionalized forms of social inequalities and ensuing physical violence.<sup>12</sup>

Ozon had a more typical French childhood than Denis; he grew up in Paris with his family. Schilt relates, Ozon is the "oldest child of a large middle-class family (he has four siblings), his parents both worked as teachers and encouraged their children's access to literature and the arts" (9). Ozon's experiences did not personally introduce him to

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<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Beugnet and Mayne's books on Denis, plus articles such as Justin Vicari's examination of postcolonial tensions and adaptation in *Beau Travail*.

<sup>12</sup> The *métropole* refers to France itself, distinguishing the mother country from her current and former dependents or over-seas territories. *La banlieue*, in translation "the suburbs," specifies the densely populated areas on the outskirts of cities where government-subsidized housing serves poor and/or immigrant populations.

colonial, postcolonial, or neo-colonial issues. He probes, however, a few relationships that can be linked to postcolonialism, as in *Les amants criminels*, where white teenagers murder an Arabic peer.<sup>13</sup>

## Theory and Biography, Theory Beyond Biography

Postcolonial theory was conceived in the aftermath of colonial independence from imperial powers. While it did not emerge as a theory until the late 1970s, a few works appeared in the 1950s that presented the colonial experience from the colonized subjects' perspective, among them Frantz Fanon's *Peau noire, masques blancs* (*Black Skin, White Masks*). Cultural ethnographers documented life in the colonies and the tensions between white and black. The controversial film *Les Maîtres fous* (1954) by Jean Rouch, a French ethnographer, visually captured the tensions illustrated by the Hausa sect's reframings of the French colonial presence.

Edward Said's landmark 1978 *Orientalism* laid the foundation for contemporary postcolonial theory. As Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman explain, "One of the reasons for the success of *Orientalism* in encouraging similar or further research was no doubt its bringing together (some might say 'yoking together by violence') of two apparently very different areas: post-structuralism, in the shape of Michel Foucault, and Western Marxism, in the shape of Gramsci" (6). The 1980s and 1990s saw an explosion

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<sup>13</sup> *Sitcom*, a film not considered in this dissertation, features a black married man, Abdu (Jules-Emmanuel Eyoum Deido) who reveals his homosexual nature as he seduces the adolescent Nicolas (Adrien de Van). Though perhaps a second-generation immigrant, his heritage is not important. As elsewhere, it is his queer sexuality that is the focus.



in criticism/theory and in films dealing with (post)colonial issues.<sup>14</sup> Today, postcolonial theory is merging with globalization studies to explain the repercussions of global migration and the ensuing decentering of dominant and/or imperial powers.<sup>15</sup>

In recent years, queer theory has become a popular lens through which to study literature and film. Although linked to identity categories such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and so on, the term “queer” is not just applied to considerations of sex, sexuality and gender, but also to more expansive considerations of identity. Whether used as an adjective, a verb, or a noun, queer entails ambiguity, fluidity, and rebellion. Clear notions of identity, especially in terms of binary dualities, are rejected together with either normative value system, hetero- or homosexual.

Some scholars insist on a sexual association, while others have a more expansive concept of the term. As Annamarie Jagose explains, “(T)here is no generally acceptable definition of queer: [...] the inflection of queer that has proved most disruptive to received understandings of identity, community and politics is the one that problematises

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<sup>14</sup> Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman’s anthology gives a broad introduction to post-colonial theory.

<sup>15</sup> Globalization is a complicated term with economic, social, and political ramifications. It refers to the increasing trend towards open global trade markets and a world that is interconnected by technology. It often entails migration toward urban centers in formerly imperial countries. It sometimes involves rapid communication and access to mass media. Denis Provencher explains the terms “globalization” and “queer” in French contexts. “The issue of ‘Americanization’ and its relation to other ‘globalizing’ trends remain essential” to his discussion (4). Jean-Luc Nancy examines two words and meanings given the term globalization in French (*globalisation* and *mondialisation*). He explains for the English-speaking reader: “‘The creation of the world or globalization’: the conjunction must be understood simultaneously and alternatively in its disjunctive, substitutive, or conjunctive senses,” indicating the complexity and difficulty of defining the term (*The Creation of the World* 29).

normative consolidations of sex, gender and sexuality [...] queer maintains a relation of resistance to whatever constitutes the normal (99).<sup>16</sup>

Denis Provencher situates the term queer both more broadly and more specifically in relation to sexual citizenship and globalization in France. Just as other theorists have argued for an *exception française* elsewhere (e.g. Hélène Cixous), Provencher explicates the peculiarities of the term “queer” for France. He concludes, “French gays and lesbians, in the context of the gay press, draw to some degree from a ‘global gay model’ of sexual citizenship that involves Anglo-American terms related to leisure, consumerism, gay pride, safe sex, and HIV/AIDS education. Nevertheless, they express their sexuality more forcefully in terms of a non-specified ‘difference’ that relies on the long-standing French republican tradition of universalism and integration” (193).<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> More recently, Lawrence Schehr situates the broadening scope of queer studies, noting, “La *queer theory*, en sciences humaines et en lettres, relut autant les classiques prévisibles que des œuvres oubliées ou marginalisées par la canonicité ou des productions artistiques (films, livres, spectacles, événements) où le contenu ou les structures homosexuels semblaient escamotés par le système herméneutique utilisé auparavant. ...Et avec les études culturelles qui se développèrent plus ou moins au même moment, la *queer theory*, devenue de plus en plus la théorisation de tout ce qui peut être *queer* (non-droit, non-rectiligne, déstabilisé) menaçait tout système hiérarchique en culture et en pratique” (“Queer theory, in human sciences and the humanities, rereads as much the known classics as it does marginalized or forgotten works of the canon or artistic production [films, books, theatrical productions, happenings] where the content or the homosexual structures seem to be retracted by the hermeneutic system previously used. ...And with the cultural studies that developed at about the same time, queer theory became more and more a theory applicable to all that can be *queer* [non-straight, not-square, destabilized] which threatened all hierarchical systems in culture and in practice”; 9-10).

<sup>17</sup> Provencher further asserts, “French sexual citizens rely on a queer French language of non-identitarian desire crystalized in ‘Genet.’ The sexual outlaw emerges as a forceful alternative to the ‘good’ or ‘integrated’ French citizen and the Anglo-American, neo-liberal “consumer” citizen” (193). In the second chapter of *Queer French*, he explores the impact of Genet and his works on “queer” French language, and describes how “imagery and narratives related to the sexual ‘outlaw’ or ‘dissident citizen’ emerge in several examples of contemporary French popular culture texts and, in some cases, initiate the

“Queer” especially is where theory and art transcend biography. Both Denis’s and Ozon’s films have often been analyzed using cross-gender filters, with Ozon frequently described as interested in femininity and Denis in masculinity. Yet the extent and diversity of their explorations cannot be even so restricted, for each defies simple categorization, instead portraying gender and sexuality from fluid perspectives that are impossible to describe simply as masculine or feminine, heterosexual or homosexual, and engage with economic, racial, and ethnic differences as well. Both put into praxis the troubling of identity as they de- and reconstruct relationships. For example, in *Beau Travail*, Denis concentrates on homosocial interactions in the postcolonial context of the French Foreign Legion and Djibouti. None of the characters are openly homosexual. Denis’s and Ozon’s films open up ways of considering a wide range of human experiences, destabilizing clear notions of gender, sexuality, violence, perversion, love, and death. Their work does not neatly fit into any single category such as “queer,” or “postcolonial”: their wide-ranging films defy simple, one-word descriptors.

Building on Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Gilles Deleuze, film theory has turned to phenomenology to describe the “messiness” of affect and suggest the complexity of “meaning.” Several scholars have ascribed “haptic” qualities to contemporary experimental and non-white—and more recently mainstream—cinema. Laura Marks argues that “haptic visuality” refers to “the way film signifies through its materiality,” meaning that film takes on a tactile quality, “as though one were touching a film with one’s eyes” (xi). She also finds a tactile quality in a film’s evocation of senses not usually associated with cinema, in particular smell and taste. Her focus is on “intercultural

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creation of a public discursive space where alternative models of citizenship can be pronounced” (54-5).

cinema,” which she says “is characterized by experimental styles that attempt to represent the experience of living between two or more cultural regimes of knowledge, or living as a minority in the still majority white, Euro-American West” (1).

The films of both Denis and Ozon are more experimental than they are mainstream. In *Cinema 1: The Movement-image* and *Cinema 2: The Time-image*, Deleuze contemplates the poles of film practice, mentioning European and U.S. directors, as well as “intercultural” cinema. Given Denis’s upbringing and proclivity for postcolonial and/or globalized subjects and locations, she more clearly fits into Marks’ conception of the haptic as involving multiple cultures. Some of Ozon’s other films, in particular *Sous le sable* and *Le temps qui reste*, could also be shown to inscribe haptic moments.

Nine of the fourteen films in this dissertation are adaptations. Some are rather faithful literary adaptations: Emmanuèle Bernheim’s novel, *Vendredi soir*; Rainer Werner Fassbinder’s play, *Tropfen auf heiße Steine* (*Water Drops on Burning Rocks*); Robert Thomas’s play, *Huit femmes* (*Eight Women*); and Elizabeth Taylor’s novel, *Angel*.<sup>18</sup> Most of these books are obscure or unusual choices for cinematic adaptation. Ozon has co-written several films with Bernheim, including *Sous le sable*, *Swimming Pool*, and *5X2*. Several of Denis’s films derive from even less likely texts: the short metaphysical testimony by French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy about his heart transplant (*L’Intrus*) that forms the basis for Denis’s film of the same name, a song by British band

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<sup>18</sup> Ozon’s short film “Un lever de rideau” is a faithful adaptation of Montherlant’s short play by the same title. Originally meant to be part of the film grouping for Chapter 1, I decided to cut the film from the chapter since it does not correspond as well with the other two in terms of haptic spaces, though it too is about a couple.

Tindersticks (“My Sister”), that subtends *Nénette et Boni*, and Herman Melville’s novella, *Billy Budd*, which is an indirect text subtending *Beau travail*.

Denis and Ozon both also engage with a wide variety of generic conventions, sometimes mixing or reworking genres, though genre is not important to all of the films discussed here. Denis’s films usually cannot be easily classified generically, while Ozon sometimes intentionally mixes genres. For example, *Beau travail*, *J’ai pas sommeil*, and *Les amants criminels* hint at and sometimes refuse conventions of the musical, crime thrillers, and the horror film. *Les amants criminels* also includes references to the fairy tale. Ozon uses excess and sometimes camp in his more theatrical work. He engages with melodrama as well in his hyperbolic representations of 1950s’ France in *8 femmes*, 1970s’ Berlin in *Gouttes d’eau sur pierres brûlantes*, and Edwardian England in *Angel*.<sup>19</sup> As appropriate, I invoke critical discussions of adaptation and genre as I discuss individual films. Each chapter proceeds with a section on the individual film after introducing a framework for their analysis.

The first chapter considers haptic moments in *Vendredi soir* (*Friday Night*) and *5X2*. Both films center on a couple. *Vendredi soir* is a surprisingly faithful adaptation of Bernheim’s novel as compared with Denis’s usual loose style. Bernheim’s novels are not immediately cinematic, at least as John Desmond and Peter Hawkes define “cinematic.” For them, a film “must have a good plot.”<sup>20</sup> The protagonists are unnamed, the narrative

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<sup>19</sup> Ozon’s 2010 *Potiche* returns to a 1970s aesthetic, this time set in France. About another dysfunctional bourgeois family, with Catherine Deneuve as the daughter of, and now wife of, owners of an umbrella factory, though not a musical it directly references Jacques Demy’s 1964 *Les parapluies de Cherbourg* (*The Umbrellas of Cherbourg*).

<sup>20</sup> Desmond and Hawkes continue, “Ideally, the text has causally connected and clearly motivated actions that are developed through a structure with a beginning, middle, and end. If the actions are conceived in scenes, then the text is even more cinematic. The text

proceeds without psychological or character development, the structure is fluid, and the story is not driven by cause and effect so much as by sensory-driven descriptions. Both films, in fact, are unusual in the broader oeuvre of each director. Denis's film is slow, lyrical, and less somber, with a rare calm. Glimpses of nightlife outside the protagonists' story nonetheless suggest a subtle commentary on the inequities of race and class in globalized, contemporary Parisian life. Ozon's *5X2*, also written with Bernheim, has an inverted chronology: there are five episodes that start at the end of the couple's relationship and end at the beginning. The film is filled with moments that exceed the narrative space to convey the characters' corporeal experiences, which in turn provoke sensorial responses in the spectator. Both films thus use tight framing and camera movement to produce sensuous moments that seem tactile and/or involve smell and sound.

The second chapter investigates sexuality in *Gouttes d'eau sur pierres brûlantes* (*Water Drops on Burning Rocks*), *8 femmes* (*8 Women*), and *Beau Travail*. All are adaptations and make subversive changes to the original texts to produce queerly cinematic pleasures. Ozon's films introduce musical performances and at such times recall that genre; *8 femmes* is also a mystery. They are rather faithful adaptations of already subversive texts. As Robert Stam recognizes, however, "The notion of 'fidelity' is essentialist in relation to both media involved. [...] The literary text is not a closed, but an open structure [...that] feeds on and is fed into an infinitely permutating intertext, which is seen through ever-shifting grids of interpretation" ("Beyond Fidelity" 57). Even

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should also have a few multidimensional characters who are interesting and sympathetic and at least one of whom is capable of some kind of development or change" (233-34). However, they go on to note that uncinematic texts can result in successful films. That is the case here.

though Ozon's films are close to the original texts, he creates a cinematic text that stands on its own. Denis's is what Catherine Grant calls a "free" adaptation, insisting, "With the vehicle of the free adaptation, contemporary film auteurs can attempt to make aspects of literary classics and other texts their own, over-writing them with their own traceable signatures, perhaps reconfiguring them by incorporating references to other (rewritten) intertexts" (58). While homosexual and bisexual characters populate these narratives (and there is even a transgendered character in *Gouttes d'eau*), most of them represent rather traditional forms of masculinity and femininity. Notions of identity nonetheless are destabilized and shift over the course of the narratives. Choreographed movement, framing and editing choices, provocative dialogue and monologue, and musical interludes provide an erotic charge.

The monstrosity of ordinary humans is at the heart of Chapter 3. Denis and Ozon both feature normal characters that become murderers in *J'ai pas sommeil* (*I Can't Sleep*), *Trouble Every Day*, and *Les amants criminels* (*Criminal Lovers*). Two of the three even include cannibalism. These movies all mix genres, including thriller, horror, and/or contemporary crime conventions. They have performances that depend in part on "gests," per Deleuze, following Brecht.<sup>21</sup> They create unease through fragmented narratives and framing choices, and blend beauty and terror in quotidian settings. Real people and news stories, not literary texts, inspired these films. Soundtracks and especially again music are

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<sup>21</sup> Deleuze works from the Brechtian concept for the theater. A "gest" is not a particular motion or act, but rather an attitude conveyed through the body of an actor on stage. Deleuze says, "It is Brecht who created the notion of gest, making it the essence of the theatre, irreducible to the plot or the 'subject': for him, the gest should be social, although he recognizes that there are other types of gest. What we call gest in general is the link or knot of attitudes between themselves, their co-ordination with each other, in so far as they do not depend on a previous story, a pre-existing plot or action-image." (*Cinema 2* 192).

important. Although not included in this dissertation, *Swimming Pool* could be considered in terms of the murderous teenage daughter, though that her deed is coded as a dream or a fantasy makes the act less like those discussed here.

Denis and Ozon also both consider death and dying in contexts other than murder. Chapter 4 considers the effects of losing a loved one in *Sous le sable* (*Under the Sand*), dying from a terminal illness in *Le temps qui reste* (*Time to Leave*), and prolonging life with a transplanted organ in *L'Intrus* (*The Intruder*). These films are quieter, more contemplative, and more somber than most of the films examined in other chapters. Although not all adaptations, all three reference numerous literary and cinematic sources. By contrast with the films in Chapter 3, death now does not provoke discomfort or disgust, and aging and dying are honestly depicted as processes that are part of life. Fantasies and dreams are also important.

The last chapter examines restructured families and kinship in *Nénette et Boni* (*Nénette and Boni*), *35 rhums* (*35 Shots of Rum*) and *Angel*.<sup>22</sup> Adaptations are again important. *Nénette et Boni* was inspired by the Tinderstick's song "My Sister." Denis's collaboration with the band on its soundtrack led to a relationship with the band that has currently spanned seven films, including the other film of this chapter. *35 rhums* is loosely an adaptation of Yasujiro Ozu's 1949 film *Banshun* (*Late Spring*). By contrast, *Angel* is a much more faithful adaptation of Elizabeth Taylor's novel, although Ozon ultimately makes Angel (Romola Garai) a more sympathetic and tragic figure.

This dissertation examines Denis's and Ozon's films thematically. While more could be said about every film, this study provides a point of departure for considering

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<sup>22</sup> The title is in English in the original, and the film is entirely in English, a first for Ozon, though he has included scenes in English before in, for example, *Swimming Pool*.



these directors in tandem. In particular, haptic qualities, the distinct concepts of gestural performances and the gest, genre, and adaptation all inform the analyses of these films. While not alike, their films continually offer common ground, and when taken together, offer insights about our contemporary, interconnected, globalized society, French, American, or otherwise.

## Chapter 1: Relationships, Desire, and Discord: Affection-images, Any-spaces-whatever, and Haptic Moments

Prior to undertaking their seventh features, both Claire Denis and François Ozon expressed a desire to make a film about “a couple.” Not only did the two filmmakers have the same idea in mind, but the two films arguably also have the most in common of all their films. Hardly typical romances, Denis’s 2002 *Vendredi soir* (*Friday Night*) depicts a one-night stand between strangers, while Ozon’s 2004 *5X2* starts during divorce proceedings. *Vendredi soir* is mainly linear, interrupted occasionally by brief dream sequences, but otherwise covers a distinct unit of time: one night, from Friday evening to early Saturday morning. Ozon’s *5X2* is told in five separate episodes that transpire in reverse chronology, and spans several years. The title *5X2* references the number of episodes in the film multiplied by the two people in the couple, to be read as “five times two.” Within this inverted chronological framework, each section proceeds in linear fashion, showcasing in turn significant events of the couple’s life, from the ending to the beginning of their relationship, in the following order: divorce, dinner party, birth of a child, wedding, and first encounter. Despite narrative and temporal differences, both films share an affinity for certain cinematographic choices, and they also contain similar themes and characters.

*Vendredi soir* and *5X2* intersect in five key ways. As mentioned, both focus on “the couple,” although the female partner is more important and dominates the screen

space. Both are co-written with and informed by the writings of Emmanuèle Bernheim.<sup>23</sup>

Both emphasize smell, sound, and touch, thereby providing what Laura Marks terms “haptic” experiences. The actors’ performances, especially those of the female protagonists, are key to both films, with facial expressions and body movements more important than verbal communication. Both directors frequently use medium close-up and close-up shots on the protagonists.

Elsewhere, Marks discusses Vivian Sobchack’s formulation of a “phenomenology of cinematic experience” (149). Both women invoke Merleau-Ponty and Deleuze to explicate sensory engagement. Marks summarizes the notion of the spectator’s participation in the meaning of cinema through instinctual physical responses:

If one understands film viewing as an exchange between two bodies—that of the viewer and that of the film—then the characterization of the film viewer as passive, vicarious, or projective must be replaced with a model of a viewer who participates in the production of the cinematic experience. Rather than witnessing cinema as through a frame, window, or mirror, the viewer shares and performs cinematic space dialogically. (149-50)

The inclusion of the spectator’s embodied experience is inherent to understanding how haptic visuality, as a particular composition of images and sounds, can elicit physical responses from those watching the film. Marks describes the way that sounds, too, can be haptic. She says:

as vision can be optical or haptic, so too hearing can perceive the environment in a more or less instrumental way. We *listen* for specific things, while we *hear*

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<sup>23</sup> Bernheim is a contemporary French author. Her novels are short, most protagonists remain nameless, and she uses mainly short sentences.

ambient sound as an undifferentiated whole. One might call ‘haptic hearing’ that usually brief moment when all sounds present themselves to us undifferentiated, before we make the choice of which sounds are most important to attend to. (183)

Marks further insists that haptic moments are intrinsically tied to memories that are elicited via the senses of smell, taste, and touch. As she explains, “[d]rawing from other forms of sense experience, primarily touch and kinesthetics, haptic visuality involves the body more than is the case with optical visuality. Touch is a sense located on the surface of the body: thinking of cinema as haptic is only a step toward considering the ways cinema appeals to the body as a whole” (163). Sobchack further contends that “[e]mbodiment is a radically material condition of human being that necessarily entails both the body and consciousness, objectivity and subjectivity, in an *irreducible ensemble*” (4). Marks’ and Sobchack’s ideas, taken together, suggest that the experience of watching cinema inherently produces physical and emotional responses in the spectator. These rather involuntary reactions derive from and are integrated to the experience of watching film at certain moments.

One of the goals of this chapter is to elucidate the connections between these two Denis and Ozon films by analyzing haptic looking and hearing. In both, I will argue, projected images and sounds elicit bodily sensations in an engaged, not a passive, spectator, due in large part to their collaboration with Bernheim. In Bernheim’s writing in general, there is a sense of what could be called “haptic readability.” Her novels evoke a range of senses, including touch, smell, and taste, that are not typically associated with the written word. *Vendredi soir* is Denis’s only film with her. *5X2* has its origins in a

screenplay co-written by Bernheim and Ozon. Ozon had already worked with Bernheim on several films, including *Sous le sable* and *Swimming Pool*.

One critical article on each film stands out for its analysis of haptic qualities and spaces. Martine Beugnet discusses haptic visuality in *Vendredi soir*, offering a comparative study with Pascal Ferran's 2007 *Lady Chatterly*. Referencing Merleau-Ponty, Sobchack, and Marks, Beugnet investigates how a "cinema of the senses" is created through the use of tight framing, camera movements, and the aspects of the soundtrack. Combined, these evoke a "contemporary state of existential malaise" ("Re-enchanting the World" 214).<sup>24</sup> Phil Powrie focuses on one scene in *5X2* and describes its haptic qualities, stressing the importance of Paolo Conte's song "Sparring Partner" to the creation of what he defines as a "haptic metaspace" ("The Haptic Moment" 207). For him, this "acts as a frame for productively unstable embodiments, marked by nomadic transitions and volatilities. Those unstable embodiments are focused on the male of the couple" ("The Haptic Moment" 207). While I agree with and follow his formulations of haptic metaspace in *5X2*, I believe that the female of the couple, Marion, is equally, if not more, important to the generation of haptic spaces.

Two Deleuzian concepts—"affection-image" and "any-space-whatever"—are important to understanding other types of haptic qualities of cinema. Although Deleuze's discussion mainly concentrates on films made during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, his work in *Cinema 1: The Movement-image* has applications to recent and earlier cinema as well. An "affection-image" is essentially an emotive face in close-up. Dislocated from its surroundings, it is not related to action but to emotion. In his description of the affection-

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<sup>24</sup> Beugnet also briefly discusses *Vendredi soir* and again mentions haptic visuality in her book on Claire Denis.

image, Deleuze argues that the “close-up makes the face the pure building material of the affect, its ‘hylé.’” Hence these strange cinematographic nuptials in which the actress provides her face and the material capacity of her parts, whilst the director invents the affect” via “an internal composition of the close-up, that is a genuinely affective framing, cutting [*découpage*] and montage” (*Cinema I* 103). From banal settings desire, repulsion, jealousy, or sadness emerge, often at unexpected moments and sometimes due to the affecting close-ups of faces. Tight framing on emotional faces evokes a physical response in the embodied spectator. As Marks explains that “[i]t is a bodily contemplation, [...] not a purely intellectual response. The affection-images [...] invite a bodily response—a shudder, perhaps” (73).

While affection-images relate to framing, any-spaces-whatever refer to what fills the frame, regardless of proximity to the camera. Deleuze explains that an any-space-whatever can be created through shadows, lyrical abstraction, and colors, drawing examples from films by Robert Bresson and Carl Dreyer in conjunction with philosophical ideas taken from Blaise Pascal, Søren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, and many others. In both Denis’s and Ozon’s films, in-between spaces punctuate, disrupt, or suspend the narrative flow, making certain images more meaningful. As the term implies, specific locations are not important to the formation of any-spaces-whatever. Deleuze insists that “[s]pace itself has left behind its own co-ordinates and its metric relations. It is a tactile space. [...] Space is no longer a particular determined space, it has become *any-space-whatever* [*espace quelconque*], to use Pascal Augé’s term” (*Cinema I* 109). Due to the tight framing in both *5X2* and *Vendredi soir*, I will argue, locations become generic spaces, such as “a living room” or “a bedroom” or “a city street.” For

example, although Denis's film is set in Paris, the exact parts of the city the protagonists travel through remain almost indeterminate. Similarly, even though Ozon's film spans a much larger portion of the couple's life and the events are stereotypical, the locations are common places.

Beyond the tactile engagements that produce haptic moments, these films also place importance on the notion of touching itself. The anticipation of touch or its refusal often creates a tension for the embodied spectator, eliciting an empathetic sense of expectation. At other times, actual onscreen skin-on-skin contact infuses a scene with tactility, evincing touch within the diegetic space. In fact, Judith Mayne contends, "*Friday Night* is an extended meditation on touch, on physical contact" (128). In contrast, mutually pleasurable touching is rare in *5X2* and the emphasis becomes more on unreciprocated, missed, or missing touches. This chapter considers a selection of scenes from each film to analyze these points of connection. In each film, haptic visibility occurs in relation to cinematic spaces where images appear as if they could be touched, or give the proximity of touching, or engage sensorial responses. A short consideration of the films together will follow in conclusion.

### Tension, Tenderness, Touching

Denis said that when she began talking with Bernheim, "Emmanuèle said to me: 'but deep down, what do you want to do?' I said to her, 'I would like a small space with the town all around. A man, a woman.' ...[S]he handed me a manuscript she had just completed, '*Vendredi soir*.' It was unbelievable for me. I said yes, even though I felt that

a lot of people didn't believe in it and thought that you couldn't adapt it to the cinema" (Ancian). As Denis mentions in her commentary on the U.S. DVD release, despite Bernheim's insistence that Denis make the story her own, Denis preferred to remain close to the book. Denis's adaptation, like the novel, is an unusual love story based in the minutiae of the moment, not on exciting events. The narrative is simple: Laure (Valérie Lemercier) is moving in with her boyfriend, but has a fling on her last night alone with a stranger, Jean (Vincent Lindon), whom she picks up during a traffic jam in Paris. The sparse dialogue, tight framing, abstract images, and poetic editing all combine to translate the sensorial experiences Bernheim describes in the novel into film.

The theme of a one-night stand is not unusual in French cinema. A film on the subject from a woman's point of view is. The slow pacing and rhythmic montage are also unconventional choices for a romantic drama. The first twenty-two minutes of the film are spent on Laure. Not much information is given about her past. Emphasis is on the present, as glimpsed through her impressions, reactions, emotions, and decisions, all registered through Lemercier's expressions. Though Laure does eventually speak, first to herself, later to Jean, the film is almost wordless. Rather than fret or get upset at the traffic jam, Laure relaxes and rocks out to some music. She sorts through boxes in her car. She and other drivers in the stoppage are encouraged by a woman's voice on the radio to put aside conventions and pick up strangers. Instead of the isolation typical of modern travel by car, where picking up hitchhikers is taboo, especially by a woman, now such barriers are lifted. In this state of suspended social protocol, Laure picks up Jean. The outcome of the relationship that develops between them becomes the film's "destination."



*Vendredi soir* is a sort of road movie. Neil Archer relates, “in distinction to much of [road film’s] cinematic history of representation,” its director, cinematographer, and protagonist are women (245). He further suggests, “if *Vendredi soir* is in part a film-poem about cars and roads, it evokes the latter not through the liberating mobility we expect from the road narrative, but through its *immobility* and slowness (245).” This film is set in heavy traffic, gridlocked due to a transport strike, and the inside of Laure’s car is a key setting. Other than a sequence when Jean drives, cars move at a very slow pace, if at all. Still, point of view aligns mostly with Laure, often showing her perspective on the world around her. Before Jean joins her, she finishes packing and cleaning her apartment, and goes down to her car, spending about 15 minutes there before spotting Jean. They cover no vast distances with meandering drives; there are no car chases, or cops. Denis instead provides tranquil moments that lead, ultimately, to the abandonment of the car.

Francis Ford Coppola’s 1982 *One From the Heart* influenced Denis as she worked on *Vendredi soir*, she acknowledges on the DVD commentary. Coppola’s film is an old-fashioned, sentimental, tragic romance, with vibrant, melodramatic musical interludes. At its heart is a dysfunctional couple, where both spouses are ambivalent about separating. Early in the film, the main characters, Frannie (Teri Garr) and Hank (Frederic Forrest), fight during dinner preparations for their fifth anniversary. They end up apart and alone in Las Vegas at night, both having love affairs. Coppola cuts in shots of each, individually, looking wistful, as if looking for her/his spouse. They actually cross paths on the crowded streets without noticing. Coppola’s quirky crosscuts influenced Denis’s filming of people on the city streets on a Friday night. Like Coppola as well, she

captures the proliferation of neon lights in commercial settings, uses superimpositions and lyrical moments in transition shots, and cuts in emotive close-ups of the protagonists.

Despite being generally considered to be more lighthearted than her other films, *Vendredi soir* nevertheless has a subtext of connubial discord. Laure seems willing to step outside her normal routine and relationship with her boyfriend, if only for a night. There are also similarities between the protagonists of Coppola's and Denis's films. Although the brunette, full-figured Lemercier is quite different physically from the thin, blonde Garr, the characters the women play bear some resemblances. Both willingly participate in adultery with a stranger on a whim. Both will probably reconcile with their partners, but ambiguity remains. Last, even though both films have moments of levity and sensuous erotic interludes, overall they both portray the unrest that occurs periodically when some couples have long-term monogamous unions.

Emmanuèle Bernheim's novels usually chronicle dystopia in relationships. Much of her work focuses on views of "the couple," depicting infidelity, underlying malaise, misunderstanding, and jealousy. *Vendredi soir* follows suit. It conveys dissatisfaction and impermanence since Laure is not only is unfaithful to her boyfriend but also suspects her new lover of having lustful thoughts about other women.

The novel and the film have two major similarities: both portray Laure's inner thoughts and evoke her senses. In both, Laure is the central character, and the story is punctuated by her thoughts and projections about the outcomes of events. The novel *Vendredi soir* sketches the daydreams as well as fears that stem from Laure's responses to sensorial stimuli. Even though told in third person, it has a personal feel, almost as though Laure were speaking in first person to the reader. Bernheim uses a free indirect

style, which as Judith Mayne has noted, “uses the third person to suggest the perspective of a first person” (121). She also uses the imperfect and conditional verb tenses when Laure projects her fantasies or fears about her boyfriend (François) or her new lover (Frédéric, named Jean in the film). For example, Laure repeatedly thinks about whether or not Frédéric is single and envisions him returning home to someone. In free indirect style, Bernheim conveys Laure’s thoughts: “Comment le rentrera-t-il chez lui? En stop? À pied? Sa femme allait s’impatier, peut-être commencerait-elle à dîner sans lui.” (“How would he return to home? By hitchhiking? On foot? His wife would become impatient, perhaps she would start to eat dinner without him”; *Vendredi soir* 21).

Denis contemplated using voice-over narration for Laure in order to convey more of her thoughts, but ultimately the decision not to do so actually helped her to remain, she felt, more true to the spirit of the novel. Instead, she captures subtleties of expression in close-up shots. Although the setting is not as sparse, the tight framing on Laure’s face is reminiscent of the sorts of framing Robert Bresson used in such films as *Procès de Jeanne d’Arc* (1962) and *Mouchette* (1967). In Deleuze’s term, these constitute affection-images.<sup>25</sup> The framing is often tight enough to cut out the surroundings, focusing attention on the nuances of Laure’s emotional responses.

Both the film and the book begin by showing boxes packed in Laure’s apartment as she finishes the work of putting her belongings away in containers. She is moving in

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<sup>25</sup> Deleuze explains affection-images, one of three sorts of movement-images in cinema, in *Cinema I*. He notes the importance of close-ups in the creation of affection-images: “it is precisely in affection that the movement ceases to be that of translation in order to become movement of expression, that is to say quality, simple tendency stirring up an immobile element. It is not surprising that, in the image that we are, it is the face, with its relative immobility and its receptive organs, which brings to light these movements of expression while they remain most frequently buried in the rest of the body” (66).

with François. In the film, he is mentioned, but is not present at any point. His voice is heard on the answering machine; in the book she does not call him, but instead decides a call would interrupt him. Her thoughts are made clear through Bernheim's free indirect narration: "Elle eut envie d'appeler François, d'entendre sa voix. Mais à cette heure-ci, elle ne pourrait pas le joindre. Il devait être en conférence" ("She had the urge to call François, to hear his voice. But at this hour, she would not be able to reach him. He was supposed to be in a meeting"; *Vendredi soir* 12-13). Yet, she repeatedly thinks about François and makes comparisons between the men, or daydreams about the future with one or the other. In the film, however, her reveries do not include fantasies about him. Denis restricts the amount of information in order to focus on Laure's responses and reactions in the present, without adding the complications of past and future. Laure whispers occasionally wondering what to keep, but otherwise there is no speech. Focus is on her movements, gestures, facial expressions, and other diegetic sounds. Tidbits of information accumulate to reveal that this is her last night of freedom.

In the book, Bernheim evokes senses other than sight. Frédéric is repeatedly associated with the smells of tobacco, cologne, and leather. There is no way to visually indicate that Jean is wearing cologne, but Denis uses cinematic cues to signal Laure's olfactory pleasure. She never vocalizes her perceptions of smell, but she reveals that his cigarette smoking pleases her when he lights up in her car, with her permission. As smoke wafts over, she inhales, closes her eyes, and smiles.

Bernheim repeats the short sentence "Elle sourit" ("She smiles") throughout the book. In the film, momentary smiles recurrently cross Laure's face. Bernheim also returns repeatedly to Jean's trio of odors, reinforcing Laure's instinctual, almost

animalistic attraction for this unknown man. Laura Marks's observation is pertinent: "[s]mell, as well as being an affection-image, is a special category of what Deleuze calls the recollection-image, an image that encodes memory" (123). Jean's smoking recalls for Laure her time as a smoker, a pleasant memory. Her pleasure derives from his other odors and his proximity as well. Denis captures this magnetism in the intimacy of the restricted space of the car, in what becomes their private refuge amidst the bustle of the city on a cold night. Laure's smile could also entail her approval of his general odor and his presence in her car. She does not get to know him, but rather takes him in through furtive sidelong glances, and by breathing in his aroma. His odor contributes to his overall physical presence in the film, as Martine Beugnet notes in the chapter "The Aesthetics of Sensation" (*Cinema and Sensation* 63-123).<sup>26</sup> She also listens to his body movements.

Valerie Lemercier is not a conventionally beautiful woman, but Agnès Godard's camerawork accentuates her soft beauty and femininity, and she successfully plays a woman who feels beautiful. Although Lemercier was reticent to perform in close-up, Denis succeeded in using a preponderance of close shots on her, and these become a source of affection-images. Lemercier as Laure does smile on occasion, but her face is often serious. Her eyes readily communicate her desires, fears, frustrations, and jealousies. For example, just prior to seeing Jean for the first time, there is a medium close-up of her through her windshield, followed by a whip pan up to a close-up on a pair

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<sup>26</sup> In her book *Cinema and Sensation*, Beugnet says, "as in *Nénette et Boni* and *Trouble Every Day*, in *Vendredi soir*, the characters' physical presence imprints itself in the reality around them and seems to linger on after they depart" (82). She also recognizes that "the camera captur[es] images and sounds that are evocative of smells, textures, volumes and even densities" (81).

of glasses in an optician's illuminated neon sign. Then, Jean appears in a slightly low-angle shot in close-up, possibly from Laure's perspective in the car. At the end of the shot of him, he smiles a little. The next shot is a slightly high-angle close-up of Laure, matched to presumably be looking at him. She does not smile, but has an expression of curiosity, and perhaps longing. With her face in close-up, the focus is entirely on her, with almost nothing besides her head in the frame. Deleuze's description of Dreyer's use of close-ups on Maria Falconetti as Joan of Arc in his 1928 *Passion of Joan of Arc* is similar. Deleuze calls it the "affective film *par excellence*," insisting the "point is that the face remains a large unit whose movements, as Descartes remarked, express compound and mixed emotions" (*Cinema 1* 106 and 110, respectively).

Several parts of Laure and Jean's first encounter include haptic moments as well. In Bernheim's book, Laure spots Frédéric early on (*Vendredi soir* 16). However, in the film, the build up to the initial meeting between Laure and Jean takes over 20 minutes, or roughly a quarter of the run time. Jean knocks on Laure's passenger side window, startling her out of a reverie. He seems to have selected Laure from among several women alone in their cars. All are stuck in traffic. This is an important scene since it sets up the practically non-verbal interaction the two share and their seemingly instantaneous physical attraction. He asks if he can get in.<sup>27</sup> As he enters, Laure is seen in close-up glancing at him, cuing that she is the one who looks and he is the object being looked upon. Little is known about Jean, although in the book Bernheim indicates at one point that Frédéric was formerly a taxi driver.

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<sup>27</sup> In French, the phrase "je peux monter" can have a secondary sexual connotation of "Can I mount you?" The question does not appear in the novel.

Jean relaxes immediately in the warmth of the car, leaning the seat back. Other than a brief shot of the cars surrounding them, a series of close-ups compose the next few minutes. Mainly, there are tight shots of Laure's eyes looking followed by close-ups on Jean's neck, hands, and profile from her perspective. The camera is certainly close enough to provoke the sense of it being able to touch the skin it shows, as if Laure herself might reach out and touch him. She is comfortable enough to rest with this stranger in her car, to the point of actually falling asleep briefly. Car horns wake her and she seems sleep-addled. In another close-up, his hand squeezes her arm to ensure that she is awake. It is their first touch, captured in a close-up of his hand on her arm. The subsequent extreme close-up of just her eyes, looking toward him, shows her surprise and approval of his touch. At the end of this sequence, he asks if she wants a cigarette and she declines, saying she has quit, but that it will not bother her if he smokes. He has his first of many cigarettes, and she responds as described earlier, by enjoying the smell of the smoke and of her new companion.

Bernheim additionally evokes sounds in the book, such as the squeaky springs of the bed, first in Laure's apartment and later in the hotel room. She actually puts the sound of the squeak in quotation marks to emphasize it, almost as though it were speech. Denis maintains these sounds in the film. Laure has almost finished packing up the contents of the place. She seems nostalgic about leaving her home. She sits on the bed and the springs make a pinging sound, one with which she seems quite familiar. She playfully bounces to make it ping again before lying back on the bed. As Laure lifts herself and

then falls on the bed, the book says “Dong” (*Vendredi soir* 9). In the film, Laure’s bounces again provoke the same sound in the hotel room.<sup>28</sup>

When Laure and Jean first embrace on the street, the camera stays very close. They are already in the shadows, and the tight framing accentuates our sense of disconnection from the diegetic space. In Deleuze’s description of affection-images, “a single close-up can simultaneously join several faces, or parts of different faces (and not only for a kiss) [and]... can include a space-time, in depth or on the surface, as if it had torn away from the co-ordinates from which it was abstracted” (*Cinema I* 104). The slow, intimate panning shots of Laure and Jean’s initial physical contact thus become another any-space-whenever dominated by affection images shot in low-key lighting. According to Marks, “[h]aptic looking tends to move over the surface of its object rather than to plunge into illusionistic depth, not to distinguish form so much as to discern texture” (162). Laure and Jean’s faces are almost indiscernible in the shadowy lamplight, and the surface of their skin and material quality of their clothing are as important as their interlocking lips.

Specific noises dominate the soundtrack, and they are especially noticeable in the absence of music. In scenes involving sex, the diegetic sounds of breathing and body movements amplify the sense of proximity. The senses of touch and smell are, however, more important. The first time Laure and Jean have sex, shortly after entering the hotel room, they do not remove their clothes, as in the book. Denis describes the importance to her of having their first contact, as strangers, be in the semi-comfort zone of being mainly clothed. The framing remains tight, at times lingering on their faces, at others holding on

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<sup>28</sup> In commentary on the DVD, Denis relates that, as an inside joke, in post-synchronization, she actually used the same sound for the springs in both locations.



their hands or other body parts, glimpsed beneath their clothes. What they are doing is not discernable: focus is instead on the heavy fabric of their winter clothes or the contrasting whiteness of their skin. The entire sequence is shot in low-key lighting, with shadows mixing with their dark clothes. The intimacy of the embrace is thus conveyed through the sound of breathing and rustle of clothes more than through what is seen of the sex. The second time they have sex, they remove their clothes, but the camera again stays in close. There is no music, and their breathing is almost the only sound. It becomes rhythmic, almost musical. This is what Marks calls haptic hearing, when “sounds present themselves to us undifferentiated” (183).

Before Laure and Jean meet, the camera often pans around the city, uninterested in Laure’s packing or driving. The combination of the tight framing on the street scenes and the sparse, but evocative, music here forms another type of any-space-whatever. This is a haptic space composed of unusually framed shots of cars, sidewalks, and streets, often too close to discern whole objects or people. The music is quiet, almost lilting, but with dissonant notes that occasionally hint at nearby or potential turmoil. In post-production, the images were manipulated into an accelerated time-lapse of the congested streets as dusk becomes night.

During these shots, original music by collaborator Dickon Hinchliffe, from the band Tindersticks, accompanies the images. As with Marks’ haptic hearing, the music here is unrelated to the images or the narrative, but is a subtle companion to the haptic visual montage of the city. As Marks notes, “[i]n these settings the aural boundaries between body and world may feel indistinct: the rustle of trees may mingle with the sound of my breathing, or conversely the booming music may inhabit my chest cavity

and move my body from the inside” (183). When Laure is alone in the car, she observes the world around her, stilled by the heavy traffic. Extradiegetic symphonic music, an excerpt from Benjamin Britten’s “Suite on English Folk Tunes—Opus 90,” creates the sense of a ballet-like progression of cars down the street.

In one example, a close tracking shot of a series of car bumpers passes by, accompanied by a mix of diegetic street sounds and extradiegetic music. Horns and shouts emanate from within the scene; offscreen a full orchestra plays. The whole is undifferentiated. As a roaming camera tracks across tight shots of the hoods of cars and medium close-ups of drivers, the sounds continue. A lyrical shot of an uncharacteristically barren metro station replaces the street scene briefly. The white, empty, clean, and well-lit atmosphere provides a contrast that fades into superimpositions of the street scene, which eventually again become the focus. The entire sequence stands outside the immediate narrative and outside Laure’s direct perspective.

Denis uses a variety of camera and editing techniques to translate Laure’s quirky or paranoid daydreams, as well as to depict the newly formed couple’s interactions. Brief special effects provide momentary light-heartedness. Slow motion emphasizes particularly poignant moments. In the car, a roving camera oscillates between Laure and Jean, often shown in uncut long takes, or the camera hovers from the backseat in over-the-shoulder shots. They sit close enough to touch, but since they do not, the camera’s proximity creates an anticipation of touch. These tight shots are interspersed with sweeping panning shots of Parisians in transition from work to weekend. More pedestrians than usual fill the streets due to the strike. Slowly, traffic starts moving, and in the next scene, the music shifts, becoming more eerie. The camera pans people

walking on the street in front of shops and restaurants from Laure's perspective. As they wait in traffic, Laure accidentally touches Jean as she opens the glove box to look for a cassette, before deciding instead to play the radio. The brief touch again heightens the sense of their building attraction and the anticipation that they will touch again, even though they have just met.

