

NEW NEGOTIATIONS IN POST-2000 FRENCH CINEMA

by

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Abstract

This thesis addresses unlikely couple formations in French cinema between 2000 and 2004, in films which have the common motif of a main protagonist ‘unlikely couple’ whose bonding violates accepted social norms and whose union is conceived of as mismatched, inappropriate, or transgressive. Such relationships have subversive potential and may indicate tension, instability, the process of change, and transformations driven by different ways of thinking. The trope of the ‘unlikely couple’ is the model through which an in-depth analysis of eight chosen films indicates the ways in which their narrative strategies may articulate critical potential inherent in the films. The main lines of enquiry are gender and nation within post-2000 French society, examined through cultural discourses of the Republican values of love, marriage, equality and desire; through complex relationships between the symbolic and social order, and culture and society; through the intertwining of gender with other categories of analysis; and finally, through the interpretation and the contesting of dominant patterns of social construction in France. The study has its own limitations in that the number of works and theories discussed encompasses a diverse, but not insignificant, range of address of contemporary French film between 2000 and 2004. The films analysed in detail are diverse in style and treat contexts such as cultural and class difference, immigration, female subjectivity and miscommunication; they also explore perception and difference within cultural and intercultural experience.

The study addresses two main questions. Firstly, can ‘unlikely couple’ films be collectively identified as a group or genre to mount challenges to the French social hierarchy, in terms of gender, class, culture, or race? Secondly, do the chosen films contribute to the ongoing national debate about what it means to speak and to ‘be’ French in post-2000 France, socially, culturally and in relation to how the nation defines itself?

Part One examines *Le Goût des autres* (Agnès Jaoui, 2000), *Gouttes d'eau sur pierres brûlantes* (François Ozon, 2000), *Anatomie de l'enfer* (Catherine Breillat, 2004) and *Vendredi soir* (Claire Denis, 2002), as films that destabilise notions of gender and sexuality in the relationships of a couple, in an explicit fashion, through the different styles of the directors and also in relation to established *auteur* cinema.

Part Two is a study of *L'Esquive* (Abdellatif Kechiche, 2004), *Fureur* (Karim Dridi, 2003), *Inch'Allah dimanche* (Yamina Benguigui, 2001) and *Raja* (Jacques Doillon, 2003), films in all of which desire, language and cultural memory in interracial, immigrant and transnational couples are shown to be in a complex relationship with France as a nation.

A focal point of the film analysis within the study is the undertaking of a consideration of 'other than visual' interpretations of the chosen texts, rather than following established theories of the dominant scopic regime, principally through new readings of Gilles Deleuze, Judith Butler, Homi Bhabha, Luce Irigaray and Laura Marks. In the absence of any one prevailing film 'theory' with which to analyse new visual traditions, the chosen theoretical approach is diverse. Although it could prove problematic to take concepts intended for philosophical discourse into the field of cinema, the study shows that there are possibilities for doing so that reveal new ways of thinking about connections around hitherto unexplored areas within French cinema. The study establishes a common denominator running through the individual analyses of the chosen films to show that there are recurring themes and overlapping issues which provide an argumentative pattern within the multiple contexts of visibility in the films studied. From the specific encounter with the chosen films and within the stated period of the study, the thesis provides a new field of possibilities in which to examine 'unlikely couples' in French film, in accordance with postmodern critiques, moving beyond the limitations of

some existing theoretical approaches to French film and providing an understanding of strategies of perception through a more sensuous approach, going beyond theories of representation and towards an understanding of the embodied, cinematic experience.

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INTRODUCTION

Overview

New Negotiations in post-2000 French Cinema locates the particular trends and orientation of a group of French films in response to observations by critics that the early 2000s featured films that were a departure from 1990s' French cinema, with the latter's predominant address to social issues of underclass and marginal protagonists (documented in studies such as Phil Powrie's *French Cinema in the 1990s: Continuity and Difference*).¹ Prior to the mid-1990s French cinema had not addressed issues that embraced ethnic minorities and marginal communities (including the *banlieue* communities). However, a period followed in which the exclusion, exile and marginality of the 1990s appeared to be superseded by the search for a new national identity which subsequently required a re-negotiation of the traditions of French national cinema, as Martin O'Shaughnessy suggests.² In the article 'Le cinéma français, existe-t-il?'³ the *Cahiers du cinéma* critic Arnaud Desplechin argues that since the 1990s there has been a marked departure from the *auteur* tradition in French filmmaking,⁴ a viewpoint which fuels debates around the definition of French film and its national significance in the light of twenty-first century, contemporary European,

¹ For example, in Powrie, Phil (1999), *French Cinema in the 1990s: Continuity and Difference*.

² O'Shaughnessy, Martin (2003), 'Post-1995 French cinema: return of the social, return of the political?', *Modern & Contemporary France*, 11, 2, pp. 189-203.

³ Desplechin, Arnaud (2004), 'Le cinéma français, existe-t-il?', *Cahiers du cinéma*, no. 544.

⁴ In which a filmmaker exercises an authorship over his or her work which is present as an artistic signature in every film he or she makes and marks them as author of the work. Auteursm explores the notions of the distinctiveness of individual creative style and control in cinema, in which the director is in a unique position of a personal artistic perspective.

cross-cultural and transnational film productions. Also in the year 2000 the journalist Carlos Pardo published an article in *Le Monde Diplomatique* criticising the content of contemporary French cinema and protesting that the stylistic ambitions of certain directors were positioned “between naturalism at its most bleak, its most hopeless, and the mannerisms of the most affected formalism.”⁵ Pardo accused directors such as Catherine Breillat, Bruno Dumont, Phillippe Grandrieux, Gaspar Noé and François Ozon (amongst others) of embodying in their work “despair and defeatism...[a] fascination with the abject and the sordid,” which, to Pardo, indicated a deep cultural malaise.⁶ In films such as *Trouble Every Day* (Denis, 2001), *Twentynine palms* (Dumont, 2003), *Irreversible* (Noé, 2002) and *Anatomie de l'enfer* (Breillat, 2004) screen depictions of physicality are pushed to extreme and unwelcome limits, raising questions about what is acceptable imagery on screen and bringing French cinema into the global critical spotlight. Carrie Tarr⁷ points out that in the year 2000, while there were also trends towards documentary filmmaking in French cinema and many works were made by new directors of the movement *le jeune cinéma français*,⁸ two films were prominent in marking a departure for French women directors, namely *Le Goût des autres* (Agnes Jaoui, 2000) and *Baise-moi* (Coralie Trinh Thi and Virginie Despentes, 2000); the former because it was a mainstream comedy by a female director (successful comedies by women directors were few at this time) and the

⁵ Pardo, Carlos (2000), ‘Crime, pornographie et mépris du peuple: Des films français fascinés par le sordide,’ *Le Monde Diplomatique*, February, p. 28.

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ Tarr, Carrie with Rollet, Brigitte (2001), *Cinema and the Second Sex*, p. 283.

⁸ Trémois, Claude-Marie (1997), *Les enfants de la liberté : le jeune cinéma français des années 90*. This was a term to describe newcomers to the profession of film directing (not to be confused with *le jeune cinéma français* which, according to Trémois, was a movement started in 1987).

latter because it took the representation of sex to a new level in French women's film-making with an action-adventure, 'female-revenge' narrative (in which the two main women characters sexually torture and murder men).⁹ French cinema was also significantly marked in the early 2000s by the films of established women directors Catherine Breillat and Claire Denis, and by productions from new directors such as Yamina Benguigui, Abdellatif Kechiche and Karim Dridi, the latter three producing diasporic films featuring immigration and ethnic minority integration narratives which departed from the mid-1980s and 1990s genre of *beur* films (such as Mathieu Kassovitz's *La Haine*)¹⁰ with their emphasis on crime and violence (and which Tarr describes as a set of independently released films by and about the *beurs*, that is, by second-generation filmmakers of Maghrebi descent).¹¹

The films of established *auteur* directors Jacques Doillon, Claire Denis and Catherine Breillat, as well as more recent iconoclasts François Ozon, Karim Dridi, Abdellatif Kechiche, Yamina Benguigui and Agnès Jaoui, whose careers developed substantially during the early 2000s period, are the subject of discussion in the thesis and while there is clearly a conversation in progress amongst these directors, the films that are the subject of the study have been investigated not only for their subject material, but also for the specifically cinematic means through which the Frenchness of their material is conveyed to the audience. The thesis questions whether there is a discernable dialogue between

⁹ Tarr, Carrie with Rollet, Brigitte (2001), *Cinema and the Second Sex, Women's Filmmaking in France in the 1980s and 1990s*, p. 284.

¹⁰ Kassovitz, Mathieu (1995), *La Haine*.

¹¹ Tarr, Carrie (2005), *Reframing Difference: Beur and banlieue filmmaking in France*, p. 2.

a radical minority of provocative filmmakers of the early 2000s whose work has attracted a degree of scrutiny and success both in France and abroad. It is in this context that the impact of eight films from directors who have become high-profile, twenty-first century French filmmakers are analysed, offering perspectives on post-2000 French cinema and looking at different approaches to issues of aesthetics and generic traditions inclusive of both popular and art cinemas. The aim is to suggest fresh conceptual frameworks for the exploration of a range and diversity of films within a nominated period (2000-2004) and provide an innovative investigation into French films which feature an ‘unlikely couple’ of characters as main protagonists who are misfits or mismatched in their relationship and who have different social, cultural or racial backgrounds from each other.

‘The couple’ is a term with multiple meanings, as the function of sexual and romantic love can vary and, as Jeffrey Weeks states, it is “a historical unity shaped and determined by a multiplicity of forces and complex historical transformations.”¹² Kate Ince describes the couple as “the staple theme of French drama,”¹³ referring to its cultural importance, while Ginette Vincendeau identifies a recurring type of couple formation in French classical films of the 1930s which she terms the “incestuous couple” (that is, a protagonist couple formed by an older man and a much younger woman), a formation historically determined in part by the patriarchal domination of ‘the father’ in French society and the French family

¹² Weeks, Jeffrey (1981), *Sex, Politics and Society*, p. xi.

¹³ Ince, Kate (2008), ed., *Five Directors*, p. 112.

and marriage legislation of the time.”¹⁴ In *Cinema and the Second Sex* Tarr and Brigitte Rollet comment on the development of Anglo-American feminist film criticism in the 1970s and the significant number of French films made by female and male directors of that period that question gender roles within the couple and that highlight female desire from a woman’s point of view (they quote Eric Rohmer and Jacques Rivette as male directors who deal sympathetically with the filming of women’s desires in the couple).¹⁵ Tarr and Rollet also comment on French cinema as being ‘less moralistic’ than Hollywood film in its treatment of narratives of the couple.¹⁶ They group 1980s’ French films that feature traditional or modern couples as centering on changing and reversal of gender roles in alternative lifestyles, and they then identify a trend in 1990s’ couples in film as being ‘less optimistic,’ as there is “a continuing failure of and desire for the impossible couple”¹⁷ as the films do not challenge heterosexual expectations of romance and there is a failure of the couple as women are not liberated from heterosexual desire. Tarr has authored a study of films of the period 1998-2006 in Francophone cinema¹⁸ but there is to my knowledge no existing study that takes both unlikely couples and French film as its twin subjects in a study of the stated timespan. This new study works towards an appreciation of unlikely couple films

¹⁴ Burch, Noël and Sellier, Geneviève (2002), ‘The “Funny War” of the Sexes in French Cinema,’ in Williams, Alan (ed.), *Film and Nationalism*, pp.152-153. Burch and Sellier document three hundred French films from their research of one thousand films from the 1930s that feature this significant incestuous couple formation.

¹⁵ Tarr, Carrie with Rollet, Brigitte (2001), ‘Couples.’ In *Cinema and the Second Sex, Women’s Filmmaking in France in the 1980s and 1990s*, p. 84.

¹⁶ *ibid*, p. 82.

¹⁷ *ibid*, p. 109.

¹⁸ Tarr, Carrie (2007b), ‘The Porosity of the Hexagon: Border Crossings in Contemporary French Cinema,’ *Studies in European Cinema*, 4, 1, pp. 7–20, focuses on French ethnic minority film in the period 1998-2006, in a study of Francophone film.

as a specific group in French cinema of this period, their signification being located within a wider, alternative vision of contemporary issues of a changing French national identity.

Vincendeau suggests that “the hallmark of early twenty-first century French cinema is ethnic and sexual diversity,”¹⁹ and the thesis is divided accordingly into two parts loosely reflecting these divisions and it is on this basis that the films were selected rather than by genre categories. The thesis investigates a variety of couplings analysed from an awareness of gender (as the central material concerns the romantic relations between couples) in a range of unions in contemporary French society, with the emphasis on socio-historical and cultural factors involved in the couple formations and with two of the films, namely *Anatomie de l'enfer* (Catherine Breillat, 2004) and *Gouttes d'eau sur pierres brûlantes* (François Ozon, 2000) being specifically studies of transgressive sexualities.

Part One is an examination of *Le Goût des autres* (Agnès Jaoui, 2000), *Gouttes d'eau sur pierres brûlantes* (François Ozon, 2000), *Vendredi soir* (Claire Denis, 2003), and *Anatomie de l'enfer* (Catherine Breillat, 2004), which are four films that destabilise notions of gender and sexuality through innovative cinematic styles. The nature of desire is examined through configurations of cinematic space, alternative scopic regimes and embodied tactile-spatial experience, and new developments are signalled relating to gender in French culture and society in the complex relationships between the symbolic and social order; culture and society; the intertwining of gender with other categories of analysis and

¹⁹ Vincendeau, Ginette (2007), ‘French Cinema since the 1980s,’ in Cook Pam (ed.), *The Cinema Book*, p. 206.

interpretation; and the contesting of dominant patterns of social construction in France. The analysis and arguments in each chapter are discussed in a focus on the trope of the unlikely couple featured in each film.

Part Two is a study of films that are intrinsically hybrid products in which desire, language and cultural memory in interracial, immigrant and transnational couples are shown to be in complex relationships with France as a nation in a study of desire and language in *L'Esquive*, (Abdellatif Kechiche, 2004), *Fureur* (Karim Dridi, 2003), *Inch'Allah dimanche* (Yamina Benguigui, 2001) and *Raja* (Jacques Doillon, 2003) in all of which diaspora and hybridity give voice to the immigrant and ethnic minority experience of French nation, both integrating and affirming the right *not* to integrate into French culture. Interracial romance is the focus on films by a particular group of post-2000 diasporic directors in works that provide a perspective on the changing significance of minority ethnic difference in the period in French cinema history in question. Unlikely matches (such as the characters Raja and Fred in *Raja*, or Lydia and Krimo in *L'Esquive*) and the pluralities and contradictions inherent in the four films of Part Two indicate the extent to which cultural productions of diaspora defy simple categorisation and continue to make significant contributions to contemporary French cinema. The thesis shows how the films project, dramatise and fantasise national identity and what role they play in constructing the sense or the image of the French nation in their themes, motifs, and preoccupations with Frenchness. The thesis provides a body of work on gender and sexuality in post-2000 French film which fills a gap in the present literature, as although there are existing gender studies of 1980s'

and 1990s' French film there is a reworking of film practices (in generic and thematic terms) in the post-2000 unlikely couple group of films which enables comparisons to be made and theoretical frameworks to be suggested in order to establish parameters against which previous and future periods of this area of French cinema history can be measured.

Theoretical Approach

The decision to examine the complex link between film and French society places the work within a long tradition of studies of French film culture as a focus for the representation of French national identity, the construction of a national imaginary, and what it means to 'be' French within changing historical negotiations of Frenchness and in the relationship between the nation and film in terms of national identity. Although cinema is a work of fiction and therefore its reflection of the nation has to be considered through the filter of its aesthetic strategies and artistic value, the vision of society offered by a national cinema can be fruitfully used in combination with questions of aesthetics and genres. As Susan Hayward states in her seminal work *French National Cinema*: "In the post-1981 period, the regressive and narcissistic character of cinema ... reveals a nation devoid of its own ideology and a society with a highly restricted culture lacking any clear sense of identity."²⁰ Hayward argues that film mobilises and anchors conflicting notions of national identity and she stipulates that the idea of patrimony and mother country have been especially enracinated in French

²⁰ Hayward, Susan (2005), *French National Cinema*, 2nd ed, p. 290.

cinematic history during the development of its narrative cinema. National cinemas are often involved in regional and transnational productions and this diversity is echoed by Hayward who argues that through the existence of mainstream and peripheral cinemas, even when referring to a specific national cinema “there is not just one cinema, but several,”²¹ for although national cinema is frequently associated with the idea of films produced within a certain nation state, it is more often and intrinsically a hybrid product and French cinema, as Phil Powrie suggests, “is not all that easy to define.”²² The underpinning theoretical concept of a national cinema is informed by prominent film studies scholars such as Thomas Elsaesser and Andrew Higson. Despite the complexity of establishing the 'national' of a cinema at the level of theoretical debate, the application of Higson’s definition of the term ‘national cinema,’ in which the cultural quality of some specific films and directors privileges a definition of national cinema as a medium representing the French nation and its preoccupations, is used in the approach to the understanding of French national identity in the thesis.²³ Whilst Elsaesser argues that Hollywood is a major component of most national film cultures where audience expectations shaped largely by Hollywood are exploited by domestic producers,²⁴ Higson summarises the concept of defining national cinema in terms of it corresponding to a domestic film industry and therefore being concerned with the location and the ownership of the production.²⁵

²¹ Hayward, Susan (2005), *French National Cinema*, 2nd ed., p. 6.

²² Powrie, Phil ed., (2006), *The Cinema of France*, p. 1.

²³ Higson, Andrew (1995), *Waving the Flag: Constructing National Cinema in Britain*, p. 4-5.

²⁴ Elsaesser, Thomas (2005), *European Cinema Face to Face with Hollywood*.

²⁵ Higson, Andrew (1989), ‘The Concept of National Cinema,’ *Screen*, 30, 4, Autumn, pp.36-46.

More recently Tarr has argued that a major focus of French cinema studies has been “the canonisation of films, filmmakers, film movements and film genres that contribute to the vexed notion of French cinema as a ‘national’ cinema,²⁶ for although national cinema was previously (generally) associated with the idea of films produced within a certain nation state, in today's global film marketplace a national cinema also offers the prospect of a raised profile for both the national culture and the film directors, as well as an increased visibility in the art-house cinema circuit and international film festivals. Vincendeau writes that most of the contemporary literature on French national identity stems from English academic study,²⁷ noting that existing literature ignores the perspective of language as a key parameter of Frenchness in film, a point which is discussed at length in the thesis chapters on *L'Esquive* and also in *Raja*, and (to some extent) in *Fureur*. Language is also pivotal in the theatricality and scripting of *Le Goût des autres*; the voice-over in *Anatomie de l'enfer*; the lack of dialogue in *Vendredi soir* (Vincendeau remarks that silence is as significant as spoken language);²⁸ and the inclusion of an iconic French (Françoise Hardy) song in *Inch'Allah dimanche*.²⁹

Literature specifically on ‘the couple’ in film is mainly concerned with the dominant Hollywood model which makes a significant contribution to the process of structuring models of modern romantic coupling focusing on conventions of romantic story-telling through models of courtship and marriage, and promoting

²⁶ Tarr, Carrie (2007a), ‘Introduction French Cinema: ‘Transnational’ Cinema?’ *Modern & Contemporary France*, 15, 1, pp. 3-7.

²⁷ Vincendeau, Ginette (2011), ‘The Frenchness of French Cinema: The language of national identity from the regional to the transnational,’ in Higbee, Will and Leahy, Sarah, *Studies in French Cinema UK Perspectives 1985-2012*, p. 341.

²⁸ *Ibid*, p. 344.

²⁹ Hardy Françoise, (1963), *Le premier bonheur du jour*, music by Renard, Jean

its stars as romantic ideals in a form of modern, popular ritual in which films define and demonstrate socially-sanctioned ways of ‘falling in love.’³⁰ Virginia Wexman’s model of popular narrative cinema provides a focus for the romantic practices of its audiences³¹ and Stanley Cavell’s study of melodrama and comedy, emphasises the importance of romance to human fulfillment³² whereas David Grossvogel’s work *Marianne and the Puritan : transformations of the couple in French and American films*³³ is a study of genre in comedy and romantic drama from the 1930s to the mid-1990s and is concerned with a direct comparison of American and French cultures with issues of female desire in film.³⁴ This literature was useful in grounding the research on historical contexts of ‘the couple’ but where the thesis significantly departs from these works is that it does not support models of romance to which the audience would necessarily aspire or identify, as the unlikely couples in the study do not simply offer the promise of Hollywoodian romantic fulfillment with its formulaic ‘happy ending’ (which usually ends in marriage). The (often) transgressive makeup of the unlikely couples provides a more diverse account of the power of romantic love, as for example in *Gouttes d’eau sur pierres brûlantes*, in which heterosexuality is portrayed as failed, as the male protagonist (Franz) rejects it for a homosexual relationship.

³⁰ Wexman, Virginia (1993), *Creating the Couple: Love, Marriage and Hollywood Performance*, p. 8.

³¹ *ibid*, p. 220.

³² Cavell, Stanley (1981), *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage*.

³³ Grossvogel, David (2005), *Marianne and the Puritan : transformations of the couple in French and American films*.

³⁴ Tarr, Carrie with Rollet, Brigitte (2001), *Cinema and the Second Sex, Women’s Filmmaking in France in the 1980s and 1990s*, p. 83.

The choice of films was made between 2003 and 2004 and was effected soon after the release of the individual films on DVD. There was little literature and scholarly study available for research on the chosen films prior to 2004 and the viewing of *Anatomie de l'enfer*, *Fureur* and *Raja* was particularly problematic outside France as DVD productions were, at first, not available. However, from 2004 onwards a greater interest was expressed in the chosen films by theorists and audiences which in many ways suggests that there was 'something different' about them from 1990s' French cinema which rendered the experience of them so vivid to the viewer, and which merited further investigation. The thesis follows a text-based approach to national cinema considering the narratives, style and perspectives of the films in terms of interpretations of national character and construction of nationhood (in this case, of 'Frenchness') within the couple scenarios studied. It was decided to devote a chapter of the thesis to each film in order to maximise the detail in the readings, within the limits imposed by a thesis and in order to facilitate an in-depth and productive investigation into 'unlikely couple' films in the chapters that follow, some initial stipulations and conditions require consideration in an account of foundational research elements that provide a framework for the critical and analytical investigations. These include: accounts of critical and theoretical approaches used in the thesis with reference to established and recent research in the field; an explanation of the thesis methodologies and an overview of its organisation and structure; and finally, a brief perspective on recent French cinema leading up to the 2000s, in order to situate the thesis within French cinema history. The point of departure and focal

point for the analysis of the eight films in the study is to turn away from Lacanian theories of subjectivity and representation typical of previous approaches to film analysis and adopt a varied approach to the consideration of ‘other than visual’ interpretations through the narrative of the unlikely couple.

Diverse theoretical approaches are therefore employed in the absence of any one film ‘theory’ with which to analyse new visual traditions. The aim of this method is to pursue the textual analysis of each film in as much depth as the length of the thesis permits in order to identify any links between the individual films and to discover any recurrent themes or overlapping arguments between the films that suggests that they could be regarded as a group of films representative of ‘something new’ in early 2000s French film. Consequently, if it were possible to provide an argumentative pattern within the multiple contexts of visibility in the films studied, does this indicate that it is possible to demonstrate a re-negotiation of the relationship between nation, society and gender in post-2000 French cinema, through the different representations of Frenchness, in films viewed by an audience which is itself rapidly changing, as the French film industry remains “in dialogue with the national as well as with the global and the local.”³⁵

Methodologies

In pursuing an approach centred on textual analysis the thesis engages philosophical theories such as Gilles Deleuze's concept of temporality, set out in

³⁵ Tarr, Carrie (2007a), 'Introduction French Cinema: 'Transnational' Cinema?', *Modern & Contemporary France*, 15, 1, pp. 4-5.

his seminal work *Cinema 2: The Time Image*.³⁶ Deleuze bypasses psychoanalytic and semiological film theories that would locate the meaning of film beneath the surface level of signs, and his philosophy is that film has the potential to create its own fluid movements and temporalities. These movements, as Amy Herzog states, while related to formal elements of rhythm and duration within the film itself, cannot be reduced to specific techniques or concrete images.³⁷ Deleuze's work on film and nation provides the foundation for a study by David Martin-Jones who explores the complex, and often contradictory, ways in which time, space and national identity intersect in film. Martin-Jones's readings of unusual narratives through the Time-image have relevance to the thesis in the light of the new and complex approaches to the representation of national identity.³⁸

A jumbled, fragmented, multiplied or reversed film narrative ... can be interpreted as an expression of the difficulty of narrating national identity at a time of historical crisis or transformation....Such narratives formally demonstrate a nation's exploration of its own "national narrative."³⁹

An important source of consideration of the 'cinema of sensation' is Martine Beugnet's *Cinema and Sensation: French Film and the Art of Transgression* (2007).⁴⁰ Given that Beugnet is concerned with filmmakers who have been

³⁶ Deleuze, Gilles (1992b), *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, transl. by Tomlinson, Hugh and Habberjam, Barbara, (first published 1986).

³⁷ (2000), 'Images of Thought and Acts of Creation: Deleuze, Bergson, and the Question of Cinema,' *Invisible Culture*, http://www.rochester.edu/in_visible_culture/issue3/herzog.htm, accessed 03/08/2010

³⁸ Martin-Jones, David (2006), *Deleuze, Cinema and National Identity*.

³⁹ *ibid*, p. 1.

⁴⁰ Beugnet, Martine (2007), *Cinema and Sensation: French Film and the Art of Transgression*

labelled as the new French ‘extremism’ or a *cinema du corps* (where physicality occurs in brutally intimate, visceral terms through conjunctions of sex, blood, flesh and violence), she is not only concerned with the violent or the shocking and engages with haptic forms in the medium of film and the unsettling of conventional visual practices. As she states “it is the materiality of the medium of the moving image that first comes to the fore.”⁴¹ Her concept of a ‘cinema of sensation’ involves an approach to filmmaking (and, by extension, to the analysis of film) that gives precedence to “the corporeal, material dimension of the medium.”⁴² Her aesthetic approach to French film analysis offers a different perspective on contemporary debates around culture and identity, which draw on the works of Laura Marks (*The Skin of the Film*, 2000) and have their roots in phenomenology.⁴³ The thesis uses the theoretical framework of film phenomenology and the articulations of ‘cinema of sensations’ in an attempt to analyse how certain films in Part One elicit a corporeal response from the viewer.

In Part Two of the thesis films point to the reinvention of French identity through interraciality and changing attitudes to ethnicity, class and gender in relationships. Addressing the challenges to the ‘national’ posed by the work of filmmakers whose own identity is hybridised and unstable, Hamid Naficy’s work into independent, transnational or accented filmmaking’ which proposes that the ‘accented’ texts of migrant filmmakers are informed by their lived personal experiences of displacement and deterritorialisation has been, as Tarr states, “instrumental in generating recognition of the work of migrant and diasporic

⁴¹ *ibid*, p.3.

⁴² *ibid*, p.32.

⁴³ Marks, Laura (2000), *The Skin of the Film; Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*;

filmmakers across a range of countries and cultures.”⁴⁴ Focusing on films by diasporic directors who have been working in France, filmmakers such as Kechiche, Dridi and Benguigui combine elements drawn from both French and Maghrebi cinematic traditions and histories to question the validity of both French national cinema and French identity as fixed entities. Three of the films of Part Two feature interracial couples whilst the fourth is the portrayal of the problems faced by an Algerian couple integrating into 1970s French society. In *Cinema Colonialism Postcolonialism*⁴⁵ Dina Sherzer argues that gender is central to an understanding of the relationship between France and its attitude towards postcolonialism.⁴⁶ Sherzer analyses the realities behind the images of the nation's past and present. Through an examination of France and its colonies, multiethnic contemporary France, and cinematic discourses that are being produced about France's colonial past to examine how French cinema has represented the encounter of French citizens with individuals from former colonies during the colonial era; they examine how French cinema has portrayed and has come to terms with the immigration of former colonial subjects to France.

The new mode of post-2000 filmmaking that is demonstrated in the thesis offers more than the depiction of sexual and social dysfunction since although there is a focus in the study on the evaluation of individual film productions there is further exploration of the medium of film itself as the films generate profound, often challenging sensory experiences, which, despite being connected more

⁴⁴Tarr, Carrie (2007a), Introduction French Cinema: ‘Transnational’ Cinema?, *Modern & Contemporary France*, 15, 1, p. 4.

⁴⁵ Sherzer, Dina (ed), (1996), *Cinema, Colonialism, Postcolonialism*.

⁴⁶ *ibid*, pp. 145-146.

loosely through commonalities of content and technique, are rendered via a radical, innovative use of film style. It is this stylistic treatment that makes the films chosen for the study so striking in their affect, both with regards to their stylistic content and to the way in which they are received by audiences. To this end the thesis examines the contexts of contemporary Frenchness through the relationships of unlikely couples and in relation to cinema of the body in the period and set of selected films, offering an account of the recent emergence and tendencies of this filmmaking; exploring the directors' styles and motifs and their critical reception; and resituating the films within recent theoretical debates using a core approach of textual analysis.

Situating Post-2000 French cinema

An approach to French cinema that was developed by a group of critics who formed the *Cahiers du cinéma* journal from the 1950s onwards, including the founder and director of the journal François Truffaut, focused on the film director as the main author of a film (the *auteur*), with importance placed on schools of thought and film movements (such as the New Wave). *Auteur* theory was derived from Truffaut's influential essay published in 1954 in *Cahiers du Cinéma*.⁴⁷ The controversial essay signalled the development of the journal's auteurist practice by rejecting the literary films of the 'Tradition de qualité' (the mainstream cinema of the 1950s) in favour of a *cinéma des auteurs* in which filmmakers expressed a more personal creative vision. The *Cahiers du cinéma* journal provided its

⁴⁷ *Cahiers du cinéma* was founded by André Bazin, Jacques Doniol-Valcroze and Lo Duca in April 1951.

contributors with a collective identity which championed certain filmmakers and criticised others and the work published in the 1950s was essential to the grounding and development of film theory and criticism in French cinema.⁴⁸ Truffaut criticised established directors such as René Clément, Yves Allègre, and Jean Dellanoy, who produced films based mainly on literary adaptations which relied heavily on scripting rather than the film being an art-form with its own specific codes of meaning. A possible comparison might be drawn here with the article Pardo wrote about French cinema⁴⁹ as a reaction to the works of directors in the early 2000s which in some way signals a departure in a similar fashion to the innovations of the 1960s New Wave movement described by François Truffaut in ‘Une certaine tendance du cinéma français.’⁵⁰

In *The French Cinema Book* Michael Temple and Michael Witt suggest that French cinema in the 1980s and early 1990s is loosely dominated by two trends in a return to studio aesthetics, namely heritage film (*cinéma de patrimoine*) and the *cinéma du look*.⁵¹ Powrie also identifies these two movements as being a predominant feature of this period,⁵² while Vincendeau adds a third trend (as a counter-trend) of *cinéma beur* which documents the difficulties of ethnic minority Maghrebi integration into French society, in particular through young male

⁴⁸ Holmes, Diana and Ingram, Robert (1998), *François Truffaut*, p. 26.

⁴⁹ Pardo, Carlos (2000), ‘Crime, pornographie et mépris du peuple: Des films français fascinés par le sordide,’ *Le Monde Diplomatique*, February, p. 28.

⁵⁰ Truffaut, François (1954), ‘Une certaine tendance du cinéma français.’ *Cahiers du cinéma*, 31, pp.15–29.

⁵¹ Temple, Michael and Witt, Michael (2004), *The French Cinema Book*, p. 189.

⁵² Powrie, Phil ed. (1999), *French Cinema in the 1990s: Continuity and Difference*, p. 2.

protagonists from the disadvantaged *banlieue* areas.⁵³ Mathieu Kassovitz's *La Haine* (1995), Thomas Gilou's *Rai* (1995), Jean-François Richet's *État des lieux* (1995) and Karim Dridi's *Bye-Bye* (1996) confirmed a new preoccupation with the reality of immigration issues and the cultural mix of ethnic minorities in France's poorer suburbs.

It was not until the mid-1990s, in the socio-historical context of the aftermath of the defeat of François Mitterand's socialist administration and the election of a right-wing government (which resulted in increased state funding for the film industry) that these distinctive trends began to emerge in French film. Heritage films often stem from literary adaptations and are made on a large budget with substantial French state sponsorship. The films feature well-known stars (such as Gérard Dépardieu) and achieved national and international success, reinstating the *tradition de qualité*⁵⁴ that filmmakers of the New Wave had rejected in the late 1950s and 1960s for more experimental productions. Films such as Jean-Paul Rappeneau's *Cyrano de Bergerac* (1990) and Claude Berri's adaptation of Emile Zola's *Germinal* (1993) appealed to a large national audience; through depictions of social poverty in an industrial setting (*Germinal*) or through rural settings, such as Berri's *Jean de Florette* (1985) and *Manon des Sources* (1986). The *cinéma du look*, including Luc Besson's two films *Subway* (1985) and *Nikita* (1990); Jean-Jacques Beineix's *Diva* (1981) and *37°2 le matin* (1986); and Léos Carax's *Boy meets Girl* (1984), *Mauvais sang* (1986) and *Les Amants du Pont Neuf* (1991) also

⁵³ Vincendeau, Ginette (2007), 'French Cinema since the 1980s,' in Cook Pam (ed.), *The Cinema Book*, pp.204-205.

⁵⁴ A reference to the mainstream French cinema of the day. Holmes, Diana and Ingram, Robert (1998), *François Truffaut*, p. 22..

appealed to a wide audience, both in France and globally (in particular Besson's thriller, *Nikita*, which was remade in Hollywood in 1993). Full of implausible characters and plots and (often) highly-stylised action sequences the *cinéma du look* films were marked not only by a preoccupation with style, surface and escapism, but with an avoidance of the representation of issues of social problems in contemporary France.⁵⁵

The 1990s also featured a marked relaxation of narrative structure in film, repeated in the spatial trajectory of the characters themselves, particularly in the recurrence of nomadic, wandering figures such as those in *Les Nuits fauves* (Cyril Collard, 1992), *Les Corps ouverts* (Sébastien Lifshitz, 1998), *Western* (Manuel Poirier, 1997), *Louise (Take 2)* (Siegfried, 1998) and *La Vie rêvée des anges* (Erick Zonca, 1997). In the mid-1990s, more markedly than in any preceding generation of French filmmakers, the cinematic gaze shifted from bourgeois inner-Paris to focus on the *banlieue*, on provincial regions, and to document the lives of those who had been previously marginalised in terms of cinematic representation, notably women, the unemployed and those from migrant backgrounds, which subject matter Myrto Konstantarakos describes as:

...an 'other' France, non-Parisian, non-intellectual, a France of everyday people, the business people of provincial cities of little interest, the underprivileged social classes, the excluded, the unemployed, the homeless, the products of the infamous *fracture*

⁵⁵ Although the exceptions were Leo Carax's *Mauvais sang* (1986) which had suggestions of the AIDS virus in the plot, and *Les Amants du Pont Neuf* (1999) which featured homeless people.

sociale '... a whole people who haven't had a place on French cinema screens for a long time.⁵⁶

During this period *le jeune cinéma* movement⁵⁷ was identified by French film critics and historians and has become synonymous with relatively low-budget, director-driven and character-centred films which have brought a new kind of realism to French cinema often set against the backdrop of the *fracture sociale* of late twentieth century French society. As well as such critical successes such as *La Haine*, other films of *le jeune cinéma* movement include Erick Zonca's *La Vie rêvée des anges* (1998), Bruno Dumont's *La Vie de Jésus* (1997) and Manuel Poirier's *Western* (1997). The movement rejuvenated the notion of genre, in particular genres such as the *film de route* and the *film de rue*, the *polar*, and the musical. Rick Altman, in a 1984 article,⁵⁸ proposed an approach to genre following a semantic/syntactic approach to film genre. He recognised that the development of film studies had seen a swing from 'genre as history' to 'genre as (semiotic) theory' an approach which largely ignores industry practices and concentrates on thematics. As Powrie states, the popular French cinema genres like the *polar* and mainstream comedy are staple genres,⁵⁹ but as the study shows, the new films break away from fixed genres and tend towards hybridity.

Contributions to literature on French cinema history include the writings of Serge Daney, an influential critic of the French film journal *Cahiers du cinéma*,

⁵⁶ Konstantarakos, Myrto (1998), 'Retour du politique dans le cinéma français contemporain?' *French Studies Bulletin*, 68, 1, pp. 1-5.

⁵⁷ Powrie, Phil ed., (2006), *The Cinema of France* p. 9.

⁵⁸ Altman's article is appended in the following: Altman, Rick (1999), *Film/Genre*, London: bfi..

⁵⁹ Powrie, Phil ed., (2006), *The Cinema of France*, p. 3.

who also constructed a personal theory of the image, and to whom Michael Temple and Michael Witt attribute a chapter, written by James Williams, in *The French Cinema Book*.⁶⁰ Williams associates Daney's work with a 'return to the self' which opened up the field of gender studies in French film to writers that succeeded Daney, such as Nicole Brenez who uses arguments for the body as aesthetic effect in cinema, grouping films in terms of the treatment they accord the body rather than according to genre.⁶¹ The growth of globalisation, exclusion, ethnic diversity and the challenging of French national identities, along with the blurring of gender and genre definitions are issues that, rather than being addressed in the narrative or representational mode, are often literally embedded in the film's body, imprinted in its texture and its combination of images and sound.

More recently Martine Beugnet proposed an aesthetics of sensation, where "the material dimension of a cinematic work is initially given precedence over its expository and mimetic/realistic functions."⁶² This is contrary to general assumptions about French cinema with its long-standing scenario-based and dialogue-driven mode of filmmaking and, as Beugnet points out, what these new French films exemplify is a tactile, sensual medium whereby spectators engage with the images and sounds of the film as compositions and with film as the object of perception. Beugnet writes of a 'cinema of sensation' in which such a corpus of films is also invested in a "celebration of the sensual, reflexive bond of

⁶⁰ Brenez, Nicole (1998), *De la figure en générale et du corps en particulier: l'invention figurative au cinéma*, cited by Williams, James S. (2004), 'Debates 1960-2004,' in Temple, Michael and Witt, Michael, *The French Cinema Book*, pp. 270-271.

⁶¹ *ibid.*

⁶² Beugnet, Martine (2007), *Cinema and Sensation: French Film and the Art of Transgression*.

subjective body to objective world,”⁶³ for whilst such films shock the viewer, simultaneously, as Beugnet suggests, the spectator experiences a certain viewing pleasure from their multisensory appeal, as the films become “a *sensual* and *sensible* expansion’ of ourselves.”⁶⁴ As Beugnet suggests,⁶⁵ a specific sense of momentum comes from the release of a number of films post-2000, such as *Baise-moi* (Coralie Trinh Thi and Virginie Despentes, 2000), *demonlover* (Olivier Assayas, 2002), *Trouble Every Day* (Claire Denis, 2002), *Vendredi soir* (Denis, 2002), and *Anatomie de l’enfer* (Catherine Breillat, 2004) all of which possess a characteristic awareness of cinema’s sensory impact and transgressive nature, as well as a willingness to exploit the capacity to have both a visceral and intellectual effect on the spectator. These films, if explored as forms of embodied thought, offer alternative ways of approaching questions central to socio-cultural debates.

Thesis Conventions

Some quotations from French texts have remained in French. Titles of French articles, as well as film titles, have also been left in French in order to facilitate the location of original material. Where the translation of a French written text was used, the name of the translator and the English title also appears in the reference. For a number of articles sourced from the daily and weekly French press, the page number is not given. This is because the articles were

⁶³ *ibid*, p. 32.

⁶⁴ *ibid*, p. 124.

⁶⁵ Beugnet, Martine (2007), *Cinema and Sensation: French Film and the Art of Transgression*, p. 14.

sourced from the BIFI (Bibliothèque du film)⁶⁶ and are in the unpaginated format in which copies of the articles were provided.

⁶⁶ Bibliothèque du Film, 100 rue du Faubourg Saint-Antoine, 75012 Paris

PART ONE

Chapter 1. *Le Goût des autres* (Agnes Jaoui, 2000)

Chapter 2. *Gouttes d'eau sur pierres brûlantes* (François Ozon, 2000)

Chapter 3. *Vendredi soir* (Claire Denis, 2002)

Chapter 4. *Anatomie de l'enfer* (Catherine Breillat, 2004)

Introduction

Clara and Castella, the unlikely couple in *Le Goût des autres*, are separated by the cultural snobbism surrounding tastes in high art and popular culture, in a film which examines some of the problems people of different tastes face by stepping outside their traditional boundaries. Pierre Bourdieu's study *Distinction*⁶⁷ concerns the operation of taste in French society and addresses itself to the study of taste and aesthetics, however, Paul DiMaggio extends Bourdieu's theory of taste in his study, *Classification in Art*,⁶⁸ and considers processes by which genre distinctions are created, ritualised and eroded, and tastes are produced as part of the sense-making and boundary-defining activities of social groups. Agnès Jaoui's film reflects on these activities in a critical look at French provincial society and exclusionist hierarchies.

In *Gouttes d'eau sur pierres brûlantes*, the couple Franz and Léopold play out gender boundaries in new ways, offering less heterocentric visions which suggests sexual fluidity. François Ozon's filmmaking style in *Gouttes d'eau sur*

⁶⁷ Bourdieu Pierre, (1984), *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*.

⁶⁸ DiMaggio Paul, (1987), 'Classification in Art,' *American Sociological Review*, 52, pp. 440-455.

pierres brûlantes belongs to familiar cinematic *auteur* traditions, but is rendered unfamiliar by taking the film into queer territory and problematising identity as fixed, with destabilising notions of gender and sexuality. I identify multiple heterosexual and homosexual triangles existing simultaneously in the unstable couple formations of the four characters in the film through their various relationships, in a new reading of a dialogue from the works of René Girard in *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*;⁶⁹ Eve Kosovsky Sedgwick in *Between Men*;⁷⁰ and Judith Butler in ‘Capacity.’⁷¹ Through the works of these three authors on triangular relationships and the complex negotiation of heterosexual desire within erotic triangles of desire, I examine Ozon’s close attention to style and theatricality in a film which shows the breakdown of both homosexual and heterosexual relationships, with the result that I reveal significant prejudices in the positioning and representation of ‘triangular’ desire in negotiations of relationships which take place within the triangular relationship, rather than remaining locked within and repeating the same circle of dominance. This refers to cultural formations and the lack of taking into account certain vacillating notions of sexual orientation, particularly in the case of the unstable identities and ‘identities-in-process’ which I identify in the film. When these descriptions or categories are imported by other cultures (the film is an adaptation of a Rainer Werner Fassbinder play, originally in German), tensions arise between the indigenous sexual cultures and the newly imported discourses.

⁶⁹ Girard, René (1965), *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*.

⁷⁰ Sedgwick, Eve Kosovsky (1985), *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*.

⁷¹ Butler, Judith (2002), ‘Capacity,’ in Barber, Stephen and Clark, David (eds), *Regarding Sedgwick: essays on queer culture and critical theory*, London: Routledge, pp. 109-119.

Vendredi soir is explored through the theoretical writings of Laura Marks in her two works *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (2000) and *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media* (2002)⁷² on the subject of haptical imagery and the experience of sensual memorising within visual representation. It is the style of Denis's cinematography in *Vendredi soir* that suggests how images of the couple Jean and Laure might be interpreted by the senses of the spectator's body, in terms of the 'touch,' rather than the 'gaze,' of the camera. Denis's unfamiliar use of space and close camerawork raise the issue of *Vendredi soir* as a film that takes a different direction from traditional *auteur* cinema, offering more of a bodily relationship between spectator and image, rather than an audience identification with a figure on screen, through the use of *haptic* images, so that images, colours and sound are experienced through the senses, rather than through the distancing effect of an 'objectifying gaze.' Martine Beugnet, in *Cinema and Sensation: French Film and the Art of Transgression*,⁷³ argues for recurring stylistic figures and motifs in an emphasis on the corporeality of film, as opposed to French traditions of scenario or dialogue-based cinema and her concept of a 'cinema of sensation' gives

⁷² Marks L., (2000), *The Skin of the Film; Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*; and (2002), *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media*. Since the beginning of the 1990s Laura Marks' research developed an understanding of perceptive strategies along definitions and interrogations of a more sensuous approach to film. Her initial notion of enquiry involves the theories of Charles Pierce and Henri Bergson, though specifically her understanding of the sensuous approach shows influences of characteristically Deleuzian interpretations. Her work bears continuities with a number of traditions: for instance, she draws on the term haptic cinema from Noel Burch's work (1986), 'Primitivism and the Avant-Gardes: A Dialectical Approach', in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*, cited in Marks (2000), p. 171, and, as Deleuzian cinematic philosophy cannot be described as a *theory* of spectatorship as such, she turns towards both Maurice Merleau-Ponty's work on phenomenology (1968), *The Visible and the Invisible* and Vivian Sobchack's writings in *The Address of the Eye* (1992).

⁷³ Beugnet, Martine (2007), *Cinema and Sensation: French Film and the Art of Transgression*,

precedence to the corporeal. Building upon Beugnet's account of the sensory nature of film, *Vendredi soir* is analysed as an example of the 'cinema of the senses' within a phenomenological framework, which acknowledges the overwhelmingly sensory and sensual nature of the film and links to Marks's arguments in *The Skin of the Film* which point to embodied and multisensory viewing.

Anatomie de l'enfer has no narrative context, history or identifiable characters. An un-named couple meet by chance and the woman propositions the man to look at her where she is 'unlookable.' The philosopher Luce Irigaray investigates how tactile experience shapes the perception of light, developing an alternative understanding of light which Cathryn Vasseleu explores in *Textures of Light: Vision and Touch in Irigaray, Levinas and Merleau Ponty* (1998) and in which she argues that Irigaray also rethinks vision and light in terms of femininity and touch.⁷⁴ Vasseleu draws on a concept of vision from Irigaray's work that is a more positive version of 'illumination,' with an erotic dimension that includes women's experience. *Anatomie de l'enfer* is explored as a reading of Irigaray's vision of boundaries as applied to the image of the self, in which alternative scopic regimes explode the conventions of the dominant codes of cinematic looking, to show that the film mounts a challenge to French cultural debates about female subjectivity.

⁷⁴ Vasseleu, Cathryn (1996), *Textures of Light: Vision and Touch in Irigaray, Levinas and Merleau-Ponty*, p. 130.

CHAPTER 1

Collisions of Taste, Space and Culture

Le Goût des autres

(Agnès Jaoui, 2000)

“Tastes are perhaps first and foremost *dis-tastes*...of the taste of others”⁷⁵

The writers of *Le Goût des autres*, Jean-Pierre Bacri and Agnès Jaoui, are described in the French press as filmmakers “(qui) ont marqué durablement la comédie française.”⁷⁶ The film was a popular success in the year 2000, with nearly 3.8 million entries at the French box office,⁷⁷ which made it the seventh film to exceed a two million viewing figure for the producer Charles Gassot, who had already collaborated with Bacri and Jaoui (*les Jabac*),⁷⁸ on the production of *Un Air de famille* (Cédric Klapisch, 1995). Together with Virginie Despentes and Coralie Trinh Thi’s film *Baise-moi*⁷⁹ which was released three months after *Le Goût des autres*, the film signals, as Carrie Tarr and Brigitte Rollet point out, a significant contribution from a female director to women’s film in the 2000s.⁸⁰ For Jaoui, the film was a directorial debut and followed an acting and screenwriting career for which she won a *César* in 1997 for her performance in *On Connait La Chanson* (directed by Alain Resnais), and also two *Césars* (with

⁷⁵ Bourdieu, Pierre (1984), *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, p. 57.

⁷⁶ Remy Vincent, (15/03/2000a), ‘L’avis des autres,’ *Télérama*.

⁷⁷ Box office figures of 3,761,000 are cited in Tarr, Carrie with Rollet, Brigitte (2001), *Cinema and the Second Sex*, p. 295.

⁷⁸ Remy, *ibid*. The name *Jabac*, originally used by the director Alain Resnais was popularly adopted by the French media for the husband-and- wife team of Agnès Jaoui and Jean-Pierre Bacri and.

⁷⁹ A violent, female, ‘road cult’ film directed by Virginie Despentes and Coralie Trinh Thi’ (2000).

⁸⁰ Tarr, Carrie with Rollet, Brigitte (2001), *Cinema and the Second Sex*, p.283.

Bacri) for the screenwriting of *On Connait La Chanson* and *Un Air de famille*, whilst *Le Goût des autres* gained second place in the figures for box office entries and was nominated for, and won, a number of *Césars*, as well as the Grand Prix Award at the 2000 Montreal Film Festival.⁸¹ Its success was hailed by some critics as a revival of popular French cinema as, for example, in a review by Vincent Remy who describes the style as “Un travail d’écriture à l’ancienne...le cinéma de scénario contre le cinéma de mise en scène.”⁸² A social comedy, the film portrays a form of exclusion which is neither economic nor institutional, but is thematically concerned with “l’ostracisme culturel,”⁸³ providing a critical commentary on French society and the elitist snobbery surrounding a bourgeois taste culture which rejects the taste of others as inferior. As the critic Florence Assouline suggests, French audiences will recognise the theme of “le goût de l’autre est moins bon que le mien,”⁸⁴ which Vincent Remy proposes is “proprement française.”

The focus of the film is a conflict between romantic, cultural and social perspectives in the unlikely coupling of a successful, wealthy (although not intellectual) industrialist, Jean-Jacques Castella (Jean-Pierre Bacri), and a middle-aged actress working in the theatre, Clara Devaux (Anne Alvaro), who is usually accompanied by a group of intellectuals. The film tracks the development of Castella’s aesthetic sensibility and traces his metamorphosis through an expansion

⁸¹ Leahy Sarah., (2007), ‘A Middle-Class Act: Taste and Otherness in *Le Goût des autres*, in Waldron D. and Vanderschelden I., eds., *France at the Flicks*, p. 116, cites Gerard Krawczyk’s *Taxi 2* in first place, gaining 10.3 million entries.

⁸² Remy Vincent, (15/03/2000a), ‘L’avis des autres,’ *Télérama*

⁸³ Assouline, Florence (24/02/2000), ‘Le film qui dynamite le snobisme culturel,’ *L’Événement du Jeudi*.

⁸⁴ *ibid.*

of cultural experiences inspired by Clara, as he falls in love with her after seeing her onstage in the title role of a seventeenth-century Jean Racine tragedy, *Bérénice*.⁸⁵ Set against this is another trajectory that moves inexorably downwards, with the collapse of Castella's marriage to interior designer Angélique (Christiane Millet), the termination of his chauffeur, Deschamps' (Alain Chabat) relationship to his partner and the ending of his bodyguard, Moreno's (Gerard Lanvin) romance with Manie the barmaid (Agnès Jaoui). Whilst the narrative tracks Castella's successful cultural crossing and demonstrates that under certain conditions even unpromising circumstances can be overcome by the development of a critical aesthetic judgement by individuals who recalibrate their sense of taste, the meta-narrative of characters such as Moreno, Manie and Deschamps suggests that there are many lives that fail to work out in accordance with the laws of taste and also that relationships outside one's taste are not always possible.

Le Goût des autres has a narrative thread which ties interconnected, but quite divergent lives together. Differing cultural standpoints of an unlikely group of provincial characters of disparate class and culture collide by coincidence, the individuals confusing situations with misplaced affections and then resolving them in often unexpected directions. As Remy points out, the film has a circular form of basic narrative 'ingredients' involving the interaction of the characters;

un chef d'entreprise qui rencontre une actrice qui est amie
avec une serveuse qui rencontre un garde du corps qui

⁸⁵ Racine, Jean (1639-1699), *Bérénice*, transl. by Knight, Roy, ed. by Barnwell, Harry (1999).

travaille avec un chauffeur qui conduit une décoratrice qui
est la femme du chef d'entreprise...⁸⁶

All these characters experience the taste of another at some time in the film, and whilst on the one hand there is the site of containment imposed by the external pressures of society, which is manifested through appearances and hypocritical rituals and for which 'taste' is a pretext for much deeper, hidden psychological conflicts, on the other hand there are the literary, classical and institutional determinations of acceptable taste. Between the two sites there falls a divide between high and low art, a border policed by society which the paths of the characters criss-cross, in a critical comment on the rigid French social system. In terms of the focus of this thesis on 'unlikely couples,' although the film is principally presenting the problem of relationships as failed, there is some kind of resolution in the sense that characters (Castella in particular) cross boundaries which enable them to experience what it means to consider what others' tastes might be and how to participate in those tastes (the taste of others). The film is a self-reflexive piece which highlights, through comedy, "l'éloge du beauf,"⁸⁷ with which French audiences can identify.

Jaoui describes her motivation and the starting point for the film as a consideration stemming from the fact that her friends and acquaintances all come from the same social circles as herself, in spite of how 'liberal-minded' she considers herself to be.⁸⁸ In the film, in contrast to real life, she intentionally

⁸⁶ Remy, Vincent (01/03/2000a), 'Le Goût des autres', *Télérama*.

⁸⁷ *ibid.*

⁸⁸ Anon, 'Interview with Agnes Jaoui and Jean Pierre Bacri,' Offline Releasing & Artistic License Films Press Kit website, www.offlinefilms.com, accessed 10/06/2008.

creates different milieus which exist in parallel, but which do not intermingle, and although it is possible to try to cross the border from one to another, this proves difficult. Bacri similarly echoes the fact that it is natural to stay within a social peer group, but when making the film;

...we really wanted to talk about sectarianism and parochialism as well as about the dictatorship of tastes. Just because you frequent a certain kind of person does not mean that you should be closed off from the world and never really consider what others' tastes might be and how to participate in those tastes and listen to another song.⁸⁹

In a study of provincialism, *Le Goût des autres* portrays a particular type of consumer of art, highlighting a new type of 'banlieue' from that portrayed in 1990s *beur* and *banlieue* cinema, particularly as the film has been described as "loin d'être polyethnique."⁹⁰ There are quite distinct groups into which the characters fall, in what Jaoui describes (in interview) as "*les clans*," whose borders are not usually traversed.⁹¹ She bases her film upon a strong dislike for "*ces chapelles qui sévissent partout*,"⁹² describing her own experiences of exclusion, originating from her schooldays, which led to the need for a *décloisonnement* on her part:

Il y a de quoi s'interroger sur ce cloisonnement. Ça commence dès l'école. Pour être rejetée il suffit de ne pas avoir le bon K-way. Cette capacité odieuse à exclure et à mépriser les gens, elle me choque plus de la part des intellectuels de gauche et des artistes, qui sont censés

⁸⁹ *ibid.*

⁹⁰ Iteanu, André (15/03/2000), 'Où sont les enfants?' *Télérama*.

⁹¹ Assouline, Florence (24/02/2000a), 'Le film qui dynamite le snobisme culturel,' *L'Événement du Jeudi*.

⁹² *ibid*

d'avoir l'esprit ouvert, que de la part des intellectuels de droite.⁹³

It is the importance of taste as a personal activity of discrimination that leads to a consideration of genre, for whilst the film would at first seem to be following a typical melodramatic, romance narrative in terms of the relationship between the main characters Castella and Clara, it is when these characters take tentative steps into the other's orbit that the film seems to move into another sphere or space. In order to arrive at any productive understanding of the film in terms of spectatorship, the indeterminate, shifting dynamics of this space must be explored to provide an alternative view of desire and identity in Jaoui's reworking of the comedy genre, arising out of the experience of sampling the taste of 'another' and reflecting ultimately on capturing the nuanced dynamics of taste distinctions that form the hierarchies of culture, within the framework of which personal taste operates.

Through the weaving of interconnecting narrative threads, the romantic encounters of the divergent lives of the characters expose some of the problems people of different tastes, cultural standpoints, classes and social cultures face, by stepping outside their traditional boundaries, demonstrating a shift in people's natural inclination to stay within the safety of their own social circle. This goes against reinforcing traditional, French, social structures and refutes the view that the so-called cultural elite are predisposed towards superior taste. It also shows that the politics of social stratification and aesthetic taste the film portrays are more complex than a simple high art / low art split and that instead, the blurring of

⁹³ Pliskin, Fabrice (24/02/2000), 'La guéguerre du goût,' *Le Nouvel Observateur*.

boundaries between ‘taste cultures’⁹⁴ suggests a transformation of taste-based, class domination, in other words, that the film questions how tastes serve as a means of what Pierre Bourdieu describes as ‘distinction’,⁹⁵ and rather that new rules of distinction are emerging with the characters’ parochial lives often intersecting in unpredictable ways, colliding by coincidence and then resolving situations in unexpected directions. As such, the film is not about class conflict, but about classifications and hierarchies in society.⁹⁶

Theories of Taste

Pierre Bourdieu's seminal study of taste, *La Distinction: Critique sociale du jugement*, concerns the operation of taste in French society and addresses itself to the study of taste and aesthetics, repudiating the idea of a universal, transcendent conception of the aesthetic.⁹⁷ Bourdieu contends that “tastes are perhaps, first and foremost, *dis-tastes*...of the taste of others”⁹⁸ (my emphasis), or, as he asserts more negatively, tastes are also “a *refusal* of the tastes of others”⁹⁹ (also my emphasis). This conflicts with the dominant aesthetic theory of taste of the philosopher Immanuel Kant, whose framework for a discussion of taste in terms

⁹⁴ A term used by Gans, Herbert (1974), in *Popular Culture and High Culture: An Analysis and Evaluation of Taste*.

⁹⁵ Bourdieu, Pierre (1984), *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. by Nice, Richard, first published in 1979 as *La Distinction : Critique sociale du jugement*.

⁹⁶ Pliskin, Fabrice (24/02/2000), ‘La guéguerre du goût,’ *Le Nouvel Observateur*.

⁹⁷ Bourdieu, Pierre (1984), *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. by Nice, Richard. This work was based on a large survey carried out in 1963 and 1967-8, on a total of 1217 subjects, in which people were asked to specify their personal tastes in music, art, theatre and home.

⁹⁸ *ibid*, p. 57.

⁹⁹ *ibid*.

of critical judgement is provided in his *Critique of Judgement*.¹⁰⁰ The close connection between judgements of taste and the faculty of judgement is reflected in Kant's view that the feeling of pleasure in a beautiful object is felt by virtue of an exercise of judgement, in what Kant specifically refers to as 'reflecting judgement'.¹⁰¹ An aesthetic judgement in Kant's usage is based upon feeling and in particular on the feeling of pleasure or displeasure.

Following Kant's *Critique of Judgement* there is a distinguishing of both the 'laws of taste' and the 'principles of taste,'¹⁰² as aesthetics seems to perform the tasks of adjudicating singular 'judgements of taste' or 'judgements of beauty' and isolating systematic features of beauty, concerned with determining whether or not given works are aesthetically excellent.¹⁰³ David Hume later sought to reconcile the subjectivity of individual preference (that is, the notion that beauty and taste belong to the sentiments, rather than being 'in' objects) with a 'standard of taste' or a notion of correct judgement.¹⁰⁴ Analogous to Hume's 'standard of taste' is what Kant called the 'antinomy of taste' in which the latter questions how a judgement based on individually-experienced pleasure can possibly claim validity for all other judging subjects. Kant illustrated the dilemma of "everyone has his own taste,"¹⁰⁵ by attributing an individual taste to everyone, which also appears as part of his premise that "there is no disputing about taste,"¹⁰⁶ in which he asserts the

¹⁰⁰ Kant, Immanuel (1911), *Critique of Aesthetic Judgement*, transl. by Pluhar, Werner (1987).

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*, Introduction, vii.

¹⁰² *ibid.*

¹⁰³ Hogan, Paul (1994), 'The possibility of aesthetics,' *British Journal of Aesthetics* 34, 4, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 337-50.

¹⁰⁴ Hume, David (1985), 'Of The Standard Of Taste', in *Essays Moral, Political and Literary*.

¹⁰⁵ Kant, Immanuel (1911), *Critique of Aesthetic Judgement*, transl. by Pluhar, Werner, (1987), p. 212.

¹⁰⁶ *ibid*

autonomy of taste and rejects cognisable principles of taste, this archetype of taste pointing to the processes on the basis of which human lives unfold when they are provided with fitting contexts in which to express themselves.

Patrick Cingolani proposes that Bourdieu treats popular culture as a negative image of the dominant culture, rather than as an autonomous space of symbolic production, with its own logic and characteristics.¹⁰⁷ In view of the fact that Bourdieu's model is also seen as giving analytical primacy to the processes of taste distinction which most closely reflect the experience and world view of the French upper classes, several works have challenged his theory of taste, modifying the framework to argue that contemporary elite consumers prefer to master a wide range of cultural consumption patterns.¹⁰⁸ Bourdieu's theory of taste points to the 'habitus' whereby subject-object dualism is overcome by inscribing subjective, bodily actions with objective social force, so that subjective individual acts take on social meaning as a key mechanism in the relationship between the way in which individuals construct reality, and the social structure that constrains them.¹⁰⁹ His theory predicts a distinct and univorous consumption pattern for the upper classes, who adopt cultural tastes that are considered 'highbrow,' to establish a distinction or hierarchy between themselves and others

¹⁰⁷ For example in Cingolani, Patrick (1984), 'Eppur si muove ! Classes populaires et structures de classes dans *La distinction*,' *L'empire du sociologue, Collectif Révoltes logiques*, pp. 89-101.

¹⁰⁸ For example: DiMaggio, Paul (1987), 'Classification in Art', *American Sociological Review*, 52; pp. 440-455. Peterson, Richard and Simkus, Albert (1992), in *Cultivating Differences: Symbolic Boundaries and the Making of Inequality*, in Lamont, Michele and Fournier Marcel (eds),

pp. 152-68. Peterson, Richard and Kern, Roger (1996), 'Changing Highbrow Taste: From Snob to Omnivore,' in *American Sociological Review*, 61, 5, Oct., pp. 900-907.

¹⁰⁹ King, Anthony (2000), 'Thinking with Bourdieu against Bourdieu: A 'Practical' Critique of the Habitus,' *Sociological Theory*, 18, 3, Nov., p. 417

(middlebrow and lowbrow), to which end he provides extensive evidence of this prediction in *Distinction*, in the context of French society in the 1970s.

