After *Romance*: portrayals of the body in films by Catherine Breillat, Claire Denis, and Marina de Van- a creative exploration.

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Table of Contents

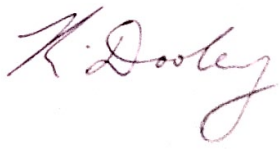
Abstract

Beginning with Catherine Breillat's controversial film *Romance* (1999), this creative PhD study examines the work of three female directors prominent within the recent French *cinéma du corps* (cinema of the body) mini-movement: Breillat, Claire Denis and Marina de Van. My thesis integrates formal film analysis, enabling practice, and a final exegetical chapter that charts discoveries made through practice. My aim is to produce new knowledge in regards to these directors' portrayals of the body, which can inform my own practice as an Australian writer/director. The eminence of the body as a matter of special interest within female-authored work in France has been particularly visible in the wake of the *cinéma du corps:* disturbing and often horrific films that explore stark portrayals of the human body, sexual debasement, and trangressive urges. Female directors in France take a formidable approach to the representation of the body, as has been noted by several writers and critics, and is exemplified by the three filmmakers who are the subject of this study.

My research is two-pronged: firstly, I provide an analysis of Breillat, Denis and de Van's thematic, stylistic and practical concerns as informed by my own interviews with the directors. Commencing with a description of the status of women directors in the French film industry, I focus on a selection of films produced by the three directors between the years 1999 and 2009. Over a series of chapters I explore areas such as bodily transitions, trauma and foreignness as outlined by theorists such as Gilles Deleuze, Laura Marks and Vivian Sobchack. The second prong of my study involves a research-led film production undertaken as a means to shed new light on the three directors' concerns. By writing and directing a twenty-eight minute film titled *The Sister,* informed by the three filmmakers' work, I produce an artefact that creates new knowledge about their approaches. This film production is practice as research, enabling a thorough investigation of identified concerns through the writing, preproduction, production and postproduction of a short film work. An analysis of the creative process and the final creative artefact produces conclusions from the vantage point of practitioner. In doing so, I create knowledge 'from the inside'. I conclude by considering how the three French directors' portrayals of the body has informed my own practice as a writer/director within an Australian context.

Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.



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I have included still images from various films by Catherine Breillat, Marina de Van and Claire Denis in my thesis and I acknowledge the production companies associated with these: Flach Film, CB Films, Mongrel Media, Agat Films & Cie, Wild Bunch, Lazennec & Associés, Why Not Productions, Soudaine Compagnie, Ognon Pictures, arte France, La Sept-Arte, Rézo Films and Tanaïs Productions. Special thanks go to filmmakers Catherine Breillat and Marina de Van, who kindly donated their time to be interviewed as part of my research.

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Introduction

> *Women directors make a lot of films in France today. They do very well. They represent modernity… Now, not only are there women directors, but they also happen to have a real feminine vision. This does not imply that it's a 'pretty' point of view.*
>
> Catherine Breillat (Sklar 1999: 24)

In France in 2009, I watched a film by French director Marina de Van. *Ne te retourne pas* (*Don't Look Back*), her second feature film, is a dark thriller about a woman who loses her identity as her body morphs into that of an unknown other.[1] Shortly afterwards I became acquainted with the work of Catherine Breillat: films such as *À ma soeur (For my Sister,* 2001) and *Anatomie de l'enfer (Anatomy of Hell*, 2004), both of which foreground themes of identity and alienation. These films were shocking in their graphic portrayal of the body and were unlike anything I had seen from filmmakers in Australia. As a female Australian writer/director I found myself wondering firstly about the directors' motivations concerning these themes, and secondly, about the eminence of the body as a matter of particular interest within female-authored work in France. Faced with such complex, challenging and at times, disturbing images, I considered the possibility that these female writer/directors could have something unique to contribute in this area.

My initial research located de Van's and Breillat's works within the confronting early twenty-first century French cinema trend known collectively as the *cinéma du corps* (Tim Palmer 2006), 'Extreme Cinema' (Martine Beugnet 2007) or the 'New French Extremity' (James Quandt 2004). Quandt questioned whether the trend represented a change in the politics of representation in France: 'a narcissistic response to the collapse of ideology in a society traditionally defined by political polarity and theoretical certitude, perhaps' (2004: 132). Kevin Cooke used the term 'mini-new wave' particularly citing the films of François Ozon as an example of a new generation of filmmakers influenced by the horror films of Roman Polanski

[1] When presenting French films to the reader I will firstly give the French title, and then the English translation in brackets, except those films with only an English language title.

(2007).[2] Claire Denis was noted as another key contributor to this mini-movement, alongside male peers Gaspar Noé and Bruno Dumont. Their films explore stark portrayals of the human body, sexual debasement, and trangressive urges in a fashion that is frequently disturbing and often horrific.

These French directors have contributed to what has now become a global trend, exploring rape, revenge, cannibalism and self-mutilation in works that sit alongside those of international counterparts like Michael Haneke (Austria/France), Lars von Trier (Denmark) and David Cronenberg (USA). Martine Beugnet argues that films such as these have emerged 'intermittently but persistently in French cinema', providing an alternative vision of modernity (Beugnet and Ezra 2010: 13). In addition to the stark, shocking subject matter and portrayal of the human body, these films stand out on account of their deployment of specific cinematic techniques, which are designed to disturb the spectator in aggressive and confronting terms. The films show 'a willingness to address […] the corporeality of the characters and actors, of the filmic body itself and, by extension, that of the spectator' (Beugnet 2007: 33). In the case of my first watching of de Van's *Ne te retourne pas* for example, I was challenged to make sense of frequently blurry, fractured and undecipherable images of the body.

Beginning with the release of Breillat's controversial film *Romance* (1999), this study focuses on the three female directors prominent within the *cinéma du corps* mini-movement: Catherine Breillat, Claire Denis and Marina de Van, all of whom have been described as auteurs due to their distinct voices and unique visions. Their work certainly cannot be described as 'pretty', in line with Breillat's comment that opens this thesis. There are several, inter-related reasons for my study of these three female directors. Firstly, France has arguably in global terms the highest ratio of female participation in the film industry. According to the 2011 *Centre national du cinéma et de l'image animée* report, of the 207 French initiative films supported by the government in 2011, 26.6% (fifty-five films) were directed or co-directed by a woman (CNC 2012). This high level of participation means that films directed by women in France are certainly not 'token' offerings, but are present across genres and mini-movements (such as the *cinéma du corps*), tackling the same or similar

[2] Polanski's early films with horror/thriller elements include *Knife in the Water* (1962) and *Repulsion* (1965).

issues as their male counterparts. Secondly, female directors in France have taken a formidable approach to the representation of the body, as has been noted by several writers and critics including Gilles Deleuze (2005), René Prédal (2008) and David Vasse (2008).[3] Their tenacity has been particularly visible since the late 1990s when Breillat's *Romance* burst onto the scene, followed by Coralie Trinh Thi and Virginie Despentes' explicit *Baise-Moi* (*Rape Me,* 2000) a year later. On the subject of female directors in France, Vasse believes it absurd to generalise, but he admits that their approach to sexuality, in particular, 'occurs more bluntly' than that of male counterparts (114). Lastly, a single text that isolates and examines the contributions of female filmmakers within the *cinéma du corps* has not yet been produced. As major contributors to this tendency, the work of Breillat, Denis and de Van provides a special take on the body, specifically in relation to issues of identity, desire, sexuality and violence. Certainly, their films seem to be a significant contrast to the work of many female Australian directors, most of whom do not foreground subject matter related to the body in such a dark or graphic way. Indeed, a movement similar to the trangressive French 'cinema of the body' cannot be said to exist in Australia.

However, I do not wish to suggest that a focus on the body has not impacted upon Australian cinema. In the last two decades, Jane Campion (*The Piano*, [1993]; *In the Cut* [2003]) and Ana Kokkinos (*Head On* [1998]; *The Book of Revelation* [2006]) are but two female filmmakers who have explored representations of the body, desire and identity, alongside male peers such as Rolf de Heer (*Alexandra's Project*, 2003) and John Curran (*Praise*, 1998). In *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (2004), a text that I will later draw upon in my analysis of the work of Denis and de Van, Vivian Sobchack recalls her experience as an embodied viewer of *The Piano*: 'my skin becomes literally and intensely sensitised to the texture and tactility I see figured on the screen' (73). This is an observation that, as with the films of the *cinéma du corps*, calls the corporeality of film characters, actors and the film spectator into question. Female Australian directors have produced work that can be considered similar to their French counterparts in terms of subject matter related to the body, but different in terms of scale (the number of films made) and

[3] Despite the fact that they generally disclaim gender as influence, contemporary female directors have explored a range of themes that would be considered 'feminist' or 'feminine' according to Anglo-Saxon film criticism, involving representations of the body, desire, identity, women's roles and communities, and the female gaze.

tenacity. The latter point could perhaps be linked to the two countries' different approaches to censorship, past and present.[4]

My research approach is two-pronged: firstly, I provide an analysis of Breillat, Denis and de Van's thematic, stylistic and practical concerns. Commencing with an investigation into the status of women directors in the French film industry, this study will examine each director's approach to the representation of the body, desire and identity. I will focus on several films produced by these filmmakers that reside amidst the tradition of the *cinéma du corps* (1999-2009). The choice of films I consider key are sorted by either author or theme, without aspiring to provide an exhaustive catalogue of the three filmmakers' output.[5] The scope of this thesis means that some works have received only passing mention, such as Breillat's 2002 mockumentary *Sex is Comedy* and Denis's *Vendredi Soir* (*Friday Night*, 2002). In terms of stylistic concerns, I will examine the directors' choices in regards to shot framing, staging and choreography, design, editing and use of sound. I spoke directly to Catherine Breillat and Marina de Van in the course of my research, and I will refer to these extensive and revealing interviews undertaken in June 2011 throughout my thesis (see appendices E and F for full transcripts of these interviews).[6]

The second prong of my study moves into the arena of creative research. As a filmmaker looking for alternative approaches to representing the body, I have embarked on my own film production: a practical project that explores the identified approaches from my position as an Australian film writer/director. This creative process has helped me to explore thematic and stylistic concerns 'from the inside', and has provided an opportunity to make discoveries through practice. The resulting twenty-eight minute film, *The Sister*, functions as an artifact enabling further

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[4] Films in Australia are classified according to a ratings code managed by the Australian Classification Board (ACB). Films in France have to be granted a visa by the Ministry of Culture upon the recommendation of the Commission for Film Classification (*Commission de classification cinématographique*). It would seem that French regulators are much more liberal than their Australian counterparts in regards to depictions of sex and violence on screen. For example, Breillat's film *À ma soeur!* (2001), which depicts teenage sex and rape, received a '12' rating (forbidden for under 12s) in France, whereas it was rated 'R' (restricted to those over 18) in Australia. (http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0243255/parentalguide?ref_=tt_stry_pg, accessed 16 June 2013.)

[5] For filmographies of Breillat, Denis and de Van, see Appendix G.

[6] A large part of my personal interview with Breillat (the original French version) appears in issue 87:2 of *The French Review* (Dooley, 2013). I will quote from this publication, as opposed to the full English translation attached as appendix E to this thesis, when possible. All translations to English are my own.

discussion of the three directors' works. By considering the filmmaking process and the resultant work in relation to my previously established practice, I answer the following question: How can these directors' approaches to the portrayal of the body inform my practice as a writer/director in an Australian context? The film production is practice as research, enabling the forming of conclusions in regards to identified thematic and stylistic concerns through the pre-production, production and post-production of a short film work.

In *Practice-led Research, Research-led Practice in the Creative Arts* (2009), Hazel Smith and Roger Dean refer to the OECD definition of research: 'creative work undertaken on a systematic basis in order to increase the stock of knowledge, including knowledge of humanity, culture and society, and the use of this stock of knowledge to devise new applications' (2009: 7). They then build upon this definition to define research in the context of artistic practice. According to their definitions, my practical project is research-led, in that I set out to devise and produce a film with particular theoretical concepts and observed practices (as outlined in Chapters One to Four). On the other hand, in the sense that the outcome of this creative project could not be predetermined, the thesis is also practice-led. In an attempt to further clarify the terms of my research, I have adopted the terms 'research-led production' and 'production-led research', which describe the inter-dependency of both research elements (film and written thesis) and the specificity of my creative project. The undertaking of the second prong of my research was emergent and complex, involving many stages (scriptwriting, preproduction, production, and postproduction) and collaboration with many people (actors, crew members) during which time my role as writer/director/researcher involved a high level of reflexivity.

Thinking outside of the context of academic research, I assume that many filmmakers have been influenced by the work of Denis, Breillat, and/or de Van, both consciously and unconsciously. My research-led production/production-led research differs, however, in the explicit attention paid to the concerns of these directors, in the documenting of my methodology and in my discussion and evaluation of the final creative product. In the context of creative writing, Jeri Kroll suggests that practice-led research achieves three goals related to conventional forms of research. Firstly, 'the research proceeds by and for the practice', secondly, 'the research

proceeds through practice in order to produce a creative product', and thirdly, 'the research proceeds before/during/after practice, aided by ideas generated by practice, in order to produce new knowledge' (Kroll 2008: 9). I believe that my film project also achieves these goals. By undertaking research in both conventional and creative formats, my project aims to illuminate information, not just about these directors' concerns, but about the creative process itself. With reference to the OECD definition of research noted earlier, Kroll makes the point that 'knowledge can be embodied in the creative work and the exegesis individually, in the combination of the creative and critical as a whole, or in an integration of the two' (9). My thesis involves the integration of formal film analysis (a starting point), enabling practice, which is then explored further in a final exegetical chapter. Screenwriting practices have been undertaken as a means of exploring story and character, while production techniques have enabled a close inspection of the relationship between performer, cast, crew and screen space. In effect, I have investigated practices of three French women's film production in an Australian context. The completed work has the tangible outcome of being a vehicle for critical discourse on the concerns of Breillat, Denis and de Van, and on my own concerns as an Australian writer/director.

While I am not aware of any creative projects on these directors, there is significant research on the subject of female directors in France, and on Breillat, Denis and de Van in particular. Carrie Tarr and Brigitte Rollet's *Cinema and the Second Sex* (2001) provides a comprehensive overview of work produced by French female directors in the 1980s and 1990s, largely sorted by film content and theme. This follows on from Françoise Audé's *Ciné-modèles, Cinéma d'elles* (1981) on female filmmaking from the 1960s to 1980s; both broad studies in comparison to my own focused examination of issues pertaining to the portrayal of the body in the work of three directors. David Vasse's *Le nouvel âge du cinéma d'auteur français* (2008) covers twenty-first century work in a broad fashion, whereas Martine Beugnet's *Cinema and Sensation: French film and the Art of Transgression* (2007) focuses more specifically on films related to the *cinéma du corps.* More recently, Tim Palmer's *Brutal Intimacy: Analysing Contemporary French Cinema* (2011) also takes particular issue with representations of the body*,* whilst a special issue of the journal *Studies in French Cinema* (vol. 12:3, 2012) focuses specifically on women's filmmaking in France between 2000 and 2010. There are also several auteur-

orientated texts related to the individual filmmakers: *Claire Denis* (Beugnet [2004], Mayne [2005]), *Catherine Breillat: un cinéma du rite et de la transgression* (Vasse and Breillat [2004]) and articles on Marina de Van (Palmer [2006], [2010]), to which I will refer over the course of this thesis. As noted, a definitive study that isolates and examines the contributions of female filmmakers within the *cinéma du corps* has yet to be published.

Taking my cue from Emma Wilson, who believes it vital 'to move beyond auteurist studies and more thematic and genre-based approaches to women's film-making…and still account for such film-making as distinct' (2005: 218), I have sought to detach myself from arguments about inherent gender difference, and rather, to define the work of the three filmmakers according to their portrayals of the body on screen. This is not intended to be a study of gender difference in relation to commercial or critical success in the French industry, but rather an attempt to explore common strategies amongst the three filmmakers. While female filmmakers in France resist labelling as a subgroup, I believe that it is premature to discount their sex as an influence and I therefore agree with Wilson who writes that '…there are risks with such gender-blindness within an industry which has been until so recently dominated by men and entrenched in masculinist perspectives' (2005: 218). My approach has been to read the films studied as films 'by women', considering female positioning in the film industry and wider community, but not as 'women's films', a label that has in the past been too narrowly associated with specifically defined ideologies.

A snap shot of the French film industry

As we progress through the second decade of the twenty-first century, the French film industry is without doubt the strongest in Europe, holding France's position as 'the leader of the alternative to the monopoly', as declared by Daniel Toscan du Plantier, chairman of Unifrance (quoted in Lanzoni 2004: 356). As previously stated, a record breaking 272 feature-length films received approval and support from the French government organisation *Centre national du cinéma et de l'image animée* (CNC) in 2011, with 207 of these being 'French initiative films'; that is, films fully or predominantly produced by French associates. The same year saw automatic support for feature film projects total an impressive €360 million, and aid allocated for selective support reached €242 million. In addition to automatic and selective

funding from the CNC, French feature films receive funding from various French and European TV stations, such as Canal +, ARTE and TF1. Other forms of support include the SOFICA tax shelter to aid production, established to strengthen links between the worlds of film and finance. In 2011, the average feature film budget was €5.45 million, slightly lower than that of the previous year. In line with Australian trends, the first decades of the twenty-first century have seen a continued polarisation of film budgets in France (studio films made with large budgets or alternatively, very low budget independent projects), which, along with influence of megaplex cinema exhibition practices, has affected the ability of feature films to be made, find success, and find an audience.

Unlike in Australia, the French film industry's domestic audience is strong. According to the CNC report, 2011 saw 216.63 million cinema admission tickets sold in France, a rise of 4.7% from 2010 (2012). This was the best cinema attendance since 1966, and marked a considerable rise in the average of the last five years. As in 2010, women accounted for more admissions (54.3%) than men (45.7%), with the comedy genre continuing to draw the largest audience share. More than half of French cinema audiences are aged over thirty-five (54.9% in 2011) and more than one third are aged fifty years or older (33.6% in 2011); it is this final statistic that perhaps suggests a demand for more diverse and age-appropriate storytelling.

Women's participation in the twenty-first century

As also previously mentioned, of the 207 French initiative films supported in 2011, 26.6% (fifty-five films) were directed or co-directed by a woman. This figure was a new high for French female directors, up from Carrie Tarr and Brigitte Rollet's figure of 13.7% for the period 1990-99 and Katherine Ince's figure of 14.4% for the period 2000-2006 (2008: 279). These productions included new films by seasoned directors such as Brigitte Rouan (unreleased at the time of this writing) and Noémie Lvovsky (*Camille redouble* [*Camille Rewinds,* 2012]), as well as a high percentage of first films. Ince points out that these first time directors may 'informally constitute a mature sector of the industry', as many have come with a wealth of experience as actresses or writers prior to directing (2008: 278).[7] If industry figures were not

[7] Recent examples of experienced French actresses who have made their first feature as director include Fanny Ardent (*Cendres et sang* [*Ashes and Blood*, 2009]) and Sandrine Bonnaire (*J'enrage de son absence* [*Maddened by his Absence*, 2012]).

enough to indicate the healthy inclusion of women filmmakers in the French film industry, one might also look at the awards given out at the annual French Césars, the national equivalent to the American Academy Awards. The César for *Meilleur Premier Film* (Best Debut Film) has been won by a female director three times in the 2000s,[8] with the César for *Meilleur Film* (Best Film) awarded to two female directors: Agnès Jaoui for *Le Goût des autres* (*The Taste of Others*) in 2001 and Pascale Ferran for *Lady Chatterley* in 2007.

It is evident therefore that, in global terms, France has arguably the highest ratio of female participation in the film industry in regards to women directing films, a situation described by Tarr and Rollet as 'a source of both delight and despair': delight at the high numbers of participation, and despair at the lack of explicit engagement with feminist ideas in a country influenced by such pioneers of feminist thinking as Simone de Beauvoir (2001: 1). From an Anglo-Saxon perspective, it is difficult to imagine female directors largely disclaiming their gender as an influence on their work, but this is in fact the case in France, a position that Tarr and Rollet believe stems from principles of universalism left over from the French Revolution, with the result that issues of gender equality, much like issues of class and race, have been obscured by the idea of the filmmaker's powerful individual voice (5). Moreover, this tactic of focused integration rather than proclamation of gender as influence does not appear to have impeded filmmakers' success, as evidenced by the numerous French female directors such as Coline Serrau, Chantal Akerman and Josiane Balasko, all of whom are present in the mainstream.

While Australian cinephiles may be familiar with the work of seasoned French auteurs such as Breillat or Agnès Varda, it is likely that their knowledge is limited to the small number of films distributed outside of France, many of which could be labeled as 'art house'. This general lack of awareness comes despite the fact that feature film productions helmed by female directors in France greatly outnumber the total annual number of Australian features. Even considering the difference in population (France has approximately three times the population of Australia) the

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[8] The César for *Meilleur Premier Film* was awarded to Julie Bertuccelli for *Depuis qu'Otar est parti* (*Since Otar Left*) in 2004, to long-time actress but first-time writer and director Yolande Moreau for *Quand la mer monte* (*When the Sea Rises*) in 2005, and to the long-established actress and writer Isabelle Mergault in 2007, for *Je vous trouve très beau* (*You Are So Beautiful*).

number of female filmmakers at work is notably uneven.[9] Jonathan Romney notes that there are currently 'a host of French women directors who manage consistently to get features made and to evolve a distinctive voice from film to film – something still unimaginable in Britain'(44), and, I would add, in Australia, with perhaps only Campion, Kokkinos or Gillian Armstrong regularly adding to their considerable body of work. This has not always been the case in France, however, and I shall now turn to look at the emergence of women directors in the French industry.

Female directors in France: a historical overview

Female filmmakers have played an important role in the French industry since the early days of cinema, although French history books often overlook, undervalue and marginalise their contribution. Alice Guy Blaché, former secretary to Léon Gaumont, head of Gaumont studios, directed hundreds of silent films around the turn of the 20th century, although little was done to preserve these works and most were subsequently lost or destroyed. Germaine Dulac was also an important contributor to experimental and visionary work produced early in the 20th century, as described by Levitin, Plessis and Raoul (2003). My research has not uncovered other women directors of equal influence until the 1950s when Agnès Varda began making films, yet there is some disagreement about whether Varda, as 'mother of the New Wave', has received the historical recognition she deserves.[10] Geneviève Sellier (2008) explores this lack of recognition, charting Varda's career from her first film *La Pointe-Courte* (*The Short Point*, 1955) to *Cléo de 5 à 7* (*Cleo From 5 To 7*, 1962), the only female-directed film officially regarded as part of the *Nouvelle Vague* output.

It is not until the 1970s that participation noticeably increases, with thirty-seven women (10% of all talent) directing a first film within this decade (Hayward 2005: 247). Notable directors of this period include Nelly Kaplan, Margarite Duras and Varda, all of whom experimented with models for counter-cinema in the exploration of different narrative conventions, cinematic language, and/or concepts of identity. As a director influenced by feminist ideas that exploded in the wake of the events of

[9] Australian Bureau of Statistics and Wikipedia figures (accessed 20/9/10) put Australia's and France's population at approximately 22.5 million and 65 million respectively.
[10] Jacqueline Audry had success as a commercial filmmaker post-World War II, and is cited by Tarr and Rollet as the only female feature film director working in 1949, although I have found few details concerning her work.

May 1968, Duras is described as being in 'constant opposition to patriarchal filmmaking practices' (Gunther: 16). It should be noted that the films of these female filmmakers were often produced on much lower budgets than those of their male counterparts, and that such films were of a highly experimental nature. For example, Duras' 1972 film *Nathalie Granger* received ten million francs from the CNC at a time when the average sum offered was forty to fifty million (Gunther: 16). To briefly address the subject of feminism in France, I would note that the French feminist movement of the 1970s saw the creation of various groups interested in pursuing women's rights, promoting female filmmakers and exploring a range of new theoretical approaches to women's creative voice, which led to the establishment of the annual Creteil International Festival of Women's Films.[11] By the end of the 1970s, however, the social and academic landscape in France meant that feminist concerns were no longer seen as legitimate and female academics and filmmakers alike distanced themselves from the idea of gender as an influence.[12]

The 1980s was a difficult decade for filmmakers working in France, especially so for those working at the margins. Financial issues could account for the move by some female directors, most of whom had previously displayed little interest in the popular genre films typically produced by their male counterparts, into mainstream French cinema. Popular films by directors such as Diane Kurys, Serreau and Akerman made their mark at the box office. Conversely, to take Catherine Breillat as an example of a director working on more personal, non-genre films, one can note a period of limited output. After a promising beginning to her directing career with *Une vraie jeune fille* (*A Real Young Girl,* 1976) and *Tapage nocturne* (*Nocturnal Uproar,* 1979), financial difficulties meant a nine-year gap until the release of *36 Fillette* (*Virgin*, 1988). René Prédal cites 1986 as an important year for women filmmakers as many female-authored films appeared in the official French selection at the Cannes Film Festival and, for the first time, the same number of women and men

[11] The Creteil International Festival of Women's Films is now in its thirty-fifth year, these days functioning as a cultural showcase rather than an event foregrounding practical issues for women filmmakers.

[12] One example of this would include the closure of the Women's Studies Program at the University of Paris VIII by the Minister of the Universities, Alice Saunier-Séité in 1980. Hayward also makes the point that there was no cross-over between feminist and film theory in France, in sharp contrast to work done in Great Britain and the United States (2005: 225).

were admitted into the national film school *la FEMIS* (*École nationale supérieure des métiers de l'image et du son*) (2008).

The socialist François Mitterrand presidency (1981-95) brought substantial social transformation and Edith Cresson was elected the first female Prime Minister in 1991. The 1990s saw many first films by female directors as well as continued output by their more experienced predecessors. Balasko's 1995 hit comedy *Gazon Maudit* (*French Twist*) brought lesbianism into the mainstream, notably followed in 1999 by Catherine Corsini's *La Nouvelle Eve* (*The New Eve*). By the end of the decade, women directors appeared to have somewhat successfully integrated themselves into the French film industry. Sellier cites a figure of twenty-four films made by seventeen women filmmakers between 1990 and 2000 that exceeded 400,000 cinema spectators in France, qualifying them as a mainstream success (quoted in Célestin et al. 2003: 214).

Recent trends

In his 2005 article 'After GATT: Has the Revival of French Cinema Ended?' Jonathan Buchsbaum comments on a number of early twenty-first century French government reports exploring the future of the film production and distribution in France, all of which noted that the biggest challenge was the 'preservation and promotion of diversity, at all levels of the industry'(2005: 40). Looking at the work produced in France over the last decade, it is fair to say that in terms of subject matter, and despite financial considerations, French filmmakers have met this challenge; as such, it is hard to categorise such a diversity of themes, styles and approaches, even when reducing the list to the (many) films directed by female makers. Looking at works in this category, Ince (2008) observes a step back from overly political concerns in favour of more personal stories, while Wilson describes a move 'to chart relations of ambiguity, of troubled boundaries and unstable performance' (2005: 219). Some female filmmakers, including Breillat and Denis (both of whom were honoured with retrospectives of their work in the UK in 1999 and 2000 respectively) continue to take what Rachel Ritterbusch describes as a 'serious, "artsy" approach' to their subject matter, often focusing on female sexuality and issues associated with gender (2008: 69). Other directors categorised in this way have moved into the mainstream (notably Anne Fontaine with *Coco Avant Chanel* [*Coco Before Chanel*] in 2009), joining seasoned players such as Serreau and

Balasko. Ince posits that 'female subjectivity, rather than feminist politics, is now the domain in which the most urgent questions are asked', citing films by Siegrid Alnoy, Laetitia Masson and Breillat as evidence of a 'new focus on the complexity and difficulty of women's individual experiences' (2008: 285). There also exists a younger generation of female filmmakers, such as Mia Hansen-Løve and Rebecca Zlotowski, who are more interested in focusing on marginal characters and issues of identity.

In her 2003 dissertation entitled *The Quiet Revolution,* Corinne Oster describes the status of female directors in France as involving a 'double dynamic of integration and difference', and suggests that the acceptance of female directors' marginal stories by French audiences implies a repositioning of the centre of the mainstream (6). On the French film industry at large, Palmer (2009) notes a reorganisation of the industry to utilise transmedia and transnational funding models, a return to 1990s subject matter such as *banlieue cinema* (depictions of the suburbs), a blending of high and low art forms, as well as a focus on graphic depiction of the body labelled *cinéma du corps*. He also suggests that the large number of women working in the industry has meant a shift in visual, narrative and multi-sensory strategies of representation and audience engagement, as well as more recognition of female auteurs. Certainly, female filmmakers are working across a range of budgets, in different film and video formats, with a wealth of background experience including formal film school training, previous lives as writers or actresses and/or decades of commercial feature film production. David Vasse is right, then, when he concludes that 'to deduce a movement or a unifying slogan that summarises…is therefore absurd' (2008: 115). This reality, as well as the need to refine the scope of my project to a size manageable for this thesis, has resulted in the decision to focus on three directors whose work exemplifies the *cinéma du corps*: Catherine Breillat, Claire Denis and Marina de Van.

Biographies

One of the few directors who has proclaimed her gender as an influence on her filmmaking, Catherine Breillat (born in 1948) has made twelve feature length films since her first, *Une vraie jeune fille,* in 1976. With a background as a novelist, many of her films have been based on her own controversial books, including *Romance* (1999), her international breakthrough film which took over a million dollars at the

American box office. Described as ‘la cinéaste la plus “dangereuse” du cinéma français (the most dangerous French filmmaker)’, by the journal *Cahiers du Cinéma* in 1991, Breillat has spent her career making films that explore female subjectivity and alienation from the body (Vasse 2008:115). Her films foreground what Liz Constable describes as ‘the numbing self-consciousness that can become a prime mediator in young women's dilemmas of desire’, and ‘shame as a differentially gendered affective experience in its distribution and its reverberations within women's explorations of sexual desire’ (2004: 677). In other words, Breillat’s work explores notions of shame that are associated with sexual activity, and how these notions affect women’s sexual agency, with a particular focus on the experience of the adolescent and younger woman.

Born in Paris in 1948, Claire Denis was raised across colonial Africa (Burkina Faso, Somalia, Senegal and Cameron) where her father was a French civil servant. This early life experience as an outsider greatly influenced her work, starting with her debut film *Chocolat* (1988), which explored African colonialism. Since winning critical acclaim with this film (as well as a nomination for a César for Best First Film), Denis has gone on to produce close to a dozen features including *Beau Travail* (*Good Work*, 1999) and the more recent *White Material* (2009), which saw a return to themes related to foreignness and alienation in an African setting. A graduate of the French film school *L'IDHEC* (*Institut des hautes études cinématographiques)*, now known as *la FÉMIS*, she has been likened by critics to American directors David Lynch and Jim Jarmusch. In addition to her formal film schooling, her entry to the film industry involved working as a first assistant to directors such as Jacques Rivette, Costa-Gavras, Jarmusch and Wim Wenders.

Marina de Van was born in France in 1971 and first studied philosophy at the Sorbonne University in Paris, before later moving into filmmaking. Since her 1996 graduation from the elite French film school *la FÉMIS*, an institution that has ‘recently encouraged more provocative filmmaking methods, in particular an emphasis upon a stark treatment of the body on-screen, in its filmmaking exercises’ (Palmer 2006: 24), the writer/director has also had a significant career as an actress, often portraying nervous, sexually non-conformist, and/or perverse women. Prior to making her first feature film *Dans ma peau (In My Skin, 2002),* in which she plays the central character Esther, de Van collaborated with François Ozon as writer on

Under the Sand (2000) and *8 Femmes* (*8 Women*, 2002), and it could be argued that both directors share a common interest in exploring issues of the body, identity and desire. Whilst de Van does not consider herself a 'feminine' director, her work is interesting in its strong focus on women in crisis and the physical manifestation of memory and trauma on their skin.

Structure

Chapters One to Three of my dissertation are concerned with an exploration of the thematic and stylistic concerns of Breillat, Denis and de Van, with reference to a selection of their films produced between 1999 and 2009. As well as analysing the materialisation of themes related to the body, identity and desire, I will explore the manner in which material is presented, via framing, camera movement, mise-en-scène and editing. The first chapter, sub-titled 'Woman Becoming', examines representations of the body in the recent films of Breillat, starting with the director's 1999 work *Romance,* to the more recent *Une vieille maîtresse (An Old Mistress,* 2007) and telefilm *Barbe Bleue (Blue Beard,* 2009). As the title of my thesis emphasises, I regard *Romance* as marking a significant turning point in terms of its thematic and stylistic approaches to representation of the body. While much has been written about this film, I nonetheless review this work and offer my own account of Breillat's groundbreaking representations of the body before moving on to analyse her follow up films, *À ma soeur* and *Anatomie de l'enfer*. When using the term 'woman becoming', I am referring to the development of awareness of patriarchal systems and expectations of female sexuality, and the bodily experience attained in the achievement of this awareness. As such, I will explore Breillat's films with reference to the work of philosopher Gilles Deleuze (1982). My exploration of this director's work is also informed by the writings of Julia Kristeva in relation to the concept of *le temps des femmes* (women's time), as I will explain with reference to the film *Anatomie de l'enfer.* Looking at *À ma soeur,* I will refer to Simone de Beauvoir's writings on female adolescent shame. As with the chapters to follow, I will utilise these concepts as a means to explore the situations and circumstances depicted, whilst maintaining a focus on textual analysis as my primary research tool.

Chapter Two, 'The Unstable, Fragmented Body', examines the two films *Dans ma peau* (2002) and *Ne te retourne pas* (2009) directed by Marina de Van (the director's entire theatrically released feature film output to date) alongside two films by Denis.

I have isolated *Trouble Every Day* (2001*)* and *L'Intrus* (*The Intruder*, 2004) from other works by Denis due to the graphic imagery associated with portrayals of the body in these works, and the stylistic approaches to camera and mise-en-scène featured within, much of which finds parallels with the work of the younger director. With reference to Steven Shaviro's *The Cinematic Body* (1993), I will explore the frequently irrational, out of control and mutating bodies featured within these confronting works. Considering Vivian Sobchack's writings on 'self-touching' (2004) and Laura Marks' theory of 'haptic visuality' (2000), both of which concern the relationship between film subject and viewing subject, I will investigate how these films engage the audience using a sense of touch, as well as sight and sound. To further explore mise-en-scène in these works, I shall look to Gilles Deleuze's writings on transitory backdrops (what he describes as 'any-space-whatever' [1986]), and Marc Augé's 'non-spaces' (2008). As I will go on to argue, within these films, Denis and de Van have subverted traditional patterns of film viewing by capturing fragmented close-up images of the body, a style of representation that is explicitly linked to their unstable protagonists.

The third chapter, 'Foreign Bodies and the Move Towards the Other', examines the concept of foreignness as articulated within the film texts by Denis *White Material* (2009) and *Beau Travail (*1999), both of which explore conflict in African settings, and in the urban Parisian drama *35 Rhums (35 Shots of Rum*, 2008). In considering these films, all of which feature multi-ethnic casts, I will explore notions of post-colonial shame, trauma, and the representation of race. To aid in my investigation of these themes, I will look to Richard Dyer's work on the representation of whiteness (1997) and to Ella Shohat and Robert Stam's key text *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (1994). I shall also refer to the writings of Ann E. Kaplan, and to philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy, who is a key influence on Denis's work.

Having isolated the thematic and stylistic concerns of the three directors, Chapter Four focuses on their practical approaches and working methods, attempting to isolate the specifics of the directors' relationships with cast, crew and the material that will become the film itself. I look for connections between themes such as the unstable body (to take Denis's and de Van's work as example) and the practicalities of writing, preproduction and production. In doing so, I will isolate a series of practical approaches to be explored in my own short film project.

The twenty eight-minute film, *The Sister* constitutes the fifth chapter of this thesis, and should be viewed after reading Chapters One to Four. (A DVD is attached in this section.) Then finally, the sixth, exegetical chapter details my attempts to further explore Breillat, Denis and de Van's concerns by means of this research-led production. Here, I aimed to further my analysis of the directors' works by undertaking a practical exercise. By analysing the filmmaking process that I followed, and then the completed short film, I summarise discoveries that will not only inform my future work as writer/director, but can provide a point of reference for other Australian filmmakers looking for an alternative approach to representations of identity, the body and desire. Through the combination of conventional and creative research practices, the completed thesis aims to provide the reader with an insight into the specificity of work produced by this particular group of female directors. In accordance with Kroll's model, new knowledge is 'embodied in a creative-critical package', to be evaluated and 'disseminated to the culture' (2008: 10).

