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**Concert and Disconcertion: the music of
relationality in the cinema of Claire
Denis**

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Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD in French

2019

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Declaration

I declare that the work presented in this thesis is my own,
and that this thesis is the one on which I expect to be
examined.

Geoffrey Brown

This thesis is dedicated to Agnès Calatayud, an inspirational teacher, who reconnected me to French cinema after a long *carence*, and who, crucially, first introduced me to the films of Claire Denis.

Abstract

This thesis argues that the interest which the films of Claire Denis display in the ever-shifting modes of relations between people is illustrated through analysis of how music is used throughout her corpus of feature films. Denis draws on an extremely eclectic palette of musical styles, and the thesis proposes that these varying musical modalities are central to her treatment of relational issues, as are the ways in which she deploys her chosen musical selections.

In this thesis, I develop a number of analytical tools. I draw on the thinking of Jacques Rancière and Jean-Luc Nancy with regard to questions of relationality, community and the dissensual elements which inform both interpersonal relationships and artistic creativity. I adapt the work of Kathryn Lachman on concepts of polyphony and counterpoint in literature for application to the oeuvre of Denis, as I do the writings of Michel Chion on music in film, especially his conceptualization of empathetic modes of cinematic music.

The thesis concludes that music in the work of Claire Denis operates in a mode which diverges significantly from the tenets of existing film music theory. Music in a Denis film is at the same time far more fragmentary and yet much more thoroughly integrated than allowed for by standard conceptualizations. It plays hand-in-hand with the challenges and invitations which are a feature of the cinema of Denis.

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Introduction

Music is essentially about aesthetic experiences and the creative expression of individual human beings in community, about the sharing of ideas.¹

[...] the way we relate to the things of the world is no longer as a pure intellect trying to master an object or space that stands before it. Rather, this relationship is an ambiguous one, between beings who are both embodied and limited, and an enigmatic world.²

A work of art is a new syntax [...] Syntax in cinema amounts to the linkages and relinkages of images, but also the relation between sound and the visual image.³

Every 'successful' relation – successful in that it manages to say the implicit without articulating it, to pass over articulation without falling into the censorship of desire or the sublimation of the unspeakable – such a relation can rightly be called musical.⁴

My aim in this thesis is to examine how the cinema of Claire Denis uses music to address questions of relationality.⁵ Critical assessment of the oeuvre of Denis has noted from time to time her use of music. This has largely been where the music has an insistent quality which cannot be overlooked: the interpolation of Britten in *Beau travail*; the forceful presence of Jean-Louis Murat and Kali in *J'ai pas sommeil*; the strident loops created by Stuart Staples for *L'Intrus*. Those examples are outstanding instances of how Denis uses music to challenge assumed or expected narratives. My proposition is that, far from being special or isolated breakings-out or breakings-in of music in her films, they are simply

1 John Blacking, *A Common-Sense View of All Music*, (CUP, 1987), p.146.

2 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Causeries* (1948), trans. by Oliver Davis as *The World of Perception* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp.69-70.

3 'The Brain Is the Screen: An Interview with Gilles Deleuze', in *The Brain Is the Screen: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Cinema* ed. by Gregory Flaxman (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p.370. First published in Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1986. Translation by Marie Therese Guirgis.

4 Roland Barthes, 'Music, voice, language' in *The Responsibility of Forms: Critical Essays on Music, Art and Representation*, trans. by Richard Howard (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), pp.284-85. Emphasis in original.

5 My consideration focuses on the eleven full-length feature films which Claire Denis released up until mid-2017.

the most apparent occasions of the use of music throughout her work as a means of providing a meta-narrative, or a series of meta-affects, which deploy music as a medium of critique and query. The filmmaker herself has offered the view that: 'Quelqu'un qui branche une radio ou qui écoute au juke box est finalement dans une relation avec quelque chose'.⁶ That statement indicates that music is important to her as part of the exploration of relational issues which we find in her work.

I use the term relationality as describing and encompassing the numerous ways in which people and things come into relation. At the interpersonal level, this embraces how individuals connect, or try to connect, or even fail to connect, with other individuals. Those interpersonal channels, or attempts to construct them, lead naturally to consideration of how the individual stands vis-à-vis society or community, how individual and community interrelate, and how individuals and communities find a relation to the world around them.

Much valuable critical thought, dealing specifically with Denis films from standpoints connected to relationality, has already taken place and I review that literature as a prelude to my own analyses, which focus on how music works as a medium for engaging with relationality in her cinema.

Literature review

Interest in the relevance of relational issues for the cinema of Denis has been growing in the last decade or so. Martine Beugnet pointed in 2004 to Denis's 'prob[ing] the more hidden implications of the multiform experience of exclusion, and in particular the internalisation of discriminatory discourses'.⁷ And, significantly, Judith Mayne gave the subtitle of 'Seeing Others' to the substantive part of her monograph.⁸ Other studies have focused on specific aspects of relations between characters. One example of this is James S.

6 'Anyone listening to the radio or jukebox is actually relating to something'. In Sébastien Lifshitz, *Claire Denis la vagabonde* (FEMIS 2005 – their subtitles).

7 *Claire Denis* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2004), p.3.

8 *Claire Denis* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005).

Williams's comparison of the treatments of the father-daughter relationships in Denis's *35 rhums* (2008) and in Ozu's *Late Spring* (1949), where he concludes that the sensitive handling in the former amounts to a new version of relationality: 'by deregulating and romancing the Father [*35 rhums*] successfully negotiates and reinvests familial structures and social prohibitions'.⁹

Andrew Asibong argues that relations between individual characters, in several Denis films, seem thwarted by convention and situation, only for the filmmaker to offer brief, tantalizing moments where intimacy might have been possible.¹⁰ A corresponding view is offered by Leo Bersani, who situates *Beau travail* within his interest in films which: 'seem to be testing definitions and conditions of intimacy and, in so doing, have proposed new or at least unfamiliar relational configurations'.¹¹ Bersani argues that: 'Claire Denis tests the identities – realized, potential, erased identities – produced by different kinds of movement' (97). This line of thought, that Denis is engaged in a kind of filmic wondering about relationality, strikes me as a very productive means of approach to her cinema.

One of the most commented-on aspects of the relationality which features in Denis's work is the public interchanges she has had with Jean-Luc Nancy – his commentaries on certain of her films and her responses to his observations – and the way in which thinker and cinéaste have influenced each other on relational questions.¹² Notable studies here are the special issue of *Film-Philosophy* (April 2008), which devoted a series of articles to the engagement between Nancy and Denis, and Laura McMahon's *Cinema and Contact* (2012), which examines issues of touch in the work of Bresson, Duras, and Denis in the light of Nancy's writing.

The special issue of *Film-Philosophy* includes a piece by Nancy himself, on

9 'Romancing the Father in Claire Denis' "35 Shots of Rum", *Film Quarterly*, 63.2 (2009), pp.44-50.

10 'Claire Denis's Flickering Spaces of Hospitality', *L'Esprit créateur*, 51.1 (2011), pp.154-67.

11 'Father knows best', *Raritan*, 29.4 (2010), pp.92-104.

12 Going beyond textual exchange and cinematic adaptation, Nancy has appeared in two short films by Denis: *Vers Nancy* (2002) and *Vers Mathilde* (2005).

Trouble Every Day; together with articles by Douglas Morrey, Martine Beugnet, Anja Streiter, and Laura McMahon. Morrey reads the work of Denis from perspectives of wounds, body, and image, drawing on Nancy's *Corpus* (2006). He concludes that ethical representation, such as deployed in the cinema of Denis, avoids offering a perspective of external penetration, preferring to open matters out by 'sliding across the surfaces of sense' (30). Beugnet explores questions of strangeness and foreignness, beginning with the Denis short, *Vers Nancy* (2002), in which Nancy himself has a central role, and moving on to the nature of the relationship between *L'Intrus* the book and the film. She sums up her argument by suggesting that the film 'offers itself as a body of sensations' which might allow the audience 'to be drawn into and infused by the unfamiliar' (46). Anja Streiter's contribution centres on issues of community, drawing on Nancy's *La Communauté désœuvrée*. She argues that 'for both the philosopher and the filmmaker touch is a terrain where being together and being separate meet' (53), and proposes that those issues 'are linked to a confrontation with the mortal body' (50) in both Nancy's writing and Denis's film-making. Laura McMahon's piece examines Christic themes in Nancy's reading of *Beau travail*, looking at the ways in which *La Communauté désœuvrée* and *Dis-Enclosure* (2008) inform his interpretation of the film. She suggests that the closed circuit of self-presence, imaged in the film, is exactly what Denis seeks to deconstruct, exploding the ideology of belonging and communal fusion, and dissecting the conjoined underpinning myths of nation and military.

These articles, which explore different facets of the engagement between Denis and Nancy, highlight elements of fluidity and variable distance which are at the centre of Denis's work. Whether the emphasis is on the spiritual or the bodily, or on intrusion or opening out, these readings speak to the shifting focus of relationality presented by her films. In her book *Cinema and Contact*,¹³ Laura McMahon, focusing primarily on *L'Intrus*, offers a re-appraisal in the light of Nancy's critique of communal models which rely on conformity and assimilation. McMahon uses the lens of Nancy's *Noli Me Tangere* (2003) alongside his text of *L'Intrus*, which inspired Denis's film, to place the emphasis on refusal of

13 London: Legenda, 2012.

assimilation and the figure of touch as limit experience, with Denis's emphasis on physical materiality and fragmentation brought to the fore as a rejection of conformity and finitude.

Moving beyond the Denis-Nancy connection, the most recent collection of interviews and essays on Denis offers different angles on relational issues in her work. Marjorie Vecchio says in the introduction to her collection: 'hidden in the belly of a Claire Denis film is the truth that all the scholarship and governing of identity politics and socialisation is nothing in the face of simple human interaction'.¹⁴ The emphasis on relationality in Vecchio's book ranges quite widely: the role of family in Denis's work; her use of montage to work against the grain, operating: 'neither to generate suspense nor to create a thematic unity' but instead to 'proliferate difference, to sensitize us to the solitude that adheres in all people and things' (83); and breaking away from social bonds in order to 'construct new forms of relations and community' (97). The contributions to Vecchio's collection are of a sympathetic nature. But even in more critical assessments, whose focus is often on the more provocative aspects of the cinema of Denis, it is recognized (sometimes reluctantly) that relationality is at issue. For example, Kath Dooley's article,¹⁵ which brings into play what she describes as 'murder' and 'torture' in *Trouble Every Day*, *L'Intrus* and *Les Salauds*, cites Greg Hainge's analysis¹⁶ of Marina de Van's *Dans ma peau* (2002) and other films (including *Trouble Every Day*) as concluding that such films: 'cannot be explained in terms of diversion or social commentary'. Rather, for Dooley, they allow for a rethinking of 'the relational modes that are brought into play in the creation and deployment of the cinematic object itself' (105).

The broad consensus of these critical views is that relationality in the films of Claire Denis connects with what we might summarize as rhythmic dissensuality.

14 *The Films of Claire Denis: Intimacy on the Border* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2014), p.xiv. Further references to this collection are given after quotations in the text.

15 'Haptic visions of unstable bodies in the work of Claire Denis', *Continuum*, 29.3 (2015), pp. 434-44.

16 'A Full Face Bright Red Money Shot: Incision, Wounding and Film Spectatorship in Marina de Van's *Dans Ma Peau*', *Continuum*, 26.4 (2012), pp.565-77.

I now want to focus on how these dissensual modes feature in the musical aspects of the cinema of Denis.

Music and the cinema of Claire Denis

The importance of conflict and resistance for art in general is underlined by Jacques Rancière: 'Art lives so long as it expresses a thought unclear to itself in a manner that resists it'.¹⁷ For Rancière, how art works (a process he describes as 'the life of art in the aesthetic regime of art') is by a form of shuttling: 'playing an autonomy against a heteronomy and a heteronomy against an autonomy [..]' (132). This places crucial emphasis on setting modes of thinking in contrapuntal opposition. Although Rancière is primarily concerned with aesthetic and political concepts, there is a read-across to the potential for representing modes of behaviour in creative counterpoint. The crux, for Rancière, is the tension between the impetus of art to create 'new forms of life in common' and its drive to remain apart, its separation constituting a 'resistance of its form to every transformation into a form of life'.¹⁸ This conflict results in what he describes as 'a project which arranges, in the form of the work, either an explanation of domination or a comparison between what the world is and what it might be' (44). Relevant here is Rancière's concept of 'dissensus'. Rancière formulates aesthetic dissensuality as 'suspending the commandment of form over matter, of active understanding over passive sensibility'.¹⁹ He accordingly attributes to creative artistic activity the need for breaking with received ideas. In this respect, the kind of movement against accepted norms which we meet in the cinema of Denis has resonance with the concept of dissensus championed by Jacques Rancière.

Greg Hainge, discussing the documentary work of Philippe Grandrieux, introduces the paradoxical idea of harmony operating in a dissensual mode. He

17 'The aesthetic revolution and its outcomes' in *Dissensus* (London and New York: Continuum, 2010a), p.123.

18 'Aesthetics as politics' in *Aesthetics and its Discontents* (Cambridge and Malden, MA: Polity, 2010b), p.44

19 *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics* (London and New York: Continuum, 2010), p.176.

suggests the possibility of being in harmony with someone 'without a need for there to be an absolute confluence of perspectives or knowledge', and he goes on to describe this process as: 'like the idea of a harmonic relation, to open oneself up to a relation with the world that is not entirely one's own, to allow oneself to resonate in harmony with a different way of being in the world'.²⁰ Hainge's insight into the harmonic aspect of relationality is a very helpful one as it is in just such a way that musical relationality operates in the work of Denis, as a means of perceiving and understanding difference.

Seen in this way, there is no inherent contradiction in drawing close and pulling apart; these movements are co-partners: appreciation of difference working in tandem with close association. This view offers a fruitful means of understanding the cinema of Denis, in demonstrating how fluid distance works as a prime means of drawing together those elements of her films which appear to many viewers as incomprehensibly fragmented. Examples of fluid distance in musical terms are: the intimacy of the performed pieces in *J'ai pas sommeil* which have a different register to the stridency of some of the interpolated recordings; the distancing effect in the use of Britten in *Beau travail* which contrasts with, notably, the sense of proximity of the dance floor music; and in *Vendredi soir*, the empathetic aspects of the composed score which butt up against the grandiose impact of Shostakovitch.

The presence of seemingly opposed pulsions of resistance and integration has been noted by Fabrice Fuentes in the context of *S'en fout la mort* (1990). Fuentes considers that Denis not only exploits the fragmentary structure of jazz to emphasize the dislocated existence of the two main characters, but also draws on the political origins of the music form to contextualize the scenario. In the latter respect, he cites Gilles Mouëllic: 'L'histoire du jazz est directement liée au conflit entre résistance à l'asservissement et désir d'intégration'.²¹

²⁰ *Philippe Grandrieux: Sonic Cinema*, (New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2017), p.71.

²¹ 'The history of jazz is an inseparable part of the conflict between resistance to subjugation and the desire for integration', Gilles Mouëllic, *Le Jazz, une esthétique du XXe siècle*, (Éditions Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2000), p.21, cited in 'La Fibre musicale', in Fontanel et al., *Le Cinéma de Claire Denis* (Lyon: Aléas, 2008), p.205. Subsequent references in text. All translations mine unless otherwise indicated.

Correspondingly, Fuentes sees the use of Bob Marley's 'Buffalo Soldier'²² as offering reassurance at the same time as presenting a trap, the characters torn between 'un rêve d'insertion' (dream of integration) and 'la nostalgie du pays nourricier' (nostalgia for a homeland) (Fontanel, 205). The fluidity and differential, noted by Fuentes in relation to how Denis uses music in this film, is something which features throughout her work as both a challenge and an enticement.²³

This mobile and uncertain quality of viewers' connection with the music is a part of the director's strategy for keeping them at an optimum distance to maintain challenge and interest. The music draws the spectator in, makes contact with her or him, but instead of offering reassurance or comfort, it mixes the pleasure of that close intimacy with a troubling intangibility and uncertainty. Martine Beugnet observes that: 'to open oneself to sensory awareness and let oneself be physically affected by an art work or a spectacle is to relinquish the will to gain full mastery over it, choosing intensity and chaos over rational detachment'.²⁴

Denis has said that, for her, an essential part of making films is excluding didacticism ('you get explanation by getting rid of explanation').²⁵ What I think she means by this elliptical formulation is that avoiding accepted explanations is a way to finding one's own understanding. She has, for example, described the making of *J'ai pas sommeil* as like exposing a hidden part of herself: 'J'avais le sentiment d'exposer un sentiment profond que j'ai de moi vivante dans le monde où je vis'.²⁶ The music which plays in all her films is drawn from

22 Recorded in 1978 but not released until 1983, on the posthumous album *Confrontation*.

23 Fuentes might also have commented on the political connotations of Marley's song, which, at plot level, uses the historical fact of 'Buffalo soldiers' – regiments of black soldiers in the US, originally formed in the 1860s to fight against Native American tribes – as a figure for the continuing battle for equality and civil rights in modern day America. Apart from the principle of the exploitation of these soldiers, the very existence of the regiments in which they served constituted a form of apartheid, represented in the film by the ghettoization of Dah and Jocelyn.

24 *Cinema and Sensation* (Edinburgh University Press, 2007), p.3.

25 Interview with Jonathan Romney, *Guardian*, 28 June 2000.

26 'I had the feeling of exposing an inner sense of myself in relation to the world I live in'. Interview with Jean-Philippe Renouard and Lise Wajeman 'ce poids d'ici-bas', *Vacarme* 14 <<http://www.vacarme.org/article84.html>> [last accessed 08/5/2017].

songs to which she has a strong affective response, or is by musicians with whom she feels that same strength of connection. In that sense, the music, like the films themselves, carries an element of risk, an exposure to the world of what she holds dear. This resonates with the use of counterpoint, presented by Lachman and others as a strategy which entails risks, the impact of which has been described by musicologists as: 'entail[ing] being in the music, perceiving the relations between the strands, in effect being surrounded by the music [...] allow[ed] no safe distance from the materials'.²⁷

On a personal level, therefore, the making by Claire Denis of a film is an exercise in both offering and holding off on the director's part. This strategy is in itself a shadowing of the close engagement into which the film invites its audience, while at the same time insisting on the distancing implied by a refusal of explanation. The music participates in this dynamic by its familiarity or unfamiliarity, its decontextualization, its fragmentation, its disappearance and re-appearance.

Rémi Fontanel, in discussing the repeated appearance of references to the illegal traffic of telephone cards in *Nénette et Boni*, sees such manifestations as echoes, which he likens to folds ('plis') which form a vital part of the film without having a direct bearing on the action. He describes such instances as 'subtle rhymes' (*rimes subtiles*) or 'refrains' (*ritournelles*) which provide enriching depth, like 'an additional skin' (*une peau supplémentaire*) or 'a concealed and hardly perceptible second breath' (*un second souffle caché et à peine perceptible*), (111, emphases in original).

Sonically speaking, in the sense that individual pieces of music, particular musicians or musical styles, enter, leave, and return in the oeuvre of Denis, it certainly seems legitimate to speak about elements of a refrain. Refrain is defined variously as a repeated musical phrase, a song or melody, or a returning theme. Deleuze and Guattari describe the structure of a refrain as

²⁷ Karen Painter, 'Contested Counterpoint: "Jewish" Appropriation and Polyphonic Liberation', *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft* 58.3 (2001), p.203, cited in *Borrowed Forms*, p.87.

having two essential aspects: augmentations and diminutions, or additions and withdrawals.²⁸ They go on to say that the refrain has two poles, which 'hinge not only on an intrinsic quality', by which they mean its immediate impact, 'but also on a state of force on the part of the listener', meaning a wider set of implications or connections which subsequently come into play (385).²⁹ In other words, there is a crucial link between musical structure and the affective response which it engenders, in which the concepts of addition and subtraction or proximity and distance play a key role. Those movements of accretion and reduction can be aligned both with the way music fits into the structure of a film and with how an audience responds to it, both initially and subsequently.

For some, this concept emerges in the actual process of music selection. Adam Nayman, for example, argues that Denis's choice of 'well-known and well-chosen songs' operates to 'collapse the vast distance opened up by Denis's more unusual choices in the space of a single riff or refrain'.³⁰ What he means is, I think, that any element of disengagement prompted in the audience by esoteric music selections is effectively countered by the adroit use of familiar pieces which draw the listener back in.

These concepts of distancing, and of augmentation and diminution, can be usefully addressed through the application of the modes of polyphony and counterpoint. Features which might be considered analogous to polyphony are: the way in which different voices occur in Denis films without any one having a privileged status, the reappearance of individual actors in a number of the films, and the eclectic use of music. Examples of counterpoint might be the way in which plot lines bifurcate and neglect to resolve, the use of actors to play against type, and the deployment of music to unsettle plot and character.

In the analyses presented in subsequent chapters it will be a feature of my

²⁸ *Mille Plateaux*, trans. by Brian Massumi (London and New York: Continuum, 1987), p.384.

²⁹ The example they use is the immediate resonance for Swann of Vinteuil's musical phrase (his love, the character of Odette, and their associations with the Bois de Boulogne), as compared with the range of broader implications which the piece of music opens up when he is confronted with a changed perspective on all those factors.

³⁰ 'Mixtape Movies' in *fireflies* 3 (March, 2016), pp.10-11.

approach to film music to avoid what has become the standard binary categorization of diegetic and non-diegetic. I suggest that these terms are of decreasing value. To give a recent example, Todd Haynes's *Carol* (2015) has a scene near the beginning in which the background music of New York nightlife (potentially audible to the characters) is brought into direct conflict with the film's 'mood' score with what seems to me clearly deliberate cacophonous effect. Daniel Yacavone makes the general observation:

It is not always clear [...] what sounds or music characters are or are not (represented as) hearing at any one point in a film [...] Rescuing the distinction [...] has involved introducing a great deal of qualification and including other, intermediate classifications such as the 'metadiegetic', 'extradiegetic'. [...] These and other similar considerations have prompted the more fundamental question of why we need to erect such a divide between a world of characters and the total audiovisual experience of a film on the part of the viewer [...].³¹

Although Yacavone mentions some examples of films whose soundtrack is 'celebrated for continually entering and exiting the "diegetic world"' (24), it is clear from the context that he regards these as exceptions to a general rule. In the case of Claire Denis, that binary way of approaching film music becomes untenable because of how she uses music to play across linkages. A few examples will illustrate this. In *J'ai pas sommeil*, the same music which conveys Camille's sense of alienation and devilment by playing over the footage of him travelling on the Metro continues into the club scene where he is shown dancing; in the same film, Denis deliberately plays with the binary concept by showing Théo practising his violin playing, only for the camera to pan to a disc rotating on a turntable. In *White Material*, the revolutionary song 'Any Which Way Freedom'³² plays as the body of the rebel DJ is dragged out of his studio. Even if one makes the unlikely assumption that the military would have allowed such seditious music to continue to play ('diegetically'), in fact the same music has run over from the preceding scene on the plantation where it plays ('non-diegetically') over Maria's last-ditch efforts to save her business.

Apart from these considerations, the terminology and definitions have become contentious, and for some the distinction is becoming increasingly blurred in

31 *Film Worlds: A Philosophical Aesthetics of Cinema* (New York and Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2014), p.21.

32 From the album of the same name (1989) by Mutabaruka aka Allan Hope, a Rastafari dub poet.

practice. Ambrose Field says:

Today, interesting new timbres can [...] be found in Hollywood films and contemporary popular music and the listening public is becoming correspondingly accustomed to listening to timbre without first wondering what the source or cause of the sound actually was.³³

It is just this kind of fluidity and non-specificity which underpins my argument about how relationality and music feed into each other in the work of Denis. In the chapters which follow I conduct close readings of a number of her films in order to demonstrate ways in which this interaction takes place. One example of this occurs in *Nénette et Boni* (1996): there is a scene between the baker's wife and her husband where he watches her while she does the dusting; her response is to show by turns awareness, embarrassment, pleasure, and invitation. No words are exchanged. This short scene plays to the accompaniment of an extract from 'God Only Knows' by the Beach Boys.³⁴ In the sense that the music replaces dialogue by expressing the intensity of amorous feeling shared by the couple, this appears at first sight as a purely empathetic, standard use of film music to enhance plot and image.

This impression, however, breaks down on closer examination. As a piece of music, it is an intrusion: it is completely heterogeneous to the composed film score, which has a languid, jazzy feel. I suggest that its significance for the film is as a counter to Boni's vivid sexual fantasies about this woman. The appropriateness of the song words about desire and need, as applied to the loving couple, become inappropriate when considered in the context of Boni's voyeuristic obsession. In terms of montage, this scene immediately follows footage of Boni in the gym, working off his frustrations, and the visual link helps to connect him implicitly to the music which follows.

On this reading, the intruding music style represents the intrusiveness of Boni's interest, and works as a criticism of him. It achieves this multivalency through its musical style and its placement in the film, and a central consideration in my

³³ 'Simulation and reality: the new sonic objects' in Emmerson, p.39.

³⁴ A track on the album *Pet Sounds* (1966), subsequently released as a single the same year. A big hit in Europe (less so in the USA, because it was the 'B' side of 'Wouldn't It Be Nice').

approach to music in Denis's work will be to consider exactly what piece of music is being used in a particular place, what its origins are, and how it is situated within the film. Music can be seen, as in the example just given, as having throughout the oeuvre of Denis a multivalent role, which adds layers of meaning which would not be there without the music. Examination of musical form in her work accordingly has generative benefit for relational issues.

The function of movement in a musical context is brought out by Laura McMahon, in Vecchio's collection (175-87). She associates this feature of Denis's oeuvre with the work of Maya Deren and the latter's concept of 'chore-cinema', saying that:

The rhythms of commonality ushered in by these filmic accompaniments of dancing bodies can be seen to articulate an ethical and political model of *syncopated* togetherness that it is Denis's concern to emphasise throughout her work (176, my emphasis).

McMahon argues that the various scenes of combined movement between the legionnaires in *Beau travail*: 'suggest a rhythming of more disjunctive forms of relationality', and that in this and other films: 'Denis weaves choreographic forms of alliance to that which elides categorisation' (179). Her conclusion is that dance in the work of Denis can be seen as: 'a privileged figure of syncopated commonality or solidarity'. This seems to me to be very apposite. My argument will be that these choreal pulsions of relationality appear *a fortiori* when observed in the context of the shifting movements of musical relationality in the work of Denis. Music in the films of Claire Denis works as a medium of both connection and disconnection, of resistance as well as agreement, and in those ways plays into the rhythms of disjunctive relationality proposed by McMahon.

Methodology

Aspects of relationality, in their centripetal and centrifugal modes of coming

together and pulling apart, are what unify the construction of a Claire Denis film. Denis implicitly allies herself to this idea when she says that the essence of filmmaking, for her, centres on the twin axes of 'fear of the other and attraction to the other'.³⁵ In cinematographic terms, one might cite such instances as the close-ups of Galoup's face as compared with the landscape of Djibouti, the barely identifiable bodily flesh in *Trouble Every Day* as against the Paris skyline, or the contours of Trebor's body as contrasted with the long shots of his surroundings in Jura or Papeete. I am calling this dual movement 'fluid distance'.

Gilles Deleuze posits the relevance of this kind of rhythm in art – specifically painting, but including music:

[This] rhythm runs through a painting just as it runs through a piece of music. It is diastole-systole: the world that seizes me by closing in around me, the self that opens to the world and opens the world itself. Cézanne, it is said, is the painter who put a vital rhythm into the visual sensation. Must we say the same thing of Bacon, with his coexistent movements, when the flat field closes in around the Figure and when the Figure contracts or, on the contrary, expands in order to rejoin the field [...].³⁶

This connects with my sense of the movement in a Claire Denis film as something which both opens out space for critical perception and possibility and closes in for detailed appraisal. What Deleuze says about the expressive force of rhythmical movement is consonant with Claire Denis's insistence in her work on considering people as individuals rather than as types, and on addressing the particular, varying circumstances of a person's relation to others. This goes to the heart of the controversies attending such films as *J'ai pas sommeil* (1994), *Trouble Every Day* (2001), and *Les Salauds* (2013) – films which query the universal applicability of social rules, especially as regards moral and sexual boundaries. The fluidity of social borders is present again and again in her work, perhaps most notably in *L'Intrus* (2004), but also evident in *Chocolat* (1988), *Nénette et Boni* (1997), and *White Material* (2009). As we shall see, music plays a key role in nuancing such aspects of relationality.

35 'Entrevista con Claire Denis', 3rd Panama Film Festival, April 2014.
<<http://enfilme.com/entrevista/claire>> [accessed 25 November 2016].

36 *Francis Bacon: the logic of sensation*, (London and New York: Continuum, 2004), pp.42-43.

Film music theory

The difficulty of pinning down music in a critical framework is highlighted by Jean-Luc Nancy, who considers music (referred to as 'the sonorous register', derived from the original meaning of the Greek *aisthesis*) as 'like the line of contact between the most interior and the most exterior', oscillating between the internal sounds of the body and external sound, the latter remaining, even after being heard, 'somewhere out there'.³⁷ For Nancy, sound has no surface and is comparable to a totality of space. He describes the variability of the impact of sound and music in the following way: 'sonorous coming into presence is thus the most close and the most distant' (85); this has a strong resonance with the modes of closeness and distance to be found in the cinema of Claire Denis: This fluidity of musical distance commends itself to Nancy on account of the flexibility of its refusal of an absolute:

Musical fragility (fractality, discretion) resides in the inarticulateness of a sense always both extended – offered – and withheld. (Here is where all the problems of the relations between text and music are suspended in the history of song, such as one rediscovers them, in a way intact, all the way up through rock 'n' roll). A signification is proposed, but it must be deciphered or understood (86).

In the work of Denis, propositions which need to be deciphered or understood abound, appearing in connection with plot, narrative, mood, characterization, and music. What is marked in her film-making, however, is that the way in which these propositions are offered is such that their very offering has to be noticed or detected. There is something of a conundrum here as regards the music in a Denis film. The traditional norm for mainstream cinema is that the musical score should so blend in with mood and action that it is to all intents and purposes inaudible for the spectator *qua* music. In contrast to this, the music in Denis's work asks to be listened to, comprising as it does items from her personal favourites or by her chosen musicians, but its relation to the film is a much more fluid one which needs to be considered in terms of its impact on each occasion. That impact constantly changes in modality, for example by offering a critique, or by opening up possible points of view not apparent in the image track. In this way the music contributes to the concept of fluid distance by its avoidance of a

³⁷ 'Music' in *Le sens du monde*, trans. by Jeffrey S. Libbrett as *The Sense of the World* (London and Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p.85.

standard role which seeks to offer the audience a fixed perspective.

This implied association between dissensus and creativity does not find much support in the critical canon relating to music in film. Film music theory has spent a long time trying to decide on the nature and impact of its subject matter, and in practice it is difficult to find a settled line of theoretical development which can be taken as a given from which to argue. Much recent discussion has turned on the perceived obsolescence of what is taken as the classic view, primarily associated with Hollywood, that the purpose of music in a film is to smooth over gaps in narrative or jumps in images – that it should work as a kind of invisible (inaudible) glue. Krin Gabbard explains this in the following way:

Since the early days of cinema, film scores have been carefully relegated to the background, only swelling up for a moment or two when the audience is meant to feel what the characters are feeling. But even on these occasions, composers have prevented the music from calling attention to itself by making it sound like other movie music. [...] In other words, the music is meant to be felt and not really listened to.³⁸

A stark expression of this attitude is encapsulated in an interview with composer Ernest Gold in which he says (in the specific context of classical music) that pre-recorded music is a distraction – either because its familiarity takes away from its purpose in the film, or because its unfamiliarity does not contribute to the film.³⁹ Dissatisfaction with the assumptions inherent in this composer-driven model began to come cogently to the fore from the late 1980s with key texts by Claudia Gorbman, Kathryn Kalinak and Caryl Flinn.

Gorbman focuses on the 'classic' assumption that 'most feature films relegate music to the viewer's sensory background, that area least susceptible to rigorous judgment and most susceptible to affective manipulation'.⁴⁰ Her appraisal is primarily concerned with why and how this situation has come about but does not offer a developed theory for this. *Unheard Melodies* occasionally regrets the absence of a more developed critical framework: for example the limitedness of a simplistic binary between parallelism and contrast;

38 Goldmark, 2007, p.264.

39 Cited in Robynn Stilwell and Phil Powrie (eds.) *Changing Tunes: The Use of Pre-existing Music in Film* (Aldershot and Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2006), pp.19-20.

40 *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (Bloomington IA: Indiana University Press, 1987), p.12.

or the equally simplistic false association of the non-diegetic with expressive capability and of the diegetic as separated from any sense of mood.

In an afterword, she notes the increasing use, from the 1980s, of popular music in film. Her instinct is to go with the orthodoxy that such a move is about crass commercialism; but her conclusion is that this development just raises a new tranche of unanswered questions. Subsequently, Gorbman has maintained that the idea of unobtrusive film music had not disappeared, but was less the norm than formerly. She attributes part of this development to the arrival of more popular forms of music and their increasing use in film. As far as theorization goes, Gorbman says that: 'The question of how film music is perceived eludes definitive answers because of its enormous historical variation'.⁴¹ She goes on to argue (41-48) that film music studies remain immersed in aesthetic discourses whereas other aspects of film studies have moved on. The reasons she gives for this include the suggestion that musicologists have been less influenced by post-structuralism; also the thriving market for film scores in their own right which is not especially concerned with 'narrative, visual, or ideological intricacies'.

Consonant with that perception, twenty-first century writings on film music have, for Gorbman, tended to abandon the search for an over-arching theoretical structure in favour of more localized close reading of individual films. In a more recent assessment, she says that the rules have changed in the twenty years since she published *Unheard Melodies*: melodies are no longer unheard, song lyrics are perceived to add rather than detract from audio-viewing, and the sky's the limit with respect to the possible relations between music and image and story.⁴²

Kathryn Kalinak's main interest is the normative Hollywood use of non-diegetic music. Like Gorbman, Kalinak's starting point is the marginal status of music in

41 'Film Music', in *Film Studies: critical approaches*, ed. by John Hill and Pamela Church Gibson, (OUP, 2000), p.45. Subsequent reference in text.

42 'Auteur Music' in *Beyond the Soundtrack*, ed. by Daniel Goldmark, Lawrence Kramer and Richard Leppert (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), p.151.

film and the privileging of dialogue – the main effect of which is, for her, the use of music as a means of strengthening weak narrative passages. A crucial problem, for Kalinak, in raising the profile of film music is the lack of a 'consistent and precise vocabulary to describe it'.⁴³ She claims that the perception continues to hold good that music in film is something we hear but by and large fail to listen to, and she argues the case for putting image and music in film on a more equal footing which recognizes their interdependence. In support of this, the bulk of *Settling the Score* is devoted to detailed case studies (*Captain Blood* (1935), *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942), *Laura* (1944) and *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980)), designed to show how a range of different uses of film music have been made. Because film music theory has been 'segregated' from film theory, Kalinak says that the way forward lies outside film study as such (39).

Caryl Flinn engages more closely with music theory, both in general and in relation to film music. Her aim is to make a case for the inclusion of concepts of gender and subjectivity as part of film music theory. Her argument considers some significant strands of social and critical theorizing, including substantial analysis of psychoanalytical and Marxist positions. The writings of Anzieu, Rosolato, Lacan, Kristeva, Barthes, Eisler, Adorno, Bloch, and Dyer are all given careful consideration. Ultimately, Flinn considers them backward-looking and therefore inadequate. Even the arrival of popular music in film is seen by Flinn not as a force of change, but as just another vehicle driven by nostalgia (especially in films of the 1970s dealing with the 1950s and films of the 1980s about the 1960s). Flinn sees as a central problem in film music criticism 'an aesthetic and formalist tendency that treats film music as a discrete, autonomous artefact'.⁴⁴ This is her way of expressing the common criticism that musicology has ring-fenced its subject.

She endorses (6) the suggestion (made by Mary Ann Doane among others) that

43 *Settling The Score: Music and the Classical Hollywood Film* (Madison WN: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), p.xii.

44 *Strains of Utopia: Gender, Nostalgia, and Hollywood Film Music* (Princeton University Press, 1992), p.4. Subsequent references in text.

'knowledge and sight have been bifurcated from intuition and sound', but she criticizes Doane for effectively maintaining this binary opposition. One of Flinn's major complaints – articulated at the end of her discussion of 'Marxist and Cultural Criticism' (90) - is that critics have: 'idealized music to such an extent as to separate it from the material conditions of its production and consumption'. Her answer to this is that music criticism, and especially film music theory, should adopt a more inclusive approach. Like Gorbman's and Kalinak's, this work does not articulate a new theoretical basis so much as point to elements which might be incorporated in it.

In short, film music theory is still struggling to catch up with, on the one hand film theory, and on the other, music theory. The paradigm which continually emerges is that proponents of a broader appreciation and a critical theoretical framework for film music have to wrestle with a conundrum: on the one hand the argument that music is intrinsic to all facets of film-making (and therefore to nothing in particular); on the other hand the view that it has specific impact (in a range of different but not readily explicable or categorizable ways).

One of the most sustained efforts at understanding how film music works is made by Michel Chion, but even he fights shy of offering a comprehensive theorization. In *La musique au cinéma*, Chion makes clear at the outset that he is not interested in constructing a theoretical template: his purpose is to conduct a wide-ranging survey of the incidence of music in film. He speaks of impoverished historical models ('des modèles historiques appauvris')⁴⁵ and says that: 'Nous souhaitons seulement informer le lecteur et réfléchir avec lui, sans lui imposer de vues simplificatrices'.⁴⁶ In other words, he believes, like those critics to whose work I have already referred, that there is a lack of a fully-conceived theory of film music, but prefers to focus on specific elements. Chion has, famously, contested the existence of a film soundtrack (40). I shall propose that Denis exceeds the arguments put forward by Chion as part of her

45 Paris: Fayard, 1995, p.16.

46 'Our intention is simply to provide information and reflect with the reader without imposing simplistic views', p.16.

strategy to engage with the audience in ways which problematize standard thinking on film music.

Chion also argues that film music falls into two broad categories: that which relates closely to the feel of the scenario he calls 'empathetic'; the other is where the music has a detached, indifferent quality, and he calls this 'anempathetic'.⁴⁷ In this context, I suggest that there is scope for the introduction of a third category. I am calling this third analytical mode *disempathetic*. I see it as relating to music which is neither too close to the image track (empathetic) nor too distant (anempathetic), and as being concerned with situations where the music plays more deliberately against what image and action suggest to the viewer and is used as a commentary or a critique on what the viewer sees. I see this as distinguishable from Chion's description of anempathetic in that it is not cosmic or indifferent, but sets out to intervene and challenge both character and viewer.

Fundamental to the introduction of disempathy as a critical tool is a moving away from relatively fixed categories of definition and towards a more fluid and less stable categorization.

Musical dissensus

Denis's films reject the idea of simplistically taking sides. They form a cinema which not only wants to look at hard cases, but which also deals in an everyday reality which owes nothing to rose-tinted vision. This connects with Gilles Deleuze's privileging in cinema of the oppositional over the romantic: 'Spiritual life isn't dream or fantasy – which were always the cinema's dead ends – but rather the domain of cold decision, of absolute obstinacy, of the choice of existence'.⁴⁸ There is a strong sense here of struggle, of the need to assert oneself against a threatening normative flow, which points to the oppositional

47 *Audio-Vision* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p.8.

48 Discussion with Gilles Deleuze, originally printed by Les Editions de Minuit (1986), reproduced in Gregory Flaxman (ed.), *The Brain is the Screen* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p.366.

nature of art, and cinema in particular. Deleuze and Guattari offer a critique of the way in which music is usually regarded in mainstream cinema when they describe music as having the capability to counter mechanistic drives: 'nature opposes its power, and the power of music, to the machines of human beings, the roar of factories and bombers' (*A Thousand Plateaus*, p.341). They assert that the refrain, in the sense of chorus or repetition, is: 'a means of preventing music, warding it off or forgoing it' (331). This implies that the repetition and systematizing of music, in order to make it familiar and therefore comfortable, is used as a defence mechanism against the probing, exploring qualities which music is actually capable of taking on when deployed in dissensual or contrapuntal mode.

Although Rancière has not offered any direct comment on the work of Claire Denis (unlike, for example, the public dialogue conducted between Denis and Jean-Luc Nancy about their respective works), what he says bears on the oeuvre of Denis in general, and specifically on the way music plays in her films. In the general context of representational art, Rancière rejects structured, deterministic meaning:

What 'dissensus' means is an organization of the sensible where there is neither a reality concealed behind appearances nor a single regime of presentation and interpretation of the given imposing its obviousness on all. It means that every situation can be cracked open from the inside, reconfigured in a different perception and signification.⁴⁹

In other words, the playing of games with, and intentionally mystifying, observers is as unacceptable as offering them a single dominating perspective. This formulation of dissensus suggests an extreme fluidity; but whereas fluidity is often presented as a means of resolving the irreconcilable, here it points to challenge and confrontation, the presentation of the unexpected, something which resists fixed meaning. It is in this dissensual way that we can read the musical modes used by Denis. Of enormous help here has been the work of Kathryn Lachman in developing applications to literature of musical modes. Two particular aspects of Lachman's work which I consider productive for my

⁴⁹ *Le spectateur émancipé*, trans. by Gregory Elliott as *The Emancipated Spectator* (London: Verso, 2009), pp.48-49.

purposes relate to *polyphony*, described by her as 'the art of combining multiple, independent voices' and *counterpoint*, which she summarizes as 'the carefully regulated setting of one voice against another'.⁵⁰

Polyphony and counterpoint

Lachman, in *Borrowed Forms*, offers a consideration of how literary structure can be infused by musical form. Her analyses also provide generative insights into how music operates on other art forms. In particular, Lachman's discussion of polyphony and counterpoint in literature has resonance for film music, and especially for the music in the work of Claire Denis. What Lachman says about musical form in transnational fiction could be read almost as an assessment of Denis's approach to cinema:

The turn to musical form in transnational fiction must be understood as a move of both aesthetic and ethical dimensions: it reflects an effort to challenge the conventions of genre and form, an interest in bringing new perspectives to the fore, a desire for new ways to engage conflicting viewpoints and histories, and a commitment to preserving difference. Furthermore, it indicates a refusal to identify with any single national tradition and an understanding of artistic and cultural heritage as hybrid, multilayered, and complex. (5).

Lachman goes on to say that: 'Music can *simultaneously* deploy multiple voices in relations of harmony, unison, or dissonance, while works of literature necessarily alternate voices in succession' (7, her emphasis). The richness of polyphony as a critical tool lies in its combined horizontal and vertical qualities: in musical terms, one voice or instrument can be followed in its linear, horizontal course; or a vertical view can be taken in which the various voices or instruments can be apprehended as they are heard together.

Turning to counterpoint, Lachman's consideration draws on the definition offered by Edward Said:

Gone are the binary oppositions dear to the nationalist and imperialist enterprise. [...] The old authority cannot simply be replaced by the new authority, but the alignments made across borders, types, nations, and essences are rapidly coming into view, and it is those new alignments that now provoke and challenge the fundamentally static notions of *identity* that have been at the core of cultural thought during the era of imperialism [...] In Said's view, a contrapuntal approach does not seek an overarching

⁵⁰ *Borrowed Forms: The Music and Ethics of Transnational Fiction* (Liverpool University Press, 2014), p.1.

resolution, teleology, or synthesis, but instead focuses on the dynamic interplay of contradictions. [...] Through counterpoint, he seeks to bring previously marginalized perspectives into dialogue with dominant voices and, ultimately, to replace a system of hierarchical relations with one of equal exchange (62, italics in original).

This is a radical re-visioning of counterpoint, which – in strict musical terms – is characterized by firm rules, and is associated with the canon of Western music (unlike polyphony, which features in musical forms around the world), and with the Christian faith. What this redefinition offers, for Lachman, is a broadening out of an internalized system of contrapuntal voices into modes of reciprocal democracy and humanism in which differences are interrogated and integrated as irreducible facets of community. Her musical proposition accordingly chimes with Nancy's stance on the continuing dynamic between individual and society.

Although, as Lachman says, polyphony and counterpoint are often used as more or less interchangeable terms, there is a paradoxical distinction between them. One way of looking at this is to consider polyphony as about the bringing together of different voices in harmony; and counterpoint as about exploring the differences in order to strengthen connections, even if the outcome has atonal aspects.

These modes are exemplified *par excellence* by the use of music as the medium through which Denis brings together technique, aesthetic intent, and ethical interest as part of a unified whole.

In the absence of an agreed and coherent theoretical paradigm for film music, and especially given the paucity in the critical literature of serious consideration in respect of music from outside the classical canon, examination of music in the cinema of Claire Denis necessitates the construction of a framework which draws on the most useful elements of existing criticism. The framework which I develop takes into account what Fabrice Fuentes says about the fluidity and variation in jazz forms as linking to the presentation of relations between individuals in the films of Denis. To that I add the concepts of polyphony and counterpoint, pointed up by Kathryn Lachman, adapted by me to the particular

question of film music, and specifically to music in the films of Denis. My consideration also brings in the various writings of Michel Chion on the subject of film music.

An additional aspect of my consideration of how music is used will be its appearance and disappearance, which *inter alia* operates to engage audiences directly in the modes of attraction and alienation which are an essential feature of the cinema of Claire Denis. Just as the image track of the films moves between sensuous close-up and cool distancing, the music track has a corresponding role. Familiar tunes play in unexpected circumstances; unfamiliar pieces of music feature at climactic moments; even when music seems to be an expected fit, the musical ambiance of the film can lead the listener to wonder about its significance. Music in the work of Claire Denis participates just as much as other elements (scenario, shooting, and editing), in presenting apparently opposed ideas of relationality. The sensuous, lingering close-up viewing of bodies and things throughout her films conveys a strong feeling of searching, of wanting to grasp an evanescent essentiality; the refusal of explanation, either through dialogue or narrative linearity, seems to contradict the notion of complete understanding. These are modes of the proximity and distance which pervade every Denis film. Their musical expression comes in the form of an eclecticism which presents contemporary and old, familiar and unfamiliar, native and foreign, popular, 'classical', jazz, reggae etc., in ways which lull, surprise, re-connect, and shock the listener into poles of attraction and distancing.

Summary

The essence of the cinema of Claire Denis has at its core a prevailing desire to challenge orthodox assumptions, accompanied by a continual movement between probing so closely as to provoke disorientation, and pulling back to allow a disconcerting re-appraisal from distance. I consider in this thesis, the ways in which these creative pulsations operate, by focusing on their musical

aspects. This offers on the one hand a mode of examination through a medium which features significantly in every Denis film – although often very differently – and so offers a common basis for comparison. On the other hand, it engages with relatively unexplored territory in relation to the films of Denis as a whole.

As indicated, my consideration is set against a backdrop of continuing general resistance to innovative uses of music in film. In her landmark study of sound in the work of Jean-Luc Godard, Albertine Fox observes:

Despite the flourishing of scholarship on film sound that has gone from strength to strength since the 1990s, commentators are still reluctant to address sound's contribution to the spectator's sensory experience in non-traditional forms and styles.⁵¹

In the analyses and discussion which follow, I approach the work of Claire Denis from the linked angles of *relationality* and of *fluid distance*, as I have contextualized them. The substance of the discussion will take place with musical aspects uppermost, and crucial here are the concepts of *dissensus*, *polyphony*, *counterpoint*, and the *disempathetic*. To recap, I see *dissensus* in Rancière's formulation as being central to creative art: a challenging of normative assumptions, but with a positive, constructive aspect in that it does not involve a binary approach, but rather shaded differences which present variant and overlapping points of view. *Polyphony* offers in a primarily musical context modes of bringing together the shaded perspectives envisaged as part of dissensus. In my analyses, polyphony will be attentive to the drawing together of dissensual threads as part of weaving them into a coherent (but complex) whole. *Counterpoint* is the non-identical twin of polyphony: a literary and musical device for presenting variations, contrasts and contradictions, which nevertheless form part of a whole, in order to explore gradations of consideration. The concept of counterpoint as used in this thesis will pay attention to ways in which the strands of differentiation which comprise the overall musical shape of music in a film are teased out. In some ways, polyphony and counterpoint can be regarded as the centripetal and centrifugal aspects of exploring difference – both working against simple binary

⁵¹ *Godard and Sound: Acoustic Innovation in the Late Films of Jean-Luc Godard* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2018), p.13.

oppositions. My formulation of *disempathy* relates to a mode of music which intervenes between the binaries usually extrapolated from Chion's classifications of empathetic and anempathetic so as to offer a more complex and differentiated set of functions.

It has been a given of what I have argued so far that the concepts which I have outlined can be applied with corresponding force in the case of every Denis film. My instinct is accordingly to be aware of the pitfalls of trying to put the films into groups or categories. I therefore adopt a relatively fluid approach in setting up my methodology, with the aim of demonstrating particular modes across a selection of differing Denis films.

In my approach to *polyphony* (Chapter 1) I focus particularly on: *J'ai pas sommeil* (1994), *Beau travail* (2000), and *White Material* (2010). As with my consideration of counterpoint, the examples are chosen to offer a range of features from the oeuvre of Denis: as to location, urban Paris, Marseille, and different places in Africa; as far as structure goes, respectively, three main characters, a first person reflective narrative – featuring two others, and a third person narrative focusing closely on the main character. One of these three films has a specifically composed score; the other two have a very varied mix of selected musical items from across a wide range of styles.

From the angle of *counterpoint*, my examples for detailed study (in Chapter 2) are: *US Go Home* (1994), *Trouble Every Day* (2001), *L'Intrus* (2004) and *35 rhums* (2008). This, and the other choices I make, are designed to offer a representative mix: these four films are variously located in Paris, the suburbs, elsewhere in France, and abroad; differ in structure in having, respectively, two, four, two plus two, and one central character; and their concerns range between the personal, the domestic, and more global considerations. Three of them have a specially composed score, while the soundtrack for the fourth comprises a large selection of popular music pieces selected by the director.

I consider in Chapter 3 how Denis's use of fluid distance in her deployment of music enables musical modes to overlap. I draw on Chion's ideas of empathetic and anempathetic film music, modified by my own conception of the disempathetic, in order to show how such layering takes place. I offer analyses of *Vendredi soir* (2002) and *Les Salauds* (2013) as illustrating how the different musical strands can be woven together. These two films share a Parisian setting, but are very different. In one sense they are antithetical, in that the *noir* feel of the first is deliberately not carried throughout the film, whereas in the second the unravelling of dirty secrets and the tragic *dénouement* are fully consistent with the *noir* style. Musically speaking, these two films also counter each other: the first having a score by Dickon Hinchcliffe which is accompanied by a wide variety of interpolated music and sounds; the second has a Tindersticks score which, although supplemented by other sounds, does not feature other artists.

In Chapter 4, I discuss questions of randomness and incompleteness in the oeuvre of Denis. As part of this, I review in relation to the films of Denis the status of Michel Chion's famous assertion that 'there is no soundtrack'. I argue that the ways in which Denis introduces music demonstrate how central it is to her work, and that the fragmentary nature of her approach contributes in its particular way to a form of completeness.

What follows in this thesis takes advantage of the paradigmatic as a pragmatic necessity; but it does so with an element of reluctance, praying-in-aid the director herself: 'Je n'aime pas quand on compare les films, quand on les met au-dessus les uns des autres. C'est vrai qu'il y en a que je déteste et d'autres que j'aime énormément, mais j'essaie de ne pas faire de classement'.⁵² My aim will be to keep in mind as fully as possible that the mirror-image of each construct and avenue of approach will be lying in wait at every turn. Modes of empathy, relationality, and musical form all readily interbleed.

52 'I don't like comparing films, putting one above another. It's true that there are some which I can't stand and others which I really like, but I try not to classify them'. Interview with Thierry Jousse and Frédéric Strauss, *Cahiers du Cinéma*, 479/80, p.30.

Chapter 1: Polyphony

*Je dois sentir dans le texte une musique réelle, une vraie mélodie, non une rengaine, un ronronnement académique.*⁵³

In this chapter I discuss how polyphony forms part of the mode of fluid distance which operates in the work of Denis, by not only contributing a centripetal, socializing force, but also through the closer examination of difference. The richness of polyphony as a critical tool lies in its combined horizontal and vertical qualities: in musical terms, one voice or instrument can be followed in its linear, horizontal course; or a vertical view can be taken in which the various voices or instruments can be apprehended as they are heard together. This concept has been related to the Denis film *Vendredi soir* by Fabrice Fuentes: 'la musique qui n'a de cesse de croiser et fusionner l'horizontale des déplacements (les personnages roulent ou marchent tout au long du film) et la verticale des sens (ouïe, vue, toucher, odorat et goût sont tour à tour sollicités)'.⁵⁴

The films of Denis are often read in a negative manner, as being primarily concerned with the self-indulgence of egotism and sexuality. Kate Ince, for example, reads the character of Maria in *White Material* in such a way, arguing that there is a logic to her murder of Henri in that: 'by killing him she may become sole owner of the plantation that is the only place she feels she belongs, and her possessive yet also grimly pragmatic attachment to "home" has no other outlet'.⁵⁵ Tim Palmer refers to *Trouble Every Day* as having an agenda of: 'on-screen interrogation of physicality in brutally intimate terms'.⁵⁶

It is undeniable that the work of Denis shows a deep interest in behaviour at the limit. But my proposition is that she displays a positive overall concern with the

53 'I have to feel in the text a real music, a true melody, not a chorus or an academic kind of chugging', Marin Karmitz in Bonvoisin and Brault-Wiart, p.41. An interesting observation from the well-known film producer.

54 'The music, which unceasingly cuts across and merges the horizontal of movement (characters are driving or walking throughout the film) and the vertical of sensation (hearing, sight, touch, smell and taste are by turns appealed to)', *Le Cinéma de Claire Denis*, ed. by Rémi Fontanel (Lyon: Aléas, 2008), p.242. Subsequent references in text.

55 *The Body and the Screen* (Bloomsbury, 2017), p.147.

56 'Under Your Skin: Marina de Van and the Contemporary French cinéma du corps', *Studies in French Cinema*, 6.3 (2006), p.171.

workings of relationality, and that the use of music in polyphonic ways plays a significant role in how that concern is brought to the screen. My discussion brings together Jean-Luc Nancy's consideration of the plural nature of community and Kathryn Lachman's discussion of polyphony.

Locale, character, plot, and narrative all have a shifting base in the work of Denis, which allows the introduction of an extremely wide range of attitudes and points of view. These factors are reflected in the music of her films, whose variety of styles and sources contributes to the multiplicity of the *œuvre*. In short, what is at stake is a vision of the communal which dismisses the notion of boundaries and privileges the polymorphous. This chimes in with Jean-Luc Nancy's emphasis on the plurality of society. Nancy describes community as being: 'made up principally of the sharing, diffusion, or impregnation of an identity by a plurality wherein each member identifies himself only through the supplementary mediation of his identification with the living body of the community'.⁵⁷

Nancy carries this idea of multiplicity across to his envisioning of cinema, where he argues that it makes for greater clarity: paradoxical in that a refusal to specify can lead to greater depth of comprehension. Writing in the context of the films of Abbas Kiarostami, Nancy says that cinema comprises a look on the world: 'a look taken by the hand and led away on a journey that is not an initiation, that does not drive to any secret, but that amounts to making the gaze move, stirring it up, or even shaking it up, in order to make it carry further, closer, more accurately'.⁵⁸ What this amounts to is an assertion that unsettling the ideas of given trajectory and intended conclusion leads to a better, undirected, and non-didactic understanding of the surrounding world. In short, additional, unexpected angles promote not confusion, but a greater capacity to understand, and this perception by Nancy has resonance for the films of Claire Denis.

57 Nancy, 2008, p.9.

58 *L'Évidence du film/The Evidence of Film* (Brussels: Yves Gevaert, 2001), pp. 24 & 26.

Nancy's concept of 'singular plural' is one of many areas in which thinker and cinéaste happen to see eye to eye. The irreducible ideas of individuality and community, which for Nancy must be brought into a *modus vivendi*, are presented, as it were, 'live' in the films of Denis, which continuously interrogate how individuals comport themselves in relation to others. This idea is given specific musical context in Nancy's *A l'écoute*, in which he sets out his thinking on the listening process and how it relates to music. Sarah Hickmott's analysis of Nancy's position is that:

A l'écoute offers a way of thinking about sound and/or music beyond inherited binaries; commensurate with his singular plural ontology, Nancy resists re-inscribing a listening subject and a listened-to object. Instead, the audible appears affirmatively as the perpetual flux of a shared, sonorous world. Nancy's position suggests a potentially radical avenue beyond a dualism that has often seen music considered in either wholly immaterial terms – the closed, positivist approach to score-based analysis or 'purely' formal procedures – or as a mere product of a particular sociocultural context with no specificity of its own.⁵⁹

This assessment gestures very appositely to the impasse presented by contemporary film music criticism, discussed in my Introduction.

A typical example of the way Claire Denis creates connections through music can be found in *Beau travail* (2000) in the fragments of sound delivered by Galoup's radio in his flat in Marseille. The tinny sound plays behind the sounds of his making coffee and his meditative voice-over. This piece of music is not even credited. It is in fact a few seconds of 'What's Your Sign' by Des'Ree.⁶⁰ This was a popular hit during the genesis or the beginning of the making of *Beau travail*, and yet another example of Denis's interest in contemporary music. Although the singer is an English artist, there are Caribbean connections in that her mother is Guyanese and her father Barbadian. This choice accordingly has implicit links with other musical selections in the film where Denis characteristically deploys music to indicate cross-cultural and relational implications. The song itself, a catchy, mid-tempo number, loops back to the subject matter of the film in its references to navigation by the stars (cf. Sentain's broken compass) and its invocation of fateful conjunctions. Its positioning in the film has resonance in that these musical implications serve as

59 '(En) Corps Sonore: Jean-Luc Nancy's "Sonotropism"', *French Studies* 69.4, pp.479-93.

60 From the album *Supernatural* (1998).

the backdrop to Galoup's introduction of Sentain in his narrative. This low-key, tangential example of how Denis uses different modes of musical applications accordingly forms one small feature of the polyphonic depths presented.

What is crucial here is plurality (polyphony) and open-endedness, the refusal to determine and classify. Wendy Everett, in a survey of films which are constructed in relation to musical form, says of Jean-Luc Godard's *Notre Musique* (2004) that:

Godard adopts a musical structure, marked by multiple voices and extreme narrative fluidity, as a way of dealing with complex issues (including the Arab/Israeli conflict), to which there can be no easy solution [...] it is the film's open-ended polyphony that enables it to avoid both straightforward polemic and simple binary oppositions.⁶¹

Although Denis does not deal in direct fashion with political questions, they are often implicit in her work. But what is most significant here for my argument is the practice, identified by Everett in relation to Godard, of using polyphonic means to problematize the simplistic.