The distinction between high culture, based on the formal aesthetic standards of, for example, theatre and classical music, and low or popular culture, based on commercial versions of low intellectual value, such as popular television fiction and music, for more widespread consumption, is a particularly potent classification of taste in contemporary Western society. According to Paul DiMaggio, in a recent extension to Bourdieu's model of taste in his article *Classification in Art*, high/low boundary tastes are one component of symbolic systems of classification, instrumental in the creation of symbolic boundaries and whose degrees of differentiation, hierarchy, universalisation, and symbolic significance vary over time and across cultural genres.¹¹⁰ Mary Douglas' and Baron Isherwood's recent studies also class taste as the ability to make discriminating judgements about aesthetic and artistic matters and as taste is one component of symbolic systems of classification, whose content and structure both reflect and shape particular states of social relations, taste serves as an identity and status marker in processes of exclusion and inclusion.¹¹¹ Displays of taste contribute to the creation of networks and shared identities within groups, with the formation of 'taste cultures' which are "clusters of cultural forms which embody similar values and aesthetic standards,"¹¹² but taste also allows for the identification and exclusion of outsiders whose standards of taste differ and who do not 'belong.'

¹¹⁰ DiMaggio, *ibid.*

¹¹¹ Douglas, Mary and Isherwood, Baron (1996), *The World of Goods*, p. 12.

¹¹² *ibid.*

Building on Bourdieu's studies and connecting cultural tastes and sociability, in a hypothesis that cultural tastes are determined by (social) network relations and that the tastes in turn form and sustain these networks, DiMaggio proposes a framework with which to analyse the relationships between social structure, patterns of artistic consumption and production and the ways in which artistic genres are classified. He offers an examination of the mechanisms of highbrow and popular culture tastes which sheds light on the mastery of different types of culture across social positions, in particular in view of the emergence of new artistic genres as a form of 'ritual classification'¹¹³ which varies in the degree to which genres are ordered hierarchically. The degree of hierarchy in turn determines the value of cultural capital (the command of culturally prestigious goods) and is related to the degree of concentration of 'cultural authority.' The latter is more likely to be concentrated when distinct tastes map onto people themselves as individuals rather than onto social roles.¹¹⁴ DiMaggio suggests that genres represent socially constructed organising principles that give artworks an inflated significance beyond their thematic content, hypothesising that perceptions of 'clustering' of works into genres reinforces the clustering of tastes.¹¹⁵ This understanding of the dynamics of personal taste in creating and maintaining

¹¹³ DiMaggio, Paul (1987), 'Classification in Art,' *American Sociological Review*, 52, pp. 440-455.

¹¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 447.

¹¹⁵ DiMaggio, Paul (1987), p. 441, suggests that if we imagine a matrix defined by persons and artworks, genres consists of those sets of works which bear similar relations to the same sets of persons (the principal behind 'structural equivalence' in network analysis, described by White, Harrison et al (1976), 'Social Structure from Multiple Networks: Blockmodels of Roles and Positions.' *American Journal of Sociology*, 81, pp.730-80 and also Burt, Ronald (1980), 'Models of Network Structure,' in *Annual Review of Sociology*, 6, pp. 79-141.

boundaries between different groups suggests that the notion of personal taste is the crucial link for understanding the dynamics of *Le Goût des autres*.

Distastes

Instances of confrontational tastes are signalled from the opening sequences of the film in a *mise en scene* of Castella and his wife Angélique dining in a restaurant with Castella's managing director, Weber, discussing an imminent business deal between the company and a group of Iranian counterparts, for which the company has hired a bodyguard (ex-police officer, Moreno) to protect Castella. The latter, who has a propensity for sugary food, orders a dessert, but is immediately reprimanded by Angélique, as both in public and in private he is denied the freedom of indulging his sweet tooth by the over-stringent Angélique, who, constantly surveying his weight and exercising control over his taste even in the privacy of their own home, forces her obsessive dietary opinions upon him while she herself eats chocolate bars "en cachette," to prevent him from being tempted with such (forbidden) pleasures. From the outset, the distinction between Castella's gustatory and aesthetic pleasures is underlined, with the difference between aesthetic pleasure in art and sensuous enjoyment of food continuing to be highlighted at various points in the film, in subtle references to the persistent division between the two 'sorts' of taste and the pleasures they afford. Typically, many philosophers writing about aesthetic taste dismiss the literal sense of taste, developing the concept of the aesthetic instead, in explicit contrast to bodily taste sensation. As Henry Kames puts it: "The fine arts are contrived to give pleasure to

the eye and the ear, disregarding the inferior senses"¹¹⁶ and similarly, the philosopher George Santayana points out the marked distinction between physical and aesthetic pleasure.¹¹⁷ Whereas touch is granted some cognitive standing and coordinates with vision, smell and taste are regarded as low in a hierarchical ordering that puts the distanced or 'intellectual' senses of sight and hearing above the 'bodily' senses of touch, smell, and taste, and supplements the distinction between aesthetic and non-aesthetic senses,¹¹⁸ as taste can be educated and refined, therefore its use as the model for aesthetic sensitivity could be argued to be warranted; however, the scope of this sense is limited.

Kant's work in *The Critique of Judgement* demonstrates openness to a variety of aesthetic and related experiences, putting forward claims that aesthetic perception is a form of "disinterested contemplation,"¹¹⁹ the concept of which frees aesthetic pleasure from bodily sensation and is not directed towards the self and therefore relative to individuals, but allows for shared standards of taste. David Hume posits that there is a "great resemblance between mental and bodily taste"¹²⁰ as the likes and dislikes of eating have been paralleled with the pleasure and displeasure responses that characterise aesthetic evaluation. This links to how critical judgement is shown in the film as the narrative proceeds, as Castella would seem to be progressively developing a more refined (superior) taste, in that

¹¹⁶ Kames, Henry (1974), *Elements of Criticism*, pp. 6-7.

¹¹⁷ Santayana, George (1955), *The Sense of Beauty*, p. 24.

¹¹⁸ Korsmeyer Carolyn (2001), 'Taste,' in Gaut, Berys and Lopez, Dominic, *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics*, p. 270.

¹¹⁹ In Kant's *Critique of Aesthetic Judgement* (1911), p. 90, the philosopher attempts to separate disinterested aesthetic contemplation from interested judgements of bodily appetite. He privileges aesthetic contemplation over judgements of pure and sensual pleasure.

¹²⁰ Hume, David (1985b), 'Of the Standard of Taste,' *Essays Moral, Political and Literary*, pp. 141-142.

he comes to appreciate high art rather than indulging his (more inferior) gustatory taste for sugary foods.

Different Tastes

The first encounter between Castella and Clara takes place in Castella's company offices when Clara presents herself for an interview as prospective English teacher, the job being to teach Castella to communicate with foreign clients. Castella dismisses Clara and her proposed, 'serious' method of teaching because he deems it will be not be *marrant* (and therefore not low-brow enough for him). The same evening he is forced to attend a theatre performance accompanied by his wife Angélique, who only goes to the play as a social gesture because their niece has a small part in this production of Racine's *Bérénice*.¹²¹ When Castella exclaims irritatedly from his seat in the circle: "*Putain, c'est envers,*" what he is acknowledging is his inability to identify with the high-level properties of Racine's language, the line length of poetry and the characters with whom he would have little in common. Jacques Derrida writes that Kant not only privileges the speaking arts in general but also certain forms of the spoken word over others, in particular "poetry over rhetoric," poetic speech allowing full presence (of the actor) and therefore, according to Derrida, being regarded as "truthful speech,"¹²² which also infers the cultural inferiority of rhetoric.

By coincidence, the actress playing *Bérénice* is Clara, whom Castella had rejected for the post of English teacher earlier on. A moment of revelation then

¹²¹ Racine, Jean (1639-1699), *Bérénice*, transl. by Knight Roy (1999).

¹²² Derrida, Jacques (1975), 'Economimesis,' in Agacinski, Sylviane et al, *Mimesis: des articulations*, pp. 57-93.

comes during the play when, in the darkness of the theatre, Castella is exposed to the emotion of Clara's performance as *Bérénice* berating her love for Titus, the effect of which propels him into the unfamiliar territory of high art, in an embodied response to Clara's performance as an unrecognisable other, a trajectory Glen Mazis describes as :

Through feeling in its emotional sense the body moves forward gropingly into the world, not as self-sufficient . . . but rather as touching things in order to be touched back...waiting for a reciprocal touch from the world.¹²³

As she emerges from the dimly-lit scenery and advances towards the spotlights, Clara as *Bérénice* reaches across a complex crossing of spaces between the medium of cinema and the medium of theatre. It is within the hybrid spaces of high art versus the straightforward arenas of popular culture, and the fusion and interconnecting of differing tastes across a network of taste boundaries, that Castella begins to open up to the world within the privacy of the darkened space of the theatre as, during a performance of Racine, his philistine resistance to culture begins to crumble. He is emotionally affected and changed by the power of the poetry spoken by Racine's characters and by the performance of Clara.

This change in Castella is signalled to the film spectator both through the camerawork and the dialogue, with close-ups of Castella seated in the circle and of Clara onstage. Castella's gaze is transfixed upon Clara, his eyes glistening with emotion in response to the experience of the diegetic rendering of Racine's script

¹²³ Mazis, Glen (1993), *Emotion and Embodiment: A Fragile Ontology*, pp. 29-30

by the actress, filtered through the camera from an intimate connection between audience and filmic image. As Béla Balász proposes, a close-up of a human face extracts viewers from spatial and temporal coordinates and likens the experience to being thrust “out of space, our consciousness of space is cut out and we find ourselves in another dimension, that of pure emotions, moods, intentions and thoughts.”¹²⁴ Similarly, as Sue Cataldi writes: “The space of affectivity resembles the space of tactility much more than it does the space of visibility or the space of instrumentality.”¹²⁵ This relates to Walter Benjamin’s concept of “mimetic innervation”¹²⁶ which is a crucial term in understanding the central role the senses play in drawing the spectator into the complex taste spaces of Castella’s first encounter with high art as a mode of cognition. This encounter involves “sensuous, somatic, and tactile forms of perception ... transcend[ing] the traditional subject-object dichotomy” and emphasises what Benjamin describes as the “palpable sensuous connection between the very body of the perceiver and the perceived.”¹²⁷ The concept of mimetic innervation, which Hansen explains as a form of “mimetic perception of the external world that is empowering”¹²⁸ would seem to be crucial to understanding the role taste plays in drawing the spectator

¹²⁴ Balász, Béla (1952), ‘The Close-Up’, from *The Theory of Film*, Dover Publications, reprinted in Braudy, L. and Cohen, M. eds. (2004), *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, pp. 314-321.

¹²⁵ Cataldi, Sue (1993), *Emotion, Depth, and Flesh: A Study of Sensitive Space: Reflections on Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy of Embodiment*, p. 118

¹²⁶ Benjamin, Walter (2001), ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,’ in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, pp. 1166-1186

¹²⁷ *ibid.*

¹²⁸ Hansen, Miriam (1999), ‘Benjamin and Cinema: Not a One-Way Street,’ *Critical Inquiry*, 25, 2, Winter, p. 51. Walter Benjamin’s related concept of “mimetic innervation,” is defined by Hansen as “a mode of cognition involving sensuous, somatic, and tactile forms of perception.” Innervation is understood as a mode of perception that “reconnects with the discarded powers ... of mimetic practices that involve the body.” (Hansen, 1999, p. 5)

into the complexity of taste boundaries in the film, as it illustrates how Castella moves from the immediacy of the sense of taste to matters of aesthetic evaluation, which clearly has an intersubjective component. The theatre scene within the filmic space draws the spectator deep into French national culture and the French classical theatre tradition, the inclusion of Racine's work in the narrative serving as a reminder that the latter's play shows that there are many facets of being in love, which parallels the collision of tastes in the film, from which Jaoui creates a scenario in which all kinds of artists and social classes collide and reassess what they want out of life.

It is clearly indicated in the film that Castella sets out in search of a taste of something different, a 'taste' of someone else. His aesthetic awakening as a result of Clara's impressionable performance, which touches his inner self emotively and affectively, is swiftly followed by a second visit to the play as he is unexpectedly smitten by the theatrical experience. His subsequent visits to the theatre are unaccompanied, which signals a break from his wife's oppressive taste and allows him to approach Clara backstage after performances, where he experiences the highbrow snobbism of her clique of art intellectuals. Castella subsequently employs Clara as his English teacher and doggedly pursues her by attaching himself to her entourage of artistic friends (though she rejects his advances), often embarrassing the actress with his boorishness and lack of sophistication and knowledge of high art. Naively making *faux pas* in front of her theatrical and artistic colleagues, Castella is shown to be ignorant of playwrights such as Ibsen (whom he believes to be a comedian), but undaunted, he stubbornly

inserts himself into this group of art intellectuals despite their mocking of his lack of knowledge and education in the arts.

The group often meet in a bar where Manie the barmaid (who is in a relationship with Castella's bodyguard and who deals in soft drugs which Clara occasionally buys) overhears the comments about Castella from the "*intello-snobs*,"¹²⁹ the essence of which Manie relays back to Castella at a later date. Castella proceeds with his English classes, reading poetry which Clara gives him and writing a poem of his own for her in English, clumsily declaring his romantic feelings. He also commissions a piece of industrial art for his factory facade and attends art galleries where he purchases a painting from an exhibition of Clara's artist friend, Bruno, which he finds pleasing to his taste, although when he hangs it in the living room at home it is rejected by his wife as "*monstrueux*" and she removes it. Unable to accept the domination of his wife's bad taste and her unwillingness to experience the taste of others, Castella finally leaves home and seems to lose his bearings, taking no pleasure in everyday life. His dipping in and out of high culture by mixing with Clara's group, attending art events and acquiring a knowledge of poetry are contrasted with scenes of visits to a night club, accompanied by a weary and concerned Moreno and Deschamps, where Castella samples the 'entertainment' but finds no pleasure in the outings, as if he were proving to himself that he had successfully developed aesthetic powers of judgement and was no longer fulfilled by such low spectacle at the bottom of the hierarchy.

¹²⁹ Tranchant, Marie-Noëlle (01/03/2000a), 'Castella, Bérénice, le chauffeur et la serveuse,' *Le Figaroscope*.

Clara finally visits Castella at his place of work and confronts him with her discomfort at his being deliberately used as a scapegoat by Bruno and Antoine, who seem to be interested only in his consumption of their art products, but Castella refutes Clara's concerns, declaring that in choosing the painting he bought from Bruno, he is making a personal judgement that the painting is pleasing to himself, rather than purchasing it merely to attract the approval of Clara. The latter consequently recognises that Castella's taste in art is genuine and invites him to the première of her new Ibsen play, *Hedda Gabler*.¹³⁰ There appears to be a 'happy ending' as Clara has come to appreciate Castella's honesty and humanity and receives him with a dazzling, complicit smile as she takes her bows onstage at the end of the piece, while Castella, seated in the centre of the circle, nods his approval of the performance, in his new role as critic.

Highbrow and Lowbrow

In the context of taste, practices appear to cluster around two dominant styles or forms of taste that have come to be referred to as highbrow and popular.¹³¹ Highbrow taste is infused with the classical Kantian aesthetic, characterised by an emphasis on the consumption experience as an attitude of transcendence which reflects higher moral and aesthetic values.¹³² Popular taste, on the other hand, is geared toward a more superficial engagement with culture in terms of fun and pleasure as the primary goals of the cultural involvement. This is essentially the

¹³⁰ Ibsen, Henrik (1828-1906), *Hedda Gabler*, transl. by Osborne John, (1972).

¹³¹ Katz-Gerro, Tally (2004), 'Cultural consumption research: review of methodology, theory, and consequence,' *International Review of Sociology*, 14,1, pp.11–29.

¹³² Van Eijck, Koen (2001). Social differentiation in musical taste patterns, in *Social Forces*, 79, p.1168.

same distinction made by Judith Blau, who differentiates between an elite culture with a productive and distributive infrastructure centered around art galleries, opera, theatres, orchestras and ballet and which can be grouped as high culture, in contrast with broad popular appeal that is primarily conveyed through live popular music concerts, night clubs and cinemas.¹³³ Popular taste is more likely to be found among some segments of the working class and routine service sector whilst the highbrow aesthetic is more likely to be found amongst the older, more established middle classes, who engage in more difficult and demanding forms of aesthetic consumption with more abstract values.¹³⁴ This mirrors the age group of the characters in *Le Goût des autres* who are in their late thirties and early forties. There is a noticeable absence of family and children in the film, and, as André Iteanu remarks, the film would no longer be a comedy if it were to address issues outside the age group it targets, as it is specifically a film for and about adults.¹³⁵ As Iteanu also remarks, the only occasion upon which the film transgresses this generation ‘rule’ is the scene in which Castella meets his father (played by Bacri’s father, an octogenarian) on a park bench.

In a series of articles that spurred a new research direction in the sociology of culture, Richard Peterson and Roger Kern documented and analysed a cultural pattern that links cultural breadth with social position.¹³⁶ Their work on the dominance of the omnivorous pattern depicts cultural omnivores, typically members of the social elite, who express preference for a variety of cultural tastes

¹³³ Blau, Judith (1989), *The Shape of Culture*, p. 433.

¹³⁴ Bourdieu, Pierre (1984), *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, pp. 32-34.

¹³⁵ Iteanu, André (15/03/2000a), ‘Où sont les enfants?’ *Télérama*.

¹³⁶ Peterson, Richard and Kern, Roger (1996), ‘Changing Highbrow Taste: From Snob to Omnivore’, in *American Sociological Review*, 61, 5, Oct., pp. 900-907.

down the cultural hierarchy of ‘highbrow,’ ‘middlebrow,’ and ‘lowbrow.’ Highbrow culture refers to cultural forms that are intellectually worthy, desirable, and sophisticated; middlebrow taste refers to those that have been in the mainstream of commercial culture; while lowbrow taste refers to genres rooted in marginal groups in terms of, for example, non-intellectual pursuits.¹³⁷ A thesis introduced by Richard Peterson has also been widely adopted in the research of cultural consumption in the western world.¹³⁸ The ‘omnivore thesis’ also includes other types of consumers, classified by their taste (for example, snob or univore). The omnivorousness is, in Peterson’s terms, a “standard for good taste.”¹³⁹ Omnivore refers to the broad range in taste for leisure activities, as opposed to univore’s much more narrow and monotonous taste. The omnivore appreciates a wider variety of cultural genres, thus the taste is developed in a more open direction, whereas members of low status occupations seem to be more limited in their liking of cultural activities.¹⁴⁰ Petersen and Kern’s works have applied the omnivore thesis in different contexts and have mainly shown that a major shift in the way of displaying status through taste has been taking place.

Characters come into more frequent and fleeting contact with others in a diversity of social situations across enlarged and anonymous social spaces, in the

¹³⁷ *ibid.*

¹³⁸ For example, Peterson, Richard and Simkus, Albert (1992), ‘How Musical Tastes Mark Occupational Status Groups?’ in *Cultivating Differences. Symbolic Boundaries and the Making of Inequality*, Lamont, Michele and Fournier, Marcel (eds), pp. 152–186; Peterson Richard and Kern Roger, (1996), ‘Changing Highbrow Taste: From Snob to Omnivore,’ in *American Sociological Review*, 61, 5, Oct., pp. 900-907.

¹³⁹ Peterson, Richard (2004), ‘The Shift toward Omnivorous Taste: Ideas, Evidence, and Prospects’, *Sociologie et Sociétés*, 36, 1.

¹⁴⁰ Peterson, Richard and Kern, Roger, (1996), ‘Changing Highbrow Taste: From Snob to Omnivore,’ *American Sociological Review*, 61, October, p. 904.

erosion of high/low boundaries in *Le Goût des autres*, with individuals typically participating in a multiplicity of groupings which do not necessarily coincide. This greater breadth and anonymity affects processes of identity formation, which for Castella provides the opportunity to expand the possibilities of experimenting with self-construction within Clara's social circles as a way of entering her world. He gradually develops the ability to manipulate a more diverse range of cultural symbols, such as writing verse, which becomes a crucial resource in interacting with Clara's group. Knowledge of the cultural codes appropriate to this group's social milieus (such as the theatre and the art gallery) and the ability to 'culture-switch' according to circumstances, becomes more useful to Castella than knowledge of a restricted range of high culture symbols. However, Castella's home life with Angélique is steeped in popular culture and by isolating themselves they have developed a chronic inability to interact beyond their immediate group, that is until Castella experiences the taste of another culture.

The opening scenes of the film immerse the spectator in the suburban and domestic world of the Castellás, drawn into the enclosed space of a large saloon car in which Castella and Angélique travel from their spacious, luxury house to other venues, chauffeured by Deschamps and accompanied by Moreno. Cocooned inside the vehicle they effect an insular mode of travel which implies a social barrier as they rarely encounter or network with the 'outside' compared with, for example, Clara, who walks everywhere, sometimes in the rain and often accompanied by her group of friends. The barrier between the Castellás and the exterior is emphasised by shots of Castella inside the car gazing through the

windows, whilst at the same time the passing scenery of the outside world is reflected in the car windows and superimposed upon Castella's gaze of 'outside.' Although socially mobile in terms of being wealthy, the couple seem disconnected from the outside environment. Their journeys from the privacy of the marital home to the public spaces of the suburbs map an initial differentiation between their lives and the lives of the other characters, but this distance becomes unsustainable as Castella is gradually drawn into a different world and finally, after deliberating on the matter of *changer/pas changer*, moves out of his home. The grandeur of the Castellás' domestic space is accentuated by the camerawork and framing which allows the spectator expansive views through the living areas and indicates their material mobility and ease. By contrast, the interior space is immersed in Angélique's bad taste and decorated with fragmented, chintzy and floral colour schemes in a dull pink, overwhelming to the eye and engulfing and enveloping the couple so that Angélique, who often wears patterned clothes, can barely be distinguished from the decor at times. Within this space the social distance between the couple is highlighted by the style of the cinematography. The shots are never closer than mid-shot and seem to undermine the intimacy of the couple who appear lost on the over-large sofa from which they are immersed in popular culture, for example in following the television film, *Palomino*.¹⁴¹ Just as Angélique proceeds with her insistence that Castella must not be permitted to break his diet, similarly she forces her gaudy, interior decorating tastes not only upon her husband, who refers to the living room as "*la bonbonnière*," but also upon

¹⁴¹ A romantic melodrama made for television, based on a popular book by American author Danielle Steele and directed by Michael Miller (The Cramer Company, NBC Productions, USA, 1991).

his sister, Béatrice, who, in the process of separation from her husband, has been offered an apartment by her brother but finds that she is dominated by Angélique's decorating plans, the latter not recognising (until the end of the film) that others have a vehement distaste of her style.

Castella's insertion into the world of high art fuels the notion that the taste of others can affect one's own tastes and that one cannot assume the existence of a 'right' or a 'wrong' taste, but that one's taste may define the kind of people who want to share it. On the one hand there is the site of containment imposed by the external pressures of society, which is manifested through appearances and society's hypocritical rituals and for which 'taste' is a pretext for much deeper, hidden psychological conflicts. On the other hand there are the literary, classical, and institutional determinations of acceptable taste. Borders are not so much erased, as crossed between the two sites. A divide falls between high and low art, a border policed by society which the paths of the characters criss-cross. The interweaving and self-referentiality of high art within the film is explicit in the art gallery scene where an exhibition of popular art is taking place, to be followed by Benoit's 'high art.' A meta-narrative of popular culture pervades the film both in the Castellás' house, when the spectator understands that both Castella and Angélique are avid followers of *Palomino*, the narrative of which is mirroring the breakdown of their marriage, and when Castella (during one of his English lessons with Clara), breaks into a popular Spanish song to which he sings the words to '*Juanita Banana*' by the comic, Henri Salvador. He is also ridiculed behind his back by Benoit and Antoine when he commissions a popular frieze for

his factory entrance, but the two high art exponents pretend to have created a valuable piece of high art, when the frieze has a lower value as popular art.

Examples of popular culture exist in counterpoint to instances of high art in the film, which are the poem that Clara lends Castella; Benoit's art exhibition; the Racine and Ibsen theatrical pieces; and the classical music that Deschamps' orchestra plays. Despite the case for a convergence of high and popular culture, well-documented through frequent cuts to the flute-playing of Deschamps, who tentatively and repetitively practises an orchestrated, middlebrow, Edith Piaf song (*Non, je ne regrette rien*), the meaning of this convergence to the spectator is open to conflicting interpretations. At one extreme, the erosion of cultural boundaries and the proliferation of aesthetic hierarchies, none of which can claim absolute legitimacy, is taken as an indication that tastes are strictly an expression of individual preferences and private choices.¹⁴²

Taste-based inequalities may persist amongst the groups in the film, but they are an expression of individual nature rather than class domination. However, also evident is the related position that tastes remain linked to status competition among groups and classes. The film shows that contemporary society is not necessarily characterised by a single, objective space of distinction dominated by a legitimate elite culture, as within the narrative, taste-based domination is constantly challenged. No one group in the film succeeds in imposing as legitimate its own standards of taste. Although Castella is influenced by Clara's friends, he is able to make an individual judgement when he chooses a painting

¹⁴²Lipovetsky, Gilles (1983), *L'ère du vide*.

that he likes. This leads to the coexistence of multiple spaces of distinction anchored in constantly shifting identities and hierarchies. It is within this context that Herbert Gans developed the concept of taste cultures.¹⁴³ In explicit contrast to much of the literature on mass culture, Gans goes beyond any sharp distinction between high and low culture. He identifies several taste levels within high and low culture and encompasses them all within a single theoretical framework.

The concept of taste cultures within *Le Goût des autres* applies as much to the Ibsen play, the orchestra in which Deschamps plays the Piaf song, the works of art in Benoit's exhibition, the garish floral designs in the Castellás' living room, or the American television melodrama that the Castellás watch. Gans rejects the negative connotations upwardly of low, mass, and popular culture. He advocates 'cultural pluralism,' arguing that all cultures should be considered of equal value and be placed on an equal footing, at least from the point of view of social analysis and public policy. Taste cultures, according to Gans, correspond to a diversity of 'taste publics,' defined as unorganised aggregates of people sharing similar aesthetic standards. He acknowledges that the conditions for appreciating works of art associated with different taste cultures are unequally distributed across taste publics, although he does not examine how these inequalities both reflect and reinforce social processes of domination and exclusion, an element which is clearly indicated in the film within the networking of intertwining taste spaces and the difficulties around Castella's acquisition of an aesthetic sensibility.

¹⁴³ Gans Herbert, (1974), *Popular Culture and High Culture: An Analysis and Evaluation of Taste*.

Developing Taste

The concept of a developing sensibility is made explicit, if only briefly, in Ludwig Wittgenstein's remarks on aesthetics when he writes:

In what we call the Arts a person who has judgement develops. (A person who has judgement doesn't mean a person who says 'Marvellous!' at certain things.) If we talk of aesthetic judgements, we think, among a thousand things, of the Arts...We distinguish between a person who knows what he is talking about and a person who doesn't...The word we ought to talk about is 'appreciated.'¹⁴⁴

Castella's first attempt at critical judgement is to listen to other followers of Clara in her dressing-room, where he pays her a visit after the play, to offer her congratulations on her performance as Bérénice. He copies the exclamations of other well-wishers, it being easier to repeat received critical opinions than to respond to them oneself, especially critics whom he supposedly deems to have superior judgement. Wittgenstein refers to the development of critical judgement when he states that the view that everyone can develop an aesthetic sensibility is a democratic one, not an elitist position:

There are lots of people, well-offish, who have been to good schools, who can afford to travel about and see the Louvre, etc., and who know a lot about and can talk fluently about dozens of painters. There is another person who has seen very few paintings, but who looks intensely at one or two paintings which make a profound impression on him.¹⁴⁵

This applies to Castella's reaction when he watches the Racine play and again when he purchases his first gallery painting. David Hume believed that agreement

¹⁴⁴Wittgenstein, Ludwig (1966), *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*, ed. Barrett, Cyril, pp. 6-9.

¹⁴⁵ *ibid.*

amongst those he termed 'ideal critics' on aesthetic issues constituted "the true standard of taste and Beauty."¹⁴⁶ Further, he proposed that the 'the ideal critic' possessed five attributes: "strong sense, united to delicate sentiment, improved by practice, perfected by comparison, and cleared of all prejudice."¹⁴⁷ Although the concept of appreciation may not be entirely correlative with that of criticism, Wittgenstein's comments suggest more varied ways in which one can become one of Hume's 'ideal critics.' Wide experience, for instance, is not essential to the Humean critic, as a person's new sense of style is influenced by those he/she believes to be more 'knowledgeable.' Thus by mixing with Clara's friends and attending events with the group (although they seem to take their lead from reading the Parisian newspapers), Castella acquires a sense of aesthetic sensibility. His new sense of style is influenced by those intellectual friends of Clara's whom he believes to be more 'knowledgeable' as critics than himself and his development as he negotiates this new social group is to assume a Humean position and take on the role of art amateur.

Amongst highbrows, the snob is the person who does not participate in any lowbrow or middlebrow activity while the omnivore is at least open to appreciating them across a range.¹⁴⁸ Richard Peterson and Albert Simkus suggest in their study of symbolic boundaries that in recent years high-status individuals are far from being snobs and are eclectic, even omnivorous, in their tastes. They propose a qualitative shift in the basis for marking elite status from snobbish

¹⁴⁶ Hume, David (1985), 'Of the Standard of Taste,' in *Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. Miller, Eugene, p. 229, in which Hume outlines the criteria for the ideal critic.

¹⁴⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ Levine, Lawrence (1998), *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America*.

exclusion. Not only are high-status individuals far more likely than others to consume the fine arts but, Peterson and Simkus state, that they are also more likely to be involved in a wide range of low-status activities.¹⁴⁹ This finding confirms the observations of DiMaggio but confounds Bourdieu's study of high-status persons as univores.¹⁵⁰ In view of their findings, Peterson and Simkus suggest that a historical shift from highbrow snob to omnivore is taking place, however, the shift in the film reinforces an elitist culture as Castella is upwardly mobile in terms of art appreciation and in terms of seeking to insert himself within an intellectual group, and to immerse himself in highbrow culture.¹⁵¹ The findings of this study support the assertion that omnivorousness is replacing snobbishness amongst people of highbrow status, and although not all highbrows have become perfect omnivores, Peterson and Simkus speculate that a shift from snob to omnivore relates to status-group politics, influenced by changes in social structure, values, art-world dynamics, and generational conflict. Although this does not signify that the omnivore is disposed to like everything indiscriminately, it signifies an openness to appreciating everything. In this sense it is antithetical to snobbishness, which is based fundamentally on rigid rules of exclusion. The change from exclusionist snob to inclusionist omnivore can thus be seen as a part of the historical trend toward greater tolerance of those holding different values, as omnivorous inclusion seems better adapted to respecting the cultural expressions and tastes of others.

¹⁴⁹ Peterson, Richard and Simkus, Albert (1992), in *Cultivating Differences: Symbolic Boundaries and the Making of Inequality*.

¹⁵⁰ DiMaggio, Paul (1987), 'Classification in Art' in *American Sociological Review*, 52, pp. 440-455.

¹⁵¹ Peterson, Richrd and Simkus, Albert, *ibid*.

French Tastes

What is very succinctly pointed out by critics of *Le Goût des autres* is that this is a French film for a French audience (“il est très français”),¹⁵² which is so heavily imbued with social coding that it is doubtful, as André Iteanu suggests, whether or not (for example), an English person, with no knowledge of French, would recognise the meanings within it.¹⁵³ Sarah Leahy describe the film as a “Middle-Class Act,”¹⁵⁴ referring to the uniquely French social *rappports* in the screenplay, which may be difficult for another culture to comprehend completely although “les Français se trouvent bien dans ce film.”¹⁵⁵ The French audience recognise themselves in this film (which is not a multicultural film), highlighting the difference between the provincial group of characters and, for example, a *banlieue* society, which would be mixed in terms of social and cultural strata. The characters in the film all experience the taste of an-other at some time, whether it be supporting the bad taste of Angélique’s interior decorating or Castella’s purchase of a painting that is frowned upon by his wife.

The movement across what has been termed ‘taste spaces’ is not conceived of as a physical movement across a physical space (it cannot, for example, be measured or seen). In terms of the screening of Clara’s performances, what must be taken into account is the moment of Castella’s experience. In the final images of the film the spectator shares a space between Castella and Clara on both the receiving and the initiating ends of their respective gazes, experiencing the

¹⁵² Iteanu, André, (15/03/2000a), ‘Où sont les enfants?’ *Télérama*.

¹⁵³ *ibid*

¹⁵⁴ Leahy, Sarah (2007), ‘A Middle-Class Act: Taste and Otherness in *Le Goût des autres*, in Waldron, Darren and Vanderschelden, Isabelle, eds. *France at the Flicks*, pp. 116-129.

¹⁵⁵ Iteanu, *ibid*.

complicity of the characters, which shows that, finally, they are indeed inhabiting the same taste-world. This is emphasised by the use of close-up of the two characters, with Clara onstage looking (into the camera) at Castella seated in the stalls and with Castella looking (into the camera) at Clara, who is in turn looking at the theatre (and film) spectator. The taste space of others crosses with the desiring space between the two bodies, which invites a comparison between the aesthetics of taste and the aesthetics of embodiment, as in this case the desire for the other is the desire for the taste of the other. There is a sharing of cinematic and theatrical space, a dipping in and out of high art (theatre) and popular art (cinema), manifest in the tropes of ‘Castella/film-body/popular culture’ and ‘Clara/theatrical-body/high culture.’ Jaoui’s film signals French popular cinema as a hybrid space and as such the film reflects French society as becoming more omnivorous in terms of cultural consumption.

CHAPTER 2

Claustrophobia, Couples and Conflict

Gouttes d'eau sur pierres brûlantes

(François Ozon, 2000)

“Une pierre dans le jardin du cinéma à la française”¹

Gouttes d'eau sur pierres brûlantes, François Ozon's third feature film following *Sitcom* (1998) and *Les Amants criminels* (1999), was released after what Robert Sklar describes as a period of “eruption of violence and sexuality in French cinema.”² *Sous le Sable*, also released in 2000, marked a successful breakthrough into the European and American markets for Ozon,³ which was then followed by a musical mystery, *8 Femmes* (2002).⁴ His 2003 film, *Swimming Pool*, a psychological mystery mainly in the English language, completed what the critic Thibault Schilt has termed a “trilogy on female desire,”⁵ consisting of *Regarde la mer* (1997), *Sous le sable* and *Swimming Pool*, in which, in all three films, the female characters face the loss or absence of a male figure (a husband or a lover). Ozon's *5x2* (2004) might also be classed as a psychological mystery as it

¹ Mandelbaum, Jacques (15/03/2000), ‘Le manifeste cruel de François Ozon’, *Le Monde*.

² Sklar, Robert (2005), ‘Sex, violence, and power in the family’ *Cineaste*.

³ Sklar, *ibid.* *Sous le sable*, made in collaboration with the actress Charlotte Rampling, is a study of a middle-aged woman's psychological response to the mysterious disappearance of her husband during a beach walk.

⁴ This was a murder thriller based on a 1960s' French play and featuring a star cast of iconic French actresses including Catherine Deneuve, Isabelle Huppert, Emmanuelle Béart and Fanny Ardant.

⁵ Schilt, Tibault (2004), ‘François Ozon,’ <http://www.sensesofcinema.com/content/directors/04/ozon.html>, accessed 10/01/2005.

examines the breakdown of a marriage in reverse chronological order, beginning with divorce and working back through five separate episodes of the relationship, to the first meeting. Ozon has made a wide range of films in a prolific output of filmmaking, developing a reputation as “*L’enfant terrible*”⁶ of French cinema with similar thematics of sexual cruelty and perversion running throughout his works, along with a poignant awareness of loss and unfulfilled desire in relation to the predominant subjects of ‘the family’ or ‘the couple.’⁷ His films display, with striking originality, a variety of styles, which, although adhering to traditional cinematic (*auteur*) traditions, subvert and subsequently often ‘queer’ sexualities.⁸ Often immersed in impropriety and troubled notions of stable sexual identities, his films tend to problematise a ‘fixed’ identity and to destabilise notions of gender and sexuality, often in unusual and explicit fashion, featuring sex, violence, and manipulative characters and a defamiliarisation of the conventions of erotic narrative, with a signature style often combining brutality and black comedy.⁹ Hybridising various recognisable genres within a single film, Ozon also evades classification as a director making a certain genre of film within the neatly delineated boundaries of mainstream French cinema. Whilst it has been suggested that his inspirations are not to be found in Gallic cinema, as he identifies with other influences such as Luis Buñuel, Joe Orton and Pedro Almodóvar, Ozon’s

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ Sklar, Robert, *ibid.*

⁸ Schilt, Tibault, *ibid.*

⁹ *ibid.*

contribution to French cinema exhibits an originality in exceeding “the cosy cinematic tradition of épater les bourgeois... taking it to queer territory.”¹⁰

Gouttes d'eau, a black comedy about bourgeois domesticity steeped in 1970s ideology and taking place in Germany (the setting is a suburban Munich apartment), is adapted from an early, obscure play, *Tropfen auf heiße Steine* (1964/65) written by the controversial German playwright and filmmaker Rainer Werner Fassbinder. The narrative revolves around a series of couplings that follow the breakdown of a sadistic romance between a fifty-year-old insurance salesman, Léopold Bluhm (Bernard Giraudeau) and a young student, Franz (Malik Zidi). As the controlling relationship grows stale and petty arguments ensue, Franz’s girlfriend Anna (Ludivine Sagnier) comes to rescue him from Léopold’s clutches. The three are then joined by the surprise arrival of Léopold’s former lover, Véra (Anna Thomson), a transsexual, and the four characters play out various combinations of sexual grouping until Franz, consumed by his love for Léopold, finally commits suicide. Upon its release, the film received a mixed critical response from the French press, as a successful portrayal of “Kitsch et dérision,”¹¹ “farce corrosive et pétillante”¹² and “petit théâtre de la cruauté,”¹³ and on the other hand as “assez vain exercice de style” and “petit théâtre de marionnettes (qui) n’amuse que celui qui y joue.”¹⁴ It won the award for the Best

¹⁰ Romney, Jonathan (1999), ‘Sitcom’, *Sight and Sound*, 9, 1, Jan., p. 56.

¹¹ C.A. (16/03/2001), ‘Kitsch et dérision’, *Les Echos*.

¹² Landrau M., (15/03/2000), ‘Gouttes d’eau sur pierres brûlantes’, *Télérama*.

¹³ Mandelbaum J., (15/03/2000), ‘Le manifeste cruel de François Ozon’, *Le Monde*.

¹⁴ Ferenczi A., (15/03/2000), ‘Gouttes d’eau sur pierres brûlantes - Bienvenu dans la maison Playmobil’, *Télérama*.

Feature Film at both the Berlin International Festival in 2000 and the New York Lesbian and Gay Film Festival (also in 2000).

Gouttes d'eau highlights the fluidity of the boundaries between 'gay' and 'straight' through the mobility of the sexualities in the relationships between the four characters. Multiple heterosexual and homosexual 'triangles of desire' exist simultaneously in the film between the characters, who participate in various sexual relationships or bonds. Investigating how these triangles function by referring to René Girard, Eve Kosovsky Sedgwick and Judith Butler's works on triangular relationships and the complex negotiation of desires within them, offers an insight into the destructive and undesirable relationships that develop. Through a new reading of erotic triangles this chapter will show that Ozon immerses the spectator in the trivial and mundane details of the daily routine of a distinctive couple, Léopold and Franz, through his close attention to style and theatricality, with a breakdown of both homosexual and heterosexual relationships that reveals significant prejudices in the positioning and representations of 'triangular desire,' in a new look at sexualities in French cinema. The chapter also establishes a strong authorial link between Ozon and Fassbinder in that the notion of sexuality in both the original play and in Ozon's film is bound up inextricably with self-identity, gender and national cultures. Simultaneously, a reading of Ozon's film through modern 'queer' theory will demonstrate a subversion of the fixity of homosexuality and heterosexuality as separate entities and the emergence of more fluid sexualities that do not fit into the two categories of gay and straight and cannot be confined to conventional heterosexual mythology and the state marriage

institution. The film also has the structural outlines of a ‘woman’s film,’ presenting a number of key elements of melodrama both in narrative themes and in characterisations, and as such Ozon offers a new reading of the original Fassbinder melodrama in terms of style and structure.

Rainer Werner Fassbinder

Fassbinder was a prominent figure within the history of German Cinema, committed to a socially aware cinema and with the distinctive capacity of often using the narrative form (and, to some degree, the content) of Hollywood melodrama. This was a specific feature of his contribution to the movement of ‘New German Cinema’, capturing the context of ambiguity, complexity and radicality in his work to produce emotive, artistic and political statements.¹⁵ Through a series of variations on the recurring themes of liberty, freedom and individuality, he was able to explore the disappointments and cruelties of urban life, usually with homosexuality as a general part of a larger, more complex and intricate element of the narrative (but not necessarily the central thematic).¹⁶ His piece, *Tropfen auf heiße Steine*, was written for theatre when he was nineteen years of age, a few years before he joined the collective avant-garde movement,

¹⁵ Particularly developed in Fassbinder’s *Les larmes amères de Petra von Kant* (1972), *Martha* (1973) and *Le Droit du plus fort* (1975). Fassbinder paired cutting-edge techniques and themes to address post-war German concerns in areas of social class, race, age, ethnicity and beauty, rather than focusing on sexual behaviour itself. Many of his films deal candidly with sexuality and sexual taboos, for example *Les larmes amères de Petra von Kant* and *In a Year of 13 Moons* (1978), the latter focusing on a doomed, transsexual protagonist.

¹⁶ In a 1993 article on Fassbinder (who was openly gay), Douglas Crimp alludes to a central question or ‘problem’ in the work of homosexual film-makers, questioning the extent to which their films are actually ‘about’ homosexuality, Crimp, Douglas (1993), ‘Fassbinder, Franz, Fox, Elvira, Erwin, Armin, and All the Others,’ in Gevert, Martha et al (eds), *Queer Looks: Perspectives on Lesbian and Gay Film and Video*, pp 257-74.

Action-Theatre in Munich, but the play was only staged much later, after his death.¹⁷ It commemorates Fassbinder's reaction to a national political consciousness which was marked by traumatic memories of Nazism, the division of Germany and conformism. Ozon has intentionally not updated Fassbinder's 1970s scenario of the play as it is a specific reference to the author and to his belief that marginalities did not exist.¹⁸ It reproduces an accurate *mise en scène* of that era, which has been described as "a milieu of polo necks and polyester,"¹⁹ and is recreated by Ozon as a homage to Fassbinder in the authentic 1970s costuming and decor of the piece.

La maison Playmobil

In a Munich suburb of 1970's Federal Republic of Germany, Franz, a young man of twenty meets fifty year old Léopold and is invited back to his apartment for a drink. Lured into the apartment by a desire that he cannot explain, Franz abandons a meeting with his girlfriend Anna to accompany the much older Léopold, by whom he is eventually coaxed into homosexual relations. Franz subsequently becomes Léopold's partner and moves into the apartment. The relationship deteriorates rapidly as Franz becomes an underdog to Léopold, who abuses him emotionally. Their lives are then complicated, first by the arrival of Franz's girlfriend, Anna (Ludivine Sagnier), who is trying to win him back, and

¹⁷ In a production by Klaus Weise in 1985 at the Munich Theatre Festival.

¹⁸ François Ozon states in an interview on the France Culture website, www.info-france-usa.org/culture/cinema/releases/ozontalk, accessed June 2004, that Fassbinder often maintained that the more a person lived outside the social norm, the more they adapted to the dominant images of human relations.

¹⁹ Anon, www.info-france-usa.org/culture/cinema/releases/ozontalk1.html, accessed 11/01/2005.

then by the appearance of Véra (Anna Thomson), a transsexual and Léopold's former lover, who has undergone a sex change operation (she was previously a man, named Helmut) in order to please Léopold. This turns the relationship into a complicated foursome, as Léopold shows a sexual interest in Anna, who then has sexual relations with both Franz and Léopold. The four characters become sealed in a vicious circle from which there is no escape, repeating their actions and movements, motivated by their needs either to be dominated or to dominate. Franz, in a fit of depression, then swallows poison and dies, whilst the others ignore him and continue their sexual activities in the bedroom, apart from Véra who pays some attention to Franz.

From the opening frames of the film, which depict two indistinguishable figures coming in from the street to an apartment in the dark, which is then illuminated in stages as Léopold systematically switches on the lamps, showing his ownership and domination of the space, *Gouttes d'eau* would seem to reflect the feeling of being trapped in a structure, the predominance of darkness bearing similarities to the opening of Fassbinder's *In einem Jahr mit 13 Monden*.²⁰ In both films, identities are indistinct and immediately draw the spectator into the process of gendered viewing conventions, raising issues in *Gouttes d'eau* of the identity of twenty year old Franz. The entire film takes place in Léopold's apartment, which is clearly delineated as a hermeneutically-sealed *huis clos* with no shots of 'outside' the four walls of the apartment, apart from views up to the outside of the windows, which cannot be opened and entrap the characters inside. The perverse

²⁰ Fassbinder, Rainer Werner (1978), *In einem Jahr mit 13 Monden*, (*In a Year of 13 Moons*).

sexuality and power dynamics that take place between Franz and the older Léopold in the claustrophobic *huis clos* of the apartment, find echoes in the relationship between the two gay protagonists of another Fassbinder play, *Faustrecht der Freiheit*,²¹ and there are also similarities in terms of the apartment setting and the abuse of a vulnerable character, with the (lesbian) couple in Fassbinder's *Die bitteren Tränen der Petra von Kant* (1972), Léopold's apartment in *Gouttes d'eau* reflecting Fassbinder's original *mise en scène* of the confined space of Petra von Kant's apartment. The decor of "bon goût munichois"²² and "artifice kitsche"²³ in the suffocating, theatrical *huis clos* of *Gouttes d'eau*, which has the air of "une maison Playmobil modèle années '70,"²⁴ is even more confined than the setting of Ozon's *Sitcom* and features frontal camerawork (by Jeanne Lapoirie) that recalls the static, spectatorial perspective of live theatrical performance. Theatricality and artifice are used to excess in *Gouttes d'eau* as a central aspect of the *mise en scène*, to the extent that, as Frédéric Bonnaud writes; "on a le fort sentiment d'un cinéma regardé, d'une présence extérieur au plan, d'un film dirigé depuis le quatrième mur."²⁵ In addition, in order to highlight the isolation of the characters within the diegetic space, the framing of windows, mirrors and doorways, which were a favoured Fassbinder device inherited from Douglas Sirk,²⁶ is used to optimal effect as these frames contain and confine the

²¹ Fassbinder, Rainer Werner (1975), *Faustrecht der Freiheit*, (*Fox and his Friends*).

²² Ferenczi, Aurélien (15/032000), 'Gouttes d'eau sur pierres brûlantes', *Télérama*.

²³ Lorrain, François-Guillaume (10/03/2000), 'Gouttes d'eau sur pierres brûlantes', *Le Point*.

²⁴ Ferenczi, *ibid.*

²⁵ Bonnaud, Frédéric (14/032000), Le droit du plus fort, *Les Inrockuptibles*.

²⁶ Bingham, Adam (2004), 'Identity and Love', in *Kinoeye*, 3, 13, notes that it is a common Sirkian motif that suggests entrapment, as well as connoting distance when characters are framed in windows. Fassbinder enthusiastically acknowledged his predecessor's influence on his work from 1971-77, in what has been described as the second phase of his career and the one that brought him

cinematic world where desires are motivating jealousies, suicide and relationships. Mirrors and windows are a recurring motif throughout Douglas Sirk's Hollywood films but in Sirk's world, rather than showing the looker as a 'double', the reflection is the looker's 'opposite': "What is interesting about a mirror is that it does not show yourself as you are, it shows you your own opposite."²⁷ Ozon uses the mirror shot as a modified directorial gaze to distance the spectator, which is a device typical of Fassbinder who, as Kaja Silverman writes:

...further denaturalises identity by emphasising at every conceivable juncture its imaginary bases. Thus he never misses an opportunity to point the camera at a character's mirror reflection rather than at the character him or herself, and he shoots almost compulsively through windows as if to deny any possibility of the camera's scrutiny."²⁸

In Ozon's case, the use of this device does not cast a Sirkian reflection, as he films Franz's fractured reflection in a mirror to signal the multiplicity of his desires for both Léopold and Anna. The resulting shattering of Franz's image in the mirror is a recurring motif throughout the film²⁹ and an indication of his fragile sexual identity. An emphasis on framing and containment within the *mise en scène* is

international acclaim. His films were modelled, to ironic effect, on the melodramas that Hollywood director Douglas Sirk made for Universal Studios in the 1950s. Sirk's style was the bourgeois melodrama in which he critiqued American society as a structure of ridicule. His films often explored how deep-rooted prejudices about race, sexual orientation, politics and class were inherent in society, whilst also examining his 'trademark' subject on the Fascism present in family life and friendship.

²⁷ Baumgarten, Marjorie (2000), 'Douglas Sirk's Imitations of Life,' http://weeklywire.com/ww/05-1500/ww_film, accessed 14/06/2005.

²⁸ Silverman Kaja, (1989), 'Fassbinder and Lacan: a Reconsideration of Gaze, Look and Image,' *Camera Obscura*, 19, January, 7, 1. p. 62

²⁹ Bingham, Adam, *ibid.*

also a recurrent composition in the film with tightly framed shots of the doorways, the hall, the rooms and the windows, such that characters are viewed (framed) through the apartment windows from the outside with the camera looking up at the windows. These common images are often employed by Sirk in Hollywood melodrama, as well as to connote distance between characters, which Ozon uses to effect when Franz and Léopold, then Anna and Franz, and finally Anna and Véra, are filmed (isolated) in separate windows, but Véra, the fourth character, in the last frame of the film, is helplessly pinned inside the window, unable to unlock it and escape from the apartment, thus denying narrative closure and connoting repetition (the meta-narrative).

Franz and Léopold

Franz and Léopold's relationship begins as a casual friendship within the space of the living room of the apartment, where the two enjoy drinks and play word games; but once power and authority are established, the resulting roles extend themselves beyond the friendship to a sexual relationship. Léopold recounts to Franz details of his own failed relationship with a woman (his former girlfriend from a seven-year relationship was 'never satisfied'), in an attempt to emphasise his impotency and heterosexual failure and in order to facilitate his sexual advances towards Franz. He makes explicit reference to the fact that his prime source of pleasure is sex with men, which exceeds his (only moderate) enjoyment of sex with women. He is aware that Franz is in a heterosexual relationship with Anna and questions him about his sexual enjoyment in the

relationship. Franz admits during the conversation that he only has sex with his girlfriend to satisfy conventions ('in order to keep the peace'), however, when Léopold learns that Franz attended a boarding school he quizzes him about relations with boys, to which Franz admits that he experienced sexual activity, but dismissively implies it was mere child's play. To elicit answers from Franz, Léopold circles around him (denoted by the camera itself circling Franz dizzily in midshot) which disorients the latter and decreases his awareness (also lessened by the alcoholic drinks he has consumed), so that he recounts his homosexual fantasies to Léopold. This scene puts Léopold in a dominating position at the beginning of the film and a position that he then maintains all the way through the narrative. Franz recounts to Léopold a sexual fantasy he has had since his schooldays of being sodomised and 'entered like a girl' by a man wearing a long mackintosh. Léopold promises Franz more sexual pleasure from a homosexual relationship than Franz enjoys in his heterosexual coupling with Anna and he consequently becomes Léopold's sexual partner and moves into the apartment, taking on the 'feminine' role of housewife whilst Léopold goes out to work, often away for several weeks at a time.

In a sense, it is at this point that Franz 'discovers' another aspect of his sexuality which is his bisexuality, but heterosexuality and homosexuality are displayed as distinct and binary, which relates Ozon to Fassbinder and a trend of gay film directors favouring a certain sense of hypervisibility to homosexuality in their films. Like Fassbinder's films, however, *Gouttes d'eau* is not a film *about*

homosexuality.³⁰ As well as partly basing the film on *Die bitteren Tränen der Petra von Kant* (although the adaptation was mainly from *Tropfen auf heiße Steine*) Ozon also draws parallels between *Gouttes d'eau* and Fassbinder's *Faustrecht der Freiheit*, in which "homosexuality is never presented as an issue."³¹ Indeed, to say that *Gouttes d'eau* (denotatively or connotatively) is 'about' homosexuality would efface much of its complexity and ambiguity in the emotional manipulation, domination and exploitation of the unstable identities of the characters.

As Ozon states: "Souvent, l'érotisation d'un homme passe par sa féminisation,"³² and within the *vie de couple* Franz takes on the role of 'housewife' to Léopold and performs domestic and menial tasks such as the Hoovering and washing up (wearing effeminate, blue, rubber gloves). He is also filmed taking bubble baths, blow-drying his hair and flaunting his slender, bare legs (one of Léopold's fetishes) by wearing boyish shorts (*Lederhosen*) around the apartment, all of which are female-orientated, fetishistic and erotically-ritualised tasks and acts. The camera accompanies Franz voyeuristically around the apartment, objectifying him as he performs his routines. When he enters (the much older) Léopold's world (the apartment), he already exhibits the voice, gestures and sensitivity of 'the feminine,' described by Foucault as

³⁰ Grandena, Florian (2009), 'Zooming In, Coming Out: Languages in Olivier Ducastel and Jacques Martineau's *Ma vraie vie à Rouen* (2003),' *Studies in French Cinema*, 9, 1, pp. 75–86. Grandena suggests that some *cinéastes* are willing to portray the lives and experiences of gay and lesbian protagonists, and the formal and thematic diversity of such works is an important characteristic of this trend towards hypervisibility of 'gay' film and TV productions.

³¹ Ozon takes up the issue of homosexuality as a theme in film, citing Fassbinder's *Faustrecht der Freiheit* (1974), as an example in which the theme of the character Eugen, taking a male partner home to his parents' for dinner, is not particularly treated so as to be read as 'unnatural'. www.info-france-usa.org/culture/cinema/releases/ozontalk1, accessed 07/07/2004.

³² Rouyer, Philippe and Vassé, Claire (2004), 'François Ozon: la vérité des corps,' *Positif*, July/August, 521/522, pp. 41-45.

“characterised...by a certain quality of sexual sensibility, a certain way of inverting the masculine and feminine on oneself.”³³ From the first meeting, the homosocial identities of the two men appear to be at opposite ends of the scale, each character’s desire manifesting itself differently, for whilst Léopold is more obviously a closet homosexual, in the sense that he practices homosexuality in the privacy of his home but publicly has heterosexual relationships, there is no easy way to understand Franz’s homosexuality. Although he has a female love-object (Anna), his masculinity is weakened and feminised by Léopold and he accepts the dominator/dominated, master/slave distinction from the beginning of the relationship with him.

Once Léopold has established the dominating position in the relationship he no longer finds it a novelty to court the vulnerable Franz (a habitual pattern in Léopold’s life, since once he has attained power, he simply becomes bored), and consequently he provokes arguments, abuses Franz (a regular trait in Fassbinderian characterisation) and cynically criticises him as being “trop fin trop sensible trop intello”³⁴ in order to cruelly and sadistically destroy him psychologically. The two men consequently live in disharmony in what becomes a “naufrage progressif de l’amour.”³⁵ This couple is an unusual case within Fassbinder’s work, since although Franz is the weaker character in many aspects, he could be considered to be intellectually dominant (being interested in the arts and theatre which he considers are the priorities in life), and therefore in that sense is superior to the banal insurance salesman but his desire for love leads him to

³³ Foucault, Michel (1976), *History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, transl. by Hurley, Robert (1990), p. 43.

³⁴ Champion, Alexis (12/03/2001), ‘Osons Ozon’, *Le Journal du dimanche*.

³⁵ *ibid.*

assume the subservient role in a master/slave relationship. As Jack Babuscio puts it, the relationship is based upon a notion of desire in “a world of masters and servants, predators and victims.”³⁶ Léopold and Franz’s constant bickering recalls Fassbinder’s comment that “Love does not exist. There is only the possibility of love,”³⁷ as their dissimilarities not only affect their relationship with each other, but also affect how they define themselves as men, as they struggle to find their place within a destructive patriarchy. Far from merely serving to preserve patriarchal culture based on male homosocial bonding, both Franz and Léopold are feminised by their homosexuality, but whereas Léopold is feminised by his desire for another man, Franz is more centrally and definingly located within femininity and “the essence of the female.”³⁸ Thus, at the beginning of the film a range of contradictions around the homo/hetero-sexual dichotomy is set up and in particular, the assignment of a gender confusion which raises the question of the orientation of desires within the piece. This particular couple’s narrative also highlights the way in which Fassbinder and Ozon are bound together as creative artists in the reflection of what Babuscio terms a “gay sensibility,”³⁹ which is a creative energy reflecting a consciousness that is different from the mainstream, with both (openly gay) directors employing stylistic devices such as strong imagery and incongruous contrasts in camp theatricality.⁴⁰

³⁶ Babuscio, Jack (1999), ‘The Cinema of Camp,’ in Cleto, Fabio, *Camp*, p. 118.

³⁷ Elsaesser, Thomas (1996), *Fassbinder's Germany*, p. 290.

³⁸ Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky (1990), *The Epistemology of the Closet*, pp. 234-235.

³⁹ Babuscio, *ibid.*

⁴⁰ Although further analysis of this similarity between the directors in relation to camp and auteur theory is outside the scope of the study.

Franz and Anna

Franz and Léopold's contentious relationship is further complicated and transformed by the sudden arrival of Anna, who has tracked down Franz (as he missed a meeting with her when he met Léopold) with the intention of winning him back. Whilst Léopold is away on a trip she stays at the apartment and successfully rekindles her sexual relationship with Franz. With childish innocence she proposes that Franz forget Léopold (and therefore deny his homosexuality) and take control of his life to escape from the latter's domination which seems to be at the heart of Franz's unhappiness. Anna plans to find an apartment, marry Franz and have children, in other words, she proposes stability, however, Franz's identity is complex and at the end of the film as he lies dying, he declares that he really loves Léopold. Having drawn the spectator into the life of the distinctive Franz /Léopold couple as the narrative unfolds, Ozon then shows the Franz/Anna heterosexual couple to share the same conflicts, Franz in particular trying to duplicate with Anna what he was subjected to, and experienced with, Léopold, including an attempt at dominating their relationship. Once Anna has convinced Franz that he should forget his homosexual love for Léopold and leave the apartment (although Anna suggests leaving a note), the two are about to leave when Léopold arrives home and confronts them. He immediately assumes control and proceeds to dominate both Anna and Franz and, in spite of his professed love of men and avowed misogyny, seduces Anna, who swiftly falls for his sexual charms. Dismissive of Anna's plans to remove Franz from the apartment Léopold develops a complicity with her, which rapidly proceeds to sexual relations

between them, and the trio then become locked in a web that Léopold spins (as he did around Franz during their first conversation in the apartment) forming a triangle of desire.

Franz and Anna and Véra and Léopold

The repeated impromptu arrivals at the door of the apartment by Véra, Léopold's ex-partner, are pre-empted by her ring on the door bell, each time signalling the interruption of a formation of relationships, first between Franz and Léopold, then between Franz and Anna and finally between Franz, Léopold and Anna. Véra, a transsexual (resembling Marlene Dietrich), has had a sex-change operation in order to marry Léopold (who would only marry 'Helmut,' the man she was by birth, if he were a woman). Announcing to Léopold that Helmut has 'left' her, Véra is then crudely introduced to Franz and Anna by Léopold, who describes her as a castrated man and this is followed by humiliating comments (from Léopold) about her sadomasochistic tendencies during their previous relationship, for it transpires that Léopold has lied to Franz about being in a previous relationship with a woman and it was Véra (as Helmut) who had been his partner for seven years. The four characters then become entrapped in a constant repetition of actions and movements ordered by Léopold. Franz's love for Léopold alludes to another central aspect of the film regarding the formation of the foursome which has divided into two pairs (Léopold/Anna and Franz/Véra), each character finding a connection that binds them together with the most unexpected person. The link between Franz and Véra as victims of Léopold and as

people desperately in search of a secure identity is played out as Franz, who has already taken the poison that will kill him discusses his love for Léopold with Véra, whilst Léopold and Anna are having sex in the bedroom. In Véra's presence Franz telephones his mother to tell her that he is dying, to which she merely replies "bon voyage." As Véra points out to Franz, she and he are in the same situation as they both love Léopold. There is a suggestion (from Véra) that they form a relationship together, but it is too late to prevent Franz's death. After discovering the poisoned Franz and helplessly watching him die, it is Véra who suggests that they call the police but Léopold callously delays this, both he and Anna professing only mild concern over the death. The suicide briefly interrupts the troilist escapades of Léopold, Anna and Véra, and the comic horror of their return to the bedroom (ordered by Léopold), leaving Franz dead on the floor in the living room, is cruel and emotionless, in view of the fact that Franz's suicide is largely due to the abusive domestic life that he has suffered as a result of Léopold's sadistic treatment. His physical death from poisoning also reflects Vera's tragic spiritual and emotional death (the death of Helmut's identity), that is the death of Vera's masculinity. As Léopold later telephones Franz's mother to say he is dead (to which the latter replies that she already knew), Anna, who earlier professed her love for Franz and wanted to marry him, can only voice her concern about who will father her children now that Franz is dead.

Towards the closure of the film, a scene in which all four characters suddenly break away from the morbid and stagnant mood of the *mise en scène* is a choreographed dance sequence, performed by the characters who line up in the

living room and erupt into a camp, disco-dance to the soundtrack of a 1977 pop song, ‘*Tanze Samba Mit Mir,*’ with German lyrics sung by Tony Holiday. The dance is performed straight-to-camera and provides a cross-cultural mix of memorabilia with the four participants mimicking the 1970s’ pop dance scene but retaining their own personal movement styles related to their relevant (film) personalities.⁴¹ Ozon specifically composed the sequence to thwart the principle of causality and thoughts of suicide and death which are the final outcome of the narrative:

Dans *Gouttes d'eau...*, la scène de danse se substitue quasiment à la scène d'amour. À un moment, j'ai senti dans l'adaptation de la pièce qu'il fallait accélérer les choses, ne plus les exprimer par les dialogues....cette danse qui, en deux minutes, résume la situation et fait la transition avec la tragédie. Tout est là: le jeune garçon qui ne suit pas le rythme, les deux filles subjuguées par le personnage de Giraudeau qui, au propre et au figuré, mène la danse. La danse économise la représentation de la partouze.⁴²

Within the group Léopold leads the dance, in fact he is the only one who knows the step sequence. Franz is out of step and the two females follow Léopold’s moves, which is an accurate representation of the pattern of their relationships. Similar to an impromptu dance sequence in Jean-Luc Godard’s 1964 film, *Bande à part*, the performance also resembles musical numbers in *13 Moons*, *Chinese Roulette* and other Fassbinder films and is a moment which is dislocated from any logical causes and effects, or intentions. Although highly contained in terms of the

⁴¹ For example, the popular dance troupe *Les Claudettes* (established 1966), who accompanied the iconic French pop star, Claude François (1939-1978) onstage.