The close camera elicits the haptic visuality that Marks describes. She contends that "[t]he haptic image, like other sensuous images, can also be understood as a particular kind of affection-image that lends itself to the time-image cinema. Recall that the affection-image, while it usually extends into action, may also force a visceral and emotional contemplation in those any-spaces-whatever divorced from action" (163). Not only do Laure and Jean anticipate touching, but the embodied spectator also physically feels their longing. The restricted space in the car, combined with the unusual framing choices that focus not on actions, but rather on emotions and reactions, create an any-space-whatever that exceeds the narrative. Deleuze describes the first type of construction of any-space-whatever as "shadow, shadows: a space full of shadows, covered with shadows" (*Cinema I* 111). Shots of Laure and Jean, when they occur, are shadowy close-ups, disconnected from the setting, marking them as affection-images in any-spaces-whatever.

Most significantly, the longer dream sequences portray Laure's desires, fears, and anxieties. After changing stations a few times, she settles on an older American song, "Two Sleepy People," which plays a moment before she begins to daydream. Even

though it seems a random choice, the song actually has deeper connections.<sup>29</sup> Set in Paris, it is about a married couple too much in love to go home to bed as dawn breaks over the Seine. Although not yet a couple at this point, Laure and Jean will be consumed with carnal love until almost dawn.

Sleepiness pervades what is shown. Laure has already fallen asleep, and now has waking dreams. Jean's smoking seems to provoke her to consider what taking him with her to her dinner engagement would be like. In a two-part reverie, she first dreams that she stops Jean as he walks away and asks him to join her at her friends' place for dinner. Then, she pictures the two of them sitting uncomfortably on the couch with her friend Marie (Hélène de Saint-Père), holding a crying baby and asking Jean not to smoke in the house. Both short scenes are cued as dreams since they have a vignette masking part of the frame and because they begin and end with Laure and Jean sitting together in the car, not walking on the street or sitting awkwardly at Marie's apartment.

The sequence following Laure's reverie again evokes tactility. In a continuous close-up, her hand pulls out the ashtray for Jean to use. He extinguishes the cigarette and closes the device with his hand near to, but not touching, her hand, which is still in the frame. The sense of touch is heightened as their hands touch the same object, but fail to make contact. The proximity of their hands insinuates their physical attraction. These shots convey the desire blooming between them and are composed of the most banal material: hands, a car ashtray, a cigarette, a gearshift.

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<sup>29</sup> "Two Sleepy People" was written by Hoagie Carmichael and Frank Loesser in 1938 and has been covered by many well-known singers. However, Denis chooses the recording with a French singer, Line Renaud, in a duet with Dean Martin from 1955. Another Renaud-Martin duet appears in *J'ai pas sommeil*, with Renaud also playing an important secondary role in the earlier film. This will be explored in Chapter 3.

After this simple moment, there are a few shots of Jean and Laure—a short shot of him looking at her, followed by one of her, smiling, in medium close-up. Her image fades to black and is replaced by a frame that is partially masked along the edges to create a vignette effect. It is a tight long shot of Jean sitting on a couch at Laure's friends' apartment and is cued as a daydream, as if Laure imagines the awkward situation that could arise if she took Jean, a potential new lover, to her friends' home. With the piercing cries of the baby prohibiting adult conversation, Jean sits uncomfortably beside her on the couch. The reverie is brief, but effectively communicates her thought processes. Returning to the present and the inside of the car, she decides to go forward instead of turning, signaling her decision not to take Jean with her to her friends' apartment. She changes lanes, smiles again at his confusion, and asks if he will join her for dinner. As their eyes meet, there is the first real confirmation of their mutual attraction. Both look away, as if embarrassed by the realization.

However, their union is postponed. Even though the overall tone of the film is more or less lighthearted, Denis manages to evoke a mix of fear and unease several times, again offering Laure's perspective. After leaving Jean alone in the car to go call her friend and tell her she is not coming over, Laure gets confused. Exiting the phone booth, she cannot remember where she left the car, and walks nervously among the cars stopped on the street, trying to be calm, whispering repeatedly that it is okay if she does not find the car and that she is not cold. Her anxiety is conveyed via shaky handheld camerawork. Jean runs to catch up with her, leads her back to the car, places her in the passenger seat, and takes the wheel.

Denis recognizes in her DVD commentary that Bernheim makes subtle references to Hitchcock in her novel, and Denis, too, includes embedded tributes to the master of suspense in the film. The first occurs after Jean guides Laure back to the car. Here, again, the combination of the music and the images evokes visceral reactions. As he takes the driver's seat, puts the car in reverse and backs rapidly down the street, the frenetic violins of Shostakovich's "Symphonie de chambre, Opus 110a" create a sense of fear. In her DVD commentary, Denis confirms the intended reference to Hitchcock suspense classics such as *Psycho* or *The Birds*. As she notes, Bernard Hermann, Hitchcock's usual composer and sound collaborator, was greatly influenced by Shostakovich.<sup>30</sup> As in Hitchcock's films, the music here also evokes anticipation and anxiety. Laure's expressions and the eerie music signal her distress. The buildings the two pass go by in a blur from Laure's perspective. These contrast with clearer shots of her riding in the car, looking out with curious or contemplative expressions. Her point of view shots become abstracted, reduced to streaks of colors and blurs. These blurred images are rich, colorful, and textured. They pass over surfaces as though one could reach out and touch them. Laure is seen through the windshield, buildings superimposed on her face creating a layered collage. In the close-up of her face is a mix of worry, curiosity, and franticness, which finally compels her to make Jean stop abruptly. Once he walks away and she returns to the driver's seat, the pace of the film slows again. When back in control, however, she realizes that she was wrong to let him go and goes in pursuit of him.

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<sup>30</sup> A second Hitchcock reference happens as Laure and Jean enter the hotel. The creepy young man who rents them a room recalls Anthony Perkins in *Psycho*. However, the empty hotel is less foreboding than the Bates Motel, and the run-down rooms become sensuous instead of sinister.

A second waking dream occurs in the Italian restaurant, where the two go after their first interlude at the hotel. Another couple enters, and the woman, visibly distressed, goes to the bathroom. Jean goes to check on her. While he is gone, Laure envisions him in the bathroom, sensually washing the woman's feet in the sink. Not as clearly demarcated as a dream sequence, the time that passes and Jean's actions and reactions upon his return to the table are unreliable guides to whether or not the scene actually occurred. Even though Laure's projection of his possible activities with another stranger perturbs her, she quickly resumes an affectionate demeanor upon his return.

By contrast with the Hitchcock-inspired periods of suspense or apprehension, Denis incorporates short, whimsical special effects as moments of levity. Before meeting Jean, as Laure stares at the Volvo bumper in front of her, an "s" floats around and places itself at the end of the word "valve." This scene is taken directly from the book, when she wonders why a multi-valve car would not have an "s" at the end of the word "valve," as would normally be grammatically correct in French. Later, even though she had just been paranoid about what Jean was doing in the restaurant bathroom, she relaxes and welcomes him back with a smile. A brief special effect here causes his pizza ingredients to smile at him also, reinforcing Laure's now happy mental state. When they return to the hotel after dinner, she imagines a lampshade flying back to its lamp in her apartment. In this short, dreamy moment she seems to ponder what life with Jean might be like.

Most of Denis's films include one brief moment of slow motion to enhance the importance of a key scene. *Vendredi soir* uses the effect more than any other. Each of these slow motion moments seems suspended in time, caught in between what has been and what will be. After the sequence when Jean drives, Laure is left alone in the car and

there is a slow motion shot of her with her hands on her face. She seems to realize that she may have lost the new stranger to the night. That momentary stillness is also slowed down and further marks the moment as a turning point. After this, Laure again begins to move, now in pursuit of the man she desires.

Later, in the café where she catches back up with Jean, she crosses him on the stairs to the bathroom. This moment is also emphasized through slow motion. The slowness further conveys their attraction. Desire is visible in their eyes, in medium close-up in slow motion. Jean's intentions are made clear to Laure after they cross paths and she realizes that he has asked for change for the condom machine, not for the phone. Her surprise and pleasure are caught in an extreme close-up of her eyes, looking in his direction up the stairs. As she and Jean return to their hotel room, Denis presents a slow-motion close-up of her face. This time, the slowed down frames indicate her contemplation of Jean's potential role in her life. The last time slow motion is used is during the final shots of the film, as she runs down the street with a smile on her face.

Another noteworthy shot of Lemercier occurs in this last sequence. After leaving Jean alone in the hotel after their night together, Laure walks, then runs, down the street, maybe in search of her car. The camera tracks along with her movement but then stops. Laure runs by across the frame from left to right, briefly caught with the biggest smile on her face in the whole film. Her face is radiant, her body is relaxed, and she seems to be free. The film has no resolution or explanation of whether she plans to return home, finish the move, and live with François, or whether she will leave her former life behind. At the very end, as she passes by, her smiling face momentarily is seen in slow motion, this time in a medium shot. The reason for her happy expression is unclear. Maybe she is



flushed from her recent amorous adventure, pleased that she got away with it, or simply content to be returning to her boyfriend and her belongings. The meaning of her expression is less important than the feeling it conveys.

*Vendredi soir* provides viewers with multiple opportunities for haptic engagement. Smell, touch, and sound are all evoked. The consistent use of close-ups, or affection-images, and the creation of any-spaces-whatever lead to another type of haptic engagement in which the emotion of the characters is transmitted to the viewer via the proximity to narratively disconnected images. These concepts are also important in *5X2*.

### Betrayal, Banality, and Beauty

In an interview about *5X2* on his website, Ozon discusses how he explores “the couple” in his second feature length film, *Gouttes d’eau sur pierres brûlantes*. He says he wanted to return to the notion using his current life experience. He adds that he did not want to give reductionist explanations as to why a couple decides to separate, or to simply rely on the cliché that it is the day-to-day monotony of conjugal life that is to blame for destroying relationships. Rather, he prefers “filmer des moments forts de la vie d’un couple sans donner uniquement ce quotidien à suivre” (“to film the powerful moments of the life of a couple without giving only the quotidian events that follow”). While the film spans a number of years, the exact amount of time that passes is unclear.

A few years seem to separate each of the five episodes. As mentioned, the chronology of the episodes is reversed, but each segment is linear and spans anywhere from hours to days.

Even though *5X2* is not as overwhelmingly evocative of the senses as is *Vendredi soir*, it does contain a number of sequences that can be classified as haptic. Some relate to sensorial engagement. More often, haptic encounters occur during liminal moments that transcend diegetic space. The dance scene in the second episode, as the song “Sparring Partner” by Paolo Conte plays, is a good example. The diegetic space shifts with the addition of the music, which is simultaneously inter- and extradiegetic. Citing Deleuze’s notion of any-space-whatever, Phil Powrie describes a cinematic metaspace created from combining these in-between spaces with the compelling, gravely voice and music of one of the beloved Italian singer-songwriters.<sup>31</sup> He explores the idea of the “in-between space, neither diegetic nor non-diegetic” in which “dancing bodies and gender instabilities intertwine with the soundtrack to create a metadiegetic and haptic moment, which takes us out of space and time into embodied feeling” (“The Haptic Moment” 208).

Ozon had a set of films in mind that influenced his narrative and cinematic decisions. Unlike Denis’s oblique references to *One From the Heart*, his tributes to Bergman’s *Scener ur ett äktenskap* (*Scenes from a Marriage*, 1973) are more recognizable. The Bergman film spans ten years in the life of its main couple, Johan

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<sup>31</sup> According to Powrie, Paolo Conte “is well known as one of Italy’s *cantautori*, or singer-songwriters, with a large following in Germany and France as well as Italy” (“The Haptic Moment” 208). For an introduction to the *cantautori*, he directs the reader to *Poesia cantata: Die Textmusik der italienischen Cantautori* edited by Frank Baasner. He lists the *cantautori* as: Conte, Franco Battiato, Edoardo Bennato, Lucio Dalla, Ivano Fossati, Giorgio Gaber, Fabrizio De Andre, and Francesco De Gregori (“The Haptic Moment” 221).

(Erland Josephson) and Marianne (Liv Ullman). It starts with their tenth wedding anniversary and ends on what would have been their twentieth. Ozon cites specifically a scene in which Marianne arrives to sign the divorce papers in Johan's office as inspiration for the first scene in *5X2*.

However, more than that scene impacts Ozon's film. In the first three episodes, when Gilles is older, he looks remarkably like Johan thanks to his curly hair and neatly trimmed beard. In terms of their characters' demeanors as well, Marion is levelheaded and strong like Marianne, while Gilles is depressive and weak, resembling Johan. At the narrative core of *Scenes from a Marriage* is the inevitable demise of even the best of couples and the complications that arise because such relationships never quite die. Bergman's minimal settings and close shots that insist on Marianne's beauty, strength, pain or suffering further influenced Ozon. He, too, keeps his framing tight and uses frequent close-ups, although his spaces are not as restrictive or sparse as those in Bergman's epic saga.<sup>32</sup> A key difference between the films is that Ozon does not incorporate omnipresent dialogue. His quieter film contains fewer scenes with sustained speech.

Ozon held screen tests for the lead couple together, instead of casting for each part separately. He wanted to find two actors with visible chemistry. He had them read a scene from *Scenes from a Marriage* during auditions. Once he had decided upon Valeria Bruni Tedeschi and Stéphane Freiss, he encouraged them to screen key scenes from the Bergman film, Sergio Leone's 1982 *Once Upon a Time in America*, and Michael

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<sup>32</sup> *Scenes from a Marriage* was originally released as a six-part TV series of hour-long episodes, with a total run time of 299 min. The theatrical release came after, with a shorter run time of 167 min.

Cimino's 1978 *The Deer Hunter*. All clearly influence the tone and composition of *5X2*, especially in the first and fourth episodes respectively. The rape scene in the beginning of *5X2* recalls the first forced sex between Noodles (Robert De Niro) and the woman he has loved since childhood, Deborah (Elizabeth McGovern) in the back of a car in *Once Upon a Time in America*, an epic film about Jewish gangsters in Brooklyn. Noodles loves Deborah but coldly rapes her nonetheless. Similarly, Gilles has been tender with Marion, telling her he still cares, but like Noodles, he holds her down against her will and violates her. The jubilant atmosphere of the wedding reception dance scene in the fourth episode recalls the celebration in *The Deer Hunter* of Steven (John Savage) and Angela's (Rutanya Aida) marriage. As the wine that spills on Angela's dress as they toast portends ill for their future, Gilles's inability to consummate his marriage with Marion is likewise a bad sign.<sup>33</sup>

Jane Campion's television movie *Two Friends* (1987) influenced the narrative structure, which functions via an inverted chronology.<sup>34</sup> Radically different from Gaspar Noé's shockingly violent and visceral *Irréversible* (2002), *5X2* does, nonetheless, share the same narrative structure as Noé's film, starting with a breakup and moving toward a first encounter. Ozon's film continually moves back in time between episodes and never returns to the "time" of the first sequence. It also gives hardly any background information.

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<sup>33</sup> Unusually, the screenplay was only three episodes long when Ozon started shooting, with the final two episodes written during a five-month hiatus in production. He planned a break to allow the actors a chance to lose some weight, change hairstyles, and rejuvenate in order to embody their characters as younger versions of themselves.

<sup>34</sup> Thibault Schilt also recognizes that *5X2* is "close in both spirit and structure" to Harold Pinter's 1978 play "Betrayal" (*François Ozon* 131). Ozon himself does not mention *Betrayal* specifically; he does mention *Two Friends* and *Scenes from a Marriage*.

As happened with *Vendredi soir*, Ozon's collaboration with Emmanuèle Bernheim results in the film evoking the senses and creating in-between spaces as forms of haptic encounters. Close-ups on the faces of the protagonists are featured. There is, as in *Vendredi soir*, a great focus on the female protagonist, Marion, played by Valeria Bruni Tedeschi, who won the Pasinetti Award for Best Actress.<sup>35</sup> By contrast with Denis's film, however, Ozon, develops his male protagonist more.

Although much more time passes in *5X2* than in *Vendredi soir*, the restriction of knowledge and use of ellipses are also points of correspondence with the Denis film. Most of the episodes present a significant event in the couple's life, but the focus is less on what is happening than on how the people onscreen interact and react. By eliding certain moments with abrupt cuts within scenes and by skipping years between episodes, Ozon leaves the film open to interpretation. He insists in the interview on his website that, "les gens combinent les ellipses en y mettant leur propre histoire" ("People fill in the ellipses with their own (his)story").

Rather than retrace some form of impossible "original happiness," the film implies that relationships contain only fleeting moments of happiness, while most of the time they are filled with a range of other emotions—from jealousy and rivalry to disdain, desire, and even elation. *5X2* draws on the dystopic portrayals of couples in many of Emmanuèle Bernheim's books. As in *Sa femme*, *Vendredi soir*, and *Un couple*, for example, plots or subplots here involve adultery. That there are more couples to consider in the Ozon film than in the Denis one augments the sense of the inevitability of strife, regardless of whether the relationship is conventional or not.

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<sup>35</sup> Bruni Tedeschi was also nominated for Best Actress for the European Film Award, and Ozon was nominated for a Golden Lion (imdb.com).

Ozon's film is much more structured than *Vendredi soir*. The ellipses in and between episodes fragment the narrative. A study of two people out of time, from the start, the locations also remain vague. Without any exposition, the film begins *in medias res* in a judge's office. The judge says more in the introductory section than the couple does for the rest of the film: he reads aloud perfunctorily and dryly from their divorce decree.

In the next scene, surprisingly, the separating couple goes together to a hotel, having decided to have sex one last time. They walk together down a dimly lit, drab hallway. Marion and Gilles are at a crossroads in their relationship: divorced but going to bed together. The scene colors the progressively "happier" views of the couple in subsequent episodes. Most scenes offer examples of Marion and Gilles, as well as other couples, somehow being out of sync. Inside the room, they are awkward, but Gilles undresses, gets in bed, and asks if Marion is joining him. She stands looking out the window, as though hesitating, but she does decide to come to bed. As in the judge's office, they say little, although they talk more after Marion's mother calls. She seems less willing to have sex than he does from the beginning, but her discomfort shifts to disgust. Her disinclination to follow through with making love to him leads to his rape of her. She has to fight to push him off of her. As she lies facing away from him, he gets on top of her from behind and pins her down. She sheds a few tears, but endures his mistreatment.

The rape sequence is an almost two-minute, uncut shot that starts as a medium two shot, with Gilles forcefully pulling Marion underneath him. Though not as graphic as Gaspar Noé's 2002 *Irréversible*, or Catherine Breillat's 1999 *Romance* and 2001 *A ma soeur (Fat Girl)*, the scene is nonetheless disturbing. The camera gradually tightens in on

Marion's face and cuts out of the frame most of what is happening to her. Gilles' face and hand are glimpsed at the top of the frame for the first minute. The juxtaposition of his hand squeezing her hair with her anguished face in an increasingly close shot translates the tension that has apparently become the norm in their relationship. While her protestations of "Stop!" and screams subside, her capitulation does not make her seem weaker, but somehow stronger.

In control, Gilles nevertheless does not look content. His labored breathing and grunts mix with Marion's screams, choked-off in her pillow. As the camera edges in, these sounds dominate, and all "action" is cropped out. Instead, the camera tracks in on an increasingly close shot of Marion's pained expression, as she lies immobile. As he continues, he does not seem to enjoy the sex act, but rather to be determined to finish it. As the shot slowly eliminates him from the frame, her face and eyes register physical and mental pain. She does not look at the camera, but vacuously ahead, with red, teary eyes and a stunned expression. By showing her face in a tight medium close-up, the film focuses on her suffering, but also her resilience. The camera hovers just above and in front of Marion's left shoulder, with her face, in partial profile, filling most of the frame for almost a minute.

The duration of the shot prolongs the emotion, and the tight framing also contributes to the haptic quality of the sequence. The face in close-up becomes dislocated in space and time, yet sensation and emotion are heightened. As with Deleuze's discussion of the face of Joan of Arc in Bresson or Dreyer, Marion's emotive face is the site of meaning. The prolonged close-up floats detached from the diegetic space, becoming an abstract site of pure emotion. As Deleuze says, part of the internal

composition of the close-up consists of “the face or faces which express it, with particular differentiated material parts and particular variable relationships between the parts (a face hardens or becomes tender)” (*Cinema 1* 104). Here Marion’s face changes from looking extremely distressed to quietly suffering. The sheets form part of an abstractly texturized surface around her face that fills the frame.

Just as Denis employs multiple medium close-up and close-up shots of Valérie Lemercier in *Vendredi soir*, Ozon uses many close shots of Valeria Bruni Tedeschi in *5X2*. These concentrate attention on Marion’s emotions. Bruni Tedeschi’s performance is communicated mainly through her body language and expressive face. This again recalls Deleuze’s notion of the “affection-image.” Two important scenes illustrate the power of the understated performance: the already discussed rape scene in the first episode and the after dinner dance scene in episode two.

Bruni Tedeschi’s eyes are key to her expression of emotion. Before, during, and after the rape, her eyes express her reticence and reluctance to copulate with Gilles. When he is on top of her while she is still semi-willing, several overhead shots show her unenthusiastic expression and the tears in her eyes, as though being in bed with her former husband resuscitates for her the painful parts of why they separated. The camera holds on Marion for several more seconds before cutting abruptly to a shot of the bathroom door through which she will emerge.

The next shot is of Marion with a towel around her torso, tearstains visible, and a wounded look on her face. She puts her bra on and stands before the mirror, facing herself before she goes back out to face him. It is the first time she is seen alone, and although she has been violated, she emerges resilient. In the final image of the episode,



she again faces herself in a mirror, in the elevator, with a hint of a smile forming on her face as she leaves behind her abusive and needy lover. Bobby Solo's song "Una lacrima sul viso" ("A tear on her face") plays extradiegetically. She is no longer crying. The song is surprisingly upbeat sounding, Marion is in a liminal state, between divorce and her new life.

In the second episode, Marion and Gilles invite his brother Christophe (Antoine Chappey) and boyfriend, Mathieu (Marc Ruchmann), over for the evening. The camera hovers and pans across the various combinations of the two couples present after dinner as they talk and dance. The sensuous movements of Bruni Tedeschi's body convey complex emotions from euphoria to melancholia. The images at once represent what is happening in the narrative space and are separated from the rest of the scene, existing in a liminal space because the diegetic soundtrack is eliminated. Marion dances with Christophe while Mathieu and Gilles talk, sitting intimately close. The rearrangement of the couples and the possible erotic tension between Gilles and Mathieu contributes to what Phil Powrie calls "gender fluidity" ("The Haptic Moment" 206). This film, however, is much less about destabilizing sexual identification than other Ozon films.

Gilles, Marion, Christophe, and Mathieu have been discussing infidelity. Mathieu contends that it is impossible to remain faithful. Gilles describes the one time he cheated on Marion, as she watched an orgy organized by friends. There is a series of medium close-ups on each of the four adults. Most time is spent on Marion's reactions. Gilles says she encouraged him to participate, but that she said she only wanted to watch. He relates that he had sex with many people that night, experimenting with sexual acts and both men and women. As he gives more details, tears well up in her eyes. The men do not

seem to notice her sadness. Gilles in contrast seems to enjoy telling them about his night of debauchery. There is no explanation as to why she chose not to participate, but the memory clearly is painful.

Powrie also discusses Michel Chion's notion of the "point de cri," or screaming point, with regard to haptic moments in the second episode. Powrie concludes that the tension in the scene "between poetic lyrics and granular refrain," is the site of the "screaming point," the moment where speech fails ("The Haptic Moment" 219). However, he does not mention what might be termed, extrapolating on Chion, a "point de pleurer," or crying point, which Marion reaches in three different episodes. Moreover, in Powrie's discussions of the screaming point, he does not mention the first episode in which Marion actually reaches a screaming point twice. The piercing quality of her screams there evokes an empathetic response from an embodied spectator. The long takes of the tears in her eyes function similarly.

Unlike *Vendredi soir*, which only shows a few shots of Vincent Lindon in close-up, there are a number of tightly framed shots of Stéphane Freiss's face throughout 5X2. Even though, or perhaps explaining why, his character is forceful with the women in his life, Freiss describes Gilles as someone who is tormented about his sexuality, with latent homosexual inclinations. In the interview on Ozon's website, Freiss says he imagined that Gilles "était troublé dans sa sexualité; que son échec avec Marion, comme ses échecs précédents, prouvait qu'il cherchait invariablement des femmes alors que c'était un homme qu'il devait rencontrer!" ("was troubled in his sexuality; that his failure with Marion, as with his previous failures with women, proved that he invariably looked for women while [actually] it was a man that he should meet!"; 5).

In each episode, there are close-ups of Gilles, mostly looking pensive, but two episodes stand out. In the hotel room at the beginning of the film, a medium shot shows him in the bed, staring into spaces as though he were remembering their past. Just before Marion comes out of the bathroom to join him, the camera tracks in to a medium close-up. Gilles looks left and bites his lip, as though in hesitation, not anticipation, of sex with Marion. In the third episode, the shots of him in medium close-up, sitting in the car, show him avoiding the hospital and his wife. His expression is almost blank and he seems detached from his family.

Touching in some form happens in most scenes. This distinguishes the middle section, the birth episode, which is practically bereft of touch between characters. Marion and Gilles do not occupy the same space, let alone touch, in that episode at any point. Consistently, touch is foiled or refused: for example, thick glass keeps anyone from getting close to the newborn or car windows protect Gilles from the rain—and the responsibilities he chooses to neglect. As the car becomes a refuge in *Vendredi soir*, here it is a space where Gilles can escape and pass time in limbo. The physical presence and texture of the glass dividers, which are smooth, transparent, and permit visual contact, refuse the warmth of human contact and reinforce the impossibility of touch. The impenetrable nature of these surfaces is augmented by added textures: the security glass of the nursery window has metal hash marks, while rain courses over the vehicle that Gilles occupies.

Powrie believes Ozon meant for Gilles to be a “fundamentally weak character,” and that is why Gilles abandons Marion during the birth of their son: he is cowardly (“The Haptic Moment” 215). He is, in fact, coded as the weaker member of the couple

throughout the film. However, having already seen Gilles taking good care of his son in the second episode, it seems strange that he would be so cold at his birth. His distance and refusal to be there for Marion could instead be the product of the discord between them. It is also possible that the child is the product of Marion's one betrayal of Gilles, on their wedding night. No one poses this question, however, and there is no indication that Marion has told Gilles about her encounter with an unnamed American (Jason Tavassoli).<sup>36</sup>

The film's third episode also differs from the others in that there are no intimate moments between couples. Neither the second nor the third episodes have sex scenes, although the dialogue in the second episode revolves around sex, sexuality, and infidelity. But in the third episode, Gilles abandons Marion inexplicably, and Marion's father (Pierre Cholet) shows disdain for her mother (Marie-Madeleine Fouquet). Marion's parents epitomize what can happen after years of marriage. Her father is verbally crude and disrespectful to her mother in front of Marion, who lies in a hospital bed after giving birth.<sup>37</sup> The film thus suggests that the older generation has experienced similar discord, but that they stay together, despite being unhappy and at odds. As with the protagonists, this older couple seems more loving, and, if momentarily, happier earlier, dancing at their daughter's wedding in the fourth episode.

Here, another liminal moment occurs at the end of the euphoric wedding dance. In contrast with the pop music heard in the reception, or a song by Conte, or one of the other

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<sup>36</sup> Whether or not Marion has been unfaithful is unsure since a sex scene with the stranger is elided. In fact, this scene had a follow-up that was deleted from the final cut, which confirms that the American was only a daydream. The final cut retains the sense that the affair did occur, leaving room for the possibility that the American is the father of Marion's child.

<sup>37</sup> The actors are incorrectly listed on [imdb.com](http://imdb.com) as Gilles's parents.

Italian singer-songwriters whose songs end each of the first four episodes, now somber, evocative notes are part of an original composition for the film by Philippe Rombi. His music is only used in the last two episodes. The music is extradiegetic, but, unlike the Conte song in the second episode, it does not seem to be heard by the characters. The plaintive music continues into the next several shots, following the couple to their room. A cut moves from the dance floor to a high-angle canted pan as they climb up a grand red-carpeted staircase, still brimming with enthusiasm, inebriated. The melancholic music does not correspond with the emotions they express.

The disjunction between what is seen and heard creates an in-between space that foreshadows the discord that occurs in the future we have already witnessed. As a couple, they are on the verge of consummating their vows. The sequence from the dance floor to the stairs to the hallway outside their room is an encounter that builds on their mutually consensual and pleasurable touching, only to culminate in a missed physical encounter. Notably, except for dancing together during their wedding reception or holding each other in their bedroom before Gilles falls asleep, they do not touch. Gilles passes out before making love to his new bride. She leaves to walk around the grounds. Their marriage has just begun, and already they are out of sync.

Marion puts on jeans over her bridal garter and panties and goes back outside. She walks out of the chateau to observe the few people remaining in the reception room. The Platters' "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes" plays, and from a distance, she watches the only couple still dancing: her parents. They appear tender and loving, in stark contrast with their comportment in the previous episode. A medium close-up of her looking cuts to a long shot of them dancing, and then gradually tracks in to a medium close-up. Another

medium close-up of Marion registers a smile on her face. In a cut to the reception, she sees Christophe in the process of picking up a waiter. Again, in medium close-up, she smiles. These are two isolated, happy moments between other couples, underscoring the fact that Marion is not happy with her new husband. She walks to a clearing by the water and sits on a log. An American man appears out of nowhere. Since he does not speak French, they converse in English. He offers her a cigarette, and she smokes. She tries to leave, but he forcibly kisses her. Although she resists and struggles against him, her resistance does not match her refusal of Gilles in the first episode, and she rather quickly gives in to the stranger's embrace. The scene cuts from Marion in the American's arms to her re-entering the chateau and running back to Gilles, who is in bed. She passionately covers her husband in kisses and tells him she loves him. But he is asleep, and so does not respond, although he does smile.

In the last episode, Gilles and Marion are not yet together. While Marion has been single a few months, Gilles has come on vacation to Sardinia with his current girlfriend, Valérie (Géraldine Pailhas). He is with her most of the episode, but he runs into Marion in the water, and begins to take notice of her. Despite their obvious attraction, they do not touch because Gilles is still, for the moment, with his girlfriend. He is cruel with Valérie their last night together, telling her that he would rather be making love to Marion. He is also somewhat forceful as they have sex. This is the second time in the film Gilles has sex onscreen, and he is callous and domineering both times.

At the end of the last episode, he walks up to Marion, who is alone on the beach. These are their first moments alone together. Marion knows he is there with someone else; thus, she is cognizant that their seemingly mutual desire may make her complicit in

his infidelity. This final scene ends with a long take of an extreme long shot of them walking out in the water in the distance, never quite touching. A Rombi composition accompanies the shot, adding a wistful dimension. This is a beginning for the couple, but their union is doomed. It is also the end of the film. This time, diegetic sounds of the waves mix with the extradiegetic music, creating a space that transcends the action. The touch that is not captured onscreen is insinuated as imminent, and creates a sense of tension that is almost tangible. At the same time, the future failure of the relationship is, because of the episodes we have seen previously, already known.

#### Tactility, Tranquility, and Adaptation

The correspondence between these two films stems predominantly from their portrayal of dystopia in relationships; their creation of sensorial, tactile, and haptic spaces; and their consistent use of tight framing, particularly in close-ups of the female leads. Although *Vendredi soir* has been regarded as a happy, sensuous film, there remains a subtext of unease, adultery, and mistrust that undermines a reading of the film as simply about a one-night stand.<sup>38</sup> Since *5X2* begins with divorce and progresses backwards toward the relationship's beginning, one might expect to learn the reasons for the couple's discord. However, direct explanations are avoided, here, as well. Both films, instead, present layers of empirical data couched within disconnected moments. Both also thwart straightforward or simple explanations. However, remembering Beugnet's association of haptic moments with a "contemporary state of existential malaise,"

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<sup>38</sup> Most critics discussed the film as unusual for Denis. Amy Taubin says, "[r]emarkable...simply the sexiest film ever made about two ordinary people who find each other for one night."

although these films portray dystopia in the couples, they also exude sensuality (“Re-enchanting the World” 214). What she observes about *Vendredi soir* and *Lady Chatterly* holds true also for *5X2*. Beugnet contends these films “make strong stylistic and intellectual statements that resonate with contemporary existential questions no less than their pessimistic counterparts” (224).

Both films present many shots cued from their female protagonist’s perspective. Although nothing about Laure’s relationship with François is revealed, she appears to be ambivalent about moving in with him, as evidenced by her non-enthusiastic phone message to him. The fact that she is willing to cheat on him the night before she begins living with him seems to indicate either that they have problems, or that she is bored and therefore allows herself to participate in a one-night stand with a stranger. Even though Marion’s interactions with the American occur during a happy time in her relationship, she has still been “abandoned” by the sleeping Gilles on her wedding night. Like Laure, she warms to the affections of a stranger. Both women also leave these fleeting encounters exuberantly, with Laure running off into the early morning streets, and Marion dashing back to her husband in bed. The films are not directly concerned with the repercussions of their actions.

Much of both directors’ work features outsiders, but in these two films, white, middle-class, heterosexual couples are the narrative focus. As Andrew Asibong notes about *5X2*, this “couple does not have the excuse of marginality or social disjunction for its breakdown: its steady corruption seems essential, predestined, an ineluctable decline into banal obscenity” (*François Ozon* 95). Nor is homosexuality or ambiguous sexuality a major theme in either film. The homosexual characters in *5X2* only seem to be included



to reinforce the idea that infidelity can be a problem in any type of relationship. Rather than focus on adultery or unfaithfulness, the films instead emphasize the women's affective reactions to their various situations. Their emotional responses range from curiosity, elation, and happiness, to anxiety, fear, and disappointment.

Neither film offers a conventional closure. Both also end at a liminal time of day. *Vendredi soir* ends at dawn, while *5X2*'s final images are at dusk. These in-between times are again haptic: things seem to shimmer or glow in the softer light. Laure's elusive smile at the end of *Vendredi soir* is ambiguous. Is she happy about her night's adventure, happy to return to her boyfriend, elated from her fling, or, maybe, will she return to neither man? The end of *5X2* is more definitive, since the film has already shown Gilles and Marion's failure as a couple and divorce. Nevertheless, it leaves open to interpretation if they stay apart.

The films both finish with music playing extradiegetically, which assists in creating a final haptic moment. Soft violin chords begin as Laure runs on the street, joined by tinkling piano notes as her face crosses the frame. The happy music and Laure's smile both point toward a positive outcome, although what will happen next is not indicated. *5X2* is seemingly more optimistic at the end, but the reverse chronology means that the film ends with the beginning of Gilles and Marion's relationship. The peaceful Rombi notes and the sound of the waves nonetheless create a soothing final moment thanks to the soft woodwinds and violins that replace the sound of waves.

Haptic moments will continue to be an important point of similarity in some of the films by both directors discussed in the following chapters. Likewise, the use of tight framing and restricted spaces will again result in the creation of any-spaces-whatever and

affection-images. The rest of this dissertation develops these and other ideas in different contexts, however. Masculinity, femininity, and alternative sexuality are explored in the next chapter. Different kinds of relationships are considered in subsequent chapters. The next two chapters delve into the repercussions that violence and death have within families and on couples. The last chapter returns to unstable relationships in fragmented families.

## Chapter 2: Sexuality and Adaptation, and (Queer) Eroticism

Ozon's third and fifth features, *Gouttes d'eau sur pierres brûlantes* (hereafter referred to as *Gouttes d'eau*) and *8 Femmes*, and Denis's fifth feature, *Beau travail*, intersect in the ways they are queer and homoerotic, if usually without portraying sexual acts. Like *Vendredi soir*, all three are adaptations of literary works, but they are less faithful to the originals. Two of the three source texts have been read as homoerotic. Framing, costuming, performance, and musical numbers containing choreographed movement all contribute to the perception of these films as queer. All three films reference genres and auteurs beloved by homosexual and/or queer audiences and include transgressive characters. They share visual and auditory strategies in their creation of erotic moments via choreographed movement and dance, sultry looks, frequent close-ups, ironic or provocative speech, and music.

A sense of the instability of identity permeates all three even though—and whether straight, homosexual, lesbian, sexually ambiguous, or transsexual—no characters are radically unconventional. Indeed, traditional, even stereotypical, forms of masculinity and femininity are dominant. *Gouttes d'eau* and *Beau travail* focus more on masculinity, while *8 Femmes* explores femininity almost exclusively.<sup>39</sup> Nonetheless, all ultimately question the notion that happiness, satisfaction, or successful relationships derive from hegemonic, patriarchal paradigms.

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<sup>39</sup> Both directors have produced films with more radically subversive characters that do not function within the realm of normal social conventions. For example, the daughter, Sophie (Marina de Van), in Ozon's *Sitcom* becomes a dominatrix after a suicide attempt and ensuing paralysis. In Denis's *J'ai pas sommeil*, Camille is a homosexual drag queen. His identity, lifestyle, and murderous acts are radically subversive. He is discussed in the next chapter.

Ozon's films often incorporate sexually subversive material. However, the settings in these two films are not stereotypically gay or queer. There are no gay bars or cruising spots. Instead, the action is set in conventional-looking homes. Nonetheless through colorful décors and costumes, kitsch objects, and artificial settings, a campy atmosphere emerges. Susan Sontag's 1964 landmark "Notes on 'Camp'" is a propos. She defines camp as elusive, multi-faceted, and yet anti-normative. For her, camp often entails a parody of traditional gender roles and sexualities and is rooted in excess. She says, "the essence of Camp is its love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration," insisting that it is "a sensibility that, among other things, converts the serious into the frivolous" (53-4).

Ozon also engages with melodrama to heighten the artifice. Fiona Handyside recognizes the importance of the heritage of both Rainer Werner Fassbinder and Douglas Sirk in *Gouttes d'eau*. She insists, "It is precisely this combination of deeply felt emotion alongside an ability to distance the viewer through the aggressive artifice of melodrama that also has appeal for François Ozon. Ozon argues that Fassbinder's power resides in his shrewd use of the melodramatic genre to provoke emotion" (209).

Based on plays of the same titles, *Tropfen auf heiße Steine* (*Water Drops on Burning Rocks*) by Fassbinder (never staged or made into a film by Fassbinder) and *Huit Femmes* (*Eight Women*) by Robert Thomas (written in 1958, rewritten and first staged in 1961), the two Ozon films contain elements of melodrama and the musical.<sup>40</sup> As homosexual or bisexual writers working predominantly within Western heterosexual culture in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, their works are frequently pessimistic. In contrast,

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<sup>40</sup> The Thomas play is spelled out as *Huit femmes* while the Ozon film is written *8 femmes*.

in Ozon's films the colors of the décor and costumes, combined with comic dialogue and music, lighten the mood, at the same time as the sexual tension and transgressive tendencies of characters increases.

*Gouttes d'eau* takes place in 1970s Berlin and *8 Femmes* in 1950s upper class, provincial France. The action is restricted to an interior setting in both the plays and the films. Each has a small cast: four characters that seem to be two men and two women in *Gouttes d'eau*; *8 Femmes* has the eight women of the title plus one man. With these two period pieces, Ozon pays homage to two different filmmaking modes: first, to avant-garde gay European auteurs such as Jean Genet and Rainer Werner Fassbinder, and, second, to mid-century Hollywood directors such as Douglas Sirk, George Cukor, and Vincente Minnelli.<sup>41</sup> Drawing on these backdrops, Ozon combines the sentimentality of melodrama with psychological torment and a camp sensibility.

In *Gouttes d'eau*, the pessimism and postmodern feel of early Fassbinder mix with the melodramatic flamboyancy of classical Hollywood musicals to parody normal society. The characters span the gamut from homosexual to heterosexual and include a transsexual character, too. Franz (Malik Zidi) shifts between heterosexual and homosexual. Véra (Anna Thomson) is a woman in Fassbinder's play but Ozon makes her a transsexual (male-to-female) character in the film. Handyside argues that Ozon produces a double distantiation for the viewer by reworking European (anti-)melodrama (Fassbinder) influenced by American melodrama (Sirk). She explains, "Distantiation works at two levels for the viewer. The first is at the same level as in a Fassbinder or a Sirk melodrama, where framing, camera movement, ironic use of music, expressionistic

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<sup>41</sup> In his book on Ozon, Schilt goes into detail about the cinematic influences for *8 femmes* (64-80).

use of colour and montage can all comment on the narrative action” (212). In *8 femmes*, Ozon achieves a similar effect by parodying integrated musicals. With *8 Femmes*, Ozon focuses almost exclusively on the women characters, as does the Thomas play. While sexual deviancy is not evident at the beginning, at least four of the women either express lesbian desire during the film or discuss past lesbian or bisexual experiences. Although colorful and beautiful on the surface, both films end tragically with a suicide.<sup>42</sup>

Less straightforward and not easy to classify in terms of genre, *Beau travail* is loosely based on Melville’s last work, the novella *Billy Budd, Sailor* (written in 1891, published posthumously in 1924). However, although Denis describes the film’s connection to Melville in interviews, the text is not credited in the film, and the source text is only obvious to those familiar with Melville’s story. As Catherine Grant says, the film is a “free” adaptation. She says, “Free adaptations [...] capitalize on difference. They are expected to *manifest* innovation and ingenuity with regard to interpreting (and not translating) the narrative systems of their ‘sources’” (58). Instead of featuring sailors on a British warship in conflict with revolutionary French forces in 1797 as Melville does, Denis’s film is set in contemporary Djibouti and deals with French Foreign Legionnaires in peacetime.

Visually and narratively experimental, *Beau travail* is a surreal journey with a lead protagonist and narrator, Galoup (Denis Lavant). Unlike Ozon’s more linear

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<sup>42</sup> *Gouttes d’eau* and *8 femmes* contain multiple intertextual references and employ conventions of film melodrama. Laura Mulvey identifies “two dramatic points of departure for melodrama. One is coloured by a female protagonist’s point of view which provides a focus for identification. The other examines tensions in the family, and between the sexes and generations” (42). *Gouttes d’eau* begins with the tension between homosexual men of different generations. *8 femmes* takes as its point of departure the perspectives of its female protagonists from three different generations.

narratives, *Beau travail*'s chronology is confusing and fragmented, shifting continually from the past in Djibouti to the present in Marseilles. The film contains no sex scenes but is rife with eroticism. The sculpted male bodies of the legionnaires appeal to queer audiences. Shot on location, *Beau travail* lacks the theatricality of the two Ozon films. Women have minor roles.

Galoup is loosely based on John Claggart, the character who despises the young, handsome new foretopman, Billy Budd. Claggart has been read as homosexual, most notably by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (91-130). Here, eroticism emanates not from sexual acts but from the male military homosocial environment and the camera's focus on the men's bodies and interactions as they practice maneuvers. In contrast with the two Ozon films' interior sets, Denis's film takes place mostly outside, in vast desert landscapes, dark rocky terrains, and deep blue seascapes, although certain interiors are also seen, including Galoup's apartment in Marseilles and the dark, pulsating nightclub in Djibouti. The cast is large, including about twenty actors playing legionnaires, a diversity of Djiboutians, and some French people glimpsed on the streets of Marseilles.

All three films foreground music, dance, and choreography. Ozon incorporates songs and dances, often at unexpected moments, in both *Gouttes d'eau* and *8 Femmes*. In *Gouttes d'eau*, there is a samba group dance; in *8 Femmes*, each of the eight protagonists sings a song. Less theatrical than balletic, parts of *Beau travail* can be likened to a choreographed dance, with an evocative musical soundtrack. The sounds of Benjamin Britten's opera accompany the soldiers during training exercises; techno music plays in the club; a Neil Young song is heard as the legionnaires complete a grueling desert march; a haunting original score by the Tindersticks punctuates the whole film.

Significantly, all three end with a character either committing or preparing to commit suicide. Whether trying to escape from self-loathing or unrequited desire, certain characters see no point in continuing to live. Ozon's films soften the tragedy with music. *Beau travail* instead replaces tragedy with catharsis. Although the entire film can be read as Galoup's preparation for death, in the last sequence he dances frenetically alone in a nightclub. His abandon makes him seem full of life.

### Seduction, Domination, Betrayal

In *Gouttes d'eau*, the potential for expanding conventional relationships exists, though ultimately no radical configurations endure. The inevitable degradation of "the couple" is a recurring theme in much of Ozon's early work, including the two films of this chapter.<sup>43</sup> He relates in the interview on his website, "Depuis longtemps je voulais faire un film sur un couple, sur la difficulté de vivre à deux et de supporter le quotidien" ("For a long time I wanted to make a film about a couple, on the difficulty living as two and tolerating the quotidian"). This film shows the impossibility of a long-term relationship, whether gay, straight or otherwise, under existing patriarchal paradigms. For Ozon, sexuality is fluid, indeed, he says, "I've always thought my films are less about homosexuality than bisexuality" (Lim).