With reference to literature rather than film, Kathryn Lachman argues that: 'polyphony implies an act of interdisciplinary translation, as we move from the "simultaneous and harmonious" melodic lines that sound in a work of music to the "multiplicity of independent and often antithetic narrative voices" that intersect sequentially and silently in a text' (30). It is this sense of the multiple and the antithetic, translated back from Lachman's literary application to one of film music, which I want to explore in relation to the work of Claire Denis in this chapter. Denis herself testifies to the multiplicity of the connections which she makes between words, images, and music: 'Our brains are full of literature – my brain is. But I think we also have a dream world, the brain is also full of images and songs'.⁶² In the sense that what happens in a Denis film is a perceptive observation of how people struggle with their own identity and their relation to others, the concept of polyphony is very helpful in understanding how those struggles are staged. Lachman summarizes Bakhtin's theory of polyphony as evoking: 'the particular capacity [...] to accommodate contradictory positions

61 'Image, Music, Film', *Studies in European Cinema*, 5: (2008), pp.7-16.

62 *Guardian* interview in 2000 with Jonathan Romney: <www.filmunlimited.co.uk>

and multiple discourses without imposing any central authoritative view' (29). This idea of multiple and contradictory voices fits well with the wide range of musical voices which we encounter in the work of Denis. It is just this insistence on openness and the bringing in of multiple voices which makes polyphony an important component of the cinema of Denis. This is an important element in her dissensual approach, which refuses to privilege a trajectory, and which offers audiences a breadth of perspectives to which they are likely to be unaccustomed.

In my examination of polyphony, I shall focus particularly on *J'ai pas sommeil*, *Beau travail* and *White Material*. I have selected these films as offering a representative breadth. Their settings are: urban Paris, Marseille, and different places in Africa. As far as structure goes, they vary between having three main characters; a narrative focusing closely on one main character; and a first person reflective narrative. One film has a specifically composed score; the other two have a very varied mix of selected musical items from across a wide range of styles.

J'ai pas sommeil

J'ai pas sommeil is a film whose multiple trajectories have been likened by its director to a board game.⁶³ Fabrice Fuentes (210) compares the structure of *J'ai pas sommeil* to that of jazz: riffing on a central theme or themes, circling, crossing, and repeating with variations:

A l'instar [...] d'un musicien de jazz qui reprend certains standards dans le but d'y puiser une nouvelle vitalité créatrice, la réalisatrice trouve un nouveau souffle en prolongeant, remettant en question ou détournant ses propres acquis, de façon à éviter ainsi l'éceuil de tout systématisme aliénant [...]⁶⁴

This seems to me exactly right. I see the terms of the analogy also as opening up fruitfully consideration of how this film works polyphonically in relation to its

⁶³ Interview with Thierry Jousse and Frédéric Strauss, *Cahiers du Cinéma* 479/480, cited in Mal, p.46.

⁶⁴ 'Like a jazz musician who picks up certain standard tunes with the aim of drawing out from them some new creative vitality, the film-maker breathes new life into what she does through prolonging, challenging or re-routing her own characteristic tendencies in ways which correspondingly avoid the stumbling blocks of an alienating systematization'.

music. *J'ai pas sommeil* presents multiple views: principally those of the four or five main characters resident in Paris, but the film is suffused with non-French associations. Alongside their connections with each other runs the series of linkages with the members of the different communities with which the main characters associate or come into contact. These, along with the tourists, residents, and police officers who flit in and out, form a polyphony of voices which constructs a discourse on the nature of the individual and the communal. Interwoven with this complex scenario is a musical score which interpolates influences from the Caribbean, Africa, and Latin America, in which are mingled jazz, 1960s and 1970s popular hits, and club music. This mix of music complements the running motif of different voices in the film by adding additional, polyphonic, layers. My consideration of this film is organized on the basis of relational and structural issues.

Opening sequence

In relation to the beginning of *J'ai pas sommeil*, Fuentes cites Denis's use of mambo-jazz as an indication of the 'joy and hope' (la joie et l'espoir) which Daïga feels at reaching Paris (209). It is true that the music⁶⁵ has an upbeat feel, combining a sense of movement (a clip-clop percussive rhythm) with one of lightness and relaxation, which matches the mood of the image track as Daïga, cigarette in mouth, window down, drives along. But this 'come-hither' musical voice of Paris is blended with a quite different tone when the horns twice inject a slightly discordant, braying chord into the tune. At the first of these chords, the image track cuts to a passing car containing two men who stare rather aggressively. This brief incident will connect with a series running through the film in which characters are the object of the male gaze.⁶⁶ The second chord coincides with her car moving down the slip-road off the motorway, in other words, entering Paris itself. The music in this way sounds a warning note quite

65 An extract – 'Cancion' – from 'The Afro-Cuban Jazz Suite' by Machito and his Orchestra, featuring Charlie Parker (1950); collected on Charlie Parker and the Machito Orchestra *Latin Bird* (2000).

66 Some of those instances will be on the part of the two detectives who keep crossing her path; they in turn connect with the two officers in the first scene of the film, laughing in their helicopter with nude pin-ups; that links to a later scene where Daïga escapes from a molester by diving into a porn cinema.

in contrast to the optimism suggested by Fuentes, and implies that there will be a seamier side to Daïga's stay in the city. This is just the beginning of a whole series of blended musical interventions.

As if to emphasize this blending, Daïga changes the music to introduce a third musical tone. The jazz playing on her transistor radio is replaced when she tunes in the car stereo to a local station. Ostensibly, the relaxed, metropolitan tone is continued: the song playing is 'Relax-Ay-Voo' – a number by Dean Martin and Line Renaud,⁶⁷ which puts an emphasis on a chilled lifestyle. But the lyrics have slightly louche undertones: taking pills, having a bath, girls being attracted to men who take things easy (not to mention the association of Martin's reputation as a drinker and womanizer), and these hint at the lifestyles which Daïga will encounter in the city. We might also recall that music conveying stereotypical Frenchness has been used before by Denis in a discordant manner, when she associates two tunes in *Chocolat* with unsympathetic characters, as she will do again with the Legion songs in *Beau travail*. The way she uses music is not to be taken at simple face value. The listener needs to be on the alert for how the attraction and harmonizing of musical interpolations balance with their unexpected and atonal aspects.

Cedric Mal describes the film as the antithesis of a standard crime movie: 'L'antithèse d'un polar cru ou du film noir glauque et sanglant' (191).⁶⁸ One of the ways in which this is achieved is by its not having a standard soundtrack of smoky jazz for atmosphere or driving rhythms to interpret action. In the first five minutes of the film, then, the music has already offered suggestions of the opportunities which Paris will offer, as well as the downside of sybaritic living. Throughout *J'ai pas sommeil* musical and other sonic means are deployed in variant relationships with the images to develop and broaden the film's polyphonic concerns with relational issues such as family, friendship, deracination, and alienation.

67 A 1955 single, not originally part of an album but subsequently included in various collections.

68 'The antithesis of a raw cop movie or a drear and bloody film noir'.

Voices

One way of apprehending this film is by seeing the three leading characters, Camille, Théo and Daïga, as beset by a chorus of voices. In a sense, all three main characters dissociate themselves from the lifestyle of the expatriate societies to which they belong – the indigent manner of those lifestyles does not speak to them in any satisfactory way. Daïga, the protagonist, is surrounded by the new influences of Paris: Ninon, her hotel and its guests, the bars and night life, Camille and the gay community, the theatrical world into which she hopes to make an entrée, her own relations and the expatriate Lithuanian community and its hangers-on, and intrusive police officers. The impact of this polyphony of voices is figured in Daïga's inability to speak French, her constant state of facial bewilderment expressing her uncertainty and indecisiveness. But, as with a deaf person, her inability to communicate verbally offers her clearer vision: she is not beguiled by the 'gentil' carapace of Camille and his partner and sees them for what they are.

Daïga's indecision is paralleled by that of Théo. The two of them share the dream of emigrating to imagined better prospects, although this idea is all they share as they never meet in the film. Visually, the film keeps them apart, while linking them, as we shall see, through music. Théo has already experienced what Daïga is to discover – the venality and prejudice of city life. His case is both precursor and mirror image of her trajectory: he longs to get out of Paris, as she will actually do, but he purportedly wants to get back to where he thinks his roots are, whereas she is, initially, rejecting what her home land, Lithuania, seems to offer her. In comparable fashion to Daïga, Théo's peace of mind is disturbed by a chorus of voices. Théo, like Daïga, is an aspiring artist. He is a musician who has to work illegally to make a living. His main worries are familial. He is at constant loggerheads with his wife, Mona, who emphatically does not share his wish to emigrate; custody of their son is also a constant issue between them. Théo has as well a conflicted relationship with his brother, Camille, whose decadent lifestyle he seems to condone disapprovingly. There is

a strong sense that the two brothers are in competition for the affection of their mother: Camille, as the younger, seems to be her favourite (Théo as the older brother may have been given the role of substitute husband in the absence of their father). But Camille does not obviously share the uncertainty of the other two. He seems relatively confident and settled in his way of life. He certainly shows no interest in decamping: he specifically comments on Théo's dream of moving to Martinique: 'Il n'y a rien là-bas' (There's nothing there).

The polyphony of voices which relates to Camille comprises three main elements. There is the 'straight' community – Ninon and her mother and the hotel workers – who provide him with services which he accepts with an amused condescension. Their awareness and tolerance of his sexuality masks knowledge of his criminal activities, an implied running threat which predictably turns to horror and loathing when the secret is uncovered. Alongside those voices are those of his family; at some level, Camille knows how much his family will be damaged when his activities come to light, but their voices are like a kind of indistinct background which he tunes out as much as possible. The third element comprises his social milieu: he appears much more concerned with how he is perceived by his friends and acquaintances, putting a lot of effort into his clothing and paying for entertainment, but he is also very wary of the potential threats, both in respect of the fidelity of his partner and the enviousness palpably present at his stage performance. (There is a strong sense on this latter occasion of backbiting – not uttered so much as suggested visually). In these respects, the voices act in a similar way to background music, helping to set a tone and flesh out the nuanced relationships presented by the scenario.

All three characters, in their different ways, are responding to the polyphonic surroundings of their respective settings. None of them is presented as having a resolute intention for moving their lives forward. The typical sparseness of the dialogue helps to show them as drifting without trajectory. In their different ways, they embody the tensions set out by Nancy: the competing urges of community

and individuality. The music in the film adds depth to those conflicting impulses by its movements towards and away from individual characters (fluid distance). This chimes in with Lachman's understanding of polyphony as something which embraces ambiguity and allows for: 'the simultaneous interplay of voices' (30).

Family

As is often the case in a Claire Denis film, family is a conflicted issue in *J'ai pas sommeil*. Efforts at good familial relations are balanced against failures. Théo's careful parenting of his young son contrasts with his inability to live with his wife, Mona; and his unilateral decision to emigrate with his child is done in the face of Mona's unwillingness to re-locate to another country. It is clear that a great deal of affection is exchanged between Fleur (the mother of Théo and his brother Camille) and her sons, but in the ultimate analysis she has mothered a psychopathic murderer. The relationship between the two brothers is perfectly pitched in terms of the film's interest in family and in proximity and distance between individuals. The brothers' instinctive affection for each other is hamstrung by their different outlook on life and their respective lifestyles. At the proxy level of parenthood, Daïga's grandmother welcomes her, but is unwilling to accommodate her.⁶⁹ Ira's efforts to find her granddaughter somewhere to live with the metaphorical extended family of émigrés is unsuccessful, and Daïga ends up skivvying for Ira's hotelier friend Ninon, who, in practice, displays the greatest level of motherliness towards the Lithuanian visitor. The music interacts with the dialogue, allowing it and the images to reflect these uncertain family connections in the following ways.

In the case of Théo's relationship with Mona, this is characterized by a silence which implies the emptiness of their marriage. It is clear from the context of the film that he and Mona are continually getting back together and splitting up. There is, literally, no music in their relationship, and this is clearly signified by the negative contrasting of their being together with two of the stand-out musical set-pieces in the film. The first of these set-pieces is Camille's club performance

⁶⁹ Irina Grjebina's character is named as Mina in the credits, but she is addressed as Ira in the film.

to 'Le lien défait'. In terms of editing, his performance is framed by footage of Théo and Mona, sleeping on the roof of the apartment building. The music fades in a few seconds before the image cuts to the club, and correspondingly fades out when the cut back to the roof scene is made. Beugnet describes the rooftop scene as: 'one of the rare moments of harmony [in the film]' (90); but it strikes me as more equivocal, given the interplay between the images and the music.

Camille is shown putting his soul into his performance, and even though his music and his environment is not something with which his brother sympathizes, the creative act contrasts sharply with the soullessness of what is passing between Théo and Mona. This implies that Théo would also like to be doing his own thing (musically as well as more generally), as indeed is implicit in his wish to depart for Martinique. At the same time, the substance of 'Le lien défait' is highly relevant. In his own register, Camille is expressing precisely the same feelings as his brother. The song treats of the failure of love, passion, country, and the natural world; none of these strongly-felt affects are able to prevent the breaking of the chain of human connection. Camille's internal despair at the ineffectiveness of these relational ties plays over into Théo's wish to make a fresh start away from corruption and venality. That despair is reflected in the song's ability to exist only (in the film) away from the traffic noise and the gaudy advertising hoardings which are the backdrop for Théo and Mona's last night together.

The second negative juxtaposition comes when Théo, in his turn, has a set-piece, playing with the musician Kali⁷⁰ and his band. As with Camille's performance of 'Le lien défait', this resonates on a number of levels. Mona is conspicuous by her absence (we see her just before, taking little Harry, and next morning returning Harry to the apartment and finding Théo absent). Once again, it is implied that Théo's musical soul can only function when she is not around. On this occasion, Camille is in the audience – in a kind of reversal of

70 Born Jean-Marc Monnerville, Kali is a musician from Martinique, known for his contributions to zouk and banjo playing.

Théo's attendance in spirit at his own event. This gesture of solidarity is acknowledged by an implied exchange of looks between the brothers. Camille's demeanour is his usual one of calm detachment, but he seems to be appreciative of Théo's playing. After a while, he leaves and is then seen walking down the street. Mal says that the right-to-left tracking shot indicates that he is running away from the future: 'fuyant l'avenir communément admis à droite du cadre' (201).⁷¹ This movement against filming norms is complicated by the music, which follows him until the point where he is stopped by the police, maintaining the connection between the brothers in a fashion comparable to the impact of 'Le lien défait'. But the difference between the two musical sequences is crucial: the run-over does not fade away for over a minute, signifying that Théo has a connection of a much more durable kind with Camille than with Mona. Despite their differences, the brothers have an instinctive relation: what Nancy expresses as an obligation to 'compear' means that they are impelled to an instinctive sharing of themselves while striving to maintain their separate identities. Music and images deliver the sense of fluid distance by enhancing how the characters come together in empathy and move apart to assert individuality.

There is also a crucial distinction to be made here at the level of characterization. The character of Camille is presented in the film as someone playing with life, whereas Théo takes it deadly seriously. The younger brother appropriately plays at singing a song by an urban troubadour, while the elder is engaged in an authentic concert of Antillean music with respected performers. The brothers' relationship – in both character and musical terms – is less a harmonic one and much more of a polyphonic association.

The film opens up a number of possibilities in relation to the ending of this final musical scene, with music bearing a polyphonic role in relation to the images. It may be simply that Camille, having witnessed the engrossment of his brother in the music, has decided that his continued presence at the concert is superfluous. At a deeper level, that might signify recognition by Camille that

⁷¹ 'Fleeing the future conventionally indicated as to the right of the screen'.

Theo has to live his own life in his own way, as exemplified by his music. Implicit in that idea would be the sense that Camille has recognized the gulf in artistry between them as symbolic of an unbridgeable gap. On that reading, he would be walking out of Théo's life as he walks down the street, as suggested by Fuentes and Mal. This latter possibility would have more weight if the music cut as Camille leaves the concert, but it continues with him for a considerable while,⁷² thus mitigating the possibility that the music bears a mocking or rueful message here. That tone is not strongly present in the relationship between the two brothers. Their respectively opposed lifestyle and outlook on life seem to be tolerated by the other, without overt approval. They do not treat each other in a hostile way; there is a sense of wanting to communicate, but finding it too hard to do so. This recalls what Nancy says about resistance to immanence: 'a complete sharing implies the disappearance of what is shared'.⁷³ The impact of the music of Kali here reflects that level of wished-for empathy, but at the same time signals the impossibility of resolution.⁷⁴

A further possible scenario is that Camille has, through Théo's playing, come to realize the meaninglessness of his own life. In keeping with the indeterminate mode of his existence, it will remain unclear whether his arrest was a willed event or just another accidental incident.⁷⁵ What the music does is offer means of connection between the two brothers which are at the same time patent yet intangible, thus reflecting the nature of their relationship as presented on screen. The relationship between the two brothers is summed up by the two key pieces of music to which they are connected. Both 'Le lien défait' and 'Racines'

72 It only cuts as the police officers get out of their car to stop Camille. In this way, the music indicates the exact point where Camille leaves the world occupied by Théo and moves irrevocably into the criminal world with which he has been flirting.

73 *The Inoperable Community*, p.35.

74 It is in fact the last proper connection between them before the final, fleeting encounter at the police station.

75 This raises the question of why Camille called on Théo when the latter was eating at home with Mona and her mother. He clearly wanted to discuss something with his brother, but was inhibited by the presence of others. He says specifically that he did not come for the money which Theo gives him. Had he intended to confess his crimes? Théo in fact goes after him, sensing that something important is in the air, but the moment has passed and Camille goes off on the Metro train by himself, but seemingly regretfully. Martine Beugnet suggests that he came to tell his brother that he has tested HIV positive ('Film noir, mort blanche' in *(Ab)Normalities* ed Catherine Dousteysier-Khoze & Paul Scott (Durham: Durham Modern Languages Series, 2001), p.249), but it seems to me less likely that Camille would regard this as something to make a special visit about.

deal with concepts of unrootedness. Théo's disconnection with France is what is driving him to move to Martinique; Camille's parallel sense of dislocation takes the form of a dissolute lifestyle which conflicts with the norms of the society in which he is living. The origin and style of the two songs speak to the different attitudes to life of the brothers, but, in a typical unsettling of assumptions, Claire Denis assigns the joyous music of Kali to the morose Théo, and the intense, introspective style of Jean-Louis Murat to the easy-going 'gentil' Camille.

The one occasion when Théo and Camille share music in a direct way is at their mother's birthday party. The dancing which takes place after the ritual candle-blowing is to an irrepressible tune, 'African Music'.⁷⁶ Fleur persuades Camille to dance with her, which he does after a brief show of reluctance, and this is a happy tender moment. Then Théo cuts in and she dances equally contentedly with her other son until Camille returns for another dance. The sons' feelings for their mother match the tone of the music; but a contrariant note is introduced in their vying – like children – for precedence. This is made explicit when, first, as Théo cuts in, Camille moves away raising his hands in the air in a kind of surrender; then, when he has given Théo a reasonable time with Fleur, Camille returns and tries to make it a threesome, but his brother ducks under his arm and goes off.⁷⁷ The sociable nature of the music which accompanies this family event is appropriate to the occasion, but is unable to bring all three together as one. In musical terms, this family is unable to play off the same page. That failure is pointed up by montage: the party scene is introduced with a brutal image cut from the surviving victim, who is being questioned in hospital about her attackers, to Camille's arrival at the party, accompanied by Raphaël, coming in with champagne and exchanging affectionate greetings with family and friends. The implication of this cut seems to be that it is lost on Camille in particular that his victims are of comparable age to his own mother, and are likely to have caring familial relationships like his with Fleur. Ostensibly, therefore, the music is in synch with the images of family celebration; but its

76 This is mis-credited – to 'Bille Omen-Thomas'. It is in fact by a Dominican ensemble called the Bill-O-Men, led by Bill Thomas. The track comes from the band's eponymous début album (1977).

77 This scene prefigures the one in *35 rhums* when Alex Descas, as Lionel, is thwarted from dancing with his daughter.

connection with the stark visual cut presents a wider, polyphonic context.

Daïga

There is one notable scene which has the warmth appropriate to a family relationship (even though it is between two people who are not related), and in which music in a socializing context comes strongly into play. This is the occasion when Ninon and Daïga get drunk. Ninon is in reminiscing mode and she puts on Procol Harum's 'A Whiter Shade of Pale'.⁷⁸ The spacey feel of the music and the allusive nature of the lyrics create an ambiance where proxy mother and daughter can come together. Although Ninon has taken the visitor on as a chambermaid, there is a sense in which she has also adopted her for the time being. But, aside from this occasion, the communication between them is nullified by the absence of a shared language: Ninon chatters away in French; Daïga says nothing or sometimes just smiles in her incomprehension. In this scene, formality weakened by wine, the two women laugh and dance together. It is not clear whether the song is familiar to Daïga (it would be surprising if it were not, given its ubiquity): as usual, she offers minimal affective response.

Todd McGowan argues that Daïga, in common with Théo and Camille, is in flight from enjoyment; that the characters have an inadequacy which stems from their inability to fully embrace the hedonistic delights which Paris offers: 'all evince a sense of dissatisfaction that stems from their encounter with a pleasure that they cannot access'.⁷⁹ But the musical connections contradict this view. Most obviously, Camille has 'Le lien défait' and Théo has 'Racines'. Daïga also has her moment of seeming unqualified pleasure, delivered in a musical context. The warmth of Ninon's reaction to the music spills over and engages the warm side of Daïga for the only time in the film.⁸⁰ Despite her own engaging

⁷⁸ The band's début single and a huge world-wide hit in 1967. Its melody derives from works by Bach, notably 'Air on a G String'. The song was included on the US version of the début album *Procol Harum*, (1967), but does not appear on any of the band's other studio albums. It features on various collections and re-issues e.g. *Procol Harum...Plus* (1998).

⁷⁹ 'Resisting the lure of ultimate enjoyment', *Kinoeye* 3.7.

⁸⁰ As Judith Mayne observes:(85-6) 'Claire Denis' approach to music [...] works to situate familiar

personality, Ninon is normally brisk and business-like, and, as is the case with Daïga, this is the one time she lets her hair down. This episode illustrates what Nancy argues about the essence of community originating in the tracing of borders which expose individuals to others. Catherine Wheatley describes the two women dancing together as a: 'lovely instance of filial communion'.⁸¹ In the same way as 'Le lien défait' and 'Racines', the use of 'A Whiter Shade of Pale' is the vehicle for characters to reveal something of their hidden nature.⁸² Music in this scene plays in sympathy with the images and the action, and effectively replaces dialogue.

Outwardly, the film seems unable to accommodate responsible and considerate behaviour between people. Martine Beugnet describes the movements of the characters as 'aimless, solitary wanderings' (90). Those errant movements are linked to the possibilities and risks of relationality. This is exemplified in the scene where Daïga decides to follow Camille. Other scenes suggest that she is fascinated by him, and in this one he is clearly not averse to her interest, making sure that she sees which bar he is going into. There follows a sequence in which they stand near each other; he passes the sugar, and pays for her coffee before leaving. What is at stake here is the chance of friendship; but it comes to nothing – they do not engage other than tangentially, any more than at other times throughout the film. It is remarkable that these two main characters, who live in the same hotel and keep on crossing paths, virtually never speak to each other.⁸³ On this occasion, they almost make contact, but the sense is that meaningful relation would be too difficult.

Beugnet reads this as creating: 'an ambiguous feeling, where threat, unspoken desire, and closeness mingle'.⁸⁴ I am reminded of what Nancy says about the alienating effect of mere touch: 'touch detaches itself from what it touches, at

songs in unfamiliar contexts, and here the song becomes a momentary connection between two women of different generations'.

81 'La Famille Denis', in Vecchio, p.65.

82 Apart from the functionality of the song in the film, its title registers as a wry connection with the extremely pale, Slavic complexion of Yekaterina Golubeva, who plays Daïga. Given the film's concerns with racism, it is hard not to think that this is also a covert allusion by Denis to that issue.

83 In this scene, Daïga says 'merci' for the sugar; they both say 'salut' as he leaves.

84 Beugnet, 2004, p.90

the very moment when it touches'.⁸⁵ His argument that a real touch amounts to a desire for a caress rather than a fleeting contact seems apposite for both these characters. The dialogic silence expresses the unbridgeable gap which prevents the opportunity of friendship. However, the encounter between Camille and Daïga takes place to a song called 'I Try' by Basehead.⁸⁶ This is an uncharacteristically slow number⁸⁷ whose gentleness of style matches with Camille's 'gentillesse', and whose outlook, a sense of trying to keep on with a smile against the world, fits with Camille's approach to life. In this way, awareness of the existence of the gap between the brothers indicated by the images and the dialogue is softened by music.

Musical connection

Throughout *J'ai pas sommeil*, the fragility of family and other relations is suggested by musical linkage. The song 'I Try', which as we have seen plays over the failed connection between Daïga and Camille, has a corresponding resonance for the disconnection of Théo and Camille. We also hear it running over a visual sequence which features: first Théo in his van, with Harry, going to work; then Camille walking along the street eating a croissant; and finally Théo at work. The bulk of this 30 second sequence accompanies Camille, but the run-overs with footage of Théo – both before and after – again make plain the affective connection, and the physical disconnection, between the two of them. Here again, music enforces both the idea of closeness between the brothers and the actual distances which are part of their relationship.

In similar fashion, music continues to link the twists and turns of family. One example is a piece, probably called 'Family'. This is one of the small suite of tunes credited to Michael Ivey.⁸⁸ Its form is of the intro to a blues number, played

85 *Noli me tangere*, trans. by Sarah Clift, Pascale-Ann Brault and Michael Naas (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), p.50.

86 Basehead, also known as dc Basehead and Basehead 2.0, is a US band formed in 1992 by Michael Ivey. Their style of music resists classification, varying between rap, hip-hop, rock, and country.

87 Taken from the 1992 début album *Play with Toys*.

88 These are credited as a group, and it has been necessary to deduce their precise incidence. Given that

on solo acoustic guitar. It shifts gently up and down key changes, without resolving into a melody. It first plays (for more than two minutes) during the scene where Théo, Mona, and her mother are having dinner. Camille arrives, wanting to talk, but goes away; Théo follows him and after a brief exchange Camille gets on a Métro train. The number plays here as backdrop to a whole series of difficult exchanges. Mona's mother is hostile to Théo's project of emigration and he is sarcastic in response to her complaints; Camille's wish for a discussion is frustrated by the presence of the two women; Mona and her mother are at odds over Harry's welfare; finally, Théo's attempt to connect with Camille is rebuffed.

In its initial context, the tune's failure to resolve melodically connects with the disjunctions of family life and with the associated unresolved issues. The second appearance of 'Family' is a very short snatch of a few seconds as Camille buys some drugs. On the third occasion, it accompanies footage of Mona bringing Harry back to Théo's apartment, finding her husband missing, and learning that he is at the police station. As the film cuts to Camille being questioned, the music continues for a second or two, almost unheard. In these examples, the fragmentary appearances of the music run with the cuts in the montage, both coming together to reflect dysfunctional aspects of the characters' lives. It is noteworthy that blues as a musical idiom seldom features in Denis's work, and its appearance here adds to the polyphony of music in this film.

Todd McGowan offers, in support of the view that the film is about incomplete pleasure, the suggestion that this is evidenced by the lack of a univocal soundtrack: 'Just as there is no ubiquitous music, there is no full or complete enjoyment'.⁸⁹ In other words, McGowan argues that the brokenness of the characters' lives is indicated by the absence of a monophonic and ubiquitous

John Pattison is credited alongside Jean-Louis Murat for the score, some of these may be his compositions, and played by Ivey. Cédric Mal (49) says that Ivey wrote a piece, intended for the opening of the film, focusing on the roofs of Paris, but that this was not used. That may be the credited song 'Serial Killer Theme' which does not seem to feature anywhere.

⁸⁹ *Kinoeye* 3.7.

soundtrack which would bind relationships together in a satisfying manner. While McGowan's statement seems reasonable, it cannot account for the complexity of musical and familial connections inherent in Denis's use of polyphony. A whole range of ties of blood and relationality are subtly connected with the deeds of the individual, through the variant use of music. Principally, it is Camille's crimes which reflect on his family, as is made explicit by the police officer's implication that they should have known what he was up to. As we have seen, his mother still loves Camille. Despite the antagonism between Théo and his wife, Mona remains concerned about him, and is at pains to return Harry to his father. The musical threads which weave in and out of the relations between the characters and the film vary, as we have seen, in the degree of understanding and critique which they extend to individual characters and to the fluctuating connections between them. That variance is reflected and enhanced by the different ways in which the music relates to the images.

In the two main set-pieces, 'Le lien défait' and 'Racines', nuanced views of the two brothers appear sharply. Both become lost in their respective performances but whereas Théo retains his taciturn demeanour, Camille is enabled to open out. When questioned towards the end of the film, he says three things to the police officer: 'I'm an easy-going person. No-one wants to suffer. The world's gone crazy'.⁹⁰ These motto-like remarks are the closest he comes to expressing in his own words the extent of the alienation he feels from the world in which he lives. It is his performance to Jean-Louis Murat's rendition of 'Le lien défait'⁹¹ which allows a much fuller expression of how he really feels.

Alienation

Murat is a musician with a reputation as a loner and an outsider. His music is

90 'Je suis un type facile. Personne n'a envie d'aller mal. C'est les choses qui déconnent'. Martine Beugnet translates this as: 'I am an easy-going guy. Nobody wants to go wrong. Things get messed up'. (*Claire Denis*, p.103). Her translation, which is closer to the literal, has the effect of focusing on Camille's sense of his own suffering; the translation which I have used (from the Arte sub-titles) gives the remarks a broader context. For me, the latter work better in that they retain an element of the detachment which is central to Camille's character, and seem less like a simple confession.

91 The film credits the writers as Jean-Louis Bergheaud (Murat's real name) and Denis Clavaizolle (musician and arranger, Murat's regular accompanist).

very personalized – in a way comparable to that of Leonard Cohen – but his songs also touch on questions connected to French society. 'Le lien défait' is important for two reasons: first for what it says about the deracination of the main characters; and second, for its performative context. 'Le lien défait' – which translates as something like 'the broken tie' or 'the loosened knot' – is a song about a damaged relationship.⁹² At that level it is very apt to Camille's life with Raphaël. But the song carries other layers of significance, relating to a general failure of individuals to sustain meaningful relationships. Music is fluidly in synch with the scenario while also working against the images presented. In this latter respect, serious flaws are implied in a society which is composed of people who cannot connect with each other. Camille's appearance for the performance is surprising because he wears a dress. He normally dresses smartly in male attire, and the wearing of a dress brings home sharply the idea of conflict in his life, and of his having another, concealed, form of existence. In Nancean terms, the music allows for Camille to be presented as performing resistance to immanence. In other words, he is rejecting the notion of inherent or intrinsic connection with his brother, asserting his individuality, however painful that may be.

Conflict and dissatisfaction come out strongly in his performance of 'Le lien défait'. The song speaks of the desire for permanence, always frustrated; the perversion of the natural world; and it carries implications of post-colonial trauma. It is the one occasion in the film where Camille appears to really care about something as he puts his heart into it. His performance marks him out as someone who feels alienated: he is unhappy with his life and its surroundings. Seen as a love song, the song words chime in with the fair complexion of Raphaël, Camille's lover and partner in crime ('like a blond angel'), and the ambivalent, sometimes violent nature of their relationship ('like a demon'). But at a deeper level the lyrics resonate with Camille's feelings of isolation. In the third verse it is the intense desire for anchorage ('féroce enraciné') which is thwarted as the 'temps du lien défait' negates any sense of deep-rootedness. The post-colonial emerges in the reference to 'Jeanne de France' and in the juxtaposition

⁹² The full lyrics, with translation (mine) are set out in Annex D.

of 'la reine des prés' (queen of the meadows) with 'morte terre' (dead earth).

Words and music resonate with and against what we are shown. In this case especially, the lyrics replace dialogue. The imaging of a perverted natural world together with the perversity of human conduct is claustrophobic. Camille has no way out of this predicament. Others – Daïga, Théo – may be able to leave but Camille is trapped, seeming to have no way out; his line of retreat is an internalized one, into himself and his performance. There is a sense in which 'Le lien défait' is reflexive: the second person references could be to himself – so it may be that the song contains, for him, elements of self-accusation. In that case, the ideas of perversion and madness which lead to the senseless destruction of relationality would stem from his own doing.

There is also the outsider status of Murat himself to consider. A singer-songwriter with a loner disposition and a strong streak of romanticism, his writing of the title song 'J'ai pas sommeil' as well as his singing of 'Le lien défait' brings to Denis's film a flavour of loss and of melancholy. This helps to balance the noir elements of *fait divers*, the sensational real-life aspects of the plot, and the underlying themes of oppression, racism, and loss of identity. The music of Murat not only rounds out the character of Camille by countering its stereotypical associations (gay, addict, robber, murderer, racial minority, slacker) and giving his personality an element of coherence and sympathy, it also, by aligning him with a well-known living performer, brings in a flavour of solidity, of connection with the real world. Notwithstanding the quality of the song 'Le lien défait', it is its conjunction with Richard Courcet's performance in the film which gives the club scene such impact. The performance stands entirely on its own, but its resonances tremble throughout the film in a striking instance of the fluid nature of relationality between words, music and images in this film. The degree of self-exposure (body and soul) in the performance is arresting. There is a true sense of the artist being lost in the moment. Camille comes across as transported, free, and regardless of his surroundings. Everyone in the club stops what they are doing to watch. But even so there is no connection between

artiste and audience. The silent, staring watchers behave much as they might if an alien had landed: shocked, puzzled, wary, even hostile. The function of the music is accordingly to give him an opportunity to express his individuality, to engage in that resistance which Nancy sees as essential to community.

Camille for his part shows no outward interest – this is not a case of someone holding the audience in the palm of his hand, rather the performance is for himself. Despite his moving among the watching men, he makes no contact with anyone, either by touch or look. His tactility is reserved for the walls and the air: his gestures to emphasize the song's words and his caressing of surfaces display that his sensuousness is not for sharing. Crucially, Camille does not actually sing, but mimes to Murat's voice. The intensity with which he does so makes the song his own for the time being. But this is yet another tie which will be undone; a dream which has to end. This sense of alienation is an essential part of the central narrative, which is shot through with implications which touch on a number of significant issues for modern-day France. These issues include race, identity, prejudice, and exploitation. This is prefigured early in the film when we see Daïga arriving in Paris. She has left her homeland in Lithuania in the search for a new life. As such she embodies the idea of disconnection which is at the heart of 'Le lien défait'. In these wider aspects, the words embraced by Camille also point to Théo's dreams of emigrating to the Antilles, their mother's homeland. It is significant that the performance of 'Le lien défait' is bookended by two scenes in which Théo and Mona discuss his repatriation plan. The two of them, together with their son, are sleeping on the roof – under the open sky. This is a kind of symbolic rejection of urban life which contrasts in particular with the louche atmosphere of the club where Camille is on stage.

Théo's reasons for wanting to leave form part of a triangular connection in the film which takes us back to Daïga, who will similarly tire of being exploited. She will be the one who actively cuts loose. At the end of the film she decides to give up on the community of ex-pats and their struggles to keep up their ancestral

ways while living in France. So Daïga performs a double breaking of the link: first, from her native land, and second, from the new homeland which has declined to embrace her. Her connection with Théo is an entirely implicit one: they never come into contact. She attends neither musical event. Her role in this film is in some ways analogous to the one played by Golubeva in *L'Intrus* – a detached, largely impassive observer. The relevance of the song for Daïga is that she is – like Camille – at the same time someone who feels a rejected outsider, as well as someone who is very wary of close contact. This phenomenon is delineated by Julia Kristeva in the following terms: 'Insensitive, aloof, he [the foreigner] seems, deep down, beyond the reach of attacks and rejections that he nevertheless experiences with the vulnerability of a medusa'.⁹³ Daïga departs to the accompaniment of Jean-Louis Murat's 'J'ai pas sommeil'. But before that happens, we are shown the intensity of Théo's feelings in the other set-piece performance, that of 'Racines'.⁹⁴

Kali is a Martiniquais musician who is known for his outspokenness on issues of imperialism and colonialism. His association in *J'ai pas sommeil* with the character of Théo fits well with the latter's disenchantment with France, and with his desire to move to Martinique. The song 'Racines'⁹⁵ is about despair and the urge to perform, so in that respect too it is very relevant to Théo's situation (and not unconnected with Camille's). Like 'Le lien défait', this is a song about love and its application to the world at large. Although the polemic here is relatively mild, the words of the song touch on inhumanity (the ignored dying children) and the inadequacy of love and music to deal with the world. At the same time, the demands of musical expression are presented as impossible to deny. We might think of Théo and Camille as children faced with spiritual death. It is certainly true, as we have seen, that both of them seek a form of release in music.

93 *Strangers To Ourselves*, p.7.

94 This song appears on a number of albums by Kali and his musical collaborators, including instrumental, acoustic, and live versions as well as the studio one. The film version seems to be a one-off performance, not issued in its own right (although available on YouTube).

95 Full lyrics are in Annex D.

The film shows Théo, like his brother, immersed in his performance. The joyousness of the playing is palpable, spilling over as it does to the appreciative audience (a complete contrast to Camille's). While he is there, Camille shares in the pleasure. On one level, this connection with his Martinique roots feels like the ideal prelude to Théo's departure for the Antilles. At another level, the sadness and despair inherent in the song hint at the dénouement to come with the revelation of Camille's crimes ('If I have to sing|Then you will cry' seems uncomfortably prophetic).

The use of Kali in *J'ai pas sommeil* resonates in other ways. The hostile reception which the film received reflected the intensity of public opinion about the real-life case on which it was based.⁹⁶ The lyrics of 'Le lien défait', which deal with the difficulty of making connection, also touch on one of the film's central preoccupations: the problem people have in seeing someone like Camille as anything other than a monster.⁹⁷ It was this attempt at objectivity which fuelled the scandal triggered by the film's release. There has been little or no comment in this context on Kali's appearance in the film (it may have gone unnoticed in the furore about seeming sympathy with a granny-killer). However, given his track record of inflaming right-wing sympathies, his inclusion is an apt one.⁹⁸ The polyphonic use of music consists here of an empathy with the images, which also offers a substratum of connection with one of the film's central themes.

The emphasis in Kali's work on authentic music forms and instruments is consonant with Denis's habitual shying away from the mainstream. This represents one aspect of her empathetic relation to Nancy's insistence on the importance of resisting forms of immanence: her sympathy with the assertion of

96 That of Thierry Paulin, gay, promiscuous, drug-using HIV positive, whose notoriety derived from a series of murders of elderly women committed by Paulin and his partner to finance their lifestyle.

97 The attempt to see Camille as human is complicated by his relationship with Raphaël. Despite his easy-going demeanour, Camille is the dominant partner and not above getting rough if he doesn't get his way.

98 For example, his song 'Reggae Dom-Tom' includes the lyrics: 'I belong to a very special race| I'm a nigger who was born in France's overseas "department"I'd have been better off born an orphan|Oh how many more generations will have to submit to this curse'. www.rfimusic.com/artist/world-music/kali/biography [accessed 20/10/2017].

individuality as a necessary part of meaningful connection. It is also one of the numerous examples of her embracing forms of Caribbean and African music (Kali brings these elements together in view of his success in Africa, and the fact that he first came to real prominence when stepping in for Fela Kuti, the world-famous Nigerian musician).

The sense of dissatisfaction with an unsympathetic world is not, of course, confined to the music of Kali. It is present in Basehead's 'I Try', which also speaks of the unfairness and inhumanity in the world. For example: 'Turn on the TV and I read the news|I know all the things the world is going through|Men forced to die, a nuclear sky [...] Don't have to read the paper|To know there's homeless people living in the streets'. Basehead as a band are outsiders, like Camille – and Kali, to a certain extent, and 'I Try' is something of an atypical track for musicians who usually go in for higher energy material. Its refrain: 'I try| To not let the world get me down' connects with the pessimism of some of the characters in the film. But in polyphonic style, the band get to show their other side. This is the scene with Camille at a dance club.⁹⁹ The loud up-tempo music and the strobe lighting show everyone having a good time.

However, what is most significant is the placement of this cut. It follows the scene between Camille and Théo at the Métro station when Camille rebuffs his brother, but seems to regret having to go off alone. His image through the glass of the carriage door changes to a reflection from inside the carriage, then becomes blurred – suggesting the confusion of his conflicted feelings. At this point a siren is heard; but it is not a train emergency, it is the opening of the music track which overlaps, as it were, backwards into the Métro train. Conversely, the blurred reflections in the train windows anticipate the fractured images of the strobe. The hellish chaos of what it is to be Camille is vividly expressed: darkness, underground, noise, frantic movement. These effects are compounded by Camille's wearing of a hat with horns,¹⁰⁰ implicating him in the

99 I am assuming from the chronology of the credits that this is 'Theme Camille'. It sounds a little like Basehead's 'Break The Chain'.

100 Picked out in red on some editions of the DVD. There is a picture of him in his room wearing such a hat – thus establishing a continuing association with it.

devilish incidents which have been taking place. Although it is a staple of club dancing that people wear strange headgear, the choice is a particularly appropriate one for him. In this respect too, the image track bleeds into its predecessor, like the music: we see Camille wearing this hat in the Métro, just before the cut to the club. Taking all aspects of the sequence together – images and music – this is a full-blown representation of alienation. It is not insignificant that it comes so soon after the sequence accompanied by the track 'Family' from which it is only separated by the brief exchange with Théo. It is characterized by an absence of words and a flowing back and forth of music and image.

The final representation of alienation in the film is a mirror image of its beginning: Daïga in her car, this time leaving Paris. The bright daylight which accompanied her arrival has now been replaced by darkness, the warning chords sounded by Machito's orchestra horns have come to fruition, and Daïga has decided that the sleaze surrounding her city life is insupportable. Denis does not make her a heroine: the contraband which she had stuffed inside her clothes when coming to France has been replaced by the money she has stolen from Camille. The film also suggests that she has gone straight from the sociable scene with Ninon to ransack Camille's room (she is wearing the same clothes and we hear Ninon still laughing in the background). The montage also implies that she has some connection with Camille's arrest: there is a cut from his being stopped on the street to Daïga in his room, and a cut back from Camille in the police car to Daïga packing and leaving, surreptitiously. A layer of polyphony is added to the scene of her packing, which plays to a raucous form of music not otherwise heard in the film.¹⁰¹ This indicates the degree of her disengagement from her surroundings, and a form of defiance or contempt. The music track cuts with an image cut to her actually leaving, conveying something of the impression of a rude sign, a slammed door, or perhaps the raspberry blown by the horns at the start of the film. Daïga's characteristic taciturnity is here echoed by the cut to silence and the action of her departure is

¹⁰¹ I have been unable to identify this uncredited snatch of music. Some of its features are reminiscent to my ear of The Beastie Boys.

endorsed by sonic negativity.

'J'ai pas sommeil' – the song

The footage of Daïga driving, which closes the film, is accompanied by Jean Louis Murat's 'J'ai pas sommeil'. Murat's lyrics are obscure and allusive.¹⁰² Their general thrust is about the relentlessness of human vice and the fear of living. The images of a wounded hare menaced by a lion, and of a scapegoat unable to escape the assembled opprobrium of the world, bring strongly to mind both the situation of the outsider as a hate object and also the particular venue of Camille's performance of 'Le lien défait' surrounded by an inimical audience. The words 'mille hurlements' (a thousand cries) recall the infernal underground scene. The insistent references to flesh in the song emphasize the carnality of the lifestyle portrayed in the film, and those to germs and infection point up the corruption - rendered as intrinsic by the recurrent mention of entrails. The sense of superficiality and disgust conveyed by the image of a mouth full of gravel and of self-deceiving pride ('grâce trompeuse') resonates widely with the film's interests and connects to Théo's disenchantment; to Daïga's disillusionment; and also suggests Camille's self-recrimination.

What the song brings out most powerfully is the inescapable power of corruption – vice is presented in its essentiality as inhabiting our intestines, and as the 'object of all our inclinations' (literally, 'vows'). Vicious behaviour is characterized as driven by a compulsive ignorance – a refusal to face the fear of the Eternal. This serves not simply as a commentary on the conduct of individuals within the film, but more broadly as a critique of the shallowness and despicability of human behaviour. Music infuses Daïga's impassiveness; in a kind of structural reversal, the images of her provide a flat background against which swell the current of Murat's words and music.

¹⁰² They are set out in full in Annex D, with my translation.

The lyrics of 'J'ai pas sommeil' do not make specific reference to issues like racism: these can be inferred from the general sense of victimization and discrimination. These sentiments, delivered in Murat's lugubrious tones, offer an appropriate closing note of alienation to a film which is shot through with that sense. Unlike 'Le lien défait' or 'Racines', there is no feeling of love sought or offered. This song makes it explicit that its alienated images are of general and current application – this is the 'histoire de ce temps'. The song's closure of the film, and its continuing to run over the credits, has its own aspect of worming into the entrails of *J'ai pas sommeil* itself. In a typical Denisian move – often achieved through music – the ending of the film connects with its beginning: the narrative is not closed, but open to re-starting; the refrain can play again, but perhaps – almost certainly - in a key which is neither the same nor completely different, just like the lives represented in the film.

Summary

My sense of what the music does in *J'ai pas sommeil* – which corresponds to how I see the structuring of the film as a whole – is that it is an important part of the dissensual flavour of what Claire Denis offers to her audience by way of suggestion and counter-suggestion. The music – like the visual montage – focuses on examining a range of possibilities, which are presented, not as proposing conclusions, but as invitations to the audience to follow their own reflective processes, wherever that might lead them. The complex of relationships in *J'ai pas sommeil* absorbs, and is absorbed by, what Fabrice Fuentes has to say about the rhythmic movements of the music in the film. As with his motif of jazz, the music, no less than the images, has to be negotiated, followed, and recognized, in whatever form it may be presented or re-presented. The structure of *J'ai pas sommeil* depends on variations, on similarities and differences, and the musical selections play their part in extending and developing the circular and interwoven fabric of the film. These polyphonic aspects of the film offer shades and contrasts as part of the blended, choral structure of *J'ai pas sommeil* in which the multiplicity of voices

and musical notes present a symphony of subtle alternatives and sharp challenges.

What the music does is flesh out issues of relationality, while at the same time providing its own polyphonic context for the audience's perception of the characters and their actions. In this, we see a reflection of what Nancy says about the interrelated movements of societal contact as well as his suggestions about the value of polyvalent cinema: 'It's necessary to envisage an unfinished and incomplete cinema so that the spectator can intervene and fill the void [...] My belief is in a form of art that seeks to create differences, a divergence among people rather than a conversation with everyone in agreement'.¹⁰³

The music in *J'ai pas sommeil* supports and amplifies the relational interweaving of the film. It provides an ambient background for the representation of the chaos of metropolitan life; it points up differences and distinctions in familial and other social connections; it provides a contextual tone for the issues of intolerance and exclusion addressed; it contributes to the rhythmic movement of the film. The dystopian nature of city life is figured in the eclectic choice of music. We hear mambo-jazz; crooning; rap; disco; zouk¹⁰⁴; troubadour-style ballads; 1960s psychedelia; and hip-hop/country. This mixture sets out a musical landscape which traces the complexities and differences of the characters and their respective situations. In some measure, this confusion is transferred to the audience: very few watchers will relate or be familiar with these multifarious musical sources, so there will be a sense of dislocation which corresponds to what the film is showing.¹⁰⁵ This effect is compounded by the way the music is distributed in the film. Although, as I have tried to show, there is a discernible pattern in its application, the ways in which snatches of some pieces are used in conjunction with repeated elements of others, and with contrasting set-pieces at various times, makes the musical shape a complex one difficult to comprehend.

¹⁰³ *The Evidence of Film*, p.88.

¹⁰⁴ A carnivalesque style of music originating from Guadeloupe and Martinique in about 1980, and a generic term for banjo-led reggae and other Caribbean music forms.

¹⁰⁵ This is exacerbated (whether by accident or design) by the incompleteness of the music credits.

In both the above respects I consider what Fuentes (211) says as having significant resonance:

Sans distinction de styles, jazz, ambient music, variété, world, pop-rock sont utilisés dans *J'ai pas sommeil* comme autant de pièces d'un patchwork sonore éclectique, qui témoigne d'une perception bigarrée de Paris, cette ville labyrinthique où des individus se croisent et des destins se hasardent dans des rues enchevêtrées.¹⁰⁶

Within this mode of connections, the relational polyphony offered by the music provides space: for Camille's desperate attempt to express his self-disgust and find an aesthetic outlet for his feelings; for Théo's more successful, but still inconclusive, musical self-expression; and, antithetically, for Daïga's failure to engage. The urban setting for the polyphony of *J'ai pas sommeil* changes to a more elemental one for the different ways in which the polyphonic appears in *Beau travail*, which I consider next.

Beau travail

The polyphonic nature of *Beau travail* is evident from the outset in its series of opening cuts, swiftly mingling sounds of railway, chatting passengers, a radio operator and the natural world. Those sounds are set against images suggesting communication and sociability but also their opposites: incomprehension and hostility. As the film develops, the modes implied here are drawn out as part of a multi-vocal appreciation of the fluid proximities and distances which comprise relationality. My analysis in this case focuses on the different forms of music used.

Although *Beau travail* credits Eran Tzur with the soundtrack, the film, set in Djibouti, draws in a very broad, polyphonic mix of musical styles and backgrounds: dance music from Europe, Africa, and the West Indies; American rock and English opera. Music is used especially to support how the film treats its main areas of activity: strangeness, incompatibility, intrusion, and sexual contestation. In this respect, Denis uses a kind of alienation of musical context

106 'Without distinction of style, jazz, ambient music, variété, world, pop-rock are used in *J'ai pas sommeil* much as pieces of an eclectic, sonic patchwork which gives a rainbow-like view of Paris, that labyrinthine city where individuals cross each others' paths and destinies are at risk in the tangled streets'.

to support her *mise-en-scène*, a process which Fabrice Fuentes (219-20) has described as 'musical uncoupling' ('*décrochage musical*'). In his terms: 'Le virage sonore que constitue le *décrochage musical* détermine une espace de vérité'.¹⁰⁷ Applying this to *Beau travail*, the dis-location of the music from its context chimes in with the ideas of deracination in the plot. Notwithstanding this, when viewed as a whole, one of this film's major achievements is to blend a panoply of contestations, particularly musical ones, into a work which exudes a sense of polyphony. This sense becomes apparent from the very beginning. The music of Benjamin Britten plays as the opening credits come up. The music is heard against a background of natural sounds – wind and sea. This is taken from Britten's operetta, *Billy Budd*.¹⁰⁸ It comes from Act 2, Scene 3, an orchestral interlude which starts to build up the tension surrounding the hero. Denis uses one of the motifs as a kind of alternative fate theme, but instead of placing it more centrally, as Britten did, she begins her film with this undercurrent. After almost a minute, it cuts to the singing of an anthem of the French Foreign Legion, heard over footage of a Legion mural. There is then a sharp cut to a disco, where young women and legionnaires are dancing.

Sonically speaking, there is a sense of strangeness from the outset, with the unearthly quality of Britten's score running ahead of the image track, and in its association with the sound of the elements. Heather Laing suggests that this extract, taken from a point in the opera when the fear of mutiny is in the air, has been transposed to the beginning of *Beau travail* to suggest the coming unravelling of order and discipline.¹⁰⁹ This sets the scene for the singing of the Legion anthem, while the camera pans slowly across a flaking, amateurish mural of Legion fighting experience. I read this second piece of music as operating in a dual way: its association with military activity connects it back intertextually with the action of *Billy Budd*, but it also looks forward to the

¹⁰⁷ 'The sonic doubling-back set up by musical uncoupling defines a space of truth'. This remark is made by Fuentes in the context of considering the early films, especially *Trouble Every Day*, but I suggest that it applies with equal force here.

¹⁰⁸ First performed in 1951 and released on record the same year. Confusingly, there are two versions of the opera – one in two Acts and one in four – my references will be to the four-act version.

¹⁰⁹ "'The Rhythm of the Night": reframing silence, music and masculinity in *Beau travail*', in *European Film Music* ed. by Miguel Mera and David Burnard (Aldershot, Eng. & Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), pp.168-69.

coming sequence of legionnaire activity. So there is an immediate sense of homogeneity. But the switch from the expansive quality of Britten's tune and its accompaniment of natural sounds to the narrow, closed-in focus of the anthem and its indoor backdrop prefigures the tension of the political and personal issues which the film will raise.

Those issues are startlingly reinforced by the cut to the dancing. Soldiers in uniform and local girls are on the dance floor, their respective clothing starkly singling out their difference: the intrusive presence of the Legion is presented visually to the viewer. At the personal level, the protagonist and his *bête noire*, Sentain, are shown in what will be their usual relationship: close in physical distance, but far away in terms of sympathy and understanding. This disjunction is signalled by the opening of the scene, where one of the dancers blows a kiss to coincide with one on the soundtrack, but the maladroitness of her synchronization looks ahead to the lack of conjunction which is to follow. As Laura McMahon observes, 'it is [the] ideology of belonging and consensual fusion which the film appears to deconstruct' (117). In their very different ways, then, these three opening musical extracts all point to the essentially alien quality of the military presence, as well as foreshadowing the drama of the plot to develop. We can therefore read the dance music scenes as *mises-en-abîme* of a Nancean predisposition in the film to represent the conflicting movements of sociability between individuals and suspicious or hostile attitudes between societal groupings.

At the most apparent level, the dance music is empathetic in its nature to the scenario, although, as we shall see, its original cultural derivation provides an additional, more oblique, commentary on the issue of deracination. Two non-musical scenes offer a transition to the next set-piece. The first, locating the action aurally in Djibouti, exemplifies in a literal way the failure of communication which is at the heart of the film. The second offers a polyphonic commentary on the disco scene: a local train is travelling through the desert, full of people – going to school, going to market – all chattering good-naturedly; the

absence of intruders is notable.

Britten

As the train clatters off, we are left in the desert. The wind-blown sand gives a backdrop to the empty landscape – but as the camera tracks, what seem to be abandoned military vehicles appear: more intrusive and alien indicators. These re-introduce in startling fashion the music of Benjamin Britten, heard at the start of the film. The surreal images of disused vehicles are followed by even stranger, other-worldly Giacometti-like images on the sand. These slowly reveal themselves to be the distorted shadows¹¹⁰ of legionnaires practising T'ai Chi, accompanied by unearthly strains from Britten's *Billy Budd*. This immediately connects to the genesis of the film: Herman Melville's writings, especially his novella *Billy Budd, Sailor*.¹¹¹ Britten's musical rendering of themes of envy, desire, and otherness here reach a pitch of intensity and strangeness which would not be out of place in the score of a science-fiction film.

What takes precedence at this stage is the sense of otherness. This idea of difference offers a kind of musical prologue to the visual indicators, which will appear throughout the film, of how the French Foreign Legion lives up to its name as a completely alien presence – in terms of its functions, its procedures, its language, its dress, its very existence in the countries of other people, and not least its composition. In this latter respect, the film now shows us a group of legionnaires of all shapes, sizes and derivations.¹¹² At this obvious level of representation, then, the eclectic nature of the music in *Beau travail* corresponds to this diverse mixture, and in so doing refers to that broad spectrum of relationality which is at the centre of Denis's cinema. But this polyphonic representation of conjoined differences also underscores the idea of

110 Heather Laing takes this as a visual reference to Melville's words: 'clear-cut shadows horizontally thrown', Mera and Burnard, p.169.

111 First published in 1924, nearly 25 years after Melville's death; the manuscript is incomplete and there is no definitive text.

112 Cf. what Melville writes in the opening pages of *Billy Budd, Sailor*: '[His shipmates] were made up of such an assortment of tribes and complexions as would have well fitted them to be marched up by Anarchasis Cloots before the bar of the first French Assembly as Representatives of the Human Race'. (*Billy Budd, Sailor and Other Stories* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), pp.321-22).

togetherness. Martine Beugnet says that: 'Strongly defined features, racial differences and scars singularise the soldiers' faces, yet ultimately, as the close-ups follow one another, the repetition works to create a sequence of images linked primarily by a relation of contiguity and resemblance' (108). In the scenes where we see legionnaire activity accompanied by extracts from Britten, the music is used to multiple effect. It endorses the solidarity in exclusion of the legionnaires; gives a critical commentary on what they are doing;¹¹³ and simultaneously highlights the strength of the contestation between Galoup and Sentain; while, in its reference to the literary source, it outlines the nature of the emotion which triggers the conflict between the two.

The scenario of Britten's operetta corresponds with the situation of the legionnaires: they are obliged to act with a common purpose, as a single body. In some respects, the Legion in Djibouti is like a ship, pursuing its course despite the surrounding elements, insisting on its own values and procedures regardless of whether the climate is hostile or benign. That aspect of their existence is emphasized in the film by the scenes of bodily exposure and proximity. In the first of these the legionnaires are bare-chested, exercising in a group. Although on this occasion the men are separate – unlike later occasions when their training exercises involve bodily contact – nevertheless the presentation of muscled torsos and bare skin introduces at this very early stage the notion of homo-eroticism in the same way as the music suggests that context in its referents.

The implication that there is something going on below the surface connects back to the essentially intrusive nature of the Legion's occupation. The solidarity which is the nature of the Legion, united against external threats, carries with it the ironic effect of increasing its separation from indigenous influences. Judith Mayne points up the impact of the images and the film's 'more emphatic reliance on bodies as they move through beautiful but desolate landscapes', alongside the reduced reliance on dialogue (93). Her view of *Beau travail* is

113 Judith Mayne sees the female figures in the film functioning 'as a kind of chorus [...] observing and commenting on the follies of men' (26).

that: 'the entire film functions as a kind of choreographed ritual' (93), with the music countering the images. I read the film as presenting the legionnaires in polyphonic fashion: sympathetically in the sense of their social engagement with each other and the performance of their domestic chores - what Sébastien David describes as 'paradoxalement solitaire et fusionnelle'¹¹⁴ - but also critically, in the pointlessness of their rituals when seen from the perspective of the local population. Here again we see represented those opposed movements of community delineated by Nancy. These contrasting aspects are inherent in the proximity and distance suggested by the images, and explicated by the corresponding modes of Britten's score.

In dramatic terms, the unexpectedness of the scene chimes in with the strangeness of Britten's music. The images and sounds have a sense of the ethereal, as if some extraneous deity is looking on at human triviality. This connects implicitly and intertextually with the mysticism latent in Melville's novella:

It is observable that where certain virtues pristine and unadulterate peculiarly characterize anybody in the external uniform of civilization, they will upon scrutiny seem not to be derived from custom or convention, but rather to be out of keeping with these, as if indeed exceptionally transmitted from a period prior to Cain's city and civilized man.¹¹⁵

That intertextual connection works too at a more pragmatic level. Denis borrows Britten's musical dramatization of Melville's depiction of sailors at work, using the medium of a sea shanty,¹¹⁶ to play with, and against, scenes of Legion communal activity. The main impact comes early in the film – during the first exercise scene – where Denis deploys this powerful musical extract in combination with the equally striking images. The effect is that the co-operation of joint activity is intertwined with foretastes of the moral conflict by the interplay of the different aspects of film form.

The musical motif of 'O Heave' recurs on a number of occasions during Act 1, scene 1 of *Billy Budd*. Denis picks up this idea, and uses it in her own way,

¹¹⁴ 'paradoxically solitary and fusional', (Fontanel, p.179). Subsequent references in text.