⁴² Royer, Philippe and Vassé, Claire (2004), ‘François Ozon: la vérité des corps’, *Positif*, July/August, 521/522, pp. 41-45.

limited space in which it takes place (it transforms the living room into a small night-club *piste*), the sequence is an interference of physical vitality that is capable of overturning the unpredictable course of the film's final images, lending a more optimistic approach to the conclusion than the scripted ending of the suicide that follows, by locking into the vital pulse of the dance movements to effect a temporary reprieve for the spectator from the 'death' of Franz, which is also the 'death' of both the Franz/Anna and the Franz/Léopold couples. Fassbinder describes the original play as "une comédie avec fin pseudo-tragique,"⁴³ that is, beginning in realism and ending in tragedy/farce, and the dance sequence is not only comedic but rendered grotesque, as it pre-empts the suicide which could also be considered as the deliberate murder of Franz at the hands of the others. The film's key inclusion of a German language song forcibly exposes the French spectator to German culture in a self-conscious, cross-cultural foray by Ozon, who also chose to end the film with the title track *Traüme* from Françoise Hardy's only German-language album, a nostalgic and haunting piece with roots in both French and German popular cultures:

For me the French are still very entrenched culturally. People in Germany talk about French culture, but nobody in France talks about German culture. So here I was going to force my audiences to listen to German...⁴⁴

Also of an ambiguous nature, with Berlinesque connotations (as a drag song), the Hardy song immerses the audience in Fassbinder's 1970s' culture along with, at

⁴³ Bonnaud, Frédéric (14/03/2000), Le droit du plus fort, *Les Inrockuptibles*.

⁴⁴ Bowen, Peter, 'François and his friends,' www.filmmakermagazine.com, accessed 15/03/2010.

one point, quotations from a Heinrich Heine poem in German (recited by Franz), and the opening titles of the film superimposed on a series of images of technicolour postcards of 1970s' Germany.

The Theatre of Fantasy

Ozon has theatricalised the sexual encounters of Franz with Léopold, Franz with Anna, and Anna with Léopold, using intertitles (consisting of Acts I, II and III) which mark stages in each characters' 'warring with the symbolic,' heterosexuality being transmuted into homosexuality as the characters engage in the combination of sexual 'acts.' The key to understanding the complexity of desires in *Gouttes d'eau* is interwoven into the repeated scenes that close Acts I, II and III, as follows: in Act I, Franz recounts to Leopold his fantasy of being sodomised, which dates from childhood dreams of a man (his mother's partner) in a mackintosh raping him "comme une fille". There is an emphasis in the text on Franz's public school education, which evokes images of "spankings,...shame, rhythmic control and prohibition,"⁴⁵ 'problematizing' male anal eroticism as being 'meaningful' (within Western systems of meaning, including gender). Léopold orders Franz to strip and lie naked on the bed, the camera cuts to a close-up pan up from the feet to the head of Léopold who has entered the room dressed in a large mackintosh as Franz lies passively waiting for him, at which point this is the end of Act I. Act II opens with a medium frontal close-up of Léopold now penetrating Franz from behind, controlling and masterful of the latter. The exact

⁴⁵ Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky (1994), *Tendencies*, p. 203.

shot appears again in the next Act when the mackintosh game is repeated, and although it is Franz who wears the costume this time and Léopold who lies naked on the bed 'like a girl,' the penetration shot is nevertheless identical to the previous one, as the camera cuts to the sex act of Léopold again engaging in a sexual act with Franz, the former having reversed his subjugated, feminised positioning as 'the penetrated' to once again be 'the penetrator'. In Act III the frame is again repeated, but it is now Léopold engaging in a sex act with Anna now in the position of 'the sodomised', replacing Franz as the object of Léopold's desire.

Thus each Act of the scene-play closes in a similar manner on a variation around Franz's sexual fantasy, which is a person naked and face-down on the bed, another standing next to the bed dressed in a long mackintosh, the sound track of a musical-box playing the same tune, and a door that closes on the scene each time to exclude the spectator, who must then imagine what follows. This interchanging of the role-play mirrors the interchanging of the sex coupling of the different characters in the bedroom. These are scenes of initiation for each participant as for Franz it marks his 'coming out' in the presence of Anna; for Anna it is her first threesome; and for Véra, who joins Anna and Léopold in the bedroom, it is the first time she tries relations with Léopold as a woman, but this is unfulfilled and she does not (or cannot, although this is not made clear in the film), physically participate in the sex acts.

Erotic Triangles

An analysis of ‘triangular desire’ in *Gouttes d’eau*, using René Girard’s concept in his work *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*,⁴⁶ yields a deeper understanding of the film’s construction, as ‘triangles of desire’ exist in the framework of homosexual as well as heterosexual relationships. These are not limited to traditional concepts of normative heterosexual relationships and are therefore more relevant to Ozon’s film. Girard’s concept functions not merely as an apparatus of sexuality, but upon the foundational concept of desire as a structured force that requires a mixture of power, jealousy, and mimesis between a subject and a mediator in order for a triangle to exist, demonstrating power relations while adding depth to characters and furthering the narrative. Multiple triangles in *Gouttes d’eau* demonstrate power relations in the narrative, ‘triangular desire’ being a required element of the analysis of the heterosexual Franz/Anna couple, since the Franz/Anna/Léopold triangle exists in the framework of homosexual, as well as heterosexual relationships, with the plot being almost wholly constructed around this principal triangle, which drives virtually all the action in the narrative. Narratives of love conjure up images of couples in whatever way or combination those couples might be composed (same-sex, bisexual, or opposite-sex), and as Marjorie Garber states, there is almost always a “battle of sorts to ‘win’ the female from another male in rivalry.”⁴⁷ In Girard’s *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, in spite of few

⁴⁶ Girard, René (1965), *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*. In this seminal work Girard reveals a different mechanism for the human desire; one which would not fix itself in an autonomous way according to a linear path between the subject and an object, but one that imitates the desire of another, according to a triangular plan of subject - model - object.

⁴⁷ Garber, Marjorie (1997), *Vice Versa*, p. 431.

references to homosexuality, there is an opening up of the critique of homosexual desire as he states:

Nothing is gained by reducing triangular desire to a homosexuality which is necessarily opaque to the heterosexual. If one turned the explanation around, the results would be much more interesting. An attempt should be made to understand at least some forms of homosexuality from the standpoint of triangular desire.⁴⁸

Eve Kosovsky Sedgwick's essay, 'Gender Asymmetry and Erotic Triangles,'⁴⁹ asserts that women are neglected in Girard's triangles because the real focus of the triangle is on the rivals; "the triangles Girard traces are most often those in which two males are rivals for a female; it is the bond between males that he most assiduously uncovers."⁵⁰ Sedgwick concludes that women are denied the position of either subject or mediator in Girard's triangles, because the real relationship or desire exists between men (the rivals), women figuring only cursorily in triangular desire by creating the fulcrum upon which desire is launched. In the film, the object of both Léopold and Anna's desire is Franz and it would therefore seem in this case that Franz is the fulcrum, although the triangle is subsequently destabilised by the presence of Véra and then becomes the Anna/Léopold/Véra triangle of which Léopold would be the fulcrum.

Sedgwick identifies strategies of homosocial desire and gives an explanation as to how the triangle is a useful figure by which to understand that; "in any erotic rivalry, the bond that links the two rivals is as intense and potent as the bond that

⁴⁸ Girard, René, *ibid.*, p. 47.

⁴⁹ Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky (1985), Chapter 1, 'Gender Asymmetry and Erotic Triangles', *Between Men*, p. 21-27.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*

links either of the rivals to the beloved.”⁵¹ That the failure of heterosexuality is due in part to self-destructive tendencies and repressed desires within patriarchy is borne out by a close look at the function of male homosocial desire in *Gouttes d'eau*, which shows patriarchy to be consistently oppressive and destructive. The patriarchal triangle, according to Sedgwick, tends to exhibit a disruptive potential when either of its relationships transgresses the boundaries from heterosexual to homosexual love, however, in the case of *Gouttes d'eau*, a queer reading reveals the ‘intrusion’ of bisexuality into the triangulation. In this sense examining erotic triangles in the film helps to clarify the dynamics informing the failed narrative of the heterosexual couple and the manipulative potential of triangular constellations, that is, the introduction of a third element in order to split up an already existing compound, with the aim of forming a new combination under the exclusion of one of the former components.

The triangular structure is sought out first by Franz, who accepts Léopold’s approaches and the eventual sexual relationship with him, knowing that his girlfriend Anna will eventually arrive. The triangle serves in this case (as Garber suggests),⁵² as an ambivalence which signals not only Franz’s difficulty of making a choice, but also his difficulty of distinguishing between self and other. The triangular relationship of Franz, Léopold and Anna is central to an understanding of the film’s structuring of both feminine and masculine identities, particularly embodied in the two male protagonists’ respective relationship to Anna, who is positioned between the two characters in the sexual ‘battle’ that Garber describes,

⁵¹ *ibid*, p. 21.

⁵² Garber, Marjorie (1997), *Vice Versa*, p. 431.

creating a rivalry between the two males for the attentions and/or affections of the female. Franz's masculinity is contested and variously defined between overt heterosexuality, in his plans to be married to Anna and have children (his fantasy) and in his bisexuality (his reality), the conflict of which he cannot resolve with the result that he commits suicide. What complicates the Anna/Franz couple is the bisexuality of both Franz and Léopold. Focus on the dynamics of a triangular relationship and how the characters attempt to negotiate it, how the relationships may be read in the film and what meaning Ozon has tried to convey through the complicated webs of desire that Fassbinder originally devised, offers an insight into Ozon's stance on the patriarchal *status quo*, as the relationships that develop in the narrative are destructive and undesirable.

In addition to heterosexual and homosexual triangles existing simultaneously between the four characters in *Gouttes d'eau*, the formation of multiple triangles within the text only furthers Girard's theory in the sense that it is not the object in the triangle that is truly desired, but the desire of the subject for what the mediator has or wants. It would seem likely that once the object has been obtained, the subject discovers that it is not the object that is desired (a 'disappointment'),⁵³ but that it is the conflict, passion, even violence that occurs between two rivals that is the 'sought-after'. According to Girard, this 'disappointment' is as inevitable as the fact that the subject will seek out another mediator and other objects, as Léopold proceeds to do with Anna and then Véra;

⁵³ Girard, René (1965), *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, p. 88.

The disappointment is irrefutable proof of the absurdity of triangular desire. ... Deprived of desire the hero (subject) is in danger of falling into the abyss of the present like a well-digger whose rope breaks. The object never did have the power ... he had attributed to it. But this power he confers elsewhere, on a second object, on a new desire, as one crosses a stream, jumping from one slippery stone to another.⁵⁴

The breakdown of Franz's relationship with Léopold would therefore seem to be a predictable step, and one could also forecast that Anna's relationship with Léopold is doomed to failure and that the latter will find yet another object, the cycle repeating itself perpetually. The act of killing Léopold is the only method by which Franz is able to assert his potency, played out in fantasy as he imagines that he shoots Léopold between the eyes whilst the latter is engaged in sexual activity with Anna and Véra, although such a straightforward method of affirming masculinity seems to belie the triangulated structure of homosocial desire. Franz does not accept the loss of his role as Leopold's partner when he is rejected in favour of Anna and Véra, as he is in a masochistic, master/slave relationship and therefore seeks escape, as Henri Laborit suggests:

Ce comportement de fuite sera le seul à permettre de demeurer normal par rapport à soi-même, aussi longtemps que la majorité des hommes qui se considèrent normaux tenteront sans succès de le devenir en cherchant à établir leur dominance, individuelle, de groupe, de classe, de nation, de blocs de nations.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ *ibid.*

⁵⁵ Laborit, Henri (1976), *Éloge de la fuite*, p. 17.

Stuck in the reality of an unhappy, dominated/dominator binary, Franz reproduces his relationship with Léopold in his relationship with Anna, attempting to dominate, but by repeating Léopold's gestures, looks and commands in a replaying of his relationship with the latter, he fails in the role of dominator in his relationship with Anna. His ethereal, artistic nature contrasts sharply with Leopold's lifestyle and employment (the latter's is commercially-based), and his homosexuality at first lies in the imaginary (in his fantasies) before passing to the act, after which he discovers that he loves Léopold (although this blocks his escape). He also imagines that he will be married to Anna (he puts up no resistance to her plans for marriage and parenthood), but rejecting this dream for the reality of being Leopold's partner, there is no way out for Franz apart from death. He is positioned as negotiating conflicting or contradictory positionings of male desire, identity and sexuality.

The heterosexual and homosocial divide is evident in Léopold's relationship with Franz and Anna and the former's attempts at asserting his potency with each. With Franz, he does this initially through his aggressive sexual stance and innuendo-laden language from their first conversations. Léopold thus defines himself and his masculinity early on in the film, through homosexual impulses directed at Franz as sexual object. Franz's masculinity, however, is reified by the culmination of his and Anna's relationship in heterosexual intercourse (implied in the film by a traditional, cut-away shot, from the lovers in embrace to them both in repose on Léopold's bed). However, Franz's homosexual relationship with Léopold is heavily repressed and signifies the 'outing' of an inner homosexuality

which has been repressed in adolescent homosocial fantasies, as, according to Ozon;

Quite often my films depict an adolescent who had not yet discovered or come to terms with his desires. Often homosexuality comes about as a form of self-realization. It is not so much something coming from outside as something coming from inside. Everything is already in each character. I never pose the question of where the norm is, since I have always inverted it.⁵⁶

With regards to this relationship, Sedgwick's notion of male homosocial desire in *Between Men*, whilst not necessarily denying any homosexual overtones, is not dependent upon them and this makes the structure of the relationship between Franz and Léopold visible *vis a vis* their positions with respect to Anna and, ultimately, *her* relationship with both of *them*.

In his extended structuralist examination of triangulated desire, Girard argues that in any triangular relationship, the object of desire is in fact less important than the connection between the two parties who seek control or ownership of that object, the object always being rendered passive. In her re-reading of Girard, Sedgwick pinpoints some of the major gender issues of the erotic triangle, arguing that intricate patterns of social and cultural discourses of power can be located in triangulated desire, resulting in a privileging of male homosocial relationships, which locate their power in a traditional patriarchal model of masculine economic and sexual authority. Within this model it seems that women are destined to remain objects of negotiation, rather than individuals of autonomous significance, as the woman is silenced and rendered passive in being objectified. Although each

⁵⁶ Bowen, Peter (15/03/2010), 'François and his friends.'

of the triangulated relationships in the film are diegetically important, they also serve to illustrate the ascribed importance of male homosocial relationships and the subordination of female autonomy to male authoritarianism.

Combining the arguments of Girard and Sedgwick in an analysis of heterosexuality within the triangles in *Gouttes d'eau* therefore necessitates examining the pre-existing homosocial relationships which form their basis and the ways in which they force the object of desire, the woman, into a subordinate position, with the positions of 'subject' and 'mediator' (using Girard's terminology) rotating between the two male protagonists, whilst the woman remains the object in the face of the apparent dynamism of the male relationship. *Gouttes d'eau* does follow a clear pattern in the initiation and development of such male homosocial relationships. Later, when these power relations are challenged by some sort of crisis or change in circumstances, which is signalled firstly by Léopold's victimisation of Franz, followed by the arrival of Anna, then Véra's appearance, the men are forced to re-negotiate their relationship. They conduct a new transaction in the form of Anna, which re-establishes a template of power relations for the men. At no point in this relationship is the woman inscribed with autonomy, but she is made a negotiable symbol of power and masculinity, seemingly being 'trafficked' (a term first used by Gayle Rubin) as a symbol of exchange between the two males.⁵⁷ Both patriarchy and heterosexuality are based in this 'traffic' in what Sedgwick considers is 'a given.'⁵⁸ From this

⁵⁷ Rubin, Gayle (1975), 'The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex,' in Reiter, Rayna (ed), *Towards an Anthropology of Women*, pp. 157-210.

⁵⁸ Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky (1985), 'Gender Asymmetry and Erotic Triangles,' *Between Men*, p. 25.

viewpoint, women are seen as exchangeable property for the cementing of bonds between the men who ‘possess’ them. This leads to Sedgwick’s central idea in *Between Men*, which is that heterosexual relations are strategies of a homosocial desire, existing to create, ultimately, bonds between men.⁵⁹

Judith Butler refers to cultural formations and the lack of taking into account “certain vacillating notions of sexual orientation” in her article ‘Capacity,’⁶⁰ particularly with consideration to the case of unstable identities and identities-in-process, which can be identified in *Gouttes d’eau*. When these descriptions or categories are imported by other cultures, this may result in interesting tensions between indigenous sexual cultures and the newly imported discourses. Butler offers a re-reading of homosocial triangulation in her article, pointing out that Sedgwick wrote *Between Men* in 1985, at a time when feminist dialogue was oriented around structuralism.⁶¹ Sedgwick implies that masculinity is defined within homosocial relations and somehow in opposition to heterosexuality, that is, masculinity is defined by the bonds established between men via their “traffic” in women⁶² who are wanted as exchange “precisely because they are wanted by the Other.”⁶³ However, Butler has recently stated that it would now be practically and logically impossible to ignore wider possibilities of desiring, and therefore triangulations of desire may now hold many meanings other than ‘men relating to men’. She raises the issue of where desires currently meet and fail to meet within

⁵⁹ *ibid.*

⁶⁰ Butler, Judith (2002), ‘Capacity,’ in Barber, Stephen and Clark, David (eds), *Regarding Sedgwick: essays on queer culture and critical theory*, pp. 109-119.

⁶¹ *ibid.*, p. 110.

⁶² The term ‘traffic’ was first used by Rubin, Gayle (1975), in her article ‘The Traffic in Women: Notes on the ‘Political Economy’ of Sex’, in *Towards an Anthropology of Women*, pp. 157-210.

⁶³ Butler, *ibid.*, p.111.

erotic triangles, and questions the extent to which heterosexual jealousy is often complicated by the question of ‘who’ is desiring ‘whom’, thus opening up Sedgwick’s interpretation to increased erotic possibilities.

Léopold comments near the beginning of the film that the Ancient Greeks practised homosexual acts (as he questions Franz about the latter’s public school experiences). Sedgwick cites (in *Between Men*) early Grecian society as demonstrating that homosocial and homosexual bonds were culturally contingent. She defines ‘homosocial desire’ as a continuum along which one may describe the social bonds between either men or women.⁶⁴ Sedgwick’s continuum allows for a plurality of desires outside the gender divisions homo/hetero/bi/trans, so that an individual will be experiencing any desire at any given time, depending on the object choice and the mediator(s). Those desires, Butler states, are an unknown, and whilst in Western culture the heterosexual couple is the paradigm of romantic love, an erotic triangle involving at least one trajectory of homosexual desire is more complex.⁶⁵ However, far from merely serving to conserve patriarchal culture based on male homosocial bonding, what the narrative of *Gouttes d’eau* illustrates in relation to this, is that the triangle tends to exhibit a disruptive potential (which in this case leads to the breakdown of the Franz/Anna heterosexual couple and the death of Franz), when either of its sides transgresses the boundaries from heterosexual to homosexual love and vice-versa. A close examination of the development of the homosocial relationships which are the foundation of these erotic triangles reveals significant prejudices and in turn forces us to examine the

⁶⁴ Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky (1985), ‘Homosocial Desire,’ *Between Men*, p. 4.

⁶⁵ Butler, Judith (2002), ‘Capacity,’ in Barber, Stephen and Clark, David (eds), *Regarding Sedgwick: essays on queer culture and critical theory*, p. 111.

positioning and representation of ‘the female’, revealing thematised constructs of traditional, patriarchal ideals of feminine silence, passivity and objectification. Not only are these ideals played out through Anna, but also through Franz, who is subjugated by Anna’s motivation towards marriage and bearing children, thereby legitimising the heterosexual couple as the socially acceptable partnership of the institution, which is to reproduce heterosexual ‘Frenchness’. This monolithic goal is underlined at Franz’s death when Anna, staring at his body, utters in dismay “mais qui va me faire des enfants maintenant?”

A re-reading of Sedgwick through Butler’s suggestions calls into question the formations of structuralist triangles and suggests new positions in *Gouttes d’eau* and a new reading of heterosexual relations within the Fassbinder text, made visible through the filmic style and mise en scène employed by Ozon. What could be understood in the sexual relationship of the Franz/Anna couple (which is complicated by both Franz’s and Anna’s desire for Léopold), is that triangles do not necessarily form on the basis of ‘women as exchange’ within homosociality, as there may be a variety of ways in which heterosexuality and homosexuality are defined through each other, against a background of multiple possibilities of desiring. From the moment Franz mentions that he intends to marry Anna, Léopold’s desiring of Anna as Franz’s other becomes a redoubling of desire itself, in order to take the object of Franz’s desire away from him, or as Butler states “..what desire always wants is the Other’s desire.”⁶⁶ Based upon this duplication of desire that Butler describes, negotiations of their relationship which take place

⁶⁶ *ibid.*

within the triangulation of the Franz/Léopold/Anna relationship, rather than remaining locked within and repeating the same circle of dominance (pessimistic endings being typical of Fassbinder narratives), could be read as new negotiations of the Fassbinder piece through recent gender theory.

A Butlerian reading of the Franz/Anna/Léopold triangle in which Léopold is experiencing desire for Franz through Anna as intermediary (as the repetition of the sex act by the figure in the mackintosh suggests in the roleplaying scenes), is, as one might imagine, an image of anal sex. When Léopold penetrates Franz anally, he is also, in a sense, performing a similar act with Anna to attain similar (or different) sexual pleasure. As Butler suggests, the phallus is circulated and defies identificatory positions in the triangle, with ‘hetero’ and ‘homo’ entwined indistinctly, although homosociality remains the symbolic bond between males:

the man who seeks to send the woman to another man
sends some aspect of himself and the man who receives
her, receives him as well.⁶⁷

Butler’s queer reading of the heterosexual couple within triangulated desires would seem to point to a multitude of homosocial desires within any triangle that destabilises heterosexuality. Homosocial desires are somehow transmitted through a third party, meet, are reflected back, mirrored and so on. This repetition of desires conflicts with heterosexuality and is dominated by anal eroticism. Butler maintains that within such a complexity of desires, male homosociality is the

⁶⁷ Butler, Judith, *ibid*, p. 112.

dominant desire and “heterosexuality is transmuted into homosociality.”⁶⁸ This has wider implications for any triangular relationships, male-dominated or female-dominated, which could now be ‘queered’ triangles, whether the homosocial desires are hidden (repressed) or ‘out’ (including the typical, social arrangement of the familiar *ménage à trois*). Ozon’s imagery strongly suggests that Anna is the site of meeting of the desires of Franz and Léopold. This complicates Franz’s identity as the repetitiveness of desire, confusingly, might have Franz experiencing his own desires for the Other, as one and the same person as himself.⁶⁹ The possible outcomes for Franz’s involvement with Véra, if he/she desires Franz in a male same-sex relationship as he/she is a castrated male, would be anal penetration and feminisation by Franz. He/she would then be duplicating both Léopold’s and Franz’s desires, the meeting place of which is also Anna.

What is problematic here is the ‘in-between-ness’ of Véra, as it is not clear in the film whether her sex change is complete (although we are told she has *had* a sex-change operation). In the rondelay of desires, if Véra desires as a woman, then the relationship with Franz could be some form of lesbian relationship, since Franz is feminised. Female homosociality is hinted at between Véra and Anna earlier in the narrative in the bedroom sex scenes, and if Franz desires Véra, Anna would again be the meeting place of their desires, which is further complicated by both Franz, Véra, and Anna all desiring Léopold. The narrative function of Véra is that he/she is a man who has physically become a woman, in other words in relation to the heterosexuality of the Franz/Anna couple, Véra is an external and

⁶⁸ *ibid*, p. 113.

⁶⁹ *ibid*, p. 117.

concrete manifestation of the implicit tendency in Franz to invert desire. Véra becomes the “venue for the convergence of (all) these passions.”⁷⁰ She is someone, as Thomas Elsaesser suggests, like Elvira, the character in Fassbinder’s *In einem Jahr mit 13 Monden* upon whom Ozon based Véra, in which “a distinct doubling is produced - a man who has literally become a woman, and who has done it all for the love of another man.”⁷¹ Indeed, Elsaesser’s statement about *13 Monden*, in which the narrative centres on the tragic transsexual, Elvira, that here; “the search for another identity, undertaken out of love, produces the fantasy of the double... (that) inscribes itself on the body,”⁷² corroborates through Ozon’s similar creation of the transsexual character in *Gouttes d’eau*, a strong authorial link between Ozon and Fassbinder. The final frames of *Gouttes d’eau* are a long shot of Véra taken from outside the building and looking up as she claws at the locked window, seemingly trapped inside, as the camera draws slowly away, distancing the spectator and emphasising that she, unlike Franz who has escaped from the apartment through his suicide, is still locked in the ‘cage’, imprisoned within another triangulation as the rival of Anna for Léopold’s affections.

The Third Way

Ozon’s style illustrates that triangles may represent an ‘erotics of the third,’ in which ‘queer’ lives exemplify an elusive ‘third way,’⁷³ between seemingly

⁷⁰ Butler, *ibid*, p. 114.

⁷¹ Elsaesser, Thomas (1996), *Fassbinder's Germany*, p. 29.

⁷² *ibid*.

⁷³ Marjorie Garber uses this term in her work, *Vice Versa*, (1997). Also, Denis Provencher’s study (2007), *Queer French: Globalization, Language, and Sexual Citizenship in France*, shows how

incompatible claims to universalism. This demonstrates the difference between the Fassbinder text and Ozon's adaptation, in relation to the representation of 'the couple,' as bisexuality is a more fluid sexuality than the homosexual/heterosexual divide in the dichotomisation between men and women, and gays and straights, that was the 'either/or' stance of the 1970s and the original (Fassbinder) German version. The absence of the metaphor of 'the closet' in the German language has lent the hidden nature of sexuality an undeniably different character, as up until the 1990s German vocabulary inadequately described contemporary sexuality, until it was motivated by a strong interest in Anglo-American vocabulary.⁷⁴ The word '*homosexuell*' radically emphasised the sexual, whilst the term '*homophil*' which had been more popular in the 1950s and 1960s in the Federal Republic, diluted the sexual more vaguely. 'Queer' then emerged as a word with a significant new ideology in America in the 1990s and was soon in use in Germany as a term that escapes such binary thinking and dichotomising of sexual boundaries that had existed, along with both the gay/lesbian and the gay/straight axes.⁷⁵ It is here that *Gouttes d'eau sur pierres brûlantes* has connotations of the meeting of German/French/American sexualities as the title of the film suggests fluid sexualities as a metaphor of water, which, when dropped onto a mass of solid rocks, will change its form, in this case when the rocks are burning and the water

French homosexuals articulate their own mode of sexual citizenship by incorporating markers of globalised identities into the French republican model.

⁷⁴ Tobin, Robert, 'Queer in Germany: Sexual Culture and National Discourses,' unpublished conference paper, Theories of Sexualities; University of Washington, http://www.unc.edu/depts/europe/conferences/Germany_celeb9900/abstracts/tobin_robert.html accessed 11/12/2011.

⁷⁵ *ibid.*

metamorphoses explosively into steam, the unstable, volatile steam produced mirrors the instability of relationships in the film.

Denis Provencher examines the ways in which the French Republican model has produced distinctly French representations of homosexuality across time, in the interconnected realms of law, politics and the media.⁷⁶ In *Queer French*, he analyses how the influence of globalised Anglo-American gay culture is mitigated in France through a specifically French understanding of sexuality and the universalistic discourse of French republicanism, providing an analysis of the influence in France of Anglo-American understandings of homosexuality and in particular, the ways in which the Anglo-American notions of ‘coming-out’ and ‘the closet’ resonate differently in a French context. As well as fusing core French values of secularism and separation between public and private spheres in his film, Ozon draws together the distinct French, German and American forces that shape his contemporary portrayal of sexual identities in a queer reading of Fassbinder’s work, moving away from the most significant of the French tropes shaping French understandings of sexual identity, which is embodied in the provocative figure of Jean Genet.⁷⁷ Thus when Franz declares to Anna and to Vera “I love Léopold” rather than ‘I am gay,’ (which he never states), he is able to, as Provencher proposes:

reinscribe [himself] into a tradition of universalism that highlights normative love. In other words, love and sexuality remain normative conversation topics in France,

⁷⁶ Provencher, Denis (2007), *Queer French: Globalization, Language, and Sexual Citizenship in France*.

⁷⁷ Provencher maintains that French gay experiences are mitigated through (gay) French language that draws on several canonical voices, including Jean Genet (1910-1986), a gay novelist, playwright and poet living in Paris, who became a muse of Jean Cocteau’s in the 1940s.

whereas discussions of homosex (sic) are generally taboo.⁷⁸

The specific rhetorical strategies employed by French people who do decide to ‘come out’ to their friends or family tend to be subtly different from the globalised Anglo-American forms, in particular in how the French demonstrate a need to replicate certain aspects of the normative French discourse on romantic love, commonly expressed in heterosexual contexts, in the ‘coming out’ narratives they provided to friends and family.⁷⁹ With regards to the presence of the family in *Gouttes d’eau*, and as Provencher explains; “the collective or universal nature of the family resembles the universalistic approach of the French Republic where the social body overtakes any individual expressions of identity.”⁸⁰ Ozon’s queering of Fassbinder’s text corresponds to Provencher’s argument that French gays (and lesbians) are shaping their own ‘queer French’ and that in relation to their Anglo-American counterparts, French gays are also now identifying as global gay citizens and therefore French culture may be participating in the resisting or reshaping of the globalisation of Anglo-American ideas on sexualities. Ozon’s film also reflects one of Provencher’s points that the missing homosexual closet in the French context stems from broader differences in the ways in which French people conceptualise various social categories, both generally (including nationality, race, gender, class, religion) and differently, from Americans:

⁷⁸ Provencher, Denis (2007), *Queer French: Globalization, Language, and Sexual Citizenship in France*. p.125.

⁷⁹ *ibid.*

⁸⁰ *ibid.*

French gays and lesbians are first and foremost French, and not “homosexual,” and therefore do not systematically distinguish themselves from their fellow citizens solely on the basis of sexuality. It is also impossible for the “closet” to function with a French republican model that erases marginal sexualities and other signs of difference and does not incite “strategies of resistance” against “Frenchness” per se.⁸¹

Thus, Franz’s ‘coming out’ is a fusion of German, French and Anglo-American sexualities and an example of French resistance to globalisation and Americanisation. His male homosocial desire is a destructive force as it drives him to a physical death, unable to live out his preferred sexual identity which is mitigated through a specifically French understanding of sexuality and the universalistic discourse of French republicanism (upheld by his ‘family,’ which is Anna and his mother). But the most revealing Fassbinderian comment in the play, equivalent to a total rejection of Franz’s sexual identity, comes from the most conventional character, Franz’s mother, an absent physical presence in the film, in the form of a disembodied voice at the end of the telephone, who, when Franz lies dying and tells her that his life is ebbing away, in complete denial of his vulnerabilities and feelings of abandonment, bids him a perfunctory ‘farewell’ and rings off.

Women’s film?

Fassbinder wrote films for a 1970s’ audience familiar with Hollywood, especially melodramas, inviting “a consideration of the social significance of

⁸¹ *ibid*, p.125.

popular culture.”⁸² However, whereas Ozon’s film is principally pessimistic and claustrophobic (as in *Die bitteren Tränen der Petra von Kant*) and presents the negativity of its heterosexual couple, the relationship is challenged by motifs of love and sufferance, common to melodrama, which are displaced onto the homosexual couple Franz/Leopold, who then form queer triangles with Véra and Anna. In terms of genre, *Gouttes d’eau* quite clearly follows the conventions of melodrama, which Stanley Cavell states are “music, moods, abandonment, subjection, dispossession, of course we are speaking of melodrama,”⁸³ however, it is not directed by a ‘straight’ male and therefore avoids the patriarchal male gaze and the narrative structure of Hollywood mainstream melodrama. Ozon clearly shows his subjects to be alienated, both as having failed at heterosexual marriage and as being gay and/or bisexual. Yet the original piece was made in the early 1970s and written and directed by the openly gay Fassbinder. Whilst Douglas Sirk’s, (and thus the maternal melodrama’s) influence on Fassbinder has been well-documented, elements in *Gouttes d’eau* demand that the film be looked at in terms of more recent critical approaches, such as queer theory.⁸⁴

The film has the structural outlines of ‘woman’s film’ in that there is a typical, first-person, confessional female point of view, first of all in Léopold’s explanation (to Franz) of the breakdown of his (hetero) relationship and his attraction to men, then Franz’s revealing (to Léopold) of his fantasy of being ‘entered like a girl’, followed by Véra’s story (told to Franz) of her attempts to

⁸² Mayne, Judith (1997), ‘Fassbinder and Spectatorship,’ *New German Critique*, 12, Fall, p. 65.

⁸³ Cavell, Stanley (1997), *Contesting Tears: The Hollywood Melodrama of the Unknown Woman*, p.222.

⁸⁴ Queer theory is a field of critical theory that emerged in the early 1990s out of the fields of LGBT studies and feminist studies.

save her relationship with Léopold by undergoing a sex change. There is also a re-interpretation of 1940s' and 1950s' Hollywood maternal melodrama, as within the surrogate, dysfunctional 'family' of *Gouttes d'eau*, (the family thematic being a 'signature' of Ozon's filmmaking), Léopold, rather than playing the role of the father, could be interpreted as a rather unemotionally cold mother figure who is confronted with a daughter (Franz), whom she subsequently ignores, whilst at the same time complaining about his own feelings of unfulfillment: "Je prends tellement peu de plaisir aux choses,"⁸⁵ and is typically critical of heterosexual marriage. Also, as in many contemporary women's films, *Gouttes d'eau* takes up issues of role-playing, sadomasochism, the confines of traditional heterosexual marriage and the perceived (and real) dominance of men and is centred around a domestic space (the apartment) which Ozon has dramatically created as a delimited and claustrophobic space. Where there is an extension and expansion 'out of' the genre of melodrama by Ozon, is in the characterisation of Véra (who resembles Marlene in *Petra von Kant*), who, in the process of mutilation of *his* (Helmut's) body in the sex change operation, is silenced and muted and in an extreme emotional state. Muteness is declared by Peter Brooks to be "the last stage of melodrama, since it is about expression."⁸⁶ In this respect Ozon's film is a near-classic example of a 'woman's film,' presenting a number of the genre's key elements, with a subject matter incorporating numerous progressive and self-

⁸⁵ Landrau, Marine (15/03/2000), 'Gouttes d'eau sur pierres brûlantes – Une farce corrosive et pétillante,' *Télérama*.

⁸⁶ Brooks, Peter (1976), *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess*, pp. 56-57. In his comments on melodrama Brooks has observed that the genre repeatedly uses physical conditions to represent extreme moral and emotional states.

consciously female topics, both in narrative themes and in the characterisations, and as such can be read in parts in terms of feminist film theory (for example, in the objectification of Franz by Leopold).

Ozon thus provides a new reading of Fassbinder's text presented and played as a new style and structure, an episodic form derived from the television genre of soap opera, though it is clear that Fassbinder could not have envisaged the soap opera conventions upon which recent feminist critical theory has platformed. The film is characterised by disrupted narrative form and avoidance of closure in a 'cliffhanger ending,' with Véra unable to unlock the window of the apartment and apparently trapped inside. The unexpected arrival of Véra at the apartment conforms to the open-ended format of soap operas with their sudden, often unexplained appearance of characters (particularly family members) and a constantly changing emotional landscape marked by continual crisis (for example Franz's 'shooting' of Leopold and his subsequent suicide) and a spectator experience of a pattern of continual interruptions (as the film is divided into Acts, providing 'breaks' resembling commercial television). The film's exploration of intense anxiety takes the form of constant playing with identity, roles, costumes and other forms of identity facades across the play of sexualities. As such, *Gouttes d'eau* emerges not only as an almost prototypical Fassbinder narrative but also as a cross-reading of French and German sexualities and queerness. Furthermore, not only is Ozon's work a clear legacy to Fassbinder's,⁸⁷ the latter was, in turn, also strongly influenced by the Hollywood director Sirk, which links Sirk, Fassbinder

⁸⁷ Although the principal protagonists of Fassbinder's original play were lesbians and not gay men.

and Ozon in a cross-fertilisation of cultures and nations, converging within *Gouttes d'eau* in new ways of describing or categorising sexual phenomena within French cinema.

CHAPTER 3

Redefining the Visual – Touch, Desire and Haptic Vision

Vendredi soir,

(Claire Denis, 2002)

‘I would like a small space with the city all around. A man, a woman.’¹

Claire Denis’s works include feature films, as well as documentaries, which have attracted critical acclaim, not only in France but globally, with the notable, striking visual qualities of her films showing an empathy with a range of people such as exiles, immigrants, sexual transgressives and alienated, urban dwellers; in other words those who thrive on the margins of society. Much of her work prior to the making of *Vendredi soir* questions the prejudices of dominant, white, European culture,² but she has also examined dysfunctional family relationships (*Nénette et Boni*, 1996), the illicit codes of desire and repression in a military, homosocial environment (*Beau Travail*, 1999), and the construction of a poetics of desire in a horror film featuring a couple who cannibalise the pleased bodies of their victims (*Trouble Every Day*, 2001). More recently, Denis’s projects include the 2004 film *L’Intrus*, about a heart transplant patient; *35 rhums* (2008), a tale of working-class family life in a multicultural ambience in Paris; and finally, *White Material* (2009), the story of a white family struggling to save their coffee plantation in Africa. Whilst her films often provide an exploration of

¹Ancian, Aimée (2002), ‘Claire Denis, an Interview,’ trans. by Inge Pruks, previously published in *Sofa*, 17, www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/02/23/denis_interview, accessed 24/05/2008.

² From colonialist tensions in *Chocolat* (1988), to post-imperial attitudes in contemporary Paris in both *S’en fout la mort* (1990) and *J’ai pas sommeil* (1994).

the literal and metaphorical borderlands where typically itinerant characters are looking for signs of what might be metaphorically termed a ‘homeland’ within and beyond the barriers of nation, culture, sex and family, increasingly, since the making of *Beau Travail*, Denis has brought her filmmaking closer to an art form in which the aspect of time is suspended. Her meandering style with moments in the present blending with dream and fantasy, non-subjective memories, glimpses of the future and intertextual references to literature (and also to her own films), has been described by Martine Beugnet as creating a more porous temporality, in which “the present is constantly inhabited by the past.”³ Habitually working with a group of long-time collaborators in the form of a technical team, with the cinematographer Agnès Godard, editor Nelly Quettier and sound director Jean-Louis Ughetto, Denis has developed a highly individual cinematic style, favouring optical and sound elements over dialogue, realism, scenic continuity and other traditional modes of narrative storytelling. Little information is generally given about the characters in her films as there is (often) minimal dialogue and the spectator is left to decode what the characters’ subjectivity might be. Sensuous and impressionistic, *Vendredi soir*, as a fantasy of a romantic, one-night affair between a couple who meet during a Paris traffic jam, differs from the director’s previous films in that, prior to 2001, Denis’s focus was on characters who were on the threshold of a culture, a society or a class, whereas *Vendredi soir* does not depict ethnic minority difference and ‘foreign-ness’ outside the margins of French mainstream society per se, although the two characters in the film might in some

³ Beugnet, Martine (2004), *Claire Denis*, p. 25.

ways be considered as being 'removed' from reality, as the world appears to come to a standstill during their one-night relationship and the film plays "like a frozen moment from their lives."⁴

The film opens with scenes of Laure's city apartment and Laure herself (Valérie Lemercier) preparing to move house. Setting out in her car to meet friends for dinner, she becomes trapped in a major traffic jam in Paris, in the midst of a public transport strike. Surrounded by cars and unable to advance in the queues of traffic, she only has the radio for company and when people on foot, stranded by the strike, try to secure transport home with car drivers in the queues, Laure offers a stranger a lift. As the encounter develops into intimacy the couple eventually stop at a café, book into a small hotel and spend the night together. The narrative revolves around Laure playing out her desires in the hotel room with Jean (Vincent Lindon) whom she leaves very early in the morning after a night of passion, running through the streets to find her car and to (presumably) resume her *vie de couple* with her partner. The film shows a very different sensuality from previous works, depicting the unexpected, brief encounter between strangers, from the woman's (Laure's) point of view. As a chance meeting, "[on a toujours] croisé un regard, un jour,"⁵ which many people may have experienced (even if they may not have played out a sexual union), Laure's escape into a fantasy world for one night seems to follow what Michel de Certeau describes as "a mobility

⁴ Felperin, Leslie (2002), 'Vendredi soir,' *Sight & Sound*, XII, 11, p. 14.

⁵ Guilloux, Michel (14/09/2002b), 'Claire Denis: "On a tous croisé un regard, un jour," *L'Humanité*.

that must accept the chance offerings of the moment and seize on the wing the possibilities that offer themselves at any given moment.”⁶

The inspiration for *Vendredi soir* was a book written by Emmanuèle Bernheim⁷ in which the author, according to Denis, describes sensations in a manner:

...so precise, so meticulous, which contains in the same phrase both the conscious and the unconscious, as well as that which is experienced and that which is desired.⁸

Denis had particularly requested a minimal scenario from Bernheim, upon which to base a film project of “a small space with the town all around. A man, a woman.”⁹ Although the narrative at first appeared to need more fictional detail and ‘incidents,’ both director and author agreed that nothing should be added, with the result that the adaptation remains faithful to the book. The simple storyline gave rise to reviews of the film as an “exercice du style,”¹⁰ and as “trop banale,”¹¹ precisely because it adheres to the minimality of Bernheim’s narrative (an *anti-récit*),¹² Laure meets Jean in a traffic jam and with only brief scenes in a *tabac* and a pizzeria the couple subsequently adjourn to a hotel bedroom for the night and Laure leaves the hotel at daybreak. The significant difference between the book and the film is a notable absence of female narrator in the latter. This would have (theoretically) been the voice of Valérie Lemercier playing Laure, but a voice-over was omitted in a deliberate strategy on the part of Denis to avoid

⁶ De Certeau, Michel (1984), *The Practices of Everyday Life*, p. 37.

⁷ Bernheim, Emmanuèle (1998), *Vendredi soir*.

⁸ Ancian (2002).

⁹ *ibid*

¹⁰ Kaganski, Serge (10/09/2002), ‘Toute une nuit,’ *Les Inrockuptibles*.

¹¹ Maupin, Françoise (11/09/2002), ‘Le temps d’une parenthèse,’ *Le Figaroscope*.

¹² Tobin, Yann (2002), ‘*Vendredi soir* redécouvertes,’ in *Positif*, 499, September, pp. 38-39.

distancing the male character, Jean (Vincent Lindon).¹³ Had a voice-over been included this would have contradicted the terms of the stylistic features of the intense closeness of the camerawork, and as a result of leaving it out, the overall scarcity of dialogue throughout the film is highlighted and emphasises Denis's stylistic quality of reliance on image and sound to convey meaning, or as Denis explains it; "*le dialogue devient un son.*"¹⁴

A Haptical Approach

The theoretical writings of Laura Marks address the subject of haptical imagery, a term associated with the experience of sensual memorising within visual representation. Marks has applied the term to film, to indicate an exploration into redefining notions of the perceptible, particularly in her works *The Skin of the Film* (2000) and *Touch* (2002).¹⁵ A focus of the thesis is the consideration of 'other than visual' interpretations of the chosen texts through narratives of the couple, and it is along the lines of Marks's work on haptics that this reading of *Vendredi soir* is developed, as Marks proposes a multisensory, rather than a purely audiovisual, experience of film in terms of spectatorship. Denis's examination of what she terms 'haptical imagery' and visual perception coalesces with an approach to film derived from Gilles Deleuze's 'time-image'

¹³ Ancian (2002).

¹⁴ Lifshitz, Sébastien (1995), *Claire Denis, la Vagabonde*, documentary film produced by *La Fémis*, cited in Beugnet, Martine (2004), *Claire Denis*, p. 28.

¹⁵ Laura Marks draws on the term haptic cinema from Noël Burch's work (1986), 'Primitivism and the Avant-Gardes: A Dialectical Approach,' *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*, cited in Marks, (2000), *The Skin of the Film*, p. 171. Burch's research is developed from the theories of Charles Pierce and Henri Bergson, showing influences of characteristically Deleuzian interpretations. As Deleuzian cinematic philosophy cannot be described as a 'theory' of spectatorship as such, Marks turns towards both Merleau-Ponty's (1968) work on phenomenology, *The Visible and the Invisible* and Vivian Sobchack's (1992) writings in *The Address of the Eye*.

cinema which opens up a discussion of the multisensory nature of film.¹⁶ What haptic cinema offers in contrast to the type of specular identification which linguistic film theory relies upon in its framework of subject and object, is a bodily relationship between viewer and image, rather than an identification with a figure on screen as, according to Marks "it is not proper to speak of the object of a haptic look so much as to speak of a dynamic subjectivity between looker and image."¹⁷

Marks's argument seems to provide an explanation for the case of vision (or haptic visuality) which is tactile, as if one were 'touching' the film with one's eyes. She defines 'haptic vision' as a closer-to-the-body form of perception where "the eyes themselves function like organs of touch"¹⁸ and 'haptic visuality' as a closer form of looking, which tends to "move over the surface of its object rather than plunge into illusionist depth, not to distinguish form so much as to discern texture,"¹⁹ more inclined to "graze rather than gaze."²⁰ She also describes haptic visuality as having certain textual qualities, such as imagery that evokes the memory of certain senses (such as taste, smell and touch) and close-to-the-body camera positions, panning across the surface of objects, with changes in focus and densely textured images. Agnès Godard, cinematographer, has described the way in which the camerawork in *Vendredi soir* seems to literally brush the surface of

¹⁶ Deleuze, Gilles (1992), *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*. Deleuze, Gilles (1992), *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*.

¹⁷ Marks, Laura (1998), 'Video haptics and erotics,' *Screen*, 39, 4, Winter, p 332.

¹⁸ Marks (2000), p. 162.

¹⁹ *ibid.*

²⁰ *ibid.*

the skin “*jusqu’à vouloir toucher,*”²¹ which corresponds to Marks’s definition of haptical images, particularly with reference to Godard’s camerawork in the hotel bedroom scenes later in the film, in which the body parts of Jean and Laure mix and fuse and in some cases are unrecognisable (at first) from such close proximity, or from a certain angle or viewpoint. It is the style of the cinematography that forms a central issue in this study of *Vendredi soir* and, in particular, the filming of the bodies of the couple in relation to how images might be interpreted by the senses of the spectator’s body, in terms of ‘touch’, rather than the ‘gaze’ of the camera. With the emphasis on closeness of the shots, the distance between spectator and image is narrowed, bringing the two closer, so that the spectator is disorientated without familiar reference points, so that he/she may not recognise or identify immediately with the (body) image; these images may control and objectify the spectator, rather than the other way around. This unfamiliar use of space and camera distance, in conjunction with close-to-the-body camerawork, raises the issue of *Vendredi soir* being a film that takes a different direction from traditional *auteur* cinema, offering more of a bodily relationship between spectator and image, rather than an audience identification with a figure on-screen, through the use of imagery that can be described as haptic.

In an examination of how the film provides an extensive anthology for the discussion of representations of the body as part of female identity and ‘voice’ in

²¹ Audé, Françoise and Tobin, Yann (2000), ‘Entretien Agnès Godard - Regarder jusqu’à vouloir toucher,’ *Positif*, 471, May, pp. 131-136.

post-2000 French cinema, the focus is on Denis's interpretation of the desire to fantasise and dream a new image of the female 'self,' offering the reality of an explicit, woman's point of view and raising the issue of haptical images being read as 'feminine' in the consideration of the film as 'women's film.' Denis's cinematic imagery is analysed as both the vehicle of desire and as the contested ground of cinematic production in a consideration of the depiction of sexuality and relationships through certain camera shots, images, sound and narrative and the privileging of image over dialogue. Sexual differences within the couple are sensed through a viewing experience of images, colours and sound, rather than through the distancing effect of an 'objectifying gaze' and often instead of dialogue and scripting.

Marks believes that filmmakers attempt to create memory-images out of the medium's sensorial limitations (sense, touch, taste, smell),²² her writing seeming to follow a progression, in a tendency of a moving closer to the body, from memory-images, to memory-objects, to proximal sense memories.²³ She also stresses the "alliance between dominant narrative form and official history,"²⁴ based on her premise of the connection between cultural memory and perception. Within unfamiliar memory-senses where, as Marks puts it, "repressed cultural memories return to destabilise national histories,"²⁵ *Vendredi soir* could also require a different way of 'seeing' on the part of the spectator, through the possibility of an embodied sense memory, particularly as there is a lack of

²² Marks, Laura (2000), p. 11.

²³ Sobchack, Vivian (2000), 'What My Fingers Knew: The Cinesthetic Subject, or Vision in the Flesh,' <http://archive.sensesofcinema.com/contents/00/5/fingers.html>, accessed 4/05/2010.

²⁴ *ibid*, p. 26.

²⁵ *ibid*, p. 27.

symbolism in the narrative, with the result that traditional memories are not stimulated, which is unfamiliar and breaking new ground.

A Man and a Woman

The film opens to a slow, panoramic view of the city rooftops in an establishing long shot reminiscent of the opening of *J'ai pas sommeil*.²⁶ This evokes a sense of magic and anticipation as the vista and skyline provide images of a city gradually undergoing the transformation from daylight to dusk, finally entering the secretive, 'other' world of a city at night, conjuring up associations with sensory and uninhibited pleasures. To the accompaniment of a gentle, jazz-blues soundtrack (composed by Dickon Hinchliffe of the British cult band, Tindersticks), the city lights appear gradually and the daylight deteriorates, until the roving camera finally settles on the windows of an apartment, then cuts to an interior shot inside this apartment where Laure is surrounded by boxes and is packing and taping up cartons of her belongings. She is preparing to move in with her partner (François) the next day and is, in a sense, also symbolically wrapping up her life as a single person as well as packing her material belongings. The camera focuses on very close details of the packing and taping process, as Laure repeats the phrase "chez nous" to herself, which is written on a note attached to the keys for her new home.²⁷ As Laure is preparing to go out for the evening she is also deciding which boxes to forward to her mother and which articles to throw away (there is a shot of the concierge sifting through certain expensive furnishings

²⁶ Denis, Claire (1993), *J'ai pas sommeil*, Arena Films, Orsans Productions.

²⁷ Coppermann, Annie (12/09/2002), 'Le désir dans les embouteillages,' *Les Echos*.

that she has rejected and thrown into the outside bin), in other words Laure is on the point of leaving parts of her life behind. Slightly anxious, she telephones her partner to inform him of her progress with the removals, but she only hears the answerphone, as François is working late. From this brief focus on Laure's single life which is about to end, it is evident that she is connected to and communicates with, a world of friends and also has socially-approved relationships, as, after loading up the car with her belongings, she sets off to meet friends for dinner. She soon finds herself in the thick of a major traffic jam caused by a general transport strike, and stuck in the ensuing chaos on the streets of Paris she sits in bumper-to-bumper traffic with motorists hooting and cyclists speeding between stationary cars. In the crowded rush-hour streets, scenes of people trying to get home lead to each car driver becoming insulated in his or her own vehicle as the cars become gridlocked and immobile, reduced to darkened interior spaces lit up with the reflections of the drivers inside, providing fleeting glimpses of the lives of others, with faces framed in car windows, cut off from the exterior.

The *mise en scène* of the traffic jam creates a myriad of images in a cacophony of sounds and lights, further accentuated by the sound effects of heavy rain bouncing off the cars and road surfaces. Flashing neon shop signs and red brake lights, along with trails of grey exhaust fumes which are lit up by the reflection of the street lights and which rise up in wisps in the cold air, become part of an atmospheric mood, as night falls on a city paralysed by the strike. Amongst the fleeting glimpses of stranded pedestrians, the actor Grégoire Colin's brief cameo appearance as one of the crowd caught up in the strike prompts the

viewer's memory as a reminder of Denis's previous films, familiarising and immersing the spectator in the cinematic world.²⁸ Around Laure's car tension erupts amongst other drivers stranded in the traffic chaos of a city brought to a standstill, yet she remains calm and comfortably isolated in her own vehicle, turning up the heater and listening to music, as well as intermittently drifting off to sleep. A voice on the radio reports the worsening traffic situation and urges motorists to offer a lift to stranded commuters and as Laure sleepily observes the flashing lights outside from the warmth and comfort of her car, she is lulled into fantasising that the 'S' on the numberplate of the car in front of her in the queue, is animated and 'bouncing' of its own accord.

The Passenger

Laure is suddenly startled by a stranger banging on the window, requesting a lift, which she refuses, but she then sees another pedestrian wandering through the traffic, also searching for transport, and when this person approaches her car and asks permission to get in, she agrees. As he enters the car the stranger brings an aroma of cigarette smoke and a masculine presence of sexual tension into the hermeneutically-sealed world which Laure has created for herself inside the car. This order of this personal microcosm of music, comfort and warmth is disrupted by the stranger's intrusion as he invades the space. Lindon incarnates the stranger

²⁸ Prior to *Vendredi soir*, Grégoire Colin appeared in Denis's films *Nénette et Boni* (1996) and *Beau Travail* (1999).

(Jean) as an inaccessible, silent character, “énigmatique et abstrait,”²⁹ an object of desire, “le fantasme, l’instrument de ce film.”³⁰ As the dynamic element of the narrative he incarnates a fantasy, but it is never clear whether he is merely a product of Laure’s exhausted imagination, caused possibly by the stress of moving house and starting a new life. Denis comments on Bernheim’s original characterisation of Jean in the book, which required a ‘solid’ type of masculinity, “un homme qui a du poids,”³¹ and for which she chose Lindon to play the role, as the latter bore some resemblance to the iconic French masculinity of the actor, Jean Gabin as “he looked like Jean Gabin in profile with his cigarette.”³² Beugnet describes Jean’s masculinity and physical attraction in terms of sensations that are created by close attention to his clothes, hands, chest and neck and the space he takes up in the front of the car with “the outline of his profile, his ear, his sturdy hand as he lights a cigarette,... the open neck of his shirt under a leather jacket that makes rich, creaking noises as he settles in the seat,”³³ as an embodiment of the disruption to Laure’s routine, and as an enigmatic and abstract presence;

Corps intensément réel et possible fantasme pur, il est comme la représentation humaine de ce qu’est une image de film. Il représente aussi, ce qui différencie *Vendredi soir* du cinéma expérimental, même le plus beau et le plus inventif: son humanité.³⁴

²⁹ Campion, Alexis (08/09/2002), ‘*Vendredi soir*’, *Le Journal du dimanche*.

³⁰ *ibid.*

³¹ Beugnet (2004), p. 194.

³² Ancian (2002).

³³ Beugnet (2004), pp. 193-194.

³⁴ Frodon, Jean-Michel (11/09/2002) ‘Songe érotique d’une nuit de grève de transport,’ *Le Monde*.

If Laure's agency is threatened by the intervention of Jean, an "*inconnu*,"³⁵ this is a crucial development in her loss of control which signals a surrender to possibilities that in the moment of reaching a transition in her life, she emphatically embraces that moment by engaging in a casual sexual encounter. She now becomes a character lost between the worlds of the anonymous city and her home or personal space, in a transitory state or 'in between,' as she acts out the fantasy of a chance meeting and a sexual relationship with a stranger, signalling the beginning of a journey, a typical theme of the romance genre.

Close Encounters

Denis's work poses recurring questions across the theme of desire in *Vendredi soir* and the relationship between the body and cinema. As Amy Taubin points out, it is the body which is always an issue for Denis;

The body and the barriers erected against it: the preservation of self and of the other...connecting bodies (or territories – the notion of the stranger, the foreigner, acting as a bridge between the two in her films).³⁶

The film goes to great lengths to establish the strategic place of the meeting between Laure and Jean in the traffic jam, with the street scenes taking up over one third of the film's running time. These scenes at the beginning build up and convey a certain tension between the seemingly organised life that Laure leads and the freedom she experiences away from her home, as she creates moments of

³⁵ Kaganski, Serge (10/09/2002), 'Toute une nuit,' *Les inrockuptibles*.

³⁶ Taubin, Amy (2003), 'Some Enchanted Evening', *Film Comment*, May/June, 39, 3, pp. 22-24.

spontaneous pleasure for herself in her car, even in the thick of the traffic jam, when she dries her hair with the car heater, puts the radio on and seems relaxed enough to briefly drift off to sleep. When Jean enters her car, a shot frames the skin on the back of his neck in extreme close-up which shows the hairs on his skin in detail, caught by the light (from the exterior street lights). The shot was taken from the back seat of the car with Godard and Denis working in the confined space of the car interior, as they also similarly filmed in a cramped situation, at close quarters, in Laure's small apartment and in the modest hotel room, with Godard subtly shooting much of the film with a mobile handheld camera for the close-ups.³⁷ As Denis explains; "tout s'est passé, en fait, dans des espaces qui appelaient cette fragmentation,"³⁸ as the closer the camerawork, the more fragmented the editing, with the effect that the shots were taken at close proximity to the actors, in profile and never from the front, as Laure and Jean only face each other when they leave the car to go to the café, a device Denis uses to emphasise Laure's modesty and anxiety in pursuing a chance sexual encounter.³⁹ Godard's camera avoids an omniscient point of view, preferring to observe Laure as she might picture herself, observing the world from her point of view and as she slowly abandons herself to the sexual adventure with Jean, her nervous anxiety may be 'felt'.

The filming of Jean when he enters Laure's car draws the spectator closely into images of his skin, his facial features and his cigarette, evoking sense-memories of smell and touch brought to the surface by the visual stimulation of a

³⁷ Frodon, (2002).

³⁸ *ibid.*

³⁹ Guilloux (2002b).

sense memory, which Vivian Sobchack describes as a “re-experiencing.”⁴⁰ In an essay entitled ‘What My Fingers Knew: The Cinesthetic Subject, or Vision in the Flesh,’ Sobchack discusses the role of tactile and sensuous experience in film spectatorship.⁴¹ Images and sound are filtered and absorbed through the senses and if sight and hearing are the most prominent of the senses, Sobchack proposes that because all the senses are interconnecting, it is the viewer’s own capacity to smell, touch and taste that allows him/her to experience film in a heightened way, as one would experience those senses in real life. Although the spectator is not ‘in’ the film, he/she is not entirely outside it either, but Sobchack proposes a relationship of reciprocity and reversibility which refutes a binary subject and object position on opposite sides of the screen. This is reiterated by Denis’s comments about the sense of smell as follows;

You know, I've always thought about smell... smells, you can imagine them in the cinema. You can speak of smells in the cinema because you do have bodies present.⁴²

The affectivity of the shots inside the car comes from this great detail, which exploits film’s own proximity to human vision, to the point at which the image exceeds the purely filmic and becomes ‘something else’, very close to itself. In a sense, it could be argued that visual agnosia does exist at this level, in terms of the image being ‘not all’ that one would expect to see, as in the haptical imagery in which the spectator does not (at first) recognise the object before their eyes. There

⁴⁰ Sobchack, Vivian (2000), ‘What My Fingers Knew: The Cinesthetic Subject, or Vision in the Flesh’, *Senses of Cinema*.

⁴¹ *ibid.*

⁴² Ancian (2002).

is a sense of a loss of boundaries in the spectator's rapport with this close-to-the-body imagery in *Vendredi soir* and it is the punctuating effect of instances such as this in the film, which go beyond the effect itself, that indicates its alignment with the haptic cinema that Marks describes and confirms the chosen theoretical approach for this particular film.

Marks notes how haptic cinema puts the cinema's illusion of representing reality into question by pushing the viewer's look back to the surface of the image where it is engulfed by a flow of tactile impressions. The mobile camera encircling Jean and Laure during their first kiss, for example, as they leave the *tabac* and stroll in the empty streets, engages the spectator not to fixate on an object and freeze it with their gaze, but involves a more plastic look which is inclined to move rather than to focus when the couple embrace, as the camera seems to swirl in circles around them. In contrast, shots such as the close-up of Laure's green glove, which she accidentally drops in the street after her first embrace with Jean outside the *tabac* and upon which the camera focuses in close-up, holds the attention of the viewer rather than encouraging a haptic look that caresses. Fragmentation is also experienced through fantasy animated sequences seen through Laure's point of view, which are quite different in style from the rest of the film. When Jean and Laure visit the pizzeria, the pizza, garnished with olives and anchovies, gives a grin as the anchovies curl upwards into a mouth. When the couple are in the hotel room, Laure 'watches' a pink lampshade cross the room and place itself onto a lamp stand then light up on its own. Other fantasy scenarios are signalled by a dissolve or an iris as a transition into scenes that

Laure imagines, of Jean seducing another woman in the pizzeria cloakrooms, or Laure presenting Jean to her friends at dinner. These moments are dreams that Laure weaves around the objects of her immediate perception.

Because Denis is close to, and therefore shortens, the distance between herself and the 'object' of her filming, her intentions are ambiguous to the spectator who does not immediately recognise the image. The viewer engages in a hitherto unknown identification with the screen image and this engagement is not through representation (as it is not recognisable) but through haptical, as opposed to optical, imagery and this viewing experience shapes the style of *Vendredi soir*. Denis's approach to the sex scenes that eventually take place between Laure and Jean in the hotel room is to preserve a sense of modesty and anxiety that a woman in her mid-thirties, with a social background such as that of Laure (deduced from the beginning of the film), might feel, in pursuing casual and unplanned relations with a complete stranger, as Denis explains:

When we came to the hotel I had it in mind that they wouldn't dare to face each other yet. In the first scene they make love with their clothes on - it's cold and they cling to each other and then he starts to put his hand under her clothes. After all the street scenes I took it for granted that in the room the camera could be above them. But then I realised I'd lose her point of view. It would be me filming two people making love, and I wanted to keep that feeling that she was still the same woman, making love but still not daring so much to face it."