*Gouttes d'eau* features a broad spectrum of sexual identification from homosexual, transgendered, transsexual, heterosexual, and bisexual to just plain sexually curious. However, no partnerships last: Léopold (Bernard Giraudeau) and Franz, Franz

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<sup>43</sup> He employs the theme in early short films such as "Robe d'été ("A Summer Dress"), as well as in his first two features, *Sitcom* and *Les amants criminels*.



and Anna (Ludivine Sagnier), Léopold and Véra, and the brief ménage-à-trois, Léopold, Anna, and Véra, all dissolve. So, too, probably will the final duo, Léopold and Anna. Another configuration of all four forms during the group dance. It is temporary as well.

While writing a manuscript, Ozon discovered the early Fassbinder play. In “Ozon Meets Fassbinder,” Gary Morris maintains, “Fassbinder never wanted it produced, either as play or film, because it was too personal, based on a scandalous real-life relationship he had with an older man.” The play corresponded to what Ozon wanted to say and the film became an adaptation and a tribute to Fassbinder’s turbulent life. Structurally, the film resembles the play, neatly divided into four acts. Much of the dialogue derives directly from Fassbinder’s text. Ozon uses melodrama to enhance artificiality and affect. As Handyside argues, following Peter Brooks, “melodrama allows the expression of social angst [...] Rather than seeking to displace his melodramatic instincts into a naturalized *mise-en-scène* that hides the film as a specifically cinematic act, Ozon increases the artifice even of Fassbinder’s own oeuvre” (215).<sup>44</sup>

*Gouttes d’eau* takes place entirely in the apartment of handsome, fifty-year-old Léopold Bluhm. As is the play, the film is set in an unspecified part of Germany. The characters operate within the paradigms of traditional, “straight” society, with “the man,” here Léopold, in control. Ozon’s film is less claustrophobic and more vibrant than many early Fassbinder films and differs in significant ways from the original play.<sup>45</sup> The oppressive, dysfunctional atmosphere of some of Fassbinder’s films informs Ozon’s

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<sup>44</sup> Handyside recalls Peter Brooks’s assessment of melodrama, saying it is “a peculiarly modern form,” in which the “heightened emotions of the family melodrama do not lead us back to the private domain but open out to the spectator the possibility of moral transparency (and thus potentially ethical engagement) in a post-sacred, post-revolutionary world” (215).

<sup>45</sup> The play does not seem to be available in translation. I obtained a copy in German.

style. The narrative has connections in particular to Fassbinder's *Fox and His Friends* (1975) and *In a Year with 13 Moons* (1978). In the former, Eugen Thiess (Peter Chatel) manipulates his friend Franz "Fox" Bieberkopf (Fassbinder), much as Léopold does Franz.<sup>46</sup> The actors' faces express complex emotions, and close-ups often emphasize their performances. Ozon maintains the *huis clos* setting of the play, but introduces other rooms, including the living room, kitchen, bathroom, office, and, notably, Léopold's mirrored-wall bedroom.

The highly stylized environment, rich color palettes, kitschy décor, and exaggerated costumes contribute to the film's campiness. Léopold's apartment is decorated in mid-century modern furniture. The living room is painted in hues of mustard yellow and avocado green. Large black stone bricks cover one wall. The bedroom has a white shag carpet and mirrored walls. Light blue paint contrasts with shiny black tile on the walls of the bathroom. Brown-haired Léopold wears fashionable suits in grey tones and the occasional turtleneck shirt. He usually remains fully clothed, except during sex scenes. Red-haired Franz starts off wearing a hip black t-shirt and leather jacket, but as he submits to Léopold's tyranny, his wardrobe becomes feminized. He wears short, green lederhosen in Act II. Much of the rest of the time he wears either a red or a green long-sleeved shirt and skimpy briefs, which also accentuate his muscular legs. Later, he dons a blue and white feminine apron as he works in the kitchen. Anna arrives in a demure outfit: a non-revealing shirt, sweater, and tweed skirt. After the short scene of her reunion

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<sup>46</sup> In terms of its usage of restrictive interior spaces and tight camerawork, as also its depiction of power dynamics in certain homosexual relationships, *Gouttes d'eau* recalls Fassbinder's 1972 *Die bitteren Tränen der Petra von Kant* (*The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant*). There, however, the younger Karin Thimm (Hanna Schygulla) dominates the aging Petra von Kant (Margit Carstensen). Still, Petra's sadistic treatment of her assistant, Marlene (Irm Hermann), resembles Léopold's treatment of Franz.

with Franz, she is subsequently either naked or in a matching light blue bra and panty set. Véra wears only a sexy camisole beneath her black coat.

The first two acts contain only the male characters. The first shows Léopold's initial seduction of Franz. By Act II, the discord of the couple's quotidian life replaces flirtation. Though homosexual, theirs turns out to be a conventional sort of relationship. Franz is a housewife for Léopold, the domineering businessman. Both acts end with intimations that the men will have sex. Unlike the play, however, the film includes nudity and eventually shows sexual acts.

The two female characters do not make an appearance until the last two acts. Although both men discuss their prior relationships, little is known about the women. Franz missed a date with Anna to follow Léopold home initially. Léopold discusses his long-term relationship with an unidentified woman who turns out to be Véra. Appearing at the door twice in Act III, she comes in only when Léopold answers the door in Act IV. As in the play, she is Léopold's former longtime companion.

Act I depicts the older man's slow seduction of an almost unsuspecting younger man. The focus is on their interactions and the increasing sexual tension between them. Léopold is suave and clearly in control. Homoerotic desire is first made obvious through a provocative close-up of Léopold's crotch, framed so that Franz appears between his legs. The shot corresponds with Léopold asking Franz to play a game of "petits-chevaux" (little horses, similar to ludo). They sit awkwardly on the couch at first, then they lounge on the floor. Franz moodily upends the game board as Léopold flaunts his winning. Franz explains his anger at losing, revealing that it stems from his time in boarding school. Léopold seizes on the revelation as bait for proceeding with the seduction.

These and other erotic moments occur most often without any sex involved. As the two men stand facing one another, desire builds though they do not touch. The camera slowly circles Franz in medium close-up. Here Léopold revolves around him in the opposite direction. Sometimes both men are in the frame, sometimes just one. Léopold is the active, dominant figure circling his prey. Like a trapped animal or a fly in a web, Franz stands immobile for a moment in frontal close-up. The camera and Léopold's circling continues until Léopold asks Franz if he has already slept with a man. The almost continuous motion produces a sense of sexual anticipation. Eventually, Léopold kisses Franz.

Other than brief nighttime gratifications with a classmate, Franz says he has not had homosexual experiences. However, he mentions a recurring dream in which his mother's boyfriend would come to him in a trench coat and take him "like a little girl." At the end of the act, Léopold incarnates the man of Franz's dreams. None of the first three acts shows any sex, but all allude to the fact that two characters are about to have sex. At the end of the first, a wipe from right to left gives way to a slightly high-angle long shot of Franz lying completely naked on the bed. Childlike music box notes play. There is no dialogue. His hands cover his genitals and he looks up in curious anticipation. An eyeline match pans up Léopold's body to his face. He wears a trench coat and smiles seductively in a slightly low-angle close-up.

Act II in the play opens with Franz singing the first stanza of the Heinrich Heine poem "Die Lorelei," although no indication credits Heine (Fassbinder 79). He then sings a brief song expressing his loneliness in English, before waxing angry at how difficult it is to please Léopold. In the film, Franz does not sing at any point. Alone in the bathroom

at one point, soaking in the tub, he recites the Heine stanza. The Lorelei, a rock cliff on the river Rhine that lures sailors to it like a siren, offers an analogy to Léopold. Ozon does not translate the poem. Franz says aloud in both the play and the film, “Ich weiß nicht, was soll es bedeuten,/ Daß ich so traurig bin,/ Ein Märchen aus uralten Zeiten,/ Das kommt mir nicht aus dem Sinn (I wish I knew the meaning,/ A sadness has fallen on me./ The ghost of an ancient legend/ That will not let me be” (Foreman). Zidi’s delivery conveys Franz’s melancholia even without the explicit meaning of the words given.

Visually, Zidi’s pale skin and red hair contrast beautifully with the light blue and black colors of the bathroom. After bathing, Franz prepares for his lover’s return, doing things such as plucking his eyebrows and blowing his hair dry, activities more typically codified as feminine. The film focuses on his facial expressions, physical beauty, and attention to appearance, emphasizing that he has assumed the “female” role in the couple.

After Léopold returns, discord is evident. The rest of this act shows Léopold being callous and cruel to Franz while Franz tries to please him. Ultimately, Franz becomes defensive and despondent. Léopold consoles him by suggesting that they still have a good sex life. Eventually he confesses his anguish over a client’s suicide: he had swindled the man. The moment foreshadows Franz’s decision to take his own life to escape Léopold’s control.

At the end of Act II, the men reverse roles. This time Franz plays the role of the seducer, mimicking what Léopold did on their first night together. As he reminds Léopold, it is now their six-month anniversary. Léopold lies nude on his stomach, turned to look up at Franz who now wears the trench coat. Again, neither speaks and the same tinkling toy box music plays.

The most graphic change Ozon makes to the play is the inclusion of the homosexual sex scene that opens Act III. In the play, Franz sits and reads alone until Léopold is up and stirring. In the film, Act III opens *in medias res* toward the end of Franz and Léopold having sex. A frontal shot of Franz in front of Léopold holds while both men achieve orgasm. They are framed in medium close-up, with the exact nature of what they are doing not really visible. Their full bodies, genitals, or any penetration are not shown. After they finish, both men continue to breath heavily though neither speaks. The intimacy they share contrasts starkly with their non-sexual interactions.

Out of the bedroom, discord resumes. Léopold leaves on a business trip. Franz receives a phone call from Anna and she shows up at the apartment. As soon as Anna arrives, Franz becomes cruel and domineering, sounding like Léopold. In this new configuration, Franz establishes himself as dominant. He imitates Léopold's initial seduction, holding Anna's head back by her hair and kissing her firmly.

At the end of Act III, Franz remains in control. He enacts again the scene of seduction from Act I. The last few shots resemble those of the first two acts and the music box notes play once again. This time, Anna lies nude on the bed on her stomach. Franz, in the trench coat, looks down at her. Franz has a serious look on his face but Anna looks playful.

The final act begins with Franz and Anna lying nude in bed. Anna plots Franz's departure from Léopold and a future life together. Franz asks Anna to play a record, insinuating that she knows the one to play. French singer Françoise Hardy's 1970 "Träume" ("Dreams"), sung in German, is heard. Hardy's voice is sultry, beckoning as the siren Lorelei does in the Heine poem Franz quotes twice. The camera sways and tilts

rhythmically above Franz in medium close-up and close-up, showing the anguish in his eyes. Meanwhile, Anna, in medium shot in the living room near the turntable, looks pensive. Franz suffers from his love for Léopold and the older man's dominance. Anna eventually also falls prey to Léopold.

Véra is a much more complex figure in the film than the play. She demonstrates the full extent of Léopold's domination: she has had a sex change for him, been abandoned by him, and yet returns to him. She arrives clothed in a red fur-trimmed black leather coat, black knee-high boots, red felt hat, and sunglasses. The first time she appears at the door, Franz opens it wearing just a long-sleeved shirt and briefs. The second time, Anna opens the door wearing one of Léopold's gold and black robes, open to expose her chest. Both times, Véra seems surprised and flustered.

In the play, Léopold returns from a business trip with Véra, bringing her back to the apartment. In the film, she comes back to his sadistic treatment despite knowing he has moved on and can never be with just one person. The third time she knocks at the door, Léopold answers and she enters. Léopold crudely introduces her to the other two as someone who "cut off his dick in Casablanca" as he escorts her into the living room.

Véra asks Léopold if she can play a record. A spontaneous group dance creates erotic tension anew. An abrupt cut shows the four framed from behind from the torso down, shaking their butts in unison to "Tanze Samba Mit Mir," a hit by German singer Tony Holiday in 1977. A frontal wide shot of the four side-by-side reveals that Léopold and the girls know the tune and the dance well, while Franz struggles to make the right moves. As the dance progresses, a series of medium close-ups of each of them captures their looks at each other. Léopold abruptly cuts the music and tells everyone to go to the

bedroom. Véra and Anna squeal and run off. Franz stays behind. He asks Léopold if the older man needs him. Léopold responds that Franz needs him. Franz, left alone, looks wounded.

Franz is the most subversive character in part because he embraces both masculine and feminine roles, is bisexual, and refuses Léopold's regime, if at the cost of his own life. Franz, who could be straight or gay, is apparently primarily monogamous, yet ultimately chooses death over domination. He is unwilling to join the others in the bedroom. In a striking departure from the play, Ozon includes a dream sequence with Franz looking in from the doorway and imagining himself shooting Léopold in the head: Franz cannot reconcile himself with his lover's betrayal. Instead of acting on his murderous urge, however, he returns to the bathroom and swallows poison. As in the play, he reveals to Véra what he has done, though does not call an insane asylum in the film. Instead, he calls only his mom, who seems indifferent in both the film and the play.

In the *Gouttes d'eau* interview on his website, Ozon discusses the importance of Véra to Franz, noting, "Pour Franz, Véra apparaît comme ce qu'il pourrait devenir sous l'influence de Léopold et son suicide est une manière d'y échapper ("For Franz, Véra appears as that which he could become under Léopold's influence and his suicide is a manner of escaping it [that fate]"). At the film's end, Léopold and Anna return to the bedroom. Véra stays behind, alone in the room with Franz's body.

In the same interview, Ozon invokes Fassbinder's refusal of marginality, noting how the seemingly subversive characters actually conform to societal norms:

Le couple de la pièce est un couple d'hommes, mais l'homosexualité n'est jamais posée comme un problème, comme dans *Le droit du plus fort* (1974), où Eugen



amène son ami Franz dîner chez ses parents, sans que cette situation soit traitée de manière particulière. La force de Fassbinder est de plonger le spectateur dans l'anecdotique et la vie quotidienne d'un couple particulier, et de réussir à donner une vision universelle du couple. Fassbinder disait souvent que la marginalité n'existe pas. Il affirmait que plus les gens vivent en dehors de la norme sociale, plus ils s'approprient les schémas dominants des relations humaines. ("The couple in the play is a couple of men, but homosexuality is never posed as a problem, as in *Fox and His Friends* (1974), where Eugen takes his friend Franz home to dinner at his parents, without the situation being treated as peculiar. The force of Fassbinder is to plunge the spectator into the anecdotic and quotidian life of a particular couple, and to succeed in giving a universal view of the couple. Fassbinder often said that marginality did not exist. He affirmed that the more people lived outside of society, the more they appropriate the dominant schemas of human relations")

Though the characters seem subversive for their sexual choices, they actually conform to conventional relationship structures. Léopold does not want an open relationship to be free or equal but instead to dominate others. Franz displays fluid sexual object choices, but does not desire polyamorous relationships. Véra suffers from her submissiveness to Léopold's cruelty and infidelity, but cannot resist coming back to him. Anna remains heterosexual, though she stands to suffer like the others.

The film ends with an ironic last shot of Véra trapped in the apartment, framed by the window. For one of the few times in the film, the camera is positioned on the exterior of the apartment. Véra is not able to open the window or to join Franz in escape-by-

suicide. Nor is she willing to rejoin the others. As a reprise of “Träume” plays, extradiegetically this time, Véra presses against the glass of the window as the camera pulls back gradually to show a total of three windows and part of the exterior of the building.

Nick Rees-Roberts notes that *Gouttes d'eau* can be read as countering France's assimilation-driven PaCS movement, where homosexuals receive the same rights as heterosexuals. Ozon, in fact, calls the film “le premier film anti-PaCS” (“the first anti-PaCS film”; 10). By making an anti-PaCS film, Ozon seeks to show that existing paradigms for relationships, hetero- or homosexual or otherwise, are not sufficient for more radically queer configurations. Franz's death signifies an end of submission to oppressive power but costs him his life. No one else changes. Léopold and Anna enter the bedroom, offscreen, and Véra remains, trapped.

### Deceit, Desire, Temptation

As in the case of *Gouttes d'eau*, the film version of *8 Femmes* draws on intertextual sources. Especially influential are the 1930s-1960s melodramas and musicals by George Cukor, Douglas Sirk, and Vincente Minnelli (Schilt 65-67). Initially, Ozon wanted to do a remake of Cukor's *The Women* (1939), but he could not obtain the rights.<sup>47</sup> Instead he chose to adapt the similarly female-centric *Huit femmes*.

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<sup>47</sup> Hollywood stars Julia Roberts and Meg Ryan own the rights to *The Women*.

*8 Femmes* follows the same general murder mystery plot as the play.<sup>48</sup> As with *Gouttes d'eau*, the setting is not stereotypically gay or lesbian. Instead, it is the same as in the play: the interior of a large 1950s French provincial country home. Although much of the action and dialogue derive from the play, the film does not follow a three-act structure. Ozon includes lesbian and bisexual intrigue and adds eight musical numbers. Phil Powrie insists correctly that these performances, with the women singing and/or dancing, distinguish Ozon's film from classic American musicals in the intentional way they interrupt and fragment the narrative: "il s'agit d'un pur spectacle, et ce qui est mis en spectacle ce sont à la fois le corps de l'actrice et la musique, l'un aidant l'autre à s'incorporer de façon spectaculaire. [...] on a donc le sentiment d'une fragmentation essentielle et profonde" ("it deals with pure spectacle, and what is put on stage are both the actress' body and the music, one helping the other to incorporate [the performance] in a spectacular fashion [...] one thus is left feeling that the fragmentation is essential and profound"; "La communauté impossible" 219). Ozon further makes the father, Marcel (Dominique Lamure), physically present. Focus is, however, on the women who function as if he has been murdered.

The Thomas play does not contain any homosexual characters though Thomas was himself homosexual. There, the plot centers on money and greed. In the film, the

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<sup>48</sup> As Ozon's most commercially and critically successful film to date, *8 Femmes* received nine awards and 25 nominations. The wins include a Silver Berlin Bear for Outstanding Artistic Achievement for the entire cast (2002, Berlin International Film Festival) and a Lumière Award for François Ozon for Best Director (2003, Lumière Awards, France). The film was nominated for a variety of Césars, but did not win any. It remains Ozon's most popular film, lauded for the all-star cast's acting, the vibrant, stylized mise-en-scène, the impeccable cinematography of Jeanne Lapoirie, and Ozon's direction. Ozon's use of famous actresses propelled the film into film festival circuits and mainstream theaters.

women's sexual identities play a large role. Ozon also relates in the interview on his website, "I wanted to paint a light and amusing reflection on femininity, actresses, class struggle, and family secrets." Written in collaboration with Marina de Van, the screenplay adds a lesbian/bisexual twist, insinuations of incest, and other sordid details.<sup>49</sup>

The women in the film are more complex, cynical, and sexualized than in the play. Though mischievous, malicious, or selfish, on the surface they appear beautiful and charming. A palpable eroticism, sometimes blatantly homoerotic, emanates from seductive looks, sexy performances, provocative camera movements, and distinctive framing choices. Thanks in good part to the musical numbers, the film creates sensual tension without showing intimate interactions, nudity, or sexually explicit acts.

Madame Chanel (Firmine Richard), Pierrette (Fanny Ardent), and Louise (Emmanuèle Béart) all reveal lesbian or bisexual proclivities. Marcel's wife and the mistress of the household, Gaby (Catherine Deneuve), is a cuckolded adulteress who willingly succumbs to Pierrette's spontaneous embrace. Her sister, Augustine (Isabelle Huppert), transforms from repressed spinster to radiant diva. Her mother Mamy (Danielle Darrieux) is more than just the drunkard that she is in the play. In the film, she confesses to killing her husband. Gaby's older daughter Suzon (Virginie Ledoyen) is pregnant in the play and the film. In the film, Ozon adds a twist: Marcel is the father. Younger daughter Catherine (Ludivine Sagnier) is more than a capricious tomboy. She turns out to be the cunning mastermind behind her father's fake murder in both the play and the film.

A campy aesthetic radiates from the artifice of the setting, thanks to brightly colored costumes, ornate décor, and dramatic lighting effects during the musical

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<sup>49</sup> Marina de Van worked previously with Ozon on his short "Regarde la mer."

numbers. The women are stuck on a remote estate in a heavy snowstorm. After finding Marcel “dead” in his room, their means of accessing help dwindle. Though not there at first, Pierrette arrives on foot. Otherwise, everyone, one to the house, is cut off from all means of communicating with the outside world, with little chance of leaving the grounds. Within the home’s interior, however, the colors are vibrant and the ambiance is warm. Elaborately decorated, if slightly outdated, the main action takes place in the living room, as in the play. The furniture, walls, and carpets are designed in rich hues of red, green, and gold; fabrics are heavily brocaded or velvety. The attention to detail adds to the kitschy feel; the setting includes many small and large objects such as paintings, furniture, decorative objects, and curtains. The costumes are also vibrantly colored and in richly textured fabrics. All the women give dramatic performances, especially during their songs, with some referencing burlesque acts or musical numbers.

As with *Gouttes d’eau*, other rooms are also shown, and these are absent from the source play. They include the dining room, kitchen, and a few bedrooms. During the songs, the lighting becomes notably more dramatic. The costumes combine haute couture looks from various decades. Seven of the women wear neatly tailored dresses or uniforms, corresponding with each character’s personality and evoking aspects of each actress’s previous onscreen incarnations.<sup>50</sup> Catherine is the only female character who

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<sup>50</sup> The inspiration for the character Louise comes from the 1946 and 1964 versions of *Diary of a Chambermaid* (Jean Renoir and Luis Buñuel, respectively), based on the 1900 novel by Octave Mirbeau. For information on connections to these texts, see interviews with Ozon on the DVD and his website; see also Schilt 67. In the novel and in both versions of the film, Célestine, the chambermaid, goes to work for a strange bourgeois family and must wear a black and white uniform, complete with black leather lace-up boots.

wears pants. All of the actresses use exaggerated expressions and deliver their lines dramatically.

Casting is key, as are the musical numbers. Ozon secured one of France's best-known film stars, Catherine Deneuve, first. She is known for performances as an upright and uptight, upper class woman who almost always has a secret sex life.<sup>51</sup> She also has a strong gay and lesbian following.<sup>52</sup> The character Gaby dresses well, in an elegant tailored dress with a low neckline and a white fur stole. Although she makes homophobic remarks when she finds out about Madame Chanel and Pierrette's relationship, she quickly succumbs to Pierrette's embrace later.

Ozon cast Huppert as Augustine, the spinster sister of Gaby. Augustine's selfishness and hostile demeanor in the first two-thirds of the film invoke Huppert's performance as melancholic but sultry Violette in Claude Chabrol's 1978 *Violette*, her first leading role. A direct reference is made to one of her roles as Alphonsine Plessis in the film *La storia vera della signora da camelia* (Mauro Bolognini, 1980). Pierrette tells her that she reminds her of a character from one of the romance novels Augustine is always reading, citing *La dame aux camélias* (*The Lady of the Camellias*, Alexandre Dumas *filis*, 1848), the source text for the Bolognini film by the same title. In the play by Thomas, the only book referenced is *La gondole des amants*, the book that Pierrette borrows from the library and in which she finds Augustine's letter to Marcel.

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<sup>51</sup> In Buñuel's 1967 *Belle de jour*, the renowned surreal journey of the degradation of the life of a bourgeois couple, Séverine/Belle de jour transforms from an innocent new bride into a jaded, experienced woman who fulfills her secret fantasy of being degraded sexually by becoming an upscale prostitute.

<sup>52</sup> For a discussion of her recognition as a cult queer symbol, see Provencher 39, 45.

Augustine is high-strung and neurotic as she is in the play. In the film, however, her singing voice is low and almost sultry. Her performance is melancholic and wistful, sensual and emotional. Earlier, in a staid dress, her hair in a bun and wearing glasses, she epitomizes the spinster aunt of the family. Near the end, she sheds her bitterness and high-necked outfit, descending the stairs in a voluptuous lilac evening gown, hair down and glasses off. The asexual virgin becomes the opposite of her former self, a radiant diva. She now accepts what Joan Rivière once described as the masquerade of femininity.

A tall, curvy brunette, Ardent as Pierrette is glamorous in a red-lined, black velvet coat with a tailored red dress beneath. Described at the beginning of the Thomas play as “une ancienne danseuse nue” (“a former exotic dancer,” 8), Pierrette is a seasoned seductress. In the play and the film, the dialogue informs us that she and Gaby share the same lover, Marcel’s business partner Jacques Farnoux. However, in the film, Pierrette is a comfortably bisexual woman who has been in a long-term, but not monogamous, relationship with Madame Chanel. She also has had numerous other male and female lovers, enjoyed a close relationship with her brother, and she blatantly seduces Gaby.

Emmanuelle Béart has played seductive, vampy characters in a number of films. Also bisexual, her character, Louise, demonstrates perverse inclinations such as a desire for sadomasochistic relationships. During her can-can number, “Pile ou face” (“Heads or Tails”), she shows off sexy black lace-up boots under her requisite black and white maid’s uniform. Having been in an affair with Marcel for years, she also eventually

evinces a fetishistic love of her current and former patronesses. She carries a photo of her previous mistress in her apron.<sup>53</sup>

Firmine Richard, the one non-white character, is a heavyset black woman with a working class accent who plays the long-term loyal family servant, Madame Chanel. In the play, the role is referred to as a “charmante dame de 50 ans” (“charming woman aged 50”), and race is not mentioned (Thomas 7). In the film, Chanel is a lesbian in love with Pierrette. Richard recalls the temperament, demeanor, and body type of the stereotypical black maids and mammies from 1930s and 1940s American films. In the DVD interview, Ozon specifically mentions *Gone with the Wind* when discussing the inspiration for Madame Chanel. She is the only one to sing her song alone, emphasizing her isolation from the others.

Far from possessing the overt sensuality and sexuality of Anna in *Gouttes d'eau*, here Sagnier gives a more physically active performance. Her character, Catherine, displays more sexual curiosity in the film than in the play. Although she continually reminds her sister and the others that she is no longer a child, she repeatedly acts like one with emotional outbursts and playful antics. She is more mature and cunning than her behavior would indicate, however.<sup>54</sup> Although not pregnant like her sister Suzon, Catherine also seems to have a very close relationship with Marcel. Fortunately, she has not conceived her father's child. She is the only character to be aware of his actual

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<sup>53</sup> Thibaut Schilt describes in detail the importance of the casting of each actress and the embedded references. The photo is of Romy Schneider, a German actress who performed both in Germany and France, in German and in French, often in sexually provocative roles. He says, “By confessing to Gaby, when talking about the photograph of her former employer (Schneider), that she ‘loved her,’ Louise ventriloquizes Ozon’s own feelings for Schneider and his profound childhood admiration for the *Sissi* film series” (67).

<sup>54</sup> In an interview on the DVD, Sagnier says that Catherine is the only masculine character because she wears pants and thinks like a man.



presence, instead of presumed death, of Marcel throughout the film and play. Eventually, Madame Chanel suspects the truth. By contrast, Virginie Ledoyen as Suzon is curvaceous and feminine in a pink knit dress. Though not provocative and sultry like Pierrette and Louise, Suzon is radiant and emanates a certain sensuality.

Three songs in particular are erotic, and with all instead of men, women are the audience. Schilt recognizes, “This departure from traditional female performance on film, where non-singing (women) characters are presented in counter shots as enthralled, admiring spectators, intensifies the film’s queer tension, sometimes forecasting lesbian romances that the text will later divulge (Chanel/Pierrette; Gaby/Pierrette), other times advancing possibilities that remain unfulfilled (Augustine/Louise; Gaby/Louise)” (75). Pierrette’s song is third and serves as an introduction of sorts to this mysterious woman. Her song is also a striptease. Spotlighted as though on stage, she sings, “A quoi sert de vivre libre?” (“What Good Is it to Live Freely?”). All the women watch. She seductively removes a long black glove. In the DVD interview, Ozon relates that he asked Ardent to study Rita Hayworth’s alluring postures in *Gilda* (1946) as she sings “Put the Blame on Mame.”<sup>55</sup> Pierrette teases, acts provocatively, and looks seductively at Gaby in particular. Deep red satiny curtains frame the doorway and Pierrette, suggesting love, passion, sin, and theatricality.

Louise sings the sixth song in response to Augustine’s question about how to seduce a man. Although Louise tells Augustine that seductiveness cannot be learned, her

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<sup>55</sup> Mary Ann Doane notes about Rita Hayworth’s performance in *Gilda*, “Striptease presupposes, on the part of the spectator, an immersion in the very process of peeling away accretions of layers. In a sense the endpoint, the completely nude body, which structures the way in which the woman is looked at, is necessarily an anticlimax” (*Femmes Fatales* 106).

song and dance are similarly sensual. She breaks free of her constricting uniform during her dance number and lets her hair down, literally. Her song starts slowly and seductively, but it becomes a leg-lifting can-can. Augustine is enthralled and rendered speechless. Catherine sneaks in to watch, keen to learn about sensuality and sex.

Gaby sings the seventh song to Pierrette as an introduction to their sexually charged encounter. The sequence with them transpires after the others leave to try to find a way off the property. It culminates in the one sexual exchange of the film: a prolonged kiss. As with Pierrette's song, the lighting for Gaby's song, "Toi, jamais" ("You, never"), focuses on her. The song references not only Deneuve's previous roles and cult persona, but also those of Marilyn Monroe.<sup>56</sup> Gaby sings to only Pierrette. She does a little tease with her fur stole and drops it on the floor, slowly moves her arms and touches her body, then dances near the window where she briefly uses the gold brocaded curtain as an alluring prop. As the song ends, the lights go down. A slightly high-angle shot of Pierrette, sitting and watching, shows her inhale quickly, a gesture that conveys her sexual titillation. Much as Léopold's circles Franz in Act I of *Gouttes*, here Pierrette circles Gaby as she describes how women should experience love, or at least sex, with other women. She revolves around Gaby several times, talking provocatively and even touching Gaby's fur. They move to sit together in a window seat. The light dims and Pierrette says that she did not reveal that Gaby has a lover to the others as a gesture of feminine complicity. They realize that they share the same lover.

Jealous, the two struggle to gain control of the revolver thought to be the murder weapon. Pierrette ends up on top of Gaby on the floor. In the play, the two women fight

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<sup>56</sup> In the DVD commentary, Ozon cites Monroe as Sugar Cane Kowalczyk in Billy Wilder's *Some Like It Hot* in particular who performs to a roomful of men.

after they realize they share a common lover, and although their battle over the gun results in them being “corps à corps” (“body to body”), no kiss ensues, they are not alone, and they break up their fight when the gun goes off (Thomas 103). The film instead offers a catfight in which Pierrette pins Gaby as the music crescendos, then shifts to soft strings as their anger changes to attraction. Gaby stops resisting as soon as their lips meet. Both women moan, their bodies pressed together, until the others return. Although a depiction of lesbian desire, the scene is also a hyperbolic representation of a stereotypical male fantasy: feminine women fight and then make out.

Catherine, Augustine, and Mamy also perform for some or all of others. Even though several of the songs are melancholic, each performance somehow allays any lingering sense of sadness. The first song sets the tone. Catherine sings the bright pop song, “Papa, tu n’es pas dans le coup” (“Daddy, You Ain’t with It”), and Gaby and Suzon dance with her. They perform for Mamy, who sits in her wheelchair and watches. Augustine sings a plaintive song, “Message personnel” (“Personal message”), at first sitting at the piano, then standing solemnly, yet theatrically, before all the female characters. Her song is melancholic, and the others sit on the stairs, swaying and watching her.

Marcel is glimpsed several times in the film in numerous short flashbacks. He neither reacts to nor responds to any of the women, however, and he is almost always shown from behind, although his perversities and vulnerabilities are exposed over the course of the film. We learn that he cheats on his wife with the maid and his (wife’s) oldest daughter and potentially that he has also had an ongoing and possibly sexual relationship with his sister. Gaby reveals, to Suzon’s relief, that Marcel is not actually her

father, but stepfather. Theirs is, nonetheless, an incestuous relationship. On multiple occasions, Madame Chanel jealously insinuates that Marcel and Pierrette have a closeness not shared by most siblings.

In the play, Marcel kills himself behind the bedroom door before Catherine enters. Callously he shoots himself in front of his daughter in the film. In both, Catherine admonishes the others with “Cette fois, c’est vraiment vous qui l’avez tué!” (Thomas 112). The play ends there, but in the film Mamy soothes Catherine. Mamy sings her song, aptly titled “Il n’y a pas d’amour heureux” (“There Is No Happy Love”). Grandmother and granddaughter sit solemnly on the stairs and sway, while the other six women dance in couples that interchange and shift. As a final theatrical wink, the eight women stand in a line, as though ready for a final bow and a curtain call.

Like *Gouttes d’eau, 8 femmes* is a rather close adaptation of the original play. Again, Ozon makes certain changes to the narrative, including incorporating intertextual references. He creates a campy atmosphere through flamboyant and colorful, yet realistic and fashionable, costuming, elaborate and intricate settings, and dramatic lighting and acting styles. Not as sexually explicit, eroticism nonetheless emanates from numerous scenes. With Deneuve’s cult queer following, the film is of particular interest to queer audiences. Several of the characters turn out to be lesbians or bisexual. Denis’ film differently adapts its source text. Although it also enlists tight framing and circling camera movements, it does so to portray homoeroticism rather than any overt form of homosexuality, bisexuality, or transgenderism.

*Beau travail* is an intriguing film that defies genre classification. Denis and co-writer Jean-Pol Fargeau's approach to adaptation differs sharply from Ozon's. Rather than closely following an original text, they relocate the setting, complicate the chronology, integrate more obscure intertextual references, and create a complicated soundtrack including Galoup's voice and many types of music. Melville's novella *Billy Budd*, the Britten opera and film versions of *Billy Budd*, Godard's *Le petit soldat*, and more inform the Denis film.

Despite being so different, *Beau travail* shares with the two Ozon films a heritage in a literary source text, ambiguous characters, and the portrayal of homoerotic tension within a homosocial setting.<sup>57</sup> Even more than in *Gouttes d'eau*, the focus is on masculinity and power paradigms, now within a hierarchal, all-male institution, the French Foreign Legion. This section considers changes made to Melville's novella, charts intertextual auteur and actor references, and describes several of the many sensual camera movements. While the major collaborators on *Beau travail* are women (the director, cinematographer Nelly Quettier and editor Agnès Godard), the protagonists are men. The twenty legionnaires perform strenuous drills. These contrast with scenes that show the men doing domestic chores, such as laundry and food preparation.

Unlike the Ozon films, Denis does not name this film for the work she adapts.

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<sup>57</sup> *Beau Travail* has received a much larger amount of scholarly attention and critical praise than any other Denis film. For example, see Brault, Jones, Lack, and J. Williams.

Rather, she uses an oblique reference to Melville's text.<sup>58</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy offers one of the most insightful analyses of the film. Nancy insists that the title "*beau travail*" (meaning both "good work" and "well done") derives from Melville's text: Claggart mockingly tells Billy, "Handsomely done," after Billy knocks over a bowl of soup ("A-religion" 14). He also recognizes that the other meaning, "good work," applies to the film as a whole: "it is a work on beauty: body, light, appearance, harmony, majesty, stark rhythm of editing, which holds the narrative at bay, in favour [sic] of an ostentation of the image through which the camera signals or signs itself" (16). It is thus "good work" in a non-conventional, enigmatic sense pertinent to film as a moving-image medium. In contrast with Ozon's artifice and theatricality, Denis shoots mainly on location here, challenging realist notions of storytelling instead through what might be termed poetry.

The impetus for *Beau travail* was Pierre Chevalier's request for Denis to participate in a project on foreignness, with the goal to produce a film for the series *Terres étrangères (Foreign Lands)*. As Denis describes in an interview, with the theme of "être étranger, se sentir étranger" ("being foreign, feeling like a foreigner"), she was able to "faire un travail dont je rêvais, partir dans un pays étranger avec une idée de fiction, ne rien préparer et, pendant le tournage, me sentir étrangère. Puis c'est devenu plus personnel, lié à mes souvenirs de Djibouti où j'avais vécu enfant. Evoquer ce thème de la Légion étrangère était presque comme un jeu de mots, comme le premier moteur de fiction parce qu'il y a le mot étranger" ("to do work that I had dreamed about, to take off

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<sup>58</sup> Mayne notes the genesis of the film: "The film was conceived as a contribution to a television series on "foreign lands," produced by Pierre Chevalier and Patrick Grandperret for ARTE. [...] The process of thinking through the notion took Denis and her usual co-screenwriter, Jean-Pol Fargeau, to two poems by Melville as well as his novella *Billy Budd, Sailor*, on the one hand, and to the East African country of Djibouti (where she lived as a child) and the French Foreign Legion, on the other" (92).

for a foreign country with a fictional idea, to prepare nothing, and during the shooting, to feel myself a stranger. Then it became more personal, linked to my memories of Djibouti where I had lived as a child. To evoke this theme of the foreignness of the Foreign Legion became almost a word game, as the initial motor for the fiction because of the word “foreign” (Lalanne and Larcher 50). Galoup represents Denis’ experience: he feels and appears as a foreigner or a stranger, to himself and others, wherever he is.

As in many Denis films, the settings are intentionally obscure, signifying a generic space, such as a French port city or a Northern African country. The desert terrain and coastal landscapes are only recognizable as Djibouti to someone who has been there. The film shifts from past to present, from Marseilles to Djibouti, from the wintry French urban locations to the sun-filled African seaside, or the vast sand and white, salt-encrusted plains. Sometimes a few seconds in Galoup’s nondescript French apartment precede a shift back to his former life in Djibouti.

Galoup is an incarnation of Melville’s Master-at-arms John Claggart. Only some basic threads of the story remain. Yet, as with the Fassbinder play, Melville’s novella is homoerotic. Most notably, Sedgwick insists, “There is a homosexual in this text—a homosexual person, presented as different in his essential nature from the normal men around him. That person is John Claggart” (92). Claggart desires Billy as it seems many of the men do. The book’s omniscient, unidentified first person narrator continually gives sensual descriptions of the handsome young man from different characters’ perspectives.

Although not clearly apparent on a single screening, the film traces what likely proves to be Galoup’s preparation for death. In intermittent voice-overs, brief shots of Galoup writing or shots of handwritten words from a journal pair with his offscreen

voice. His monologues indicate that he is describing the end of his time with the Legion before being decommissioned for sabotaging a younger recruit. His words gradually make more sense, though he is never a straightforward guide. Nor are the times and places in and from which he speaks clear. His is not, however, an omniscient narrating voice, but rather a partial one. In other scenes, the camera and dialogue “tell” the story.

Galoup is jealous of Sentain (Grégoire Colin), who is inspired by the character of young seaman Billy Budd. Sentain, a new recruit, is noticed for his bravery by Commander Bruno Forestier (Michel Subor), a version of Melville’s Captain Vere. The triad Galoup/Sentain/Forestier derives from the Claggart/Billy Budd/Captain Vere triad in Melville’s book, with the same sort of jealousy, desire, and hatred motivating the Galoup/Claggart characters. The most striking change to Melville’s *Billy Budd* is that Claggart (as Galoup) does not die from Billy’s (Sentain’s) punch. Instead, Galoup is knocked down and survives to try to provoke Sentain’s demise. Acting out of jealousy and resentment, Galoup sabotages Sentain and leaves him to fend for himself in the vast desert and salt fields with a faulty compass. After his crime is discovered, Galoup is decommissioned. He is lost without his regimented life in the Legion.

Denis extends the life of other characters within the space of her film as well. The most obvious example is Bruno Forestier, the Commander. Subor plays a character with the same name in Godard’s *Le petit soldat* (1961, censored in France until 1963). The narrative extension is plausible: Godard’s young double agent who defected from the Algerian conflict could have joined the French Foreign Legion and become a commander in the subsequent 38 years. By using the same name and the same actor, Denis pays



tribute to Godard's controversial film.<sup>59</sup>

Forestier is a pensive, observant, and generally silent figure, an evoked memory rather than an active agent. Denis relates, "Je me suis alors raconté qu'après ce film [*Le petit soldat*], où il déserte de l'armée et tue le correspondant du FLN, Forestier est rentré dans la Légion. A la fin du film du Godard, il dit en voix-off: '*Je n'étais pas amer et j'avais du temps devant moi.*' C'est la première phrase que dit Lavant dans mon film. Subor est devenu... Comme s'il s'était mis à remplacer Melville, à devenir un transformateur. Avec Lavant seul, nous étions uniquement dans la nostalgie. La présence de Subor repoussait cela" ("I told myself that after this film [*Le petit soldat*], where he deserts from the army and kills the FLN correspondent, Forestier enters the Foreign Legion. At the end of Godard's film, he says in voice-over: '*I wasn't bitter and I still had time ahead of me.*' It's the first sentence that Lavant says in my film. Subor became... As if he was put in place to replace Melville, to become a transformer. With Lavant alone, we would have remained solely in nostalgia. Subor's presence repels that [notion]" (Lalanne 51, emphasis in original).

Galoup is more at ease as a soldier in a foreign land than he is in his native country, out of the military. However, even though a ranking officer in the French Foreign Legion, he nonetheless seems out of place in Djibouti as well. First seen in civilian clothes in Marseilles, he is then viewed in uniform in Djibouti where he watches the people he later recollects. Later, he wears a black button-up shirt, then an entire black outfit as he nears his end. The inclusion of increasingly disturbing original music by the Tindersticks enhances a sense of foreboding.

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<sup>59</sup> For more information on the connection to *Le Petit soldat*, see e.g. Beugnet *Claire Denis* 113-15 and Mayne 93-94.

Galoup's jealousy for Sentain derives from Commander Forestier's attention to the younger man. However, Galoup does not seem to harbor carnal desire for his superior officer but rather deep esteem. The homoerotic desire among the men of *The Indomitable* is more blatant than it is among the legionnaires in Denis's film. Here, lingering camera movements instead emphasize the beauty of male bodies. The legionnaires are often shirtless and sometimes touch body to body in their dance-like exercises. Denis explains, "Sex between characters doesn't interest me. What's important is the sexual charge that passes between the actors and the spectators" (Darke 9).

A few scenes illustrate how sensual the camera movements can be. Several show the legionnaires spread out on the ground or standing in a wide circle, slowly performing group stretches that resemble Thai Chi. Another centers on a circling shot. Ballet choreographer Bernard Montet coordinated both scenes, making the soldiers seem more like dancers. The powerful "Oh, Heave!" refrain from the Britten opera plays during both.

Halfway through the film, the men rhythmically perform the same motions repeatedly: they raise their arms in unison in the air, bring their hands down in a diamond shape in front of their chests, push their hands forward, then reach out to the side. With so many short, dislocated scenes in the film, this long sequence stands out. Standing in a group in the sun, the soldiers move slowly and with precision as the voices and instruments of the opera's refrain climax. Without any sex, the combination of shots of the well-honed men and the powerful music is evocative and erotic. Most of the time the camera stays at a medium close-up or close-up distance. At the end, a long shot of Galoup shows him watching the men with binoculars from the ruins that serve as a

makeshift training space: he admires the work of the men he has trained.

In a similar sequence, Galoup performs the exercises with the men. This sequence begins with an abrupt cut to a frontal medium close-up of a black man's torso. The music again builds toward a lengthy crescendo as the camera shifts up to include the man's face and chest. The low angle enhances his stature in the well-lit desert. Mountains are glimpsed in the distance behind him. Handheld, the camera nevertheless holds relatively steady. Instead of showing how the men stand in relation to one another, another cut shows a profile close-up of Sentain with his arms in the air, partially blocking his face. He brings his arms down in the same motions. The camera shakes and moves more as the music swells contributing to a mixed sense of desire and dislocation.