¹¹⁵ *Billy Budd, Sailor*, p.331.

¹¹⁶ Generally known by its chorus: 'O Heave', from Act 1, Scene 1.

deploying extracts from it during the course of her film. These extracts link Galoup's memories of what he has done and has lost. The first plays behind images of Legion activity in Djibouti, and of the sea, cutting backwards and forwards to Galoup in his apartment in Marseille. About two-thirds of the way into the film, another few seconds of the same cut play over Galoup, again in reflective mood, this time on the dockside in Marseille, then over footage of the cityscape behind the water of the harbour, before another sharp cut – this time back to a Legion drill sequence. In the final example, another brief extract plays over a short sequence showing Sentain trying to find his way in the desert. The music plays its part here in linking the images of the events and the consequences of Galoup's retrospective narrative by providing a bridge between the site of the protagonist's reflections and the locus of the events about which he is musing. In the third cut, unlike the first two, which relate directly to Galoup's recounting of where he has gone wrong on a personal level, a visual perspective is provided which cannot be Galoup's. What the music does in this third case is to extend the intertextual critique of the failure of the ideas of co-operation and solidarity, which are initially implicit as a subtext to Galoup's own account, to the murderous circumstances in which Sentain finds himself.

The music accordingly connects Galoup with the blame which he avoids throughout his narrative: he talks of things going wrong, but never expresses regret for what happened to Sentain. In this way, the images of the victim lost in the desert and near to death are linked by musical connection with the preceding elements of the narrative. What, on the face of it, is a detached observation carries an increasingly harsh note in the focusing of its aspect of critique. The music of Britten continues to evoke the jealousy inherent in the source text as the driver for the misconduct which follows.

The next extract from Britten's opera, at about the half-way point, signals a further episode of demonstrated solidarity and oblique critical remark. This two minute extract plays over another scene of the legionnaires exercising. The

shots of the background sky together with the brass-led crescendo of the music imply hubris as the ominous choral voices take the musical foreground. The shifting tone of the music implies a gesturing towards a reduction of the grandiosity of the Legion's presence to something trivial and mundane. The extract is this time taken from the end of *Billy Budd*: Act 4, scene 3, Billy's death sentence. In the film, however, it is used mid-way as part of the build-up. What is in the opera a sense of growing rebellion against injustice and tyranny translates into the film as an intensifying undercurrent of relationality. The concept of togetherness in isolation appears here once again as the legionnaires are shown carrying out the exercise routines together – but their individuality is emphasized by the way in which they are seen in close-up, shot from below against the sky and mountains. During this routine, there is a short cut away to watchers on the ridge; their curiosity and detachment are a part of the running critique of the legion. Their distance, coupled with the brightness of their clothing when compared with the drab military uniforms, contrasts with the intense proximity of the soldiers' bodies and faces in a visual presentation of fluid distance.

The music builds up from shots of the dreary buildings being used as a temporary base, set against the beauty of the landscape: sky, mountains, and the blue sea occupied by three 'sentinel' volcanoes; but tainted by the brooding presence of Galoup. After the climax of the exercise scene, the music decrescendos to the backdrop of the base and its surrounding panorama, now even more appealing in the light of the setting sun. The music which ushers in the end of Billy Budd's life is serving here as a marker for the coming attempt on that of Sentain. But it also has a much broader critical quality, as if the triviality of the Legion's existence is matched by the pathetic nature of Galoup's plotting, both judged as meaningless and unimportant in the wider scheme.

The same musical cut is repeated in a later scene (it is a few seconds shorter, but in essence identical). On this occasion we see Galoup and Sentain circling each other in mock attack/defence practice. What I think is indicated here is the

net which Galoup intends to throw around his victim gradually being tightened. The focus is now on these two, presented for the first time overtly as in opposition. The film cuts briefly to another shot of the sea, glowing phosphorescently, as a reminder of the earlier critical commentary, then to a scene of guard duty. This latter scene will be the setting for the springing of the trap; the music runs over with the scene change in order to associate the two events, then fades out below the crunch of boots (of the victim and the scapegoat). The parallels with Claggart's entrapment of Billy Budd, about which the use of Britten's music continually reminds us, are becoming inescapable.

Denis uses on one occasion a different cut from *Billy Budd*. When Galoup springs his trap and victimises Combé, we hear a short extract from Act 2, Scene 4. This is another shanty, about setting sail and engaging with the enemy. In terms of the film, it empathizes with Galoup's exultation at having made a decisive move. In the opera, it follows closely on doubts expressed about Billy's loyalty, and in this respect plays intertextually once again to the theme of plotting against innocence. Ostensibly, *Beau travail's* setting in a desert country is a long way from the seafaring environment of the source material. Two things work against this. First, the continuing visual references to the endless, shifting sands align themselves with a fluid, watery environment; second, much of the action is set on or near the coast, so the sea itself is constantly present in the scenario. It is also relevant that Galoup's banishment is to Marseille – a seaport itself, but somewhere which emphasizes the expanse of water which has been placed between him and his beloved Legion. The essence of that separation and of his unstable moral outlook is imaged in the sequence of his written memoir shown with the sea as background – as if written in water – which is seen during the exercise sequence, with Britten's music still playing over, and linking the scenario across the seas to the scene of his writing in Marseille.

The central narrative is roughly framed by liquid associations. The shots of the defunct matériel in the opening sequence play to the sounds of the sea and

wind, alongside the music; the sunburnt and dehydrated Sentain, near to death, is seen towards the end of the film by the side of a huge salt lake. The significance of the sea is also foregrounded towards the end of the first exercise sequence, when the scene slides seamlessly into a translation of the men on to a boat, with (unusually for Denis) shot/countershot of Galoup and Sentain, accompanied by the rising pitch of the extract from *Billy Budd*. As in its opening use, material from *Billy Budd* is often connected to Legion activity. It is heard here very briefly, linking footage of the sea and legionnaires at work and leisure, the narrative voice-over, and Galoup in his Marseille apartment.

In the longer takes, there is more going on. As we have seen, these are associated with Galoup's recollections of his leading training and practice sessions for his legionnaires. Galoup and Sentain invariably feature in these image sequences, in one way or another, and what is at stake here is a sense of the moral ethos of the Legion and pride in its being and accomplishments. Accordingly, the music bears with full force on the corruption of ideals which Galoup's behaviour will entail. In these longer sequences, the music has a more multivalent impact: connecting to Galoup's individual enterprise; but maintaining its sense of cosmic commentary on the pettiness of what is happening. Catherine Grant dismisses any possibility of music from *Billy Budd* adding contextual depth to Denis's film, saying that: 'the excerpts provide conventionally appropriate, grandiose film music to underscore the film's loving display of beautiful male bodies and startling desert landscapes, as well as to emphasize the dramatic tensions of the circling sequence'.¹¹⁷ As my analysis has shown, this seems too simplistic: Britten's *Billy Budd* functions by turns as personal commentary at the character level and global commentary on the contamination by the individual of nobler concepts. It forms one strand of the complex, polyphonic presentation of *Beau travail*.

Legion songs

However, Britten's music is only one part of a polyphony which runs through

¹¹⁷ 'Recognizing *Billy Budd* in *Beau travail*', Screen 43.1, p.64.

Beau travail. As a variant on the associations with *Billy Budd*, Denis deploys extracts from the Legion anthem on several occasions. The first, as we have seen, occurs right at the beginning of the film and plays both sympathetically and antiphonally alongside music from the operetta. Musically, the sea shanty which features in the music chimes in with the cut to a chorus of voices singing a Legion anthem.¹¹⁸ As two sets of military choruses they are in practice and immediate context perfectly sympathetic. However, the total difference in musical structure unsettles any empathy between them for the film's purposes. Instead, their conjunction provides at the outset a clue to the conflicts to come.

The anthem returns when we hear Galoup singing it to himself over footage of an assault course exercise. This happens at an earlier point in the narrative, when he still feels in control: he comfortably leads the line of straining soldiers, while humming to himself – but the alert viewer will have taken note of the words of 'Sous le soleil', which refer to discipline, tradition, and obedience: standards from which the protagonist is soon to fall. On the final occasion a Legion song is heard, it again has an ironic effect. We first hear the strains of a departure song – however it is not the Legion which is departing, but Galoup who is leaving, dismissed and repatriated. His visual memories play in reverse: going from a reverie in a Marseille bar to legionnaires singing a farewell, followed by footage of the plane which presumably took him back to France. The song is 'La lune est claire'¹¹⁹ which, with its lyrics referring to duty, valour and loyalty, adds a clearly discordant tone to Galoup's reflections on his service. The scene also has a slightly surreal aspect: the soldiers seen singing in dress uniform seem out of place – it is not likely that Galoup would have got a hero's send-off – and this may be a fantasy sequence (what Galoup wishes had happened).

There are links between this scene and the one of the funeral of a legionnaire, which are both visual and sonic. On that earlier occasion, Sentain is praised by the Commandant for his conduct in terms which cast a shadow on Galoup's

118 'Sous le soleil brûlant d'Afrique' ('Under the burning sun of Africa'), written in about 1935.

119 One of a number of songs associated with the Legion. Its origin is uncertain.

intentions and subsequent behaviour. Forestier tells Sentain that he did his duty, acted bravely, selflessly and level-headedly, and that he, and the entire Legion, is proud of him. At moments like this, the relevance of what Nancy says about resisting immanence seems most marked in the distinguishing between the respective conduct of Sentain and Galoup: the new recruit who acts in ways approved by military codes; and the experienced officer who subverts his duty to personal vendettas. The funeral is attended by music whose context is on that occasion appropriate and unambiguous: 'Sonnerie aux morts' – the French equivalent of 'The Last Post'. All the military-related music has to a greater or lesser degree the impact of a critique: the more we know of Galoup's attitude and machinations, the less such paeans are apt for him; and their fit with Sentain's conduct indicates the growing rift between the historic sense of the Legion's duties and responsibilities and Galoup's perversion of its traditions to suit his inclinations.

Eran Tzur

Intertwined with the threads of Britten and Legion-associated music is Eran Tzur's score.¹²⁰ This operates very much like a Fate theme, running almost below the action. It is heard on three occasions, all concentrated into the second quarter of the film. The first is a three minute sequence which implicitly encapsulates Galoup's contentment with Legion life. We see legionnaires engaged in exercises on ropes, and domestic chores like washing and ironing; Galoup's girlfriend, Rahel, doing similar chores, and being helped by him. These are calm, light-hearted scenes. Beugnet and Sillars point to such scenes as part of 'the film's insistence on the mundane [which] undermines the mythology of hyper-masculinity'.¹²¹ I would add to that the observation that the music supplies an ironic commentary in hinting that things may go wrong. Tzur's score has an insistent steady bass line on a repeated descending scale which unsettles the lightness of these domestic scenes.

120 Also known as Zur. He is an Israeli singer and composer, best known for up-tempo emotional ballads.

121 'Beau travail: time, space and myths of identity', *Studies in French Cinema* 1.3, p.168.

The theme returns after a brief break, beginning this time over footage of Galoup in Marseille, ironing his shirt, and later buying perfume for Rahel, presumably in Djibouti. In between is footage of Rahel dancing in the disco, her face lit by a red strobe. But there is no dance music: Tzur's theme continues over the footage of the dancing. The soft focus, in addition to the editing, suggests that these are wistful recollections. But Galoup's relation to Rahel is never clarified: she is passive and their domestic regime is not invested with passion or intimacy. These images may be Galoup's remembering happy times, but the music again has an unsettling effect, hinting at trouble ahead.

On the third occasion, the theme recurs for about a minute, but this time I consider that its incidence has a more complicated context. The music begins over footage of mountain ranges and the Legion camp, then moves to a goatherd with her flock, followed by Galoup asleep. The tone of the images is different from the earlier two sequences inasmuch as the goatherd makes a hostile gesture and appears to throw something, so this is another reference to the unwelcoming setting of the action. But if this is a memory of Galoup's, it is in a different register. Tzur's theme begins almost imperceptibly under the sound of the wind and is first audible against footage of Galoup with his head in his hands. It continues over a long shot, showing the Legion camp, dwarfed by the surrounding hills, before the goats appear. The use of Tzur's theme here connects with the idea of alienation: explicitly as regards the Legion, implicitly in relation to Galoup, and perhaps signalling his own growing realization of his alienation. Perhaps of most significance is the final part of the sequence where Galoup is asleep, watched by the Commandant, Forestier, who calls to him but fails to wake him. This clearly cannot be something seen from Galoup's own point of view. The implication is that he is losing the usual control over events which he presumes himself to have. All the parts of the sequence – landscape, goatherd, and camp – are linked by the music. It is as if the image track is beginning to accommodate itself subtly to the music track. Crucially, this whole sequence and its associated music follows close on the heels of a cut with sharply critical effect, accompanied by a very different piece of music, by Neil

Young (discussed below). I read it, by virtue of that association too, as part of the polyphonic critique surrounding Galoup.

When the sound of water joins the music we see the legionnaires wading, engaged on a military exercise – the picture of collaboration and solidarity. Then there is a cut to another physical work-out – this time involving the clasping and unclasping of bodies. Tzur's score fades and returns continually, in broad sympathy (but not synchronized) with the bodily connections and disconnections. We see Forestier, looking on as usual, watching the exercise, and then Galoup sitting by the dockside (presumably, from the traffic sounds and the subsequent footage, in Marseille). Tzur's music finally fades under the street noise. During this sequence, the process of Galoup's disengagement from the Legion in Djibouti becomes increasingly explicit. The music underscores that process, effectively confirming the doubts which it suggested when linked with Galoup's happier memories. Tzur's fate theme accordingly is allowed to disappear when its job has been done. The effect is that it has moved through a gamut of modes, as Galoup's memories shift focus from happy days of duty to what he has lost, and finally ending up in dual mode: embracing his gloomy narrative of blame and expulsion, but carrying in undertone a pointing to Galoup rather than others as being responsible. This latter aspect is underscored by the immediate following of a few seconds of Britten, which have the flavour of 'I told you so' in their context.

For a period, totalling a dozen minutes and situated just after the mid-point in time of the film, there is almost continuous music. Its polyphonic nature blends the extracts of Britten, the examples of Legion anthems, and Eran Tzur's moody score – all of which fade in and out, mixed with the natural sounds of the sea and the wind. But there are other musical elements.

Impromptu music

The first use of improvised music is when the soldiers are relaxing after their

day's work. In this scene they make their own musical entertainment: calling, whooping, and whistling to a mix of percussive sounds; one has a small drum, others use sticks on pots and bottles, and metal rods. The effect is slightly cacophonous, but they are in rhythm together. It is noticeable that Galoup takes no part in this piece of harmony – he sits on the margin, brooding and malevolent.

This polyphony is added to in another exercise scene. This time, the men form a ring with Galoup in the centre. There is a flux of to and fro, approach and distance. Once more, all are engaged in the same exercise, but its nature is contestatory: the legionnaires in their training routine are individually brought up against the adjudant-chef, and are simultaneously with him and against him. Polyphony appears here literally: the lunges forward are to an emphatic choral grunt set against the watchful, preparatory movements which are accompanied by the chugging beat of the legionnaires' boots. But even this short episode of seemingly empathetic music has its countering mode: towards the end of the exercise the chorus has faded out and we are left with Galoup's solo grunts. On another occasion, during a scene in which legionnaires prepare vegetables, one of them sings a snatch of a song – seemingly in Italian – and the other whistles along. This small addition to the musical polyphony which permeates *Beau travail*, has its undertones: it sits between the sequences in which Sentain is commended for his actions and Galoup shows his anger, and the game of chess between Forestier and Galoup. This last is a foreshadowing of Galoup's machinations, and of the Commandant's dispensing with his services. The co-operative effort of the vegetable-preparing men is pointed up by their musical joining and contrasts with the disloyalty and deviousness which Galoup is beginning to reveal.

Neil Young

The music which follows immediately has a strongly critical nature. In a bizarre scene, we see the legionnaires marching through desert terrain as Neil Young's

song 'Safeway Cart' plays.¹²² The simple tune and its repetitive style match the slog of the legionnaires' progress, but its critical use is emphasized by the degree of synchronization ('Mickey Mousing'), along with the implied banality of the Legion activities inherent in the comparison with going to the supermarket. Alongside those considerations, the spare instrumentation, the level of echo, and Young's reedy voice add a surreal character to the scene, which partly refer back aurally to the implications of Britten's music in relation to the early footage already discussed. The message is clearly that the Legion's presence is pointless and absurd. Young's lyrics draw attention to the tedium of daily routines and their contrast with significant purpose.¹²³ The song also has an underlying looping bass line, whose dissonance suggests – in the manner of Tzur's theme – the implosion to come. This song is not only intrusive in its strangeness and context, but it adds yet another layer of the polyphonic to the soundtrack of *Beau travail*, this time an American influence. But its author is himself a kind of intruder in that his music has a firm place in the US canon, although Young is a Canadian by birth. The presence of 'Safeway Cart' in the film can therefore be read as one of the many instances of Denis's use of intertextuality to support an idea: Neil Young's music here speaks at a number of levels to the theme of intrusive alien cultures, and to the Nancean motif of constant flux in relationality which runs through the film.

Dance music

The intertextual motif of intrusion is introduced at a very early point in the film. When, a few seconds after the half-minute of Legion anthem, the film cuts to a dance club, soldiers and local women are moving to Tarkan's 1997 dance hit 'Simarik' - aka 'The Kissy Song'. Here again we see Claire Denis with her finger on the pulse of contemporary popular culture, using a number from only a couple of years before *Beau travail* was released (and in this case ahead of the game: the song was written by Sezen Aksu, who is credited with changing the

122 From Young's 1994 album *Sleeps With Angels*.

123 The words juxtapose symbols of shopping and watching TV with the image of 'a sandal mark on the Saviour's feet'. In this exchange of the diurnal and the unreal, there is implicit criticism in the reduction of the sublime to the mundane.

face of Turkish popular music, and of the European Song Contest when a protégé of hers won the contest a few years afterwards, in 2003). Tarkan is a German-born Turkish artist and the use of his song represents Denis's resistance to monocultural attitudes. 'Simarik' is a joyous up-tempo number whose ethos cuts right across the militarism associated with the two pieces of music which precede it. The footage shows soldiers and young women having a good time, miming kisses to the song's refrain. As music, it is entirely appropriate to the action. But, as noted earlier, the clothing of the participants indicates their difference and that is reinforced by the origin of the music: its European derivation and style make it an intrusion in the culture of an African country, just like the legionnaires.

There are several dance numbers in the film and they all make their own distinctive contribution to the polyphonic approach. In addition to 'Simarik' at the start of the film, there are three more. These are mainly concentrated in the first 30 minutes of the film, where they offer an essentially polyphonic set of angles on the past happinesses of relationality and how those good times started to go wrong. This style of musical influence is absent for the next hour; it returns with éclat in the final set-piece.

On the second occasion of the incidence of dance music, we see legionnaires and women dancing again, as they were to 'Simarik', but this time to Oliver N'Goma's 'Adia' – the title track from his album of 1995. This seems broadly empathetic; as at the opening of the film, everyone is having a good time, the music is catchy and the words simply speak of love and wanting to be together. (Interestingly, the promotional video for this song features individuals dancing, often against a watery background, recalling the way Galoup and his narrative often have the sea as a backdrop). There is a different feel to the next song, Francky Vincent's 'Tourment d'amour' (1994). This is a slightly slower number, with highly suggestive words.¹²⁴ The images which it accompanies are of

¹²⁴ The song is entirely about women visiting Vincent's territory and engaging in sexual activity. It begins with Donna Summer-style moaning and the lyrics speak of breasts, 'lower down', and getting pregnant, as well as more explicit references to 'coconut cream' and spermatozoa. It was included in Vincent's highly successful 1994 album *Fruit de la passion*, and subsequently released as a single in

women dancing on their own with Rahel at centre stage and Galoup looking on from the sidelines. The music is accordingly indicative of both his desire and her unreachability. Significantly, this sequence immediately follows a scene where Rahel is asleep and does not wake when Galoup speaks to her. There is no music with that scene.¹²⁵ However, the sequence before that is the one where Galoup is seen buying perfume for her (he speaks of 'making a small gesture'), and where she dances alone, accompanied by Eran Tzur's theme. Ostensibly, Vincent's music has here empathetic qualities – in relation to both Rahel's individuality and Galoup's isolation – but its promiscuous, 'devil-may-care' tone is at odds with the narration, and its impact is coloured by its proximity to the Fate theme. Neither Vincent's nor N'Goma's song was contemporaneous to the making of *Beau travail*, but they were relatively recent. More significantly, they represent more evidence of the eclectic nature of Claire Denis's taste in music. Francky Vincent is a reggae and zouk artist from Guadeloupe and Oliver N'goma is Gabonese. In their respective ways, they add to the sense of polyphony in the film – not only in their different styles of music, but also in their cultural associations: in the one case Caribbean, and in the other East African, from the opposite side of the continent to Djibouti.

The final musical cut in the film features the leading character and narrator doing an extempore dance to 'Rhythm of the Night', a 1994 European dance hit by Corona (an Italian band) and a number from the same period as 'Adia' and 'Tourment d'amour'. This song is played in full and it is significant that this is the only occasion when something other than an extract is used. It synchs with Galoup's appearance in the empty disco and the ending of the credits. The joyous music and Galoup's obvious affinity with it have a strongly affirmative feel. But the scene is problematized by the lyrics and the song's placement. It follows footage of Galoup nursing his pistol, during which the camera focuses on his tattoo: 'Sers la bonne cause et meurs' (serve the good cause and die). This makes a musical connection with the beginning of the film in that the tattoo

1996.

125 This reflects corresponding scenes e.g. in *J'ai pas sommeil* and *Trouble Every Day* where the absence of music corresponds to a troubled relationship.

recalls the words about service and duty which feature in the Legion anthems. It is possible to read the scenario as Galoup's death dance: the reality of the Legion being lost to him has hit home and life no longer has any purpose. For Susan Hayward, it has a negative cast: 'it should be read as [Galoup's] post-colonial moment when he recognises in his own terms (dance) [...] the futility of it all'.¹²⁶ In tandem with a negative reading, the song lyrics ('this is the rhythm of the night|this is the rhythm of my life') point to the surreptitiousness of Galoup's machinations against Sentain by matching with repeated shots of Galoup at night. In this sense, the music can be read as empathetic to Galoup's actions. At the same time, the music has an undermining quality in its implicit criticism of his subterfuge and his malcontent attitude, connecting back to Galoup's little skip of pleasure on the parade ground when he thinks he has disposed of Sentain. Sarah Cooper maintains that the impact of the montage is that: 'Galoup's tale exceeds his verbal narration to present his past in terms of an extralinguistic montage'.¹²⁷ This feature of *Beau travail* is made much stronger by the intersection of music with the images.

Summary

Beau travail contains some 25 minutes of music from extremely varied sources, which wind in and out of the other sounds in the film (wind, sea, traffic, military activity, housekeeping) and the images. Polyphonically, the various strands of music thread throughout the film. Extracts from Britten, songs associated with the Legion, composed score, dance music, numbers from other sources, including non-instrumental ones, feature throughout; the film's action is seldom far from some kind of musical intervention. In the first half-a-dozen minutes of the film there are four incidences of music, which keep shifting perspective for the audience, thus prompting implied questions of whether this is going to be a story of comradeship, or one of emulation, or betrayal, or love, or defeat. Even at this early stage, the music opens all these possibilities. It fits by turns the larger themes to which it makes reference as well as the close-up delineation

126 'Claire Denis' Films and the Post-colonial body', *Studies in French Cinema* 1.3, p.164.

127 'Je sais bien, mais quand même...', *Studies in French Cinema* 1.3, p.181.

and deliberate undercutting of the attitudes with which it is associated.

Overall, the music in *Beau travail* flows across a range of modalities, chiming in with actions while offering implicit criticism as well as fatalistic warning notes. It is not possible to offer a general categorization of tone. This applies not least because the ending of the film is an uncertain one: it can be argued that the conclusion shows the protagonist as having put his regrets behind him and being ready to move on. Denis herself says: 'It's as if his soul is freed from his body. It flows out with the blood from his veins. There was never any question about the ending for me. It had to be'.¹²⁸ On that reading, the final dance music would be life-affirming, countering the seeming inevitability of his fate, and allowing for a different interpretation and different outcome. This music also introduces a note of circularity, re-connecting Galoup with the upbeat, carefree earlier disco scenes. In that context, it could be said to cast a shadow on Forrestier's failure to properly engage with and support Galoup. I read this as offering another facet of relationality, which problematizes the sin-inflected context of Melville's text and its concomitant delineation of right and wrong.

In the time associations of all the musical elements, the contemporary is mingled with the historic, bridging a period of something like 120 years from the inception of the Legion anthems, running through Britten and coming right up to contemporary times. In this way, age-old concepts of loyalty, betrayal and passion, are figured polyphonically in a modern context. What takes these polyphonic features of *Beau travail* to another level is the complex manner in which music fades in and out, and privileges a very wide range of sources and styles, which are blended together in what is often a very unobtrusive way. I see the polyphony in the film as an essential part of the staging of those fluid movements of relationality set out by Nancy. In my next analysis, polyphony will feature as part of a more complex relationality – interior familial relationships and external connections with the outside world. In line with this, the musical shadings are more nuanced.

128 Interview with Amy Taubin, 'Under The Skin,' *Film Comment* 36.3, p.22.

White Material

David Boulter of *Tindersticks* observes of *White Material* that: 'although this is a film set in Africa, the music shouldn't have anything to do with African music. The film is about Europeans who are somewhere where they don't really belong'.¹²⁹ Almost no-one is at home in *White Material*. The Vials are third-generation settlers on the brink of dispossession; their workers have been driven away; the replacement workers (also to be driven away) come from elsewhere; the occupying French military is having to pull out; the army soldiers represent central government and are not local; the guerrillas are insurgents from other parts of the country. To some extent, the scenario resembles that of *L'Intrus* in that there is a central character – Maria, the coffee planter – whom the film surrounds with contrapuntal voices. What is different in *White Material* is that there is a much broader focus, which gives greater weight to the surrounding issues. *L'Intrus* is about Trebor's lack of concern for others; *White Material* is about the events at whose centre Maria happens to be, and presents a range of voices amongst which Maria is only one of many.

This chorus of voices seems to be ranged against the central character: she is at odds with workers and family; officials and military. In a sense, events on a national scale are working against her. The film even suggests a level of hostility in the topography: the silent mountains and the sounds of the jungle. However, unlike Trebor, Maria is a symbol of a type: a colonialist; the voices ranged against her are not simply personally-inclined, but speak against what she represents. In tune with this, the soundtrack has a fluid relationship with events, varying from implied criticism to sympathy and regret. *Tindersticks* provide a score, this time one of implacability and displacement, issues at the heart of the film. Denis adds in music which is alien to the visible scenario, and which gives an emotive flavour. With one exception, the additional music in this film has Jamaican connections and both in style and content conjures up the idea of a diaspora.

129 Interview with James Bell, *Sight and Sound*, May 2011, p.16.

Critical assessment of this film has predominantly focused on reading it from a post-colonial viewpoint. Veronica Jordan-Sardi says that: 'Denis's film provides us with the ultimate destruction of colonial subjectivities' and that 'the film consciously annihilates conventional colonial constructs'.¹³⁰ Cornelia Ruhe depicts *White Material* as concentrating on political issues, saying that 'Denis literally returns to Africa and to questions of (post-) colonialism that are central to many of her films', and that what the film stages is a 'political allegory; not one of colonialism but of the political ideology that has always been associated with it and which, in many African countries, has come to replace it in the public imagination – capitalism'.¹³¹ While clearly relevant, such readings tend to gloss over the film's interest in a wide range of relational situations, for example between family members and between opposed factions in the civil war which is raging.

Catherine Wheatley aptly puts her finger on the relevance of the internal dynamic, describing *White Material* as showing: 'a colonialist family spectacularly implode against a background of political unrest'. She observes that: 'the [Vial] family as a whole constantly fail to connect'.¹³² For Wheatley, the film is an example of a trend in Denis's work to use family as 'an alternative vision of human connection, one that stands apart from the themes that are often seen to structure Denis's work'(74). Presumably this refers to perceptions of her work from perspectives such as the post-colonial, the haptic, or the confrontational. But, whatever the subject matter or the particular treatment, relational issues of familial and non-familial kinds are embedded throughout her oeuvre. My own reading of this film is as a typical example of Denis's work, in which intimacy, family relationships, and wider connections between individuals and society all play fluidly across each other. The written score and the interpolated musical items form a polyphony which draws out and questions these multi-faceted aspects of damaged community and intrusion. The music has a complex, polyphonic relationship with the images which it accompanies.

130 'Colonial subjectivity: an evolving legacy', (2012), p.57, <https://ir.uiowa.edu/etd/2908> [accessed 18/11/2018].

131 'Beyond Post-Colonialism? From *Chocolat* to *White Material*', in Vecchio, pp.111 and 119.

132 'La Famille Denis' in Vecchio, p.72. Subsequent reference in text.

Its impact in any particular case tends to be multivalent, offering tones of localized empathy or criticism while commenting on the relevance of the event to the wider situation. Because of the fluid impact which I see the music as having on the scenario, my analysis is arranged primarily in terms of the different pieces of music.

'Opening'

The film begins in silence, with the opening credits shown in cream on a black background. After 20 seconds, wind is heard on the soundtrack, accompanied by the faint glockenspiel chimes which begin Tindersticks' 'Opening' before the other instruments come in. This piece sets the tone of the score. It features a harmonium and low-register cello. The sound has a very emotive feel, managing by turns to be gloomy, menacing, and reflective. During this opening sequence, the music chimes with the images we see: the interior of a house at night, items only picked out in a narrow beam, and a dead man, Le Boxeur, a guerrilla general, in army fatigues laying on a bed, looked at by a number of soldiers. Some of the items seen in passing seem to be African masks featuring grotesque expressions. The tone of the *mise-en-scène* is dreary and troubling, and the music indicates expressively that bad things are in store.

'Bus Vision 1'

It is something of a shock – the first of many – when the film cuts to broad daylight and a woman (Maria, the main character) on a dirt road trying to hitch a lift. As she first takes cover when a vehicle full of armed soldiers passes, and then gets a ride on a bus, the images (and minimal dialogue) are explicit and come without music. It is when she gets a seat on the bus and goes into reverie that the music adds tone to what we see and hear. This second track, called 'Bus Vision 1', conveys a complex of affects to go with a series of scenes. It begins with Maria looking into space, then cuts to footage of her on a motorbike; in the recollected images, she stops the motorbike to examine some items, and

is then beset by a megaphone message from a helicopter, telling her that the French army is withdrawing. The music fades as the helicopter flies off and the image cuts back to Maria on the bus. 'Bus Vision 1' is a little less portentous than 'Opening,' featuring at its beginning a lighter harmonium drone and tinkling arpeggiated guitar to accompany Maria's happy memories of freedom from care – illustrated by her riding the motorbike with arms in the air. As the tune develops, it moves into a deeper, more menacing key, interspersed with high-register reverb guitar, which adds an element of threat to the otherwise banal images of her discoveries. The music has offered a brief prelude, and fades under the explicit message from the army of the danger in store.

'The Boxer'

As the scenario shifts away from Maria to events beyond her direct knowledge, we see Le Boxeur, wounded, hiding from Government troops and making his escape. He has music of his own, which begins as he makes the horrific discovery of slaughter in a church, including a priest, followed by a row of bodies by the roadside. 'The Boxer' has a very simple melody with a deeper tone and longer chords. The tune is melancholic, but less threatening, speaking more of remorselessness than menace. The sense of recognized failure conveyed here by the images of the rebel general's injury, his flight, and the murders of citizens and priest, is carried by the music; but its voice offers a counter note to Maria's stubborn refusal to acknowledge what surrounds her.

'White Material'

As the image cuts, the soundtrack cuts with it to a new track, 'White Material'. This shortish number is similar in length to its predecessor,¹³³ but has a different character. It plays over footage, first of shots of the plantation and house, calm and peaceful, then – after briefly cutting back to Maria on the bus – shows burning sheds, soldiers guarding the conflagration, and smoke rising against the sky; other shots of the plantation, seemingly inactive, are followed by a scene

¹³³ 1'32 and 1'40 respectively. Very unusually, they play back to back as one running piece of music.

where Maria tries to stop her workers leaving. The tune 'White Material' carries a much heavier weight. It weaves together the various implications of the images: of all being well on the coffee plantation, the concerns which lead to the workers' leaving, and, between the two, the violent consequences about which Maria was warned by the retreating military. The music has a much more aggressive quality: the strumming chords hint at the inevitable conflict of wills (Maria's stubborn refusal to leave and the juggernaut of the approaching civil war), while the strident, atonal guitar and its sliding, off-key figures, signals intrusion and violence.

Although the sound is not as harsh and jarring as the guitar loop on *L'Intrus*, this music occasionally approaches that same feel. It reaches a peak with shrill, keening notes which play over images of the burning coffee sheds (a scene to come in the chronology of events, but here briefly anticipated), adding to the visual sense of violence. It also has an empathetic quality, relating as it does to the actual events on screen as well as to the illustrated hopelessness and perversity of Maria's attempting to carry on against all odds. In this latter respect, it forms part of the polyphony of voices coming together.

'Children's Theme 1'

The next piece of music begins with a far more gentle feel: lightly strummed guitar and plaintive flute to accompany footage of young guerrillas. Some of them are small children, but all are armed. 'Children's Theme 1' has a sense of wistfulness, which takes on a darker edge as they creep up on Le Boxeur and we realise they are not playing games. The over-dubbed guitar chords towards the end of the track point to the underlying tragedy; the strains of the flute come to crescendo in a passage which matches with the conflicted images of children, some little more than toddlers, toting guns and machetes.

'Maria and The Boxer'

Having established friendly contact with Le Boxeur, the guerrillas chat to the sound of jungle insects, before one of them produces a gold cigarette lighter, belonging to André, Maria's ex-husband. This is contemptuously dismissed as symbolic of the 'white material' of the film's title. The reference cues music which plays over footage of Maria at the coffee plantation going about her normal business. The ironic juxtaposition of this with the preceding scene is pointed up by the structural similarity of the melody for the two scenes, but in this case the guitar figure has a deeper tone, and the flute which spoke of the children's lost innocence is here replaced by the ominous harmonium drone which we hear at regular intervals throughout the film. The images of unreflecting activity are given a deeper context by the fateful cast of the music. The number is called 'Maria And The Boxer'. However, it only operates as a prelude to the encounter between the two characters, fading as she investigates an outhouse, picking up a machete. There will not, in fact, be any direct threat from the wounded Boxeur – it is his presence on the plantation which will trigger the bloodbath to follow. Maria, as usual, is only concerned with the immediate. The music empathizes with her immediate sense of danger, but also hints subliminally at the much greater dangers to come.

'Sawale'

The soundtrack now breaks with 'Tindersticks' music for some time. In the next musical intervention, the local DJ, sympathetic to Le Boxeur, propagandizes to the background of Baba Ken Okulolo, a Nigerian bassist associated with Afro Funk, and the band Kotoja; their track 'Sawale'¹³⁴ is subtitled (Run Home) and is in keeping with the pan-Atlantic flavour of the other interpolated pieces of music.¹³⁵ Apart from the ironic implications of the title, the number is cheerful and upbeat – and to this extent runs against the images of unrest and disorder

134 On their 1992 album of the same name.

135 The band re-located to USA in the 1980s. Their music is a mixture of Nigerian influences, mixed with reggae and soul.

and the hostile radio pronouncements against which it plays. But at the same time, this music brings to the film the ideas of diaspora and displacement which are at the heart of the storyline: the band's connections are less with the African continent and more with the West Coast of the US (where Okulolo has been based since the 1980s) and the Caribbean (by virtue of his and Kotoja's musical influences). In addition, these musicians' fusional style infuses the film with a further layer of polyphony. 'Sawale' only plays for about half a minute, but its inclusive mode runs quite counter to the provocative pronouncements of the DJ.

'Workers'

We return to the scored soundtrack with 'Workers', which has only a marginal connection with its title. The music starts to play as Maria is driving her newly-hired labourers to the plantation, but the images are primarily about their surroundings (jungle, houses, political slogans). The brief cut back to Maria, pensive on her bus journey, underlines that this is about her perception of what is happening. The track has a steady rhythm of guitar, bass, and drums. The harmonium drone is absent, and I read this track as implying that it is almost too late for warnings. As it goes along, the guitar arpeggios become increasingly prominent, the distortion loop crescendos and the tune heads into deconstruction – telling the listener what Maria, busy discounting the radio reports, will only grasp in hindsight. The music, having delivered its latest warning, fades out into silence during images of Maria attempting to carry on as normal, and her son Manuel's narrow escape from death. The drama of his plunge into the tank and the guerrillas setting up to spear is given no musical amplification, as is commonplace in the cinema of Denis.

I have already referred to the impact of musical inaudibility and silence in *Beau travail* and *J'ai pas sommeil*, and I return to this issue especially in the context of my chapter on counterpoint. Hannah Paveck argues appositely that:

White Material registers [the] undercurrent of imminent violence through a strategy I am calling 'tonal silence'. By withholding dialogue and magnifying sonic materialities of the landscape, the film's tonal silence approximates what Eugenie

Brinkema defines as 'near inaudibility': a tension or pressure within form itself.¹³⁶

The tensions identified by Paveck extend to the musical aspects: lapses of dialogue and increased emphases on ambient sounds are further modulated by the ways in which the music chimes in, increases in volume, and fades down to both near inaudibility and complete silence. In *White Material* musical silence is a part of the polyphonic presentation of relational variants which flows throughout the film.

'Maria And The Old Man'

When music returns, it has a highly symbolic flavour. As with its immediate predecessor, the track 'Maria And The Old Man' is not wholly devoted to its subject matter. It begins to play over footage of Maria driving her new workers to the plantation. The new foreman tells Maria that without ownership of the land her title is useless; we then see a shot of the mountain (symbolizing the land), followed by a remembered scene in which her father-in-law tells her that the plantation is hers (this is obviously much earlier: her father-in-law looks in better shape, despite his illness, and Maria is in a dress not otherwise seen in the film, and has shorter hair). The sequence ends with the truck passing the unofficial roadblock, reminding us of the uncertainty of possession and ownership. The track opens with muted harmonium chords, then a slow, walking bass figure, joined by plangent guitar figures which harmonize with the keyboard notes. There are hints of the usual harmonic deconstruction, but these are fleeting and this piece has a softer, less intense mood. Its place on the album score suggests that it was intended for later – after the high drama of 'Yellow Dog' which is yet to come. Given that it has a less harsh mode, despite playing over the scenes of disputed ownership, its function here is as a period of calm before the real storm breaks.

136 'Near Inaudibility: The Ethics of Listening in Claire Denis's *White Material*', unpublished paper given at Film-Philosophy Conference 2018.

'Jah Give Us Life'

Around the middle part of the film, there is a loose pattern of scored pieces alternating or mixing with pre-recorded items. This injects, musically, the idea of disruption and intrusion. We hear and see the rebel DJ in his studio, encouraging youngsters to join the guerrillas, with 'Jah Give Us Life' by Wailing Souls¹³⁷ playing. As with 'Sawale', only a short extract is played. The lyrics touch on the situation: 'too much injustice on the land', but the reggae song is in essence one of disengagement from systems and of life-affirmation. As before, the DJ's music is out of kilter with his political message; here, crucially, its emphasis on not having a plan is both apposite to Maria's situation and critical of her attitude. As with the other examples of interpolated music, this piece of pure Jamaican reggae introduces into the film aspects of musical style and culture which are ostensibly extraneous to the African scenario. 'Jah Give Us Life' represents one more voice in the polyphonic chorale of sonic commentary. Its weight is polyvalent. At one level, it represents one of the many examples of musical contemporaneity which we can associate with Denis, having been a recent release during the run up to the film. At another level, the song's origin is in the 1970s and in this respect it can be interpreted as a marker for the continuing impact of colonial oppression. Its placement is significant: almost exactly at the centre of the film, it follows immediately after the aborted attempt to spear Manuel in the swimming pool (a strike against the person of an imperialist occupier), a scene whose significance is underscored by the counterpointed images of the comfortable lifestyle of the Vials and footage of a burning petrol station (a strike against the matériel of the white entrepreneurs), over which the music continues to play in fluid commentary.

'Yellow Dog'

In a key scene, Manuel has an encounter with the two young guerrillas by whom he was almost speared. The absence of music during that threat to his

137 A 1978 single, the B side of 'War,' which appears on various subsequent collections. It was re-issued as a single in 2007.

life perhaps stood for his total ignorance of what is happening. He now chases after them through the plantation, is ambushed and humiliated. The music which accompanies this sequence is called 'Yellow Dog'. This is a name given more than once in the film to Manuel and refers among other things to his light colouring. 'Yellow Dog' is perhaps the most striking and beautiful musical cut in *White Material*. There is a long intro – a third in length – of tinkling percussion, reminiscent of the cow bells on *L'Intrus*, which begins with almost a minute of a single, repeated soft chime, then additional, irrythmic notes, before the organ comes in with much longer, sustained chords than elsewhere. The main accompanying instruments are cello and violin, their glissandos first in lower, mournful register, then climbing the scale to a climax before finally dying away. The music conveys a mixture of sadness, beauty, and regret, and has a strongly elegiac tone.

The associations here are complex. On the one hand, there is the respective innocence of the two young guerrillas (exploring the bungalow and its contents rather like a treasure cave) and of Manuel, who is equally disconnected and naive in relation to the lives of others. These aspects connect with the simplicity and tonal purity of the beginning of 'Yellow Dog'. But in addition the plangent tone of the latter part of the musical cut suggests the tragedy to come: events will entail the brutal ending of these three lives, as well as of their friends and family members. Mingled with these personal implications are the threads of the film's overview: colonialism, exploitation, political corruption, and violent revolution, all reflected in the sombre melody which begins mid-track. What is given musical form beyond the images at this point is a sense of never-ending loss – not only of individual lives, but of the possibility of brotherhood, peace, and a way of living with the land as opposed to pillaging it.¹³⁸ This music is a polyphonic assemblage of the unattainable ideals which the film represents.

138 The suggested possibility of the rape of Manuel in this sense parallels the idea of what the coffee planters have done to the country; as does the aftermath, in which Manuel's behaving like someone with PTSD can be compared with the post-colonial situation on the national stage.

'Children's Theme 2'

Image and music tracks re-combine to further explore the doleful message. A sequence juxtaposing footage of members of the guerrilla and regular armies is followed by a guerrilla killing a regular soldier. These scenes take place accompanied by 'Children's Theme 2'. This track has a sad feel. It begins with mournful flute and faint percussive chimes, gentle bass and harmonium; then strangulated guitar chords come in and together with the flute work up to a crescendo; finally, the tune fades away and the piece ends with soft repeated single guitar notes which fade away behind the disappearing light chimes. In this way, the activity of war shown in the images is suffused with the plangency of the tragic undercurrent suggested by the music. The track is a re-working of 'Children's Theme 1', with the following differences: in version 1, the flute was accompanied by harmonizing guitar but this is now missing; instead, there is a high-pitched whine which runs behind the flute melody – on the score album this actually starts about 30 seconds before the other instrumentation comes in, but that intro is excised from what plays on the film. In addition there is a short bridge of keyboard drone before the guitar comes in.

The overall effect is to modify the plaintive tone of the melody, which predominates in version 1, to give it a rather harsher and more atonal mode in version 2. This music continues over scenes of the rebels 'liberating' the primary school, and ends with footage of José's mother leaving the plantation. Inasmuch as the music relates in different ways to scenes involving children, it has empathetic relevance. Its wistful mood speaks to the tragedy of what is happening to the individuals concerned: the child soldiers, separated, like José, from their mothers, as would also be the likely fate of the schoolchildren running out of school with the rebels. Version 1 accordingly signals the coming risks for all the children in the film, while version 2 reinforces that message, but with an added sense that those risks are now becoming reality. This repetition with difference amounts to a use of refrain and is a part of the polyphonic approach featured in *White Material*.

'André And The Old Man'

This track, originally placed on the album soundtrack before 'Yellow Dog', plays here as part of a surge of music in the final quarter of the film. The track, very quiet on the album but with increased volume on the film soundtrack, is a simple reprise of earlier motifs. Its effect is to continue the air of disquiet as André tries to persuade his father to sign away the plantation, and that mood is added to by the carrying over of the music to brief footage of Maria working on the crop and unaware of the betrayal which is taking place. As such it serves as a marginal but contributory factor in the polyphony which runs through the film.

'Night Nurse'

The next piece of music is Gregory Isaacs's 'Night Nurse'.¹³⁹ The narrative function of the song is that it is the signature tune of the pirate rebel DJ. However, its love-lorn lyrics of longing and desire sailing under pseudo-medical colours ('Only you can quench this thirst|My night nurse|Oh the pain is getting worse') are, as with other songs on the soundtrack, translated from the Caribbean to Africa, where the song now serves as a commentary on the ailing nation state, presented in *White Material* as breaking up in civil war. The ubiquity of its application is emphasized by the circumstances of its playing. It is heard first at mid volume over a close-up of the workers' transistor; then more muted, as if coming to Maria, sitting in the patio, from a distance; then louder, inside the DJ's studio. Despite its jaunty reggae rhythm, this number has an empathetic application to the situation, playing to the dangers approaching. We have here another of the triads regularly found in the cinema of Denis. On this occasion, there is no polemic from the rebel DJ and what is suggested is just his communing with his troubled listeners. But the two poles of his broadcast (radio transmitter and receiver) bracket footage of Maria, and this implies musically as well as visually that she is in the middle, not taking notice. This reading is endorsed by the music track cutting out as the image track finally cuts

139 This was Isaacs's breakthrough song in 1982 (although not a chart hit), from his album of the same name.

away from the DJ to Maria, reiterating sonically her wilful deafness.

'Maria And The Sheriff'

As Maria sits outside, the music of Gregory Isaacs is joined by a Tindersticks track, which plays underneath until a cut to a recalled scene. This track is 'Maria And The Sheriff'.¹⁴⁰ It features guitar and bass, both playing resonant chords with snatches of looped feedback in the background. The scene is of an evening with weed and powder and the music is accordingly slightly woozy. It has a generally softer feel, although the dissonant feedback has connotations of danger, connecting in a rough synch with a discussion of Manuel, who Chérif prophetically tells Maria is going off the rails. Here is yet another warning voice, a further variant in the polyphonic presentation of voices in the film.

'Any Which Way Freedom'

More reggae follows, this time with a decidedly empathetic application: 'Any Which Way Freedom'.¹⁴¹ The artist is a Jamaican Rastafari poet and musician, whose name derives from a Rwandan term for someone who is always victorious. His interest in black consciousness issues is a global one, and once again, Denis's interpolated use of this song introduces another shading of musical commentary. Sample lyrics bear closely on the film's subject matter: 'killin de children in soweato| turnin el salvador inna one big ghetto|dumpin waste on sea and lan [...]now yuh kill I today| yuh can't kill I tomorrow [...]a change mus com| by de ballot or de bullet'. The song begins as Maria dresses for what will be her final, fateful excursion. It continues as she surveys the plantation, and as her father-in-law does the same. It is played in a very similar way to 'Night Nurse' – first quite faintly, then louder, and finally at higher volume over footage of the radio station. We then see the body of the DJ being dragged out by a soldier and the music cuts abruptly and significantly with the

140 A malentendu: her companion is the local mayor, whose name is Chérif.

141 Usually rendered: 'Any Which Way...Freedom'. The title track of the 1989 album by Allan Hope, better known as Mutabaruka.

juxtaposition of the murdered man and the reference to 'de ballot or de bullet'. The music in this way contributes to the film's linkages with the notions of struggle for democracy and self-determination, colonialism and inherited wealth, and the threat to individual lives.

'Attack On The Pharmacy'

'Attack On The Pharmacy' does not accompany that event, which we do not see, only the aftermath. It starts as Maria, having discovered the bodies of her friends, the chemists, wanders out on to the road. The music begins with the whine of guitar sustain, joined by the organ as she looks at her murdered foreman. It then picks up tempo as the image cuts to Maria's commandeered truck driven by the rebels, followed by the now psychotic Manuel. The score track has a dramatic quality not dissimilar to 'André's Death' in *35 rhums*. It has a very slow and quiet build-up of organ and guitar. The quality of the guitar notes is at first much clearer; they take on a chiming quality and are underscored by acoustic phrases. The melody slowly drifts off key and the piece turns into a guitar excursus which would not be out of place in a rock concert, accompanied by a steady bass rhythm and drum rolls. The music no longer has the ominous tones of earlier, and it is empathetic to the joyous attitude of the rebels, heading back to their hero, Le Boxeur. The difference in tone of the music suggests that it is now too late for thinking about consequences. It is in sympathy with the image track in accompanying Manuel's ecstatic joining of forces with the rebels and with his raiding the plantation storeroom for a binge (which will be paralleled by their indiscriminate consumption of pharmaceuticals). The music cuts under the sound of the guerrillas shouting as they run around the yard after Manuel, like the schoolchildren they really are.

'Bus Vision 2'

The scene and the music cut back to Maria on the bus, trying to get the driver to stop as it passes the road to the plantation. The images point up that her project

is doomed to failure. The accompanying music, 'Bus Vision 2' is a short reprise of elements of 'Bus Vision 1', re-stating the themes of menace and inevitability. In this shorter and more concise version, the contrasting aspects of melodiousness and of deconstruction are muted. It is as if the music is running out of steam, in sympathy with the repeated checks which Maria is experiencing.

'Closing'

The scenes which follow, primarily of the slaughter by the military of the child soldiers, run in silence, needing no musical commentary. The final music, 'Closing', begins as Maria approaches her home. Glockenspiel percussion is joined by the strains of the moody harmonium and other instruments of 'Opening'. The track is longer than its opening counterpart, and, having replayed the ominous tones with which the film began, moves into a mode of deconstruction, empathizing with the images of the burning of the plantation, of Manuel's charred corpse, and of Maria's final desperate act – the murderous assault on her father-in-law. (The reason for this is not spelt out. The film implies that he may have signed away the farm, as asked to by André. But his offence may be to be still alive: both André and Manuel are dead, while he is unharmed. In addition, he watched as the troops entered the farmstead, without raising the alarm). 'Closing' continues over footage of the wounded rebel lieutenant running away, his situation replicating that of Le Boxeur at the start of the film. After a few seconds of black screen, the closing credits roll while the track still plays. It might therefore seem that the film has been brought – visually and sonically – to a resolution which closes the circle. But the visuals exceed the music in the sense that the credits are only halfway through when 'Closing' ends. So, musically speaking, the end is not the end.

However, music is so much a part of this film that it seems Denis was unwilling to end either on a note of silence or in a predictable way. When, on the album score, the main instruments have finished playing on 'Closing', the track continues for a minute and a half of cow-bell like glockenspiel, which fades very

gradually below hearing level. For the film itself, Denis uses only a few seconds of that percussion, and then splices in – virtually seamlessly – the closing couple of minutes of 'Attack On The Pharmacy'. This sounds almost like a different track, as the keening guitar part is muted into the background and the other instruments, notably the tom-toms and other percussion, are brought higher up in the mix. Musically speaking, therefore, the film has two endings: the inevitability suggested by the mournful themes of 'Opening' and 'Closing', and the reprise of the tones of aggression and pain with which 'Attack On The Pharmacy' is replete. The implication seems clear: that one way or another murder and violence may have the last word. That idea is consonant with what feels like a kind of cinematic challenge: the soundtrack fades and ends with an exact cut matched to the end of the credits. There follow some dozen seconds of black screen and silence. Is the audience being asked to reflect on the efficacy of pictures and music? It would certainly be characteristic of Claire Denis to insist on leaving open not only the scenario in this particular film, but also the broader question of resolution of relational issues – not simply within the visual and sonic contexts of cinema, but in the world beyond.

Summary

I read this film as something of a limit case as concerns Nancy's ideas of community. The notion of 'compearance' is repeatedly shown as ineffective between the characters in *White Material*. However, Maria stands out in that respect by virtue of her individuality, even if this comes across as wrong-headed. The film presents positive aspects of her instinctive drive towards home and family alongside the intensity and uncompromising nature of those impulses. Perhaps the most telling example of positive relationality comes towards the end of the film when Maria breaks down and is given comfort and help by two local women. The ride home she is offered by them does not happen because she is given a lift in Chérif's car. There is no music for either of these two scenes. I suggest this is because the dialogue is explicit: she finally recognizes her powerlessness, both over her own life and that of her son. The

music in *White Material* is not about negotiation, but about inevitability. No-one comes out as blameless.

In some ways, Maria's situation connects most closely with what Nancy writes in *L'Intrus* about his realization that a transplant will be needed. 'Quel vide ouvert dans la poitrine ou dans l'âme' corresponds to Maria's enforced awareness of the impending rupture with what she holds dearest; while 'l'intrusion d'un corps étrangère à la pensée' seems to delineate accurately how her presence is viewed by the local populace.¹⁴² The hole driven into Maria's life corresponds to the fatal abdominal wound suffered by Le Boxeur and the similar injury to the guerrilla lieutenant. The music is a linking agent, serving to combine these symbols of the self-inflicted wounds dealt to itself by the young nation with those to the colonialists. In this, it carries a refrain which implies that the circle of violence will not be closed.

The film can be read as a disquisition on intrusion of a different nature to that in *L'Intrus*. The music links with the background images to point out the conflict between Maria's own justifications and the overarching context, and in doing so gestures towards all those other voices in the film which she ignores. But the effect of the music is also to suggest that she never had a choice and that her frenetic behaviour was always running down a blind alley. In this sense, it can be interpreted as suggesting that Maria is effectively cursed by her heritage and only partly to blame.

Emile Bojesen's Nancean critique argues that: '*White Material* presents characters who give themselves up to a world which is not there. Creation, for Maria Vial, is not so much to do with an engagement with the world that exists and that is shared but rather with a world that is intensely private and unresponsive'.¹⁴³ Bojesen (175) goes on to observe that: 'The complex and

142 'What a gaping opening in the breast or in the soul'; 'the intrusion into the mind of a foreign body', (Paris: Galilée, 2000), p.17.

143 'Nancean Faith and Dis-enclosure in Claire Denis' *White Material*', in Kenneth R Morefield (ed.), *Faith and Spirituality in the Masters of World Cinema* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), p.172 (Subsequent references in text).

constantly shifting relationships between the characters express inability to formalize any singular belief of how anything should operate or even what one should do with oneself'. That tone of uncertainty identified by Borjesen is brought out by the fluctuating tonal quality of the music, and by the mix of musical genres used by Denis.

With a few minor variations, Tindersticks' score is used almost in its entirety and for the most part in the scenes of the film for which the individual tracks were written. But, as usual, the director put her own stamp on the film – both as regards the placement of the items and the use of additional musical material. Notwithstanding the contrapuntal elements in those decisions, and to a certain extent inherent in the construction of the Tindersticks score, the music in *White Material* has predominantly the nature of a polyphony of musical voices blended into the one complex message of fluid relationality.

Chapter summary and conclusions

The setting for *J'ai pas sommeil* is the quintessentially Parisian district of Montmartre. However, the film is suffused with other associations: predominantly, the Martiniquais origins of the two main male characters and their family; and the Lithuanian Daiga and the expatriate community with which she associates. Alongside these connections runs the series of linkages with the members of the different communities with which the main characters associate or come into contact. What these add up to – along with the tourists, residents, and police officers who flit in and out – is a polyphony of voices which forms a discourse on the nature of the individual and the communal. Interwoven with this complex scenario is a musical score which interpolates influences from the Caribbean (some of which is inflected with African associations), Latin, jazz, 1960s and 1970s popular hits from the USA, England and France, club music, and a 'slacker rap' track from the 1990s. This mix of music complements the running motif of different voices in the film by adding additional, polyphonic,

layers.

The polyphonic nature of *Beau travail* can scarcely be overstated. The French Foreign Legion is an organization with a multi-national composition, which by definition operates in territory outside its homeland. The different racial origins and native languages of the legionnaires are apparent from the outset. The military activities are continually brought into play alongside indigenous traits – of dress, language, and culture. A strong performative presentation inhabits the film: of masculinity, of femininity, of repressed homosexuality. In narrative terms, the action shown in the images is framed by a reminiscent voice-over (itself briefly imaged as writing – on a watery background) set apart in Marseille, far from the Djibouti of the film's setting, adding further dimension to the kaleidoscope of viewpoints. In musical terms, this is one of Denis's most eclectic films. The literary association of the plot with Herman Melville's novella is linked with the intrusive unreality of the foreign military presence by the deployment of Britten's *Billy Budd*. A similar use is made of music by Neil Young. A moody background soundtrack by Erwan Tzur, an Israeli musician and composer, is supplemented with a variety of other material: by Tarkan, a singer of German/Turkish origin; Oliver N'Goma, a Gabonese zouk and reggae artist; Francky Vincent, a controversial performer from Guadeloupe; and Corona, an Italian dance group. The shifting focus of the music might be compared to the ever-moving sands which surround the main characters, and whose resistance to definition ties in with the theme of polyphony.

White Material follows a common Denis strategy in using a composed score to which supplementary items are added. The scenario of the film introduces a host of different voices. Within the household of the main character different notes are struck by her husband, her son, her father-in-law, and the various members of staff. Then there are the voices of the plantation workers, leaving in fear; these are succeeded by other, non-indigenous workers who are first wary, then reluctant, and finally hostile. Set alongside these domestic bodies are the rebel guerrillas, the regular army, and the French military. On top of that are

townspeople of the region and traders, the local mayor, the French pharmacists, the schoolmaster. Finally, the DJ who acts as the voice of the rebellion.

These polyphonic voices are interwoven with music. The score by Tindersticks seems to convey the immutability of the landscape and its enduring presence across a history of attempted exploitation – by indigenous and foreign agency. Those intrusions are conveyed by the varying tone and mood of the score, which sounds in alternating crescendo and decrescendo. Alongside that music is the interpolation of the Caribbean sources, which speak to the ideas of displacement and exploitation latent in the film. The Jamaican numbers and their theme of freedom intermingle with the multivalent viewpoints associated with white settlement of Africa, with indigenous aggression towards immigrants, and with internecine violence between state and rebels. This happens in musical modes which are at the same time both ironic and joyous, thereby adding to the complex polyphony at the heart of the film.

Across the different settings and plot lines of these three films, what they have in common is a polyphonic mixture of voices, instruments, and melodies, which contribute, in the range of ways described, to the relational complexities with which each work is concerned. In my next chapter, I look at how counterpoint is used in the work of Denis.

Chapter 2: Counterpoint

Unlike an object that is closed in on itself by the intervention of a style and a signature, present-day art shows that form only exists in the encounter and in the dynamic relationship enjoyed by an artistic proposition with other formations, artistic or otherwise.¹⁴⁴

La musique n'aurait jamais été la musique si elle s'était cantonnée à cette union des notes, des paroles et d'une action.¹⁴⁵

My aim in this chapter is to consider how music contributes contrapuntally to the examination of relationality in the work of Denis, and I focus on how uses of counterpoint add to the dimensions of challenge in the cinema of Denis, by neglecting expected forms and offering new ways of approach, especially musical ones. This challenge to the normative functions as a centrifugal mode of her cinema, pushing away from standard conceptions, and forms part of the pulsions of fluid distance which come into play as an essential mode of Denis's enquiries into relationality.