The scenes of the couple's sexual relationship are filmed with fleeting glimpses of 'under the clothes' spaces, these unreadable spaces requiring decoding. As Roland Barthes states "the most erotic portion of a body [is] where

the garment gapes...It is intermittence...which is erotic: the intermittence of skin flashing between two articles of clothing ...between two edges...it is this flash itself which seduces.⁴³ The filming of the surface of the bodies of Jean and Laure on the bed preserves movement at the level of the look as well as the image, as objects are not mastered but simply ‘there,’ present. They encourage a look which moves on the surface plane of the screen. In making the body only partially visible, it becomes hypervisible by the images becoming haptic, not by being obscured technically and therefore appearing incomplete and thereby unavailable, but by being hypervisible and too close. As a result of this withholding of knowledge, the spectator has to provide information from his or her memory to complete the image.

According to Marks, haptic images such as these pull the viewer close, “too close to see properly and this itself is erotic.”⁴⁴ The effect is achieved through fleeting shots, concentrating on the erotics of isolated fragments of feet, ears, hands, of curvatures under cloth and expanses of skin which build towards a tempered sense of sexual excitement. The ‘caressing’ camera movement required for this cinematic style exemplifies what Marks means by a haptic vision as the over-close camera means that the image is not in focus and indicates a lack of mastery over the image. The eroticism which Marks links to haptics through the intersubjective relationship of viewer and screen has a peculiar resonance where it seems to seep from the physical tension of the disallowed intimacy between Jean and Laure and into the viewer’s own experience. In the absence of the couple’s

⁴³ Barthes, Roland (1989), *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. by Miller, Richard, originally published (1975) as *Le Plaisir du texte*, pp. 9-10.

⁴⁴ Marks, Laura (2002), *The Skin of the Film*, p. 16.

own touch being shown only fleetingly in the frame, the spectator performs the experience of being agonisingly close to the couple, yet distinct, and this results in the spectator's own acute awareness of their rapport as an awareness of tactility. The impressions of the film are overwhelmingly sensed: "Thus it is not proper to speak of the object of a haptic look so much as to speak of a dynamic subjectivity between looker and image."⁴⁵

As Steven Shaviro states: "when the real is fragmented...the opposition between subjectivity and objectivity, between the observer and the observed, vanishes"⁴⁶ and in this respect *Vendredi soir* bears a relationship to Robert Bresson's cinema, in that the body is fragmented and disconnected through the fleeting close-up shots of parts of the body which become "tactile spaces,"⁴⁷ the lack of distance forcing the spectator to enter into the spaces of the film, almost transversing them and exploring them as intimately as a character does. This is related to Deleuze's consideration of the 'out-of-field' (*hors champ*) which refers to "what is neither seen nor understood (in the frame), but is nevertheless perfectly present"⁴⁸ and therefore is still part of the cinematographic image as an off-screen space where the spectator continues to imagine.

There is also an out-of-field that Deleuze has elliptically noted as "a more disturbing presence . . . outside homogeneous space and time,"⁴⁹ when the frame is as closed, and encloses, as much as possible and when hardly any out-of-field (for it cannot be totally eliminated) can be imagined. This, in line with

⁴⁵ *ibid*, p. 3.

⁴⁶ Shaviro, Steven (1993), *The Cinematic Body*, p. 40.

⁴⁷ Deleuze, Gilles (1986), *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* pp. 108-109.

⁴⁸ Marks (2002), p. 16.

⁴⁹ *ibid*, p. 17.

cinematically conveying a sense of enclosure in the early scenes of *Vendredi soir*, in the *huis clos* of Laure's vehicle, neutralises any likely out-of-field for the frame, and also any psychological comfort for either the spectator or the character, which opens up the image by focusing solely on the in-field, as Didier Peron remarks:

On comprend exactement ce qui est dans le champ ou non, quel est l'espace exact du film et sa profondeur. De la première idée de scénario au mixage final, la question de trouver l'espace du film, sa spatialité singulière, intime, secrète, est pour moi primordiale.⁵⁰

Denis combines devices such as details in the framing, a variety of gestures and poses, her own musical selections for the soundtrack and the explicit sensual coupling between the bodies of Jean and Laure against the tactile nature of the surroundings (such as the textured bedspread upon which Laure leaves a body imprint and the rough, hotel carpet which is contrasted with the smooth skin of Laure's bare feet), often captured in a series of fleeting impressions compiled to insulate the couple in a 'sensed' cinematic universe. The different relationship between sound and image also forces another perception of the characters and objects which differs from the traditional meaning customarily accorded to them. Robert Bresson describes such film as "not made for a stroll with the eyes, but for going right into it, for being totally absorbed in..."⁵¹ What seems to be stressed in *Vendredi soir* is not the hierarchical distinction between body and image or between real and representation, but the possibilities of affirming embodiment as

⁵⁰ Peron, Didier (11/09/2002b), 'Un film peut naître d'une musique,' *Libération*.

⁵¹ Bresson, Robert (1986), *Notes on the Cinematographer*, trans. by Griffin Jonathan, pp. 85-86.

part of the cinematic process. The proximity of bodies and the centrality of the body, magnified by the camerawork in the film, forces the spectator to move beyond certain limits, which are different from the separation between spectator and image which Lacan describes.⁵²

As Marks explains, in optical visuality the eye perceives objects from a far enough distance to isolate them as forms in space, and with optical vision there is an assumed separation between the viewing body and the object. The haptic image is, in a sense, 'less complete', requiring the spectator to contemplate the image as a material presence rather than as an easily-identifiable representational object. What Laura Marks defines as *haptic* are images that "invite a look that moves on the surface plane of the screen for some time before the viewer realises what he or she is beholding,"⁵³ thus privileging the materiality of the image, that is, acknowledging its bodily presence and forcing the spectator to concentrate on the image itself. As the images are incomplete, they do not impart enough recognisable information to the viewer, (as they are 'too close') and consequently the additional information the spectator needs to provide to decipher them is from his or her own sensory and memory bank. According to Marks, this leads to more of a "bodily relationship between the viewer and the image."⁵⁴ In keeping with Deleuze, Marks's epistemological contrasting of haptic visuality (touch, feel and taste) with conventional visuality (sight, hearing) is inspired by Henri Bergson's philosophical dualism (mind/matter, body/spirit, intellect/intuition), especially his duality of memory (habitual or cerebral memory versus pure memory or

⁵² Lacan, Jacques (1977), *Écrits, A Selection*, transl. by Sheridan, Alan, p. 104.

⁵³ Marks, Laura (2000), *The Skin of the Film*, p. 162.

⁵⁴ *ibid*, p. 164.

duration). As habitual memory perception is opposed to pure memory (and conditioned by what is visible), it may be stimulated by other non-visual triggers, the former, (like Deleuze's 'movement-image'), aligning to 'official history' of which there is very little in the film in terms of information about the characters, whose lives cannot be described as other (because other is recognising the self, in another). This engagement is not through representation (as it is not recognisable) but through haptical as opposed to optical imagery which shapes the style of Denis's film.

Vivian Sobchack is of the opinion that what the eyes see, the body also 'sees' in that it experiences what is seen, in the sense that it provides "alternative sense and signification" to the information that is visible.⁵⁵ As she points out, this is contrary to Christian Metz's theories in which the latter does not provide the spectator with a "lived-body experience."⁵⁶ There is, according to Sobchack, a double embodiment and double intentionality operating within the film experience;

the spectator's uniquely situated and contingent vision intentionally shapes the signs and meanings of the film's vision as much as the uniquely situated and contingent vision of the film intentionally shapes the spectator's.⁵⁷

This has coalescence with the main point of Marks's argument which is to demonstrate that the body has a visceral, mimetic relationship to the external world that, like memory, is both cerebral and emotional. Cinema, therefore, as part of the external world, can also embody a many-sided sensual experience as,

⁵⁵ Sobchack, Vivian (1992), *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture*, p. 271.

⁵⁶ *ibid*, p. 270.

⁵⁷ *ibid*.

in the case of *Vendredi soir*, Denis's evokes unfamiliar memory-senses in a film that has no typical narrative form, but is experienced by the spectator within the fantasy world of the female character living out her sexual desires for one night. Though the narrative structure of the film is chronologically linear, it is characterised by significant fragmentation on a number of different levels, which contributes to a reinforcement of the pattern of fantasy present in the film, revolving around the characters Jean and Laure, whose only commonality would seem to be that they are both alone and stranded in the city. The minimal plot has a notable absence of narrative purpose and formal closure which is a psychological dislocation for both spectator and characters, the latter seeming to be driven by no specific aim. The theme of obscurity pervades the narrative with little information being revealed to the spectator about the characters and the focus being on their desire for each other. Jean and Laure are two people without a story and with little or no history, interacting according to a driving force of desire which is never explicitly articulated throughout the film, in what Denis terms an "internal dialogue,"⁵⁸ relying on the body as the narrative, rather than on the frugal (and at times, inaudible) dialogue.

City Sounds

Whilst the film does not consist exclusively of haptic images, it is a mixture of images that appears in what Marks refers to as a "dialectical

⁵⁸ *ibid.*

relationship with the optical.”⁵⁹ The blurred images of the indistinct swirling headlights of the traffic jam, for example, which at times dominate the optical, resolve periodically to show people walking or hurrying along the streets, trying to get home on foot. The urban city sounds of cars hooting, first foregrounded at the beginning of the film and then heard as a muffled background as the film progresses, lose their symbolic quality:

as noise, they arrive to us less as signs with specific meanings than as an audible texture. Noise, one might say, is haptic sound”. To some degree it is up to the individual hearer whether to experience them as a texture or to distinguish and perceive them, as in the difference between haptic and optical visibility.⁶⁰

The blurring of the sounds of the city in the soundtrack draws attention to the blurring of the optical images which contrasts with the clarity of, for example, the sound of water in the hotel washroom and the detailed, well-lit images of the scenes in *Le Rallye*, examples of the dissolution and resolution of the optical and the haptic into each other, which acts as a counterpoint in the film, in an inverted sound hierarchy with the soundtrack often constructed as a blurred mixture of indistinct sounds, rather than structured, vocal interactions. The revving and braking of cars and the fragments of voices and the shouts, footsteps and abstract noise collide and compete with a cacophony of both diegetic and nondiegetic sound fragments. The audience is left to reconcile all this into a meaningful, coherent whole; to relate what is heard to what is seen.

⁵⁹ Marks, Laura (2002), *Touch*, p. 12.

⁶⁰ Marks, Laura (2002), ‘Emergent Senses, A Response to Swalwell’, in *Film Philosophy*, 6, 36. www.film-philosophy.com/vol6-2002/n36swalwell, accessed 15/06/2006.

The visual poetry of exchanged looks, the close-ups of hands, and the mundane details such as the glowing heater in the hotel room, the rough carpet under Laure's feet, the wet windscreens in the traffic jam, and the squeaky noises of Jean's leather jacket, consequently reveal a whole network of images in *Vendredi soir* which are in opposition to the smooth and hard surfaces of cars, the exhaust fumes, air from driers, cigarette smoke, steam, (all of which circulate freely and create a bond between individuals, that is between skin and skin), such elements as colour, texture and the visceral sensations of touch, taste and smell (as well as female desire) are made possible by an initial focus on everyday actions and rituals carried firstly from the interior of Laure's flat to the space of the car, then to the hotel room. Images frame, 'isolate' and caress a part of the human figure, or encounter and 'feel' a woollen glove, the collar of a jacket, the rim of a cup or an entwined, almost indistinguishable part of another body. As such, *Vendredi soir* is a film of bodies coming together and pulling apart.

The Body of the City

The persona and space of the city itself in relation to the couple is that Jean and Laure are essentially linked and organically connected to the metaphoric, imagined body of the city and its spaces, with the city assuming a corporeality and providing a background of sensual spaces within which Laure lives out her fantasies in her relationship with Jean, within the cityspace and in the relationship with each other. Although the film starts with panoramic views of Paris, once Laure finds herself stuck in the traffic jam the city becomes decentralised, with

the focus first on the streets and then gradually closing in on the couple as their relationship develops, to the intimacy of the scenes in a *huis clos* with only the presence of the two characters in the small hotel bedroom. Denis endows her 'landscape' of Paris with visions of familiar spaces that have been recovered by the motions of desire, which turns the city into a mythical arena for this chance encounter of the couple. The spectator glimpses patchwork views and fleeting images of Paris (such as *métro* signs) with the fiction built around *arrondissements*, which eventually converge towards an impression of unity or homogeneity in the hotel room, giving an impression of both diversity and fragmentation rather than a unique centre. This also applies to the film's protagonists at the level of belonging, as they find themselves within and between cultures, their movement around the city, both in the car and on foot, attesting to the dynamic and shifting quality of the society in which they live. In this respect, with the significance of the details that Denis provides of dark anonymous streets, the car interior space, the lit interior of the *tabac* which the couple visit, the pizzeria where they dine and the hotel room where they have sexual relations, is that the city *mise en scène* provides spaces that have sensual meaning.

According to Michel de Certeau, representations of the city are mainly connected with the imaginary. He argues that the city as a whole does not exist as a homogeneous or readable representation and that its citizens thus escape all means of detection or identification.⁶¹ De Certeau's notions of spatial practice in relation to movement, time, and space with the city as the archetypal ground for

⁶¹ De Certeau, Michel (1999), 'Walking in the City,' in *The Cultural Studies Reader*, During, Simon (ed), pp. 151-160.

examination of visual and sensory experience, along with form and style, bring fresh insights to current understandings of cinematic space and the relationship between the film and the city.⁶² Recent work by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (work extended by Saskia Sassen), points to the city as a crucial site in which to explore the dynamic relationship between identity and space in the cinematic imaginary.⁶³ The ambulation of Jean and Laure around the city spaces further emphasises the decentralisation characteristic of the urban landscape and the anonymity of the characters, which prevents the audience from relying on known structures that would allow him/her to orientate the narrative around the places he or she is seeing onscreen. Instead, it forces the spectator to rely on deconstructed locations, producing shifting, unreadable, spatial representations and accordingly, there is an absence of traditional, cultural and historical icons in the frame. There are few recognisable, symbolic places in *Vendredi soir* and only the establishing long shot and pan of the Paris rooftops in the opening sequences gives a visual background which sets the scene for the rest of the film. Although orientation is achieved through the several shots of the repeated motif of the optician's giant, neon sign (a pair of illuminated spectacles) and the familiar style of the sign of the *tabac* in red, neon lighting, signifiers of the historical city are replaced by highways, empty streets, stairways, the hotel entrance and the hotel room, thereby displacing traditional city spaces onto a more alternative setting. These signs belong to anonymous areas of the city with which Laure, at least, is unfamiliar, giving rise to her anxiety. When she returns

⁶² Schiel, Mark and Fitzmaurice, Tony (eds), (2003), *Screening the City*.

⁶³ Hardt, Michael and Negri, Antonio (2008), *Empire*. Also in Sassen, Saskia (1992), 'The Global City'.

to the car, having briefly used a telephone box to call and cancel her dinner appointment, Jean is at the wheel of the car. He suddenly drives off at speed when he finds a momentary break in the traffic queue, which proves an unsettling experience for Laure. This is coupled with the use of mainly medium camera shots, which never allow the spectator to situate themselves or the characters precisely in space, thus accentuating the feelings of dislocation as images escape symbolic recognition, in an almost Hitchcockian moment of suspense which changes the pace of the film. Finally, delocalisation also takes place at the level of time, as Paris is not only seen at night as an intimate space, mostly associated with pleasure that does not belong to conventional modes of living, but it is also seen at dawn, a liminal time of transition, when Laure emerges from the hotel into the street and starts to make her way home. Thus the active participation of the spectator is used to identify with Laure and to firmly establish her 'other' identity in the space that she occupies in her one-night relationship with Jean.

Issues of displacement and desire are addressed against a backdrop of an ever-diminishing cityscape which eventually becomes indistinct as a reference point in the frame, which in turn mirrors the cinematography and the lack of referencing in the close camerawork on the body which follows in the bedroom scene. Denis fully encloses and isolates the couple, who operate in a *huis clos*, first of all being trapped together in the car as a result of the traffic jam, then in the hotel room when they abandon the car altogether. Jean-Michel Frodon writes that *Vendredi soir* is a film about 'humanity'; it is this that differentiates it from

other experimental film.⁶⁴ The characters are ‘real’, sensual beings rather than abstract figures, but they are without a story and with little or no history. As strangers, both to themselves and to the spectator, Laure and Jean have no context. Although Laure has some notions of a past and future, Jean does not exist outside the boundaries of the one-night affair. They seem to interact according to a driving force of desire which is never explicitly articulated, as the theme of obscurity pervades the narrative, with little information being revealed to the spectator about the characters. As such, Jean and Laure embody the city in a state of *détente*, a *corps* paralysed because of the strike and consequently deprived of the vibrancy and energy of the normal rhythms of the day-to-night transition. The focus is on the couple’s desire for each other, in the light of sparse dialogue (which is inaudible in parts), so that the body of both the couple and the city (which assumes a corporeality), becomes the narrative.

Conclusions

As she ‘leaves’ the real world, Laure experiences her dreams and transgresses the boundaries of her daily routine, living out various emotions and sensuality, playing out her desires, then leaving the fantasy world the next morning, returning to the sounds of the city waking up and daily life recommencing. Jean is the fantasy to whom Laure abandons herself then leaves behind as soon as the day breaks, presumably to resume her relationship with François. The manifestation of unspoken sexual desire that she experiences with Jean is permissible by virtue of

⁶⁴ Frodon, (2002).

the fact that it is contained in a moment that is isolated and virtually ‘out of time’. The chance meeting also gives Laure an opportunity to define for herself what she is giving up in order to have a committed relationship, as the conditions are in place for her to be able to act on the sexual attraction she feels for a total stranger. When Laure leaves the hotel room after the night of passion the only visible sign of the night’s sexuality is a slight smile on her face, a sign also of her relief in re-entering a more familiar world, as she runs until she eventually reaches a large boulevard in a more populated area which holds no anxiety.

What is different about Denis’s style of filming is that it allows for a ‘freedom of decoding’ on the part of the spectator.⁶⁵ This is a move away from the semiotics of the domination of encoded messages that assures a social control, in that the spectator experiences the film text through his/her unique embodiment. In terms of cultural interpretations of the film, the spectator will have certain sense-memories which he/she shares historically with the rest of the culture and which results in a predetermined interpretation of encoded messages onscreen, in this case within the parameters of traditional *auteur* French film. What *Vendredi soir* does is to offer the spectator recognition of this, (unavoidable) framework of controlled messages and provide a space for the spectator’s individual and bodily interpretation. The method of communication Denis employs through the medium of images and sound to convey emotions such as desire often lacks the familiar symbolic distance and ‘pointers’ that, for example, the *auteur* system requires for traditional representation to ‘work’, and in this respect *Vendredi soir* lacks a

⁶⁵ Eco, Umberto (1979), *A Theory of Semiotics*, p 150, cited in Sobchack, Vivian (1992), *The Address of the Eye, a Phenomenology of Film Experience*, p. 306.

framework by which to define the Lacanian ‘object’ in terms of both libidinal investment and visual and narrative representation. a more sensuous approach, which advances the study of *Vendredi soir* and shows that the film offers more of a bodily relationship between spectator and image. Through the use of certain camera shots, images and narrative and the privileging of image over dialogue, Denis reflects upon sexual difference within the couple in the virtual absence of dialogue and scripting and within images and sound experienced by the spectator through the senses, rather than through an ‘objectifying gaze.’ This emphasis in filmmaking extends to an unsettling sense of the body’s proximity as her work seeks to capture or even intensify this affective dimension within the experience of film viewing in which the use of Marks’s work moves the analysis of *Vendredi soir* beyond purely literal notions of representation and affective responses to images, as she states;

Bodies and minds work together. This appeal to olfactory, tactile, and other nonvisual bodily knowledges makes many participants uncomfortable, since these knowledges are little valued or cultivated in modern Western contexts, even in the art world. Even if we respect them, we may not know how to make sense of them. In short, stirring up the hierarchy of the senses is not a chance to play dumb: in fact it's quite exhausting.⁶⁶

The emphasis in *Vendredi soir* of a ‘stirring up of the senses’ lies in the film’s sensations of touch, taste and smell, with many of the sensual moments being framed and isolated in a heightened, multisensory cinema which permits an intimacy with the actors’ faces and bodies and the spaces which the characters

⁶⁶ Marks (2000), p. 118-119.

inhabit. By interacting close up with an image, and close enough for the figure and ground to mingle, the spectator relinquishes his or her own sense of separateness from the image “not to know it, but to give him/herself up to her desire for it.”⁶⁷ The film invites a haptic look through this imagery, creating sensations by utilising such techniques as alternately drawing the spectator into a disorientating closeness and allowing him or her to master barely perceptible imagery. The ending of the film refuses narrative closure, remaining ambiguous, as if the transcendence of the encounter can only be attained in its oscillation between the dream state and reality, with female desire assuming its real force in fantasy.

⁶⁷ *ibid*, p. 183.

CHAPTER 4

Confounding the Visual: Looking at the Unlookable

Anatomie de l'enfer

(Catherine Breillat, 2004)

“Hell has an anatomy... the woman's body.”¹

A recent trend in post-2000 French cinema has been the confusion of boundaries between art film and pornography, with the making of a proliferation of films containing onscreen, explicit sexual activity. By the end of the 1990s French films had already offered controversial visions of sexuality in which the limits of what could be shown onscreen were challenged, such as Laetitia Masson's *A vendre* (1998), Gaspar Noé's *Seul contre tous* (1998), Bruno Dumont's *L'Humanité* (1999) and Catherine Breillat's *Romance* (1999). In the early 2000s this trend, which has been referred to as ‘cinema of transgression’ and ‘cinema of abjection,’² continued even further amidst a showing of a more explicit portrayal of sexuality, such as in Virginie Despentes and Coralie Trinh Thi's *Baise-moi* (2000) and Patrice Chéreau's *Intimacy* (2000). Violence and human deprecation, often coupled with explicit sex scenes, have also been associated

¹ Murphy, Kevin (2004), ‘Hell's Angels: An Interview with Catherine Breillat on Anatomy of Hell, http://archive.sensesofcinema.com/contents/05/34/breillat_interview.html, accessed 20/03/2010.

² These terms referred in particular to Catherine Breillat's films, for example, in Vasse, David (2004), *Catherine Breillat: Un Cinéma du rite et de la transgression*: also in Gronstad, Asbjørn (2006), ‘Abject Desire: *Anatomie de l'enfer* and the Unwatchable,’ *Studies in French Cinema*, 6, 3, pp. 161-169.

with this trend in films such as Gaspar Noé's *Irréversible* (2002), Michael Haneke's *La Pianiste* (2001) and Philippe Grandrieux's *La Vie nouvelle* (2002), but in 2004 Breillat's *Anatomie de l'enfer*, a screen adaptation of her novel *Pornocratie* (2001),³ containing sexual images so explicit that they were deemed 'unwatchable,' foregrounded new debates about the sexuality and subjectivity of representing female bodies onscreen, the struggle to make the body 'visible' and the attempt to reveal the 'secret' of female sexuality to the film spectator.⁴

Breillat's films had previously encompassed a wide range of issues concerning the understanding of female sexuality, from the adolescent obsession with the loss of virginity in *Une vraie jeune fille* (1975), *36 Fillette* (1988) and *Ma soeur* (2001), to the sexual and emotional gulf between an older woman and a younger man in both *Parfait amour!* (1996) and *Brève traversée* (2001), then to a woman's exploration of sadomasochism in *Romance* (1999) and finally, to the highly controversial exploration of sexuality and the relationship between men and women, taken to visual limits, in *Anatomie de l'enfer* (2004). Whereas *Romance*, which followed a woman's transcendence of socially-dictated sexual repression, had, according to Breillat, failed to 'reveal all' in terms of exceeding the limits of the watchable (although it transgressed codes of sexual representation), the imagery was subsequently taken further in *Anatomie de l'enfer* in what Breillat describes as a challenge in overcoming a 'cowardice' on her part, which was that, in her opinion, she had not shown the reality of the

³ *Pornocratie* was written when Breillat was seventeen years of age and legally too young to read the explicit content of the novel. It was published in 2001 expressly as a precursor for a film project.

⁴ For example Fuss, Diana (1989), in *Essentially speaking* and Williams, Linda (1989), in *Hard Core*.

female sexual organ in films prior to 2004.⁵ With close-ups of the female genitalia, menstrual blood, bodily fluids and sex acts in *Anatomie de l'enfer*, the film depicts a man's transcendence from his view of women as obscene and disgusting, to a full and total understanding of women, which changes him accordingly, even though the outcome is tragedy. As the film finally reaches the limits of the unwatchable, "the end of a necessary cycle...the worst film I could make,"⁶ it significantly marks the completion of a ten year cycle of Breillat's filmmaking, an 'end of series' which began with *Parfait amour!* and for which she engendered a reputation on the European art film circuit as a director of "films tendance cul."⁷ Breillat has subsequently explored other genres in her filmmaking, with *Une vieille maîtresse* (2007), a costume drama, and *Barbe bleue* (2009), a dark fairytale, which marks her contribution to another major topic of debate in post-2000 French film, which is the expansion of genre. Denying any links with pornography,⁸ which she describes as originating from a different way of thinking from her own and criticising the genre as "removing sex from human dignity," Breillat suggests that "if you reintegrate sex in human dignity, then you can film sexual scenes, even scenes of sexual depravation."⁹ As she predicted,

⁵ Sélavy, Virginie (2008), 'Interview with Catherine Breillat,' www.electricsheepmagazine.co.uk/features/2008/04/01/interview-with-catherine-breillat/ accessed 25/04/2010.

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ Gillain, Anne (2003), 'Profile of a Filmmaker: Catherine Breillat,' *Beyond French Feminisms: Debates on Women, Politics and Culture in France, 1981-2001*, Célestin, Roger at al, (eds), p. 207.

⁸ Widemann, Dominique (28/01/2004), 'L'origine du monde', *L'Humanité*.

⁹ Sklar, Robert (1999), 'A Woman's Vision of Shame and Desire: An Interview with Catherine Breillat', *Cinéaste*, 25,1, pp. 24 – 26.

following its release *Anatomie de l'enfer* was adversely criticised, particularly in the American press, but received a mixed reaction from French critics.¹⁰

The film has no references in terms of history, narrative, context or identifiable characters. The latter remain anonymous (in a similar way to the characters in Bertolucci's film, *Le Dernier Tango à Paris*),¹¹ which furthers the abstraction, "allowing sexual expression [to] emerge free of history and the deformed culture,"¹² The couple meet by chance and the man agrees to be paid by the woman to look at her where she is 'unlookable' over a period of four nights, during which time the two characters enact a post-religious Adam and Eve scenario in a symbolic reworking of the meeting of the first man and woman on earth. Breillat describes the screen adaptation of her explicit script as "illisible,"¹³ highlighting the difficulty of filming the female sex organ as subject, as such filming mimics pornographic conventions, with camera angles designed to provide the viewer with all the necessary visual information and the extent of various sex acts in progress:

Comment on montre ce qui n'est pas regardable ? C'est ça le sujet. C'est l'impératif pornographique qui est l'impératif

¹⁰ Grønstad, Asbjørn (2006), cites a list of American publications which vilified the film in 'Abject Desire: Anatomie de l'enfer and the Unwatchable,' *Studies in French Cinema*, 6, 3, p. 161. Articles were published in the French press, such as : Marie-Noëlle Tranchant, 'Liturgie de l'obscène,' *Le Figaroscope* 28 January 2004 ; Tranchant, 'Mise en obscène,' *Le Figaro* 28 January 2004; Dominique Widemann, 'Maintenant l'apocalypse,' *L'Humanité* 28 January 2004 ; Widemann 'L'origine du monde,' *L'Humanité* 28 January 2004.

¹¹ Bertolucci, Bertrand (1972), *Dernier Tango à Paris*, (in which Catherine Breillat played the role of Mouchette).

¹² Mellen, Joan (2004), *In the Realm of the Senses*.

¹³ Tylski, Alexandre (2003), 'Entretien avec Catherine Breillat (Breillat, la peinture et *Anatomie de l'enfer*),' *Cadragé*, Octobre, www.cadrage.net/entretiens/Breillat/catherine.html, accessed 30/06/2010

des artistes: essayer de débusquer la pornographie pour trouver l'obscénité, pour savoir si elle existe.¹⁴

These comments echo Luce Irigaray's points made in her 1985 work, *Speculum de l'autre femme*, in which she considers that the visualisation of female desire within Western thought is unrepresentable:

The predominance of the visual...is particularly foreign to female eroticism....While her body finds itself (thus) eroticised and called to a double movement of exhibition and of chaste retreat in order to stimulate the drives of the 'subject', her sexual organ represents *the horror of nothing to see*.¹⁵

Whilst Irigaray's comments point to an appearance/disappearance of female eroticism in a 'hide and seek' "double movement" which offers nothing to the view, the female sex organ in Breillat's film is far from hidden and, rather than being "nothing to see" and having "no distinctive form of its own,"¹⁶ is not only visible, but is also seen in extreme close-up, the multiple planes of which offer much more than instrumental value in terms of spectatorial engagement. In order to analyse where the viewing pleasure can be located within this uncomfortable imagery and to consider what perspectives might be employed to theorise the experience of looking at 'the unlookable,' for both the male character and the film spectator, a new way of reading the visual imagery in the film and an alternative way of viewing 'the erotic' is called for, that succeeds traditional notions of a

¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵ Irigaray, Luce (1985), *Speculum de l'autre femme*, trans. by Gill Gillian, pp. 25-26.

¹⁶ Irigaray, Luce (1981), *This Sex Which Is Not One*, transl. by Porter, Catherine with Burke, first published (1977) as *Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas un*.

patriarchal gaze (which operates only within dominant systems of mastery). As Breillat reveals what is normally *not* revealed in terms of cinematic (sexual) imagery, *Anatomie de l'enfer* calls into question traditional ways of 'seeing' sexuality and looking at sexual images, in a symbolic re-appropriation of the feminine. This reading is conducted with a view towards addressing the implications of the film's participation in alternative scopic regimes that explode the conventions of the dominant codes of cinematic looking, to show that *Anatomie de l'enfer* is a specific cinematic intervention into French cultural debates about female subjectivity, with an alternative reading of the relationship between man and woman, which defies a reading as pornography and which the director felt compelled to show to audiences:

...because all the images of sex and bodies that we see are marred by perversion. There is just one point of view about sex, and it is pornographic...artists have the responsibility to represent sex from another point of view... what I must do is to show images that are not showable.¹⁷

Vision and Light

The works of Luce Irigaray and Maurice Merleau-Ponty present a philosophical study of the importance of 'light,' both investigating how tactile experience shapes the perception of light (in Irigaray's case in relation to sexuality), both moving away from the Western, Platonic model of sight. Irigaray is amongst a number of philosophers who have drawn associations

¹⁷ Murphy, Kevin (2004).

between masculine identity and ocularcentrism and she has also entered debates on the redefining of love and light. Her remarks on vision and illumination both take up and go beyond those of Merleau-Ponty by developing an alternative vision of light, which Cathryn Vasseleu describes as an “eroticising of the source of light.”¹⁸ Vasseleu examines Irigaray’s work in *Textures of Light: Vision and Touch in Irigaray, Levinas and Merleau-Ponty*,¹⁹ arguing that Irigaray also rethinks vision and light in terms of femininity and touch, not only exposing how the feminine has been excluded from the light of reason in philosophy, but also charting out a new feminine investment in light by showing how vision is dependent on, (but not necessarily reducible to), the texture of light or touch of light on the eye.²⁰ Vasseleu draws on Irigaray’s work to suggest that vision is “open to or affected by the touch of light,” so that without the sense of touch there would be no seeing.²¹ This is a more positive version of ‘illumination,’ with an erotic dimension that includes possibilities for women’s experience. Using Irigaray as an alternative way of viewing ‘the erotic’ other than seeing ‘the sexual’ through traditional codes of looking, is a new approach to cinematic spectatorship beyond the traditional dominance of the gaze. This perspective expands Irigaray’s concept of vision/touch beyond subject-object/other hierarchies to conceive of vision as an erotic, tactile experience.

¹⁸ Vasseleu, Cathryn (1996), ‘Illuminating Passions: Irigaray’s Transfiguration of Night’, in Brennan, Teresa and Jay, Martin, *Vision in Context*, p. 130. Although both Luce Irigaray and Maurice Merleau-Ponty can be read as seeking to undermine the dominant characterisations of vision and light in Western philosophy, engaging in more detail with differences between Merleau-Ponty’s theory of vision and that of Irigaray would challenge the space limitations of the thesis.

¹⁹ Vasseleu, Cathryn (1998), *Textures of Light: Vision and Touch in Irigaray, Levinas and Merleau-Ponty*.

²⁰ *ibid*, p. 13.

²¹ *ibid*, p. 12.

Given the importance of ‘looking’ in *Anatomie de l’enfer*, an interpretation of the film through an Irigarayan reading of vision may have wider consequences for female identity and the theorisation of film spectatorship. As light is at the heart of the cinematic apparatus, linking the film to Vasseleu's work on Irigaray's concept of illumination will offer an opportunity to explore the challenge the film makes to light's association with the display of truth. It may shed light on the association between light and truth, as the film enters a new dimension, one conducive to fantasy, which Breillat acknowledges (in interview) is always inseparable from filming sexuality.²²

The study of an alternative form of vision articulated in the film in a radical interpretation of both the text and theory is also approached in such a way as to show how this new vision intersects and conflicts with the French philosopher, Jean Baudrillard's, arguments in his work *Seduction* (1990). These concern the reappraisal of sexual identity and relations in the theorisation of contemporary Western society and subjectivity, identifying their movements and recuperations, and they involve the erosion of traditional, conservative attitudes towards sexual practices and gender:

By defying the boundaries that were set for it in the past, sexuality has become part of life, which means that it... no longer has transcendent value, neither as prohibition, nor as a principle of analysis, pleasure or transgression.²³

²² Murphy, Kevin (2004).

²³ Baudrillard, Jean (1992), *America*, p. 92.

It is from this premise that hails a new climate of sexual uncertainty, in parallel with an awareness that the present era is distinguished by, among other things, its mass production and consumption of sophisticated, realistic images, that the theory of seduction is developed. Here I shall explore Baudrillard's arguments concerning the re-appraisal of sexual identity and relations through their articulation in a dialogue with the film. An articulation of these arguments, in which Baudrillard considers that woman exists only as 'ambiguity' in his reappraisal of female sexual identity, in a dialogue with the film's articulation of the female subjectivity that Breillat makes visible, will also show that the initiation of the man in *Anatomie de l'enfer* illustrates Baudrillard's fear of the threat to the survival of the subject (man) if woman becomes 'real.'²⁴

The Contract

Anatomie de l'enfer opens in a gay night-club where a lone female (Amira Casar) wanders away from the dance floor and attempts suicide in the toilets. She is found just in time by a man (Rocco Siffredi), with whom she had the slightest of bodily contacts in the club as they brushed against each other on the stairs. The man accompanies the woman to a pharmacy to dress her wounds, they walk for a while in the deserted streets and the woman then puts a proposition to the man, offering to pay him to look at her from the angle from which she should never be viewed, in other words to be looked at where she is 'unlookable':

-Parce que vous n'aimez pas les femmes, vous pouvez justement me regarder. Je veux dire avec impartialité.

²⁴ Baudrillard, Jean (1990), *Seduction*, pp. 156-169.

-De quoi s'agit-il?
 - De cela. Me regarder par là ou je ne suis pas regardable.
 Vous n'aurez pas besoin de me toucher. Votre témoignage
 suffira.
 -Ce sera cher, dit-il.²⁵

The man accepts this arrangement and over four nights makes his way to the woman's house, an isolated cliff-top villa, to be paid to gaze upon the woman's sex. He arrives by taxi each night, dressed in a light-coloured suit, to be greeted by the woman in various states of attire, and the characters discuss sex and related topics in an existential discussion, as well as performing acts of sex over the four nights. Finally the man returns on the last night to find the bedroom empty and no trace of the woman within the house. In a fantasy ending to the film, when he does find her on a cliff path above the sea, the man advances towards her and pushes her over the clifftop to her death.

Opening to pulsating music, the film uses several devices to show the cultural construction of sex in the *mise en scène* of an urban underworld, reminiscent of night club scenes in *Romance*, suggesting links to sadomasochistic culture and associations with the violence of homosexual night life, including images of male-on-male fellatio and male bodies writhing to dance music. There is no visible female presence in the opening scenes of the film, apart from the unnamed woman, who pushes her way unnoticed through the crowded club in the semi-darkness. This, combined with the flashing lights of the dance podium, is in strict contrast with the environment in which the sexual encounter subsequently takes place, which is a barren, starkly-lit bedroom in a rather austere villa, the

²⁵ Widemann, Dominique, (28/01/2004), 'L'Origine du monde,' *L'Humanité*.

setting of which has Sadean connotations and some similarities with the setting of Just Jaekin's decadent film, *L'Histoire d'O*.²⁶ The gay club environment as a misogynistic microcosm in which the female character stands isolated in her womanhood in a mass of male-on-male sexual bodily contact, serves to allegorise the state of the female, not only in the *mise en scène* of the film, but in society as a whole, signifying the self-indulgence and autonomy of the male, whilst in turn visualising the remoteness and solitude of the female body. Breillat's lone female character is searching for desire and her sexual identity, in other words, her 'self,' outside the male symbolic order.²⁷

Historically, the female body has consistently held a special function in the symbolic realm as a fetishised and dismembered object of the patriarchal gaze in a feminised "space of dispersion,"²⁸ in which the female figure functions as an entity to be manipulated by men for their own impressions, with the female body a territory appropriated for men's sexual pleasure and aesthetic appreciation, denying women their subjecthood. More recently, feminist theorists and writers have re-appropriated both the female body and women's sexuality in their writing, drawing attention to the fact that women's bodies, in spite of their metaphorical utilisations by men, have rarely been explored in a natural, organic sense, which "invite us to see, touch, and smell a body made of organs."²⁹ As Irigaray remarks, "with respect to life, language, and philosophy, women have been women only in

²⁶ Jaekin, Just (1975), *L'Histoire d'O* featured the sexual initiation of a female that took place in an isolated, Gothic mansion.

²⁷ Murphy, Kevin (2004).

²⁸ Salvaggio, Ruth (1998), 'Theory and Space, Space and Woman', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, pp. 261-282.

²⁹ Sellers, Susan (1991), *Language and Sexual Difference: Feminist Writing in France*, p. 111.

relation to the determinations made for them by men,” with the effect that women are displaced from any situation they might establish for themselves on their own terms.³⁰ As such, the logic behind the woman’s apparent suicide attempt at the beginning of *Anatomie de l’enfer* and the essence of what she recounts to the man who finds her, is, quite simply: “*Parce que je suis une femme.*” As the narrative unfolds, it becomes clearer from the conversations between the man and the woman that the latter understands that the fact that she is female causes all men to hate her, which drives her to a decadent nightlife indiscriminately, both in search of herself and in a manifestation of masochistic loathing of the world experienced from her woman’s point of view. What she is seeking and what she subsequently creates in her contract with the man, is an understanding on his part of what it means for her to be steeped in the awareness that men fear the sight of the female genitalia, with the result that society condemns the female sex organ as obscene. This is an aspect of the image of women’s sexuality that the female character wishes the man to confront, in order to have a pure understanding of the other, as “knowledge of the other is the highest goal.”³¹ In her film, which is an initiation of the man into knowledge of the woman, Breillat wishes to free the woman by allowing the man to understand the other and thus understand himself.³² On a wider scale the couple are engaging in a rediscovery, not only of themselves, but also of society as a whole (which includes the spectator and the audience), in a reassessment of aesthetic beauty and human morality, which, though complex, Breillat wishes the audience to transvaluate through her images and to re-evaluate

³⁰ Irigaray, Luce (1985), : *Speculum of the other woman*, p. 212.

³¹ Price, Brian (2002), ‘Catherine Breillat,’ www.sensesofcinema.com/breillat, accessed 20/12/04

³² *ibid.*

what it means to be a man and a woman within the foundations of religious, Western morality, based on the ‘fall’ of Adam and Eve.

What follows as a result of the prearranged nocturnal meetings between the man and the woman are sex scenes that are brutally realistic in terms of imagery, with no attempt made on the part of the director to glorify the sex act or to hide body parts usually deemed cinematically unaesthetic, in other words failing to provide viewing pleasure. The spectator is exposed to scenes of menstrual blood escaping from the genitalia, extreme close-up shots of the sex act, the two characters consuming menstrual blood, the female character’s mouth oozing sperm, the man wiping his hair with vaginal fluids, the sodomisation of the woman with a garden pitchfork handle and the smearing of the female genitalia with lipstick, to resemble a monstrous mouth. In terms of this explicit imagery, nothing remains hidden from an audience point of view, the ‘truth’ about female sexuality is revealed, there are no more secrets and nothing more explicit remains to be seen in the field of vision, as James Hoberman has observed: “*Anatomie de l’enfer* is a rigorously self-reflexive film, a film about watching ourselves watch(ing) the unwatchable.”³³

Adam and Eve

The basic carnal ritual enacted by the couple across their series of nocturnal

³³ Hoberman, James (2004), ‘Gray Anatomy’, *The Village Voice*, 49: 41, p. 53.

rendezvous is that the woman, reclining nude in the centre of a sparsely furnished bedroom, “une chambre dénudée,”³⁴ puts her body on display for the man, lit by white light as if undergoing a medical examination. The contrasts of a clinicalised, sterile image of the female body in Western medicine, with a composition with reference to the sublime, classical, Renaissance nude, demands to be viewed otherwise than with a pornographic vision. The woman’s reclining pose, a *tableau vivant*, bears striking similarities to reclining nudes from works of art such as Titian’s *Venus of Urbino* (1538), Diego Valazquez’s *Venus at Her Mirror* (1644), Francisco de Goya’s *The Naked Maja* (1800), and Edouard Manet’s *Olympia* (1863), and makes particular reference, as Breillat acknowledges, to Gustave Courbet’s painting, *A l’Origine du monde* (1866) which is an almost anatomical depiction of the female sex organ in the tradition of carnal, lyrical painting (thereby escaping pornographic status) upon which Breillat based the concept of the film.³⁵ She also cites the inspiration of paintings by Caravaggio³⁶ and quotes the influence of Renaissance artists as the basis for her use of light in the studio, particularly in achieving a luminescent effect on the actress, Amira Casar, in order to give a more plastic appearance to her skin.³⁷

³⁴ Devanne, Lauren (01/02/2004), ‘Catherine Breillat; cinéaste,’ Entretien réalisé pour l’émission de cinéma *Désaxés* et diffusée sur *Radio Libertaire* www.arkepix.com/kinok/Catherine%20BREILLAT/breillat_interview.html, accessed 04/05/2010.

³⁵ Devanne *ibid* and Tyłski, Alexandre (2003), ‘Entretien avec Catherine Breillat (Breillat, la peinture et *Anatomie de l’enfer*),’ *Cadrage*, Octobre.

³⁶ Macnab, Geoffrey (2004a), ‘Written on the Body: Interview with Catherine Breillat,’ www.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound/feature/220, accessed 13/07/2010. Also in Douin Jean-Luc, (28/01/2004a), ‘Euchariste profane autour d’un corps féminin condamné par son sexe,’ *Le Monde*.

³⁷ Widemann, Dominique (2004/01/28), *L’origine du monde*, *L’Humanité*.

Mikhail Bakhtin has classified bodies as ‘closed’ versus ‘open’,³⁸ whilst more recently Francesca Miglietti has suggested the categories ‘classical’ versus ‘extreme.’³⁹ The notion of the open body emerges in Bakhtin’s description of the Carnival as a celebration of the body and an openness to life, with no distinctions between ‘the profane and the sacred, the lower and the higher, the spiritual and the material’.⁴⁰ A central aspect of Carnival is its attitude to the body, which Bakhtin calls the ‘grotesque’ in which bodies are open to the world with an emphasis placed on “an unfinished and open body without clearly defined boundaries,”⁴¹ in terms of body parts such as the mouth, genitals and anus, so that it is more connected to other bodies and the environment around it. Whilst Western civilisation has created a disembodied, alienated and closed body through which sensuality is impeded, the open body, in contrast, resists the controlling discourses of Modernity and embraces embodiment and sensuality, tending towards a subjectivity that is less individualistic. This more ‘open’ subjectivity can help construct culturally subversive open bodies that resist dominant discourses. In the history of the Fine Arts the classical, closed body is an image of idealised perfection and calmness,⁴² while the open, extreme body is leaking out and visceral, often in an image of pain and wounding (for instance, in Fra Angelico’s painting of *Christ with Crown of Thorns*).⁴³ The scenes of blood escaping from the female genitalia in close-up, the body’s fluids, its falling apart and its

³⁸ Bakhtin, Mikhail (1984), *Rabelais and his world*, p. 285-286.

³⁹ Miglietti, Francesca (2003), *Extreme bodies: The use and abuse of the body in art*.

⁴⁰ Bakhtin, Mikhail (1984), *Rabelais and his World*, pp. 285-286.

⁴¹ *ibid*, pp. 26-27.

⁴² For example in a work of art such as Michelangelo’s sculpture, *David* (c.1501).

⁴³ Angelico, c.1450.

mutilation (Breillat cites comparisons with Pasolini's 1975 film, *Salò*),⁴⁴ link the film to religion, themes of purity and abjection as the woman represents the extreme body of Christ: "Amira Casar est dans une situation christique...une position de révélation à l'autre."⁴⁵ The dominant religious icon in the bedroom, a large crucifix which hangs prominently over the woman's bed where the couple meet, is reinforcing the air of the sacrificial of the naked woman stretched out on the bed under bright lighting:

Elle est clouée sur le lit, sous le regard de l'homme, qui peut être le regard du pharisien. Elle est à la fois dans un état de sanctification et de sacrifice. Il y a quelque chose de sacrificiel car elle est vouée à la cruauté.⁴⁶

Examining and visualising monstrous bodies and viscous male and female bodily fluids acknowledges, but also productively negotiates, the effects of the recent cinematic revolution of 'real' sex in narrative film, on female contemporary experience,⁴⁷ and the issue of the female genitalia as culturally pre-determined metaphors of human lack and loss. Given that the imagery in the film could be interpreted as pornographic content, as it consists of an incorporation of recognisable, pornographic generic elements and a desire to make 'it,' the female sex organ, visible in the inclusion of close-ups of penetration and oral sex, this calls into question the definition of 'pornography,' given that these graphic images of onscreen sex are to be understood otherwise:

⁴⁴ Murphy, Kevin (2004).

⁴⁵ Widemann, Dominique (2004/01/28), L'origine du monde, *L'Humanité*.

⁴⁶ Vassé, David (2009), Extrait du livre de David Vasse paru aux éditions: Arte Editions et Editions complexe, www.flachfilm.com.

⁴⁷ For example in Williams, Linda (2008), *Screening Sex*.

Pornography... adds a dimension to the space of sex, it makes the latter more real than the real – and this accounts for its absence of seduction... [In pornography,] sex is so close that it merges with its own representation: the end of perspectival space, and therefore, that of the imaginary and of phantasy – end of the scene, end of illusion.⁴⁸

A new field of possibilities opens up if the term ‘pornographic’ is revealed as a fundamental misunderstanding of *Anatomie de l’enfer* and the motivation behind it, which is that the ‘obscenity’ of the female sex is the source of enquiry in the film and the object of Breillat’s analysis. This obscenity exists as shocking, strange and indeterminate material that blurs the borders between the known and the unknown of the cinematic visual experience:

Il faut que je me confronte avec l’obscénité vraie. Des images sexuelles frontales. Je crois a ‘l’impératif pornographique’. C’est une question de conscience. Il faut révolutionner les vieux codes esthétiques.⁴⁹

The ‘enfer’ of the film’s title, the living hell of the woman’s body, has been described as *‘l’enfer c’est l’autre,’*⁵⁰ and, by Breillat, as *“l’enfer, c’est le sexe dans notre civilisation...une épouvante.”*⁵¹ Representing the female sexual organ as repulsive and horrifying with the technique of filtering unwatchable images through the eyes of the male character (and therefore through the eyes of the spectator), emphasises the act of seeing, as Stephen Heath states: “given the perspective of visibility established, it is the sex of the woman that is taken as the

⁴⁸ Baudrillard, Jean (1990), *Seduction*, pp. 28-29.

⁴⁹ Breillat, Catherine (28/01/2004), Mes dates clés, *Libération*.

⁵⁰ Azoury, Phillippe (26/01/2004), ‘Le sexe passé au rayons X’, *Libération*.

⁵¹ Vecchi, Phillippe (08/12/2003), ‘Breillat de A a X’, *Le Nouvel Observateur*.

very instance of the unseeable: the hidden.”⁵² It is clear that the notion of the essence of ‘the obscene’ interlaces with the monstrous unwatchability that underpins *Anatomie de l’enfer*, and that ‘obscenity,’ as the director intends it to be understood, is not in relation to spectacle, but in relation to ‘the unlookable.’ Accordingly the film seeks to uncover the limitations of vision and ocularcentrism in terms of what cannot be shown or what must not be shown onscreen, through the techniques Breillat employs to address these issues.

Breillat gives the voice-over commentary of the film in person, as a narration from the male character’s point of view (the first time she has “occupied the body of a man” in her films),⁵³ which provides a literary and mythical context with which to confront the unwatchable images that arouse so much fear, as she informs the spectator that “it is not their obscenity, but women’s *denial* of their obscenity, which frightens men.” This allows the spectator the possibility of creating a transcendent beauty out of images that society would otherwise have deemed unaesthetic, for although the visual focus of the film is the female anatomy, it is evident that language plays a very significant part in the narrative, to the extent that, at times, the philosophical and intellectual narration and conversation between the man and the woman subordinate the sexual imagery and allow a distancing of the spectatorial point of view. The most important technique Breillat uses in order to remove spectatorial pleasure from her sex scenes, in addition to the voice-over, is the narrative continuation in which the characters speak throughout the sex acts, thereby engaging the spectator intellectually, whilst

⁵² Heath, Stephen (1978), ‘Difference’, in *Screen*, 19, (3), pp. 51-113.

⁵³ Murphy, Kevin (2004).

preventing him/her from passive visual enjoyment of the images. The philosophical and intellectual narration, along with the conversation between the man and the woman, subordinate the sexual imagery and allow a distancing of the spectatorial point of view, in order to remove spectatorial pleasure from the sex scenes. This device directs the focus away from 'the visual' and images of sexuality, in a denial of carnal lust through voyeurism, by which means the film refutes charges of pornography.

Baudrillard argues that seduction, as a mode of representation, can be understood as fundamentally in opposition to pornography. By pornography he does not refer simply to graphic depictions of sexual acts, but to the modern tendency that seeks to render the relationship between seer and seen totally transparent, that is, apparently without mediation. Pornography endeavours to conceal its re-presentation of reality by raising the visibility of the most powerful images towards the points of maximum proximity and exhaustion. Taking sexual pornography as paradigmatic, such images are typically of penetration and ejaculation, the visibility of which engender an imaginary zoning of the sexual body into genitals and periphery. This marginal area, which includes a multiplicity of subjective triggers for arousal (for example gesture, expression, context and posing) is eclipsed by the centrality of the genital region. The over-exposure characteristic of pornography works to compensate the viewer for his/her passivity and absence from the pornographic scene, though at the cost of tantalising peripheral details and the nuances of an independent, detached interpretation by its viewer. In this way, pornography is "hyperreal", in that it

becomes ‘more real’ than the unmediated object it depicts, and thus represents the supplanting of the real by its model, as Baudrillard suggests:

Pornography... adds a dimension to the space of sex, it makes the latter more real than the real – and this accounts for its absence of seduction... [In pornography,] sex is so close that it merges with its own representation: the end of perspectival space, and therefore, that of the imaginary and of phantasy – end of the scene, end of illusion.⁵⁴

Both Breillat and Linda Williams deny this, as Breillat states that “when you speak about sexuality, you are always working in a fantastic dimension,”⁵⁵ whilst Williams questions how viewers' bodies engage with the sex acts of such scenes:

If the films are not 'only' pornography, by which we mean not 'only' designed to arouse us, then what is the role of our own bodily engagement with the aroused, desiring, but not always pornographically satisfied, bodies on the screen?⁵⁶

Disclaiming the image

The textual construction of the film’s opening sequences is given an almost documentary configuration in which subtitling disclaims the ‘ownership’ of the filmed genitalia by the actress, Amira Casar, a stark notice onscreen informing the spectator that Casar has a ‘body double’ for images of the female sex and the onscreen sex acts. Although Breillat had not originally planned a stand-in for the scenes, Casar insisted that it be written into her contract, “*pas d’entrailles, pas*

⁵⁴ Baudrillard, Jean (1990), *Seduction*, pp. 28-29.

⁵⁵ Murphy, Kevin (2004).

⁵⁶ Williams, Linda (2001), Cinema and the Sex Act, *Cineaste*, Winter, pp. 20-25.

d'orifices."⁵⁷ By agreeing to a disclaimer that the female genitalia portrayed were *not* that of Casar, Breillat inserts a secondary conspicuous signifier of representation to acknowledge the construction and mediation of the female image and make apparent to viewers their perceptual and interpretative distance from Casar's actual self. The contention that the film is used in such a way as to suggest transparency is thus compounded by the fact that Casar refused to appear in certain scenes involving real sex with Siffredi. Following this announcement the film then opens, the foreword allowing Breillat to distance the 'object' of the actress's body with the 'subject' of her film, which is the obscenity of the female body, dispensing with sex as the 'object' of enquiry, separating sex from its objective portrayal: "I take sexuality as a subject, not as an object."⁵⁸ Breillat warned that the film would have a violent reception as it involved looking at a woman's body in a way that might frighten people, as the images are dense and fully engage the female flesh to the point that the film would elicit "a strong, hateful response because it's about the forbidden aspects of religion, more Judaism than Catholicism... it is about impurity, about blood,"⁵⁹

The disempowered gaze

Breillat's deliberate choice of a misogynistic male, in a submissive role lacking mastery or dominance and in a position that is weakened and feminine, was a role contrary to the actor, Rocco Siffredi's, public persona as an

⁵⁷ Morain, Jean-Baptiste. and Nicklaus, Olivier (28/01/2004), 'L' Amazone Amira', *Les Inrockuptibles*.

⁵⁸ Wiegand, Chris (1999), 'A Quick Chat with Catherine Breillat,' *Kamera.co.uk*, www.kamera.co.uk/interviews/catherinebreillat.html, accessed 23/06/2004.

⁵⁹ Murphy, Kevin (2004).

international star of pornographic film. Breillat justifies her controversial choice of a star of pornography to play the main protagonist of the film, not in terms of his screen experience in a genre which has dominant systems, but rather in terms of his traditional acting skills and his sense of performance “with his entire body and mind.”⁶⁰ The sexuality of the man who the woman chooses to look at her where she is unlookable, is explained by the director as an allegory for men who dislike women, hence the inscription of sexuality on the female body within patriarchal and capitalistic systems of coercive power is less likely in the narrative, as the female does not potentially offer fulfillment of the male gazer’s needs and, as Breillat explains, she is looking for her sexual identity, her ‘self,’ rather than for desire.⁶¹ Through hyperdiegetic scenes which appear to be flashbacks from the man’s childhood Breillat suggests an ingrained disgust and contempt for the female body which seems to embody the man’s desire to possess and control women from an early age. The man moves to a more direct address of the woman’s impurity during the conversation on his first night at the villa. As he is gazing at her sex, which he calls a “pestilence,” suggesting a virulence of uncontrollable proliferation, the man compares the vulva and labia of the vagina to the slimy, green skin of a frog, in a religious reference to Biblical plagues,⁶² which connects him to what Breillat asserts is the source of shame of the female sex stemming from religious taboo.⁶³ He then remembers (through flashback), as a young boy, stealing a baby bird from its nest and dashing it to the ground for no

⁶⁰ *ibid*

⁶¹ Murphy, Kevin (2004).

⁶² Macnab, Geoffrey (2004a).

⁶³ Sklar, Robert (1999), ‘A Woman’s Vision of Shame and Desire: An Interview with Catherine Breillat’, *Cinéaste*.

reason. Breillat equates this to the fear that men have of the female body, as the little boy would probably have liked to have kept the baby bird in his pocket, (since that was where he first put it for safety), but out of a sadistic urge to control it, he then suddenly kills it. The voice-over narration at this point accompanies images of the squashed pulp of the dead bird, which cuts to a close-up of the vagina, the narrator talking of “the slime that mocked him,” referring to the mockery of the man through the destruction of the object (the woman) who will never be owned by him. In another flashback a young girl is also objectified in a scene under some bushes in which young boys dressed as doctors subject her to the male gaze as she is forced to lift her skirts for a mock medical examination. These references to incessant female objectification appear early on in the narrative and link a fear of the female body to men’s sadistic perversity, which Breillat’s subsequent filmic subjectification of the woman attempts to overthrow. In conversation with the woman the man seems to suggest that his homosexuality exists to isolate him as an ‘immunity’ from women, “I bless the day I was born immune to you and all your kind,”⁶⁴ he states and then adamantly defends sodomy as something that is true and ‘does not lie’, while describing the seduction of woman as ‘vulgar’.

As the man’s gaze is being directed by the woman, since she is paying him and is in control of the space (the villa) where he is contracted to meet her over the four nights, his sexual identity is unstable and is converted into a metaphor of possibilities in Breillat’s particular screen microcosm. He is “a body, a

⁶⁴ Macnab, Geoffrey(2004b), Sadean Woman,’ <http://www.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound/feature/209>, accessed 13/07/2010.

multiplicity of changing desires, sensations, instincts,”⁶⁵ as he is not, as Breillat points out, necessarily homosexual.⁶⁶ Instead, he represents man ‘prior-to’ and ‘independent-of’ woman, a man preferring the company of other men in a fraternal sense, as “there are many places on the planet where men don’t like women.”⁶⁷ This simultaneously problematises traditional visual analysis, since the man is feminised in that he is playing a submissive role without mastery or dominance and not gazing from a desiring position, and yet the film narrative revolves around ‘looking’.⁶⁸ He lacks the capacity to direct a gaze as the object of his vision has been chosen for him, in fact he experiences difficulty in ‘just watching’ for any length of time. Such explicit images also place the male spectator in a position from where he confronts the unconscious ‘real’ of his desire, or rather, where ‘it’ (the female sex) confronts him. Simultaneously this position is also an uncomfortable one as he is presented with what he most fears, which is the lurid wound that the female genitalia represents, which he looks at with great awkwardness.

The man, unable to sustain his gaze on the woman’s sex for any period of time and reluctant to stay seated in the chair opposite the bed upon which the female reclines, restlessly seeks to escape the horror that confronts him. The role of the man ‘in flight’, escaping the sight of the female body, is transformed and disempowered, in view of the fact that Breillat highlights the confusion of

⁶⁵ Kennedy, Barbara (2000), *Deleuze and Cinema: The Aesthetics of Sensation*, p. 87.

⁶⁶ Murphy, Kevin (2004).

⁶⁷ *ibid.*

⁶⁸ Sélavy, Virginie (2008), ‘Interview with Catherine Breillat,’ www.electricsheepmagazine.co.uk/features/2008/04/01/interview-with-catherine-breillat.

masculine sexuality as the man is forced to gaze, not into the woman's eyes, but at sexually opened legs, the power of 'it' gazing back at him, the man unable to distance himself from the rawness of the act of 'looking at the unlookable', or as Breillat describes the object: "...a hairy horrifying/horrified vulva, like the face of the Medusa...not about a real sexual organ, but about this world-wide fantasy of the vulva as a horrifying thing."⁶⁹ The sight of the genitalia and beyond, ultimately reaching back into the hidden depths of the womb, also figuratively 'looks back' at the man, from what Breillat describes as "le trou noir de l'univers dont tout le monde a peur."⁷⁰ She further emphasises the size of the 'horrifying' image of the sexual organ, "a real black hole of ghostly dimensions from which the world is born and returns to die,"⁷¹ through the use of extreme close-ups of the female sex.

The sight of the supposedly 'castrated' sex of women, according to Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic conceptions of self-consciousness and sexual difference, initiates all of the rage, jealousy, and murderous impulses of the Oedipal situation: "Probably no male human being is spared the terrifying shock of threatened castration at the sight of the female genitals,"⁷² although Breillat rejects a Freudian reading of her images as, "to me Freud is the protector of bourgeois society. He assuages the symptoms so that society can continue unchanged."⁷³ Jean-Paul Sartre's theory suggests an imprisonment by and through the look of the

⁶⁹ Sélavy, Virginie (2008), 'Interview with Catherine Breillat,' www.electricsheepmagazine.co.uk/features/2008/04/01/interview-with-catherine-breillat/

⁷⁰ Pagès, Frédéric (04/02/2004), 'La monotone du vagin', *Le Canard enchainé*.

⁷¹ Gillain, Anne (2003), 'Profile of a Filmmaker: Catherine Breillat,' *Beyond French Feminisms*, pp.201-213.

⁷² Freud, Sigmund (1962): *Three essays on the theory of sexuality*, p. 216.

⁷³ Macnab, Geoffrey (2004b).

other, which is premised on the claim that even in concrete relations each person is attempting to enslave or imprison the other "while I seek to enslave the Other, the Other seeks to enslave me.... conflict is the original meaning of being-for-others."⁷⁴ There is also an awareness of 'myself' as a subject, which is the Sartrean struggle with the Other, which is that "Hell is other people."⁷⁵ Whilst this view of vision creates an illusion of mastery over the world, there are alternative concepts of vision (such as Irigaray's) that allow for more ethical relations to the world.

Lighting and illumination

The lighting of the woman in *Anatomie de l'enfer*, as she lies on the bed, which is the central focus of the setting for the initiation of the man, provides a deeper phenomenological basis to the film reading through the constant hue of white lighting and the intensity of the 'colour' white exceeding representation and specific significations. Breillat is striving for a lighting effect similar to that of silent cinema which has an incandescent effect on the body, a primitivity which is fundamental to her film: "la lumière, c'est l'âme."⁷⁶ What is vital to the audience reception of the explicit images of the naked female character is the significance of the use of bright, white lighting to sharpen the perception and arrest the look of both the spectator and the male character. Like the distance from and perspective on the object, the lighting context figures in experience by

⁷⁴ Sartre, Jean-Paul, (1956), *Being and nothingness*, p. 475.

⁷⁵ Spoken by the character Garcin in the conclusion to Sartre's play *No Exit*, (1944).