Galoup and Sentain become the focus. The camera lingers on a close-up profile shot of Sentain, breathing rhythmically. The vocal and symphonic music grows louder. Another cut shows Galoup, arms outstretched, performing the exercises with the men in medium shot. The music crescendos as horns are added. The men stand facing one another in a large circle. With continuously tight framing and a persistently unstable camera, the sequence showcases muscular masculinity and builds tension. The music continues as a low-angle long shot reveals a group of Djiboutian boys watching the soldiers from a rocky hill. The camera returns to the legionnaires, again in tight framing, showing some of the others. These men are doubly spectacles: of the locals who gaze and of the camera.

About twenty minutes later, Galoup and Sentain circle one another in a scene that could be preparation for a fight, though it turns out to be another military exercise. Galoup has confessed his jealousy for and hatred of Sentain in voice-over. As the men eat

lunch midway through a day of digging rocks in the sun, Galoup stares maliciously ahead, his gaze most likely focused on Sentain. A close-up shot of Sentain shows him eating nervously: he is aware of his superior officer's intent look. Softly, "O, Heave!" begins anew.

In long shot, Galoup and Sentain face each other, the sea and rocky terrain behind them. As they begin to circle one another, the music crescendos with horns, cymbals, and drums augmenting a sense of expectation. Pascale-Anne Brault says, "A l'œuvre donc chez Denis, nous avons une caméra qui ose son désir, une caméra qui ose poser le corps masculin comme objet de désir, une caméra qui reconnaît au sujet désirant—qu'il soit féminin ou masculin—son pouvoir d'objectification sur corps masculin, sa mainmise sur lui." ("In Denis's work, thus, we have a camera that dares to desire, a camera which dares to pose the masculine body as the object of desire, a camera which recognizes in the desiring subject—whether it is feminine or masculine—its power of objectifying the masculine body, its seizure of it"; 293). A slightly high-angle close-up of Galoup's serious face perhaps signals Sentain's taller perspective. The scene culminates in a low-angle medium close-up of the powerful-looking, handsome Sentain, then a pan left to a close-up of Galoup, before ending on both men in the frame in close-up. Although close enough to kiss, both look ready to fight. An incongruous cut shows the water at night: the scene ends abruptly.

Melville's text contains no women because it takes place almost exclusively on male-only ships. By contrast, the settings of *Beau Travail* allow for a variety of Djiboutian women, including some in modest dress, with colorful headscarves and long dresses, and others in revealing secular clothes. When they have leisure time, the soldiers

go to town and spend time with local women at the nightclub, ironically named “Bar des Alpes.” There, they dance to techno music. The images show the pulsating movements and rhythmic flow of the bodies, but the men and women do not touch for the most part.<sup>60</sup>

Early in the film, when the men are seen for the first time in the nightclub, the Turkish pop song “Simarik” by Tarkan plays. It is fast-paced, erotic, and repeatedly makes a double kiss sound. Although the women are prostitutes, no confirmation of their trade via sexual acts, even kisses, occurs. As Judith Mayne notes, “Denis has alluded to the number of prostitutes in Djibouti, but the women whom we see at the disco in this film are not coded stereotypically as prostitutes” (95). She further describes both these women and the traditional Djiboutian women seen outside the club as observers and witnesses rather than simply exotic Others (96-98).

That the women look at the legionnaires, not vice versa, confounds traditional power structures. Early on, a small group of women and children in traditional clothing stand at the right side of the frame, near a road, looking left, toward where the legionnaires were seen in a previous frame. The next shot, from their perspective, shows a man working on a utility pole. Their sightline would indicate that they are watching the men train or the man at work, but no explanation is given, and their looks are not returned. The only place where the legionnaires gaze at the women is in the nightclub. However, even though they dance with the men, the women look mainly at themselves here, and only occasionally at the men, in the mirror. Their presence is seductive, though the soldiers do not have further contact with the women onscreen. Even with Galoup,

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<sup>60</sup> In her DVD commentary, Denis describes the women as prostitutes, although other than Galoup, none of the soldiers are seen with women alone and away from the nightclub.

who does have more contact with one woman, Rahel (Marta Tafesse Kassa), no sexual activity can be seen.

The recurring images of Rahel in medium close-up or medium shot looking directly at the camera in the nightclub augment desire. At one point, as she dances before the mirror, she looks at the camera in close-up “and returns our gaze,” as Sarah Cooper notes (180). She is the only character to look directly at the camera. Some of Galoup’s flashbacks recall the time he spent outside the club spent with Rahel. He does not discuss the relationship in his voice-over narration. The frequent medium close-ups of her, however, indicate he is fond of her.

Some of the most intimate moments of the film occur in her small home. However, the two are not shown being affectionate and there is no nudity. The only time Rahel speaks is to another woman who helps prepare food, not to Galoup. He lounges silently alone on the bed. The other woman asks Rahel if he is her boyfriend. She shyly seems to affirm that he is. This is one of the only times in the film that the Arabic language is translated with subtitles. It could signify that Galoup understands enough to include the exchange in his recollections. Regardless, it confirms that the two were involved. Another close-up of her, this time from Galoup’s perspective, shows her again looking at the camera as she returns his gaze, shot from his perspective lying on the bed looking at her sitting on the floor.

The film’s ending suggests that Galoup will commit suicide, though no direct confirmation of his death is given. In the “present” time frame, Galoup has been cleaning his home and clothes throughout the film, as though in preparation for something. In the final scene, he lies on the bed in his pressed black button down shirt. A tight overhead

pan from head to torso reveals his hand holding a gun on his chest. The film ends and the credits begin without him actually pulling the trigger.

However, within the final credits, Denis embeds an epilogue of sorts with Galoup alone in the nightclub in Djibouti. He wears the black outfit he was seen in earlier. A techno version of “Rhythm of the Night” by the band Corona plays.<sup>61</sup> Lavant smokes a cigarette and sways a bit before launching into a full body, energetic, physically demanding performance. The scene serves as an intertext to Lavant’s feverish run/dance to David Bowie’s “Modern Love” in Léos Carax’s 1986 *Mauvais sang* (*Bad Blood*).

If the film is read as a preparation for Galoup’s suicide, then this finale helps allay potential sadness at the loss of the protagonist or at his decision to kill himself. More than any scene of these films, moreover, the empty dance floor surrounded by mirrored walls seems like a quintessential gay milieu. As with the songs at the end of the two Ozon films, the techno sequence is unexpected. The music plays the entire time the credits roll. Galoup appears euphoric, liberated, and sexualized in a way never expressed during the film.

### Sensuality, Sexuality, and Choreography

Returning to the notion of the meaning of the title, *Beau travail*, as “good work,” these three films are all good work in that they succeed in opening up narratives. Queer characters—out and closeted gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender—appear in somewhat traditional settings. Stylistically different, these films nonetheless similarly

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<sup>61</sup> The band is a gay cult favorite that plays regularly in gay clubs.

treat sexuality and sensuality. The three films also generate eroticism, often from non-sexual scenes. All three films inscribe non-hegemonic forms of desire and relationships.

The two Ozon films are closer adaptations than Denis's film. Ozon keeps the general storylines but makes changes that enhance sexual and sensual aspects. Both *Gouttes d'eau* and *8 femmes* contain more queer characters than the original plays. However, none of the characters succeeds in achieving stable relationships. In *Gouttes d'eau*, Léopold remains in control, but his power has been challenged. In *8 femmes*, the patriarch does eventually die, seemingly opening up possibilities for the women to take charge of their own lives, but the film ends without showing what their futures hold. Both films incorporate flashbacks and/or dream sequences not present in the original plays. Both also incorporate important musical numbers, sometimes with a group dance. These songs allow the characters to express their sexuality, to be in sensuous proximity to others, or even to seduce another or others.

In *Beau travail*, the focus is on daily interactions in a homosocial environment. Homoeroticism derives from seeing the men's bodies and movements during military exercises rather than from witnessing overtly homosexual relationships. The heterosexual relationship between Galoup and Rahel is peripheral. Although he is tender with her and looks at her with desire in the club, he does not discuss her in his recollections nor is he shown having sexual relations with her. Her image and her gaze punctuate his story, marking him as an outsider, as a foreigner to be observed.

All three films appeal through unusual visual strategies that involve color, texture, and movement, often unhooked from character point of view. Across the scenes explored here, a combination of framing and editing creates moments of visual pleasure. In



particular, the circling shot in each film increases a sense of anticipation, whether sexual or not. Near silence in these scenes in the Ozon films contributes to erotic tension, the repeated inclusion of the “O! Heave!” refrain in Denis’s differently prompts anticipation.

Only *Gouttes d’eau* actually contains sex scenes, though some of the moments without sex are unexpectedly more sensual. *8 femmes* has numerous scenes thick with sexual desire but without sexual acts, except for Gaby and Pierrette’s kiss and full-body embrace. *Beau travail* contains no sexual activity. The men’s bodies are presented as spectacle in an inversion of men’s traditional positioning as active subjects. Galoup is passionately jealous of Sentain, and this suggests physical desire. The three films thus all are homoerotic, but for the most part without any of the characters touching.

The suicides in this chapter (Franz, Marcel, possibly Galoup) reflect these men’s disillusion and dissatisfaction with their relationships. Even the indirect murder attempt of Sentain by Galoup, though a jealous act that shows anew Galoup’s attempts at domination, is not a violent act. The next chapter, in contrast, explores overtly imbalanced power relationships: in these films ordinary people, some of them gay, some straight, become indifferent murderers; others seductively entice their prey in order to murder and/or cannibalize them. Not only do *J’ai pas sommeil*, *Trouble Every Day*, and *Les amants criminels* all show sexual acts explicitly, now touching becomes the precursor for violence.

### Chapter 3: Sexuality, Criminality, and Desire: Beauty and Terror of Everyday Killers

Denis's third feature, *J'ai pas sommeil* (*I Can't Sleep*), and sixth, *Trouble Every Day* (Denis, 2001), and Ozon's second feature, *Les amants criminels* (*Criminal Lovers*), explore taboo acts such as murder and cannibalism. All three films show the monstrosity of the ordinary: the murderers here appear normal to others, and especially to those who should know them best. Everyday people are killers: classy gay men, a savagely beautiful woman, a soft-spoken doctor, a teenage couple. All three films use elements from a mix of genres, among them the crime thriller, horror, and the fairy tale. Their principal characters are created in part through the use of gestures, following Deleuze's description discussed in the introduction. At times the nuanced soundtracks elicit visceral responses. These films mix also banality, beauty, disgust, and unease across fragmented narratives.

*J'ai pas sommeil* investigates the human sides of a murderer through the character Camille (Richard Courcet), a fictional representation of France's best-known serial killer from the 1980s, Thierry Paulin. This chapter investigates the pervasive sense of unease in the film that derives in part from media reports and also explores the way Camille is presented as an ordinary person, not a monster.<sup>62</sup> While homosexuality and eroticism are undeniably important to the film, Camille and his partner do not sexually mistreat or become involved with their victims, as the killers do in *Trouble Every Day* and *Les*

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<sup>62</sup> Deborah S. Reisinger revisits Jean Baudrillard's contention that because Paulin did not continue to be front-page news after his capture, the whole affair became an ultimate example of modern banality. She contends, however, that the *fait divers* itself was misread and that "the response to this affair reflects not a postmodern apathy à la Baudrillard, but rather the pervasive climate of *insécurité* fed by the conservative media" (85). She briefly discusses *J'ai pas sommeil*, seeing the film as repudiating Baudrillard's conclusions.

*amants criminels*. Over the course of the film, short scenes give piecemeal indications of Camille's routines around Paris and relationships with his two lovers, his family, and strangers. He turns out to be the "granny killer," as Paulin was known. The film is not easy to classify generically, but it has hints of the crime thriller. Also unlike the other two films, Camille's murders take up little screen time, and no blood is shown. And Camille is not the film's sole focus. Instead, his story is intercut with that of two other outsider protagonists, Daïga (Yekaterina Golubeva), and Théo (Alex Descas). As Robin Wood describes, *J'ai pas sommeil* is thus "an extremely intricate jigsaw in which every smallest piece is felt to have its significance, but a jigsaw that exists in time and memory, not spread out on a table for our contemplation" (3).

*Trouble Every Day* was a scandal at Cannes. Critics initially warned audiences about the gory murder scenes. However, the film has been reevaluated and analyzed more than many of Denis's films.<sup>63</sup> The film has occasional bursts of blood and nods to the vampire trope, but it does not conform to typical horror conventions. While contemporary horror films are wide-ranging, Dracula has become iconic as a seductive, blood-sucking vampire. Yet, even within this narrow branch of horror, determining generic conventions

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<sup>63</sup> For example, in *Variety*, Derek Elley scolds, "Hannibal gets the French arthouse treatment in Claire Denis's 'Trouble Every Day,' a resolutely silly movie, largely shot in English, that plays like 'An Existential American Cannibal in Paris' with a morose Vincent Gallo spending a sanguinary honeymoon in the City of Light" (1). Bob Carroll writes the film off as "cryptic and absolutely pretentious" (1). Writing for the *Guardian*, Fiachra Gibbons and Stuart Jeffries reported "The first full-blown scandal of the Cannes film festival erupted last night over the lurid French film *Trouble Every Day* [...]. Marceau, of the magazine *Premier*, [...] said: 'The film is terrible. There is no redeeming context.'" Yet, they also recognize the importance of seeing Denis's films more than once: "Denis, however, was defended by the French commentator Henri Behar, who shared the podium with her [at Cannes] and who claimed the scenes were not as graphic or as gratuitous as they might first appear. 'If you look at this film a second time it is not that explicit. It is very carefully done.'"

can be difficult. Far from being set in a “doomed postmodern landscape,” as Barry Grant and Christopher Sharrett say is characteristic of contemporary horror films, Denis’s film takes place in everyday Parisian locales (xi). Instead, *Trouble Every Day* provokes unease and fear in more unusual, and ultimately more disturbing, ways. John Edgar Browning and Caroline Joan (Kay) Picart discuss films outside the mainstream with a heritage in Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, or other tales of the undead. They “examine *Dracula* films and the ways in which *Dracula*’s movement across borders of nationality, sexuality, ethnicity, gender, and film genre since the 1920s has engendered conflicting conceptualizations about the formation of the “other,” identity, and ideology that oscillate between conservative and liberal spheres of normalcy” (x-xi). Denis investigates a range of contemporary human issues through showing normal “monsters” in banal settings, far from the feel of the “world of rock video” that Grant describes as being pervasive in such films as David Fincher’s 1995 *Se7en* or 1999 *Fight Club* (xi).

Martin Rubin similarly describes the difficulty of defining a wide-ranging genre such as the thriller: it “is not just an excess of feelings but the question of *which* feelings are emphasized. The thriller works primarily to evoke such feelings as suspense, fright, mystery, exhilaration, excitement, speed, movement. In other words, it emphasizes visceral, gut-level feelings rather than more sensitive, cerebral, or emotionally heavy feelings, such as tragedy, pathos, pity, love, nostalgia” (5). Denis does not use typical conventions of the thriller, either. In *J’ai pas sommeil*, the pace is slow with characters presented gradually and incompletely. Gaps of time between scenes, flashbacks, and dream sequences disrupt the narrative. Nikolaj Lübecker therefore contends that *J’ai pas sommeil* de-dramatizes violence (17). Unlike the brevity of and lack of gore in the murder

scenes in *J'ai pas sommeil*, *Trouble Every Day* shows cannibalistic frenzy. The soundtrack elicits visceral responses more than the visual images. During the longest murder scene, the camera remains very close and the lighting is low so as to actually obscure what is happening. *Trouble Every Day*, in a sense, thus also de-dramatizes the violence.

Ozon's *Les amants criminels* was also dismissed, though much less has been written on it than practically any other Ozon or Denis film.<sup>64</sup> The film bombed at Cannes. As Frédéric Bonnaud comments, "Ce fut un carnage: éreintement unanime de la part de la presse et désastre commercial." ("It was complete carnage: a unanimous critical reproach from the press and a commercial disaster" ("Histoire d'O" 2). However, J. Hoberman contends, "*Criminal Lovers* may be as gimmicky as Ozon's other features, but it's also more resonant and even haunting. Natacha Régnier [...] is bizarrely confident and mercurial as the disturbed Alice." More than any character in the film, she is monstrous.

The film seems to mix genres capriciously, but Ozon intentionally developed it in two distinct parts: one related to the teenagers (home, school, stores), the other pertaining to the woodsman's domain (the forest, his cabin, the basement). In the first part, the film has overtones of horror. It abruptly turns gory as teenage Alice (Natacha Régnier) induces her boyfriend Luc (Jérémy Renier) to kill their Arabic classmate, Saïd (Salim Kechiouche). In discussing the modern horror film, Martin Rubin dates its inception to 1968 with Roman Polanski's *Rosemary's Baby* and George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead*. He says, despite their differences, these films "shared two characteristics that would be central to the development of the modern horror movie: the familiarity of their

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<sup>64</sup> Several of the critics are only identified by their initials. For examples of bad reviews of the film, see O.D.B. and J.L.

settings and the visceral explicitness of their horrific content” (153). Although the initial murder scene is relatively brief, it is abrupt, bloody, and takes place in an ordinary setting: the school gym’s bathroom. Sexual desire and tension mix with an unsettling power dynamic both before and after the murder. Although in general the narrative is more linear in the first part, the second part of the film shifts in tone and becomes disjointed, referencing the fairy tale. It appears to be a modern-day Hansel and Gretel tribute: a woodsman (rather than a witch) traps Alice and Luc in his cabin. Temporal shifts in the form of flashbacks and dreams reveal the buildup to the murder, the earlier murder scene repeats, and Alice fantasizes about the woodsman strangling Saïd.

Desire drives the impulse to kill in all three films. Material yearning motivates the killers in *J’ai pas sommeil*. Yet, as mentioned, the murders are not central to the narrative and do not occur until two-thirds of the way into the film. More important are sexual tension, erotic moments, and lyrical digressions. Sexuality is, in contrast, the catalyst for murder in both *Trouble Every Day* and *Les amants criminels*. These killers lure their prey through seduction. Both films have scenes that shift abruptly from sensuality to gore and death.

Gests, to return to Deleuze’s term, are important in all three films. These isolated or repeated gestures—facial expressions, looks, movements—become iconic and matter more than dialogue. Close-up or frozen images sometimes dominate the film space, causing the moment to stand outside the narrative. As Deleuze explains of Cassavetes’ *Faces* (1968), “When Cassavetes says that characters must not come from a story or plot, but that the story should be secreted by the characters, he sums up the requirement of the cinema of bodies: the character is reduced to his own bodily attitudes, and what ought to

result is the gest, that is, a ‘spectacle’ a theatricalization or dramatization which is valid for all plots” (*Cinema 2* 192). What is unspoken is similarly important in these films: each can also be read as producing a cinema of bodies because in them symbolic gests stand in for speech and create meaning.

As both directors have continued to produce critically acclaimed work, these formerly maligned films have been re-evaluated by francophone and anglophone critics alike. This chapter provides readings of *J’ai pas sommeil*, *Trouble Every Day*, and *Les amants criminels*, further complementing and occasionally correcting previous readings, referencing applicable genres, adding a focus on gests, and deepening appreciation of sound and music. Robin Wood, for example, misses or misunderstands several Denisian clues, overlooking, in particular, the role of Ninon and her relationship with Daïga. While Bob Carroll finds the music “underused and often ineffective” in *Trouble Every Day*, I concentrate on how the evocative, almost wordless, performances of its protagonists operate in conjunction with the haunting score.<sup>65</sup> Asibong, Rees-Roberts, Reeser, and Schilt have all contributed to the reevaluation of *Les amants criminels*. I consider in more depth than they do the uses of voices, especially in voice-over, and I also investigate the usually neglected character of Alice.

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<sup>65</sup> Carroll does nonetheless recognize that “never before have a band and a film’s subject matter been so appropriately matched” (3).

Situated between *S'en fout la mort* (*No Fear No Die*) and *Nénette et Boni*, Denis's third fictional feature, *J'ai pas sommeil*, is an early product of her continuing collaboration with screenwriter Jean-Pol Fargeau, cinematographer Agnès Godard, and editor Nelly Quettier. A slow-paced and elliptical film, it has elements of a crime thriller without using the typical forms of suspenseful narrative structures described by Martin Rubin, Tzvetan Todorov, and Steve Neale ("The Suspense Thriller").

*J'ai pas sommeil*'s disjointed narrative has detours, mounting climaxes and partial dénouements. Without clear character motivation, the film creates a growing sense of unease. It starts *in medias res*. The frequent use of restrictive framing shows characters without establishing specific locations. Dialogue is sparse. By setting the film primarily in Montmartre, the same neighborhood where the real killer operated, Denis shows the wide mix of cultures that populate that section of town. Most scenes cut abruptly from one thread of the story to the next with no temporal or spatial explanation.

As was true of the real murderer, Paulin, the fictionalized Camille is a black, homosexual, HIV-positive man. His white boyfriend, in the film called Raphaël (Vincent Dupont), assists Camille in his crimes.<sup>66</sup> They appear to be a normal gay couple. French audiences familiar with the sensational case could, however, have recognized Camille as the killer before receiving other narrative clues. Brief moments show the two men with their mutual lover, an unnamed but often present blond doctor (Laurent Gréville). Camille seems well liked by his friends and family but from the beginning of the film also

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<sup>66</sup> Reisinger notes that Thierry Paulin was from Martinique and his boyfriend, Jean-Thierry Mathurin, was Guyanese (90).



exhibits traits of a sociopath. He is often inexplicably violent with Raphaël, and he usually looks detached.

As in many crime thrillers, detective work forms part of the narrative. Police investigating the serial killer appear several times, though they do not figure out who the killers are as quickly as Daïga does. As an outsider, a Lithuanian woman who is ostensibly alone, functions as a sort of private investigator. She patiently observes what goes on around her and turns out to be an astute detective who eventually uses the clues to her own advantage. This time in line with traditional conventions of the genre, she represents Rubin's insistence that "a crucial aspect of the classical/whodunit detective story is the *detachment* of the detective hero. His emotional and physical involvement in the events of the story is limited" (185). Denis felt her role was:

essential ..., because I did not want to use the old woman's killer as a character, as the thread we follow. I wanted us to discover him, as we do when we open a newspaper and discover a foreign universe. When I worked on the screenplay with Jean-Pol I always imagined that Paris with its ring road was like the goose game (French spiral board game). And I saw a foreign woman arrive and enter this Paris which arouses fear. (Ancian 11)

Though a foreigner on the margins of society who knows little French, Daïga is able to put together information that only someone with a position near the killers could manage. She remains a passive detached observer for the most part.

When Daïga is onscreen, news from a television or radio or newspapers is often heard or seen depicting the search for the killer or warning people to be careful. A sense of unease emanates from the recurring references to the "granny killer" heard during

broadcasters' reports on television or on the radio, or seen printed in headlines. On several occasions, Daïga's peripatetic path around Paris leads her to encounters with the killers, a crime scene, or the police. Not simply a passive observer, she too commits a crime at the end of the film, stealing money hidden in Camille's room just after he is apprehended. Deborah Streifford Reisinger recognizes that in following the three protagonists and not just the killer, Denis gives a more complicated view: "she seems keenly interested in problematizing the crimes in a social and political context. [...] Her depiction of society's problems (illegal immigration, ineffective police, unemployment), its Other (immigrants, old women, gay men), and the stifling nature of the city (conveyed by darkness, lack of private space, tight shots of the city, invading noise) reflect the larger world that the *fait divers* represents" (43).

After an elusive opening where two police officers laugh hysterically as they fly a helicopter above Paris, attention shifts to Daïga. She has presumably fled the turmoil of the Eastern bloc at the end of perestroika and come to Paris to find a French theater director she met back home with whom she seems to have had a one-night stand. She seeks to rekindle things with him and perhaps thereby find employment, though she fulfills neither aspiration. She locates her great aunt Mina (Irina Grjebina), who helps her find a place to live. With no other relatives in Paris, other Slavs, especially other elderly women, additionally assist her.

A third narrative strand follows Théo. Camille and Théo are brothers whose family is originally from Martinique, though it is unclear whether they have ever lived there. Camille frequents restaurants and clubs, walks the streets, and never works. Théo, by contrast, is a hard-working, serious father who wants to return to Martinique despite

his wife Mona's (Beatrice Dalle) objections. He carves out a life with his often-estranged spouse and their son, Harry (credited as Little Harry, played by Ira Mandella-Paul). Théo earns his wages honestly making furniture. He is also an accomplished musician. He thinks he can avoid the turmoil and complications of life in a contemporary city if he returns to "life back home" in Martinique. Photos show his family's past history and portray his future hopes: he conceives of the island as an idyllic paradise where simple living is possible.

Denis says the most important aspect of the story is: "how you can call somebody a monster. What does monstrosity mean when it is about someone who is not a creature invented for cinema, but really a human being?" (Renouard and Wajeman 33). The notion of the monstrosity of the ordinary permeates the film. Everyone likes Camille, but he is a killer. But just as Camille has seductive, beautiful, and tender qualities, the other two protagonists also have dark sides. Daïga can be unexpectedly violent and deceptive, while Théo is stubborn and reserved to the point of being insensitive with Mona. Denis, in fact, here intentionally refused categorical notions of good and bad: "I am always wary [...] about films where the dynamic of the drama is reduced to the opposition between good and evil [...] except when the conclusion is that, in reality, there is no difference" (Renouard and Wajeman 33).

Throughout *J'ai pas sommeil*, music is used for character enhancement or serves as lyrical interludes in which a protagonist conveys emotions through gestures and looks. Certain types of music are associated with each key character. Each performs to a particular song where gestures become especially important, independently of the lyrics but in conjunction with the instrumentation. What Deleuze says of Godard's 1983 *Prénom*

*Carmen (First Name Carmen)*, is *a propos*: there the “body continually refer[s] to a musical gest which co-ordinates them [Richard Forst (John Marley) and Jeannie Rapp (Gena Rowlands)] independently of the plot; which takes them up and subjects to them a higher linkage [...] sounds and colours are attitudes of the body” (*Cinema 2* 195).

Musical themes that derive from 1990s L.A. band D.C. Basehead (especially the song “I try”) and other instrumental sections of their album “Play with Toys” accompany Camille periodically.<sup>67</sup> Brief melodic and low-key snippets of the album are often heard as he walks alone down the street. The repeated connection to him loosely contributes to our seeing his persona as self-absorbed and narcissistic.

The soundtrack contains several other significant lyrical moments, such as each protagonist’s “performance” to a song. In a gay club, Camille lip-syncs in drag to a large crowd. His performance of Jean-Louis Murat’s “Le lien défait” is slow, melancholic, and sensual. The song’s lyrics are not translated in subtitles, but the title means “broken tie” and the song paints a bleak picture of love and relationships. Denis describes Murat’s music as being “always kind of on the crest of erotic tension” (Ancian 6). Camille is many things: attractive, alluring, vain, indifferent, and elusive. As he moves around the club, the spectators within watch him attentively.

The scene is notable for its length, absence of cuts to other parts of the narrative, and erotic focus on Camille. The performance lasts more than six minutes, almost the entire length of the song. Camille wears a long, strapless black dress, little make-up, and

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<sup>67</sup> As a whole, the album provides an ironic commentary on sex, drugs, violence, race, and gender couched within a smooth, laidback hip-hop groove. One could almost mistake the sarcasm and dismiss the lyrics as run-of-the-mill chauvinistic, hedonistic, popular music. The speaker in “I Try” seems to sing about having a positive attitude in spite of bad relationships. Camille, too, keeps up a deceptive positive outlook that masks his violent and murderous tendencies, as well as his HIV status.

no shoes. He walks around the club, occasionally mouthing the words, but mainly gesturing with his hands and arms. His provocatively raised arms and his aloof, unattainable facial expressions become “gests,” signifying his detachment and allure simultaneously. He exudes an inaccessible sexiness. Everyone wants him but no one can have him. His monstrous side is masked by his physical beauty and provocative appeal.

In another scene, Camille is in a techno club wearing a stocking cap with devil horns. This occurs abruptly after his sudden and inexplicable visit to Théo’s place one night. He leaves by subway and the screeching diegetic sounds of the train shift into sirens. Techno music plays unexpectedly. Strobe lights pulse. Camille dances with another man. He can only be discerned occasionally as the light shifts. The music and ambiance of the scene contrast starkly with the rest of the film. He is falling apart, and his decline is underlined by the more sinister, fast-paced, and gritty music and dark, gyrating images.

Forms of popular music play periodically during scenes with Daïga as well. As she first drives onscreen, a groovy sixties pop song is heard. The song emanates from her tape player. She turns it off and listens to some news before finding a station with music. “Relax-ay-voo” (a play on the phrase “relaxez-vous,” meaning “Relax yourself”), a duet sung by Dean Martin and Line Renaud in 1954, plays.<sup>68</sup>

Daïga and Ninon drink wine and talk late one night. “A Whiter Shade of Pale”

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<sup>68</sup> The song also creates an intertext via the voice of Line Renaud, who plays Ninon, the character who gets the closest to knowing Daïga. Wood does not make the connection between this song and Ninon. An important secondary character, the hotel owner and operator, sixty-something Ninon, becomes Daïga’s employer and only real friend. As there is a subtext about AIDS in the film, it is perhaps significant that Renaud created the French Association des Artistes Contre le SIDA (Association of Artists Against AIDS). Denis is meticulous about what she includes in her films.

(Procol Harum, 1967) comes on the radio. Ninon recognizes the tune, hums along, turns it up and asks Daiga to dance. She recalls nostalgically how she “rubbed up against” a lot of different men to this song in the past. Daiga is more carefree and affable than at any other point in the film. Usually somber and reserved, she smiles or laughs only a few times. This relaxed moment stands outside the plot, reinforcing it as her gest. Her levity symbolizes the possibility that abuse, mistrust, and neglect can be overcome, if momentarily.

A beautiful young woman, Daiga dresses sloppily and downplays her remarked-upon beauty. It seems as though she has had difficult or abusive relationships or generally been mistreated by men. In stark contrast with her typically quiet, undemonstrative comportment, when Daiga lashes out in anger, she is crude, forthright, and even violent. Her apprehension, loathing, and bemusement are conveyed through her expressive eyes and mouth. Other than her Slavic cursing, she says little.

When she is alone, men act lecherously toward her. The cops she encounters a couple of times treat her as though she is suspicious or look at her in disdain or with lust. She responds by calling them “seal dick” in Lithuanian. When she ventures out of the hotel alone one night, a man approaches her, tries to talk to her, and chases her down an alley. Ironically, she loses him by purchasing a ticket for a movie. In one of the few comic moments of the film, she bursts out laughing as she realizes that she is in a theater full of men watching a pornographic movie.

After she approaches the theater director at work, he kisses her in the hallway, but gives her no employment. Later, when she spots him driving alone, she forcefully and repeatedly rams his car from behind with her own vehicle, even though she has two

passengers with her. His refusal to press charges and his willingness to accept responsibility for the “accident” seems to confirm his recognition that he has mistreated her. Although she does not physically injure him, Daïga seems a marginal figure capable of criminal behavior, though not of murder.

While at the police station after the car incident, Daïga recognizes the sketches of the suspected serial killers. A cut shows Camille as he walks on the street and returns to the hotel, spied on by Daïga. On the soundtrack Basehead's music again begins to play as a close, high-angle shot pans up Camille's suit on the bed. An abrupt cut then shows him dressed and walking downstairs. The song continues through a series of shots that show Daïga standing outside the hotel smoking and Camille leaving on foot. She watches him and follows him down the street. He seems aware of her presence: he turns to look back at one point, and this is matched by a shot of her stopping and waiting for him to continue.

When Daïga arrives at the café, Camille already has a glass of red wine in front of him. As she enters, the music stops. In medium long shot, she stands beside him and orders a coffee. This is the only scene in the film where these two characters interact. As he passes her the sugar, their hands brush slightly. A brief moment of slow motion accentuates the touch, an uncommonly used technique in this film that signals the importance of the moment, making it a *gest*. As their hands part, Daïga takes the sugar. He pays for her drink, but other than a thank you and a goodbye, they exchange few words. She looks at him but he stares ahead. His vague smile conveys that he is aware of her gaze. She reveals nothing to him about knowing his identity. She seems curious. He seems strangely shy, remote, and elusive.

The short scene builds tension and expectation but gives no straightforward insights about either character. Daïga seems surprised at Camille's abrupt departure, as though she wants to say something. He exits the frame and she remains still, looking down at her coffee. Suddenly she turns and looks toward him, her face alive with emotion. She smiles briefly and inhales swiftly, but the image is left to speak for itself. The smile is her symbolic gest. She seems to long for more communication with Camille.

A relative quiet underscores Théo's pensive character and makes his live performance stand out. Occurring as one of the final scenes of the film, his talent and passion emerge: he plays the violin soulfully in an Afro-Caribbean-inspired jazz trio. This music is rhythmic, sexy, and melancholic, more conducive to dancing than Murat's mellow "Le lien défait." Théo's song shows him at his best, doing something he loves and being admired by the audience.

A handheld close-up pans from the back of Théo's head and neck to his face as he plays the violin in a dark club. The camera surveys the crowd and settles on the founding member of Kali, Jean-Marc Monnerville, as he plays a type of banjo. The sound of the song fills the soundtrack. It is a tranquil, beautiful scene that showcases talented musicians. Many people sway to the music, and one older couple dances. Camille stands in the back and watches his brother. After they make eye contact, Camille slips out to what will soon be his arrest by the police. The music continues, shifting from diegetic to extradiegetic, as a tracking shot follows Camille down the street from the perspective of the cops trailing him. It ends abruptly as they stop him.

The film concludes ambiguously with a few short scenes that reinforce uncertainty about the characters and give little or no indication about their futures.



Camille, once in custody, admits to the murders one by one with an extreme sense of detachment. He will go to prison but little else is known. His mother, Théo and a few other relatives visit him briefly, astounded that he is the infamous killer. Other than Théo walking down the street outside the police station, none are seen again.

Daïga returns to the hotel and ransacks Camille's room and steals his stash of money. The last frame of the film shows her driving out of town, leaving as precipitously as she came, without saying goodbye to her few friends. Perhaps this is not out of character for her; her inner thoughts are never indicated. Her final actions are nonetheless surprising and open up questions about human nature and where and why a criminal path starts. The film ends with a freeze-frame shot. A tight close-up of Daïga's face, her smiling gesture emerges again slightly as she departs Paris in her car, giving the film a strangely uplifting ending.

The non-linear narrative, evocative music, and suggestive gestural performances make *J'ai pas sommeil* an unconventional crime drama, one more interested in raising oblique questions about the vagaries of interpersonal connections than in providing straightforward answers about "who done it." Gorier, with gruesome murders, *Trouble Every Day* is more viscerally disturbing.

Denis's sixth feature, *Trouble Every Day*, was initially her least well-received and most controversial film.<sup>69</sup> Inspired by a request to participate in a horror film project, the film works in elements of the vampire trope and contains tributes to other horror staples (as discussed by Barry Grant, Christine Gledhill, Steve Neale ("Science Fiction"), and Robert Spadoni, for example) such as mad scientists experimenting in laboratories, monsters, and brutal killers who seduce their prey. As does *J'ai pas sommeil*, the film elusively shifts between characters and locations. Again, the murder scenes do not occur until the latter part of the film, but now they are more horrific. Again, too, the narrative structure is elliptical, with chronological linearity disrupted by flashbacks and dreams.

With little dialogue, the soundtrack includes an array of diegetic sounds and carefully scored original music by the Tindersticks. This is Denis's second collaboration with that band. Their music haunts the film and adds to the impact, especially of the murder sequences. Even more than in *J'ai pas sommeil*, the acting depends upon gestural performances and subtle facial expressions.

*Trouble Every Day*, in English, is the original title of both the film and of the original song on the soundtrack. Vocalist Stuart Staples, composer and violinist Dickon Hinchliffe, and pianist David Boulter wrote the song in response to Denis's script before the film was made. Hinchliffe related in interview that "One of the first things she

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<sup>69</sup> While some condemned the film outright upon its release (e.g., Derek Elley), subsequently numerous scholarly articles have considered aspects of the film and given Denis credit for a complex, beautiful, and terrifying film (e.g. Asals, Chapman, Kaganski, Met, Morrey, and Wood). It is situated between the critically acclaimed *Beau Travail* and the slow, lyrical *Vendredi soir*, but is unlike these films and stands apart from all her other work in terms of engaging with the horror genre.

[Denis] said to us about *Trouble Every Day* was that it's a film about that point, in a sexual way, when a kiss becomes a bite. She was very interested in the sensuality, when something very tender and loving becomes something violent and aggressive. That set the tone for the music and for our whole approach" (Hill 7-8). The song hints at trouble that is potentially lurking anywhere. The murderers are intelligent, professional people who contract a disease from their scientific research. Irrepressible sexual desire drives them to lure their prey into a fatal embrace.

As the title track plays, the opening credits start. Then, an enigmatic, obscure scene shows a medium close-up of an unidentified couple kissing in a car. As the camera moves in, the man grips the woman's chin and presses a kiss into her neck. He holds her neck too tightly and the embrace takes on a sinister quality. The lyrics state that there is trouble every day, adding menace. The scene ends with a serene shot of the water of the Seine and a long take of Parisian cityscape. It is dawn. The sky is a slightly ominous red. The plaintive song repeats "There's trouble every day" and "Look into my eyes. Hear the words I can't say." The notions of unspoken words and of the inability to express oneself become recurring themes.

Denis contends that the film is neither "explicit [n]or violent. It's actually a love story.... I think every mother wants to eat her baby with love. We just took this on to a new frontier" (Gibbons and Jefferies). Nancy says of the image of the kiss in *Trouble Every Day*, "[i]t has long been accepted and repeated that kissing is a kind of devouring" ("Icon of Fury" 1). Denis delves into the repercussions of how all-consuming sexual attraction links Freud's death drive to pleasure; in her version, the sexual drive conflates with the death drive. Nancy continues:

Sex becomes a metonymy of the kiss: the kiss is broader, deeper, more encompassing than sex. We must understand that the bite of the kiss, here, devours the sexes (their organs), not by castration, but by an absorption which opens on to a kind of horrific sublimation: not that of sex in which a body takes pleasure, but that of an entire body in which sex bursts out and is spattered with the body's blood, with its life/death and with that which explodes it: that which exposes it in splashes, drops, streams and stains, clots and ribbons that will never again be restored to a form. (2)

*Trouble Every Day* oscillates between two couples, each with a member affected by a strange disease. Denis creates convoluted connections between these characters and suggests a dark world where those afflicted cannot be controlled. Dr. Léo Semenau (Alex Descas) tries to sequester his murderous wife, Coré (Béatrice Dalle), in a home in the provinces, yet she continually manages to escape, seduce, and kill new prey. Another couple, American newlyweds, arrives in Paris for their honeymoon. Husband Dr. Shane Brown (Vincent Gallo) has a secret mission to find out about his worsening condition and reconnect with Léo, whose deadly research Shane apparently misappropriated for monetary gain. Unlike Coré, Shane is capable of maintaining some normalcy in his life, though he continually resists consummating his marriage with June (Tricia Vessey), to her dismay.

As does *J'ai pas sommeil*, *Trouble Every Day* disturbingly shows how beautiful violence and terror can be on film.<sup>70</sup> In the commentary on the DVD, Denis references

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<sup>70</sup> Met gives a thoughtful consideration of the "humanity-within-monstrosity" of both films. In fact, he says, "the 'unthought of the body (rather than the conspicuous taboo of sex as a carnivorous act) constitutes the philosophical core of *Trouble Every Day*, as well

Irena (Simone Simon), the female lead from Jacques Tourneur's 1942 *Cat People*, as an influence for Coré. Irena fears, correctly as it turns out, that she suffers from an ancient curse on women from her native Serbian village. It turns local women into seductresses who take the form of panthers to kill their prey. Irena is not a vampire, though she is a predatory carnivore. Once aroused, angered or made jealous, they cannot control their destructive desire. However, unlike Irena, who diverts her killing urges onto animals and provokes her own death before killing a human being, Coré cannot resist her desire and acts on instinct to seduce her prey. Nonetheless, just as Tourneur evoked compassion for the beautiful Irena, Denis makes Coré a beautiful and savage figure who is loved but who cannot safely copulate with her man.

Unlike the talkative, emotional Mona of *J'ai pas sommeil*, Dalle as Coré resembles the deranged Betty (also played by Dalle) who stabs out her own eye at the end of *Betty Blue*. Coré is the toughest character. Dalle incarnates the feral predator, completely absorbing herself in the role and leaving behind any trace of humanity. As Denis notes, "Béatrice, plus encore que Vincent, a emmené le film très loin. Je crois qu'elle a pris un risque énorme" ("Béatrice, even more than Vincent, carried the film very far. I think she took a huge risk"; Bonnaud, "Claire Denis—Leçons de ténèbre," 5). Dalle uses her eyes and mouth to convey Coré's seductiveness, longing, and uncontrollable desire. Her grunts, moans, and shrieks augment her ferocious, animalistic, monstrous side, while her sultry looks and voluptuous body demonstrate her humanity and beauty. Her gestures include both her wordless seductive stares and her ferocious, destructive open-

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as the more instinctual basis for the most audience responses to it. In other words, less the dark side of the unconscious self than the filmic equivalent of a sensitive thought of the body in its most unthinkable incarnations."

mouthed kisses.

As Dr. Léo Semenau, Descas is somber and serious.<sup>71</sup> His facial expressions convey a deep sense of caring for others, a quiet concern for the future, compassion for his sick wife, and an unapologetic understanding of the atrocities of which she is capable of doing to others. His repeated gest is his serious facial expression of compassion mixed with concern. Vincent Gallo plays Shane as soft-spoken, tender and quietly deceitful.<sup>72</sup> The strength of his performance, too, lies in his facial expressions. These convey secret suffering, desire and concern, all that he tries to mask from June. During the only time they sightsee in Paris, he looms over her like a monster, a gesture that captures his predatory instinct, though he casually plays it off as a funny imitation to June.

More than with the other characters, clothing and hairstyle play a large part in crafting June's appearance and personality.<sup>73</sup> Vessey effectively captures the naïve but curious nature of the character with her innocent expressions and her classic, well tailored Audrey Hepburn-style wardrobe and haircut. Even though by the end her world is crumbling around her, perhaps without her knowing it, she still maintains a cool demeanor. She does not have a distinct gest.

Two early scenes juxtapose the two couples. Both allude to serious underlying problems yet include tender moments and sexual desire. A brief sequence with Coré shows her seducing a man, but his murder is elided. Léo finds the bloody corpse before

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<sup>71</sup> He had appeared in *S'en fout la mort* (*No Fear No Die*) and later would appear in *Ten Minutes Older: The Cello* (segment "Vers Nancy"), *L'Intrus*, and *35 rhums*. Uncharacteristically here, he is not a working-class man, but instead a physician and brain researcher.

<sup>72</sup> The character Shane strongly resembles Vincenzo Brown, the affectionate husband also played by Gallo *Nénette et Boni*. Both characters share the common surname Brown.

<sup>73</sup> Tricia Vessey is the only actor who had not previously nor subsequently worked with Denis.

finding his wife, mouth smeared in blood. Huddled on the ground, she remains in a stupor after the kill. He lovingly cares for her despite the evidence of her brutal behavior. The short scene presents a strange combination of horror and humanity.

Next, in the bathroom on a plane, Shane envisions a bloody scene that shows a woman who resembles June, lying in a bed soaked in blood and wrapped in blood-soaked sheets, but alive and smiling. Again, horror is mixed with an unexpected element, here happiness. The handheld camera and offscreen whooshing sounds contribute to the disquieting feel of the short scene and raises questions: Does the woman's smile indicate enjoyment of whatever happened? Why is Shane having such a fantasy?

The film repeatedly references vampire tropes. Shane is tender with June, but somehow also menacing. On the plane before his bloody dream, he takes her arm and kisses it from the wrist up. Gallo remains soft-spoken and tender, but manages to show something in his expression that hints at the monster he will become. Although an action any new husband might perform, the camera focuses on her wrist, and his intense eyes threaten. Shane is also fascinated by the maid Christelle (Florence Loiret-Caille), who helps the newlyweds take their luggage to their room. Repeated long tracking shots of her as she walks down the hallway, from Shane's point of view, together with shaky, close views of the back of her head and neck create a sense of threat.