In the technical musical sense, counterpoint is defined in terms of setting melodies in conjunction; in more vernacular terms, counterpoint is understood as something which forms a pleasing or notable contrast to something else. Lachman's consideration of counterpoint in the context of literature illustrates the connection contained within this concept between opposition and fluidity of resolution: 'a contrapuntal approach does not seek an overarching resolution, teleology, or synthesis, but instead focuses on the dynamic interplay of contradictions' (62). What Lachman says about musical form in transnational fiction could, I think, be read almost as an assessment of Denis's approach to cinema music:

The turn to musical form in transnational fiction must be understood as a move of both aesthetic and ethical dimensions: it reflects an effort to challenge the conventions of genre and form, an interest in bringing new perspectives to the fore, a desire for new

144 Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Dijon: Les presses du réel, 2002), pp.20-21.

145 'Music would never have been music if it had been confined to a mere union of notes, words and action', Prosper Hillairet, 'à propos du cinéma de Germaine Dulac' in *Ecrits sur le cinéma – Germaine Dulac (1919-1937)*, (Paris: Editions Paris Expérimental, 1994), pp.66-67.

ways to engage conflicting viewpoints and histories, and a commitment to preserving difference. Furthermore, it indicates a refusal to identify with any single national tradition and an understanding of artistic and cultural heritage as hybrid, multilayered, and complex (5).

This chimes in closely with what Rancière says in relation to dissensus.

Lachman goes on to say that: 'Music can *simultaneously* deploy multiple voices in relations of harmony, unison, or dissonance', (7, her emphasis). We can correspondingly apply this multiple capability to cinema in terms of sound and, especially, music. I consider, in this chapter, counterpoint in relation to film music in the work of Denis in the light of an exploration of differences – in voices, in sources, and in contexts – as a means of investigating relational connections. In the work of Denis counterpoint does not operate on the basis of simple opposition. It appears in a range of ways which modulate between character relationships and how the audience is invited to consider them.

Even a critic as sympathetic to Denis's work, and as attuned to musical resonances in her films, as Fabrice Fuentes has characterized the way the music works in the cinema of Denis as part of a disorienting sensorial experience which runs hand-in-hand with the puzzling impact of disjunction in image and narrative flow: 'rather than contribute to the grasping of a definitive truth, the music makes the viewer feel the impossibility of comprehending what he sees'.¹⁴⁶ But Denis's films are not about grasping definitive truths, what they offer is a discursive examination of possibilities. Accordingly, what Fuentes suggests is a problem can be seen more productively in terms of counterpoint.

Alan Licht, in his fascinating book about minimalist music, *Sound Art*, suggests a comparison between drama and music in that both set up: 'a series of conflicts and resolutions, either on a large or a small scale'.¹⁴⁷ Although Licht's concern is not with cinema, this statement is a useful one inasmuch as it can be applied to both the shape and the effect of film music when used in counterpoint. My examination of Denis's refusal to conform uses the prism of Rancière's formulation of dissensus alongside Kathryn Lachman's propositions

146 'la musique fait ressentir au spectateur l'insaisissabilité de ce qu'il voit au lieu de contribuer au saisissement d'une vérité définitive'. Fontanel, p.249.

147 *Sound Art: Beyond Music, Between Categories* (New York: Rizzoli, 2007), p.13.

on counterpoint. Lachman (63) points out the relational potential of counterpoint: 'As a theoretical tool, counterpoint provides a mode of conceiving relations between different parts within a whole'. This strikes me as extremely productive for my project in its potential for critical appreciation of difference and connection through the medium of music.

Music in a Denis film does not follow the dominant model of simply underlining the action and the images. Instead, it suggests, interprets and, especially, contradicts. For some critics, music has an ungraspable, fluid quality. Trevor Wishart argues that music itself is essentially subversive of rationalization and codification, and that it operates on a plane of inexplicability:

There is an immediate dialectic of musical action and experience by which music reaches directly to us in a way which language can never do, communicating powerful messages which are not refutable within the socially-approved categorical systems of any scribe-culture. It is music's intrinsic irrefutability, its going behind the back of language, which has caused it to be viewed with so much suspicion and disdain by guardians of socially-approved order.¹⁴⁸

This idea is picked up in a musical context by Jean-Luc Nancy, who, discussing a rhythm of affect, sees it as essentially contrapuntal, as: 'the beat of a blending together and a pulling apart, of an accepting/rejecting or a swallowing/spitting'.¹⁴⁹ What Nancy says resonates with the concept of fluid distance, here specifically connected to musical rhythm. It bears appositely on how music functions in contrapuntal modes in the films of Denis.

Contrapuntal structures are visibly present throughout her œuvre – from *Chocolat* to *Les Salauds*. My detailed analysis of counterpoint will look especially at: *US Go Home*, *Trouble Every Day*, *L'Intrus* and *35 rhums*. These four films present a representative mix in that they have different locations: central Paris, the suburbs, elsewhere in France, and abroad. They differ in structure in having, respectively, two, four, one, and two plus two, central characters. Their concerns range between the personal, the domestic, and

148 *On Sonic Art* (Amsterdam: Harwood, 1998), p.17.

149 *A l'écoute* (2002), trans. by Charlotte Mandell as *Listening* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), p.38.

more global considerations. Three have a specially composed score; the soundtrack for the fourth comprises a large selection of popular music pieces selected by the director.

US Go Home

US Go Home (1994) was made as part of a TV series 'Tous les garçons et les filles de leur âge', about the attitudes of young people in France. It differentiates itself within the Denis oeuvre in two notable ways. First, it is a linear narrative without flashback or dream sequences. Second, it gives adolescents – normally not very present in a Denis movie¹⁵⁰ – a central role. My discussion of the music begins with relational categories and moves on to dissensual modalities.

In this film, Claire Denis uses music in a number of ways: to convey sympathy with the feelings of the main characters; to underscore their sense of alienation; and to provide a form of critical commentary on the action. The result is a contrapuntal mix of angles on the angst of adolescence, the concerns of adulthood, the thrusts of economic and cultural progress, and the downsides of modern society. By using predominantly 1960s rhythm-and-blues songs, Denis associates the adolescent desires of her characters with the musical language of disenchantment and rebellion from that period. In this way, the rites-of-passage experiences depicted in the film are extrapolated into a commentary on the attitudes and behaviour of young people generally, as well as on those of their parents' generation.

Counter-cultural influences

The idea of disconnection from mainstream French culture is indicated first by a voice-off clip about Radio Caroline, the pirate music station which was in the vanguard of promoting new forms of music attractive to young people. It is

¹⁵⁰ It is difficult to think of examples. Alice Hourie (Martine) and Grégoire Colin (Alain) re-appear as the title characters in *Nénette et Boni*, but they come across to me as primarily young adults. Manuel in *White Material* resembles someone in his twenties who behaves like a teenager. Justine in *Les Salauds* also seems as much a young woman as an adolescent.

significant that this clip is delivered not in French but in impeccable RP English, implying that this is going to be a film which challenges narrow social and linguistic boundaries. Underlining that point are the album covers which we then see decorating the walls of the bedroom of the teenage Alain. These do not refer to the music of the popular charts in France, but to something foreign and strange: American-influenced, British R and B, exemplified here by The Animals and The Yardbirds.

This serves as a visual prompt for the playing of The Yardbirds' version of 'Good Morning Little Schoolgirl', a song whose wailing harmonica and guitars figure the idea of alienation from accepted norms of popular musical style, but whose verbal content also hints at the counter-cultural notion of nomadic musicians preying on virginal girls. The point is underlined by two shots: one of girls waiting at a bus stop; the other of the US flag, an emblem here of intrusion and occupation. 'Good Morning Little Schoolgirl' is a song with a long history of American musical associations¹⁵¹ and its relevance is cemented by a brief shot of a US army officer. This will turn out to be Captain Vido Brown, who will embody the combined threat and fascination of an alternative culture.

As the music fades, it is subsumed into the noise of building work taking place behind a deserted bus stop. These signs of modernizing but culturally destructive changes are counter-pointed by a voice-over: a girl who speaks of learning Russian at school. At a stroke bi-culturalism is introduced at the same time as its relevance is called into question when the girl and her schoolmates join in a chorus of Russian phrases.¹⁵² Those issues are held in balance literally as the sound and image of a train passing a level crossing coincide in time and sonic level with the girls continuing to converse in Russian. Although there is no music in this scene, the dialogue (a chattering which is rare in a Denis film) contributes to a minor polyphonic effect of multiple tongues.

151 First recorded by John Lee 'Sonny Boy' Williamson in 1937 as 'Good Morning, School Girl' and subsequently by artists such as John Lee Hooker, Lightnin' Hopkins and Muddy Waters in the 1950s and 1960s.

152 Shades of Cold War tensions, and their relevance for young Europeans, may also be read as part of a counterpoint set up with much of the US-influenced music in the film.

This linguistic interpolation functions in a number of ways. We have, even at this very early stage, seen the introduction of references to English culture (radio, band posters, music) and implicit references to US culture (music, US service personnel, Vido's iconic Chevrolet Impala). To the extent that those references are largely to counter-cultural emanations, their impact is to bracket together ideas of indigenous adolescent rebelliousness and alien, exotic influence. In that context, the Russian conversation adds an additional dimension. While not carrying the same implications as the other references (although in an historical mode, the Russian language will connect for many with the sweeping consequences of Revolution), it nevertheless adds to the implied attractions of the exotic. At one and the same time, this opens up a panorama of potential change from parochial limitations while keeping the scenario grounded: these are schoolgirls and learning a foreign language is commonplace.¹⁵³

At another level, this intervention allows the director to widen the field and to avoid presenting a polarized scenario: the language of the East and the music of the West both have their positive and negative implications. At plot level, this also signals that there may be conflict ahead, but different modes of disagreeing and multivalent choices may have to be made. So, even though this will be a linear narrative, the viewer is already experiencing flashes of the changing focus which is inherent in Denis's habitual mingling of the close and the distant, which I am calling fluid distance. In figurative terms, these contrapuntal moves anticipate the practical and psychological conflicts which will be experienced by the characters. Fabrice Fuentes (215) highlights this as part of a continuous vibrant movement in the film:

Images et musiques sont combinées de façon à générer un flux permanent de mouvements et de sonorités qui a pour but d'extérioriser l'agitation pulsionnelle inhérente à l'adolescence en instaurant une dynamique du trop-plein. Ce refus vital de l'inertie ne se résorbe pas en partie que dans l'isolement et l'accomplissement du désir.¹⁵⁴

153 There is also a short burst of Italian, saying goodbye at the end of a bus journey.

154 'Images and music are combined in a way which generates a flux of movements and sonorities, whose purpose is to exteriorise the instinctual agitation of adolescence by introducing a dynamic of overflow. This crucial rejection of inertia is only partly offset by isolation and the satisfying of desire'.

Adolescence and rebellion

Our effective introduction to the leading female characters is dramatized through the use of music. Two of the girls (who will turn out to be the protagonist Martine and her friend Marlène) carry on speaking in the foreign language while hitching a lift. Music is used at this point with an evident dual purpose: to satirize the driver's position and to empathize with the girls. The song he puts on in the car is 'Leader of the Pack'. It is clear that the man considers himself trendy and by (musical) implication sees himself as a pack leader. But it is significant that what he is playing is not the Shangri-Las' original, which was subject to criticism and even banning as being morbidly preoccupied with death and connected to motorbike culture.¹⁵⁵ Instead, the version is one by Franck Alamo, a popular French singer of the time.¹⁵⁶ This contrapuntal move allows Denis to convey in the one song a sense of the girls' burgeoning rebelliousness/sexuality and a critique of the banality against which they want to rebel. This duality in the choice of music points up the contrast between the self-appreciative driver and the condescending attitude displayed towards him by the two girls.

The sense of alien culture and danger implicit in the original is muted and the substitution of a sanitized article exposes the driver as a faux-hipster. At the same time, the introduction of this particular song implies the girls' wish for something exciting to happen and prefigures the wished-for romantic and sexual connections which are on both their minds. However, even in this early example, the film avoids the binary by allowing space for criticism of the behaviour of Martine and Marlène. Their callous treatment of the driver, to whose attempts at conversation they do not respond and just smile condescendingly, calls into question the self-absorption of their own behaviour. These modalities prefigure what is presented at greater length in the way *US Go Home* juxtaposes two parties. The daytime one to which the two girls are

155 'Leader of the Pack' (1964) was the Shangri-Las' highly successful follow-up to their début 'Remember (Walking in the Sand)'. It was included on the 1965 album *Leader of the Pack*.

156 One of Denis's wry jokes may be involved here. The French hit's title was "Chef de la bande": "bander" in French means to get an erection; but the car driver is the antithesis of sexual excitement for the two girls.

allowed to go corresponds to the hitching episode. The evening party offers an effective distinction between an acceptable social occasion and one which has a murkier aspect. Music plays a significant part in differentiating the two events.

When the two girls arrive at the first party, what is playing is 'SLC Jerk' by Les Lionceaux.¹⁵⁷ This was a popular hit in the style known as Yé-yé: a kind of Beatles-/Holly-lite genre of popular music not closely connected to the dubious associations of rock and blues, in other words, more parentally acceptable popular hit music. The girls realize to their dismay that the party is attended by parents, so no prospect of counter-cultural activity is in evidence. In this scene, music is used as a twin-direction mode of the dissensual: both to re-emphasize the characters' growing distance from the behaviour expected of schoolchildren, and to satirize that of uncomprehending adults.

As the girls peer into the house from behind the hedge, the music changes to 'Woolly Bully' by Sam the Sham and the Pharaohs.¹⁵⁸ This was a big hit on both sides of the Atlantic and is a dance tune with nonsense words. Its inappropriateness here for Martine and Marlène is demonstrated in two ways. First, to their mixed amusement and derision, they see one of the parents dressed like, and behaving like, the self-imaged hipster from the car. He takes centre stage in dancing at this kids' party, displaying, like the driver earlier, what are for the two watchers the pathetic limits of his assumed coolness. Second, the dancing of the guests turns into that staple of family gathering uncoolness: a conga – in which the adults participate. At this nadir, Marlène decamps, followed eventually by Martine who struggles to drag herself away from this, for them, bizarre event.

Martine and Marlène have actively rejected the earlier party, from which they kept out of sight, symbolizing their attitudinal disengagement. Their attendance

¹⁵⁷ This was a 1965 single. It is primarily a musical number, guitar and organ driving a tune not unlike the Beatles' 'Day Tripper', whose only words are: 'Salut les copains' (roughly: 'Hi, pals'). The Jerk was a kind of dance, which came into prominence in 1964.

¹⁵⁸ Their first, and biggest, hit in 1965. This is another dance reference, this time to the Hully Gully – a synchronized dance first popularized by Zoot Money in 1961.

at the second party is intended to deliver greater levels of excitement and intimacy; but for Martine that will be denied. The songs heard deal with the search for passionate connection, which Martine desires, but their burden is usually about frustration and loss, resonating with her own disappointments. The film then cuts to their arrival at the other party. It is now dark, signalling a shift from the norms of daylight behaviour. The lights at the venue are correspondingly turned low. During the course of the night, a series of pieces of music is played. The musical selections have a period authenticity. But the music has the function of a contrapuntal commentary, which engages with and highlights the sexual tension inherent in the images of conjoining bodies in the half-light, while deflating the actuality of the main characters' experiences.

Sébastien David reads the party scene as a kind of parallel to the one where Alain loses himself in 'Hey Gyp', arguing the case for a generality of submerged individuality:

Les sonorités musicales, la succession des morceaux instaurent ainsi un rythme qui captive les corps, les unit, les fait vibrer, les remue et préside à une interpénétration généralisée et indifférenciée, à un enroulement des individualités les unes sur les autres, les unes dans les autres.¹⁵⁹

This is an accurate reflection of the party scene, and of parties generally, but it takes insufficient account of how the music is modulated to reflect relational issues, especially as concerns Martine, something which will be explored further below.

Sexual angst

In this central section of *US Go Home*, musical counterpoint shifts from its earlier global connotations to ones of individual relationality. The first number heard as the two make their way in has, in total contrast to 'Wooly Bully', a

¹⁵⁹ 'The musical sonorities, the succession of musical pieces, introduce a rhythm which captures the bodies, unites them, makes them vibrate and move, and directs a generalised and undifferentiated interpenetration, a rolling up of individualities on to and into each other'. 'Les Corps hérétiques ou les puissances de la chair' in Fontanel et al., *Le Cinéma de Claire Denis* (Lyon: Aléas, 2008), p.178. Subsequent references in text.

visceral appeal: the girls' reaction is that this is the kind of party where people have sex. The Animals' 'How You've Changed'¹⁶⁰ is a slow, bluesy number, performed in a honky-tonk style, about romantic disappointment. Eric Burdon and his band introduce an appropriately *louche* note by adding to Berry's lyrics words which speak of 'walk[ing] from school' and 'breaking all those precious rules'. The dissensual quality of the music, which picks up the mood of the two party crashers, turns against them and anticipates in its words the disillusionment to come.

For both young women, in different ways, the party will be an unsatisfactory experience and the song lyrics point to the let-down which follows initial excitement and expectation. That idea of a person in the throes of change as regards sexual attraction connects directly to Martine's situation. As if in response to her exchange with Marlène about sexual expectation, the 'House of the Rising Sun' cuts in with its associations of the *bordello*.¹⁶¹ As the girls are about to find, there is plenty of slow dancing and kissing and cuddling. This piece of music is accordingly resonant with the action; but it has a strong measure of counterpoint for Martine in particular: she is looking for a romantic first experience rather than the pumped-up climaxes suggested by the song's rhythm and the paid-for transactions indicated in its words. Her *naïveté* is at stake in the critique implied here by the music.

Her entry with Marlène to the party room is accompanied by The Troggs' 'With A Girl Like You'.¹⁶² This is a slower number than those with which the band made its name and it seems perfectly suited to the occasion, speaking as it does of romantic longing and with its focus on dance as the mode of courtship. In fact, the closing line where the boy says: 'can I dance with you?' is an exact expression of what Martine in particular is hoping for. But in practice, she

¹⁶⁰ This was not a single release. It appeared on *Animal Tracks* (1965), The Animals' second album. The track did not feature on the American album of the same name, but instead was included on *The Animals On Tour* (a studio album released in the US in 1965). The song was written by Chuck Berry and was included on his second album *One Dozen Berrys* (1958).

¹⁶¹ This was The Animals' second single release and a huge hit in 1964. It is based on a traditional blues number, sometimes called 'Rising Sun Blues'.

¹⁶² A No. 1 hit in 1966, written by the band's lead singer, Reg Presley. It was not on their *début* British album *From Nowhere* (1966), but was included on the US album *Wild Thing* (also 1966).

spends some time as a wallflower, ignored or patronized by boys who do not have a partner.

The arrival of the next song, Otis Redding's 'Try a Little Tenderness' is loaded with ambiguity. At one level, it continues the more romantic vein of The Troggs' song in its tempo and tone of request rather than full-on demand. In that respect it simultaneously relates to Martine's feelings about her treatment and offers an implied reproach to those who have been less than kind. At another level, it hints at the unreality of a relationship based on romance only, even though it exhorts a more sympathetic attitude from man to woman. There is a sense of latent cynicism in the song as its pace and the brassy accompaniment picks up and intensifies towards its conclusion. To that extent, it matches perfectly Martine's feelings of sexual desire (her aim in coming to the party was to have sex for the first time), but at the same time fits with her wish to have a romantic experience rather than just a sexual encounter. This Redding number returns to the pleading refrain of the one by the Animals, but offers a variant in musical style. In the same vein, another Otis Redding song 'My Lover's Prayer' carries on the mood of distant, frustrated longing coupled with elements of complaint and regret. Whereas for the dancers these are smoochy songs, suitable for getting up close, for Martine they have an ironic flavour: she is at the sort of party she wanted to be at, but nothing of what she wants is happening to her.

The advent of these slow songs seems to constitute a kind of sad parody of Martine's situation. That sense turns full bore when someone puts on the Troggs' 'Wild Thing', the up-tempo riff-based song which was hugely popular yet retained street credibility (not least with its explosive deconstruction at the hands of Jimi Hendrix).¹⁶³ The mood of this number is unambiguous, but in context it bears a weight of counterpoint: the vital female persona celebrated in the song is a cruel antithesis of what is actually happening to Martine.

At this point, the film shifts its approach and Martine gets, contrapuntally, some

¹⁶³ Written by Chip Taylor and first recorded by The Wild Ones in 1966. It was The Troggs' second single and was included on their debut albums *From Nowhere* (UK) and *Wild Thing* (US), both 1966.

of what she wants, but not the way she wants it. A song good for dancing is played – a version of a Little Richard number, by the Animals – and she is at last asked to dance. Her partner is, however, not especially attractive and the music, 'The Girl Can't Help It',¹⁶⁴ suggests the limitation of her options. Although things seem to be looking up when a more good-looking boy cuts in, once again the music offers a commentary. 'We Gotta Get Out of This Place'¹⁶⁵ chimes in with her partner's move of a perfunctory dance as a prelude to taking her out of the room and getting intimate. Lines such as 'young and pretty' and 'you'll be dead before your time is through' speak to the risks she is taking.

Having rebuffed these sexual advances, Martine returns to the party room and tries to get back into the mood – this time with her earlier dance partner, now accompanied by another girl. The song is The Young Rascals' version of Wilson Pickett's huge dance hit 'In The Midnight Hour'.¹⁶⁶ In its way, this song encapsulates what Martine would like to happen: the excitement of up-tempo dancing, followed by the romantic events suggested in the lyrics – all in good time, when love comes tumbling down in the midnight hour. But things are still not happening in the way she envisages.

The party is a fiasco for Martine: all expectation and no result; hoped-for romance disappointed; the few men willing to dance with her unsuitable for various reasons. The musical counterpoint reflects those conflicted feelings, suggesting, promising, but failing to deliver. She eventually leaves, accompanied on the walk home by her brother, and the absence of music during this scene reflects how down and empty she feels, combining as it does with the lack of vibrancy in the slow images of traipsing along the road. But just when it seems that the film is heading for realism in the form of a discontented

164 The song was written by Bobby Troup for the film of the same name (Frank Tashlin, 1956), in which it was performed by Little Richard. He released it as a single in 1956 and had a minor hit. The number was included on the Animals' 1964 début album *The Animals* (both UK and US versions) but not released as a single.

165 Written by the well-known songwriting duo Barry Mann and Cynthia Weil ('On Broadway', 'Walking in the Rain', 'Uptown', 'You've Lost That Lovin' Feeling', 'Saturday Night at the Movies'). First recorded by The Animals and a 1965 hit single for them.

166 A big hit in 1965 for Pickett, written by him and guitarist Steve Cropper, it also appeared on the 1965 album of the same name.

descent back to the quotidian, another contrapuntal move takes place: the early pointers to US culture suddenly reappear in the form of Captain Vido Brown.

Experience and initiation

Martine asks Vido for a lift; Alain is reluctant to have anything to do with an American soldier. The antagonism between French and US identity, introduced at the start of the film, is here replayed in microcosm, along with the generational and cultural clash which despised American militarism and revered American-derived music. This conflict was present in our musical introduction to Alain: his intense relation to 'Hey Gyp' by the Animals is with a music form derived from North American music. The film now introduces its penultimate piece of music. This is significantly different to what we have heard before: Vido plays Prince Buster's 'Al Capone'¹⁶⁷ on his car's stereo. This is a master-stroke by the filmmaker which resonates at a number of levels. It brings into play her appreciation of a wide range of musical forms. The song is an early example of the 'toasting' tradition of Caribbean music making it into the mainstream, and it can be seen as a precursor of both 'gangsta' music and rap in general. For Martine, it represents a kind of music which is new to her; but she quickly attunes to it, as is indicated by her later humming the tune. In this respect, it is consonant with the new experiences which she craves.

Fuentes (223) regards this as a kind of epiphany for her: 'Martine a intégré, le temps d'une chanson, le territoire musical de son doux chauffeur, et su renoncer à son besoin d'autonomie'.¹⁶⁸ He goes on to argue (223) that, having found a common space, she and Vido are (re-)united through music, which provides a means for love to enter. What is interesting is that the song vehicle differs not only from the French mainstream music which the character is growing out of, but also from the blues-rock with which she has been associated up to now. 'Al Capone' is primarily an instrumental with a brass-heavy ska

167 This song, written by Prince Buster, aka Cecil Bustamente Campbell, was released as a single in 1964, but only became a hit in 1967. It was included on his album *It's Burke's Law* (1965).

168 'Martine has brought together, in the space of a song, the musical territory of her gentle driver and the renouncement of her own need for autonomy'.

rhythm. Its seeming celebration of gangsterdom is not spelt out, and both character and viewer are left to draw their own conclusions. The theme of the tune does however relate to how Vido Brown is presented in *US Go Home* - that is as a loner and outsider.¹⁶⁹ However, his difference is emphasized by counterpoint: he is a North American who might be expected to favour contemporary rock and roll, but his choice of a ska song points him out as an even more alien presence than just a foreign soldier. This, dissensual, implication that not all US culture is the same consists with the director's own recall of the conflicted attitudes of her generation:

we dreamed about American culture, literature, music, cinema, the American way of life. It was *the* influential country, but at the same time we were completely anti-American. We didn't hate Americans, but we were against the war in Vietnam.¹⁷⁰

In the same way as Martine comes to like his strange music, she is seduced by Vido's different behaviour. He does not come on to her, despite being attracted to her; he is polite and considerate, concerned to get her home, and in the beginning treats her more like a younger sister. In another contrapuntal move, Martine is not seduced by Vido, it is she who takes the sexual initiative. Martine achieves her rite of passage, but this does not happen at all in the way she envisaged. Her partner is not a good-looking French boy, but a slightly odd-looking man from the USA. The male does not sweep her off her feet as in a romantic fantasy. There is no dancing, either of the up-tempo or the slower kind. The dissensual nature of Denis's cinema denies the viewer the expected sex scene. The event is in fact off-screen and silent; Prince Buster has offered an introduction, but fades out in order to let matters take their course.

Cédric Mal goes as far as to say: 'Le spectateur éprouve la même frustration que la fillette avant son passage à l'acte'.¹⁷¹ However, 'Al Capone' has already sent out a subliminal signal that this unexpected relationship may continue to offer surprises, and the disjunction of the image sequence is here

169 Words written by Buster – although not appearing on the hit single, the version used in the film – are relevant to industrial change and the move away from agrarian economy in the Caribbean. To that extent they resonate, intertextually, with the economic changes pointed up by the film.

170 Sonia Benjamin, 'Claire Denis, une cinéaste curieuse de toutes les cultures,' *Journal Français d'Amérique*, August 4-31, 1995, p.10. Cited in Mayne, p.66. Italics in original.

171 'The viewer feels the same frustration as the girl before the consummation', *Claire Denis: Cinéaste à part et entière*, (Paris: Editions de Verneuil, 2007), p.74. Subsequent references in text.

sympathetically matched by a disjunction in the soundtrack. As Mal indicates, this counterpoint forms, for Denis, a correspondence with the self-sufficient aspects of desire and feelings of let-down after the event “très vite, le plaisir tombe”.¹⁷² In musical terms, this disenchantment will translate to the other characters at the end of the film through the plangent tones of the closing song.

Dissensual music forms

'Al Capone' is an early example of Denis's use of music – often with an Antillean origin or connections – to unsettle assumptions, whether of plot, character or affect. In this case, the cultural and musical references in the film have been either European or North American. The drift of the scenario, between the binary of successful or unsuccessful 'making it' with a local boy is suddenly disturbed by the re-introduction of the character of Vido, as is the corresponding trend of musical references – between anodyne popular hits and grungy alternatives – by the impact of an entirely different style of music, emanating from a source from outside of the continental repertoire established by the film. Antillean music is used in this way in other Denis films as a contrapuntal effect in relation to Parisian, or to African settings. In the same way, songs of Paris (*Chocolat*) or of the Americas (*White Material*) are used in African contexts as a means of critique.

Sometimes, notably in *J'ai pas sommeil* and *Beau travail*, this aural strategy becomes polyphonic. One distinct advantage of this approach is that Denis's use of music avoids becoming stereotyped: different forms and sources of music are deployed with varying effect throughout her work to suggest a range of points of view. One example of this in *US Go Home* is the scene where Martine comes across Alain and Marlène, naked in a bedroom. Martine is wandering about as the party winds down from dancing to sexual encounter, and her wretchedness and sense of exclusion are brought into stark relief with the realization that her brother and her best friend have had what she wanted. Conventionally, this dramatic occasion would be highlighted by music pointing

¹⁷² Mal citing Denis: 'very quickly, the pleasure drops'.

up the shock and disappointment. What actually happens is that the party music in the background, continues to play, as it were, heedlessly.

But Martine's discovery is in fact anticipated by the music. The Animals again offer a prelude, as they did on her arrival at the party. 'Bring it on Home to Me'¹⁷³ is a version of a Sam Cooke song: a slow, soulful ballad about a man whose woman has left him and who is promising the world if she comes back. The sad tone of the song suggests that the woman will not return – and by transference here it is implied that Martine too will remain unsatisfied. As she turns away to go back downstairs, the music fades, and then cuts with an image cut which finds her – still alone – in the kitchen. The absence of musical sound here suggests emptiness: Martine's unfulfilled desires. Any empathy in the music therefore also points up her continuing rejection by the events of the party.

The scene crystallizes Martine's ambivalent feelings about both her brother and her friend. It is implicit in the film that she accepts that both are sexually active, but seeing them in bed together presents a level of reality which is painful for her. This contrasts sharply with an earlier scene when the two girls are getting ready to go out. As they put on their make-up and party clothes, their preparations are accompanied by a popular French song, by Ronnie Bird, called 'Adieu a un ami' ('Tribute to Buddy Holly').¹⁷⁴ This is another example of 'Yé-yé'. In the light of events at the party, its inclusion can be read as commenting on the impending change in their relationship, but in terms of the action they happily sing along with this hit in a spirit of exuberance rather than anything more serious. The presence and absence of music accordingly modulates the moods of the relationship between the two young women as well as helping to present them both in their respective situations of transition from girlhood to womanhood.

173 Sam Cooke's 'Bring it on Home to Me' was a big 1962 hit, originally a B-side (ironically here the A-side was 'Having a Party'). It was a re-working of a gospel number by Charles Thomas from 1959. The Cooke single did not appear on an album during his short lifetime, but is now included on various collections. The Animals' version, also a hit single, in 1965, featured on the US version of the album *Animal Tracks* (1965).

174 This hit single in 1964 was Bird's first release. It subsequently appeared on the album *Ronnie Bird* (1966).

In their turn, these shades of relationship are counterpointed with a representation of the young male – Alain. This different take on things is offered in the film's best-known sequence, in which Grégoire Colin, as Alain, features in a set-piece, acting-out to the Animals' 'Hey Gyp'.¹⁷⁵ This is a song in the classic rock/blues tradition of a man offering a woman inducements (cars and mansions) in exchange for giving herself to him. Alain's performance consists of striking a series of postures, cigarette in hand, sometimes jumping on his bed and miming to the words or singing along to them.¹⁷⁶ He is clearly living out what he thinks will make him very attractive to women.

Laura McMahon's discussion of this sequence focuses on elements of escapism, locating it in relation to Andrea McRobbie's writing about young adulthood and dance, and citing as apposite McRobbie's description of 'the possibility of some mysterious transformative power...a fantasy of change, escape, or achievement...'.¹⁷⁷ This sense of escapism is enhanced by the exoticism of the foreign words and the American-English musical form. The sequence links implicitly to Martine's later connection with Vido, who does the very opposite of offering material inducements as means of seduction, thus cutting away the assumed ground of imperial dominance and critiquing Alain's narrow outlook while simultaneously associating with his musically-induced excitement.

Contrasted scenes between Alain, his mother, and the two girls, made explicit by the way in which the film cuts sharply from one to the other, are accentuated by matched music cuts. This use of counterpoint extends to bring in the parental generation and to work against a monochrome view of events and characters. Music is at the heart of what is happening. Immediately before the two scenes involving the young people (Martine and Marlène's getting dressed up and Alain

175 A track which appeared on the US album *Animalism* (1966). Released in France in 1967 on the EP *Hey Gyp*. Written by Donovan Leitch and issued by him in 1966 (as the B-side of 'Turquoise'), it is a re-working of 'Can I Do It For You' by Memphis Minnie, a blues pioneer from Louisiana active between 1920 and 1950.

176 In itself, this scene of movement to music points forward to other significant scenes in the work of Denis, notably those in *J'ai pas sommeil*, *Beau travail*, and *35 rhums*.

177 In Vecchio, p.81 (ellipses in original).

performing to 'Hey Gyp'), we see Martine's mother humming along to another Animals track: 'I Believe To My Soul'.¹⁷⁸ This is a Ray Charles song¹⁷⁹ with a more bluesy, wistful tone – about love going wrong – and it reflects the mother's own regrets about her life. Although this is another American-influenced number by an English band, it connects with an earlier tradition of soulful jazz ballads rather than the rebellious spirit of most of the other songs in the film. Ostensibly, this is music from another era. However, the song continues to play across a cut to Alain resting on his bed, and consequently extends to and embraces his own feelings of frustration, thereby bridging visually and sonically the generation gap in terms of musical genre, as well as refusing exclusivity of emotion on a generational basis. Here is a pointed reminder that dissensual feelings are not anyone's exclusive prerogative. Taken together, these three scenes and the contrapuntal use of music in them indicate that the parental generation is allowed to have its moments of desire and regret, while the younger generation is not all about hormonal drives and escape.

As part of the contrapuntal presentation of graduated attitudes, showing on the one hand that adolescent desire is normal and understandable, but on the other hand that its modes of negotiation are not necessarily ideal, the film leaves us with the three party-goers: Alain and Marlène, implicitly less than completely satisfied with the outcome of their one-night stand – achieved in the standard drunken party manner – and in contrast Martine, who has been driven back by Vido after their unscheduled but tender liaison. There is no dialogue and no need at this point for musical commentary: and the action ends with the sound of the twittering of birds, harbingers of a dawning new season. However, birdsong was also heard early in the film, accompanying the playing of 'Good Morning Little Schoolgirl' and the first shot of Vido. That sound reference accordingly has a polyvalent aspect, knowing what is to come – although only accessible to the audience in retrospect – and acknowledging what has happened. In the experiential sense, Martine is, at the end of the film, no longer

178 Not a single. Included on the 1965 albums *Animal Tracks* (UK) and *The Animals on Tour* (US).

179 A single release by Charles in 1965 – not a hit – taken from the album *The Genius Sings the Blues* (1961).

a 'little schoolgirl' but one who has had an adult liaison.

In a final move, which blends the polyphonic and the contrapuntal, the credits roll to another perfectly-pitched choice of music. Nico's version of 'These Days'¹⁸⁰ speaks appropriately of the gap between fantasy and reality and the unreliable lure of music— a 'life lived in song' not matching up to the actual mistakes of life. The function of the music here is to bring together the themes of *US Go Home*: a sympathetic presentation of the frustrations and wishes of adolescents; of their struggles to escape enforced parental and societal restrictions; and of their experiences in trying to connect with a life which has meaning and feeling for them. But this is achieved in a complex way. The thrust of Nico's song ties in with one by Ronnie Bird, heard earlier, when Martine danced with Alain after their reconciliation. The song playing on that earlier occasion was a plaintive number, 'Ma Vie S'enfuit',¹⁸¹ about someone who realizes that life on one's own has no meaning. Its lyrics connected then with Martine's feeling that 'life is slipping away through [her] fingers'. Musically speaking, this was a backward step: she was back to being a young girl, listening to a French popular song lacking in the edge and change she is looking for in her life.

But 'Ma Vie S'enfuit' is part of a musical triptych. The mournful qualities of the Bird and Nico songs bracket Martine's encounter with Vido and the ska of Prince Buster. It is part of the dissensual mode of the cinema of Denis that these three pieces of music are spread over the last third of the film's running time, in sharp contrast to the continual presence of music in the first two thirds. Although spaced out across the final 22 minutes of the film, they are not interrupted by other music. Crucially, in my view, the music here does the opposite of building to a climax in the fashion of mainstream cinema. Structurally speaking, this musical combination corresponds with the earlier pre-party trio of songs involving Alain, the mother, Martine and Marlène.

180 A track on her album *Chelsea Girls* (1967), it was written by singer/songwriter Jackson Browne, who later included it on his own album *For Everyman* (1973)

181 Included on the 1966 EP *Où Va-T-Elle*.

These three items of music reflect what has happened to Martine, representing, respectively, her sense of frustration, excitement, and post-coital reflection. Considered together, they connect the four main characters in a loose, contrapuntal linkage, in which a range of individual viewpoints is mingled with the film's recurrent themes of progress, loss, economic change, and cultural ambivalence. The sounds of the natural world blend with the background of industrial activity in the closing images, providing triggers for the elegiac melody and words which are additionally counterpointed by the delivery of Nico's over-precise, Germanic accent.¹⁸²

Summary

This is a film which in some ways is the antithesis of a *nouvelle vague* feature in which characters discuss their situation and feelings unceasingly. Denis always goes in for spare dialogue, and here this serves a double purpose: the inarticulacy of youth is presented as a silence in which alienation is implicit; but in tandem, the music speaks for the wishes and desires of the main characters and even comments on what is happening to them. In these ways, fluid distance, portrayal through moving away and coming close, in the sense of the variations of isolation and intimacy which is always a feature of Denis's oeuvre, is channelled not through dialogue but through the images and the interpretation of them suggested by the music.

At the level of character, the music only occasionally makes a direct empathetic connection – notably Alain and 'Hey Gyp', Martine and Marlene with 'Adieu à un ami' and Martine's mother with 'I Believe to my Soul'. More generally, the large number of pieces of music in the film present a series of shifting commentaries on the scenario, moving in to sympathize with a mood or a situation, and pulling back to suggest criticism or a wider context. These movements of fluid relation

¹⁸² Some accounts of Nico's life say that she was raped by a US serviceman when a similar age to Martine's at the encounter in the film. Denis never seems to have mentioned this, and it is an open question whether life is here imitating art or the reverse.

provide a panoramic, sometimes polyphonic, but primarily contrapuntal representation of desire and feeling between individuals together with contextual society-related frustrations and anxieties— impulse for change, fear of instability, confusion about status. Those conflicted and varying incidences of affect and association come together in *US Go Home* in a dissensual chorale of tones and shades, in which the contrapuntal plays the leading part in pointing up difference within this ensemble of musically-driven relationality.

My next film for analysis, *Trouble Every Day*, offers a significant musical difference in having a composed score.

Trouble Every Day

Trouble Every Day is structured on the dynamic of two couples sharing the same problem, the consequent implicit connection between them which scarcely actualizes, and the very different relationship within each of the two couples. That dynamic pivots on an extreme issue of relationality: the occasion when desire crosses over with violence. Maurice Blanchot, in his consideration of the nature and borders of community, cites Marguerite Duras's linkage of violence and possession in a relational context: 'l'envie d'être au bord de tuer un amant, de le garder pour vous, pour vous seul, de le prendre, de le voler contre toutes les lois, contre tous les empires de la morale'.¹⁸³ Denis takes, in effect, this expressed sensation and gives it actual representation in her film. Both in conception, therefore, as well as in its reception, *Trouble Every Day* is germane to the idea of dissensus as a striking against accepted norms. The scenario is suffused with aspects of counterpoint, and the music participates in and extends those contrapuntal modes in a range of ways. It adds dimension by adopting an empathetic tone which plays over action and images. It points as well to the gritty reality of the behaviour driven by the virus sufferers and the consequences. The music, in its romantic mode, also enables the adoption of a

¹⁸³'The wish to be on the verge of killing a lover, to keep him for yourself, for you only, to take him, to steal him in breach of all law, in breach of every consideration of morality', Maurice Blanchot, *La Communauté inavouable*, (Paris: Minuit, 1983), p.76.

more objective point of view, a standing back from the visceral nature of the images.

In all, there are 32 minutes of music, including the credits. This represents almost a quarter of the film's running time. There are several surprises. Although the film's title comes from a Frank Zappa song,¹⁸⁴ Zappa's music does not feature. Unusually for a Denis film, the major part of the written score finds its way into the film. Another novelty is that the score, written and performed by Tindersticks, is not supplemented by any other music. With the exception of the use of 'Trouble Every Day' to frame the events of the film, music (without words) appears regularly throughout the film, presaging what is to come or cutting across what is happening. From the point of view of analysis, music is deployed in an interwoven patchwork which actively resists discrete subject areas. My discussion is accordingly organized primarily in relation to the specific pieces of music.

The musical mood is quite sombre, as befits a film which manages to be at the same time an homage to Gothic movie-making and a commentary on the encroachment into our lives of the medico-scientific complex. At the same time there is a strong streak of romanticism about the music. The musicians say that the score came from a feeling they got from the film, pushing them to 'go with the romance against the violence' (Vecchio,9). This is especially true of Stuart Staples's rich vocal for the title song, which is the only piece with words. Denis says that, although offered to her casually as something to play over the end credits, the song went so to the heart of the film that she knew it had to have a crucial place at the beginning.¹⁸⁵

184 Originally, 'Trouble Comin' Every Day' on the début Mothers of Invention album *Freak Out!* (1966). Zappa's song is part skit/part homage to the urban blues tradition, and deals with the dystopian nature of modern inner-city life. Its lyrics have no direct connection with the scenario of the film, and are relevant only in the general notion of troubles piling one on top of another and from which there is no escape. Denis has spoken at various times about Zappa's work and about this song; one assumes she was unable to get the rights to use it.

185 NFT interview 27 April 2011. <<https://bfiftp.bfi.org.uk/workflow/GET/9U452FZE4MY5CQV2-0000>> [accessed 03/07/2017].

'Trouble Every Day' – the song

On the face of it, Tindersticks' track 'Trouble Every Day' is a love song about two people who are struggling to make a relationship work. This is resonant for the two couples in the film, each of whom has a partner whose psycho-medical condition makes the relation between them a dysfunctional one. The narrative of the film therefore creates additional levels of relational incompatibility. The standard difficulties associated with accommodating oneself to the wishes and needs of a partner while at the same time retaining an adequate sense of self are here compounded, not simply by the need to care for someone with a serious illness, but above and beyond that, to do so in a context which puts the carer at risk in an extraordinary way. Love and affection will not uncommonly lead someone to put themselves in danger of catching the disease or condition which is assailing their partner, but in *Trouble Every Day* the illness has an outward manifestation which puts even a loved one at risk of violent assault and a horrible death, not indirectly transmitted from the other person, but directly by their hands (and mouths).

There is a strong contrapuntal visual sense – seen particularly in the relationship between Coré¹⁸⁶ and Léo – in which the tenderness involved in looking after someone is constantly teetering on the verge of inducing overspill into murderous proximity. For example, in the scene where he tenderly cleans her up: she becomes amatory; he backs off, knowing what it would lead to. Coré's destroyed personality is not like that of Rochester's Bertha in *Jane Eyre*, fixating on the object of jealousy or revenge; it is more primal in its unrelenting drive for sensual satisfaction, even if the medium for satiation nearest at hand is the loving carer. But whereas Bertha seemed not to know what she was doing, we have the strong sense that Coré – although overwhelmed by her body's needs at the time – is aware of what she has done. This awareness plays a part in the presentation of her as a victim, something to which the music in the film makes a significant contribution through its melodic, harmonious style, which

186 Coré is a name associated with Persephone, Queen of the Underworld, abducted by Hades, and compelled to spend part of her life in darkness.

suggests the sadness of her situation and at the same time the feelings which continue to exist between her and Léo; in the latter respect there is the shadow of the love which they would have shared before she was stricken.

Those contrapuntal aspects also apply to the other sufferer, Shane. However, in his case sympathy is muted: the elements of control which remain to him in respect of his condition present him as more calculating, as less of a hapless victim. His tracking of Christelle, the chambermaid, linked with her implied complicity, gives the soundtrack a quite different pitch as it applies to him. The grooming of the sexually curious victim-to-be by the sexual predator, and their final conjunction, take on in the film's scenario something of a louche engagement which goes over into excess. But here the melody and harmony of the music have a strongly critical mode: the romanticized mood reads in a contrapuntal fashion, as commenting on the images of their awkward early encounters and the crudeness of their final conjunction, which it accompanies.

In another mode, it is the two unafflicted partners who are victims. For Léo and for June the music is in more sympathetic mode. Léo not only cleans up after Coré's attacks and does what he can to protect her from herself, but is also frantically engaged in trying to find an antidote to her condition. In his case, the music testifies, empathetically, to his devotion. For June, the sense is more of a distanced one: she is unaware of what is wrong with Shane, and has no knowledge of what he might have done in the past; her honeymoon is being marred by his unwillingness to have sex with her, and his efforts to protect her from himself leave her as the one central character who is completely out of the loop – ineffectual and to be pitied. Overall, the music in the film operates in a range of contrapuntal ways, pointing up the similarities and the differences between the variously-shaded sets of relationships.

The title song has arguably the greatest impact in those respects. Musically, the song is dreamy: sung in Staples's languid, mournful baritone, it evokes both pleasure and regret. It plays, in its shortened version, called 'Opening Titles' on

the album score, for almost the full extent while the credits run.¹⁸⁷ The music functions here as a prelude, running over a long kiss in a darkened car, beautiful footage of the Seine sparkling in the dark against a half-lit sky, and fading below traffic noise as we see Coré for the first time, on the hunt. It manages to convey a range of modes in that it chimes in with the romance and beauty of the footage; suggests a kind of lofty unconcern with the smallness of life; but sets up the countervailing harsh reality of a form of passion for which tenderness is only a means to an end.

I think it is worth setting out the lyrics in order to examine more closely their relevance (only half of the words are used in the version called 'Opening Titles'):

Look into my eyes
 You see trouble every day
 It's on the inside¹⁸⁸
 So don't try to understand
 I get on the inside of you
 You can blow it all away

Such a slightest breath and I know who I am

Look into my eyes
 Hear the words I can't say
 Words that defy
 And they scream it out loud

I get on the inside of you
 You can wave it all away
 Such a slightest thing
 It's just the raise of your hand
 And there's trouble every day

This is best understood contrapuntally. The message in the words, of the impossibility of understanding and of communicating what is wrong, can apply in different ways to all four main characters. Ostensibly, these ideas fit best the two sufferers – Coré and Shane – as expressing the internal nature and irrationality of their condition. Coupled with this is the longing for that impossible communication and an appreciation of the tenderness shown by each one's partner. Most tragic, perhaps, is the contrapuntal sense that on the one hand a

187 Denis lops about 30 seconds off the track, but about half of that is silence as the diminuendo fades into nothing.

188 Here and elsewhere some of the published lyric is omitted or varied in the soundtrack album.

gesture from the other one might be able to wave away all the troubles, but on the other that 'a raise of the hand' by the sufferer is all too likely to lead to something very bad. It seems to me that the music works differently in respect of the non-infected partners: in their cases, the song speaks to the frustrations brought to bear on their loving by the thing which cannot be acknowledged. For Léo, it is Coré's inability to say what she feels; for June, it is Shane's unwillingness to tell her what the problem is.

The words 'It's on the inside of me' refer obliquely to the internal sickness at the centre of the film. On a number of occasions, what might seem to be fairly standard words from a love-lorn song take on a sinister undertone. For example, 'look into my eyes' is a normal lover's invitation; but in this case, it also invokes the obsessive gaze of the two afflicted characters, and their crazed eyes which are the last thing seen by their victims. Some of the song words go right to the heart of the action. 'Hear the words I can't say|Words that defy|And they scream it out loud' touch on the remarkable fact that one of the couples never has a conversation in the entire film. Béatrice Dalle as Coré is a suppressed volcano of desire and anger who is past talking and communicates purely by look and contact: she speaks once in the film, to say 'I can't wait any more Léo. I want to die' to her partner. Léo is completely occupied with trying to keep her (and her victims) out of harm, while desperately searching against the odds for a drug which will remit her condition; he treats her tenderly and without recrimination, but he knows there is nothing he can say and accordingly does not speak to her. There is so much they could say to each other, but none of it would be to any avail, so the unspoken words scream silently. (The victims are in the opposite situation: they die screaming in frightened agony). For the other couple, we can make a slightly different interpretation: Shane knows he has the condition and is equally frantically looking for a cure; but he has not told his new wife, June, what the matter is. So for her there are things screaming to be said, which her husband is refusing to share with her.

It is interesting that the second half of the lyrics of the song 'Trouble Every Day'

are deferred from the beginning to the end of the film. Almost exactly half of the song is used as 'Opening Titles' – and serves that function of playing over the opening credits; but for the closing credits, the whole song, this time given its eponymous title, plays in full. The tone of the second half of the song is slightly different: Staples sings in a marginally higher key, and in a way which is fractionally less mournful, and a touch more hopeful. The words to this second half are:

If I want you back
I could get away
Before the sunshine leaves your eye

But I need to know
How to find a place
Before the days become nights
Before the years become lies

And there's trouble every day

You know that I love again
Please make it start again

There's trouble every day

You know that I'll always hear
The words that you never say

In terms of the scenario, the lyrics relate, like the rest of the music, to what is happening on the image track. For example, in relation to the need to grasp the moment, words from the second half of the song: 'Before the days become nights|Before the years become lies' speak at another level about the nocturnal aspect of the characters' psychotic condition, and about the desperate search for a medical cure under the cloak of legitimate science; 'Before the sunshine leaves your eye' strongly implies how time is running out; and 'You know that I'll always hear|The words you never say' clearly reference back to the situation between Coré and Léo.

Mal (228) identifies the sense implicit in the opening half of the song:

Les paroles insinuent un mal-être intérieur qui ronge un peu plus chaque jour, une douleur invisible et indicible qui perturbe une relation (amoureuse), quelque chose d'indépassable. Séquence d'ouverture qui influence par nature, qui

trouble la lecture du film.¹⁸⁹

However his reading does not fully develop the nuances of the second half of the song, which gives those feelings of inexpressible pain a context in terms of the action. The contrapuntal aspect is that, whereas the music which opens the film goes a long way to setting a mood and suggesting what might be to come, the closing music plays against the audience's awareness of what has happened. In that way, the first half of the song which is repeated becomes re-interpreted in the light of events: repetition is not pure repeating, but a new form of the same. The creative line of such a mode is suggested by Deleuze and Guattari:

Music is precisely the adventure of the refrain: the way music lapses back into a refrain[...]; the way it lays hold of the refrain, makes it more and more sober, reduced to a few notes, then takes it down a creative line that is so much richer, no origin or end of which is in sight (333).

At the same time, however, the addition during the end credits of the second half of the song seems to me to give it a different cast. The air of melancholic hopelessness in the first half alters subtly towards a sense of possible escape: the ideas of 'get[ting] away', 'finding a place' and 'start[ing] again' would have chimed empathetically with Léo's and Shane's hopes at the start of the film; but when placed after the conclusion of the action, the context brings a twist whose contrapuntal aspect injects additional layers of both tragic sadness and over-romanticized hope into the words. These later shifts in suggested meaning are reinforced by the lighter tone of the singing and the phrasing, which also seems to embrace a greater chance of resolution. But it is a part of the dissensual nature of this film that this happens when any limited possibility of escape from the nightmare has gone: Coré is dead; Léo has lost his love and his purpose in life; Shane has given up the search for a cure and is descending on to the path followed by Coré; June's future, as the wife of a sex-murderer who is running out of control, looks bleaker than ever.

In this way, Denis strikes a dissensual note in relation to the film's dénouement.

¹⁸⁹ 'The words suggest a gnawing, steadily increasing, interior sense of unease, an invisible and inexpressible pain which disrupts a (loving) relationship, something insurmountable. An opening sequence whose essence has an impact, which problematizes the reading of the film'.

By giving an unexpectedly upbeat note to the standard carnage at the end of a film in the horror style, she does two contrapuntal things. One is to suggest, however obliquely, that matters may not have been resolved in the conventional fashion. Another is to introduce a line of objectivity: the idea is in the air that these are not, after all, monsters but individuals struggling with hostile circumstances. As Mal (113) observes:

Chaque personnage est pétri d'une part obscure qui s'oppose à un côté angélique. Il n'y a pas de dichotomie simplificatrice – et bien commode – dans le cinéma de Claire Denis: le Mal ne réside pas uniquement chez les méchants qui seraient à coups sûrs battus par les gentils, inévitablement porteurs du Bien. Comme chez Jacques Tourneur monstruosité et angélisme peuvent se mélanger en une seule personnage.¹⁹⁰

Beugnet (164-65) also argues that:

In the godless world of [Denis's] films, evil, drained of its transcendental or subversive overtones, comes closer to conformity and ordinariness. As in *J'ai pas sommeil*, the strangeness of the monstrous portrayed in *Trouble Every Day* feeds on the banal [...] in *Trouble Every Day*, the transgressor is a tragic figure, beset by irrepressible cravings, but tormented by the horrifying nature of his or her desires.

My argument is accordingly that the director's purpose in separating the two halves of this song and deploying them in the way she does is of a piece with other occasions when there is an implicit plea to the audience not to dismiss characters as types, but as examples to be considered, and whose motivations, intentions, and future actions should be assessed accordingly. Read in this way, *Trouble Every Day* is no more a celebration of, or knee-jerk revulsion at, monsterdom than *J'ai pas sommeil* is a celebration of, or knee-jerk revulsion at, gay granny-killers.

'Houses'

The second tune on the soundtrack is called, appropriately, 'Houses' and is heard initially with footage and sound of a plane (implicitly that of Shane and June) landing, but mainly over shots of suburban houses, finishing up with the

190 'Each character is steeped in an obscure element which is set against an angelic aspect. There is no simplistic and convenient dichotomy in the cinema of Claire Denis: Evil is not found exclusively in villains destined to be brought down by the confident and certain strikes of the good guys. As in Jacques Tourneur, monstrosity and the angelic can merge in a single character'.

one where Léo and Coré live, while Erwan (a neighbour and future victim) watches. It consists of extended string chords underlaid by double bass and rim-stick drumming, hinting at the suppressed longing and the ticking of a time-fuse. Denis uses the whole of this short piece, lasting just under a minute. 'Houses' works on a number of levels. The mixed longing and suspense implicit in the tune play empathetically alongside the images of surveillance, suggesting that prurience may turn into some kind of intervention. In this it anticipates the scene where Erwan, accompanied by his friend Ludo, succumbs to the overwhelming desire he feels for Coré and breaks into the house. But, contrapuntally, the music also figures the reversal of roles which will take place when Erwan and Coré meet. In engagements with Coré, the hunter always finds himself to be the hunted; whatever the strength of Erwan's desire, it is as nothing to that of Coré, and the film will steadily reveal the extent to which her existence is like that of a caged animal.

This music accordingly plays in an ironic vein: the character has no clue of the risks ahead, but the audience has already had a foretaste of the things of which Coré is capable, even if it is not clear yet exactly what happened in that first encounter with the truck driver. In that respect, the music has a retrospective quality: we are only shown their meeting, followed by Léo's arrival to tidy up the scene; so I suggest 'Houses' can be interpreted also as an after-commentary. The truck-driver looking for some easy action was in exactly the same position as Erwan in that he had no idea that he was the one at risk, and the music offers a kind of belated warning, necessarily ineffectual. A much stronger presentation of counterpoint comes out when this piece of music is considered alongside that part of the image track which shows the houses to which its title refers. The apparent normality of the suburban setting will be belied by the extremes of the action of the film. In part, this can be read as a nod by Denis to the style of film which she is adapting, in which the commonplace is often emphasized in order to heighten the impact of the shock/horror when it arrives.

But more crucially, this is another example of how the director blends visual and

sonic elements into a counterpoint which challenges received ideas. As with *J'ai pas sommeil*, *Trouble Every Day* seems to ask the question: how is a monster defined? Coré does not live in Gothic surroundings, but in an ordinary house, with a loving husband. The tensions implicit in the musical structure of 'Houses' therefore connect to a condition which has been visited on her, as opposed to a trait which might be assumed to be congenital. In other words, she cannot simply be assumed to be inherently and inevitably bad. Once again, the dissensus inherent in Denis's film surfaces with this challenging of received assumptions.

'Maid Theme'

There follows a relatively long interval without music (almost ten minutes) before 'Maid Theme' plays. This is another short track of just under two minutes, again used in full by Denis. It begins alongside footage of the chambermaid, Christelle, who plays a significant part in the film. We have already seen her, carrying the guests' luggage and making the bed in their room; at those points there was no music: she was just a functionary. Now, however, she gets an introduction in her own right through the music: she is shown pocketing spare jars of jam, changing in the maids' basement, washing her feet. The viewer is introduced to her territory, her attitude to her work, and to her body – all things which will be of relevance – and the stripped-down music, a simple piano figure which only alters by changing key, accompanied by a metronomic clicking beat, and which hints, as with 'Houses', that something is in the air and that the clock is ticking down. That sense is added to by a brief shot of the bedroom corridor, then footage of Shane on the bed, masturbating. These images connect Christelle implicitly with Shane and with sexual activity, and the music endorses this linkage by running her theme over into the bedroom scene before the piano fades under the sound of the shower running in the bathroom, while Shane's exertions are completed with the accompaniment of the ticking beat.

In the arrival scene, there was a visual sense of unease shown on the faces of

both Christelle and Shane; June was excluded from this association: she is the innocent bystander. The uncomfortable scene between the three of them had no music – whatever the potential, things were for the moment sterile; relationality was merely a prospect. It is only now that the proximity between Shane and Christelle is given significance by the linkage of 'Maid Theme'. For this later scene the two women are presented, visually, in analogous fashion by parallel editing. We see the legs of June in the shower, and we see Christelle putting her feet in the washbasin. At this stage, June is directly next door to Shane, while Christelle is floors away in the basement. However, this piece of visual counterpoint is reversed by means of the music. The percussive ending to 'Maid Theme' emphasizes the sexual distance between Shane and his wife: each is partly or completely unclothed, but their activities are quite separate; the ticking sound has an ominous sense for their relationship. But Shane and Christelle are made complicit by the music. The maid's face is shown in close-up, with a brooding, almost predatory quality before the camera switches to the upstairs corridor, and then to the bedroom with Shane. Desire is in the air for each of them and the musical linkage endorses this: Shane and Christelle conduct a kind of flirting, or mutual stalking, in which music has a part to play.

Rémi Fontanel (137) suggests a kind of extra-sensory linkage between the two: 'comme si la jeune femme ressentait au plus profond d'elle-même la présence lointaine de l'américain'.¹⁹¹ This carries cadences of the super-heightened sensibility of Roderick Usher, who can hear his sister scrabbling to escape from her coffin, hinting at the connections between the climax of *Trouble Every Day*, of Poe's novella, and that of Roger Corman's film (*The Fall of the House of Usher*, 1960). These fleeting but significant nods to the *grand guignol* ambiance which Denis's film subverts carry through contrapuntally to the subtle linkage through music which she makes, as opposed to the full-on orchestral underscoring in Corman's film.