Chapter 1- The body in transition: 'Woman becoming'

Recent films directed by Catherine Breillat are significant in their portrayal of women in moments of transition, whether focusing on the adolescent or older woman. By traversing bodily states such as pregnancy and menstruation, or exploring events such as marriage, birth, miscarriage, rape and/or the loss of virginity, as well as the psychological traumas of relationship breakdowns, Breillat attempts to subvert processes of objectification and expose the contradictions involved with women's desire and shame on screen. Most important, however, is the representation of protagonists becoming aware of patriarchal society's expectations and constraints, to become agents of their own desire, or at least to attempt to. Breillat herself has said 'I want to describe female shame-but beyond that, cinema is a mode of expression that allows you to express all the nuances of a thing while including its opposites' (quoted in Constable 2004: 672). This ambition involves breaking down traditional oppositions of subjective/objective and masculine/feminine to reposition the gaze and rethink the body, identity and desire.

This chapter will examine representations of the body in Breillat's recent films, starting with *Romance* (1999), a film that had a significant effect on the cinematic landscape of film production in France, given the controversy surrounding both its filming and its reception. My study of the body in cinema is a study of both corporeal and visual concerns, which seek to interrogate issues concerning the presence of the actor, and his/her representation on the screen. In this thesis as a whole, I am seeking to explore the construction of the onscreen body, and its relation to the physicality of the spectator and filmmaker. In this first chapter, in particular, I will examine areas such as the presentation of characters as bodies (incorporating lighting and costume choices), emotions, narrative and plot.

Breillat's films, whether set in a contemporary, historical or fairy-tale world, are consistent in their exploration of the passages between different embodied states. In this sense, the term 'becoming' is an appropriate as a means of describing Breillat's protagonists' reforming of themselves. Considering issues surrounding bodily awareness and patriarchal expectations of female sexuality, I will offer a new reading of *Romance* and then go on to explore these concepts in relation to both male and female subjectivity in *Anatomie de l'enfer* (*Anatomy of Hell*, 2004). With reference

to Deleuze's concept of the ceremonial versus the everyday body, I will then explore Breillat's portrayal of marriage in the more recent films *Une vieille maîtresse* (*An Old Mistress*, 2007) and *Barbe Bleue* (*Blue Beard*, 2009). Lastly, I will address the bodily transitions of the adolescent girl in *À ma soeur* (*For My Sister*, 2001), looking specifically at links between female sexuality and shame. As previously mentioned, my exploration of themes in this chapter is further informed by the writings of Julia Kristeva and Simone de Beauvoir. Considering the part-practical element of this thesis, style is also of concern. I will suggest that Breillat has repeatedly and tactically deployed stylistic elements to challenge binary oppositions, accentuate moments of transformation and to question female agency and subjectivity.

Bodily awareness: *Romance*

Breillat's breakthrough film *Romance* follows on from a significant body of work produced in the 1970s and 1980s in which the director repeatedly interrogated notions of female agency and desire. The narrative concerns the sexual explorations of a young schoolteacher, Marie (Caroline Ducey), who decides to embark on a journey of discovery with various lovers after being scorned by her prudish male partner. The controversy surrounding the film had much to do with the appearance of notorious Italian porn star Rocco Siffredi (and particularly, the appearance of his erect penis); more to the point, *Romance* stands out for its focus on a female protagonist in the role of sexual instigator and pursuer. Marie's journey involves the development of bodily awareness and a discarding of patriarchal expectations in favour of a more personal, individualistic understanding of her own romantic and sexual desires. Male sexuality is also re-cast with the several male characters occupying unusual, non-virile positions in the film. The story begins with effeminate boyfriend Paul's announcement that he no longer physically desires Marie. Paul (Sagamore Stévenin) considers this quite normal considering the stage of their relationship and that it is in keeping with his past experiences. Liz Constable aptly describes Marie's emotional response: she 'reverberates with the pain of feeling shamed and dishonoured as she pictures herself through others eyes, she also decides to live sexual encounters with two other men, and to surrender sexually to an anonymous third' (2004: 684). This journey through a series of different and sometimes risky sexual encounters allows Marie to achieve a new awareness of her sexual agency. The conclusion of the film sees the simultaneous birth of her child

and death of her husband, due to an explosion at Marie's hands. This connection of new life coincident with actual death is a common theme in Breillat's work. Marie is now reborn as a woman centred on her own desires, no longer alienated from her own body, no longer yearning for a boyfriend and 'romance'.

The journey that *Romance*'s protagonist undergoes permits an exploration of the limited and sometimes contradictory symbolic roles of women in western patriarchy, including object of desire and icon, as Marie is both participant and observer in a series of sexual encounters. With her headmaster Robert (François Berléand), Marie enters a series of S&M bondage experiments that explore her differing position as agent of surrender and object of submission. One such scene sees Robert lead Marie down a hallway with her eyes closed. He positions her in front of a mirror and asks her to look at herself. Later (see Figure 1), she is tied up and prodded, with her clothes hitched up around her middle and a black mask covering her mouth. Unlike scenes of pornography, the action is not titillating and the appearance of Marie's exposed vagina, after her establishment as a thinking human being, is jarring. Upon removal of the mask, Marie breaks into tears so convincingly that one could believe the actress is genuinely in distress. Robert comforts her, a seemingly reassuring guide in Marie's sexual journey.

Figure 1- Marie in *Romance* [13]

[13] Still images appearing in this thesis are screen grabs taken directly from the various films unless otherwise noted.

A later scene sees Marie engaged in sexual activity with an anonymous male on the stairs of her apartment building (see Figure 2). Their involvement becomes rough and Marie is vulnerable; indeed, her position as a consenting participant is questionable. What distinguishes this scene from those in the porn genre is Marie's final response to her aggressive male partner. Upon his finishing and quick departure, she cries 'I'm not ashamed'. Marie then weeps as her attacker calls her derogatory names. Emma Wilson aptly describes this scene on the stairs and Marie's other sexual experiments as a series of 'deformations', during which 'the co-ordinates of female sexuality are remapped across the territory of her body' (2001: 145). This remapping involves a shift in Marie's gaze on her own body so that she is active viewer as well as object of desire in these sexual experiences, as evidenced by her announcement of her position at the end of the scene described above. Deleuze and Guattari (1982) describe a process of 'becoming' in which the body changes from one state to another as a result of contact with others, which suitably describes Marie's development as she encounters her various partners. The protagonist traverses various embodied states- object, subject, pursuer, surrenderer- continuously reforming herself, and finding a final position that moves beyond patriarchal expectations of female sexuality. As Deleuze and Guattari posit, 'becoming' involves the exploration of positions not fully invented or revealed, which exist outside of dualisms.

Figure 2- Sex on the stairs, *Romance*

Breillat utilises a range of stylistic approaches to aid in her interrogation of binary oppositions, particularly in relation to the gaze and physical positioning of the protagonist. I will examine the framing of the *Romance*'s opening sequence (three

short scenes) as an example. The first scene shows Paul, an actor preparing for a film shoot, having his face made up with white powder. He stares intensely into what one can assume is an off-screen mirror, appearing somewhat sceptical of his appearance (see Figure 3). The film then cuts to two wider shots as Paul rises from the make-up chair and appears on set in an outdoor sporting arena. In both of these shots, the film's protagonist, Marie, is foregrounded in the left and right of frame respectively, her back to the audience so that her facial features are hidden (see Figures 4 and 5). Breillat firstly establishes Marie's position as 'watcher', not unlike the film spectator, as the drama of Paul's film shoot then unfolds in medium shot. Action unfolds around Paul, whilst Marie is sidelined: the anonymous viewer of the action whose face is yet to be revealed.

By contrast, the second scene in which Paul and a distressed Marie have lunch at a nearby restaurant denies Marie a subjective point of view. Instead, the camera sits over Paul's unsympathetic shoulder as Marie voices her frustrations concerning the intimacy of their relationship, positioning her as an object rather than active bearer of the look (see Figure 6). The third scene of the film's opening sequence, in which the couple further discuss their relationship whilst traversing sand dunes, is filmed in wide shot, distancing both characters from the viewer and providing a moment for objective evaluation (see Figure 7). This is evidence of what Constable describes as Breillat's ability to portray 'emotions as collectively and collaboratively constructed social formations, not individualised psychic phenomena of interiority'(2004: 687). The use of objective medium and wide-shots, such as those in the latter two scenes described, draws attention to the gazes that fall upon Marie's body- those of Paul, her employer and her team of doctors, all of which are implicit in her construction of self. In effect, the camera positioning of the film's opening sequence first aligns the viewer with Marie, only to then objectify and distance her. As the film unfolds and Marie's journey of sexual discovery plays out, Breillat plays with this camera positioning to challenge and subvert the protagonist's status as object or subject.

Figure 3- Paul in the make-up chair, *Romance*

Figure 4- Marie watches Paul, *Romance*

Figure 5- Marie's face remains hidden as she watches Paul in the arena, *Romance*

Figure 6- At lunch with Paul, *Romance*

Figure 7- Marie removes her shoes as she traverses the sand dunes with Paul, *Romance*

Further evidence of Marie's problematic positioning as both object and subject comes to the fore in an early bedroom scene, which illuminates her lack of intimacy with partner Paul. White furniture and bed covers, along with the white walls of the apartment, create an environment that is pristine, austere and cold, as Marie, also dressed in white, climbs into bed. Paul watches TV with a bored expression, seemingly at home in this sterile space. Marie's attempts to initiate sex are rejected and she flees the apartment. A shot in which she drives a convertible through the streets of Paris at night functions as a transition into another world, one in which she can explore her desires with a series of new and sometimes anonymous partners. The protagonist finds solace in a bar with a random stranger (Siffredi). In contrast to the apartment, this late-night bar is warmly lit, with the night-time ambience creating a sense of otherworldliness and transgression, as if she has temporarily moved away from the sterile 'real life' of her apartment. Marie moves between these two worlds (sterile, domestic reality and a transgressive nightlife) at several points in the film,

with the two coming together when she is admitted to hospital for examination. In this key scene the protagonist's heavily pregnant body is tied to a hospital bed with her abdomen disappearing into the adjacent wall of her hospital room. In what can be interpreted as Marie's fantasy, the camera moves through the wall into a dark and dingy sex club where a variety of naked male suitors look to take advantage of the exposed lower half of her body. Literally, her body exists in two spaces and she is physically caught in the middle. The division between these worlds- the sterile and known versus the night-time unknown- relate to Marie's internal dilemma concerning sexual desire and shame. The difficulty in reconciling these worlds and in turn, satisfying her need to occupy a position as both subject and object of desire, is the narrative's central concern. Marie's conflicted existence as both subject and object is also the focus of an earlier hospital scene, in which the protagonist stares at herself in a small mirror (see Figure 8).

Figure 8- Marie looks at herself in a hospital mirror- object and subject, *Romance*

Set design and costume function as a means to understand the key theme of changing bodily status. In Breillat's films, colour plays an important role by highlighting character journeys, oppositions and relationships. This is perhaps most obvious in the transformation of Marie in *Romance*, noting her change from white dress to red as her sexual explorations progress. Through these costume changes, Breillat uses colour to subvert and deconstruct patriarchal stereotypes associated with feminine icons. In her various guises, Marie moves beyond fixed, stable identities of the virgin, wife, whore and widow. Editing also works to further this sense of instability in character roles. In particular, Breillat unsettles the viewer with sudden, unexpected cuts to momentous plot events, as at the end of the film, where the explosion of

Marie's apartment, signalling the death of her partner Paul, follows close-up images of childbirth. Here, we cut directly to the explosion itself, so that the shocked viewer has little time to process the details and ramifications before we cut again to Marie, dressed in black, carrying her child at Paul's funeral. After a film of frequent long takes and minimal editing, by contrast, this sequence ends the story in a very succinct fashion. The same observation could be made of the final shot of *Anatomie de l'enfer*, where, after the series of slowly paced night-time explorations, the alienated male character suddenly pushes the female protagonist off a cliff.

To explore bodily status further, Breillat accentuates Marie's conflict between her mind and body with voice-over narration that is frequently at odds with the images presented. The director has noted that, 'When you see her, she's in extremely contradictory states […] I thought that the interior voice would come from an impulse to do certain things. The very fact of doing these things brings her somewhere else and it's this "somewhere else" that allows her to articulate why she's doing these things' (quoted in Sklar 1999: 26). Thus Marie's voice-over recounts her conflicted desires and actions and later facilitates understandings of these actions. Marie describes the personal journey and growth associated with moments of night-time transgression, the action of which runs alongside the breakdown of Marie's relationship with Paul, who dies at Marie's hands. With dramatic rock music and stark, stylised production design, the final sequence of Paul's funeral blurs the line between fantasy and reality, as Marie emerges a woman reborn. The experiences of *Romance'*s female protagonist, both real and fantasy, result in a new outlook; a 'becoming' driven by moments of bodily contact that allows her to transcend patriarchal expectations concerning her body and desires.

A double becoming: *Anatomie de l'enfer*

Based on her novel *Pornocratie* (first published in 2001), Breillat's *Anatomie de l'enfer* (2004) returns to the territory of *Romance* with its exploration of female subjectivity. In this later film, the director presents an episodic narrative structure, a cross-gender voice-over, an anonymous and minimal setting that refuses the stamp of a particular time period, and extreme close-ups of graphic and taboo imagery, all of which takes the themes present in *Romance* and amplifies them within a mythical setting. The story follows the journeys of two protagonists, a male and female, both

of whom move through different embodied states while engaging in a series of sexual experiments with one another. The film begins in a gay nightclub full of dancing male patrons. We meet an unnamed woman (Amira Casar), who is out of place in this setting. Appearing dejected, a moment later she attempts to slit her wrist in the bathroom, but is rescued by an unnamed bar patron (Rocco Siffredi). The woman suggests an experiment: she will pay the man to spend four nights at her house, 'watching her when she is unwatchable'. The man agrees and the next stage of the film begins. Adrienne Angelo (2010) makes the point that the plot is a reference to Marguerite Duras' novel *La Maladie de la mort* (*The Disease of Death,* published in 1982)*,* in which a man hires a woman so that he may explore her body over a series of nights. Breillat reverses the gender roles so that it is the woman who seeks to regain her subjectivity and overcome her alienation from her own body. Similarly to Marie's journey in *Romance*, the female protagonist of *Anatomie de l'enfer* explores her position as both object and subject, considering what Angelo describes as 'woman's "(s)existential" anguish: a conflict between her self-perception and the way in which she is perceived through the eyes of men' (2010: 44). The choice of a somewhat misogynistic gay male 'watcher' is significant as his gaze is one of disgust rather than desire for the female body. The exploration of historical patriarchal ideas concerning the 'unclean' female body is the director's main concern and her gay male character functions as a means to foreground a lack of conformity to traditional expectations of femininity.

Scenes depicting the female protagonist lying naked or semi-clothed on her bed expose the man's fear of the female body: of pubic hair, body parts and menstruation. From the first night that the man watches the woman, he expresses his disgust with the 'obscenity' that he terms the female body. Upon leaving the woman's abode after his final night of watching, he likens the nearby wild and choppy ocean to 'a bitch on heat'. Through the action of 'watching the unwatchable,' however, the man seems to lose his concrete sense of identity. Over the film's course, he alters from having a stable to unstable notion of self and develops questions about his own sexuality, intimacy and ideas of man/woman. This development is evident through a series of episodic sexual encounters involving bodily contact that allows both players to traverse a series of alternating power positions. On the final night, the man returns to the house near the beach, finding it

empty but for bloody sheets. Breillat depicts the material almost as a religious shroud, suggesting that the female character's 'becoming' has involved transcendence from her bodily state. The final sequence of the film is perhaps a dream sequence in which the man pushes the woman off the cliff, regaining his power as the ocean swallows her up. As in *Romance*, we see new life (for the male protagonist) gained through death (of the unnamed female). This theme is also apparent in *À ma soeur,* when the teenage Anais begins her new life as sexually active woman following the deaths of her mother and sister. Furthermore, Breillat's 2009 film *Barbe Bleue* sees the young female protagonist find freedom with the death of her murderous husband.

Changes in bodily status are linked to the concept of night-time transgression (as introduced in *Romance*), which Breillat takes a step further in *Anatomie de l'enfer*. By constructing a narrative divided into several distinct chapters, each being a night passed between the two nameless protagonists, the director creates a sense of timelessness, reinforced by the lack of dates and the ambiguous seaside setting. Action unfolds largely in a single room, one stripped bare of embellishments save a crucifix that hangs over an iron-framed bed. The minimal production design is effective here in focusing attention on the relationship between the two anonymous main characters; they can be symbolic of "man" and "woman" in a mythical sense, as well as characters with traditional motivations or detailed back-stories. Ruth McPhee makes the point that such structures indicate that the film 'is intended as an allegorical, rather than character-based, exploration of the sexual relation' (2009: 167), which is also alluded to in the film's dreamlike cross-gender voice-over. Here, Breillat herself narrates on behalf of the man and the woman, using the term 'we' rather than 'I' to speak on behalf of all men and women, rather than just the two featured in the story.

The concept of time itself is also implicated in Breillat's approach to changes in bodily status. With reference to Kristeva's idea of *le temps des femmes,* (woman's time), Sarah Cooper suggests that Breillat speaks in the tense of *future perfect*, 'a paradoxical tense, which gestures simultaneously to a past and future: it designates a time in which something "will have been done"' (2010: 104). Kristeva's term draws upon James Joyce's phrase, "father's time, mother's species" to 'designate two dimensions that human beings have occupied' (McAfee, 2004: 94). Joyce suggests a

contrast between the two: that masculine time has a very linear sense, whereas feminine time is cyclical, concerned with eternity and new life. I propose that the presentation of time in *Anatomie de l'enfer* evidences Breillat's interest in depicting this variation. Indeed, Breillat creates a space in which both the male and female characters may challenge the construction of their identities and their relation to the body, a journey in which physical interactions and dialogue between characters challenges the process of linguistic articulation, to bring about a shifting of status. One of the final scenes of the film sees the man drinking in a bar with a random male acquaintance. His confused dialogue reveals the trauma of his experience and a loss of subjectivity as result. His 'becoming' would therefore appear to involve a new understanding of the masculine and feminine; one that has moved away from prior dualisms and binary oppositions.

As a means of further subversion in both *Romance* and *Anatomie de l'enfer*, Breillat utilises extreme close-up shots to display subject matter that is normally unseen, such as a real birth experience and details of female genitalia. Writing on the use of close-up and extreme close-up shots, Martine Beugnet comments that these are often used as a shock tactic in traditionally male audience-orientated genres, a convention now being reclaimed by women directors, including Breillat (2007: 93). In *Romance*, the graphic birth shot functions to assault the gaze after Marie's objectified experience at the hands of doctors and medical staff. As Beugnet notes, 'the traditional porn movie close-up on the face of a woman lost in ecstasy is replaced by that of the woman in the pain of birth, and the images of holes to be filled by images of spilling out' (2006: 34). Wilson makes the point that Breillat 'disrupts the relations of distance and control, on which viewing has been seen to depend, by her emphasis on the tactile' (2001: 151). In *Anatomie de l'enfer*, the extreme close-ups of female genitalia and menstruation produce what Breillat describes as 'stupor proportionate to the dread, that the man feels before that which is unwatchable, this denied part of the woman' (quoted in Vasse 2004: 3). In the notes accompanying the DVD release of the film, the director comments on her desire to frame the parts of the body that are 'increasingly hidden or eliminated', including pubic and under-arm hair. Gustave Courbet's painting *The Origin of the World* (Figure 9), as well as the photography of Man Ray (see example in Figure 10) in which more realistic portrayals of female body hair are included, influence the imagery of these shots. Breillat's confronting

work challenges film conventions with the offering of graphic, taboo imagery that demystifies the female body while the use of jarring close-up framing gives full disclosure of the subject it portrays. Unlike pornography, these images are not titillating, but rather encourage a multi-sensory spectator response.

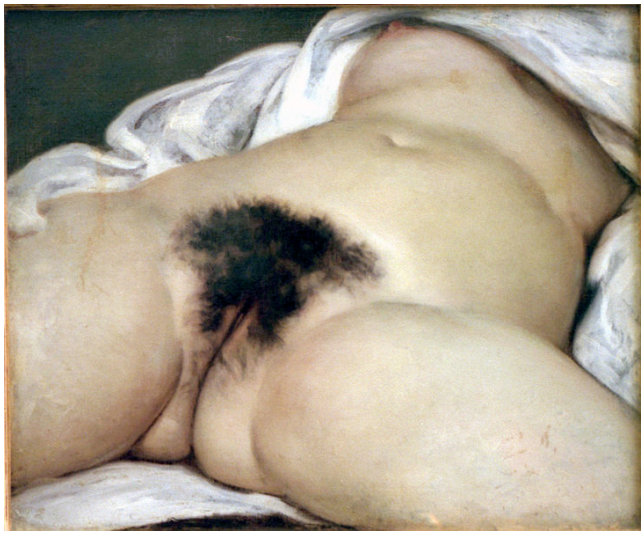

Figure 9- Gustave Courbet's *The Origin of the World*, 1866 [14]

Figure 10- *Nusch*, (Man Ray, 1935) [15]

[14] Image taken from Wikipedia- http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/3/3f/Origin-of-the-World.jpg, accessed 3/4/12

[15] Image taken from http://scottzagar.com/arthistory/timelines.php?page=popup_fullsize, accessed 3/4/12

Figure 11- Breillat poses her actors like a painter would pose their models- *Anatomie de l'enfer*

Writing on the subject of body genres, David MacDougall refers to Linda Williams's research on viewer responses to graphic documentary, pornography and horror footage, noting that the resulting 'strong physical responses to such images- of shock, flinching, faintness, sexual arousal… underlie Williams' point that in film viewing we do not necessarily feel for others, we feel for and in ourselves' (2006: 18). I propose that Breillat's portrayals of the body encourage just such an interplay between cinematic subject and spectator, with the extreme close-up shots of the fractured body in *Anatomie de l'enfer* blurring the boundaries between the inside and outside of the body. This leaves the spectator without the control that a more distanced view allows, a key feature of haptic visuality, a concept that I will describe in more detail when looking at Claire Denis's *Trouble Every Day*, and the work of Marina de Van in the following chapter.

It can be argued then that through the use of an episodic narrative structure, cross-gender voice-over, an anonymous, timeless and minimal setting and extreme close-ups of graphic and taboo imagery, *Anatomie de l'enfer* amplifies the themes presented in *Romance*. In the later film both characters move through a series of embodied states, overcoming binary oppositions and stable notions of identity and sexuality. As with *Romance*, the female character's 'becoming' involves a transformation and transcendence from her bodily state; however, it is debatable as to whether the male character has succeeded in effecting such a transformation.

The ceremonial body: *Une vieille maîtresse* and *Barbe Bleue*

Having explored the concept of 'becoming' with reference to changes in subjecthood and protagonists' views of their own bodies in *Romance* and *Anatomie de l'enfer*, I will now explore this concept alongside the director's portrayal of marriage. To do so, I will consider the protagonists' shifts in social status in two of Breillat's more recent films *Une vieille maîtresse* (2007) and *Barbe Bleue* (2009). These films, both of which unfold in a period setting, question women's roles, patriarchal expectations surrounding the ritual of marriage, and the notion of the body as commodity. In her portrayal of the wife and mistress in the first film, and the adolescent bride versus the giant in the second, Breillat again challenges binary oppositions to expose the contradictions associated with patriarchal norms. For the brides of both films, their 'becoming' involves the loss of virginity (or threat of loss), and the realisation of their limited possibilities as desiring subjects in the role of wife. Deleuze's writings are relevant here as he describes two poles in the cinema-body-thought link: the everyday versus the ceremonial body. Specifically, he writes:

> To give a body, to mount a camera on the body, takes on a different sense: it is no longer a matter of following and trailing the everyday body, but of making it pass through a ceremony, of introducing it into a glass cage or a crystal, of imposing a carnival or a masquerade on it which makes it into a grotesque body, but also brings out of it a gracious and glorious body, until at last the disappearance of the visible body is achieved (1989: 190).

One might easily relate this to a variety of on-screen spectacles (dance sequences or beauty contests come to mind when thinking literally of carnivals and masquerade that might bring about a disappearance of the visible body). Certainly, Marie's journey in *Romance* exemplifies the idea of the body passing through a ceremony; however, I apply the concept here to Breillat's presentation of marriage as a rite of passage from one bodily state to another. For the brides of *Une vieille maîtresse* and *Barbe Bleue,* the ritual means a change of bodily status, as well as an assumption of new expectations and limitations. Breillat utilises a range of stylistic approaches when, alternatively, presenting a mistress as contrasting figure, and portraying the adolescent bride, as I will now explore.

The narrative of *Une vieille maîtresse* is centred upon a love triangle between the male protagonist Ryno (Fud Ait Aattou), his virginal bride Hermanguarde (Roxane

Mesquida) and his extroverted mistress Vellini (Asia Argento) during the period of the French aristocracy. Ryno promises to renounce his mistress following the marriage, but is unable to do so and eventually flees the country with Vellini at his side. Both Hermanguarde and Vellini find their positions fraught with difficulty and limitations, and it is here that Breillat challenges opposites such as wife/mistress. Douglas Kessey makes the point that the mental difference between wife and mistress is one that comes from within, 'an identity crisis provoked by contradictory patriarchal demand' (2010: 6). Hermanguarde's position as wife means that, although the status of her body is elevated, she is denied the sexual enjoyment experienced by Vellini. Conversely, the mistress is denied Hermanguarde's social standing and stability. Indeed, the death of Vellini's child could be read as punishment for having borne a child in the position of mistress rather than wife. For Hermanguarde, however, the ritual of marriage means a metaphorical disappearance of her body. While *Une vieille maîtresse* features several sex scenes, Hermanguarde's loss of virginity and other moments of sexual contact occur largely off-screen. It appears that, as chaste wife, her sexual desires are now transferred to her husband and informed by the society into which she has married, reflecting 'Ryno's compartmentalising view, women are either wives or whores, mothers or mistresses' (Keesey 2010: 8). Hermanguarde's naked body is revealed only once, when Ryno takes her to bed upon hearing that she will bear his child and has therefore fulfilled his expectations. Here, she lies still as he strokes her body, as though she is a possession or plaything. The desire to be more than passive wife, however, is that which leads Hermangarde to follow Ryno to Vellini's distant abode, a journey that leads to the miscarriage of her baby.

Drawing on the idea of the white and red woman quite literally, Breillat presents us with two female characters clothed to challenge and undermine the opposites: virgin/whore. Hermanguarde is consistently dressed in long white dresses, reflecting her status as virginal wife. By contrast, Vellini appears in red and/or black dresses with a Spanish influence. There are moments, however, when their dress is not dissimilar, or alternatively, when costumes create alliances between women across class barriers, such as between Vellini and her maid. By using costume to give the women the effect of similar appearance, Breillat questions the difference in their status and how this inhibits their wants and needs. The film utilises naturalistic

lighting to illuminate or shadow the body, and one can observe a difference in the presentation of the olive-skinned mistress Vellini and the pale but coldly appealing Hermangarde. While such differences in skin tone works to reinforce their contrasting roles in the story, lighting further emphasises Hermanguarde's problematic position as new wife by capturing her face and clothed body in crisp (and somewhat cold) indoor light. This does not permit the air of mystery and seductiveness associated with Vellini's warmly lit, shadowed form, as Hermangarde is not permitted to play this role.

Figure 12- Ryno and Hermanguarde are married, *Une vieille maîtresse*

Figure 13- Vellini watches from above, *Une vieille maîtresse*

In the scene involving her marriage, Hermanguarde pushes on a heavy door and advances down the aisle of a large cathedral. Her small body is completely covered with a white dress and veil, the edges of which are carried by four bridesmaids in red dress. The staging of the extras and the costume suggests an attempt to explore

binary oppositions and female stereotypes, with guests divided into categories of women (in white dress) and men (in black dress) on either side of the aisle, watching as the bride reaches the alter and pauses next to her future husband. As can be seen in Figure 12, at this moment Hermanguarde's body, clothed and adorned for the ritual of marriage, is completely covered, with the skin being near impossible to view. As the ceremony gets underway, we cut to a wider shot of Vellini, fully visible and clothed in black, watching from an isolated position in the upstairs gallery (see Figure 13). The ceremony of marriage means a change in bodily status; the disappearance (through covering) of Hermanguarde's body, while Vellini's attendance as mistress undermines the couple's union.

Barbe Bleue explores similarly territory, this time with adolescent bride Marie-Catherine (Lola Créton). Taking Charles Perrault's seventeenth century fairy-tale as starting point, Breillat recounts the story of Marie-Catherine and her sister, Anne, who are left destitute after the death of their father. Despite the knowledge that wealthy aristocrat Blue Beard's former wives have all vanished, Marie-Catherine decides to marry him as a way to solve her financial problems. When Blue Beard leaves on a business trip, giving his new bride keys to his castle, she is forbidden to open the door to one secret room. Marie-Catherine is overcome with curiosity and unlocks the door, finding the bloodied and hanging bodies of her husband's former wives. When Blue Beard returns and discovers her deception, the countdown to Marie-Catherine's own death begins. In a last minute reversal, however, it is she who kills her husband, aided by her sister Anne. Like Hermanguarde in *Une vieille maîtresse*, Marie-Catherine is not content to assume the role of passive wife. Her 'becoming' involves a rejection of patriarchal expectations that will, in this case, mean the saving of her life.

With *Barbe Bleue,* Breillat offers the viewer a parallel storyline, in which two young sisters read the story in the 1950s. Through their innocent discussion and paraphrasing of the fairytale's plot events, the director questions this material as being appropriate for young girls, making the point that it proposes that the protagonist learn to love the man who will kill her; it is after all, a story of arranged marriage to a serial killer. Breillat draws parallels between the relationship of Blue Beard's young wife Marie-Catherine and her sister Anne, and that of the two story narrators, raising questions concerning the changed (or unchanged) romantic desires

and aspirations of young girls. When Marie-Catherine finally opens Blue Beard's locked chamber and discovers the bodies of his dead former wives inside, the younger of the two 1950s sisters is inserted into the story, creeping across the blood-stained floor in place of the fairytale's female protagonist. Not only does this moment explicitly suggest a blurring between fantasy and reality for the young narrators, but also the subsequent disagreement between the sisters leads to one girl's actual death alongside Blue Beard's fictional demise. Breillat makes the point that brief immersions into other worlds- in this case fantasy- can have serious repercussions for one's real life, desires and identity.

Figure 14- Marie-Catherine first meets Bluebeard, *Barbe Bleue*

Figure 15- The killer assumes the weaker position, *Barbe Bleue*

Whereas Breillat explores conventions associated with the red/white woman in *Une vieille maîtresse*, she turns her attention to the portrayal of good and evil in *Barbe Bleue,* again using cinematography and lighting as tools. We see the adolescent wife

Marie-Catherine brightly illuminated as she makes her first acquaintance with her dangerous future husband (see Figure 14). The framing of the shot, in which the courageous young girl stands over Blue Beard and introduces herself, positions Marie-Catherine as a powerful, redeeming force. Her suitor sits resting his body against a tree in the deserted woods (see Figure 15), but Marie-Catherine's small body temporarily overpowers his large form, backlit by rays of sunlight. Although young and naive, she is presented by Breillat as a potential equal for Blue Beard. The marriage ceremony brings about a change in social status, as well as bodily status. Returning to the idea of the ceremonial body versus the everyday body, I will examine this marriage scene in more detail. The opening shot, in which the camera is positioned at a high-angle, gives power to an ageing priest who stands in front of a series of church stained-glass windows. Off-screen choral singing continues as we cut to our first view of the figure of Marie-Catherine, who, dressed in a red cloak, is overshadowed by the larger body of Blue Beard who rests on a pew closer to the camera. The priest brings their wedding rings, momentarily obscuring our view of the bride as a ring slips onto her finger. Guests watch from the gallery in the background, but Marie-Catherine is unable to turn and view them. The final shot is a close up of her expressionless face as gold coins tumble from a shiny chalice, to rain down over her face, as seen in Figure 16.

Figure 16- Coins fall about the bride's face, *Barbe Bleue*

One could interpret the staging of this scene as reflecting a change in her status from subject to object, as Marie-Catherine's body becomes literally obscured and hidden

from view. She functions as a tradeable object within the religious ceremony, a commodity paid for in gold. The young bride quickly asserts her will, however, choosing a small bedroom for herself in the castle, rather than accepting the bed she will share with her husband. Blue Beard seems content to wait for her to 'mature' both physically and mentally. The fairy tale involves Marie-Catherine's discovery of the bodies of Blue Beard's previous wives and her impending threat of death, and one could read this as mirroring her impending loss of virginity. Marie-Catherine resists both by asserting herself in the castle. Within this story, the marriage contract means the literal disappearance of her body, by means of imminent death. The new status of Marie-Catherine's body; that of a commodity belonging to her husband, is one that she actively resists in her role of the girl versus the giant. It is interesting to note that Breillat's portrayal of Blue Beard is at times sympathetic, perhaps making the point that he too is somewhat unwillingly playing a role.

Both *Une vieille maîtresse* and *Barbe Bleue* are significant in their exploration of marriage as rite of passage that brings about a change in bodily status. By presenting the limits and contradictions associated with the roles of wife and mistress, and by exploring the desires of an adolescent bride faced with an ominous future, the director questions the status of the body as it enters into this contract, including the loss of virginity, the role of childbirth and threat of death, and the literal or metaphorical loss of the visible body. For both films, lighting and costume aid the director in establishing and challenging the complex power structures and relations between characters. There is a similarity also, in their narrative devices, with both utilising a narrator to reframe elements of the story. For both Hermanguarde and Marie-Catherine, their 'becoming' involves a refusal of the patriarchal expectations of their new roles. The conclusion of the *Une vieille maîtresse* sees Ryno leave his wife and return to his mistress, producing society gossip similar to that which opens the film. It seems that Hermangarde cannot overcome the obstacle that is his passion for Vellini. Marie-Catherine succeeds at escaping her fate, however, when killing her murderous husband.

Overcoming shame: *À ma soeur*

As can be noted in the films described above, Breillat's works often feature adolescent girls and young women grappling with their sexuality. Breillat's interest lies in the idea of the adolescent girl as a clean slate; she can become anything or

anyone, as the future is not yet set.[16] For these inexperienced protagonists, however, the line between desire and shame is muddled, exemplifying Simone de Beauvoir's writings on the emotional changes and humiliation associated with becoming sexual subjects in *Le Deuxième Sexe (The Second Sex*), first published in 1949. Specifically, on the subject of sexual initiation, Beauvoir suggests that 'an active participation is asked of (the girl) in an adventure that is positively desired neither by her virgin body nor by her mind, beset as it is by taboos, prohibitions, prejudices, and exactions' (1988: 353). This area is explored in *À ma soeur*, also known as *Fat Girl* in the United States, which was in fact Breillat's original title for the film.[17] Through the eyes of the protagonist Anais (Anais Reboux) we see the awakening of female sexuality accompanied by feelings of excitement, fear, guilt and shame. As the 'fat girl' Anais is presented as a somewhat marginalised figure, able to remain a distanced observer in her sister Elena's (Roxane Mesquida) romantic play whilst on a family holiday. For both girls, a change of embodied state involves sexual contact and the loss of virginity, dramatised in sequences involving alternately, long takes and minimal editing, or sudden cuts to jarring close-ups to reveal shocking plot events. For Anais, the process of 'becoming' is a journey away from romantic ideals and patriarchal expectations (not unlike that Marie in *Romance* or the unnamed women in *Anatomie de l'enfer*), to accept her new position as sexually experienced young woman.

At the start of *À ma soeur* we observe Anais and Elena walking down a country road, discussing the future losses of their virginity. Elena's comments reveal a desire for romance and love, while Anais sees the rite of passage as something that can be experienced without emotion, with a seemingly random partner. The events that follow echo these sentiments in dramatic fashion. The girls meet a handsome Italian student at a seaside café. His interest in Elena is immediate and their courting begins- a series of coercive conversations until Elena eventually sleeps with him. For Elena, the loss of virginity means treading the line between desire and shame, which Elena 'seeks to mitigate with expectations of permanence and commitment' (Fox-Kales 2010: 16). Her virginity is something that can be charmed away, a commodity later

[16] Breillat states that 'for me, adolescence is my favourite thing, because a teenager can become anything. They can become great or they can become a bimbo. You just don't know what their future holds.' Personal interview with the director, Paris, June 2011.
[17] French test audiences rejected the foreignness of the original English title *Fat Girl*, so it was then changed to *À ma soeur.*

replaced by a piece of stolen jewellery. Anais, on the other hand, plays the role of the cynical and reluctant witness. When she is brutally raped at the end of *À ma soeur*, a sequence that could be interpreted as a dream-sequence produced in reaction to her sister's experience, she denounces the experience, much like Marie's response on the stairs in *Romance*. By refusing to acknowledge the experience as rape, but rather as the cold and emotionless loss of virginity that she earlier desired, she subverts her position as victim and retains her subjectivity; a 'becoming' which means a new embodied state. The depiction of the girls' experiences in this film makes an interesting statement on the parallels between the two girls' loss of virginity, leaving the viewer to ponder which method was the crueller.