⁷⁶ Vasse, David (2009), 'Extrait du livre de David Vasse paru aux éditions: Arte Editions et Editions complexe,' www.flachfilm.com/index.

leading the gaze to the optimum place where the lighting presents the colour (white) best and provides a maximum of visibility.⁷⁷ In giving primacy to the lighting of the naked female body Breillat references the transcendence of the lighting in the German director, Friedrich Murnau's, early silent films, in which:

...you realise the primacy of the image in film. All those scenes have to be mute, because all those lyrical passages and dialogues had to be translated into metaphorical and metaphysical light, literally transposed into cinematic light. it is the image that is emblematic of what's actually going on.⁷⁸

In transposing the lyrical passages of her script onto screen images and referring to silent film conventions, Breillat, like Murnau, uses cinematic lighting as a metaphorical and metaphysical dialogue, which is the essence of the cinematic apparatus itself. Light as a metaphorical mechanism reveals much about what it is representing (although Irigaray makes the claim that a truth-system based around the light metaphor is biased towards masculine approaches to philosophy)⁷⁹ and as Merleau-Ponty suggests, the gaze "knows" the significance of a certain patch of lighting in a certain context and this then provides the logic for an understanding of the world.⁸⁰ By severing the representational structure of images of the woman, as she does in the *mise en scène* of *Anatomie de l'enfer*, Breillat highlights the contingency of the lighting level which, particularly as the light on the reclining

⁷⁷ Merleau-Ponty, Maurice (1962), *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 302.

⁷⁸ Murphy, Kevin (2004). Breillat follows the influence of German film director Friedrich Murnau (1888-1931), whose knowledge of art history filled his films with arresting images which recalled Rembrandt and expressionist artists, in the intense range of light and dark, in films such as *Faust*, (1926).

⁷⁹ Vasseleu, Cathryn (1998), *Textures of Light: Vision and Touch in Irigaray, Levinas and Merleau-Ponty*, p. 15.

⁸⁰ Merleau-Ponty, Maurice (1962), *Phenomenology of Perception*, pp. 326-377.

woman is white, allows the viewer to see both metaphorically and in terms of the corporeal. Merleau-Ponty suggests that shifting or challenging lighting levels lead to “instability and nausea that can accompany the experience.”⁸¹ This is what Breillat accomplishes in her film as she reveals the contingency of the level itself through exposing the spectator to the lighting level and ‘colour’ white on the figure of the woman, thus providing an opening for change and allowing for new equivalences. Here Breillat also opens up space for a reconsideration of the cinematic apparatus and of film as a medium for representing the ‘real’, and offers an opportunity to explore cinema’s investments in light, as her own film invests extensively in issues of illumination and truth. This links her to Vasseleu’s study of Irigaray on illumination and emphasis on light’s eroticism, as illumination comes to represent truth through a metaphorical path.

For Irigaray, this is a reclaiming of light from the Platonic tradition to rediscover the kind of interactions that light can have with the world. It restores the erotic undertones to the term ‘carnal’ and explores the implications of eroticism for the pursuit of truth. Breillat has constructed the visibility of the woman’s sex through a revealing rather than concealing, outside the visual field of scopophilia (which is not about light or truth, but about the displacement of desire onto the visual field so that visuality becomes a metaphor for the desires of the flesh).

⁸¹ *ibid*, pp. 254-294.

Blood and Sin

Irigaray discusses how women's sexuality has always been conceptualised on the basis of masculine parameters.⁸² Not only is a woman's sexual capacity viewed as inferior to a man's, but it carries the stigma of shame and sin in Western religious traditions, stemming from a doubt or weakness surrounding the portrayal of traditional biblical myths about Eve. Though Western society has largely broken away from the Judeo-Christian tradition in a religious sense, these beliefs still pervade society, as Breillat describes from her own experiences.⁸³ Within the dialogue of the film, the taboo of impurity is generated in a discussion of female body hair as the woman questions whether she should have removed it. The man replies that "it would still show... you would not be rid of your obscene nature," which reflects a specific social commentary requiring women to shave in a form of 'mutilation' of the natural body devised to fit societal expectations, rendering the female body in its natural and organic state unacceptable and disgusting.

The film is infused with religious references upon which the press have remarked in articles entitled, for example, '*Euchariste profane*,'⁸⁴ and '*Liturgie de l'obscène*,'⁸⁵ whilst *L'Humanité* published an interview with Breillat in which the director explains that her film is an encounter between a man and a woman going back to Adam and Eve, and although men and women were created

⁸² Irigaray, Luce (1985), *Speculum de l'autre femme*, transl. by Gill, Gillian, p. 23.

⁸³ Murphy, Kevin (2004). Breillat recounts in interview that she attended a strict, Catholic, girls' boarding school.

⁸⁴ Douin, Jean-Luc (28/01/2004a), 'Euchariste profane autour d'un corps féminin condamné par son sexe', *Le Monde*.

⁸⁵ Tranchant, Marie-Noëlle (2004/01/28), 'Liturgie de l'obsène', *Le Figaroscope*.

equally in God's eye in Genesis, there develops a fear between them in terms of sexual relationships, particularly for men.⁸⁶ Religion and religious fundamentalism, for Breillat, has led to sex being regarded as obscene and undignified. She considers that religion is the root of women's 'obscenity' and the reason why it is required to be hidden and secretive. In particular she cites the case of the wearing of the Islamic veil,⁸⁷ a point of current political conflict with traditional French values and citizenship, as rendering the body even more obscene by hiding parts of it as if they were something of which to be ashamed.

Emilie Bickerton problematises the film as revealing weaknesses in Breillat's work (more so than in her other films) citing *Anatomie de l'enfer* as dependent upon a complicity with the audience's lived experience of the taboos it confronts, as well as perpetuating the very structure of which Breillat is critical, however, public reaction to the film belies this opinion as there was a mixed reaction to it from audiences.⁸⁸ *Anatomie de l'enfer* is deeply entangled in the complexities of the rituals with which Western culture is suffused. Grace Jantzen points out that all lives are affected by a culture's dominant religious symbolic order, in whichever culture one dwells, regardless of an individual's thoughts on the matter.⁸⁹ If it is the case that human life and culture is saturated with a religious symbolic (religious figures, myths and symbols are alluded to in Breillat's film) so that even ostensibly secular positions do not escape religious structuring of consciousness, then the question is not whether or not we are religious, but rather

⁸⁶ Widemann, Dominique (2004), 'L'origine du monde', *L'Humanité*.

⁸⁷ *ibid.*

⁸⁸ Bickerton, Emilie (2004), 'Anatomy of Hell,' *Sight and Sound*, 15: 1, pp. 40–42.

⁸⁹ Jantzen, Grace (1999), *Becoming Divine*, p. 224.

whether we choose to become conscious of the way the imaginary is expressed in the religious symbolic that permeates thought and social structures, or whether we remain unconscious of these ways (and therefore remain unchanged and perpetuate the system). Accordingly, the film is an opportunity (for the audience) to become conscious of, and to think through, a different configuration of the sacred figures and concepts that derive from the religious symbolic order and suffuse the Western cultural imaginary.

Rather than fetishising certain parts of the female body, Breillat reconstitutes it as an organic entity comprised of tissues, blood and fluids. Although she clearly takes issue with the historical associations of scientific and medical language, for example in the deliberate and distanced way that the man handles the woman's reclining body, placing her legs in certain positions on the bed as if he were conducting a medical examination, Breillat also uses this language to subvert classical sexual metaphors, forcefully re-appropriating female bodily fluids, which have historically rendered woman abject.⁹⁰ In the *mise en scène* she poeticises and sublimates menstrual blood with images of a body spilling over and exceeding its boundaries as "a horizon (that) will never stop expanding ...stretching out, never ceasing to unfold."⁹¹ In sum, rather than being fragmented or condemned as unclean, the woman is celebrated as an organic entity of desire and *jouissance*.

Julia Kristeva argues that the hygienic sanctions of the Old Testament permeate contemporary Western society, the sacred nature of the purification rites

⁹⁰ Kristeva, Julia (1982), *Powers of Horror, An Essay on Abjection*, pp. 65-9.

⁹¹ Irigaray, Luce (1985), *Speculum de l'autre femme*, trans. by Gill, Gillian, p. 213.

(ritual cleansing and blood sacrifice) required to cleanse a defiled and unclean subject extracting the concept of defilement from the secular order, aligning it with the sacred. Filth, which has gained an amplified significance by its alignment with the sacred, becomes “a non-object of desire, abominated as ab-ject” that is positioned outside of the “self and clean” subject.⁹² Within the film there is an emphasis on cleansing and a connection to the clinical, before the sexual ‘ritual’ begins: when on the first night the man arrives at the villa, the woman has not had time to cleanse her body. Kristeva offers an explanation of how unclean substances become a demarcation of an abject subject, asserting that “filth is not a quality in itself,” but applies “only to what relates to a boundary,” and, more particularly, “represents the object jettisoned out of that boundary, its other side, a margin.”⁹³ Thus, any matter issuing from the body (such as blood, urine, or faeces) is immediately marginal, having physically traversed the boundary of the corporeal body. Because such substances were metonymic for the impurity of the individual who touched them, women, whose menstrual flow was regarded as a ritually unclean substance, became defined as a locus of impurity, as Camilla Paglia reflects: that

the nature of the cultural disgust triggered by this discharge: Menstrual blood is the stain, the birthmark of original sin, the filth that transcendental religion must wash from man. Is this identification merely phobic, merely misogynistic? Or is it possible that there is something uncanny about menstrual blood, justifying its attachment to taboo?⁹⁴

⁹² Kristeva (1982), p. 65.

⁹³ *ibid*, p. 69.

⁹⁴ Paglia, Camilla (1991), *Sexual personae : art and decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson*, p. 11.

Sticky Stuff

It might therefore be possible to conceive of a mode of vision that is less a gaze distant from and mastering its object, than an immersion in light and colour. Sensing as touching is within, experiencing what touches it as ambiguous, continuous, but nevertheless differentiated. Touch then becomes a signifier of visual culture as a mode of synaesthesia.⁹⁵ Vasseleu maintains that if vision is founded on touch, then the split between mind and body, between objective and subjective, can no longer be sustained: “The distance and space for reflection and insight that comes with vision through the mediation of light is lost as the sense of sight passes to the sense of touch.”⁹⁶ According to Vasseleu, Irigaray points to tactility being an essential aspect of light’s texture, where texture can also refer to points of contact within the strands of the field of vision:

An elaboration of light in terms of texture stands as a challenge to the representation of sight as a sense which guarantees the subject of vision an independence, or sense in which the seer is distanced from an object.⁹⁷

From this alternative notion of vision Irigaray advocates gaps or spaces between us opening up for communicating, rather than alienating the seer and the seen, so that vision connects and touches others upon whom it depends for its agency and rather than vision then being alienated, there is a connection between the subject and the seen. This avoids domination and mastery which is a product of alienation. Elisabeth Grosz also comments on Irigaray’s premise that touch works

⁹⁵ Vasseleu, Cathryn (1998), *Textures of Light: Vision and Touch in Irigaray, Levinas and Merleau-Ponty*, p. 12.

⁹⁶ *ibid.*

⁹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 13.

better than visibility in the relationship between ‘seer’ and ‘seen,’ bridging the gap between subject and object by being based on a more fluid, viscous, and proximal understanding. As Irigaray states,

The question is not only of preserving a flesh which ought to provide the materiality that supports both vision and thought but of entering an other relation between flesh, vision and thought. That is to say of reaching a fleshy or carnal seeing and thinking, a way of seeing and thinking which obeys an other logic than the traditional Western logic.⁹⁸

Martin Jay, in his work *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth Century French Thought*,⁹⁹ describes various ways in which French theorists either criticise the priority of vision in Western philosophy or demonise vision as a necessary evil. In his reading of philosophers such as Sartre and Jacques Lacan, vision is a necessary evil that in various ways alienates us from ourselves, while philosophers such as Emmanuel Levinas and Luce Irigaray criticise the priority given to vision and suggest replacing vision with touch. Sartre and Lacan, according to Jay, denigrate vision, effectively perpetuating a particularly alienating notion of vision by imagining space as essentially empty and objects (or subjects) in space as points separated by the distance between them.¹⁰⁰ Irigaray re-conceptualises Merleau-Ponty’s notion of ‘flesh’ (*la chair*), where the lived body is intertwined in the world through experience. In her

⁹⁸ Irigaray, Luce (2004), ‘To paint the invisible,’ in *Continental Philosophy Review*, 37, p. 390.

⁹⁹ Jay, Martin (1993), *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth Century French Thought*.

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.* Jay provides a thorough exposition of Sartre and Lacan (and other philosophers) who have challenged the primacy of vision.

arguments she proposes that mucous is a more apt metaphor for envisaging intercorporeal space.

Mucous, according to Irigaray, “always marks the passage from inside to outside, which accompanies, and ‘lubricates’ the mutual touching of the body’s parts and regions,” and, as Grosz writes, it returns experience to the primacy of touch.¹⁰¹ The term ‘mucous’ refers to the various liquids of the body, but for Irigaray, specifically the sexual liquids, as they serve physically to facilitate sexual union. Mucous has an inter-determinacy as it is neither subject nor object, it is more visceral, pulsating and escapes control, so that it cannot be grasped or contained because of its slippery fluidity. Vasseleu describes Irigaray’s “function of mucous” as the fluid embodiment of touch that threatens boundaries, sustains excess, dislocates systems and orders and marks the collapsing of interior and exterior notions of the body.¹⁰² Mucous only mingles with other mucous and is a continuation of the body beyond the boundaries of the flesh, and as such, it requires and signifies the physical presence and actions of persons:

The mucous, in fact, is experienced from within, in the prenatal and loving night known by both sexes. But it is far more important in setting up the intimacy of bodily perception and its threshold for women.¹⁰³

The meetings in *Anatomie de l’enfer* between the man and the woman which take place over four nights, have significance in that each night in the narrative

¹⁰¹ Grosz, Elizabeth (1989), *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists*, p. 160.

¹⁰² Irigaray, Luce cited in Grosz, Elisabeth (1989), *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists*, p. 160.

¹⁰³ Grosz, Elizabeth (1989), *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists*, p. 109.

signals a different phase for the woman, each visit by the man marking a step towards her annihilation, as the woman knows that she will die and this is already mapped out. The woman returns to the ocean like a siren at the end of the film and as such, she is “a creature of elsewhere, occupying spaces between circumscribed solid land and the uncontained... (in) a space of risk.”¹⁰⁴ Breillat, like Irigaray, is situated at the borderline between ‘the known’ masculine philosophies to which society adheres, and a changing ‘sea’ of new sexualities, operating, as Irigaray suggests “outside of the logic within which the original fantasy is constructed.”¹⁰⁵ In Breillat’s film the woman’s voice is disruptive and promises a new world to the man, suggesting new ideas and a transformation of sexual relations, which, like Irigaray’s concepts, as Elisabeth Grosz writes: “announces the birth of a new epoch, a new type of exchange and coexistence.”¹⁰⁶

When Irigaray calls for new ways of thinking and moving in the world, she calls for a total cultural shift away from control as domination. In this case the couple in the film operate in what Merleau-Ponty calls the ‘chiasmus,’ which bridges the space between two persons, two sexes, so that there is a mutual crossing of boundaries where identity is not hidden away.¹⁰⁷ Touching and gazing work in both directions as the man can no longer use the woman as ground and she can no longer hide from behind his masculine fantasies of woman. They both cross the boundary of the skin through the touching and mingling of mucous "into

¹⁰⁴ Bosanquet, Agnes (2006), ‘Seeking a Sensible Transcendental: An Amorous Exchange,’ *Outskirts: feminisms along the edge*, 14, www.chloe.uwa.edu.au/outskirts/archive/volume14/bosanquet, accessed 23/04/2007.

¹⁰⁵ Irigaray, Luce (1981), *This Sex Which Is Not One*, transl. by Porter, Catherine with Burke, Carolyn, p. 76.

¹⁰⁶ Grosz, Elisabeth (1995), *Space, Time and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies*, p. 213.

¹⁰⁷ Whitford, Margaret (1991), *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine*, p. 167.

the mucous membranes of the body," entering a "fluid universe" where, as Whitford states: "the stable universe of "truth" becomes unstable."¹⁰⁸

Baudrillardian Man

Baudrillard's work, *Seduction*, relates to a slippage of rigid social restrictions, expectations and normative values with regards to women's sexuality and sexual behaviour, whereby historical notions of the markers of women's femininity (such as chasteness and passivity), have become increasingly outdated, irrelevant and offensive, sometimes to the point of obscenity. These challenges to patriarchal constructions of female sexual identity with which Baudrillard is concerned in *Seduction*, have been paralleled by the social and psychological redefinition of sexual relationships achieved through defying the boundaries set for them in the past. In her examination of the feminine, Breillat allows the female character to be vulnerable in terms of what the spectator sees, which could be construed as catering to the pleasures of the gaze and reinforcing male dominance, however, the material is de-eroticised in a shift in power to the feminine, which problematises a feminist reading of the film. She appears to be less concerned with the feelings of the homosexual male than she is with the repressed and fragmented self of the female and how that female views men and thus views herself:

There is no masculine psychology in my cinema. There are only the resentments and desires of women. A man should not attempt to recognize himself in my male

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.*

characters. On the other hand, he can find a better understanding of women.¹⁰⁹

In refusing to represent male psychology in any significant way, Breillat not only refuses to reinforce conventional patterns of female identification, but asks that men learn something about women, or at the very least, that the male spectator is refused easy signs of character psychology. A Baudrillardian reading sheds light on male consciousness in the film, however Baudrillard describes seduction as the appearance of a “void”, the beyond, the unknown, which is the border, the limit beyond which there is nothing and a border which can be safely occupied by the male subject. He suggests that seduction is an exceeding of the rules and a refusal to play ‘the game’ to the advantage of man, the subject, where in opposition to production, power and pornography, there is seduction which defies force, visibility and transparency, showing a marked distinction between ‘sex as a function’ and ‘seduction as a game’.¹¹⁰

For Baudrillard, feminism is a “radical obscenity” that wants everything out in the open and which he proposes must be “recycled and normalised in sexual liberation in particular,”¹¹¹ as it signals the end of uncertainty, a world in which there are “no more secrets,” the beginning of a “radical obscenity,”¹¹² as a process in which femininity is ‘normalised’ and brought under masculine control. Baudrillard agrees with Freud in terms of female sexuality as a contradiction and an impossibility, as he states that: “there is but one sexuality, one libido and it is

¹⁰⁹ Murphy, Kevin (2004).

¹¹⁰ Baudrillard, Jean (1990), *Seduction*, p 76.

¹¹¹ *ibid*, p. 17.

¹¹² *ibid*, p. 20.

masculine,”¹¹³ thereby denying ‘the real’ of the woman, which Breillat strives to create in the image of the woman in her film, as transcendent beauty out of images that society would otherwise consider unaesthetic.¹¹⁴ In *Anatomie de l’enfer*, faced with the situation of being forced to confront what he fears most, and which is in opposition to the ‘rules’ of the phallogentric structure of “mastery over the symbolic universe” (attributed to man),¹¹⁵ the man finds himself in a terrifying abyss, a trap in which the woman has exceeded the limits of her purpose, which is motherhood (a brief glimpse in the film of an extended vagina with a baby’s head showing, duplicates a shot from *Romance*). This signals the end of the ‘real woman’ with whom the man is familiar, and the beginning of a new femininity which Baudrillard states is the end of man: “Man is without hope if the woman becomes real,” because, according to Baudrillard, when the subject (the man) confronts female sexuality “he presupposes a mirror... in which the subject alienates himself in order to find himself...and here there is no mirror.”¹¹⁶

Following the woman’s revelation to the man of her true self, the feminine has become unfamiliar and hostile for him, as by paying for and therefore exerting power over the man to gaze upon her sex, she is exceeding mystery and enigma and attaining mastery of the seduction process. During one of the conversations between the man and the woman, the man makes the remark that the woman’s naked body, which he refers to as her “fragility,” inspires either “homage or brutality.” Here the man is making a Baudrillardian distinction between what is

¹¹³ *ibid*, p. 6.

¹¹⁴ *ibid*, p.76.

¹¹⁵ *ibid*, p. 8.

¹¹⁶ *ibid* , p. 169.

the woman's seductive presence (homage) and the result of her production, of sex (the brutality), for if her anatomy is her destiny (the 'hell' of the film's title), then "seduction alone is radically opposed to anatomy as destiny."¹¹⁷ The man is asserting that this is the result of the woman's deception (her 'lie') which is her seduction: "It takes forever between the offer and the demand...this is the first deception," the woman states, clearly distinguishing the seduction of sex and its production, and revealing that the 'lie' of sex is the female body.

The solution for the man, in order to efface her form and restore the familiar order of seduction of which he is master, is that he applies lipstick to the woman's mouth, face and vagina (whilst she is sleeping and unaware of his actions) in an annihilation of her feminine features and as a means of preserving the "artificial perfection of the sign."¹¹⁸ He can only seduce the woman after he has decorated her vagina, anus and face with an excessive amount of lipstick to efface her features and make them 'disappear'. The consequences of eradicating every zone of secrecy, mystery and artifice in order to win autonomy, truth and desire, are that the woman consequently finds herself illuminated in a particularly harsh light, which is still within the masculine order and still oppressed. A long shot of the woman grotesquely smeared with the lipstick also reveals that cosmetics are unnatural, whereas Breillat's aim in the film was to restore beauty to the nakedness of the woman, which is her 'secret'. As Breillat points out, she films the menstruation and vaginal secretions that society is presupposed to treat with loathing and contempt, when they are part of the 'natural' female body, whilst

¹¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 10.

¹¹⁸ *ibid.*

devices that hide and conceal the ‘real’ woman, such as tampons and cosmetics, are treated with a certain homage.¹¹⁹ This manipulation of appearances, such as the application of makeup, signals the effacement of the woman which renders seduction effective because it is reversible: “Now all appearances are reversible... only at the level of appearances are systems fragile and vulnerable.”¹²⁰

Thus seduction confounds masculine forces that strive for transparency by making them aware that appearances are constructs and remain subject to challenge, interpretation and flux. The man, whose seduction is a ‘game’, is limited to appearance and disappearance and effacement of ‘the same’: “why become stuck undermining foundations, when a light manipulation of appearances will do?”¹²¹ As the woman in *Anatomie de l’enfer* falls away from the structures of institutional power and pursues an unfamiliar (to the man) version of sexuality, in which she becomes the seducer and puts her ‘unlookable’ secret self on display, the man’s ability to wield influence over the field of representation is destroyed. He does not operate ‘beyond the void,’ and anything which exceeds the secret role to which he has allotted it has to perish so that once he leaves the woman after the four nights of the contract and returns to society, he returns once again to a seduction which is delimited and has borders: “the point of reversibility at the edge of the black hole...where there is no outside.”¹²² He later (at the end of the film) recuperates this power by killing the woman. Therefore, despite Breillat’s

¹¹⁹ Devanne, Lauren (01/02/2004), ‘Catherine Breillat; cinéaste,’ Entretien réalisé pour l’émission de cinéma *Désaxés* et diffusée sur *Radio Libertaire* www.arkepix.com/kinok/Catherine%20BREILLAT/breillat_interview.

¹²⁰ Baudrillard, Jean (1990), *Seduction*, p. 8.

¹²¹ *ibid.*, p. 10.

¹²² *ibid.*, p.86.

denial of entering into ‘male psychology’ in her films, *Anatomie de l’enfer* is also about the pathology of male identity and the anxieties produced by internal and external pressures to maintain an idealised masculinity, in which the male must remain the master of the symbolic order.

According to Baudrillard “the old structures of knowledge, the concept, the scene, the mirror, attempt to create illusion and thus they emphasise a truthful projection of the world.”¹²³ The mirror is essential as the boundary between man and the void he fears and is a limit that reflects back to the subject so he recognises his reflection. When the mirror is threatened, that is, when seduction no longer operates as a mirror, man is no longer sure of himself and is in danger of being absorbed into alien ‘networks’ (in this case femininity) which have no meaning for him in a collapse of the rules in “a world without stakes.”¹²⁴

The Ocean

A powerful metaphor Breillat employs to connote the expansive and powerful nature of women’s *jouissance* is the raging ocean, which represents a rhythmic force that cannot be controlled by man, inviting a comparison of the woman’s body with water, a metaphorical drowning of the man in her sex, an image of total saturation and submersion in her fluids. Here, looking down at the sea from the clifftops, the man is subject to the overwhelming vastness of the vaginal body, rather than the vagina being rendered passive by the active, dominant phallus.

¹²³ *ibid.*, p. 87.

¹²⁴ *ibid.*, p. 156.

Placing the woman outside the social order and linked to nature and the ocean removes the vaginal body from its repressed position, highlighting its prominence rather than its inferiority in relation to sexual pleasure. Kristeva asserts that part of the collapse of the symbolic order lies in women denying identification with the father/phallus and learning to identify with the mother/vaginal body, at which point women and their *jouissance* move from being repressed to being sublimated. In this sense Breillat's film is dedicated to women and their *jouissance*, containing provocative explorations of love and pleasure

Conclusion

In an unexpected twist to the narrative, when the man has discovered that the woman has gone from the house, he enters a local bar and converses with a local about what has happened to him. The language is coarse and the man refers to the woman in base terms. To this stranger in the bar he admits his ultimate failure to 'know' any details about the woman, "je n'ai même pas demandé son nom." He then recognises that despite his intensive physical exploration of the female, he will never truly understand or possess her. Thus the desire of the woman, which was that the man should come to know her more intimately than flesh, hair and blood, has not been realised. However, by acknowledging that the woman has an identity separate from his own, she is given the autonomous subjecthood that patriarchal discourse has historically denied her. The man succeeds in taking the woman to a point where she has no distance from her body, which was her goal and the way in which she discovered her identity and subjectivity (that is,

language), until finally he cannot stand the uncertainty so that he seeks to eradicate all that terrifies him.

The tragic ending to *Anatomie de l'enfer* suggests that Breillat sees such hope subject to imminent doom, that being a retreat into the safety of society's conventions. After the man leaves the isolation of the villa, he enters back into society, rendering the interaction between himself and the woman a fantasy. Once re-assimilated into the throes of culture and people, the man immediately returns to his contempt of women, talking as follows to the man in the bar (which is mainly frequented by men), as Breillat states:

In the scene in the bar he describes sex in the ugly way it is presented in pornography –he says he fucked her, and then he turned her over and fucked her up the ass– with no emotion or love attached to the act of love-making. It's the way all men talk about sex, and also all the censors and religious creeds that teach us it's an abominable act. But when he realizes that the vulgar terms he's using are a lie, he begins to cry. He does not even know her name, yet his sense of loss is overpowering. This is what making love is about, and the depth of his emotion is a revelation to him.”¹²⁵

Retreating into the masculine environment of violence and destruction, destroying the beauty he has experienced, the man returns to society's expectations of him. Sex is restored as an ugly, one-dimensional exploit, an act of the flesh and of brutality, now returned to the realm of filth and pornography. The only way the man can be totally free of the woman after this stark and sudden revelation that he

¹²⁵ Macnab, Geoffrey (2004a).

‘doesn’t know her,’ must then be to kill her, to free himself from her truth, and this he does. In an overtly surreal and reflexive final sequence, the unnamed man returns to the isolated house, finding nothing in the bedroom (a restoring of filth without emotion). But afterwards, when he finds and approaches the ghost-like woman out on the cliff path, he pushes her into the ocean in a dreamlike and haunting scene. If the woman exists as the iconoclastic martyr, then this death is necessary, though tragically this also shows that the man has returned to himself and that the film then comes full circle, the man allowing the woman to die as if he had never stopped her from committing suicide in the first place. Thus the man finally confronts his downfall, his own ‘death’ as a subject, with the cyber/digital onscreen image of the woman signalling the end of the ‘real woman.’ What man fears is his destruction by a seduction that is too powerful, in other words a fatal seduction. At the end of the film the borders and identities of the man’s world have been unravelled by the feminine, as he first breaks down with emotion (in the bar) and then loses control (by killing the woman) as what he fears most is his destruction by a seduction that is too powerful (a fatal seduction).

Destruction of the object in fantasy leads to the discovery of the object's reality, its otherness, and vice versa, as “the subject is being destroyed in fantasy as fantasy and is felt as real because of this, at the same time its realness makes *fantasy* destructiveness possible.”¹²⁶ This results eventually in the creation of a new space, no longer a ‘potential space,’ but what Michael Eigen terms an ‘area of faith,’ an area in which the subject can relate to the object "in some basic way

¹²⁶ Eigen, Michael (1981), ‘The Area of Faith in Winnicott, Lacan and Bion’, *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 62, p. 417.

outside [its] boundaries, [as] 'wholly other.'" This opens the way, according to

Eigen, for:

a new kind of freedom, one because there is radical otherness, a new realness of self-feeling exactly because the other is now felt as real as well. The core sense of creativeness that permeates transitional experiencing is reborn on a new level, in so far as genuine not-me nutriment becomes available for personal use. The subject can use otherness for true growth purposes and, through risk of difference as such, gains access to the genuinely new.¹²⁷

By this process, according to Donald Winnicott, the subject comes "to live a life in a world of objects," always keeping in mind that "the price has to be paid in acceptance of the on-going destruction in unconscious fantasy relative to object-relating."¹²⁸ However, it is in the context of the nation that we can most clearly see that Breillat's film indicates a shift towards a renegotiation of ways of viewing sexuality that is ultimately reterritorialised as an ode to the culture of shame and subordination that surrounds female sexuality. A reversal of society seems unlikely, though this is what Breillat requests or at least requires the spectator to reflect upon. *Anatomie de l'enfer* is at the intersection of Baudrillard's outer limits of seduction and Irigaray's 'future of woman,'¹²⁹ at the point of no return. According to Breillat, her work is not to satisfy audience expectations (stating in interview that: "I don't really think about my audience very much")¹³⁰ but is

¹²⁷ *ibid.*, p. 415.

¹²⁸ Winnicott, Donald (1971), 'The Use of an Object and Relating Through Identifications', in *Playing and Reality*, p. 90.

¹²⁹ Irigaray, Luce (1991), *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche*, p. 12.

¹³⁰ Price, Brian (2002), 'Catherine Breillat,' www.sensesofcinema.com/breillat.

constructed in such a way as to confound the spectator, in order that new ideas, new ways of seeing can emerge and, as she herself puts it:

I've evolved but I haven't basically changed. It is more society that has changed, and that now accepts me rather than thinks my films horrible and vulgar. Society has accepted my film and given another identity to it now. Society has changed, I haven't changed. That's the impression I've got. I've fought a lot for society to have a different way of looking at things.¹³¹

The object of Breillat's analysis in *Anatomie de l'enfer*, which is 'obscenity,' exists as shocking, strange and indeterminate material that blurs the borders between the known and the unknown of ocularcentrism. The 'enfer' of the film title has been described in the press as "l'enfer c'est l'autre,"¹³² and also by Breillat as "l'enfer, c'est le sexe dans notre civilisation...l'image du sexe c'est une épouvante,"¹³³ as she also warns that the film will elicit a strong, hateful response from the public, because it confronts the forbidden aspects of religion.¹³⁴ Linda Williams comments that after more than a century of screening sex, perhaps the most important lesson is that "the very act of screening has become an intimate part of our sexuality ...(that has) proffered an opportunity to see and to know what has not previously been seen so closely."¹³⁵ Through such a reading, the spectator enters into a dialogue with the text such that, as Williams puts it:

a bodily exchange takes place between authors, readers, translators, and within and between texts. an alternative to

¹³¹ Wiegman, Chris (1999), 'A Quick Chat with Catherine Breillat.'

¹³² Azoury, Phillippe (2004), 'Le sexe passé aux rayons X.'

¹³³ Vecchi, Phillippe (08/12/2003), 'Breillat de A à X,' *Le Nouvel Observateur*

¹³⁴ Murphy, Kevin (2004).

¹³⁵ Williams, Linda (2008), *Screening Sex*, p. 326.

ways of reading the text with a particular distance between subject and object.¹³⁶

Within this exchange the film body becomes active, searching for, or seeking, an audience which will respond to its meaning whereby there is a disengagement from the guilt of sexuality and from prevailing puritanical ideologies of society so that a more sensual, organic world of human sexuality can be recognised through a celebration of carnal desire, in other words seeing the film through a different kind of vision.

This chapter has shown that there are similarities between Irigaray's reading of vision and light and the new way of looking at love and couple relationships that Breillat provides in *Anatomie de l'enfer*, resulting in a new concept of relationships beyond subject-object/other hierarchies and therefore relating to cinematic spectatorship beyond the traditional dominance of the scopophilic (voyeuristic) gaze, through 'touch,' that effects a slippage between seer and seen, with the bodily engagement of the spectator.¹³⁷ Baudrillard's seduction is to reassure the subject that 'the feminine' will always exist as a border zone of protection, a mystery that is securely ritualised and a secrecy that is understood. Anything that exceeds the secrecy of woman must perish, as the film illustrates. But Breillat shows that there is a future for woman, which Irigaray firmly underlines in insisting that tactility is the primordial sense in which the body's interiority is constituted.

¹³⁶ *ibid.*, p.7.

¹³⁷ Sobchack, Vivian (1992), *The Address of the Eye a Phenomenology of Film Experience*, provides a discussion on the development of the notion of film's 'body.'

Part One Plenary

Agnès Jaoui creates a strong generic emphasis on traditional French national identity in *Le Goût des autres* in a theatrical *mise en scène* of entrances and exits, crossings and collisions, in which the players intersect and pass on in a style reminiscent of 1930's Poetic Realism and in particular Renoir's *La Règle du jeu*,¹³⁸ with its construction of social and gendered spaces. The comedy follows strict elements of French theatre traditions, including three scenes with the characters playing in the *huis clos* of a theatre. The narrative focus is a cross-section of middle-classes whose lives intersect, but although Castella (who is not versed in cultural taste) crosses boundaries and is able to participate in middlebrow culture to communicate with Clara, which then enables him to experience 'the taste of others,' the film does not engage with consumers of low culture and, as Sarah Leahy points out, the film "avoids any sustained interrogation of Republican values"¹³⁹ and is not inclusive of the working class or ethnic minorities. This foregrounds class distinction and the impossibility of 'thinking the other' and the difficulty of forming relationships across rigid class and cultural divides (which is the main problem for the characters in the film).

The theme of theatricality continues in Chapter Two in a more restricted space (the small apartment) where the melodramatic relationship between Franz and Léopold takes place. Constant framing of windows and doors is a stylistic and

¹³⁸ Renoir, Jean (1939), *La Règle du jeu*.

¹³⁹ Leahy, Sarah (2007), 'A Middle-Class Act: Taste and Otherness in *Le Goût des autres*,' in Waldron Darren and Vanderschelden Isabelle, (eds), (2007), *France at the Flicks*, p.126.

excessive feature emphasising the *huis clos* in which four characters play out sexual relationships and where gender boundaries are fluid and mobile. The film negotiates with Hollywood conventions yet also has a firm contemporary French cinematic address and thus inhabits a hybrid cinematic space, in what is a remodelling of Fassbinder's work, but with a heightened sense of artifice and the use of melodramatic aesthetics which give an overbearing feeling of entrapment and claustrophobia typical of melodrama.

Vendredi soir is considered alongside an increasing interest in phenomenology amongst film theorists. Building on Beugnet's account of its sensory nature the study places Denis's film as an example of the cinema of the senses,¹⁴⁰ with an overarching phenomenological framework informed by Laura Marks¹⁴¹ and sensing the haptic nature of the camerawork so close that it seems to 'touch' the skin. The temporal disruption or slowing up of time and logic during the one night affair between Jean and Laure relates to Deleuze's concept of time-cinema,¹⁴² in which time is not linked to the narrative but is flexible and changing. A phenomenological reading of Denis's cinematic depiction of desire is particularly appropriate for this film as it corresponds to an emphasis on embodied experience, producing in the viewer a bodily identification with the film.

Breillat's treatment of sexuality in *Anatomie de l'enfer* and the social and feminist issues that arise from her explicit visual language make onscreen sexuality uncomfortable, thus preventing the spectator from engaging in visual pleasure. Although the visual focus of the film is the female sexual anatomy and

¹⁴⁰ Beugnet, Martine (2007), *Cinema and Sensation: French Film and the Art of Transgression*.

¹⁴¹ Marks, Laura (2000), *The Skin of the Film; Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*;

¹⁴² Deleuze, Gilles (1992a), *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*.

the characters remain anonymous, the use of language plays a significant part in the narrative to the extent that it subordinates the sexual spectacle. In this film Breillat sets up an extreme scenario with the emphasis on human sexual relations which is rendered in transgressive and graphic terms. For this narrative of the body the project is effected via an innovative use of film style and technique. Above all, as an example of the new transgressive cinema of the body¹⁴³ the film facilitates an unsettling aesthetic encounter with its fundamental lack of compromise in the relationship of the film text with the viewer.

¹⁴³ The subject of works by Palmer, Tim (2011), *Brutal Intimacy: Analyzing Contemporary French Cinema* and Beugnet, Martine (2007), *Cinema and Sensation: French Film and the Art of Transgression*.

PART TWO

Chapter 5. *L'Esquive* (Abdellatif Kechiche, 2004)

Chapter 6. *Fureur* (Karim Dridi, 2003)

Chapter 7. *Inch'allah dimanche* (Yamina Beguigui, 2001)

Chapter 8. *Raja* (Jacques Doillon, 2003)

Introduction

L'Esquive (Chapter 5) contributes to problematic ideas within contemporary French culture as it highlights the question of identity and potential problems of the identity construction of a group of adolescents in contemporary France, complicated by the social environment (the *cit *) in which they live. Set in *banlieue*, on a housing estate, where college students of mixed ethnicity (but largely Maghrebi), are preparing to stage an eighteenth-century Marivaux play,¹ the ways in which *L'Esquive* centres around the performance of French language suggests the film's complex relation to French society and ethnic minority integration as the film helps to demystify 'Frenchness' by finding ways of recognising its diversity and heterogenous experience. Mikhail Bakhtin's seminal essay 'Discourse in the Novel' in *The Dialogic Imagination*,² is concerned with "the philosophy of discourse in a ...multi-language world."³ His concept of heteroglossia, or forms of social speech (socio-ideological languages), is a useful

¹ Marivaux, Pierre Carlet de Chamblain de (1688-1763), *Le Jeu de l'amour et du hasard*, (1730), transl. by Bartlett, Neil (1992).

² *ibid*, pp. 259-442.

³ Bakhtin, Mikhail cited in Morris, Pam (ed), (1994), *The Bakhtin Reader*, p. 16.

framework for analysing how various accents, vernaculars and dialects of the community ‘street’ language in *L’Esquive* are used by people of varied cultural backgrounds in Abdellatif Kechiche’s paradoxical study of life in a banlieue community. The role of language in French film as a whole remains markedly absent from most academic studies of film. In France, this is partly ascribable to identification of the verbal tradition with French literary heritage, an association infamously condemned by François Truffaut in his 1954 attack on the *tradition de qualité*.⁴

The specificity of Frenchness and French cinema is evaluated in *Fureur* (Chapter 6) in order to understand how and why spaces for the articulation of transnational and multicultural identities arise, or are denied, received definitions of national identity, particularly as the interracial couple, Rapha and Chin, are characters clearly concerned with the multicultural and the diasporic. Gilles Deleuze’s time-image,⁵ closely aligned with Henri Bergson’s work on memory,⁶ marks a shift from a cinema that adheres more directly to time rather than to motion. Deleuze’s philosophy of the time-image provides a starting point for examining the cinematic processes surrounding ‘the national’ as engaged in temporal disruption in film. Deleuze provides an aesthetic of the cinema, making the complex relationships between things visible, and thereby altering notions of time and space. This work is developed by David Martin-Jones in *Deleuze, Cinema and National Identity* (2006) in a sustained analysis of cinema and

⁴ Truffaut, François (1954), ‘Une certain tendance du cinéma français.’ *Cahiers du cinéma*, 31, pp.15–29.

⁵ Deleuze, Gilles (1992b), *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*.

⁶ Bergson, Henri (2004), *Matter and Memory*.

national identity, proposing the national as a category that has a problematic temporality, in an investigation of national identities and the states of narrative time.⁷ Using Martin-Jones work I suggest alternative views of national identity and new possibilities in *Fureur* through the disruptive force of the time-image in this film which is also strongly embedded in French cinema culture, as the film negotiates deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation in the light of the dominance of Chinese, rather than French identity.

Inch'Allah dimanche (Chapter 7) marks a powerful challenge to cultural otherness and ethnic tensions, common themes of contemporary diasporic cinema, reflecting the challenges faced by ethnic minorities wishing to maintain their authenticity and negotiate their traditional heritage in a dominant host society. The couple Zouina and Ahmed, of the same origins (Maghrebi), but estranged for several years until Zouina is permitted to join her husband in France, are unable at first to adapt to a new society and culture together. Zouina is the instrument of change and progress towards some form of integration into the French way of life for the couple and their children. A transmission of memories, the film produces a missing text of female, Maghrebi immigration into France in the 1970s, demonstrating the difficulties of gender relations within contemporary France's postcolonial society and proposing the possibilities of alliances between women that cut across ethnic, religious, class, and generational borders. Rosi Braidotti's definition of the nomad in her work *Nomadic Subjects*⁸ is in opposition to the terms 'exile' and 'migrant,' in her introduction to postcolonial thinking in feminist

⁷ Martin-Jones, David (2006), *Deleuze, Cinema and National Identity: Narrative Time in National Contexts*.

⁸ Braidotti, Rosi (1994), *Nomadic Subjects*.

theory which provides movable foundations for a post-humanist view of female subjectivity. I explore the possibilities of using nomadology in raising questions on how Yamina Benguigui opens a web of discourses, subject positions and spaces around the female experience of 1970's Algerian immigration into France. This 'cinema of displacement' foregrounds gender, nation, and diaspora, making connections between feminist nomadic inquiries and new images of what potentially exists 'outside' the gendered and racialised social order that frames the lives of French women of Maghrebi descent. By being historically situated and culturally specific, and maintaining the emphasis on the imbalance of power in the couple through the portrayals of Zouina and her complex, problematic, relationship with Ahmed, the film comments on the fluidity of cultural identity and interrogates the idea of what it means to be a hybrid in postcolonial France.

The fractious romance at the centre of *Raja* (Chapter 8) between a wealthy Frenchman living in Marrakech, and a local native girl, is a narrative of frustrated desire at an impenetrable language barrier as Fred and Raja are unable to communicate on any language level and are separated in terms of needs and desires. The film creates a distance from which the spectator is positioned to critique the French 'nation' and neo-colonialism and to imagine counter-hegemonic identities, through a humanistic analysis of the barriers to mutual expression and communication. Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity in his work emphasises the heterogeneity of postcolonial cultural identity and its constructed and unstable nature which has led to a more complex and sophisticated analysis of the politics of identity.

CHAPTER 5

Après La Haine, L'Amour

L'Esquive

(Abdellatif Kechiche, 2004)

“J’espère que cette génération va prendre son envol.”⁹

This chapter is one of three addressing film-making in France by directors of Maghrebi origin. Directors who produce films outside their country of origin are the subject of Hamid Naficy’s writings on filmmaker displacement and diasporic production modes, in which the latter proposes that filmmakers whose origins are postcolonial and who have relocated to cosmopolitan cities, in a displacement from the margins of Western culture to the centre, exist in a state of tension between their country of origin and the ‘adopted’ country in which they live and create their films.¹⁰ Such directors resist definition by any familiar narrative or generic schema, and as a result can be grouped under what Naficy terms an ‘accented’ style of filmmaking.¹¹ This ‘accent’ emanates not so much from the accented speech of the diegetic characters in the films, but from the displacement of the filmmakers themselves; from their interstitial and sometimes collective modes of production; and from the stylistic features of their films, which are created “astride and in the interstices of, social formations and cinematic

⁹ Fajardo, Isabelle (07/01/2004), ‘Cités dans le texte: Entretien Abdellatif Kechiche et Cécile, Ladjali,’ *Télérama*.

¹⁰ Naficy, Hamid (2001), *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking*, pp.11-17.

¹¹ *ibid.* Naficy identifies three types of accented films (exilic, diasporic and ethnic) which can overlap, as the majority of accented films have some characteristics of all three types.

practices.”¹² Diasporic filmmakers maintain a long-term sense of ethnic consciousness and distinctiveness about their cultural origins with a collective memory of an idealised homeland. Different types of accented films are created by diverse experiences of displacement and an emphasis on the relationship to place (whether this is in relation to the homeland or the host society). Yet, regardless of these variations, accented cinema embodies (on the whole) a particular style in its thematic preoccupations, narrative structure, and visual form, with the experience of lack of belonging and cultural identity that informs these films, underlining the importance of film-makers of Maghrebi origin in not only presenting a model of integration for the community as a whole, but, as Carrie Tarr points out, “negotiating their own position in French society.”¹³ A number of French films in the 1980s and 1990s had already characterised the foregrounding of ethnic diversity within the French social sphere, namely in *beur* and *banlieue* cinemas, both of which explore the preoccupations and concerns of Maghrebi migrant communities who have settled in France as a distinctive group and are concentrated mainly in the *banlieue* of Paris and on the outskirts of other major cities (such as Lyon and Marseille).¹⁴ Accented cinema formations created by diasporic and exilic filmmakers from their own *émigré* experiences appear to inform French productions with increasing frequency in the post-2000s, with directors such as Abdellatif Kechiche recognising the influences of diaspora on

¹² *Ibid*, pp.4-5.

¹³ Tarr, Carrie (2005), *Reframing Difference: Beur and banlieue filmmaking in France*, p.210.

¹⁴ *ibid*. Tarr provides a major study of these two strands of contemporary French cinema, defining *cinéma de banlieue* as a way of categorising films set in the rundown, multi-ethnic, working-class estates (the *cités*) on the peripheries (*banlieues*), of France’s major cities, whilst noting that the term can be potentially reductive.

their own film-making, as he acknowledges: “Je suis moi-même issue d’immigration donc je m’intéresse à ce que je connais.”¹⁵

Cultural Identity

Identity issues for minorities such as the French-Maghrebi community can in many ways be linked to postcolonial struggles, as there is confusion about cultural identity for a significant number of young French citizens of North African origin “being French by nationality and socialisation, but ‘other’ by origin and family upbringing.”¹⁶ The French media reported on the violence, tensions, unrest, and the problems of minority integration into mainstream French society in negative terms over a period of several decades, calling into question the ‘Frenchness’ and republicanism of multiethnic *banlieue* communities.¹⁷ This representation, according to Meredith Doran, implies that the presence of immigrants and their descendants who form the *cit * communities, are responsible for a *fracture sociale* between the *banlieue* and the *grandes villes*. In addition, as these youth communities speak their own language (*le verlan*), “a linguistic bricolage”¹⁸ derived from a range of languages reflecting the origins of the *cit * communities, this further exacerbates the *fracture sociale* with a *fracture linguistique* that mirrors what Doran terms “a social breakdown between traditional French society and the

¹⁵M linard, Micha l (07/01/2004), ‘Cette jeunesse n’a pas de place dans le paysage audiovisuel,’ *L’Humanit *.

¹⁶ Marley, Dawn et al. (1998), *Linguistic Identities and Policies in France and the French-Speaking World*, pp. 11-26. See also in Tarr C., (2005), *Reframing Difference: Beur and banlieue filmmaking in France*, p. 21.

¹⁷ Doran, Meredith (2007), ‘Alternative French, Alternative Identities: Situating Language in *la banlieue*,’ *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies*, 11, 4, pp. 497-508.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 497.

quartiers chauds of the banlieues.¹⁹ This reflects the desire amongst ethnically-mixed youth populations to create alternative definitions and means of expression of identity as a way of differing from ‘traditional’ Frenchness, as Erin Schroeder states:

Often the gesture towards peripheral urban spaces and working class and immigrant cultures becomes part of an overdetermined equation to measure the health of the French nation via its ‘others.’²⁰

L’Esquive, Kechiche’s second film,²¹ follows the daily lives of a community of young, multiethnic *cit -dwellers* in the *banlieue*, as they rehearse for a school production of the eighteenth-century Pierre Marivaux play, *Le Jeu de l’amour et du hasard*,²² the theme of which is echoed in a romance between the main couple in the film, fifteen year-old Lydia, (Sara Forestier), who is white, and Abdelkrim (Osman Elkharraz), of Arab immigrant origin (and nicknamed Krimo). Occupying a space in French film previously associated with the negative portrayal of immigration as a legacy of problematic integration, it departs from typical *banlieue* and *beur* themes and signals a shift from the position of ‘minority cinema’ responding to a majority discourse, to being both a force for critique from without and change from within French cinema, as Kechiche films the lives of

¹⁹ *ibid*, p. 498.

²⁰ Schroeder, Erin (2001), ‘A multicultural conversation: *La Haine*, *Rai* and *Menace II Society*,’ in *Camera Obscura*, 16, 1, 46, pp. 143-179.

²¹ Kechiche’s first full-length film, *La Faute   Voltaire*, (2000), followed a Tunisian immigrant’s attempts to find romance and permanent residency in an inhospitable France.

²² Marivaux, Pierre Carlet de Chamblain de (1688-1763), *Le Jeu de l’amour et du hasard*, transl. by Bartlett, Neil (1992).

those individuals in *banlieue* communities who are not often depicted in French film:

...these people who live in the projects, in the suburbs are always discussed or depicted in the French media in a caricatured way. What I wanted to do was to break that mould of representing them and replace it with another, more complex, sort of image.²³

The chapter shows *L'Esquive* to index a range of identity issues specifically tied to a desire to create alternative definitions and means of expression of emerging identities in a multicultural population. It raises questions about the integration of ethnic youth culture into contemporary French society through the hybridisation of traditional French language, with the teenage characters' creative use of ethnicised community language suggesting a positive move towards integration between the multiethnic community and traditional French culture, both within and outside the *banlieue*. Kechiche describes the deliberate structuring of the film around language as:

Quelque chose de très fort (qui) se passe au niveau du langage dans la banlieue...Il y a une vraie culture de la langue. C'est très recherché, très intelligent. Il y a une musicalité, une harmonie. A l'entendre très rapidement de l'extérieur, on a l'impression d'un cafouillis mais il y a un vrai plaisir de la langue.²⁴

²³ Porton, Richard (2005), 'Marivaux in the 'Hood': an interview with Abdellatif Kechiche, transl. by Dezio, Joanna, *Cineaste*, XXXI, 1, Winter, pp. 46-49. Porton interviewed Kechiche for *Cinéaste* shortly after the American première of *L'Esquive* at New York's New Directors / New Films Festival (2005).

²⁴ Mélinard M., (07/01/2004), 'Cette jeunesse n'a pas de place dans le paysage audiovisuel,' *L'Humanité*.

As a witness to the complexity of contemporary identities, the film focuses on the theme of adolescents and their anxieties, rather than portraying the clichéd problems previously synonymous with *banlieue* narratives which devalue the diversity of that population (consistent with long-standing republican ideology of assimilation, which views plurality as a source of conflict and therefore as an unwelcome threat to national unity).²⁵ Lydia and Krimo as an interracial couple playing eighteenth-century theatre in a contemporary *banlieue* setting, creates, as Vincent Thabourey points out,²⁶ a blending of diverse worlds, in a film in which Kechiche brings together opposing milieus: “l’utopie d’une réconciliation qui devient possible grâce au cinéma.”²⁷ The film, “un autre regard sur la cité,”²⁸ presents a different focus on life in the outer city suburbs from previous images of a crime-ridden *banlieue* dominated by all-male gangs (as portrayed by films such as *La Haine*),²⁹ in an alternative construction by Kechiche:

sans qu’il y soit question de tournantes de drogue, de filles voilées ou de mariages forcés. J’avais envie d’entendre parler d’amour et de théâtre, pour changer.³⁰

Through its special focus on language use in a realisation of hybridisations of linguistic and ethno-cultural crossings, the film is also considered here in terms of Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia, in which the concept of a multiplicity

²⁵ Fajardo, Isabelle (07/01/2004), ‘Cités dans le texte: Entretien Abdellatif Kechiche et Cécile Ladjali,’ *Télérama*..

²⁶ Thabourey, Vincent (2004), ‘L’Esquive, une banlieue si sensible,’ *Positif*, Jan., 515, pp. 43-44.

²⁷ Domenach, Elise and Rouyer, Philippe (2007), ‘Entretien avec Abdellatif Kechiche: échapper aux règles pour voir la vie se créer,’ *Positif*, Dec., 562, pp. 16-20.

²⁸ Tessé, Jean-Philippe (2004), ‘Cité dans le texte,’ *Cahiers du cinéma*, April, p. 52-53

²⁹ Kassovitz, Mathieu (1995), *La Haine*, Studio Canal+/La Sept cinéma.

³⁰ Fajardo, Isabelle, *ibid*.

of languages or 'many voices' are in operation within one culture. Bakhtin's seminal essay, 'Discourse in the Novel', in *The Dialogic Imagination*,³¹ favours the literary genre as the most receptive to heteroglossia (particularly referring to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries) however, as Pam Morris points out, it is much concerned with "the philosophy of discourse in a ...multi-language world,"³² which raises the possibility of considering the community 'street' language which the characters use in the film, as inherently heteroglossic. This use of *patois* by people of varied ethnic, gendered, and social backgrounds, (such as the *cit * community the film portrays) may reveal ways in which the appearance of linguistic, and by extension, cultural unity, is subverted from within. The chapter also refers to Bakhtin's concept of dialogism in terms of the various degrees of code-switching between the dominant and minority languages as a means of representing both the daily reality of cultures in contact, and multicultural exchanges within the community that Kechiche portrays, in the use of *banlieue* language as the dominant issue in the film, which shows another aspect of the lives of the young members of the community portrayed:

Effectivement, je voulais d mystifier cette agressivit  verbale, et la faire appara tre dans sa dimension v ritable de code de communication. Une sorte d'agressivit  de fa ade, qui cache bien souvent une certaine pudeur, et m me parfois une v ritable fragilit , plus qu'une violence   proprement parler.³³

³¹ *ibid*, pp. 259-442.

³² Bakhtin, Mikhail cited in Morris, Pam (ed), (1994), *The Bakhtin Reader*, p. 16.

³³ Anon, 'Entretien avec Abdellatif Kechiche,' www.commeaucinema.com, accessed 15/03/2008.

Bakhtinian concepts that revolve around the idea of intertextuality are also used here to reveal the relationships between interconnected texts (in this case *L'Esquive* and *Le Jeu de l'amour et du hasard*) in terms of their use of language, and to show new possibilities afforded by using Bakhtin's work in relation to film.

Le jeu de l'amour and the language of *tchatche*

The opening scenes immerse the spectator in the daily quotidian of a group of young adolescents engaged in rehearsing *Le Jeu de l'amour et du hasard*,³⁴ in the context of the mannered tones and gestures of the comedy and the linguistic and theatrical artifice of Marivaux, within the *cit * space that is depicted in the film as specifically used for talking (*tchatcher*).³⁵ Lydia, in the principal role of Lisette and dressed in period costume, enacts scenes from the play outside with her peers, in between the high-rise apartment blocks, whilst Krimo, who lives on the estate and attends the same class, watches the rehearsals and falls in love with her, but receives no encouragement. In order to facilitate an amorous approach, he bribes Rachid (Rachid Hami) to relinquish the role of Arlequin (playing opposite Lydia/Lisette) in exchange for some stolen goods, so that Krimo can take his place as lead actor. The relationship between Lydia and Krimo develops around a rhythm of conversation and discourse within their own *cit * sociolect, with the narrative of the film oscillating between the characters Lydia and Krimo of

³⁴ *Le Jeu de l'amour et du hasard* is a Marivaux comedy in three acts, first performed at the Com die-Italienne in 1730.

³⁵ Doran, Meredith (2007), 'Alternative French, Alternative Identities: Situating Language in *la banlieue*,' *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies*, 11, 4, p. 497. The distinctive language used by banlieue groups, is variously called *la tchatche*, *le langage des jeunes de banlieue*, *le langage te'ci*, or *le verlan*.

L'Esquive, and the sub-narrative of the couple Lisette/Silvia and Arlequin/Dorante of *Le Jeu de l'amour et du hasard*. In the context of eighteenth-century French society, Dorante and Silvia, a young aristocratic couple (who have not previously met), independently convince their respective servants (Arlequin and Lisette), to exchange places with them in order to discreetly observe the other party before agreeing to an arranged marriage. Although in disguise, the attraction between servants and between masters is spontaneous, but complicated by confusion about the adherence to rigid eighteenth-century class barriers that society dictates. Dorante and Silvia eventually declare their love for each other and once the disguises have been lifted, the social structure of masters and servants is restored to the correct order. During rehearsals for the play, whilst Lydia expertly commands and delivers the language of Marivaux, Krimo is unable to utter Arlequin's lines correctly (in spite of receiving coaching from Lydia), with the result that he is humiliated in front of his peers and eventually defeated in his thespian attempts. A last-minute cast change signals the reinstatement of Rachid in the role of Arlequin and although the public performance of the play attracts a wide multicultural audience of enthusiastic children and adults from the housing estate, Krimo only briefly observes the proceedings through a window in the cultural centre, before returning to his apartment alone, having failed in his attempts to woo Lydia.

A generic feature of *banlieue* youth language, according to Meredith Doran, and one that is prominent in the film, is the recognisable pattern of the sound of the language, giving it a marked vocal quality and distinguishing it from what she

terms: “the more precise diction of standard French...a refusal of the measured, careful pronunciation of normative French, the language of a cultural *élite*.”³⁶ From the opening scenes, Lydia is supported by an entourage of female peers, including Frida (Sabrina Ouazani) and Nanou (Nanou Benahmou), with whom she frequently holds heated and animated discussions in *verlan*³⁷ which take the form of loud and chaotic displays of a fusion of languages, including (mainly) French and Arabic, the resulting *mélange* exhibiting little regard for the linguistic unity of any one specific language. Coupled with a typically rapid delivery style (“le style speede”)³⁸ the *tchatche* operates as a soundtrack “qui enregistre jusqu’à saturation ces dialogues émaillés d’insultes, cette langue souterraine (qui) crie haut et fort.”³⁹ Maghrebi living in social housing areas such as the Franc-Moisine (the *cit * in which *L’Esquive* was filmed) follow this common language pattern (created mainly by young North Africans in the 1980s) both as a way of situating themselves in French society and as a style to designate a new social figure for Maghrebi integration.⁴⁰ Thus the dialogue spoken in *L’Esquive* gives insights into contemporary language use at a particular point in time, in the ways in which the characters distinctively use the language so aptly as an essential component of the film, revealing cross-cultural differences and preferences in community linguistic norms and conventions, with the dialogue between the characters Lydia and Krimo as the central axis around which the narrative revolves. The linguistic

³⁶ Doran M. (2007), ‘Alternative French, Alternative Identities: Situating Language in *la banlieue*,’ *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies*, 11, 4, pp. 497–508.

³⁷ *ibid*, p. 497.

³⁸ *Ibid*.

³⁹ Cauterman, Marie-Mich le and Habi, Malik (2005), ‘Enjeux de l’enseignement du fran ais,’ *Recherches*, 43, 2, p. 46.

⁴⁰ Wihtol Catherine and Leveau Remy (2001), *La Beurgeoise*, p. 44.

bricolage of *L'Esquive* that confronts the film spectator is marked by the multilingualism and multiculturalism present in the narrative and in the scripting of a language that subverts French grammar, and as a result, mutates it in comic style onscreen.⁴¹

In his study of *banlieue* language Mikaël Jamin argues that, although the *cité* accent may not be regarded as socially prestigious outside the context of the *banlieue*, it nevertheless symbolises a degree of identification with the street culture that binds young *banlieue* speakers, within a subculture that is created and maintained by the infrastructure of the *banlieue* areas.⁴² This is problematic for outsiders to *banlieue* culture, for whilst the community language is widely understood amongst *banlieue* youth, it is less accessible outside this social context. Scenes from *L'Esquive* played out between the group of adolescents outside their school classroom and away from their families largely consist of lengthy argument scenes, seemingly containing improvisations and devices, but fully scripted and consisting of “des jeux de mots piégés... des galipettes verbales,”⁴³ which, coupled with a hand-held camera and almost constant close-ups cutting from one speaker to another, gives the film some elements of documentary style. Street language is not used during the rehearsals of the play to modify the (Marivaux's) script in any way (and vice versa). When the young ‘actors’ deliver their lines they are engaging in the eighteenth-century French as

⁴¹ Domenach, Elise and Rouyer, Philippe (2007), ‘Entretien avec Adbellatif Kechiche: échapper aux règles pour voir la vie se créer,’ *Positif*, Dec., 562, pp. 16-20. Ghalya Lacroix wrote the screenplay and script of *L'Esquive*, and was also the film editor.

⁴² Jamin, Mikaël (2004), ‘Beurs’ and accent des cités: a case study of linguistic diffusion in la Courneuve,’ *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies*, 8, 2, p. 175.

⁴³ Méla, Vivienne (1991), ‘Verlan ou le langage du miroir,’ *Langages*, 101, Paris; Larousse, pp. 73-94.

an academic task in a ‘foreign’ language, rather than adapting it to their own sociolect, as Fajardo notes: “... ils ne rappent pas, ils ne passent pas la langue de la Comédie-Française au *flow* des codes langagiers de la rue, ils font juste un exercice scolaire.”⁴⁴ However, the adolescents code-switch to a more ‘recognisable’ French when addressing members of the older generation of the Maghrebi population (such as Krime’s mother), and in the school classroom, when the register changes to “*le langage à l’endroit*.”⁴⁵ This is the public face of language, whilst a language cultivated on the estates, or “*le langage à l’envers*,” is used in *lieux clos*, away from public spaces, although the latter, as Vivienne Méla suggests “cherche aussi à donner libre.”⁴⁶

The game of marivaudages

The language of Marivaux works on several levels in the film as the play and the film are clearly linked by the literal translation of ‘*l’esquive*’ as a term referring to a ‘feint’ or ‘dodge’ (used in the sport of fencing) and to the words of Arlequin in the play, which provide the title of the film:

-Enfin, ma reine, je vous vois et je ne vous quitte plus, car j’ai trop pâti d’avoir manqué de votre présence, et j’ai cru que vous esquiviez la mienne.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Fajardo, Isabelle (07/01/2004), ‘Cités dans le texte: Entretien Abdellatif Kechiche et Cecile Ladjali,’

Télérama.

⁴⁵ Méla, Vivienne (1991), ‘Verlan ou le langage du miroir,’ *Langage*, pp. 73-94.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*

⁴⁷ Marivaux, Pierre (1688-1763), *Le Jeu de l’amour et du hasard*, transl. by Bartlett N., (1992), Acte III, scene 6, cited in Cauterman, Marie-Michèle and Habi, Malik (2005), ‘Enjeux de l’enseignement du français,’ *Recherches*, 43, 2, p. 52.