There is a further level of counterpoint connected to the musical thread spun between Christelle and Shane. When we see Coré, who has escaped from the

¹⁹¹ 'as if the young woman feels in her deepest self the distance presence of the American'.

apartment, walking along an embankment in predatory mode, the footage of her is without music, but when the film cuts to shots of Léo speeding home and discovering her break-out, interspersed with cuts of Erwan and his friend, snooping as usual, the music which goes with these scenes is a brief repeat snatch from 'Maid Theme'. This new triad substitutes Coré for Shane as the person on the prowl; Erwan for Christelle as the one displaying a prurient interest; and Léo for June as the concerned third party. On this later occasion, the connection between predator and potential victim is less explicit, but the musical linkage with the earlier deployment of 'Maid Theme' offers a suggestion of the similarities in situation. The scenes also work as a further troubling of simplistic ideas of blame and stigma: Christelle and Erwan – like the anonymous truck driver at the start of the film – are looking to step over a moral line; to that extent, each of them carries a degree of complicity with the unpleasant end which is in store, as implied by the musical read-across.

'Room 321'

In one of the numerous understated examples of mirroring in this film, we first see in one scene Shane contemplating June's naked body in the bath; the tension in his silent, enigmatic observing of his defenceless wife is resolved by a loving embrace. Correspondingly, a little later, after Léo has cleared up the latest atrocity site, we see the couple back at home: Coré's naked body is being carefully and lovingly washed clean by Léo, after which he caresses her gently. Empathy between the situation of the two men, each doing his utmost, in his own way, to protect his partner, is conveyed visually. The soundtrack intervenes later during this sequence, and its effect is to link, contrapuntally and transversally across the two couples, the behaviour of Coré and Shane. First, musical silence is maintained while Léo digs a makeshift grave, and continues during footage of Coré sitting in the van and silently mouthing words. The scene then cuts to a shot of the corridor outside Shane and June's bedroom and the camera zooms slowly on to the door and its number, recalling the corridor shot which was a prelude to the earlier visual and musical linkage between Shane

and Christelle. This footage is accompanied by the arpeggiated opening notes of the track 'Room 321'. A dissolve takes the viewer inside to Shane and June in bed. Shane is restless and lights a cigarette as the track continues.

This piece of music is different in tone – maracas and discordant horn harmonies – and carries a sense of the restlessness felt by Shane, together with a tone of ominous, inevitable anticipation. Underlying the visual links between the two men are the indications of what is at stake: Léo's hand in the blood-stained water associates implicitly with Shane's reveries of blood, and with the blood at the murder site and afterwards on Coré's body. Contrapuntally, the care represented in the action shown by the two men for their partners is set against the image and sound tracks which cross-cut to the two killers, Shane and Coré. 'Room 321' continues to play over scenes of Erwan in bed, awake; June asleep; Shane sleepless on the hotel balcony or at the window watching. These three characters will not meet together, but they form another relational triad, comparable to the ones connected by 'Maid Theme'.

This is one of the longer pieces on the soundtrack at just over 4 minutes, and Denis uses almost all of it. The inherent surging in and dropping out of the instruments fits perfectly with the restive nature of what happens on the screen, the image track continually cutting between scenes, sometimes only for a matter of seconds. A few solitary bass notes around the middle of the track accompany brief shots of the windows of Coré and Léo's house and of Erwan, thus offering another musical hint of the fate in store for him.

There is visual counterpoint in the images: Erwan is in bed, like June, but unable to sleep, like Shane. The implied similarity of circumstance between them is tightened by the relationship formed by the shared music, which simultaneously points, by its own dislocated nature, to the bodily damage ahead. 'Room 321' comes to a conclusion with the arrival for the night shift of Christelle (probably the event for which Shane has been waiting). The closing notes of the track carry a heavy weight, since they coincide with the sensuous

goodbye kisses she gives her boyfriend and accordingly look forward, contrapuntally, to her coming fatal sexual encounter with Shane.

'Computer'

This seems to be a flashback, as we see Shane waking from a doze. He then opens his laptop, looks at information about the elusive Léo and then apparently goes into reminiscence about the scientific experimentation camp in Guyana where they were together. With this plays the next piece of music, of just under two minutes, most of which is used, called 'Computer'. It serves as a kind of interlude (and we are at about the midway point of the film). The music is less menacing or anticipatory in tone: slow and steady – piano chords, the occasional double-bass note and a plucked sound resembling a harp, with a fluting keyboard coming in from time to time. There is a faintly exotic flavour to this, as suits the connection with the Caribbean. The sound of Shane's phone cuts into the music as he makes an appointment at the laboratory. Linkage is implied, without any particular suggestion of immediate consequence.

The bells of Notre Dame

The soundtrack then cuts abruptly to the clang of bells in line with an image cut to the façade of Notre Dame. The ostensible light-heartedness of this scene, with Shane clowning around playing the monster, is counterpointed by a series of much more sombre references. The tortured shapes of the eroded gargoyles offer a commentary on the film's preoccupation with monstrosity, pain, and anguish. Shane's gestures also recall both the scene where Coré, on the look-out for prey, raises her arms above her head with a kind of growl of frustration, and also the one where June, leaving their hotel room, raises her arms to put on her hood. The contrapuntal associations are clearly suggested: Shane's nature to women in general is predatory – akin to that of Coré towards men; but he tries to be a normal loving husband to June. The continuing sound of the bells

while he pretends to menace his wife connect him to Hugo's famous monstrous outcast. But there is more counterpoint involved here: the film has recently suggested strongly that Shane's ambition and greed were at the bottom of his (and Coré's) contraction of their illness. However unintentional the outcome of his actions, he does not share Quasimodo's innocence. The only sense in which the cathedral is a refuge for him is as a brief respite from his bloody urges.

'Notre Dame' – the music

Scored music then replaces the bells. 'Notre Dame' is hauntingly sad – strings reprise in slower tempo the motif of 'Trouble Every Day' with variations, augmented with piano or harp phrases. It only lasts for a minute, including very brief pauses which resonate with the visual hints of the relational fissures which are beginning to appear in the lives of June and Shane. It plays first as June stands between large gargoyles and removes her scarf; this is a vivid green, an unusually bright colour for her, and when we see it floating away over the Seine there is a strong sense that this is the point at which her loss of innocence begins. She and Shane exchange uneasy glances while the music continues, as it does over a cut to the pair in bed back in their hotel room, where Shane says that he would never hurt her. The music itself conveys no menace, but its mood of romantic regret has here for me a strongly empathetic quality – both with June's feelings and with Shane's concern for her well-being.

Contrapuntally, the film cuts to Erwan and his friend Ludo, who are breaking into the apartment where Coré is contained. For this cut, 'Notre Dame' runs over at the beginning. Its presence here reminds the viewer that romance and tenderness have their counterparts in sexual violence, and that Shane's efforts to compartmentalize his life are suspect. The few seconds of music give way to incidental sound – breaking of doors and window and passing traffic. The connective factors offered by the music have now become lost with the urgency of desire.

'Killing Theme'

It is only when Erwan gets to Coré and they start to make love that music returns. This is 'Killing Theme', a number of just over 3 minutes, used in full. It begins with a tapping percussion, slowly but gently increasing in volume for nearly 30 seconds; ominous double-bass chords at low register; then the melody opens and the piece fills out with strings, piano, and horns, dropping back to solo cello before returning to fuller instrumentation, then finally fading out.¹⁹² The percussive beginning coincides broadly with the foreplay; the bass lines come in just after Erwan has entered Coré and she is getting down to serious business. The strings crescendo and rise in pitch – not synched but in line with the intensity of sexual fury, and the piece ends on a dying fade when the climax is over. Musically, 'Killing Theme' is the most complex piece in the soundtrack, as well as the most lyrical. The instruments play more extended figures than the brief interpolations elsewhere typical of the score. In essence, this is a romantic piece of music, and in this respect runs counter to the image track. It is in the lower-register strings, especially at the start, that the indication of a darker mood is present.

The nature of this track reflects the relationship between event and music throughout the film, problematizing questions of monstrosity, sex, and love. In this scene, it allows the question to be raised about the true nature of Coré's sexual engagements. These are not – judging by this example – full-on assaults from the outset. They involve an element of seduction, and clearly Erwan receives a significant amount of pleasure at the outset from Coré's caresses. As things come to a climax, it is possible to read events as if Coré's violent actions are a reaction to her being insufficiently sexually satisfied (as evidenced by her slaps of encouragement and her post-coital nuzzlings). On this reading, she is not so much a full-blown, calculating murderess as a woman driven to extremes by her hyperactive sex drive. Laura McMahon (132) refers to her attempts to

192 On the score album, an alternative version is offered. This is broadly the same, except that towards the end the strings take on a lush tone, more typical of standard cinematic emphasis and resolution.

revive Erwan as: 'a bid for absolute communion, refused in death', arguing that this implied 'rejection of fusion' is matched by 'the slipping away of the film from the viewer's appropriative or comprehending grasp'. But, by playing in counterpoint to the bloody maulings on the image track, the music makes a connection for the viewer between what Coré wants and what she does. One of the central contrapuntal issues of the film is the desire on her part for a kind of reciprocal affection which is frustrated by the strength of that desire.

'Taxi to Coré'

From this point on, as the action moves inexorably forward, music is only absent for a few minutes at a time. 'Taxi to Coré' is a short number which plays over Shane's journey to the house. Its title carries on the connective links between them. We should perhaps remind ourselves that the two of them meet only once in the film, and that up until that climactic moment the association is only made by means of visual and aural bridges. McMahon (130) points out a specific instance of this:

In the middle of this sequence [the encounter between Coré and Erwan], the film cuts to a shot of Shane waiting alone in a café, reminding the viewer of the unavowable relation which binds him to Coré (the 'relation without relation' that [...] the mechanics of film editing are so apt for suggesting).

This implicit relationship is furthered by the music: 'Killing Theme' plays there without a break across the visual cuts away and back. 'Taxi to Coré', which acts as a prelude to their actual coming together, comprises a long cello sustain with violin harmonies, accompanied by a bass figure augmented by pizzicato. It has a kind of gentle, almost stately rhythm, which conveys the inevitability of the imminent encounter, while continuing the running vein of regretful longing.

It actually begins to play with footage of Coré, blood-stained and walking about in front of a wall which is so smeared as to resemble a kind of painting.¹⁹³ This is the death scene to which Shane is heading. Contrapuntally, it will also be the

¹⁹³ The vivid broad strokes of this nightmare canvas seem to me to have a resonance with the work of Francis Bacon, invoked by Denis in relation to *J'ai pas sommeil*: 'I thought that the hotel rooms should be reddish-pink, so flesh looks raw-like. Then I found out this idea for reddish-pink flesh was not my own invention. My idea had come from Francis Bacon's paintings', *Jump Cut* 40, p.72.

scene of Coré's own demise. As the music continues, we are given a brief recapitulation of events so far, in anticipation of the final series of dénouements. We see Coré, covered in blood and Shane in pursuit of his mission. The taxi journey offers a reminder of the beginning of the film, recalling the track 'Houses' with its shots of ordinary suburban dwellings. The music stops with Shane's arrival, and there is a short period, of less than a minute, while he looks around and finds his way indoors.

'Coré on Stairs, Love Theme'

We share with Shane the view of Coré descending the stairs. When she is about halfway down, we hear the start of 'Coré on Stairs, Love Theme'. This is probably the most beautiful music in the film; it comprises an extended revisiting of the main musical themes, which are harmonized into one flowing track, picking up all the ideas of desire, hope, and regret which have featured. The music embraces a number of issues: Coré's wish to make an end of things – lighting the match which will fire the house; her pleasure at seeing Shane; her attempted attack on him; and his strangling of her. As with 'Killing Theme' the beauty of the music plays in counterpoint to the sordid and murderous actions shown. It accordingly points to a complex of affective responses. In terms of regret, it empathizes with the sad state of Coré's life in particular, and also suggests Shane's feelings of responsibility for what has happened to her. In terms of desire, the meeting of friends is quickly contradicted by Coré's attempt to make Shane her final victim. However, contrapuntally, there is no sense that Shane reciprocates in this respect: there is no sexual contact involved in his killing of Coré. A further flash of counterpoint suggests itself here: because she is not one of his sexual victims, his withholding of himself from her partially mirrors his protection of June from the strength of his desires.

As far as the action is concerned, the music synchronizes with events. The spaced opening couplets reflect Coré's hesitant progress down the stairs. They change to triplets with more of a flavour of suspense as Shane watches her

from his hiding place and waits to see what she will do. The introduction of plucked strings cue Coré's striking of the match, and play as a prelude to a brief cut to Léo on his bike, yet again coming late to a murder scene. The music fades below the noise of the bike and resumes shortly after the scene cuts back to Coré and Shane, hugging. It continues to play as the strangling takes place, contributing an ambivalent flavour: if she is getting what she deserves (rough justice), then Shane is acting as society's avenger; if she is getting what she wants (death), he is playing a sympathetic part in putting her out of her misery. Did he intend the latter, or was he just acting in self-defence? The music accommodates itself to all of these scenarios, playing with the regretfulness of their circumstances on the one hand, but against the unromantic and unlovely scene of two sex-murderers grappling for each other's demise.

The deeper notes of the cello come in as the flames rise, and we see Léo for the last time, looking at the mayhem. Coré's wish (and action in starting the fire) to end it all can be read in part as incidentally taking Léo out of danger; Shane's efforts to protect June from his irresistible urges are evidence of his love for her. In those senses, this love theme connects empathetically to the two relationships. As the scene cuts to the hotel bedroom, the fuller, lush string harmonies come into play, empathizing with the images of Shane and June finally engaging in sexual contact, but the romantic potential is undercut by uncertainty as to whether this will be the consummation of the honeymoon, or whether Shane will lose the control which he has carefully maintained. In the event, the gentle resolution of the music is brutally counterpointed by Shane's breaking off and rushing into the bathroom to relieve himself. For this, and for June listening outside, there is a musical silence appropriate to the emptiness of what is happening. June once more stands in relation to Coré – not this time linked simply by connection to Shane, but as a woman denied satisfaction. In fact, this is the one occasion on which her husband treats her other than gently, here shoving past her in the urgency of his need. The musical silence continues as he descends the hotel stairs – relating him back to Coré in yet another mirror scene. 'Coré on Stairs, Love Theme' is a counterpart to 'Killing Theme' in the

sense that it provides music in a mode of romantic style, but which plays over a murderous encounter. In this it goes directly and deliberately against the grain of the plot and image track.

'Maid Theme (End)'

The last thematic tune in the film is 'Maid Theme (End)'. This is a re-working of the original 'Maid Theme'. Whereas the first version had the central thread of a clicking, metronomic percussion throughout, this is now entirely absent. The triple-note figures on plucked strings or keyboard, varying and moving gently up and down the scale, remain a feature, but this time there is a very occasional bass figure. The significance of the re-phrasing seems to be that anticipation is coming to an end. The music ends as Christelle takes off her dress. Towards the end of the track, there is a slightly dirty-sounding low-key horn intervention – which synchronizes with Shane's entry into the women's washroom. Fabrice Fuentes' commentary (234) on this piece of music emphasizes this variation: 'l'irruption subite de cuivres vient clore le morceau (renommé justement "Maid Theme (End)"), annonçant la mort prochaine de la femme de chambre'.¹⁹⁴

Fuentes (234-35) uses this example to discuss the function of counterpoint:

Cette présence de cuivres n'est donc pas fortuite: outre qu'elle métaphorise la présence du mal, elle induit aussi l'idée de contrepoint, en distillant une note anguissante à l'intérieur d'un plan à l'ambiance ouatée.¹⁹⁵

I do not go along completely with this interpretation, since my reading of the work of Denis is that it has no interest in representing metaphysical concepts such as Evil. But I agree that this contrapuntal note is striking. It recalls the brass intervention which problematizes the upbeat ambiance at the beginning of *J'ai pas sommeil*. Here, it serves to undercut Christelle's expectation of a fling with the American guest. This music marks the final, and fatal, connection between the two. It begins as we see Shane lurking in the hotel corridor as Christelle comes out of Room 321, where she has been sitting on the bed and

194 'The sudden irruption of brass comes in to close the piece (retitled appropriately "Maid Theme (End)"), announcing the coming death of the chambermaid'.

195 'This presence of the brass is thus not accidental: besides metaphorizing the presence of evil, it also introduces the idea of counterpoint by distilling a harrowing note into the body of a scene with a muffled ambiance'.

smoking a cigarette stolen from the guests. She then goes off with her trolley, finished for the day, and we next see her in the staff basement, going to her locker and starting to change out of her uniform, watched by Shane. The short, two minute piece fades as Shane approaches her and the encounter which follows has no musical accompaniment – only groans of desire and screams of pain.

The fact that there is no music for the physical encounter is interesting. Unlike the coupling of Coré and Erwan, which was attended by the romantic strains of 'Killing Theme', this coming together is presented in a neutral fashion, musically speaking. It is as if the director saw no need for commentary one way or the other. It perhaps confirms suggestions elsewhere in the film that, whereas Coré is still seeing her activities as a form of love, Shane is much more clearly able to separate his love for June from the urges which his condition forces upon him.

It is this degree of subtlety which tends to mark off Denis's use of music from the mainstream. It is not that she is the first director to utilize music in a contrapuntal fashion, but rather that she does not follow the path of directly associating discordant music with a fractured scenario. That is something which, to take one example, Jacques Rivette does in *Paris nous appartient*, which has a Bartok-like score intended to have a jarring effect. Almén and Buhler suggest that:

Rivette intended this music to rub uneasily against the visuals and narrative [...] The non-coincidence of visuals, plot development, and music – the refusal of underscoring to clarify or even to align with narrative or visual elements – pairs off with the music's dysphoric topical associations.¹⁹⁶

This is a strategy often used by David Lynch. McMahon (128) makes a specific audio-visual connection between *Trouble Every Day* and *Eraserhead*:

While corporeal fragments are magnified, sounds (taps dripping, the rattle of the chambermaid's trolley) are amplified too, becoming haptic, recalling the use of sound in David Lynch's *Eraserhead* (1978), in which clanking industrial noises accumulate to create an ominous atmosphere.

I suggest that this connection is even closer than indicated by McMahon, who

196 'Mad Sound and the Crystal Image' in Liz Greene and Danijela Kulezic-Wilson (eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Sound Design* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), p.198.

does not mention the industrially-inflected ambient rumbling which features in *Trouble Every Day*. I return to this point in more detail in Chapter 4.

The work of Denis is not essentially about dysphoric or dystopian states. Even in *Trouble Every Day* the focus on relationality and individual connection remains. The greater level of subtlety is noted in connection with this film by L. Coulthard: 'violence [is prefaced] with music that could be read as romantic, or at the very least pleasing and melodic. [...] Music fades away as the sounds of violence take over, but the effects of the music linger to create an added dimension of intimacy'.¹⁹⁷

Summary

This soundtrack vigorously resists classification. It is empathetic in mood to the dreams of the protagonists, who wish to be cured of their illness and to rediscover love and tenderness – a wish shared by their partners. Against that, the music represents a form of commentary on the contrast between those dreams and the visceral nature of the actual lives of the main characters. In a number of respects it offers a more pointed critique, not least as respects the element of implied complicity on the part of the victims. The truck driver is looking for a quick engagement with what he thinks is a street prostitute; Erwan is desperate to take advantage of a woman whom he believes to be a caged nymphomaniac; Christelle is more than ready for a fling with someone whom she knows to be a recently married man. For these characters, the romantic, emotion-laden music offers a tart commentary on the nature of their respective motivations.

These constantly shifting modes form an essential part of the counterpoint which is seen and, especially, heard throughout the film. This is underscored by Judith Mayne, who in the context of *Trouble Every Day*, says:

197 'Acoustic Disgust: Sound, Affect and Cinematic Violence' in *The Palgrave Handbook of Sound Design*, p.189.

[Tindersticks'] music itself is liminal, in that on one level it can sound quite sweet and romantic, until one becomes entranced by the rhythm of their music (and the rhythm is virtually impossible to resist). And then on another level; it is haunting, pulsating in its own way, suggesting pleasure and sadness at the same time. Their music seems both to accompany the image on screen and to suggest a pull in another direction (p.11).

The contrapuntal use of music allows Denis to present a narrative undriven by dialogic explanation which examines a wide spectrum of aspects of relationality around love, caring, and sexual drive. *Trouble Every Day* is of a piece with the interest shown in, for example, *J'ai pas sommeil*, *L'Intrus*, *Les Salauds*, *White Material*, and even *35 rhums*, as to how, and why, determination can become obsession and take people to the brink, or across the border, of what is regarded as acceptable behaviour. The controversial subject matter and its presentation challenge norms of cinematic content. The shadings between the binaries: of good/evil; innocent/conniving; blameworthy/sympathetic; are supported by the musical interventions. This effect – of fluid distance with regard to the music – is highlighted by Fuentes (235), in whose assessment it operates both in contrapuntal and centripetal ways:

Ce double usage contrapuntique – instrumental (un instrument fait contrepoint avec d'autres – et visuel (la musique fait contrepoint avec les images) – sollicite une propriété de clivage fluide de la musique qui transite à travers des segments filmiques à la teneur dramatique différente, selon le principe des vases communicants, de sorte à ne point altérer l'homogénéité de l'ensemble et entretenir un équilibre consonnant.¹⁹⁸

The elements of counterpoint provided by the music, the ambient sounds, and the silences contribute to the dissensual nature of the film. Those sonic aspects, which at the same time give the film a consonance, while in particular aspects playing sharply against issues of character and scenario, come out strongly in *L'Intrus*, the next film under consideration.

L'Intrus

L'Intrus offers a multivalent perception of the main character and his actions,

198 'This doubly contrapuntal use – instrumental (one instrument counterpoints others) – and visual (the music counterpoints the images) – calls forth a quality of fluid cleavage from the music which delivers across the filmic segments a differing dramatic content, along the principle of communicating vessels, in a fashion which in no way derogates from the homogeneity of the whole but rather maintains a consonant equilibrium'.

from the individual perspectives of family, neighbours, medical staff, industrialists, political contacts, avengers; and in a variety of settings: in Jura and Polynesia, on land and water. The film scenario is unusual for Denis in that there is neither a dominant relationship nor an immediately apparent web of interrelationship. Instead, the protagonist is presented at the centre of a contrapuntal assemblage, in which the soundtrack plays a significant part. Jean-Luc Nancy (Vecchio, 148) describes the film's construction in musical terms: 'the film's editing, full of ellipses and its photography, the wide shots and cut-up sequences [have] the rhythm of a startled, syncopated thinking'. Because of the fragmented way in which the music features in the film, my analysis in this case is most closely linked to the movement of the scenario.

Almost all the events take place with direct reference to the main character in contrapuntal fashion, frequently inflected by the music. The arrogance and selfishness of the main character drive his behaviour, which is checked throughout by a series of impasses. The music provides a continual counterpoint by contesting and criticizing the figure of the protagonist as an intrusive element between subordinate characters. The music for *L'Intrus* was written by Stuart Staples of Tindersticks and arranged by Dickon Hinchcliffe. To the director's surprise, Staples did something quite unexpected, centring his score around an atonal guitar loop. Denis says:

Très tôt, j'ai demandé à Stuart Staples une musique avec seulement la guitare [...] Lui était d'accord pour la guitare, mais se méfiait de ce qui pourrait ressembler à une bal(l)ade. Il m'a dit: "I'll be your drill" (je serai ta perceuse). Il n'a écrit que des boucles de guitare.¹⁹⁹

In effect, the composer reversed what he had done for *Trouble Every Day*. In this case, Staples says that he felt that there was so much melody in the images of the film that the soundtrack seemed to require broken rhythms.²⁰⁰

The stridency of the music has prompted a tendency for critics to regard it as

199 'At a very early stage, I asked Stuart Staples for music with just guitar. [...] He went along with this, but was wary of doing anything which would come across as bland. He said to me: "I'll be your drill". He wrote only guitar loops'. Jean-Michel Frodon, 'Trajectoires de *L'Intrus*', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, 601 (May 2005).

200 NFT interview 27 April 2011. <<https://bfiftp.bfi.org.uk/workflow/GET/9U452FZE4MY5CQV2-0000>> [accessed 03/07/2017].

ineluctably hostile. Fabrice Fuentes (233), for example, concentrates on what he sees as its quality of immutability: 'une ligne mélodique immuable perdure, comme pour marquer l'impossibilité d'une projection dans l'avenir ou d'un retour en arrière totalement libérateurs'.²⁰¹ This assessment seems much too narrow. What emerges is a score which simultaneously connects with the broken life of the central character, critiques his actions, and offers a kind of elemental commentary on petty humanity.

The musical score for *L'Intrus* is striking. However, it only makes fragmentary appearances. In typical Denis fashion a variety of other musical elements is added; these too are very brief. But the pattern developed by Denis of an early musical introduction, which applies in most of the preceding films is not followed on this occasion. More in keeping with *Chocolat* and *S'en fout la mort*, it is approaching ten minutes before Staples's music is heard. The score consists of 10 tracks, whose titles are geared to specific scenes in the film.²⁰² However, none of them is used in full on those occasions. Instead, Denis reverts to her more familiar style of sampling extracts. Counting the end credits, the music is heard over fourteen separate scenes – generally in short bursts of between 30 seconds and a couple of minutes. These interventions are characterized by an iterative form which features a swelling keyboard chord, arrhythmic percussion, a clanging looped guitar figure, and occasional plangent trumpet.²⁰³ As with *Trouble Every Day*, the elements of the score are essentially variations on a basic theme. Different emphases are given to the instrumentation for each tune.

This mode of using music extends in *L'Intrus* to the inclusion of silence and speech. There is no music during the opening of the film. Instead, it starts with a woman standing in the shadows, lighting a cigarette, and a voice-over speaking words from Jean-Luc Nancy's eponymous source text. Nancy's words, derived from a sense of lurking internal bodily threat, will be found to have empathetic

201 'An immutable melody line continues, as if to mark the impossibility of a totally liberating projection into the future or a corresponding return to the past'.

202 Released in album form in 2011 as part of the compilation *claire denis film scores 1996-2009*.

203 There is one track on the soundtrack album called 'Closing' which features piano and strings and is entirely out of keeping with the rest of the soundtrack. Presumably the director could not relate it to her film as it does not feature anywhere.

aspects in their relation to the heart condition suffered by both writer and character; and in Nancy's text, dysfunction in the body corporal is broadened out and applied to the body politic and social. But in Denis's film, the literal failing of the heart is transposed in parallel to moral turpitude. Structurally, the film implies an inversion in which the life and conduct of the central character, Louis Trebor, is made a cause of his physical sickness. The opening emptiness, musically speaking, figures Trebor's amorality, and prefigures the later scene where the nemesis figure played by Yekaterina Golubeva tells him that he is not suffering from a diseased heart so much as an absence of one. In this respect, the words and silence gesture to the character's medical situation, while opening the process of moral critique which continually attends him.

McMahon (146-7) argues that crucial to an understanding of the film is an appreciation of the occasions when the withholding of touch is implicitly and visually interrogated. To illustrate this relational view, she points up three particular instance (Trebor viewing Sidney's body; his reaching towards Béatrice Dalle's character; and the scene with the blind masseuse) where the film connects with Nancy's *Noli me tangere* in the specific context of the uncertainty of touch in Titian's painting of the same name. It seems to me that the withholding of music at the start of the film resonates with this line of thinking, mirroring for the listening spectator the absence of the expected aural contact.

After this opening, the film goes, visually and narratively, straight into contrapuntal mode. Two scenes follow: one of the search of a van at a frontier post; the other featuring the domestic arrangements of a young couple with two babies. The couple are the frontier guard seen in the preceding scene and her partner, who will turn out to be the son of the main character. We have here opening examples of fluid distance in the abstract idea of communal boundaries figured in the border scene, and the notion of family represented in a practical context. We are shown the woman working on the front line and the man looking after the children, but we are not told by musical intervention what view to take of these scenes.

Then comes a sudden disruption in the form of footage of a forest at night and people running through trees, across fields, and climbing a wall. It is not clear whether they are escaping or intruding, but the intensity of this last sequence is underlined by a swelling organ chord and a humming bass. As the image track cuts to the title, in orange letters on a black background, lit by a wandering torchlight, the first strident clang of the looped guitar cuts in, in synch. This is taken from the first track on the released score, called 'Opening'. The music is accordingly performing the intrusion which is the film's subject matter. But simultaneously, it mimes sonically the growing pressure and the jarring implosion of a heart seizure, something central to the film's action and to its source text. This scene, with its attendant music, lasts for less than a minute before we return to more pastoral material – landscape, stream, bird calls. This is to be the fluid pattern of the film: the various aspects of intrusion which will be examined in the scenario are punctuated at regular intervals by contrapuntal music and other sound. The effect is to include viewers in what is happening on the screen by administering to them these repeated musical shocks.

Sébastien David (186) summarises the impact of the visual and the sonic in the film in the following way:

L'hypertrophie des sensations que le film produit et communique, à la fois par la bande-son saturée des bruits chamarrés de l'impassible nature et par l'attention portée par l'image aux gestes et aux choses, est le corrélat de la relation du corps de Louis Trebor avec le monde fait de contacts, de touchers, d'étreintes avec les vivants [...], d'abandon silencieux à la symphonie des éléments.²⁰⁴

It is significant that the music does not function in the expected manner of cinema music by underlining the action. For example, a number of things happen in the first quarter of the film: we see the protagonist pursuing his outdoor life in the Jura, swimming, cycling, walking his dogs, during which a number of crises happen: he seems to be under surveillance, he has a minor heart attack, he cuts the throat of a prowler. But none of these events is given music to underscore its significance. It is as if the film is telling us in a

²⁰⁴ 'The hypertrophy of sensations which the film produces and communicates, at the same time through the soundtrack saturated with sounds redolent of the impassive natural world as well as through the image track's bringing our attention to gestures and to things, is the correlate of the relation of the body of Louis Trebor with the world formed of contacts, touchings, clutches with the living [...] of silent abandon to the symphony of elements'.

disjunctive manner that Trebor's life can be expected to be like this. (He is constantly on the watch, and we see at a later point that he has at least two passports – one Swiss and one Ukrainian). When the music does return,²⁰⁵ it is not until nearly 30 minutes into the film. Its effect is to point out that there are things which Trebor cannot control by his actions. It plays first over his concession that he is obliged to opt for a heart transplant.²⁰⁶ It then recurs over a funeral service, fading to privilege the voice of the priest who reads from Revelation 21.6, criticizing those who lead sinful lives. Although we are not told who the deceased is, in linking the two events the music is implying the message that, however people may choose to lead their lives, the ultimate choice in continuing to live or die is out of their hands. These images and the music can also be read as looking forward to the closing scenes of the film, where a juxtaposition is again made between a body in a coffin and the ailing Trebor.

Fuentes (233) suggests a direct stylistic arrangement, where what he sees as the two predominant modes of music correspond to the rhythms of the heart central to the film:

La musique de *L'Intrus* combine des orientations stylistiques à la fois douces et brutales, qui sont autant de mouvements étroitement imbriqués en un va-et-vient incessant: la systole post-rock combinée à la diastole ambient instaurent une ventilation qui oppresse et aère des plans plombés de mystère, instaurant un climat durable et prégnant de hantise.²⁰⁷

I think there is something in this, but it seems out of keeping with how either *Tindersticks* or *Denis* work to think of the music in too formulaic a way.

In between the two passages of the score discussed above, there is a short

205 This is a further sample from 'Opening'. The second piece on the soundtrack album, called 'Binoculars' was presumably written to go with the scenes a little earlier when Trebor seems to be under surveillance by a group in a car during his cycling, and he gets out some binoculars to survey the landscape. That track consists of a sustained chord on a keyboard, with the guitar loop very muted and only coming in occasionally; it seems not to have been used in the film – although footage of Sidney, Trebor's son, out walking with his family is accompanied for 40 seconds by a humming bass sound which could have been sampled from this track.

206 He sends an e-mail in Russian to set up arrangements for paying for a new heart and the associated procedure.

207 'The music of *L'Intrus* combines stylistic orientations at once gentle and brutal, which are so many movements closely imbricated in an incessant coming and going: the post-rock systole combined with the ambient diastole introducing a flux which both bears down on and lightens shots steeped in mystery, bringing in a continuing atmosphere full of obsession'.

scene with Trebor strumming on an acoustic guitar. The initial chords sound to be in the same key as 'Opening' and form a bridge between the two musical phases. The counterpoint of the different instrumentation connects with the disparity of the image track. Trebor's amateur noodlings are a kind of intrusion into the painterly-framed view of the Jura scenery and the natural sight and sound of his dogs playing outside. By contrast, the score music plays against the serious backdrop: the need for medical treatment to keep him alive and the implication that artificial intervention of that kind will be meaningless in the context of a life with an amoral centre thus bracket not only visually but also musically the insouciance of his attitude.

Fuentes (234) reads this in a slightly different way, arguing that:

La progression écran/fosse assure dans ce cas le passage de la réalité à un état de rêverie passager et visionnaire, angoisse d'une mort annoncée où le personnage anticipe en quelque sorte sa propre fin, comme si à une vie désaccordé faisait contrepoint un au-delà cauchemardesque.²⁰⁸

I certainly agree with Fuentes about the menacing tone of the counterpoint. Whether Trebor is whistling in the dark or just behaving with his customary insouciance is a matter of interpretation.

This sequence has resonance for a later one where young men are digging a grave while members of the older generation are singing *a capella*. This has symbolic weight: it is bracketed by footage of Trebor in a critical condition on his hospital bed. In counterpoint to the darkness of his solitude, the digging scene is a communal event: refreshments are being served; people are dressed in very light colours – white and tangerine predominate. The musical silence which accompanies Trebor contrasts with the funeral song. This is also amateur music, but meaningful and semi-formal. We can interpret this juxtaposition as indicating that the music of the film is running out (only two more excerpts from the score to come), just like the main character's life is ebbing to nothing. But the singing at the grave scene is a marker for someone who will be missed.

²⁰⁸ 'The progression from actual playing to background music ensures in this case the passage from reality to a state of fleeting and precursive reverie, the anguish of a predicted death where the character in some measure anticipates his own end, as if a life out of tune is counterpointed to a nightmarish hereafter'.

These musical examples comprise further representations of a certain stylistic tendency in Denis's work to use subtly triangular conjunctions (first noted above in relation to *Trouble Every Day*). This mode does not take the form of simple repetition, but of variations in form and impact.

In a variant from how Denis generally uses music in the film, the next musical extract, appropriately named 'Running Dogs', plays over footage of Trebor driving off and abandoning his canine companions, who run after the car until it outdistances them. This time, the guitar loop is slightly less prominent and has more reverb. It is accompanied by a mournful trumpet phrasing, suggestive of howling. In this, it has a contrapuntal flavour in that it gels both with the situation of the discarded dogs, and with Trebor in its implication that the man of action is confirmed, as suggested by the nemesis figure, as a man with an empty heart.

But from this point the dissensual mode followed by Denis accelerates as the scored music and what is used in the film start to become seriously out of kilter with each other. Following the match between the track 'Running Dogs' and the visual track, the soundtrack had seemed to be settling into a relationship with the film. As we see Trebor, having left his dogs far behind and travelling in the dark on the first leg of his journey, we might reasonably expect to hear the next item on the soundtrack album, which is called 'Night Drive'. This is a short track consisting entirely of clattering drums and cymbal with a broken rhythm. But, perhaps because its implication of the protagonist's life falling apart seemed too obvious an allusion to Denis, it does not feature at all. Instead, what plays sounds like a sample from 'Pusan Snow' whose title relates to a later episode. The clattering drums are present on both tracks, but in addition the organ and guitar parts, missing in 'Night Drive', bring the ambience much closer to the cuts already used for earlier scenes. En route, the headlights of the car pick out, as at the start of the film, people who seem to be making an illegal border crossing, followed by footage of Antoinette the border guard on patrol. The music therefore seems to be playing along partly empathetically with the images of fragmentation and intrusion, but it also re-connects with those early themes in a

self-referential way. It thus serves to highlight once more the idea of Trebor himself as an intruder, rather than just a man whose life is in crisis.

The disjunction between music and image is carried further at their next meeting. This is a figurative scene in which Trebor is dragged along in the snow behind two horses, one of them ridden by the nemesis character who spoke at the opening of *L'Intrus*. The sequence has a blue-tinged, slightly unreal air; its character, and the fact that it cuts to Trebor in a hotel bedroom, give the idea that it is a dream sequence.²⁰⁹ The track on the released soundtrack is called 'Horse Dream', and some empathy with the action might reasonably be expected. It is organ and trumpet-led, with dogs (or more probably wolves) barking and howling in the background. It has a much calmer feel than other numbers, although generically part of the Tindersticks' score. But that track is not used; moreover, the music which plays over the sequence does not appear anywhere on the released album, and is not mentioned in the credits. What we in fact hear over the images of snow, horses, and a trailing body is an oscillating whipped siren effect accompanied by twangy guitar chords with tremolo. There is a slight hint of horn as the track goes into *rallentando* in parallel with the horses slowing to a halt.

This does two things which are not achieved by 'Horse Dream'. First, the tempo and style is much more in keeping with the action which it accompanies. Second, it is clearly distinguished from the rest of the score. In this way, the careful listener is told, musically, that this scene is to be differentiated from what is the actuality of the film. At the same time, the music also keeps up a sense of tension and threat, implicit in the retributive nature of the scene, and endorsed by the nemesis figure telling Trebor that he will never be able to sufficiently pay for what he has done. That effect would otherwise be reduced by the plangent nature of the track intended by Tindersticks for this scene. One starts to get a sense that, for this film at least, Claire Denis did not want Staples's role as composer to be too prescriptive. Her decisions in *L'Intrus* recall what she did with the music in her early films: selecting just the snippets she wanted from a

²⁰⁹ Horses in surreal circumstances will reappear in *35 rhums* and *White Material*.

composed score.

The reversed cross-over, in which the music anticipates Busan²¹⁰ while the images are still in Jura during the night drive sequence, comes into play again with the next piece of music. First we see two hunters dumping the body of what looks to be a young woman of Asian origin in the snow. Her garments are blood-stained, and before long we see an equally blood-red heart also abandoned in the snow.²¹¹ Trebor's two abandoned dogs then run up and start eating the discarded heart. Up until that point, there has only been ambient sound, most notably the barking and howling of wolves. At the point where the dogs start to eat the heart, the music begins to fade up. Since shortly after we see Trebor waking up in a hotel room in Busan, the preceding sequence with its stark, surreal red and white colouring comes across as either a dream or bad memories. But as Trebor is coming round, and the music is building up, there is footage of snow in Busan.²¹²

One might therefore reasonably expect to hear the track titled 'Pusan Snow'. Instead, Denis here uses part of 'Horse Dream'. The album track is nearly three minutes long; what we hear behind the images is roughly the first half, in which the keyboard drone starts imperceptibly and very slowly crescendos, with the occasional soft bass figure and guitar phrase toward the end. The level is kept well down, and operates behind the incidental sounds of animals and traffic. The way the music starts to play in Jura and continues in Busan draws together both locations, linked by snow, and implicates Trebor, who has just had his transplant operation, with its suggestion of criminal behaviour and murder (in Jura) and ethically dubious practices (running over from Jura to Busan). Once again, the use of the music by Denis keeps the multiple aspects of the film in contact with each other, and avoids a structure which is too banal or compartmentalized.

210 I am using the accepted contemporary spelling for South Korea's second city, but have left the use of 'Pusan' in the song title unchanged.

211 These images subtly connect two earlier passages: the two scenes of illegal immigrants, and Trebor's stipulation that he does not want a woman's heart for his transplant.

212 A rare meteorological event, which according to Denis had an impact on the shape of the film, leading to the culminating sleigh scene in Jura. See interview on Tartan DVD release of *The Intruder*.

The next incidence of music is an extraordinary interlude at the centre of the film, which combines elements of comedy with interpolated tunes. Sharp, brightly-coloured footage of a ship ready for its launch ceremony stands out in total contrast to what we have seen so far. McMahon (141) reads this scene as emblematic of the film's interest in 'a more abstract expropriation of the body', arguing that: 'At the ceremony [...] the exploding streamers of the bulbous decoration act like ventricles of the heart, becoming a figure of the body emptying out and opening up to an irreducible outside'. This reading is clearly germane to the central issue of Trebor's failing heart, but the musical aspect, not commented on here by McMahon, offers a further, critical dimension: images of the outlines of the ship and its high-contrast paintwork are accompanied by the sounds of a brass band tuning up; as the band strikes up the fanfare for the launching and the enormous streamer balls discharge their contents of primary colours, the music is temporarily drowned by a loud raspberry-like blast on the hooter. This contrapuntal intrusion is designed to mock Trebor's grandiose sense of himself, and has its reflection in the tailing off of the fanfare into a discordant trumpet chord. The band then goes into a version of 'O Sole Mio'.²¹³ The bathos of this selection, coupled with the words (which effectively claim ownership of the Sun), further underlines the disjunction between the main character's sense of his own importance and the realities of relationality.²¹⁴ There follows a very short medley of jaunty tunes, a brief final snatch of fanfare, and a reprise of the whipping siren sound (first heard in the Jura snow of the horse scene, but here at home in a city context) which carries over into Trebor's meeting with the board of the company from whom he wishes to commission a vessel.

There are elements of polyphony in these scenes: the glorious colours; the work of the docks; the range of music and accompanying sounds – all these elements offer connected snapshots of Trebor's dream of the building of a ship in honour of the son whom he will seek. But, in the ways indicated, the various aspects of the scenes also run in contrapuntal fashion. This counterpoint is

213 Music by Eduardo di Capua and original Sicilian lyrics by Giovanni Capurro. Composed in 1898.

214 It also seems to me that there may be a sense in which the song title invokes the idea of being solo.

brought out in the scene after the meeting with the board of the shipping company. Trebor has achieved his commission and is having a quiet celebration. Some local workers on a bar crawl in their free time notice him as a foreigner and – with unconscious irony – remark that he looks lonely. When they move on, one of them goes to sit with Trebor, shares his bottle with him, and starts to sing. His first song is a snatch of what he calls 'a soldier's song'; this is followed by his professed favourite: Elvis Presley's 'Are You Lonesome Tonight'.²¹⁵ The singer only knows the chorus line, but does a passable version of Presley's deep tenor growl. This snippet works on a number of levels. Most obviously, it is one more example of how Claire Denis deploys music in her films, using her own mental back catalogue. The song also makes a link, via Presley, to the earlier ship scene, because his 'It's Now or Never' (1960, words written by Wally Gold and Aaron Schroeder and set to di Capua's music for 'O Sole Mio') immediately preceded, in his recording history, 'Are You Lonesome Tonight'. These are both love songs, but their respective titles do have some resonance for Trebor's situation.

This scene is notable in *L'Intrus* for its unusual sense of jollity: people are out enjoying themselves. Significantly, Trebor is offered friendship – briefly taken into community – by a complete stranger who is looking for nothing in return. His drinking companion has sensed his solitude and has reached out to him wholeheartedly, partly through the medium of music. It is also not without significance that very shortly afterwards comes the incident where his nemesis tells Trebor that he has no heart. That particular short scene does not have a musical accompaniment, but we hear yet again the whipping siren effect which seems to be associated with Trebor's nefarious activities. The counterpoint therefore works to underline the isolation of the main character.

In a similar vein, the track 'The Purple Sea', one used this time almost in full, plays over footage of the sea around Tahiti displaying almost incredible colours of purple, blue and pink. The counterpoint provided by the music, which is effectively a reprise of 'Opening', is at its fullest: the beauty of the images is

²¹⁵ Roy Turk and Lou Handman (1926). Released by Presley in 1960.

challenged by the cranked-up guitar loop. Trebor's Polynesian dream, we are being told aurally, is going to be no idyll, and the strident music continues to contest and criticize the figure of the protagonist as an intrusive presence in whatever paradisaal location he places himself. But 'The Purple Sea' is not confined only to the subject matter of its title. The track fades up while Trebor's son, Sidney, is reading charred writing by his father, indicating that his sole interest is in the other son he left behind in Papeete. Sidney's distress at this literal and psychological abandonment is symbolized by the Christic wreath he is wearing. The music fades down below traffic noise as we see Trebor about the business of finding his lost son, a project doomed to failure.

The jarring tune accordingly makes a contrapuntal connection between the two sons and once again impugns the behaviour of their father. Two small snippets reinforce these connections in subsequent scenes. First, as we see Trebor in bed awake and restless, the same music comes up again. On this occasion, its tone fits the image in underscoring his inquietude. But any empathetic feel it might have is counterpointed by three loud blasts from a ship's hooter²¹⁶ which bring the cut to a rather mocking close. Second, as Trebor arrives by motor boat, cruising through turquoise sea, the refrain returns. This time it is no more than the sustained keyboard chord which features in most of the soundtrack numbers. Here it offers a fleeting echo of the earlier scene in which the beauty of the tropical seascape is challenged and problematized by the musical intervention. By contrast, later shots of a young man enjoying himself on a board in the bright blue sea and white surf appear without music: the images there say it all and do not need supplementary comment. What is also unstated is the implied visual counterpoint between unalloyed enjoyment of the natural setting and the dubious nature of Trebor's own lifestyle – recalling the similar scene in Jura when his dogs were at play.

For the closing scenes of *L'Intrus* Denis brings score and film back into harmony. The penultimate piece of music in the film is called 'The Black

216 A possible reference to Peter's thrice denial? But in any case a link back to the hooter sounding at the ship launch in Busan.

Mountain'. The scene is one of dark mountains with heavy cloud cover – seen from the ship in which Trebor, in company with his adopted 'son', is travelling with the coffin of his son, Sidney. The music here has perhaps the greatest degree of empathy, offering a tone of much sadder, elegiac commentary on the end of the failed project. It seems to say: 'you were warned, but it's a pity it ended this way'. In this sense, it matches with the dark land- and sea-scape, as well as with Trebor's situation, to which it seems to attribute the inevitable outcome of *hubris*. The pace of the music in 'The Black Mountain' is slightly slower and the keyboards and guitar, with the occasional humming bass in the background, are offset by a series of trumpet phrases, whose quality is more mournful than strident.

McMahon (145) reads this in a Nancean context of immanence:

The scene moves between the material and the immaterial, the real and the transcendental. Combined with a resonant trumpet line overlaying the guitar loop on the soundtrack, the next scene cuts to a prolonged shot of open sea at dawn, as if to figure the ineffable beyond the Ascension'.

I would argue that the unexpected counterpoint of this instrument has a complex aspect. Ostensibly it empathizes with Trebor's immediate situation; it also offers a final statement of the refrain of danger signalled by the music throughout the film; but it is hard not to see the clear brass notes as having a triumphal sound too.

Shortly after, in a final contrapuntal move, an image cut from the ship in the Southern Seas to the Jura forest is matched by a corresponding sonic shift: the sound of the wind blowing across snow-laden trees, followed by the sound of sled runners and dogs' paws, introduces 'Closing'. This is, in effect, a reprise of 'Opening' but with clattering drums and percussion added. The sled driver is a beatific Béatrice Dalle exercising her dogs, encouraging them and laughing from sheer exhilaration. The insistent, driving nature of the music is to a degree consistent with the action portrayed on the image track: this is a scene in which those present fit perfectly into their surroundings. The naturalness of the scenario is in conflict with the threats and concerns expressed up to this point

by the musical score.

However, the intrusive connotations with which that music has been associated throughout the film are no longer present. The visual counterpoint of Dalle's sleigh driver, her black hair contrasting with her surroundings (light-coloured clothing, dogs to match, and brilliant snow for backdrop) offsets the contrapuntal setting of the music: 'Closing' not only plays to a white background, its metonymic appearance here reverses the dark implications which I suggest the music in *L'Intrus* has had for the protagonist, by means of this joyous application to a character whose motives do not come under question.

Mal (260) argues that the impact of *L'Intrus* reaches outwards: 'L'essence du récit se passe hors de la caméra, comme si la représentation excluait l'action'.²¹⁷ This effect is matched by the musical context of the film's ending. 'Closing' runs over from the dog-sled scene into the closing credits. When these are finished, the screen remains black for a further minute and a half while the music track concludes. The music accordingly stretches out well beyond the action, the image track, and even the credits. The augmented repeated refrain implies that Denis has, perfectly in keeping with her usual approach, chosen a (musical) way which offers an element of understanding and sympathy for the failings of the defeated protagonist. But on the other hand, the music declines an implied resolution, favouring instead an ending which, by completing a visual and sonic circle, implicitly re-opens the questions which *L'Intrus* has been raising from the start.

Summary

Dissensus features in *L'Intrus* not so much in relation to a provocative subject or shocking imagery, but in the form of a film whose fragmentary narrative structure offends against canons of linear understanding. Hand in hand with the disjunctive nature of the imagery goes the challenging mode of the musical

²¹⁷ 'The drive of the narrative exceeds the scope of the camera, as if representation were excluding action'.

score: not only challenging in itself by reason of its stridency, nor simply because it confronts the beauty of the cinematography, but also because, in a sense, it pursues the main character, constantly critiquing his behaviour and refusing sonic resolution. In this respect, the musical loop created by Staples presents a synecdochic model of the film's trajectory. I differ here from Martine Beugnet, who describes Trebor in the early part of the film as 'literally blended into his environment'.²¹⁸ From my perspective, the visuals present him as a heterogeneous figure from the outset, and this effect is strongly supported by the intrusive style of the music.

In some ways, it is as if the challenging, disturbing nature of Jean-Luc Nancy's text *L'Intrus* has infiltrated the making of the film. As Beugnet (40) puts it:

Between mind screen and sensory screen, in fragmented sequences accompanied by syncopated drum beats and the outlandish, lingering sound of electronic sound waves and single guitar chords, images then offer themselves as an evocation of a physical and mental process of self-estrangement, which Nancy's words had already conjured up with cinematic force: 'I end up being nothing else than a flimsy threat; from pain to pain and from strangeness to strangeness'.

Despite the long and figurative transposition which she made of the book, Denis has said that she always had the sense of not going beyond what Nancy had written. That is patently not the case, but the determination of her drive to represent the sense of his text was clearly a powerful one (she claims to have persuaded the author that everything in the film was in the original).²¹⁹ The sharpness of her vision extended to an equally determined and uncompromising view of the appropriate musical treatment. There is certainly a difference here in the extent to which she has varied from the usually highly collaborative engagement with members of *Tindersticks*. In this case, the composer felt a contrapuntal score was needed. Mal (149) points up the contrapuntal essence of the music, arguing that Staples's contribution is imagined from the interior of the images, never as a decorative element whose content simply underscores what the images and other sounds are indicating.²²⁰

218 'The Practice of strangeness', *Film-Philosophy* 12.1, p.37. Subsequent reference in text.

219 See interview on Tartan DVD release of *The Intruder*.

220 'Sa partition est pensée depuis l'intérieur des images, jamais comme élément décoratif dont la teneur surlignerait simplement ce que les images et les autres sons racontent'.

But Denis used the score in her own way, to some extent contrapuntally to Staples's intentions. In my next, and final, analysis in this chapter, the operation of counterpoint in *35 rhums* will appear in a very different mode.

35 rhums

35 rhums is a film in which harmony and disharmony are interlaced to contrapuntal effect. The action begins at the point where the loving, long-standing relationship between father and daughter is just starting to be tinged with contrariety. The hitherto solidarity of their harmonious life together is about to be challenged by a series of intrusive, disjunctive events. In relational terms, the film opens out both the changing attitudes of the two towards each other, and the shifts in their relations with the people around them. The film is structured around the motif of the railway, which infuses the working lives and the social lives of the characters. Trains bring people together, separate them, even cause death. In this respect the railway parallels the usual relational moves in a Denis film of shifting proximity and distance. Those contrapuntal modes feature in the soundtrack – a mix of composed score by Tindersticks and interpolated items from the director's eclectic personal playlist. This mixture makes it most apt to consider the music in terms of broad applications.

Trains and music

Counterpoint is present at the outset of this film. *35 rhums* begins with a brief opening shot of the moon shivering in a watery reflection, then as the credits start to come up, 6 seconds in, the music is cued. 'Opening' plays in full: first, while the credits roll – a slightly eerie fluting sound, supported by ghostly string and woodwind effects; then, with a cut to footage of railway tracks seen from the driver's cab, the tune changes to a much jauntier, typically French-sounding style, which goes into a rollicking funfair-like phrasing before the entry of a piano.²²¹ In some respects, this is a reversal of the opening of *J'ai pas sommeil*.

221 In fact, the instruments credited (apart from guitars and percussion) are: flute, ondes martenot (an electronic keyboard instrument with a slide effect, a relative of the theremin), melodica (a reed instrument with a keyboard) and Fender Rhodes (a kind of electric piano, with guitar characteristics).

In that earlier film, music in a jaunty style was contradicted by an ominous brass intervention.

Rosalind Galt²²² interprets the railway scenes as indicating a fragile tension in the lives of the characters:

We move from the state visibility enabled by split-screen station surveillance cameras, to the control room and its map of the train system; from a direct view of train tracks, we then move to a view mediated by state visibility to the dehumanized managerial view of lights on a grid. The sequence does not end with the abstracted vision of the urban system, but cuts to René's locker, in which he has posted a photograph of a plate spinner [...] an image of frantic, focused labour, the plates spinning on a stick, a system in miniature that the performer can never quite keep up with [...]. This sequence makes visible the structures and systems in which the drivers themselves are embedded, while also hinting at that system's anxieties.

Galt's interpretation of these images is implicit in the musical changes we hear in 'Opening'. However, unlike *J'ai pas sommeil*, an unsettling tone is here struck first, then overlaid with a reassuring but false ambience of normality. The two, stylistically different, segments of this opening number signal, first, that there may be something strange about the scenario to follow, and, second, that we shall have to do with an urban *mise-en-scène*. The two parts of 'Opening' are very much in contrast, musically, and accordingly this counterpoint sets the scene for the contentions which will follow.

Striking a different note, 'Train Montage I' plays primarily over footage of commuter trains by night, seen variously from the driver's cab, outside the train, and inside the carriages packed with commuters on their way home. This track, which also plays in full, comprises acoustic guitar, melodica – mainly in upper woodwind register – and, later on, flute. It has a slightly dreamy, gentle feel and carries a sense of the weary commuters portrayed, but is not especially downbeat. The image track cuts at intervals between the train passengers and the man we shall come to know as Lionel, waiting, smoking, and then setting off on his motorbike. At this point in the film, Lionel has not been introduced to the audience and his demeanour is not especially reassuring. The empathy of 'Train Montage I' tends therefore to be muted as it applies to him in these scenes. It

222 'Claire Denis's Capitalist *Bastards*', *SubStance*, 43.1, p.103. Subsequent references in text.

continues over footage of Joséphine (Jo), seen earlier on the train. The track dies under the sounds of her taking off her outdoor clothes and unpacking her bag.

On first impression, then, this is going to be a film where music features strongly: almost eleven minutes in the first quarter of an hour. That pace slows slightly as scenes of Jo in class and of René's retirement event run without music. Offering a reminder of the title, Lionel's assertion that he won't be doing the 35 rums that night cues another score track. 'Night Train' is another ambient piece, which is heard over footage of the retirement party members on the train home. It features another gentle melody with sounds of keyboards, slightly more insistent bass, and guitar chord changes with a slight tremolo. It displays empathy with the gently tipsy colleagues; but when it runs over to a cut to Gabrielle, who is finishing her taxi stint, the sense of her solitude which is suggested in the basement parking, and the refusal by Jo, whom she meets in the lift, of an invitation to dinner, sit contrapuntally against that congeniality of musical style.

By contrast with the railway scenes, the domestic lives of the characters are rarely accompanied by music. That may be because Denis wanted to convey a sense of flatness and of routine, for which no musical subtext seemed necessary. When the scenario returns to a railway context, fairly late on in the film, the score music comes back. This track is called 'René's Death', a slower, mournful tune, with a plangent melody, upper harmonica register and broken phrasing which halts at regular intervals. Although the track plays out in full, there is a break as Lionel goes to inspect a body on the track and realizes that it is René. His shock is conveyed by silent close-up, showing the intensity of emotion on his face. The music returns with a shot of the lights of the train, followed by a cut to Lionel coming into the apartment. In this return it conveys what cannot easily be said – the trauma of the event which will keep coming back to haunt Lionel.

Within this sequence is footage featuring one of the surreal dream-like events which are common in Denis's work. On this occasion, we see a horse's hooves running on to railway tracks, and then Lionel riding the horse with Jo.²²³ After a few seconds pause, 'René's Death' cuts back in. This connection has the dual sense of Lionel's reluctance to see Jo leave home and his recognition of its inevitability. On that reading, the image of his 'saving' her on his charger is counterpointed by the plangent tone of the music. Another angle of musical counterpoint is offered by Jenny Munro, who argues that ghost music is implied here in that a father riding a horse with a child he is on the verge of losing inevitably recalls the fable of the Erl-King, and invites the assumption that we will hear Schubert's *Erlkönig*, whereas in fact it is the music of *Tindersticks* which plays.²²⁴

Community and music

Although the thrust of the score music is broadly empathetic, connecting with the ideas of completion, satisfaction, and expectation shown in the images, there is a hint of fractures to come. For example, the guitar arpeggios in 'Opening' which chime with the sense of waiting or concern on Lionel's face as he smokes in the dark. After he and Jo are shown at home for the first time in the film and while they are clearing up after their meal, a song plays on the radio in the kitchen. This intervention is Denis's first variation from *Tindersticks'* score. The number is 'Mèci Bon Dié' (Merci Bon Dieu), a song by Harry Belafonte.²²⁵ This piece of music has a multiple function typical of a Claire Denis film. Ostensibly, it is a light-hearted piece of calypso – suitable for the post-prandial mood of father and daughter. Its lyrics are uplifting, essentially thanking God for good things received, and in this respect it is entirely consonant with the image track. But there are contrapuntal considerations.

First, the song – sung by Belafonte in a Haïtian creole – introduces the idea of

223 Cf. comparable scenes involving horses in *L'Intrus* and *White Material*.

224 Unpublished paper given at European Cinema Research Forum (July 2012): 'Who rides there so late? Using Riffaterre to read the silenced sonic intertext in Claire Denis' *35 Rhums* (2008)'.
Using Riffaterre to read the silenced sonic intertext in Claire Denis' *35 Rhums* (2008)'.
225 On his first album, *An Evening With Belafonte* (1957).

community, in the warm, family sense, but also in the sense of foreignness: the idea of a social enclave in the heart of the city, whose dreams are tinged with wistfulness in relation to thoughts of the Caribbean. As the film will make explicit later on, this notion is crucial to René's death. So there is a distancing element here: the music seems to be saying something about the situation of these characters, and suggesting their relation to a wider scenario. Second, and crucial to the plot of the film, is a doubled aspect of mixed relational considerations, which are strongly present in the music. As the radio plays, we see Noé climbing the stairs in the dark. He stops on the landing, looks at the closed doors of the apartment with obvious feeling, and hears the music. The visual presentation of his exclusion is contrapuntally underscored by the music, which by virtue of language and geographical context suggests that he is not in the same world. The music cuts symbolically as he goes upstairs to his own apartment. Music serves here as a figure for the exclusive nature of the relationship between father and daughter, and the marginalization of their friends and neighbours. There is a fleeting sense of ghettoization here, appropriate to the *mise-en-scène* of the film, which is concerned with a relatively closed, internalized community.