As per Constable, I propose a link between *À ma soeur* and the writing of Simone de Beauvoir. Both Breillat and de Beauvoir suggest that 'self-conscious shame emerges in young women as a result of a repeated failure to acknowledge the real bodies they inhabit, through an absence of response to their feelings as emerging sexual subjects' (Constable 2004: 677). Breillat has written at length about her own sexual awakening and dissatisfaction with western cultural stereotypes of gender, stating that 'as far as sexuality and women's sexuality in particular are concerned, women are given an image of themselves that has lost its dignity. I've never believed that that person was me' (Sklar 1999: 29). Kessey makes the point that the 'contrast between the two sisters is also a contrast within them' (2009: 53), referring to a comment by Breillat that the girls are one soul in two bodies, each representing the conflicting desires that accompany adolescent sexual awakening. Colour is used to signal similarity between the two sisters, as they often appear dressed in similar shades of yellow or green. With their matching outfits, they can be read as a two opposing sides of a coin, both looking to reconcile their sexual and romantic desires.

Anais's self-conscious shame and conflicted view of her own body is evident in the several scenes where she appears scantily dressed (at the beach or swimming pool, for example). Fox-Kales aptly describes a scene of *À ma soeur* in which Anais looks upon her plump body in the mirror (see Figure 17). 'She lifts up her dress to expose her barely developing breasts and rotund belly, then proceeds to reprimand her own reflection with the expletive "Slut!" once again signalling the psychological realities of the adolescent girl's conflicted responses to the possibilities of female sexuality…'(2010: 17). Furthermore, Anais's plump figure in contrast to Elena's

slim frame is a continual focal point of the film. Scenes where the girls wear bathers to swim in the pool, indulge in ice-cream sundaes or buy new dresses at a nearby boutique draw attention to Anais's inability to participate in activities of consumption without guilt and shame. Alienated from popular images of the desirable young girl, she is left a near invisible figure, quietly observing family dynamics and romantic play from a distanced position. Sisterly solidarity does exist, however, despite the different experiences and desires of Anais and her older sibling. At one point the girls look at themselves in the mirror (see Figure 18), and despite huge physical differences, Elena comments 'When I hate you, I look at you and I can't anymore; it's like hating a part of myself'. Although the girls are in many ways opposites, the director makes the point that they are the same in their struggles. A similar scene of solidarity takes place between Vellini and her maid in *Une vieille maîtresse*.

Figure 17- Anais examines at herself in the mirror, *À ma soeur*

Figure 18- two sisters, the same but different, *À ma soeur*

To further explore Breillat's presentation of desire and shame, I will examine the film's camera positioning, noting that, whilst not including such explicit portrayals of female genitalia as *Romance*, *À ma soeur* still uses close-up shots to portray the body and shock the viewer, particularly in the final sequence of the film, which depicts Anais's rape and the murder of her mother and sister in a service-station car park. The camera frames Anais's pale, bare legs as she faces her family's killer in the nearby woods. We later see close-ups of her murdered mother's legs pushed against brake pedals in the family vehicle, of a high-heeled shoe awkwardly cast aside and of stockings, wrinkled and torn. After the rape, when Anais emerges from the woods in the company of two policemen, the camera reverts to the more distanced, objective view, as is utilised many times throughout the film and was earlier described in relation to the opening sequence of *Romance*. More frequently than in the earlier film, however, the protagonist Anais is positioned as an observer and we are privy to her desires. She is the 'smart' girl, often being the sympathetic eyes through which the viewer follows the unfolding narrative. This is established in one of the opening scenes when Anais and Elena meet Italian student, Fernando, at a local café. Anais is seated opposite the would-be lovers and it is over her shoulder that we observe the flirtations that signal the beginning of the holiday romance. Breillat allows Anais a point of view, much more so than that afforded to Marie in *Romance.* However, the reverse shot objectifies Anais as she consumes a banana split, excluding the other characters and distancing her from the action, making her both marginalised and central to the unfolding plot.

Whilst the narrative of *À ma soeur* comprises perhaps Breillat's most conventional arrangement of plot, it is interesting to note that like *Romance* and *Anatomie de l'enfer*, it also plays on notions of timelessness and fantasy, constructed here from an adolescent point of view. Cooper observes that the meandering walks of Anais and her sister suggest that, for these teenage girls, family holidays involve 'time to kill' (2010: 106), a concept also describing their uncertain futures and the desire to become adults. Elena's two sex scenes play out in sequences of long takes that occupy more than a third of the film's entire running time. Although not presented as fantasy, the deliberate pacing and lengthiness of these scenes creates a sense that time has slowed and Elena's sexual encounters are occurring in a transgressive space, distanced from her daytime reality. Editing is minimal, with pauses in

movement and dialogue guarded, rather than discarded, to bring a sense of immediacy and reality to the dramatic unfolding of events. The body language contained in these long takes is as important as words spoken, and Breillat allows the action (seen in Figure 19), to play out in largely uncut sequences. As with *Anatomie de l'enfer,* life is also reduced to relations between two people in one room, with the addition of Anais, a figure who functions as a point of identification for the audience.

Nowhere in the film is the staging technique of positioning Anais as observer repeated more effectively than during Elena's sex scenes. The camera keeps a distance from the lovers, filming the episodes of sexual coercion in wide and medium shots in keeping with Anais's position in an adjacent bed. When the first sexual act finally takes place, the film cuts to close ups of Anais shielding her eyes with fingers or an arm, but unable to completely look away (see Figure 20). These sex scenes are filmed in keeping with Breillat's tendency to mount the camera on a tripod and obtain long takes with some tracking movement. The first twenty-five minute scene involves minimal editing, with one single shot of the couple on a bed lasting in excess of seven minutes. This penultimate shot, in which Elena is seduced, sees the camera slowly track closer and closer towards her vertical body, a reflection of her lover's progress in the art of persuasion. This single take adds to the sense of realism in the actors' performance, creating anticipation and making Elena's final experience, and her accompanying sense of humiliation and shame, all the more devastating.[18] In *The Time Image,* Deleuze argues that 'The body is never in the present, it contains the before and the after, tiredness and waiting' (2005: 189), an idea that finds resonance here in relation to Elena's simultaneous eagerness and anxiety concerning the loss of her virginity. Once again, one could make a link here to Kristeva's 'woman's time' considering these night-time events as unfolding in a non-linear space that gestures both to the past and the future. I would argue, however, that at these moments, both girls' bodies are very much in the present tense, however informed by preconceived notions of feminine desire and agency. By featuring lengthy long takes in the lead up to these sexual encounters, Breillat breaks

[18] A similar scene appears in the Breillat's behind the scenes 'mockumentary' *Sex is Comedy,* also featuring Roxane Mesquida. One could assume that this film provides insight into Breillat's working methods, revealing the same camera set-ups and shot compositions in the 'film within the film.' Breillat has commented on this manner of working, stating that while the approach involves complex choreography within a shot, if successfully executed, much screen time can be achieved in a single set up.

from the pace of 'normal life' established earlier in the film, to emphasise the trauma involved in the girls' experience. The only other night scene in *À ma soeur* is the one involving the murder and rape at the conclusion of the film, returning to the idea of transgression occurring under the cover of darkness.

Figure 19- Elena's seduction, *À ma soeur*

Figure 20- the silent witness, *À ma soeur*

Thus, Anais's 'becoming' involves a journey from naive and alienated teenager to sexually experienced woman, through rape and the loss of virginity. Her statement to police at the conclusion of the film, in which she refuses the label of humiliated victim, enables her to rise above patriarchal expectations of her sexuality. Her sister Elena, by contrast, is not so lucky, finding herself coerced and then abandoned by the male suitor to whom she loses her virginity, and also killed in the film's final minutes.

Summary

In this chapter I have identified and outlined a number of reoccurring themes in Breillat's work. *Romance* and *Anatomie de l'enfer* explore female subjectivity and alienation from the body most overtly, while *À ma soeur, Une vieille maîtresse* and *Barbe Bleue* explore adolescence and/or the role of wife with a deconstruction of identity, desire and shame. Breillat's protagonists, whether inhabiting a contemporary or fairy-tale world, reform themselves as they make the passage between different embodied states. These transitions involve moments of bodily contact, through experiences such as the series of sexual experiments undertaken by Marie in *Romance* or by the unnamed man and woman of *Anatomie de l'enfer*, or through marriage and/or the loss of virginity (or threat of loss) in *Une vieille maîtresse* and *Barbe Bleue.* For all of Breillat's protagonists, the journey of 'becoming', whether successful or unsuccessful, is one that involves an interrogation of binary oppositions and patriarchal expectations in regards to female sexuality.

Writing on the history of pornography and sex on screen, Linda Williams notes that, 'for women, one constant of the history of sexuality has been a failure to imagine their pleasures outside a dominant male economy' (1989: 4). She makes the points that, historically, patriarchal law has 'told women that sexual pleasure makes them bad girls', and furthermore, that the role of the imagination and fantasy in feminine desire and pleasure has been underestimated (1989: 226, 61). In the exploration of alternatives Williams considers the writings of Jessica Benjamin, who suggests 'the creation of an "intersubjective space", a space of exchange between people in which, by being with the other, one also experiences a profound sense of self. In this space the woman's interior is experienced as part of her own being […] not as a passive object or a place to be discovered' (Benjamin quoted in Williams 1989: 260). I would argue that the idea of this 'intersubjective space' is highly relevant when examining the work of Catherine Breillat. For the 'becomings' of her protagonists, as explored in this chapter, the creation of such a space involves moments of contact that bring about a change in the emotional, physical or social status of the body. Breillat's work, whilst having been likened to pornography due to the inclusion of graphic sex and of erect penises, is not titillating, as I have said. Rather, it is effective in questioning the onscreen limits of representation of the female body, and in

offering alternatives.[19] By playing with notions of distance and control in her framing and by reclaiming the close-up to offer tactile, non-clichéd views of the female form, Breillat draws the viewer into the quest of her protagonists, thereby creating a 'becoming' that sees the renegotiation of the body, desire and shame.

[19] I have chosen not to focus on Breillat's behind the scenes 'mockumentary' *Sex is Comedy*, but this film also reminds us of the illusionary nature of romance and seduction while blurring the lines between masculine/feminine and object/subject.

Chapter 2- The unstable, fragmented body

In a 2004 interview Claire Denis remarked that her films are sometimes unbalanced. 'They have a limp, or one arm shorter than the other, or a big nose' (quoted in Beugnet 2007: 149). This comment was made with specific reference to her eighth feature film, *L'intrus (The Intruder,* 2004*),* a film that, like the earlier *Trouble Every Day* (2001), features a protagonist involved in graphic acts of murder. Both films draw attention to the limits and animalistic qualities of the human body, so it is apt that Denis should use such a description to describe the body of the film itself. Further to the idea of an unbalanced work, Martine Beugnet describes Denis's films as those which 'shun well-defined, stable characterisation and situations and favor transitory, mutating spaces' (2004: 21). This unstable characterisation can be observed in both of the films listed above, in which protagonists act on impulse or according to primal urges, killing for pleasure or for their own survival. Denis offers little psychological depth to her characters, preferring to keep the focus on the surface of their bodies, and literally speaking, does so with close-ups and extreme close-ups of their skin. As bodies move through rituals of killing (*Trouble Every Day*) or heart transplant surgery (*L'intrus*), the stylised camera work breaks down the line between object and subject, keeping the spectator close to the graphic and gory unfolding action on screen.

The year following the controversial reception of Denis's *Trouble Every Day* saw the release of Marina de Van's debut feature film *Dans ma peau (In My Skin,* 2002). This film features a female protagonist who, following an accident, becomes obsessed with the mutilation of her own body. In a similar fashion to the works by Denis described above, de Van frames the body in extreme close-up, drawing attention to wounds and scars on the skin's surface. In *Dans ma peau,* the camera frequently pans along arms and legs with movement following human form, and the fracturing of the body into separate body parts contributes to the viewer's awareness of the protagonist's loss of a sense of unified self. As with Denis's two films described above, de Van's protagonist is unable to control her bodily urges; the director's corporeal images explore feminine psychology with a particular focus on a perceived divide between mind and body. After a lengthy break, de Van returned to explore similar territory in her second feature *Ne te retourne pas (Don't Look Back*,

2009). This higher budget film features successful middle-class career woman and mother, Jeanne (Sophie Marceau), whose life falls apart when she begins to transform into the body of another woman (Monica Bellucci). Here the protagonist's body is literally unstable, often stretching and distorting to transform between the bodies of the two lead actresses. As with *Dans ma peau*, the lead character's journey is one involving a rearrangement of her body and identity.

Examining both thematic and stylistic approaches, this second chapter will explore representations of the unstable and fragmented body in the four films listed above. While *Dans ma peau* and *Ne te retourne pas* represent the theatrically released feature film output of de Van to date, I have isolated *Trouble Every Day* and *L'intrus* from other works by Denis due to the graphic imagery associated with portrayals of the body in these works, and the stylistic approaches to camera and mise-en-scène featured within, much of which finds resonance in the work of the younger director.[20] I will go on to examine other works of Denis in the following chapter, one that specifically addresses the concept of foreignness. Here, however, I wish to maintain a focus on the frequently irrational, out of control and mutating bodies featured within these two more graphic and confronting works. Greg Hainge makes the point that, whilst films such as *Dans ma peau* and *Trouble Every Day* 'do indeed present transgressive bodies, unruly bodies, bodies attacked, and bodies invaded', they are not horror films, and as such, 'they cannot be explained in terms of diversion or social commentary' (2012: 568). Rather, they allow for a rethinking of 'the relational modes that are brought into play in the creation and deployment of the cinematic object itself' (568). This suggests a need to rethink the relationship between author, viewer and text within these works that I will label as 'graphic art house films'.

Similarly, when writing on the need for a renewed interrogation of embodied film viewing in *The Cinematic Body* (1993), Steven Shaviro notes that 'It is odd that semiotic and psychoanalytic film theory remains so preoccupied with the themes of ideology and representation, that it associates visual pleasure almost exclusively with the illusion of a stable and cantered subject confronting a spatially and temporally homogeneous world' (41). Such an observation is key when examining the thematic

[20] De Van recently directed the telefilm *Le petit poucet (Hop-o'-My Thumb),* which screened on French TV in January 2012. She currently has a third feature film, *Dark Touch*, nearing release.

and stylistic approaches of Denis and de Van in these four films. Moving on from Laura Mulvey's seminal work on audience placement and the gaze 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' (1975), I will discuss how these films offer viewing experiences that, to varying degrees, challenge traditional notions of visual pleasure. In order to consider this, I shall explore how, in these films, the use of tactile close-up and extreme close-up shots of the body works to destabilise the viewing experience. In doing so, I will make reference to Vivian Sobchack's writings on 'self-touching' (2004) and Laura Marks' theory of 'haptic visuality' (2000), both of which concern the relationship between film subject and viewing subject. Looking at both directors' films as works that engage the audience using a sense of touch as well as sight and sound, I note that the key cinematographic features of these works include a framing of the body as landscape or as foreign object, and a focus on fleeting gestures, details and intersections where the surface of the skin is often more important than character motivation or psychology. To further explore mise-en-scène in the four films described, I will look to Gilles Deleuze's writings on the use of transitory backdrops he describes as 'any space whatever' (1986) and Marc Augé's 'non-spaces' (2008), particularly in regards to the common use of clinical and/or corporate environments as backdrop to the unfolding drama. In terms of editing, I will address Denis's arrangement of parallel narrative threads and matching eye lines to create and then to undermine expectations regarding the meetings of characters, and de Van's use of split screen and visual effects. These stylistic approaches are key when attempting to destabilise the protagonists' bodies, and that of the film spectator, as the directors, I believe, aim to do. I will argue that, within these four films, Denis and de Van have attempted to subvert traditional patterns of film viewing by adopting stylistic approaches that reflect the unstable identities of their protagonists.

Dangerous contact: *Trouble Every Day*

Trouble Every Day was originally conceived as a shorter segment for a co-directed film on vampires, also featuring the shorter works of two other directors. When this larger project collapsed, Denis worked with co-writer Jean-Pol Fargeau to expand her script into a feature film. The film controversially played out-of-competition at the Cannes Film Festival in May 2001. Writing for *Indiewire*, Mark Peranson described the film's topic as 'the body and the fluids that flow from inside it', noting

that the film's 'few gory and cannibalistic scenes' were likely to garner attention (2001). Writer Philippe Met notes that the film 'earned both the *Prix Très Spécial* and a dubious reputation as a *film à scandale*', the latter point perhaps referring to the fact that several audience members reportedly fainted during the gory scenes of murder (2003). The film, he posits, may fall into the 'infamous category of *films maudits*, i.e., pictures that are all but unanimously—and hysterically—reviled upon their releases' (2003). This begs the question, what was it about the portrayal of the body in this film that so affected the audience members who viewed it?

The opening shot of *Trouble Every Day* shows a couple making out in the back of a car, their unidentifiable faces seen in shadowed close-up through the car window. There is a foreboding sense that this is not a happy story, confirmed moments later when the troubled Coré (Beatrice Dalle) lures a truck driver to his death in a field near the Paris peripheric ring road (see Figure 21). The story cuts to an airplane and we meet Shane (Vincent Gallo) and his new bride (Tricia Vessey), who are traveling to Paris for their honeymoon. Shane kisses his wife's arm in a way that is not so much tender as hair-raising (see Figure 22). Moving to the cramped aircraft toilet, Shane locks himself in and fantasises images of his wife's naked body covered in blood. The narrative suggests that both Shane and Coré are infected with a disease that causes them to have uncontrollable murderous urges activated by sexual desire and contact. While Shane seems more successful in controlling his urges, Coré is completely out of control. Upon finally crossing paths with Shane towards the end of the film, she exclaims 'I want to die', her only line of dialogue in the film. Flashbacks suggest that they have been infected by a plant substance from a former experience in one of France's foreign territories. Now returned to France, the disease manifests itself in their bodies and behaviours- a reminder of a colonial past that cannot be shaken off. Meanwhile Coré's scientist husband Léo (Alex Descas) searches for a cure, hoping to save his wife from herself.

Figure 21- Coré murders near the Paris peripheric ring road, *Trouble Every Day*

Figure 22- Shane kisses his wife's arm, *Trouble Every Day*

Cinematographer Agnès Godard's camera work takes us close up onto the neck of a young hotel maid who crosses Shane's path when he checks in with his wife. These shots, which provide no character insight into the maid and do little to build on the narrative, occur at several points during the film as the maid moves up and down hallways. Shane's voyeuristic gaze establishes the potential for danger and the camera continues this gaze in his absence as we follow the maid into a locker room and watch her undressing. In another scene, the imprisoned Coré seduces a young male neighbour who has broken into her house. Leaving his friend at the bottom of the stairs, he looks at Coré through wooden planks, which are broken down a moment later. The sex scene that follows is filmed in extreme close-up, the camera moving over unidentifiable body parts so that they become a kind of landscape in the shot; the human body as a whole loses its form (see Figure 23).

Newton (2008) makes note of the fact that throughout history, certain lighting types have been used to portray skin in the most flattering way. In *Trouble Every Day* by contrast, we have a focus on the blemishes and textures that mark this landscape. As Morrey writes, 'the skin is here to be broken and explored, under as well as on its surface' (2008: 17). After a period of shared kisses, Coré moves in for the kill, literally biting and then chewing the face of her wailing, immobilised victim, with the camera maintaining its tight framing of the scene. A moment later Coré murders her lover, overcome by the cannibalistic urges associated with her mysterious illness (see Figure 24); however, Denis does not seek to condemn the behaviour of the murderer. Morrey rightly observes that Denis's cinema searches for an ethical representation, one that 'would seek not to penetrate the sense of its subject from an external position of authority, but rather to open representation as a question by sliding across the surfaces of sense' (2008: 30). This is evident in *Trouble Every Day* as the director presents the two killers, not so much as evil monsters, but as human beings caught in a daily battle with their irrational and trangressive urges. Their bodies are contaminated and uncontrollable, so that desire is dangerous and bodily contact can be deadly. One might, like Beugnet, link these protagonists' transgressive acts to 'pre-objective sensations, before desires and drives are inscribed' (2007: 129). This state of existence, where characters tread the line between human and animal, between dream and reality, can be observed across all four films explored in this chapter.

In *The Skin of Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment and the Senses,* Laura Marks explores the concept of bodies having history concerned with trauma and everyday experience. Defining 'haptic visuality' as 'the combination of tactile, kinaesthetic, and proprioceptive functions, the way we experience touch both on the surface of and inside our bodies', she describes a cinema experience where 'the eyes themselves function like organs of touch' (2000: 162). This means that, as viewers, we make a connection between the bodies on screen, our own bodies and the memories contained within, enabling an embodied cinema experience that links the body of the film and the individual body of the spectator. Marks identifies the term 'haptic' as originating with the art historian Alois Riegl at the turn of the twentieth century, when he considered the qualities of ancient Egyptian artworks (2002: 4). She makes the point that Deleuze and Guattari 'appropriate Riegl's findings to

describe a “nomad art”[…] in which the sense of space is contingent, close-up and short term, lacking an immobile outside point of reference’ (2002: 6). Marks considers the term’s first ostensible appearance in the writings of Noel Burch who ‘uses it to describe the “stylised flat rendition of deep space” in early and experimental cinema’ (2002: 8). Neither Marks nor Deleuze and Guattari specifically link haptic visuality to such graphic cinematic offerings as described here; however, I believe the concept holds particular resonance when considering the scenes of Coré’s and Shane’s killing in *Trouble Every Day*, large parts of which are filmed in disorientating extreme close-ups, restricting a distanced view of the action and seeming to bring about a physical response (fainting) for some viewers.

For example, if we return to the scene in which Coré lures the young male neighbour into her bed, we note again that the camera glides over his naked torso, so close as to render individual body parts indiscernible. While Marks does not associate haptic visuality with close-up and extreme close-up shots in an exclusive sense, it would seem that, in the case of this scene, such framing is important in prohibiting a distanced view of the horrific action. Beugnet describes these ‘haptic’ images as disruptive in the way that they break ‘the traditional way of viewing films as a subject/object, figure and ground manner […], haptic images rely on a basic form of perception concerned with details, the material surface’ (2007: 63-64). Lacking a wider shot that gives context to the human forms present on the screen, the viewer must use other senses to comprehend these images, and also draw upon their own memories of unpleasant physical experiences. As a result, he/she is unable to order and control the viewing experience, as is the case with the traditional optic visuality of Hollywood cinema. Therefore when the murder occurs on screen, the viewer is left in an extremely vulnerable position, and very close to the action, perhaps suffering from an extreme physical reaction (recoiling or ‘skin crawling’) as a result.

Figure 23- The skin as landscape, *Trouble Every Day*

Figure 24- Coré murders her lover, *Trouble Every Day*

Vivian Sobchack's theory of embodied viewing offers another explanation of the traumatic experience of viewing this and other scenes in the film. Taking a phenomenological approach, Sobchack describes this experience as a type of 'self-touching' in which the audience's own bodily desire to touch and feel moves towards the screen and rebounds back upon itself, made sensitive to the tactile images presented' (2004: 73).[21] Revisiting the previously described scene in this sense, one could posit that during the close-up shots in which the camera glides over the male victim's blemished, naked body, and during the following shots of cannibalism, the flesh of the audience member is made sensitive, creating a desire to touch or feel that

[21] As mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, Sobchack takes a scene from Jane Campion's *The Piano* (1993) as example, examining the moment in which George (Harvey Keitel) pokes his finger through a hole in Ada's (Holly Hunter) woollen stockings. 'Watching *The Piano*, for example, my skin's desire to touch screams towards the screen to rebound back on itself and then forward to the screen again and again. In the process my skin becomes literally and intensely sensitised to the texture and tactility I see figured on the screen, but it is neither the particularity of Ada's taffetas and woollens nor the particularity of the silk blouse I'm actually wearing that I feel on its surface' (2004: 73).

rebounds to produce a physical reaction in their own body. For Sobchack, film viewing involves a response based on 'lived bodies'; on what one sees and hears, but also involving what one knows and thinks, evident in her statement that 'my sense of sight, then, is a modality of perception that is commutable to my other senses, and vice-versa. […] My entire bodily experience is implicated in my vision' (1992: 78). In this sense, the fleeting close-ups of body parts, fabrics and textures in *Trouble Every Day* affect the viewer as a living, material body. Lacking full disclosure of the murder, the disturbing sounds of the wailing male victim are even more affecting, despite the gentle non-diegetic guitar track that appears during the scene. As Coré kisses, then bites her lover, we are permitted only fragmented views of facial features. The method with which Coré restrains the young victim is unknown. Unable to access the full details of the murder in wide-shot, the viewer, as living body, speculates as to the ambiguous events unfolding, losing the position of objective, distanced viewer, and is therefore traumatised by the graphic materiality of these tactile images.

The uncontrollable body: *L'intrus*

This theory of haptic visuality also productively sheds light on Denis's later work *L'intrus* (2004), which, like *Trouble Every Day*, also features fragmented shots of the wounded body. Loosely based on the similarly named forty-page memoir by French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy, the film presents the journey of ageing protagonist Louis Trebor (Michel Subor), a solitary figure with a questionable military past, who seeks to control his ailing body, and specifically, his defective heart. Opening scenes portray customs searches at the French-Swiss border, a young couple's intimate relations, and illegal immigrants dodging border protection guards in near darkness (see Figure 25) as Denis sets up the central theme of the film: invasion of the mind, body, and space. Louis's quest for new life leads him to undergo a black market heart transplant, an act that physically opens his body to a foreign object: the replacement organ. This operation moves the film to the southern hemisphere as the recovering protagonist goes in search of an illegitimate son fathered in Tahiti decades earlier. Here, Denis takes inspiration from Robert Louis Stevenson and Paul Gauguin's South Seas paintings to present an idyllic landscape in which Louis might recover his health; however, the operation is unsuccessful and he returns to hospital having failed on all counts. A mysterious young woman (Yekaterina Golubeva),

who is perhaps a physical manifestation of his guilty conscience, reminds Louis that his new heart is still empty of emotion. The final scenes of the film reveal that his legitimate son, Sidney, had been killed in order to obtain the transplanted organ; it is a conclusion that reinforces the film's opening line of dialogue: 'Your worst enemies are hiding inside, in the shadows, in your heart'.

Figure 25- Illegal immigrants in the forest, *L'intrus*

Figure 26- Louis rests in the forest, *L'intrus*

An early scene introduces us to Louis. We see his face twisted into a grimace as he sits, naked, resting against a tree in the forest (see Figure 26). A moment later he seems to experience a heart attack whilst swimming in a small lake. A mysterious young woman watches from a distance but does not approach. In similar shot framing to *Trouble Every Day,* the camera moves to the back of her neck as she ties up her hair, and the viewer is left uncertain as to her role in the film. As the story unfolds in non-linear fashion (the fractured narrative moves between characters, locations, and past and present with multiple plot ellipses), we learn that Louis has

undergone his heart transplant; his chest bears the gruesome scars of the operation, a kind of 'X marks the spot' for the intrusion of a foreign object into his body. The scene that reveals this information sees the sickly protagonist recovering in a hotel room. An Asian woman arrives to massage his wounded chest- a seemingly bizarre form of post-operative therapy. In close-up framing, a lingering camera focuses on the motion of her hands caressing Louis's skin. These haptic shots have an erotic quality, which, when considering Sobchack's concept of 'self-touching', could be seen to rebound onto the spectator as s/he projects a desire to touch Louis's chest. On a similar note, Marks considers the erotic qualities of haptic visuality 'may be described as a respect of difference, and concomitant loss of self, in the presence of the other' (2000: 192-93), suggesting that the audience might also project themselves into Louis's place. The healing of Louis's scar signals the passing of time but his new found health is short lived. Beugnet notes that, 'as he becomes progressively sicker, the recurring images of his hands caressing his scarred chest herald the growing intrusion of heterogeneous images within the body of the film itself' (2008: 37). Here, the 'self-touching' exists in two senses, firstly with respect to the actions of the protagonist, and, secondly, to those of the viewer.

Divisions, partitions and any-space-whatevers

With both *Trouble Every Day* and *L'intrus,* Denis displays a tendency to partition her human figures in space, focusing on either their distance from, or close proximity to, others. On the latter work, Beugnet observes that 'the film speaks of enclosures and partitions, yet shows them to be porous, vulnerable to the intrusion of the gaze, the movement of bodies, the blow of a weapon, and the effect of time' (2004: 42, 43). This sense of intrusion and division is reinforced by the composition of shots in which the human body is framed through windows, hallways and doorways. For example, an early scene of the film shows Sidney tending to his two young children. In wide-shot, the voyeuristic camera looks in through the windows of his apartment as he moves from room to room, in and out of sight, partitioned from his neighbours and the outside world in this semi-private space. Sidney does not acknowledge his ability to be seen from outside and hence seems to be in a vulnerable position. In the case of *Trouble Every Day,* one might recall the scene in which Shane stalks the hotel chambermaid (Florence Loiret Caille). As he peers at her from behind a set of metal staff lockers, it seems that this physical structure that, due to camera

positioning, restricts a clear view of either character, is all that prevents their dangerous interaction from occurring.

While the two films' mise-en-scène aptly fosters this idea of partition and division, they also utilise vacant spaces as locations for transformation and transgression. Equally featured are closed, private spaces, such as hotel rooms and bathrooms, where characters momentarily escape from the outside world and the gaze of others. Laura Marks describes such locations as an 'any-space-whatever', borrowing the phrase from Gilles Deleuze (1989), to mean a space between worlds (2000:27). These are sites where one can rediscover or remake oneself, often in isolation. Deleuze describes a profliteration of any-space-whatevers in the post-World War Two landscape: 'deserted but inhabited, disused warehouses, waste ground, cities in the course of demolition or reconstruction […] (where) a new race of characters was stirring, kind of mutant' (quoted in Marks 2000: 27). I find parallels here with Marc Augé's writings on 'non-spaces', which he describes as temporary or transient spaces, such as airports and hotels, which have no history of occupation (2008: 77). Here, Augé posits one can fully confront one's own identity, despite often being in a state of anonymity (2008: 107). These settings, whether public or private, are important in providing the backdrop against which the protagonists' breakdown or transgression can occur. This is evident in *Trouble Every Day,* as the protagonist Shane cowers in an airplane bathroom, fantasising about a bloody attack on his new bride. Later, afraid that such fantasies might become reality, he locks himself in a hotel bathroom. For Louis of *L'intrus*, this 'non-space' or 'any-space-whatever' includes the darkened hotel room in which he recovers following the off-screen heart transplant. As the Asian woman massages his chest, revealing long geometric lines that form a grisly scar on his raw flesh, we are unable to gauge the concrete passing of time, nor to grasp any concept of the world outside the door. In the following scene Louis has recovered, seeming to have remade himself in both mind and body.

Similar to the mise-en-scène in *Romance* discussed in Chapter One*,* several of the films associated with the *cinéma du corps* unfold in cold, sterile environments, such as office spaces, laboratories and hospitals, settings that utilise 'the abstraction and dehumanisation of the late-capitalist world as a foil for the deployment of their 'aesthetics of sensation' (Beugnet 2007: 33). One can observe this tendency in Denis's *Trouble Every Day*, as Shane searches for an old colleague in a Paris

medical laboratory, seeking a cure for his deadly affliction. Here, we are offered close-ups of a brain in a water container as well as other scientific contraptions that remind us of human attempts to transcend mortality (see Figure 27). Similarly, Louis passes through conference rooms and hospitals in his quest to challenge the terms of his natural life in *L'intrus*. For both Shane and Louis, these medical and business backdrops are imperative in their fight to overcome body malfunctions and reform their fractured identities.

Figure 27- In the lab, *Trouble Every Day*

In the same way that the setting of these films gives shape to the notion of the unstable body, I also note that, with lingering tracking shots, as well as a static camera, Denis's films give extended time to deserted spaces and inanimate objects. In doing so the staging of such scenes depicts what Beugnet describes as 'a void that destabilises the gaze' (2007: 169). *Trouble Every Day's* medical laboratory scenes, for example, include several static long takes of medical equipment and human tissue. The length of time spent with these static shots creates a sense of an unsettling returned gaze, as if there is more to these man-made constructs than meets the eye. Furthermore, as Shane's eventual prey, the chambermaid, undresses in a grimy staff bathroom, we cut to a floating camera that lingers over metal lockers and empty corners; a move that is of no direct narrative consequence but is perhaps important in the creation of a generalised anxiety and malaise; these objects and empty spaces seem to embody an unknown threat to the characters.

Montage: Unstable narratives

Emotional logic fostered by rhythm is the key driver of the montage of the two films described above. One could argue that, in the films of Denis, rhythm takes precedence over narrative logic, meaning that some plot lines are left unanswered or open-ended. For example, an early scene in *L'intrus* sees Louis murder an intruder in his home but the identity or motivations of this victim are never revealed. Moreover, the matching of eye-lines between characters in separate narrative threads sometimes creates the false impression that interaction will occur, as is the case in *Trouble Every Day*. At several points in this film, we cut from shots involving Shane, to those portraying the object of his quest, the scientist Léo. The matching of their eye-lines would have the viewer believe that a crossing of paths is inevitable, although this is in fact not the case; Denis rather creates false expectations. Similarly, the use of music is equally ambiguous. The non-diegetic musical offerings of Denis's long time collaborators, UK group The Tindersticks, are sometimes inserted to undermine audience expectations of the action to come. *Trouble Every Day* features moments when the soundtrack works in direct opposition to the image, as I have mentioned, when agreeable, jangling guitar sounds accompany Coré's shocking and gruesome murder of her lover.

Referring to 'undecidable' notions of time and space, Adrian Martin aptly uses the word 'slippage' to describe the seemingly disconnected and often dream-like nature of Denis's scenes and narrative structures (2005). Indeed, looking at the structure of *L'intrus,* a film that moves across multiple time planes and plot ellipses, the montage is organised around shifts in geography and changing seasons. It is notable that several key plot points such as the actual transplant operation and the death of Sidney, occur off-screen. The passing of time is blurred, signalled only by Louis' healing transplant scar, rather than by editing transitions or other devices. As is common in Denis's films, a repetition of, and return to key moments, both past and present, builds meaning for the viewer. One observes this in a sequence towards the end of the film when the protagonist, accompanied by an elderly male local, visits the coastline of the Marquesa Islands in French Polynesia. In medium shot, Louis stands upon a cliff, looking out to the vast sun-drenched ocean. A moody guitar and trumpet score transitions us to a distant boat where a younger man addresses an off-

screen accomplice. This is footage from the 1965 adventure film *Le Reflux* (dir. Paul Gégauff), also starring Subor and set in Tahiti. Should we read this as Louis in the past or is it his long lost son? Is it perhaps Louis's dream of events that could have been? Denis creates a sense that past, present and future are colliding here. An event seems to be replaying itself, hinted at by subtle differences in film exposure and the soundtrack, but we are not privy to the original details, and therefore cannot be sure. With the fragmenting of past and present, ambiguity is key. With emotional impact not so strongly connected to the advancement of story, rather, the ambience of each moment seems a priority.

Martin describes Denis's work as 'a cinema of doubt', referring to Jonathan Rosenbaum's comment on the films of older generation directors Carl Dreyer, Roberto Rossellini, Jacques Rivette, Otto Preminger, Jean-Luc Godard and John Cassavetes, where 'a shot is often a question rather than an answer, a hypothesis rather than a fact' (quoted in Martin 2005). Martin is correct to note that Denis's cinema involves 'a charged distance', which in the case of *Trouble Every Day* and *L'intrus* describes the position of the embodied spectator in relation to the film's narrative, and also refers to the distance between intersecting characters on screen. Both works provide the viewer with a series of graphic images and impressions based around body experience, meaning that the fragmented narrative unfolds or breaks down according to the movements of the protagonists' own bodies. Denis claims 'capturing bodies on film is the only thing that interests me' (quoted in Asals 2007: 78). The two unsettling films explored in the first part of this chapter feature bodies that are unstable, sinister, fragmented, eroticised or torn apart, but unlike traditional Hollywood cinema, often deny the viewer any chance for psychological character identification or moral judgement. I shall now explore these parallels in the two feature films of Marina de Van.

The mind/body divide: *Dans ma peau*

Dans ma peau (In My Skin) was released in 2002. It was the debut feature film of writer/director de Van, who, as I mentioned, also plays the lead role in the film. As an actress in films by François Ozon, de Van had built a reputation playing off-beat, neurotic and sometimes murderous characters. Her short films had also earned her a reputation as a director concerned with explorations of psychology and the body.

With scenes of graphic mutilation and bodily disorder, *Dans ma peau* was quickly compared to the films of de Van's *cinéma du corps* counterparts.