In the hotel room, Shane surreptitiously takes medication, perhaps to try to stop the onset of the disease or alleviate its symptoms. When Coré casts her pills aside, Shane tries to manage his compulsions. But can the urge to kill one's partner when sexually excited be controlled? He appears to know what he is capable of doing when aroused. He surprises June as she takes a bath and asks her if she knows that he would never hurt her.

His words seem more troubling than comforting.

Shane telephones, then visits, a lab looking for Léo. In the hotel room and at the lab itself, flashbacks and dream sequences hint at the origins of the terrible disease. More dialogue occurs in the sterile scientific environment than in other parts of the film. Short ambiguous scenes reveal that experiments began during a research investigation in the rainforests of French Guyana by a team including Coré, Léo, and Shane. They were seeking ways to map the brain. The illness seems contagious and to spread via sexual activity and/or by blood, much like AIDS. Léo has been shunned by the scientific community, which also disavows the existence of the disease. The disjointed presentation of confusing and incomplete bits of information adds to a growing sense of disquiet (disease).

Denis makes a correlation between contemporary scientific research and the types of unforeseen complications that can occur. The oblique South American connection underscores the potentially disastrous ramifications of global scientific pursuits by Western scientists. Beugnet recognizes that: “Shane and Coré are contemporary vampires, creatures of a postcolonial era tormented by a curse brought back from a former colony” (*Claire Denis* 182). By entering into remote rainforests once untouched by non-indigenous populations, these researchers unleash an unknowable pestilence upon society, akin to how AIDS “mysteriously” made its way from interior Africa to Europe and the U.S.

Léo has been relegated to an inferior status and forced to conduct his experiments from home. He patiently and calmly continues to care for his patients in a clinic as well as to care at home for his deranged wife whom he obviously still loves. He is, in other



words, in many ways ordinary, not perceived as a mad scientist like the obsessive Henry Frankenstein (Colin Clive) in James Whale's 1931 *Frankenstein*. When two adolescents boys break in to the basement of his home in the provinces, they prowl around looking at Léo's scientific set-up in the basement. It includes refrigerated brains and vials of liquid in refrigerators. These serve as the only clues that Léo has continued his research in private; no shots actually show him working in his home lab. Why is he not infected? How is the disease spread? Have Shane and Coré infected others? Can Shane infect June and make her his killing partner?

According to Nancy, the consequences of scientific meddling can be world destroying. He cautions:

It is not a question of "weighing in" for or leaning toward either destruction or salvation. For we do not even know what either can signify: neither what another civilization or another savagery arising out of the ruins of the West might be, nor what could be "safe/saved" when there is no space outside of the epidemic (in this respect, AIDS is an exemplary case, as are certain epizootic diseases on another level: the scale of the world, of its technologies and of its *habitus*, brings the terror of the plagues of the past to incommensurable heights). (*The Creation of the World* 35)

Denis seems to agree with Nancy that globalization has the potential to destroy the world. However, the beauty of her film also lends credence simultaneously to the other meaning of globalization (*mondialisation*) as an act of creating a world, as the film is a unique form of thought-provoking art.

The only time Coré speaks (beyond a brief flashback image of her talking to a

woman in the lab prior to her sickness) she laments to Léo that “Je ne veux plus attendre. Je veux mourir” (“I don’t want to wait any longer. I want to die”). Her words communicate her inability to continue living with the disease, even if she is in some way helping Léo formulate an antidote or find preventative medicine for this gruesome affliction.

Early in the film, a neighboring teenager (Raphaël Neal) is seen in short takes. He is obsessed with breaking into Léo and Coré’s home and reaching the mysteriously captive Coré. Eventually, he succeeds in penetrating the fortress-like house and reaches the room where Léo has sequestered his wife. Léo is away at work. Through boards roughly nailed across the doorway (Coré had earlier escaped by cutting her way out with a chainsaw), the boy and Coré touch and kiss. His desire drives him to rip down the barrier. As with her brief silent seduction of a trucker in the initial sequence of the film, Coré patiently waits for the boy to reach her. Their mutual attraction sparks lustful touching.

She patiently seduces him, then spends a long time killing him. The boy’s titillation turns to fear as he realizes he is trapped beneath an uncontrollably strong, fierce killer. He emits frantic pleas for help, screams piercingly, then produces sounds of labored breathing as Coré’s kiss becomes a bite and she perforates his neck. After he is dead, she paints a bloody mural on the wall and paces trancelike back and forth, her dress bloodstained.

The Tindersticks music builds (“The Killing Theme”). Tight framing and low-key lighting on Coré as she pins down the boy reveal little. As Tim Palmer recognizes, in this film, Gaspar Noé’s *Irreversible* (2002), and Bruno Dumont’s *Twenty-nine Palms* (2003)

an “oppressive use of sound” that is “used to disturb” (73). He finds a “slippage in acoustic fidelity, a wavering connection between image and sound. Alongside, under, and over scenes—as the density, mix, and volume of the soundtrack abruptly shift—a subterranean barrage of off-screen and nondiegetic sound peaks and ebbs in waves” (73). Indeed, in this sequence, the visual track is less important than the more powerful soundtrack. The boy’s guttural wheezes and Coré’s catlike growls and squeals in conjunction with the plaintive, evocative music are troubling, although instead of being jarring, the music is expressive and poignant. There are trumpet bursts and a constant low percussive beat from hand drums and cellos. The scene is at once disgusting and haunting.

More than any other scene in these three films, Coré’s final kill is viscerally provocative. As Deleuze notes about certain New Wave films, at times the camera is so close to its subjects as to give a sense of bumping into them (*Cinéma 2* 193). The camera is uncomfortably close in this scene. Unlike the haptic moments discussed in Chapter 1, however, the proximity of the camera in the murder scenes here elicits revulsion rather than pleasure. As Jennifer Barker argues of Roman Polanski’s *Repulsion* (1965) and David Lynch’s *Eraserhead* (1977), some horror films create tactile responses built on a proximity to the film’s skin so that “the film startles and disgusts us with the violent eruption or unsettling smear of materiality in places and images where it seems not to belong. Things creep, slither and ooze everywhere we touch, smooth surfaces dissolving into disgusting, dark, viscous imagery” (49). During Coré’s final kill, blood oozes from the frames, much too close for comfort.

As the most monstrous character, Coré is, however, also the most humane: she is

the only one who takes a proactive role to eliminate the disease. After finishing killing the boy, she descends to the kitchen where she opens the oven to kill herself. She realizes that she must take her own life to liberate herself from her suffering and to prevent herself from spreading this strange disease. Her death is intercut with a more tranquil scene with Shane. He waits to meet up with a woman from the lab who informs him of where Léo lives.

As Coré stands in the gas-filled kitchen, Shane arrives to ask Léo for help. He finds her, blood-soaked and deranged. They embrace; their attraction has been hinted at in dialogue in the lab between Shane and another female scientist. Arousal predictably provokes Coré's murderous instinct and she tries to kill Shane. By sheer strength, he forces her down into the collecting gas on the kitchen floor and strangles her. She is his first victim, although he does not kill with a kiss. He appears to comprehend, perhaps for the first time, that the disease is likely incurable and he has no real recourse. However, instead of halting the spread of the disease by also killing himself, he flees. He finds a victim who will temporarily placate his sexually cannibalistic urges.

This final murder is less bloody. The camera follows Christelle alone in the employee locker room, creating the impression that she is being watched. She does not seem overly concerned. When Shane appears by her locker at the end of her shift near the end of the film, she is just as eager as Coré's victims were earlier to embrace a complete stranger. One could say that she, like the teenage boy and the truck driver, is lured by a preternatural urge to be with her killer. Just as in those scenes, an erotic encounter ensnares an unsuspecting victim. Loiret-Caille's performance is evocative: she exudes sexual attraction, she submits to domination, and she recoils in terror.

This scene again incarnates Nancy's icon of fury, though the blood remains off-screen this time. As opposed to the darker, more tightly framed scene with Coré and the boy, this scene is well lit, in focus, and in medium-shot. At first, Christelle finds Shane's assertiveness playful. She returns his kisses and accepts his domination with desire. He gets on top of her on the floor between the lockers. Placed above Shane as he moves down her body to perform oral sex, the camera concentrates on Christelle's writhing upper body. She screams and cries from extreme pain, not pleasure, as what begins as cunnilingus turns to cannibalism. Shane's grunts of pleasure increase as Christelle's noises of distress and agony grow. It is obvious that he is literally devouring her sex organs. Her agonized face engorges with blood. She turns to the side as she tries in vain to escape his fatal embrace and screams. The brutal scene ends with a high-angle medium close-up shot on her. The actual murder is not shown. Shane drags her bloody body into the laundry room to hide it and clean himself up.

He has killed more quickly than Coré did, and he shows concern for the consequences. He interacts with June, who returns to find him finishing a shower in their room. A close-up shows a single, watered-down rivulet of blood on the shower curtain. It is an indication that Shane is barely ready in time for his wife's return and provides a clue for June, if she is able or willing to notice it. Although not a clear eyeline match, her eyes do seem to look toward the bloody water drops. The final shot of the film is an over the shoulder medium close-up of her eyes conveying a mix of curiosity and anxiety.

The film ends without revealing how much June has learned of his condition or what will happen to the couple beyond their stay in Paris. However, by choosing to return to the States, Shane willingly brings an advancing version of the illness to another

continent and risks a much greater chance of spreading it. No more is known about Léo. As Nancy says, “There is no resolution, neither ecstasy nor appeasement: only distraction. A clenching in fits and starts. There is no end to it. Trouble every day” (“Icon of Fury” 7). As the end credits roll, the latter portion of the title track plays for the first time, reinforcing the notion that evil is lurking everywhere. The song’s lyrics pick up with “If I want you back, I could get away/ Before the sunshine leaves your eye/ But I need to know/ How to find a place/ Before the days become nights/ Before the years become lies/ And there’s trouble every day...” As she did in *J’ai pas sommeil* Denis again reveals that there is much to be feared from everyday people.

*Trouble Every Day* accordingly produces a growing sense of anxiety as (once) ordinary people transcend the boundary of acceptable behavior and kill and consume other humans. The visuals and especially the sounds of the murder scenes elicit visceral responses. Less intricate than the two Denis films, *Les amants criminels* nonetheless also uses flashbacks and fantasies to interrupt linearity. In Ozon's film murderous desire is, moreover, both homosexual and heterosexual, at times evinced through fervent looks or enacted in theatrical poses. Without the same emphasis on music, instead spoken words are more important.

## Hetero- and Homosexuality, Hostility, Homicide

Not as overtly subversive as his early shorts, especially his thesis project *Victor* (1993) and his first feature, *Sitcom* (1998), Ozon's second feature *Les amants criminels*, nevertheless unusually mixes horror, crime thriller, and fairy tale conventions (see, for example, Zipes) in mundane contemporary settings. The narrative structure is atypically fragmented for an Ozon film.<sup>74</sup> As with the two Denis films, the characters are introduced without explanation. The soundtrack contains an original score: Philippe Rombi's lilting but sparse instrumentals. These occasionally set the mood, but the music occurs infrequently. By contrast with the Denis films, verbal communication, including dialogue and voiceover, are prevalent.

Alice, the only female character, convinces naïve boyfriend Luc to help kill high school classmate, Saïd.<sup>75</sup> Although not a common recurring theme as with Denis, there are underlying racial tensions because Saïd is a second-generation North African Arab teenager who is simultaneously an object of desire and hostility for his white peers. However, he is not simply an object, as Rees-Roberts and Asibong argue.<sup>76</sup> Certain

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<sup>74</sup> On his website, Ozon discusses how the complexity of the original version may have contributed to the poor reception of the film, which influenced him to reorder it and release an alternate version to accompany the theatrical release on the DVD. Focus here remains on the original version, in part because of its greater complexity, but also because of its general availability.

<sup>75</sup> In only his second credited acting role, the muscular and handsome Salim Keriouche, twenty years old at the time, appears comfortable onscreen as Saïd.

<sup>76</sup> Rees-Roberts contends that Saïd's character is mainly objectified and "The beur [person of Maghrebi descent] boy is here denied any sense of subjectivity, existing purely as a figure of the lovers' imagination" (31). Asibong, too, describes Saïd as "a feared, hated, eroticized object of study that needs to be endlessly watched, described and mastered — that serves as the conduit for the transgressive desires of the protagonists" ("Meat, murder and melancholia" 211).

scenes show him to be sexual, macho, and assertive. Indeed a medium close-up of Saïd looking over his shoulder at Alice, whom he desires, recurs throughout the film. It is his gest, conveying social attitudes of flirtation and attraction.

The film pays tribute to a wide range of sources, from recent real-life news stories about murderous teenagers to fictional sources such as Charles Laughton's *Night of the Hunter* (1955) and the Brothers Grimm's "Hansel and Gretel." For example, after Luc and Alice bury Saïd, they get lost and end up taking a boat float down a river. Several shots look similar to the children's flight from the evil Harry Powell (Robert Mitchum) in *Night of the Hunter*. An unnamed woodsman (Predrag Manijlovic) watches Alice and Luc in the woods. Later he captures the two teenagers as they forage for food in his remote cabin. Afterwards he keeps them chained up in the rough basement. They are like children in conventional fairy tales who fall prey to witches and ogres.

As occurs in both Denis films, regular people turn to murder. The most power-hungry and monstrous character is the attractive, cunning, domineering Alice. As is also the case in the two Denis films, moreover, *Les amants criminels* is ambivalent about what is good and what is bad. Ozon insists in the interview on his website: "the criminal act is presented as it is in all its mysterious and frightening brutality, without any psychological explanation or sociological context."

An emphasis on diegetic sounds begins before the opening shot. As credits roll, sounds of a clock ticking mix with someone's breathing. In the first shot, a medium close-up, Luc sits blindfolded on a bed. Alice's voice is heard before she is seen. The initial scene of the film sets up the power dynamic between Alice and Luc.<sup>77</sup> He is

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<sup>77</sup> Part of the disparity in sexual awareness or maturing tastes between Luc and Alice



generally shot from her dominant perspective, from above. She is shown in low-angle shots, indicating she is in control. She pretends to do a striptease. She is curt and tells him she is doing things she is not. She suddenly pulls his pants down and pretends to take a photo of his crotch. She laughs, and he becomes enraged. He is hurt, not excited, by her cruel behavior.

Alice desires Saïd, not Luc, however, but simultaneously denies her feelings. Here is thus a driving force behind the murder. Saïd is mutually attracted to her. A scene where Saïd acts out his desire for Alice to his friend Kalim (Yasmine Belmadi) interrupts the initial bedroom scene with Alice and Luc. Saïd provocatively describes how he wants to “fuck” Alice. Yet Saïd’s confession of heterosexual attraction has homoerotic overtones. Although he flirts in the hallways with Alice, kisses her, and talks about having sex with her, he presses himself against Kalim as he describes what he will do with Alice. To further complicate matters, Luc also seems to be attracted to Saïd.

The murder scene occurs early in the film but repeats later in flashbacks, emphasizing Alice’s fierce look of determination and Luc’s murderous gesture of stabbing. Alice seduces Saïd in the school showers by the boxing gym. On her cue, she holds Saïd down as Luc stabs him in the torso until he dies; the sound of Luc's knife

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stems from the fact that Natasha Régnier is Jérémie Renier’s senior by almost a decade. Not a novice, Régnier had been in thirteen film and television titles prior to this film. This is only Renier’s third film. He has gone on to perform in over forty titles, though not working again with Ozon until the recent *Potiche* (2010). Although both actors play characters that are meant to be a similar age and Régnier makes a believable teenager, her sexual assertiveness as Alice derives from a body that cannot fully mask its actual greater life experience. Only 18 while making *Les amants criminels*, Renier incarnates the insecure, awkward and sensitive Luc, and is effective as the emotionally provoked killer. His youth makes his portrayal of Luc as submissive to both Alice and the woodsman more believable.

entering Saïd's flesh accompanies the image. The well-lit, white-tiled bathroom and all three teenagers are covered in blood. Saïd cries out but dies quickly. Several short scenes show how they move Saïd's body from the school's gym to Luc's parent's car, then their stops for supplies (including a shovel), and journey to the forest to bury the body. For the most part, there is no music, but significantly, a pop song by the band Lamb plays while they are in the supermarket. It underscores their youth and cavalier attitudes. While they bury Saïd and just after, a few notes from the original score sound occasionally, creating a sense of unease that builds as the woodsman catches them.

Rough with the couple when he apprehends them, the woodsman is subsequently shown as diligent and hardworking in his domestic routine. He becomes tender with Luc after he brings him up from the basement. Schilt nevertheless first describes him as “an evil middle-aged man” (52), although he recognizes later that “[i]t is the woodsman who assumes the role of sexual facilitator in what becomes a bizarre coming-of-age narrative, turning this paternal monster into a multifaceted figure that is simultaneously good and evil, father and lover, savior and executioner” (59). He is strangely honest and hardworking.<sup>78</sup>

The woodsman has carved out a comfortable existence in a remote setting, prioritizing a clean and orderly abode where he can prepare succulent meals with the food he has caught (even if the meat is sometimes human). He lives on the fringe of society but he is less monstrous than Alice. Todd Reeser asserts: “Although the only male/male relationship in the film seems to be one of master and slave as the man keeps Luc on a

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<sup>78</sup> Having begun his acting career in 1970 and almost 50 during the shooting of this film, Manijlovic, from Serbia, is effective as the not-so-scary ogre, ruggedly handsome, with a soft voice.

leash in the cabin, the physical bondage also allegorizes a kind of forced apprenticeship of gay domesticity and a concomitant release from the bondage of feigned heterosexuality” (40). Perhaps he models self-sustaining and sexually gratifying behavior to the younger man: after all, he does not rape Luc, but instead gradually initiates him into the world of sex. What previously were undercurrents of homoeroticism and homosexuality culminate in a positive first gay sexual experience for Luc.

Unlike his inability to interact sexually with Alice at the beginning of the film, Luc responds quickly to the ogre’s gentle touches and achieves orgasm. Schilt notes that the ogre “infantilizes his protégé by recommending that he ‘be a good boy’ and by calling him ‘*mon lapin*’ (“my little rabbit”), a common term of endearment in French...” (60). However, even though Luc is submissive while the woodsman is awake and in charge, as the older man sleeps, Luc takes charge and liberates himself and Alice. Reeser explores Luc’s sexual transformation and domestic apprenticeship, but does not discuss Luc’s monstrous side (39-40).

Non-chronological flashbacks embedded within Alice and Luc’s imprisonment at the ogre’s cabin show events preceding the murder. Lying on his bed, the ogre reads aloud from Alice’s journal. His deep, gravelly voice is replaced with hers and a flashback begins. In it, Alice, alone in her room, writes in her journal. She describes Saïd in an erotic way, especially his mouth and tongue. Her expression is frenzied and her voice intense as she speaks aloud what she writes.

The same fervent look crosses her face during the murder scene, in the forest near the woodsman’s cabin before he imprisons them, and at the end of the film before she is shot. This is, in a sense, her repeated gest in the film. Her character is built on the

repetitions of looks: “the gest is the development of attitudes themselves, and, as such, carries out a direct theatricalization of bodies, often very discreet, because it takes place independently of any role” (*Cinema 2* 192). Here as in Deleuze's description of Cassevetes's *Faces*, the moment exceeds the plot; Alice's face dominates the scene.

The flashback reveals what a deceptive and manipulative young woman Alice is. While Asibong (“Meat, Murder, Melancholia”), Schilt, Rees-Roberts and others discuss her domination of Luc and her cruelty, they do not focus specifically on her sexuality. She actually has the most perverse inclinations of any character in the film for she denies herself and others (Luc, Saïd) pleasure, and her desires exceed sexual encounters to include murder. In her bedroom, she writes and whispers, saying, “I’ll fuck you, asshole.” An extreme close-up of Saïd’s lips signals the object of her venomous remark. The scene shifts to a classroom. Alice longingly looks at and draws the back of Saïd’s neck. Perhaps noticing her inattention, the teacher (Bernard Maume) calls on her to read aloud from Rimbaud’s prose poem “Nuit de l’enfer” (“Night of Hell”).<sup>79</sup> Alice instead recites the passage from memory. Her intense expression as she recites is emblematic of her character.

As the only direct quote in the film, the poem stands out. Alice’s fascination with Rimbaud contributes another layer of homosexual association. She recites without emotion. But as she arrives at the line “Parents, vous avez fait mon Malheur et vous avez fait le vôtre” (“Parents, you have caused my misfortune and your own”; 275), she looks up and continues to deliver the remainder of the paragraph without looking down and

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<sup>79</sup> The poem comes from the long prose poem in nine parts entitled “Une saison en enfer” (“A Season in Hell”). Wallace Fowlie is the translator for *Rimbaud* and the quotations used here.

with growing passion. Other students look at her; she continues to stare intently at the back of Saïd's neck as she speaks. As she says "Un crime, vite, que je tombe au néant, de par la loi humaine" ("A crime, quick, so I can drop into the void, in accordance with the law of man"; 275), a medium close-up of Saïd shows him turn to look at her and smile. An extreme close-up of his lips opens the flashback.

A few other flashbacks show Alice flirting with Saïd and, later, surprising Luc as he sits alone in a chemistry classroom. She asks Luc if he loves her and tells him she needs his help to kill Saïd. These flashbacks provide details about how deceptive Alice is with Luc, how they plan the murder, and what they do after killing Saïd. These scenes contain a lot of dialogue but rarely any music. Both Saïd and Karim are seen together a few times. In one scene, they are in the bathroom peeing in urinals. Karim tells Saïd he has a funny way of doing it. Luc enters and goes to another urinal. Unexpectedly, Alice opens the door and asks if Luc is coming. Saïd and Karim tease Luc, calling him a virgin. The indication is that Alice has told Saïd about her naïve boyfriend.

Another break in chronology occurs in a dream sequence in which Alice masturbates by a tree as she watches the ogre seductively touch and then strangle Saïd. Because it is her fantasy, Saïd is objectified and has no voice or capability of independent action. Alice, too, is passive in her dream, a voyeur who watches the ogre act out her fantasy as he stares back at her. The scene underscores Alice's strange yearnings and inability to attain sexual satisfaction, even in a dream.

After Alice and Luc escape from the woodsman's cabin, the narrative becomes linear, following the couple until the end. They frolic in a river and become amorous. As they have sex on a rock, the scene veers toward hyperbole: small forest animals approach

and watch the copulating couple on the rocks. Their curious presence underscores a false sense of tranquility and security, and invokes anew a sense that this is a fairy tale. The animals, though real in *Les amants criminels*, recall the affable animated creatures that accompany Uncle Remus in Disney's *Song of the South*, or those in other Disney films such as *Sleeping Beauty*. Although Luc is ultimately able to respond to Alice sexually and briefly consummate their relationship, their coitus is frenzied and not tender. Moreover, it is cut short by the sudden presence of a police search team with dogs.

Luc steps in a small animal trap as they try to flee, ending any remote chance of escape and reinforcing the idea of him as a rabbit. Alice runs and is chased by masked men in uniform with vicious German shepherds. The pace quickens to the accompaniment of eerie piercing violins reminiscent of a Bernard Hermann Hitchcock score. She reaches a cliff above water and turns, which provokes her execution by men chasing her. Both the woodsman and Luc are captured but Luc is quietly placed in a police van while the ogre is beaten to the ground. Luc yells at them to stop, but as the van pulls away, he falls silent. He does not look like a murderer who has newly experienced both homosexual and heterosexual sex. Instead, he is suddenly subdued after frenetically trying to fight off the police. As with the two Denis films, no specific resolution is given, though his fate is fairly clear.

Ultimately, Ozon's film and Denis's films portray the monstrosity of the ordinary and evokes a general sense of malaise underlying contemporary society. Here a young, white, megalomaniacal woman wields power by seducing and provoking the murder of an exotic Other. If, like a fairy tale, Ozon's film has a moral at the end, it could be that neither heterosexuality nor homosexuality can be trusted. Sex can be a path to temporary

physical fulfillment, but comes at the cost of domination and/or imprisonment. Or, as with Alice, no sexual fulfillment is possible.

#### Everyday Menaces, Unsettling Beauty, Contemporary Urban Malaise

As the tagline of *J'ai pas sommeil* says, "evil exists everywhere." All three of these films portray ordinary people who become monstrous in everyday settings. Trouble is always lurking, even in unremarkable places. Although Denis's and Ozon's methods differ, as I have shown, both shift the generic expectations that normally underpin character development and dictate film style. Instead of showing gratuitous gore or dwelling on the aimless pursuit of helpless victims as certain horror films or crime thrillers might do, these films hone in on the human characteristics of their murderers. They expose the monstrosity of people who, for the most part, manage to appear harmless to those around them. Desire motivates all of the killers. Surprisingly, most of the victims in these films mutually sexually desire and willingly embrace their future murderers as well.

None of the murderers are supernatural creatures. Camille is a ruthless assassin who masquerades as a well-dressed socialite. He is most monstrous because he so easily blends into society despite having killed dozens of women. Coré is the most gruesome killer, but even she retains aspects of humanity and by the end of the film is piteous. After all, unlike Camille, who kills for money, an uncontrollable disease compels both Coré and Shane. Alice stands out as the most immoral character of the three films because she orchestrates the murder of the object of her desire, acting neither on instinct

or for profit. Even though she is not the actual killer of her beloved, she is cruel, deceptive, and manipulative.

All three films mix genres, whether crime thriller, horror, and/or fairy tale. They combine dense visual tracks and nuanced sound tracks, creating strangely lyrical portrayals of horrific acts. The fragmented narratives and diffuse characters prevent easy comprehension of what happens. *J'ai pas sommeil*'s elliptical structure shifts the narrative's focus onto the people who know Camille best, giving some indication as to how and why they did not recognize him as the granny killer. The crosscutting between the two couples (and killers) in *Trouble Every Day* creates a subtle tension, while the murder scenes evoke a visceral repulsion. The two different parts of *Les amants criminels* at first do not seem cohesive, but Alice's perversities in the flashbacks and dream sequences function to integrate them.

All of the primary characters in these films possess distinctive "gests" in Deleuze's sense. The protagonists in *J'ai pas sommeil* convey melancholy and detachment through their facial expressions. During their musical performances, each of them is more relaxed. Camille's raised arm and seductive stance during his drag performance become his essential gest, one that conveys social attitudes of narcissism, apathy, and beauty simultaneously. Daïga's laugh startles for its rarity but signifies her capacity for enjoying life despite its many hardships. Théo's solemn look is his gest, related more to lyrical abstraction than to a social posture.

In *Trouble Every Day*, both Coré and Shane adopt iconic horror film stances. In a low-angle long shot of Coré standing on a hill, she raises her arms and looks like the vampire from Murnau's *Nosferatu*. On top of Notre-Dame, Shane holds his arms out and



resembles a zombie for a moment. Otherwise, for each of them desirous expressions at their victims and more gruesome, but lustful, looks as they kill are quintessential gestures. In *Les amants criminels*, Alice's fervent face as she fantasizes, writes in her journal, recites the poem in class, or orchestrates Saïd's kill is her repeated gesture.

With Denis's two films more than with Ozon's, musical themes contribute to character development. Still, various forms of music, including original compositions in all three, are important. For them all, the soundtrack at times viscerally augments the visual track. More than in the other films, in *J'ai pas sommeil*, each protagonist is associated with certain music and each gives a performance of sorts. In both *J'ai pas sommeil* and *Trouble Every Day*, as mentioned, musical themes were scored for the films. Basehead riffs play when Camille is alone. Tindersticks notes haunt the scenes with Coré most especially, and she emits animalistic sounds. Unusually for Ozon, *Les amants criminels* contains little music. The symphonic chords of the Rombi score erupt only a few times and the film has little other music. Instead, verbal exchanges and voiceover play a significant role.

Jean-Luc Nancy's insights explicate the sense of uncertainty and unease that the spectator is left with at the end of all these films. He says, "It is as if being itself—in whatever sense one understands it, as existence or as substance—surprised us from an unnamable beyond. It is, in fact, the ambivalence of the unnamable that makes us anxious: a beyond for which no alterity can give us the slightest analogy" (*Creation* 35). Instead of hideous beings that one expects to do horrible things, Denis's monsters scare because they are so ordinary, their disease is not recognized or accepted, and they look and act, for the most part, just like anyone else. *J'ai pas sommeil* quietly and lyrically

reveals formerly sympathetic characters to be horrific killers, but the lack of closure leaves an unsettled feeling, as though evils still lurk. As Carroll states about *Trouble Every Day*, “Denis has managed to devastate you with exactly the reason you bought the ticket. She has managed to subvert the movie’s selling point of flesh, both sexy and devoured” (1). Meanwhile, though *Les amants criminels* may not keep sleep at bay, its abrupt finale with the capture or death of all the “bad” characters still does not provide a sense of closure or comfort that the monsters are gone. All three films are, indeed, frightening because the people and places are so familiar and commonplace, and because in them attraction is linked to death, and evil to beauty.

## Chapter 4: Coping, Grieving, Denying: (Re-) Imagining Death and Dying

Where the films of the third chapter consider links between sexuality, violence, and death, these films focus on the impact that loss, illness, and aging have on a loved one, or on a person preparing to die, or on someone trying to prolong life despite disease. Ozon's fourth and eighth features, *Sous le sable* (*Under the Sand*) and *Le Temps qui reste* (*Time to Leave*), treat, respectively, how one deals with the unexpected loss of a spouse, and what one man with terminal cancer chooses to do with the short remainder of his life.<sup>80</sup> *L'Intrus*, Denis's eighth feature, traces the path of a 70-something man seeking a heart transplant on the black market.

The grieving process, dying from a terminal illness, organ transplantation: the subjects of these films are not everyday cinematic fare. The three are closer in terms of style than any other set of films discussed in this dissertation. In his website interview on *Sous le sable*, Ozon states, "Je voulais que le spectateur se raconte des histoires à partir d'indices corporels ou vestimentaires ...que rien ne soit littéralement expliqué, mais que l'on suive ce personnage à travers sa manière d'être, de bouger, de s'habiller, de se coiffer." ("I wanted the spectator to formulate his own story based on corporal or vestimentary indications...that nothing would be literally explained, but that one follows a character via his/her manner of being, of moving, of dressing, of his/her hairstyle").<sup>81</sup> That Charlotte Rampling, Melvil Poupaud, Jeanne Moreau, and Michel Subor are all over

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<sup>80</sup> These films are also the first two films of Ozon's trilogy on death. The final one, *Ricky*, treats the death of a baby. It differs stylistically from the two films discussed here.

<sup>81</sup> See the interview on *Sous le sable/Under the Sand* on Ozon's official website.

50 and have not had plastic surgery contributes to the realistic portrayals of aging and or disease.

Like the films analyzed elsewhere in this dissertation, these films contain layers of cinematic and literary references that subtly pay tribute to other actors, directors, authors, and artists. Only the most seasoned *cinéphile* would be able to identify all the interconnections: these filmic quotations contribute to the complexity and richness of these three films in particular. The notion of homage also fits well with this chapter since another key idea associated with aging, death, and dying is remembrance. As Denis and Ozon cite older material, they revive the work of old masters.

Both directors spend a majority of screen time on a solitary protagonist, often shown in close-up. *Sous le sable* focuses on Marie Drillon (Charlotte Rampling) and her attempts to reconcile the mysterious loss of her husband of 25 years, Jean (Bruno Cremer). She is largely unable to accept a new love into her life, but instead copes with his loss by imagining him still living peacefully with her. In this sense she follows a trajectory explored by Sigmund Freud in *On Murder, Mourning and Melancholia*: she internalizes the lost loved one, but in her case happily so. She goes so far as to lose touch with what is real, an extreme but understandable result of mourning according to Freud. In fact, he says, “This tendency can become so intense that it leads to a person turning away from reality and holding on to the object through a hallucinatory wish-psychosis” (204). Ozon captures this process beautifully on screen in Marie’s fantasy and dream sequences.

In *Le temps qui reste*, Ozon follows Romain (Melvil Poupaud) through the remaining months of his life. The film has certain affinities with AIDS films, most

especially with Hervé Guibert's *La pudeur ou l'impudeur* (*Modesty and Shame*, 1992), which depicts the director's last year of life as he loses the battle with AIDS. Ozon's work similarly contemplates the premature death of a homosexual man but without adding the stigma of a sexually transmitted disease. Rather than confiding in his friends and family, Romain chooses to reconcile with himself, mentioning his disease only to his grandmother. He dies alone.

*L'Intrus* follows the solitary Louis as he seeks a new heart, which leads him from his son, daughter-in-law, and grandchildren in France around the world to Korea and Tahiti. Striking land- and seascapes are ambiguously connected by temporal ellipses. Recurring close-up shots of Louis looking pensive evoke Nancy's short book, also called *L'Intrus* (2000), in which he ponders the metaphysical implications of his heart transplant.

All three films explore the intersection of reality and dreams. They portray dreamscapes, whether as waking reveries, flashbacks, or both. In *Sous le sable*, Marie interacts with visions of Jean when she is at home. Throughout *Le temps qui reste*, a child version of Romain (Ugo Soussan Trabelsi) appears, first in the opening frames of the film, then via Romain's daydreams about his childhood. In *L'Intrus*, Denis mixes past and present, using cues that seem to signify Louis's dreams or memory space, repeatedly blurring the boundaries between reality and fantasy, confusing temporal logic.

Ozon and Denis offer candid portrayals of aging, often using close-up shots of faces, hands, and other fragmented body parts. Unlike most mainstream Western representations that revere youth, these films all reconsider aging, refusing to equate it simply with decline. As such they are examples of creative endeavors that model non-

decline in older individuals. These, sociologist Margaret Gullette maintains, are needed to combat misconceptions of “age ideology” (199-200, 207). All three films do just that. Marie, in her 60s, is active, attractive, and open to new experiences despite, or perhaps in part because of, living with the specter of her late husband. Romain’s grandmother (Jeanne Moreau) represents an older woman in her late 70s who is smart, strong, and even seductive. Louis needs a new heart, but otherwise he is a healthy man of almost 70. These and other secondary characters, whether intentionally or not, help to counter the dominant belief in aging as decline. In fact, the only character who has a body in decline and who dies debilitated is the 30-something Romain.

#### Solitude, Survival, Sexuality

Critically acclaimed as one of Ozon’s best films, *Sous le sable* considers what it means to live with the unexplained disappearance, and likely death, of a loved one. Many of Ozon’s earliest films (such as his film school project in 1993, *Victor*, and his first two features, *Sitcom* and *Les amants criminels*) commingle sexuality, transgression, and death, portraying scenes of death and murder, but not delving into the grieving process. Far from the juvenile antics employed in these films, for which he has received much criticism, *Sous le sable* is serious and mature in tone.

The film explores mourning, midlife, sexuality, and suicide. In an interview with Sheila Johnston, Ozon states: “We had a lot of problems because in France nobody believed in the film. Everyone said, ‘It’s an old people’s story, bereavement is a depressing subject, [actors] Charlotte Rampling and Bruno Cremer aren’t fashionable

names” (13). Instead of backing away from the project, Ozon found other sources of funding and finished the film.<sup>82</sup> His tale is far from depressing. The film shows grief to be a sensuous, dreamy process of learning to live without a loved one, not simply a sad, woeful experience.

Situated between the vibrant and stylized *Gouttes d'eau sur pierres brûlantes* and *8 femmes*, *Sous le sable* stands out for its subdued visual tones and acting. The film has no musical interludes and hence no comic touches. Ozon remarks in the website interview, “J’avais envie d’aller vers une certaine simplicité” (“I wanted to go toward a certain simplicity”). Not an adaptation, *Sous le sable* is instead based on a real-life event from his childhood at the family’s regular vacation spot in Les Landes, in southwestern France.<sup>83</sup> When he was 9 or 10, Ozon witnessed the unexplained disappearance of the husband of a Dutch couple on vacation. He uses the area as the setting for Jean’s disappearance.

Ozon has described the first part as a prologue to the rest of the film. This first section contains only three chapters and lasts just under 20 minutes. Financial difficulties prevented him from immediately beginning the second part of the film and kept him from maintaining the same type of film stock when he resumed shooting six months later. While the couple is still together in the first part, the colors are more vivid, due to the higher quality 35 mm film stock. The second part has 16 chapters, lasts about 70 minutes, and explores, subjectively, how Marie copes with Jean’s disappearance. Both parts open

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<sup>82</sup> France and England refused to contribute much toward the production of the film. In the interview, Ozon describes how he obtained financing primarily from Italy and Japan.

<sup>83</sup> Ozon discusses this in the interview on *Sous le sable*. Although a number of the resources on his website can be read in French or English, this article appears only in French.

with shots of the Seine, with buildings looming in the background. The second part is filmed in a noticeably colder season, represented well through the slightly grainier 16mm stock. As Ozon explains and as one can see, this change is not disturbing as the second part of the film has a different feel. He further explains in the interview on his website: “Tout est alors très mental, les faits sont moins certains: on est dans la tête de Marie, dont le parcours est ambigu, moins déterminé, plus flou, plus fragile, c’est un terrain de sables mouvants” (“Everything is thus very mental, the facts are less certain: we are in Marie’s head, thus the path is ambiguous, less determined, more blurry, more fragile, it’s a terrain of moving sands”).

As part of his meditation on loss, Ozon reconsiders traditional psychoanalytic concepts. Freud likens serious mourning to melancholia, especially in cases in which a person has lost a close loved one. He notes that this type of mourning “contains the same painful mood, the loss of interest in the outside world—except as it recalls the deceased—the loss of ability to choose any new love-object—which would mean replacing the mourned one—turning away from any task that is not related to the memory of the deceased” (204). Yet, as noted above, in *Sous le sable*, Marie does not exhibit an all-consuming melancholia. Instead, she lives rather happily, her imaginary husband providing her solace and company. Freud argues that usually a person in mourning perceives the absence of the “beloved object,” which “demands that the libido as a whole sever its bonds with that object” (204). However, since Marie sustains a fantasy image of her husband, she achieves what Freud calls “a hallucinatory wish psychosis,” a state of denying reality in favor of holding on to the lost object (204).



As the second part of the film opens, Marie attends a dinner party hosted by her longtime friend and colleague, Amanda (Alexandra Stewart) and her husband Gérard (Pierre Vernier). Both women are English and teach British literature at the same Parisian university; both have married French men. The small group of guests seems animated and light-hearted. Marie appears to have overcome the loss of her husband, and does not display signs of detachment or depression. However, she surprises everyone by speaking of Jean as if he were still part of her everyday life. Her words reveal that rather than accepting Jean's disappearance as death, she has convinced herself that he is still alive. Following Freud's formulation, she has a "hallucinatory wish-psychosis" in the form of suspended denial.<sup>84</sup> Other than speaking of him in the present tense, she does not otherwise indicate to her friends that she lives with an imagined version of her husband. Once she returns home, however, Ozon depicts her interactions with Jean. She relaxes alone on the sofa in the dark. Quietly, Jean enters the room and sits beside her. This first glimpse of him since his disappearance provides no clues as to whether he somehow has returned home or if he is a ghost, for he looks as substantive as he did when he was alive. Small indications, such as not eating or leaving the apartment, confirm that he is an imaginary image there to comfort Marie.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Freud elaborates, "Normally, respect for reality carries the day. But its task cannot be accomplished immediately. It is now carried out piecemeal at great expenditure of time and investment of energy, and the lost object persists in the psyche. Each individual memory and expectation in which the libido was connected to the object is adjusted and hyper-invested, leading to its detachment from the libido" (204-5).

<sup>85</sup> In the interview on his website, Ozon describes how he consulted with a psychologist on the subject of grief to confirm that it is normal for a person in mourning to hear or see the dead person, even though this behavior could appear crazy in the eyes of others. He has Marie conjure up visions of Jean as part of her refusal to accept his absence.

Amanda hopes that Marie will hit it off with a fellow professor, Vincent (Jacques Nolot), whom she invited to the party. He is a handsome man in his late 50s, noticeably smaller and trimmer than Jean. Marie is oblivious to his attention. At Amanda's urging, Marie allows Vincent to drive her home. He tries to kiss her before she exits the car, much to her consternation. Ozon places the camera outside the car and does not mike the sound from inside. Instead of focusing on their words, he directs attention to their physical responses. She recoils and blocks his advance, indicating viscerally her unwillingness to open up. As Freud predicts, she has difficulty accepting a new love. She is detached from her libido except when fantasizing about her lost husband.

Ozon takes his time depicting Marie's grieving, showing alternating views of her at home with her fantasy of Jean and her routines outside the home—going to the gym, teaching, and shopping. After purchasing a new dress for herself and a tie for Jean, she returns home. First, she listens to and smiles at an awkward message from Vincent, asking her out. Then, Jean appears from another room, startling her. This second imaginary visit is the longest. Her vision of him is tender, erotic, playful, and understanding. They flirt as she models her purchase, he strokes her leg, and they lie in an embrace on the bed. He even encourages her to go out with the new man. It is as though she is coming to terms with the idea by imagining approval from her husband. There is hope that she will be able to accept a new love object.

After her first date with Vincent, she lies back on the bed, fantasizes, and masturbates in one of the most visually stunning scenes of the film. For two minutes, segments of her body are shown as she lies back on the bed, still wearing her new red dress. The entire scene is filmed from a bird's eye view, with the camera positioned just

above the bed, framing her in medium close-up. The resulting images appear upside down on the screen. The moment is tender, enigmatic, quietly erotic, and ultimately sad. The camera lingers on Marie's face in close-up, eyes closed in enjoyment, then shifts to her torso. The rich, satiny fabric fills the screen. From outside the frame, first Vincent's hands enter from the right, then Jean's from the left. Her fantasy becomes more complicated as she processes Jean's loss and makes room for a new man in her life. Each set of men's hands takes off one of Marie's shoes, touches her body, and slowly makes their way up to her head. The camera shifts from the hands touching her face to frame her own hands touching her genitals, over the dress. As she opens her eyes, her fantasy ends. The hands remove themselves from her body and float outside the frame. She appears surprised to be alone and looks sad. As long as she maintains her fantasy, she is happy. The reality of being alone encourages her to seek out an actual physical encounter.

After an afternoon tryst initiated by Marie at Vincent's apartment, she returns home to a disturbing message from a medical examiner in Les Landes, saying they have found Jean's body and asking her to come. She opens the bedroom door and sees herself framed in a wardrobe mirror, alone. She calls out and Jean does not appear. She finally shows signs of realizing that Jean is gone and displays a more characteristic form of mourning. As the title of the subsequent chapter, "Return to the real," indicates, Marie goes about her daily routine, but she looks despondent and does not finish her workout at the gym. For the first time, she exhibits more typical signs of mourning. Freud describes melancholia as "mentally characterized by a profoundly painful depression, a loss of interest in the outside world, the loss of the ability to love, [and] the inhibition of any kind of performance" (204). Marie lacks her previous energy and enthusiasm as her

living in denial ends. She has not fully accepted Jean's loss, nor is she willing to shift her "libido position" from Jean's large, overweight figure to the comparably smaller and lighter-framed Vincent. Yet, the possibility of physical proof of Jean's death interrupts her ability to maintain her illusion of living with her spouse.

The second time Vincent and Marie make love, this time at her apartment, the imaginary Jean appears for the last time. He looks at them from the doorway and smiles at Marie. Although she smiles back, the next day Marie is less than courteous, telling Vincent that he just does not measure up.<sup>86</sup> Ultimately, she refuses to return to reality. At the morgue, although the evidence is unmistakable, she insists that the body is not Jean. In the final image of the film, Marie runs after a possibly new fantasy image of him. As with his initial disappearance, what happens to her is uncertain. It is a possibility, as it was for Jean, that she chooses to enter the water and not return, to commit suicide.

Ozon shows us that life after fifty can be sensual, and that aging bodies can still be sexy, capable, and strong. With an attractive middle-aged woman as the protagonist, he models a positive view on aging and midlife that contrasts with the Western notion that midlife heralds a decline. Indeed, Margaret Gullette indicates that "middle-ageism" is as destructive and invasive as sexism and racism (210).