When the third track from the score, 'Night Time Apartments', is cued, this again ostensibly plays to type, alongside footage of the apartment block, its inhabitants, a neighbouring block, and a passing train. The music sounds variously as a piano, a high-pitched oboe-like woodwind, and a clavier. The tone is dreamy and light, once more quite in keeping with the easy evening air of the events depicted. It continues to play over a cut to a shot of Gabrielle, seen earlier smoking at the window of her apartment, now in her taxi cab during the day. In this way, calm and reflection is invested with a contrapuntal sense of lack: people in a cityscape on their own, or anonymous as commuters. Gabrielle, like Noé, is isolated from community warmth at a meaningful personal level. As 'Night Time Apartments' fades, it is at once replaced by 'Can't Live Without You', by Sophia George.²²⁶ As with the Belafonte number, this is an upbeat song – this time Jamaican reggae. It is empathetic both to image and

²²⁶ From her 1986 album *Fresh*.

context: it is the sort of lively music that one might expect someone with a driving job to play. But it also anticipates what the film will show us in terms of Gabrielle's feelings for Lionel and Jo's for Noé ('Oh, Boy, can't make it without you...' etc.). There is accordingly an ironic, contrapuntal element to the contrast between melody, lyrics, and dramatic context.

That contrast is underlined when we next see Jo in her apartment, getting ready to shower; the doorbell rings and it is Gabrielle, wanting to talk about concert tickets. Jo has music on: 'Imposter' by Mydoll's, a primarily female proto-punk band from Texas.²²⁷ The air of disconnection shown in the image track is emphasized by the raucous music – a far cry from Sophia George's reggae – and further underscored by the way the music cuts with the shutting of the apartment door in Gabrielle's face. The words of the song are also relevant: they speak of someone not being sure who they are, and of putting on a pretence, a false persona. As far as Jo is concerned, she always seems to be putting on an act, making sure that she does not give too much of herself away. Like her father, she maintains an emotional distance from others. In this way, the music points up that contradictory behaviour of Jo and Lionel – one thing for themselves and, to a certain extent for each other; something entirely different in relation to outsiders.

But it also contrapuntally indicates the cultural generation gap: on the one hand, Gabrielle hanging on to her roots, on the other Jo demonstrating the disengagement of youth with a non-mainstream piece of American music. Ironically, the latter pre-dates the reggae number and presents a contrapuntal crossover, not only in style but also in time frame. There are other resonances to this musical selection. Mydoll's formed in 1978 and was part of the spearhead of the punk music wave: it is typical of Denis to have had a finger on the pulse of a new music form; moreover, the predominance of women in the band came at a time when this was a relative novelty. Intertextually, Mydoll's are the band

²²⁷ 'Imposter' came out as a single/EP in 1982. Subsequently included in the collection *A World of Her Own* (2007).

shown rehearsing²²⁸ in *Paris, Texas* (Wim Wenders, 1984), on which Denis was assistant director.

However, counterpoint is not limited to the arrangement of different pieces of music. Denis also makes strategic use of its absence. In *35 rhums*, once the main elements of the scenario have been established, there is a kind of settling-in period, in which a number of scenes show the different relationships between the characters. The visual interactions are reasonably explicit and attract no musical accompaniment. In some cases, especially those between Lionel and Jo, there is significant dialogue (even if relatively muted in typical Denisian fashion) and we witness one of the many examples of the director's antipathy to mixing dialogue and music. These are empathetic passages which neither attract critical comment nor require underlining. The absence of music is therefore, in my judgement, contrapuntal in the sense of its divergence from cinematic norms which would seek to have music to ensure the audience was in no doubt about what was taking place. In that respect, the omission of the score track 'Lionel Home Drunk' is significant. The slow, slightly melancholy flavour of this tune, with its bassoon-like quality, would have been well suited to the scenario had Denis wanted to endorse it musically, but she chose not to, and I suggest this is for the same, dissensual, reason of avoiding a didactic mode.

After this relatively extended period – almost fifteen minutes – without music, the soundtrack comes to life again almost half-way into the film, accompanying more footage of routine life: Lionel in his train cab; Jo texting to say she will be late home. These scenes reconnect to the central motif of the railway. They are accompanied by a reprise of part of 'Train Montage I'. This runs over to shots of Gabrielle parking her taxi to go into a bar. The sounds inside the bar anticipate the images by a couple of seconds, so there is a kind of sonic cross-over.²²⁹ I see 'Train Montage I' as thus reinforcing the connection between Lionel and Jo, while contrapuntally excluding Gabrielle – by virtue of her non-connection with

228 Performing what was to become the title track from *A World of Her Own*.

229 Shortly before, there is one of Denis's wry humorous tics when Lionel sounding the train hooter is synched with a similar-sounding slide on the guitar fretboard.

the railway (and therefore symbolically her lack of connection in respect of father and daughter). In the bar, Gabrielle encounters first René and then Lionel. After some intense exchanges, the three go their different ways and the film cuts to Jo, working in a record shop. Music is, naturally, playing. What we hear is 'Home' by Basehead,²³⁰ a US slacker-rap band notable for its alternative approach, whose music is hard to classify. The track comes from the 2002 album *DC*. It chimes with Mydoll's in indicating Jo's assertion of her independence – and also recalls the use in *US Go Home* of American music as an indicator of rebellion by a young generation.

This is countered musically by the reprise soon after of Sophia George's 'Can't Live Without You'. As before, this plays on the Hi-Fi of Gabrielle's car. The occasion is an outing to a concert by the four main characters. Gabrielle turns the volume up, indicating the degree of her happiness that the four of them are together 'en famille'. Lionel in particular is unhappy with this assertion and his discomfort is indicated by his asking brusquely for the music to be turned down. This is because, as far as he and Gabrielle are concerned, the music speaks of her unreciprocated feelings for him; he is not a romantic, dreaming of the Antilles – like René – but much more of a pragmatist, happy with his life in Paris (he actually says at an earlier point that his present life, with Jo, has all they need). Their different attitudes to what is playing endorses the emotional gap between them. The doomed nature of the outing is suggested by the car's breaking down, preventing their reaching the concert.

Galt (106) says: '*In 35 rhums*, breakdown becomes a principle of movement and its prevention occurs at a sensual and experiential level'. The sonic context of this is that as Gabrielle tries to get the car re-started, the coughing of the starter motor blends with the reggae's cutting in and out, both finally spluttering to a stop, just like what goes on between Gabrielle and Lionel. This use of music in close synchrony with the action is another example of the director's understated sense of humour. Its contrapuntal aspect speaks to the

230 Aka dc Basehead and Basehead 2.0. The band is presumably a favourite of the director's, given her inclusion of 'I Try' in *J'ai pas sommeil*, as well as other tracks by the band's leader, Michael Ivey.

undermining of Gabrielle's romantic nostalgia – for both 'home' and Lionel.

In the extended restaurant scene which follows, a flurry of music accompanies the underlying emotions and tensions of the characters to contrapuntal effect. To begin with, a cheerful background number plays; this seems to be 'Lountani', credited to Moulaye Diarra.²³¹ Its significance for our purposes is as an example of Denis's practice of implying conflict through counterpoised items of music. This African-derived piece accordingly reinforces the Antillean/American contrast made before by introducing music from another continent, while at the same time offering an oblique commentary on the intrusive nature of the event (Lionel hammered on the door until the restaurant agreed to open for them). It may also be a nod in the direction of the actress playing the restaurant owner, Adèle Ado, who is of Ethiopian/Chad origin. 'Lountani' having served as intro, the music cuts to something with a Caribbean flavour. The recording by composer and singer Ralph Thamar and pianist Mario Canonge,²³² both from Martinique, is 'Siboney',²³³ written in 1929 by Cuban Ernesto Lecuona, a much-recorded love song with a samba rhythm. The words are of a piece with the Sophia George song – dying of love for someone ('yo te quiero|yo me muero por tu amor'). The tempo of the song and warmth of the vocal make it empathetic to the hospitality of the surroundings. It has an irresistible effect on Lionel, who dances exuberantly with Gabrielle, and then more tenderly with Jo.

There are, however, contrapuntal aspects as well. The passionate text of the song raises questions about the appropriateness of Lionel's dancing with someone whom he is normally keeping at a distance (Gabrielle) or with his daughter. As a Cuban song by Martinique artists which does not attach itself directly to any of the characters present, 'Siboney' hints at the uncertainty and intrusion/exclusion at the heart of the relationships in the film, and its derivation

231 Diarra, who is an actor in the film, is also a musician. However, he has no releases in his own right, his output being limited to two songs on compilations of Malian music. Neither of these has the title attributed to this part of the soundtrack. The possibility remains that it was recorded for the film and not otherwise released. 'Lountani' is a not uncommon Malian name – e.g. the singer Lountani Kouyaté – and one of Diarra's released tracks has the title 'Oumou Sangaré' the name of another, well known Malian musician.

232 Canonge, like Diarra, has a role in the film.

233 From the 2005 album *Alma Y Corazon*.

alludes once more to the conflicted nature of René's association with the island of his origin; this time at a remove, as he is not actually there on this occasion. The sense of conflict and exclusion takes an overt tone when Noé comes to cut in. His appearance in shot is cued with The Commodores' 'Nightshift'. This is soul music for smooching to.

James S. Williams²³⁴ sees this scene as representing a smooth transition of affections: 'Everything seems to flow here – a mobile camera opens up the frame and traces the movement of desire, which Lionel sets in motion through a subtle yet decisive act of agency: he gently hands his daughter to Noé [...]'. My interpretation is quite counter to that of Williams, and much more in line with what Jenny Munro²³⁵ argues:

A close-up on Lionel's solemn face as Joséphine and Noé dance shows his unease at the prospect of losing his daughter to Noé; as Lionel then dances with the *patronne*, a close-up on Gabrielle's face shows the depth of her disappointment as she realizes that he does not wish to rekindle their relationship. The juxtaposing shots of the 'performers' with those which show the reactions of the 'audience' is in itself a wordless speech event.

The song 'Nightshift', like Noé, breaks across the mood of 'Siboney' with its growling opening bass line.²³⁶ The introduction of a new style of music – Motown – has provided the vehicle for Noé to cross the accustomed space between himself and Jo, and also to make a breach in the solid front which father and daughter normally maintain towards the rest of the world. Although at first the two maintain a physical distance, this paradoxically suggests greater intimacy: their holding each other at arms' length has a contestatory quality which comes across as very provocative. The words of the song provide a subtext: 'It's gonna be a long night|On the nightshift'. The lyrics of 'Nightshift' extend, implicitly, to cover the range of sexual anxiety displayed in the scene: 'You found another home|I know you're not alone|On the nightshift'. The song carries different significance according to viewpoint, and therefore simultaneously has a close or distancing aspect for the various characters.

234 'Beyond the Other: Grafting Relations in the Films of Claire Denis', in Vecchio, pp.99-100.

235 'Denis, Cavan, Fassbinder', *Studies in French Cinema*, 13.1, p.73.

236 It appeared on The Commodores' album *The Commodores* (1985), and was subsequently a big hit as a single. The song was conceived as a tribute to recently-deceased Marvin Gaye and Jackie Wilson. The melody has undertones of Gaye's 'Sexual Healing'.

But at another level, the genesis of 'Nightshift' refers to interrupted lives and untimely deaths. In addition to connecting to what is happening between the main characters, then, it also looks forward to René's demise.²³⁷ His desire to return to his homeland turns out to be a chimera: his dream, superficially connected with Gabrielle's nostalgia, is counterpointed by her ability to live life in practice, whereas his retirement fantasy crumbles into dust. The notion of 'going home' is a mask to cover his anxiety about having to retire, and he is unable to either go or stay. The Antillean music establishes a thread of sympathetic connection between the two, while, contrapuntally, the North American music touches on similarity (as taxi and train driver, they both do nightshifts) only to indicate their respective traumas.

Williams (102) aptly draws attention to the parallel between the restaurant scene and the Noh performance in Yasujiro Ozu's *Late Spring* (1949), one of Denis's source texts: in both films these scenes come at a critical point of realization of separation between father and daughter. In Williams's reading, Denis truncates her scene 'to prevent the risk of unnecessary Ozu-like melodrama'. But this implication of melodrama conflicts with Williams's earlier line about unproblematical shifts in relationality. The films of Denis tend to suggest and imply rather than go for full-on dramatization; the underlying tensions are nevertheless there, figured in the way Munro describes, by the close-ups and the moves away of the camera, and especially brought to attention by the shifts in the music.

Lübeck

As part of Denis's dissensual mode of filmmaking, the film cuts without warning to Lionel and Jo driving on a German motorway and arriving at Lübeck. The impact on the viewer conveys something analogous to the dislocative effect on the characters of René's suicide. Through this journey the next track on the score, called 'Lubec', plays. However, although there is no visual or dialogic

237 In my view, the use of 'Nightshift' has much greater resonance than Denis's original choice: 'Little Red Corvette' by Prince (see *Daily Plastic*, 27 February 2011, <<http://www.dailyplastic.com/20009/03/interview-claire-denis-on-35-shots-of-rum/>>[accessed 09/05/2017]); the latter certainly conveys sexual anxiety, but would have lacked these other nuances.

indicator of what is to come, the music has anticipated by starting to play as Lionel and Jo eat while still at home. 'Lubec' is a gentle, mid-tempo tune with a steady rhythm. It is empathetic with the images both of the two getting their lives back on track, and with their journey. For the visit to Lionel's sister-in-law and her daughter there is conversation, in German and in French, and again no need to supplement talk with music. It is only when Lionel, with Jo, is silently tending the grave of his wife that music adds an emotive context. 'Mechthilde' – the dead woman's name – is a short piece of just over a minute with a plaintive, lingering flute melody, which conveys the sadness and regret associated with the early death of Jo's mother.²³⁸ The scene ends on autumnal shots of trees in the graveyard, and cuts suddenly to footage of sand dunes. At the same time the music also cuts to the sound of a whistling wind. Jo and Lionel are in their camper van, happy together. We hear the sound of children's voices singing, followed by footage of a lantern procession across the dunes in the gathering twilight. The singing is accompanied by the track 'Lanterns' – effectively an (equally short) companion piece to 'Mechthilde' but with more vibrato. As the shot cuts to the children's lanterns, now on the road, highlighted against the night sky, the musical track predominates. Lionel briefly hums along as he and Jo lie wrapped in their blankets. The music fades away completely as the two express their contentment.

The music for these interpolated scenes in Germany is essentially empathetic to the action. The nature of this part of the film, which is different in tone from elsewhere, peaceful and reflective, is matched by a more wistful musical quality, and its contrapuntality consists in that structural difference. In the sense that the music reflects what father and daughter are about to lose, it also counters the images and spare dialogue of contented togetherness. The different tone of the music, the children's voices, and the natural sounds reflect what Lachman (79) says about 'exemplary instances of contrapuntal exchange' in which 'the opposition of different voices produces some new unanticipated harmony'.

238 Mechtilde (Mechthilde, Matilde, Métilde) was the name of a Saint from Saxony, who was noted for her musical prowess, and is sometimes referred to as 'Christ's Nightingale'. Intertextually, the name also evokes the beloved of Stendhal in *Vie de Henry Brulard*.

Finale

This difference noted by Lachman becomes apparent when the trip abroad comes to an ending as abrupt as its start. We jump from father and daughter sleeping out on the dunes to back in the Paris apartment. There are two minutes of shots of the four main characters, suggesting, without any definitive evidence, the wedding of Jo and Noé. These play, latterly, alongside the penultimate track on the album score, called 'The Necklace'. The title is a reference to Lionel's giving Jo a necklace, which belonged to her mother, for the ceremony. This is in fact a reprise of the music which began the film, the first section of 'Opening'. Its ethereal quality is here even more evanescent, and suggests in some measure the final fading away of Jo's life with Lionel. It also enhances the running sense of separateness in the film by evoking the early scenes of commuters bunched together without social contact and Lionel isolated in his cab. In this respect, the effect of exclusion is reinforced by these final moments of father-daughter affection being interspersed with cuts of Noé, still shut out in the corridor, even as bridegroom, and of Gabrielle, as ever smoking on the stairs, her offer of assistance with the bride's preparations having been brusquely rejected by Lionel. There is a structural connection with *Trouble Every Day*, since both films use the device of closing with the piece of music whose first half is heard at the beginning.

Tindersticks wrote a final number, 'Closing', which, like 'The Necklace', is a very slight variation on the second half of 'Opening'. However Claire Denis seems to have had a different view from her music composer on how best to end her film, as she does not use this track. Instead, as 'Necklace' ends, the image and sound tracks cut to Mario Canonge, live, playing a version of his 'Biguine pou F Eboué'.²³⁹ This is not the jolly, syncopated, up-tempo, recorded version, but a slower, more reflective, but still fairly light-hearted, performance. Canonge plays along with Lionel's finally going for the 35 rums of the title, in celebration of the momentous occasion. This closing music is entirely empathetic. The biguine form originated in Martinique and is played here by a Martiniquais. It is both

²³⁹ A track from his 2001 album *Carte Blanche*.

appropriate to the action, and also recalls referentially the passing of René, whose dream was to return to his land of origin.²⁴⁰ In this, it presents one of those examples of counterpoint where the director goes against what is offered by the musicians.

Summary

In *35 rhums*, the function of Tindersticks' score is to act as a thread which connects the events of the main characters' daily lives. The force of their music in this film is an empathetic one, often used in more subtly contrapuntal ways than elsewhere, against which the underlying emotional dramas play out. Any expectation that Denis would follow the pattern used in *L'Intrus* of using samples of the composed score and shifting them from their intended position is unfulfilled. In this film, with the exception of 'Lionel Home Drunk' and 'Closing', all the tracks are used in full and where might be expected. The composed score is accompanied by elements of interpolated music drawn by Denis, as usual, from the eclectic range of her musical taste. The two elements of the soundtrack construct a counterpoint in which intrusions of musical style vary with the harmony of the composed score to represent the visual scenario in which people with ordinary lives struggle to deal with crises of feeling and circumstance.

Chapter summary and conclusions

Claire Denis in *US Go Home* associates the adolescent desires of her characters with the musical language of disenchantment and rebellion. But the music also pays attention to the conflicts and disagreements between the main characters. This allows it to comment on and critique notions of alienation at the individual as well as at the general level. In this way, the rites-of-passage experiences depicted in the film are extrapolated into a commentary on the attitudes and behaviour of young people in relation to each other and to the

²⁴⁰ The part of René is played by Julieth Mars Toussaint, best known as a painter, who is of Martinique origin.

society in which they find themselves obliged to live. Crucially, however, the film avoids being drawn into judgement. In these respects, the music modulates between empathy with the disaffected young and also with an adult point of view. The contrapuntal emerges not only in these aspects of personal relation, but also as respects the socio-political issues which infuse *US Go Home* – housing, employment, language, alien culture, and military occupation.

Trouble Every Day centres on a modulation between two couples with a connected history. The scenario accordingly offers a wide range of possibilities for contrasting attitudes and modes of action. The music participates and extends those contrapuntal modes in a range of ways. It adds dimension by adopting an empathetic tone which plays over action and images showing the gritty reality of the behaviour driven by the virus sufferer, and of the necessary but brutal aspects of the tidying-up process. The music also enables the adoption of a more objective point of view, a standing back from the visceral nature of the images. In addition, it introduces dissensual tones by suggesting the complicity of the victims and thus problematizing the assignment of blame. The composer, Stuart Staples, points to the centrality of counterpoint in the music in saying that he felt impelled to write romantic music for a tough film.²⁴¹

L'Intrus is unusual for Denis in that almost all the events take place with direct reference to one main character. The scenario shifts around ideas of psychological and bodily danger, stemming from the solipsistic behaviour of the main character. There is a composed score, with minimal additional material. Its impact is contrapuntal in two main ways: it contrasts with the beauty of the cinematography, and it provides a constant critique of the protagonist. Staples says that he felt that the soundtrack seemed to require broken rhythms: '[the score was] based around failing rhythms, [the] guitar motif [...] had a faltering rhythm, [it] tore and hurt at the same time [and] had this sense of gradual decay'.²⁴² The already dissensual nature of the soundtrack is subject to a further

241 Interview conducted at NFT 27 April 2011

<<https://bfiftp.bfi.org.uk/workflow/GET/9U452FZE4MY5CQV2-0000>> [accessed 03/07/2017].

242 *Cinema Scope* interview with Jason Anderson <<https://cinema-scope.com/cinema-scope-magazine/interviews-a-marriage-made-in-heaven-stuart-staples-on-tindersticks-claire-denis-film->

mode of deconstruction by the director, who only uses samples of it. The music rarely functions in the expected manner of cinema music by underlining the action. What it does is provide a continual counterpoint by contesting and criticizing the figure of the protagonist as an intrusive element.

In *35 rhums*, counterpoint appears within a musical context, as part of the narrative scenario, and in relation to the combination of soundtrack and image. The central plot structure is a fluid four-hander: a main couple, whose respective relation with the other two characters provides scope for looking at a more complex set of relationships. The connective force of the score works in gentle counterpoint with the interpolated musical items. The latter operate to indicate stronger elements: passion, frustration, heritage; while the former is more in keeping with the running stresses and strains of daily life played out in the scenario. The music in this film has a generally empathetic feel, and provides a sonic backdrop against which the underlying emotional dramas play out. The two elements of the soundtrack consist in themselves of a counterpoint in which intrusions of musical style vary with the harmony of the composed score to represent the visual scenario.

At the most apparent level, the cinema of Claire Denis causes friction because of its refusal to adopt a normative standpoint: in the eyes of those particularly critical of her work that refusal amounts to a moral – or even amoral – vacuum. So, films like *Trouble Every Day*, *J'ai pas sommeil* and *Les Salauds* attract reprobation because characters seemingly conforming to a type – serial killer, sexual abuser, racketeer – are insufficiently condemned. Such dissensual modes in the cinema of Denis can be seen in the positive light of presenting perceptive opportunities which invite viewers to form their own judgements on what they see and hear. The concept of counterpoint is of great help in understanding how this happens. As Matthew McDonald exemplifies:

The music is telling you something different to what you are seeing on the screen. It tells you that something is happening which does not meet the eye. Yet because music is such an abstract art, it does not tell you what that 'more'

is.²⁴³

The use of the contrapuntal in Denis's work takes varying forms. In the examples analysed in this chapter, we have seen how it functions in respect of adolescent issues of relationality in *US Go Home*. In *Trouble Every Day* it draws together and separates the different relational strands in a scenario bearing comparison with *White Material* which pits the inevitability of the surrounding context against individuals in hopeless circumstances who are struggling but failing. The music accordingly points up the romance of a possible escape alongside the tragedy of personal circumstance. In *35 rhums*, the musical counterpoints tend to work with the counterpointed aspects of the scenario, with the music speaking to the diversity of individuality within a closely-knit community, and gesturing towards dreams of relationality and its practical difficulties. For *L'Intrus*, the music offers a critical commentary which runs counter to the images and exposes alternative possibilities to the protagonist's solipsistic mode of living.

Kathryn Lachman argues that one of the benefits of counterpoint is that: 'there is no permanently dominant perspective, nor a permanently subordinate one, but always an oscillation as different subject positions interact, contaminate, deterritorialize, and transform one another'. (87) This chimes in well with my own position, which is that dissensual usage is not necessarily conflictual. Drawing on the director's expressed surprise at what Staples produced for *L'Intrus*,²⁴⁴ Marcello Panozzo describes this in the following way: 'El resultado de estas dos visiones contrapuestas es casi un milagro: el punto más alto de la colaboración entre ambos'.²⁴⁵ For Panozzo, clearly, counterpoint here points to a creative coming together, an almost polyphonic effect. I examine in the next chapter how coming together and moving apart can be assessed in terms of fluid empathy.

243 'Blowin' in the Wind', in Wierzbicki, p.90.

244 See e.g. her interview with Damon Smith in *Senses of Cinema* <www.sensesofcinema.com>.

245 'The result of these two counterpointed visions is like a miracle: the high point of the collaboration between the two of them', Marcello Panozzo, 'Rapsodia en azul' in Alvaro Arroba (ed.), *Claire Denis: fusión fría* (Madrid: Ocho y medio, 2005), p.111.

Chapter 3: Fluid empathy

*Gospel, and rhythm and blues, and jazz...all those are just labels: we know that music is music.*²⁴⁶

The bringing together of pieces of music, and the setting of them against each other are essential aspects of how Claire Denis addresses relationality through fluid distance. This movement has an appropriately fluid application since it works in different ways in selected films. It is not my position that there are 'contrapuntal' or 'polyphonic' Denis films; in my reading, these movements feature throughout her work. Their incidence fluctuates from film to film and scene to scene, and this happens in such a way as to resist categorization. In order to demonstrate some aspects of that fluidity, I examine in this chapter the protean effect of musical interweaving in two Denis films, using Michel Chion's theorization of the empathetic in film music.

Chion²⁴⁷ has suggested that there are two ways in which film music can create specific effects. He labels these empathetic and anempathetic. The first relates to music which reflects what we are seeing on the screen: 'music can directly express its participation in the feelings of the scene, by taking the scene's rhythm, tone and phrasing; [...] In this case we can speak of *empathetic music*'. The second way is where the music provides a kind of neutral backdrop, which has the effect of intensifying the emotional impact of the screen images:

music can also exhibit conspicuous indifference to the situation, by progressing in a steady, undaunted, and ineluctable manner [...] This juxtaposition of scene with indifferent music has the effect not of freezing emotion but rather intensifying it, by inscribing it on a cosmic background. I call this second kind of music *anempathetic*.

My development of Chion's terms introduces the concept of disempathy, relating to music which contributes modes of partial distancing and critical commentary.

My examples for analysis are *Vendredi soir* (2002) and *Les Salauds* (2013).

These two films share a Parisian setting, and to some extent also share a sense

246 Primal Scream, 'Come Together' on *Screamadelica* (1991).

247 Chion, 1994, p.8 (his italics).

of urban claustrophobia, but in other respects are very different. I have chosen them as contributing to the demonstration of how the modes of musical relationality to which I have been drawing attention feature throughout the cinema of Denis. I begin with *Vendredi soir*, for which my analysis is organized in terms of the different kinds of music in the film.

Vendredi soir

As the film begins, we hear tinkling piano notes which suggest a frisson of uncertainty, coupled with distant traffic noise. At the outset, therefore, we are getting hints of adventure and motion. But as if to reassure us that nothing too bad is going to happen, we next see a series of roof shots accompanied by orchestral chords of a calm, peaceful nature; there is a sense of solidity and composure in the images and sounds. But then the music shifts to a minor key accompanied by the initial tinkling theme, giving a clear sense of excitement and expectation. This turns into a sustained chord as night falls, followed by a lighter one to accompany a view of the brightly-lit Sacré-Coeur.

Judith Mayne (123) refers to the visual counterpoint, mentioning ‘a series of beautiful images of the city’ and ‘famous Parisian scenes’, which she sets against the absence of people ‘until the camera shifts, and it comes as something of a shock to see that the streets below are filmed in fast motion, so that people and cars are moving at high speed’. Martine Beugnet (187), referring, like Mayne, to the contrasts presented by the early camerawork, says: ‘an alteration of tempos and a series of “false starts” punctuate the beginning of the film’.

Mayne goes on in the same discussion to say that:

The movements across the apartment buildings and the rooftops seem slow, even languid, but the shift to the populated streets is abrupt. It is almost as if a reverie has been interrupted, as if Laure, while contemplating her place in this city, is jolted back to reality.

This seems to me exactly right, and although Mayne does not refer here to the sonic aspects, the shifting affect she and Beugnet note here is enhanced by the

music. The music is giving out the message that there is going to be both darkness and light in this film. The scenario will play out almost entirely at night and the emotional context will be one of mixed apprehension and fulfilment. The presentation of these aspects is enhanced by the way music and other sounds cut in and out, fade and overlay each other, mixing together modes of empathy, anempathy, and the disempathy.

These initial impressions are repeated as the music continues in the same vein, first over speeded-up images of traffic and then over shots of the protagonist, Laure, finishing packing up boxes and clearing out her flat. The music stops with the appearance of the credits and is replaced while they run by sounds of boxes being taped and occasionally intruding traffic noise. Having re-emphasized in this way the essence of the narrative to come (moving out and moving on), the film cuts to Laure having a bath; but this is presented functionally rather than erotically: the shot is from behind her and, crucially, there is no music. Apart from the noise of the shower, there is only a faint humming sound, which might be made by the heater or might be an empathetic piece of orchestration.

Ian Murphy says that: 'One of the more subversive qualities of *Vendredi soir* is the manner in which its audio track is furnished with an intricate layer of micro-sounds from start to finish: rather than a silent film, it is a subliminally noisy one'.²⁴⁸ For Murphy, (11) this is part of the dissensual practice employed by Denis: 'Taken collectively, the jazz-like variations of mood and tempo trigger unexpected overlaps and correspondences within the viewer's perceptual field, encouraging him or her to surrender the optical mastery associated with narrative and instead assume a pleasurable haptic relationship to the screen'.

The pattern throughout *Vendredi soir* is that music, in replacing narrative, sometimes associates with emotional points or actions, at other times it suggests an ambiance; it regularly critiques, but also often gives place to silences and background noise. As Laure leaves the apartment building, there

²⁴⁸ 'Feeling and Form in the films of Claire Denis', *Jump Cut*, 54, p.12. Subsequent references in text.

are renewed hints of the earlier music, but these are largely overlaid by street sounds. Events such as a stranger's knocking on the car window and Laure's driving off in fright, or later frantically looking for her car, do not have musical accompaniment – the action does not need to be supplemented. Instead, the music, when it comes, anticipates a coming event, or remarks on something which has happened.

As Laure makes slow, stop-start progress in the city-wide traffic jam, the situation which she shares with many others is pointed up sonically: traffic noise goes up and down in the mix, along with interpolated car horns; footsteps, car engines, voices fade in and out, as do snatches of music, symphonic or up-tempo dance rhythms. The music, street and traffic sounds, and the images are all orchestrated to convey the sense of dislocation which is at the heart of the film. In those respects, the music has flavours of the empathetic, in Chion's terms, as well as being in tune with the ambient sound. Simultaneously, tones of distancing (anempathy) and criticism (disempathy) can be detected.

Hinchcliffe's score

Dickon Hinchcliffe's score for *Vendredi soir* provides a mood which is empathetic to Laure and to the sociable life which goes on all around her. It often plays concurrently with other sonic features of the soundtrack: traffic noise, the bustle of the evening city, the conversations of passers-by. In this respect, it runs counter to the images of angry motorists, and especially to Laure's moments of anxiety – picking up a stranger, losing her car, losing Jean. But Hinchcliffe's music can also modulate against normative cinema music: its empathetic mood plays against the drama of the images and contradicts the *noir* ambience which implies that images of calm and happiness will soon be disrupted by some menace. The feelings engendered by Hinchcliffe's score are accordingly rather ambiguous. To some extent they are ones of reassurance, that whatever alarms may occur in the film, things are not likely to end badly.

However, there are moments of implied risk. This music is in many respects consistent with the atmosphere of the fairy-tale which underpins the film (heroine sets out from home seeking a new life; meets an attractive stranger; has disturbing experiences; is rescued by her cavalier; story ends happily). In this sense, it runs the gamut of the musical empathetic: paying attention to Laure's pleasurable anticipation of her new domicile (empathy); situating the coming narrative in the context of the metropolis (anempathy); but hinting simultaneously at the potential dangers of the Parisian nightscape and of the romance which she will find (disempathy). Beugnet (188) sums this up as follows:

The music written by Tindersticks' Dickon Hinchcliffe, alternating between the minimal and lyrical, stresses the fragile and otherworldly quality of the moment and fills the space with expectation. Against this background, the filmmaking playfully sets out to explore the more circumscribed variations of rhythm and moods that reflect the characters' own momentum and hesitations.

The seemingly-postulated danger scenario, commonplace in a *noir* film, of a woman alone at home at night busy with mundane tasks, anticipating the appearance of an intruder, does not in fact happen. To this extent, the ostensibly anempathetic tones of the music reflect, empathetically for the audience, what we feel we *might* experience; but it plays counter to what will actually take place. In this way, modes of the empathetic shift across character insouciance and audience expectation. The distance of the cityscape and the proximity to Laure in her apartment are matched with the empathetic modes of the music – but not matched exactly, just as contrapuntal and polyphonic aspects of the music play with and against each other. Hinchcliffe's music forms part of the polyphony of background sound in *Vendredi soir*; but it also runs contrapuntally to the street sounds by its different tone, and by its implicit attachment to what is happening to Laure. His music also differs, to varying degrees, from the rest of the musical items used in the film. Its impact, musically, is a mixture of the polyphonic and the contrapuntal– it forms part of the array of pieces of music and other sounds, while preserving a discrete function and voice in its own right.

The score written by Hinchcliffe consists of twelve short pieces, mostly

variations on a thematic melody. Fuentes (241) emphasizes the element of refrain:

les plans courts de ce prologue sont à percevoir en terme de variabilité musicale, chacun désignant un lieu que la musique joint au suivant, abolissant par là les distances. Comme l'ont énoncé Gilles Deleuze et Félix Guattari à propos de la ritournelle, la musique peut se concevoir comme un agencement territorial qui 'emprunte à tous les milieux' et 'mord sur eux'.²⁴⁹

Denis makes typical use of the score for this film, selecting items and trimming them or cutting and pasting to achieve the wanted effect rather than using them precisely as the composer intended. Although the titles of the tracks suggest their use throughout the film, in fact, apart from a couple of instances early in the film, the director places nearly all of them in the second half; and without necessarily aligning them to the scene for which they were written. 'Nightfall' links empathetically with images of Laure, who is completing her packing in the growing dusk. Fuentes (240) suggests that this approaches ambient music, since it 'se déploie une mélodie éthérée, magnétique et hypnotique, autour de laquelle gravitent quelques sonorités électroniques éparses, à la manière de touches picturalo-sonores'.²⁵⁰

This first track on the soundtrack album meshes with the early introduction of other music. It presents the main motif: a mid-tempo, melodic piano phrase with underlying resonant string chords, punctuated by trills on the chimes. The next cut, 'Le Vestibule', is a twenty-five second extract from the track of this name, and plays over Laure leaving her apartment. It begins with high-register string variation on the motif, accompanied by vibrato string backing; the motif is picked up by the chimes which gently crescendo, switching roles with the vibrato strings which then serve as punctuation. There is something a little eerie about the tone of the strings in this second number, which carries through a sense of suspense and uncertainty. Both these pieces are given an association with other, interpolated, music.

249 'the brief shots of this prologue are to be seen in terms of musical variability, each designating a place which the music successively joins, thus abolishing distances. As Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari have set out in relation to the refrain, music can be understood as a territorial framework which borrows from every medium and gets its teeth into them'.

250 'spreads an ethereal, magnetic and hypnotic melody around which revolve several scattered tones, like pictural-sonic touches'.

In the way Denis cuts, selects and places the score music, and in her juxtaposition of it with other music, the soundtrack is constructed in a non-linear fashion. For example, 'Falling Asleep', the fourth track on the album, is first sampled in an anticipatory way: its effect here is to pick up the static, somnolent atmosphere of the traffic standstill. But it also works as a prelude to the scene where the two main characters do drop off to sleep. 'Falling Asleep' begins with sustained string chords, joined by a slow piano version of the main melody. Its pace at the start is apt to the (non) action (empathy), although it briefly accelerates in the second half, before dying slowly away. It might be read as conveying the double sense of sleeping together.

Hinchcliffe's music comes more into its own in the second half of the film, when the relationship between Laure and Jean reaches fulfilment. It first returns at the point where Laure is searching for Jean: during this sequence 'Laure's Theme' is heard, almost in full. This number is in keeping with the general, oneiric tone of the score. Its style is one of slow piano cadences, accompanied by resonant strings and punctuated by the gentle chimes, which here and elsewhere, pick up one of the motifs of the musical introduction to the film. The falling resolution of the phrases reflects the sense of adventure and expectancy which come to be associated with the character of Laure, and it therefore comes across as primarily empathetic to the main character. From the point where Laure rediscovers Jean it is rare for more than a few minutes to pass without some reintroduction of Dickon Hinchcliffe's music. 'Le Rallye', a track consisting of a continuous pizzicato of an unvarying plink-plonk nature, with a constant keyboard drone, is placed third on the soundtrack album, but it plays much later in the film, in conjunction with the Le Rallye Café radio and other background noise. It is the longest track on the album score, heard almost in full, and also the least varied, offering no musical progression. Its impact here, empathetic to the scenario, is to signal a point of stasis, the moment when the relationship hesitates at the point of action.

As the two reach their hotel room for the first time, the track 'Chambre 26' plays.

This shortish musical cut²⁵¹ which features a high-register, wistful violin, accompanied by murmuring cello and gentle chimes, strikes a note of empathetic longing which is entirely appropriate to the situation. It is followed soon after by 'Hotel Love', which begins with picked-out, piano arpeggio, then swells with moaning low-register cello and string crescendi, which develop a blissful and lyrical tone. It is first heard as a fifteen second extract of its opening, which accompanies the couple and their preparations; the remaining body of the track provides apt accompaniment for their first scene of love-making.

'Footsteps', a two-and-a half minute track, plays in full over footage of the two leaving the restaurant where they have dined, walking back to the hotel and returning to their room. Like the first use of 'Chambre 26', it functions here in anticipation of their making love again. In the sense that the music has an uncertain quality, it chimes in empathetically with a mood of expectation; but it is also in keeping with the *noir* feel of the film. That tone of uncertainty is reflected briefly on the image track as Laure has a momentary recollection of the boxed-up possessions in her old flat: a kind of moment of recapitulation before the next move (of house and lover). In that respect, the track also has disempathetic qualities. As the track progresses, fuller-bodied instrumentation contributes to a mode of satisfaction or fulfilment. As a piece of music with a serious tone, it is undercut by one of the visual jokes in the film: the lampshade popping into place of its own accord and the light illuminating itself. This piece of visual counterpoint has the effect of modulating both the scenario and the music: the romantic empathy is muted by a kind of anempathetic nudge.

When, shortly after, the pair are getting ready to settle down for the night, a short reprise from 'Laure's Theme' plays across footage of Laure in the bathroom, then undressing and jumping into bed. This extract is from the opening of the tune and comprises high-register, arpeggiated piano notes – reflecting something about Laure's combined uncertainty and anticipated desire; the music here does not develop into the richer phase mentioned above, and it,

251 50 seconds in length. It is the penultimate track on the soundtrack album, but is used much earlier – just past the halfway point.

appropriately, attaches empathetically to Laure's desire. It seems to connect less with Jean, perhaps remarking (disempathetically) on his relative lack of eagerness.

Close to the end of the film when Laure wakes and gets up to look outside, 'La Voiture' plays along. This more jaunty arrangement – softly jangling keyboard and chimes, emphatic double-bass, and string chorus – looks forward empathetically to the excitement of the coming day of house-moving. Denis fuses it with a further reprise of 'Laure's Theme'.²⁵² On this occasion, what we hear comes from the first half of the track (that is, the more tentative part of the melody, without the bass and cello which offer a sense of fulfilment in the full version). The musical combination runs over Laure's visualization of her parked car and her demonstrated exhilaration on coming in from the balcony, before she returns to bed for a final love-making. This musical fusion achieves a sense of her contentment, blending the new day to which she is looking forward with a last embrace. The two tracks run against each other, musically speaking, both in style and in their overlapping. Blended together, they contribute to a polyvalent sense of the main character: her infidelity co-existing with her stable relationship and her adventure having, paradoxically, enhanced her self-possession. Here the empathetic and the disempathetic mix, putting Laure more on a par with Jean: she too has willingly engaged in a one-night stand.

The final piece by Hinchcliffe²⁵³ – titled 'Sunrise' and used in place at the end of the film – has a rather different feel. It opens with slow, drawn out, string chords, followed by light chimes, steady double-bass and piano chords, growing to a melodic sense of ease and joy. Apart from 'Le Rallye' this is the longest piece of the score. It is used in full, and begins as Laure runs down the street looking for her car. In this respect it reprises a shade of the noir-ish anxiety which has

²⁵² As usual, street sounds are never far away from musical ones. Here, the joining of the two pieces of music is signalled by a single blast on a car horn – reminiscent of the cacophony of car horns which awoke the sleepers earlier.

²⁵³ Two numbers from the album soundtrack appear not to be used. These are: 'Jean', a very short piano variation of the main melody, slow and wistful in tone – perhaps Denis did not use this in order to retain a focus on Laure; and 'Street Fight', an up-tempo number with pizzicato, more in the manner of 'Le Rallye', but faster – since the contretemps between motorists plays with no music, one assumes Denis thought the action needed no musical corroboration.

regularly appeared during the film. But as the film speed slows, her motion takes on an aspect of exhilaration, while the music gently crescendos, giving a bitter-sweet final taste to Laure's smile, which seems to simultaneously encompass (empathetically) what has just happened to her, and what is in store (anempathy).

Other music

Not only does Denis use Hinchcliffe's score itself in ways which go against his intentions as composer; his music is countered by a number of other interventions. The first of these brings in music by Jeff Mills. Mills is a US DJ, record producer, and composer, noted for his work in the techno field. Mills's 'Entrance to Metropolis'²⁵⁴ begins even before the film itself starts, playing over the distributor's logo and continuing over the image track. This both sets a tone and the city context, and can be read as a cue for the engagement of Laure with the Langian maelstrom of a Paris paralysed by a giant traffic jam. In that respect, it clearly identifies as anempathetic. Mills's piece perfectly conveys the faux-ideal of the opening scenes of *Metropolis* (Fritz Lang, 1927), while containing the occasional discordant hint of the dramas to come in that film. Its placement at the start of *Vendredi soir* works with the counterpoint of the implied threat in the scenario, but, like Hinchcliffe's music (and Lang's film), also gestures towards a happier outcome, with early hints of empathy and disempathy.

Another significant musical intervention in *Vendredi soir* is music by Dmitri Shostakovich. An extract from his *Chamber Symphony in C Minor, Op. 110a*, plays after Laure is found by Jean following her phone call and when he takes the driver's seat. The dramatic quality of the music empathizes with his taking the wheel, but also with her anxiety at losing control over events. James S. Williams (Vecchio, 96) sees this musical shift as corresponding with a crucial

²⁵⁴ A track from his album *Metropolis*, a re-working of the music for Fritz Lang's film by Gottfried Huppertz. This is yet another example of Denis's musical eclecticism and connection with contemporary music: Mills's album came out in 2000 and would have been current for the making of the film which was released in 2002.

move in the film. He refers to the 'musico-cinematic tensions' of *Vendredi soir*, arguing that these begin with Mills's 'Entry to Metropolis' and are 'ignited by a stunning encounter between Shostakovich and Benjamin Britten'. Williams (106) elaborates on this:

The turning point in *Vendredi soir*, when it literally changes gear and Jean takes over the wheel from Laure, occurs when the prevailing quiet, sombre, unison strings in Britten's *The Bitter Withy* (Opus 90) are superseded and transformed as the car surges forward to the pounding modernist chords and rapid strings of Shostakovich's string quartet *Chamber Symphony Opus 110a*.

Certainly, things change with this very different music. Shostakovich wrote his work in 1960 at a crisis point in his life and it is set in a series of sombre key signatures. The five movements have distinct differences, and some critics have considered the piece a very ambiguous one, whose ambiguity is enhanced by the use of (musical) counterpoint. Intertextually, the composer's being at a crossroads (on some accounts, he was planning to commit suicide – like Tchaikovsky vis-à-vis his *Pathétique*) has some resonance with the imminent change in Laure's life. Shostakovich's compositional inspiration was the destruction of Dresden. The dark feel accordingly transfers between cities to a Paris, darkened by night, and aligns with the *noir* atmosphere of the opening of *Vendredi soir* as established by Mills's 'Entry to Metropolis' and Hinchcliffe's 'Nightfall'. The tone of uncertainty carries across, intertextually and musically: most filmgoers will be familiar with Lang's film; some will know Mills's recent re-scoring. By no means all viewers of Denis's film will be acquainted with Shostakovich's work; relatively few will have heard *Tindersticks*' music. In other words, this is a polyphonic construction in respect of which the audience's empathetic relationship will be a very fluid one.

Denis herself says that there is something special for her about this piece of music by Mills, which she describes as 'the start of something' (le début de quelque chose). She adds: 'Je ne sais pas quoi, mais c'est un espace inconnu que je découvre à l'écoute, un repérage à l'intérieur de moi-même, une zone intérieure que je n'ai pas encore envahie mais dont le morceau me désigne la direction'.²⁵⁵ We may accordingly read these musical interpolations as of a piece

²⁵⁵ 'I don't know what, but it's an unknown space which I discover as I am listening, a reconnaissance

with other items which have had a striking effect on Denis – and which have awaited their moment for appropriate inclusion in one of her films. Analogues are Britten in *Beau travail*, Presley in *L'Intrus*, Jean-Louis Murat in *J'ai pas sommeil*, Tindersticks in *Nénette et Boni*, Eric Burdon in *US Go Home*. In a comparable intertextual musical vein, Denis once more uses music by Benjamin Britten, as she did in *Beau travail*. On this occasion, it is 'The Bitter Withy',²⁵⁶ which plays virtually in full over footage of the traffic jams and the first appearance of Jean; it fades out as Jean knocks on the window and asks for a lift. This piece of music functions in the film on several levels. It cues after Laure's foray into the box of books on the rear seat and another of her changes of mind about what possessions to keep; in that sense, there is an empathetic connection with the nostalgic subject of Britten's piece. At first sight, the transposition of a bucolically-inspired tune to a contemporary metropolitan setting seems bizarre, although perhaps there is a wisp of connection to the naturalistic idea of a man and woman meeting and being attracted to each other. Another fleeting link is the context of the original folk song, which envisages a young Jesus playing with friends, misbehaving by using his godly powers inappropriately and being punished by his mother: does this hint at the (sexual) misbehaviour to come in the film? Empathy with Laure combines with tinges of disempathy in the implied, anticipatory critique of her stepping over the line.

Visually, the presentation of Vincent Lindon's arrival on the scene is striking. He is lit in chiaroscuro, handsome, self-assured – almost godlike. This impression is reinforced by the reaction of a blonde woman in one of the cars, who adjusts her hair and make-up and smiles, seemingly in anticipation of his joining her. Britten's music itself has a stately quality, the assertive but unhurried rhythm of the strings providing a melodic backdrop to the piano figures. *Qua* music, it plays very much against the style of the Shostakovich, which is louder, faster,

into the interior of myself, an internal zone which I have not come across before but to which I am directed by the piece of music', Didier Péron, 'Un film peut naître d'une musique', *Libération*, 11 September 2002.

256 A traditional English folk song, arranged by Britten as part of his 'A Suite On English Folk Songs' (Op. 90).

frenetic. On the other hand, both these very different works come together in their association with Jean, the essence of whose character is of being in control. An empathy here mixes with the empathetic.

In a very different mode, there is a two-minute extract from Alain Chamfort's 'Manureva' – a big hit in 1979. Its pumping rhythm matches the chugging of car engines as Laure waits for an opportunity to move forward; it also conveys something of her impatience at being stalled at an important juncture of her life. The song's title (said to be Tahitian for 'travel bird'²⁵⁷) hints at the idea of the passing connection which is at the centre of the plot (and just about to begin with the appearance of Jean). This track has teasingly been previewed a few minutes before with a snatch heard from a passing car. The chorus line of 'là-bas' (down there) once again suggests Laure's situation down on the street, as well as her impending loss of control (the song is about a famous trans-oceanic racing yacht which disappeared in a storm, the crew presumably drowned), and carries tones of disempathy. Fabrice Fuentes has the following to say about this piece of music:

Les paroles, écrites par Serge Gainsbourg, font alors écho aux changements de vie du personnage, semble-t-il à la dérive, et pour qui un déménagement semble se profiler à l'horizon. Cette chanson populaire, outre qu'elle suggère dans le film les incertitudes d'une femme d'aujourd'hui confrontée à l'échéance imminente d'un engagement sentimental, ne vient pas rompre le climat languide de la séquence, mais participe plutôt de ce moment de flottement particulier qui dessine en filigrane un état de conscience ralentie.²⁵⁸

Fuentes (229) sees similar nuances. His interpretation centres on the oneiric mood of the scene,²⁵⁹ whereas mine encompasses the elements of frustration and criticism to which I consider the music also connects.

A brief musical extract of a more frivolous nature comes from another song contemporaneous to the making of the film. This is a 2000 hit by a band called

²⁵⁷ See Wikipedia entry.

²⁵⁸ The words, written by Serge Gainsbourg, provide an echo of the apparently uncontrolled life change of the character, for whom a house move appears to be on the horizon. This popular song, besides suggesting in the film the uncertainties of a woman of today faced with the imminent deadline of an emotional commitment, does not break the languorous mood of the sequence, but rather forms part of this particular moment of hesitation which sketches subliminally a slowed-down state of consciousness'.

²⁵⁹ He also – justly in my view – associates the slowed-down, sleepy atmosphere at this point with the comic fantasy sequence shortly after when the lettering on the car in front transposes itself.

French Affair and the number is 'My Heart Goes Boom!'. This is typical of Denis's choice of music which is at the same time in tune with the events of her film, but equally carries a loaded message that we are involved in cinema, not real life: the subject matter of the song is relevant and empathetic to the *amour*, but the light-hearted style tells us, with a touch of the anempathetic, that we should not take things too seriously. As such, this parallels the visual jokes in the film, for example the restaurant meal where the pizza topping morphs into a smiley face.

There are two other notable musical interpolations. The first is a number by Dean Martin and Line Renaud, called 'Two Sleepy People'.²⁶⁰ This does not play in the obvious place, during the sequence where Laure and Jean both nod off, but bookends the fantasy scene where they visit a friend with her baby (who is anything but sleepy). It plays as Laure manoeuvres in the traffic, cuts out during the imaginary visit, and returns as a prelude to their deciding to eat together. Its relevance is that the song is about two lovers who talk about saying goodnight but cannot bring themselves to part. In its context, it runs empathetically with their nascent intentions as prospective lovers, and especially for Laure's imagining of Jean walking away, but disempathetically with the frustrations of the imaginary visit.

The second interpolation is a piece attributed to Janós Lehár,²⁶¹ titled 'Gondoliers'.²⁶² This plays on three occasions, once in a substantial cut and twice in full, all during the meal in the restaurant. It is a somewhat generic number, reminiscent of balalaika playing. Its relevance is not easy to determine. The restaurant is an Italian one, called Le Due Torri (The Two Towers), so music with a Venetian theme is not entirely out of the way, even if rather uninspiring in content. For the most part, it accompanies scenes of eating and flirting between Laure and Jean, and also a couple of fantasy inserts of goings-on in the

²⁶⁰ Written in 1938 by Hoagy Carmichael with words by Frank Loesser. Released as the B side of 'Relax-Ay-Voo' by Martin and Renaud in 1955; subsequently included as an additional track on the 1998 re-release of the album *A Winter Romance* (1955).

²⁶¹ This is a soubriquet used by John Leach, an English composer and musician and an expert on the dulcimer – especially the cimbalom, a large Hungarian dulcimer played with wooden mallets.

²⁶² A track on the album *Around the World in 80 Minutes – 3*, released in 1989.

restaurant bathroom. Perhaps, especially as it is what goes with the smiling pizza, this is a humorous glance by Denis at the banality of desire (or the power of desire to overcome banality). As Beugnet (189) observes, '[Denis] superimposes the banal and the dream-like, the physical reality of the content and the de-familiarising effect of the filmmaking process itself'. In these respects, this tune could be said to play empathetically or disempathetically with the action. As a matter of style it differs significantly from the rest of the music in the film.

These interpolations are part of the subtly shifting rhythms of *Vendredi soir*, which change in pace, volume, and style across the range of empathetic modes in ways which also embrace the concept of fluid distance. Fuentes (245) puts it in this way:

A la richesse de la bande-son se joint un alternance rapide de plans furtifs [...] s'ils épousent tout d'abord in rythme saccadé, les plans s'enchaînent ensuite d'une manière plus en plus coulée et visent à réduire la profondeur de champ [...] un mouvement du lointain vers le proche.²⁶³

The overall mood of the film is enhanced by the constant use of street and traffic noise and other quotidian sounds, like the hum or buzz of heaters or the hissing of taps. Beugnet (31) observes that: 'the richness of the soundtrack grants a particular density to sounds, and imbues them with an almost tactile quality'. In some respects, music directly replaces dialogue: although we occasionally hear other voices – passers-by, motorists, customers in the café and restaurant – the normal background sounds of people talking are often replaced by snatches of music, whose source is not always explicit. These musical interpolations are not part of Hinchcliffe's score, but seem to emerge from the air, coming from radios or music players, cars, shops or apartment buildings. We hear morsels of opera, jazz, popular music of all sorts, all contributing to the sense of disorder and fragmentation which the film offers as the scenario for a specific rupture in the ordered pattern of the life of the protagonist.

²⁶³ 'To the richness of the soundtrack is joined a rapid alternation of fleeting shots [...] if these engage at first in a jerky rhythm, the subsequent shots link in an increasingly flowing way with the intention of reducing the depth of field [...] a movement from the distant towards the near'.

Fuentes (230) seems to dismiss these contrapuntal tendencies in the music. He argues, for example, that the sample from 'Manureva' is little more than a pause in the action which corresponds to the somnolent ambience in the car:

Elle est un effet de volume plaisant, sans conséquence sur la suite de narration, tout au plus un palier ou une pause fondue dans la matière filmique. Une présence sonore entrelacée à l'atmosphère hypnotique de la séquence que le personnage entend, en somme, sans écouter.²⁶⁴

He elaborates this point with reference to Chion's argument in 'Dieu est un disc-jockey' that songs are used 'pour orienter la destinée de personnages qui "ne les écoutent pas vraiment mais les entendent"'.²⁶⁵ This implies that music is intended to relate to the audience rather than the characters. Fuentes demurs in this instance from Chion's formulation, asserting that: 'Cependant, dans *Vendredi soir* on notera que la musique d'écran semble davantage environnementale que capable d'anticiper leur destinée'.²⁶⁶ I consider it mistaken to attempt, as Fuentes does here, to separate so rigidly the sonic interventions in the film when the nature of the music, in tune with *Vendredi soir* as a whole, has such a fluid quality.

The ambient sounds fit more aptly with Chion's definition of anempathetic, in the sense that they relate to a wider world, or one which is not in sympathy with the desires of the characters. But there is also a sense in which they empathize with the instincts of Laure and Jean to seize the moment and engage in an adventure. To that extent, they, along with the rest of the score, form part of the filmmaker's usual interest in exploring the limits of human behaviour.

Summary

The mélange of musical styles and the ways in which the music is used in *Vendredi soir* is typical of how Denis works with music, unexpectedly weaving it

264 'The effect is one of light-hearted expansion, without consequence for the rest of the narrative, at the very most an interval or a brief tuning-out in the filmic content. A sonic appearance wound into the hypnotic atmosphere of the scene which the character hears, in short, without listening'.

265 'to direct the destiny of characters "who do not really listen but hear"'.²⁶⁵

266 'However, in *Vendredi soir* we note that the score music seems more environmental than having the capacity to anticipate their destiny'.

in or leaving it out.²⁶⁷ A particular feature in this film is the use of refrain and echo. As noted earlier, 'Laure's Theme' and 'Falling Asleep' are, respectively, returned to or pre-echoed; and 'Hotel Love' is used as a prelude of itself. 'Manureva' is also previewed in passing before it plays substantively. 'Two Sleepy People' brackets the fantasy scene of the visit to Marie, playing as a prelude to it, and recurring afterwards. As early as Laure's departure from her apartment, the accompanying 'Le Vestibule' is preceded by the briefest snatch from the Shostakovich which plays much later. In a reverse direction, a cut from 'Entrance to Metropolis', which opened the film, is reprised just before Laure and Jean introduce themselves. These examples represent a further aspect of how Claire Denis brings a dissensual approach to her art: by avoiding cliché and by introducing a subtly referenced series of musical shadings.

Dickon Hinchcliffe's score for *Vendredi soir* is often empathetic. The music regularly chimes in with the feelings of the central character, Laure – her excitement and apprehension on the verge of a change in her life; her sadness about what she is leaving behind; her frustration at being stuck in the Paris-wide traffic jam; her suspicion of the hitcher she picks up; and the mellowing of her initially spiky relation with her passenger, Jean. But this music has to co-exist with other music, other sounds, and with fluctuations in volume including fadings-out. Instead of underscoring the images, the music suggests, hints, anticipates in disempathetic ways.

The sonic aspects of the film signal encouragement, warning, and frustration – fitting, not neatly but appropriately untidily, with the stop-start nature of Laure's exploit and the negotiated staccato of her relationship with Jean. Not only emotionally but also physically, the two keep coming together and moving away, just as the sounds in the film keep popping up, fading out and returning. In this way, fluid distance features in both visually relational and musical terms, as it will in the last film to be discussed, *Les Salauds*.

267 I should note here that the générique credits two numbers to Florentino Calvo: 'Sourires' and 'Grazie Mille'. I cannot detect any trace of these on the soundtrack. Calvo is a noted mandolin player and teacher, based in France. Nor can I find any evidence of his having recorded these two songs, whose titles seem not to fit with his usual orchestral context.

Les Salauds

Les Salauds is a film which has produced some strong reactions. The review in *Cahiers du cinéma*²⁶⁸ spoke of Denis as having a view of humanity based solely on its basest instincts ('animée seulement par ses plus bas instincts'), and concluded: 'Claire Denis se noie dans la séquence finale, complètement superflue [...] comme si le film ne pouvait faire autrement que d'être contaminé à son tour par tant de saleté'.

Nikolaj Lübecker²⁶⁹ offers it as an example of a 'desperation film', describing it as: 'a slow and highly aestheticised film with a particularly unpleasant plotline'. What Lübecker particularly objects to is not being offered a clear point of view, for example: 'the provocation of this film largely comes from its taking on controversial matter without offering the moral framing one might expect' (138); and 'the combination of seduction, underdeterminacy and horror produces an ambiguity that no political or ethical framing helps to stabilise' (137). Worse, Denis is deceiving her audience: 'she is exploring nihilism without allowing the viewer to think that *Les Salauds* is a controlled exercise in provocation' (141). For Lübecker, the 'disheartening' ending of the film compares most unfavourably with the 'cathartic' ending of *Beau travail*.

Saige Walton situates *Les Salauds* in the realm of the baroque, arguing that moral darkness and blindness are crucial elements. Significantly, for her, 'rather than seeing in the light, [the film] begins in near total darkness'.²⁷⁰ But on the other hand, she says (3) that: 'Much of the film is chromatically bland. It is tinged beige, grey, slate, cream or off-white, as if echoing the film's concern with capitalistic corruption and hidden secrets behind visually unassuming facades'. Like Lübecker, Walton is impelled to read the film in terms of villains and victims. Justine is presented as the ultimate victim (4), her 'teenage body has

268 'Claire Denis drowns herself in the completely superfluous final scene [...] as if the film couldn't do other than be contaminated in turn by so much filth'. *Cahiers*, 691, p.54.