The film opens with split screen images of Paris business district La Défense (see Figure 28), some of which are inverted so that they resemble a film negative, intercut with shots of office stationery. This title sequence suggests a split between the surface and inner realities of this corporate world, suggesting disorder. The first scene then introduces protagonist Esther (de Van), a successful marketing executive, and her husband Vincent (Laurent Lucas), an upwardly mobile couple who are considering an upgrade to a larger apartment (and larger mortgage). The world is thrown off-balance, however, when Esther trips and falls in the rear yard at a party, not immediately realising the severity of an injury to her leg. She visits a doctor and receives several stitches to repair a deep cut in her calf, but much to both her and the doctor's amazement, Esther cannot feel the pain of this wound. So begins a process of experimentation and transgression where Esther digs at her wound, eventually alienating herself from her husband and colleagues. The act of self-mutilation becomes an embodiment of her 'corporeal malaise' (Palmer 2006: 175), and could also be read as an internalisation of the pressures involved with 'business' ideals and mundane corporate life. Esther becomes increasingly obsessed with self-mutilation until she is no longer able to continue with her career. Several scenes show her alone in a rented hotel room, nibbling at her own skin as if compelled by a desire to consume her own flesh (see Figure 29).

Figure 28- Paris's La Défense business district as backdrop, *Dans ma peau*

Figure 29- Anonymous in a hotel room, Esther nibbles at her own flesh, *Dans ma peau*

One could view Esther's problem as representative of a mind/body divide: required to be 'all mind' in the corporate world, she lacks the ability to feel the pain of her serious and graphically presented wound as her body is literally disconnected from her brain. Her body's nerve centre, one that registers and processes such sensations, has broken down. According to this reading of the film, the narrative involves a drive to overcome this problem and reconcile Esther's position as both object (body) and subject (mind).[22]

To shed further light on this subject I will turn to Deleuze, who writes about the body/mind relation as one involving instructions sent in both directions, positing that, 'There is as much thought in the body as there is shock and violence in the brain […] The brain gives orders to the body which is just an outgrowth of it, but the body also gives orders to the brain which is just a part of it: in both cases there will not be the same bodily attitudes or the same cerebral gest' (2005: 205). Deleuze suggests that, firstly, the body holds its own intelligence, rather than being a vessel controlled by the brain, and that secondly, the body can generate and send signals to the brain, rather than just facilitating the physical manifestation of conscious and/or unconscious thoughts. I would argue that this concept is evident in *Dans ma peau*, which stands as evidence of the mind/body relationship gone awry. Esther's inability to feel pain is a sign that her body is forcing a search for alternative means of being.

[22] Speaking on the subject of the *cinéma du corps*, de Van in fact rejects this label for her work, commenting that 'my cinema isn't about the body; it's about the mind and the identity. My interest is in identity and how the body escapes this identity, or doesn't escape. The body is just a vehicle for some questions and ideas' (Personal interview with the director, June 2011).

As much as she appears to be cognitive of her acts of self-mutilation, there are many moments when the body itself appears to have taken control. Close-up and medium shots of Esther's wounded body often appear separately to shots of her head, indicating that her bodily impulses are occurring involuntarily, or independent of thought. This mind/body divide occurs most explicitly when Esther lunches with work colleagues in a busy restaurant. Fighting urges to disfigure her body under the table, at one point Esther looks down to find that her disobedient arm has literally become disconnected from the rest of her body. It sits on the tablecloth; isolated, but strangely, no one seems to notice (see Figure 30). A pattern of shot-reverse-shot sees her looking down, the disconnected arm, and then back to her face for a contained response. Similar shot framing and editing occurs in an earlier scene when a surprised Esther first discovers her leg wound. In separate shots we see blood on her leg, on the carpet, before then cutting to a shot of her reacting face. Esther is both an object (reduced to body parts) and the active viewer of her own body parts, the agent with whom the audience identifies. One could read her state of being as a metaphor for a devastating division brought about by the demands of corporate life, with her drive to mutilate being a symptom of this disorder, rather than a cure.

De Van reinforces this uncomfortable mind/body disturbance when Esther first checks into a hotel room to indulge in further mutilation of her wounds. As with the 'any-space-whatevers' described in the context of Denis's work, this hotel room setting allows her anonymity; a space for an encounter with the self. With her body contorted so that her face is pressed against her bleeding arms and legs, the camera frames the moment as it would a meeting of lovers (see Figure 31). Medium close-ups reveal Esther's somewhat obscured, desiring expression as she licks and kisses her bleeding wounds with a lover's gaze cast upon her own body. The protagonist's problem is not unlike that of Shane and Coré in *Trouble Every Day*, or of Louis in *L'intrus*: how to control and manage an unstable body. The failure or inability to do so means alienation from friends, colleagues and loved ones, as well as from the self.

Figure 30- A business lunch gone wrong, *Dans ma peau*

Figure 31- A lover's gaze on her own body, *Dans ma peau*

Further to the portrayal of a mind/body disturbance, from Esther's initial accident, tight framing gives us close-up views of her graphic wound, and at several times thereafter, the full force of these shots is accentuated by the disturbing sounds of bandages being torn away, or of the wound being prodded by external objects. A graphic final sequence sees Esther slice her body and face into a bloody mess, capturing the experience in a series of Polaroid photographs, also revealed in split screen. The disturbing nature of these shots produces a full-bodied response in the film spectator, similar to that offered by the murder scenes in Denis's *Trouble Every Day*. The experience of absorbing *Dans ma peau*'s tactile offerings cannot fail to have a visceral effect on the viewer, in the way that Sobchack describes the phenomenology of embodied viewing. Referring again to the author's writings on film spectatorship, one can find resonance in her description of absorbing a film's

tactile offerings and Don Idhe's comment that he could feel a blackboard through the piece of chalk he used to write upon it (1992: 175). Like the medium of chalk on a board, de Van's graphic depictions of Esther's bodily preoccupations are absorbed through the multiple senses of the embodied viewer (sight, sound and touch), with the frequent use of blurry, close-up shots, as de Van denies the audience a safe, objective distance from which to view the action. Like Breillat and Denis, de Van blurs the line between the inside and outside of the body, here literally revealing veins, tendons and bloody under-skin.

The last shot of *Dans ma peau*, in which Esther lies disfigured on a bed in an anonymous hotel room with a vacant expression on her face, suggests that she may have achieved the goal of remaking herself but that this is achieved at the expense of her future as wife, mother and money earner, having abandoned the corporate and domestic/family world. Hainge makes the point that after a series of close-up, split screen shots 'in which there is a total sensory and corporeal identification between Esther and the viewer, these final shots, in which the camera tracks back and rotates, allow the viewer to regain a more distanced perspective in which s/he is returned to his/her own body' (2012: 573). He rightly notes, however, that they do not allow for the 'work of intellectual synthesis and hermeneutic closure that final shots often allow', but rather encourage a feeling of vertigo due to the camera's rotation (2012: 573). As with the work of Denis, the focus remains on the surface of the skin, rather than a psychological understanding of character, as Esther's final emotional state is left a mystery.

The body transformed: *Ne te retourne pas*

Despite the critical success of de Van's debut feature, funding difficulties meant a second feature film was slow to follow and the director returned to short-form filmmaking in 2007.[23] *Dans ma peau's* box-office numbers were relatively low in France; however, the film was successful in earning de Van the status of auteur, a factor that attracted Sophie Marceau and Monica Bellucci to the director's subsequent feature project. Finally, in 2009, her higher budget feature film *Ne te retourne pas (Don't Look Back*) was screened out-of-competition at the Cannes Film

[23] De Van returned to short-form filmmaking in 2007 with the 35-minute drama *La Promenade (The Stroll)*.

Festival.[24] This second feature has much in common with its predecessor, including a protagonist who is very much her own antagonist, who loses control of her body and whose wounds function to symbolise trauma, past and present. Jeanne (Marceau), a career-driven writer, wife and mother, is appalled and terrified to find her body physically transforming into that of another women (Bellucci); a problem of identity that seems linked to traumatic childhood memories, no longer able to be suppressed (see Figure 32). The opening sequence reveals her naked body, fragmented in a series of close-ups shots, as she prepares and beautifies herself for the day. These fractured images, many of which are reflected in a series of small cosmetic mirrors, suggest that her physical presence contains a level of complexity that is too large to fit in the frame. We cut away to a series of photos pinned onto the wall; family shots that reveal Jeanne as smiling wife and mother. However, the subsequent scene in which she visits her disapproving publisher, suggests unease and dissatisfaction, as is similar for Esther in early scenes of *Dans ma peau*. The appearance of a mysterious long-haired girl as Jeanne leaves the publishing house seems to want to return her to her own childhood in a process that will lead to an alternative destiny.

At dinner with the family in a subsequent scene, Jeanne sees a mysterious reflection in a kettle in the kitchen and perceives a change in the behaviour of her children whilst, literally, her back is turned. The husband dismisses her unease as irrational, leading to an argument at the dinner table in which she becomes physically aggressive. Jeanne's fears are confirmed when she plays back a handycam recording of the families' evening together in the house, discovering that her appearance has completely changed (indeed, her role is now played by a different actress, Monica Bellucci). It seems that as wife and mother, she is a replaceable commodity, and moreover, her husband and children are in on the ruse. As she begins a physical transformation into Bellucci, Jeanne's rejection from her home, family and the eventual loss of her own body could be interpreted as reflecting an increasing alienation from the consumer lifestyle depicted in mainstream TV and magazines. At one point, terrorised by her changing surroundings, Jeanne moves from room to room in her apartment, watching the decor and furniture change to a series of pleasant but unfamiliar configurations, much like a walking through an IKEA

[24] This international co-production had a budget of just under 12 million euros. *Dans ma peau* had a budget of approximately 2 million euros.

showroom. These unfamiliar material possessions and the unfamiliar clothes in the wardrobe, no longer provide comfort. More and more dramatically, Jeanne's body morphs into that of this other woman, with the transformation oblivious to those around her. While doctors suggest that it may all be in her head, Jeanne is eventually convinced that the problem is connected to an unknown childhood event and that she needs to travel to Italy to explore her past. Here, she discovers that, at eight years old, a French family adopted her after their own similarly aged daughter was killed in a car accident. The ending of the film suggests that this accident saw a merging of the identities of the two young girls and that Jeanne exists alongside the spirit of her childhood friend- two personas in one body. The final scene, in which the women sit side by side, typing on a common keyboard, suggests that the two personalities have found a way to exist in harmony and the past is reconciled.

Jeanne of *Ne te retourne pas* and Esther of *Dans ma peau* are similar in their drive to reform their identities, rejecting typical family life and capitalistic concerns such as property and material possessions. Whereas Esther's journey ends with irreversible transgression and alienation from society, Jeanne is reconfigured as a part of her alter ego's split personality. One could read both *Dans ma peau* and *Ne te retourne pas* as portrayals of women who realise that their bodies are commodities existing alongside institutionalised systems of trade, corporate concerns and material possessions, the validity of which is constantly called into question. Their drive to remedy wounded and unstable bodies involves the reforming of identity. Jeanne's traumatic journey leads to a rejection of her role as middle-class career mother and as for Esther, sees a search for an alternative means of being.

Figure 32- Jeanne transforms, *Ne te retourne pas*

The body in space

Close analysis of de Van's stylistic concerns (cinematography, mise-en-scène) provides further evidence of her strict focus on unstable, mutating bodies. To look firstly at continuities in camera framing, one notes that, as with *Dans ma peau, Ne te retourne pas* features similarities in the framing of leg scars, in this case the result of a car accident in the a protagonist's distant past. At several points during the film Jeanne rubs these scars, as if needing reassurance that her marked legs are still an identifiable part of her body. These moments of 'self-contact' are filmed in close-up, revealing the changing nature of her body. Along with tactile close-up visions of her husband and children's bodies, of shifting freckles and changing skin tones, we return to the idea of the body filling the frame to become a type of landscape, as discussed with reference to Denis's *Trouble Every Day*. Alternatively, one can find parallels between Jeanne's caressing of her scars and Louis's 'self-touching' throughout *L'intrus*; the framing of these close-up shots encourage a haptic viewing experience, as described earlier.

The director is furthermore consistent in her utilisation of specific cinematography and mise-en-scène techniques to explore the concept of human body as objectified asset in the technological and corporate world. Strategic framing and deep focus in *Dans ma peau* captures body parts layered between technological devices and inanimate objects, blurring the line between manufactured and organic forms. One of the film's opening scenes portrays Esther in her office working at her computer, the large screen of which, featured in the foreground of the shot, obscures our view of her body. The camera cuts to a close-up of her leg pushed up against the leg of a chair as if it were an extension of her human form. Further cross over between body and manufactured object occurs when the Esther's self-mutilation begins. Here, her body's image appears in the shiny reflective surfaces of ceiling lamps and door handles, as if incorporated into the decor of anonymous hotel rooms. Similarly, in *Ne te retourne pas* the bodies of Jeanne and her family are reflected in the metal surfaces of various kitchen appliances.

Like Denis, de Van sets her films in cold, sterile and somewhat unwelcoming environments. Tim Palmer notes that, in contrast to David Cronenberg's *Crash* (a film cited as a reference by de Van), in *Dans ma peau*, the mise-en-scène is concerned with the creation of an ordinary 'blank impassive diegetic world' (2011:

86). In the film much of the action unfolds in banal corporate interiors, with Paris's *La Défense* business district as backdrop, or in non-descript hotel rooms, allowing for an exploration of 'ordinary life's daily brutality' (2007: 158). The opening shots of the film establish a deserted corporate landscape of towering skyscrapers, reflective windows and metro stairwells devoid of daily commuters. Whilst more prominently featuring the family home as setting, *Ne te retourne pas* might also be read as a critique of principles of consumerism and corporate living. In this film, subtle and inexplicable changes in the placement and style of designer furniture and a clutter of personal effects foreshadow the protagonist's identity breakdown. Speaking of the moving furniture, de Van comments that 'you can't be sure that the real world is […] or isn't real. It's only a criterion to see that the reality is fake'.[25] For the protagonist, the change signals a world thrown off balance and the need for investigation. The fact that Jeanne's family is largely absent from these scenes of reconfiguring decor increases her sense of loneliness and disconnection. Brightly painted walls and over-exposed light adds to a sense of artificiality, while material objects, rather than a comfort, are signifiers of Jeanne's unstable identity.

Whereas the lighting utilised in the work of Denis is largely naturalistic, de Van's two films feature highly stylised sequences that draw upon the conventions of horror and *film noir* genres. This is evident when Esther flees the dinner table at her work function in *Dans ma peau*, taking refuge in the darkness of a restaurant storage area, another 'any space whatever'. Framed by metal shelves, Esther creeps through the darkness, emerging into a bright circle of sunlight, which functions as a spotlight on her body. Picking at her skin with a blunt instrument, Esther crouches on the floor with her contorted body assuming an animalistic pose. The spotlight creates a halo effect, highlighting the horror of this self-inflicted attack and creating a sense of irreversible transgression and transformation. Similarly, in *Ne te retourne pas*, Jeanne's slow movements along a hallway associated with childhood memories is filmed with heavy shadows and Dutch angles, suggesting dangerous passage into an unknown world. Visual effects function alongside camera work inspired by film noir to create a vertigo effect, with Jeanne's shrinking, disfigured body further denying the viewer a concrete visual understanding of physical space. The framing and lighting of this sequence, in which Jeanne's monstrous and stifled movements are

[25] Personal interview with Marina de Van, Paris, June 2011.

accentuated by her looming shadow, recall the horror of films such as *The Elephant Man* (dir. David Lynch, 1980) or *The Fly* (dir. David Cronenberg, 1986), suggesting an irreconcilable bodily transformation. The director successfully visualises Jeanne's complete loss of identity and body image, interrogating the divide between self and unrecognisable 'other'.

Digital reimaging of the body

De Van's two films also share a common, visible play with the possibilities of digital editing and compositing. For *Dans ma peau,* motion effects, colour grading and split screen reinforces the fractured and unstable identity of the protagonist Esther. In the case of *Ne te retourne pas*, compositing and other visual effects actually create a single protagonist from isolated images of two bodies; in other words, complex visual effects work to digitally combine images of actresses Monica Bellucci and Sophie Marceau into one character. Key points of movement or transformation are accentuated with transitions to white, as if the overexposed camera has blown out to reveal a new reality. I will now consider a scene towards the end of the *Ne te retourne pas* that evidences the unstable, mutating body, aided by the possibilities of digital editing and special effects. Jeanne (now fully transformed into Monica Bellucci) passes through a crowded room at a party in an Italian setting. She is overwhelmed by the uncanny familiarity of the situation, and stops to dance with the unknown party of strangers. An eerie orchestral score overcomes the diegetic sounds of musicians playing as she stumbles into an adjoining hallway, overhearing conversation that sheds new light on childhood events. Digital effects applied at the post-production stage skew and distort the frame as she undergoes another bodily transformation into a young child. Following a confrontation with her mother, the young girl runs from the house, pausing in a doorway decorated with hanging beads. The image blows out to an overexposed white, and then returns to a normal exposure to show a waiting car and an alternative family. This new scene seems to be a return to Jeanne's actual childhood (a memory), as opposed to a meshing of the two worlds (past and present). The use of highly visible transition effects, along with the post-production techniques that have enabled such physical transformations of Jeanne's body, move the action through a series of actual and imagined times and spaces. The audience is left with a sense of disorientation; as with the narrative structure of *L'intrus*, we cannot be sure if this is memory, reality, fantasy, or a combination of all

three. De Van's second film is perhaps the most conventional of the four in terms of the adherence to principals of continuity editing, no doubt reflecting the complex pre-production work that has enabled the successful deployment of visual effects. For both *Dans ma peau* and *Ne te retourne pas,* however, editing choices block access to the protagonist's body as a whole, instead favouring medium and close-up images of the protagonists' face and limbs to portray the fragmented nature of their bodies.

On a related note, the presence of digital, image-making technology is key in the diegetic worlds of both of de Van's films (as opposed to being a tool for the construction of the film itself), which I feel warrants additional analysis, particularly when considering the relationship between onscreen devices (still cameras and handycams) and the body. Sobchack's writings on the links between objective encounters with technology and our status as embodied subjects (2004) are relevant here, in particular, her suggestion that recorded images and digital video play an interesting role in registering bodily change. Sobchack makes the point that we live in cinematic and electronic times, and that as much as we develop and utilise technology, it also remakes us; 'in the most profound, socially pervasive, and yet personal way, these objective encounters transform us as embodied subjects' (2004: 136). In the case of *Dans ma peau*, Esther purchases a Polaroid camera to record her frenzy of self-mutilation in the film's climactic final scenes. We observe the protagonist in her anonymous hotel room, but rather than focus directly on her torn skin, the results are shown in a series of macabre photos. In a split-scene sequence similar to that at the beginning of the film, we pan across a table where these gruesome photos are cast aside. A close-up shot takes us into the eye of her camera, in which the circular lens reflects Esther's distorted body (see Figure 34). The inclusion of this in-camera reflection, as well as the photographing of this final mutilation, evidences Sobchack's assertion that technological processes and devices in turn remake us, a process involving 'radical alteration of the forms of our culture's previous temporal and spatial consciousness and of our bodily sense of existential "presence" to the world, to ourselves, and to others' (2004: 139). I would argue that the photographs of Esther's mutilated body reveal a different, fleeting reality (one can imagine that the cuts will scar but heal); however, her relationship to her body may well be changed as a result of the experience. As with an earlier scene, where

the protagonist stores a piece of her own cut and dried skin in a floppy disk case, her fragmented self-in-the-moment is something that she attempts to archive and file away for future reference. Furthermore, for Jeanne of *Ne te retourne pas*, de Van positions digital imagery as capturing unreliable, fractured images of the body, which she describes as drawing upon 'the idea that the recorded image can reveal some aspects that we don't see in the living moments of life'.[26] Opening shots of the film frame several family photos and holiday shots on the walls of Jeanne's apartment, linking the protagonist's identity to that of the idealised, successful career-mum portrayed in these images. Upon viewing the handycam footage that shows her transformation into Monica Bellucci, Jeanne's frantic review of family happy snaps find that these have also 'updated' and now feature this 'other woman' (see Figure 33). It would appear that Jeanne is indeed being recast, or 'remade' to return to Sobchack's assertion.

In *The Corporeal Image: Film, Ethnography, and the Senses* (2006), David MacDougall suggests that 'Photographs, like mirrors, double us and create a parallel world, what Susan Sontag has called "a reality in the second degree." They represent us, and they also serve to re-identity us' (2006: 148). In de Van's work, both protagonists' sense of self are constructed as unstable, and drawn from recordings made on stills and video cameras. As well as confirming the protagonist's identity problem in *Ne te retourne pas*, these photos and digital recordings remind us that Jeanne's image is as temporal and interchangeable as the material possessions that decorate her home. The protagonist's identity becomes not so much reflected in these digital images of herself as happy wife and mother, as fostered by them, so that their changing nature allows for no stable notion of true identity. Sobchack's suggestion that one's identity and status as an embodied subject is informed by objective encounters with digital and electronic technologies could be seen to underpin the narrative of de Van's second film. These tools for representation, video camera and still photos, are not just part of the mise-en-scène but key props in storylines chronicling Jeanne's psychological breakdown. Like Esther in *Dans ma peau*, Jeanne's task involves with a renegotiation of her own body, in which digital image-making tools are implicated.

[26] Personal interview with de Van in Paris, June 2011.

Figure 33- Jeanne finds her image changed, *Ne te retourne pas*

Figure 34- Esther's reflection captured in the lens of her camera, *Dans ma peau*

Summary

The concept of a fractured and unstable body is central to the thematic and stylistic concerns of the four films explored in this chapter. For Denis and de Van, dark and graphic stories place a focus on dangerous encounters with the self and/or others, occurrences of irreversible bodily transgression and the reforming of fragmented identities. Returning to Shaviro's earlier included quotation related to different economies of viewing pleasure, these films call for a method of analysis that can account for a visceral, full body response in the viewer. As the films feature protagonists who are unstable and irrational, and who inhabit transitory, mutating, and dangerous worlds, I would argue that the experience of viewing these films evokes a full body response through the use of tactile imagery, a focus on fleeting details and shot framing that encourages Laura Marks' concept of 'haptic visuality'. It is clear that, like Denis's films discussed in this chapter, Marina de Van's films adopt techniques of cinematography in order to break with traditional notions of distance, control and viewing pleasure. De Van positions the camera to interrogate

divisions of mind and body, of self/other, and of human/inanimate object, while Denis explores similar concerns with a focus on dangerous human contact. Furthermore, for all of the four works explored in this chapter, mise-en-scène highlights the limits of the body and the corporate/consumer environment in which it exists. Denis grants screen time to inanimate objects and empty spaces as a means of subverting narrative expectations, whereas de Van draws attention to the body's relationship with technology, destabilising her character's notions of identity. Looking at the transgressive journeys of these films' protagonists, one can observe a common shift back and forth between the opposing realities of the characters' public and private worlds. In terms of narrative form, Denis and de Van have created stories that not only move between worlds of fantasy and reality, that play with notions of time and space to challenge traditional representations of the stable body. The slippage between the past and present, between day and night or between public and private space is key in the interrogation and deconstruction of identity, allowing for the reforming of bodies (as is seen literally as well as metaphorically in *Ne te retourne pas or L'intrus)*. I will now turn to some of Denis's other cinematic offerings of the last decade, to explore the concept of foreign bodies in films featuring multi-ethnic groups.

Chapter 3- Foreign bodies and the move towards the Other.

> *…if my films have a common link, maybe it's being a foreigner - it's common for people who are born abroad - they don't know so well where they belong. It's not the kind of thing you find in literature, music or photography - being from abroad makes you look different* (Claire Denis quoted in Jonathan Romney 2000).

Having grown up in Africa as the daughter of a French civil servant, Claire Denis was positioned as an outsider. Whereas this status was clearly marked by her skin colour in her early life, returning to France as a teenager would have also presented challenges in terms of foreignness and identification, despite it being the country where she was born and of which she is a citizen. Douglas Morrey posits that 'in the filmmaking of Claire Denis, the body is the limit between sense and world. The body is always other – the means by which the other appears to me but also by which I am revealed to myself, as other' (2008: 29). This statement has resonance not just for the director's choice of themes, but also for her stylistic choices: the use of cinematography, sound, and editing to explore the intersections of foreign bodies. Beugnet makes the point that Denis's 'perception of the Other is always complex and ambiguous', and is 'that which spurs curiosity and creates desire' (2004: 3). As such, rather than reinforcing binary oppositions that seek to stigmatise, the director is subtle in her questioning of the effects of dominant cultures in multicultural contexts. Foreign bodies are presented, not so much with the intention of defining difference, but as a means to access other worlds, and to question one's perception of self. Denis offers us tales of characters with complex and/or traumatic cultural and personal back stories, exploring the French postcolonial landscape, be it in Paris or in an African setting.

This third chapter will further explore the work of Claire Denis, moving away from the concept of the 'unstable body' to examine the concept of foreignness, as articulated across the films *White Material* (2009) and *Beau Travail (Good Work*, 1999), both of which explore conflict in African settings, and in the urban Parisian drama *35 Rhums (35 Shots of Rum*, 2008). The Oxford Dictionary (2013) defines *foreign* as an adjective meaning 'strange or unfamiliar,' that includes elements that are 'of, from, in, or characteristic of a country or language other than one's own'. The noun *foreignness* can be used to identify the feeling associated with these

elements; both words derive their meaning from the Latin *foris*, meaning 'outside'. In terms of the human race, I define foreignness as the name given to the characteristics that make a person appear strange or unfamiliar: physical factors, such as gender, skin or eye colour, or behavioural differences drawn from 'other' cultural norms, social and/or language traditions. As a pronoun, 'other' can be defined as 'that which is distinct from, different from, or opposite to something or oneself'. This contested term, which occupies a significant place in scholarly discussions throughout the Humanities and Social Sciences, is not one that I can fully unpack given the scope of this thesis. Rather, I will explore it within the context of a selection of theories listed below. I believe the concepts of 'foreignness' and 'the other' underpin Denis's work as a writer/director and that her presentations of them are complex. The director's characters are often positioned as entities on the inside/outside of cultural and/or social systems and events, the details of which are often presented with both ambiguity and ambivalence.

Writing on the representation of humans identified as 'white' in his ground-breaking text of the same name, Richard Dyer makes the point that 'to represent people is to represent bodies'(1997: 14). Taking a cue from this author, this chapter analyses the portrayal of bodies in the three films listed above. I will refer to Dyer's key work on the representation of whiteness and to the work of Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, who, in *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* 'try to address overlapping multiplicities of identity and affiliation' rather than 'recreat[e] neat binarisms' such as black/white or male/female (1994: 6). Following on from Dyer's work, Gwendolyn Foster makes the point that 'the cinema has been remarkably successful at imposing whiteness as a cultural norm, even as it exposes the inherent instability of such arguably artificial binaries as male/female, white/black, heterosexual/homosexual, classed/not classed' (2003: 2). By examining Denis's portrayal of bodies from a variety of different cultural backgrounds, I will argue that, in films such as *Beau Travail* and *White Material*, Denis has moved away from the cinematic representation described by Foster. Finally, I will approach the complex topics of otherness and postcoloniality by looking at the specific areas of firstly, trauma and the body, with reference to the theories of Ann Kaplan, and secondly, body knowledge and sense, with reference to the writings of French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy. This section of the chapter explores questions of a psychological

nature; specifically, how bodies contain and transfer experience and knowledge. Further to Kaplan's suggestion of the existence of memory associated with individual and/or shared trauma, I will look to Nancy's writing in *Corpus* to suggest that, for Denis's protagonists, collective and/or shared knowledge is passed from generation to generation, and to some degree, contained within the body rather than the brain (Nancy and Rand 2008: 23).

Recent decades have seen much debate related to the use of the term 'postcolonial'. In one of the first investigations of the term in its relationship to cinema, Shohat and Stam are critical of the label, making the point that the term postcolonial 'subtly downplays contemporary domination, [whilst the terms] "colonialism" and "neo-colonialism" imply both oppression and the possibility of resistance' (1994: 39-40). Whilst I agree that the former term 'obscures the deformative traces of colonialism in the present', I nonetheless find it appropriate to apply to the worlds of the three films explored in this chapter, as the structures of domination and opposition presented by Denis seem purposely undefined and ambiguous (1994: 40). I agree with Susan Hayward who, with reference to the writings of Stuart Hall, notes that the term post-colonial 'blurs the clear-cut distinctions between colonisers and colonised', and therefore move beyond the binaries of oppressor/oppressed and dominated/dominator (Hall quoted in Hayward 2001: 160). Similarly, Denis does not dwell on power relations related to France's colonial history and is instead ambivalent in her presentation of conflict, as I will go to explore in more detail.

Postcolonial shame: *White Material*

In a recent interview with the filmmaker, Andrew Hussey notes 'Denis read [Franz] Fanon when she was about 14 and found his ideas devastating. What she found most humbling in his work was his analysis of the degrading effect of the shame and humiliation, which infect coloniser and colonised alike. "I understood that humiliation was the important feeling that people had in this relationship" she says, "and this is on both sides, black and white"' (Hussey 2010). Denis's work as writer/director has repeatedly addressed the concept of shame associated with France's postcolonial position. This theme is explored most recently in the film *White Material*, a story set in an unnamed African country, where Maria Vial (Isabelle Huppert) struggles to save her family's coffee plantation in the midst of civil war and racial unrest. As her business and family unit crumbles, Maria makes a

connection with le Boxeur (Isaach De Bankolé), a wounded African resistance leader, now hiding from both the authorities and rebel gangs. Maria's lethargic and impressionable son Manuel (Nicolas Duvauchelle), a teenager who spends most of his time in his room, flees the family home and forms an alliance with a gang of local rebel children. As plot events unfold in dramatic fashion, Maria becomes increasingly stubborn and irrational, refusing to abandon her plantation. Violence escalates, leading to the death of a staff member and of her ex-husband (Christopher Lambert). Finally, having lost everything, Maria is left with no one to blame but her ailing father-in-law and family patriarch, Henri (Michel Subor), upon whom she enacts the ultimate act of violence and revenge: death by machete.

Figure 35- Maria with her workers, *White Material*

Taking the Vial family as its focus, *White Material* chronicles the violent transformations of a range of characters, and in doing so, breaks from typical portrayals of postcolonial behaviours and relationships. Shohat and Stam make the point that 'dominant cinema has spoken for the "winners" of history, in films which idealised colonial enterprise as a philanthropic "civilising mission" motivated by a desire to push back the frontiers of ignorance, disease, and tyranny' (1994: 109). By contrast, Denis's film suggests that there are no 'winners' and that the values and practices associated with past colonialism- of seizing, occupying and cultivating the land, and of transmitting imported values to new populations- are no longer viable nor acceptable. Throughout the film, Maria's focus is the cultivation of her coffee beans, an act that seems increasingly illogical as civil conflicts escalate around her. Rather than follow orders to evacuate her property, Maria puts her family in danger by refusing to abandon her crop, and later finds her property invaded. Certainly,

being visible as white is no longer a 'passport to privilege' as was the case in colonial contexts (Dyer 1997: 44). Racial hierarchies are transformed, with those that once held power (in this case, the Vial family), now victims of their own inability to move with the times. At the conclusion of the film we are left with a sense that Maria's life is over. Her European-headed plantation is burnt by African soldiers, her family dead and she herself is a murderer; indeed, there seems no future for Africans and Europeans to peacefully co-exist. Denis's film does, however, end with a small sign of hope for the future of the unnamed African country: a young solider runs into the forest with Le Boxeur's red beret, signalling future resistance and resurgence. With reference to Dyer, I will now examine the positioning of opposing groups and individuals in this film, considering the presentations of power, the gaze, and the physicality of the body.

Figure 36- Maria with her ex-husband, *White Material*

In *White*, Dyer makes the point that, historically, white people have been seen as the norm: 'not of a certain race, they're just the human race' (1997: 3). He calls for works in which white people are alert to their particularity, so that whiteness is 'made strange' (1997: 10). The Vial family (the only white characters to appear in *White Material*) are surrounded by African characters occupying a range of class positions, including servants, neighbours, resistance fighters and government officials. I would argue that in this film, Denis has achieved Dyer's challenge. The casting of the pale and freckly Isabelle Huppert as Maria Vial and the blonde-haired Christopher Lambert as her ex-husband, means that the family at the centre of the drama stands out physically, as well as on account of their wealth and power as employers (see Figures 35 and 36). Several scenes show Maria focussing on her

physical appearance: applying red lipstick or changing from work clothes into a dress. In fact, the changing of costume functions as a means to understand the timeline of the story, with frequent jumps between past and present recognisable due to the protagonist's changed dress. In a review of the film, Megan Conway observes that 'The narrative is told prismatically, so that we're constantly shifting in time, watching small events unfold both before and after the town explodes into chaos, and all we have to chart our course are her [protagonist Maria's] changes of clothes from gingham to linen' (Conway 2010). More than just fulfilling the function of marking time, however, Maria's clothing and makeup further identifies her as an outsider. After her family house is ransacked, a key scene shows her entry into town, where she discovers a female gang member wearing one of her dresses and a set of her earrings. The two women stare at one another, with Maria seemingly unnerved by this dangerous stranger who is now proudly adorned with her 'white material'. At this moment it is difficult to determine who is more displaced, with these pieces of clothing and jewellery signifying changed statuses of power and control.

Like his mother, Maria's son Manuel is also positioned as an outsider wanting to form alliances with the local community. Notably, the body of the blonde-hair and blue-eyed teenager is marked by a series of large tattoos, further differentiating his skin from that of the local Africans. His physical features could be considered 'uniquely white, to the degree that a non-white person with such features is considered, usually literally, to be remarkable' (Dyer 1997: 44). This conspicuous nature of Manuel's appearance places him at odds with his young neighbours. In a key scene he follows two intruding rebel boys with spears into the Vial plantation fields. Not fully aware of the potential danger of the situation, Manuel is quickly captured by the boys, who strip him of his clothing, cut off a chunk of his blonde hair and label him 'yellow dog'. Devastated by this reminder of his physical difference, Manuel returns to his homestead, and driven by inner turmoil and the quest for empowerment, he shaves his head in the family bathroom (see Figure 37). Having then removed one of the physical traits that separates him from other youth, he stuffs his cropped tuffs of hair into the mouth of a young female African servant, an attempt to impose his physicality onto another that is, ultimately, an unsuccessful bid for empowerment.

Figure 37- Manuel shaves his head, *White Material*

Manuel flees the plantation with a rifle and a crazed expression, now aware that he is no longer protected by his status as the son of a plantation owner. Shamed and humiliated, he runs behind a pick-up truck of gun-toting African children, daring them to shoot him. Looking to increase his chances for survival, he seeks to form an alliance with the rebel group that tortured him, and does so by inviting them into his house. Manuel's movement towards this dangerous group brings him a short reprieve, and whilst the rebel children do not shoot him, his wish for death is later granted in a different and dramatic fashion when he is caught in a fire in the Vial family's large barn. Whereas his mother has the wealth, experience and authority to form relationships with government officials and servants, Manuel is completely alienated from his peers, demonstrating again how the film challenges traditional notions of whiteness, and features transformations and shifts of power as the two characters renegotiate their identities (and those associated with the coloniser/colonised) in a conflict ridden postcolonial setting.

The cinematography of *White Material* includes cameras that stay close to bodies, a stylistic choice that connects the audience to the physicality of the protagonists' skin, whilst the choice of angle, a frequently side-on gaze on the protagonist, also restricts our ability to access character psychology. Instead of traditional shot/reverse shots of characters, Denis favours a floating handheld camera view that obscures facial expression (the face is often turned away from the camera), moves from the side, and lags over the shoulder of moving bodies. As well as sometimes creating a sense of dread comparable to the over-the-shoulder shot often employed in traditional horror films (used frequently by Denis in her two films discussed in Chapter Two), the lack of full facial exposure/expression adds to the ambiguity of sparse plot developments.

The audience must imagine and/or formulate character motivations and responses, bringing their own personal biases and experience to the film viewing. This is evident as the protagonist Maria combs the African landscape in an attempt to find her missing son (see Figure 38). With social order disintegrating around her, the disembodied camera keeps us guessing as to the extent of Maria's psychological distress and/or resilience, as we cannot obtain a clear view of her face. In the sense that the motivations for Maria's actions are not always clearly signposted for the viewer, the strangeness of her body goes beyond her physical appearance to include her reactions and behaviours. Whiteness is 'made strange' on a behavioural level, through our inability to access Maria's psychology.