In addition to showing Marie in a bathing suit in the first part of the film, the sequences of Marie with Jean and/or Vincent or by herself show aging bodies in honest and sensual ways. In close-up, Marie notices wrinkles around her eyes in the mirror as she prepares to join Jean in bed early in the film. Rampling is a beautiful and vibrant

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<sup>86</sup> In French, the expression "Tu ne fais pas le poids" literally means "You are not heavy enough," but figuratively insinuates and is usually translated as not measuring up. Vincent does not measure up to Jean in both senses.

woman whom Ozon filmed without filters or excessive make-up.<sup>87</sup> As he does with Marie, Ozon also provides a candid portrait of Vincent's aging body. Jacques Nolot, too, has wrinkles and a lot of grey in his hair. During the sex scenes, close-ups on faces, torsos, and hands show that neither Marie nor Vincent has lost the capacity for desire, tenderness, passion, and pleasure. Akin to Denis's portrayal of Marie and Jean in *Vendredi soir*, here, too, the scene contains haptic moments created by their skin, the texture of the sheets, and the sounds of their breath.

Ozon also presents the struggle to accept aging as a natural part of life. Marie reads to her class from Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*, although the source of the passage is not revealed until she tells Vincent about it on their first date. In the novel, Bernard provides a meditation on time and the banality of daily routines, which speaks to Marie's current existence of exercise, work, and home. Cutting from a high-angle long shot of her swimming in a pool to a medium shot of her standing at a lectern at the front of a large auditorium, Ozon shows Marie in her element as she reads aloud to her students:

"And time," said Bernard, "lets fall its drop. The drop that has formed on the roof of the soul falls. On the roof of my mind time, forming, lets fall its drop. Last week, as I stood shaving, the drop fell. I, standing with my razor in my hand, became suddenly aware of the merely habitual nature of my action (this is the drop forming) and congratulated my hands, ironically, for keeping at it. Shave,

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<sup>87</sup> In the interview on *Sous le sable* on his website, he states that, "je tenais à ce que Marie soit une belle femme dont le spectateur puisse tomber amoureux. C'était vraiment une idée première du film: filmer l'âge du personnage sans fard ni artifice. C'est pour cela qu'avec Jeanne Lapoirie (chef opérateur) nous n'avons pas utilisé de filtres, je voulais filmer la beauté des rides" ("I wanted Marie to be a beautiful woman with whom the spectator could fall in love. That's why Jeanne Lapoirie (cinematographer) and I did not use filters, I wanted to film the beauty of wrinkles.")

shave, shave, I said. Go on shaving. The drop fell. All through the day's work, at intervals, my mind went to an empty place, saying, 'What is lost? What is over?' And 'Over and done with,' I muttered, 'over and done with,' solacing myself with words. People noticed the vacuity of my face and the aimlessness of my conversation. The last words of my sentence tailed away. And as I buttoned on my coat to go home I said more dramatically, 'I have lost my youth.' (136)<sup>88</sup>

As she reaches the end of this passage, she falters. Andrew Asibong contends that it is the reading itself that makes her stumble and stop (*François Ozon* 85). However, Ozon's montage reveals that it is more than the words of Woolf's text that disturb her. As Marie reads aloud, the camera approaches her. In shot reverse-shot, shots of her are followed by shots of her students from her perspective. As the distance gradually tightens to her in close-up, the camera concentrates in medium close-up on one student in particular. This is the student who identifies himself to Marie after class as a lifeguard who helped in the search for Jean's body the summer before. The startling sight of him disrupts her reading as much or more than the words themselves. The passage she has chosen to read to her students simultaneously reminds her of her own lost youth and of her lost spouse.

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<sup>88</sup> Marie reads from the second half of Woolf's book. It is divided into nine parts, without chapter numbers or names. Each part opens with an italicized section that charts the progression of a day, from dawn to dusk, from the beginning to the end of the book. The remainder of the book has six protagonists (Bernard, Louis, Neville, Susan, Rhoda, Jinny), who speak in first person, in a series of stitched-together soliloquies. The nine sections that follow the poetic musings on the progression of a day trace the course of the six protagonists' lives from youth to old age. By the seventh section, it is afternoon, and the six are middle-aged. Bernard's words open seven out of nine parts of the book. The other protagonists call him a phrasemaker. He talks always of writing a book, but never does so.

Insinuations that Jean's death was a suicide begin in the first part of the film even though Marie does not acknowledge the hints. Jean looks somber, melancholy, wistful, and pensive, while Marie looks content, serene, and engaged. He is tender and attentive to his wife, but he also conveys a deep sense of detachment. Ozon includes a brief portrait of Jean alone, the only time he is without Marie in the film. He goes out to collect wood for a fire the night they arrive at the country home. He half-heartedly gathers a few sticks and stops to ponder an anthill under a log. He is too tired for sex. His eyes betray a detached sadness, and he pauses too long to appreciate nature, as though he might not see these woods again. On the beach the next day, signs of dysphoria can be read in his pensive looks. His face is framed in close-up and his gaze is deep, sad, and possibly resolute, as if he thinks it is time. He goes for a swim and never returns.

Ozon presents suicide as an acceptable choice, not a reprehensible act. In the second part of the film, Marie finds one of Jean's prescriptions and ascertains at the pharmacy that he was taking antidepressants. As she finds out about Jean's depression, she wonders if his death might have been intentional. She does not seem shocked or disturbed that Jean might have chosen to end his life. She quotes Virginia Woolf's suicide note at the dinner table with Vincent on their first date, insisting that hers was a beautiful death. He thinks it is morbid. Later, at lunch with Amanda, she looks distressed and finally asks, in future and not past tense, if Amanda thinks Jean will commit suicide. For Marie, past, present, dream, and reality mix as she struggles to make sense of her husband's loss.

In the final scene, Marie walks in the grass above the ocean and down onto the beach. The camera frames her hand in close-up, digging her fingers in the sand. Another

shot focuses on her face as she finally breaks down and sobs. For a long moment, she appears to be coming to terms with the reality of Jean's loss. However, her tears subside as something catches her eye in the distance. The final shot of the film is a long take of Marie running toward a man who looks like Jean, hefty and wearing a dark leather blazer, near water's edge. She runs and runs, but never reaches him. The ambiguous ending leaves us wondering if she has created a new fantasy image of her lost husband, or if perhaps she is on her way to join him in death.

Preoccupied by death, mourning, loss, and suicide, *Sous le sable* is not gloomy or dark. Ozon leaves questions unanswered and the ending ambiguous. Philippe Rombi's original piano and violin composition for the last sequence is plaintive and melancholic, setting a somber yet tranquil mood. Perhaps as homage to the famous ending shot of Antoine Doinel (Jean-Pierre Léaud) running toward the sea in *Les 400 coups* (*The 400 Blows*), Marie runs towards a man in the distance for almost a minute. The camera remains motionless and the shot is continuous. The film ends with a freeze-frame of Marie approaching the unidentified figure near water's edge. Unlike Doinel, she has seen the sea before. Similar to him, though, the uncertainty of the future is captured in a still image that remains onscreen for several seconds.

#### Death Sentence, Decisions, Dying

In contrast to *Sous le sable*, *Le Temps qui reste* focuses on a dying person's solitary trajectory toward death, not on its effects on a loved one. Ozon admits that he was thinking about the AIDS epidemic and its impact on the homosexual community. But



he did not want his film to be restricted to being simply a film about AIDS. In the interview on his website on *Le Temps qui reste*, “*Time to Leave* is nevertheless marked by the anxiety that my generation has experienced with regard to AIDS. Our sexual awakening came hand in hand with an acute awareness of illness and death.” He wanted to show the “concrete reality” of someone’s struggle when faced with a death sentence. “How do you live when you know you are going to die? How do you feel, what choices do you make? For example, just because he’s got a noose around his neck doesn’t mean Romain will make peace with his family. He’s more concerned with making peace with himself.” The film subjectively follows Romain’s perspective, candidly showing the deterioration of his body and his reconciliation to his impending death.

*Le Temps qui reste*, Ozon’s seventh feature and second in his trilogy on death, follows *5X2*. Where *Sous le sable* is a “tearless melodrama,” Ozon says in the interview on his website, “For this film, I wanted to try a masculine melodrama, I wanted to see if this young man’s story could solicit tears, which meant I would need to eroticize the actor. The audience needs to ‘fall in love’ with Romain in order to empathize with him and accept his journey.” The film’s presentation of how a homosexual man chooses to live out his final days is unlike the sexual fervor of Cyril Collard’s 1992 *Les nuits fauves*. Ozon cites instead as influences more somber works such as Hervé Guibert’s 1992 *La pudeur ou l’impudeur* (*Modesty and Shame*) and Ingmar Bergman’s 1957 *Smultronstället* (*Wild Strawberries*). There is also an association to Eric Rohmer’s work, especially *Contes d’été* (1996), with the choice of Poupaud to play Romain.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Ozon further notes in the interview that Poupaud is the only male lead in the *Four Seasons* series, and that “Rohmer filmed him [Poupaud] with the same grace and eroticism as the young women.”

In contrast with Marie's uncertainty regarding Jean's death, Romain knows he will die in a relatively short amount of time, especially since he opts for no treatment. The film opens near the end of his life. A successful fashion photographer, Romain frenetically shoots female models on the roof of a building in Paris on a bright sunny day. In a medium close-up, he falls backward and passes out, and the shot fades to white.

In the following scene, a doctor tells Romain he has a metastasized brain tumor that is a type of terminal cancer. Understanding that he has little chance to survive the cancer, he refuses chemotherapy despite the doctor's recommendation. Like Marie, Romain is a likeable, if unpredictable, character. Unlike Marie, he comes to terms with the diagnosis. He abandons his professional camera in favor of a small digital one, which he carries around for the rest of the film. He changes from a professional with top-notch gear into an amateur with a point-and-shoot, arbitrarily documenting moments of his quickly ending life. Although initially arrogant and at times downright nasty, over the course of the film, he becomes less animated and domineering, and more pensive. His photos no longer provide his income. Instead, they chart his inevitable, yet peaceful, path toward death.

In order to better understand Romain's decision to die alone, it is important to consider the role of flashbacks, the effects of illness on his body, and his decision to father a child with strangers. More sexually explicit, but not necessarily more erotic, than *Sous le sable*, Romain's sexual identity has little to do with the narrative. As part of coping with his death sentence, Romain distances himself from his boyfriend Sasha (Christian Sengewald) and his family, and does not reveal his illness to anyone close to him except his grandmother (Jeanne Moreau). Towards the film's end he has consensual

sex with an infertile heterosexual couple in order to impregnate the woman, giving the gift of life as he faces death.

Throughout the film, Romain recalls moments from his childhood as a way of coming to terms with his upcoming death. Ozon visually translates these thoughts by depicting recurring encounters with and reveries of Romain and the child image of him. Some of Romain's daydreams depict happy times with his sister, Sophie (Sophie as a child played by Alba Gaïa Kraghede Bellugi). These scenes contrast with the disdain he shows for her (Sophie as an adult played by Louise Anne Hippeau) and her children early in the film. In the entryway to a residential building, Romain coaches himself in a mirror on how to break the news to his family that he is terminally ill. He decides not to tell them. In the bathroom, he does a line of coke and has the first encounter with his younger self as he looks in the mirror. The mirror is shown from the adult Romain's perspective, with the young Romain framed in the mirror, returning his gaze. A few soft piano notes play over their exchange of looks. That there is not much music renders the moment more poignant.

Besides recalling his youth, other fantasies also help Romain to separate from his loved ones. Before his body starts to decline, he withdraws from his family and breaks up with his boyfriend. The last time he and Sasha have sex, Romain abruptly kicks him out. After the spurned lover has gone downstairs, we see Romain's torment as he quietly repeats, "Forgive me!" Sasha does not actually leave. When Romain descends, he finds him asleep on the couch. He takes a series of photos of a peaceful-looking Sasha. Shots of Romain taking photos with an SLR camera interchange with those of various parts of Sasha's body. A single image, almost as though showing each photo as a still, appears

after each shutter click. Then, in a slightly high-angle shot, Romain frames Sasha's sleeping head and torso. A stream of blood spontaneously runs down from his temple as Romain looks at him. This turns out to be a form of reverie. It is as though Romain must picture his lover harmed or dead in order to separate from him. He already misses his mate and imagines the suffering he has caused his loved one. However, he thinks it will be easier for Sasha to move on if he breaks up with him before he deteriorates too much.

The next scene is reminiscent of the type of transgressiveness that Ozon's early films feature prominently and regularly. A visual shift marks a turning point for Romain. From the disturbing shot of Sasha, Ozon cuts to a dimly lit gay leather bar. The scene is unlike any other in the film, whether it is a dream or not. Throughout it, no one speaks. Romain almost immediately locks eyes with one man in particular. The other man holds his gaze, and they go downstairs into an even darker hallway. An over the shoulder tracking shot follows Romain as he trails the stranger from a distance. They pass room after room of S/M dungeons, each filled with leather-clad men performing bondage and beating scenes.

Romain approaches the end of the hall two levels down from the bar where the scene began. The man with whom he has been flirting is lying in a sling. What is being done to the man is open to interpretation. The remainder of the scene is mostly shot from Romain's perspective as he stands just outside the "play" area. The camera shows a range of feelings on the stranger's face, from agony to ecstasy, as an older, fiercer-looking man in buttless chaps, a leather harness across his chest, tends to the man Romain followed. As the first man's look becomes euphoric, Ozon abruptly cuts to a low-angle medium close-up of Romain and Sasha against a blue sky. They look elated. The momentary

reverie represents Romain's thoughts, which apparently have turned back to a happy image of the man he still loves. It is as though Romain has entered the dungeon in order to close the chapter on the (homo)sexually active side of his life. Yet while the film does not return to the leather bar, the colors and lighting remain subdued, never again equaling the vividness of the imagined or remembered shots of Romain and Sasha as a couple.

The remainder of Romain's daydreams focuses on interactions with his sister, father (Daniel Duval), and childhood friend (credited as Laurent, played by Victor Poulouin). When Romain goes to see his grandmother, they talk and look at old photo albums all evening, discussing death, but also reminiscing. Romain's nostalgia for his youth increases. After his grandmother goes to bed, he goes out to walk around in the woods where he imagines two different moments from his childhood. The light shifts from the dark of night to an illuminated, daytime scene of happy young Romain and Sophie playing peacefully in a homemade shelter under some branches. Then, young Romain walks down a rural road with his father. They come upon a rabbit in a trap that Romain wants to help. His father tells him that this is a natural part of life, to leave it and go on. Was this Romain's first encounter with death? Does he remember it now because he is dying? Ozon does not clarify what the memories mean. Romain's parents do not appear again. But, the short scene points to Romain's acceptance that dying is a natural part of life.

Romain watches a daydream image of himself and his friend in a church later, when he remembers his first homosexual experience. Ozon states on his website, "There is something necessarily sacred about Romain's journey. He's in a church when he reminisces about his sexual identity. It seemed to me that Romain should confront his

feelings about spirituality, the afterlife, all the metaphysical questions that invariably arise in such a situation.” His distance from his family has occurred subsequent to his understanding of his sexual preference. Memories before the church scene depict quotidian moments with his family. The one in the church represents another shift. The moment is pivotal. The mischievous boys pee in the holy water, his friend kisses Romain’s cheek and runs off. The camera frames the startled youth in medium close-up, a mix of emotions on his face. Adult Romain cries gently as he watches the boys. He then pictures them anew, this time whispering and touching shoulders as they stand and hold out their hands, presumably for communion during mass. This reverie links his sexual and religious identities. After this scene, Romain does not see images of himself as a child again until the end of the film.

Ozon also meditates on the similarities between terminal illness and old age. Romain seeks out his grandmother to help him come to terms with having a body in decline, even though his is weakening from illness rather than age. Referring to Jacques Lacan’s idea of the “phantasm of the fragmenting body,” Kathleen Woodward describes the connection between old age and decrepitude (182). Romain experiences as a young man what most people do much later in life. Woodward notes, “Lacan rightly emphasizes that the fear of death, which is dominant in our culture, is in fact secondary to our fears of mutilation or injury” (187).

Romain’s grandmother fears the decaying that comes with old age, showing him the many vitamins and supplements that she takes to stave off decrepitude. Unlike Romain, she still has some time, and she would prefer to die “in perfect health,” as she tells her grandson. He does not have this luxury. As Romain confides in her, they

recognize their similarities and affinities, and they discuss various parts of their family's history. She asks him why she is the only one in whom he decides to confide about his illness. He almost callously retorts that she, like him, is near death.

As he does with Rampling, Ozon chooses not to use filters, showing Moreau's wrinkles and her considerable beauty. Laura appears to be at peace with her solitary life despite her fears of not being able to maintain her health. Hers is a capable, elegant body. Photos of younger versions of Jeanne Moreau recall her earlier films, especially *Jules et Jim* (1962). Again Ozon thereby pays cinematic tribute to Truffaut. But while Catherine dies because she is reckless, Laura is comfortable in her aging body. As they talk, she wishes that she could just slip away with Romain. This desire and his choice to not receive treatment are both subtle references to suicide. Not a recurring theme as it is in *Sous le sable*, here it is presented as an option not taken. Laura would like to die peacefully in her sleep, but she is not willing to bring about her end. Romain's death is imminent regardless of his decision not to endure treatment. He does not precipitate his death, but instead allows himself to experience the swift stages of decline.

Poupaud changes physically over the course of the film. Ozon demanded that he gain weight and build muscle for the first part of the film, then lose of weight to realistically portray Romain's physical decline. Poupaud subsisted on next to nothing while he lost weight. Since he could not eat with the rest of the crew, in an interview on Ozon's website on the film he says, "that isolation brought me closer to the character." Ozon also had him shave his head onscreen, in a mandatory single take. Without his hair,

Romain looks even thinner and sicker.<sup>90</sup> In the final scene at the beach, Poupaud sucks in his stomach to further enhance an emaciated look.

Romain's decision to visit his grandmother and confide in her brings him into accidental contact with Jany (Valeria Bruni-Tedeschi), a woman working in a roadside diner.<sup>91</sup> He stops for coffee, and she chats with him long enough to find out that he is single and childless. The encounter seems insignificant, perhaps serving only to allow Romain to tell her that he is not a nice person. Without learning anything more about the woman, Romain finishes, pays and leaves. Just after the interlude with his grandmother, however, he runs into her again. She provides an opportunity to do something he never previously seems to have considered as a possibility: to become a father, even if he will not live to see his child.

After leaving his grandmother, he stops again at the truck stop, this time eating in the smaller café near the gas station. As he eats, Jany enters, recognizes him, and goes to greet her husband who works there. A shot reverse-shot between Romain and the couple indicates that he is aware that they are looking at him. She comes over to talk to him, asking if he would consent to sleeping with her since her husband is sterile and they would like to have a child. As with the scene in the restaurant where she works, she is direct despite knowing practically nothing about Romain. He refuses her request, but eventually returns and agrees to sleep with her.

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<sup>90</sup> This could be a tribute Carl Dreyer's 1928 *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* (*The Passion of Joan of Arc*), in which Dreyer did the same to Maria Falconetti.

<sup>91</sup> Jany is not named in the film, but the name appears in the credits. Similarly, her husband is not addressed by name in the film, but in the credits, he is listed as Bruno (Walter Pagano).



His choice demonstrates his evolution in thinking about the cycles of life. In the beginning of the film, he teases his mother (Marie Rivière) that she would never have grandchildren by him and he shows disdain for Sophie's offspring. In the first encounter with Jany, he says he does not have or want children. Yet, after his health begins to decline, he changes. He makes peace with his sister by phone: even though he is standing nearby, watching her and her children at a park playground, he decides not to see her face to face. At the family dinner early in the film, Romain had snidely refused his sister's request to take family photos. Now, however, using a digital camera, he surreptitiously snaps some images of his sister with her children. This act also indicates a future value for his last images, whether to become memories for his family, or simply to survive him as a photographic journey of his particular experience of dying.

By focusing on a dying homosexual and an infertile heterosexual man, Ozon brings together people who normally would not know each other. Romain is not just a sperm donor. All three have sex, although Romain must coax Bruno to participate. While often more subversive in depicting bisexual relations onscreen, here Ozon shows an awkward union born of the desire for a child rather than desire of men for each other, or for Jany. Fiona Handyside says, "This parenting decision is placed into a context, however, which works to question and problematize [*sic*] traditional family structures as Romain has sexual intercourse with both the mother and the father of the child. The slow, close panning shot over the three naked chests of the participants works to unite them cinematically and images a differing form of sex that combines queerness with reproduction, rather than seeing them as opposed" (287). Bruno's hesitation and

reluctance to participate, however, are less than queer, more an indication that the threesome is a means to an end, not an erotic act.

Melvil Poupaud does not think that Romain is as concerned with leaving his trace as he is interested in the cycle of life. In the interview with Poupaud on the Ozon website, he says, “I think as he [Romain] reaches the end of his journey toward death, Romain decides that the meaning of life might be to perpetuate it. Not necessarily with an eye to reproducing oneself, but rather with an eye to simply passing life on.” Romain also ensures that his child will be well taken care of by willing his estate to the unborn baby. No indications are given as to whether or not Romain lets any of his family know about his parenting or his will.

Although Romain’s decision to distance himself from his family to die alone is an unconventional one, Ozon presents it as a natural choice, a serene ending to a life cut short. After being with the couple, Romain returns to Paris, then leaves for a beach in Brittany where he presumably dies. Even though he may cause suffering to his family, what is important is his personal journey towards death. He models an alternative way to cope with illness and dying. In the final sequence, Ozon again accompanies the images with Rombi’s soft, soothing piano and violin. Romain and his child image encounter each other face-to-face for the first time: Romain returns a beach ball to his younger self when it bounces to him. This signals his reconciliation with himself. Romain takes a final swim, has a smoke, and lies down to die on the beach as everyone else prepares to leave at sunset. He has made peace with himself. He sheds a couple of tears, smiles, and closes his eyes. The film quietly fades to black after the sun sets behind his profile in medium close-up.

## Intruders, Indifference, Isolation

In *L'Intrus*, Denis's eighth feature, she also contemplates old age, physical decline, death, and dying. She shares Ozon's interest in embedding cinematic homage and other intertextual associations. Although Ozon's two films contain dream sequences, they both progress relatively linearly and logically. Both last a conventional hour and a half. The Denis film is 130 minutes long. The narrative is oblique and secondary to the visuals. Robert Stam builds on Gérard Genette's work on "transtextuality" and follows work by both Julia Kristeva and Mikhail Bakhtin to recognize: "Film adaptations, then, are caught up in the ongoing whirl of intertextual reference and transformation, of texts generating other texts in an endless process of recycling, transformation, and transmutation, with no clear point of origin" ("Beyond Fidelity" 66). Despite its origin in Nancy's metatext, the film pays tribute to and cites a myriad other sources as well.

Denis leaves many questions unanswered, especially where the elusive protagonist, Louis, is concerned. Close-up profile shots, tracking shots, and long shots of Louis traveling, for example along a road by bike, do not situate him in a specific locale. The narrative is thin, the characters are intentionally underdeveloped, and their relationships are unclear. Louis has ties to the Russian black market and has somehow amassed enough money to now procure an illegal heart. His past is otherwise cryptic. Instead, it is as if musings on life, death, love, rejection, and kinship are transmitted in part through complicated montages of beautiful land- and seascapes.

Of Denis's films, *L'Intrus* is closest in form and feel to *Beau travail*. Between *Vendredi soir* and *35 Rhums*, Denis made "Vers Nancy," a meditative short film loosely

based on Jean-Luc Nancy, as part of the series *Ten Minutes Older: The Cello*, while she formulated her ideas for *L'Intrus*. As she did with Melville's *Billy Budd*, here this film, too, is a "free" adaptation. Nancy's short book, *L'Intrus*, serves as the germ from which Denis crafts an altered fragment. Nancy's text is a metaphysical contemplation of how organ transplantation makes one a stranger to oneself. Denis retains yet transforms his emphasis on strangeness, exile, and outsiders.

Nancy describes the emotions he felt as an organ recipient, noting "l'étrangeté et l'étrangèreté deviennent communes et quotidiennes" ("Strangeness and being strange become commonplace and quotidian"; *L'Intrus* 33). The distancing he feels from himself is communicated in the film through its fragmented, fitful progression. The provocative score by Stuart Staples of the Tindersticks heightens the experience of strangeness. The haunting music, composed mainly of abstract, eerie, electric guitar, trumpet, drums, and other synthesized sounds, reverberates throughout the entire film and heightens a sense of unease. As is characteristic for Denis, the visual track is composed predominantly of quotidian material, made strange through framing and montage. Agnès Godard's camerawork uses tight framing with close-ups of people and objects and handheld moments, which further increase the sense of instability and uncertainty.

As Stephanie Zacharek says, "I wouldn't trust anyone who claims to understand, in a literal sense, Claire Denis' *The Intruder*.'...[T]he picture is a kind of seizure, a baffling work that demands your complete engagement and then leaves you feeling stranded and yet fascinated, trying to track down the information that appears to be missing—but also feeling as if you've just *lived* something." This type of lived experience as the result of an encounter with art recalls Kristeva's notion of the "real

experience” installation art can provide.<sup>92</sup> In *Le sens et non-sens de la révolte*, she describes how an encounter with art is also at once an encounter with one’s self:

Une installation nous invite à raconter notre petit roman, à participer, à travers lui et nos sensations, à une communion avec l’être. D’une manière trouble, elle réalise aussi une complicité avec nos *régressions*; car, lorsque vous êtes devant ces débris, ces flashes de sensations, ces objets disséminés, *vous ne savez plus qui vous êtes*. Vous êtes au bord d’un vertige, d’un trou noir, d’un morcellement de la vie psychique que certains appelleront psychose ou autisme. N’est-ce pas le redoutable privilège de l’art contemporain que de nous accompagner dans ces nouvelles maladies de l’âme ? (“An installation invites us to tell our own story, to participate, through it and our sensations, also complicit with our *regressions*; because, once you face these fragments, these flashes of sensations, these disseminated objects, *you no longer know who you are*. You are on the verge of vertigo, a black hole, a fragmentation of psychical life that some call psychosis or autism. Is it not the formidable privilege of contemporary art to accompany us in these new maladies of the soul?”; *Sens et non-sens de la révolte* 20)

By “new maladies of the soul,” Kristeva invokes the woes of modern, technology-driven society. As global citizens, both Kristeva (Bulgarian-French) and Denis (French, raised in colonial Africa) understand the dislocation that can arise from living in more than one culture.

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<sup>92</sup> As Kristeva suggests with regard to certain art installations, “le but ultime de l’art est [...] de nous faire éprouver, à travers des abstractions, des formes, des couleurs, des volumes, des sensations, une *expérience réelle*” (“the ultimate goal of art is [...] to make us feel, through abstractions, forms, colors, volumes, sensations, a *real* experience”; *Le sens et non-sens de la révolte* 20).

Denis also integrates a complex network of intertextual connections. Kristeva coined the term “intertextuality,” in her landmark 1969 *Semeiotikè: Recherches pour une sémanalyse*. The idea that no work of art stands alone as original without influence from other sources is now a widely accepted concept. As Kristeva does, Denis believes that works of art emerge from the contemporary avant-garde art rather than from popular culture. Most obviously, Denis cites her earlier work and that of actor Michel Subor, referencing his role as Bruno Forestier in both Godard’s controversial *Le Petit Soldat* (1961) and *Beau Travail*. In the latter, as discussed in Chapter 2, Denis referenced Godard’s film, giving Subor the same name and having his character represent a sort of logical life progression from being involved in terrorist activities during the Algerian war, to being a commander in the French Foreign Legion in Djibouti three decades later. In *L’Intrus*, however, Subor is no longer called Bruno Forestier. Nonetheless, his solemn demeanor and mysterious presence recall his role in *Beau Travail*. Now the character’s name evokes the actor’s name (Louis Trebor/Michel Subor). Denis also quotes an early, unfinished film featuring Subor, Paul Gégauff’s 1965 *Le Reflux*, the only film the writer attempted to direct. A clip from that film shows young Michel Subor in a maritime setting and serves as a reminder both of Louis as a young man and of the actor’s own past.

Another ambiguous character, known from the credits as the Young Russian Woman (Yekaterina Golubeva), recalls Denis’s *J’ai pas sommeil* (1994) and Léos Carax’s *Pola X* (1999). Denis also considered works by Herman Melville, Robert Louis Stevenson and Paul Gauguin as she worked on the script for *L’Intrus* (D. Smith). To prepare the script, she traveled to the South Pacific with Jean-Pol Fargeau to experience

firsthand what she had read in works by Stevenson and Melville.<sup>93</sup> She conveys this sense of melancholic darkness throughout the film. In one of the longest takes of the film, the camera rocks with a large steam ship at dawn, portraying beauty, unease, and detachment.

*L'Intrus* opens with an obscure shot of a woman (Golubeva) in a forest setting who says, in accented French, “Your worst enemies are hiding inside, in the shadows, in your heart.” Her words speak to the “heart” of the film, as it will entail not only Louis’s quest for a new heart, but also hint at the illegal exchanges that secure one from the black market. She also echoes Nancy, who says in his testimony: “Mais les ennemis les plus vifs sont à l’intérieur” (“But the most vivid enemies are on the inside”; *L'Intrus* 33). The biggest threat to the newly transplanted organ comes from rejection. Trebor later gives her money to buy a new heart, and she is present periodically elsewhere as well without explanation.

Jonathan Romney wonders if she might just be part of the overarching disconnected, dreamy feel of the film, asking “[I]s the Russian woman, who follows Trebor around the world, for instance, real or an embodiment of the death he can’t hope to escape?” (42). She again appears to know more than other characters about Louis, and her nearly silent presence looms mysteriously around him, whether watching from a

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<sup>93</sup> Fargeau, Denis’s co-writer on most of her films, co-wrote *Pola X* with Carax. *Pola X* is also based on a Melville novel, *Pierre: or the Ambiguities*. The title *Pola X* is an acronym for the French title of Melville’s book, *Pierre ou les ambiguïtés*, with the addition of the X for the number of the draft that it was of the script (imdb.com).

distance or interacting with him periodically throughout the film.<sup>94</sup> She represents communicates in both French and Russian. Everywhere she moves she is an outsider.

The short opening is followed by red credits on a black screen, accompanied by silence. Denis then cuts to a different scene *in medias res*, an unidentified area where we see a female border guard near a checkpoint. The area can only be identified by the presence of Swiss and French flags. As with *Nénette et Boni*, *J'ai pas sommeil*, *Trouble Every Day*, and other films, it takes a few minutes to even know who onscreen will be singled out by the camera as pertinent. The female border guard (Florence Loiret-Caille) of this beginning scene reappears with her husband, Sidney (Grégoire Colin), and their children. We see them both outside in an idyllic natural setting and in their home. Sidney is Louis's son and although the kinship between the aging man and the young father is clear, Louis is distant. In contrast, the initial scenes between young husband, wife and children are some of the most tender of the film, with the man and woman demonstrating great affection for each other and their children. Their relationship bears little resemblance to Louis's lonely, nomadic existence with his dogs. His detachment from his son suggests the lengths to which he will go to obtain a new heart later in the film.

The camerawork offers a mix of close-ups on Louis's weathered yet strong face, body and hands, and long shots of him and his white huskies. He gives the dogs far affection than he ever shows his son. He is willing to do what it takes to preserve his own life, even—as we later learn—to the (possibly provoked) destruction of his own next-of-kin. In his eyes and as Woodward notes: “an infirm old age is regarded as being

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<sup>94</sup> Discussed in Chapter 2, in *J'ai pas sommeil*, Daïga (also played by Golubeva) pieces together the identities of the serial killers and is the catalyst for their arrest. There, she is simultaneously peripheral and central to the progression of the narrative.



something other than life, and it is implicitly understood as being worse than death” (35). Louis stays in shape by walking, riding a bike, and swimming. However, as he swims by himself in a lake, he suddenly suffers a heart attack. He makes his way to shore, catching his breath eventually. This is the first indication that he has physical problems. When he returns to his house, he sends a cryptic message in a Cyrillic font from his computer, translated in a subtitle that says, “I opt for the emergency solution.” When he gives the Russian woman money in a hotel room somewhere in Geneva, he insists that he wants a young man’s heart, not a woman’s or an old man’s.

Several instances of violence and death occur as a result of Louis’s need for a new heart. After meeting with the Russian woman, there is a strange, brutal scene in which Louis is dragged behind horses across the snowy landscape. The camera is shaky and the jarring shots are accompanied by frenetic music. The Russian woman approaches him, and he tells her he already paid. She replies that it is never enough, and she and the other men ride off, leaving him alone on the cold ground. The next few minutes of film time are incoherent. Louis does have relationships with a few people from the nearby community, but for the most part, he is alone. The local pharmacist (Bambou) is a girlfriend of sorts: briefly they share intimate moments at his house.

Soon thereafter, a few shots show a woman (perhaps this girlfriend) with him on the ice, followed by her with Louis’s dogs at his home, but without him. She goes inside and bathes in a big blue tub. Without explanation, a cut shows two men with guns dragging a bloody body in a sheet out onto the snow. The woman has been murdered. The dogs howl. Who are these men, and why would they attack this woman? Do they kill her for her heart? A brief image shows a heart cut from a body, bloody on the snow.

Later, a young man's body, which could possibly be that of his son Sidney, is loaded in a coffin onto a container ship at a bustling port in Busan, Korea. To what lengths has the aging man gone for a new heart? The implications are sinister.

Even if he does actually receive a young man's heart, as he desires, the new organ remains an intruder within him, and there is always the potential for his body to reject it. This was the case for Nancy, too, though he received his heart legally and recognized that he could have received a heart from anyone as long as the blood type matched: "mon coeur peut être un coeur de femme noire" ("My heart could be the heart of a black woman"; *L'Intrus* 31). The part of the film that occurs after Louis has the heart transplant (i.e., the part in the Pacific Rim) visualizes Nancy's sense of strangeness living with an unknown person's heart: "Il y a l'intrus en moi, et je deviens étranger à moi-même" ("The intruder is in me, and I become a stranger to myself"; 31). Louis has removed himself from the familiar and his trajectory is inexplicable except as a return to a site of his youth, as captured in the Gégau film. His journey conveys dislocation via an unreliable narrative.

Denis elides the actual transplant, merely indicating that the operation has taken place by showing a large scar across Louis's chest. The film shifts abruptly from buildings in Geneva to a dark room where an old, blind, Asian woman works on Louis, massaging parts of his body. She is a healer of sorts. He pays her and helps her out of the room. Briefly, a nighttime cityscape fills the screen before returning to short glimpses of Louis, tightly framed. The remainder of the film progresses in a similar manner, with Louis shown in different places in between long takes of landscapes. Eerie Tindersticks

original music, composed mainly of solitary electric guitar notes that linger, accompanies many of the shots, enhancing the strangeness.

Even with a new heart, however, Louis is less strong, less certain, and out of place. Where Nancy's immune system tried to reject his transplanted heart, Louis has some post-operative discomfort, but does not have to seek medical treatment. Denis does not specify what his physical problems are, preferring to give an overarching sense of the strangeness of his presence in there.<sup>95</sup> Even more than before, he is the intruder in a strange land. Clips from *Le reflux* punctuate scenes of the ailing Louis alone in his island hut. Are they hazy memories of his previous time in the islands?

With subtlety, Denis expands on Nancy's experience, visualizing it as of being a stranger to oneself, as well as an outsider everywhere to others. The elliptical editing is jarring. The inclusion of non-related images provokes even more uncertainty. Denis sidesteps the narrative in favor of lingering in an Asian port (recognizable as Busan, Korea, only to those familiar with the city) where streamers explode out of a ball suspended high in the air above a ship. Perhaps not from Louis's perspective, colorful strands of paper blow in the wind as the ship is christened. The scene shifts abruptly to a dark conference room in which Louis negotiates with Asian businessmen to find a missing son he thinks he fathered decades before. Louis is a postcolonial Western subject, an outsider who takes advantage of his wealth to get the healthcare he requires, at times illegally.

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<sup>95</sup> Nancy says of his own strangeness: "C'est donc ainsi moi-même qui deviens mon intrus, de toutes ces manières accumulées et opposées" ("It is thus me that becomes my intruder, from all of these accumulated and opposed ways"; *L'Intrus* 36).

Another shift shows his other son, Sidney, back in his French cabin, going through his father's partially burned letters. The short scene shows the son's comprehension of his father's quest and partiality for another son. It ends on a close-up of the back of Sidney's head with a garland on it. Is this a cryptic suggestion that Sidney is (or will be) sacrificed for his father, as Christ was? As usual, what this means is unclear, and the scene changes again to Korea. Disturbing electric guitar chords accompany a handheld panoramic shot of the sea at dawn. Near film's end, Louis identifies Sidney's body at a morgue and accompanies the body on to a ship (is this the same ship as earlier?), destination unknown. Was Sidney murdered for his heart? The Russian woman's enigmatic presence and the fact that Sidney's corpse is there, not in Europe, are good indications that he was.

While *Beau Travail* alternates between northern Africa and a southern French port city, *L'Intrus* changes locations abruptly from Europe to the Pacific Rim. Romney notes, "There's much more to say about *The Intruder*, not least about the way it continues Denis's geopolitical contemplation of France's post-colonial vision of the world" (42). Tensions permeate the film, but Denis prefers not to refer explicitly to France's complicated legacy of colonialism. She describes her impetus in an interview with Gavin Smith and reveals: "I wanted to explore why the North is attracted to the South. This is something I am very curious about: why the people from the North always feel, think, dream, that there is something in the South that is paradise, that is pure nature, pure sexuality, whatever. This is really intriguing for me, this attraction. Because today this dream is gone, and apart from Australia, and hopefully some countries in South America, the South is mostly sea and poverty."

Denis is not trying to speak for the subaltern, but instead to present alternative views of the global South. She stands as an example of a Western director who pushes the boundaries of film form in ways similar to what Teshomé Gabriel describes: “Should the reorganization be successful and radical enough, a rethinking of the critical and theoretical canons of cinema would be called for, leading to a reconsideration of the conventions of cinematographic language and technique” (355). For Gavin Smith, her films since *Beau Travail* have “become more dreamlike” (5). Denis, however, contends that she “wouldn’t call it dreamlike. It’s an awake perception, but it’s a kind of experience that goes with being awake and not part of something, just to one side.” She goes on to say that, “My dreaming-awake position of filmmaking is not an attitude or position I like. It is something that is happening to me. I am not convinced that I have to go on like that forever. On the contrary, I’m really trying to fight that. I am a dreamy person. I have never been totally in real life, I think. I have never felt familiar anywhere” (6).

Near film’s end, Louis has contact with long lost acquaintances while searching for his lost son. In a series of scenes without him, Denis shows villagers in a remote setting trying to find an appropriate surrogate son to send to Louis, underscoring the uncertainty as to whether he ever sired a son there or not. There is no conventional form of closure. Shifting from Louis alone in an island hut, Denis takes the spectator briefly back to Europe. The final scene returns cryptically to the French-Swiss border region and the elusive character known from the credits as The Queen of the Northern Hemisphere (Béatrice Dalle). She laughs and drives her huskies to carry her in a sleigh across a snowy

wilderness. Why is there a return to France, especially with a peripheral character? The ending is even more ambiguous than the Ozon films.

### Melancholia, Mourning, Murder

The three films discussed here all counter traditional ideas about mourning, grief, aging, dying, and/or death by centering on characters that cope with loss, illness, or end of life issues. Serious, contemplative, and complex, *Sous le sable*, *Le Temps qui reste* and *L'Intrus* are visually engaging. Ozon's films offer more cohesive narratives and coherent characters. *L'Intrus* is more oblique, revealing little about who Louis is or what he has done, but rather giving a visual and audial sense of an uneasy state of being. Denis's film thus comes closest to the sense of vertigo and resulting uncertainty about one's identity that Kristeva describes as resulting from certain encounters with contemporary art (*Sens et non-sens de la révolte* 20-21).

Just as Virginia Woolf crafted *The Waves* to read as though it rhythmically ebbed and flowed like waves, these films also follow the movements of the sea. Both directors place great importance on the sea. Images of sand and waves repeat in all three films. All three thereby at times produce the sensation of shifting sands. Jean's disappearance leaves Marie uncertain. *Sous le sable* features the beach in early and last parts of the film. Marie's life after Jean's disappearance is dreamy and sensual; she floats through her life in denial. The film follows her as if trying to get to the top of the wave to see what lies beyond, never quite reaching it before another waves obscures the view. The end is calm, but ambiguous.

*Le Temps qui reste* opens and closes on the beaches of Brittany, presenting a cycle of life and a coming to terms with death that flows through the last few months of Romain's life. The doctor's diagnosis ultimately leaves him with a feeling of acceptance similar to Marie's. The film crests a few times during key scenes with loved ones, but generally tranquilly flows with him on his journey of self-acceptance.

More than in the other two Ozon films, *L'Intrus* both lulls and disturbs, seeming more like the unfamiliar and unpredictable waves of remote seas. The second part of *L'Intrus* frequently frames wide-open ocean waters of the Pacific, as well as the idyllic white sands of the small islands of Tahiti. In all three films, beaches serve as liminal spaces, marking off yet linking natural elements of water and sand with the temporalities of life and death.

Chiefly concerned with protagonists who all confront death, each film nonetheless somehow also begins to transfigure family structures. Marie, Romain, and Louis all three end up alone as a result of confronting or postponing loss, dying or death. Traditional notions of kinship become less important. The discussion of the films in the final chapter focuses more centrally on restructuring family relationships. Also affected in some way by death or loss, there the protagonists all form somewhat unusual families and/or relationships.

## Chapter 5: Reconstructing Traditional Family Structures

*Nénette et Boni* (*Nénette and Boni*), *35 rhums* (*35 Shots of Rum*), and *Angel* all center on partial families. Notions of kinship, whether between parents and children, or siblings, are at the heart of these films. At least one parent has died prior to the beginning of each film, and by the end of *Nénette and Boni* and *Angel*, the protagonists are orphans. That their mother is absent leads to the development of a strained relationship between the siblings in *Nénette and Boni*. In *35 rhums*, in contrast, a close bond between father and daughter emerges. In *Angel*, Angel (Romola Garai) invents a history for the father she never knew to aid her creation of herself as a self-absorbed artist. Her life becomes irrevocably entwined with a sister and a brother, Nora and Esmé Howe-Nevinson (Lucy Russell and Michael Fassbender).

A song, a film, and a novel provide the sources for these films. The Tindersticks' 1993 "My Sister" inspired Denis to make *Nénette et Boni*. The film's narrative and characters are unlike those of the song, however. More significant is Denis's collaboration with the Tindersticks on the original score for the film. By contrast, *35 rhums* is, in part, an homage to Yasujiro Ozu's film *Banshun* (*Late Spring*). The film replicates several scenes from Ozu's film within a modern Parisian context. Ozon's film revives a mid-century pulp novel by British writer Elizabeth Taylor, *Angel* (1957). His first period piece, it stands apart within his *œuvre*. Ozon's film is a more faithful adaptation than Denis's musical translation and filmic homage are. Yet, Ozon also makes changes that modify Angel's character, make Nora more sympathetic and more openly lesbian, and complicate perceptions of Esmé's art and lifestyle choices.



In the article “Family Ties,” Ginette Vincendeau explores social themes and values in terms of French national identity with regard to recent productions by Olivier Assayas and Arnaud Desplechin. She notes that many female French filmmakers also offer “trenchant analyses of the family,” including *Nénette et Boni* (17). Although she does not treat any of the films in the list or even mention the directors by name, by virtue of citing this film by Denis, Vincendeau recognizes that it opens up traditional notions of the family.

*Nénette and Boni*, in fact, alters traditional nuclear family structures more than the other two films. No explanation of how their mother died is given. Although their father, Félix (Jacques Nolot), makes several appearances in the film, only he and Boni actually exchange words, hostilely on the part of the son. Boniface, known as Boni (Grégoire Colin), is 19. He and his friends live in what was his mother’s home and run a mobile pizza truck. Antoinette, or Nénette (Alice Houri), age 15, leaves boarding school to return home, seeking help from her brother since she is pregnant. They have a strained relationship. Nénette does not want the baby, but it is too late for a legal abortion.