269 *The Feel-Bad Film* (Edinburgh University Press, 2015), p.135. Subsequent references in text.

270 'Affective Forces and Folds of Night: *Les Salauds/Bastards as Baroque Dark Matter*', *The Cine-Files*, 10, p1. Other references in text.

been financially traded, emotionally abused and psychologically violated'. Walton's critique centres on assumptions of inevitability: 'a downward trajectory is set in motion from the beginning (7)'; 'blind to the truth and to the irreparable damage they do to others, the bodies of *Bastards* repeatedly fall down into moral darkness, corruption, depravity and death' (10).

My own reading of the film avoids an essentialist or binary approach, and focuses on the plays of relationality and empathetic modes, to which I see the music (rarely mentioned in these critiques) as playing a significant role.

The music for *Les Salauds* offers yet another variation on the relationship between director and composer. A large part of the composed score appears on the soundtrack in full, and for the most part the individual items match with the filmed scenario. However, four tracks on the album score are not used in the film; their omission is discussed below. What is noticeable is that for this film there is no additional music performed by other artists.²⁷¹ That is a very marked departure, as we have seen, from Denis's usual way of operating, with *Trouble Every Day* being the only other comparable example. The degree of integration of the music is such that my analysis is organized around its sequential movement.

There are marked correspondences between the use of music in *Les Salauds* and what was done in *Trouble Every Day*.²⁷² In each case, there is one piece of music with words, which plays at the closing of the film; and one single set of musical performers. One of the effects of this is to augment the enclosed, dark *mise-en-scène* of the two films. What is different in the case of *Les Salauds* is that the one piece of music not written by Tindersticks, who once again are the composers of the score, is nevertheless performed by them. The song 'Put Your Love In Me', written by Errol Brown,²⁷³ seems a most unlikely choice – not only

271 There are a few seconds of music from a radio station as Marco, the main character, is on his way to Paris – the song playing in the background is muted and unrecognisable. (The backdrop could be Gibraltar, so the music might have a Maghrébien origin – what is heard would be consistent with that).

272 Interestingly, Justine – like Coré in *Trouble Every Day* – only speaks on one occasion.

273 A hit single for Hot Chocolate in 1977, which appears on the *You Win Again* EP of the same year, and

for this film, but also for what we know of the musical attitudes of both Claire Denis and Tindersticks: the jaunty semi-disco associated with, for example, 'You Sexy Thing' or 'Every 1's a Winner',²⁷⁴ is ostensibly incongruous in the extreme here. I discuss this in more detail below.

As if to reach out from the screen to the audience, the film's soundtrack begins over the logos of the production companies. A constant rushing noise is heard for almost half a minute before the images begin. The first thing we see is what seems to be thick yellow grain²⁷⁵ – which turns out to be luridly-lit footage of pouring rain. The hissing of the water is joined by the whine of music, heard under traffic noise, before the first chiming chords of 'Opening'. The tone – both of the musical soundtrack and the film – is set: the repeated double chord, accompanied by a bass quintuplet, gives this piece of music an ecclesiastical, funereal quality; as it progresses, the claviers inject a spacey feel, coupled with echoing, breathy (non-verbal) voices.

This opening track bears comparison with that for *White Material* in its sense of foreboding. It carries a strong sense of what Chion calls the anempathetic – a kind of disembodied, god-like observation. The images we see are, first, those of a man in a darkened, empty office, looking out at the rain, then footage of paramedics and police on the street (we are invited to conclude, correctly, that the man has jumped); then footage of a young woman, naked except for her shoes, walking along a street; the scene cuts back to the emergency scenario; finally, a woman in an office with two police officers, one of whom gives her what will turn out to be her husband's suicide note.

These opening four minutes are exemplary for a Claire Denis film: the images give us in turn hints of a business problem, of a suicide, and of aberrant sexual

the 1978 album *Every 1's A Winner*.

274 Big hits for Hot Chocolate in, respectively, 1975 and 1978.

275 I take this to be an oblique Denisian reference to the dénouement of her film, drawn from *Sanctuary*, Faulkner's 1931 novel of life in the agricultural South of the USA. Cf. also, for example: 'upon his shadow, upon the checkered orifice of the window, the ragged grief of the heaven-tree would pulse and change, the last bloom fallen now in viscid smears upon the sidewalk'. (William Faulkner, *Sanctuary* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), pp.107-8).

behaviour. Although no more than fleeting suggestions, these will prove to be the central issues of *Les Salauds*. The function of this piece of music is to enwrap these at present loosely connected matters in a cloak of aural hints about excess, misconduct, abuse, and death (I suggest the quality and tone of the music would make it well suited to, for example, a Black Mass scene). In this sense, the music has a polyphonic quality: it plays over these different scenes, acting as a link between them, uniting them as significant aspects of the scenario. But it also has a dissensual mode: if the doom-laden quality of the music is apt for the suicide about to happen at the start of the film, that event has already moved into the past very shortly afterwards. So at that point any omens present in the music are ambiguous, both backward- and forward-looking; empathetic and, at this stage, anempathetic.

By contrast with the deep resonance of this opening track, the next musical cut is insubstantial. 'Marco' is a short number of well under a minute and consists of little more than a thin, reedy whine which occasionally has a vibrating quality. Interestingly, it does not play on the occasions when we see Marco on his ship getting the news of his brother's death, on his journey to Paris, or when we see him moving into an apartment by day, coming back at night, or encountering his neighbour, Raphaëlle, in the lift. It is heard only over footage of his looking at Internet information about Laporte, the man whom his sister-in-law blames for her husband's death. The placement at this juncture of this light piece of music implies that Marco, who sees himself as the all-action avenger of his brother, will in fact turn out to be a paper tiger. This fits with my category of disempathetic: here, music which subtly indicates criticism. The implication is that Denis saw no need for Marco to have his own music. This suggestion is endorsed by the fact that the next track on the soundtrack album – called 'Elevator' – and presumably written for when Marco and Raphaëlle meet in the lift, does not feature: their encounter is silent and musically empty.

The second musical item of note is called, appropriately, 'Night time cigarettes'. This accompanies an erotically-charged exchange between the two neighbours.

It begins when Raphaëlle, wearing a coat over her nightwear, goes across the street to get cigarettes and is thwarted by the closing of the tobacconist; Marco, who has been watching her from his balcony, throws down some packs of cigarettes, wrapped in the shirt he was wearing. We then see her back in her apartment, laying on the bed and touching the shirt. 'Night time cigarettes' features a repeated single bass chord in a minor key, fleshed out with higher keyboard notes and tailing away vibrato flute. The phrases are punctuated with silences and give the feel of musical elements almost reluctant to come together. This conveys very well the sense of anticipation combined with wariness that both characters are exhibiting. In this case, the music combines elements of empathy (the immediate connection between the two characters) and disempathy (the expectation is equivocal; as we discover, Marco is planning to use Raphaëlle as a means of getting at Laporte). The importance of the music is to provide that sense of tension and to question what is in the images. By way of contrast, the following scene which shows a torchlight search, the discovery of a child's bike, and a distraught Raphaëlle has no musical accompaniment. The impression given is one of a kidnapping or murder – but, since we see Joseph, Raphaëlle's son, later in the film alive and well, this can only be a fantasy. The hint of this, given in the image track of Marco in bed musing, is supplemented by musical silence: this will turn out to be one of Marco's ineffectual ideas.

When the music returns, it has the effect of further remarking on the extent to which Marco is out of the loop. The scene begins with a visit to his niece in hospital. He looks at the scars on her wrist, which suggest self-harm; although he is troubled by this, his anxiety is contained – we get the impression that he thinks this is some minor teenage trauma (he says, rather bathetically: 'I'm here for you'). The film then cuts to another version of the naked young woman walking in the street at night. The viewer now knows that this is Justine, Marco's niece (that this character has the same name as Sade's eponymous one will not have been an unknowing choice by Denis). Whether what is seen on screen is something like an out-of-body experience of what happened to her, or whether

this is information privileged to the audience, does not matter. The point is that Marco has little clue about it. The music begins with the spectral sound of strings, which are heard just before the cut from the ward, and the ominous chiming chord – first heard in 'Opening' - comes in as soon as we see the vulnerable Justine on the rainy street. The track is called 'Naked walk' and is a short reprise (about half the length) of 'Opening'. The chiming chords end as the image cuts back to the ward, while the ghostly background whine continues over Justine's saying 'I love him. I want to see him'.

At one level, the disembodied viewpoint of the images and the tone of the music match with Chion's category of anempathetic as exhibiting 'conspicuous indifference to the situation, by progressing in a steady, undaunted, and ineluctable manner' (8) in relation to Justine's situation (on the street). But in my reading the music adds a further, disempathetic, dimension as part of what will become a crescendo of critical observations on Marco's actions and assumptions. His confusion is an important element in the tragic turn of events. As Denis has observed: 'Il était très important que l'on soit aussi aveugle que lui [...] Si l'ennemi est le mensonge, quelque chose qu'il ne peut pas envisager, alors là il devient un héros fragile'.²⁷⁶

At a further level, the music can be read as thus distinguishing between Justine's desire, as signified by the intensity of the drawn-out string chords, and the traumatic nature of her experience, as signalled by the dramatic chiming sound. In both respects, however, it provides a musical commentary on Marco's ignorance of what is really going on (and which he will never fully find out). This is endorsed by the fading of the tune before Marco has a meeting with a doctor, who tells him his niece may need surgery. In this way, the same music works entirely empathetically for Justine's situation, but sharply disempathetically as regards Marco.

What follows is a series of short scenes, featuring Marco's efforts to help his

²⁷⁶ 'It was very important to be as blind as he is [...] If the enemy is untruth, something which he cannot envisage, then he becomes a fragile hero', *Cahiers du cinéma*, 691, p.84.

sister-in-law, sort out his brother's business affairs, look after his niece, keep in touch with his own family, and organize some kind of revenge on the person responsible for what has happened, Edouard Laporte. All this goes on without any supporting music, highlighting yet again the vacuity of Marco's project.

Music only returns to accompany the semblance of practical achievement. Marco cashes in his life insurance and sells his classic car to help with the insolvency of the business. As he looks round the residual material in the family shoe factory, the track called 'Factory/Day drive' starts to play. There is less of a sense of menace about this track. It is slower in pace; its chords resemble those of a church organ, with prominent bass pedal, the gentle phrases ascending and descending, moving to a fuller final section with a tapping drum-rim rhythm and a vibrato crescendo on the bass notes. The mood of this piece is one of ineluctability: the time for warnings is past – or at least Marco has not heard them – and events will now move forward with no prospect of control or prevention. (In this the musical accompaniment, although different, recalls the comparable impact in relation to Maria in *White Material*). Here again, empathy is mixed with disempathy: the sense of progress which associates superficially with Marco attaches more strongly to events moving out of his control, with even a shade of anempathy coming in.

Audio-visually, the music connects footage of the factory and its unboxed piles of shoes;²⁷⁷ photos from past family holidays; and Marco's signing cheques for Sandra to stave off her creditors. It continues to play behind a rendezvous with one of the seedy elements introduced in the second half of the film, a fixer and go-between named Xavier. As Marco and Sandra drive behind him to his farmhouse, the finale of 'Factory/Day drive' offers a hint of the music to come for one of the climactic episodes of the film; correspondingly, the images prefigure the hair-pin bends which will also feature in that episode. These are 'tasters' of the kind noted in *Vendredi soir*. The music track fades as they arrive at the

277 There are some implied references to the moral issues in the film. Marco comments that going down-market hasn't helped the family business: 'cheap and tacky' can be taken as extending beyond commercial issues, to moral ones; and it seems more than chance that the traumatized Justine is shown wearing only a pair of high-heeled shoes which might correspond to that description.

farmhouse; the images which are to follow are sufficiently graphic to need no explanation or counterpoint: in return for payment, Xavier and his partner show the visitors the outhouse which they rent out for sex parties – garish lighting, red leather beds, stained and marked, and facilities for taking videos.

The next track should be 'Love on the stairs', according to the soundtrack album, but this does not appear in the film. It has a much lighter tone – higher register and more melodic chords, conveying a sense of peace and fulfilment. One surmises that Denis was reluctant to surrender her vision of the blundering, myopic central character. There is a sexual encounter between Marco and Raphaëlle at this point in the film, but it is not the night the two spend on the stairs, which comes later. The music used for this earlier encounter is instead a short reprise of less than a minute from 'Night time cigarettes', which – as before – is about expectation: it begins as Marco, in a bar, sees Raphaëlle passing and follows her to the apartment building; it ends as they meet and start to kiss. As with its first appearance, this track has combined empathetic and disempathetic qualities, but now heightened: the sexual expectation is bearing fruit, but at the same time Marco's deception is looking shabbier to us as viewers, and his lack of control becoming more apparent.

The soundtrack continues to diverge from the composed score for the next musical cut. The scene begins with Marco on the stairs in the dark with a gun, seemingly contemplating revenge on Laporte, who is collecting Raphaëlle for an evening out. As usual, this initiative comes to nothing. The melody of this number is again that of 'Night time cigarettes' – but what is heard on the soundtrack is almost twice as long, and – unlike the original – has a ticking percussion beat all the way through. It starts as Marco sits on the stairs waiting for Raphaëlle to come back. It stops as she says goodnight to Edouard and it returns as she comes up the stairs. The track continues to play as they embrace and make love, and carries on without a break until she has to run down to answer the phone. On this occasion, then, the tune plays beyond the two lovers' anticipation and through their physical engagement. The significance

of the music here is that they have finally thrown caution to the winds and dispensed with their earlier hesitations. However, the added percussive element has the nature of a clock ticking, suggesting for me that the fuse has now been lit for the final explosion, and giving the music a stronger quality of disempathy than in its original form.

The soundtrack then reverts to the score sequence with 'Low life', a longer number than usual, of almost five minutes, most of which is heard over a visual sequence which explicates a number of aspects. It begins precisely as Sandra admits – almost insouciantly – that she has never been able to control her daughter. Subsequently, we see another version of Justine on the street; this time, we see her legs up close, thighs streaked with blood from the abuse, before she is found by police officers and taken into their care. Following a brief scene in which Marco is given a lift by the doctor, who speaks elliptically of abuse in the family, there is another fantasy interpolation. In Marco's nightmare, he is in a seedy alley, with evidence of drug abuse, down-and-outs, prostitutes, his dead brother, and what looks disturbingly like Elysée, Xavier's partner, presented as a transsexual. At the end of the sequence, we see Marco – apparently back in real life – getting a taxi to the farmhouse at night. 'Low life' has a slightly faster rhythm, with clicking, off-beat percussion and prominent bass. The melody is continuous, augmented increasingly frequently, and with crescendo, by layered floating, chanting voices and vibrato keyboards.

The music's evocation of hazy, uncontrolled sensation fits with what we have begun to find out has happened to Justine. It also speaks to Marco's struggle to comprehend what is happening. At plot level, it helps to tie together the brothel-like aspects of the scenario with those of parental irresponsibility (and worse). What has been going on in the family (as hinted at by the doctor), what has been taking place at the farmhouse, and how Justine fits into both scenarios – represented fragmentally by the images – are welded together through the embracing musical connection. The achievement here is that the music not only connects, empathetically, with the different states of confusion present in

Justine and Marco, but at the same time it operates in a disempathetic mode to comment unfavourably on the transgressive and dysfunctional behaviour of all concerned (Justine, I think, not entirely exempted).²⁷⁸

These mixed functions of the music blend different perspectives. The scenario of the film is not presented from a single point of view: Marco is, in a literal sense, the protagonist, but the perspectives of the other characters seep in and contribute to the polylogic series of voices, allied with the shadings of the music. Against that, those voices, those musical shades, run counter to the narrative which Marco is attempting to construct, and are heard stridently against the musical vacuum which he inhabits. As the music has been telling the audience from the outset, Marco will be too slow and too late to make a difference. The pace of the action picks up, and the musical score will follow suit. But Marco's attempts to resolve matters will continue to be carried on silently as far as musical accompaniment goes.²⁷⁹ He fails to find Justine, who has discharged herself from the clinic. Things are falling apart with Raphaëlle, because Laporte has found out about her affair and is taking their son away. When Marco tries to intervene, he is shot by Raphaëlle with his father's gun.²⁸⁰ As ever, Marco's actions – even his death – merit no music.

In what seems to be broadly parallel time, we see Xavier, Elysée, and Justine going for a stupefied drive at night. The car's occupants are all so off their heads that they just laugh when Justine switches off the car lights as she speeds round the hairpin bends. Critics have tended to read this as a deliberate suicide/murder. Rosalind Galt, for example, says:

Justine cannot cope with the physical and psychological abuse she has endured [...] the close-ups and heavy musical score in the scene seem to promise intimacy and outlaw energy, but in fact signal only Justine's desperation and the

²⁷⁸ Denis gives some support for this view in saying: 'elle n'est pas dans une grange, enfermée, elle est consentante' ('she is not locked away in a barn, she is consenting'), *Cahiers du cinéma*, 691, p.83.

²⁷⁹ A track called 'Night time woods', probably intended for Marco's return from the farmhouse on foot, is another omission from the soundtrack. This has shimmering, buzzing string sounds and modulated, ecclesiastical organ chords. It would have given a sense of growing menace – had Denis wanted music for Marco.

²⁸⁰ The film gives no indication whether this is revenge on her part; an effort to get back onside with Laporte; or an attempt to shoot Laporte which went wrong. Ironically, the gun used is Marco's.

impossibility, for her, of this apparatus leading anywhere but death.²⁸¹

I demur from this reading. It is clear from the hospital scene that she has fallen in love with Xavier and that it is him she wants to see. Consonant with this, the three in the car are on very intimate terms and there is no suggestion that Justine feels hostility or angst with regard to them. The scene reads for me as an example of that stepping over a normative line which so interests Denis. The rhythm of the music is hedonistic, as Galt implies, but if it carries an implicit warning, it is one which none of the pleasure-seekers hears (Xavier smiles and Élysée laughs at what Justine is doing).

This scene plays out to 'Night drive', a much faster piece, with a pumping beat,²⁸² chugging keyboards and wailing voices – all coming up higher and louder in the mix until a sudden fade. The dying keyboards continue over footage of the crashed car, with the bodies of Xavier and Justine and the badly injured Elysée. As I read it, the music here is primarily empathetic, fitted to the action as well as offering more general disempathetic comment on the disordered lives of all the characters in the film, crashing out of control. After the next scene in the film's actual chronography – showing in dislocated time the demise of Marco - there is a short cut to the wrecked body of the car, being driven away on a truck. Underneath the traffic and wind noise can be heard, very faintly, a snatch of the background whine of 'Night drive'. Music and image here combine to remark once more, disempathetically, on the inevitability of the personal disasters represented.

In the final sequence of *Les Salauds*, music and image are inseparable. After a (musically silent) prologue in which Dr. Béthanie offers Sandra a memory stick, which he says contains 'a few images' (a major understatement of the revelations which it contains), there is a cut to the ceiling camera embrasure in Xavier's brothel/outhouse before footage of the sexual activity starts to roll. At the point of the cut, Tindersticks' version of 'Put Your Love In Me' begins to play.

281 'Claire Denis's Capitalist Bastards', *Studies in French Cinema*, 15.3, p.286.

282 Reminiscent of Giorgio Moroder's work – for example 'I Feel Love' by Donna Summer on *I Remember Yesterday* (1977).

There is something different about this Errol Brown song from the usual offerings of Hot Chocolate. The YouTube version of their performance of 'Put Your Love In Me' incorporates slightly woozy synthesized keyboards and plays over footage of a couple embracing, the man being naked from the waist up. Nevertheless, it is still essentially a piece not out of place in the popular music charts. But the performance of the song by Tindersticks is transformative: the tempo is slowed down; Staples's baritone gives it a swooning quality; and the instrumentation adds a shimmering, ghostly effect. The throbbing bass guitar is much more prominent in the mix, sounding like a racing heartbeat, and the impassioned vocal, sliding up and down the scale, adds a further dimension. This effect is augmented by the ghostly slides of the ondes martenot.²⁸³

This scene of the film has been the subject of particularly unfavourable comments and is often read as somehow supplementary. Walton (10) describes it as a coda and asserts that its 'entire purpose is to shock'. Galt (288) asserts that: 'the film culminates brutally, placing the spectator into the uncomfortable role of pornographic voyeur'. Lübecker (136) says:

Of particular significance is the ending. [...] The explicitness of the ending goes hand in hand with various forms of underdeterminacy, one of which is produced by the plot structure. Denis provides us with building blocks for a plot, but stops far short of providing a tightly woven narrative.

This critique seems to expect Denis's film to vary from her usual approach. In particular, the criticisms ignore the impact of the music, either mentioning it purely in passing or leaving it out of account altogether. What the music does here is to connect with the extremes portrayed in the images: empathetically, with the intense desire, and ostensibly anempathetically with the distanced judgement of the observers; but also disempathetically, in the sense that, as we have seen, Denis wants to portray events which can happen in reality, but without falling into unconsidered condemnation of relational transgressions.

As with 'Trouble Every Day', Denis considered this Tindersticks performance as

²⁸³ A relation of the theremin; a baroque keyboard instrument which uses oscillations in vacuum for its effects. It has gradually become more widely used in recent years, especially since the development of an electronic version. Strictly speaking, the modern version is called an Ondéa to distinguish it from the original.

of sufficient impact to close her film with it. The full 7.22 minutes of it plays. In some ways, this is the director keeping her cards up her sleeve, musically speaking: the album score features a shorter version (2.40 minutes) as the opening track. This is called 'Put Your Love In Me (Fade)' and is the version usually available on social media. But this is not used, and the song, in its full version, plays over the shocking final scenes and the end credits. The feel, appropriately enough, is one of delirium – passion taken to extreme. The music brings to the words of a conventional love song a more perverse element, matched by the perversion of the activity on the image track:

I need you now and forever...Everything you are has just got to be a part of me...Give me more...more...Take me, take me to the very heart of you|Tonight I want to touch the stars|Tonight I want to be in heaven|Put your love in me

It is possible to take the view that the film structure itself concludes in a perverse way. There are three dénouements: the shocking death of Marco, the even more shocking (although in some ways not quite so surprising) deaths of at least two of the three young people, and the graphic revelation of sexual abuse and incest with which the film closes. It is of course this last key event which triggered the scenario of *Les Salauds*, even though at the opening of the film the audience is only given hints of what has happened.

The music at the outset of the film announces the seriousness of what is to follow. But, unlike the image track, which in its ending returns us implicitly to its opening shots, thus closing the circle of the narrative, the final music track does not reprise the ominous tones of 'Opening' or 'Naked walk', but instead strikes out in the completely new mode described, running contrapuntally, musically speaking, to what has gone before even as it seems to chime in with the closing image sequence. The effect of this is to refuse – in a manner reminiscent of *J'ai pas sommeil* – to offer unequivocal condemnation of what Jacques has done.²⁸⁴ As Denis herself has said, in relation to that film and to *Trouble Every Day*: 'J'ai toujours eu de la méfiance, pour moi, pas pour les autres, vis-à-vis des films où

²⁸⁴ Lübecker interprets Denis's observation that Justine consents to what happens to her as an example of how Denis confuses 'the cinematic and the extra-cinematic world' by: '*not wanting to judge*' (his italics), Lübecker, 2015, p.142.

la dynamique se réduit à l'opposition de Bien et du Mal'.²⁸⁵ In *Les Salauds*, whether accurately directed or not, most of the rancour is pointed at Laporte – although what he has actually done or not done is a matter of hearsay. Marco and Sandra also accuse each other of various failings; no-one seems to actively blame Jacques for the business failure, or for his suicide. Of the various possibilities mooted, we never know what actually drove him to kill himself.

Seen in this way, the film permits Jacques to be read as a victim – of malpractice, of blackmail, of his own desires. This is consistent with what Denis observed some years before making *Les Salauds*, in the context of Faulkner's *Pylon* (1935), which she re-read while making *Beau travail*: 'c'est le destin des hommes: être fait de chair et de sang, et être damné, mais damné laïquement, par le désir'.²⁸⁶ By closing with a piece of music which highlights the overpowering nature of desire, Denis is allowing the assumptions of criminality patent in the final images to be challenged by the music. Conversely, the musical silence which attaches to the character of Marco can be read as pointing away from guilty intention on his part. His error is to underestimate what he is dealing with. As Denis has observed, his story is that of a seemingly strong and dependable man, who 'because of his sense of duty, will be hurled, swept up by elements he couldn't even imagine'.²⁸⁷

Summary

The music in *Les Salauds* plays a key part, by its shifting associations with the various modes of empathy, in the film's presentation of relational fluid distance. Without it, sympathy with Marco or Justine would tend to run along uncritical lines, and the demonization of Jacques would not be mitigated by the broader perspectives suggested in the score. As Mayne (111) observes more generally

285 'I have always been wary, on my own account, not for others, about films in which the dynamic is reduced to the opposition between Good and Evil', 'Ce poids d'ici-bas' <<http://www.vacarme.org/article84.html>> [accessed 20/9/2017].

286 'It's the fate of man: to be made of flesh and blood, and to be damned, damned in a secular sense, by desire', 'Ce poids d'ici-bas' <<http://www.vacarme.org/article84.html>> [accessed 20/09/2017].

287 Q&A session at London première, Curzon Soho, 4 February 2014.

about Tindersticks work: 'their music seems to both accompany the image on screen and to suggest a pull in another direction'.

What has appeared to a number of commentators as a chaotic *film noir* which abandons the director's usual open-ended viewpoint, emerges accordingly as another example of relationality, as a new variant on her norm of querying the rules and boundaries of communal behaviour.²⁸⁸ Once again, her refusal of simplistic conceptualizations of Good and Evil evidences the dissensus which is central to her work. As Walton (11) concludes, the film 'brings the force of cinematic effect together with thought'.

Chapter summary and conclusions

The music for *Vendredi soir* plays across genre, mixing styles and running both with and against character and circumstance. This broad-ranging polyphony is mixed with elements of counterpoint. Dickon Hinchcliffe's score generally follows an empathetic line but is shot through with shades of disempathy, and occasionally anempathy. It variously blends with and counters the other music in the film, stylistically speaking, but also joins and departs from those other interventions in their empathetic and contradictory impact. Denis uses the score as a series of fragments, feeding them in to align with and to counter the image track. The rest of the music used in the film, orchestral and other, fulfils a similar role, contributing to both the polyphonic and contrapuntal aspects by adding to the elements on the soundtrack, but often doing so in a dissensual or implicitly critical way. As with Hinchcliffe's score, aspects of the musical empathetic are constantly woven in.

In respect of *Les Salauds*, the score offers perhaps the greatest variation in styles yet produced by Tindersticks. However, unlike *Vendredi soir*, and the other films for which members of the band have produced music, the score

²⁸⁸ And not least because her central character, the self-appointed instrument of justice, proves to be incompetent and unsympathetic. In this respect, Marco bears comparison with Galoup.

matches more closely with the film's events – and yet its variations carry a much stronger flavour of implied commentary; perhaps it is because the music gets closer to the shifting of Denis's use of fluid distance that she uses it more extensively. The one interpolated song is saved until the end with enhanced impact and offers a twist, not so much one of plot but a change of critical angle. As with *Vendredi soir*, the shadings and fluctuations in the music reflect the variations in viewpoint from which the characters can be observed, modulating through the range of empathetic, anempathetic, and disempathetic tones.

The differences in the music in both films, as regards its content and its usage, illustrate different ways in which aspects of the empathetic range can all be brought into play. In these respects, the ways in which Denis evades standard modes of film scoring become apparent. Notwithstanding these modes of variation, there is in every one of her films that degree of integration of the different musical elements which binds them into a whole. In my next chapter, I consider how incompleteness and fragmentation work as part of a coherent strand in the work of Denis.

Chapter 4: Incompletion and coherence

*L'envie de cinéma doit aller au-delà du cadre, vers le sens. Ca doit être un désir de relation avec les autres.*²⁸⁹

I have considered in close analysis how a number of Claire Denis films deploy music to interrogate relationality, using polyphony, counterpoint, and modes of empathy. As I have indicated, these critical tools can all be applied to any, and all, of her films. I now want to show how aspects of her practice of musical dissensus can be applied across the corpus of her work. In this chapter, I consider first how Denis uses music in fragmentary ways as an essential element of her creative technique, and as part of the challenge she offers to audiences. I go on to look at how music serves an integral function in giving her oeuvre a coherence. As part of this consideration, I reflect on what Chion says about the integrity of film soundtracks, how relevant this is to the films of Denis, and the ways in which other filmmakers deploy music.

Deconstruction

Don Van Vliet once remarked, in his persona of Captain Beefheart, that 'anyone who is serious about music has to be kidding'. This apparent throw-away dig at pretentiousness contains a characteristic irony: the idea (put into practice by Beefheart and his Magic Band in their recording and performing career) that music of any worth has to avoid cliché and be constantly re-created. In other words, the 'serious' side of music which reveres accepted form should be discarded in favour of a more playful, improvisational approach which privileges reinvention and re-interpretation. This chimes in with Deleuze and Guattari's concept of a refrain as something other than stale iteration: as repetition with difference, or as in the formulation referred to by Albertine Fox: 'the unpredictable rhythmic variations that repetitive music gives rise to mirror the permutations and oscillations [...] in which repetition never leads to the identical

²⁸⁹ 'Cinematic desire has to go beyond the frame, towards feelings. That involves a desire for relationship with others', Claire Denis interview in *Les Inrockuptibles*, 1 June 1994.

same but to a variational similarity'.²⁹⁰

Deleuze and Guattari describe in *A Thousand Plateaus* the structure of a refrain as having two essential aspects: augmentations and diminutions or additions and withdrawals (384). They go on to say that the refrain has two poles, which 'hinge not only on an intrinsic quality' (by which they mean its immediate impact) 'but also on a state of force on the part of the listener' (meaning a wider set of implications or connections which subsequently come into play).²⁹¹ In other words, there is a crucial link between musical structure and the affective response which it engenders, in which the concepts of addition and subtraction or proximity and distance play a key role. For present purposes, those movements of accretion and diminution can be aligned with the way music, and its absence, fits into the structure of the film and with how an audience responds to it, both initially and subsequently.

These concepts also connect with the idea of fluid distance as a simultaneous coming together and a creative breaking apart. Steve Sweeney-Turner argues that unmaking and re-making of this kind works in a way which enhances creativity: 'Deconstruction assumes that the dialectical uses opposition/antithesis simply as a means of reinforcing the original thesis. Deconstruction aims to break out of such unitary closure'.²⁹² This has relevance for Claire Denis's practice of avoiding set musical format in her films.

A repeated motif in the work of Denis is the medium of dance, an activity which draws on the formulaic but which will be different each time for participants. Kristin Hole sees dance in the films of Denis as representing unique occasions of relational contact made possible by music: 'the moment when the body engages with music can never be exactly repeated, thus expressing the

²⁹⁰ *Godard and Sound* (London and New York: Tauris, 2018), p.27.

²⁹¹ The example they use is the immediate resonance of Vinteuil's musical phrase for Swann – his love, the character of Odette and their associations with the Bois de Boulogne – as compared with the range of broader implications which the piece of music opens up when he is confronted with a changed perspective on all those factors. See p.385.

²⁹² 'On Dialectics and deconstruction', in *Music, Culture and Society: A Reader*, ed. by Derek B. Scott, (OUP, 2000), p.182.

sensations of a unique and fleeting moment in time'.²⁹³ For Hole (148), 'dance [...] is exemplary of the kinds of bodily creativity that a rethinking of relationality and subjectivity enables' (148). This kind of reassessment of relational issues is extrapolated in a more general musical context by Simon Frith, who argues for the impact of music in prompting a new angle of perception on societal values: 'What music does (all music) is put into play a sense of identity that may or may not fit the way we are placed by other social forces'.²⁹⁴ The relational querying in the work of Denis makes use of different modes of contact, between music, hearing, dance and touch, and opens out consistently to new perspectives, requiring audiences to make contact with troubling uncertainties.

The shifts of fluid distance exemplified in musical variance and surprise offer new perspectives and challenges. Music is used by Denis in her work in ways which do not conform to standard notions of film music. Composed scores are sampled, moved around, or replaced; items of recorded music are similarly introduced, in part or in whole, in places where they might not be expected. Ambient sound, and silences, add to this sonic shifting. By refusing to conform to normative approaches to film music (as with other aspects of her filmmaking), Denis gestures away from practices and assumptions which tend to endorse the accepted, and instead towards a sense of the importance of the integrity of individual perception. The cinema of Denis works against closure, certainty, and set patterns. As Hole observes: 'Denis's interruption of cinematic mythology parallels Nancy's advocacy of myth's interruption – or the privileging of openness and fragmentation over the fixity of singular meaning or explanatory framework' (129). My interest here is in how Denis achieves such interruption through fluid, fragmentary use of music.

Fragmentation

Fragmentation is a practice which Denis utilizes from the outset. In *Chocolat*, she uses Abdullah Ibrahim's score in fragments throughout the film. As an

²⁹³ Hole, 2016, p.149. Further references in body of text.

²⁹⁴ *Performing Rites*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), pp.276-77.

African musician, Ibrahim brings an implicit sense of locale to the scenario; this is enhanced by his use on the score of traditional instruments like bamboo flutes (see Fontanel, 199). His music joins with the sounds of animals and the elements to form a contextualization. However, the fleeting and occasional nature of the use of Ibrahim's music also accords with the fragments of France's memory as well as with the elusiveness of the dream which she is trying to realise. The African-ness²⁹⁵ simultaneously chimes in with what the protagonist is in the process of recalling, while presenting a mounting sense of hostility to the appropriations of her recall. In a reverse sense, the 'French' music ('Prosper Youp La Boum'²⁹⁶ and 'La Petite Eglise')²⁹⁷ offers a connection to the homeland of her parents, but its placement gives it an intrusive quality as a celebration by visitors to Cameroon of their own (foreign) nationality. What will come to be a regular theme of Denis's cinema, the questioning of colonial appropriation, is figured in the disruptive use of the music. Corresponding fragmentary modes feature throughout her work, in films as varied as *J'ai pas sommeil*, *Beau travail*, *L'Intrus*, and *35 rhums*.

In *J'ai pas sommeil* there is an occasional musical motif, notably Basehead's 'I Try', but more generally the music revisits implicit connections (the pieces by Michael Ivey) as well as weaving in contrasting elements, which connect via the image track and the characterization. The music therefore plays a part in augmenting the sense of passing connection, disconnection, and re-connection which takes place in the plot, by an integrated movement of coming, going, and returning (fluid distance). Fuentes (213) describes this effect of the music in the following way: 'la musique génère une série d'enveloppes sonores relatives à des particularités individuelles, tout en ménageant dans le même temps des possibilités de fuite et de débordements'.²⁹⁸ Alongside the incidence of the music runs its associative connections: Kali's association with Martinique is

295 Even this is not straightforward: although a respected African musician, Ibrahim is not Cameroonian, but born in South Africa, and not permanently resident there.

296 A hit for Maurice Chevalier in 1935.

297 A much-recorded number written by Paul Delmet (words by Charles Fallon), a nineteenth century composer with strong links to Montmartre, who specialized in romantic songs with a Parisian flavour.

298 'The music generates a series of sonic envelopes relating to individual particularities, but always providing the possibility of flight and overflowing'.

clearly important in view of the origins of Fleur and her sons, and Théo's desire to return to his homeland. The Dominican flavour provided by Bill Thomas and his band offer a different link to the Antilles; their number also brings in the wider dimension of Africa.²⁹⁹ The Frenchness of Jean Louis Murat is balanced with English (Pattison and Procol Harum) and American (Basehead) flavours. This refusal by the music of a fixed associative location ties in with the sense of rootlessness which pervades *J'ai pas sommeil*. It is jazz-like in its push towards operating outside a narrow frame.

The reprises of situation and music in the film are equally about the impossibility of staying together. Camille's rows and making-up with Raphaël; Théo's with Mona; the affection and aloofness between Théo and Camille; Fleur's relation with her sons; Daïga's whole relationship with Paris: all these end in separation. In line with those aspects of the oeuvre of Denis which are about the unrepresentability of happy endings and tidy resolutions, the moments of intimacy and friendship in this film are outweighed by the impulse of individual and society to assert their sense of separateness. Accordingly, the occasions of purely empathetic music are rare. Musical predominance is given to questioning or undercutting what the image track is showing. In *J'ai pas sommeil*, these musical effects are by turns, and sometimes together, at some distance from sympathetic connection with the events to which they attach and at times deliberately deconstructive. The director herself says that she sees 'Le lien défait' as having a central place in her film because she believes there is a link between the disconnection indicated in the song, the circumstances of Camille's life as an outsider, and the impulse for someone excluded from society to lash out violently.³⁰⁰

299 'African Music' is a classic example of the fusional approach which Denis often uses. It has an authentic African feel – reminiscent of, for example, Hugh Masekela – even though conceived by an Antillean band.

300 Denis says that she wanted the structure of the film to reflect the incomprehension of those close to Camille as to how the same person could be two diametrically opposite things, i.e. 'gentil' and yet a murderer. For this reason the film takes what she describes as a 'sideways' approach, not focusing on the murders because Camille's relatives were unaware that they were anything to do with him. This approach is sustained as far as possible in relation to the audience (in fact, until over an hour into the film when we see the first murder). Unpublished interview with Thierry Jousse, included on French DVD of film.

Denis adopts different approaches towards the written scores for her films. In *White Material*, although she does bring in additional material, those items only consist of snatches as opposed to full or substantial extracts from the songs concerned. From about the middle point of the film, the score and the soundtrack start to lose touch with each other. As we have seen, 'Maria And The Old Man' (originally Track 10) has been brought forward. Its place in the musical chronology is taken by 'Night Nurse'. Track 8, 'André And The Old Man', placed on the soundtrack album before 'Yellow Dog', plays at a later stage, as part of a surge of music in the final quarter of the film. 'André's Death', the twelfth track on the score, is not used at all. There are two possible reasons for this. The most obvious is that the film does not show André's death – perhaps this was a planned scene which did not materialize, or make the final cut. However, it is interesting that this musical track has a significantly different quality to the rest of the score. It features more assertive percussion; bass and organ figures move up and down the scale more fluidly but also more emphatically than elsewhere; the guitar notes are in a higher register and harsher than usual. Overall, this track has an aggressive and dramatic tone. One can speculate that the director felt it was out of key with the sombre mood and inexorable movement of her film.

There are comparable examples in relation to other films. *Nénette et Boni* and *Vendredi soir* use relatively short cuts from the written scores; *Trouble Every Day* draws more extensively on what had been composed, without making use of it in full. In the case of *L'Intrus*, however, Denis seems to have been taken aback by the bleakness and stridency of the offered music, and uses it sparingly. More recently, musicians and filmmaker have found a greater degree of consonance. The soundtrack for *35 rhums* followed most closely the composed score, using all the tracks except one, in the intended place, and for the most part in full.³⁰¹ For this film and for *White Material*, Tindersticks seem to have found a mode which appeals to the filmmaker. It seems likely that those two scores captured the kind of ambiguity which Denis likes in her films. On that

301 The exception is 'Lionel Home Drunk', a short variation on the main theme, with lugubrious woodwind, which the director presumably decided was *de trop*.

view, the music for the earlier films may have come across to her ear as too simplistic: either too sympathetic or too antagonistic to the images which it accompanied.

Ambient sound

The sexual encounter between Shane and Christelle in *Trouble Every Day* is an example of how Denis's approach to film music comprises not only questions of choice, positioning, and length, but also of withholding. There are a number of instances in the film when the score is supplemented by ambient sound or is superseded by it. The recorded album score has pauses between instrumentation; in the film, these gaps are filled by additional sound: aircraft and traffic noise, machinery, but also by a rumbling noise which takes on a thrumming quality, suggestive of a roaring in the ears. In this way, the motifs linking the characters in different ways are supplemented by aural suggestion of their pent-up bodily tensions.

This mode of background rumbling sound offers something comparable to Eran Tzur's fate theme in *Beau travail*, underlining the sense of impending doom. The sound is sometimes submerged under other ambient sound effects, but keeps returning. It appears in the scene where Léo is washing Coré, supplementing the linkage suggested by the way in which the track 'Room 321' is used. It is also heard during the dream/flashback of Léo's research work, seeking a cure. This scene, showing him examining plants in a glass-protected laboratory, is different from the general ambience of the film and has a slightly surreal air, overlit but blurred. The ambient rumbling is present throughout, conveying a sense of his desperation; the nature of the task, which is like wading through treacle in its hopelessness, is figured almost haptically in the indistinct quality of the background sound.

When Christelle is working in the bathroom, accompanied by the notes of 'Maid Theme', she hears the room door close and she is momentarily transfixed. At

this point the soundtrack re-introduces the ambient rumbling as a prelude to our seeing Shane coming in and sitting on the bed; the two are now directly connected by the linked associations of 'Maid Theme' and ambient sound which play alongside each other as the shot cuts between the bathroom and the bedroom. On another occasion, juxtaposition of ambient rumbling with the musical score also occurs underneath the sound of Christelle wheeling her trolley, then comes more into prominence as she gazes at the 'do not disturb' sign on the door of Room 321. Her demeanour is as if she cannot believe that she is denied access to the room, and the implicit connection with Shane is once more brought forward.

That connection is further reinforced by a cut to June, drowsing in bed: the rumbling is now louder and we see her sitting up in bed, displaying the bite mark left by her husband – the sonic link points to the counterpoint between the play token left by Shane and the visceral wounds which he will leave on Christelle. There is also a sonic carry-over to the next scene. June has been disturbed by the sound of Shane's laptop; when she opens it, she sees on screen a link to Léo Semeneau, whom Shane is desperately trying to contact. The rumbling continues as June looks at the resolving screen, and then carries over a cut to Shane pursuing his search in the laboratories where Léo used to work. His fruitless interview with the lead scientist, Choart, takes place to the background of laboratory sounds which run in sympathy with the earlier rumbling. The interrelationships in these examples are counterpointed by the ambient sound. For Shane, it represents the intensity of his awareness of the demands of his condition and his search for a cure; for Christelle, it further underscores her prurient interest and hints at the unknown risk she is running; for June, it also suggests an element of threat, coupled with a mix of anxiety and unawareness. The similarities and differences of the relationship which each woman has with Shane are accordingly brought out, sonically.

When we see Shane, lurking in voyeuristic mode outside a washroom, the ambient noise is given a less industrial and more musical tone; this does not

take the form of specific notes, but the muffled throbbing is again reminiscent in tone to Erwan Tzur's fate theme in *Beau travail*. Shane's attempted sexual contact with a stranger is linked yet again to Christelle as the ambient noise runs over briefly to her making the bed and then cleaning the bathroom. While she does this, we hear a reprise of 'Maid Theme', followed by a very short snatch of background noise which anticipates a more sustained rumbling, heard over footage of the corridor and then joined once more by 'Maid Theme' before the image track cuts back to Christelle in the bathroom.

For the final scenes of *Trouble Every Day* there is a reprise of the ambient rumbling, which picks up immediately after the assault scene in the basement, as June enters the bedroom and the couple embrace in the bathroom. This absence of musical resolution represents a dissensual move, in line with the unresolved plot lines (Shane may have got away with murder; the couple are again in harmony as they prepare to return home; and the visual hints that June knows Shane has a serious problem – as evidenced by the medication she finds and the trickle of blood on the shower curtain – do not indicate that she is fully seized of his condition). The muffled, sub-aquatic sound runs over into the black screen and fades as the credits roll. The music, like the plot lines, leaves matters open-ended. Denis also applies similar techniques to aspects of sonic volume.

Sound levels and silences

For some critics, music in the cinema is getting ever louder and more assertive, but its role continues to be undervalued. Seth Kim-Cohen summarizes the position of music in the following way: 'engagements with sound remain rooted in perceptual essentialism. This tack is likely motivated by the second-class citizenship of sound in the community of senses. Always in vision's shadow, sound must shout to be heard' (94). Against this, it is quite usual for music in a Claire Denis film to function at a low level, almost (sometimes completely) unheard. This happens with the music of Eran Tzur in *Beau travail* and that of

Abdullah Ibrahim in *S'en fout la mort*. In *Trouble Every Day*, the undercurrent of barely noticed sound is fulfilled by the ambient rumbling rather than actual music. In similar fashion, Dickon Hinchcliffe's music in *Vendredi soir* often fades below street noise and other sounds on the soundtrack.

I have drawn attention at various points in this thesis to absences of music in the films of Denis. I suggested in my introduction that the appearance and disappearance of music forms part of the working of fluid distance: the music participating in this dynamic by its familiarity or unfamiliarity, its decontextualization, its fragmentation, its disappearance, and re-appearance. The absence of music has been noted for the unsettled relationships between Mona and Théo, and between Camille and Raphaël, and also for the confrontation between the arrested Camille and his mother, in *J'ai pas sommeil*. Particularly noteworthy here is the often-mentioned absence of music in this film for the murderous assaults which are shown. The unsettling effect of this – together with the single-take, medium-shot, unemphatic shooting of these scenes – is evidenced by some of the criticism which the film attracted: effectively that the undramatic portrayal of the attacks equated to a reprehensible failure to condemn the murders on which the story was based. Denis herself has spoken often of her refusal to aestheticize those events by giving them heightened colouring, including music.

The effect of the absence of music is particularly notable in *Trouble Every Day*. In the scene where Shane and Christelle unexpectedly encounter one another in the hotel room, the image track shows sexual desire (Christelle's sensual anticipation and Shane's getting into bed preparatory to self-pleasuring), which is paralleled by the sonic twin track. When Christelle emerges from the bathroom and apologizes, 'Maid Theme' no longer plays and the ambient sound is muted (and more like traffic noise, although the shifts in level make it analogous to the impact of the ambient theme tone). This suggests that the floors and doors which separated the two characters, when musical connection bridged the distance between them, are no longer there and that there is no

auditory need for a connecting note. In plot terms, this sudden proximity is like a catch of the breath, a hesitation before action, and the sudden muting of the music reflects this.

The juxtaposition of silence and music have already been highlighted in the early encounter between the honeymooners and the chambermaid, and in the footage of Coré on the prowl, all in relation to 'Maid Theme'. Later on in the film, there is brief footage of June, dressed for going out, greeting Christelle and the other chambermaids in the corridor. This short scene needs no music: there is no direct relationship of significance between the two women; their point of connection is through Shane. But the absence of music also forms an implied commentary on the relation June has with her partner. She is on her honeymoon with her rather oddly-behaving husband, who avoids making love to her. Their relationship is affectionate, tactile, but there is no sex (the bite mark on her shoulder is the closest indicator of passion). Does this make her complicit with his clandestine behaviour? Denis leaves this question unresolved. However, the withholding of music from their relationship points up that all is not as it should be between them. This musical silence is indicative of the lack of meaningful communication which takes place between husband and wife – they do not engage in long conversation and for the most part their discourse comprises short banal remarks. This also carries a contrapuntal weight in relation to the framing music of the film. There, reference is made to words which cannot be spoken, and the absence of engagement which exists between the couple is figured by musical absence.

This lack of narrative (visual) resolution is endorsed by the song 'Trouble Every Day' which plays over the credits. The ominous aspects suggested by the words of the song remain, and the return of the music with which the film began leaves open whether the circle of violence will continue to come round.

Similarly, in keeping with the musical schema of *J'ai pas sommeil*, in which dead or dying relationships play against silence, Camille and Raphaël share no

music. Raphaël is present in the club for Camille's performance, but he is one of the series of seemingly disconnected observers. The moments which they have to themselves in the film are usually either neutral – coming or going together silently – or, in more intimate relation, attended by violence. The first time we see them together, Camille behaves aggressively towards his partner. When Raphaël says he wants to leave, he is treated in a threatening manner; and, later on, we see him dishevelled and bleeding leaving the hotel with his belongings. The fact that the two have no musical connection is marked by the manner of Raphaël's departure.

We see him descending the stairs, distressed, during the last few seconds of 'A Whiter Shade of Pale' (like Daïga, his complexion is very pale). In his case, we can apply the referential nature of the song to a sexual relationship³⁰² as touching on what has been between the two men; but, instead of a celebration of experience, it announces the end of the relationship. His experience is a far cry from the pleasure which Ninon and Daïga have had in each other's company, and the music which carried so much sympathy between the two women now has a strongly alienated affect as it briefly touches Raphaël's image. His situation is underlined by the synch cut in which the music stops as the doors of the hotel close behind him, immediately followed by a short cut of Camille sitting silently on the stairs. In this respect their relationship is similar to the emotional distance indicated by the lack of music between Théo and Mona, noted earlier.

Another relational failure indicated by the absence of music appears in the scene where Fleur confronts Camille after he has admitted the murders. She refers to him as Satan and says she wishes she had strangled him at birth ('J'aurais dû te tuer quand tu es sorti de mon ventre'). Notwithstanding, he remains her son, and she caresses his face before they are separated. Shortly before, Théo, in answer to an officer's insinuations, says that his brother is a

³⁰² Keith Reid, the lyricist, says that it is a song about a relationship and its progress. Interestingly, he also says that he was very influenced by French film at the time of writing, and that the structure of the song was to provide ideas which listeners could develop and conclude for themselves (not unlike Denis's approach to film). See <www.songfacts.com/detail.php?id=1131> [accessed 3/6/2015].

stranger to him ('mon frère, je sais rien de lui, comme toi'). None of this drama is set to music: not only is musical embellishment unnecessary for such a scene of family tragedy, but the (musical) silence, in suggesting emptiness, offers a stark commentary on the comparison with the birthday party, which I think we are invited to infer. In this film, then, we can say that the breakdowns of family and music run together.

The sociable contact across music between Ninon and Daïga stands in contrast to other relationships in the film. All we see of Ira's social network is her taking advantage of it: pressurizing Ninon and Ossip to find accommodation for Daïga, to find her work, to help her sell her car. Mona similarly relies on her sister and her mother for accommodation and babysitting. With the exception of Raphaël, Camille's friends all seem to be hangers-on: we only see them wheeling and dealing, or going out for the night or returning in the morning; their relations are all conducted in public places. The lack of empathy in this pattern of empty relations in *J'ai pas sommeil* is reflected by the musical silence which attends them.³⁰³

Other examples already discussed in detail are: the association of musical absence with emptiness for the characters in *US Go Home*; and the absence of musical intervention in narrative scenes in *L'Intrus* and in *35 rhums* (especially post-'Nightshift'). These dissensual, deconstructive moves against the norms of over-emphatic cinema music gesture silently towards the challenges of Denis's cinema. In a sense, the audience is required to either supply its own music, or to ask itself why music is not supplied.

Commentators have occasionally noted instances where music goes missing. For example, Cédric Mal draws attention to the de-dramatization of the scene in *Nénette et Boni* where Boni abducts his new-born nephew at the end of the film; Mal comments (212) that not only is the film speed slowed, but also this

³⁰³ It is noticeable that the only two couples in the film are the flawed ones of Camille and Raphaël, and Théo and Mona. Théo is the only father. There is a preponderance of women, and the men are predominantly police officers or gays; the theatrical types are a form of light relief, as is the potential car-buyer.

dramatic event is soundless: 'En plus du ralenti, tout son est évacué de la bande sonore: la caméra est restée derrière la fenêtre de la pièce où se joue le rapt'.³⁰⁴ The point here is that one might have expected the removal of a baby at gunpoint by someone who is not his parent to be underscored by an emphatic intervention on the soundtrack, rather than the incident being at one remove visually and the sound muffled.

Rémi Fontanel (120) remarks on a very different incidence of sonic absence in *Beau travail*: what he describes as 'un plan de six secondes privé de son' (a six second scene with no sound).³⁰⁵ The image is of Rahel dancing, lit by a red strobe, but without music. Fontanel's interpretation of its significance is that it represents a flash of memory for Galoup, but, inserted among a whole series of cuts, it operates to complicate the already uncertain temporality of the film.³⁰⁶ Fontanel's argument (120-21) seems to be that its difference from the visual and sonic scale of the other disco scenes throws further doubt on what Galoup is remembering and when: 'À quelle temporalité appartient ce flash au sein du discothèque? Au passé de Galoup certes, mais où situe-t-il dans ce passé éclaté de la même manière que semble l'être ce qui est raconté au présent?'³⁰⁷

These examples by Mal and Fontanel are more manifestations of fluid distance. We are up close with the legionnaires, and with Galoup and Rahel; but the events are distant in time and place. This is clearly conveyed by the juxtaposition of soldiers ironing under Galoup's supervision, and his own solitary stint with his ironing board back on mainland France. I agree with Fontanel (120) that this music-less flashback is a significant fragment: 'Une bribe de passé revient et repart pour laisser place à une autre moment appartenant aussi à ce grand puzzle où ce ne sont plus deux temporalités qui cohabitent

304 'In addition to the slowing-down, all sound is evacuated from the soundtrack: the camera is left behind the window of the room where the abduction is playing out'.

305 He has slightly misheard here as the images are in fact accompanied by an extract from Eran Tzur's score which also plays over the preceding and following scenes.

306 These include legionnaires hanging out washing; doing their ironing; Galoup helping Rahel hang out the washing; Galoup doing his own ironing (in Marseille); buying perfume for Rahel (in Djibouti).

307 'To what temporality does this flashback inside the discothèque belong? Certainly to Galoup's past, but where does it fit into this exploded past in a way consistent with what seems to be related in the present?'.

mais bien plusieurs car chacune d'entre elles est ainsi pénétrée d'autres surgissements'.³⁰⁸ This is part of the fragmentation which Denis practises in her fluid approach to relationality.

Musical integrity

As we have seen, one of Chion's well-known assertions relates to the integrity of film soundtracks:

By stating that *there is no soundtrack* I mean first of all that the sounds of a film, taken separately from the image, do not form an internally coherent entity on equal footing with the image track. Second, I mean that each audio element enters into *simultaneous vertical relationship* with narrative elements contained in the image (characters, actions) and visual elements of texture and setting.³⁰⁹

This has echoes of Vertov's assertion that: 'an audiovisual film is not the mechanical combination of a radio-film and a silent film, but the uniting of both so that independent existence of image or sound line is eliminated'.³¹⁰ However, what Chion argues amounts to an assertion that music is the poor relation of film, that its elements do not have a discernible relationship with each other, and that those elements have an essentially localized application. This seems debatable. As Chion concedes, there are, admittedly rare, films whose soundtrack plays against a blank screen; in those cases, it must be true that the soundtrack has a superior status to an effectively non-existent image track. But sound can augment image in the same way as image can augment sound. A film – for example *Vendredi soir* – played without its sound would only be a coherent entity in a very narrow sense. In that context, the soundtrack is arguably potentially more viable on its own than the image track. Chion's argument raises a number of issues. Among these are the extent to which a film score can be considered as totally viable in its own right, when there are ostensibly external elements to add to its richness, and how far one can listen satisfactorily to any piece of music in total isolation from its context or its connections.

308 'A fragment of the past returns, then departs, ceding place to another moment also belonging to this great puzzle in which there are no longer two cohabiting temporalities but many others, since each of them is correspondingly penetrated by the arrival of others'.

309 *Audio-Vision* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p.40 (his italics).

310 1942 diary entry cited in Fox, p.33.

One consideration here (suggesting that Tindersticks do not wholly share Chion's view) is that the band has issued as a box set the soundtracks written for Claire Denis. As far as that goes, therefore, this music is established – aesthetically and commercially – as something which can satisfactorily be listened to in its own right. It is worth noting too that occasionally tracks on a Tindersticks' score album include non-musical sounds used in the film. Naturally, a listener familiar with the associated films will temper and augment the listening experience with memories of the film images; but by the same token such individual listeners will bring different memories to bear, in the same way as anyone listening to any music will do so while applying their personal context to it. And a listener to these particular scores does not have to have seen a Denis film to derive value from the listening experience.

There is, however, another consideration which challenges Chion's view of the absolute integrity or viability of an individual film score. That relates to how one film connects, musically, with another. The cinema of Claire Denis is an allusive one, and there is invariably scope for the alert watcher to pick up references and hints which add texture to the immediate narrative. Jean-Luc Nancy, for example, has drawn attention to what he sees as a thread of Christic imagery running through certain Denis films. There are constant references in her oeuvre, varying from the oblique to the obscure, to works of art and literature. As she says herself: 'Je pense qu'il n'y a pas la littérature d'un côté et le cinéma de l'autre, il y a quelque chose qui est greffé'.³¹¹ So too with music, as indicated by the wide range of cultural associations adumbrated in the films of Denis.

Using *Vendredi soir* as a representative example, there are musical connections to at least three other of Denis's own films. First, the use of 'The Bitter Withy' by Benjamin Britten. Given the importance of Britten's opera *Billy Budd* in *Beau travail*, and the struggle between passion and routine duty in that earlier film, the thread of a relation between the two films presents itself by this musical

311 'I don't think there is literature on the one hand and cinema on the other, it's something which is grafted together', 'Ce poids d'ici-bas', <<http://www.vacarme.org/article84.html>> [accessed 20/09/2017]. Denis brackets together in the same interview the importance for her of Nancy's *L'Intrus* and Derrida's *Le Toucher*, Jean-Luc Nancy.

bridge. Similarly, the relevance of the song 'Two Sleepy People', to Laure and Jean is obvious – although it carries some ironical weight, because at the end of the film a contrapuntal move will have Laure leave a sleeping Jean. But it also makes a thread of connection with the playing, at the start of *J'ai pas sommeil*, of its obverse – 'Relax-Ay-woo', also sung by Martin and Renaud, the latter of whom plays a part in that film, (not to mention the shared somnolence inherent in this song and in the title of the earlier film). On a purely aural level, in the scene where Laure is looking for Jean in *Vendredi soir*, the accompanying music, 'Laure's Theme' by Hinchcliffe, captures something of the flavour of the score by Tindersticks for *Trouble Every Day* in its quality of anxious desiring and mournfulness – and once that connection has been made, the parallel between the two films of a woman busy looking for a man in the French capital inevitably asserts itself.

Connections of these kinds are abundant. Accordingly, the usefulness of Chion's approach to the issue of the integrity of film music is problematized by the more fluid approach of filmmakers such as Claire Denis, whose work challenges stereotype assumptions. I now look at how these ideas sit with the use of music by other directors.

Different uses of film music

I now take a look at some comparative samplings, which have been selected to indicate how other directors use music in ways which are either consistent with assumed norms or which strike out more deliberately and obviously against those normative assumptions. The case which I want to make is that Claire Denis, in using the shifts and variations which are a feature of her films, avoids the paradigmatic but does so in less obvious ways, which allow music to be an integral part of her work at the same time as a force constantly gesturing towards the undoing of pattern and stereotype.

As discussed in my introductory chapter, film music theory continues to struggle

to embrace sometimes conflicting practices. This is perhaps an inevitable outcome of attempts at over-prescription, and, particularly, the imposition of an inflexible role for film music. The routine assumption of what music is expected to do in a film is set out by David Sonnenschein, who lists the criteria for the use of music in film as: 'emotional signifier, continuity, narrative cueing, and unity'. In line with standard thinking, Sonnenschein says that: 'a good musical score [...] is not meant to be heard, at least not consciously, normally remaining subordinate to the dialogue and the visuals'.³¹² This kind of resistance to change dies hard. Composers as different as Elmer Bernstein and Jean-Michel Jarre concur on the principle. Bernstein's resistance to variance from a set approach is expressed as: 'film music is in an abysmal state in the United States, with music designed to be specifically commercial rather than germane to the dramatic work',³¹³ while Jarre is quoted as saying, in the context of David Lean's *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962): 'I think it is important to have a main theme [...] instead of disturbing the audience with too many different themes' (47).