Figure 38- A side-on view of Maria, *White Material*

Displaced bodies: *Beau Travail*

Claire Denis's *Beau Travail* (1999), a feature film commissioned by cable TV channel Arte in a series on the theme of 'foreignness', is set in the former French colony of Djibouti in North-East Africa. This earlier film also allows Denis to explore postcolonial behaviours and relationships. Furthermore, in *Beau Travail*, Denis interrogates the physicality of the body and reappropriates the gaze for local African women, therefore subverting traditional representations of the exotic other, as I will go on to explain. Loosely based on Herman Melville's story *Billy Budd, Sailor* (first published in 1924), the film tells the story of a former French Foreign Legion officer, Galoup (Denis Lavant), who recalls his emotionally isolated and regimented life as a leader of troops in the not so distant past. His recollection of events in Djibouti is presented in flashbacks intercut with scenes of present-day France. Galoup first recalls the moment when his mostly happy existence in Djibouti

was disrupted by the arrival of Sentain (Grégoire Colin), a young soldier who captured the attention of Galoup's superior Bruno Forrestier (Michel Subor). Galoup's resulting jealousy led to destructive acts, which revealed the full extent of his status as outsider and also led to his dismissal from the Legion. Plot developments are interspersed between images of bodies in motion as the troops perform their exercises and daily routines in choreographed sequences. Denis makes a strong comment on the legacy of French colonialism with this group of men: of their different ethnic backgrounds and appearances (black, Asian and predominantly white), all working to become part of an unsegmented whole in the harsh North-East African landscape. These are displaced men from a variety of backgrounds now seeking to master a dislocated space: the postcolonial Djibouti landscape. Hayward relates Galoup's crisis to that of the 'postcolonial (white, male) body in crisis', as he (and in a more general sense, the Legion as a whole) attempts to get his location under control (2001: 162). Surrounded and observed by a range of foreign bodies, including the North African and Arab women they encounter in the Djibouti streets and bars, the legionnaires work to master their unfamiliar environment. As with *White Material*, Denis offers us an insight into this unknown world, without being didactic or nostalgic in regards to colonial history and its aftermath.

Beau Travail is an extremely sensual film with a focus on the choreography of human movement. One of the early shots of the film begins with the camera panning across sand to show shadows of motionless human bodies. The camera tilts upwards to reveal a legionnaire posing with arms raised into the air, surrounded by others in similar stances, all facing different directions. In their silent tai-chi style poses, they resemble a frozen human sculpture that exists within the environment (see Figure 39). This sense that human bodies are part of the landscape (in contrast to bodies filling the frame as landscape, as observed in the previous chapter) reoccurs in several shots, such as when the troop of soldiers march through a wide shot of the barren desert, their steps in time to the dramatic and poetic orchestra of human voices singing. Here, the audience is physically kept at a distance through the use of an extreme-wide shot; the activities of the legionaries are presented without context or narrative explanation. Parts of the dramatic soundtrack are taken from Benjamin Britten's earlier produced opera, *Billy Budd* (1951), also based on Melville's story.

Figure 39- Bodies in/as landscape, *Beau Travail*

Other scenes of *Beau Travail* reinforce the routinised and regimented movement of the soldiers' black or white bodies as the camera captures the troops at work digging holes or ironing shirts in their desert habitat. With a comment that captures the ideals of French colonialism, Morrey describes the legionnaires' activities as seeking 'at once to impose themselves on the landscape and to mark themselves off from it: shaping it, appropriating it, reconstructing its roads, but at the same time fencing themselves in and preserving their peculiar, inward-looking dynamics' (2008: 13). In the pursuit of this goal, I would suggest that the tightly knit unit of soldiers becomes more than the sum of its parts: personal histories and varying ethnicities can be discarded in favour of group identification and history. In a sense, we see Shohat and Stam's idea of 'radical multiculturalism' at work as 'the hierarchy that makes some communities "minor" and others "major" and "normative"' is challenged by the group (1994: 47). With their shaved heads and frequently naked torsos, the individual identities of the legionnaires are lost, their male bodies are reduced to their surface physicality and all bodies seem equal.

Writing on the presentation of the white body in American films set against colonial backdrops (*Rambo* [dir. Ted Kotcheff, 1982], for example), Dyer makes the point that images of hard, contoured bodies foster a sense of separation and containment; 'a hard, contoured body does not look like it runs the risk of being merged into other bodies. A sense of separation and boundedness is important to the white male ego' (1997: 152). In contrast, Denis's film includes several scenes of exercise routines involving the entangling of toned and contoured but seemingly vulnerable naked black and white bodies. One scene in particular shows dust rise as the legionnaires

throw themselves back and forth into one another's open arms (see Figure 40). Earlier, a group of soldiers clad in blue swimwear huddle together as one tends to the wounded foot of another; they work as a unit rather than individual entities (see Figure 41). However, Galoup occupies the position of outsider, not just because of his status as their superior, but due to his physical distance (as watcher) from the group. Additionally, the fact that he is clothed in a cap and uniform (whereas the lower rank legionnaires appear sweaty and shirtless) reflects his distinction from the lower ranked soldiers and further distinguishes him from his colleagues. Whereas Dyer describes the naked body of Hollywood adventure films as a vulnerable body and the loss of clothing to mean a loss of prestige, I would argue that on the subject of clothing and prestige, a different set of values are at play for Galoup in *Beau Travail* (1997: 146). Whilst he has rank (in and out of uniform), Galoup is an outsider who is unable to access the camaraderie and team spirit of the younger officers. As the clothed commandant, his white body seems especially foreign, not just from the lower ranked legionnaires, but from the Djibouti locals, and as such, his appearance contributes to his alienation rather than facilitates alliances.

Figure 40- Bodies merge during training exercises, *Beau Travail*

Figure 41- A Legionnaire tends to another's injured foot, *Beau Travail*

While Galoup is Other is terms of his differently clothed presence, there are points in the film where the lower ranked legionnaires seem vulnerable in their nakedness. The displacement and alterity of the soldiers' vulnerable, exposed bodies is reinforced by the distant but interested gaze of Djibouti locals who pass by on foot or in an open vehicle. Through their eyes, the activities of the legionnaires are made strange, as it is the soldiers who are on the outside (rather than the African locals); it is they who become the objects of spectacle and desire. Denis has commented on her desire to portray black people as desiring subjects (rather than as exotic objects) and *Beau Travail* is a film in which the representation of the exotic 'Other' (usually the black characters within films featuring a multi-racial cast) are explored and subverted.[27] This occurs through the positioning of the Djibouti locals as a desiring and knowledgeable social group. They are active bearers of the gaze and rather, it is the Legionnaires who become the exotic Other. A similar point is made in *White Material* when, as I have described, Maria comes face to face with a young rebel woman who is adorned in her clothing and jewellery. The camera gives us a series of close-up shot-reverse-shots as the two women stare at one another. Both Maria and her opponent are active bearers of the look, so that neither French nor African woman holds the power of the gaze at this moment. However, the fact that Maria is at this point outnumbered by a large group of young African rebels draws attention to her difference and places her in a vulnerable position.

In *Beau Travail* Denis reappropriates the gaze for the local Djibouti women in particular, with many sequences revealing them to be active and desiring. The opening sequence of the film exemplifies this; here, a series of young women mingle with legionnaires in a crowded discothèque. For the first twenty-five seconds of the film, the camera focuses on several smiling, dancing girls framed in medium close-up, before one of the uniformed soldiers (the object of their gaze) becomes prominent in the frame. The remainder of the eighty-second nightclub scene gives more time to the legionnaires, as the camera glides around bodies on the dance floor. Most notably, eye line matches do not privilege one set of gazes over another. Breaking from the cinematic norms described by Laura Mulvey in her earlier

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[27] 'In my films, black people are never objects. They are subjects who actively choose what they want. Producers usually have a very exotic idea about what black actors should do and where they should be seen. Producers' scripts would liken black characters to lions and elephants' (Denis, quoted in Reid 1996).

mentioned seminal article (1975), the active gaze is shared between the two sets of communities. Shohat and Stam make the point that 'the cinema translates […] correlations of social power into registers of foreground and background, on screen and off screen, speech and silence' (1994: 208). These authors pose questions such as 'How much space do (social groups) occupy in the shot? […] Are they active, desiring characters or decorative props?' (1994: 208). I note that, in *Beau Travail*, Denis presents Djibouti women as 'active, desiring characters' whose looks are reciprocated, rather than 'decorative props'. On a similar note, a later sequence from the film portrays the legionnaires move to a new location where they mark their territory with painted stone paths and begin training exercises in an unoccupied building. Local women watch from a distance, fascinated, as this group of outsiders go about their array of tasks. This change of camera positioning momentarily aligns the viewer with the Djibouti locals, and in doing so, emphasises the foreignness of the legionnaires. Their activities are made strange and, as objects, they are disempowered.

Trauma, memory and remorse

In *Traumatic Contact Zones and Embodied Translators*, Ann Kaplan suggests that bodies have histories linked to traumatic past events (Kaplan and Wang 2009). Whereas Laura Marks explores similar territory to link body trauma to haptic viewing experiences, Kaplan uses the term 'contact zone' (borrowed from Mary Louise Pratt) to refer to cross-cultural intersections of subjects who were 'previously separated by geographical and historical disjunctures and whose trajectories now intersect' (Pratt quoted in Kaplan and Wang 2009: 46). In the case of *White Material* and *Beau Travail*, this 'contact zone' describes multicultural social and geographical spaces affected by civil war, military occupation and/or the aftermaths of French colonialism, as lived out in contemporary Africa.

As previously mentioned, both *White Material* and *Beau Travail*'s fractured narratives jump back and forth through time; in the case of the latter, between contemporary France (where a solitary Galoup is now exiled) and Djibouti (the not so distant past). As discussed with reference to *L'intrus* in Chapter Two, Denis favours ambiguity in the organisation of plot events, often jumping back and forth

through time as the film's traumatic events unfold. In the case of *Beau Travail* Galoup narrates the story with remorse, now able to recognise his unstable emotional state, his obsession with Sentain, and his resulting destructive behaviour, which almost cost the younger officer his life. Hayward suggests that Galoup's remorse points towards 'the neurotic state in which the dislocated postcolonial body can find itself, […] a neurosis which is the by-product of repressed history/memory/desire and which leads to pathological behaviour whose recognisable effects can take the form of uncontrolled economies of desire' (2001: 162). Kaplan's concept of 'traumatic contact zones' provides a different explanation. In the case of large-scale catastrophes such as war or colonisation, Kaplan suggests the existence of 'collective' or 'shared' trauma, a concept that I believe to be relevant to *White Material* and *Beau Travail.* Kaplan proposes that traumatic memories are passed from generation to generation of peoples unable to cognitively process events directly. These 'traces of past events', are expressed in the form of 'repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviours' (2009: 46).

While Kaplan does not cite him directly, a similar phenomenon was described by the psychoanalyst Frantz Fanon who investigated 'the impact of the internalising process of inferiority that widely affected those who lived in former colonies or had come from these territories to establish themselves in France' (Beugnet 2004: 10). According to Fanon, the effects of this process on the oppressed and oppressor continue well beyond decolonisation. I would suggest that in her portrayal of foreignness, Denis associates bodies with histories of trauma, the memory of which in stored in the body, rather than cognitively processed by the brain. Unprocessed emotions and desires are expressed through thoughts, dreams or behaviours, both during and after the trauma itself. In this sense Galoup's remorse is linked to his experience in the 'contact zone' of Djibouti, the full trauma of which was absorbed into his body, rather than cognitively dealt with at the time. The protagonist's displacement and foreignness, even upon his return to France, appears linked to an internalised history of trauma, which is expressed most notably through bodily movement alone in his final scene on the dance floor in a Djibouti discothèque. As the disco track 'The Rhythm of the Night' plays, his frenzied steps in an empty nightclub (one seen earlier as a crowded meeting place for legionnaires and local women) allows the awkward movement of his body to reveal the full extent of his

alienation from his peers (see Figure 42). The absence of both the other legionnaires and the Djibouti women from the nightclub reflects Galoup's status as an outsider in relation to both groups. Although he begins his solitary dance seemingly in control of his body, his movements become increasingly bizarre and frenetic, until finally, he appears to have lost control of himself. On the subject of preparation for this energetic, unrehearsed scene, which was filmed in a single long take, Denis comments that 'I told him (Denis Lavant) it's the dance between life and death' (quoted in Hughes 2009). Galoup's potential death is foreshadowed in the film's penultimate scene, in which he lies on a neatly made bed with a gun in his hands. Denis's camera gives us a close-up shot of a pulsing, twitching vein in his forearm: a reminder of his vulnerable beating heart. The dance scene that follows could be read as a rare moment in which the unprocessed trauma of his experience in Djibouti escapes from his body in a series of uncontrolled frenzied movements.

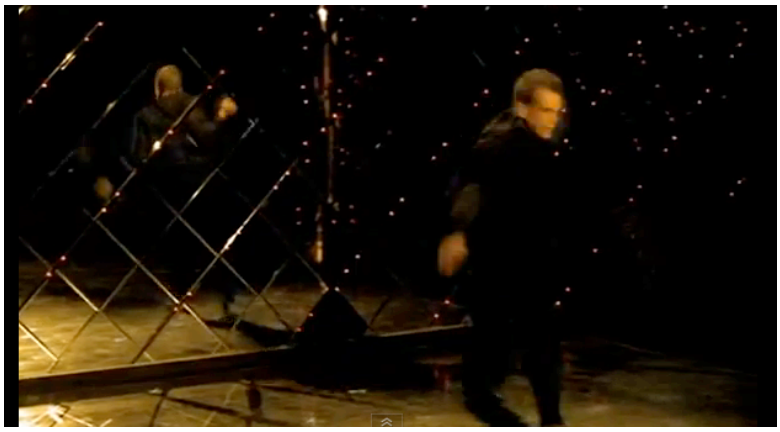

Figure 42- Galoup's frenzied dance, *Beau Travail*

Kaplan's theory of 'traumatic contact zones' may also illuminate events in *White Material*. In the case of this film, traumatic memories (in this case linked to colonisation) are passed from generation to generation of people who are unable to cognitively process them directly. As with Galoup's dance sequence, a frenzy of movement can be observed in the final scene of *White Material,* in which Maria murders her father-in-law Henri, the Vial family patriarch and original coloniser of the land. Following the discovery of the charred remains of her rebel son (burnt to death in a torched barn), the film cuts to a medium shot of Henri, seemingly alone in the still smouldering building. A floating camera takes us close in behind his head and shoulders, where a machete suddenly plunges into his neck. A series of jump

cuts connect four shots of four further blows, each time crossing the 180-degree line of spatial continuity to add confusion to the unfolding events. A final, wider shot reveals Maria as the holder of the machete, as she strikes her final, murderous blow, before a close-up leaves us with the image of her blood stained face and tortured expression. Here, the use of jump cuts creates spatial disorientation that, with the subject matter, further shocks the viewer, and hides the identity of Henri's attacker until the end of the scene. *White Material's* violent final scene is not sign posted for the viewer, and is in line with the observation that Denis's work features 'the erased traces of a repressed past' which 'constantly threaten to resurface, and cyclically, mysteriously, as in a traumatic expression of forgotten memories, violently erupt' (Beugnet 2004: 20). Henri's violent murder is in a sense driven by Maria's repressed trauma, the origins of which could be associated with the violence that had previously kept inequitable black/white relations in place. The patriarch's death signals the end of the Vial family's reign over the African land and the beginning of a new chapter for the local African people.

Bodies, knowledge and sense

To amplify the concept of foreignness in *White Material* and *Beau Travail,* I will now turn to the work of French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy; Nancy has been acknowledged as a key influence on Denis's work.[28] Writing in the text *Corpus,* Nancy suggests that the body is not just a 'pure and simple exteriority of sense, […] not (existing) then, finally as "the body," but instead as "the body of sense"' (Nancy and Rand 2008: 23). He goes on to remark that 'we will call it the body, as the absolute of sense itself, properly exposed' (2008: 25). I interpret these phrases to suggest the body as a container of learned knowledge as well as the vehicle through which experience and sensation is filtered. Further to Kaplan's suggestion of the existence of memory associated with individual and/or shared trauma, it would appear that, for Denis's protagonists, collective and/or shared knowledge is passed from generation to generation, and to some degree, contained within the body rather than solely within the brain. When knowledge is no longer useful, or is no longer

[28] Douglas Morrey suggests that 'the mutual fascination that exists between Nancy and Denis is well established, demonstrated by Nancy's detailed, published engagements with Denis's films – *Beau Travail* (1999), *Trouble Every Day* (2001), *L'Intrus* (2004) – as well as by Denis's short film portrait of the philosopher – *Vers Nancy* (2002) – and her cryptic appropriation of his text *L'Intrus* (Nancy 2000) (2008: 10-11)

able to be passed on, it is then possible for bodies of knowledge to differ; bodies become alien or foreign in terms of innate knowledge and abilities. We see this alienation from the body specifically in relation to mastery of the environment.

Both *Beau Travail* and *White Material* feature protagonists who cling to regimented and repetitive work patterns as a means to master their environment. In the case of the former, the legionnaires undertake exercise or combat training to make sense of the foreign desert landscape, to attune their bodies to the temperature, textures of dirt and sand and the potential dangers of exposure to the sun. Morrey describes these scenes in *Beau Travail* as 'an illustration of Nancy's concept of the spacing of space: an attempt to make sense of physical space through bodily action, an active – even aggressive – inhabiting of space through a disciplined occupation of the body' (2008: 13). By undertaking group training and work activities, the Legionnaires exhibit a level of control of both their environment, and their bodily responses to the natural elements. Likewise, in *White Material*, Maria is often seen at work in the fields of her coffee plantation- retrieving, transporting or drying coffee beans, as a means of maintaining order. The sun is fierce but Maria moves with the confidence of a woman who has mastered her environment. When her harrowed staff flee the plantation, she lures a new group of locals to her workplace with a promise of generous wages. Maria gives them hurried orders with a sense that a return to routine may save them all from destruction, although this is, of course, ultimately not the case. Considering the repetitious patterns of work in the two films, both *Beau Travail* and *White Material* evidence Nancy's concept of the body as the limit between sense and the world. Both films see a disciplined, regimented use of the body as the means by which to master the landscape. A combined effort regarding labour or experience enables the breaking of the limits of individual achievement. In other words, the body becomes a vessel through which one can make sense of the environment, a tool that can both limit and facilitate a level of mastery of the world. Furthermore, Maria's body, and the bodies of the legionnaires, contains a learned body of knowledge that determines their response to, relationship with, and mastery (or eventual lack of mastery) of the harsh environment. In the case of *White Material*, this knowledge comes as a result of Maria's inherited knowledge and experience as a farmer, while for *Beau Travail*, it is the result of exercises undertaken in a group setting: it is a shared knowledge of, and approach to the severe

desert landscape that comes as a result of practice and conditioning. These approaches are different to those of the African occupants of the land, who through their innate abilities and inherited knowledge, have a different 'body of sense' in regards to their environment. As such, the bodies of local African people are differently attuned to the landscape than those of the legionnaires, or of Maria and her family.

To illustrate this point, I will now look at a scene in the last third of *Beau Travail*. Galoup's courageous rival Sentain is abandoned in the desert as a form of punishment, with the task of returning to camp on his own. A faulty compass means he is quickly lost in harsh salt fields, and all hope seems lost until his sunburned and unconscious body is discovered by a local salt caravan: merchants who, accompanied by camels, walk the eight-day return trip to Ethiopia to sell their product (see Figure 43).

Figure 43- Sentin's body discovered by local men, *Beau Travail*

Denis describes this scene as key:

> We see the feet of the camel drivers, and then Grégoire (Sentain), lying there, half dead, […] as we come closer, we see that (the camel drivers) are wearing little plastic shoes, beach shoes that they are very thin and their skin is burned by the salt. We see all these little details, and we understand that (like Sentain) a salt caravan is also men who walk for hours on salt. And suddenly it is no longer exotic at all. Grégoire's body is the body of a young white man, well nourished, fleshy, even if it is sunburned. And we see these men who have come to

> save him, twice as thin as he is, dried out, wearing those little shoes (Quoted in Castanet 2004: 146-47).

Here Sentain's body is foreign, not just because of its differing physical appearance, but for its body of knowledge and ability to master the environment. While he may be 'fleshy and well nourished', he lacks his rescuers' experience-driven understanding of the environment and, unlike the locals, cannot survive in the harsh conditions. Without the mastery enabled by the larger group of legionnaires, he must be rescued by these men who are physically weaker but stronger in knowledge and sense, one illustration of the complex and contradictory relationship between the legionnaires and the Djibouti people, around which this film revolves. Denis's focus on tactile details- the sunburn on the surface of Sentain's skin, his dry lips, the burnt feet of the local men- reveals the differing bodily responses of the opposing groups. A similar point is made in *White Material* when Manuel cuts his foot whilst walking through the fields of the coffee plantation. Unlike the local youth, he faces serious consequences when walking barefoot.

In summary, both *White Material* and *Beau Travail* chart ambiguous and sometimes contradictory postcolonial relationships between French protagonists and local African people, in which 'the inevitable "intermingling" of races and classes takes on a powerful aura of transgression' (Martin 2005). For Galoup, this involves his relationships with his colleagues and the Djibouti women, whilst in the more recent work, Maria puts her family and staff in a vulnerable position. The two films, with their postcolonial settings in lands of dramatic conflict and civil unrest, position French protagonists as foreign bodies with a history linking them to the role of coloniser. Due to their status, physical appearance, and their embodiment of trauma, knowledge and learned experience, these characters are separated from the local population, affecting their personal relationships and transforming them into the object of spectacle.

Foreignness and community: *35 Rhums*

White Material and *Beau Travail* challenge concepts of foreignness by exploring relationships between opposing social groups in African settings. By contrast, Denis's 2008 film *35 Rhums* shifts away from themes of postcolonial conflict to explore domestic life in the contemporary, multicultural suburbs of Paris. Here,

rather than whiteness (or any other skin colour) being 'made strange,' a tight knit group of multi-racial family and friends are united by their work (as RER train drivers) and their dwellings (a block of apartments). Characters have multiple, overlapping affiliations with different cultures and countries, which are noted, but do not alienate. In the case of this film, identity is drawn from individual and cultural memory stored within the body. While these memories may not involve such immediate and/or large scale trauma as that featured in *White Material* or *Beau Travail*, trauma is nonetheless present in the form of characters' references to family members now passed away, and broken relationships. In the case of this film, the concept of foreignness applies less to racial differences than to a renegotiation of identities: the roles of father, daughter, wife or lover. As such, identities are not singular but constructed across a range of intersecting positions and reference points.

The story of *35 Rhums* revolves around a mixed-race family: train driver and widow, Lionel (played by the Afro-Caribbean actor Alex Descas), his young adult daughter, Josephine (Mati Diop), and their network of multicultural friends, colleagues and neighbours, including taxi driver and Lionel's former lover Gabrielle (Nicole Dogué). The relationship between father and daughter is close, with backstory revealing a German wife and mother long since passed away. The memory of this family member is highly present, however, in the form of photographs, keepsakes and in the unspoken absence underlying daily domestic life. Similarly, memories of Lionel's former relationship with Gabrielle are presented vividly in old love letters found by Josephine. The interaction between these three characters of father, daughter and former surrogate mother sees an exchange of loving glances and embraces which implicate their bodies as containers of memories expressed through words and touch. When Josephine begins a romance with her longtime neighbor Noé (Gregoire Colin), Lionel must release his daughter to her future husband and adult life. This process involves a road trip to Germany, where Lionel and Josephine visit the grave of the deceased wife/mother, and the home of her living relatives. Denis describes the film as 'a sort of tragedy in a family sense', with the division of father and daughter being 'the worse separation since the mother died' (quoted in Hughes 2009). This separation means an end to the routine and small domestic rituals that father and daughter have built into their life together (see Figure 47).

Figure 44- Josephine and Lionel ride home together, *35 Rhums*

The world presented within *35 Rhums* is significant in that Denis appears to have well and truly moved beyond Dyer's project of making white strange, to portray the harmonious relationships of a group of multi-racial family and friends. The film shows peacefully co-existing characters who have multiple, overlapping affiliations with different cultures and countries within a single family. Like Denis's previous Paris-based films (*S'en fout la mort* [*No Fear, No Die,* 1990] and *J'ai pas sommeil* [*I can't sleep,* 1994]), *35 Rhums* reflects France's status as a postcolonial nation in which a mélange of peoples exist without a consummate reference point in relation to ethnicity, evidence that 'the colonial is not dead', but rather 'lives on in its "after-effects"' (Hayward 2001: 160). In this sense, Josephine's marriage to Noé could be considered an 'after-effect' of French colonialism, one that signals another overlap of ethnicities, with their family or any potential children they have able to identify across a range of intersecting positions such as black, white, African, French and/or German. Like *S'en fout la mort* and *J'ai pas sommeil, 35 Rhums* is also significant in terms of the active voice given to each of its protagonists. Carrie Tarr makes the point that 'few French authored films account for the presence of immigrants in France through subjective, historically situated, realist dramas. Rather, representations of immigrants conventionally function as signs of otherness and trouble in popular genres like the policier (police drama) and the comedy' (1997: 66). By contrast, *35 Rhums* presents a functional and harmonious community, albeit working class, without drama focused upon racial difference and/or social disadvantage, as is seen in films such as Mathieu Kassovitz's *La Haine* (*Hate*, 1995) or Abdel Kechiche's *L'esquive* (*Dodge*, 2003), which centre on the difficulties of

immigrant families living in the Paris *banlieue* (suburbs) in the last two decades. All of Denis's central characters are presented as active, desiring bodies and bearers of the gaze, regardless of their skin tone or physical appearance; moreover, they accept one another as such, there is no sign of conflict or alienation based on race. The portrayal of community in *35 Rhums* can be linked to Shohat and Stam's notion of 'mutual and reciprocal relativisation, the idea that the diverse cultures placed in play should come to perceive the limits of their own social and cultural perspective' (1994: 359). The authors make the point that different cultural groups are able to obtain a clearer idea of themselves through recognising others: 'the point is not to embrace the other perspective completely but at least to recognise it, acknowledge it, take it into account, be ready to be transformed by it' (1994: 359). I would argue that, with *35 Rhums*, Denis has created a world in which this notion is central. Looking beyond the colour of the face in the frame, the image is concerned with integration and harmony.

Returning to the idea of trauma contained within the body, in *35 Rhums* Denis focuses on the personal experiences of a handful of characters, which are often connected to past individual trauma, rather than foregrounding the shared trauma of various cultural groups. Outside the apartment block that is central to the film, the strongest sense of community comes from Lionel's workmates, a tightly knit group of RER train drivers of mostly French-African or Caribbean descent. The predominantly male drivers are seen enjoying after hours drinks and banding together to farewell a retiring colleague. Denis has commented on her interest in the Afro-Caribbean group, many of whom migrated to France in the 1960s to fill post-World War Two labour shortages, but resists making a comment about this community (and their past experience) as a whole. Rather, as previously mentioned, trauma is associated with the individual protagonists' memories of family members now passed away (Josephine has lost her mother; both of Noé's parents are deceased), and with broken relationships (Lionel and Gabrielle). These past losses are foregrounded by Josephine's potential movement away from her father.

Indeed, several scenes in *35 Rhums* suggest that Josephine's devotion to Lionel seems to have hampered her ability to make a life of her own, a fact that is recognised by her father. For both characters, the renegotiation of identities, from

daughter to wife, and from father to independent man, is fraught with anxieties concerning the continuation of their close relationship. This anxiety is captured in one of the film's key scenes, which, as with *Beau Travail*, sees emotion expressed through dance. On the way to a late night concert, Lionel, Josephine, Gabrielle and Noé seek food and shelter in an empty café after their car breaks down in heavy rain. When The Commodores' 'Nightshift' plays over the radio, a makeshift dance floor is created in the cafe, but instead of Galoup's frenzied nightclub steps, slow rhythmic movements suggest that anxieties are being overcome as Josephine passes (literally) from her father to her future husband on the dance floor (see Figure 45 and 46). The family unit is key, and unlike the unstable blood ties that connect the protagonists of *L'intrus* or *Trouble Every Day*, we have a sense that, here, problems will work themselves out. Lionel, who was previously the centre of his daughter's life, moves to the outside and is replaced by Noé. An envious Gabrielle then watches as Lionel goes on to dance with the café's attractive female owner. On the topic of dance as means to convey emotion, Denis remarks that 'I remember when I was young, a teenager, and going to parties and dancing, that girl, that boy, both very shy, suddenly revealing so much by dancing' (quoted in Hughes 2009). Similarly, as *35 Rhums'* young couple (Josephine and her husband-to-be) embrace on the dance floor, the full extent of their passion is revealed on screen for the first time in the film. It's clear that Lionel has not only moved to the outside of the dance floor, but to the outside of the partnership formed by his daughter and future son-in-law. For these reasons, the themes of otherness and exclusion are made evident through changing relationships and family dynamics rather than through representations of race.

Figure 45-Noé and Josephine dance, *35 Rhums*

Figure 46- Lionel watches the dance, *35 Rhums*

Figure 47- Preparing dinner: Josephine kisses her father, *35 Rhums*

Whereas attention is focused on the physical differences between the bodies portrayed in *White Material* or *Beau Travail*, *35 Rhums* foregrounds the mostly familiar bodily experiences of its protagonists as a means to demystify any sense of an exotic other. For example, in a sequence at the beginning of the film there is a long-take of the family's interior apartment front door as Josephine arrives home and

prepares for dinner. This extended shot sets up domestic routines such as the removal of shoes on entry to the apartment, an action later repeated by Lionel who removes his clothes and showers in preparation for his evening meal at the end of his working day. Scenes such as this contribute to the film's 'oneiric and emotional world […] built up out of banal, specific, precisely observed small actions', and moreover, looking specifically at the portrayal of Lionel's body, they are important in removing a sense of otherness (Biro 2009: 43). On the subject of the portrayal of such experiences on film, David MacDougall makes the point that, typically 'the most familiar bodily experiences are either completely absent or are treated with exaggerated caution', including 'more mundane acts such as spitting, scratching, shaving, cutting the nails, bathing and so on' (2006: 19). By contrast, we spend considerable time with Lionel as he undertakes mundane tasks such as having a shower and dressing. In these moments we are reminded that 'a naked body is a vulnerable body', and that he is an ordinary, vulnerable man (Dyer 1997: 146). Later, when Noé leaves town on a business trip, a dressing-gown clad Lionel enters his apartment to close an unsecured window that is banging loudly in strong wind. Having accomplished this task, Lionel then sits in silence on his absent neighbour's couch, where he conspicuously breaks wind. We spend a few more seconds observing him on the couch before the film cuts to the following scene. This portrayal of Lionel as a functioning body, neither exotic nor sanitised, foregrounds his 'ordinary' experience in the world by focusing on details related to the ritualised experience of the everyday life, often with little or no consequence in terms of furthering the plot.

Summary

Each of the three films explored in this chapter illustrates Denis's statement that 'all my films function as a movement towards an unknown Other and towards the unknown in relation to other people' (Romney 2000). As I have suggested, in *White Material* and *Beau Travail*, the notion of foreignness and more specifically of foreign bodies is not only associated with physical difference, but with contrasting behaviours, embodied knowledge and histories of traumatic experience. In her portrayal of postcolonial French and African relations, Denis challenges the hierarchy that positions some communities as weak and others as strong and blurs the line between controller/controlled. For *35 Rhums*, notions of racial difference are

approached ambiguously; rather, Denis focuses on the relationship dynamics that concern a handful of protagonists with differing ethnic backgrounds. Here, the unknown indicates changing roles and futures as Josephine makes the transition from daughter to wife, and as Lionel renegotiates his position as father and provider.

Writing on Denis's portrayal of the body, Morrey notes that the director's 'frequent refusal to provide the traditional cinematic signifiers of psychological depth often means that the spectator is brought up short before the strangeness of these bodies as bodies, which in turn opens up an interrogation as to the sense of her images' (2008: 10). I would argue that, for the three films discussed in this chapter, this lack of psychological depth, and the subsequent focus on the foreign, encourages the viewer to draw upon their own body of memories to align themselves with, or alternatively remain distanced from, the characters onscreen. The movement of Denis's protagonists from the inside or outside of a dominant group or structure, be it a racial group, a family relationship or social situation, is a significant theme, often enacted through violent means, as seen in the first two films discussed. For all three works, bodies are presented with the intention of exploring rather than defining difference, as a means to explore the French postcolonial landscape, and to question one's perception of self.

Chapter 4- Practical approaches and methods of working

The previous chapters of this thesis have attempted to analyse the thematic and stylistic approaches of the three directors who form my focus, looking particularly at commonalities within their presentation of cinematic elements. In this fourth chapter I will focus on the working methods of the directors, attempting to isolate the specifics of their relationships with cast, crew and the material contained within their films. My aim is to explore practical considerations in relation to the concepts explored in Chapters One to Three, posing questions such as, how do these directors' specific working methods give rise to these themes? How are themes such as the unstable body (to take Denis's and de Van's work as examples) fostered by the stages of writing, preproduction and production? Does the concept of bodily knowledge and sense (as explored in Chapter Three) give shape to Denis's on-set practices? To answer these questions I will refer to a range of texts, as well as Breillat's remarks in my own interview with the director (Dooley 2013).[29] By doing so, I will isolate a series of practical approaches that laid ground for the methods used in my own practical project, the short film *The Sister*. As Breillat and Denis have a much larger body of work than the less experienced de Van, they are afforded more space in this chapter.

While a filmmaker's remarks on his/her own work should be taken with caution, I have nonetheless chosen to reflect upon and analyse various interviews with Breillat, Denis and de Van in this chapter, which I believe inform their approaches to the art of writing and directing. While their statements regarding cause and effect can only be taken at face value, they nonetheless offer insight into the creative process, even if only in hindsight, which I believe, provides a greater overall understanding of their work.

Starting out

The films of Denis, Breillat and de Van each find their origins in a variety of public and personal places. For Denis, these include written texts (*Chocolat* and *White Material* were both inspired by Doris Lessing's novel *The Grass is Singing* [1950],

[29] As the publication of my interview with Breillat in *The French Review* is forthcoming (scheduled for late 2013) I am not yet able to cite page numbers for this article.

whilst *Vendredi Soir* and *L'intrus* are adaptations of works by Emmanuèle Bernheim and Jean-Luc Nancy, respectively), real events (*J'ai pas Sommeil* was based upon the acts of a real-life serial killer), and themes imposed by a television commission (*Beau Travail, Trouble Every Day*).[30] Regardless of her starting point, processes of scriptwriting and film realisation seems to involve the blending of a range of ideas and influences, drawn from her collaborators, literature, music, and current affairs. Denis states that 'in my work I talk often about grafting. It is as if, for me, cinema is only interesting if it is grafted', a comment that strongly relates to her process of scriptwriting (quoted in Renouard and Wajeman 2004: 23). Considering her films' focus on the surface of the skin, it is apt that Denis should choose a word with such bodily connotations to describe her practice of incorporating disparate elements into a coherent work.

Although a literary background undoubtedly influences Breillat's work, this concept of grafting also finds resonance in her mix of fairytales and personal family recollections, and in the blurring of the boundaries between fact and fiction. For example, *Barbe Bleue* mixes the traditional tale with the director's memories of her own upbringing and sisterly relationship, while *Sex is Comedy* sees the replaying of scenes featured in the earlier *À ma soeur*, with a mockumentary style. Meanwhile, for Marina de Van, films to date have involved attempts to translate psychological phenomena into visual form, drawing upon her own childhood experiences as influence. With de Van's second film *Ne te retourne pas*, the director takes some of the most recognisable elements of the French *cinéma du corps* style, and transposes them into a considerably higher budget and more mainstream film than her debut. This involves the combination of corporeal images usually considered art-house in nature with complex visual effects and a high concept storyline. I will return to the question of influence in greater detail as I discuss the practical approaches of each writer/director.

Grafting the screenplay

It would be apt to describe Claire Denis as a collaborative writer as all of her dramatic feature film works have been co-written. She collaborated with acclaimed novelists Marie N'Diaye to write *White Material* (2009) and with Emmanuele

[30] The character of Camille in *J'ai pas sommeil* is based on Thierry Paulin, a young French serial killer who strangled or suffocated several elderly women in their apartments in the 1980s.