In *35 rhums*, as with *Nénette et Boni*, the mother is dead. However, the daughter Joséphine (Mati Diop) is not estranged from her father, Lionel (Alex Descas).<sup>96</sup> Instead, she lives with him in a small apartment on the outskirts of Paris. Melissa Anderson recognizes that they interact more as a couple “in a near-constant state of domestic bliss, reveling, like the happiest of couples, in the dailiness of their routines.” Her short review, however, does not consider in depth their relationship.

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<sup>96</sup> The film’s title derives from a Caribbean drinking tradition alluded to several times in the film. It celebrates a significant event, entailing the consumption of 35 shots of rum. Lionel participates in the ceremony at the end of the film after his daughter gets married. The origin of the ritual is never really explained.

Although not as disruptive of normal family paradigms as the others, this film nonetheless provides fruitful material for expanding considerations of traditional Western family structures. Lionel and Joséphine's bond inhibits her from forming a love relationship with anyone else.<sup>97</sup> Even for immigrant contexts, father and daughter are closer than many. Their relationship changes, however, over the course of the film as Lionel realizes the importance of letting his daughter develop close ties of her own.

"Chosen family" and traditional rites figure prominently in the lives of these modern, mixed-race Parisians.<sup>98</sup> Other than Lionel and Jo (as she is called), most of the characters' ties to one another derive from work associations, a common cultural background, or proximity of living situations. They speak the same language, are from a number of previously colonized countries, and come together to re-establish a sense of community.

The younger generation, especially university students, actively discusses the contemporary ramifications of postcolonialism, recognizing the continuing relevance of Frantz Fanon. James S. Williams sees their reference to Fanon and ensuing discussion as "rather gratuitous and purely academic" (47). However, these issues are an important part of the fabric of the overall film, even though racism, assimilation to white culture, and global wealth distribution are not overtly explored elsewhere in the dialogue.

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<sup>97</sup> Denis insisted in a director dialogue that I attended at the New York Film Festival that the relationship between the actors who play these characters "would never look incestuous" as the two actors appeared to have a platonic chemistry between them. New York Film Festival Director Dialogue with Claire Denis, October 11, 2009.

<sup>98</sup> Although the concept of chosen family is more closely linked to the American LGBT movement, it can also be applied to the fractured diaspora of (im)migrants who find themselves living far away from their country of origin.

Denis, in fact, asks us to remember Fanon and to reconsider how notions of family expand to include networks of interconnected blood relations, friends and acquaintances. She includes people who live and interact in the *banlieues* of Paris and existences, and offers portraits of their daily lives. In *35 Shots of Rum* in particular, the focus is on non-white people, with Noé (Grégoire Colin), Jo's German aunt (Ingrid Caven) and cousin, and photos of her mother the only visible whites. From the classroom discussion of postcolonialism to student strikes over the closing of the Anthropology department, to the title ritual, Denis prompts consideration of marginalized people and places in modern-day global urban centers, such as Paris. All the train workers are black, as are all the people seen in service industry jobs. They are not seen interacting in the "white" world.

*Angel* differs greatly in style, tone and length from the Denis films. Yet, it too provides rich material for reconsidering the family and exploring non-conventional dynamics. Visually the film resembles a Hollywood melodrama, but Ozon actually refuses several melodramatic conventions. His female protagonist is in no way a victim (Lippe 65). In contrast to Denis's films, Ozon does not confront postcolonial tensions or other contemporary issues directly in this film: it is set prior to the end of colonialism. Set in Edwardian England, *Angel* defies societal expectations by dropping out of school to become a writer. She is unlike other women of her day because she manages to escape a working class life through her own means. *Angel* lives as independently as almost any woman in Western society could today. She also proposes to and supports her husband.

Less transgressive in its revision of Freudian scenarios than *Sitcom*, *Angel* nevertheless also empowers women.<sup>99</sup> The absence of a father allows her to deny his actual existence (as a working class man) in favor of creating her own imagined versions of her heritage (as possibly having noble blood). She grows up in a household where capable women work and provide for themselves. Her widowed Mother Deverell (Jacqueline Tong) runs the family grocery located below their apartment and her Aunt Lottie (Janine Duvitski) earns a relatively good living as a domestic servant at Paradise House. Angel sees they are capable, but that they must serve others and labor physically. She hates that they must serve others. Instead of being a powerful force in Angel's life, her mother meekly bends to the daughter who in turn dominates and reigns. Once Angel attains fame and wealth, she moves her mother from the grocery and tries to make her into a lady. The change and lack of purpose provoke her mother's untimely demise, however.

In Taylor's novel, Nora Howe-Nevinson is a homely, mannish woman in love with Angel. In the film, a more compelling Nora exudes devotion for Angel, becoming Angel's live-in personal assistant as she does in the book. Without Nora's help, Angel would never be able to maintain her vast house, array of servants, and remain engrossed in her writing. In the film, as Angel becomes close with Nora's brother Esmé, however,

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<sup>99</sup> Michelle Chilcoat provides a detailed analysis of how Ozon's first feature, *Sitcom*, queers the family by symbolically destroying the patriarch (through the murder of the rat), alluding to Freud's famous case study on the "Rat Man." She tells us that in "*Sitcom*, then, the rat signifies or substitutes for the penis, which is itself, according to Freud, the "prototype of fetishes." (25) Drawing on Irigaray's notion of hom(m)osexuality and Deleuze and Guattari's explanation of the dominance of the penis (for all forms of desire/sex are masculine and women are lacking), Chilcoat assiduously explores how *Sitcom* exposes the male biases of Freudian theory while empowering women to become the catalysts for and murderers of the rat/phallus/patriarch.

Nora grows jealous, yet she continues to live and work at Paradise House, seemingly as dedicated as ever to Angel and to facilitating her writing career.

Angel tries without success to manipulate both siblings to fit into the imagined life she tries to live. Unfortunately, she does not desire the one that truly loves her (Nora), and she fails to recognize Esmé's true nature and infidelity. After his suicide, a hidden letter that Angel serendipitously finds reveals his passion for and secret union with the other Angelica (Jemma Powell).<sup>100</sup> By film's end, a darker portrait of the solitary artist emerges, indicating that egoism, fame, and deception can perforate and disintegrate "family" order.

#### Pizza, Pregnancy, and Passion

In *Nénette and Boni*, the title characters are estranged siblings. The film is set in the port city of Marseilles. No adults supervise Boni's life or give him guidance. Nénette is pregnant and leaves the stability that school and a close girl friend offer early in the film to return "home" to Boni. Little is revealed about their mother or how she died. Even though the children suffer hardships, their circumstances remain far more hopeful than in the song "My Sister" that inspired Denis to make the film. In it, the Tindersticks' lead singer Stuart Staples sings beguilingly about a sister who becomes blind at age 5. At age 10, she burns down the house by smoking in bed, thereby killing her mother and a cat; she recovers her sight at 13 when she falls in a well; she marries an older man at 15 who

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<sup>100</sup> Angel is named after Angelica, the daughter of the patroness of Paradise House. Angel's Aunt Lottie worked for Angelica's mother since they were both 18 (Taylor 13-14).

abuses her for years before he cripples her in her young twenties; she dies at 32. Other than smoking at a young age, Nénette is not like the sister in the song. The concept of adaptation or reconsideration is thus less important in this film than in the other two since it has no real narrative connections to the source “text.” The Tindersticks did not give permission for Denis to use their song, but offered to work on an original soundtrack instead. Their ongoing collaboration has continued for seven films, including this year’s (2013) *Les salauds* (*Bastards*).

The film begins *in medias res* with a corrupt, middle-aged, white Frenchman (Guy Léonardi) trying to convince a roomful of immigrant men, women and children to buy fake telephone cards. The framing is tight, never revealing much about the locale. The camera pans around the crowded room in medium close-up. The whole scene lasts less than a minute before there is an abrupt cut to the title. The white counterfeiter is the only person from the opening scene who returns in the film, but his association to the narrative remains oblique. Still, his presence signals that white men are unreliable and corrupt.

For about half an hour, the camera oscillates between scenes from each of the siblings without giving a clue as to their blood relationship or history. In the first image of Nénette, a high-angle tight medium close-up shows her floating in the school’s indoor pool, a serene look on her face. She drifts peacefully, as the Tindersticks’ music plays on the soundtrack. The jazzy notes and hint of vocals are uplifting and soothing. She smiles for one of the only times in the film. A woman blows a whistle and makes her get out, scolding her for wearing a T-shirt and underwear instead of a swimsuit. Nénette’s

demeanor shifts completely; she becomes indifferent, almost taciturn, as she will be during most of the film.

The music continues into the next scene, which is focused on Boni. A fast-paced series of handheld shots from in- and outside a fast moving car, from the perspectives of the driver, a passenger, and onlookers, are dislocating. He drives crazily around an urban space, though not in traffic. Boni is in the passenger seat, first seen in profile, smiling but slightly anxious as his buddy pulls the car to a stop. This is one of the only scenes of the film where Boni relaxes with his friends. Most of the time, he is either at home or out in the city working in his pizza truck, often daydreaming about the local bakery woman (Valeria Bruni Tedeschi). He is a hard-working, independent, young man who lives without a family. Although often demonstrating maturity beyond his years, his fantasies about love relationships are juvenile. His sexual dreamscapes are whimsical, colorful, and surreal.

Neither sibling has much contact with members of the opposite sex. Boni's friends notice Nénette upon her arrival. Boni has a chance encounter with his crush, the bakery woman, at the mall. She is nervously loquacious while he silently stares at her. In some of his reveries, she and her husband share tender, intimate moments. Other short scenes hint at how these strangers met and stand outside the scope of Boni's knowledge, even though such scenes are possibly also meant as his perception of them. This unknown couple presents the only loving relationship in the film.

The sequence of events, the ellipses in time, and the way the scenes are framed contribute to the transformation of Boni into a caretaker. Nénette arrives at her brother's house to find refuge while she is pregnant. He does not want her to stay at first, but she

reveals her reason for being there, and he concedes to her staying. She continually rejects maternity and motherhood. Boni is distant and harsh with her. As the film progresses, his bachelor lifestyle—in a household filled with his male friends and coworkers—evolves into a calmer, cleaner space shared also with his sister. He is increasingly sensitive to her and the future baby's needs, though he reacts forcefully by hitting her if she worries him. He makes sure she gets medical care and cleans out their mother's former room to create a nursery space. By contrast, Nénette is not concerned about preparations for the arrival of the baby. She smokes cigarettes up to and after giving birth. She never seems to treat her body with any awareness of the dietary modifications needed to foster the growth of a healthy baby. She even attempts a late-term abortion that could easily have killed her.

By not including a parallel fantasy life for Nénette, Denis underscores the notion that the girl is at a loss as to how to proceed with her life: she has no dreams of the future. She has been stripped of sexual fantasies because her (possibly first) sexual experience has resulted in an unwanted pregnancy at age 15. She does not work much, though she does initiate cleaning the house. She frequently sits alone, smoking pensively. Boni, by contrast, is active and often dreams about the bakery woman, but lacks a real relationship. His sleeping and waking dreams punctuate the first two-thirds of the film. His imaginings are marked from the beginning as spaces that do not correspond with his daily realities. Almost all his free time, when alone or asleep, is thus devoted to creating spaces where he can indulge his desires. While his depictions of love may be products of adolescent lust, the images of Valeria Bruni Tedeschi are beautifully shot: she is a mature, attractive, sexy woman.



The early scene of Nénette leaving school at night shifts to one where Boni lies alone on his stomach, voicing his plan to encounter and have sex with the bakery woman. The Tindersticks' music plays softly with dreamy, lilting notes. In this first fantasy, as Boni describes the bakery woman in voiceover, he recounts step by step what he will do to her: he imagines he takes her from behind. A silent fantasy sequence shows him with her. She is seen in medium shot and looks alluring. The camera is at a high-angle over her from his perspective. What they do is obscured by the camera's proximity. She wears a pink dress. Arty, erotic shots are mixed with strange moaning sounds. Abstract light patterns appear as the fantasy blends with reality and Boni awakens to coffee brewing in an automatic machine beside his bed. As Boni emerges from the dream, he leans over to lovingly caress the coffeemaker. In the absence of a real lover, a kitchen appliance transforms into an object of lust. Other scenes between the coffeemaker and Boni also make it more of a character than simply a machine.

As the film progresses, Boni's dreams change from juvenile imaginings to more grown-up sexual visions. As his sister gets close to term, Boni pictures the bakery woman and her husband with a newborn. By comparison with the instability and uncertainty in the lives of the siblings, this dream couple and their baby become an example of a unified, happy family. Both husband and wife are gentle with each other and with the baby. They are pictured in the bakery kitchen, rather than at home. The image shifts to the couple alone. Close-ups and panning shots show them passionately embracing. The scene ends with close-ups of pink pastries, adding a playful dimension.

Of nearly 85 scenes in the film, in only seven do we witness illicit dealings or their ramifications. However, such scenes do punctuate the narrative. Although Boni

demonstrates a growing sense of responsibility toward his sister's unborn child, he nonetheless maintains ties to illegal activities. All of his buddies also seem to be associated with the trafficking of stolen goods, an affiliation that is also ambiguously linked to their father, Félix. In a separate narrative strand, Boni and his buddies help traffic stolen merchandise. This is how he gets his prized coffee maker. The man (Christian Mazucchini) who coordinates the goods turns out to be a family man. With the assistance of Boni and his pals, he unloads piles of merchandise into every available space of his home, including under the children's beds. Again, the notion of a stable, secure, traditional family space is tainted.

Events splinter out in a spider's web, disrupting and altering the lives of the perpetrators and victims alike. The telephone cards reappear in three short, non-connected scenes: the counterfeiter cons a white man into letting him photograph his phone card, an Asian woman uses a card in a phone booth to call abroad, and a white French woman disputes charges with France Telecom about calls to Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. The Asian woman on the phone is briefly shown in passing as the camera pans away from Boni and his co-worker dancing while working in the pizza van. Another telephone card incident occurs as Nénette seeks information about giving up her baby anonymously. She speaks in person with a woman at a desk, who informs her of the process of giving away a newborn without naming the parents. The woman interrupts her explanation to respond to the call she has with a representative at the phone company, saying she did not call Vietnam. These brief portraits illuminate how the black market has touched an array of people and demonstrate the interconnectedness and scope of the international population in Marseilles.

Although Nénette and Boni's father plays a small role, he appears several times. First, a flashback clip shot in different film stock shows a much younger version of Boni by the coast, with underwater divers nearby, as well as Félix. The flashback scene ends with an abrupt cut to the present, with Félix and another man sitting at an outdoor table by a cabin in the port. After discussing Nénette, the man brings up Boni, reminding Félix that he also has a son. The short scene reveals little about either man. Félix seems to regret this distance from his children. Some time after Nénette gets settled in at Boni's house, Félix arrives, yelling at the locked house that he understands. As he tries to enter, Boni forces him away with a rifle, shooting in the air above his father's head. As with the mother, little information is given about why the siblings are estranged from him.

Later, a short, disconnected scene shows Félix and two men in an apartment. With menacing expressions, the two bully Félix. Just afterwards, Félix appears again at his son's place. This time he enters. He tries to see his daughter, but Boni remains hostile and unwelcoming. Félix mentions that Boni's mother had eyes only for her son after his birth and no longer desired her husband. As a rare reference to their past, it seems that Boni and his mother had a close relationship. Certain statements indicate that after the parents divorced, Boni stayed with their mother and Nénette lived with Félix until he shipped her off to boarding school. Tension builds with extremely tight framing on Boni's and then Félix's heads as they pace around each other and the room. Félix pleads with Nénette to come out and talk with him and come home, but her door remains closed and she never responds.

Not long after this scene, Nénette tries to abort the baby by drinking vinegar and soaking in a mustard-infused bath. Shot in the bathroom, what she is doing is not

apparent until a close-up on her face shows her drinking vinegar. A close-up on Boni in bed shows him listening to the sound of the water. He tries to get into the bathroom, but with no response from his sister, he breaks the door open. He lifts her, unconscious, out of the tub. As she revives, he holds her over the sink to vomit. The scene ends with Nénette in bed, staring blankly ahead. Boni goes to her, softly touches her belly and asks if she can feel the baby moving. He is happy and reassured that both his sister and baby are alive. She remains distant and detached.

In the next scene, Félix is murdered. No information is given as to who the killers are. Félix is alone with a woman who seems to be his girlfriend (Laure Milbanck), although it is her first and only appearance in the film. As they pull out of a parking spot and drive down a street, a motorcycle pulls beside them and one of the two men on the bike shoots Félix in the head. Briefly, a graphic image of Félix's girlfriend with blood and brains on her face, sitting in shock in the passenger seat of the car, fills the screen. The shot gives a visual jolt. The juxtaposition of Nénette's abortion attempt with her father's murder means that any remaining sense of family stability is lost.

The dreamy sexual fantasy sequences end as responsibilities increase for Boni. He tries to maintain a constant vigil over Nénette, but she manages to elude him, escaping through a window at night to walk alone to the hospital to have the baby. Several rapid shots show how unprepared she is for labor. Despite her rudeness, a nurse stays with her through labor and even gently strokes her hair after she delivers. Boni eventually finds his sister and learns of her decision to deliver anonymously. Displeased, he leaves to procure the items necessary to take the baby from the hospital by force. Boni takes the newborn home, but its mother is absent and its uncle is unpredictable, though loving.

Alone with the baby, Boni is tender. Several shots show them together. The camera pans the tree in the courtyard beside the house. The final image is a medium close-up on Nénette, sitting outside, smoking a cigarette. These siblings are now orphans themselves. Will Boni get to keep the baby? Will he turn into another Félix? Will Nénette live with Boni and the baby? If the final shot is a guide to her location, it is possible that she has returned home. However, the film ends and nothing concrete is known. In this fragmented family, then, parents are mainly absent, adolescent siblings act independently, a young mother shows no interest in her baby, and her brother nurtures the abandoned newborn.

#### Rice, Rum, and Relations

*35 Shots of Rum* shares several thematic and stylistic traits with *Nénette and Boni*. In both, Denis employs ellipses in time and uses tight framing to simultaneously focus attention on the characters and de-emphasize or obscure the location. As with *Nénette and Boni* also, Denis questions and explores forms of the modern family, again emphasizing paternity in the absence of a maternal influence. Differing completely from Félix who is distanced from and disliked by his children, Lionel has an almost inseparable bond with his daughter. Yet, he recognizes the need to let her grow up and develop close bonds of her own. Joséphine is in no hurry to leave her father's side. The duo is part of a larger network of friends, a chosen family mainly composed of other first or second-generation immigrants.

The repercussions of postcolonialism are addressed in the film, but more as academic concerns than as realities of daily life. Even though the characters are not wealthy, they lead comfortable lives. Just as the relationship between Nénette and Boni is not immediately clear, *35 rhums* begins again with an alternation of scenes, this time between father and daughter that make who they are unclear.

As opposed to the oblique influence of the Tinderstick's song "My Sister" on *Nénette et Boni*, *35 rhums* more directly evokes Yasujiro Ozu's film *Banshun*. Though not a faithful adaptation, the source text, does, however, impact the narrative and certain cinematic choices, as in the loose adaptations *Beau travail* and *L'Intrus*. As in Chapter 4, Denis's film here also intersects in intertextual ways with Ozu's film and a broader range of influences (Stam, "Beyond Fidelity," 64-66). The train tracks that Ozu frames in the opening of his film, as well as the train that is the means of transportation from the nearby village to Tokyo, inspired Denis to hone in on the role of the train in the lives of those who live on the periphery of a large city. Lionel is an RER train conductor.<sup>101</sup> Lionel and Joséphine's relationship shares much in common with that of the Japanese father Shukichi Somiya (Chishu Ryu) and daughter Noriko Somiya (Setsuko Hara).<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> The RER is an extension of the Paris metro system that runs mainly above ground and services areas outside the city center, including the *banlieues* and the airports.

<sup>102</sup> The film also pays tribute to Denis's family as her mother and grandfather also were very close. In an interview with James Bell, Denis says, "It was a story about my grandfather, who raised my mother from two months old. His wife died giving birth to her, and so he became a family legend. My mother told us many stories about him that differentiated him from the image we had of a father. He was a wonderful grandfather, but also an adventurer: during the war he ran away from Paris with my mother. He was a serious father; he never joked about my mother's food, her school or her education, but he was also a charming and attractive man. [...] When, as a student, I discovered Ozu's films, I was flabbergasted by the father figure in so many of them, usually played by Chishu Ryu. He was familial, yet secretive, hiding all his suffering. I'd never seen films where what happens inside a family is offered so delicately. It's not exotic at all—even if

As with the Ozu film, nothing extraordinary happens, nor does suspense build. Instead, the focus is generally on working class life and shots of the *banlieue*, including repeated images of housing developments and nearby networks of train tracks. Also like *Late Spring*, *35 rhums* frequently depicts domestic spaces during quotidian activities (laundry, eating, bathing). The film opens with a long series of shots of a train moving through tunnels and along various tracks. These are intercut with shots of Lionel smoking in the cab of the train or in the train yard watching trains pass at a distance. From his perspective and that of another RER conductor, René (Julieth Mars Toussaint), we see both morning and evening crowds of workers.

The film then crosscuts to the first image of Joséphine. In a medium close-up shot framed in a store window, she browses through kitchen appliances. The camera pulls in tighter on her, but remains on the other side of the glass, outside. She chooses a pink rice cooker. Like the coffeemaker in *Nénette et Boni*, the rice cooker becomes a symbolic household object, though not one with erotic connotations as in Boni's dreams. However, without the anthropomorphic features of Boni's appliance (it "breathes" and comforts him; he caresses it), it is less a character than simply a significant object. In the next shot, Joséphine is home, in an apartment building hallway. Plaintive notes of the Tindersticks' score play. These initial images are tranquil.

Lionel, Jo, Noé and Gabrielle (Nicole Dogue) form a nexus of multicultural urban life. They are connected by kinship, work, school, and housing locations. Denis gives glimpses into each of their lives separately before ultimately showing them functioning as a sort of extended family unit. Noé, who is white, travels abroad regularly for work. The

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the food and the way they sit are all Japanese. There is something so strong that everyone can recognise in this kind of family, this kind of love or sadness." (44)

other protagonists witness his departures from and arrivals to the apartment building from their apartments. High-angle images show him entering or exiting his car or a taxi. After Lionel and Jo eat dinner and Jo plays African music on the radio, a cut takes us to the lower floor where Noé climbs the steps. As he approaches their floor, diegetic music comes from the end of the hallway where father and daughter reside. He stops to listen but continues toward his own apartment. Shortly thereafter, Gaby sits in her window in the same building where the others live, smoking. The camera cuts back inside to Lionel and Jo at home, eating rice from the new red cooker Lionel purchased. The camera forms a connection between the four characters.

The daily routines of Jo and Gaby cross in the entryway to their building. They take the elevator up together, and as they exit it, Gaby invites Jo over for leftovers. Jo refuses, insisting that she must study for exams. Gaby alludes to Jo's childhood when it was easier to get the young woman to eat at her house, indicating that they have known each other and lived in the same building for a long time, and that Gaby used to take care of the younger woman, serving as a mothering influence.

Inside a university classroom, Jo has just presented an argument on postcolonialism to her rhetoric class. In a film with limited dialogue, this wordy scene stands out as important and not solely an academic debate. Her professor (Stéphane Pocrain) is critical and encourages her to better explain her argument. Another student insists that there is still much inequity and instability in the modern postcolonial world where the countries of the global "South" must always pay for those of the "North." The camera shifts from Jo, to her professor, to a few other students, resting in medium close-up from each person who speaks.



The last student to speak states, “on révolte parce qu’on ne peut pas respirer (we revolt because we can’t breathe).” He insists a return to Frantz Fanon is needed and encourages the class to read his work. This sense of revolt occurs on an intellectual level, much as did the modern cultural revolt Fanon described that occurs when marginalized people try to make sense of their complicated past, especially as the result of viewing Western art or analyzing literature. At the end of *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon says, “I should be very happy to know that a correspondence had flourished between some Negro philosopher and Plato” (230). He ends with an appeal: “At the conclusion of this study, I want the world to recognize, with me, the open door of every consciousness. My final prayer: O my body, make of me always a man who questions!” (232).

The class is composed mainly of non-white students, probably second-generation immigrants. Jo clearly actively considers repercussions of postcolonialism in contemporary Parisian life. As Homi Bhabha reminds us:

Remembering Fanon is a process of intense discovery and disorientation.

Remembering is never a quiet act of introspection or retrospection. It is a painful re-membering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present. It is such a memory of the history of race and racism, colonialism and the question of cultural identity that Fanon reveals with greater profundity and poetry than any other writer. (xxv)

By naming Fanon and by voicing continued concern about the ramifications of colonialism via this classroom debate Denis asks the spectator also to remember.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> By contrast, in *White Material* (2009), Denis overtly contemplates the dire conditions of postcolonial life in war-torn African countries of the global South beset by internal and external conflicts and the heritage of colonial racism. Instead of academic discussions,

Lionel's colleague René is unhappily retiring from work as a train conductor. He has no family and would prefer to keep working. Uprooted and displaced at the end of his career, he is uncertain how to fill his days. His fellow train workers, men and one woman, celebrate his retirement at a local bar. He receives numerous gifts that include African or Caribbean objects of art (a handmade black and white leather blanket and a multicolored folk art wooden swan) and an iPod. Although his speech of thanks contains uplifting, grateful words, René's expression remains deflated. All celebrate with rum and drink up to eighteen shots apiece. Lionel decides not to participate in the ritual of 35 shots of rum this night. Everyone is already drunk. He perhaps waits for a more significant time to complete the full amount. Members of the party ride the train home afterward. René listens to his new iPod while others drift to sleep. In several close-ups, Lionel is shown contemplating his friend, looking concerned.

Lionel returns from the party a bit intoxicated. After observing Jo working at her computer, he goes to the kitchen for a final shot of rum. The next day, in his bedroom, Jo tends to his hangover. More than previously, their closeness shows as Lionel tells Jo not to be so concerned with his well-being. They touch each other's arms as he asks her to think about herself more. This scene recalls Ozu's *Late Spring* as the widowed Japanese father recognizes the need to let his aging daughter get married and urges her to find a husband. More oblique in his approach, Lionel simply urges Jo to feel free, without overtly speaking of marriage. This scene is immediately followed by two long sequences that set up the close but enigmatic relationship between Jo and Noé, signaling that there is

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the film portrays tensions between people of all skin tones, not just white versus black, and class-based hatred. Disturbingly handheld and filled with violence, the film lacks the serene moments and relative peacefulness of the *banlieue* spaces in *35 rhums*.

a potential suitor already in her life. That their relationship is shown differs completely from Ozu's film, which never portrays the daughter's future husband.

Even though nothing yet is known about their association, Jo is comfortable around him. Noé joins her for an early morning run by the Seine near their building. In a spontaneous moment of playfulness, he falls into the river as they run along the edge. A low-angle shot of him shows him smiling as he says that the water is warm even though it is obviously not. The camera pans up to Jo as she tells him that he is crazy, although she does not look truly upset. A cut to inside Noé's apartment reveals him shot through the bathroom doorway at an angle that could be from Jo's perspective. He is putting on a shiny button-down maroon shirt. He is in an upstairs area while she is downstairs on the couch. A certain intimacy exists between them although they do not touch.

After Noé and Jo take a morning jog, he prepares coffee for them at his place. Jo notices his plane ticket and passport on the stairs and wonders where he is headed next. He says that if she really wants to know, then she should join him. The camera pans around the apartment cluttered with old furniture and collectibles. Noé is an orphan living in his family's flat. It, his parents' belongings, and a cat are all that he has left of them. He tells her that he does not get too attached to things, to which she asks what keeps him around. These two informative scenes end with a sly look from him at her, his eyes speak what he does not say: she is the reason he stays. Later, as he leaves, Noé drops his keys by Lionel and Jo's apartment. Lionel cooks breakfast for the three of them in the small kitchen. After Noé leaves, Lionel asks Jo how Noé gets by alone. She tells him that Noé has the two of them. Jo, however, is in no hurry to leave her father.

In the longest and most poignant sequence of the film, Jo, Noé, Lionel, and Gaby go out for the evening. Planning to attend a concert together, the four of them ride in Gaby's taxi. A reggae song that played earlier in the film plays again. A woman sadly sings about not being able to get along without her former lover. Gaby says that it has been a long time since they have been out together as a family. Her words confirm a past history between her, Lionel, and Jo, with insinuations of a former romantic involvement with Lionel. She plays "Can't Live Without You" on the car's stereo expressly to show him how she still feels. The scene not only reveals details about the protagonists' past relationships, but also paints a portrait of a small neighborhood establishment and the people who gather there after hours. Every tone of black skin is represented, from the light tones of Gaby and Jo, to the deep black skin of the patroness (Adèle Ado).

As they try to get to the concert in the rain, their family outing goes awry. The car breaks down and they must push it down the street. Everyone is soaked. They seek refuge in a small restaurant. The young black man behind the bar insists that the restaurant is closing. His aunt, however, welcomes them back in after it proves impossible for them to get a ride after the broken-down car is towed away. She allows other couples to enter as well and prepares food for the latecomers.

The atmosphere lightens and everyone relaxes. They dry off and enjoy the food and drinks. Music plays and it ranges from African to American. Lionel dances closely first with Gaby, then with Jo until Noé cuts in. He also holds her tightly. As they dance to "Night Shift" by the Commodores, Noé loosens Jo's hair and kisses her. Although a passionate embrace, the tone shifts again as Jo breaks away and sits down, drawing Noé over to sit beside her, looking uncomfortable about being so intimate in front of her dad

and the others. Lionel next dances intimately with the beautiful black African woman who runs the restaurant; he desires her.

Even though he is loyal and tender with his daughter, Lionel is practically cruel with Gaby several times in the film, refusing to allow a romantic connection to rekindle. He probably spends the night with the patroness of the restaurant: he does not accompany the others home and arrives at the apartment alone the next morning. That he elects to be with another woman on their “family” night out is another reference to *Late Spring*. There the father and daughter attend a Noh theater performance. He insinuates that he is interested in a woman in order to push his daughter toward finding a husband.

The character René has no equivalent in the Ozu film. He is an example of a displaced postcolonial citizen. His situation, in contrast with the others, is grim. Although usually somber and pensive, Lionel’s strong connection with his daughter provides meaning for his life. He rarely speaks, as René reminds him one day while accompanying him around the city in the cab of the train, saying, “You aren’t talkative. You never say anything.” Lionel responds that when he has dark thoughts he thinks of his daughter. He understands that René is having a hard time without the routine of work. He has no one to comfort him.

A solemn dreamscape, a one-of-a-kind moment in the film, follows. After Lionel’s words, the cab of the train is replaced by a superimposition of Lionel and Joséphine astride a horse. The horse runs along the train tracks. The camera stays tight on the horse’s head and the upper torso and heads of the riders. Music resumes. The camera rocks with the motion of the horse. The sequence ends in a transition to Lionel’s point of

view on the tracks at night from his position in the front car.<sup>104</sup> Lionel then stops the train as he sees a body on the tracks. Repeated close-ups show him walking in exaggeratedly slow motion to René's dead body on the tracks. The handheld camera's shakiness conveys Lionel's sense of despair and dislocation. Without close friends, family, or purpose in life, René opts to kill himself on the very tracks that had sustained him for years.

The event reinforces the importance of family for Lionel and Jo. Lionel returns home and shares a meal with Jo in the kitchen. Perhaps in response to René's death, or maybe as a final chance for the two of them to spend time together before Jo begins married life, the two decide to go on a trip together. A cut from an emotional embrace between father and daughter in their kitchen shows them in Lionel's blue VW van. The architecture looks different, and the road signs are in German.

The father and daughter of Ozu's film also take a trip together prior to her marrying. Lionel and Jo visit Jo's maternal aunt and cousin, the only two white people other than Noé in the film. Her aunt's words indicate that Jo's mom probably died by drowning. After their brief visit, Lionel and Jo tend her mother's grave then spend a cold night at the beach. These scenes reinforce how close they are. They huddle in the cold while Jo expresses her wish that they could live together forever, just as the Japanese daughter did with her father. Also, as in the Ozu film, they sleep next to each other, almost like a couple.

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<sup>104</sup> Darren Hughes says to Denis of the scene, "It was the one moment that seemed to slip out of a more objective camera position." She responds, "It's because of the Goethe poem ["Der Erlkönig"] about the father riding his horse with his baby, who is dying of a high fever. I felt that because of the German wife. He holds his daughter and he feels the horse is too slow and maybe he will be too late to the next village to save her" (5).

An abrupt cut returns to a close-up on white shoes and flowers in their apartment. Lionel waits. He refuses entry to Gaby, who wants to help with Jo's hair. His grey suit and Jo's white dress indicate that they are preparing for her wedding. Father and daughter embrace one last time after Lionel fastens a necklace that belonged to her mother on Jo's neck. The camera cuts to Noé waiting for them in the hallway, dressed handsomely in grey and black tones that match Lionel's suit. Denis elides the wedding ceremony and cuts from him to a reception in a bar. The newlyweds are not there. Lionel, Gaby and their friends drink rum and count the number of shots. This time Lionel completes the 35 shot ritual at an appropriately festive occasion, but one of mixed emotions for him.

The film closes with a cut back to Lionel, alone in his apartment. He finds the rice cooker Jo had purchased. He puts the two cookers side by side on the counter and adjusts the lids. The final image is a close-up on his hands. Even though he no longer has his daughter at his side, he has an object that she acquired there as solace. As opposed to the reconfigured family of *Nénette and Boni*, in *35 rhums*, the final family here is more traditional. Father and daughter relinquish their bond so that she may form an adult relationship with a partner. The film has no definitive ending. Family connections drive the narrative, indicating repeatedly the importance of kinship, by blood, but also by friendship. For Denis, the film is "a sort of tragedy, in a family sense. It's the major separation" (Hughes 2). Yet, a new family is forming, giving hope that close ties of kinship will continue.

Family dynamics are also at the heart of Ozon's film *Angel*. As usual, distinctly different in narrative and cinematic style from Denis's two films, *Angel* is a melodrama set in early 20<sup>th</sup> century England. As mentioned and as opposed to Denis's oblique evocations of Ozu's *Late Spring* in *35 rhums*, *Angel* is a rather faithful adaptation of the Elizabeth Taylor novel. Nonetheless, Ozon shifts certain narrative events. As does Denis, Ozon often uses narrative ellipses, though more to compress the number of events to fit the run time of a feature-length film than to complicate the flow of the story. Unlike her two films, his has a lavish mise-en-scène with exquisite costumes, settings, and dramatic acting. Ozon, like Denis, uses an original score. Unlike the electronic instruments and contemporary sound of the Tindersticks' compositions, Philippe Rombi's compositions are orchestral.

Taylor's novel is based on the life of sentimental novelist Marie Corelli (1855-1924), though Taylor's *Angel* resides in Edwardian, not Victorian, England. She lived from 1885 to sometime after the end of World War II. Like Corelli, *Angel* escapes her lower middle class roots to become a writer famous for saccharine love tales. As with Robert Stam's discussion of Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, Taylor's *Angel* can be considered as a "proto-cinematic" text that merges two "antagonistic strains within the novel: the documentary style [...] and the Cervantic, parodic, intertextual tradition" (*Literature Through Film* 144). *Angel* blends the subdued romantic style of the novel with the excessive aesthetic of the mise-en-scène. Taylor mentions Corelli by name on several occasions in the novel (e.g., pp. 76 and 108). The film starts much as the book,



just as Angel is discovering her passion for writing. Both Angel characters are self-made, daring to write a book at the age of 16, leaving school to write full time. Both find a publisher, though in the book it takes Angel several attempts. In the film, Theo Gilbright (Sam Neill) agrees to publish her book and she becomes famous overnight, appealing especially to lower middle class women. Although authoring pulp fiction, both Angels remain blindly confident that they are literary geniuses.<sup>105</sup>

Not as nuanced and complex as the two Denis films, Ozon nonetheless complicates the source text to create a film that challenges conceptions of family, being an artist, and being prolific in one's work. *Angel* is 134 minutes, long for either of these two directors.<sup>106</sup> Although containing colorful flourishes in costume, setting, narrative style, and cinematography, *Angel* is not a typical melodrama, and Angel is not a stereotypical heroine.<sup>107</sup>

Unlike the pensive Nénette or studious Joséphine, Angel is a strong-willed, domineering force. Relying on nothing but her imagination, she immerses herself in her

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<sup>105</sup> Ozon also shows the personal sacrifices required to produce even mediocre art. As he states in the interview on his website, "L'important n'est pas la qualité de l'écrivain de polars ou de romans sentimentaux mais son énergie, comment l'inspiration lui vient, la prend entièrement, au point de mélanger réel et imaginaire. Est-ce que l'art permet ou empêche de vivre? Quel engagement faut-il avoir dans son art?" ("The important part is not the quality of the writer of crime fiction or of sentimental novels, but his energy, how inspiration comes to him, takes him entirely, to the point of mixing the real and the imaginary. Does art permit or prohibit life? What engagement must the artist have in his art?").

<sup>106</sup> *35 rhums* is 100 minutes, longer than most Denis films except *L'Intrus*. *Angel* is Ozon's longest film. He has had several 110-111 minute features (*Swimming Pool*, *8 femmes*, *Potiche*, *Dans la maison*), but this is his only film over two hours. Ozon portrays Angel's life from adolescence to death.

<sup>107</sup> As he mentions on the website, Ozon first picked Nicole Kidman to star, then decided he needed someone younger who could also play Angel as a 16-year-old. He lost the star power, but Garai is an excellent casting choice. She convincingly plays Angel from age 16 until her death. In the book, Angel lives longer because Nora keeps Esmé's infidelity secret longer. In the film, Angel dies prematurely of chagrin.

writing, determined to avoid the ordinary life in store for her as daughter of a grocery owner. She lives alone with her mother, but as opposed to the close bond that exists between Jo and Lionel, Angel and her mother do not draw closer as a result of her father's death. Instead, her mother fears and thus caters to a capricious daughter who turns tyrannical when she does not get her way. Both her mother and aunt are traditional women who are baffled when Angel suddenly becomes worldly. In this familial reconfiguration then, the father is absent and the child takes control. Ozon's Angel thereby defies late 19<sup>th</sup> societal norms.

Angel is sure of herself and demanding, even more than in the book. Ozon takes his time developing her character, showing her revelation of writing as a means of escape, both from lower class life and from reality. As she finishes her first book, in a medium close-up, she breathes heavily and smiles euphorically. From the start, her work is all consuming, leaving her exhausted and happily depleted as she finishes each book. Her creativity allows her a comfortable, lavish life, yet she lives more in her mind than she does among her possessions.

The inspiration for the *mise-en-scène* derived in large part from melodramas shot in Technicolor from the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s in Hollywood.<sup>108</sup> However, Ozon does

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<sup>108</sup> Although the film has mainly received poor reviews, Ryan Gilbey recognizes that *Angel* is an elaborate, well-constructed new work. He notes that "Some reviewers have missed the point of the film by a good country mile, taking Garai to task for being shrill and obnoxious—exactly how the character is supposed to come off—or bemoaning the dodgy back-projection which provides a deliberate throwback to filmmaking of the 40s and 50s" (2). In fact, Ozon concedes in this interview with Gilbey that some people do not understand his intentional choices in using techniques from previous decades, criticizing him for not having state of the art special effects. Ozon explains that "They haven't seen those old films which look like that; they are used to *Harry Potter* and *The Lord of the Rings*, where the effects are perfect. I realized at that point my film was complex. Before that, I thought it was mainstream. Maybe it's mainstream for people

not make the entire film color-saturated. Before Angel goes to London, the costumes and the setting are drab and subdued, in earthy hues. Once she has a publisher, Angel quickly gains the confidence to advocate for herself despite her young age or meager qualifications. By sheer will and determination, she attains fame. The color palette shifts with her success to become bright and intense, with bold reds and greens. It remains vibrant until she loses her audience and her husband. As her decline begins, the colors again become somber, reflecting her broken heart and spirit.

On her first night in London, Theo and Angel ride together in a carriage on the way to his house. The stylized scene recalls the rear-projection used in Vincente Minnelli's *Gigi* (1949) when Honoré Lachaille (Maurice Chevalier) tours Gigi (Leslie Caron) around Paris in an open carriage as she marvels at the sights.<sup>109</sup> Like Gigi, Angel demonstrates her inexperience, awestruck by her first visit to the city. A pastiche of short scenes of Angel at book signings signals that time has passed. The sequence resembles the series of scenes that trace the transformation of Gigi from awkward adolescent girl to sophisticated demi-mondaine with coaching from Aunt Alicia (Isabel Jeans). Unlike Gigi, though, Angel immediately plays the part of an adult, embracing her books' success. However, in contrast to Gigi, Angel lacks real sophistication as her excessive wardrobe and ignorance of social customs show. Angel also differs starkly from characters such as Gigi who eventually become good wives or victims of society or men. Angel is an obstinate woman who must be the center of attention, but who also works with a surprising tenacity and force. She is most concerned with her writing. Unlike her

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who are 60 years old, or for gay men. I don't know. If you don't have that perspective, maybe it seems too strange, too perverse. When I make a film, I always assume the audience is clever" (2).

<sup>109</sup> *Gigi* is a costume drama, a musical, and an adaptation, of a novel by Colette.

contemporaries and the heroines in her books, Angel does not aspire to marriage. However, she does fall madly in love at first sight.

In the film, Angel first encounters Nora and Esmé at the reception following a theater production of Angel's first book, *Lady Irania*. Although brief, the meeting of these three individuals is the cornerstone for Ozon's restructuring of family values. The duo present another alternative family structure, for they are orphans and neither of them has ever married. Also, although they have no money of their own, they come from an upper class family. Angel, by contrast, has money, but not a noble heritage. After receiving a standing ovation from the audience from her balcony seat, Angel mingles with the wealthy crowd in the large hall. Resplendent in an emerald green gown, she is at first startled by the ebullient Nora, kneeling to greet her, and then enthralled at the sight of handsome, aloof Esmé. Their uncle, Lord Norley (Christopher Benjamin), raised them and still provides for them. Nora's initial enthusiasm indicates immediately her feelings for Angel. In contrast to his sister's dramatic behavior, he prefers to criticize Angel's taste in art. She fails to recognize his sarcasm, practically stuttering her response in an addled, beguiled state. To Angel, Esmé is the perfect incarnation of one of her book's heroes. She knows nothing at first of his poverty, womanizing, and cynicism.

In the book, Angel encounters the siblings and Lord Norley at her home. She then obsesses over Esmé for years before seeing him again in person, asking Nora questions about him regularly. The change to the theater setting in the film is significant since it shifts the dynamic between Angel and Esmé. In the opulent setting with everyone in fine clothing, she is immediately intrigued by him. She is more beguiling to him after she pretends to know about his art.

In another departure from the book, Theo and Angel take a second carriage ride as he escorts her home after the above reception. By contrast with the first ride, the scene is set at night. Ozon uses tight close-ups on each, as well as de-saturated hues that reduce the environment and their clothing to greys and blues. Angel asks him to stop abruptly as she spots a for sale sign for Paradise House, where her Aunt Lottie had served and Angel had dreamed of living. Angel buys and renovates the house. She installs her mother there and leaves Nora to care for her and the grounds. Angel is more proactive in the film and decides to visit Esmé by surprise under the pretext of seeing his paintings. She goes to London to meet Esmé and convince him to paint her portrait. His meager one room apartment-cum-studio startles her.

Angel is rarely with both siblings at the same time after their initial encounter. As she has taken an interest in someone other than herself for the first time, she is vulnerable to real rather than imagined emotions. Nora achieves her goal of caring for her beloved Angel. She moves in to Paradise House, but at a high price to herself as she gives up writing poetry and acting as a free agent. She attends to all of Angel's needs, from managing the opulent yet eccentric mansion, to overseeing Angel's writing production for publication. She eschews domestic tasks and does not seek to have a child, as it would interfere with her work. However, Nora often ends up taking care of the country estate while Angel spends time in the city. While she is away from Paradise House, her mother's health declines rapidly.