It is not that dissonant music is new, but its use in the past has generally been in conformity with the precepts outlined by Sonnenschein. To take an example from the *ancien régime*, Eisner's score for Dudow's *Kuhle Wampe* (1932) has obvious and deliberate dissonant elements – but these chime in with rather than contradict the narrative: the chaotic work-seeking and despair of the first part; the surreality of camp life in the second; and the set-piece bravura of the third part: for all of these, the music endorses and emphasizes the dissonant aspects of the scenario rather than running counter to them. To that extent, the music fits into the 'unheard' model, not being set up as a counterpoint but providing an additional aspect of the alienation inherent in Brecht's script and Dudow's images.

A later example of this is Alain Robbe-Grillet's *Glissements progressifs du plaisir* (1974), in which music, together with various Foley sounds, is heard

312 Sound Design (Studio City CA: Michael Wiese Productions, 2001), pp. 155-56.

313 In Mark Russell and James Young, *Film Music: Screencraft* (London: Roto Vision, 2000), p.43. Subsequent reference in text.

almost always contrapuntally to the images. However, this is a film in a surrealist mode (bedsteads, beaches, broken bottles, blood, and unclothed women) and the function of the soundtrack seems simply intended to augment the provocative visuals. Something similar might be said for the soundtrack to Jim Jarmusch's *Dead Man* (1995), by Neil Young. In typically idiosyncratic mode, Young was not interested in the script or the scenario, and composed the music while viewing a rough cut of the images.³¹⁴ Despite the striking nature of the music, as well its appositeness for the film, this method of composition is not so far from the standard mode of film scoring, adding music when the film is virtually finished. This is very different from how musical considerations are embedded from the outset in the work of Denis.

Sometimes, music is foregrounded but isolated, as for example in Alain Resnais' *L'Amour à mort* (1984), where image and dialogue on the one hand and music on the other are rigorously kept apart for almost all the film. And of course Jean-Luc Godard, typically running against the norms, wants the music in his films to be jarring and intrusive, to assert its independence by way of volume and style (in much the same way as he works with dialogue, captions, images, and other sounds). Albertine Fox says: that 'Godard uses sound and silence to disrupt the narrative flow and to make the spectator conscious of the soundtrack' (21). Music is of central importance for Godard, and can be seen to have a value which matches that of image and dialogue. In this context, Orlene Denice McMahon cites Annette Davison's emphasis on:

the key technique of deconstruction in Godard's use of music, whereby he constantly works to keep the elements of the soundtrack separate and distinctive in order to create dialectical audiovisual relationships.³¹⁵

In some of his films, music can be said to be the dominant element – for example, *Eloge de l'amour* (2001), in which the sense of loss and mourning is conveyed in a heart-breaking fashion by the music. Other Godard films,

³¹⁴ See Juan A. Suárez, *Jim Jarmusch* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007), p.117. Suárez himself actually makes a comparison with composing for silent films. Conversely, Jarmusch wrote the screenplay for *Dead Man* while listening to the music of Young and Crazy Horse – see Elsie Walker, 'Dead Man' in *Understanding Sound Tracks Through Film Theory* (OUP, 2015), p.63.

³¹⁵ *Hollywood Theory, Hollywood Practice* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), p.80, cited in Orlene Denice McMahon, *Listening to the French New Wave* (Oxford and New York: Peter Lang, 2014), p.86.

ostensibly about music, such as *One Plus One* (1968), use it more as background to the narrative. However, Godard's emphatic style tends to work like a series of zooms, bringing to the fore one aspect after another rather than seeking to integrate them. Godard's cinema is the antithesis of the perceived Hollywood model inasmuch as it insists that the music – like the other elements of the film – is brought to front stage and actively noticed. The comparative point here is that Denis's films make the music significant without giving it such prominence as a discrete aspect

Even where music's function is a dislocative one, the tendency has been to hear it as simply supporting the scenario. Juraj Lexman offers as an example of asynchrony Alain Resnais' *L'Année dernière à Marienbad* (1961): '[...] one shot shows a hotel music band swiftly playing the strings. However, the sounding music is a slow organ music'. Lexman takes this to signify: 'the internal psychological world of the main character'.³¹⁶ By contrast, Terrence Malick uses music to represent emotional intensity, but this does not happen simply as an underscoring effect; often, the music has a predominant role: in *To the Wonder* (2012), for example, already muted and fragmentary dialogue disappears behind the swelling score. Malick deploys music to present the inarticulacy of the human condition, especially when emotional intensity overflows. Denis neither uses music in the psychologizing way suggested by Lexman, nor does she allow it to predominate as Malick does.

Almén and Buhler remark of Rivette's *L'amour fou* (1969) that: 'by insisting at the outset that sounds and music can take flight [...] and concatenate in strange and provocative ways, the film calls into question the utility of the sound-image "marriage", which seems to lock everything into conventional, predetermined roles'.³¹⁷ Philip Glass argues against musical prescription, saying in the context of *Powaqqatsi* (Godfrey Reggio, 1988): '[Mickey Mousing] doesn't provide any

³¹⁶ *Theory of Film Music* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2006), p.121. As a musician and musicologist, Lexman adheres to the technical, musical meaning of counterpoint, using the term asynchrony to indicate contrast or difference in musical juxtaposition.

³¹⁷ 'Mad Sound and the Crystal-Image' in *The Palgrave Handbook of Sound Design*, p.200. Subsequent reference in text.

space for the spectator to enter the experience of watching. By contrast, when you leave a certain space between the image and the music, the spectator has to psychologically cover that space. It is in the act of traversing that space that their experience becomes personalised' (128).

Marguerite Duras's *Son nom de Venise dans Calcutta désert* (1976) also uses music in a contrapuntal manner. In Duras's film, the orchestra plays for a great deal of the time, especially during the middle third of the film. There is a strong sense of repetition and refrain here as three or four tunes are continually heard, weaving in and out of the repeating sounds of the narrator's voice, the conversations at the Embassy ball, the cries and singing of the Laotian woman, and the calls of the Ganges fisherman, and those of the birds and monkeys. The music in *Son nom de Venise* operates on a number of levels. The dance music (a mix of tango, rumba, and waltz) plays empathetically with the social scene running behind the narrative. At the same time, its languid, 1930s style³¹⁸ conveys a sense of the depleted, enervated nature of the dying days of colonialism. It is reinforced in this by the continuing appearance of the 'India Song' theme tune, with its languid, melancholic feel. The sense of superfluity in *Son nom de Venise* is also contributed to by the incongruous contrast of the sounds of the dance band with the strident external noises. At the narrative level, a counterpoint is created between the formality and custom of the setting (ritual music) and the passionate urgency of the vice-consul and his overwhelming impulse to cast aside convention (his screams of frustration).³¹⁹ In the sense that this film replays the soundtrack of Duras's *India Song* (1975), but without showing the audience the characters, the insistence of the music adds another layer of counterpoint by emphasizing the ghostliness of the absentees, playing as it does against a backdrop of abandoned rooms and dilapidated buildings. This is a more subtle use of music, which has some resonance with the practice of Claire Denis in how the sound slides in and out, and cuts across the scenario, although in some ways it represents the polar opposite in its

318 Composed for the film by Carlos d'Alessio, a Duras regular.

319 Further emphasized by the short break allied with the shock of this grand solecism being followed by the orchestra striking up a jaunty, insouciant air (which at the same time gels with the reassuring platitudes offered by embassy officials to their guests).

privileging of dialogue.

Some directors put especial emphasis on the importance of music in their films. For example, the work of Martin Scorsese often uses a soundtrack which fits the scenario but which is also meant to be listened to and identified with, as in *Who's That Knocking at My Door?* (1967), *Mean Streets* (1973), and *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore* (1974). This does not preclude its more complex use, an example of which can be found in *Goodfellas* (1990). At a critical point in the film, when unquestioning loyalty and friendship start to turn towards mistrust, Scorsese signals this shift by introducing 'Sunshine of Your Love' (1967) by Cream. Musically speaking, the descending bass cadences strike an appropriate tone of threat. The song also works contrapuntally: it is about the anticipated pleasure of reunion with a lover and in this respect points in the opposite direction to the scenario. Stylistically, the music indicates a major change; the film soundtrack up to this point has been dominated by Italianate ballads from the 1950s and rhythm and blues numbers from the early 1960s, but what is now heard is a completely new style, marking the change of tone, the effect is like a gear change. Although Denis clearly does not think of her films à la Scorsese, as offering separable, listenable soundtracks, his more subtle use, as in the example given for *Goodfellas*, brings him closer at times to how she works with music.

David Lynch is another director whose films are noted for their musical content: one immediately thinks of the originality of Angelo Badalamenti's scores; the *bravura* set-piece in *Mulholland Dr.* (2001); or the threnodic context of Bobby Vinton's 'Blue Velvet'. Like Denis, Lynch tends to use a written score studded with heterogeneous elements. *Blue Velvet* (1986), for example, has a written score supplemented by a number of interpolated musical pieces. *Wild At Heart* (1990) similarly has a score to which is added a plethora of different music. Likewise, the music in *Lost Highway* (1997) ranges through the orchestral score to the Brazilian musician Antonio Carlos Jobim, via the grungy rock of Smashing Pumpkins and the provocative output of Marilyn Manson, with contributions by

Lou Reed, David Bowie, and, notably, 'Song To The Siren', featuring the singing of Elizabeth Fraser, whose intonation, phrasing, and vocal swoops turn the song into a threnody with a comparable impact to Rebekah del Rio's performance of 'Llorando' in *Mulholland Dr.* Lynch's use of music is an eclectic one, although his has a predominantly North American leaning. The characteristic tone of his work is one of bizarre and troubling situations whose mood the music endorses and heightens. Whether consonant with character anxiety or threatening scenario, the soundtracks run very much in accord with Chion's classification of empathetic.

As an illustration of how Claire Denis works with music, it is interesting to compare how she and David Lynch use the music of Elvis Presley. In *Wild At Heart*, Lynch utilizes two Presley songs, 'Love me'³²⁰ and 'Love Me Tender'³²¹ to serve as declarations of love in the tradition of film musicals: the hero delivering the full song in a set-piece. Denis by contrast deploys two songs associated with Presley in a very different way in *L'Intrus*. In the scene where Trebor is spending an evening in Busan, he strikes up an acquaintance with a local, out on a night's drinking, who, in convivial mode, sings a snatch of 'Are You Lonesome Tonight'.³²² In the tradition of pleasantly-drunk crooning, this is entirely apt as an example of empathetic relationality. However, there is a darker edge as this piece of music offers a commentary on Trebor's essential solitariness. The lyrics, by underlining issues of emptiness and pain, point to the lack in the central character. As usual, Denis brings the issue in obliquely: this is the one scene in the film where Trebor is seen laughing and enjoying himself, and so the connection with the underlying mode of distance and intrusion plays against the immediate mood. Furthermore, this has been prefigured unobtrusively. The earlier scene on the dockside shows a launch ceremony; the smashing of the bottle and the explosion of multi-coloured streamers is accompanied by an instrumental version of 'O Sole Mio'. We see no players, so whether this is a recording or an attendant band is not clear. Here again, this is

320 Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller (1956).

321 Elvis Presley and Ken Darby (1956).

322 Written by Roy Turk and Lou Handman in 1926. Recorded in 1960 by Presley and became his third No. 1 hit in the year he came out of the army.

an ostensibly empathetic musical insertion, the jolly brass-dominated rendering offering an upbeat note to the proceedings.

But there is an implied, contrapuntal, connection here with Presley's release 'It's Now or Never',³²³ not only suggesting, within the lyrics of the song, Trebor's last-ditch, desperate project ('I've spent a lifetime waiting for the right time|my love won't wait'), but also, in the combined musical references, as remarking on the grotesqueness of Trebor's project to buy a merchant ship as a kind of offering to the son he is seeking. The polyphonic (the two different references to Elvis songs, one instrumental, one *a capello*) merges with the contrapuntal (the playing against the apparent mood of the scenes in order to re-indicate what is at stake in the film as a whole). This multivalency allows music to permeate the films of Denis in ways which work to bind the fragmentary into a complex whole.

One very striking example of how music infuses a Denis project relates to *S'en fout la mort*, where she likens fieldwork to dance:

Je me suis rendu compte que ce travail [Alex Descas going to the Antilles to learn about cock-fighting] ressemblait à une danse de la Martinique et de la Guadeloupe qui s'appelle le 'bel air'³²⁴ et aussi à la 'capoeira'³²⁵ du Brésil, où les esclaves enchaînés par les mains se battent avec les pieds et les jambes; c'est une danse qui vient du temps de l'esclavage et où il me semble que les deux combattants ressemblent à des coqs.³²⁶

So in this instance, preparatory work for the film, the backdrop of racism and exclusion, and the combative aspects of the scenario are all connected through the medium of dance music. But, as often in the work of Denis, these threads are not immediately apparent to the viewer.

323 Presley's 1960 hit, which immediately preceded 'Are You Lonesome Tonight', used Eduardo di Capua's music for 'O Sole Mio' with English words by Aaron Schroeder and Wally Gold.

324 Also known as *bélé* – a form of combined music, singing, and dance, which influenced later forms like *zouk* and *béguine*.

325 A Brazilian martial art, originating in Angola and Congo, which combines elements of dance, acrobatics, and music.

326 'I realized that this work was like a dance from Martinique and Guadeloupe called "bel air" and also the Brazilian "capoeira", where slaves in manacles fight with their legs and feet; it's a dance which originates from the time of slavery and in which it seems to me that the two combatants resemble fighting cocks', Mathilde Monnier et Jean-Luc Nancy, *Allitérations: conversations sur la danse* (Paris: Galilée, 2005), p.123.

Risk and the audience

As indicated in my introduction, engaging with the dissensual has been associated with risk. Denis herself formulates her approach to cinema by reference to risk-taking as a means of seeking creative novelty:

Il ne faut pas domestiquer le scénario au point de tout maîtriser. Il faut laisser une part de risque, une part non résolue qui, finalement, nous oblige à nous dépasser, et qui fait que, même dans les pires moments, on continue de croire au film.³²⁷

This evidences a desire to push the boundaries and avoid homogenizing conformity. Hole goes so far as to make a case for the extension of riskiness towards the spectator. Writing about the opening of *Trouble Every Day*, she suggests that:

the hungry kisses of the unknown pair and our desire to comprehend the image tie into the themes of lust and devouring that the film takes to their extremes. Rather than stabilising the spectator through mechanisms of identification, as does classical cinema, the film highlights the viewer's vulnerability to the film as itself a risky encounter (128).

Part of that audience vulnerability lies in the intertextual connections which are offered in a kind of challenge to make the implied associative links. Referring to Nancy's critique of *L'Intrus*, McMahon speaks of: 'film and viewer becom[ing] strangers in contact' (150). Similarly, Hole (147) points up the dissensual nature of Denis's work in this respect: 'Denis [...] shifts the codified terms of viewing such that we are placed in a kind of affective proximity to the bodies on screen, rather than looking at them from a perspective of distance and mastery'.

In musical terms, in *Beau travail*, Denis deploys the powerful music of Britten alongside legionnaire exercise, but waiting to be found is the deeper resonance with Melville and themes of jealousy and betrayal. The same applies to those implicit connections which, by linking the musics of Africa and of the Caribbean, suggest a critique of enslavement, in *J'ai pas sommeil* and *35 rhums* especially. In *Les Salauds*, the film's soundtrack begins before the film starts and seems to reach out from the screen to the audience; conversely, in *White Material*, the music stops short in the middle of the credits as if to invite listeners into a

³²⁷ 'One should not constrain the scenario to the point of total control. A risk factor needs to be left in, an unresolved element which, in the last resort, forces us to overreach ourselves, and whose effect is, even in the worst moments, to retain belief in the film', Tirard, 2006, p.166.

debate. One of the ways in which the work of Denis invites audiences to look at things differently, to consider new situations or to assess them from an altered viewpoint, is by confronting audiences with the musically unexpected. The music draws the spectator in, makes contact with her or him, but instead of offering reassurance or comfort, it mixes the pleasure of that close intimacy with a troubling intangibility and uncertainty. The changes and surprises brought by the music serve as challenges to viewers and listeners to embrace new perspectives. As Lisa Downing and Libby Saxton suggest, 'often the most apparently pernicious representations are the ones that can enlist the viewer in particularly nuanced reflection'.³²⁸

Martine Beugnet in *Cinema and Sensation* lists a number of films which she considers as offering: 'an alternative vision, an affecting and thought-provoking way of questioning our status as observers and "consumers" of the pro-filmic reality'. Her list of 23 films includes no less than four by Claire Denis (14-15). Beugnet, paraphrasing Bellour, states that: 'the cinema of sensation starts where other films draw to a close and resonates with the myriad of untold stories and sensations that the self-contained world of conventional filmmaking fails to convey' (17). She goes on to say: 'Such a cinema bears the mark of its unfinishedness in the openness of its narrative structure and through the audio-visual fluctuations that animate its surface' (17). This seems a very just observation in relation to the kind of dissensual structuring practised by Denis.

Rémi Fontanel (104) endorses this openness in the following terms:

Par le biais de l'image mais aussi par celui du son, Claire Denis dilue et délaie les éléments constitutifs de ses récits de sorte qu'ils puissent engager chaque spectateur dans une posture qui prend les allures d'une quête parce que toujours, l'oeuvre lui offrira la liberté d'une interprétation à la fois sensible et *progressive*.³²⁹

Fontanel's assessment that both image and sound in the cinema of Denis work in these dissensual ways to directly engage members of the audience chimes

³²⁸ *Film and Ethics: Foreclosed encounters* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), p.21.

³²⁹ 'Through the oblique angle of the image, but also through that of the sound, Claire Denis dilutes the constituent elements of her narratives in a fashion which enables them to engage with each spectator in a way which takes on the characteristics of a search because the work always offers them the freedom of an interpretation which is at once responsive and dynamic' (italics in original).

with Robin Wood's emphasis on what he sees as the requirement on the viewer of a Claire Denis film to actively participate. He says that the director's work expects us 'to be alert and perceptive at all points, to become aware of nuance, and of the possible significance of an apparently trivial detail' and that she permits us 'a certain amount of freedom of interpretation that demands the active participation of the viewer'.³³⁰ Wood gives as a particular example in *J'ai pas sommeil* the appearances of Mona and Daïga (in the scene where we first see Mona), which, although seemingly a prelude to a meeting between the two, is in fact only a parallel of circumstances in that 'both are involved with men who reject their demands'. Wood says that: 'the rights and wrongs of those demands are by no means clear-cut'; and that: 'once again, Denis is inviting the spectator into the film as an active participant'.³³¹

There is general critical agreement that the films of Denis reach out to her audience. Cédric Mal (202) describes Denis's method as giving the audience 'a respectful slap' (une baffe respectueuse) to get it out of its comfort zone. Rémi Fontanel (103) speaks of the need for spectators to grasp clues on the wing, whether visually or aurally.³³² Sébastien David (174) argues, as have others, for the relationship extending beyond the frame: 'Le cinéma de Claire Denis devient alors la fiction insistante d'un sens commun, l'union toujours imparfaite des expériences vécues, la trame qui unit les corps-fantômes de l'écran aux corps des spectateurs'.³³³ The essence of these imperfectly-lived encounters can be found in the way Denis introduces incomplete and seemingly randomly fractured musical elements into her work.

I have suggested in my detailed analyses that the use of music in *Trouble Every Day* and *Les Salauds* has the effect of challenging conventional morality and inviting audiences to consider the nuances of the particular situations with

330 'Claire Denis: Cinema of Transgression' *Film International*, 1 April 2011.

331 'Only (Dis)Connect; and Never RelaxeZ-Vous; or, "I Can't Sleep"', *Film International* 27 January 2011 [accessed 14/6/2015].

332 'Une construction narrative pénétrée de signes à caractère informatif que le spectateur se doit d'attraper au vol...du regard ou de l'ouïe'.

333 'The cinema of Claire Denis thus becomes the insistent fiction of a common sense, the always imperfect union of lived experiences, the framework which unites the ghost-bodies of the screen with the bodies of the spectators'.

which they are confronted, rather than rely on a normative response. *J'ai pas sommeil* is another good example of how music in a Denis film challenges rather than reinforces fixed positions. In that case, the disorienting effect for the viewer of the fragmented and deferred nature of the narrative connects with the lack of orientation offered by the music. As Albertine Fox (13) argues:

By not flinching at the lack of straightforward dialogue or recoiling at the absence of a clear plot, and by embracing instances when one's usual sense-making processes are tipped off balance, we gain access to a plethora of expressive nuances that give forms to a different picture.

In *J'ai pas sommeil*, one effect of the appearance and disappearance of music is to engage audiences directly in the modes of attraction and alienation, or fluid distance, which feature in the cinema of Claire Denis. Just as the image track of the film alternates between sensuous close-up and cool distancing, the music track has a corresponding role. Familiar tunes play in unexpected circumstances (e.g. 'A Whiter Shade of Pale', 'Relax-Ay-Voo'); unfamiliar pieces of music feature at climactic moments ('Le lien défait', 'Racines', 'J'ai pas sommeil'); even when music seems to be an expected fit (as in the club dance scene), the musical ambiance of the film leads the listener to wonder about its significance. In this way, music in the work of Claire Denis participates just as much as the scenario, the shooting, and the editing of footage, in presenting apparently opposed ideas of relationality. The sensuous, lingering close-up viewing of bodies and things throughout her films conveys a strong feeling of searching, of wanting to grasp an evanescent essentiality; the refusal of explanation, either through dialogue or narrative linearity, seems to contradict the notion of complete understanding.

These modes of fluid distance pervade every Denis film. Their musical expression comes in the form of a polyphony which presents contemporary and old, familiar and unfamiliar, native and foreign, popular, classical, jazz, reggae etc., in ways which lull, surprise, re-connect, and shock the listener into poles of attraction and distancing. That mobile and uncertain quality of viewers' connection with the music is a part of the director's strategy for keeping them at an optimum distance to maintain challenge and interest.

Centrality of music

One of the significant things about music in the context of a Claire Denis film is the extent to which it features from the inception of a project. While Denis and her co-scenarist, Jean-Pol Fargeau, were working on the script for *Chocolat*, they were listening to the music of Abdullah Ibrahim; it was only subsequently that Ibrahim was asked to write a score for the film.³³⁴ Correspondingly, Denis says that she and Fargeau had Britten's *Billy Budd* playing while they were writing the script for *Beau travail*,³³⁵ and that she and Agnès Godard listened to Neil Young's *Sleeps With Angels* (1994) while working on the same film.³³⁶ This is normal procedure for Denis: 'Quand c'est possible, on tourne avec un *play back*. Ou on écoute la musique avant de tourner'.³³⁷ She also observes that as part of Michel Subor's preparation for the role of Trebor in *L'Intrus*, she gave him recordings of Johnny Cash to listen to.³³⁸

As illustrated earlier, the scenario of *Vendredi soir* was partly inspired by Jeff Mills's music for *Metropolis*. Denis herself says that this music was crucial to her conception of the beginning of the film:

En écoutant Jeff Mills, j'ai vu et senti le [premier] plan, l'espace de la ville, le regroupement humain en elle. Dickon Hinchcliffe, le compositeur de la musique du film, a compris qu'il devait écrire un terme qui pouvait mordre sur ce morceau de Mills.³³⁹

In terms of the editing, this is exactly what happens: 'Entrance to Metropolis' plays for almost its full length, and then dovetails with Hinchcliffe's 'Nightfall', which ably picks up the tone of uncertainty and blends into a noir ambience. Denis has said on numerous occasions that Tindersticks' 'My Sister' was important to the genesis of *Nénette et Boni*, and the extent to which she involves the band at an early stage is also now well recorded. For example,

334 See Mouëlliach, 'Le jazz pour penser le cinéma', *Jazz Magazine* 521, p.29.

335 Interview with Eric Hynes: 'Claire Denis, Unpredictable Universe', at Walker Art Centre, 17 November 2012. YouTube [accessed 24 November 2016].

336 Tirard, 2006, p.167.

337 Claire Denis in Mouëlllic, 2006, p.90.

338 Interview on Tartan DVD release of *The Intruder*.

339 'Listening to Jeff Mills, I saw and felt the scene, the open space of the city, the human clustering in it. Dickon Hinchcliffe, the composer of the music for the film, understood that he had to write something which could overlap into that piece by Mills', Claire Denis in Didier Péron, 'Un film peut naître d'une musique'. *Libération*, 11 September 2002, cited in Mal, p.126.

Stuart Staples says that they tend to get the script first, as it is being written, followed by rushes of some scenes, then a rough cut; but often before the process starts there will have been conversations about the developing scenario.³⁴⁰

On the other hand, there is nothing formulaic about this. Staples observes that the process of his and Tindersticks' involvement has been different for every film.³⁴¹ On more than one occasion, Denis has been offered a piece of music which so impressed her that she changed her mind about how her film was to open. For *Trouble Every Day*, her reaction to the title song – offered by Tindersticks as something to close the film – was to decide it should have pride of place; as a consequence, the original intended opening of the film (June and Shane Brown on the plane) was replaced by the kissing in the car with which she planned to end.³⁴² For *35 rhums*, Staples's offer of a David Boulter composition had a similar response: 'Opening' plays over the start of the film, for which the director originally intended to have no music.³⁴³ It is this fluid, instinctive approach to the use of music which distinguishes the work of Claire Denis: music has a central place in her films, but it is never a case of music in the expected place.

Denis's use of music is an idiosyncratic one, which at times resonates with that of other directors such as Duras, Lynch and Scorsese, but nevertheless retains its distinct character in which fragmentation operates as both challenge and invitation, widening the perspective at the same time as helping to give each film a coherence and integrity.

340 *Cinema Scope* interview with Jason Anderson, <cinema-scope.com/cinema-scope-magazine/interviews-a-marriage-made-in-heaven-stuart-staples-on-tindersticks-claire-denis-film-scores> [accessed 21/1/17].

341 Vadim Rizov, 'More Than Words', *fireflies* Issue 3 (March 2016), p.46.

342 Interview by Wendy Ide with Claire Denis and Stuart Staples, National Film Theatre, London, 27 April 2011, <<https://bfiftp.bfi.org.uk/workflow/GET/9U452FZE4MY5CQV2-0000>> [last accessed 12/9/17].

343 See *fireflies*, 3, p.46.

Chapter summary

The films of Claire Denis privilege a disjunctive form of presentation. The flow of action is broken and episodic; the cinematography tends to avoid middle-distance, preferring either long shot or – especially – extreme close-up; there are multiple intertextual references; and the soundtrack offers levels and shadings not usually present in mainstream film. It may seem paradoxical to argue that diverging from accepted norms of presentation is a way to get closer to the audience. However, a sense that life is about contradictions and imperfectly resolved issues informs how Denis reaches out to spectators, offering them a closer, more effective, and more fluid engagement with life's experience in which pat solutions are not on offer.

As I have argued throughout, this idea has resonance with the writing of Jacques Rancière on dissensus. Steven Corcoran, in his introduction to *Dissensus*, says that: 'For Rancière, genuine [...] artistic activities always involve forms of innovation that tear bodies from their assigned places and free speech and expression from all reduction to functionality'.³⁴⁴ Art in general for Rancière is something which crosses boundaries, and in the process challenges and either destroys or re-draws lines of delineation. Discussing political and aesthetic aspects of cinema, he presents the non-linear as relating more closely to the realities of life. He summarizes what he calls 'the Brechtian paradigm' as:

[...] an art that replaces the continuities and progressions of the narrative and empathetic model with a broken-up form that aims to expose the tensions and contradictions inherent in the presentation of situations and [in] the way facts, what is at stake[,] and outcomes are formulated.³⁴⁵

For me, Rancière's terminology here translates as connecting to relational issues. In his formulation, mainstream cinema has a deadening, normative effect, and the interruption of expected form and structure works to open out

344 Rancière, 2010a, p.1.

345 *Les Écarts du cinéma*, trans.by John Howe as *The Intervals of Cinema* (London and New York: Verso, 2014), p.104.

space for closer engagement. Rancière situates film within his vision of the central importance for aesthetics of dissensus. His main preoccupation in *The Intervals of Cinema* is to argue the benefits of a disjunctive cinema – one which breaks with prior notions of narrative linearity. This accords with his broader concern with the rejection of imposed structure and meaning.

The fragmentary use of music by Denis, which I have shown to be dissensual in a Rancièrian sense, has a wide range of applications. She employs a variable approach to issues like: whether a composed score features; the extent to which a composed score is used; where score extracts are placed on the soundtrack; how much a score is supplemented by interpolated music. The use of ambient sound, variation of sonic levels, and silences add to the diversity of musical modes across her work. Music is thus used in divergent ways in the cinema of Denis which problematize some of Chion's assertions about the integrity of film soundtracks.

In Denis's films, the absence of a conventionally-constructed soundtrack, which offers heightened cues to moments of emotional drama, requires spectators to make an effort to orient themselves in a sonic landscape which cuts in and out, fades, returns, switches mood and style. These shifts are modes of the fluidity of musical distance practised by Denis, which allow space for reinterpretation by the viewer. Confirmation of this can be found in the director's own remark about her preference for musical space: 'like in music from one note to another there is a little space. It's more melodious'.³⁴⁶

In the cinema of Claire Denis, a contrapuntal approach works to create spaces in which dissenting views can be presented and considered. The effect of this manner of filmmaking is to present the viewer with a complex of issues which require careful examination and which invite a considered response. This amounts to a form of challenge, albeit one offered in a spirit of empathy.

346 Claire Denis discussing *Les Salauds* with Miriam Bale, 24 October 2013, <<http://www.pastemagazine.com/articles/2013/catching-up-with-claire-denis.html>> [accessed 21/08/2016]

Audiences are not given a settled perspective from which to sit back and casually watch a Claire Denis film go by: they can refuse to engage (and many do) with the subject matter or its treatment; or they can allow themselves to be drawn into a set of challenging perspectives framed in dissensual form. In this way, the aspects of fragmentation which are integral to Denis's work cohere in different ways to give each film an integrity of its own, at the same time as representing a running feature of her œuvre as a whole, notwithstanding that it operates differently on each occasion.

Conclusions

*Le septième art, l'art de l'écran, c'est la profondeur rendue sensible qui s'étend au-dessous de cette surface: l'insaisissable musical.*³⁴⁷

*Does it not seem appropriate to characterize the intersection of various forms of interaction as polyrhythmic and contrapuntal?*³⁴⁸

The interrogation and re-interrogation of modes of relationality is associated in the work of Denis with a sense of fluidity and change. This is embodied not only in forms of movement which feature as a reaction against accepted norms, but also as the shifting of focus between the close-up and the distant. As Denis herself puts it:

Ce n'est pas le dépassement qui m'intéresse, mais le trajet inverse; c'est-à-dire: partir du monstre pour revenir vers ce que nous croyons tous connaître [...] Dans ce sens, je trouve qu'il y a une part de reconnaissance de soi-même et de l'autre, même dans ce qu'il y a de plus monstrueux.³⁴⁹

Her interest in all modalities of putative contact and withdrawal is visible in every one of her films, in which aspects of intimacy and of separation, whether individual or communal, appear constantly.

My argument has been that music offers a valuable insight into how aspects of relationality infuse the films of Claire Denis. I have shown how the nature of what she does is founded on ideas of confronting and examining set assumptions about people and groups. The contributions of thinkers such as Jacques Rancière and Jean-Luc Nancy have played an important role in my conceptualization of how what I have termed fluid distance, that is a shifting focus between proximity and withdrawal, can be found at the heart of the

347 'The Seventh Art, the art of the screen, is depth made perceptible which extends below the surface: the musically elusive', 'La musique du silence' in Prosper Hillairet, *Écrits sur le cinéma (1919-1937)* – Germaine Dulac, p.108 (cited in Fontanel, p.126).

348 Seth Kim-Cohen, *In the Blink of an Ear: Towards a non-cochlear sonic art* (New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p.252.

349 Claire Denis in Sébastien Lifshitz, *Claire Denis la vagabonde* (1995): 'It's not so much exceeding limits which interests me, but rather the opposite trajectory: that is, starting out from the monster in order to get back to something more familiar [...] In that sense, I think there is something we can recognise in ourselves and in the Other, even in the most monstrous aspects'. (I have used here my own translation in order to get closer to what Denis is saying).

cinema of Denis. As she says, in relation to *L'Intrus*: 'Ensuite, j'ai compris que la construction binaire ne suffisait pas. Il fallait un troisième terme, qui est en Corée, et que j'appelle les Limbes, le passage entre deux états du corps', thus indicating how an instinctive dissensus from standard formulation operates in her work.³⁵⁰

I have underlined how connection and disconnection play an important role in the work of Denis. In the specific context of film, Bersani and Dutoit observe that: 'In art, events *appear* to one another; words, images and sounds communicate indeterminately with one another, composing forms and structures only to play with the possibility of undoing forms and structures'.³⁵¹ I take 'indeterminately' to indicate, not disorganization, so much as resistance to pre-determined order. Their remarks in connection with Jean-Luc Godard seem to me to apply equally well to characteristics found in the work of Claire Denis, with the qualification that in her case it is not a matter of simple dismantling, but rather an empathetic observation of how things are and a desire to try and understand through examination of how relational aspects of being operate.

I have emphasized how important I consider it is that sonic aspects are seen as part of the picture. Marcelo Panozzo sees music as an essential link in the relation between the films of Denis and their audiences: 'la música en el cine de Claire Denis nunca subraya, jamás repite, y siempre intenta crear una tercera dimensión, una vía entre las imágenes y nuestra percepción de las mismas'.³⁵² This formulation, which lays emphasis on the indeterminate aspects of the use of music in the cinema of Denis, offers what I regard as an apt summation of the centrality of musical relationality in her work. The importance of music in general for considerations of relationality are underscored by Tia DeNora, who argues that:

350 'Eventually, I realised that a binary construction wasn't enough. It needed a third mode, set in Korea, which I call limbo. The passage between two states of the body', Jean-Michel Frodon, 'Trajectoires de *L'Intrus*,' *Cahiers du Cinéma*, 601 (May, 2005).

351 *Forms of Being* (London: bfi, 2004), p.67. (Italics in original).

352 'Music in the cinema of Claire Denis never highlights, never repeats, and always tries to create a third dimension, a way between the images and our perception of them', 'Rapsodia en azul' in *Claire Denis fusión fría*, ed. by Alvaro Arroba, (Madrid: Ocho y medio, Libros de Cine, 2005), p.105.

[...] music provides a basis of reckoning, an animating force or flow of energy, feeling, desire and aesthetic sensibility [...] The study of music and its powers within social life thus opens a window on to agency as a human creation, to its 'here and now' as existential being.³⁵³

She goes on to say that: '[...] music is not about life but is rather implicated in the formulation of life; [it] is a formative, albeit often unrecognized, resource of social agency' (153-54). This gestures appositely towards the potential of music as a relational conduit as well as to the indeterminacy of its workings, in ways which I find fruitful for considering the work of Denis.

Similarly, Sébastien David (178) emphasizes, in the context of *US Go Home*, the importance of music as an intrinsic, relational force:

Les sonorités musicales, la succession des morceaux instaurent ainsi un rythme qui captive les corps, les unit, les fait vibrer, les remue et préside à une interpénétration généralisée et indifférenciée, à un enroulement des individualités les unes sur les autres, les unes dans les autres.³⁵⁴

What David says here helpfully brings together the ideas of rhythm and relationality which are central to my argument.

Denis has spoken of her sense that her films have a hidden aspect, a 'second face', which only emerges with time, post-editing and post-release.³⁵⁵ As she expresses it, this seems not to be something conscious, but rather an aspect of her film-making which is concealed from her as director. In that sense, she is both closely involved with what she does, but at the same time distanced from it in an obscure way. This represents, for me, a significant aspect of what I am calling fluid distance. In analogous fashion, in terms of her output, it is possible to discern a shape to Denis's movement between producing more intimate, often urban, dramas of a relatively closed-in nature, and ones with more distant, global scope or implications. In the same mode of narrow and wide application, it has been a regular phenomenon that a Denis feature film comes out in a similar time frame to a short.³⁵⁶ In more recent terms, one might cite the broadly

³⁵³ *Music in Everyday Life*, (CUP, 2007), p.153.

³⁵⁴ 'The musical qualities, the succession of pieces thus introduce a rhythm which captures the bodies, unites them, makes them vibrate, makes them move and directs a generalized and undifferentiated interpenetration, a rolling together of individualities, on top of each other and with each other'.

³⁵⁵ Interview with Jonathan Romney on New Wave DVD release of *35 rhums*.

³⁵⁶ For example, *Vendredi soir* and *Vers Nancy*, both appearing in September 2002; *L'Intrus* and *Vers Mathilde*, both appearing in September/October 2004.

parallel work on *White Material* and *35 rhums*, and on *High Life* and *Un beau soleil intérieur*. These manifestations demonstrate how fluid distance operates instinctively as part of Denis's craft.

These ideas of variation and change seem to me to have resonance with the ways in which the films of Denis offer challenges to expectation and formulation, not only with respect to such aspects as plot and cinematography, but also in regard to music. Her work accordingly displays dissensual qualities, and, in the same way as the relational perspective of the cinematography in her films changes between distance and close proximity, a corresponding movement can be discerned in the music in her films.

To the extent that movement between distance and proximity in her work operates to engage the spectator, I would argue that this modality is certainly part of how she explores relationality; however, in my estimation, there is no sense of her seeking to bring matters to a resolution: rather, the thrust of what Denis does is to interrogate – and to invite interrogation – while avoiding judgement and settled answers. Her engagement with issues of relationality is one of continuing change.

Ideas of relationality are central to how music functions in the films of Denis. In her own words, Denis emphasizes the importance for her of social interaction and of its benefits for her as an individual:

Je n'ai pas du tout envie de me retrouver sur une île déserte, de devenir asociale. J'ai un travail de groupe à vivre. Même si je ressens le besoin d'être seule, mes plages de solitude sont enrichies par la confrontation avec les autres.³⁵⁷

She also expresses her curiosity about others, and how she sees this as relevant to cinema:

I suppose I am interested in the variety of human life – how people live. I am most interested in individuals and how they respond to challenges or to difficulties, or just to each other. I am curious about people. So that's why I do a lot of different things. The cinema should be human and be part of people's lives; it should focus on ordinary existences in sometimes extraordinary situations and places. That is what really

³⁵⁷ 'I have not the slightest wish to find myself on a desert island, or to become anti-social. My life and work are collaborative. Even if I feel a need to be alone, the shores of my solitude are enriched by confrontation with others', Claire Denis in *L'Aventure du premier film*, ed. by Samra Bonvoisin and Mary-Anne Brault-Wiart, (Paris: Editions Bernard Barrault, 1992), p.44.

motivates me.³⁵⁸

Cédric Mal (112) remarks about the approach of Denis's filmmaking in general: 'jamais elle ne nous prend par la main pour nous mener sur le chemin d'une compréhension univoque et d'un entendement exclusif'.³⁵⁹ Mal (126) goes on to describe the work of Denis as: '[...] des films que nous nous approprions sans être guidé par une vision totalisante qui impregnerait sa signification à l'œuvre et son sens à l'auditoire'.³⁶⁰ These emphases on the absence of didacticism and of simplistic propositions are, for me, crucial, and my contention is that they apply equally to the use of music by Denis in ways which challenge expectation and invite uncertainty.

The musical elements in the work of Denis are of a hybrid nature, drawn from a very wide palette of sources and styles. I have used *Vendredi soir* as one example of hybridity which embraces a range of stylistic elements: the chamber symphony written as a string quartet by Shostakovich, but arranged for orchestra by Rudolf Barshaj; Mills's re-visioning of Gottfried Huppertz's original music for *Metropolis*; Hinchcliffe's stylistic adoption of those two latter pieces; the East European feel of the music by the English composer John Leach; and more popular numbers. Alongside the issue of source runs Denis's practice of selecting extracts to suit her film, whether from recorded pieces or from the specially-composed score; her resistance to automatically accepting music in the immediate context for which it is offered; her use of fluctuating volume and silence; and her mixing of music with ambient sound. These practices of selection and variation contribute to Denis's multi-faceted observations of relationality.

My analysis has utilized tools developed from Kathryn Lachman's application in a literary context of notions of polyphony and counterpoint, and from Michel Chion's terminology of the empathetic in film music. I have also drawn

³⁵⁸ Interview with Andrew Hussey, *Guardian*, 4 July 2010.

³⁵⁹ 'She never takes us by the hand to lead us along the road of one-eyed comprehension and single understanding'.

³⁶⁰ 'Films which we assimilate without being guided by a totalizing vision which saturates the work with its significance and dictates its meaning to the audience'.

extensively on a range of texts which deal with music theory, both in general and in cinema. I have argued that there is a strong sense of musicality in how Claire Denis approaches any film project, and that it becomes increasingly clear how, for her, cinema and music are inseparable. As she observes: 'Je ne vois pas comment je pourrais alimenter mon imaginaire sans la musique!'³⁶¹ This indicates the importance for her of music as part of her creative cinematic work.

I have looked in some detail at the present position on film music theory. Using the medium of the cinema of Claire Denis, I have explicated in this thesis the idea that intertwining and overlapping applications of music in film militate against the utility of any sort of monochromatic or binary interpretive approach. Music is itself a fluid medium and attempting to put film music in a straitjacket makes no sense. As Greg Hainge observes: 'sound is an immersive medium that [...] stubbornly transgresses borders and attempted containment'.³⁶² Perhaps Nirvana will be reached when we can say, to paraphrase Chion, there is no film music theory, just different uses of music. In the meantime, it is to be hoped that increased flexibility of selection and of deployment of music in films across the board will feed into a restructured form of critical assessment which takes account of the polyphonic, contrapuntal, and variously empathetic modes discussed in this thesis.

Film music theory has for a long time taken the line that a film soundtrack is something extraneous to a film. But for Claire Denis there is no separation between cinematic creativity and music. As she asserts: 'les idées de cinéma sont toujours accompagnées d'une musique'.³⁶³ Music in her work is deployed in innovative ways which illuminate her approach to relationality and form part of the pulsions of fluid distance which pervade her films. In making a case for what he calls a 'musical' approach, Ian Murphy (2) argues that: 'In the case of Denis' cinema [...] the images assume a purely sensual and symbolic relation to [...] other elements, whereby they only carry meaning as part of a complex whole'. I

361 'I don't see how I could fuel my imagination without music!', Bonvoisin and Brault-Wiart, p.35.

362 Hainge, 2017, p.12.

363 Laurent Tirard. *Leçons de cinéma 2* (Paris: Nouveau Monde, 2006).

have reservations about the absolutism of this, but I am in wholehearted agreement with what he says about elements forming part of an integrated whole. I have demonstrated that Claire Denis remains very much in advance of most of the field in the fluid ways in which music features in her cinematic work, and my proposition for future development would be that a thorough-going consideration of an innovative director like Denis can reap benefit for an opening-out of the current narrow confines of cinema music theory.

As far as music goes, my research has shown that any attempt to discern a straightforward pattern in the work of Denis quickly runs into difficulty. Her sources and methods are so varied as to escape classification. In her early work, it was possible to identify an approach to music which focused on a particular artist; but on careful examination that kind of close focus is seen to be supplemented from other – often quite different – sources. Conversely, from the time she began working in collaboration with Tindersticks, there seemed to be the development of a new pattern: of a preference for using specially scored music; but those scores are invariably in musical conversation with extraneous elements. Not only are Denis's musical sources so eclectic, but the way in which she mixes together different styles from one film to another similarly defies any broad cataloguing.

Above all, it seems to me crucial that an end is put to thinking about music in a film as something extrinsic. Denis herself offers the view that strong personalities, such as she encounters with Tindersticks, are a boon in that they make an important contribution by confronting norms, bringing a sense that: 'the music is part of the film. It's not an element you bring [in] at the end to make it smooth. It's really something that is inside'.³⁶⁴ Members of Tindersticks themselves endorse the case for a dynamic, integrated mode of music in film. David Boulter expresses a reluctance to work in conventional fashion, with directors other than Denis:

It's very difficult because they've usually made the film and then at the end they ask you to do the music, and they tell you what they want and what kind of mood they want, which I think for us it's not really worthwhile making music like that, because it's

³⁶⁴ Interview on Tartan DVD release of *The Intruder*.

compromised in some way, and I think we need to get some freedom for us as well.³⁶⁵

Stuart Staples says: 'Often, I'll go to the cinema and find that music is used to really overemphasize emotions to me. It says: "Feel this now" and you don't have any choice. [...] That to me is a dead space'. Whereas, when working with Claire Denis, he says: 'music is changing the edit and the edit is changing the music'.³⁶⁶

I have demonstrated how music in the cinema of Denis forms part of the reaching-out of her films to the audience, engaging its members more closely in the issues presented by each film and bridging their sensuous and cerebral challenges. As Hole (153) suggests: 'counter to the pain of exposure, Denis's oeuvre also gestures towards the unique power of bodies on screen to offer us more pleasurable affective encounters with the spectator, bodily in every sense, and impacting us in a place beyond the thematisable'. Musical dislocation contributes to a sense of the relational in the work of Denis by its refusal of the normative and its consequent gesturing to a more reflective response. By its suggestion of the different and the personal, music invites a more generous and sympathetic reaction from the films' audiences.

The work of Claire Denis places itself very centrally in the field of oppositional activity elaborated by Rancière as part of dissensus, but her aim is always about searching for understanding rather than seeking to provide definitive explanation or moral conclusion. One example of this is her tongue-in-cheek observation that: 'I've got nothing against dialogue, but I always think it's good when you can get rid of it'.³⁶⁷ In other words, the director shies away from forms which point the audience in a certain direction.

Trevor Wishart argues for the power of music as art to challenge the regulatory

365 Interview with David Boulter, Indie Lisboa Film Festival (May 2011). Vimeo [accessed 21/1/2017].

366 *Cinema Scope* interview with Jason Anderson, <cinema-scope.com/cinema-scope-magazine/interviews-a-marriage-made-in-heaven-stuart-staples-on-tindersticks-claire-denis-film-scores> [Accessed 21/1/2017].

367 'Ce poids d'ici-bas', *Vacarme* 14 (Winter 2001) <<http://www.vacarme.org/article/84.html>> [accessed 7/5/2017].

and the formulaic by unhinging language: 'It is music's intrinsic irrefutability, its going behind the back of language, which has caused it to be viewed with so much suspicion and disdain by guardians of socially-approved order'.³⁶⁸ Rémi Fontanel (61) attributes to Denis an aesthetic courage in her rejection of cinematic norms: 'Claire Denis dérouté, intrigue, fascine parce que son œuvre refuse la fixation, la systématisation, le rituel au profit d'un courage esthétique toujours grandissant au fil des années'.³⁶⁹

In Denis's films, the absence of a conventionally constructed soundtrack, which offers heightened cues to moments of emotional drama, requires spectators to make an effort to orient themselves in a sonic landscape which cuts in and out, fades, returns, switches mood and style in what at first sight seems an entirely arbitrary fashion. These shifts are modes of the musical fluidity practised by Denis. The variant ways in which Denis deploys music in her films form part of the movement which I refer to as fluid distance: a constant shifting of focus, both in terms of material used and how it is presented, and comprise an essential element in her multi-directional investigations into the unpredictable modes of relationality.

In this conception, the recognition of difference is contained as a central ingredient embodied in the variations of musical subject matter. But, despite this running mode of differential musical elements, I argue that the ways in which Denis relies on music at all stages of her work: in the conception of her films, in their writing, filming, and editing, attests to its centrality and to its coherence. Coherence in the work of Denis is not an easily defined figure in the carpet, but my argument is that, notwithstanding the resistance to imposed form which her oeuvre constantly performs, it comprises a notable aspect of integrity and consistency.

These perceptions go to the heart of the functioning of fluid distance in the work of Denis: put differently, the sense of objective distancing accompanies a

368 *On Sonic Art* (Amsterdam: Harwood, 1998), p.17.

369 'Claire Denis confounds, intrigues, and fascinates because of an aesthetic courage which, increasing over the years, benefits her œuvre by the refusal of fixity, systemization and ritual', Fontanel.

grappling with detail. This is precisely the interest which the art of Claire Denis displays: the limit cases which need to be interrogated as part of an inquiry into the location of the boundaries of human behaviour, and the consequent implications for how society constructs itself.

The essence of my argument has been that music allows Claire Denis to blend individual aspects of relationality together with more globally-concerned issues which nonetheless affect people as individuals. Use of music in her films contributes to a multivalent and polyphonic series of perceptions whose dissensual, contrapuntal elements pose questions without offering pat answers. Sébastien David (178) cites Alain Badiou in support of his evocation of how dance contributes to desire reduced to: 'une pure forme, celle qui organise la triplicité de l'enlacement, de la rencontre, et de la séparation'.³⁷⁰ David's perceptions sum up ideally the proposition maintained in this thesis: that relationality, fluid distance, and musical form constitute a tripartite structure which informs and inheres the cinema of Claire Denis.

My own research has also had a triple thrust. First, it has offered a means of looking at Denis's work as a whole which does not rely, as is commonly the case in other studies, on the conventions associated with reading her work via a focus on post-colonialism, racism, violence, sexuality etc. Second, it has explored in depth an aspect of her oeuvre which is invariably commented on only in passing or in a specific context, and has shown how musical considerations, far from being peripheral, are central to the director's creative process. Third, my close reading of how music is deployed in the films has demonstrated how what I have termed "fluid distance", that is, a continually shifting relational focus, operates as an integral part of the filmmaking of Claire Denis.

370 'A pure form, which organizes the triple conjunction of embracing, meeting and separating', Alain Badiou, *Petit manuel d'inesthétique*, (Paris: Seuil, 1998), pp. 91-112, cited in Fontanel.

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Annex B: Filmography

<i>Alice Doesn't Live Here Any More</i>	Martin Scorsese (1974)
<i>Beau travail</i>	Claire Denis (1999)
<i>Blue Velvet</i>	David Lynch (1986)
<i>Carol</i>	Todd Haynes (2015)
<i>Chocolat</i>	Claire Denis (1988)
<i>Claire Denis la vagabonde</i>	Sébastien Lifshitz (1995)
<i>Dans ma peau</i>	Marina de Van (2002)
<i>Dead Man</i>	Jim Jarmusch (1995)
<i>Eloge de l'amour</i>	Jean-Luc Godard (2001)
<i>Glissements progressifs du plaisir</i>	Alain Robbe-Grillet (1974)
<i>India Song</i>	Marguerite Duras (1975)
<i>J'ai pas sommeil</i>	Claire Denis (1994)
<i>Kuhle Wampe</i>	Slatan Dudow (1932)
<i>Goodfellas</i>	Martin Scorsese (1990)
<i>L'Amour à mort</i>	Alain Resnais (1984)
<i>L'amour fou</i>	Jacques Rivette (1969)
<i>L'Année dernière à Marienbad</i>	Alain Resnais (1961)
<i>Late Spring</i>	Yasujirō Ozu (1949)
<i>L'Intrus</i>	Claire Denis (2004)
<i>Laura</i>	Otto Preminger (1944)
<i>Lawrence of Arabia</i>	David Lean (1962)
<i>Les Salauds</i>	Claire Denis (2013)
<i>Lost Highway</i>	David Lynch (1997)
<i>Mean Streets</i>	Martin Scorsese (1973)
<i>Metropolis</i>	Fritz Lang (1927)
<i>Mulholland Dr</i>	David Lynch (2001)
<i>Nénette et Boni</i>	Claire Denis (1996)
<i>Notre musique</i>	Jean-Luc Godard (2004)
<i>One Plus One</i>	Jean-Luc Godard (1968)
<i>Paris, Texas</i>	Wim Wenders (1984)
<i>Powaqqatsi</i>	Godfrey Reggio (1988)
<i>S'en fout la mort</i>	Claire Denis (1990)

<i>Son nom de Venise</i>	Marguerite Duras (1976)
<i> dans Calcutta désert</i>	
<i>To The Wonder</i>	Terrence Malick (2012)
<i>Trouble Every Day</i>	Claire Denis (2001)
<i>Vers Mathilde</i>	Claire Denis (2005)
<i>Vers Nancy</i>	Claire Denis (2002)
<i>White Material</i>	Claire Denis (2010)
<i>Who's That Knocking at My Door?</i>	Martin Scorsese (1967)
<i>Wild At Heart</i>	David Lynch (1990)
<i>35 rhums</i>	Claire Denis (2008)

Annex C: Glossary of musical terms*

accelerando	speeding up
arpeggio) arpeggiated)	notes of a chord played in succession instead of simultaneously
crescendo	increase in sound volume
decrescendo) diminuendo)	decrease in volume
descant	separate melody played or sung above a basic melody
dissonance	note combination which surprises, seeming to need resolution
forte, fortissimo	loud, very loud
glissando	gliding between pitches, sometimes called sliding
harmony	combination of consonant notes, not requiring resolution
melody	an extended series of notes played in an order which is memorable and recognizable as a discrete unit
piano, pianissimo	soft, very soft
pizzicato	plucking of strings rather than bowing
reverb	reverberating note or notes, fading in volume
ritardando	slowing down
rallentando	gradual slowing down
sforzando	sudden loud burst
sustain	an electronically-produced prolonged note or chord

tremolo	rapid repetition of a single note
vibrato	tonal fluctuation by changing pitch, using hand movement or breath variation

* This is a glossary designed for the lay person, compiled by me and drawing on various sources, including on-line dictionaries and an article by Kathryn Kalinak, 'The Language of Music' in *Movie Music: The Film Reader*, ed, by Kay Dickinson (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 15-22.

Annex D

1. Lyrics to 'J'ai pas sommeil'*

Oyez, braves gens
l'histoire de ce temps
où sur la machine ronde
s'amusait Satan
où sur la machine ronde...

Le bouc à qui nul ne résiste,
la somme de vos colères,
dansait sur les charbons ardents
sans se brûler les chairs

oh l'âme désire le mal
au fond des entrailles
où l'orgueil et la paresse
aiment mener le bal

chez ce fils de nos entrailles
objet de tous nos vœux
que la crainte de l'éternel
vous incline le cœur

comme le lièvre blessé
effraya le lion
les campagnes ont résonné
de mille hurlements

et la bouche remplie de graviers
de grâce trompeuse

tous prièrent oh verge de fer
transperce lui le cœur

oh ce fils de nos entrailles
objet de tous nos vœux
que la crainte de l'éternel
nous incline le cœur

[et la voix de Dieu s'éleva
putois, étalon,
il n'y a pas de mauvaise graine
dans les germes du temps

et si rien n'est pur dans vos chairs
infecte, purulent
que la bête représentative
vous arrache ce gémissément

oh fils de nos entrailles
objet de tous nos vœux
que la crainte de l'éternel
vous incline le cœur]

Listen people
The history of these times
Where Satan amuses himself
On the round machine

Where on the round machine
The irresistible scapegoat
The sum of your angers
Danced on the red-hot coals
Without burning its flesh

Oh the soul desires evil
To the bottom of its entrails
Where pride and sloth
Call the tune

With this offspring of our guts
Object of all our our inclinations
May the fear of Eternity
Sway your heart

Like the wounded hare
Fear-struck by the lion
The countryside resounds
With a thousand screams

And, Mouth full of stones
Of deceitful grace
Everyone prays: oh iron rod
Transfix his heart

Oh this offspring of our guts
Object of all our inclinations
May the fear of Eternity
Sway our hearts

[And the voice of God raises itself
Polecat, stallion
There is no bad sprouting
In the seeds of time

And if nothing is pure
In your tainted, purulent flesh
May the representative beast
Tear this groaning from you

Oh offspring of our guts

Object of all our inclinations
 May the fear of Eternity
 Sway your heart]

* Lyrics from <http://murattextes.chez.com/divers.htm> (accessed 10/5/15), together with my translation. N.B. the last four verses are omitted from the film.

2. Lyrics to 'Le lien défait'**

Comme l'ange blond
 noyé dans la durance
 comme un démon
 tu déferas le tien

comme l'oiseau borgne
 comme Jeanne de France
 dans ta démence
 tu déferas le tien

comme la vipère
 comme la reine des prés
 morte terre
 tu déferas le tien

comme la femme douce
 comme l'homme léger
 au moment d'oublier
 tu déferas le tien

on se croit d'amour
 on se croit féroce enraciné

mais revient toujours
le temps du lien défait

on se croit d'amour
on se sent épris d'éternité
mais revient toujours
le temps du lien défait

Like the blond angel
drowned in time
like a demon
you will break with your own

like the blinded bird
like Jeanne de France
in your frenzy
you will break with your own

like the viper
like the queen of the meadows
dead earth
you will break with your own

like the soft woman
like the gentle man
at the moment of oblivion
you will break with your own

you believe yourself in love
you believe yourself fiercely rooted
but the time always returns
when the tie is severed

you believe yourself in love

you feel smitten for everyone
 but the time always returns
 when the tie is severed

** My translation of French lyrics taken from:
<https://greatsong.net/PAROLE-S-JEAN-LOUIS-MURAT,LE-LIEN-DEFAIT,100071448.html> (accessed 13/04/17)

3. Lyrics to 'Racines'***

Rasin lapenn an tet-mwen
 Vinijik an bout dwet-men
 An chanté lanmou
 Tjè-mwen ja ka séré

Rasin lapenn an tet-mwen
 Dio ka monté dan zyé-mwen
 An chanté lanmou
 Vini an bout dwet-men
 Si fo mwen Chanté'y piéré ou key piéré

Gadé timanmay ka mò
 Rasin lavi an tet-mwen
 Lanmizik an bout dwet-men
 Sé tanbou lespwa
 Ka bat adan tjè-mwen
 Si fo mwen chanté'y
 Wè!
 Kriyé an se kriyé

Les racines de la tristesse sont dans ma tête
Elles vont jusqu'au bout de mes doigts
J'ai chanté l'amour
Et mon coeur se serre

Les racines de la tristesse sont dans ma tête
Les larmes me montent aux yeux
J'ai chanté l'amour
Jusqu'au bout de mes doigts
S'il faut que je chante
Alors tu pleuras

Regarde ces enfants qui meurent
Nous faisons semblant de ne pas les voir
Certains souffrent
Et d'autres prennent leur pied

Les racines de la vie sont dans ma tête
La musique va au bout de mes doigts
C'est le tambour de l'espoir
Qui bat en mon coeur
Si je dois le chanter
Alors je crierai

Roots of sadness are in my head
They go to the ends of my fingers
I sang of love
And my heart clenched

Roots of sadness are in my head
Tears mount to my eyes
I sang of love
To the ends of my fingers
If I have to sing
Then you will cry

Look at those children who are dying
We pretend not to see them
Some of them suffering
Others find a way out

Roots of life are in my head
Music goes to the end of my fingers
The drum of hope
Beats in my heart
If I have to sing it
I will shout

****My translation from the version in French of the original Creole,
as given on YouTube.*