Berheim for *Vendredi Soir* (2002), which was based on Berheim's novel. Most notably however, screenwriter Jean-Pol Fargeau is central to Denis's collaboration, having worked with the director on eight films since her first, *Chocolat,* in 1988. Prior to working with Denis, Fargeau had established himself as a musician and playwright, i.e. as a professional artist/writer working outside of the film industry, which is a trait shared by all of the director's collaborators. One could assume that the input offered by these creatives (each with different experiences and backgrounds of writing) creates a layer of opposition and tension in the work produced. In the press kit for *35 Rhums* (2007), Fargeau likens his collaboration with Denis to that of musicians composing an album. **'**Since the start… I always compared the excited complicity which binds us, Claire and I, to that of the musicians reunited to compose an album' (2007: 17). His comment suggests a particular method of working, while the musical allegory is of interest considering the fact that UK musical group The Tindersticks, also Denis's frequent collaborators in terms of musical score, are often brought in at script stage. Adrian Martin describes the script-devising work of Denis and Fargeau as involving the creation of a 'basic network or diagram of relations', a process raising questions concerning 'what [does] each character see[s], whom [do] they look at; [what are] the lines of desire, or hatred; who tells which part of the story; significant back story elements connecting the characters in their shared or overlapping pasts; the real or imaginary status of each event' (2005). This particular method of construction suggests a departure from traditional methods of screenwriting, which often focus on character objectives, obstacles and three-act structure, and similarities with the character-based approach of veteran British director Mike Leigh, who creates story from a web of actor improvisation and interactions.[31] The idea of a 'diagram of relations' between characters echoes Leigh's approach to the creation of drama, but unlike the British director's method of screenplay construction, this writing stage for Denis and Fargeau does not appear to involve actors in the process. Instead, plot conflicts seem to be driven by the positioning of characters as opposites, allowing the writers to explore questions such as who is on the inside/outside or who is the chaser/chased?

[31] Mike Leigh's method of feature film 'writing' involves long periods of improvisation with several actors. After observing a series of solo improvisations by actors in various characters, Leigh encourages them into duo or group improvisations. From this work, relationships are established and conflicts then determine the plot of each film (Carney and Quart, 2000).

Figure 48- Denis at the European Graduate School.

Evidence of these unique methods can be found in Denis's master classes in 'Cinema as Cultural Anthropology' at the European Graduate School, videos of which are now archived on YouTube (EGS 2010). In one of these classes, using the word 'clandestine' and the setting of a train as a starting point, Denis encourages students to explore character and point-of-view oppositions to map a film narrative (see Figure 48). The director asks students to consider whether a hypothetical film might begin inside or outside the train, whether the action unfolds in movement or a situation of immobility, and who is the watcher and who is watched? As students make choices, the starting point of the film is literally mapped in a diagram on a white board. Over the course of the EGS video lectures, Denis often returns to the idea of risk-taking in regards to character oppositions and point of view. She voices her preference for documentaries (which she has also written and directed) that bring viewers into proximity with characters without relying on voice over or other narration to make a point. 'As audience you just exist with them… you have to accept the duration of time you spend with characters. Every noise, response, action, tells you about them' (EGS 2010). This preference is evident in Denis's fictional feature film work, which features a clear focus on character physicality and carefully selected point of view, rather than plot, as the driver of her films. As I have described earlier, films such as *35 Rhums* capture the moment-to-moment movements of protagonists and are often shot in long-takes, with slight plot

developments bringing each film to a climax. For the director, the perfect point of view is one without judgement, a concept realised in her feature film work, as noted by Morrey (2008: 30) and previously discussed in this thesis. Preferring to take a light-handed approach to story, the writer/director allows camera positioning and point of view to establish the trajectory of the narrative without foreshadowing events to come. As Denis remarks, 'there is incredible suspense when you are with someone and you don't know where they are going' (EGS 2010).

Returning to the 'diagram of relations', Martin notes that, 'once this template, with its logic, is in place, Denis's work as an artist seems to involve a process of complicating that network, confounding it, punching holes in it, making it mysterious' (2005). This process, which begins at script stage and continues into postproduction, has the result of making the audience work to connect elements during the viewing experience. One can, for example, observe several story ellipses in the narrative of *L'intrus* (the actual heart transplant) and *35 Rhums* (the marriage proposal). The scriptwriting process of *Beau Travail* further illustrates the process by which Denis 'confounds' the narrative. After deciding upon a story concerning the French Foreign Legion in Djibouti, Denis and Fargeau set about writing 'journals' for the fictional main character, Galoup. Loosely based on the short story *Billy Budd*, these journals were read by lead actor Denis Lavant and by director of the fiction unit of Arte, Pierre Chevalier, to provide insight into the project. Denis describes the process: 'Pierre Chevalier told me at one point that I had to produce a screenplay. But I did not know how I could do so and still stay with the idea of the journal. So we made the journal into the beginning of a screenplay, and we produced a second part in counterpoint' (quoted in Castanet 2004: 145). This statement suggests the grafting of separate texts into a completed screenplay, with a strong focus on Galoup's point of view from the journal element. James Williams notes that the screenplay 'in turn operated in counterpoint with the voiceover Denis wrote based on her memory of watching *Le Petit Soldat* (*The Little Soldier*)', the 1960 Jean-Luc Godard film that also focused on the Foreign Legion. Combined with actor movement choreographed by choreographer Bernardo Montet, 'this working method formed a kind of musical "hybrid-graft"' (Williams 2004: 49). The meshing of material, the references to past works and the gaps in the story, not only suggest

innovation on Denis's part, but requires the viewer to invest heavily in order to piece together the various elements of the work.

Music also contributes significantly to the scripting process, as I mentioned above. The director considers her strong rapport with music, and its influence on her films, as the only element that identifies and individualises her body of work, stating 'I look to music for what my collaborators cannot give me, for what a project cannot give me on its own. And what is fantastic is that, at the moment of filming, I share it with others… I play the soundtrack to Agnès Godard (cinematographer), to the actors, and then to the editor… it is as though, finally, I was able to reveal my sources' (quoted in Castanet 2004: 153). *Beau Travail* provides an interesting case study in this respect; for this film the tracks of Charles Henri de Pierrefeu and Neil Young were selected at the beginning of the filmmaking process and played on-set during filming. In the case of *Trouble Every Day,* the process of scripting was inspired by pre-existing songs by The Tindersticks, therefore rather than a score being derived from the film, the opposite has occurred, with ideas for scenes drawn from the group's already recorded songs.[32] Furthermore, in *L'intrus,* Johnny Cash was established as a point of reference for Louis, although Cash's musical tracks were excluded from the final cut of the film. The process of identifying characters and arranging the narrative, considering rhythm, emphasis and tempo, is one that resonates with Fargeau's album composition analogy, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. The construction of a diagram of character relations could be seen to mirror the process of layering instruments in the devising of a song, with characters being the instruments that produce sounds playing against one another.

Perhaps the most convincing evidence of Denis's collaborative approach to screenplay writing can be derived from her comments about the finished product. 'I don't at all like the idea of a screenplay being a cage and that inside the cage you have to direct the actors. It seems to me that a screenplay is a kind of take-off and that the best moment is to see the characters taking off' (quoted in Ancian 2002). This returns us to the concept of grafting, which here describes an opportunity for

[32] In a *Senses of Cinema* interview, Denis comments, 'You know, in *Trouble Every Day* there is this scene where Vincent Gallo is looking at his wife taking a bath, and you can see pubic hair moving in the water. That's one of Stuart's (The Tindersticks) songs. On his second CD there is a song called Sea Weeds and the story is just that. I truly wrote the scene because of that song. There is a lot of criss-crossing in my films' (Ancian 2012).

actors to take charge of the written material and integrate their own personal experiences and association with previous film works into their selected roles. I will go on to explore actor input when looking at Denis's on-set practices further on in this chapter.

Catherine Breillat came to scriptwriting with an already established career as a controversial novelist with a number of well-known works to her name. Her films undoubtedly reflect her literary background. Like Denis, she graduated from the elite French film school now known as *la FEMIS*. In contrast to Denis's collaborative approach, Breillat writes alone, with several of her film screenplays adapted from her own novels (*Un Vraie Jeune Fille* [1976];*Tapage Nocturne* [1979]; *36 Fillette* [1987]; *Anatomie de l'enfer* [2004]; *Abus de faiblesse* [*Abuse of Weakness* 2013]) and recently from fairytales (*Barbe Bleue* [2009]; *La belle endormie* [2010]). In the case of films based on her own novels, the scriptwriting process involves the reworking of detailed and often abstract ideas into condensed visual form. Speaking about *Anatomie de l'enfer*, Breillat comments that, due to the mix of explicit sexual content and philosophical ideas in the novel, writing the screenplay involved translating 'lyrical passages and dialogues' into 'metaphorical and metaphysical light, literally transposed into cinematic light' (quoted in Murphy 2005). For this film, the source novel *Pornocratie* was written as a deliberate precursor to the film, or in other words, the idea for the film came first and the novel was written as a means towards the screenplay. Breillat explains, 'I wrote the book, *Pornocratie*, as a way to flush out the poetic language of the script. The writing of the script led me to the writing of the literature' (Breillat quoted in Vasse 2004: 5).

The screenplay for *Anatomie de l'enfer*, like Breillat's other work, has a very literary feel in regards to character voice and expression, due to the actual 'cut-and-paste' from the pre-existing novel, which has led to the formation of voiceovers and dialogue. This approach is key in de-eroticising explicit sex scenes; rather the focus moves to gender relations and agency. The search for a poetic but subtly de-eroticised approach to male and female sexual relations that dominate the narrative means that character thoughts are presented as voiceover, a device that also appears in *Romance* (1999). In this earlier film, thoughts are clearly communicated to the audience, with the result that the viewer, being aligned with the thoughts of the

protagonist, is more likely to see her as subject rather than object. In *Anatomie de l'enfer*, the voice over, despite being spoken by a female voice, represents both the male and female character, in keeping with the more abstract and mythical quality of the story.

Breillat's two most recent films *Barbe Bleue* and *La belle endormie* are based on much celebrated fairytales written in short form by Charles Perrault in the seventeenth century. In these works, Breillat's task as writer entailed not containing and condensing material, but expanding it to a longer form. In the case of *Barbe Bleue,* this process involved the addition of characters in a 1950s parallel world. As Breillat explains, 'Perrault's fairytales are about ten pages long, so I had to make them my own story and tell them in my own way. [For *Barbe Bleue*] that involved first having the two girls in the attic, who are obviously me and my sister, who are reading the story and projecting themselves into the fairy tale. The story I'm trying to tell is the girl versus the giant… the most interesting, delicious part of the story. In telling the story this way, I make it my own and I make it provocative' (quoted in Dooley 2013). Here, the grafting of the screenplay involves the meshing of the traditional fairytale with elements from the director's own life, including her childhood experiences with her sister. A similar process occurs with the script for *La belle endormie*, meaning that these works are in keeping with Breillat's earlier films in the exploration of gender relations, girlhood romantic ideals and sexual politics.

Similarly to Denis, Breillat believes the film script functions as a starting point for production. Speaking about the contrasts between her work and that of commercial Hollywood cinema, the director comments that, 'In English, the script is very, very important, but for me it's just the *fantôme* of the movie. It's just something very efficient to work with for the movie, but it is not the movie' (quoted in Murray 2011). With reference to *La belle endormie* the director notes the surprising difference between script and finished product, commenting that 'even when your assistant is there during the shoot, when you bring everything together in the mix, what you end up with is something else. It's better if you have a good script but, in fact, I always change my script' (quoted in Murray 2011). For *Barbe Bleue*, this meant inventing new scenes during shooting, whilst in *À ma soeur,* the film's original ending was lost. For both Denis and Breillat, the approach to screenplay

seems to suggest a desire to create 'something more', as if the script and film are two separate entities, rather than just one text derived from the other. Breillat's comment above suggests that, for her, the script is an outline that is brought to life during shooting, a concept I will explore further when detailing the director's on-set practices.

In contrast to Denis's collaborative approach and Breillat's adaptation of works, Marina de Van writes her original screenplays alone and without marked textual references. Most notably, the writer/director draws upon her own bodily experience as influence. In conversation on writing and directing with Claire Vasse, de Van comments that 'it's a pure cinematographic pleasure to translate an interior phenomenon into images' (Vasse 2009: 9). This translation begins with the challenge of finding a visual way to communicate psychological issues related to identity formation and breakdown. The director's work to date has seen social alienation expressed through bodily transformation. Tim Palmer notes that Marina de Van was involved in an accident as an eight year old, receiving a horrific injury when a car ran over her right leg (2007: 175). In this experience, de Van first encountered her own body as 'as just another object, a deformed object…a scrap' (de Van quoted in Palmer 2007: 175). It would seem that this experience was fundamental in informing the director's future work, as her two feature films revolve around physical injuries, with the second film featuring a protagonist similarly injured at the aged of eight. In her attempt to explore the distorted thoughts and impressions preoccupying her protagonists, de Van is careful to maintain a single point of view that cements the audience's identification with that of the main character. Speaking of *Ne te retourne pas*, she comments that 'adopting a point of view other than Jeanne's – for example the point of view of those close to her – would have removed the emotion, turned her into someone who had descended into madness'(Vasse 2009: 6).

Although Breillat and Denis have had some acting experience,[33] de Van comes to scriptwriting and directing with a wealth of experience as actress.[34] Although we

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[33] Breillat played the minor role of Mouchette in director Bernardo Bertolucci's *The Last Tango in Paris* (1972). Denis has made brief appearances in films by her peers *(En avoir (ou pas)* [*To Have (or Not*)], dir. Laetitia Masson, 1995; *Vénus beauté (institut)* [*Venus Beauty Institute*], dir. Tonie Marshall,1999).

[34] Prior to playing the lead role in her first feature film *Dans ma peau*, Marina de Van appeared in key roles in films by Francois Ozon: *Regard le mer* (1997) and *Sitcom* (1998).

cannot know for certain, it is possible that de Van's time spent in front of the camera means she has a high level of empathy for the actors cast in her films, and furthermore, that her interest in character psychology can possibly be attributed to her experience as actress. Potentially, this influences not only her working relationships with cast and crew, but also her approach to the writing of confronting scenes. De Van does not appear to write with specific actors in mind. In the case of *Ne te retourne pas*, the director speaks of ideas relating to the distorted figures present in the work of painter Francis Bacon, among other initial thoughts and influences (Vasse 2009: 12). This project eventually attracted actresses Sophie Marceau and Monica Belluci, both of whom regard Marina de Van as an auteur[35].

Risk-taking versus control: preproduction and on-set practices

Having explored the three directors' approaches to screenplay writing I will now examine their practices during the film preproduction and production phases, including the processes of casting, rehearsals and shooting. I will describe how, for Denis and Breillat, spontaneity on-set is of great value, while de Van takes a more structured approach, driven either by her dual role as director/actor (*Dans ma peau*) or by the need to accommodate complex visual effects (*Ne te retourne pas*). For all three directors, production is a process involving differing elements of risk-taking and control that calls for a high level of trust between director, cast and crew, particularly in regards to the filming of sexually explicit or violent content.

For Claire Denis, on-set tensions and emotions are important in the creation of drama, as she remarks:

> I go forth into my work without much theory, with the desire during the shoot to invent fiery moments, something that rings true of an experience that everyone has had, something like a memory, a burst of memory, a burst of love, or else resignation, a terrible sadness that submerges you. When this kind of moment, which everybody experiences, comes on a shoot, I try – not to catch it; I don't want to be pretentious – but to put it in play (Denis quoted in Castanet 2004: 147).

[35] Both actresses refer to de Van as an auteur in 'special feature' interviews attached to the DVD of the film.

As discussed in Chapter Two, Denis's films are often concerned with fleeting and somewhat spontaneous moments of contact between human bodies. Interestingly, the above quote suggests that this concept describes well her on-set experience, specifically, her desire to capture fleeting moments in which memories and emotions drawn from cast and crew are channelled into the scene itself. It would seem that these 'fiery moments' in which cast and crew are likely involved are not planned but highly sought after by Denis. In an interview with Aimé Ancien, Denis describes the joy of working as an assistant to German director Wim Wenders during the production of *Paris, Texas* (1984) in America. It was here that Denis discovered a much freer and spontaneous method of production in which 'everything was absolutely connected', in contrast to her previous experience on sets in France (Denis quoted in Ancian 2002). This early experience as assistant to Wenders and other directors such as Jim Jarmusch was key in the formation of her own shooting style, one that values on-set discoveries and spontaneity. The director comments that 'if filming means you have to control everything, I'd shoot myself. You already have to control the framing, the colours, the costumes, the sets and all that. But that's done before, the control's done before' (Denis, quoted in Ancian 2002). This suggests that the 'fiery moments' that the director hopes to invent and put into play during shooting are made possible by a great deal of preproduction work with each film's cinematography and design departments.

Denis is not unlike other directors in her quest to capture fresh performances from her actors, but her method for achieving this is particular. In addition to writing the film screenplay, Denis works with Jean-Pol Fargeau to write additional scenes for rehearsal purposes only. This allows for more spontaneity on-set, as the director describes: 'There are films where you need to rehearse, but it's true, I don't like rehearsing scenes that I'm about to shoot… Because I'm too afraid, if I rehearse a scene, that I'll find myself saying during the shoot: it was so good earlier, now it's gone' (quoted in Ancian 2002). I imagine that these additional scenes are important in informing the characters that eventually develop, as the actors have additional information related to character behaviour to draw upon. As previously mentioned, this approach resembles that of Mike Leigh, who workshops actors through a series of improvised scenes, many of which are absent from the final 'script' but which inform the actors' performances. Given Denis's expressed fear of stale performances,

it is interesting to note that she does not necessarily encourage improvised scenes. Speaking of *Beau Travail*, Denis has commented that the acting process for the film is the opposite of improvisation. 'I like improvisation very much, but I never have the necessary confidence. It (*Beau Travail)* is the most rehearsed of all my films' (quoted in Castanet 2004: 154). In this case, the inclusion of choreographed scenes involving several actors at once may have meant a need for increased control of the various elements at play. Despite Denis's stated lack of confidence to improvise, her comment suggests that the preproduction of some of her other films may have involved less rehearsal, and therefore potentially greater freedom for the actors in front of the camera.

Like Denis, Catherine Breillat also dislikes rehearsals, preferring to find 'some kind of magic' at the moment of shooting (Murray 2011). She states that 'I never rehearse. If the first time is good, I always keep the first take, even if it is contrary to what I want' (quoted in Murray 2011). Further to the idea of spontaneity on set, Breillat loathes the idea of storyboards. She remarks: 'It is horrible, this rational side, as if the movie was already determined and that to shoot it would be a simple formality' (quoted in the *Sex is Comedy* press kit 2002: 8). Breillat mitigates against the potential risk produced by the absence of storyboards by, firstly, undertaking extended periods of casting. Managed by the director, rather than by a separate casting director, this process sees the selection of actors in whom Breillat sees a reflection of herself, a strategy creating continuity in her body of work (Dooley 2013). She comments: 'My work is like that of a painter- I look at the face, the colour, the character and I work that way. I use unknown actors. I see hundreds of them and I do the casting myself with my assistant…I don't use a casting director because they may not see the actors the same way I see them' (Dooley 2013). After casting, Breillat restricts her contact with actors so that, with the exception of costuming, they are not seen again until shooting begins. This strategy supports her quest to ensure that the production process involves on-set discoveries. She comments that 'since my work with the actors is like love at first sight when I choose them, I don't want to see them before we start filming lest I become disgusted with them… I love them as I film them, not in their daily life' (Dooley 2013). Secondly, Breillat mitigates against risk brought about by a lack of storyboards by taking control of her actors' bodies on set, and by excluding them from processes

determining the blocking and choreography of scenes. In her films, shot framing, actor and camera movement are decided on-set, on the day of shooting, with crew standing in for the actors, in collaboration with the director of photography. Some calibration is needed when the actors are inserted in the scene, taking their size and movement into consideration. In relation to the director's habit of arranging the limbs of her subjects as an artist might arrange those of a model, actress Roxanne Mesquida (*Sex is Comedy; À ma soeur; Une vieille maîtresse*) comments that 'working with Catherine with a very physical adventure' (*Sex is Comedy* press kit 2002: 24*)*. Breillat states that 'I have to pose the actors like a painter and I'm very particular. I move their bodies this way and that way. The hair, I might pat down with my own saliva to put it place. I think in an English-speaking country I might get in trouble for all this' (Dooley 2013). This tactile approach can be seen in the aforementioned *Sex is Comedy*, a film-within-a-film that suggests insight into Breillat's on-set practices. Here, the director, played by Anne Parillaud, meticulously arranges the actor's body parts in scenes of intimacy.

With these measures in place: thorough casting and control of actor choreography, Breillat is able to put her actors under extreme pressure. Mesquida, who has collaborated with Breillat on three films to date, describes Breillat's directorial approach as involving the actor putting herself into a state of crisis, similar to that associated with her role onscreen. Although not wanting to control the 'magic moment' of shooting, Breillat seems to exert a high level of control over her actors, often pushing them to their psychological and physical limits with repeated takes of a scene. The director describes the filming of sexually explicit scenes involving Rocco Siffredi and Caroline Ducey in *Romance*, in which the actors repeated scenes until 4am, at which point both broke down emotionally (Dooley 2013). Similarly, the long-take where Elena loses her virginity in *À ma soeur* was actually the twentieth take of the shot, and is effective because of the long pauses and silences that were perhaps the result of actor fatigue (Dooley 2013). Generally speaking, Breillat films in long-takes and considers the fourteenth take of a shot to be the 'magic take', meaning a controlled test of endurance for the cast (Dooley 2013).

The director stresses that while the actors 'have the freedom to let the magic happen', improvisation is not encouraged, meaning that actors must work around the

script and her strict choreography in order to experiment.[36] In an approach she describes as 'liberating', the director will also model the part for the actor if the performance is not to her liking (Dooley 2013). While this approach must indeed give actors the confidence to take risks, seeing as the director has done so herself, it is one that goes against popular approaches to directing actors, such as those made famous by Constantin Stanislavski or Lee Strasberg. As an example, Breillat refers to a moment during the shooting of *Une vieille maîtresse*, in which she was dissatisfied with the lead male actor's approach to kissing his female mistress. 'I found that Fud (the lead male actor) wasn't kissing the actress like a man should, so I said "no, you're not doing it right." I grabbed Asia Argento (the lead female actor) and I showed him how I wanted him to do it' (Dooley 2013). She goes on to describe how a similar approach was taken to the handling of Siffredi's genitals on the set of *Romance*, an approach that is not premeditated but that she feels appropriate at the time. Breillat physically puts the actors into position, choreographs their movement in advance and models the performance she wishes to capture, exerting a very high level of control over their bodies, rather than allowing the actors to move and act based emotional responses drawn from internal motivations and objectives, as is the Method Acting tradition.

In a video interview with Felix Von Boehm (2008), Breillat comments on her need to experience, rather than just watch, the intimate moments that unfold during shooting. Metaphorically speaking, she wants to be between actors' bodies. For Breillat, this involves the utilisation of a sense of fear amongst the cast. She comments, 'I still think that the actors need to be afraid…because fear can create a very pure intimacy. If they did it without fear and very easily, this would be like in a sex shop' (quoted in Von Boehm 2008). It is interesting to note that, in line with her dislike for rehearsals, Breillat does not take concrete measures to prepare her actors for the filming of violent or sexually explicit scenes. Speaking of her approach to actors before the filming of such scenes she comments that 'when you are backed up against the wall, everything is easy. You just do it' (Dooley 2013). Fearing that conversations and questioning in advance of these confronting scenes only serves the purpose of increasing actor anxiety, the director films without a lead up. In regards to the

[36] 'They don't have the right to improvise but they do have freedom. I'm very strict with the choreography and all that but a take can't be magical unless there is some sort of accident or something unexpected. Otherwise it's very academic and stilted' (Breillat quoted in Dooley 2013).

character interactions within her films, Breillat comments that they 'should be felt live, like you are sharing this very private emotion […] between the actors. I think that is the thing most specific to my films, right from the start' (Dooley 2013). Elements of both risk-taking and control are important in this process.

In contrast to the two directors just discussed, Marina de Van takes a structured approach to preproduction and production, which is perhaps driven by her lesser experience, as well as her task as actor/director. Drawing on her experiences at *la FEMIS,* the director set about preparing for her role as Esther, protagonist of *Dans ma peau,* by undertaking a series of exercises exploring bodily disturbances. Effectively, she created a body of experiences that could be called upon when playing the role of Esther, designed, as Palmer notes, to create an increased sense of herself as object (Palmer 2007: 176). These included 'walking around in uncomfortable shoes, buying and wearing clothes that she disliked' and 'growing her fingernails to awkward lengths' (Palmer 2007: 176). These exercises were perhaps undertaken in the lead up to production with the aim of invigorating her performance; considering de Van's status as actor/director, her opportunity to make on-set discoveries was somewhat limited in comparison to that of Breillat or Denis. In an attempt to go further, and perhaps giving up some control over her performance, de Van also hired acting coach Marc Adjadi and was able to reinterpret and re-evaluate her approach to the script.

De Van's two films indicate the director's more traditional approach to preproduction tasks such as short planning and storyboards. Palmer describes the comprehensive preparation undertaken for *Dans ma peau*: 'She shot extensive stylistic tests of each and every shot on digital video before exposing any celluloid, storyboarded meticulously, outlined arrays of editing options in advance, and met repeatedly with her cinematographer, Pierre Barougier, to develop framing, lighting, compositional and optical effects' (2007: 178-79). In the case of preparation for *Ne te retourne pas*, detailed preproduction work was a technical requirement for the special effects that saw Sophie Marceau transformed into Monica Bellucci.[37] Close attention to time and space was needed to effectively animate sequences in which

[37] The breadth of work (sketches and mock ups) undertaken for *Ne te retourne pas* is evident in the special features of the DVD.

faces and body parts changed back and forth. This attention to detail and awareness of the work to be done in postproduction continued in the process of shooting *Ne te retourne pas*. For scheduling reasons, Marceau and Bellucci were not present on-set at the same time. The director explains that 'It was a bit of a headache to have Monica act without knowing what Sophie would do… and all the more because Monica would play Sophie's character later! I ended up directing Monica while trying to guess how Sophie would play the part, then directing Sophie with Monica in mind!' (*Don't Look Back* press kit, Vasse 2009: 16). Here, similarly to Breillat, de Van used her own body to model performances for the actresses: 'I play (and) I mime to give them direction' (Allociné 2009). Thus, one could consider Marina de Van's methods of control as crucial in facilitating the technical needs of the second film, and ensuring her success as director/actor of the first.

The on-set family and the 'ritual' of collaboration

I have already discussed the value of collaboration in regards to Denis's scriptwriting and I will now consider the role that repeated collaboration with a group of actors and technicians plays in the work of the three directors. Having only completed two feature films to date, Marina de Van has yet to develop a clear pattern of collaboration. Breillat and Denis, however, have a considerable track record of repeated workings with cast and crew. For both directors, these highly developed working relationships impact upon their styles of working and the completed films themselves. Both have been known to refer to cast and crew as family or friends, rather than colleagues, suggesting an intimate and friendly on-set collaboration for all involved. To look firstly at the work of Denis, one can note that actors such as Michel Subor, Vincent Gallo, Alex Descas, and Beatrice Dalle have made repeated appearances in her films, contributing to the idea of a filmmaking 'family'. To take *Beau Travail's* Grégoire Colin as an example, an actor who has appeared in seven of Denis's projects, one can chart his development as an actor from adolescent to adult and notice a progression in the range of his characters. From his first appearances as a rebellious young adult in *US Go Home* (1994) and *Nenette et Boni* (1996), then as the youthful challenger in *Beau Travail* (1999), to the murdered husband and father in *L'intrus* (2004), and most recently playing the laid-back neighbour and future husband in *35 Rhums* (2007), Colin plays with a series of onscreen experiences and proven capabilities. The same can be said for Alex Descas, who has also appeared in

seven Claire Denis projects in roles large and small. The director's reputedly friendly relationship with these actors most likely informs her approach to casting, recasting and rehearsals, in terms of creating a common language between actor and director. Similarly, Denis's signature style is derived from repeated collaboration with crew-members, most noticeably, cinematographer Agnès Godard, who has been crucial in the development of a lingering shot style and action choreographed around bodies, since the debut film *Chocolat*. Speaking about Godard and other cast and crew-members, Denis comments that:

> I said to (Agnès) that *35 Rhums* could not exist without her, because it was also (about) our family - Alex, Grégoire, Jean-Pol, Arnaud (art director), her, me - and because there was no way of envisaging the movie without her. Agnès sees things like me […] I believe that we have the same idea of the modesty, thus that also helps, we are not obliged to say everything (*35 Rhums* press kit 2007: 9).

This quote suggests that Denis has a system of non-verbal communication with Godard, based on shared values and experience. This idea of a system of communication with crew that is comprised of glances or body language mirrors the action and performances within her films; here glances and movement takes precedence over dialogue. In terms of this collaboration, the production process itself can also be seen to have implications for the concept of the body as a container of knowledge and sense, as explored in my third chapter. The director's repeated workings with actors and crew mean a pool of communal memories and shared experience that impacts upon the material captured. Furthermore, the repeated collaboration between director and crew raises questions regarding the raised expectations for each new film. Denis comments 'I think I try harder with Agnès and she tries harder with me', suggesting that, rather than just revisiting successful techniques of working, the pair are actively seeking to push boundaries and capture new experiences together (Denis quoted in Davis 2009). Denis is clear that her repeated collaboration with cast and crew such as Godard is not just driven by what each individual can bring to the style and look of the film, but by the simple pleasure of working together.[38]

[38] Denis comments '*Nénette et Boni* was very important: Agnès and I both understood to what point we had progressed together, to what point we each wanted to continue making films. I understood that

Denis describes her film shoots as a type of 'ritual' but detests the idea of obligations, stating 'I would hate people to feel we are the family and they cannot say no [about joining the next project]…I want everyone to be free, but the ritual is "are you ready for this one? Are you in?"' (Davis 2009). Further to the idea of film shoot as 'ritual', it is worthy of note that Breillat describes her production process as one including a 'sacrificial aspect' linked to risk taking on the part of the actors (Dooley 2013). Speaking about her second collaboration with Siffredi for *Anatomie de l'enfer*, she notes that his role in this film, that of a man who hates women, is one that posed a risk for his career as a porn actor. She comments that 'he didn't hesitate. In fact, he gave a gift of himself to the movie, for the art… the way I see sex scenes is that they have a ritualistic aspect to them, of sacrifice' (Dooley 2013). One could ponder the extent to which Siffredi's performance in *Anatomie de l'enfer* is driven by his experience on the set of *Romance,* and by the critical reception of this controversial film, particularly concerning his performance. Similarly, Breillat's work with actress Mesquida allows for the questioning of the production process itself, as is evident in the mockumentary *Sex is Comedy*. In this film Mesquida replays the memorable sex scene from the earlier film *À ma soeur,* with attention drawn not just to the ritualistic elements associated with the loss of virginity, but to the risks involved with the filming such a scene. The element of sacrifice is evident as Mesquida breaks into tears after replaying the brutal scene before the team of (fictional) technicians, and is then comforted by the director.

As is the case with Denis, Catherine Breillat's technical collaborators are undoubtedly implicated in the specificity of her work. Keesey (2009:9) notes that first assistant director Michael Weill has worked all of Breillat's film since *Romance*, and like his fictional counterpart, Léo, in *Sex is Comedy*, assists in the choreography of intimate scenes by temporarily standing in for the actors. Furthermore, Keesey credits cinematographer Yorgos Arvanitis with finding 'the spiritual light in female characters' faces during their moments of sexual ecstasy in *Romance, À ma soeur, Anatomie de l'enfer* and *Une vieille maîtresse* (Keesey 2009: 9) and I would argue

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I wasn't just asking Agnès to frame the image, but that quite simply I wanted to make films with her. So that when Grandperret and Chevalier said to me: "If you've got three or four months, come and do this 'Foreign Lands' collection with us"(*Beau Travail*), I was so strong in my relationship with Agnès that I accepted. So that she and I could go further. Not in experimentation, but in the pleasure of working together' (quoted in Ancian 2002).

that Arvanitis could perhaps also be credited with developing Breillat's now signature camera movement style of semi-circular tracking. The director shoots very quickly. Her most recent film, the costume drama *La belle endormie* was shot in nineteen days, whilst the much higher budget period drama *Une vieille maîtresse* was developed, shot and postproduced in just eight months. Breillat believes that this fast turnaround is possible due to the high calibre of acting talent involved, as well as her tendency to film in long-takes, and she describes this manner of filming as 'rather risky, because if ever one of the actors loses concentration, we have to start all over again. On the other hand, when we obtain magnificent things, we already have five to six minutes in the can' (*Une vieille maîtresse* press kit 2007: 8). The team of faithful technicians with whom she repeatedly collaborates no doubt aids this fast turnover. In the area of production design, it is interesting to note that Breillat takes a very personal approach to the buying of props and costumes. This interest in art direction, considered at script stage, most likely also contributes to the quick advance from green light to post-production.

Summary

From my examination of the writing and production practices of Claire Denis and Catherine Breillat, it is demonstrated that the directors show certain similarities in their approaches to the separate stages of writing and production. Rather than the screenplay being a blueprint for the completed Denis or Breillat film, it functions as a guide for production. Seeking on-set discoveries, rather than predetermined performances and shot formation, Breillat refuses rehearsals and storyboards in favor of more spontaneous interpretation and cast/crew decision-making during filming. Denis, too, limits her rehearsal of actors, preferring to use material from outside of the final script to prepare. The resulting element of spontaneity during filming is a considerable risk for both directors, but is managed by detailed work in preproduction (Denis) or by taking physical control of actor's bodies (Breillat). For both directors, the concept of 'grafting' has resonance, not just for the meshing of assorted material in their screenplays, but also for their repeated collaboration with cast and crew.

Marina de Van, as relative newcomer alongside Denis and Breillat, not surprisingly employs a more structured approach to preproduction and shooting. Lacking the long-term relationships that her more seasoned peers have established through repeated collaboration with cast and crew, the use of storyboards and other tools are essential in her preparation for the role of director. Whatever the approaches to the business of writing and directing, all three directors have produced stories influenced by autobiographical elements such as childhood memories and relationships with siblings, 'grafted' with other texts, music and/or literary influences, to produce a distinct body of work. Their working methods with actors, whether highly structured or spontaneous and unrehearsed, whether working with a seasoned 'family' cast or as actor/director, have allowed for the creation and portrayal of protagonists that deny normal methods of audience identification in favour of a different, and sometimes unnerving, method of engagement. A discussion of these practical concerns has allowed me to specify how the three directors bring their stylistic and conceptual elements, as described in Chapters One to Three, into being. I will now take these filmmakers' working methods, as well as their thematic and stylistic concerns, on board as points for further exploration and emulation in the production of my own film project.

Chapter 5- *The Sister*, a short drama

Please watch the film before reading the remainder of the thesis.

This can be found online at: https://vimeo.com/album/2052508/video/54422961

Chapter 6- Investigation through film production

> *Research would take place in and through bodies. It would transmit and proliferate between bodies, whose transformations would be irreducible, literally incomparable, eternally singular and irrevocable, un-write-down-able* (Simon Jones quoted in Allegue et al. 2006: 20).

Having catalogued the thematic, stylistic and practical concerns of contemporary French directors Claire Denis, Catherine Breillat and Marina de Van through an examination of their films and through interviews I conducted, this sixth, exegetical chapter reports on my attempts to explore their concerns from the vantage point of practitioner. As I mentioned in my introduction, my twenty-eight minute film *The Sister* (Chapter Five) forms an integral part of this PhD study. By adopting and/or emulating approaches drawn from the analysis presented in Chapters One to Four, I address the question: **'**How can the thematic, stylistic and practical concerns of these three contemporary French directors inform my practice as writer/director in an Australian context?'

As also previously mentioned, the film is both a research-led production and production-led research; research-led in that I undertook a film production with particular concepts and observed practices as influence, and production-led in the sense that the outcome of the film project informs my textual analysis, ultimately allowing greater insight into the work of the three directors. Importantly, the production functions as a means to challenge and reconsider my own established practices as writer/director, hence informing my future work. To further define my methodology, I shall explore other terminology associated with creative research. As this field has gained recognition as a legitimate form of scholarly research, a variety of labels and categories have emerged, with differing philosophies, methods of collaboration, and creative outcomes.

Kurt Lewin coined the term 'Action Research' in post-World War Two America to describe a research process whereby 'theory would be developed and tested by practical interventions and action' (Lewin quoted in Kindon and Pain 2007: 9). Lewin speaks of a research process in which activities shift between action and reflection to create change through participants' social action. On a similar note

some fifty years later, Sarah Kindon, Rachel Pain and Mike Kesby define 'Participatory Action Research' as 'a collaborative process of research, education and actions explicitly orientated towards social transformation' (Kindon and Pain 2007: 9). What Lewin's early formation and the approach reconsidered by Kindon et al have in common is a focus on collaborative research that empowers the participants, ultimately bringing about positive social change. Although my filmmaking project involved the participation of a sizeable cast/crew, it is ultimately concerned with the examination and potential change of my own practice as filmmaker, driven by the desire to further examine the specificity of work by Denis, Breillat and de Van.