Only at the end of her mother's life does Angel come to realize how she has caused her mother's deterioration by taking her away from the grocery store where she proudly worked. When she dies in the film, Angel is devastated, crying inconsolably over

the body. In the book, her mother expires in a paragraph without any reaction from Angel. Nora steps in to fill the void in Angel's life in both cases, becoming a watchful guardian and patient assistant.

Angel secretly plans to unveil Esmé's portrait of her at a party in the book and the film. However, in the film, the occasion is again a public society event. She wears a long, elegant red ball gown and commands attention. She hopes to please Esmé by showing off his work. He abruptly leaves before she can show the painting. She runs after him, confesses her love for him, and proposes to him on the spot. The moment is the height of melodrama: it starts raining as they embrace passionately and a rainbow arches over their heads.<sup>110</sup>

Ozon also makes Esmé a more complicated figure. In the film, he is an artist with talent and a somewhat more sympathetic man. He turns out to be both more despicable and more pitiable: he is unfaithful, has gambling debts and a war injury, and endures heartbreak. Nora despises her brother for his lifestyle choices. She becomes jealous, though she remains loyal to Angel. As in the book, all three live under the same roof. In the film, Angel acknowledges Nora's adoration more openly. Though never shown in a sexual situation, several times Angel touches or embraces Nora. The sharpest contrast with the book, however, is that Angel and Esmé have a mutually pleasurable sex life.

In the book, Angel avoids sexual activity. The narrator says, "She felt nervous and not herself at bedtime, wondering in an unsettled way if she would be expected to play that ludicrous and alien game of sexual love" (Taylor 160). However, in the film, Angel

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<sup>110</sup> In the book, he leaves and they do not have contact again for a while. Later, he confesses his love to her, but suggests he is not fit for marriage since he has no money. She vows to provide for both of them (Taylor 142, 151).

and Esmé, at least in the beginning, have regular and seemingly enjoyable sexual relations. Far from the sexually repressed character in the book, Angel is sensuous and not inhibited onscreen. She ends up writing nude as well, often getting up from having sex to go to her desk.<sup>111</sup> Angel does not seek to have a child, as it would interfere with her work. She never conceives in the book. In the film, she miscarries the one time she does, unfortunately after finally desiring a child. By that time, World War I begins, Esmé enlists, and their relationship deteriorates. She decides to never tell him about losing their baby.

Esmé manages to deceive and manipulate Angel in ways even more deplorable than those she uses on others. While away at war, he tells Angel he has no leave, but he actually meets up with Angel's namesake, Angelica. This is one of the greatest departures from the novel. There, he has an ongoing affair on leave, but the woman is named Laura, they do not have a child, and Angel does not encounter the other woman. In both the book and the film, Nora and Theo accidentally see the illicit couple together in London, but do not tell Angel. Angel, Esmé, Nora, and Angelica form an unfulfilled love quadrangle: Angel loves Esmé, Esmé loves Angelica, Nora loves Angel, and Angelica, though she might love Esmé, marries another man. Moreover, Angelica and Esmé have a child together, though father and son never meet.

Esmé learns of his lover's marriage to another man in both texts and subsequently kills himself. In the book, he drowns, while in the film, he hangs himself in his studio. Angel detaches from the world after Esmé's death. She is not aware of Esmé's deception and offspring until she finds a letter from Angelica hidden in Esmé's favorite book after

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<sup>111</sup> In the book, she writes nude once out of necessity during the summer heat (Taylor 179).

he dies. When she learns of his lifetime love for her namesake, Angelica, she confronts the other woman. Instead of condemning her, however, Angel returns Angelica's love letter to Esmé. As Angel leaves, she sees Angelica and Esmé's son on the stairs. In a short dream sequence, the child changes into Esmé. Angel stares at him longingly and tries to touch him, but the vision ends and the boy runs upstairs, afraid. This temporal dislocation in the film signals a shift in Angel. She is overcome by reality. Her health declines and she dies.

Even though in both texts, it is Nora who is with Angel on her deathbed, in the film, Angel acknowledges Nora's love and devotion outright. She says that Nora is the only one to have ever really loved her. Although unrequited and unconsummated, Nora's love has sustained and nurtured Angel. Though Angel does not profess love in return, by recognizing Nora's feelings, Angel legitimizes Nora as a lesbian. Thus, even though Ozon's film looks like a classic Hollywood melodrama, it actually presents the most subversive familial configuration of the three films in this chapter.

### Siblings, Parents, Lovers, Rivals: Reconfiguring Family Structures

Denis and Ozon explore notions of family and inscribe relationships that are more or less unusual in these three films. Admittedly, both directors consider familial relations in some manner in the majority of their films, but these three in particular offer atypical configurations. *Nénette et Boni* and *35 rhums* are touching and lyrical. The camera captures people and places that are both peripheral and integral to the lives of their protagonists. They mix textual, filmic, and cultural references and sketch poignant



associations among mundane things. By contrast to the black main characters in Denis's generically free-form films, *Angel* is a highly stylized melodrama with an all-white cast. Set in another era, the film does not comment directly on racial issues but does address gender roles and class differences.

*Nénette et Boni* presents estranged siblings who find a way to live together, but their union is unstable. Adults are not good role models in the film. Boni works and dreams. He gradually becomes more interested in his sister and her baby. Nénette remains pensive and speaks rarely. She tries to abort the child on her own, she smokes incessantly, and she never bonds with the baby. By contrast, though Boni must threaten force to take the baby from the hospital, he is gentle and nurturing once they are home.

Echoing Ozu's repetition of the rituals that both father and daughter practice upon each exit or entry to their home in *Banshun*, Lionel and Jo also repeat simple gestures: hanging up a hat or keys and replacing shoes with slippers while sitting on a bench in their hallway. They still perform daily tasks such as cooking dinner, washing clothes, and bathing, providing a sense of normalcy and calm. René's suicide and Lionel's somber demeanor contribute to a sense of melancholy and loss.

In passing, Denis addresses situations that recent immigrants to the *métropole* encounter. For example, the initial scene of *Nénette et Boni* shows the phone card counterfeiter trying to con a group of African immigrants. The classroom discussions in *35 rhums* reveal that discussions of the history of colonialism and its repercussions are still important and necessary. People of all skin tones appear at ease in their working and living environments. No racial strife is shown.

No one is seen interacting in the “white” world. Although their marginalization could thereby be implied, the main characters are for the most part strong, independent, hard-working people with comfortable, stable home lives. They demonstrate a more positive view of contemporary society. Denis says of *35 rhums*, “I felt the film demanded a certain type of calm, and also handheld, so it’s sort of breathing. But my main desire was to make it simple and solid, because all of the characters are black, and I wanted to make it very clear to the audience that they do not live like clandestines. They have a real life, they are settled, they are French. And I thought if the camera were shaky, it would make their life shaky” (Hughes 3).

Angel and Esmé leave no heirs. But, Angelica, initially glimpsed as a young woman living at Paradise House when Angel is 16, is Esmé’s mistress. She and Esmé have a child together who is being raised by Angelica. She marries another man to provide a stable and secure life for the child. The presence of an heir complicates anew questions of kinship and class. This illegitimate child would not have known his biological father, even if Esmé had not died. Will the boy be molded into a proper bourgeois like his mother, or will he, like his father, take an alternative path? Esmé kills himself out of frustration at not being able to be with the woman he loves. By contrast, Angel only allows herself to love someone other than herself only once with Esmé, but even then she loves in a self-absorbed way. Nora does not mask her sexual preference, but nor does she gain acceptance or fulfillment.

So what does this say about Ozon’s conception of alternative lifestyles? Are they all ill-fated? Ozon may refashion family dynamics in this film, but he does not necessarily present a comforting view. Ozon’s heroine perishes of a broken heart,

betrayed by her dead husband. There is no heterosexual happily-ever-after-ending *à la Gigi*. At best, as Angel dies, she not only recognizes Nora's love, but she also makes a final statement of her own identity, declaring, "I am Angel Deverall." Richard Lippe contends, "Angel, by asserting her identity as a final gesture, reaffirms her self-definition and takes responsibility for it. She becomes a genuine heroine, a woman who celebrates her strength and accomplishments [...] and, in acknowledging and accepting Nora's love, Angel affirms the power and beauty of one woman's love for another" (67). Nonetheless, Angel's final words are ultimately self-serving, a reassurance that her life meant something. Likewise, Angel's acceptance of Nora's love does not provide Nora with a reciprocation of emotion, only an acknowledgment of her unrequited feelings. Homosexuality does not offer happy endings either.

As Eithne O'Neill notes, "Fidèle au genre de la reconstitution historique et fictive pour l'écran, le film d'Ozon reflète des stéréotypes idéologiques de notre époque. Femme pour tout temps, Angel nous ressemble. La vérité prime sur nos rêves d'amour exclusif, de réussite qui perdure. Comme la névrose révèle la norme, la démesure est la mesure de la condition de l'homme" ("Loyal to the genre of historical fiction reconstituted for the screen, Ozon's film reflects the ideological stereotypes of our epoch. Woman for all times, Angel resembles us. Truth takes precedence over our dreams of exclusive love, of success that lasts. As neurosis reveals the norm, disproportion is the measure of the condition of man"; 20). Through *Angel*, Ozon demonstrates how contemporary conceptions can be restructured, re-examined and re-presented by engaging with melodrama and using excess intentionally in costuming, décor, and acting styles.

The style of *Angel*, its flourishes and colors, mimic Angel's novels; the film, like them, lacks the depth and poignancy of *35 rhums*. *Nénette et Boni* lacks the solemnness of *35 rhums* as well. However, despite Boni's colorful dreamscapes and lurid imaginings, this film asks serious questions about contemporary life for broken families. In addition to teenage pregnancy and abortion, the film presents illegal activities and murder. Especially white men are untrustworthy. But by the end of the film, Boni is calmly caring for the baby. Is he part of a new generation of caretakers? In *35 rhums*, the somber tone derives from father and daughter coming to terms with the end of their relationship as they know it and allowing her to grow up. Although René's suicide adds another layer of sadness, the film does not present violent acts or have victims of crime. As opposed to *Angel* where no relationships endure or succeed, the Denis films contain ambiguity about the future and offer possibilities of love relationships that may endure.

## Conclusion: Globalization and Its Discontents, or Beauty and the Beasts

This dissertation has considered groupings based on thematic choices, though each chapter's films manifest stylistic similarities. All of the films here are concerned with relationships. This dissertation has thus come full circle from the first chapter, which considers failed heterosexual couplings in *5X2* and *Vendredi soir*, to the last chapter, where non-traditional family structures showcase characters in heterosexual unions in *Nénette et Boni*, *35 rhums*, and *Angel*. More unusual, deviant, even violent characters in more unstable relationships populate the other chapters. The second chapter progresses from overtly queer characters in *Gouttes d'eau* to heterosexual and discreetly bisexual and lesbian characters in *8 femmes*, and homoerotic relationships in *Beau travail*. The most heinous characters populate the third chapter, where in *J'ai pas sommeil*, *Trouble Every Day*, and *Les amants criminels*, everyday people are or become brutal killers. They all dominate or deceive their naïve and/or reluctant partners. The fourth chapter explores death also, examining *Sous le sable*, *Le temps qui reste*, and *L'Intrus*, but now from the more contemplative perspectives of those who have lost loved ones or are dying slowly from disease.

Denis and Ozon and their teams employ a wide range of visual and auditory strategies. Both often use quotidian settings, show working and lower middle class characters, and employ original music. Both offer intriguing framing choices and utilize unusual camera movements. Both directors also reference other literary and cinematic works. Their films, however, often look and feel quite different. Denis includes brief slow-motion effects in most films to lyrically emphasize certain events. Most of Denis's

films are shot on location. She engages actors who convey emotions through their gestures. She uses minimal mises-en-scène. Her films often take place in urban settings. *J'ai pas sommeil*, *Trouble Every Day*, *Vendredi soir*, and *35 rhums* take place in various parts of Paris. *Nénette et Boni* is shot in Marseilles. *Beau travail* shifts between Marseilles and urban and rural parts of Djibouti. *L'Intrus* has the most ambitious geographical scope of the films discussed here; including rural and urban parts of the French/Swiss border region, as well as urban, rural, and remote island settings in and around Tahiti. Disenfranchised or somehow otherwise "marginal," Denis depicts characters who live away from city centers. All her films signal problems in contemporary globalized life, even though all the films also contain beautiful and poignant moments.

Some of Ozon's films correspond in tone with Denis's films. *5X2*, *Sous le sable*, *Le temps qui reste*, and even *Les amants criminels* utilize realistic settings, ordinary protagonists, and non-flamboyant acting. These films also portray contemporary life in France, though more often in rural rather than urban settings. Unlike Denis, Ozon's focus is, moreover, primarily on white, middle-class French people. His literary adaptations contrast greatly with Denis's films: they feature artifice and flaunt theatricality; they employ camp and melodrama. *Gouttes d'eau*, *8 femmes*, and *Angel* proffer colorful costumes, detailed period décor, and expressive acting. Primarily shot in studio, these films are dialogue-driven, and take place primarily in interior settings.

*Vendredi soir*, whose screenplay was co-written with Emmanuèle Bernheim, is Denis's most faithful adaptation, but the book, as mentioned earlier, is an unusual choice for adaptation. The film captures allusions of touch, taste, and smell present in the book.

As the first chapter explores, this film multiplies haptic moments. Laure's reactions to Jean are conveyed in close shots that show her pleasure at the smell of his cigarette, and later their mutual enjoyment of skin touching. These Deleuze would call affection-images. The original score emphasizes such sensuous moments, especially in the low-key, tightly framed lovemaking scenes.

Bernheim also co-wrote the screenplay for Ozon's *5X2*. Not surprisingly, then, it contains haptic moments akin to those in *Vendredi soir*. The camera is often close and its proximity combines with evocative music to produce a sensation of tactility. As in Jennifer Barker's description of the lovers in Alain Resnais's 1959 *Hiroshima mon amour*, Laure and Jean's, or Marion and Gilles's, bodies fill the screen, and "[t]hese images compromise vision (and visual identification), forcing us to experience them as skin and to *become* skin in order to make sense of them. The only way to understand them is to caress them, letting the eyes wander gently over their surface with no particular destination" (60). Tight framing on fabric augments these tactile qualities. At several points, music replaces dialogue. As Marion and Gilles dance at their wedding in episode three, for example, both smile and laugh as they hold each other and move to the music. The focus is solely on them, their former strife is forgotten, and the happy, sensuous moment briefly exceeds the narrative space to become, again in Deleuze's terminology, an any-space-wherever.

The films of Chapter 2 also work well together, both visually and thematically. Both *Gouttes d'eau* and *8 femmes* depend on colorful mise-en-scène to invoke 1970s Germany and 1950s France, respectively. Both take place in a single interior home setting. As adaptations of obscure plays by homosexual playwrights, both films are

pointedly theatrical. Though dark comedies, moments of musical performance add whimsy. The four characters of *Gouttes d'eau* perform together to “Tanze Samba Mit Mir” in an entertaining tension-breaker. In *8 femmes*, each of the eight women sings a song. All of these songs and/or dances interrupt the narratives, but they also contribute to character development. For example, the lesbian seductress Pierrette does a partial striptease as she sings to the others. The rather promiscuous bisexual maid Louise literally lets her hair down, loosens her uniform, and lifts her legs in her provocative burlesque number.

In contrast, Denis’s adaptation of Melville’s novella *Billy Budd*, unlike *Vendredi soir* or the Ozon films in Chapter 2, is a “free” adaptation, meaning the film has but loose connections to the original text (C. Grant 58-9). Although the settings are realistic and the acting styles are less theatrical, *Beau travail* nonetheless also obliquely engages with musical conventions. Dance choreographer Bernard Montet orchestrated many of the soldiers’ activities, from group exercises in barren expanses to domestic chores at camp such as hanging laundry. This lends a balletic quality to many scenes. At times, Denis Lavant and Grégoire Colin’s movements become ominous, especially during the scene where they circle each other as though to fight. Their intense expressions and tension-filled bodies express their anger and animosity, and this is enhanced by the climactic sounds of the extradiegetic Britten opera.

In Chapter 3, the films are not literary or theatrical adaptations, but originate in news stories. *J’ai pas sommeil*, *Trouble Every Day*, and *Les amants criminels* cannot be clearly generically categorized. They all contain certain thriller and horror film elements, yet none of them operates to produce suspense and fear in typical ways. While all three



films provoke unease, only a few isolated moments, notably the murder scenes in *Trouble Every Day* and *Les amants criminels*, are gory or repulsive. The second part of *Les amants criminels* even shifts toward the fairy tale, mixing references to Hansel and Gretel with its experimental chronicling of the *fait divers*, somewhat incongruously.

As mentioned, all these characters are ordinary people whom others do not suspect as monsters. Each evinces repeated expressions or movements that contribute to a Deleuzian sense of gest, conveying detached melancholia (Camille), predatory lust (Coré), or deranged vengeance (Alice). Deleuze reminds us of the cinematic dimension of the gest, reminding us that it “is necessarily social and political, following Brecht’s requirements, but it is necessarily something different as well [...] It is bio-vital, metaphysical and aesthetic” (*Cinema 2* 194). The gestures here depend on the actor’s performance together with framing and editing choices that amplify or multiply the acting’s effects and affect, both.

The soundtracks of these films play important roles, but these films are by no means musicals. The two Denis films contain little dialogue. By contrast, *Les amants criminels* is wordy, and besides copious dialogue, includes voice-over narration and poetry recitation. Music and other sounds enhance character development, augment poignant or chilling scenes, and/or elicit sensorial responses. Although not choreographed numbers as in *Gouttes d’eau* or *8 femmes*, the three protagonists in *J’ai pas sommeil* do each perform to a song. Camille’s performance is the only queer musical moment: it is a slow, somewhat erotic, somewhat gloomy drag rendition of Murat’s “Le lien défait.” It is somewhat comparable to Ozon’s staged, sexually charged dance sequences, especially to the group samba in *Gouttes d’eau* and Pierrette’s song in *8 femmes*. Daïga and Théo, in

contrast, relax during their songs. Daïga dances with Ninon, but does not sing, speak, or play an instrument. As opposed to this and to Camille's lip-sync, Théo participates in the creation of the music and plays the violin soulfully to a Caribbean tune with the band Kali.

In *Sous le sable*, *Le temps qui reste*, and *L'Intrus*, which all consider death and dying in the context of loss and illness, the characters are again ordinary people, but they are not monstrous. Adaptation is somewhat pertinent to Chapter 4; genre is less important. Bernheim and Ozon co-wrote *Sous le sable*, but unlike *5X2* or *Vendredi soir*, this film is not an adaptation of one of Bernheim's books. *L'Intrus* is a loose reworking of an unusual textual source: Jean-Luc Nancy's philosophical musings about his heart transplant. *Le temps qui reste* is not an adaptation, but instead an original screenplay written by Ozon.

All three films present poetically ways people cope with loss, aging, or terminal illness. Both Ozon films recall Freud's work in "On Mourning and Melancholia." The uncertainty around Jean's death prevents Marie from accepting his absence in *Sous le sable*. Touching dream sequences transmit her fantasies that he is still there. In *Le temps qui reste*, Romain gradually isolates himself from everyone he loves in order to die alone. Denis expands on Nancy's metaphysical contemplation about organ transplantation. Ambiguously, *L'Intrus* presents moral dilemmas and suggests murders have taken place in order to procure Louis Trebor's new heart.

The final chapter continues to engage with relationships, though death is less present. Families have absent parents. In *Nénette et Boni*, the siblings' mother is dead before the film starts, and the father plays a minor role, then dies abruptly, murdered.

Inspired by the Tindersticks song “My Sister,” the siblings in the film fare better than the abused girl of the song’s title. Boni’s fantasies provide relief from daily work: they are shown as colorful interruptions amidst an otherwise drab palette of city streets in winter, or a dreary courtyard with a leafless tree. *35 rhums* pays tribute to Ozu’s *Late Spring*. It depicts quotidian life for working class characters living on the outskirts of Paris. Joséphine’s mother is likewise deceased, and Noé is an orphan. Though Lionel is especially close with his daughter due to his wife’s absence, he recognizes his role as father is to help her to have a relationship and family of her own. Both films have original soundtracks by the Tindersticks that emotively accompany the visual images.

*Angel* also features protagonists with missing parents, but because it is a costume drama based on an obscure novel it differs greatly from the Denis films. Angel’s father died when she was a child; her mother dies midway through the film. The Howe-Nevinson siblings are orphans. They are dependent on their uncle, Lord Norley. An odd threesome, Angel, Nora, and Esmé eventually cohabit, but Angel and Esmé’s marriage deteriorates after he is injured in World War I. Eventually he commits suicide. Angel and Nora’s “queer” relationship is short-lived, for Angel dies, but not before recognizing that Nora is the only one to have loved her. Visually resplendent, this film uses original music by Philippe Rombi to accentuate the more emotional scenes.

Postcolonial theory, queer theory, and phenomenology have been useful in analyzing most of these films. Postcolonialism and globalization are in some ways interconnected. Both deal with contemporary social and economic inequalities. They link developed countries with underdeveloped ones. Postcolonialism pertains to former colonies and imperial powers that continue to have close political and economic

relationships. Globalization relates to the extra- or international exchanges of goods or movements of people. Today's Western cities are increasingly composed of formerly colonized citizens. Others migrate from rural to urban areas as markets evolve. The effect for densely populated cities such as Paris and Marseilles is that many lack the means to escape their working class lives. They exist apart from white middle and upper class French citizens. Nancy distinguishes two meanings for globalization, depending on which French word is used. Globalization can mean both "world-creating" ("mondialisation") and "world-destroying" ("globalisation"). He returns to Marxist ideas about the global market, indicating that "through the interdependence of the exchange of value in its merchandise-form (which is the form of general equivalency, money), the interconnection of everyone in the production of humanity as such comes in to view" (*The Creation of the World* 37).

Denis's films engage more with contemporary globalization and immigrant populations than do Ozon's, which are primarily concerned instead with white bourgeois families. Most of Denis's films also engage with postcolonial issues. Her films intimate that although immigrants from Eastern Europe and the former French colonies (Daïga, Théo, Lionel, Joséphine) can achieve a good standard of living, the legacy of colonialism nonetheless permeates their lives. Frantz Fanon is directly referenced in *35 rhums*, and almost all the characters in the films here are working class first- or second-generation immigrants from France's former colonies. Joséphine's discussions of Fanon serve as reminders that formerly colonized citizens and their descendants continue to face social and economic inequalities.

In *J'ai pas sommeil*, characters speak to the displacement often felt by immigrants: Théo is a hardworking, honest man who yearns to return to his family's native Martinique, while his brother Camille is callous, deceptive, and murderous, seeking nothing more than a hedonistic life in the underbelly of Paris. The legacy of colonialism is a mere backdrop to *Beau travail* and *L'Intrus* since they take place partially in Djibouti and Tahiti, respectively both countries formerly colonized by France. The main protagonists are Westerners, though the Legionnaires come from diverse backgrounds. The only non-white characters in the Ozon films are Saïd and Madame Chanel.<sup>112</sup>

Andrew Asibong (*François Ozon*), Nick Rees-Roberts, Thibault Schilt, and others have already examined queer attributes of many of Ozon's films, and indeed, as I have shown, the term is more applicable to Ozon's films than to any of Denis's except *Beau travail* and *J'ai pas sommeil*. Ozon features queer characters in many films, while she rarely does, and some of his films play with and insist on lighting, costumes, and artificiality more than her films do. Queer theory is only truly discussed with the films of the second chapter. Yet, *Gouttes d'eau*, *8 femmes*, and *Beau travail* all present sexuality without showing many (or any) sexual acts. Set in the past or in the military, all end with a character committing (or preparing to) suicide as a means to escape traditional power paradigms. Ozon's two films have a queer sensibility that derives from their transgressive characters and campy mises-en-scène: the transgendered Véra, bisexual Léopold, lesbian or bisexual Pierrette, Louise, and Madame Chanel move in kitschy, colorful décors and

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<sup>112</sup> As mentioned, Rees-Roberts analyzes both Saïd's *beur* masculinity and Salim Kechiouche's queer appeal. He also associates Ozon's genre mixing with queer precedents such as Jean Cocteau's *L'Eternel retour* (1943) and *La Belle et la bête* (1946) and Jacques Demy's *Peau d'âne* (1970).

give animated performances. The musical numbers in these two films, like the coordinated movement of the men's bodies in *Beau travail* and its insistence on men looking at or talking about other men, all offer moments of queer spectacle.

Phenomenology is explored principally in Chapter 1. Laura Marks links the haptic image to Deleuze and the time-image:

The haptic image, like other sensuous images, can also be understood as a particular kind of affection-image that lends itself to the time-image cinema.

Recall that the affection-image, while it usually extends into action, may also force a visceral and emotional contemplation in those any-spaces-whatever divorced from action. Thus the haptic image connects directly to sense perception, while bypassing the sensory motor schema. (163)

An example from the third chapter involves Coré's final murder in *Trouble Every Day*. The visual track is reduced to uncomfortably tight shots of her astride the boy. Very little can be distinguished about what exactly Coré does since the camera stays so close and the lighting remains low-key. The setting is unimportant; instead layers of sounds drive reactions: the evocative Tendersticks' music, Coré's feral sounds of pleasure, and her victim's final guttural wheezes. This scene, however, produces more than a shiver. These images and sounds evoke dread, horror, and revulsion, while also touch and hearing in the "multisensory experience" Marks deems cinema can provide (129).

Similarly, in *Sous le sable*, Marie's recurring fantasies of her missing husband have haptic moments. The scene when she imagines that Jean visits her in the bedroom expresses how she "feels" his touch as she masturbates while imagining his presence. The camera is close, eliciting anew Marks's sense of haptic viscosity, though differently in the

final scene in *Le temps qui reste*. As Romain dies on the beach, the camera gradually and slowly pulls back as the sun sets, without a cut. The lengthy duration of the shot and dimming light make his body indiscernible from the sand. Textures merge, and together with the plaintive Rombi compositions that play on the soundtrack, create a haptic moment that stands outside the narrative.

Despite their differences, the films of Claire Denis and François Ozon pair well together in numerous ways, both theoretically and thematically. They both consider, across multiple films, the relationships with family and/or lovers, quotidian life, and ordinary people, some with monstrous inclinations, some confronting loss, aging, and/or illness. Taken together, the fourteen films analyzed here often present unsettling situations with unhappy outcomes. Not uplifting, these films depict unstable relationships. Happy moments do occur, but they are rare and fleeting.

Yet even though the subject matter is often difficult, beauty is also abundant in these films. Some of the most memorable and stunning elements include: the camera's slow panning perusal of stupendously fit male bodies in *Beau travail*, or of parts of Paris in *Vendredi soir*; the lingering close-ups on two strangers in a burgeoning heterosexual relationship in *5X2*; the brilliantly colored costumes in *Gouttes d'eau* and *8 femmes* such as Pierrette's gorgeous red dress, Catherine's bright lime green capris, or Franz's deep green turtle neck; the loving extreme close-ups on Jeanne Moreau, Charlotte Rampling, Michel Subor, and Denis Lavant's untouched, aging faces and bodies, to name but a few.

Whether they portray cannibalistic killers who pass unnoticed among us, or people who confront death and dying with a certain grace, Denis and Ozon produce complicated meditations on modern life in a world where we are all increasingly

interconnected. Ozon's films sometimes seem less serious, but underneath the theatrical façade of some is an awareness of impermanence and instability. Denis's films have depth and darkness, but always also contain allure and beauty.

Despite often distinctive styles, these two filmmakers have a lot in common. They pursue similar subject matter, collaborate with their cinematic crews, integrate wide-ranging cultural references, and meticulously craft their visual- and soundtracks. They represent the tension between the meanings of the word globalization (*globalization* and *mondialisation*): explained by Nancy and as also glossed by Jacques Derrida, globalization is both creative and destructive.<sup>113</sup> In Denis's and Ozon's films, trouble exists every day, everywhere, though sensuousness continually emerges. Their films are about desire, and, as Denis has said in interview, "sexuality isn't gentle, nor is desire. Desire is violence" (Darke 17). Couplings and relationships in these films can lead to violent outcomes, though remarkable mise-en-scène, cinematography, and editing keep those who love film engaged and eager for their next endeavors.

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<sup>113</sup> Giovanna Borradori spoke with Jacques Derrida and Jürgen Habermas about globalization and terror/terrorism after experiencing September 11, 2001 in New York City. During their conversations, Derrida explains that the French concept of *mondialisation* is contradictory. He continues to give a lengthy explanation of these differences, recognizing the implications for those who do not "have" globalization. He says, "In an age of so-called globalization, an age where it is in the interest of some to speak about globalization and celebrate its benefits, the disparities between human societies, the social and economic inequalities, have probably never been greater and more spectacular (for the spectacle is in fact more easily "globalizable") in the history of humanity. Though the discourse in favor of globalization insists on the transparency made possible by teletechnologies, the opening of borders and of markets, the leveling of playing fields and the equality of opportunity, there have never been in the history of humanity, in absolute numbers, so many inequalities, so many cases of malnutrition, ecological disaster, or rampant epidemic (think, for example, of AIDS in Africa and of the millions of people we allow to die, and, thus, kill!)" (121-2).



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## Filmography

### *35 rhums (35 Shots of Rum)* 2008

Director: Claire Denis

Production: Karl Baumgartner and Bruno Pésery for Soudaine Compagnie, Pandora Filmproduktion, Arte France Cinéma, Wild Bunch, WDR/Arte, Sofica Soficinéma 4, Canal+, TPS Star, Centre National de la Cinématographie (CNC), Filmförderungsanstalt

Screenplay: Claire Denis and Jean-Pol Fargeau

Cinematography: Agnès Godard

Editing: Guy Lecomte

Music: Tindersticks

Production Design: Arnaud de Moleron

Costume Design: Judy Shrewsbury

Sound: Martin Boissau

Cast: Alex Descas (Lionel), Mati Diop (Joséphine), Nicole Dogué (Gabrielle), Grégoire Colin (Noé), Julieth Mars Toussaint (René), Adèle Ado (the bar owner), Jean-Christophe Folly (Ruben), Ingrid Caven (the German aunt), Mario Canonge (colleague), Stéphane Pochrain (the professor), Mary Pie (Lina)

Running Time: 100'

### *Beau travail (Good Work)* 1999

Director: Claire Denis

Production: Patrick Granperret and Jérôme Minet for SM Films, La Sept-Arte, Tanais Com

Screenplay: Claire Denis and Jean-Pol Fargeau

Cinematography: Agnès Godard

Editing: Nelly Quettier

Music: Eran Teur

Choreography: Bernard Montet

Production Design: Arnaud de Moleron

Costume Design: Judy Shrewsbury

Sound: Jean-Paul Mugel

Cast: Denis Lavant (Galoup), Michel Subor (Commander Bruno Forestier), Grégoire Colin (Gilles Sentain), Richard Courcet (Legionnaire), Nicolas Duvauchelle (Legionnaire), Adiatou Massudi (Legionnaire), Mickael Ravovski (Legionnaire), Dan Herzberg (Legionnaire), Giuseppe Molino (Legionnaire), Gianfranco Poddighe (Legionnaire), Marc Veh (Legionnaire), Thong Duy Nguyen (Legionnaire), Jean-Yves Vivet (Legionnaire), Bernardo Montet (Legionnaire), Dimitri Tsiapkinis (Legionnaire), Djamel Zemali (Legionnaire), Abdelkader Bouti (Legionnaire), Marta Tafess Kassa (Rahel)

Running Time: 90'

### *L'Intrus (The Intruder)* 2004

Director: Claire Denis

Production: Humbert Balsan, Jérôme Clément, and Michel Reilhac for Ognon Pictures, Arte France Cinéma, Conseil Régional de Franche-Comté, Centre National de la Cinématographie (CNC), Pusan Film Commission  
Screenplay: Claire Denis and Jean-Pol Fargeau  
Cinematography: Agnès Godard  
Editing: Nelly Quettier  
Music: Stuart Staples  
Production Design: Arnaud de Moleron  
Costume Design: Judy Shrewsbury  
Sound: Jean-Louis Ughetto  
Cast: Michel Subor (Louis Trebor), Grégoire Colin (Sydney), Yekaterina Golubeva (the young Russian woman), Bambou (the pharmacist), Florence Loiret-Caille (Antoinette), Alex Descas (the priest), Dong-ho Kim (the boat owner), Se-tak Chang (the associate of the boat owner), Hong-suk Park (man in the fish market), Henri Tetaianuarii (Henri), Jean-Marc Teriipaia (Tony), Anna Tetuaveroa (the mother), Béatrice Dalle (the Queen of the Western Hemisphere)  
Running Time: 130'

*J'ai pas sommeil (I Can't Sleep)* 1994

Director: Claire Denis  
Production: Bruno Péseroy and Fabienne Vonier for France 3 Cinéma, Canal+, Véga Film, M6 Films, Les Films du Mindif, Pyramide, Orsans Productions, Arena Films, Agora Film  
Screenplay: Claire Denis and Jean-Pol Fargeau  
Cinematography: Agnès Godard  
Editing: Nelly Quettier  
Music: Jean-Louis Murat, John Pattison  
Production Design: Arnaud de Moleron and Thierry Flamand  
Costume Design: Claire Fraisse  
Sound: Thierry Lebon  
Cast: Yekaterina Golubeva (Daïga), Richard Courcet (Camille), Vincent Dupont (Raphaël), Laurent Grévill (the blond doctor), Alex Descas (Théo), Irina Grjebina (Mina), Tolsty (Ossip), Line Renaud (Ninon), Béatrice Dalle (Mona), Sophie Simon (Alice), Simone Bonte (Ninon's mother), Antoine Chappey (car buyer), Dani (dressmaker), Solveig Dommartin (blonde woman), Catherine Frot (the woman in the apartment), Manuela Gourary (Mona's mother), Arlette Havet (victim), Alice Hurtaux (victim), Fabienne Mai (victim), Ira Mandella-Paul (Harry), Jacques Nolot (the audience member in the pornography theater)  
Running Time: 110'

*Nénette et Boni (Nénette and Boni)* 1996

Director: Claire Denis  
Production: George Benayoun for Dacia Films, La Sept Cinéma  
Screenplay: Claire Denis and Jean-Pol Fargeau  
Cinematography: Agnès Godard  
Editing: Yann Dedet  
Music: Tindersticks

Production Design: Arnaud de Moleron

Costume Design: Elizabeth Tavernier

Sound: Jean-Louis Ughetto

Cast: Grégoire Colin (Boni), Alice Houri (Nénette), Jacques Nolot (Monsieur Luminaire), Valéria Bruni Tedeschi (the bakery woman), Vincent Gallo (Vincenzo Brown, the bakery man), Malek Sultan (Malek), Gerard Meylan (friend of Boni), Sebastien Pons (a friend of Boni), Alex Descas (the gynecologist), Pepette (the social worker), Guy Leonardi (the counterfeit card seller), Christine Var (the Vietnamese woman on the telephone)

Running Time: 103'

*Trouble Every Day* 2001

Director: Claire Denis

Production: Georges Benayoun, Philippe Liégeois, Jean-Michel Rey for Rezo

Productions, Messaoud/a Films, Arte France Cinéma, Dacia Films, Kinétique Inc.

Screenplay: Claire Denis and Jean-Pol Fargeau

Cinematography: Agnès Godard

Editing: Nelly Quettier

Music: Tindersticks

Production Design: Arnaud de Moleron

Costume Design: Judy Shrewsbury

Sound: Jean-Louis Ughetto

Cast: Vincent Gallo (Dr. Shane Brown), Tricia Vessey (June Brown), Béatrice Dalle (Coré), Alex Descas (Dr. Léo Semenau), Florence Loiret-Caille (Christelle), Hélène Lapiower (Malécot), Aurore Clément (Jeanne), Bakary Sangare (night guard), Lionel Goldstein (receptionist), Arnaud Churin (truck driver), Slimane Brahimi (friend of Christelle's)

*Vendredi soir (Friday Night)* 2002

Director: Claire Denis

Production: Bruno Pésery for Arena Film

Screenplay: Claire Denis and Emmanuèle Bernheim, based on the novel *Vendredi soir* by Emmanuèle Bernheim

Cinematography: Agnès Godard

Editing: Nelly Quettier

Music: Dickon Hinchcliffe

Production Design: Katia Wyzkop

Costume Design: Catherine Leterrier and Judy Shrewsbury

Sound: Jean-Louis Ughetto

Cast: Valerie Lemercier (Laure), Vincent Lindon (Jean), Hélène de Saint-Père (Marie), Hélène Fillières (the tired woman in the restaurant), Florence Loiret-Caille (the young woman in the café), Grégoire Colin (the young man in a parka), Gilles D'Ambra (the husband in the restaurant), Micha Lescot (the hotel receptionist)

Running Time: 90'

5X2 2004

Director: François Ozon

Production: Olivier Delbosc, Philippe Dugay, and Marc Missonnier for Fidélité Productions/France 2 Cinéma/FOZ

Screenplay: François Ozon and Emmanuèle Bernheim

Cinematography: Yorick Le Saux

Editing: Monica Coleman

Music: Philippe Rombi

Production Design: Katia Wyszokop

Sound: Jean-Pierre Duret and Brigitte Taillandier

Cast: Valeria Bruni Tedeschi (Marion), Stéphane Freiss (Gilles), Françoise Fabian (Monique), Michael Lonsdale (Bernard), Géraldine Pailhas (Valérie), Antoine Chappey (Christophe), Marc Ruchmann (Mathieu), Jason Tavassoli (L'Américain/The American), Jean-Pol Brissart (Le Juge/The Judge)

Running Time: 90'

*8 femmes (8 Women)* 2002

Director: François Ozon

Production: Olivier Delbosc, Philippe Dugay, and Marc Missonnier for BIM/Canal+/CNC/Fidélité Productions/France 2 Cinéma/Gimages 5/Local Films

Screenplay: François Ozon and Marina de Van

Cinematography: Jeanne Lapoirie

Editing: Laurence Bawedin

Music: Krishna Levy

Production Design: Arnaud de Moleron

Costume design: Pascaline Chavanne

Sound: Pierre Gamet

Cast: Danielle Darrieux (Mamy), Catherine Deneuve (Gaby), Isabelle Huppert (Augustine), Emmanuelle Béart (Louise), Fanny Ardant (Pierrette), Virginie Ledoyen (Suzon), Ludivine Sagnier (Catherine), Firmine Richard (Madame Chanel), Dominique Lamure (Marcel)

Running Time: 111'

*Les amants criminels (Criminal Lovers)* 1999

Director: François Ozon

Production: Olivier Delbosc, and Marc Missonnier for Fidélité Productions/arte France Cinéma/StudioCanal/Euro Space/Canal+/Studio Images 5/CNC

Screenplay: François Ozon and Emmanuèle Bernheim

Cinematography: Pierre Stoeber

Editing: Monica Coleman

Music: Philippe Rombi

Production Design: Arnaud de Moleron

Costume Design: Pascaline Chavanne

Sound: Benoît Hillebrant

Cast: Natacha Rénier (Alice), Jérémie Renier (Luc), Predrag Manojlovic (l'homme de forêt [the woodsman]), Salim Kechiouche (Saïd), Yasmine Belmadi (Karim), Bernard

Maume (Le professeur), Jean-Louis Debard (night watchman), Catherine Vierende (Jewelry Saleswoman)

Running Time: 96'

*Angel* 2007

Director: François Ozon

Production: Olivier Delbosc, Christopher Granier-Deferre, Genyviève Lemal, Alexandre Lippens, Marc Missonnier, Tanya Seghatchian, and Bernatte Thomas for Fidélité Productions/France 2 Cinéma/FOZ

Screenplay: François Ozon and Martin Crimp (dialogue)

Cinematography: Denis Lenoir

Editing: Muriel Breton

Music: Philippe Rombi

Production Design: Katia Wyszok

Costume Design: Pascaline Chavanne

Sound: Pierre Mertens

Cast: Romola Garai (Angel), Sam Neill (Theo), Lucy Russell (Nora Howe-Nevison), Michael Fassbender (Esmé Howe-Nevison), Charlotte Rampling (Hermione), Jacqueline Tong (Mother Deverall), Janine Duvitski (Aunt Lottie), Christopher Benjamin (Lord Norley), Jemma Powell (Angelica)

Running Time: 134'

*Gouttes d'eau sur pierres brûlantes (Water Drops on Burning Rocks)* 2000

Director: François Ozon

Production: Olivier Delbosc, Christine Gozlan, Kenzô Horikoshi, Marc Missonnier and Alain Sarde for Fidélité Productions/Les Films Alain Sarde/Euro Space Inc

Screenplay: François Ozon and Emanuèle Bernheim

Cinematography: Jeanne Lapoirie

Editing: Laurence Bawedin and Claudine Bouché

Music: Ceská Filharmonie, Susi Dorée, Günter Loose

Production Design: Arnaud de Moleron

Costume Design: Emma Lebaill

Sound: Benoît Hillebrant

Cast: Bernard Giraudeau (Léopold), Malik Zidi (Franz), Ludivine Sagnier (Anna), Anna Thomson (Véra)

Running Time: 82'

*Sous le sable (Under the Sand)* 2000

Director: François Ozon

Production: Olivier Delbosc, Philippe Dugay, and Marc Missonnier for Fidélité Productions/France 2 Cinéma/FOZ

Screenplay: François Ozon, Emanuèle Bernheim, Marina de Van, and Marcia Romano

Cinematography: Antoine Héberlé and Jeanne Lapoirie

Editing: Laurence Bawedin

Music: Richard Boudarham and the Symphonic Orchestra Bell Arte

Production Design: Anne Bernard

Art Direction: Jérôme Bertin  
Costume Design: Pascaline Chavanne  
Sound: Jean-Luc Audy  
Cast: Charlotte Rampling (Marie Drillon), Bruno Cremer (Jean Drillon), Jacques Nolot (Vincent), Alexandra Stewart (Amanda), Pierre Vernier (Gérard), Andrée Tainsy (Suzanne)  
Running Time: 92'

*Le temps qui reste (Time to Leave)* 2005

Director: François Ozon  
Production: Olivier Delbosc, and Marc Missonnier for Fidélité Productions/France 2 Cinéma/FOZ  
Screenplay: François Ozon  
Cinematography: Jeanne Lapoirie  
Editing: Monica Coleman  
Music: Edouard Dubois, Philippe Escanecrabe, Pascal Vonhatten  
Art Direction: Katia Wyszkop  
Costume Design: Pascaline Chavanne  
Sound: Jean-Pierre Laforce and Brigitte Taillandier  
Cast: Melvil Poupaud (Romain), Jeanne Moreau (Laura), Valeria Bruni Tedeschi (Jany), Daniel Duval (Le père), Marie Rivière (La mère), Christian Sengewald (Sasha), Louis-Anne Hippeau (Sophie), Henri de Lorme (Le médecin), Walter Pagano (Bruno), Ugo Soussan Trabelsi (Romain enfant), Alba Gaïa Kraghede Bellugi (Sophie enfant)  
Running Time: 81'



## Vita

Amy Bertram was born in Memphis, Tennessee, to Katherine and Phillip Bertram. Her parents, both physicians and avid supporters of the arts, instilled in her the value of intellectual curiosity. Amy attended middle school at University School of Nashville and continued to Cookeville High School in Cookeville, Tennessee. As an undergraduate at Davidson College, she majored in French, studied abroad a year in Montpellier, France, with Dr. Harold Buckley, and completed requirements for pre-medicine. She cemented her love of French language and culture during her time in France. University courses piqued her interest in film and theater. She attended professional and amateur theatrical performances, and participated in an acting course. She has focused on French film and theater since her first semester as a Master's student at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, in 2002. Inspired by coursework with Drs. Chris Holmlund, Les Essif, and Charles Maland, she has pursued Cinema Studies as a second concentration in her PhD at UTK. She has attended the theater festival in Avignon, France, several times, volunteers annually at the Nashville Film Festival, has been invited to introduce a film at the Belcourt Theater, and has travelled to New York Film Festival twice. Since the fall of 2009, she has taught film at Watkins College in Nashville, Tennessee. This fall, she began teaching French at Belmont University. In Elements of Film Art at Watkins College, a course she teaches every semester, her students produce a photo-roman, a short film composed solely of still photographs, as their final project. She is passionate about watching, analyzing, and writing about film.