L'Esquive and the verb *esquiver* are used directly and indirectly in the implicit commentary within the play as Lisette 'dodges' the advances of Arlequin, mirrored by Lydia side-stepping Krimo's inexperienced amorous advances in the film romance, as the latter attempts to kiss Lydia but is thwarted when she swiftly ducks away. Krimo also seems to be 'dodging' his jilted girlfriend, Magalie (Aurélie Ganito), as well as 'ducking' (in the sense that he is postponing) a visit to his father (who is in prison) and finally, he is dodging (avoiding) Fathi's attempts at persuading him to openly declare his love for Lydia. The adolescents play on the use of the verb *esquiver*, in its sense as a transitive verb with a contemporary meaning.⁴⁸ Lydia uses the verb in this sense when she and Rachid coach Krimo in the role of Arlequin, carefully explaining Rachid's staging of Arlequin's approach to Lisette, followed by the latter's 'dodge' to avoid him, as Lydia explains to Krimo:

-Rachid il s'asseyait et après, Arlequin il faisait ça, il s'approchait et puis, elle l'esquive, Lisette.⁴⁹

When Krimo rehearses this stage movement with Lydia, she again uses the verb transitively, instructing him to move closer to her, or she will 'dodge' him and escape his embrace:

-Faut que tu t'avances plus parce que sinon moi je peux t'esquiver.⁵⁰

However, it is during a rehearsal at school, in front of the class, that another prominent connection emerges between the film and the play, as Lydia complains to the teacher (Carol Franck) that her friend, Frida, in the role of Silvia (disguised

⁴⁸ *ibid.* For example, *'je t'esquive'* in *banlieue* language could be 'translated' into traditional French as *'je m'écarte de toi pour ne pas te parler.'*

⁴⁹ *ibid.*

⁵⁰ *ibid.*

as Lisette's maid), is too arrogant in her impersonation of the chamber maid, whereas Lydia believes that the only female character to show aristocratic manners and gestures should be herself in the role of Lisette (impersonating her mistress), as she explains:

-Mais je suis la pauvre dans l'histoire...je suis la bonne de elle et je dois faire ma riche, c'est ça? Elle c'est la riche et elle doit faire la pauvre. Et je (ne) comprends pas pourquoi â peine elle arrive, elle fait des gestes de riche.⁵¹

The teacher interrupts the rehearsal to confirm to the class that Frida is correct to assume 'airs and graces' when playing the role of a lady pretending to be a servant, because of the implications of 'social class,' a topic which is itself open to subversion:

-Les riches jouent les pauvres, les pauvres jouent les riches et personne n'y arrive. Ce que Marivaux nous montre c'est qu'on est complètement prisonnier de notre condition sociale...on peut toujours se mettre en haillons quand on est riche et puis de robe en haute couture quand on est pauvre, on ne se débarrasse pas d'un langage, d'un certain type de sujet de conversation, d'une manière de s'exprimer, de se tenir, qui indique d'où on vient.⁵²

Thus, although the play is entitled *Le Jeu de l'amour et du hasard*, the message that it is conveying is that nothing is left to chance, as the rich inevitably fall in love with the rich, and the poor with the poor, in other words, the social classes recognise each other and fall in love with their own class, despite outward appearances or disguises. In contrast, the focus of Kechiche's film is a reversal of

⁵¹ *ibid*, p. 54.

⁵² *ibid*, p. 53.

the negative perceptions of the young people of the *banlieue* which confounds what the play demonstrates about ‘reinventing’ oneself. It is the message that the teacher conveys, as an authority figure and representative of the secular educational system, that indicates the persisting rigidity and exclusionary politics of the class system in France, for what she is saying to the young *citè* inhabitants is that, no matter what aspirations they have, they will always be recognised through speech, language and manners, as having come from the deprived social areas of the *cités*. This effectively denies the young adults any hope for the future in a message that, in spite of Kechiche’s new portrayal of the *banlieue*, infers that the *jeunes du quartier* are locked in a circle from which there is no escaping to the ‘other’ France from the social stigma associated with the deprived *citè* areas.

The multilingual dialogue of *L’Esquive* and the incongruity of (national) language in terms of the use of *verlan* begins to suggest the extent to which language invariably elides attempts to fix it at the point of representation. It is at the level of interpretation that the *tchatche* in *L’Esquive* is both experienced and enjoyed as transgressive, its humorous tension highlighted in the disorderliness of this ‘street’ language, which is the key to the film’s *mise en scène* of the play within a *citè* environment. The display of teenage aggression through the accented use of a mixture of French and Arabic provides a sharp contrast with the formal language of Marivaux, but rather than drawing comparisons between the two and thereby establishing the superiority of one or the other, Kechiche advocates an oscillation between the two: “Je n’ai pas voulu faire de comparaison entre la

qualité du langage de Marivaux et le leur, plutôt les renvoyer l'un à l'autre,"⁵³ Marivaux created psychologically complex characters from the lower as well as the upper classes, (quite unlike the characters of many of his contemporary playwrights), which was deemed unacceptable to eighteenth-century bourgeois audiences of the time:

Marivaux accorde à ses personnages issus de milieu populaire une intériorité, une intelligence, des sentiments que très peu d'auteurs de son siècle leur prêtent. De même qu'aujourd'hui on représente les gens de ces quartiers populaires de manière réductrice, superficielle, sans les traiter dans leur complexité. Dans *Le Jeu de l'amour et du hasard*, le valet éprouve la même passion, le même dépit que le maître. Il y a chez Marivaux un enjeu social souterrain. C'est un auteur subversif.⁵⁴

This provides exchanges in the film which capture the vulnerability of the young community amidst a certain aggressiveness of speech, in terms of the speed and vociferous delivery of the everyday language of the characters, which, although it may be perceived as violent, is presented as a code of communication and a means of establishing a community identification. Like the strictly-coded language of Marivaux in the play, the contemporary language of the adolescents in *L'Esquive* is bound by the rigour and conformity of its own rules: "on retombe sur un autre ordre des choses qui...n' en est pas moins contraignant et où transgresser les règles, c'est être exclu du jeu."⁵⁵

⁵³ Fajardo, Isabelle (07/01/2004), 'Cités dans le texte: Entretien Abdellatif Kechiche et Cecile Ladjali,' *Télérama*.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*

⁵⁵ Méla, Vivienne (1991), 'Verlan ou le langage du miroir,' *Langages*, 101, Paris: Larousse, p. 59.

Sight and sound

Peter Bloom suggests that when the *beur* movement takes on a visual identity, ‘difference’ and those who do not fit into the dominant culture’s expectations of *beur* identity, are highlighted.⁵⁶ The concern in the case of *L’Esquive* is that language might be defined solely in terms of either its aural characteristics of the spoken languages, or in terms of the visual difference of the group of multiethnic adolescents, as distinct from Lydia, who is the only white character. The film’s depiction of the latter as its ‘French’ character linguistically isolates her within the broader multicultural sphere, through her flawless uttering of Marivaux’s lines, further illustrating the extent to which *L’Esquive* could be read as being complicit in problematic discourses. Coached by her teacher, Lydia easily slips from her mother-tongue into the Marivaux language even to the extent to which she loses her local accent to speak what is, in effect, a ‘foreign’ language:

... la facilité avec laquelle Lydia passe de sa langue qu’on pourrait dire natale à celle de Marivaux, allant jusqu’à perdre son accent (car c’est bien d’une langue étrangère qu’il s’agit), c’est déjà saisir beaucoup du personnage, de sa confiance en soi et de son aisance.⁵⁷

Bakhtin acknowledges that authors reach back to the past and connect with their ancient identity, in particular in the use of carnival forms, which he describes

⁵⁶ Bloom, Peter (2003), ‘Beur Cinema and the Politics of Location: French Immigration Politics and the Naming of a Film Movement’ in Shohat, Ella and Stam, Robert (2003), *Multiculturalism, Postcoloniality and Transnational Media*, p. 53.

⁵⁷ Massart, Guillaume, ‘*L’Esquive*,’ *FilmdeCulte*, www.archive.filmdeculte.com, accessed 20/01/09.

as “the inversion of standard themes of societal makeup.”⁵⁸ Bakhtin’s notion of carnival, a fundamental aspect of dialogism, represents a theory of freedom from all domination: “the place for working out a new mode of interrelationship between individuals.”⁵⁹ It is in this sense that Kechiche presents a carnivalisation of the *banlieue*, through the subversion of the dominant language by the group of teenagers, as *L’Esquive* mirrors the carnival culture in its juxtapositions with the Marivaux play, in the mixing and confrontations of high and low culture, upper and lower classes, identity and disguise, serious conventions and parodies, and the essence of carnival which is to do away with barriers, reflected in the mixing of languages in *L’Esquive*, and the teenagers’ *cit * lifestyle. The aspiration of carnival is to reveal the hegemony of any ideology and to project an alternate conceptualisation of reality, which “makes it possible to extend the narrow sense of life.”⁶⁰ Dialogism is a fundamental aspect of the carnival, a plurality of “fully valid consciousnesses”⁶¹ each bringing with them a different point of view and a different way of ‘seeing’ the world so that it is perceived through both the time/space of the self and through that of the other.

When Lydia and Krime are in the classroom rehearsing the historic lines of Marivaux, although they are physically facing each other and sharing an external space and time as characters in the play, each of them is ‘seeing’ something different internally. Whilst Lydia metaphorically reaches back to her origins through Marivaux’s classic French, Krime’s memory encapsulates his homeland

⁵⁸ Bakhtin, Mikhail (1984), *Rabelais and His World*, p. 15.

⁵⁹ Bakhtin, Mikhail in Holquist, Michael (ed), (1981), *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, p. 123.

⁶⁰ *ibid*, p. 177.

⁶¹ *ibid*, p. 9.

in the oriental influences reflected in the surroundings of his family apartment. As Bakhtin argues, by being outside a culture one can understand one's own culture, which process opens up new possibilities for each culture, reveals hidden 'potentials,' and creates new voices that may become a part of a future dialogic interaction.⁶² The outsideness of groups that are marginalised by a dominant ideology not only gain a voice through carnivalisation, but they also comment about the ideology that seeks to 'silence' them.

Lydia is able to shift between the two worlds of classical French tradition (colonialist) and contemporary French society (the post-national) whilst Krimo illustrates a lack of stability and a vulnerability in the search for intersubjectivity and capacity for cross-identification. Voyaging back in time and escaping to the land of the eighteenth-century dressed in her long robe of the times, Lydia's journey is to a land that is 'foreign' in terms of its customs and language, but the land of Marivaux, as part of French literary heritage, is geographically 'near' for her. Krimo also travels, as he daydreams about Lydia from his bedroom but his apartment, which is his homeland, filled with furnishings and decor from his mother's generation, with the voile curtains billowing in the breeze and offering a hint of orientalism, in scenes accompanied by the soundtrack of Arab music, distances Krimo from eighteenth-century French tradition. This illustrates Lydia's and Krimo's complex and different identity construction, complicated by the social environment (the *cité*) in which they live. Whilst on the one hand the film confirms the image of what Dina Sherzer refers to as a "doomed interracial love

⁶² *ibid*, p. 271.

affair”⁶³ and also Tarr’s suggestion that the beur is “a lovable loser,”⁶⁴ in the hybrid space of the classroom as “a contested site of the state of nation-building in France,”⁶⁵ Krimeo also attempts to transcend the in-betweenness of his own generation of Maghrebi descendants. It is against this backdrop that an ambiguous message is projected by *L’Esquive* if the trajectory of Krimeo is followed. His interest in the play is merely an excuse to approach Lydia as he bribes his way into the Arlequin role, obliged to purchase the role rather than being chosen on merit, then donning a traditional Arlequin costume to the derision of his male peers, who are disrespectful towards acting and the theatre (and therefore high culture), as Fathi proclaims:

-Il a un déguisement, on dirait: “v’là le pédé.” Je jure que c’est vrai, on dirait un pédé avec, mon vieux. Même Lydia on dirait v’là la bouffonne genre t’as vu ils lui font un truc du baiser de la main, là, genre il l’embrasse comme ça et tout, il baisse la tête, il embrasse la main. Truc de ouf...⁶⁶

When he attempts to play Arlequin to impress Lydia, Krimeo is unable to juggle the ‘alien’ Marivaux language and although, (like Lydia), he finds himself a ‘stranger’ to eighteenth-century French language, he is further distanced by his cultural origins. In spite of the advice of the teacher to “articule, change de manière de bouger, change de manière de parler, sors de toi, amuse-toi, libère-

⁶³ Sherzer, Dina (ed), (1996), *Cinema, Colonialism, Postcolonialism*, p.243, cited in Tarr, Carrie (2005), *Reframing Difference*, p. 212.

⁶⁴ Tarr, Carrie (2005), *Reframing Difference*, p. 212.

⁶⁵ Swamy, Vinay (2007), ‘Marivaux in the suburbs: Reframing language in Kechiche’s *L’Esquive* (2003),’ *Studies in French Cinema*, 7, 1, p. 64.

⁶⁶ Merigeau, Pascal (08/01/2004), ‘Après la Faute à Voltaire On Kiffe Grave *L’Esquive*,’ *Le Nouvel Observateur*.

toi,⁶⁷ he eventually turns Marivaux's phrases upside down and the line: "votre bouche avec la mienne" becomes "ma bouche avec la tienne,"⁶⁸ as he reverses the possessive pronouns and is swiftly reprimanded by Lydia:

-L'auteur il marque "sur votre bouche avec la mienne", on n'est pas là pour changer les textes. Si tu commences à changer le texte moi aussi je vais changer le texte et je vais mettre n'importe quoi. C'est pas possible.⁶⁹

The comedic use of language in *L'Esquive* gives rise to the issue of the elusiveness of Marivaux's language to Krime as a visually ethnic character, and by extension, the relationship of such language to the spectator. Krime fails in his efforts to assume a theatrical role and communicate in the language of the Comédie Française and it is in this sense that the question of *L'Esquive* as a paradigmatic example of a film in which the tensions within multiculturalism arise, specifically in terms of whether it implicitly conflates the visual representation of France's 'others' with their 'foreign' languages and accented speech. Krime's accent signals difference and an intercultural tension occurs as a barrier, which functions as an indication of the alienation and complexities of dialogue between a widely diverse, multiethnic youth population and traditional French culture:

le verlan, à l'image de ses locuteurs, est ambigu, parfois violent parfois amusant; c'est la langue miroir dans

⁶⁷ Massart, Guillaume (20/01/09), 'Critique: *L'Esquive*,' *FilmdeCulte*, www.archive.filmdeculte.com, .

⁶⁸ Cauterman, Marie-Michèle and Habi, Malik (2005), 'Enjeux de l'enseignement du français,' *Recherches*, 43, 2, p. 54.

⁶⁹ *ibid.*

laquelle se reflètent les multiples tensions de la société, la diversité des références des verlanisants.⁷⁰

Whilst the image of an identifiably ‘non-French’ Krimo uttering Marivaux’s classic phrases might be considered from the perspective of the Bakhtinian notion of heteroglossia, in as much as it suggests the extent to which the French language is not confined to use by one race, the conditions of its utterance conspire against such a reading. Specifically, Marivaux’s language, representative of institutionalised, national language, is haltingly uttered by Krimo. The incongruity of not only the physical appearance of the speaker, ‘disguised’ as Arlequin and reciting Marivaux’s famous lines, but also the imperfect accent with which the lines are uttered, reinforces the ‘strangeness’ of the French as appropriated by the ‘non-French.’ Krimo’s uttering of Marivaux’s lines is received by the ‘audience’ (on the one hand the intertextual audience made up of Krimo’s classmates in the film and on the other hand, the spectators of the film itself) as the inability to deliver Marivaux’s lines in the same ‘authoritative’ way as Lydia, the camera cutting from Krimo to close-up shots of individual members of the class, whose reactions are of embarrassment whilst Krimo is comically stumbling through the manipulation of the sophisticated *marivaudages*. As a vulnerable and shy, inarticulate young man: “(Il n’a) jamais lu un livre de sa vie,”⁷¹ Krimo is unable to engage with the Marivaux script, but the audience laugh with him, rather than at him in the sense that there is a play with language that opens doors and reveals

⁷⁰ Méla, Vivienne (1991), ‘Verlan ou le langage du miroir,’ *Langage*, pp. 73-94.

⁷¹ Cauterman, Marie-Michèle and Habi, Malik (2005), ‘Enjeux de l’enseignement du français,’ *Recherches*, 43, 2, p. 54. The words of Magalie, Krimo’s jilted girlfriend.

possibilities for a trajectory that is an optimistic portrayal for Krimo's future development, as Kechiche acknowledges:

C'est plutôt encourageant, c'est quelque chose qui va le construire...un garçon fragile et timide, qui a du mal à s'exprimer. Il n'est pas l'emblème d'une jeunesse de cité. Si j'ai voulu montrer cette fragilité-là, c'est aussi pour casser l'image caricaturale de la banlieue.⁷²

Many Voices

In *Discourse in the Novel*, Bakhtin describes heteroglossia as a complex mixture of languages and world views which illustrate the essential importance of context in terms of a word's meaning, as each language is viewed from the perspective of the other.⁷³ When heteroglossic languages intersect and encounter one another in a mutually self-defining process of dialogue, language itself, Bakhtin proposes, is a dynamic and evolving process. This dialogised heteroglossia: “(the) authentic environment of the utterance, in which it lives and takes its shape,” creates a complex unity, for whatever meaning language has.⁷⁴ As Gary Morson and Caryl Emerson suggest, this resides neither in the intention of the speaker nor in the text. “but at a point between speaker or writer, listener or reader.”⁷⁵ According to Bakhtin, there are two forces in operation whenever language is used, namely centripetal and centrifugal forces,⁷⁶ the former tending

⁷² Fajardo, Isabelle (07/01/2004), ‘Cités dans le texte: Enretien Abdellatif Kechiche et Cécile Ladjali,’ *Télérama*.

⁷³ Bakhtin, Mikhail, cited in Morris, Pam (ed), (1994), *The Bakhtin Reader*, p. 85.

⁷⁴ Bakhtin in Holquist Michael, (ed), (1981), *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, p. 272

⁷⁵ Morson, Gary and Emerson, Caryl (1990), *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics*, pp. 284-90.

⁷⁶ Bakhtin, Mikhail (1895-1975), ‘Discourse in the Novel,’ in Holquist Michael, (ed), (1981), *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, p. 294.

to push things towards a central point (unifying), whereas the latter tends to push things away from it and out in all directions (dispersing):

the centripetal forces of the life of language, embodied in a 'unitary language', operate in the midst of heteroglossia. At any given moment of its evolution, language is stratified not only into linguistic dialects in the strict sense of the word... but also... into languages that are socio-ideological.⁷⁷

When examining the use of heteroglossic language in *L'Esquive*, such notions of unifying and dispersing could be applied to a definition of multiculturalism in the film, in the sense that there is the possibility of two distinct groups either coming together in an in-betweenness suggested by the term 'hybrid' and thereby making unity and similarity possible, (cogent with Bakhtin's conception of dialogue encompassing two opposing points of view), or, on the contrary, wanting to differentiate themselves from one other, with the focus directed onto the forces that make disunity and difference possible, which gives rise to an ambiguous definition of multiculturalism. Theoretical considerations applied to the understanding of the linguistics of cinematic multiculturalism in *L'Esquive*, such as the nature of the use of *verlan*, which is not widely understood outside its context, are integral to an understanding of dialogics, which can also be defined as "the collection of all the forms of social speech or rhetorical modes that people use daily as socio-ideological languages."⁷⁸ Every instance of language use, (utterance), Bakhtin suggests, is embedded in a specific set of social circumstances, as language is in itself ideologically and historically specific in the

⁷⁷ Bakhtin cited in Morris, (1994), p. 75.

⁷⁸ Bakhtin in Holquist, Michael, (ed), (1981), *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, p. 263.

ways in which the meaning of each particular utterance is shaped and influenced by the multi-layered context in which it occurs:

At any given time, in any given place, there will be a set of conditions - social, historical, meteorological, physiological - that will ensure that a word uttered in that place and at that time will have a meaning different than it would have under any other conditions.⁷⁹

Language, Bakhtin points out, is in a constant state of being borrowed from others so that it lies “on the borderline between oneself and the other,” and although people borrow language from one another, they only make it their own “at the moment at which they inject it with their own intention.”⁸⁰ Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language, but rather exists “in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions. It is from there that one must take the word, and make it one's own.”⁸¹ The utterance is constructed around a dialogic relationship with what Bakhtin terms “the anticipated response of the other.”⁸² As the ways in which specific utterances have meaning depends upon the particular addressivity (in terms of who, and what, is being addressed), and the particular meanings, or ‘accents’ that wordings develop within specific socio-historical contexts, far from being a static entity with fixed meanings, it is, as Bakhtin states, “a living, social phenomenon, dynamically carrying and contributing to the meanings that can be

⁷⁹ *ibid.*

⁸⁰ *ibid.*, p. 294.

⁸¹ *ibid.*

⁸² *ibid.*, p. 253.

made.⁸³ This dialogue not only occurs between the multiple voices within the film narrative (as in heteroglossia), but also beyond the level of the text in the relationship between the film and its addressee, (the spectator), a notion which seems especially relevant to *L'Esquive*, where there is arguably a great contribution to be made by the audience in terms of meaning. In addition, the level of interaction between audience and 'author' in film generally, is more complex than that of a novel, as meaning is not transferred directly from the script to the spectator but is mediated through, or filtered by, visual codes.

The passage of meaning from the film text to the spectator can also be interpreted as a dialogical process, with the spectator's understanding of meaning representing a response, in order that the film successfully communicate its narrative message, constructed around a dialogic relationship with the anticipated response of the other (the spectator). This would seem to be appropriate in examining the context of hybrid language usage and the implications of the reception of *L'Esquive* in areas of society in which *banlieue* language (as the dominant language in the film) is not widely understood. Whilst Kechiche acknowledges the problem of some film spectators in not understanding the *tchatche* in his film (and therefore the meaning), he is unsympathetic to the fact that whilst a relatively small number of Parisians live in the city, (which has approximately two million inhabitants),⁸⁴ there is also an appreciable, new audience of large groups of people, not only in the suburbs but throughout the youth population, who speak and understand *banlieue* language:

⁸³ *ibid*, p.276.

⁸⁴ Porton, Richard (2005), 'Marivaux in the Hood': an interview with Abdellatif Kechiche, transl. by Dezio, Joanna, *Cineaste*, XXXI, 1, Winter.

Si le verlan est en premier lieu un argot de banlieue, de bandes, il a quand même infiltré toute la jeunesse et même la société entière. Peu de gens ignorent son existence; beaucoup de jeunes le parlent.⁸⁵

Kechiche reaches this new audience through the making of a film which is a blend of social commentary and romantic comedy, challenging a mass audience about the awareness of the *banlieue* community, knowledge of which he feels is alien to much of French society.⁸⁶ He has suggested, in supposition, that if Parisians were to be positioned amongst the multiethnic population of the suburbs (that is to say, within the *beur* community), they in turn would not be understood,⁸⁷ therefore the film demands a respect between speakers of both ‘*le français ordinaire*’ (standard French)⁸⁸ and the language of the suburbs. The gap between the two is connected by the social problem of segregation within the difference that exists between the communities and the metropolis, promoting the creation of a hybrid code of communication, in a country where “mastery of a carefully defined linguistic standard (*le bon usage*) is highly prized, and taken as a precondition for legitimate citizenship.”⁸⁹

At the French *Césars* in 2005, *L’Esquive* was an unexpected winner of four awards,⁹⁰ where the voting public consisted of “artists, actors and filmmakers ... in a position to judge a film's artistic merit,”⁹¹ rather than financiers wielding political or financial power, but in spite of its success, Kechiche failed to attract

⁸⁵ Méla, Vivienne (1997), ‘Verlan 2000,’ *Langues françaises*, 114, Paris; Larousse, pp. 16-34.

⁸⁶ Porton, Richard (2005).

⁸⁷ *ibid.*

⁸⁸ Gadet, Françoise (1997), *Le français ordinaire*.

⁸⁹ Doran, Meredith (2007), ‘Alternative French, Alternative Identities: Situating Language in *la banlieue*,’ *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies*, 11, 4, pp. 498.

⁹⁰ *ibid.*

⁹¹ Porton, Richard (2005).

any major funding from the film and television industries for new projects. He describes “a certain *élite* milieu who own cultural property and who do not wish to relinquish this ownership”⁹² as he berates the funding bodies, not only for their disinterest in the nature of the film’s *banlieue* theme and the community that it portrays, along with their reluctance to consider the experiences of the immigrant communities portrayed, but upon their outright refusal to do so:

Those who have the power are not interested in this population and they are not aware of their needs and desires. All decisions are made in one centralised spot with the same small number of people. It does not seem to be in their interest for things to change.⁹³

This raises the question of *L’Esquive* as an anomaly, in terms of it not meeting the criteria sought by the funding institutions as a film representing France to the domestic audience, as it has “a combination of factors which would seem set to deny it popular appeal,” whilst it also amassed large audiences of more than a quarter of a million spectators at the box office in the first year of its release.⁹⁴

In so far as the scenes of the *cit * adolescents rehearsing for the Marivaux play posit French diversity as heteroglossic, involving the simultaneous existence of unified languages, what the film also seems to propose is the potential for a reactionary reading, that is the film as representative of the threatening or undermining from without, of linguistic and cultural unity. The multiculturalism

⁹² *ibid.*

⁹³ *ibid.*

⁹⁴ Tarr, Carrie (2007), ‘*L’Esquive* (Kechiche, 2004): Reassessing French Popular Culture,’ in Waldron Darren and Vanderschelden Isabelle (eds), *France at the Flicks*, p. 130. Tarr quotes box office figures for *L’Esquive* as 283,578 for the film’s first run.

posited by the film could be viewed as particularly unconstructive, in as much as it is contingent on the actions and utterances of its ethnic characters, rather than its 'French' characters, to the extent that *L'Esquive* perhaps can be read as critical of the French status quo in that it problematises perceived French inabilities to function in an evolving society which does not adhere to established ideas of 'nation' (that is the *French* nation). In this sense *L'Esquive* can perhaps offer a critique of French notions of heteroglossic multiculturalism through its images of minority ethnic characters speaking the traditional French of Marivaux. The juxtaposition of Krimo as a visually encoded 'foreigner,' with the fluently spoken 'French' Lydia, offers a potentially destabilising critique of ideas of national homogeneity which is not in the simple equation of audible language and visible ethnicity, but in the ways in which the film's heteroglossic invocation works to subvert audience expectations. As the film contributes to such problematic ideas of integration within contemporary French culture, it might also, through its discourse, equally help to demystify 'Frenchness' by finding ways of recognising its diversity and heterogenous experiences, in other words, in transcending cultural boundaries and resisting their incorporation into the categories of *immigré* discourse. Any potential here for *L'Esquive* to illustrate social change within the French context could be severely curtailed if French society is increasingly heterogenous, not because of the inherently constructed nature of any idea of unitary national identity or language, but through the representation of urban space and territory in the film which is tied extensively to its perspective of time, in the historical and generational context. However, an important consideration in

the difference between the *beurs* and the ‘whites’ is their relation to the *cit * space which Tarr attributes to the different ways in which the groups relate to ‘Frenchness.’⁹⁵

The ambiguity of *L’Esquive* is that the film shows the integration of a white female into the behaviour and language codes of the *banlieue* and in this sense it offers a more sympathetic understanding of its female characters, as female subjectivities had previously been largely ignored in *beur*-authored and *banlieue* films (which tended to focus on crises of masculinity),⁹⁶ but it also shows that, although born in France and thoroughly modernised, *beurettes* such as Frida and Nanou are still expected to conform to the dictates of a patriarchal society. The small, outdoor rehearsal arena that the young people use is transformed for a short time into a space of verbal and physical combat between Frida and Fathi, when Frida is threatened by the latter into pressurising Lydia to respond to Krimo’s declarations of love, in a scene of suppression embodying the contradictions that burden the female *beurettes*. Lydia also finds herself caught up in a repressive domination of her group of friends by Fathi, because of her involvement, (although it appears to be more of a curiosity on her part), with Krimo, when the girls are ordered into Fathi’s car, driven off to a more secluded area and then obliged to wait tensely in the car until the matter of Lydia and Krimo’s relationship is decided. In other words, until Lydia admits to ‘belonging’ to Krimo, she is forced to stay in the car, entrapped in a (Fathi’s) masculine space, a

⁹⁵ Tarr, Carrie (2005), *Reframing Difference*, p. 21

⁹⁶ Levine, Alison (2008), ‘Mapping Beur Cinema in the New Millennium,’ *Journal of Film and Video*, Fall/Winter, pp. 42-59.

situation to which she reacts with unease and some fear, on this (the only) occasion on which the group cross the boundaries of their social space and during which time they are also stopped and checked by the police, (although, as Kechiche remarks, this is a social reality and a daily occurrence for *banlieusards*).⁹⁷ Within the *huis clos* of indoor locations such as Krimo's apartment, the classroom, the *salle des fêtes*, the cellar, and the stairs of the apartment block, Kechiche redefines the *cit * and, thereby, the significance of space in the construction of identity,⁹⁸ with the action taking place in confined and enclosed spaces, similar to the confines of a theatre space. Out of doors, the rehearsal space that Lydia uses also resembles a small arena, enclosed in turn by the perspective of the high-rise apartment blocks, these 'enclosures' affording a measure of security and protection for the adolescents and further underlining their cultural isolation from the metropolis, whilst mirroring the physical separateness of the *cit * spaces in which they live.

The Authoritative Word

Bakhtin's emphasis on centripetal and centrifugal forces at work within society map closely onto his notions of authoritative and internally persuasive discourse,⁹⁹ in which the tendency to assimilate another's discourse takes on an even deeper and more basic significance in an individual's ideological 'becoming' in the most fundamental sense, as its history is already established:

⁹⁷ Porton, Richard (2005), Marivaux in the 'Hood': an interview with Abdellatif Kechiche, transl. by Dezio, Joanna, *Cineaste*, XXXI, 1, Winter.

⁹⁸ Tarr, Carrie (2005), *Reframing Difference: Beur and banlieue filmmaking in France*, p. 3.

⁹⁹ Bakhtin, Mikhail cited in Morris, Pam (ed), (1994), *The Bakhtin Reader*, p. 78.

The authoritative word is located in a distanced zone, originally connected with a past that is felt to be hierarchically higher. It is, so to speak, the word of the fathers. Its authority was already *acknowledged* in the past. It is a *prior* discourse. It is therefore not a question of choosing it from among other possible discourses that are its equal. It is given in lofty spheres, not those of familiar contact.¹⁰⁰

It functions as internally persuasive because its themes and language are familiar: “half ours and half someone else’s...as one of those creative border zones upon which new meaning is produced, in this case, the self.”¹⁰¹ Such authoritative discourses impose particular meanings and stand in contrast to internally persuasive discourses, which are ways of meaning with which the individual has dialogically engaged in order to develop a newer way to convey meaning.¹⁰² Marivaux’s language is indissolubly fused with authority and as ‘authoritative word’ it emphasises ‘the past’ and its superiority, and represents traditional French culture. Lydia and Krino have a different relationship to the language and traditions of Marivaux in terms of their past/Frenchness which cannot accommodate Krino’s cultural difference of spontaneously creative stylising variants on Marivaux’s language, as the authoritative word: “permits no play with the context framing it, and no play with its borders. One must either totally affirm it or totally reject it.”¹⁰³ Authoritative word is privileged language which is distanced, taboo, and powerful, as opposed to internally-persuasive discourse, which is more akin to retelling a text in one’s own words, with one’s

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*

¹⁰² Bakhtin, Mikhail in Holquist, Michael (ed), (1981), *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, p.346.

¹⁰³ *ibid.*

own accents, gestures and modifications. In Bakhtin's view there is a constant struggle between the two types of discourse, in an attempt to assimilate more into one's own system, and also to simultaneously free one's own discourse from the authoritative word.

Yuri Lotman's cultural semiotics feature his concept of the 'semiosphere,'¹⁰⁴ one of the keystones of which is that everything contained in the memory of culture is directly or indirectly part of that culture's synchrony, hence traditional structures can be said to continue to exist in culture's modern textual expressions as 'over-coding' (or intertextuality). Lotman's 'semiospheric approach,' in addition to interpreting the text as a coherent whole, helps to analyse the position of a text in the semiotic space and its relations with other semiotic structures in culture as a dynamic process, and as an 'open system' which takes its meaning from its relations with other forms and texts.¹⁰⁵ Bakhtin's concepts are extended by Lotman's interpretation of intercultural transfers that highlight questions of national identity and intercultural exchanges in the context of contemporary society.¹⁰⁶ By adopting Lotman's approach, *L'Esquive* and its sub-text of *Le Jeu de l'amour et du hasard* can be related to each other, translated from and into each other, and their identities defined to reveal intertextual links. This intertextuality indicates that various dialogues and negotiations are taking place between texts and their 'authors,' within and between genres, and between different systems of representation and narrative. Umberto Eco also proposes that every text refers back to previous texts, and no text can be read independently of the reader's

¹⁰⁴ Lotman, Yuri (1990), *Universe of the Mind*, p.136-138.

¹⁰⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*

experience of other texts.¹⁰⁷ Intertextual knowledge establishes its own intertextual frames that help to evoke a particular discourse. Peeter Torop takes this one step further and argues that the co-existence of languages in culture, with the constant and simultaneous specialisation and integration of those languages, with the processes of creolisation and different levels of migration and transformation of meanings, shows that culture as a dynamic system is permanently in the state of translation:

Intersemioticity ... brings us closer to the analysis of texts generation in contemporary culture ... A permanent interweaving of ... messages and meanings, takes place in culture. It might be said that culture is a permanent process of intersemiotic translation.¹⁰⁸

In particular, the film can be considered as a ‘re-mediation’¹⁰⁹ of the play, embracing a multilingual, intertextual discourse through the trope of the couple, which refers back to the play, and which cannot be separated from the film spectator’s experience of the older text. The French of Marivaux operates as Bakhtin’s “authoritative word,” imposing the past and its superiority as “the word of the fathers,” whilst creating a tension with the new accents, gestures and modifications in the community language that is the internally persuasive discourse of *L’Esquive*.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Eco, Umberto (1979), *A Theory of Semiotics*, p. 21.

¹⁰⁸ Torop, Peeter (1999), ‘Cultural semiotics and culture, *Sign System Studies*, 27, pp. 9-23.

¹⁰⁹ A term first used by Bolter, David and Grusin, Richard (1999), *Remediation: Understanding New Media*.

¹¹⁰ Bakhtin, Mikhail cited in Morris, Pam (ed), (1994), *The Bakhtin Reader*, p. 78.

From the spectator's point of view, *L'Esquive* reflects a searching for intersubjectivity within contemporary French identity through the adolescent couple's strategies of subjectivity construction. This indicates a shift in multiculturalism which forces the dominant national cinema to speak in a minority dialect and requires more mobile frameworks and a more flexible approach to the decolonisation of French cultural structures in terms of the rethinking of the relations between French subjects and the society in which they find themselves. It is in this sense that *L'Esquive* stands as a paradigmatic example of the tensions within the French debate on film multiculturalism, on the one hand for the ways in which it imagines a kind of multicultural diversity in a closed 'environment' (the *cité*), and on the other hand in the critical divide epitomised between Lydia and Krimo centering on the film's use of language. The prominent use of different styles of French spoken with differing degrees of fluency foregrounds issues pertaining to the broader consideration of how language might function in French multicultural cinema, mainly in the consideration of the relationship between visual and aural elements and the implicit conflating of the visual representation of France's others with the 'foreign' languages that they speak. Through the use of romantic and comedy genre, and by affirming the right of minorities to speak; by deconstructing the dominant narrative; and by critiquing the relations of different sections of French society from the inside, *L'Esquive* presents a new political stance in cinema. Seen from this perspective, what characterises the commentary of the film's proponents is the way in which it subverts both spoken and film language, although the main theme of the film is,

arguably, ‘humanity.’ Lydia and Krimo exist in a society in which intolerance is rife and therefore Kechiche’s film is neither idealist nor utopian, but optimistic, as there is an indication of the perspective to change this situation, through the hybridity of language in the film:

Je pense que ces jeunes vont transformer la langue, l’enrichir, l’empêcher de se figer....Il y aura des auteurs qui écriront dans cette langue. J’espère que cette génération va prendre son envol.¹¹¹

Such observations implicitly highlight the role of the spectator as a contributor to meaning in the film. Therefore, rather than offering on the one hand, a solution to the integration of France’s ethnic minorities, or on the other hand presenting a culturally pessimistic view of a troubled post-national France that is unable to shrug off its postcolonial image, the film highlights the contemporary questioning of identity and the potential problems of adolescents with identity construction. It departs from the ‘traditional’ *cinéma de banlieue* in presenting a positive image of *banlieue* youth by using language as a tool for negotiating and expressing identities which stand outside the binary categories of mainstream French discourse, allowing young adults to define and express themselves through a creative language that mirrors their sense of identity as mixed, evolving, and drawing from multiple cultural and linguistic sources. Bakhtin’s dialogic utterance shows that the film may both contribute to, and be inflected by, continually evolving French social discourse in the *quartiers sensibles*, the inhabitants of

¹¹¹ Fajardo, Isabelle (07/01/2004), ‘Cités dans le texte: Entretien Abdellatif Kechiche et Cécile Ladjali,’ *Télérama*.

which, according to Mireille Rosello, “without being from elsewhere... are in contact with several languages and several cultural zones, in transnational networks,”¹¹² illustrating how hybrid utterances both reinforce and challenge the hegemonic force. The sense of intertextuality that impregnates the whole process of *L'Esquive* and *Le Jeu de l'amour et du hasard* as a ‘coming together,’ is visible within the various perspectives of hybridity and blending, presented with the different textual entities of the play and the film, and realised in quite different spatio-temporal places and conditions and with different frequencies. Both relate to each other in the sharing of similar themes as Kechiche wittily re-mediate *marivaudages* in *L'Esquive*, paralleling modern French culture with the French classics of the past through the Lydia/Krimo narrative and dialogue, so that the film resounds with its own adapted *marivaudages*, which, although not as formal as Marivaux’s phrases, are nonetheless highly stylised and provide a re-evaluation of the term itself with the identities of the play and the film defined through the act of language.

¹¹² Rosello, Mireille (2004), ‘Frontières invisibles autour des banlieues: des ‘déroutiers’ aux ‘soldats perdus de l’Islam,’ *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies*, 8, 2, p. 146.

CHAPTER 6

(Inter)cultural and (trans)national dialogues of loss

Fureur

(Karim Dridi, 2003)

“*Roméo and Juliette* à l’ère socio-ethnique.”¹

Diaspora and Origins

Many contemporary diasporic and migrant filmmakers in France are involved in filmmaking which transcends national confines. Their works, directly reflecting the intensifying, migratory dynamics and the transnational essence of contemporary (and in the case of this thesis, post-2000) French cinema, make it necessary to re-evaluate the clear-cut concepts of belonging and commitment to a national culture. According to Hamid Naficy, diaspora is a collective experience which involves the scattering of populations to places outside the homeland, often as the result of economic migration or displacement.² People in diaspora have an identity in their homelands prior to their departure, and their diasporic identity is constructed in resonance with this identity, from which they maintain a long-term sense of ethnic consciousness and distinctive otherness as;

...diasporic consciousness is horizontal and multi-sited, involving not only the homeland but also the compatriot communities elsewhere. As a result, plurality, multiplicity and hybridity are

¹ Potel, Isabelle (25/05/2004), ‘Fureur,’ *Libération*.

² Naficy, Hamid (2001), *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic*, p. 14.

structured in dominance among the diasporans...³

Karim Dridi, as a French-Tunisian director, can lay claim to a hybridised identity as a diasporic filmmaker.⁴ This would seem to have an important influence on his films, which are mainly concerned with questions of identity, community and belonging. His film *Bye-Bye* (1995), set in Marseille, depicts a multiethnic *banlieue* culture that is (overall), pessimistic about integration⁵ whilst *Pigalle*, (also 1995), has a background of drug-dealing and crime in the ‘red light’ district of Paris, both films representing the *beurs*, although, as Carrie Tarr points out, *Bye-Bye* was not solely concerned with exploring the marginalisation of young *beurs*.⁶ *Cuba Feliz* (2000) explores race and musical heritage in Cuba in a documentary, whereas *Fureur* (2003), set in a Chinatown district in Paris, has a theme of Thai boxing, interwoven with an interracial romance. More recently, Dridi has further expanded his repertoire in terms of genre to make *Khamsa* (2008), a social drama about childhood in a Gypsy camp outside Marseille and *Le Dernier vol* (2009), a 1930s adventure romance which takes place in the Sahara desert between a female pilot and a French army lieutenant. The experience of diaspora (Dridi was born in Tunisia and migrated to France), brings him ‘closer’ to the ‘non-French’ Asian culture he is seeking to represent in *Fureur*, which he

³ *ibid*, p. 14.

⁴ Tarr, Carrie (2007), ‘Maghrebi-French (Beur) Filmmaking in Context,’ *Cineaste*, Winter, 33, 1, p. 32.

⁵ Tarr, Carrie (2005), *Reframing Difference:Beur and banlieu filmmaking in France*, p. 84.

⁶ *ibid*.

describes as: “une histoire d'amour, une histoire de métissage dans une France que je défends et que j'aime.”⁷

The narrative content of *Fureur* and the biography of its filmmaker combine central issues of migration, intercultural relations and transnationalism, and find a context in the themes of love, loneliness and alienation, typical of characters in accented film.⁸ According to Dridi the film shows “en termes physiques, et non pas abstrait ou politique, la question du métissage et des relations intercommunautaires dans les sociétés modernes.”⁹ Whilst *Fureur* is clearly concerned with the multicultural and the diasporic and national identity is constructed significantly through gender in a fusion of Asian and French notions of identity, crucially, the focus is on the way the two cultures are superimposed through the interracial couple and the use of singular, emblematic images that distort normal perceptions of both time and space. The film’s specific location in the thirteenth *arrondissement* of Paris invites the spectator to place the central characters’ quest for romance within wider discourses of national identity, as they find themselves ‘in transit’ between two worlds in liminal spaces of loss. The transition from one space to another, across cultures, is identifiable in the ways in which the characters try to cope with loss through wrathful revenge (the anger or *fureur* of the film’s title). In this chapter the specificity of Frenchness and French cinema is evaluated in order to understand how and why spaces for the

⁷ Anon, ‘Interview with Karim Dridi,’ www.commeaucinema.com/news/karim-dridi, accessed 07/08/2009.

⁸ Naficy, Hamid (2001), *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic*, p. 27.

⁹ Tinazzi, Noël (17/04/2003), ‘Roméo et Juliette à Chinatown,’ *La Tribune Defossés*.

articulation of transnational and multicultural identities arise or are denied received definitions of national identity.

Time-Image

In order to undertake a more in-depth investigation of the nation/gender trope in *Fureur*, a starting point for examining the cinematic processes surrounding ‘the national’ as being engaged with temporal disruption, is Gilles Deleuze’s philosophy of the time-image,¹⁰ developed from, and closely aligned with, Henri Bergson’s work in *Matter and Memory*.¹¹ Deleuze’s work in *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, marks a shift from a cinema that defines itself more directly through time rather than through motion. David Rodowick describes Deleuze’s time-image as:

fluctuat(ing) between actual and virtual, that records or deals with memory, confuses mental and physical time, actual and virtual, and is sometimes marked by incommensurable spatial and temporal links between shots.¹²

Deleuze’s philosophy can be characterised by a dyadic approach which considers both the movement and time of the moving image, to articulate a synthesis of production as a multiple occupancy of time. Rodowick’s interpretation of Deleuze’s work is that two distinct ‘planes of immanence’ are created by the cinemas of the movement-image and the time-image. In the movement-image the spectator does not directly witness the spectacle of time passing, in what

¹⁰ Deleuze, Gilles (1992b), *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*., transl. by Tomlinson, Hugh and Habberjam,, Barbara.

¹¹ Bergson, Henri (2004), *Matter and Memory*, transl. by Paul, Nancy and Palmer, Scott.

¹² Rodowick, David, (1997), *Gilles Deleuze's Time Machine*, pp. 79-118.

Rodowick describes as a classical form of time which is linear and singular,¹³ but this is an edited version of time with the mediating influence of a protagonist's movements, whilst the time-image provides, as David Martin-Jones explains in his work, *Deleuze, Cinema and National Identity*, a direct image of time, which is the passing of time itself, unmediated by the influence of a protagonist's body.¹⁴ Martin-Jones investigates the possibility of examining certain films using Deleuzian concepts, analysing examples from popular genres with specific cultural narratives of identities posited as "disrupted, multiple, jumbled, or reversed" by their narrative construction,¹⁵ which he reads as indicative of the period approximately five years before and after the year 2000 (and therefore relevant to the period studied in the thesis). He expands the understanding of the construction of nationhood in film and explores the complex and often contradictory ways in which time, space and historical memory intersect, identifying a complex cycle of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation, whereby more temporally-oriented, cinematic images are subject to recuperation and codification within their respective national cinemas, particularly in narrative structures which bear a specific relationship to questions of national identity.¹⁶ Using Martin-Jones's view of Deleuze's movement-image and time-image, the chapter will show that *Fureur* is an example of a hybrid film in which the movement-image and time-image co-exist within simultaneous movements of

¹³ *ibid*, p. 22.

¹⁴ Martin-Jones, David (2006), *Deleuze, Cinema and National Identity*, pp. 19-49. Martin-Jones provides a fuller explanation of the historical origins of Deleuze's concepts of Movement-image and Time-image which lie outside the limits of the length of the thesis.

¹⁵ *ibid*, p. 5.

¹⁶ *ibid*.

reterritorialisation and deterritorialisation of narrative time and, with it, national identity.

La Fureur, L'Amour et La Haine

The film is a tragic love story between Chinese immigrant Chinh (Yu Nan), and Raphael ('Rapha') Ramirez, (Samuel Le Bihan), a Frenchman of Spanish heritage; a version of *Romeo and Juliet* "à l'ère socio-ethnique,"¹⁷ in which, as the critic Adrien Gombeaud writes: "l'opposition entre deux cultures (est) transcendée par l'amour."¹⁸ A former professional Thai boxing champion, Rapha gave up his career following the death of his father to manage the family business (a failing car repair centre near the Porte d'Italie), with his younger brother Manu (Yann Tregouet), also a promising boxer. Rapha meets Chinh for the first time at a boxing match but she is already promised in an arranged marriage to Tony Tran (Bounsy Luang Phinith), the son of a wealthy and successful businessman of Chinese-Vietnamese origin. The couple meet in secret against the wishes of their respective families and communities, as Chinh's extended family, who run a restaurant, follow traditional ideals in the marriage of a female family member. Chinh eventually leaves her guardians to cohabit with Rapha, but their relationship is doomed when Tony Tran discovers that Chinh has jilted him. In an angry rage he sets fire to the Ramirez' property and burns down their business and home. Chinh's brother Noi (Samart Payakarun) arrives from China and takes part in illegal martial arts fights in order to earn money whilst he awaits a visa

¹⁷ Potel, Isabelle (25/05/2004), 'Fureur,' *Libération*.

¹⁸ Gombeaud, Adrien (2003), 'Fureur,' *Positif*, May, pp. 55.

promised by Tony Tran, in return for his (Noi's) consent (as male next of kin) to marry Chinh. When the Ramirez' financial situation worsens as a result of the arson attack on their garage, the brothers face bankruptcy. In desperation, Manu Ramirez secretly enters an illegal combat fight, unbeknown to Rapha, in order to win money to pay off the debts (and to prevent Tony Tran from taking over the garage premises and business). Manu is killed by his fight opponent, who, in a twist of fate, is Chinh's brother, Noi. Rapha then becomes intent upon reaping revenge upon Manu's killer and is about to defeat Noi in a deadly combat, fought on the rooftops above Paris, but he finally curtails his rage against Noi to avoid another tragic loss of life and to provide some hope for the future of his relationship with Chinh.

Connotations of Colour

Deleuze describes images in movement as constituting a 'plane of immanence.'¹⁹ He defines two ways of perceiving images, namely through 'liquid perception' and 'objective perception,' the former referring to the metaphorical liquidity of an image, which suggests a likeness to the movement of water, in a rippling and diffusing in all directions as molecular vibrations.²⁰ The filmic shot, according to Deleuze, becomes pure movement where all surfaces are "divided, truncated, decomposed...a multiple perspective, shimmering, sinuous, variable and contractile."²¹ Deleuze takes this image movement a stage further when he suggests that one must go beyond the 'liquid' state to the 'gaseous' state of an

¹⁹ Deleuze, Gilles (1992a), *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, p. 84.

²⁰ *ibid*, p. 23.

²¹ *ibid*.

image perception, in which vibration is ultimately produced, perhaps as a flickering or rhythm which is beyond visual configuration and involves, in terms of the cinematic image, a ‘felt’ experience, a sensation, not based upon semiotics, but on hapticity.²²

In the opening sequences of *Fureur* this sense of undulation is produced through the use of colour, movements and rippling shapes, resulting in a liquidity of the images which is haptical and sensed by the spectator. Later in the film, colour and movement also function as the main modulator of sensation in connection with Chinh’s visits to the Chinese temple and in an unexpected fantasy animation sequence of butterflies which appear to descend from a high-rise apartment block and downwards to where Rapha is walking across a square and squinting up into the sun at the flickering images. The titling sequence at the beginning of the film provides a sensual experience of pastiche images, colours and sounds from both the past and the present. Large areas of the screen are ‘daubed’ with red blocks of colour in the form of Chinese lettering, edited to appear as if they are painted by brush strokes. These patches of primary colour indicate the Chinese culture (the ‘homeland’) as whole and unbroken and thus separated from France and French culture, as the coloured expanses are superimposed on a backdrop of the Parisian skyline. Chinese letters also appear in blue and white, already enforcing, from the outset of the film, the national dominance of China over the *bleu/blanc/rouge* of France’s national colours and suggesting a conflict of power. The expanses of colour then shimmer and provide

²² Kennedy, Barbara (2000), *Deleuze and Cinema: The Aesthetics of Sensation*, p. 114.

movement through the rippling of the letters and shapes, resembling a semi-transparent veil which flutters over the symbolic image of the Paris cityscape at daybreak. This further emphasises the gulf between the two cultures and pre-emptively problematic, cross-cultural encounters which later materialise in the relationship between Rapha and Chinh. The magical combination of colour and movement is accompanied by a rhythmical, oriental soundtrack (composed by Jean-Christophe Camp), mirroring Chinese culture in the Western imaginary. However, this essentialised notion of 'Chinese' (and cultural stereotyping), accentuated by the binary division with French culture, calls for a consideration of the multiple agencies and subjectivities that impact both the cultural production and reading of the film, when considering its cultural translatability, particularly in terms of the 'transnational' and in an exploration of how the film negotiates the various cultural and national boundaries it inevitably crosses.

The opening frames of the film are not solely defined by visual presentation but also evoke a movement of time which accompanies the figure of a mystical, traditionally-dressed, Chinese sage, who performs slow-motion martial arts movements on the flat rooftop of a modern apartment building, high above the more traditional buildings of Paris. The bearded, white-haired figure's presence dominates the land- and skyline and remains an enigma throughout the film, signifying a temporal disruption between old and new Chinese traditions and also indicating a rupture between Chinese and French national cultures that persists throughout the narrative and is played out through the cultural conflicts surrounding the main couple. Paris is delineated here, not as a predominantly

modern space, but as an intersection point for oriental influences, as the dominance and separateness of Chinese culture is established right from the opening, with the Chinese elder exerting a centrifugal role for Chinese culture, holding traditions together and forming a spiritual nexus throughout the film. This is particularly evident in the opening sequences of *Fureur* with the disorientating movement of the 'camera' (the images are computer generated) circling around the figure of the Chinese elder perched on the rooftops. In these frames a background of the sky and dark clouds 'moving' at great speed across the screen indicates a disruption of both time and space in a digital animation sequence that creates the fantasy of the sage symbolically positioned 'on top of' the French city, and not only dominating the French nation, but also, more omnipotently, dominating time and space.

Liminal Spaces

The presence of the Chinese elder also captures the essentially displaced situation of migrant Chinese workers such as Chinh, both within China itself and then in diaspora, in a double displacement from their origins (and a further displacement in the case of Chinh's brother, Noi, who journeyed to France via Thailand). Such migrants existing on the fringes of French society have their 'outsider' status constantly reinforced by the backdrop of an alienating space of the Western, contemporary city, against which, in this film, the romantic couple struggle to articulate their own sense of place and identity, as Chinh falls in love with an outsider to her culture and, as a migrant worker, she lingers in a liminal

space in which she neither belongs to her own country, nor to the French city (a response to the impenetrability of the metropolis).

Hamid Naficy connects the notions of claustrophobia and agoraphobia to the spatiality of transnational film and links the inscription of phobic spaces to the directors' own experience of conditions in their homeland. He describes the use of space by a diasporic director as being "typically claustrophobic,"²³ and defines the style of transnational film as a 'structure of feeling,' which is not a formal concept, but rather a set of personal and social experiences with internal relations and tensions:

The accented film's structure of feeling is deeply rooted within the filmmaker's profound experience of deterritorialization which oscillates between dysphoria and euphoria, celibacy and celebration. These dislocatory feeling structures are powerfully expressed in the accented films chronotopical configuration of the homeland as utopian and open and exile as dystopian and claustrophobic.²⁴

Chinese homeland is simulated within the artificially constructed, enclosed spaces of a dystopian Chinatown, a replica cultural version of 'home,' hidden away in the thirteenth *arrondissement*. Similarly, above ground, the Chinatown location, accessed via a shopping mall, is an artificially-lit space, concealed and entrenched from the view of what is 'outside' and 'foreign'. A Chinese temple, swathed in red and gold and decorated with symbolic cloths and bells, is hidden from the public eye within an indoor Chinatown market:

²³ Naficy, Hamid (2003), 'Independent Transnational Film Genre' in Shohat, Ella and Stam, Robert (eds), *Multiculturalism, Postcoloniality and Transnational Media*, p. 213.

²⁴ Naficy, Hamid (2001), *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic*, p. 26.

L'échec du film se résume à une porte: celle du petit temple du parking des Olympiades. Dans la réalité, elle est en verre, mais Karim Dridi la remplace par un épais rideau rouge. Tout le problème de *Fureur* est là: le cinéaste doit masquer la transparence bien encombrante du vrai Chinatown, pour créer artificiellement le Chinatown caché de son imaginaire. Des idées parfois poétiques, servies par un chef décorateur inspiré, mais qui s'écroulent lorsque l'auteur soulève sa lourde tenture pourpre pour revenir à la réalité.²⁵

What is striking is the excess of the colour red in the *mise en scène*, echoing the patches of colour from the opening sequences and the national iconographic colour of the Chinese dragon (which appears later in the film, leading the Chinese New Year procession), emphasising the authority and dominance of the Chinese culture. The temple space is filled with interior decorations (red strips of cloth) hanging from the low ceilings, which further draws attention to the claustrophobic nature of the space. The difference between the combat area and the temple space is that, although both emphasise containment, the latter is non-threatening. The predominantly red décor and lighting of the temple creates a visual barrier which impedes the spectator's ability to perceive the action inside the temple distinctly, resulting in a distancing and blurring of the image. This is a strategy of transnational film that Naficy describes as utilising "tight physical spaces, shots that impede vision and access, and a lighting scheme that creates a mood of constriction and blocked vision."²⁶ *Fureur* is a film of liminal panic, of "retrenchment in the face of what is perceived to be a foreign...host culture."²⁷

²⁵ Gombeaud, Adrien (2003), '*Fureur*,' *Positif*, May, pp. 55-56.

²⁶ Naficy, Hamid (2003), 'Independent Transnational Film Genre' in Shohat, Ella and Stam, Robert (eds), *Multiculturalism, Postcoloniality and Transnational Media*, p. 213.

²⁷ *ibid*

Dridi engages in a fetishisation of the national dialogue in the cross-cultural narrative in which social codes of different orders are juxtaposed within the romantic couple formation, resulting in the confusion of genre conventions, in particular in the martial arts scenario of the film and the physical domination of the ethnic, male, combat body which, where French cinema is concerned, is historically unconventional. The interstitial spaces of the fetish are constructed through a complexity of meanings which do not relate clearly to the origins of the different characters (Chinese, Thai, Vietnamese and so on). Near the beginning of the film, after the first fight sequence, when Mr Tran and his son Tony, accompanied by Chinh, visit the triumphant Ramirez brothers and their *équipe* below the ringside, following Manu's success in the boxing ring against an opponent sponsored by the Tran family, any sense of unified (Chinese) identity has already been fragmented into the image of Thai, Vietnamese and Hong Kong identities through the film's multiple languages, subtitling and narrative. In spite of the group's diversity, Rapha announces them as *la délégation chinoise*, rather than associating them with multiple identities, which destabilises identities right at the beginning of the film and in particular intensifies the instability of Chinh's identity, as the camera dwells on her in close-up and highlights her submissive gaze with downcast eyes and lack of agency as a subservient, Chinese female. As the film progresses she is shown to be crossing cultural borders and gradually finding agency in her rejection of traditional Chinese cultural values.

Memories and Images

As Rapha follows Chinh through the indoor market and into the calm, mystical atmosphere of the oriental temple, the spectator also enters a different zone of time and space. The diffused lighting and attention to the aesthetics of the temple location interrupt the narrative realism, forcing the spectator to experience another temporality and space, exotic and alien, which is that of the displaced diasporic who inhabits a different space. Saturated with red, the temple is a womb-like, contemplative space where memories are evoked, time slows down and narrative pace is suspended, as Chinh regularly performs acts of remembrance by lighting candles, thereby creating poetic recollections of the homeland. A sensation, in other words, activates forgotten memories. It helps recall not only a sensation from the past but, more importantly, the entire ambience surrounding the sensation. This concept is prominent in *Fureur* and central to the style of the film in which the character Chinh's present reality is seamlessly merged with the memory of her past. Cinematically, Dridi distils the images of time and allows the viewer to sense the physical passage of time through a change of pace, a slowing down which corresponds to the action that takes place within the temple, where the timelessness and stillness, both spatial and psychological, are the central modalities of 'being and time' that the film attempts to capture within the Chinatown location. This style creates temporal 'intervals' that allow for the surfacing of images from Chinh's past memories, taking her beyond the 'actual' (present) world and into a 'virtual' (past memory) world. The temporal disruption is unlike that experienced, for example, in Krzysztof Kieslowski's films, in which

rather more precisely negotiated questions of nation and national identity are raised.²⁸

Deleuze advocates a past and present ‘split’ in the image,²⁹ explained by Rodowick in terms of the time-image oscillating between the ‘virtual’ and the ‘actual,’ achieved, for example, through shots linked by fluctuations or confusions of spatiality and temporality.³⁰ He assigns a form of temporality that accounts for what might be termed the ‘present/past-ness’ of the film image, and which according to Donato Totaro’s analysis of the Deleuzian time-image, is the cornerstone of the time-image and can be described as the ‘crystal-image,’ the virtual image waiting to be ‘recalled’ from the temporal past that “fuses the past-ness of the recorded event with the present-ness of its viewing...an image that is subjective, in the past and recollected.”³¹ As a development of the concept of these past/present images, Deleuze proposes that there are two possible types of time-image;

one grounded in the past, the other in the present....it is the virtual element into which we penetrate to look for the 'pure recollection' which will become actual in a 'recollection-image'.³²

The ‘recollection-image’ functions in *Fureur* as a flashback, which is an allegory of ‘the national’, disrupting Chinh’s agency by foregrounding the past and reterritorialising the lack of subjectivity of the (Chinese) national narrative. In

²⁸ Wilson, Emma (2000), *Memory and Survival: the French cinema of Krzysztof Kieslowski*.

²⁹ Deleuze, Gilles (1992b), *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, p. 55.

³⁰ Rodowick, David (1997), *Gilles Deleuze's Time Machine*, pp.79-118.

³¹ Totaro, Donato (1999), ‘Gilles Deleuze’s Bergsonian Film Project; Part 2: *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*,’ in *Offscreen*, March, p. 1.

³² Deleuze, Gilles (1992b), *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, p. 98.

addition to Chinh's narrative, the latter is realigned in the film through the thematic of global enterprise and capitalism, shown in the characterisation of Asian migrants in their search for economic prosperity in Europe. Naficy notes that the frequent device of using flashbacks to inscribe recollection or reimagination of the homeland is effected by women, who, as the "remembering subjects," are "the dominant agents of such returns-by-memory and of their narratives of empowerment."³³ The presence of Chinh, coupled with the contemplative tone and mood of the scenes in the temple, achieved through the subtle use of sound, colour and slow-motion, indicates the recalling of a memory in a Deleuzian sense. A long camera take creates a continuity of duration in which the presence of Chinh is combined with a shift in depth that allows images of the past and present to co-exist in a single shot. Jacques Aumont implies that cinema allows the spectator to experience different levels of time, such as the passing from the present, to the past, to the future, as *Fureur* illustrates through the agency of Chinh:

...the cinematic apparatus implies not only the passage of time...but also a complex, stratified time in which we move through different levels simultaneously, present, past(s), future(s) - and not only because we use our memory and expectations, but also because, when it emphasises the time in which things take place, their duration, cinema almost allows us to perceive time."³⁴

Alternative views of national identity and new possibilities open up through the disruptive force of the time-image in *Fureur* which, although strongly embedded within definable practices of French cinema culture, negotiate de- and

³³ Naficy, Hamid (2001), *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic*, p. 235.

³⁴ Aumont, Jacques (1997), *The Image*, transl. by Pajackowska, Claire, pp. 129-130.

reterritorialisation in the light of a dominance of Chinese, rather than French identity. As the director states: “It’s a film that is the other way round.”³⁵ However, the mixture of Asian identities in the film and references to an Asian culture as hegemonic, renders the reading of ‘non-French’ identity complex for the spectator and sets the female protagonist, Chinh, (and other Asian characters) apart from French culture, as ‘other.’

Deleuze further links memory and past /present images through depth of field, using the concept of what he terms ‘sheets of past,’ which, as Totaro points out, was originally a Bergsonian concept of a space in which virtual and actual images could cohabit, and from which recollection images (which do not necessarily have to originate from flashbacks) can arise.³⁶ Chinh and the temple are linked through the uninterrupted long take from Rapha’s point of view as observer of the ritual, which transforms the temple into a ‘sheet of past’ of Chinh’s stored memories. In an expansion of the term ‘sheet of past’ Deleuze proposes that each character (in a narrative) may have their own individual ‘sheet of past’ and, furthermore, that these may overlap with others.³⁷ Three separate past histories intersect in *Fureur*, surrounding the troublesome triangular relationship of Rapha, Chinh and Tony. These three protagonists have overlapping sheets of past in the diegesis, with the patriarchal heritage and family honour of both the Ramirez brothers, the Tran family and Chinh’s small family circle, colliding violently in the present and causing conflict and friction which leads to a

³⁵ Anon, www.commeaucinema.com/news/karim-dridi, accessed 07/08/2009.