The most applicable contemporary notion of creative research I have found to date is what Jeri Kroll refers to as 'Performative Research', a mode of investigation informed by 'individual and cultural circumstance', as well as a 'critical understanding of a specific kind related to creative achievement, but not always to notions of "the market"' (2008: 2). This mode of research involves a self-reflexive examination of creative work undertaken in a particular cultural setting, in this case the exploration of French filmmaking practices in the creation of Australian short film. With reference to the ideas of philosopher David Davies, Leo Berkeley makes a case for a study of the film production process as a means to better understand the finished film text. He writes that, according to Davies, 'the artwork is the performance of its production as well as the exhibited outcome', meaning that in the case of a film, such a study serves to 'focus attention on the significance of the production process and the relationship between this process and a meaningful understanding of the finished work' (2008:2). I entered into the writing and production of *The Sister* with this objective. By undertaking reflective practice I hoped to not only obtain a more critical understanding of my own finished work, but to shed further light on the work of the three French filmmakers whose approaches I had used as influence. *The Sister* is not just an appendix to the analyses detailed in previous chapters, but a means of re-evaluating these analyses- and my own practice as writer/director- in order to come to a set of new conclusions informed by creative discoveries. The short film has been produced with this specific intention, rather than being driven by an agenda relating to specific film festivals or other media distribution outlets.

In the quote at the beginning of this chapter, Simon Jones detects a shifting paradigm in regards to creative research practices. I feel that his research goals resonate with my own; I set out on a practical exploration of Denis, Breillat and de Van's concerns, in which research, in many phases of the project (preproduction, production and postproduction) was poised to take place in and around actors' bodies. Patricia Leavy likewise notes that knowledge and memory is embodied by research participants and accessible through documented experience, writing that the body is therefore 'a tool through which meaning is created' (Leavy 2008: 183). I acknowledge a similar approach in my own project and also the role that my own body, as a holder of memory and experience, has played in the creation of knowledge. I consider that, as Anne Brewster posits, to incorporate bodily practice into writing is 'to discard orthodox paradigms in which the object of the research is inert and passive and the researcher masterful and controlling' (quoted in Smith and Roger 2009: 129). Upon starting the film production, I felt that an element of the project would indeed, as Jones says, be 'irreducible' and 'un-write-down-able', in line with the less tangible aspects of the work of the three French directors themselves. My aim in the creation of a new audio-visual text was to clarify and articulate ideas through practice and/or in visual form, and to produce an artefact enabling further discoveries.

My practice as an Australian filmmaker has undoubtedly been influenced by my local education and experience; from this I draw upon knowledge that is culturally situated. In *Integrating Creative Practice and Research in the Digital Media Arts*, Andrew Brown and Andrew Sorensen make the point that 'practical knowledge is inherent in doing and is often considered implicit and as such may not be identified or found without explicit attention paid to it' (in Smith and Roger 2009: 162). By examining the concerns of a small group of French feature film directors and then using these concerns as a starting point for a short film production, my project allowed me the opportunity to pay explicit attention, to reflect on my own practice and to explore contrasting filmmaking practices drawn from another cultural setting. Jonathon Dovey makes the point that:

> The regular day-to-day writing of the screen media practitioner is of two kinds: either it is a pitch… or it is an artist's statement, a justification couched in the language of contemporary aesthetics that tells the story of the evolution of the work often through reference to other artists, fields of practice and to critical theorists.

> The former lays claim to innovation as potential 'hit,' the latter to innovation through ongoing creative production. Neither of them makes the production of new knowledge central (quoted in Allegue et al. 2006: 58).

Dovey's comment highlights my challenge in this chapter: to produce a text that creates knowledge through the detailing and analysis of film aesthetics and experience, attained during the making of my own film production.

Having now presented the aims and methodology associated with the creative element of my research, I shall move on to provide a short overview of *The Sister*'s production details. The film was shot in high-definition Canon 5D video over a period of eight days, with a cash budget of $3,000 provided by the Flinders University Department of Research and Higher Degrees. The decision to write and direct a single 25-30 minute film (as opposed to two or three shorter film works) was driven by my feeling that the longer format would allow the opportunity to properly explore the concerns of feature film directors. I believed that any shorter work/s would not provide the time for in-depth character development and narrative explorations, as seen in the feature length works I had been studying. The project was a collaboration with the Flinders University Drama Centre. In negotiation with the Centre's staff, I was given access to four actors aged between nineteen and twenty-three, all of whom were approaching the end of their second year of training. I was also allotted a certain schedule during which I could work with these actors: two production blocks of several weeks, in October 2011 and February 2012. This meant that, as a result of cast and budget constraints, I had some fairly concrete parameters within which to devise my script.

With the final draft screenplay locked off by December 2011, shooting took place over eight days (2 x 4 day blocks) in February 2012. The conditions of the $3,000 Flinders University research grant meant that, in addition to the cast, the majority of the crew would also be made up of students (and recent graduates) enrolled in the area of the Creative Arts. *The Sister* marked my first collaboration with director of photography David Tang, a recent graduate of the University. The film was also my first collaboration with production designer Hannah Sitters, a second year Finders University student. Additionally, I was able to secure the support of some of my long time collaborators, notably, composer Jason Sweeney and producer Liz Dooley. My

collaboration with Liz meant that I was able to focus on the creative elements of the project in full knowledge that the logistical elements were being well organised. During filming, we utilised a range of locations located in the Adelaide CBD and inner suburbs, as well as a beach location approximately 10 kilometres from the city.

Postproduction took place at Flinders University over a period of several months. I chose to edit the film myself so that I could spend a lengthy amount of time experimenting with multiple cuts of the film. The first cut was assembled without any deviations from the script and came in at thirty-seven minutes; much longer than originally intended. The sixth and final cut of the film came in at 27 minutes and 30 seconds, including titles and credits, meaning that almost 10 minutes of the film had been removed from the initial edit. Before starting the editing process I had envisaged undertaking several versions of particular scenes as I explored the different aesthetic concerns of Breillat, Denis and de Van; however, time constraints meant that this was not possible. The film had its premiere cast and crew screening at Flinders University in November 2012, meaning that the time frame involved from preproduction to screening was in line with short film projects I had completed in the past.

The Sister is a film that is significantly different to my previous work as an Australian writer/director. In my analysis of the production process and completed film, I have attempted to separate general filmmaking issues (further details of logistical and generic production information) from those issues specifically pertaining to the work of Denis, Breillat and de Van. Approaches to film budgeting and the logistics of filming have not been influenced by the work of the three French directors (rather, these factors are shaped by this project's status as a low budget student film production), therefore further information concerning production constraints and other logistical and technical information can be found in a production log (Appendix A). The process of scriptwriting and production has been documented through the recording of video, still photographs and regular journal writing, examples of which are attached as appendices to this thesis.

I will now outline changes to my practice as writer/director during the making of *The Sister*. This involves an analysis of points of departure from my previous methods of working brought about as a result of my adoption of the French directors' thematic,

stylistic and practical concerns. I will examine my altered approaches to idea generation, script, cast and crew, cinematography, design, editing and sound. As well as determining results achieved through the adoption of the three directors' concerns, I will critique the completed film as an independent text and speculate about the different viewing experience that it might offer. Like Hazel Smith, I consider a creative research artefact (in this case, the short film work) to fulfil two functions: firstly to stand 'as a demonstration of the theory' which is 'available as a reference for further investigation and verification', and secondly, to 'provide the stimulus for engagement with the knowledge gained' (quoted in Smith and Roger 2009: 163). By identifying points of change in my practice, and by evaluating the aesthetic and technical qualities of the completed film, I will attempt to answer the research project's central question. I shall then move on to present new insights into the work of Denis, Breillat and de Van, gained as a result of the production experience.

Points of departure: changes in my practice as an Australian writer/director

Starting points

Given the range of material explored in Chapters One to Four, my first task when approaching the film production was selecting of thematic concerns on which to focus. This lead me to form an initial list that summarised the key concerns of Breillat, Denis and de Van, as noted in Chapters One to Three (Appendix B). I also needed to make a decision about an approach to the writing of a screenplay. The adoption of Denis's approach to the construction of narrative in the undertaking of this project is one of the most significant modifications to my own practice as an Australian writer/director. As outlined in Chapter Four, the script writing approach of Claire Denis and her co-writer Jean-Pol Fargeau involves the formation of a 'diagram of relations' which determines character relations and narrative. Denis's approach appeared to be the most distinct and different from my own established method of writing and one that would offer the most opportunities for experimentation and exploration; hence, I decided to adopt this method of construction when devising *The Sister*.

I wish to be clear, however, that I did not seek to emulate every aspect of Denis's process, and most notably, I did not co-write the screenplay for *The Sister*. While the issue of how to overcome established writing habits limiting or negatively influencing the new project was of concern, I did not have a person outside of the film industry available for collaboration, as is Denis's method. Rather, I decided to allow the four actors attached to the project to contribute to the script writing process. Each individual would generate ideas in relation to the character they would potentially play. As well as injecting new perspectives into the 'diagram of relations' that would become a script, this collaboration allowed me to take a step back and evaluate my own practice; a sort of defamiliarisation and rediscovery where 'the artist intuitively adopts dual roles of the researcher and the researched, and the process changes both perspectives because creative and critical inquiry is a reflective process' (Graham Sullivan quoted in Smith and Roger 2009: 51). For these reasons I adopted Denis's approach to the arrangement of the narrative through the use of the 'diagram of relations'.

At the beginning of the collaborative process, all four of the prospective lead actors were unknown to me. While this condition could have aligned me with Breillat's occasional practice of working with 'unknown actors' with whom she has no established relationship, it was contrary to the approach of Denis, who has had repeated collaboration with a 'family' of actors with whom she is well acquainted. Wanting to align myself with the latter, I decided to spend some time observing the actors in class, and to undergo short interviews in order to get a sense of their respective skill sets. After several observations, I asked the four to speak to camera about an incident involving bodily discomfort and/or their bodily experience (see Figure 49); these were responses to one or two specific questions from a short list (Appendix C). Questions were shaped by the list of identified thematic concerns to potentially be explored within the film production, with the hope that such an activity could generate interest in a particular area, perhaps leading to a definitive starting point. I also wished to acknowledge the actors' minds and bodies as storehouses of memory and experience, which could be brought into play in the writing process.

James Smith ***Rhiannon Williams***

Sarah Allen ***Lochlin Maybury***

Figure 49: Introduction to the actors- questions on camera.

The responses to the questions were varied. Sarah Allen spoke of an incident when she was unable to stop fidgeting, whilst Lochlin Maybury spoke of his experience of a broken collarbone. Rhiannon Williams described episodes of 'sleep talking', and James Smith recalled a temporary facial disfigurement experienced as a child. All were sound potential starting points for a screenplay, but I felt that more work needed to be done getting to know the actors before a thematic decision could be made.

Writing the script: a 'diagram of relations'

Before detailing the changes in my writing practice brought about when undertaking *The Sister*, I will firstly briefly address my previously established ways of working. My approach to the screenplay has been shaped by my tertiary education, by participation in script development and pitching programs run by state funding agencies (development labs and more personal one-on-one experiences with script editors), and by the submission of my work to such agencies. Ian Macdonald

describes the process of 'how individuals form a system of dispositions within a culture and area of activity' according to Pierre Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus', which, in terms of screenwriting 'provides the practice with its normative codes, which are (re-)internalised as 'best practice,' craft skills and so on' (Macdonald 2010:46). In this way, my screenplays have been informed by the writings of institutionally sanctioned screenwriting gurus such as Robert McKee and Michael Hague, both of whom stress the importance of a clear notion of protagonist/antagonist, set up, journey and resolution. Their models of writing (and those of the labs I have participated in) appear to be most clearly aligned with the Hollywood cinema model. Bordwell, Thompson and Staiger (1985) note that, from the outset, basic principles of Hollywood film practice have included 'the story as the basis of the film, the technique as an "indiscernible thread," the audience as controlled and comprehending, and complete closure at the end of all' (Bordwell, Thompson and Staiger 1985: 195). I believe that, as an independent Australian writer/director seeking the support of government agencies, I have been encouraged to produce work, and I have produced work underpinned by these same principles. To date, I have taken three as yet unproduced feature film scripts and several produced short films through the process of development with government agencies, all of which have been written and critiqued according to the above criteria.

Furthermore, writing about scriptwriting and development the UK, Ian Macdonald makes the point that 'the very basis of screenwriting is dependent on social consensus and debate, whether that is led by the market or clarified by bodies in authority, or directed by critical "taste"' (2004:262). From my experience as a writer/director in Australia, I gathered that the principles of 'good' screenwriting are drawn from similar factors- industry gurus, broadcasters and government funding bodies- albeit within a smaller system. As an example of this phenomenon in practice, I look to Australian writer/director and academic Kathryn Millard, who has written about her experiences redrafting the feature film *Traveling Light* (2003) so that it might be green-lit for production. She comments that 'pressures did not come from the film distributors who were providing a distribution guarantee, but from the public broadcaster and government screen-funding agencies who would form a vital piece of the financing jigsaw if the script was to make it to the screen' (2010: 12). Millard comments on the difficulty of breaking from a Hollywood cinema model in

which ‘story’ forms the basis of the film: ‘my talk of independent cinema with its ambiguity, internalised character conflict and visual motifs as structuring devices did not go down well’ (12). Like Millard, I feel that, with the desire to have my projects green-lit for production, my writing habits have been shaped by these industrial and commercial influences.

Yet, as Kathryn Millard notes, ‘the work of many innovative screenwriters and film-makers has long favoured audio and visual expressivity over plot and narrative drive’, citing Gus Van Sant, Jarmusch, Tony Grisoni, Michael Winterbottom, Wong Kar Wai, Wenders and Chantal Ackerman as examples (2010:13). I would add Claire Denis to Millard’s list, due to the writer/director’s focus on character physicality, rather than just character psychology, as the driver of her films. Whereas the approaches of gurus such as McKee and Hauge stress the development of character arcs that can be mapped from point A to point B, Denis’s approach appears less concerned with the journey and more on character contrasts as a way of generating drama. Differences in status, behaviours and positioning in relation to social standing and class, all determine character wants and needs in Denis’s films, which may well lead to conflict, meaning plot developments as a consequence. My writing of *The Sister* explored this different approach.

As described in Chapter Four, the Denis/Fargeau method of constructing a ‘diagram of relations’ is driven by a series of questions to determine character positioning, relations, point of view and the revelation of plot, as explored earlier. Working around a particular theme, pertinent questions I asked my actors included:

Who is on the inside/outside?

Who is the watcher and who is watched?

Who is in motion/who is immobile?

What are the lines of hate and desire?

What is the shared back-story?

Who reveals these elements of back-story?

What is real/imagined?

This method of mapping identifies a series of oppositions, which lead to the creation of drama. Character oppositions facilitate the exploration of foreign bodies, dangerous contact and/or intersections, all key concepts in Denis's work. As I have noted, the director emphasises the physicality of her characters, rather than their psychology, sometimes leaving questions concerning motivations for actions unanswered. With this in mind I decided that I would, as a starting point, allow my four actors to develop characters individually, and that the 'diagram of relations' would be constructed according to the most interesting intersection of these characters according to oppositions, desires and shared histories. The group of four were given a number of weeks to develop two characters that they would be prepared to play. Although only one character per actor would eventually be utilised, this development process meant more initial possibilities and a process of elimination. While, as writer, I would ultimately decide upon the mapping of the diagram, the inclusion of character material drawn from the four actors, as well as their feedback, would mean a collaborative piece in which the actors were implicated.[39]

At the beginning of my collaborative work with actors in October 2011, I developed and refined back-story for the various characters they had invented, some of which was concerned with family conflict, loss, and alienation. At this early stage of exploration and experimentation I looked to de Van for inspiration, encouraging the actors to think of clothing and jewellery and what this might mean for their characters' bodily nuances. For example, it was decided that one character, Terry, might wear his shoes bound up very tightly as a reflection of his frustrated attitude towards work. Another character, Olivia, was often seen wearing and fingering a ring that belonged to a family member. I also encouraged the actors to improvise their character in an 'any-space-whatever' or 'non-space' as outlined by Deleuze and Augé respectively- waiting in the airport or alone in a hotel room- as a means of observing their behaviour within an unfamiliar or anonymous setting.

The second part of this collaboration involved linking these characters to one another. Would they be friends or enemies? This stage involved the construction of the 'diagrams of relations' to explore potential character conflicts and overlaps.

[39] Much like Denis, Leigh creates a 'diagram on a napkin', which determines the relationships between characters. His work differs however, in the time given to character improvisation and in the non-disclosure of plot information from one actor to another (Carney and Quart 2000).

Character back-stories were shared to create common histories and narrative crossovers. Several themes from the list (Appendix B) were imposed on the characters to explore Breillat's, Denis's and de Van's thematic concerns. It soon became clear that the concepts of 'intersecting lives' and 'dangerous contact', as explored in Denis's *Trouble Every Day*, worked across a range of scenarios for script development. As the several characters had been developed as unconnected entities, it was somewhat natural that they should eventually intersect, with potentially disturbing results, in order to create a film narrative. With this noted, I worked with the actors to brainstorm several configurations before reaching a final diagram (see Figure 50).

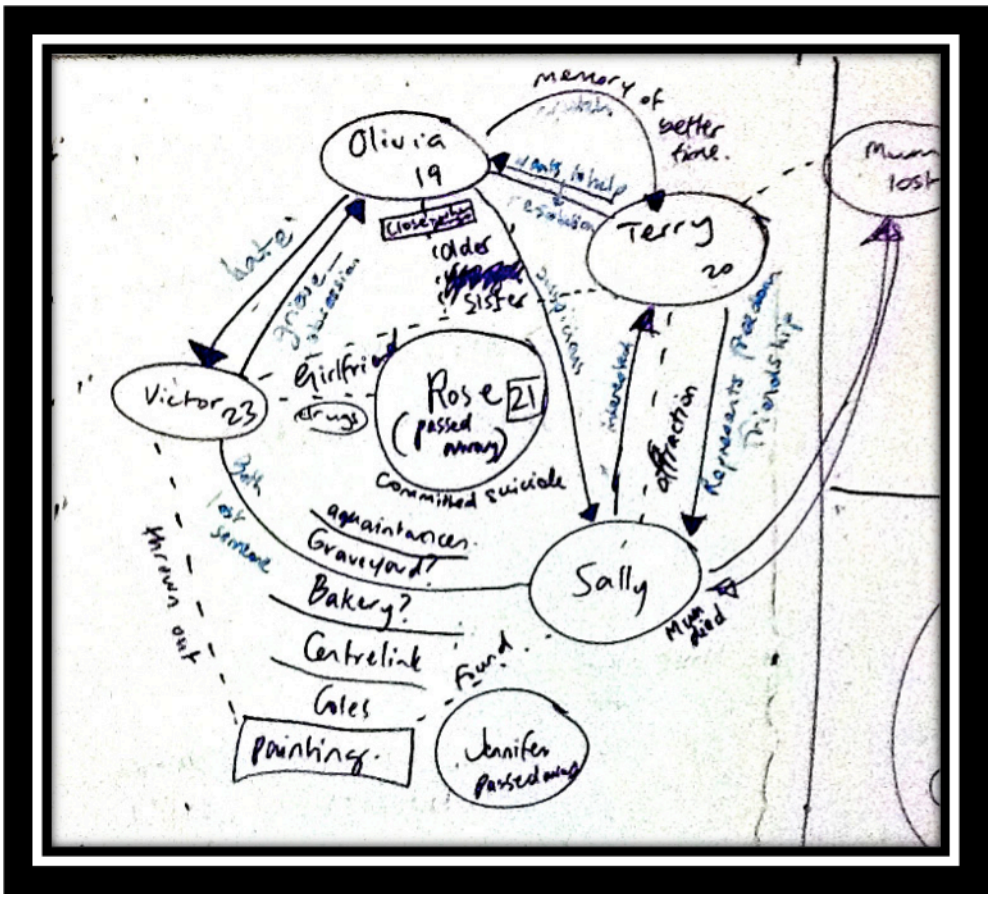

Figure 50: The diagram of relations, workshopped on a classroom whiteboard, then summarised more clearly.

Each of the circles in the diagram above represent a character, with the four lead actors to play the parts of Victor (James Smith), Olivia (Rhiannon Williams), Terry (Lochlin Maybury) and Sally (Sarah Allen). Other characters associated with individual back-stories were woven into the diagram. It is important to point out that the centrally placed character, Rose, and Jennifer (bottom centre) are deceased, but that others' memories of them play important roles in shaping the story. In discussion with the four actors, I linked the characters Victor and Olivia to a girl that had tragically drowned a year earlier (Rose). Victor was Rose's boyfriend, whilst Olivia was her sister. Neither had properly moved on with their life in the year since Rose's death. Terry became Olivia's boyfriend, whilst Sally was a less inhibited girl with whom Victor becomes involved. Both Olivia and Victor are unable to move forward with their lives; their film journey would be redemptive by means of sharing their grief. By contrast, Sally is moving forward, having recovered from the loss her mother, Jennifer, several years earlier. This meant that two of the characters were physical reminders (through likeness) of people passed away, and I could explore the actors' skin (tattoos, scars), jewellery and clothing as holding memory associated with the past. Returning to the questions listed in above, one can note that the arrows moving from one character to the next indicate lines of desire and/or hatred, enabling the creation of plot. Victor was the most obvious outsider in the diagram, a young man who would observe Olivia from a distance, just as she too could spend time watching him. Victor and Olivia would also be immobile characters, as if their lives had stopped moving forward following the death of Rose. Terry was to be the concerned watcher of Olivia, whilst Sally, as complete outsider, observed much of the action from a more distanced position. A summary of this action can be found in the film synopsis (Appendix D).

During the last two workshop days of the film devising process, I asked the actors to draft a short monologue for their characters as a sort of a personal manifesto. A monologue delivered by Boni (Grégoire Colin) in Denis's *Nenette et Boni* (1996) was screened as an example. This monologue, which appears in one of the film's first scenes, establishes Boni as an arrogant, sexually frustrated young man, and is read out of a journal in which Boni writes. I hoped that my actors' monologues would provide a similar overview of their characters' personality traits. On the final workshop day we recorded these monologues to video, along with scenes of an

imagined police interrogation following the death of the sister, Rose (see Figure 51). Although these scenes were not included in the final film, they were useful in developing the emotional history of the characters. I hoped that the actors would be able to draw on this experience when performing other scenes, as per Denis's approach of writing additional scenes for rehearsal purposes only.

Figure 51: Olivia (Rhiannon Williams) undergoes police interrogation during the final stages of workshopping.

Having finished the process of devising at the conclusion of the October workshop session, I then went away and wrote the screenplay for *The Sister*. This stage involved the transferral of the mapping undertaken with the four actors into standard script layout so that it could be utilised and understood by an Australian crew. My desire at this point was to resist my learned and now hard-wired tendency to conform to conventions involving character journey, story structure and closure, and rather, to let Denis's questions guide the action. Instead of considering character trajectory and resolution as I had in the past, I focused on a change from character and/or plot immobility to movement, from characters' shift of sentiments from hate to desire and from their positioning as watcher to watched (or vice-versa). As a writer/director

working in Australia, I had previously revealed character through action related to plot, an approach linked to the belief that story (plot) is the basis of the film. For Denis, character is sometimes revealed through human movement alone, audiences need time to exist alongside the characters, and in her work these elements contribute to her non-judgemental point of view. For these reasons, I included scenes where the characters simply existed in their own space, something that I would have considered uneconomical in my previous practice. I retained several lines of dialogue devised by the actors themselves, which contributed to the different voice of each character, rather than my voice (as writer) deciding their tones.

The completed script of *The Sister* (Appendix H) is influenced by Denis's and de Van's tendency to explore unstable bodies and by Denis's approach to foreignness and trauma. It has less dialogue than my previous scripts while featuring more characters, comprising my first 'ensemble piece' (my other projects had previously centred on a single character or relationship between two). The narrative moves towards the inevitable intersection of Olivia and Victor with the lead up creating ambiguity as to whether this meeting will involve violence: an eruption of repressed trauma. The back-story of Rose's death is also ambiguous, so that Victor appears as a threat, even though he is ultimately not one. Like much of Denis's work, the script jumps between past and present to reveal pieces of back-story. In my choice of theme, I have leaned towards Claire Denis's concerns more than those of the other two directors; however, the narrative succeeds in weaving together a number of the three directors' concerns, without compromising the unity of the project as a whole. Sally's character provides a means to explore the concept of 'becoming', as seen in the work of Breillat. Sally takes photos of her body parts as a means to reconstruct herself, an act which, alongside the presence of photos in her life in general, links with themes present in the work of Marina de Van: that photos can reveal a truth not otherwise seen and that technology can remake the body. Finally, thematic and stylistic choices; the decision to focus on the body as a holder of trauma, and on the unstable body as represented by Denis and de Van, were driven by the desire to take a culturally different approach to the portrayal of the body and to meld the exploration of different concerns into a single, coherent work.

Transferring the script to screen: direction

As director, my aim was to break from my regular approach to preproduction and production (one in which all aspects of the film are carefully planned in advance) and rather, to take inspiration from Breillat's philosophy; that the process of filming should involve a series of on-set discoveries. As stated earlier, Breillat does not rehearse her actors and specifically, does not take measures to prepare them for the filming of difficult scenes. Rather, performer anxiety and the fear of the unknown seem important when considering the emotional intensity of her actors' performances. I decided to take the same approach to scenes in *The Sister* I considered most challenging: those surrounding the random intersections of Victor and Olivia, and their eventual violent struggle, which yielded an interesting result. While I did meet with the actors and talk about the content of these scenes, they were not rehearsed. Subsequently, the actors, while anxious about their upcoming performances in these scenes, were also quite excited in anticipation. Other scenes had been workshopped in the initial stages of my collaboration with the four actors, as well as some extra scenes that were not included in the script. This allowed the players to draw upon their memories of these scenes when approaching others, meaning that their performances were fresh.

The filming of the final confrontation scene- one important in the resolution of the film as a whole- was certainly the most exciting moment in the shoot. The confrontation called for a highly emotional exchange between the characters. Keeping my direction to a minimum and avoiding rehearsal on set, I found that from the first take, the actors' performances were strong. Some repetition was needed to calibrate the camera movement however; specifically, the final moments of the scene. This point of action, in which the characters fall to the ground in a struggle (see Figure 52), was filmed over a dozen times; a necessary test of endurance for the actors, finishing at 4.30am. Some of the final takes, in which the actors were clearly tiring, were among the most emotionally intense. Just as was noted by Breillat while filming *À ma soeur*, the pauses became as important as the lines spoken, giving more weight to the performances captured.

I must note that the limitations of working on a low budget with an unprofessional crew meant little money for equipment and props, and a limited time in which to shoot each scene, which had additional consequences for the actors' performances.

As my attention was often focused on directing the camera and lighting team, I consequently devoted less time to the direction of the actors than I would have liked. To some degree, my attention was frequently consumed by technical matters (the result of low budget filmmaking), rather than the finer points of performance, which would not be the case for better resourced directors working with a more experienced crew.

Shot framing and choreography

Early on in the preproduction stage I spoke to cinematographer David Tang about my desire to avoid storyboards and other forms of planning in regards to shot framing and choreography. Rather, I would assemble a rough list of shots, with final decisions to be made on the day of shooting. My desire to include shots that explored Marks' concept of haptic visuality meant that some preliminary planning in regards to camera lens and lighting choices needed to occur. To carry out this approach, I was highly aware that I was asking Tang to work against everything he had learnt as a cinematographer, namely, to present clear images. When presenting the intersections of Victor and Olivia, and when portraying the bodies of my characters in general, I urged him to ignore his training and consider filming in a way that would at times be consciously blurred or dark, to create a film that would encourage this specific viewing experience. Going into production without storyboards increased my anxiety levels, but the preproduction stage did seem more organic as a result. Rather than having a set approach to the filming process, I gave my collaborators more scope for input, as well as creating a situation in which on-set discoveries could take place. More elements were uncertain; therefore it was not possible to fully anticipate the end product or to look beyond shooting.

As predicted, the filming of shots intended to encourage a haptic viewing experience was a difficult task due to the desires and expectations of the camera crew. While the capturing of extreme close-ups was possible in a situation of minimal movement (the bath tub scene, for example), it was difficult when characters were 'on the run', as is the case in the film's climactic final confrontation between Victor and Olivia. Here, shot framing was determined by the camera crew's physical capabilities. With actors moving at a fast speed, it was difficult for the camera to keep up, and therefore the images were wider than originality intended. This scene was the last to be filmed, and posed the most risks for both actors and crew, as it involved a violent struggle, in

low lighting, in the early hours of the morning. I needed to repeatedly remind the camera crew that images should be dark and blurry, as their predisposition was to add light.

Figure 52: Olivia and Victor's final confrontation 00.22.20

As a result, 'haptic' close-up and extreme close-up shots have been used to portray the body at several points in *The Sister*. I believe that, from the outset, these images engage the audience as embodied viewers. The opening tactile shots of the film, in which an extreme close-up of a lifeless female arm on the beach is intercut with shots of an anxious Victor staring into the distance, create the sense that a tragedy has occurred, without revealing the full details of this event (see Figures 53 and 54). The lack of disclosure that results from the use of such extreme close-up images, in the absence of a more distanced view of the entire female body, is an effective hook with which to interest viewers, encouraging them to draw upon their own bodily experience in order to speculate as to what may have passed. I believe that these tactile images of the skin lying against wet sand and stray strands of hair also establish a sense of vulnerability about the human body. The audience is encouraged to bring their own memories of sensations related to the beach into play when considering this scene. Similarly, a later scene in which Sally takes a bath attempts to align the audience with this protagonist through the proximity to her skin, rather than through her actions or dialogue (see Figures 55 and 56). These extreme close-ups of suds on isolated parts of Sally's body ask the viewer to consider her as a complex and vulnerable living being. The fragmentation of her body, in the absence of a wide-

shot offering a more distanced view, encourages the audience to work to actively piece together an image of Sally as a whole.

Figure 53- Rose's lifeless arm 00.00.32

Figure 54: The discovery of Rose's body on the beach 00.00.35

Figure 55- Extreme close-up of Sally's toes 00.09.12

Figure 56- Sally takes a bath 00.09.18

These images establish a more visceral and less masterful relationship between character and viewer, and they are also, generally speaking, important in generating a high level of suspense in relation to the unfolding film narrative. The use of dark or blurry imagery means that there is a level of ambiguity associated with unfolding events. To take the scenes of Olivia walking along the river as example, the low lighting and blurry images shot from over her shoulder not only obscure the surrounding environment, but Olivia's response to it as well (see Figure 57). Clear views of her face are avoided in favour of shots that focus on movement as a means to communicate emotion. At this moment the audience might ask: is she being followed? What is she afraid of? The use of haptic imagery encourages the audience to speculate as to the answers to these questions. At other points in the film, close-up shots of Terry playing guitar, Olivia chopping carrots, Sally writing in her diary or Victor writing on his arm, appear at the beginning of scenes so that the identity of the person undertaking such activity is not immediately revealed. Rather, the audience must contemplate these actions without full knowledge of their context.

Figure 57- Olivia walks home 00.07.03

Art direction

The move to deliberately set my film in locations aligned with Deleuze's description of 'any-space-whatevers' comprised a considerable stylistic departure from my previous body of work. Deserted areas such as stairwells, bridges, and beach scrub become isolated sites for character mutation and transformation (see Figures 58-60). My desire to incorporate action in such places resulted in a location-led scriptwriting process. I considered interiors such as supermarkets and nightclubs in a similar fashion to both Breillat and de Van. Cityscapes have a dark, cold, alienating feel, whilst the supermarket (see Figures 62 and 63) and laundromat are brightly lit and clinical in appearance. In the case of these locations, the look results from the use of 'natural' lighting (no special lights were added for the purposes of filming), which although related to time constraints, was nonetheless a choice. By contrast, the bar in which several characters appear is a warmer, more transgressive space, similar to those featured in several of Breillat's films. Additional lights were utilised to create the warm atmosphere in these scenes. On the subject of props, just as photos are important in the formation of identity in de Van's two films, photos are physically present in the lives of my protagonists, displayed on walls or within a camera, to capture alternative representations of reality.

The Sister has a somber tone, with many scenes being filmed at night in order to capture moments of calm and emptiness. The use of 'any-space-whatevers' is a contributing factor when considering the film's visual style. Although Deleuze does not describe these spaces as sinister in nature, in my film these locations foster a sense of impending danger due to their shadowed and/or isolated nature. From the beginning of the film, water becomes a sinister image; from the beach, to the river, to Sally's bath water. It was only during editing that I became conscious of this fact and I have played upon it by repeating such images at key points within the film. Shots of gentle waves washing up on the beach in the early morning often accompany flashbacks associated with Olivia, Victor and Rose, so that the viewer is frequently reminded of the unresolved tragedy seen at the beginning of the film.

The fact that I had such specific objectives in regards to location choice, lighting and art direction saw a change in my practice in terms of my relationships with the cinematographer and production designer Hannah Sitters. Whereas on past projects I had granted those working in these crew roles more freedom of decision-making in

regards to lighting choices and props, conversations regarding the design of *The Sister* were focused on achieving my research objectives and therefore concerned with small details as well as the overall look of the film. In terms of these relationships, change to my practice comes not from the influence of the three directors, but as result of undertaking a film production contextualised by postgraduate research.

Figure 58- Encounter in the apartment stairwell 00.03.59

Figure 59- Victor works towards the beach 00.23.08

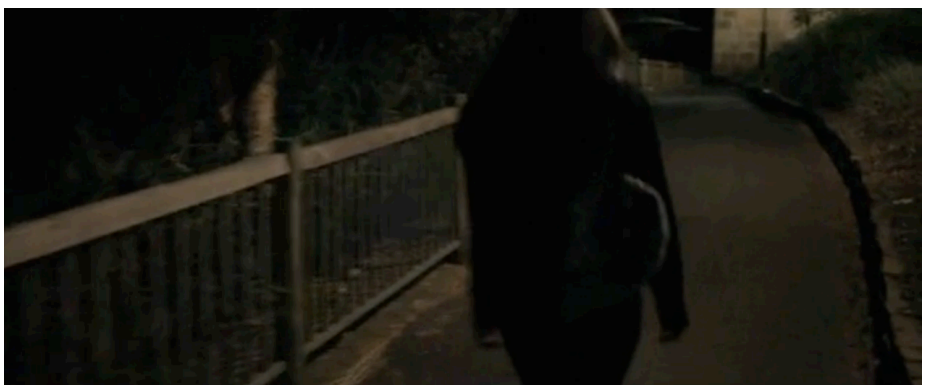

Figure 60- 'Any-Space-Whatever'- a riverside track 00.21.53

Editing

The editing style of *The Sister* is most strongly aligned with that of Denis, which is unsurprising considering the role that her method of screenplay construction played in the writing of the script. The process of montage has led me to reconsider the relationship between character, action and dialogue. An early cut of the film revealed that characters were often speaking words that did not need to be said; rather, their intentions or desires were apparent through facial expressions and the exchange of looks. I removed several lines of dialogue, as well as an entire breakup scene between Terry and Olivia, to take one example. Their subsequent scene- a walk together in the park- is a more believable moment capturing the evolution of their relationship, as in this case, movement and glances, rather than dialogue reveals their new situation (see Figure 61). A similar excising of material was undertaken in the scene showing Victor and Olivia's final confrontation. Here, the removal of dialogue gives more weight to their exchange of looks, meaning the audience has more room to speculate as to their ambiguous mental states.

Figure 61- Olivia's final glance at Terry reveals a more harmonious relationship 00.26.11

The use of Denis's approach has also meant greater opportunities to rediscover the filmed material in the editing suite. While my other short films have been faithful to the ordering of scenes as presented in script form, *The Sister* has been completely reordered in post-production with the goal of producing the most engaging version possible. The fact that many scenes involved only one or two characters, and that the exchanges of glances (without dialogue) could be interpreted in a number of ways, has resulted in the increased ability to re-contextualise scenes by changed ordering. It is easy to imagine a similar process occurring in Denis's films *Trouble Every Day* and *L'intrus*. Furthermore, the filming of flashback scenes in *The Sister*, all of which

were fragmented and reordered in the final version of the film, allow for frequent jumps between past and present. As with Denis's works, these have not been signposted by dissolves or other visible editing transitions and are, therefore, somewhat open-ended. As with the privileging of glances over dialogue, the audience must take a more active role in piecing the narrative together, rather than having all the answers provided for them.

Use of music

Having composer Jason Sweeney attached to the project at an early stage meant that, following Denis's example, I could choose several music tracks to align with certain scenes or characters as the script was being written. I played these tracks to cast and crew as a way to communicate these intentions and provide a sense of tone. Music certainly was a useful tool for providing the actors with a sense of the emotion to be created within a scene, particularly in the case of those for which no rehearsal had taken place. I felt assured that we had a similar understanding of the performance I hoped to capture, with a level of intensity drawn from the pieces of music as a reference point.