³⁶ Totaro D., (1999), ‘Gilles Deleuze’s Bergsonian Film Project; Part 2: *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*’, in *Offscreen*, March.

³⁷ Deleuze cited in Totaro, Donato (1999), p. 1.

resulting '*fureur*' from all parties. This escalates into violence which is manifested in the physical acts of Tony's attack on the garage, Chinh's knife attack on Tony in the kitchens, and Rapha's rooftop fight with Noi. In the case of all these 'rages,' the common site of conflict is Chinh.

Fight Spaces

What is apparent is that characters are associated with temporalities and spaces which articulate and constitute multiple aspects of identity through trans-subjectivity. Spaces are delineated for different national histories, with border spaces such as the rooftop linked to *clandestins* and where Chinh secretly meets Rapha, the underground combat areas where the illegal fights take place, and the restaurant kitchens, which strongly suggest an employment outlet for Chinese immigrants. Rapha, who is of Gypsy origin and has roots in music and dance, celebrates after a boxing victory by Manu in a crowded, noisy bar, whilst the Tran family attend a sophisticated night club, the trappings of which mark their business success and participation in global capitalism. By contrast, an alienating, underground, urban decor of fight arenas enhances the climate of violence in the film, the players in this area being predominantly foreigners of mainly Asian descent, transplanted away from home. Spectacular fight scenes take place within enclosed spaces which are heavily guarded and therefore offer little chance of escape. Accessed through dimly-lit tunnels located at the heart of a disused underground rail system, Dridi has utilised this setting for the scenario of illegal combat fights that are diffused live via the internet, with the rings concealed and

sound-proofed, thus providing a gloomy, predominantly dingy enclosure for the activity. The tight framing and extreme angles of the shots of doors and long corridors which mark the access routes to the fights, express and encode the melodrama of the accented action genre.

Rapha, Chinh and the ‘fight couples’ who engage in illegal combats are all delineated by specific boundaries, with Rapha and Chinh meeting in a secret, rooftop, living space (usually occupied by Noi, who is hiding from the authorities), whilst the fights take place behind locked doors and are accessible only through a heavily-guarded labyrinth of tunnels. There are similarities between two types of couples (the romantic liaison of Rapha and Chinh, and the couples forming the fight partners) in that they are both illicit, both suffer adverse consequences and both are doomed. However, Chinh and Rapha also traverse open spaces once Chinh leaves the Chinatown (her homeland) area, suggesting that her split subjectivity mirrors the hybrid and divided nature of the film in terms of de- and reterritorialisation of national identities.³⁸ Significantly, Chinh’s romance takes place in spaces that Marc Augé has described as ‘non-places.’ Augé distinguishes between ‘place’ (marked by history and active in the construction of social life) and ‘non-place’ (in-between spaces where individuals are connected essentially via images and words, and the creation of social life is precluded).³⁹ His examples of non-places include shopping malls, airports and motorways, in other words, ‘transit spaces’ where people pass through and where

³⁸ Martin-Jones, David (2006), *Deleuze, Cinema and National Identity*, p. 139-142.

³⁹ Augé, Marc (1995), *Non-places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*.

there is “a total absence of symbolic ties, and evident social deficits.”⁴⁰ Thus the escalator, the mall and the square, are ‘non-spaces’ where Chinh is in transit between one culture and another. As a consequence, the fact that movement and migration have a complex transformation reflects Chinh’s situation, as Iain Chambers emphasises:

The migrant’s sense of being rootless, of living between worlds, between a lost past and a non-integrated present, is perhaps the most fitting metaphor of this (post)modern condition.⁴¹

Chinh, as a displaced ‘border-crosser,’ without stability and struggling to succeed despite cultural barriers, seems to embody the conflict between old Chinese traditions and contemporary Western values. The film’s focus on her as a migrant, rejected (after her rebuffal of Tony Tran) by her guardians, in the country to which she has emigrated, and also by her native country (as she has gone against traditional marriage customs), could be seen as a projection of a class of ‘other,’ paralleling Dridi’s own position as a diasporic subject to whom the notion of ‘home’ is one of the most salient issues in current dialogues on postcolonialism, diaspora and transnationalism.

There are several occasions in the film when the issue of being ‘sent back’ to the homeland is raised. As Tarr states, in films made by directors of Algerian origin, for example, the struggle for the integration of marginals and their ability to settle in France is depicted by spaces and sounds (both music and language)

⁴⁰ *ibid*, p. 126.

⁴¹ Chambers, Ian (1994), *Migrancy, Culture, Identity*, p. 37.

that are recreated so that the immigrant feels ‘at home,’⁴² and typically, there is an interracial couple used as “an important trope for (their) potential integration,”⁴³ but the films also show that the immigrants’ stay “can be brutally curtailed at any moment.”⁴⁴ Chinh’s guardians refer nostalgically to the homeland when Noi arrives from China (via Thailand). They are also categoric about (and use as a threat) the fact that Chinh will have to return to China, should she disregard cultural (patriarchal) tradition and refuse to marry Tony. Mr. Tran also threatens his disgraced son with return to China when the latter confesses to having avenged Rapha for his relationship with Chinh by arson, when he deliberately burns down the Ramirez’ business and home.

Genre and Diaspora

A comparison might be drawn here between Dridi and the director, Olivier Assayas, whose significantly Asian-influenced films include *Irma Vep* (1996) and *demonlover* (2002). The star image of Maggie Cheung in the title role of Assayas’s *Irma Vep* represents the embodiment of the cosmopolitan woman (both as a character and as a star), who (in Cheung’s case) signifies Hong-Kong as a global identity. The ‘character’ that Cheung plays (she plays herself), in tandem with the film’s copious, self-reflexive references to French cinematic history, prompts viewers to reconsider French national cinema in a global context. In *demonlover*, an elliptically-structured, transcultural espionage thriller (in an English/French/Japanese co-production with a multinational cast), calls for a

⁴² Tarr, Carrie (2005), *Reframing Difference*, p.197.

⁴³ *ibid.*

⁴⁴ *ibid.*

reconsideration of issues such as cultural identity and demands new critical models regarding spectatorship, production, consumption, nationalism, and hybridity in the process of border-crossing. What makes *Fureur* different from Assayas's films is that it is not only the homeland that is the narrative in *Fureur*, but an artificial construct of a rather hegemonic Asia, layered onto a French cinematic production of a contemporary martial arts (and therefore Hollywood-dominated) genre.

Fureur bears some resemblances to Abel Ferrara's American film, *China Girl*, in that the latter is also a modern version of *Romeo and Juliet*, but set in America, in 1980s' Manhattan.⁴⁵ The plot revolves around a relationship developing between a young man from *Little Italy* and a teenage girl from the local *Chinatown*, whilst their elder brothers engage in a heated gang warfare against each other.⁴⁶ In both films dominant images of Chinese women in Western film generally seem to relate allegorically to the relationship of modernity with the nation-state. Through the conventions and narrative of the martial arts genre displaying the heroic, masculinised, ethnic male body, displaced across space and time, the genre is already exiled from its origins, which were Chinese, then Hong Kong cinema, with the latter so successfully emulated by Hollywood from the 1970s onwards that it has now been integrated into Hollywood cinema, conforming to Hollywood's global identity. The martial arts genre is further re-contained here within French cinema, as an exilic body, operating in a space of displacement, separated from mainstream culture. According to Naficy's

⁴⁵ Frodon, Jean-Michel (16/04/2003), 'Fureur', *Le Monde*.

⁴⁶ Ferrara, Abel (1987), *China Girl*. The film has some similarities with *West Side Story* (1961), directed by Jerome Robbins and Robert Wise.

description of this term, in which a narrative and iconography of memory, desire and loss are dominant features, as “sites for intertextual, cross-cultural, and translational struggles over meanings and identities,”⁴⁷ *Fureur* could be viewed as ‘independent transnational cinema’ (Naficy’s term).⁴⁸ Although it has its roots in French cinema, the film is displaced through the director’s diaspora and, in addition, narrates Chinese identity (mainly through Chinh’s performance of remembrance, the combat narrative and the presence of the Chinese sage) “as a finite, limited space inhabited by a tightly coherent and unified community, closed off to other identities besides national identity.”⁴⁹ The ‘nation’ narrative is inextricably linked to gender through the Rapha and Chinh couple as an allegory of national identity conflict. The risk of ascribing a universal value to the Western perspective and of reducing the Chinese narrative to an allegory of Western cultural phenomena is avoided in that the heteronormative romance allegorises not only Chinese diaspora experienced by Chinh, but the complex relations between other diasporic Asian communities and the French ‘nation-state.’ Embedded in the notion of this diasporic dispersal is the concept of a historical and spatial ‘point of origin’, whose notion, although lost in dispersal, implies (theoretically) a potential for recuperation in the future. The diasporic conception of culture is one that arises in tandem with the nation state and its insistence on boundaries.

The tension between the fixity of national boundaries and the dynamic nature of cultural subjectivities underlies the discussion on theories of diaspora, as Arif

⁴⁷ Naficy, Hamid (2003), in Shohat E. and Stam R., (eds.), *Multiculturalism, Postcoloniality and Transnational Media*, p. 205.

⁴⁸ ‘Transnational’ used in this sense is not referring to the funding, economic distribution or marketing of the film, which was French.

⁴⁹ Ezra, Elizabeth and Rowden, Terry (2006), *Transnational Cinema: The Film Reader*, p. 18.

Dirlik argues: “a fundamental contradiction built into diaspora discourse is that, while it seeks to negate the nation, or more strictly, the nation-state, it is itself incomprehensible without reference to the latter.”⁵⁰ Eugène Eoyang argues that no culture can exist outside plurality, national and disciplinary boundary-crossing and interchanges⁵¹ and in this sense, *Fureur* is a transnational film, as it continues to be in the grips of both ‘the old’ and ‘the new,’ a model of intercultural encounter between France and China, operating in a transnational space of romance and combat/action (rather than possessing a global identity typical of the martial arts genre), the locus of a constant exile or displacement, rather than the site of non-hegemonic inclusivity and assimilation of otherness. This transnational discourse is negotiated through images of the past (China’s), which are ‘returning’ images, played out through Chinh’s lack of subjectivity. The attachment of female subjectivity to poetic memory is in stark contrast with the gender politics of the male combat arena. Read from a Western perspective, the film explores the multiple and shifting deployments of the figure of the oriental female and also follows her trajectory as she discovers a new possibility for agency, through her relationship with Rapha and in contrast with her experience of Chinatown. This intense rupture of modernity signals a departure from the personal dimension of political concerns as the function of the figure of Chinh is to consolidate both

⁵⁰ Dirlik Arif, (2004), ‘Intimate others: [private] nations and diasporas in an age of globalization,’ *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, 5, 3, p. 491.

⁵¹ Eoyang, Eugene (1998), ‘Essay 11: Tianya, the ends of the world or the edge of heaven: comparative literature at the fin de siecle,’ *China in a polycentric world: essays in Chinese comparative literature*, edited by Zhang Yingjin, pp. 218-234.

hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourses in a shift towards a refashioning of her identity.

Although Chinh's silence is connected with her chasteness, the character cannot easily be read through the Western gaze as there are multiple discourses at play. Displaced female figures, according to Gina Marchetti,⁵² experience and negotiate displacement, exile and immigration by reinscribing a stable identity in exile. As an exile from her homeland, Chinh's relations with the host society are subject to tensions and create struggles as she inhabits an interstitial space between two extremes. She is torn between respecting her old culture and being liberated by Western values, amongst which are having the freedom to choose a partner. The woman who resists her family's attempts to arrange a marriage and determine her future, is a signifier of the old China, rejecting elements of its national past. When Chinh does have a relationship outside her own culture it has tragic consequences for both herself and Rapha. Within her own culture Chinh's personal (sexual) life is restricted and heavily surveyed. Her future is decided for her, so that all she would need to make her feminine social identity complete is a husband. Because of the constraints, Chinh is unable to meet with Rapha in public and is terrified when he follows her home and takes the lift with her, only to be seen by the guardians when the lift arrives on Chinh's floor. To have romantic freedom would signify choice over her own body actions and this, in the eyes of the old culture, would indicate social instability.

⁵² Marchetti, Gina (2001) 'Transnational Exchanges, Questions of Culture, and Global Cinema: Defining the Dynamics of Changing Relationships,' in Yau Esther, *At Full Speed: Hong Kong Cinema in a Boundless World*, pp. 251-60.

Laura Marks writes that many intercultural works “begin from the inability to speak” and are marked by “silence, absence and hesitation.”⁵³ There is a difficulty in representing cultural memory as there does not exist a language in the country of exile to fully express and understand the diasporic culture. Rapha tries in vain to meet and converse with Chinh but she is confined to silence until in desperation he falls down on his knees in public to address her (in the shopping mall). He succeeds in forcing Chinh to speak, even though her reaction is adverse, however Rapha is jubilant in declaring “*elle parle, elle parle.*” As Rapha walks outside, across a concrete square in the city which is devoid of greenery and nature, superimposed, colourful animated butterflies flit down from a high-rise city building and over his head, in a captivating sequence of movements. He looks up into the sun and through his blinking a sensation is ‘felt’ of the fluidity and tactility of the image sequence, which highlights the beauty of the butterflies and is a reference to the delicateness of Chinh, foregrounding her attachment to nature. The asymmetrical trajectory of the fragile butterflies and their darting pathway of motion is appealing and beautiful to the eye, but confusing to the brain of the (film) spectator because of the complex ‘eye-brain’ activity required to interpret the performing, fluttering, disparate movement pathways onscreen.⁵⁴

In spite of pressure from her guardians, Chinh does not appear to have close family blood-ties (apart from Noi) and thus her future is uncertain in the sense that she is able, to a certain extent, to instigate changes in her life. These changes take place during violent scenes at her place of work (in the kitchen of the guardians’

⁵³ Marks, Laura (2000), *The Skin of the Film*, p. 21.

⁵⁴ Kennedy, Barbara (2000), *Deleuze and Cinema: The Aesthetics of Sensation*, p. 116. Kennedy refers to eye-brain activity and tactility of the image.

restaurant), where she is accosted by Tony, but picks up a large carving knife and threatens him by force to stay away from her. The guardians' reaction is one of anger that she should have rejected her future (chosen) husband and shamed the family. In choosing Rapha as a lover, rather than Tony, who was chosen for her, Chinh has not upheld Chinese tradition and honour and is immediately ordered to pack her bags and leave. She arrives at the Ramirez' domicile destitute and an outcast, only to find that Rapha has also suffered loss because of his romantic involvement with her, as Tony has destroyed the Ramirez' business in an arson attack and the brothers are salvaging property from the ruins. Chinh's inner conflict, her split subjectivity, alienates her from the present. She is overwhelmed with reminders of her national roots, her culture and attachments to her native land. However, what foregrounds the reterritorialisation of the national narrative of the past is Chinh's performance of national identity in the present, the clichéd inevitability (that is, the havoc that her presence wreaks), dominating the narrative and preventing a deterritorialisation of the national past.

Chinese diaspora is integral and contained within the Chinatown location, the limits of which the protagonists enter and leave. The delineation of outside and inside this cultural space as two separate worlds indicates that they are clearly nationalised and ethnicised. However, not all the Chinese immigrants in the film are represented as unemployed, living in poor conditions and existing on the borders of society. Tony's father, Mr Tran, runs a large meat factory which is more economically viable than the Ramirez's failing garage business. Scenes inside the factory indicate a highly organised enterprise with Mr Tran in a position

of authority and directing a considerable workforce. The Tran family would therefore seem to be in a more prosperous position and higher up the French economic hierarchy than the Spanish immigrants, so much so that Tony Tran offers to buy the Ramirez business. Rapha refuses this proposition and his decision leads to Manu taking part in the fatal combat for financial reasons. The Ramirez heritage is expressed as a paternal, patriarchal influence through the photograph of the late Mr. Ramirez which dominates the living space of the garage property and whose influence is destroyed in the fire started by Tony. Rapha and Tony, rivals in love, are linked by the friendship and fraternity of their fathers and the different relationship their fathers had with the State because of their place in French society. However, as the drama of the traumatised and dysfunctional nuclear families unfolds, the family structure is shifted from its basis of descent and blood-ties to matters of contract, and the family becomes the site of a struggle for personal and national territory.

Images of the scenes of the illegal fights in which Noi and Manu participate are relayed across the world via the internet, from the ringside, a reference to new media apparatus disturbing what Naficy describes as “the essentiality of belonging to a nation.”⁵⁵ In terms of a cinema that includes references to a virtual community as the site of representation, in *Fureur* the illegal martial arts combat ring is filmed on the internet and the cyberspace community created in this genre of mediation disturbs the territorial imperatives of nationalist experience, in terms of the essentiality of ‘being and belonging’ to a nation, in a diasporic experience

⁵⁵ Naficy Hamid, ed., (1999); *Home, Exile, Homeland*, p. viii.

through Western narrative traditions as the mode for national temporality. The distribution of information and scenes of the fights reaches beyond ‘the national’ as it travels outside the boundaries of France, although as cyberspace it shares “the essential temporal structure of the modern nation-form”⁵⁶ and therefore, there is diaspora and deterritorialisation of the imagined (cyber) community of illegal fighters and fight-goers, which Naficy terms “technodiaspora.”⁵⁷ New technologies have resulted in a different diasporic identity for these ‘communities,’ as the development of electronic media and faster and more accessible modes of communication have meant, as Naficy states, that the notions of the ‘global village’ encompass new meanings.⁵⁸

According to Deleuze, the difference between American Hollywood cinema and European cinema is that the former is associated with action-image and the latter, the time-image. Both are found in *Fureur* by virtue of the Hong Kong cinema legacy and also the Chinese identity issue in connection with Chinh. As Martin-Jones points out, hybrid films are a mix of cinematic styles derived from the separate styles of Hollywood and various global national cinemas, however, the separate styles individually target a certain audience and therefore, styles that were once quite separate and that are now crossing over, meet different and mixed audiences’ expectations, resulting in niche productions which have a different relationship to national identity.⁵⁹ It is into this category that *Fureur* falls, for although it is consistent in its thematic appeal as a French film, the manner in

⁵⁶ *ibid.*

⁵⁷ *ibid.*

⁵⁸ Fazal, Shehina (2002), ‘Diasporic Communication: Transnational Cultural Practices and Communicative Spaces,’ *Javnost – The Public*, 5,9,1, pp. 5-18.

⁵⁹ Martin-Jones, David (2006), *Deleuze, Cinema and National Identity*, p. 8.

which it constructs Chinese national identity is by territorialising dominant myths through Chih's narrative on the one hand, but confusing the issue by deterritorialising Asian identity on the other hand, through generic conventions of martial arts cinema, the latter being further complicated through its appropriation by Hollywood cinema. The film may therefore only appeal to a niche demographic of the French national audience.⁶⁰

The interference of the martial arts genre in the film is confusing and sits awkwardly between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourses. The boundary between *Fureur* as critically questioning national identity from a transnational and multicultural perspective, and being a global commercial intention is clear-cut, as the film does not meet global audience expectations, particularly in terms of falling into the action genre. By focusing on national identity, the historical context of individual cinemas within the film (that is, Chinese, Hong Kong, Hollywood and French) becomes visible and the dominance of the Chinese past is confirmed through the time-image. *Fureur* appropriates conventions of Asian film, however, and mixtures and movement of time are a tendency away from "French cinema" and towards a hybrid cinema in which cultural memory is grafted onto the image through style, in the use of colour and haptical images and through the time-image. In some respects *Fureur* may be considered as having a hybrid identity composed of both past and present places and a mixture of genres.

The diverse spaces that the characters occupy, from the stifling closeness of the Chinatown environment and the underground arenas, to the urban outside spaces

⁶⁰ Tarr, Carrie (2005), *Reframing Difference*, p. 218. Box Office figures (Paris availability only), 16, 865.

of the square and the rooftops, reflect the diversity of the position that Dridi as a filmmaker of Franco-Maghrebi descent has come to occupy within French national cinema, exploring a genre outside his own personal experience and community. The spectator is left with an intangible yet optimistic feeling that the characters will find a way to transcend the spatial limitations placed upon them. The *dénouement* seems to suggest that the characters will eventually succeed in functioning as agents of a transcultural network, in inhabiting a new space beyond the confines of the film, as in the final scenes which take place in the liminal space of the rooftops above Paris, Rapha controls his '*fureur*' in order to avoid killing Noi in revenge for Manu's death, and in doing so he also avoids losing Chinh, with whom he can build a future in an optimistic outcome for the interracial couple, whose relationship is saved even though their families have suffered such tragic losses.

CHAPTER 7

Migrants and memories

Inch'Allah dimanche

(Yamina Benguigui, 2001)

“*C’était mon histoire*”¹

The Refusal of History

Post World War II immigrants in France were primarily single, male workers recruited from the former colonies and particularly from Algeria, on a temporary basis, as unskilled labour. In 1974, the French government decided to halt the temporary immigration for the purposes of work and to allow the *regroupement familial*.² A generation of native Algerian women, mostly young mothers with children, were shipped over to France in this wave of immigration which transformed the Maghrebi community in France from a group of primarily single males, to families whose children and future grandchildren would eventually gain French nationality in large numbers. Children born to these immigrants found themselves in a unique cultural situation, being French by birth and external environment and North African by heritage and family ties. The immigrant males who came to France in the hope of improving their socio-economic status maintained strong ties with the Maghreb, however their planned economically successful return to the homeland was slowly abandoned by many, due to economic and political troubles in the Maghreb and their children’s insertion into

¹ Benguigui, Yamina (2001), *Inch'Allah dimanche*, Film Movement Series, DVD, Director’s commentary.

² The 1974 law giving wives the legal right to take up permanent residence in France and join their husbands who had already moved to France to work.

French society (including their participation in the education system), and they remained resident in France. Yamina Benguigui was born to Algerian immigrant parents who settled in France in the 1950s, before the *regroupement familial*. As a film-maker she has dedicated many of her works to the subject of Maghrebi immigration in France with which she identifies: “J’appartiens à l’immigration,”³ producing both documentary and fiction films since 1994. *Inch’Allah dimanche* is based on her mother’s experiences of immigration and on the struggles for autonomy that Algerian women immigrants suffered as they attempted to integrate into French society: “As the daughter of immigrants...I wanted to capture this memory, and to work with memory.”⁴

In creating the main narrative around the drama of adjustment of an Algerian couple and with particular focus on the displaced female migrant, Benguigui follows the precedent of two other female, Algerian filmmakers, Rachida Krim and Zaïda Ghorab-Volta, both of whom produced films at the end of the 1990s depicting the problematic identities of Maghrebi females. *Souviens-toi de moi*,⁵ a *banlieue* film with female protagonists, is autobiographical, with the presence of the director in the lead role, whilst *Sous les pieds des femmes*⁶ (set in the South of France) is a family drama about a well-integrated Maghrebi family who speak the French language (rather than Arabic) and whose daughter is married to a (white) Frenchman. *Inch’Allah dimanche*, which received twenty-seven awards in both

³ Bouzet, Ange-Dominique (05/12/2001), ‘Sur la vie de ma mère,’ *Libération*.

⁴ Benguigui, Yamina (2001), *Inch’Allah dimanche*, Film Movement Series, DVD, Director’s commentary.

⁵ Ghorab-Volta, Zaïda (1996), *Souviens-toi de moi*

⁶ Krim, Rachida (1997), *Sous les pieds des femmes*.

French and International Festivals,⁷ is an account of the immigration experience of a young Algerian mother, Zouina (Fejria Deliba), who arrives in the town of St. Quentin in northern France to join her husband Ahmed (Zinedine Soualem). Through Zouina and Ahmed the film documents a largely true account of the 1970s' immigration and integration into France, and reflects the challenges faced by ethnic minorities wishing to maintain their authenticity and negotiate their own, traditional heritage in a dominant host society. Zouina sails from Algeria to France in the company of her three small children and her mother-in-law, Aïcha (Rabia Mokeddem), then travels to Picardy to join Ahmed, who has worked in France for ten years without having his family with him. The film portrays Zouina and Ahmed as a couple from a traditional Eastern culture caught up in the difficulties of integration into Western society, both as a married couple and also in terms of their individual gender identities.

The drama shaped and constructed in the film is, firstly, a narrative of Western versus Eastern family values and inter-generational conflicts, and secondly, a deconstruction of identities of both French and Maghrebi cultures that ultimately redefines contemporary French society as a hybrid, complex space. The film serves as the transmission of a record to a lost, first-generation of Maghrebis who arrived with little knowledge of the culture and language of the country to which

⁷ *Inch'Allah dimanche* won the following awards: Special Jury Prize at the Amiens International Film Festival, OCIC Award and Prize of the City of Amiens (2001), Bordeaux International Festival of Women in Cinema, Audience Award and Golden Wave (2001), Cairo International Film Festival, Golden Pyramid (2001), International Film Festival of Marrakesh, Golden Star (2001), Toronto International Film Festival, International Critics' Award (FIPRESCI) (2001), official selection at the Film Society of the Lincoln Centre's 'Rendezvous with French Cinema' series, New York.

they had emigrated. It is also a transmission of memories of the personal (displaced) experience of women, many of whom were of Benguigui's mother's generation, including members of the cast of the film who had experienced the *regroupment familial* first-hand as young immigrants in the 1970s. Some had also experienced the cruel treatment young Algerian wives were subjected to by their husbands, who were often at breaking point due to the socially-deprived conditions in which they lived and worked in France. The plight of the immigrant labourer is described by Benguigui as:

...une vie de paria à l'intérieur de la société française: ils travaillaient...mais ils n'étaient pas acceptés. Ils touchaient des salaires de misère, ...ils n'avaient que des modèles d'autorité brutale, ne pouvions pas appréhender une vie de famille à la française. Mais la vie à la maghrébine, où il y a toujours de monde, de parents, de voisins, où les femmes vivent en groupe, ne pouvait pas non plus se reconstituer.⁸

Benguigui's personal commentary on the film is revealing, as she describes it as the hidden story of her own heritage, which was that of a first generation immigrant brought up in a culture of silence and shame:

France didn't recognize us or talk about us; the countries which we came from didn't talk about us and knew nothing about us; and our parents were silent, told us nothing. ... I realised that in France we had this first generation, this first wave of immigrants, who were slowly

⁸ Bouzet, Ange-Dominique (05/12/2001), 'Sur la vie de ma mère,' *Libération*.

dying out and vanishing, and it was important for me to stop and capture them, to transcribe their experiences.⁹

The film is about an exile in France that the director has seen and inhabited through her mother's experiences, but rather than seeking to analyse exile as such, the film generates emotional power, impact and an insight into that exile through its specific historicity. Although cultural otherness and ethnic tensions are common themes of contemporary diasporic cinema, the chapter shows that *Inch'Allah dimanche* marks a powerful challenge to the thematic of 'otherness', as Benguigui's role as film director is blurred with the reality of the narrative, pinpointing a particular historical moment in the director's family history.

Rosi Braidotti's work in *Nomadic Subjects* reflects the existential situation of a multicultural individual and proposes the notion of nomadic identity.¹⁰ Her figuration of the nomad is a political fiction as well as a critical consciousness, an attempt "to explore and legitimate political agency, while taking as historical evidence the decline of metaphysically fixed, steady identities."¹¹ For Braidotti, nomadism entails a constant state of 'in-process' or 'becoming,' which she refers to as "as-if".¹² Her work introduces post-colonial thinking into feminist theory and provides fluid foundations for a post-humanist view of subjectivity. Gendered space in *Inch'Allah dimanche* and the problematics of the integration of the couple in terms of race and identity, are negotiated directly with the female (not

⁹Alexander Livia (2002), 'French-Algerian: A Story of Immigrants and Identity,' *Satya*, www.satyamag.com/may02/alexander, accessed 03/03/2009.

¹⁰ Braidotti, Rosi (1994), *Nomadic Subjects*.

¹¹ *ibid*, p.5.

¹² *ibid*, pp. 6-7.

the male) as a trope for integration, demonstrating an ‘in-between’ nomadic identity that is not fixed but is floating and mobile. As the site of a mesh of multiple connections, the nomad demonstrates an acute awareness of the non-fixity of boundaries. In the case of Zouina this facilitates the female’s integration into an alien society, as “she easily make links with inhabitants of the hegemonic culture in which she arrives.”¹³ This allows for possibilities of new models of subjectivities. The chapter reflects upon these possibilities and the limitations of using Braidotti’s notions of nomadism as a rhizomatic model of thinking about and theorising contemporary diasporic, female subjectivities. The narratives of transition and movement surrounding young female immigrants such as Zouina provide a space for nomadism to emerge as a theoretical plane for making connections.

Point de départ

As the title of the film suggests, there is a conflict between two cultures in terms of references to diaspora and nation within the cultural domain and although the system of representations in the film is articulated around traditional dichotomies of East and West, and self and other, the film points to the historical role of migrancy to the French nation and redefines new spaces of identification in terms of immigrant integration. In particular, in the development of female autonomy, public spaces are constructed and structured through intercultural encounters of affection and emotion, exchanges and family dynamics.

¹³ *ibid.*

The opening sequences of the film are the harrowing scenes of farewell between Zouina and her elderly mother at the docks in Algiers. This *point de départ* signals the point or moment for Zouina at which there is a change of identity, in this case a loss of identity, when the relationship with her homeland is forcibly renegotiated. Bullied by her mother-in-law Aïcha (Rabia Mokeddem) she is forced up the gang-plank onto the awaiting boat and through customs, whilst her own mother screams and laments her departure from behind a barrier on the docks. The scene is highly charged with emotion for there is no likelihood of return to the homeland for exiles such as Zouina and her children. Weighed down with baggage and suitcases, she is a nomad, a subaltern, and a woman in transit, evidence of a dominant historical discourse and its highly gendered trope of cultural immigration. As subalterns, women such as Zouina have no voice, or as Gayatri Spivak states, “they cannot speak.”¹⁴ Women who emigrated to France as part of the *regroupement familial* were mainly wives of unskilled workers, often uneducated and from rural backgrounds. Upon their arrival they remained at the margins of French society, if only because of their lack of French language skills with the majority participating only in the private sphere, staying at home and taking care of their children, whilst covering themselves with the hijab whenever they went out in public. This unwittingly helped to maintain the persistent image of the subordinate and subservient Maghrebi wife and mother, only visible in

¹⁴ Spivak, Gayatri (1994), ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ in Williams, Patrick and Chrisman, Laura (eds), *Colonial Discourse/ Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, pp. 66-111.

French society primarily through her victimisation, absence, and double subordination to her husband (or other males in the culturally patriarchal household), and to French society, which remained uneasy about allowing the wives and families of Algerian immigrant workers to join their husbands and live in France, a policy which ultimately produced profound changes for French society, the impact of which is still evolving. For the wives who were in the first wave to come to France under this new policy, the transition to their new life was particularly difficult as most of them came from rural areas where they led very traditional lives with an extended support network (particularly important in the absence of their husbands).

In France the new arrivals were scattered, isolated, without friends, often depressed and caught between two worlds. Women like Zouina, that is, young mothers aged between eighteen and twenty-five, arrived from North Africa unprepared for entry into a Western society. They also arrived at a time of great change for women in France in terms of the feminism movement which was entering a new phase, with debates on women's rights to abortion, contraception and divorce. The communities in which Algerians and their families lived in their own country were organised very differently from the nuclear French family. Maghrebi families, as Camille LaCoste-Dujardin points out, are founded on a collective ideology which is not compatible with French society.¹⁵

Following Zouina's arrival, the reunion between husband and wife is unemotional as Ahmed proffers only a perfunctory embrace, utters no verbal

¹⁵ LaCoste-Dujardin, Camille (2000), 'Maghrebi Families in France', in Tarr, Carrie and Freedman, Jane, (2000), *Women Immigration and Identities*, pp. 57-68.

greeting and then ignores Zouina in favour of his mother and the children. She and the family are transported to the suburbs in a delivery van, driven by Ahmed's friend who has decided against the *regroupement familial* as being too traumatic a change, and instead has chosen to stay in France living in a hostel and sending his salary home to the family who will remain in Algeria. Ahmed begs his friend to come into the house and socialise with his newly-arrived family, but the friend declines in spite of Ahmed's pleas, leaving the latter insecure and unsure of himself as a (reinstated) head of family. The gap in living standards between the family's former, impoverished, rural existence in Algeria and their new lifestyle in the suburbs of St. Quentin is evident, as the family are framed in the doorway of the living room looking in, in awed silence. Only Aïcha speaks, to compliment her son on having a house 'like a palace', referring to its space, even though the rooms are almost unfurnished. Aïcha unpacks a suitcase containing only her sheepskin rug, symbolic of their transitory state and rural roots, whilst Zouina sits on a mattress alone in her bedroom, overcome with longing for the homeland which she evokes through touching her few belongings from Algeria, including a wallet containing her mother's picture. Finding herself away from the female support system she has been used to in her native country, she cries uncontrollably whilst Ahmed listens and remains immobile outside the bedroom door.

As Benguigui explains, the shot of Ahmed framed outside the door and unable to react to his wife's sobbing is significant in that it denotes a cultural practice in which the Maghrebi male should not show any emotional weakness.¹⁶ Ahmed is

¹⁶ Benguigui, Yamina (2001), *Inch'Allah dimanche*, Film Movement Series DVD, director's commentary.

culturally 'forbidden' to react to Zouina's plight and is unable to offer her any comfort. He abides by the culture of subordinating his epouse and confides the keys to the provisions cupboard to Aïcha rather than to Zouina, negating her subjectivity and confining her to a subservient role, which requires her to have to ask permission to access comestibles such as coffee and sugar, as well as being forbidden to leave the house, until eventually Ahmed sends her to the local shop on her own to buy provisions, as Aïcha only speaks Arabic. Ahmed's dominant power has already been eroded in French society by his role as an Algerian immigrant worker and a Muslim and as such he occupies a doubly marginalised position. Subsequently he finds difficulty in assuming authority apart from through physical and violent means. However, his (and Aïcha's) dominance through ethnic cultural tradition is subverted by Zouina's attempts to construct an identity of her own and to achieve some sort of compromise from Ahmed so that she is able to integrate.

The narrative vehicle of the story, and the source of the dual nature and juxtaposition of French and Maghrebi cultures in the title of the film, is Ahmed's decision to purchase a sheep to celebrate the festival of Eid at the end of Ramadan. He and his mother regularly go to check on the sheep's condition on Sunday afternoons, which gives Zouina some respite and a chance to develop some independence and knowledge of the outside world by risking trips outside her domestic confinement. Without Ahmed's knowledge she traces a young Algerian mother who lives in the same town and once Ahmed and Aïcha have left the house, goes with her children in search of her compatriot, Malika (Amina

Annabi), pursuing a dream of female friendship, shared conversations and social contact with a fellow Algerian, a link with her own culture that she has been so far denied but Malika rejects Zouina as not conforming to the strict traditions of their Algerian culture as she has left the house unaccompanied by her husband. When Malika asks her to leave immediately, in a violent act of desperation and abandonment, Zouina harms herself by punching her arm through Malika's window, creating a spectacle of them both in the (French) public eye. This reaction seems to release tension and Zouina then subverts cultural traditions by daring to board public transport on her own, which is a taboo in her own culture. The sympathetic bus driver empties the bus for her and she is taken on a tour of the area and finally dropped off outside her house, where a delegation (composed of Ahmed, Aïcha, and the neighbours) awaits her. Here, when confronted by Ahmed, Zouina returns the gaze of her husband and he speaks her name for the first time in the film, acknowledging her identity and subjectivity, and elevating her status above that of his mother, for the first time.

It is Zouina who utters the last lines in the film to affirm that is she who will undertake the daily journey to school with the children, which signals her empowerment in not only developing her own sense of identity but also her childrens'. This is Zouina's rebellion against Ahmed's lack of willingness to allow her any independence which might aid her integration, the denial of any form of which originates from the misconception amongst Maghrebi immigrants of this epoch that they were always going to 'go home':

These immigrants never saw themselves as becoming a permanent part of French society; they were always there for a finite period of time and would go back to Algeria. So children weren't supposed to integrate; they were supposed to leave, but they never did.¹⁷

This interstitial existence in between the two cultures results in a split subjectivity and, as Naficy writes, 'children of exile' may take time to adjust to a new identity "by which time their return may be deferred for ever."¹⁸ Benguigui describes this split that her own generation lived, as 'schizophrenic', through following Islamic traditions at home and learning about 'the world' at school.¹⁹

Filming the Past

Prior to making *Inch'Allah dimanche*, Benguigui directed *Mémoires d'immigrés: l'héritage maghrébin*,²⁰ a documentary tracing three generations of Maghrebi immigrants, firstly men from North Africa recruited to work in French factories in the 1950s and the 1960s; secondly women of the age of Benguigui's mother who arrived in the 1970s to join their husbands already there; and thirdly, children like Benguigui herself who were subsequently born in France and found themselves 'between' cultures. *Mémoires d'immigrés* and *Inch'Allah dimanche* are productively linked as both explore how the cinematic apparatus can construct

¹⁷ Alexander, Livia (2002), 'French-Algerian: A Story of Immigrants and Identity,' *Satya*, www.satyamag.com/may02/alexander.

¹⁸ Naficy, Hamid (2001), *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking*, p. 236.

¹⁹ Dupont, Joan (1998), 'Seeking an Identity in the Immigrant's Silence,' <http://www.iht.com/articles/1998/03/31/yam.t.php>, accessed 23/03/2009.

²⁰ Benguigui, Yamina (1997), *Mémoires d'immigrés*. The documentary was the result of 350 interviews conducted with Maghrebin immigrants across France. After a two year period of preparation and nine months of editing it was first shown in May 1997 on Canal+, then re-broadcast the following month and shown in cinemas the following January, 1998.

coherent, historical narratives, binding otherwise heterogeneous diasporic populations through the immigrant experience. Whilst the former is a direct testimonial of events, the latter is a unique viewpoint from the voice of its director as second generation Franco-Maghrebi, who reveals the fractured nature of memory and undertakes a historiography of diaspora through her film which, although fictional, is simultaneously tasked with cultural production. In terms of style, as Maryse Fauvel points out, the film follows “traditional French cinema aesthetics.”²¹ Rather than being filmed with a hand-held camera with emphasis on close-ups, typical of the style of *banlieue* and *beur* films (as for example in *L'Esquive*), the filming is more traditional and the continuity of the editing follows classic techniques. The camera shots closely match the thematics of imprisonment and escape, which in terms of semiotic references link Zouina to inside/outside and self/other, the (mainly) medium close-up shots of her suburban house and garden contrasting with distance shots of the more expansive views in the cemetery and beetroot fields where she ventures. In terms of genre, the film is a hybrid of both comedy and melodrama as well as fantasy (the latter is evident only in a brief, but significant sequence) and it could also be classed as pseudo-documentary in the sense that the fictional narrative of immigration experience of the Algerian couple (characters) in the film is derived from a specific historiography.

²¹ Fauvel, Maryse (2004), ‘Yamina Benguigui’s *Inch’Allah dimanche*: unveiling hybrid identities’, in *Studies in French Cinema*, 4, 2, pp. 147-157.

Ahmed

Ahmed typifies Algerian men who came from rural areas and worked in very difficult conditions in France, which, as Benguigui documents in *Memoires d'immigrés*, gave rise to a situation that was never talked about or discussed subsequent to the arrival of the families. They undertook the most menial, underpaid work, estranged from their wives, children and relatives, often living in hostels. These conditions and their plight were kept silent and were a taboo subject for Algerian families because of the shame of the revelations that the conditions under which they worked were unacceptable. This denial and the fact that there was no public discussion about their plight was as if the mens' suffering was erased from history.²² The opening scenes of *Memoires d'immigrés* show Maghrebi men in the outer suburbs of Paris making their way from their hostels to work in the French automobile industry factories. In an interview with Joan Dupont, Benguigui describes this 'imported' workforce as the "sacrificed generation,"²³ a generation that was 'lost', in the sense that these immigrants had had no education and social integration, which, according to Benguigui, explains their frustration and subsequent domestic violence. They were without authority, doubly outcast through their immigrant status and their marginal existence and often only able to manage their families, and uphold their authority and their honour, through acts of violence. Female witnesses also testify to this in

²² Alexander, Livia (2002), 'French-Algerian: A Story of Immigrants and Identity,' *Satya*, www.satyamag.com/may02/alexander, accessed 03/03/2009.

²³ Dupont, Joan (1998), 'Seeking an Identity in the Immigrant's Silence,' <http://www.iht.com/articles/1998/03/31/yam.t.php>, accessed 23/03/2009.

Memoires d'immigrés and Benguigui' refers to the domestic plight of the young Algerian wives in her discourse on the making of *Inch'Allah dimanche*.²⁴

Ahmed has no screenplay outside the setting of the house and the immediate street, although it is he who is the 'official' contact with the outside world in terms of dealing with, for example, visits from the police and the door-to-door salesman. He goes off to work every day and it is he who walks the children to school (until the final scenes, when Zouina asserts that she will undertake that role). He has no reference in the absence of a Father or elder, so that he has to bear responsibility for all matters, which he does with difficulty and in silence, his insecurity and lack of authority in evidence when dealing with white males such as the policeman and the salesman. Ahmed is a man who is *mal dans sa peau*, trapped in the received roles that he feels bound to play culturally, namely the devoted son, strict father and dominant husband. In fact he is a weak man, conscious of his second-class status in France as a pariah, unable to demonstrate any emotion towards his wife, nor to support her in the face of his mother's constant criticism and only occasionally able to express his feelings (which he does when he plays the guitar for his children). Consequently, within the family dynamics of the couple, it is the silence of the male, the lack of verbal communication between Zouina and Ahmed and the transference of patriarchal power to the mother-in-law, Aïcha, that marks the difference between East and West cultures. Ahmed is restricted in the activities he undertakes in order not to

²⁴ Benguigui, (2001), *Inch'Allah dimanche*, Film Movement Series, DVD, Director's commentary..

appear inferior in front of his family as he lacks education. His attempts at assimilation are demonstrated by his sessions of playing music, when he adopts the activity of guitar-playing and renders a self-taught, Western (cowboy) film tune, the guitar itself functioning as a symbol of American popular culture. Ahmed also follows a trajectory as he experiences raising a family in France, sending his children to be schooled in French education and cultural practices and, finally, in the closing sequences of the film, subverting Aïcha's matriarchal domination and compromising his male authority in the couple to allow a new relationship to start to develop between himself and his wife. It is Ahmed who endorses the change in response to Zouina's resistance and through recognising her need to integrate, he is ultimately freeing their children to integrate and have a future within French society. Indeed, the film depicts the children going to school dressed in uniforms that will align them with French children. Being educated alongside the indigeneous French population it is they who, unlike their parents who have experienced exclusion from mainstream culture, will benefit from their state education in terms of integration, insertion and assimilation into their adopted culture.

Women's Circles

The plight of Zouina more closely resembles that of the lead character Mimouna in *Souviens-toi de moi*, as both characters follow a very similar pattern of forging links with the indigenous population of females in order to further their

integration; however Zouina's migratory status is brought about as a result of a specific historical and political moment. As Braidotti states:

It is as if the diaspora had been defeated. It is as if France has chosen amnesia and oblivion; the negation of its own history, a sort of closed chapter which I would like to reopen with the postnationalism that is, for me, a critique of state racism. Why is it that no-one talks about it anymore, if this is where modern France comes from? ²⁵

When Zouina arrives in France as an immigrant and an outsider in French society, her identity as a wife within the traditions of her own culture, as an Algerian citizen, and as her mother's daughter, has either been taken away or denied her. The absence of a supportive network of a same-sex framework within which she will perform gender-based tasks normally allocated to women, is lacking, and instead Zouina learns about French women and their lives from the medium of the radio to which she subversively listens when she is alone in the kitchen. Algerian women who went to France in the 1970s had little or no schooling, often came from impoverished, rural societies (such as shepherd families) and were forced to follow and obey their mothers and mother-in-laws according to rural traditions. Zouina is from this traditional society and would have come from a social structure surrounded and supported by friends and family in her own area, whereas in France she finds herself 'imprisoned,' until she begins to find sympathetic contacts amongst a range of French women.

²⁵ Braidotti, Rosi (2002), *'Europe does not make us dream'*, An interview with Rosi Braidotti by Rutvica Andrijašević, www.translate.eipcp.net, accessed 13/03/2010.

Zouina is befriended by her young, feminist neighbour Nicole Briat (Mathilde Seigner) and also by Madame Manant (Marie-France Pisier), a widow whose husband was killed in the Algerian War, but she is constantly dominated and surveyed by Ahmed and Aïcha and unable to interact with them and reciprocate their hospitality as she would wish. But what Zouina does have in common with Nicole and Madame Manant, along with the other female characters in the film, (both ethnic and white), is that they are all, in a sense, through different subject positions, undergoing a search for survival. Madame Manant has to cope with the loss of her husband in the Franco-Algerian war; Nicole Briat is a young divorcee setting up a network of support for other young women in the form of a reading group (studying the writings of Simone de Beauvoir); Aïcha is a powerful matriarch presiding over her daughter-in-law's rebellion whilst trying to preserve the gendered traditions of her own culture; and Madame Donze (France Darry), a pensioner, is attempting to cope with the problem of having neighbours whose culture is alien to her, by concentrating on preserving her own 'sovereignty' and marking her terrain, in the obsessive cultivation of her flower garden which borders onto Zouina's.

Madame Donze illustrates the older French generation's resistance to immigration, for a generation for whom the term 'third world' was appropriated in the 1950s.²⁶ This colonialist term of 'third world woman' as a singular and monolithic subject, a constituting of a colonial Other within a white Western text,

²⁶ Spivak, Gayatri (1996), *The Spivak Reader*, in Landry Donna and MacLean Gerald (1996), (eds), p. 270. Spivak explains that the term 'Third World' originated in 1955 by those emerging from the 'old' world order to establish a 'third way' which was within neither the Eastern nor the Western bloc in the world system.

assumes this category to consist of women as a coherent group with identical interests, experiences and goals prior to their entry in the sociopolitical and historical field. This emphasising of the differences between roles in the womens' own culture and their adopted cultures echoes the colonial past and notions of 'the oppressed' and 'the oppressor'.²⁷ It is against Madame Donze that Zouina commits a transgression that brings the police to the household. The elderly neighbour frequently complains about Zouina's activities in the adjoining gardens and when the children's football strays near her flowerbeds, Madame Donze eventually loses her temper and destroys the ball, first by stabbing it with a knife and subsequently by tearing it to pieces savagely between her teeth. This action infuriates Zouina so that she rips off her dress and physically attacks Madame Donze, dressed only in her white petticoats. Zouina is uncontrollable at this point because in the productivity of her own power, the threat of authority over herself and her children on their own property breaks down any barriers of self/other and inside/outside and her violent reaction can be likened to a 'pseudo-petrification' as Homi Bhabha puts it, in terms of her acting as a "native caught in the chains of colonialist command."²⁸ Zouina's gesture is a reversal of ex-colonial authority, a direct conflict of cultures and a bringing of ex-colonialist memories to the fore. It highlights not only the differences between cultures, but also that Zouina is 'in between' cultures, a hybridity which Bhabha describes as "interven(ing) in the exercise of authority not merely to indicate the possibility of its identity but to

²⁷ Mohanty, Chandra (1988), 'Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses' *Feminist Review*, Autumn, 30, p. 68.

²⁸ Bhabha, Homi (1994), *The Location of Culture*, p. 166.

represent the unpredictability of its presence.”²⁹ Any power that Zouina has generated to protest against the neighbour’s actions is then subverted by Ahmed behind closed doors, for when the police have departed from the house after an attempt at a (forced) reconciliation between Zouina and Madame Donze (in which Zouina shakes hands with the latter but squeezes so hard that she hurts her neighbour), Ahmed beats Zouina violently for her ‘transgressions,’ while Aïcha encourages this abuse as Zouina, in terms of Algerian traditions, has committed a serious, gendered, cultural breach by undressing in the public eye.

Displaced Women

The most popular theme within diasporic cinema is the theme of ‘journey’, usually a journey to the West. However, according to Hamid Naficy, not all of these journeys involves physical travel but can be metaphorical and philosophical journeys of identity and transformation for the film’s characters and even for the filmmakers themselves.³⁰ Zouina bears visual markers of collective identity such as the traditional dress she wears at home (including a headscarf with a motif of the homeland) and the performing of gendered, domestic tasks such as the daily bread-making that she undertakes. Played as a background soundtrack to accompany her morning tasks in the kitchen, Algerian music draws attention to the acoustics of exile, but later in the film this is replaced by Françoise Hardy’s

²⁹ *ibid*, p. 163.

³⁰ Naficy, Hamid (2001), *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking*, p. 125.

1960s song, *Le premier bonheur du jour*,³¹ which Benguigui introduces as a notion of ‘French’ quotidian and a participation in French domestic culture, as Hardy was an iconic singer, star and a household name.³² The variation in soundtracks that accompany Zouina and the emotions evoked by the national symbolism of the music in the film depicts her hybridity and trajectory towards her own liberation, and her dipping in and out of French culture.

Evidence of an unwillingness to admit that for these immigrants there is no return journey to the homeland is shown by Zouina’s visit to Malika’s house, where, after a fifteen year period of diaspora, suitcases are still visible and packed as if in readiness for a departure. Other objects such as bags, suitcases and carrier bags which are placed on top of the kitchen cupboards in Zouina’s house are symbolic of the transitory nature of the family’s existence, and reminders of the state of displacement that they imply. Dubravka Ugresič suggests that exile is:

like a nightmare... an immeasurable state described in measurable facts – stamps in one's passport, geographical points, distances, temporary addresses, ...money spent ...on buying new suitcases...the history of things we leave behind...³³.

Placed in their own particular historical and political contexts, rather than being ‘robbed’ of their historical and political agency, displaced women can have moments of empowerment (as Zouina shows), and, along with this, a diverse, heterogeneous sort of subjectivity. In her film Benguigui opens up a space in

³¹ Hardy Françoise, (1963), *Le premier bonheur du jour*, music by Renard, Jean.

³² Benguigui, Yamina (2001), *Inch'Allah dimanche*, Film Movement Series, DVD, director’s interview.

³³ Ugresič, Dubravka (1999), *The Museum of Unconditional Surrender*.

which to play out differences amongst the woman in the film, which ultimately leads to Zouina's empowerment and, consequently, a change in her relationship with Ahmed. This is explored through Zouina's encounters with Nicole Briat, Madame Manant, Madame Donze and the shop assistant, and also shows the differences between generations of women, such as Aïcha and Zouina, and between Zouina and her compatriot Malika. The latter, by her refusal to accept that Zouina is between 'being' and 'becoming,' a hybrid occupying an in-between cultural space and by virtue of her adherence to Algerian traditions and her disapproval of Zouina venturing out without Ahmed's consent, rejects her and reinforces Zouina's isolation.

Sara Suleri states that Mohanty's claim that "only a postcolonial, subcontinental feminist can adequately represent the lived experience of that culture"³⁴ points to the difficulty posited by the authenticity of female ethnic minority voices such as Benguigui's, in terms of relating the first narrative of knowledge of the ethnically-constructed woman. Women who inhabit a place within diaspora are also the object of critique, as Diane Brydon writes:

now that the marginal is being revalued as the new voice of authority in discourse, it is tempting to accept the imperial definition of the colonized as marginal.³⁵

The personal history of education and cultural integration of Benguigui herself is inextricably bound to the narrative. of *Inch'Allah dimanche* which is derived from a lack of awareness on the part of French society of the difficulties faced by

³⁴ Suleri, Sara (1992), 'Woman Skin Deep: Feminism and the Postcolonial Condition', *Critical Inquiry*, Summer, pp.756-769.

³⁵ Brydon, Diane (1989), "Commonwealth or Common Poverty?," *Kunapipi: Special Issue on Post-Colonial Criticism*, 11,1, pp. 1-16.

immigrants, as Benguigui's experience achieves its articulation here through a distanced autobiography in terms of memory, namely through the trope of the mother. Although Elspeth Probyn remarks that "living with contradictions does not necessarily enable one to speak of them,"³⁶ Benguigui states that this film could only have been made by a female director,³⁷ as its creation provides a vantage point from which Benguigui can view her mother's story, even if her own cultural narrative does not exactly mirror that of her mother's:

Diasporic or border positionality does not in itself assure a vantage point of privileged insight into and understanding of, relations of power, although it does create a space in which experiential mediations may intersect in ways that render such understandings more readily accessible.³⁸

The ways in which the actors' own roots, identities and language are mobilised within the film explores questions of individual and national identities. So true to reality was the scenario of *Inch'Allah dimanche*, in places, that, according to the director there were difficult moments in the shooting of the film, as the actress Rabia Mokeddem was amongst several females who were emotionally overcome by having to enact scenes of domestic violence similar to scenes which she recalled from her own youth. In other words, during the shooting of certain scenes the actors were made more acutely aware of the abuse they themselves had witnessed and were forced to relive the hurt that their mothers had suffered, in

³⁶ Probyn, Elspeth (1990), 'Travels in the postmodern: making sense of the local', in Nicholson, Linda (ed), *Feminism/postmodernism*, p. 182.

³⁷ Benguigui, Yamina (2001), *Inch'Allah dimanche*, Film Movement Series, DVD, Director's commentary.

³⁸ Brah, Avtar (1996), *Cartography of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*, p. 207.

particular in terms of the domestic abuse that was culturally prevalent against Maghrebi wives. In the case of Mokeddem, the depicted violence was her reality as a young Algerian mother and at times she was unable to continue with the shooting of the film.³⁹ The relationship between Madame Manant and Zouina is also particularly significant in that Zouina has approached a military widow for help (Madame Manant's husband was killed in action in the Franco-Algerian war). When she visits Madame Manant's house, she experiences a complete contrast of class, race and culture from her own history. The living space is dominated by a framed photograph of madame Manant's husband in military uniform, looking down into the room, the furnishings are sumptuous and the tea-set from which Zouina is served is the best china (she is afraid of breaking it and abruptly replaces the cup and saucer on the tray when Madame Manant leaves the room). The generosity Madame Manant shows to Zouina is a one-way hospitality, as she is surely aware that the latter will not be able to return the invitation in view of the colonial history that is attached. However, as Mireille Rosello suggests, models of hospitality do not necessarily have the same meaning across societies.⁴⁰

In working with her figuration of the nomad, Rosi Braidotti, in her work, *Nomadic Subjects*,⁴¹ is careful to distinguish between the terms 'exile' and 'migrant.' In terms of exile, she takes a position of detachment, whilst she is also cautious with the use of the metaphor of 'migrant' as one who goes from one

³⁹ Benguigui, Yamina (2001), *Inch'Allah dimanche*, Film Movement Series, DVD, Director's commentary.

⁴⁰ Rosello, Mireille (2001), *Postcolonial Hospitality: The Immigrant as Guest*, p. 137.

⁴¹ Braidotti, Rosi (1994), *Nomadic Subjects*.

point to another with a clear destination. The migrant is more socially marked than the nomad and tends to exist within a subculture, not easily integrating into the hegemonic culture in which she arrives. Thus, the nomad does not stand for homelessness (in a sense of a complete detachment from all roots), nor “compulsive displacement” (with its attendant longing for home), but rather for “the kind of subject who has relinquished all idea, desire, or nostalgia for fixity.”⁴² Braidotti also suggests that the nomad is a “form of political resistance to hegemonic and exclusionary views of subjectivity.”⁴³ Nomadic concepts are those which do not observe disciplinary boundaries and, according to Braidotti, are at an intersection between feminism and postmodernism/poststructuralism, both of which have critiqued the notion of the unitary subject, albeit with different conclusions. One common feature of feminism and poststructuralism is the “desire to leave behind the linear mode of intellectual thinking, the teleologically ordained style of argumentation that most of us have been trained to respect and emulate.”⁴⁴ In connection with Deleuze and Guattari's feminist nomadic inquiries,⁴⁵ ‘moments of becoming’ can be described as rhizomatic, or in the case of nomadic subjects, ways of being at home without being rooted in a place, an identity, or a memory. Movement along rhizomatic paths of becoming points to a rethinking of what it means to be ‘at home,’ and to move in between space/time boundaries. Rather than being considered as ‘the immigrant female’ Zouina as a nomad is instead in transition, visiting different situations, places and communities, moving in relation

⁴² *ibid*, p. 22.

⁴³ *ibid*, p. 23.

⁴⁴ *ibid*, p. 29.

⁴⁵ Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Félix (1987), *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, transl. by Massumi, Brian.

to a web of discourses, practices, subject positions and spaces. From Zouina's point of view, nomadism shelters new images of thought about what potentially exists 'outside' any gendered and racialized social order framing her existence and highlights analyses of new modes 'of becoming', no longer constrained within closed identity boundaries.

Zouina as a nomad is the site of a mesh of multiple connections. She functions as "a multiple entity....in a net of interconnections"⁴⁶ demonstrating an "acute awareness of the non-fixity of boundaries."⁴⁷ She *passes through* situations of encounters in spite of Ahmed's attempts to limit her boundaries. As well as inviting Nicole into her home and receiving a visit from Madame Manant whilst Aïcha is present, she is returned to her doorstep after one of her Sunday escapades by an army convoy (who have accidentally run over Madame Manant's dog, which Zouina then furtively buries in her own back garden). She also faces questioning from the police following the attack on Madame Donze, she is tricked by the door-to-door salesman when informed that she has 'won' a vacuum cleaner and she finally plucks up courage to get on a bus with a driver who has been observing her peering at the outside world from behind net curtains. The latter takes her on a tour, after first emptying his bus for her (out of respect for her culture, as Algerian women would not have been allowed to sit on public transport within the proximity of men). The ending of the film, arrived at by means of a fantasy sequence, in which Zouina is safely delivered home by the bus driver after

⁴⁶ Braidotti, Rosi (1994), *Nomadic Subjects*, p. 36

⁴⁷ *ibid.*

her adventurous trip, seems to provide some development and resolution towards Zouina's search for an identity.

What also transgresses the boundaries of Zouina's existence and gives her access to the outside world and its culture, is the radio. Physically separated from the world of the other by an iron-barred front door and the semi-opaque net curtains at the windows, Zouina is able to subvert her subsequent isolation by listening to the transistor radio in the kitchen. Radio waves operating in a universal space and crossing cultural boundaries permit her to formulate an emotional, sensory response to a Western national entertainment medium. Significantly, the media functions here as an instrument of cultural education, as the programmes she listens to are womens' programmes (presented by the household name, M^énie Gr^égoire), the subject matter of which includes discussion and advice on sexual intimacy. Zouina is also fascinated by the popular game show *Le Jeu des mille francs*. As the camera cuts from Zouina listening to the radio in the kitchen, to Mme Donze who is listening to the same programme in her sitting room next door, the radio links its listeners across space and cultural difference, but whereas Zouina has her pleasures abruptly cut off by Aïcha (who suddenly appears and switches the radio off in protest), Mme Donze continues to listen, relaxing in solitude in her armchair and enjoying the programme uninterrupted. The radio here acts as a visual motif in the film, linking the two females and functioning as an epistolary narrative in which there is such a blurring of boundaries between the fictional and the non-fictional, that the

relationship between authorship and authenticity is unclear.⁴⁸ As Naficy points out, in transnational film there is an interconnection between genre, auteurism and culture,⁴⁹ which in terms of cultural identity could point towards the emergence of a Maghrebi-French cinema, in a similar same way in which there has been an Asian-American trend (although the latter is mainly limited to the action genre), making the experiences of Maghrebis the very subject matter of film through the influence of directors such as Benguigui (who also has a political role in French society)⁵⁰ and this could determine the role of the North African diaspora in the direction French cinema may take over the coming years.

Clearly new identities are being negotiated within the couple Ahmed and Zouina, orchestrated by Zouina herself, in a different space from that of the cultural memory of origin of both parties, however, by looking at immigration from the point of view of gender, rather than homogenising the third world, as a culturally hybrid film, *Inch'Allah dimanche* is critical of the patriarchal structures within both Algerian and French societies. However, the film, which demonstrates the difficulties of gender relations within contemporary France's postcolonial society, proposes the possibilities of alliances between women that cut across ethnic, religious, class, and generational lines. Through the portrayals of Zouina and her complex, problematic, relationship with Ahmed and the subsequent outcome of *Inch'Allah dimanche* in which Zouina attains some agency

⁴⁸ Naficy, Hamid (2001), *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking*, p.101.

⁴⁹ Naficy, Hamid (2003), 'Independent Transnational Film Genre' in Shohat Ella and Stam Robert, eds., *Multiculturalism, Postcoloniality and Transnational Media*, p. 205.

⁵⁰In March 2008, in the French municipal elections, Benguigui was elected in the XXe arrondissement, to the Conseil de Paris.

and empowerment, the film comments on the fluid notion of cultural identity and interrogates the idea of what it means to be a hybrid in postcolonial France, for both Zouina and Ahmed (and in a complex web of ‘real’ versus fiction, the director herself) still bear the legacy of the discourse of a colonial nationalism. Zouina alone fights against it and ultimately succeeds in beginning to convince her husband to accept the need for integration, in that it is she who takes the first steps to establishing a social network outside the home. What the film shows, rather than the formation of Maghrebi female identity is a hybrid identity, an ‘in-between’ identity that is not fixed but is floating and mobile.

The lack of consciousness, of historical memory attached to the narrative, has meant that, in a certain sense, there has been a regression in the problem of the development of identity. What is needed is a reconstruction of the social imaginary in the absence of a space in which real alternatives are lacking, which Bhabha states is “a conjugation of postnationalism with nomadic subjects and feminism, to provide a space of possible transformations.”⁵¹ In terms of the outcome of the film as an agent of cultural comment, and as far as Benguigui has reported, there has been no evidence, no further inter-generational communication that demonstrates that immigrants have overcome ‘the silence’ regarding the situation in which they, (both male and female), found themselves in the nineteen seventies.⁵² In particular, as borne out by Benguigui’s witnesses in *Memoires d’immigrés*, the males have remained silent. If *Inch’Allah dimanche* is to be regarded as an autobiographical piece it could be considered to have an optimistic

⁵¹ Bhabha, Homi, (1994), *The Location of Culture*, p. 364

⁵² Benguigui, Yamina (2001), *Inch’Allah dimanche*, Film Movement Series, DVD, Director’s commentary.

outcome as it highlights a repression of past memories and a need to purge the past through the involvement of the director. By being historically situated and culturally specific and maintaining the accent on the imbalance of power in the couple, the film avoids being recuperated in a “hegemonic discourse of celebratory, successful migration narratives”, as Tarr puts it.⁵³ The film negotiates the representation of gendered space and the problematics of integration of Algerian diasporic people in France in terms of race and identity, directly using the female as a trope for integration rather than the male. Instead of focussing on ‘the couple’ as a trope for the complexities of integration, there is a direct use of the rather more successful efforts of the female to acquire acceptance within a community, suggesting that integration is less complex for females. The task of the film is to produce a missing text, that of the director’s, through the autobiography of her own childhood, as reconstructed through the biography of her mother’s experiences. Therefore the film stakes a claim in national developments of memories of migration in recounting how and to what effect the national and the transnational meet in France’s political culture. Naficy argues that “thanks to the globalisation of travel, media and capital, exile appears to have become a postmodern condition.”⁵⁴ An alternative view on exile, one that holds that a range of analytical possibilities must be deployed to counter perceived Eurocentric debates based on postmodernism, might refute this position by emphasising the importance of race in discussions of the nation-state, cultural identity, diasporic formations and representations of postmodern mobility.

⁵³ Tarr, Carrie and Freedman, Jane (eds), (2000), *Women, Immigration and Identities*, p. 161.

⁵⁴ Naficy, Hamid (1999), *Homeland: Film, Media and the Politics of Place*, p. 4.

Naficy's framing of exile does not preclude the necessity of foregrounding complex histories of voluntary and forced migrations, slavery, colonialism and the postcolonial. Exile, in fact, cannot be detached from the historical context that led to global displacements invoking a poetics of loss and yearning. Whilst the relationship between migration and the colonial past does not necessarily constitute the main theme of the narrative of *Inch'Allah dimanche*, in which Zouina shows a determination to become culturally visible and claim her own place in French society, the film establishes a strong symbolic congruence between remnants of colonialism, such as shifting value systems, Westernisation and language confusion. These intrude into the lives of contemporary second and third generation French-Maghrebis as a reminder of France's past, as Benguigui is actively engaged in rediscovering her own cultural past, in recovering cultural histories and retrieving her mothers's memories that had been carefully repressed for years, through the pervasive cultural amnesia over the the history of the Maghrebian immigration to France.

CHAPTER 8

Neo-colonial cross-currents

Raja

(Jacques Doillon, 2003)

“Quand elle aura besoin de l’argent elle reviendra”¹

Jacques Doillon, the director of *Raja*, emerged as an *auteur* in the 1970s, alongside directors Maurice Pialat, Jean Eustache and Robert Bresson, during which period major changes and reforms took place in the relationship between French cinema and French television industries. These changes were mainly in terms of the investment of French television companies’ money in film production, a factor which was to have a significant and permanent effect on the economic model of the French film industry.² Doillon’s films at this time were similar to the works of his contemporaries Pialat, Eustache and Bresson, in that they followed (in general) themes of humanity and forms of, for example, economic oppression. The works of these directors depicted a rupture between collective history and the environment, a “dissonance between powers of the world and our power of understanding,”³ generally characterised by a loss or ‘lack of,’ such as the loss of the mother in the film *Ponette*.⁴ Since 1974 Doillon has directed more than thirty films, including, more recently, *Le Petit Criminel*

¹ The words spoken by the character, Fred (Pascal Greggory) in the final scene of *Raja*, when he pays for Raja’s wedding to Youssef in the hope that Raja will eventually return when she needs more money.

² Kaganski, Serge et al (21/05/2003), ‘Au bord de la crise’, *Les Inrockuptibles*, 390, pp. 47–53.

³ Temple, Michael and Witt, Michael (2004), *The French Cinema Book*, p. 243.

⁴ Doillon, Jacques (1996), *Ponette*.

(1990), *Ponette* (1996), *Raja* (2003), *Le Premier Venu* (2007) and *Aux Quatre Vents* (2010), the three most recent films featuring couple scenarios. Although *Aux Quatre Vents* has a more complex and entangled narrative than either *Raja* or *Le Premier Venu*, *Raja*, an award-winning film,⁵ is complex in its *mise en scène* in terms of the narrative of the improbable romance it portrays, between a young Moroccan woman and a middle-aged Frenchman, a couple whose desire is miscommunicated, unlikely and misunderstood.

Marrakech is the background for Doillon's provocative exploration of a contemporary relationship crossed by all kinds of contrasts. Fred, (Pascal Greggory), a wealthy Parisian, owns a large estate on the outskirts of Marrakech, Raja (Najat Benssallem) is one of his casual workers, living in sparse accommodation (a bedsit) within her local community. 'Fred' is suddenly siezed with an irresistible desire to seduce Raja, but language and cultural differences impede his pursuit along with Raja's reticence to allow Fred to approach her physically, which causes the latter to proceed with the flirtation cautiously and deviously. Although he promotes Raja from gardener to housekeeper and subsequently showers her with money and gifts, she remains resistant to his advances although she is flattered as well as repelled by his attentions (in front of her peers she expresses a dislike for Europeans). As the relationship develops neither Raja nor Fred fully trusts the other's intentions, as Fred suspects Raja of being interested only in his wealth and Raja, in response to Fred's offers of money, refuses to be 'bought'. Fred consciously avoids any notions of a

⁵ Doillon was French Cinéaste of the Year, winning the French Culture Award for 2004 at the Festival de Cannes, with his film, *Raja*.

‘purchase’ of Raja but his persistent and unsuccessful courtship leaves both parties confused. He is the exact opposite of Raja as a rich, well-educated European, man in his fifties but when the two meet and apparently fall in love, a psychological battle ensues to ensure the almost military conquest of the other person. In a final, desperate attempt to make Raja happy and keep her ‘accessible’, he pays for her to marry her Moroccan partner, Youssef and live within the grounds of his villa. The relationship proves too complex under these circumstances and Raja decides to leave Fred’s employment. In the closing sequences Fred’s despair is echoed by his final, tearful words “quand elle aura besoin de l’argent elle reviendra” as Raja finally departs with Youssef.

Raja upholds the failure of interracial relationships within conflicts of age, desire, language and culture, firstly projecting a positive, dominant image of the French ‘nation’ as economically and financially powerful and secondly, siting the recolonised female within negative images of dysphoric relationships. The latter involves the exploitation of the female decolonised body as a site of production within an impoverished nation-state. The central question posed by *Raja* is how two people establish and mediate historical memory as they are on opposite sides of these fields and how do they desire each other with a desire that does not have its roots in neo-colonialism? It is clear that Raja and Fred are desiring bodies, although they are unable to articulate their feelings due to language incompatibility, but what is not clear is whether such feelings are manufactured and exploited or whether it is possible for their desire to exist outside neo-colonial

power relations, in other words, whether it is founded on a forbidden code which is doomed to fail.

Postcolonial Relations

Catherine Portuges points out that in the 1980s and 1990s a wave of autobiographical postcolonial film narratives produced by (white), French women directors (such as Claire Denis) invariably treated the race/gender/class issues from the point of view of memory and recollection (often from childhood), foregrounding the story of the colonies in terms of the “colonial féminin.”⁶ These family histories, as Portuges suggests, may mask the “unconscious French attachments and material interests in its former Empire...of France’s repressed elsewhere.”⁷ Rather more claustrophobic tensions than the themes of postcolonial family, child and domestic issues are evoked in the interracial romance of *Raja*, upholding the failure of inter-race relationships on the grounds of conflicting cultural and economic difference rather than race.

According to Homi Bhabha, colonial knowledge can be re-inscribed in hybrid forms and given new, unexpected and oppositional meanings as a way of ‘re-staging the past’.⁸ Bhabha is opposed to binary systems and structures of opposition and rather than referring to ‘difference,’ advocates a shifting, or splitting which gives rise to in-between spaces lying on the borderline, between

⁶ Portuges, Catherine (1996), ‘Le colonial féminin’, in Sherzer, Dina (ed), *Cinema, Neo-colonialism, Postneo-colonialism*, p. 81.

⁷ *ibid*; 96

⁸ Bhabha, Homi (1994), *The Location of Culture*, pp. 303-337.

inside and outside.⁹ In terms of colonisation, this is a re-writing of the notions of the ‘colonised’ and the ‘coloniser’, in which Bhabha describes, as Benita Parry puts it, colonial power as the production of hybridisation: “rather than the noisy command of colonialist authority or the silent repression of native traditions.”¹⁰ In contemporary contexts Bhabha argues that the processes of hybridisation have collapsed the idea of subjectivity as stable, single and ‘pure’ and have drawn attention to the ways in which diasporic peoples in particular are able to challenge exclusionary systems of meaning. According to Bhabha, it is this possibility that enables them to disrupt the exclusionary binary logics on which neo-colonialism, nationalism and patriarchy discourses depend. However, what Bhabha is unable to overlook, as John McLeod suggests, is the fact that any mode of resistance on the part of the ex-colonised subject is constrained by the language of the dominant group.¹¹ One of the most disputed terms in postcolonial studies, ‘hybridity’ commonly refers to the creation of new transcultural forms within the ‘contact zone’ produced by colonisation.

In the opening sequences of *Raja*, European rather than Moroccan cultural memory is evoked by a Western soundtrack of classical chamber music, rather than an Arabic composition (which was a signifier of cultural memory for the character, Zouina, in the title track of *Inch’Allah dimanche*).¹² The soundtrack accompanies the first images of the character Raja within her community, with

⁹ *ibid.*, p. 19.

¹⁰ Parry, Benita (1994), ‘Signs of Our Times: Discussion of Homi Bhabha’s *The Location of Culture*,’ in *Third Text*, 8, 28, Autumn/Winter, pp. 5-24, www.thirdtext.com, accessed 15/04/2010

¹¹ McLeod, John (2000), *Beginning Post-neo-colonialism*.

¹² Benguigui, Yamina (2002), *Inch’Allah dimanche*.

shots of a group of young Moroccans playing cards in the winding back streets of Marrakech, signalling a cultural hybridity of 'European' and 'exotic' from the opening sequences. The group light-heartedly accuse Raja of cheating to win, whereupon they impose a forfeit which Raja carries out, noisily charging in tomboy fashion through the narrow streets, shrieking and galloping. This focuses the spectator on the history of colonial discourse at the beginning of the film and situates Raja as an awkward, tomboyish, nineteen-year old, of unstable identity, in the process of 'becoming-woman'. Raja is boisterous, assertive and aggressive and soon after the card game she physically attacks her Moroccan partner, Youseff, by head-butting him when he fails to appreciate her gifts of money. In a later scene, when she has been rejected by Fred and dismissed from his employment, Raja also engages in a fight with the latter away from his domain and on the open road, leaving him incapacitated on the ground as a passing driver observes his plight and offers to help him. Raja is particularly astute when negotiating monetary exchanges, although in terms of relationships and marriage she is constrained by cultural customs and is expected to conform to the arranged marriage traditions of her community. Orphaned at the age of eight, she has engaged in prostitution in order to survive in the local, economically impoverished environment and is also sent to work in Fred's gardens by her aunt, who protests that for economic reasons she is unable to support both Raja and her own daughter, Nadira.

Fred, economically more powerful than the local Moroccans, is a 'coloniser' through owning a large property on Moroccan territory and using the local

population as a workforce over which he exerts control by paying their wages. At the beginning of the film a Manichean opposition is set up in the first scene (shot on Fred's estate), between colonised and coloniser, a division into the 'two worlds' observed by Franz Fanon in his work *Peau noire, masques blancs*.¹³ The walled estate owned and controlled by Fred, who inhabits a spacious villa within its walls, is a model replica of a colony. Whilst his staff look after the outside of the property and the housekeeping (Ahmed is the handyman and Zineb and Oum el Aïd are cooks), in direct contrast with Fred's luxury lifestyle his group of gardeners (including Raja and her cousin Nadira) live in the local community in poorly-furnished, cramped conditions. Raja is first noticed by Fred when she arrives for work with the contingent of local Arab girls making their way through his gates singing and laughing. He goes down to the lawn to greet the group who are depicted in their 'natural' state, kneeling or seated on the ground, their view of 'le patron' a low-angle shot looking up at Fred (Raja's point of view) which establishes 'French' as dominant and colonial. Fred is unable to converse with his workers as he speaks no Arabic and they speak little French, although Nadira interprets for the group with some success. Due to the communication difficulties and in a reversal of colonial discourse, the girls mock Fred's appearance (in Arabic), commenting that he is balding, ageing and shabbily-dressed and that his shirt is too small for a man who could surely afford a new one. Fred cannot interact with their jibes because of the language barrier and the workers are at

¹³ Fanon, Franz (1986), *Black Skin, White Masks*, transl. by Markman, Charles, originally published (1952), *Peau noire, masques blancs*.

liberty to pass comments aloud about their employer without consequence, given his lack of knowledge of the local language. This is a deterritorialisation of Fred, who is alienated from his homeland in terms of culture and language and who is scrutinised and to some extent ridiculed by the community who work for him.¹⁴

Whilst the girls are engaged in their outdoor work the conversation centres on their aspirations and prospects of marrying out of poverty. Raja voices her dislike of Europeans but is encouraged by Nadira to consider pursuing a relationship with Fred for economic reasons and in the hope that at least one of the group could escape their unpromising economic circumstances. As Raja's extended family also remind her later, a marriage to a wealthy, white European would mean salvation (for all the family) from a life of poverty and misery. Fred singles out Raja from the group but she refuses his advances when he comments that her direct, upturned gaze reminds him of a character from a poem of Pierre Louys,¹⁵ which makes reference to the direct gaze of young women of Seville who, Louys writes, never lower their eyes. Nadira explains to Raja that Fred appears to be smitten with her and as she is leaving work she turns out of curiosity to see Fred observing her, returning his gaze which he misinterprets as desire. Raja's future in terms of marrying Fred and acquiring a lavish lifestyle is discussed after the girls return home from work, when Raja fantasises, as mistress of Fred's villa, how she would command her servants by clapping her hands and giving orders, a polarity

¹⁴ Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Félix (1987), *L'Anti-Oedipe: Capitalisme et Schizophrénie*. This term was first used by Deleuze and Guattari to refer to a severance of social, political or cultural practices from their native places and populations .

¹⁵ Louys, Pierre (1870-1925) was an influential critic, poet and novelist in his day in symbolist circles, but his works were not as well-known as those of his peers: Apollinaire, Mallarmé, Gide, and Valéry. His best known work, on the theme of obsessive love, was *La femme et le pantin* (1898).

of her own, servile situation and a reinforcement of a binary colonial discourse, although (as she explains to her young niece) her late mother had aspirations that Raja would go to school and follow a career in law (and therefore experience a more hybrid identity). Raja engages in prostitution and was a victim of rape whilst attempting to earn enough money to pay her rent and look after Youssef, which gives the sex trade a visibility in the film even though Morocco is a strictly muslim country:

Raja et son entourage ne représentent pas une tradition, une culture préservée. Ils en sont le dérivé en phase de dégradation. Vêtues tantôt à l'ancienne, tantôt en jean moulant, (elles) ne correspondent pas au cliché de la femme musulmane (étonnante absence de la religion dans le film). Chez les adultes, les mères, les hommes, l'écart entre la morale ancestrale et les conduites est aussi vertigineux. Tous veulent l'argent, le reste n'est que posture de respectabilité.¹⁶

Doillon's visual construction of space in *Raja* is a codification of the paradigms of gender, desire, and neo-colonialism present within the film. The spaces in Fred's villa are clearly delineated in terms of race, the Moroccan workforce being mainly confined to the exterior and to the gardens, whilst the dining rooms are a hybrid space. Access to the kitchens is restricted to the two cooks, Zineb and Oum el Aïd who mix freely with Fred and look after him as housekeepers. The whole domain is surrounded by a high wall with security gates as a barrier to the outside world, glimpses of which are few, the scenery sparse

¹⁶ Audé, Françoise et Martinez, Dominique (2003), Jacques Doillon, *Positif*, 511, Sept. pp. 21-27.

and mainly consisting of unmade roads and undeveloped expanses of white sand, dotted with palm trees. The ordered, if inegalitarian, structure of Fred's 'mini-colony' appears to be a harmonious and blissfully peaceful place 'inside', as Fred occupies the interior of the villa mainly in the company of his two matronly cooks, in a space where there is no disruption from the anguish of desire he feels from the presence of the local girls in his garden. As he explains to Zineb and Oum el Aïd, "il n'y a que le bonheur à l'intérieur, ici c'est le bonheur parfait," whereas he expresses an anxiety about the outside, where "il n'y a que le désir dehors dans le jardin." In contrast with the inner peace that the house affords, Fred also describes a trap 'outside' the confines of his property, as "même quand on se promène dans la ville, à chaque regard il y a un histoire possible." Similarities may be drawn here with the typical theme of entrapment of the white male by the 'native' girl in early colonial film, a history which would situate the local girls in *Raja* as evil influences, confirming the warnings given to Fred by Zineb and Oum el Aïd, who regard *Raja* as untrustworthy.

Fred is able to communicate in basic French with his two cooks who are 'superior' to the gardeners in terms of hierarchy and status. To these matriarchs Fred reveals a preoccupation with the rekindling of his dwindling libido, in a desire that is lacking; but Zineb and Oum el Aïd are unable to comprehend either his sexual anxieties, or his discourse on desire and his attraction to *Raja*, whom he describes as exuding sexual promise, as "une vraie machine à pomper le désir." In an antithesis of his abject self, he describes *Raja* to the cooks as "une vraie confirmation de vie." Through questioning the cooks Fred discovers that they no

longer have sexual relationships with their husbands, in other words they have no desire, which prompts him to consider them as “les femmes idéales – on n’a vraiment pas envie de coucher avec vous.” Their lack or loss of libido, which is their reality, is Fred’s future, a utopian ‘beyond desire,’ an aspiration of freedom to which he is looking forward and of which he enviously comments that “débarassées de votre libido, vous êtes bien en avance de moi. Un jour je serais libre comme vous.”

The Third Eye

On the surface, the cooks would seem to be playing subordinate roles as characters, but as ‘elders’ of the Moroccan community the two women, who Fred refers to in jest as “*les deux sorcières*,” have knowledge of both French and Moroccan cultures and both nations’ violent histories of neo-colonialism, and in this sense they may be regarded as seers.¹⁷ They hold the seat of power over both Fred and Raja and are the site of the generation of conflict and tragedy which later leads to the ultimate separation of the couple. ‘See-ers’, they regard the world through what Fatimah Tobing Rony terms a “Third knowledgeable Eye,” which allows them to perceive the dominant culture from both inside and outside,¹⁸ as they act as intermediaries in translating Fred’s communications to Raja and vice versa, often incorrectly, thereby controlling both Raja’s and Fred’s destinies. Whilst both women warn Fred of the dangers of a relationship with a Moroccan

¹⁷ Marks, Laura (2000), *The Skin of the Film*, p. 28-29.

¹⁸ Tobing, Fatimah (1996), *The Third Eye: Race, Cinema and Ethnographic Spectacle*.

girl, Zineb also wrongly informs Fred that Raja has stated her intention to steal all his money, which eventually leads Fred to reject her.

The importance of language in transactions and as a route to success is expressed by Fanon in terms of power:

a man who has the language consequently possesses the world expressed and implied by that language...Mastery of the language affords remarkable power.¹⁹

Fanon also comments on the legacy of colonisation in the cultural memory of a colonised nation as a domination by the language of the ex-coloniser: “every (colonised) people finds itself face to face with the language of the civilising nation, that is, with the culture of the mother country.”²⁰ He contends that even after independence, ex-colonial subjects remain colonised internally and psychologically, their ways of ‘reading’ the world and their desires carried across into the desire for ‘whiteness’ through a kind of metempsychosis. As Roy Young states, quoting Fanon’s work; “their desires have been transposed, though they have never, of course, actually become white. They have a black skin, with a white mask.”²¹ It is evident from the local girls’ comments that Fred falls below the expectations of the Moroccan girls’ fantasy of a smart, white European whom they would aspire to marry to ‘become-other,’²² but following the attention that Fred pays to Raja whilst she is at work, and even though she describes Fred

¹⁹ Fanon, Franz (1986), *Black Skin, White Masks*, transl. by Markman C., originally published (1952), *Peau noire, masques blancs*, p. 18.

²⁰ *ibid*

²¹ Young, Robert (2003), *Postneo-colonialism: a very short introduction*, p.144.

²² Deleuze, Gilles (1995), *Negotiations 1972-1990*, p. 44.

indifferently (as neither handsome nor ugly), Raja (always in the company of Nadira in accordance with cultural codes) visits Fred's house where although she refuses his physical advances, she offers a kiss in exchange for money that Fred gives to both girls. Fred is unable to converse satisfactorily with Raja and the lack of communication between them frustrates the progress of the relationship leading to conflict early on as each of them barter for leverage in an uneasy situation, often locked in a tense stalemate, their frequent disagreements yielding sharp insights into the ways in which language incompatibility can irrevocably determine the course of events for a couple. Their interactions have the tone of an ongoing negotiation in which the spectator plays a privileged part, as Doillon's staging of the language gap gives the narrative an intense, dramatic edge. Fred's long gazes at Raja replace the facility of conversation which they both lack and he is obliged to rely upon visual communication to inform her of his desire, although he often lapses into audible monologue in her presence. Knowing that they cannot understand each other's spoken language, Raja and Fred are free to voice their frankest thoughts in their own language without any repercussions, which in turn allows the spectator to access his or her feelings directly through the subtitling. The spectator, who is obliged to both watch the film and to glean narrative meaning by reading the subtitles, then becomes privy to knowledge that the characters lack. This transforms the act of spectatorship as the spectator is required to read as well as watch the screen and also has knowledge of the narrative that the characters do not have.

The onscreen subtitling display which accompanys the diegetic Arabic language highlights the translation issues of transcultural cinema. *Raja* is a bilingual film but as the narrative unfolds, within the binary French/Arabic dialogue there exists a multiplicity of accents, intonations and linguistics. Ex-colonized peoples are highly diverse in their nature and their traditions, so that while they may be 'other' from the ex-colonisers, they are also both constructed and changing, different one from another and from their own pasts, and therefore they cannot be totalised or essentialised. As such, the complexities of the linguistic situations in the narrative, including the creolisation of the French language in varying forms, particularly by Zineb and Oum el Aïd, causes confusion for both Fred and Raja. Although the couple communicate on a certain basic level as Raja has a French dictionary and Fred resorts to miming, and they both rely on translators who have some, (although limited) knowledge of French, in addition, their desire is frustrated by third party (native) interference, as others serve as interpreters in a series of miscommunications which end in the failure of their relationship. Through the use of subtitling as indirect discourse, the minority dialect (Arabic) is forced to 'speak' in the dominant, ex-colonial language. However, diegetically, Fred is often the outsider and the minority to whom efforts are made in terms of explanation and understanding. This concentrates the narrative on Fred as European tourist, in the sense that he is the minority who has moved into the indigenous Moroccan culture. The deprivation of language knowledge then extends to Raja, for whom the potential loss of her native Arabic language, which shapes her individual, regional and national identity, is a real

possibility in the light of Fred offering to pay for her to learn the French language, presumably to communicate with him.

Silence becomes a powerful tool as it allies the couple in a mutual position of observation of the other, in a silence that creates space for the contemplation of the complex nature of Raja's identity, the result of neo-colonialism, which Doillon presents by articulating the sexual and power interaction between the couple on the visual level. The film derives from tension between separate shots of Fred and Raja, which echoes their isolation with respect to their problematic communication, in the framing of their respective images in contemplative mood. The narrative is arrested abruptly with long takes of first one character then the other, the camera organising a detached voyeurism, an immobile stare, on the separateness of the two characters, the long pauses marking an empty time. The long takes and expressive compositions of Fred with head hung, gazing off-frame, thinking and considering his situation, builds a space of solemn self-possession and frustration that has an evocative tone, giving the spectator a transparent kind of intimacy to the thoughts of the character. From the moment Fred rejects Raja for a local prostitute and subsequently dismisses her from his employment (on Zineb's advice), Raja makes her way back onto the street and into prostitution. A long tracking shot, a close-up that dwells on her facial expression, accompanies Raja as she strides into the city, her expression hardening as she once more becomes a victim of the global economy. The intensity of the separate images of Fred and Raja forces a strong spectator/image bond that connects the spectator with the characters. In this sense, cinema itself then becomes the privileged

vehicle for the representation of colonial power, because it can show how the field of the visible articulates power relations and relations of desire and their intermingling. As such, the film creates a distance from which the spectator is positioned to critique French 'nation' and neo-neo-colonialism and to imagine counter-hegemonic identities. Doillon's nurturing of spontaneous performances in the loosely-scripted and improvised dialogue and his sensitive portrayal of cultural differences provides a view of the barriers to interracial relationships which opens up the possibility of cultural exchange through a humanistic analysis of the outcome of mutual expression and communication breakdown.

Deleuze proposes that 'becoming other' is established via "diversity, multiplicity (and) the destruction of diversity."²³ When Fred arranges for Raja to have French lessons and learn the language he is offering her a way of 'becoming other,' a route to 'becoming European' and 'becoming French.' As Fanon wrote, (referring to the ambitions of African females), marrying a white man meant that one was moving towards 'becoming white', to "join the white world,"²⁴ leaving behind what Fanon suggested was an 'inferior' reputation associated with 'women of colour.'²⁵ Anne McClintock has shown that Africa has become what she terms "a porno-tropics for the European imagination – a fantastic magic lantern of the mind onto which Europe projected its forbidden sexual desires and fears."²⁶ This is echoed by Nadira who foregrounds the perception of the superiority of 'being

²³ Deleuze, Gilles (1995), *Negotiations 1972-1990*, p. 44.

²⁴ Fanon, Franz (1986), *Black Skin, White Masks*, transl. by Markman C., originally published (1952), *Peau noire, masques blancs*, p. 58.

²⁵ *ibid*; 44

²⁶ McClintock Anne, (1995), *Imperial Leather Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context*, p. 23-24.

French' when she asks Raja whether French women are better than they are, to which Raja replies that they are, but Nadira then questions why, in that case, would their menfolk want to come to Morocco.

The characterisation of women in *Raja* follows a positioning within the confines of racial and sexual criteria. On the one hand there are recognisable, traditional Moroccan profiles such as the two cooks, Oum el Aïd and Zineb (in typical Moroccan dress), and on the other, the younger women who work with Raja and also those in the bar whom Fred approaches, invariably are generic profiles of Westernised young women (usually dressed in jeans and trainers). In addition, Fred's garden employees also wear some items of 'national' clothing whilst they are at work, so that in addition to a racialised discourse their image clearly links them to a generic exotic/erotic national entity. This reduces them further into an allegory for a gendered, racialised and nationalised body of people whose national traits are tightly linked with postcolonial economic interests. Whilst this nationalises the female body, it also historically encapsulates the desire for neo-colonial conquest. The production of these historically cultivated desires foregrounds the role the desires play in the hiring of female labour, by placing the bodies of women within the fantasy narratives of neo-colonial conquest (and to some extent encouraging them to use their sexuality and femininity to compete for the favour of their employer). Their racialised, gendered figures become the articulators of the border and the boundary markers of imperialism.²⁷

²⁷ *ibid.*

Body Commodities

Raja's community are trapped in a cycle of lack as they have no (financially lucrative) employment and no prospects. Raja resorts to prostitution to pay the rent (as Youssef contributes little) and because such a community have no future, as the future lies elsewhere, they have become exiles, no longer economically able to occupy the ground upon which they stand. Living a static existence and as exiles in their own country, their circumstances are bleak and the only way out is to become European. The insistence on Eurocentrism in the narrative, of the model of an ideal, European society upheld as the future in the imaginary of Raja's community, continues to maintain the patriarchal ideology of neo-imperialism, labelling women as alien subalterns. Fred draws parallels between his swimming pool and the ocean that has to be crossed between North Africa and Europe when he offers to teach Raja to swim, metaphorically offering her a route to 'European-ness', but as she refuses his offer of instruction in the pool and they circle round each other clumsily in the water, he comments that "Tout le monde veut aller en Europe. Tout le monde veut traverser la mer, mais toi, tu refuses à apprendre à nager."

The desire of women like Raja is thwarted by the move towards global capitalism of a developing nation and the treatment they suffer as victims of a global economy. Raja views a relationship with Fred as a more convenient form of prostitution than working on the street. Scenes of Raja's prostitution in the street, her meeting with a client at the airport, the underage prostitutes in the coffee house, the discussions between Raja and Nadira about the prices they both

charge for sexual favours and finally the account of the cruel rape they both suffered whilst attempting to earn money in night clubs, involve the exploitation of the female, decolonised body as a site of production within an impoverished nation-state. The female body then becomes a bartering ground of capitalist negotiation, a site of business deals. Like cinema itself, the body of the woman/actress is alienated within a capitalist system of exchange. They both function as commodities in a structure of exchange between those who sell and those being sold. In terms of characterisation Raja demonstrates how women are deterritorialised from one social field (the domestic sphere) and reterritorialised on another (the street), and how women's bodies are territorialised by capital and so become commodities in response to a desire for commodities. Eugène Holland describes deterritorialisation as a new concept of a “double-becoming” where one deterritorialised element serves as a new territory for another deterritorialised element,²⁸ for example Raja, herself deterritorialised in her “line of flight” from postneo-colonialism, serves as a new desiring territory for Fred, himself deterritorialised from France-nation.²⁹ Deterritorialisation is said to be negative when the reterritorialisation obstructs the line of flight. In this sense Raja’s deterritorialisation is negative as her reterritorialisation in the unchartered territories of desire and romance blocks the line of flight back to her home territory, which is her Moroccan community. Raja is deterritorialised first from a

²⁸ Holland, Eugène (1999), *Deleuze and Guattari's Anti-Oedipus: Introduction to Schizoanalysis*, p.59.

²⁹ Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Félix (1984), *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 293. A line of flight or ‘becoming,’ as Deleuze says, underlining its mediatory quality, “is neither one nor two...it is the in-between, the border. One is not consciously passing through the line of flight..something is passing through you.”

coupling with Youseff, and then from the relationship with Fred when he dismisses her from the house and she returns home to Youseff. This is a sexual and economic deterritorialisation that is then re-territorialised on ‘the street’, as she returns to prostitution, when Fred rejects her for a local prostitute. From the moment Fred betrays Raja by inviting the young prostitute to the villa (in other words to replace an ‘unwilling’ Raja) Raja’s resistance to the rejection is to offer her sexual services to strangers, in other words she makes decisions about the ownership of her body; however this is to a great extent linked to her economic needs and in her case capitalism is the deterritorialising machine whereby, with the emergence of a global capitalism, young females of indigenous populations such as Raja’s community, are deterritorialised from a more artisanal (traditional) type of work that they would have carried out, only to be reterritorialised into the sex industry.³⁰ This signals a shift in the spaces created by the colonial legacy to the transactional rather than the conflictual, a site of economic rather than cultural production, which entraps women of the Third World who still lack agency within their religious/social culture and now find themselves trapped within international capitalism, a global capitalism, within a third space, which, rather than being a space of negotiation of cultural production is a site of economic production which is a part of globalisation of the former colonised countries.

Gayatri Spivak states that “if the colonial subject was largely a class subject, and if the subject of postcoloniality was variously racialised, then the subject of

³⁰ Holland, Eugène (1999), *Deleuze and Guattari's Anti-Oedipus: Introduction to Schizoanalysis*, p.57. In *Anti-Oedipus*, Guattari departs from the original (social) meaning of deterritorialisation, which related to the freeing of labour-power from, for example, work on the land or on a factory line.

globalisation is gendered.’³¹ As a ‘native woman,’ Raja, within the context of new transnational economies, contests nationalist and feminist signifying practices as some nations and cultures, such as the Moroccan community to which Raja belongs, are situated as consumers of ‘modernity.’ As postcolonial product of French nation, choosing the modular form of national society within raced and gendered relations in specific sites of ‘difference,’ the film demonstrates a historical alliance between the ideology of colonial domination and the ideology of male domination in terms of class and wealth. Raja and her community are isolated from the globalist economy as they appear not to have been coordinated with international political spaces. They have little in the way of technology and when Fred offers Raja a mobile telephone as a gift, she appears bemused. The need for such equipment is not apparent as none of her community appear to use any form of technology, apart from outdated television receivers. In addition, Raja has no social contact with people outside her community and would be unlikely to be able to afford the calls. In terms of technology the community appear to have been left behind in what Bhabha refers to as ‘an anxiety of enjoining the global and the local ; the dilemma of projecting an international space on the trace of a decentred, fragmented subject.’³²

In terms of power and economic inequality within a narrative of problematic, interracial relationships, comparisons may be drawn between *Raja* and Claire Denis’ film, *Chocolat* (1988). In the latter, the legacy of tensions and conflicts between the white, female French colonialist character Aimée, who falls in love

³¹ Spivak, Gayatri (1994), ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ in Williams, Patrick and Chrisman, Laura (eds), *Colonial Discourse/Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, p. 123.

³² Bhabha, Homi (1994), *The Location of Culture*.

with her native Cameroon servant, Protée, refers to wider metaphoric meanings of mainland France, the Cameroons, neo-colonialism and the politics of desire, with the film's sweeping camerawork of exotic scenery suggesting that desire is structured on the level of the visible rather than the verbal, the *mise en scène* and the camerawork informing the audience what the characters do not verbally articulate. Similarly in *Raja*, although the *mise en scène* is centred mainly within the confines of Fred's walled villa rather than across exotic landscapes, the characters' unspoken desires are played out through shots of Fred and Raja in silent contemplation, matching their inability to communicate through verbal means. Whilst Protée's and Aimée's relationship in *Chocolat* entirely embodies a colonial power relationship, Denis' film also positions Protée as the main player in the relationship and intermixing is not thwarted by republican ideology but by the colonial subject's (Protée's) 'refusal' of a romance with the coloniser (Aimée). Ironically, *Chocolat* did receive state funding although Denis was requested to change the narrative (presumably to enhance the box office profits) so that the subaltern, Protée, became sexually involved with the colonialist, Aimée, a request with which the director did not comply.³³ Where *Raja* differs from *Chocolat* and takes this one stage further is that the 'colonised' (Raja), although an unwilling party in the romance with Fred, is able to generate some kind of economic advantage from her situation. This highlights the antagonism which exists between Raja and the matriarchs Oum el Aid and Zineb, as the latter are excluded from the advantages of neo-colonialism whilst Raja manages to turn colonial

³³ *ibid*; p. 84. Denis refused to change the narrative - although Protée was attracted to Aimée, his refusal was his way of avenging his degrading condition and demonstrating his freedom.

exploitation to her account. With the narrative of Fred's desire (rather than Raja's history) as the subject of conversation between Fred and his two cooks at the beginning of the film, it is Fred's desire which is the vehicle for the film and which is thwarted by the intervention of Raja as capitalist 'producer' rather than as a (reciprocal) emotional desiring party.

Although Raja is seemingly rendered without voice, both in her limited interactions with Fred and also as a single female in her community, hers is the most powerfully articulated character in the film. Her haunting power and desperately misunderstood situation belie the fragility of a carefully maintained facade that governs the colonial code of conduct which is marked on the figure of Raja in terms of her compromised emotions and reactions, as she fears rejection from all sides. Her dignified manner, humility and disciplined negation of Fred's sexual approaches express the underlying power structures of this postcolonial code and, in turn, its instability. Expressed in colonialist terms, the potential for Raja is to be seen as an exotic 'export' for consumption by the nation-state, however, alongside this image of her physicality is also an underlying dignity, humility and resistance as an equally important part of her colonised identity and which Fred tries to respect and adapt to. When he has exhausted all strategies to develop a relationship with her, against his better judgement Fred resorts to 'purchasing' Raja, "avant qu'on ne te vend ailleurs," (as Raja had also been promised in marriage to a policeman in Casablanca, an arrangement overseen by her brother). Fred offers Raja accommodation within his property, but also invites Youssef to live with her with the prospect that they will both be trained to look

after the house, which, on the spur of the moment, Fred rashly claims he has plans to develop into a small hotel complex, although he invents this plan. However, he makes Raja secretly promise that she will have sexual relationships with him in return, putting their relationship in terms of a business arrangement from which Raja is the only party to profit: “On a que des rapports de commerce tous les deux, sauf que lá, c’est toi qui fais des affaires. Moi, je n’ai rien en échange, rien.”

The commercial solution to Fred and Raja’s relationship is a downward spiral for the couple, their situation only worsening when their sexual relationship fails, as Raja initiates the sexual encounter with Fred but then shows little engagement or desire, but performs an emotionless act, as if she were a prostitute servicing a client, which angers Fred, who describes her as an emotional cripple. Raja, not understanding Fred’s rejection, and believing that she had satisfied his sexual needs, returns immediately to prostitution and solicits at the local airport. Although Zineb and Oum el Aïd comfort Fred, they (as seers) had predicted the outcome of the romance (in the words of Oum el Aïd: “on te l’avait dit”), but when Zineb (referring to Raja as a prostitute), raises the question of whether Fred had compensated her financially for her sexual favours, Fred sets off in search of her in order to give her money, realising that on her terms, their relationship was an act of economic survival. He then goes on to pay Youssef even more money to marry Raja and uphold her honour, and finally has to visit his bank in order to draw out enough money to pay for Youssef and Raja’s wedding. Fred’s last bitter words in the final scene of the film echo his fear about being desired only for his money:

En Fred peut s'entrevoir l'allégorie de l'homme occidental, c'est-à-dire, en dehors du pouvoir que lui confère son argent, un pantin désespéré et amer. Sa remarque implique la vénalité de Raja et du système social qui l'encadre. Doillon note combien la chasse au fric pervertit. Ici, plus agressif encore, il accuse l'argent d'être responsable de la corruption des rapports humains, donc de la démolition des sentiments.³⁴

In terms of Fred and Raja as an unlikely couple, the film shows the unsuccessful mapping of desire onto an exploitative relationship that is steeped in (neo-colonial) power inequalities, which, coupled with the funding inadequacy that Doillon suffered as a result of the politics of the French film industry, renders it an 'anti-national' film on the one hand, whilst it could also be considered as global cinema on the other. By making *Raja* in Morocco, as a Western director Doillon is experiencing a displacement of culture and language, which is a reversal of minority 'exilic' film-making.³⁵ He also faced difficulties in funding his film, which is a frequent obstacle that diasporic directors have to overcome. The paradox of *Raja* is that it operates within a dominant internal history of neo-colonialism and national cultural traditions and therefore supports the ideological fantasy of the powerful French state, whilst not conforming to the narrowing range of representations 'allowed' by the current state funding situation (as Calatayud and Bray have pointed out), as its appeal is not to the typical mass French television audience, in which case it would have almost certainly been eligible for substantial funding. The double problem that arises during the funding

³⁴ Audé, Françoise et Martinez, Dominique (2003), Jacques Doillon, *Positif*, 511, Sept. pp. 21-27.

³⁵ Naficy, Hamid (2001), *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking*, p. 24.

process is the question of how nations represent themselves first within the nation-state and then to other nations. When funding organisations appear to prioritise films' potential contribution to the ideology of national identity over aesthetic qualities, the contested terrain of film is demonstrably no longer a national, but rather a global cultural product. Just as the purpose of France's GATT agreement was to resist the French film industry being flooded with Hollywood productions, so France's growing financial involvements in international coproductions (for example in Eastern Europe and Africa) also reflects a still unresolved postcolonial tension through a renewed hegemonic desire in the realm of film production. *Raja* also address the imbalances of power (economic, cultural and ideological) that are at play within the film, specifically in relation to the legacy of French neo-colonialism. Directors bring into question the validity of both national/transnational cinema and cultural identity as rigid and fixed concepts in contemporary (post-colonial) France. As Simon During has suggested, by deploying concepts like hybridity, ambivalence and mimicry (in other words, the incorporation of the colonised into colonising culture), post-neo-colonialism has a reconciliatory role rather than a more critical anti-neo-colonialism.³⁶

Films and Funding

Prior to the making of *Raja*, Doillon had prepared another film project but had failed to obtain funding for it and was consequently forced to abandon the

³⁶ During, Simon (2000), 'Globalising Postneo-colonialism,' *Cultural Studies*, 14, 3/4, July; pp. 3-86.

proposed film.³⁷ In Doillon's opinion (which he made public in an article in the film journal, *Première*),³⁸ the lack of funding support (*l'avance sur recettes*) was the result of the scenario of his planned film project: "not fitting in within the light entertainment focus of the financiers."³⁹ This impacted upon the making of *Raja* and led Doillon to express his dismay at what he perceived to be the limited opportunities provided by the French film industry, to the extent that his article in *Première* proposed that his own creativity might be affected, should he choose to change his style to suit the demands of the film finance institutions.⁴⁰ As a direct consequence of the lack of substantial funding for *Raja*, the production was moved to Marrakech, where on a low budget and using local Moroccan amateur actors where possible, Doillon shot the film in less than six weeks, independent of major finance from the French television companies.⁴¹

Since the 1980s, the funding of French film has undergone major changes in order to protect French national film production from Hollywood domination of the French market. The GATT agreement, signed in 1993 by the French government,⁴² imposed a limit on film productions shown in France that were not French film industry products, on the grounds of cultural exception, which was

³⁷ Bray, Maryse and Calatayud, Agnès (2005), 'The French film industry's current financial crisis and its impact on creation: the example of Jacques Doillon's *Raja* (2003)', *Studies in European Cinema*, 2, 3, pp.199-200. The abandoned film project was to have been a love story starring Emmanuelle Béart, Vincent Lindon and Edouard Baer.

³⁸ Doillon, Jacques (2004), 'L'angoisse de Jacques,' *Première*, May, pp. 80–84.

³⁹ *ibid.*

⁴⁰ *ibid.*

⁴¹ Doillon, Jacques (2003), *Raja*. DVD produced by Film Movement. Although France 3 and Canal+ are listed in the the credits, the film is stated on the label as a Franco-Moroccan co-production.

⁴² The 1993 General Agreements on Trade and Tariffs.

argued to be “a legitimate means of cultural protection.”⁴³ Subsequently, ‘la loi Toubon’ was introduced in 1994,⁴⁴ but although this legislation protected the interests of French film directors and producers such as Pathé and Gaumont, there was increasing competition for film sponsorship from French television channels which were (and currently remain) both publicly and privately owned, to the extent that the major television corporates dominate the funding of any film currently made in France. This necessarily imposes limitations on the genre and type of film that is now made in France, as any production must match the expectations of a typical, French television audience, as well as the cinema-going audience (which might, for example, be a niche audience viewing art-house or experimental film). As Wendy Everett points out in her study of European identity in cinema, film funding reflects the level of status that a nation accords its films.⁴⁵ This suggests that power is wielded in the direction of a film’s mass audience appeal in order to ensure box-office profits, which in turn would have a negative impact on the production of art house, niche and low budget films (and also Francophone cinema), all of which (usually) have a limited box-office appeal, both at national and international levels. The relevance of funding control in the post-2000 French film production period, which is within the time-span of films

⁴³ Ulf-Moller, Jens (2001), *Hollywood’s Film Wars with France: Film-Trade Diplomacy and the Emergence of the French Film Quota Policy*, p. 107. The French argued that audiovisual products were culturally specific to each nation-state and therefore (in this case) to French national identity.

⁴⁴ Bray, Maryse and Calatayud, Agnès (2005), ‘The French film industry’s current financial crisis and its impact on creation: the example of Jacques Doillon’s *Raja* (2003),’ *Studies in European Cinema* 2, 3, pp. 199–212. The then culture minister Jacques Toubon thus further protected French language and film production which lead to tax breaks and levies contributing money towards French productions, and ultimately increasing French box office profits.

⁴⁵ Everett, Wendy (1996), ‘Framing the Fingerprints: a brief survey of European Film,’ in *European Identity in Cinema*, pp. 13-28.

studied for the thesis, is explored by Maryse Bray and Agnes Calatayud, who present a case study of *Raja* as an allegory for the turbulent producer/director relationship in the light of funding issues surrounding film-making, which they describe as “the conflict-ridden relationship between film-makers and their financiers in a world where return upon investment is the paramount criterion for the selection of scenarios.”⁴⁶

Bray and Calatayud provide an analogy of Fred as film producer (who has the financial backing required for a film project) and Raja as director (the creative artist who has no substantial funds available and who has to broker deals with those who have). Although the focus in this chapter is the narrative of interracial desire in terms of communication, language and power imbalance in *Raja*'s unlikely couple, in view of Doillon's concerns about the effect of financial constraints on his approach to film-making which Bray and Calatayud highlight, the funding implications remain implicit in the discussion, as the narrative of *Raja*, which is the sexual desire of a decadent, wealthy, white French businessman for a poor, local, Arab girl, falls short of the expectations of the French funding system. In other words, the film does not meet the criteria sought by the funding institutions as a film that represents France to the domestic audience. As Bray and Calatayud point out in their study, Doillon was not only refused funding by Canal+ and TF1 for his project prior to *Raja*, he was also denied the *avance sur recettes*⁴⁷ for the cancelled production and as a consequence resorted to making *Raja* as a small-budget film to overcome the economic problems involved. This

⁴⁶ Bray and Calatayud, *ibid*, p. 199.

⁴⁷ *ibid*, p. 201. In order to obtain specific funding such as the advance on tickets sales, a film needs to be approved by the state-run Centre National de la Cinématographie (CNC).

raises the question of how the film, with its dominant, colonial theme, operates as national cinema through historical memory, but did not secure the continuing state support for investment in the ideological fantasy of French national, cultural tradition, in this case a nation's collective memory of its repressed colonial history. The question of the context of *Raja*, rather than the promotion of 'difference' itself within the protagonist couple, situates the politics of its funding at the level of the nation-state and whilst the theme of the film is drawing upon a discourse which addresses the dominance of cultural and economic inequalities, the nation-state is also ambiguous in not providing the material resources for the French production.

Although the relative success of *Raja* demonstrates that French cinema does not necessarily have to rely on French funding, the future of French cinema *per se* is thrown into question in terms of becoming overshadowed in the light of competition from the internationalisation of film production in general.⁴⁸ Whilst Bray and Calatayud compare the Fred/Raja couple with a producer/director relationship, this chapter shows how the film is also a contemporary critique of the legacy of French neo-colonialism in which Raja is an exploitative 'producer' of a different sort, in terms of capitalist and commercial gain, in a reversal of the productive roles which exist within the conflict of global capitalism versus national culture tensions within the film.

⁴⁸ Significantly, although *Raja* was a Cannes Film Festival award winner (2003), the DVD production of the film is now restricted to Region 1 (USA/Canada), unlike the film and the DVD version of, for example, *Inch'Allah dimanche* (Yamina Benguigui, 2002), *Raja* was not released in England and the film has had a limited international festival circuit.

Doillon has produced a hybrid film which combines aspects of traditional Moroccan culture with the dominant political, economic and social structure of French nation, expressed by the main female character's instability and dislocation within her own culture. Bhabha observes that "even the most traditional historical narrative accedes to the language of fantasy and desire."⁴⁹ yet it is the author's, not the coloniser's narrative that betrays Doillon as a European and theoretically-informed director, displacing his own desire and fantasy in relation to the object of his own narrative, which he shares with the colonial texts that he is criticising. Doillon is a peripatetic and nomadic Western subject, free to travel and make films, whereas exilic film-makers from non-European countries do not have transnational freedom, but rather are in a forced deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation. As such, Doillon creates actual, material borders in *Raja* within the Eurocentric narrative of a utopia which increases the 'outsideness' of both Doillon who makes the film and the character Fred who redefines his desire against the commercialisation, providing new discursive boundaries between self and other. Borders being a highly performative place and are constituted discursively through the representation of the two nations in the film and materially through the installation of a transnational, economic space in which different national discourses are both materialised and transcended in an ambivalent space at the fringe of two cultures, controlled by the power of their shared colonial historicity.

⁴⁹ Bhabha (1994), p. 97.

Part Two Plenary

Contemporary questioning of identity and the potential problems of identity construction of ethnic minority adolescents in modern France are highlighted in *L'Esquive* (Chapter 5) and complicated by the social environment.. The use of language, the relationship between such use and the film's broader situation within the specific contexts of its critical reception (the spectator position), and the generic repertoire of a problematic discourse which sometimes embodies the film's reinforcement of clichéd constructions of both Frenchness and 'foreignness,' and the ways in which the film utilises this repertoire as point of reference in its critique of this discourse, suggest its possible duality as both an object and an agent of criticism of the film's focus on ethnic minority integration. However, the film negotiates the construction of hybrid identity through the hybridity of language which is distinctive in that it is almost exclusively a banlieue youth language, and situates it in relation to standard French, questioning the social meaning of the difference between the two languages.

Alternative views of national identity and new possibilities open up in *Fureur* (Chapter 6) through the disruptive force of the time-image in the film, which is also strongly embedded within definable practices of French cinema culture and negotiates de- and reterritorialisation in the light of a dominance of Chinese, rather than French identity in the film. Cultural otherness and ethnic tensions are common themes of contemporary diasporic cinema, however *Inch'Allah dimanche* (Chapter 7) marks a challenge to the thematic of 'otherness', as

Benguigui's role as film director merges with the reality of the narrative of the film, pinpointing a particularly poignant historical moment for the immigrant community of the 1970s. Reading the construction of Zouina's identity through Rosi Braidotti's nomadism reflects the existential situation of a female ethnic minority individual and proposes the notion of nomadic identity. Her theory introduces post-colonial thinking into feminist theory and provides fluid foundations for an alternative view of subjectivity. In *Inch'Allah dimanche* the gendered space and the problematics of integration of both Zouina and Ahmed in terms of race and identity, are negotiated directly through the female rather than the male, the former demonstrating an 'in-between' nomadic identity, that is not fixed and demonstrates an acute awareness of the non-fixity of boundaries. Insofar as film-style trends exceed the borders of nation-states, the concept of national style would seem to presuppose a transnational background against which the national style becomes evident so that a national cinema would require an understanding of transnational, international or global styles. Yet studies of national cinemas are plentiful, while studies of transnational film style are few and far between.

Fred and Raja (Chapter 8) are unable to communicate, and although Raja is seemingly rendered without voice, both in her limited interactions with Fred and also as a single female in her community, hers is a powerfully articulated character in the film. Raja's dignified manner, humility and disciplined negation of Fred's sexual approaches express the underlying power structures of this neo-colonial code and, in turn, its fragility. Expressed in neocolonialist terms, the

potential for Raja is to be seen as an exotically beautiful 'export' for consumption by the nation-state. Her community are isolated from the globalist economy and they appear not to have been coordinated with international political spaces, and seek to escape their situation.

CONCLUSIONS

In my research out of widespread viewing around the final focus on the eight case studies, significant thematic axes stood out through recurring patterns and it became clear that all the films repeatedly engaged with specific questions about contemporary French society. Given existing scholarship when I started this project, I expected that certain themes present in one film might have been absent from another, but what was most noticeable from the results of my study was the hybridity of the films in terms of traditional French cinema genres. As national cinema is a relational, conceptual category, and is constructed (mainly) in response to, and challenges, the domination of American cinema, the examples of French cinema studied were found to be deeply hybridised. The adoption of 'foreign' film genres (for example in *Fureur*) and diverse narrative strategies (in the reliance of images and sound over dialogue in *Vendredi soir*, for example), complicated attempts to associate the films with indigenous traditions or characteristics of French national cinema. Whilst I have loosely categorised the films as featuring 'unlikely couples,' it would be very difficult to sub-categorise them into, for example, genres. Neither do they form a significant movement. However they do reflect particular trends of an alternative vision in the way that they show filmic reality.

The films have been grouped as Part One and Part Two of the thesis by virtue of the fact that the four films in Part One are genre hybrids and articulate nationality and genre differently from the films in Part Two, which show more of

a propensity for being a collective group, with a more ‘visible’ challenge to Frenchness in terms of narratives of racial integration of ethnic minorities that are developing French identity through a different relationship to Frenchness and nation (such as in the blending of eighteenth-century French language with banlieue *verlan* in *L’Esquive*).

While I have not started out from a single theoretical framework but have embraced diverse theories and philosophies with a view to exploring alternative ways of looking at French film, I hope that this flexible approach will open up a corpus of work on genre, in view of the lack of French scholarship regarding genre studies and the emphasis on the historical roots of genre. An empirical tradition in French cinema genre, from a theoretical standpoint, must, as Raphaëlle Moine (one of the few scholars of genre in French cinema studies) states ‘reconcile both textual and contextual approaches.’¹ To this end one of the conclusions of the study is that there is a need for a more theoretically expansive view of genre studies in French cinema. The 2000-2004 films in the study, which have been approached from different theoretical standpoints in terms of the construction of identity of the couples portrayed, are connected by their very diversity of styles, with less adherence to traditional French cinema genres and a more fluid approach to style. This transition marks a shift which is borne out not only in the expansion of the definition of ‘French cinema’ by these films, but out of a consideration of who the audience ‘is’ for twenty-first century films made and financed in France, to meet the expectations of a changing audience, when, as

¹ Moine, Raphaëlle (2008), *Cinema Genre*, p. xvi.

Jason Solomon states “the cosy, traditional French bourgeois drama is becoming a thing of the past.”² The transition in French cinema post-2000 has been described by various writers who have grouped post-2000 film as a ‘cinema of desire,’ and ‘cinema of sensation,’³ with films such as *Anatomie de l'enfer* also heralding a new ‘cinema of transgression,’ whilst within the works of new ethnic minority filmmakers, a direction in terms of the transnational and diasporic or ‘cinema of *métissage*’ has developed. Filmmakers such as Abdellatif Kechiche have made the transition to other narratives (such as adolescent romance in *L'Esquive*) in a more recent evolution of ‘cinema of community identification,’ which could be viewed as contributing to a broader awareness of the cultural and ethnic heterogeneity of contemporary France, particularly in the foregrounding of French ethnic minority protagonists, suggesting that the composition of the films in Part Two and the concerns they portray, are changing in France. *L'Esquive* and *Fureur* simultaneously address the complex and often violent processes which have brought disparate cultures together. In the case of *L'Esquive*, the distinct borders between French and non-French languages are crossed, such that the code-switching and blending of new hybrid words mimics the ethnic and cultural *métissage* of modern French society, which also becomes part of a hybrid culture that provides an alternative framework of understanding. It also leaves open an intriguing point of departure for the future study of French cinema beyond the

² Solomons, Jason (16/11/2008), ‘France on the crest of a new New wave,’ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2008/nov/16/french-cinema-new-wave> Accessed 03/06/09.

³ For example Martine Beugnet’s work: (2007), *Cinema and Sensation: French Film and the Art of Transgression*.

chosen period, as it was not possible to define a neat, closed French national identity within the films studied.

What draws Part One and Part Two of the thesis together is the different cinematic experience that the films provide in catering for a constantly evolving audience. The importance of *mise-en-scène*, of the elements that appear within the film's frame, as well as the innovative presentation of narrative themes, adds to the continued evolution of the French film industry and its global appeal, especially in films that mix genres, or are looked at as a particular genre by different audiences of diverse cultural, social, and political backgrounds. By nature of their hybridity the films do not fall easily into specific genre categories and whilst *Gouttes d'eau sur pierres brûlantes* is a black comedy, it has elements of television melodrama and, as it was originally a German play, could also be considered to be transnational. There is a confusion of genres in *Fureur*, as the kickboxing sub-genre sits uncomfortably with the romance narrative set in Paris. *Le Goût des autres* is a comedy but has elements of provincial theatre, whilst *Raja* was made outside France and necessitates subtitling in parts. *L'Esquive* and *Fureur* simultaneously address the complex and often violent processes which have brought disparate cultures together. In the case of *L'Esquive*, the distinct borders between French and non-French languages are crossed, such that the code-switching and blending of new hybrid words mimics the ethnic and cultural *métissage* of modern French society, which also becomes part of a hybrid culture that provides an alternative framework of understanding.

One of the areas of enquiry of the thesis is to examine how the films of 2000-2004 address 'Frenchness' and 'nation.' Whilst the term 'unlikely couple' indicates subversion between the two parties involved, what the thesis shows is that the films indicate a subversion on a wider scale. It is clear from the diversity of the films examined that each couple featured has its own 'story' articulated in its own space, but the group of films chosen have a different relation to national identity in the way that they relate to the cinematic space of 'the national.' It is in terms of cinematic space that they question the French status quo with bold stylistic experimentation and a fundamental lack of compromise in their engagement with the viewer. The directors of the films that were the subject of the thesis have produced works that reflect the new society and culture that is around them, in terms of a broadening of the borders of narrative, of expanding of stylistic techniques and of audience appeal, a change dictated by the audience. This reflects the evolving face of French society and the cultural memory of the French nation, which has undergone (over a period of time) a transition and a move away from traditional narratives in filmmaking that previously reflected rather more closed cultural representations prior to 2000. New ground is also being broken by the diverse group of directors, in, for example, Benguigui's intensely personal commitment in filming a fictional version of a missing piece in the history of France's Algerian immigration in *Inch'Allah dimanche*; Denis's filming of the body in a new cinematic 'aesthetic of sensation'⁴ through haptic

⁴ Beugnet, Martine (2007), *Cinema and Sensation: French Film and the Art of Transgression*.

vision;⁵ Breillat's questioning of gender politics in *Anatomie de l'enfer*; Ozon's *Gouttes d'eau sur pierres brûlantes* as an adaptation of a German play; and the directors Dridi and Kechiche presenting new perspectives on ethnic minority communities by nature of their own diasporic cultural memory and identification with the minority communities through their filmmaking.

What also links Part One and Part Two of the thesis, and is a pervading theme throughout the study, is what could be termed the 'foreign-ness' of the films, a term that Beugnet uses to describe the films that Denis creates.⁶ This not only applies to the physical relationship of displacement from a country of origin, but to any mental or physical feeling of exile. This could be extended in wider terms to *Vendredi soir* where Laure is outside her experience of the quotidian and is marginalised by a strange and different feeling of displacement and loss of identity, outside her normal boundaries and limits. This encounter with the unfamiliar is echoed in the strangeness of everyday spaces in which Laure experiences her relationship with Jean. The study provides an understanding of perceptive strategies through a more sensuous approach, which advances the investigation of the chosen films towards an understanding of the embodied experience, that is, in the case of film, identification (or not) with a screen body. Through the trope of 'the couple' there is a renegotiation of 'looking' and a reconstruction of cinematic space to provide new spectator positions. Couples'

⁵ Marks, Laura (2000), *The Skin of the Film; Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*, p.162.

⁶ Beugnet, Martine (2004), *Claire Denis*, p. 2.

desires are 'seen' by the spectator in alternative ways; through the style of the director, the method of filming, the positioning of the camera and the distance from the subject (for example in Claire Denis' close filming of the body in *Vendredi Soir*), and through the narratives (or lack of narrative). Although there appears to be an excessivism within the chosen films, fantasy and dreams play a major part in all of them, reminding the spectator of the cinematic illusion. These may be atypical films, each with a highly stylised approach, resulting in a distinctive quality and following themes not based on binary opposition but more around a fluid mesh of uncertainties about sexual and other differences. This diversity is optimistic since the decentralisation of French identity in the films is where the true originality lies.

FILMOGRAPHY***Le Gout des autres / The Taste of Others***

(2000), 112 mins.

Director: Agnes Jaoui

Production: Charles Gassot

Screenplay: Agnes Jaoui and Jean-Pierre Bacri

Camera: Laurent Dailland

Editing: Hervé de Luz

Sound: Laurent Boudaud

Music: Jean-Charles Jarrel

Cast: Anne Alvaro/Clara, Jean-Pierre Bacri/Jean-Jacques Castella,
Agnes Jaoui/Manie.***Gouttes d'eau sur pierres brûlantes / Water drops on Burning Rocks***

(2000), 90 mins.

Director: François Ozon

Production: Fidelité Productions

Screenplay: François Ozon from the screenplay by Fassbinder, *Tröpfen auf heiße Steine*

Camera: Jeanne Lapoirie

Editing: Lawrence Bawedin

Sound: Eric Devulder

Music: *Träume* performed by Françoise Hardy*Symphony no. 4*, Mahler*Requiem 3*, Verdi*Zadok the Priest*, Handel*Tanze Samba Mit Mir*, performed by Tony HolidayCast: Bernard Girardeau/Léopold, Malik Zidi/Franz, Ludivine Seignier/Anna,
Anna Thompson/Véra.***Anatomie de l'enfer / Anatomy of Hell* (2004) 77mins**

Director: Catherin Breillat

Production: Antonio da Cunha Telles

Screenplay: Catherine Breillat from her novel *Pornocratie*

Camera: Georgos Avantis

Editing: Pascal Chavance:

Cast: Amira Casar/the woman, Rocco Siffredi/the man.

L'Esquive / Games of Love and Chance (2004), 123 mins.

Director: Abdellatif Kechiche

Production: Jacques Ouaniche

Screenplay: Abdellatif Kechiche

Camera: Lubomir Bakchev

Editing: Ghalya Lacroix

Sound: Nicolas Washkowski

Cast: Osman Elkharraz/Krimo, Sara Forestier/Lydia, Sabrina Ouazini/Frida
Nanou Benhamou/Nanou, Rachid Hami/Rachid.***Fureur / Rage***, (2003) 95 mins.

Director: Karim Dridi

Production: Alain Rozanes

Screenplay: Karim Dridi

Camera: Eric Guichard

Editing: Lise Beaulieu

Sound: Michel Brethez

Music: Jean-Christophe Camps

Cast: Samuel LeBihan/Rapha, Nan Yu/Chinh, Yann Trégouet/Manu, Bounsy
Louang Phinith/ Tony.***Inch'Allah dimanche / Only on a Sunday*** (2001) 98 mins.

Director: Yamina Benguigui

Production: Bashir Derais

Screenplay:

Camera: Antoine Roch

Editing: Nadia ben Rachid

Sound: Dominique Hennequin

Cast: Fejria Deliba/Zouina, Zinedine Soualem/Ahmed, Mathilde Seignier/
Mlle. Briat, Marie-France Pisier/Mme. Manant.***Raja***, (2003), 115 mins.

Director: Jacques Doillon

Production: Margaret Menegoz

Screenplay: Jacques Doillon

Camera: Helene Louvart

Editing: Gladys Joujou

Sound: Brigitte Taillandier

Music: Philippe Sarde

Cast: Pascal Greggory/Fred, Najat Benssallem/Raja, Ilham Abdelwahed/Nadira,
Hassan Khissal/Youssef, Ait Youss/Oum El Aid, Ouchita/Zineb, Ahmed
Akenouss/Ahmed.

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