After the completion of the film's picture edit, I reconsidered pieces composed by Sweeney. These were attached to characters as motifs for particular emotional responses. The most prevalent track, titled 'Antony slow-up', became aligned with Olivia's grief and anguish, whereas other tracks signal the change to a different time period, be it a flashback or dream sequence. Two tracks by contemporary Australian pop group *Mist and Sea* give the film an upbeat feel in moments of dance: in Sally's bedroom and at the pub. Much ambient sound has also been added with the intention of increasing moments of tension without seeming heavy-handed or manipulative. Generally speaking, the use of sound is intended to assist the viewer in making sense of the narrative, while still allowing a somewhat open-ended reading of certain events. By following Denis's example, I have gained an insight into the importance of music as a means of communication, not just between filmmaker and audience member, but between director, cast and crew.

New insights into the work of Denis, Breillat and de Van

The production-led research undertaken through the making of *The Sister* has further illuminated several of the thematic, stylistic, and practical concerns explored within

chapters One to Four. Firstly, the use of Denis's scriptwriting approach has allowed me greater insight into her portrayal of characters on screen; namely, the importance of the physicality of the body and the power of the gaze as creators (and manifestations) of tension and conflict. I have come to realise that the 'diagram of relations' method of story construction is the cornerstone of the director's approach to thematic and stylistic concerns. I am certain that Denis's method of devising, and specifically, her method of positioning of characters in relation to one another, fosters the idea of a point of view without judgement, enabling an 'ethical representation' of film subjects. The posing of questions such as: who is in movement/immobile, or who is on the outside/inside, emphasises the placement and action of the body, rather than character psychology. As a result of my focus on character oppositions in *The Sister*, I have created a film in which the intersection of various characters is the key generator of both suspense and drama. There is little action and few plot points propelling the story forward. Rather, for the four protagonists, the film journey shows an acknowledgement of their selves and situations when faced with an opposing other. Of all of the questions posed when constructing the 'diagram of relations', *who is the watcher/watched* seems key, and I will use the interaction of Victor and Olivia in *The Sister* as an example to explain this further. Their initial accidental meeting in a supermarket, from which Olivia flees, sees an exchange of hostile and frightened glances (see Figures 62 and 63). Later scenes show the two characters alternating in the position of watcher/watched: at the skate park, and at Olivia's apartment. It is not until the film's climactic river side scene that Victor and Olivia finally speak to one another; at this moment Olivia finally holds Victor's gaze, and he hers (see Figure 64). Accepting the gaze, so that both characters acknowledge one another, is key in the resolution of their relationship and emotional arcs. Similarly, Victor finally accepts Sally's gaze as she takes a photograph of him, whilst Olivia and Terry's final scene shows them glancing at one another with expressions of contentment. In all of these moments, dialogue is minimal or non-existent.

Figure 62- Olivia sees Victor in the supermarket 00.06.33

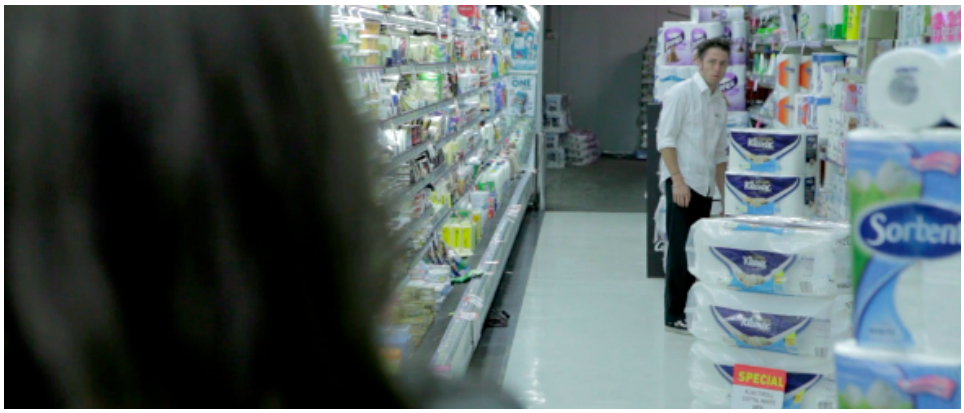

Figure 63- Victor returns her gaze 00.06.29

Figure 64- A shared gaze 00.24.22

Secondly, my research has given me greater insight into the three French filmmakers' approaches to direction and how this provides opportunities for the expression of their thematic and stylistic concerns. One could posit a strong link between Breillat's lack of actor rehearsal/preparation and the heightened emotional response that she elicits from actors during the shooting of intimate scenes. I believe

that such heightened emotional responses are key when considering her quest to subvert representations of the body and challenge binary oppositions. Moreover, I would argue that de Van's focus on the bodily nuances of her characters, as work-shopped during the pre-production stage of *Dans ma peau*, is integral when considering the characterisation of her protagonists on screen. Most notably, the making of *The Sister* has illuminated the fact that Denis's and Breillat's directing styles are remarkably different, despite their common desire to make discoveries on-set. Breillat's processes of blocking and choreography are determined without actors, highly structured and controlled, whereas Denis allows her actors more freedom. In a sense, Breillat starts her work on-set with the camera, whereas Denis appears to start with actors' bodies.

I reached this conclusion when attempting to emulate Breillat's approach to the on-set choreography of action. The first day of *The Sister* involved the shooting of the beach party scenes; those making up both the beginning and end of the film. The absence of storyboards meant that I needed to block the action with the cinematographer at each location. Following Breillat's style of excluding the actors from this process, I first talked through the action and camera directions with David Tang and then inserted the actors into place. This system was successful for the beach scenes, as there was little interaction between the actors. Rather, a single character (Victor) was reacting to the discovery of a body on the beach (see Figure 54); his physical approach and movement was easy to choreograph in advance. However, scenes involving two or more actors, particularly those involving dialogue and/or action that had not been rehearsed, were more difficult to envisage. Having not seen the scenes played out, I had no idea how the actors would use the locations, or what movement would appear natural within the confines of the set. Making decisions about choreography, in the absence of the actors, meant that their action was rigidly predetermined and fixed according to technical requirements.

By contrast, the cinema of Denis sees her camera follow the human movement, rather than the reverse; here, the actors, in consultation with the director, determine the scene's choreography. Highly visible camera moves, such as unmotivated tracking shots, are avoided, with the result that the camera records but does not interfere with the material captured. I would argue that this is an approach to filming bodies which also facilitates Denis's 'ethical point of view', as discussed earlier in

this chapter. In my quest to capture fresh and realistic performances, and to make discoveries relating to my film subjects on set, I decided I preferred this latter approach to choreography. As a result, much of *The Sister* was shot with a hand-held camera so that the cinematographer could move alongside the actors. The lack of stylised camera movement (tracking or dolly shots) in favour of hand-held work also resulted in an ability to shoot as a fast speed and to capture more shots than might have otherwise been possible. Filming in a range of controlled spaces (supermarket, bakery, antique shop and laundromat), with only a limited amount of time in each, meant that lighting was also kept to a minimum through necessity. This has contributed to *The Sister's* realistic feel and it would appear that Denis's approach to cinematography has yielded similar results for her feature film productions.

Summary

The Sister is a story about grief, and specifically, about two people reconciling their feelings of loss. The central question of what happened on the night of Rose's death guides the action surrounding the crossovers of the four lead characters. Unlike my previous work, the action of this film revolves around the intersections of characters, with a specific focus on the portrayal of body and the surface of the skin. My choice of themes drawn from the French directors' works- of unstable bodies, foreignness, and Breillat's 'becoming'- has not resulted in such graphic images as those described in my initial discussion of the *cinéma du corps*. In contrast with my previous films, however, I feel that *The Sister* encourages a different, and more open-ended viewing experience. As a result of the stylistic choices that have seen an investigation of haptic visuality, the short film offers a more visceral viewing experience by presenting vulnerable bodies captured in fleeting moments of contact.

Therefore, to answer my study's central question, I must firstly conclude that the use of the three French director's thematic, stylistic and practical approaches as a starting point has been an extremely useful means of evaluating and challenging my own practice as writer/director. The study has encouraged me to reconsider my approach to the actor, and specifically, to consider their body as a physical means of communicating character, rather than relying on action and dialogue. The process has changed my thinking as to the writing of action in film. Although I had always put a greater focus on character than plot, this film makes me understand the importance of movement within personal spaces as a way to create relatable and

sympathetic characters. Small actions can have big consequences and dialogue is often superfluous.

Secondly, I have been challenged to question the way in which I involve the viewer in the process of meaning-making. The need to engage viewers on a multi-sensory level was foregrounded, meaning the creation of a film that focuses on the tactile when presenting images of the body. Attempting to film with a haptic approach has meant establishing a different relationship between filmmaker and audience. By creating ambiguity the film becomes something that is opened-ended; there is no single vision that I am offering to the viewer. Rather than clearly signposting events within the film, as was my previous practice, there is more room for audience interpretation of the narrative, a reflection here of the influence of Denis's work. Generally speaking, my investigation of the three French directors' concerns has challenged the way I position myself as director. I feel that the filmmaking process associated with *The Sister* has allowed me to create a work in which action seems led by the characters, rather than by my hand, as a filmmaker who is constructing a reality from a series of different shots and points of view. This relates to Denis's 'POV without judgement': the retaining of an ethical distance from the action so as to let the audience make up their own mind as to the ethical stance/moral dilemmas of the characters. Whilst it is true that I have guided the action as director, I have not been heavy handed or didactic in my presentation of material. In the case of *The Sister,* I've achieved this through the use of less dialogue and of longer takes than was my previous practice.

As hoped, the production process has allowed for greater insight into the work of Breillat, Denis and de Van. The action of making *The Sister* has further illuminated links between the thematic, stylistic and practical concerns explored in Chapters One to Four. By emulating Denis, Breillat and de Van's approaches to writing and direction, I have indeed been afforded the ability to explore their concerns from 'the inside', resulting in a clearer understanding of cause and effect in relation to their thematic, stylistic and practical considerations. Of course, there are aspects of the three directors' works that could never be replicated, namely material differences resulting from the use of specific cameras, lenses and other equipment, or physical differences, such as those related to the contrasts between Australian and French landscapes. My study has not attempted to comprehensively address all of these

factors but rather to pick and choose elements of greatest contrast (to my own practice) and interest. Whilst my film work has always been influenced by the work of other filmmakers, my explicit focus on the work of Breillat, Denis and de Van has meant that I've been able to analyse my own processes, making a series of realisations about the tendencies and limits of my previous body of work.

Despite the influence of three French filmmakers, *The Sister* is a film that feels as much like 'my work' as the films I had previously written and directed. The opportunity to produce a film within the context of a PhD study has meant that I have been able to cast away the usual restraints associated with industrial expectations, so that in a sense, the film could be considered as more faithful to original ideas, and less constrained by external influences than my previous efforts. By 'constrained' I mean that the script was not taken through a development process with a third party, and that market forces related to funding, film festivals and other competitions were not foregrounded during the writing and production processes. Working with this new found freedom, I have enjoyed the opportunities for increased character and plot complexity that have come as a result of a twenty-eight minute running time (more than double the length of any of my previously directed short films). I have also felt extremely comfortable producing a film that takes representations of the body-character physicality and interactions- as its primary focus, leaving story/plot as a secondary concern. Whilst this experience will undoubtedly influence my future work, I do however acknowledge the fact that, working outside of a tertiary environment, Australian industrial forces would make it difficult for me to fund and/or undertake a project with a similar focus a second time. With this in mind it is interesting to ponder the degree to which my practice as an independent writer/director is shaped by market forces.

Conclusion

In the years passed since this study began in 2010, an extraordinary range of new work by French female directors has continued to make a mark both critically and at the box office. To name but a few examples, Noémie Lvovsky's popular time-travel comedy *Camille redouble* (*Camille Rewinds*) closed the Cannes Film Festival Director's Fortnight in 2012, while Catherine Corsini's psychological drama *Trois mondes* (*Three worlds*, 2012) opened the *Un Certain Regard* category in the same year. More recently, actress-turned-director Valeria Bruni-Tedeschi's comedy *A Castle in Italy* screened in the official competition of the 2013 Cannes Film Festival. Additionally, a new generation of younger directors including Mia Hansen-Løve (*Un amour de jeunesse* [*Goodbye First Love*, 2011]), Rebecca Zlotowski (*Grand Central*, 2013), and Katell Quillévéré (*Suzanne*, 2013) have presented original takes on wide-ranging topics, earning the label 'France's female new wave' (Poirier 2011). As this small sample can attest, female directors continue to produce a diverse range of features in France, having 'secured a place within the French film industry, which remains […] remarkably robust' (Tarr 2012: 199).

At the time of my interview with Catherine Breillat in June 2011, the director was undertaking screen tests for her fourteenth feature, *Abus de faiblesse* (*Abuse of Weakness*) starring well-known French rapper (and non-actor) Kool Shen. Based on her novel of the same name (published in 2011) *Abus de faiblesse* went into production in 2012 with Isabelle Huppert in the role of Maud, a disabled intellectual, cast opposite Kool Shen as the conman Viko. The plot is based on the true story of Breillat's experience with real-life conman Christophe Rocancourt, who swindled her out of her life savings as she was recovering from a debilitating stroke suffered in 2005.[40] At the time of writing, the film is approaching its August 2013 release in France.

The year 2013 has also seen film festival launches of new feature films from Claire Denis and Marina de Van. *Les salauds* (*Bastards)* premiered in the *Un Certain Regard* category at the Cannes Film Festival in May. The film reunites Denis with

[40] Rocancourt was sentenced to sixteen months in prison for his crime of *'abuse of weakness'* in February 2012.

several of her frequent collaborators including actor Vincent Lindon, who plays Marco, a ship's captain who returns to land to discover that his niece Justine (Lola Creton) is in hospital[41]. The girl appears to have sustained injures from a sexual episode in which she has actively taken part and Marco's attempts to investigate see him drawn into a dangerous, predatory world, where he eventually crosses paths with the wealthy and repulsive Edouard (Michel Subor), who may well be responsible for the abuse of Justine. It would seem that in this film, as with *L'intrus*, 'characters are elliptical and don't say very much', which in turn creates ambiguity with regards to character motivations and plot events (Badt 2013). Meanwhile, de Van has produced her first English-language feature, *Dark Touch*, which premiered at New York's Tribeca Film festival in April. This film 'stocked only with authentic, disturbing, grounded and serious horror', is set in a remote village in Ireland, and tells the story of eleven-year-old Neve, a girl with telekinetic powers that surface in situations of fear or anxiety (Arbeiter 2013). After the death of her physically and sexually abusive parents, Neve is sent to live with her sympathetic neighbours, but her special powers cannot be tamed and she destroys this second household.

The three new films of Breillat, Denis and de Van each demonstrate thematic and stylistic tendencies in continuity with the bodies of work described throughout this thesis. It is important to note that, for all three directors, the body remains a focus as a material object, and as a site for identity formation and transgression. Interviewed on set of *Abus de faiblesse*, Breillat commented that 'the story is really about a healthy body that's abusing a damaged, weaker body' (Van Hoeij 2013). Although the film's plot explores monetary and emotional manipulation, this suggests that the body remains at the centre of the director's work. Similarly, Denis notes that ' [*Les salauds*] started […] with an idea I had after watching some Kurosawa films of the 1950s and 60s, in which the lead character is Toshiro Mifune. I always thought Vincent Lindon had […] a solid body you can lean on. In Kurosawa's films, the tragedy is that this strong man was crushed by corruption or mistrust at the end. My film started with that body' (Badt 2013). Denis's story also sees the protective male body fail, and like *Abus de faiblesse*, involves monetary deception and transgression. On the other hand, de Van describes Neve's journey in *Dark Touch* as a realisation

[41] *Les salauds* is co-written with Jean-Pol Fargeau, features music by the Tindersticks, and cinematography by Agnès Godard, who shoots on digital stock for the first time.

of 'her inability to establish relationships with other people, as she is incapable of recognising when people are showing her affection or tenderness' (quoted in the *Dark Touch* Press kit 2013). As was the case for Esther in *Dans ma peau*, the young protagonist's transgressive and uncontrollable urges (this time involving the mutilation of others, rather than the self) means that she is alienated from her peers and from society in general. Like *Ne te retourne pas*, De Van's *Dark Touch* explores the physical manifestation of psychological trauma.

Looking closely at the content of the three films described above, one notices the emergence of a trend involving explorations of injured or disabled bodies, the result of illness or abuse. Furthermore, such themes are explored in other recently released French-language films such as *Augustine* (the debut feature for director Alice Winocour, 2012), *De rouille et d'os* (*Rust and Bone,* dir. Jacques Audiard, 2012) and *Amour* (*Love*, dir. Michael Haneke, 2012). This suggests that the *cinéma du corps* remains active as a subject for exploration for both seasoned and debut directors, both male and female, a tendency that deserves further attention in future studies. De Van's decision to produce her third theatrical feature in the English-language is also of interest as a point of further research. The director cites American films *Firestarter* (dir. Mark Lester, 1984), *Carrie* (dir. Brian De Palma, 1976) and *Poltergeist* (dir. Tobe Hooper, 1982) as influences on her new film, meaning that effectively, she is a French director working under the influence of American horror/thriller films. While this English-language project might bring de Van increased recognition outside of her home country, the director has commented on the more relaxed child protection laws in Ireland as one reason for filming outside of France (this allowed her to obtain more risky, gruesome footage).[42] One might also question the difficulty of obtaining full production finance in her home country in the current financial climate as another possible motive. Female directors looking outside of France for funding is not a new phenomenon; Carrie Tarr makes the point that of the 410 films directed or co-directed by women in the 2000s, 87 (21%) were majority French co-productions (2012: 192). Despite the implementation of austerity measures resulting from the European financial crisis, the new leftist government of

[42] In regards to *Dark Touch,* De Van commented that 'I'm not authorised to (film) in France because it is with children. I don't have the authorisation of the child protection agencies in France' Quoted from my personal interview with the director in Paris, June 2011.

François Hollande (elected 6 May 2012) does not appear to have effected drastic changes to the system of film support in France.[43]

Through the integration of formal film analysis, enabling practice, and a final exegetical chapter that charts and further investigates discoveries made through practice, this thesis has produced new knowledge in regards to three female French directors' portrayals of the body. My analysis of the work of Breillat, Denis and de Van has called for a different way of thinking about the body: as a dynamic form affected by physical contact, a dangerous material object with its own motivations and/or as a holder of memory and knowledge. My arguments are drawn from the films themselves, from descriptions of specific sequences and techniques, with reference to the ideas of a range of theorists, and from discoveries made through practice. Furthermore, this study has involved reconsideration of the relationship between the bodies of filmmaker, actor and film viewer in order to account for cinema's capacity to move us viscerally, as well as intellectually and emotionally. I have explored how all three directors adopt stylistic and practical approaches which promote 'film's often undervalued yet most essential of all privileges: the ability to reach a spectator's mind through the intelligence of the affective' (Beugnet 2007: 178). By looking beyond issues of representation to explore practices of writing, preproduction and production, I have investigated the process of embodiment, making links between the directors' working methods and their final film products.

As well as producing new knowledge in regards to the films of Breillat, Denis and de Van, the study of these directors' films, the consequent emulation of the directors' concerns as a method of discovery, and the taking of the body as a starting point for my own film production has fostered a significant change to my own practice as a writer/director in Australia. By drawing upon the work of these filmmakers as a key influence, I have been afforded the opportunity the re-evaluate my established methods of working and to reinvigorate my practice. The question remains as to how I will go forward as a film practitioner? How to incorporate in a sustained way some of the more exciting and innovative approaches of Breillat, Denis and de Van into my future projects as writer/director? As I have noted in my summary of Chapter

[43] Although Hollande has not changed conditions of government film support in France, he has proposed new labour and salary rights for French film crews, which will impact upon the feasibility of low-budget productions. See http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/aug/23/francois-hollande-french-film-industry-row, accessed 6/9/13.

Six, an attempt to do so has its challenges in relation to Australian industrial trends and market forces in the areas of script development and project funding. However, I believe that the ability to utilise a range working methods and approaches when creating film projects, and specifically, when presenting the body on screen, is vital in the pursuit of dynamic imagery and concepts. Moreover, the ability to work with broadened objectives, and to adopt a range of approaches and standpoints as a film practitioner has ramifications for the long-term diversity of Australia's national cinema. As such, I would like to see more emphasis on alternative methods of scriptwriting and directing in Australia, on projects that foster ambiguity rather than certainty, and on projects that choose to portray the body as an embodied, material form. Certainly, all three of these areas deserve further exploration and research in the context of Australian work. With this as one of my goals, I look forward to moving into the next stage of my practice as a writer/director, informed by the extraordinary experience of undertaking this PhD project.

Appendices

Appendix A: *The Sister* Production Log

The Sister was shot in high-definition video over a period of eight days in February 2012. As mentioned, the decision to write/direct a single 25-30 minute film was driven by my feeling that the longer format would allow me to the opportunity to properly explore the concerns of feature film directors. Additionally, considering my low budget of $3,000, I could not financially sustain a longer project, given that this would likely involve a longer shooting period. The decision to film on high-definition video, specifically, using a Canon 5D camera, was made as this was the highest quality camera available to me at the time. I could not afford a 35mm film camera, nor desired to use one, as I considered video to afford a greater degree of spontaneity. A HD video camera allowed me to capture more material, and potentially more varied performances from actors as the unlimited amount of stock facilitated experimentation with different approaches.

I decided early on in the course of my PhD that I wanted my creative project to be a collaboration with the Flinders University Drama Centre, a well-regarded South Australian training institution for actors. I also wanted my film to be a realistic, contemporary drama, in line with the majority of Breillat, Denis, and De Van's films, and because I lacked the budget to undertake a heavily stylised or period drama work. In negotiation with Drama Centre staff, I was given access to four actors aged between nineteen and twenty-three and I was allotted a certain schedule during which I could work with these actors: two production blocks of several weeks. As mentioned earlier, I now had some fairly concrete parameters within which to devise my script. Firstly, the four characters (two male and two female) would all need to have somewhat equal weighting in the story, and, given that I wished to produce a realistic urban drama (to keep art department costs to a minimum), they would all need to be aged in their late teens/early twenties.

With the film script written by December 2011, shooting was scheduled for February 2012. My initial aim was to have the project finished by July 2012, meaning that overall, the time frame involved from preproduction to postproduction was in line with short film projects I had completed in the past.

Initial questions related to my own role in the film production. I was to use Denis, Breillat and de Van's concerns as a guide to be integrated with my own practice but how could I account for the different production circumstances of my actors and crew? My understanding was that 'meaning is context bound- for the practice-led researcher this is an inescapable reality', in other words, meaning is created within the parameters of the possible (Brad Haseman and Daniel Made quoted in Smith and Roger 2009: 216). With this in mind, my initial steps towards this creative project involved decision-making to allow the greatest range of discovery whilst also acknowledging the parameters associated with the film budget, timelines, my background as filmmaker, and that of my cast and of my crew. This falls in line with Smith and Dean's apt description of the process of artistic selection:

> Biological processes hinge on the survival of the fittest, but fitness depends on the environment… Artistic selection processes are likely to be even more arbitrary, and there may be many fine specimens among the practitioner's rejects… In addition, although we might be tempted to think of these choices as individually motivated, they are made in response to broader social and artistic processes (2009: 22).

The authors describe how the narrowing of possibilities may be driven by environmental and other factors, rather than involving active choice. Likewise the narrowing of my list of concerns and other decision making occurred in line with the establishment of other constraints: my choice of actors, crew and the time/money available for the project.

Writing the synopsis

Writing the synopsis posed a considerable challenge as, much like the script writing process itself, I found myself trying to fit the story into a format associated with my culturally shaped concepts of journey, structure and resolution, as was my usual practice. I found myself falling into habits associated with the writing of pitch documents; the result of many years of writing grant applications for various Australian film bodies and institutions. I have not been able to access any such documents written by Denis, Breillat or de Van, and as a result, I can only speculate as to how they might differ. Receiving feedback on my synopsis and script was another problematic area, as my advisors (friends and colleagues also working within

the context of Australian film industry) had a similar bias when considering such documents. The issue of how I could unlearn all that I had learnt was one that I was not fully able to reconcile. Rather, I tried to foreground my research goals as a continuous reference point when revising material.

Preproduction

I moved into the preproduction stage in November 2011, having finalised a 24-page short film script. As mentioned, the majority of the crew assembled for the shoot were Flinders University film students. My first meetings with key crewmembers Hannah Sitters (production design) and David Tang (director of photography) involved a discussion of the film themes with reference to the works of Breillat, Denis, and de Van. I also played crew members musical tracks that I hoped would be incorporated into the film.

Production

Production was scheduled for two blocks of four days over a period of two weeks in February. This was most convenient for the film crew, many of whom were working around part-time jobs and other responsibilities. Our tight shooting schedule meant that minimal lighting was used for interior locations such as the Supermarket and Laundromat- we had permission to film for only a few hours in these locations. More elaborate lighting setups were employed in the apartment locations, as we were at each of these for one full ten-hour day of shooting in each case. Some work was needed to create a continuity of lighting at apartments seemingly next door to one another, which were in fact filmed in different locations.

Generally speaking, the film shoot progressed without incidents of a negative nature. Logistical issues meant that I was forced to reconsider my approach to shot framing, choreography and point of view on more than one occasion. For example, in the scene in which Olivia looks through the pub window and sees Terry with Sally, I had wanted to film over Olivia's shoulder, but the dim evening light in the pub (which was open to the public and busy) meant that it was impossible to see anything when doing so. Putting up lights in the busy pub was not a possibility, therefore the camera was taken inside the pub and Olivia is seen looking through the window. This represents a significant change in point of view, but was unavoidable.

There were also several moments when I added additional action to scenes. For example, I felt the final scene- in which Terry and Olivia split up- to be extremely contrived when the actual filming took place. In particular, the dialogue felt forced and awkward. Therefore I added an additional shot in which the two characters simply walk together, with the hope that they might express their feelings for one another through this action, rather than through dialogue. I also captured a series of tracking shots of empty aisles in the supermarket, thinking that these might be good for adding tension to the scene.

Postproduction

As mentioned, my intention with editing was to construct a series of cuts of the film, aligned with the contrasting styles of the three directors. This would mean different considerations of the passing of time, pacing and arrangement of dialogue, the use of transitions and video effects. The long-takes in the initial 37-minute version of the film somewhat resembled the pacing of scenes in Denis and Breillat's feature films. Early scenes showed the characters observed from a distance as they went about their daily business but unlike Denis's work, this beginning felt clunky and lacked sufficient drama with which to engage the audience. Based on feedback from one of my colleagues, and my own feeling that I would alienate my audience if I did not effectively hook them into the story at the beginning, I set about rearranging the timeline of the film. Scenes from the middle of the script (Sally retrieving Victor's painting from the street at night) were pushed forward, so that those that followed (the daily business of work, university) were further contextualised and therefore, more compelling. This early version of the film did not include any fades or dissolves to transition from one scene to the next, in line with the work of both Breillat and Denis.

Feedback at this point suggested the need to rethink the opening scene of the film. This saw a group of young people being visited by the police; characters who made no reappearance in the story but an action meant to convey the fact that a tragic event (Rose's death) has occurred. It seemed that the focus on these individuals, rather than any of the four lead characters, made it difficult to engage with this event. I therefore decided that Olivia's grief should be the hook through which the audience enters into the story and the cemetery visit scene was pushed to the beginning of the film as a result. I reconsidered the flashback sequences and explored the possibilities

associated with their complete fragmentation and scattering throughout the film. I also decided to move some footage of Victor on the beach, and of Rose's undisclosed dead body to the beginning of the film, hoping that this would clearly and dramatically establish Victor as a questionable character.

I experimented with fragmenting Victor's flashbacks: those in which he is painting Rose, and when she takes drugs at the party. I found that I was able to break these flashbacks up into three or four segments, and by incorporating outtakes, could edit them together to create different meanings. For example, at one point I edited Victor's glances at Rose as he is painting her in order to make him seem as sinister as possible. With dialogue removed, these moments became quite ambiguous in meaning, so that a fading smile, for example, could become a sign of negative emotions. Similarly, blurry outtakes from the night time party scene represented an opportunity to add off screen sounds and/or voices, which could create a sense of danger. By re-editing I aimed to make a stronger link between these flashbacks and the revelation of Victor's character. I wanted the audience to be unsure of his intentions or crime until the final confrontation with Olivia.

When seeking a fresh opinion on the film from a professional producer friend, I was surprised to discover that her reading of the dream sequences was completely different to what I had expected. As I had mixed up fragments of flashbacks involving a party and of Victor painting Olivia's portrait, I had inadvertently created the sense that these two events had occurred at the same time, i.e. that Victor was painting Rose whilst a party was occurring in the house. This gave me reason to reflect: was it problematic for these two events to be interpreted as one? I decided that it did not really matter to the story and that some additional off-screen dialogue could be added to clarify the situation. In this sense, the flashbacks had become much more unified and easier to understand.

After some minor changes, the sixth cut of the film became the final version. As mentioned, this came in at 27 minutes and 30 seconds, including titles and credits. In line with the work of all three directors I have studied, the film is grounded in the principals of continuity editing, the one exception being the moment of Victor and Olivia's final confrontation, in which fast jump cuts (similar to those in the climactic scene of Denis's *White Material*) are used to jar the action. Time constraints meant

that I was not able to consider a variety of edits exploring specific practices relating to each of the directors from my study.

Appendix B: Filmmaker concerns covered in Chapters One to Four

The following list is a summary of Breillat, Denis and de Van's key thematic, stylistic and practical concerns, compiled with the aim of providing a starting point for the creation of my own film production. The practical concerns relate to the process of writing and directing, and are labelled as such. I've grouped this last category of concerns according to the writer/director with whom they are associated.

Theme

Becoming: overcoming gender roles, change in bodily status.

The Unstable Body: Transgression and mutation, identity rebuilding.

Technology remaking the body

Foreignness, memory and trauma

Stylistic approaches

Narrative

Unstable threads, past, present, future intertwined

The jump between dreams and reality

Camera

Haptic Visuality to bring about embodied viewing

Framing: Body as landscape

Camera movement, choreography led by the body

Mise-en-scène

'Any-space-whatevers' as a space for bodily transformation

Corporate/clinical landscapes

Night time/darkness as a space for transgression

Editing

Use of transitions, hard cuts to portray the passing of time.

The fragmentation and reforming of the body

Practical concerns related to writing and directing

Catherine Breillat

Intense actor testing before casting

Lack of rehearsals

No preparation for difficult scenes

No improvisation from the script

Claire Denis

Screenwriting: forming a 'diagram of relations' as a way to create plot

Rehearsing scenes that are not filmed to inform character

Marina de Van

Conducting bodily experiments; actor as uncomfortable body due to clothing or props.

Appendix C: Initial questions for actors

Describe a moment in your life when you have felt like an outsider for some reason.

Have you had an experience of being a foreigner in another town, city or country? If yes, what was it?

Have you ever broken a bone or suffered some other sort of serious injury? What happened and how did you feel?

What do you feel when looking at photographs/video of yourself? Describe a photo/video of yourself that you like/dislike.

Do you have any tattoos or scars? If so, what do they represent?

Have you ever felt unable to control your body? Explain.

Have you ever felt that your body is/was a commodity? Explain.

Appendix D: *The Sister* Synopsis

Tragedy mars a lively suburban beach party when a young woman, Rose, is found drowned on the nearby beach in the early hours of the morning. One year later 20-year-old university student, Olivia, is struggling to come to terms with her older sister's death. Her frustrated partner Terry finds himself increasingly unable to guard against her waves of anger, grief and bitterness.

When Olivia unexpectedly finds herself face to face with Victor, the young man she considers to blame for her sister's death, she is forced to re-examine and deal with her suspicions. Her actions drive Terry away, and instead Victor, the deceased Rose's former boyfriend, becomes the dark focus of Olivia's daily existence.

It soon becomes clear that the similarly angry and confused Victor reciprocates this strange fascination, leading to a dangerous confrontation in which the details surrounding Rose's death are finally revealed.

Appendix E: Interview with Catherine Breillat

Conducted in French, Paris, 27 June 2011. Translated to English by Kath Dooley with the assistance of interpreter Tanya Reznichenko.

A significant part of this interview appears in *The French review* (2013, issue 87:2) in its original French version.

On Performance, Intimacy and the *Abuse of Weakness*: An Interview with Catherine Breillat

Q. How did you approach the (re) writing of the known fairy tales *Barbe Bleue* and *Sleeping Beauty?*

R. I wanted to tell a story that, on the one hand, involved having the two girls in the attic (which are obviously me and my sister) who are reading the story and projecting themselves into the fairy tale. These are fairy tales for children but they are quite terrifying. In fact they teach girls to love the man who kills them. So I don't understand why they are intended for children. The story I'm trying to tell is the girl versus the giant. This is the most interesting and rebellious part of the story. Effectively, the fairy tale becomes something that fits with my work, unlike that of other directors, because of its rebellious and provocative side.

Q. I notice you have two sisters, much like *À ma soeur.* At what point did the idea of inserting the 1950s sisters into the story of *Barbe Bleue* emerge?

R. There are two sisters in *À ma soeur,* yes. The two sisters (in *Barbe Bleue*) are like my sister and me when we were reading Blue Beard. She's my older sister and we were both scared- her 30 seconds before me. You can read the fairy tale, once, ten or one hundred times, and the fearful part is always in the same place. It provokes the same reaction. For example, in the film *Splendour in the Grass* by Elia Kazan (1961), I always cry when Natalie Wood recites the poem, regardless of how many times I see the same thing. It always provokes a reaction.

I like the period of the 1950s and the 1960s because they are timeless. They are unmarked- especially the image of the little girl in the 1950s pinafore. It's a timeless image, the checkered dress. My sister recently bought the same dress for her great niece, with embroidered flowers. It's timeless, the same cut, even now. In *Sleeping Beauty* I mixed the time periods.

Blue Beard is a serial killer. It's a magnificent theme. The idea of the film is subversive because I suggest that she chooses to marry him with full knowledge of what he is. Again, I'm very surprised that this story is intended for children.

Q. We were commenting earlier that you have perhaps started a trend as there are now many films based on fairy tales being produced, but not Disney films. Rather, for adults.

R. Yes, I know. There is the Jane Campion sponsored film *Sleeping Beauty*, which was selected for Cannes.

Q. For me, the cutting between reality and story in *Barbe Bleue* creates a sense that fantasy can be disruptive. Was this your intention?

R. It's hard to find the right word for what it is. Maybe it's subversive because the little girl going towards her killer is in fact abnormal. Seeking out the killer is abnormal and I've always wondered why little girls are supposed to read this. This fairy tale shouldn't be for children. *Sleeping Beauty* yes, it could be a children's fairy tale but *Blue Beard*, not at all. Maybe for sadomasochists.

Obviously, it is very close to the sisters in *À ma soeur.* Here, the second daughter gets ahead of the older daughter and kills her. In *Barbe Bleue* it is more radical because it's done unconsciously. The mother doesn't even realise this as she's too focused on the older girl. She doesn't realise that the second daughter has been killed unconsciously.

Q. Both *Une vraie jeune fille and L'anatomie d'enfer* are based on literary texts- what were the challenges for crafting a screenplay based on existing ideas?

R. When I was twelve years old I wanted to be both a writer and a filmmaker. It was easier to be a writer because you can buy a ream of paper. It's obviously less expensive. To make movies is more difficult as you need money. So that's why I

opted for the first choice. When I wrote *Une vrai jeune fille* I didn't think it would be possible to make it into a movie but of course when I was asked to do so, I did. The book is not at all cinematic, so I had to cut pieces of dialogue and rework them to insert them into the film. The text is very provocative but it wasn't initially geared to be a movie.

Q. You have had repeated collaboration with actors such as Roxanne Mesquida (*À ma soeur, Sex is Comedy [2002], Une vieille maîtresse [The Last Mistress,* 2007*])* and Italian porn star Rocco Siffredi (*Romance, Anatomie de l'enfer [Anatomy of Hell,* 2004]). Do you write with specific actors in mind?

R. Concerning Roxanne in *Fat Girl (À ma soeur)* there were some very bad critical reactions. We have no culture of the teenager in France, thus she was seen as a girl who is beautiful and stupid… so much so that when Roxanne went to England for the first time, she began to apologise for the role. I said, 'no Roxanne, that's not it at all. You're not stupid in the movie. You're just young and inexperienced'. A teenager is taken advantage of by someone with more experience. Later she played the same role again in *Sex is Comedy* […] she played herself in *À ma soeur.*

Q. So it was natural to cast her again in that film?

R. Also, I wanted to give Roxanne a present as she played the role in *À ma soeur* so courageously, and was courageous in the aftermath. Roxanne is my little girl and I love her dearly. When we went to Berlin, Roxanne was asked how I had manipulated her to play the role and the sex scenes, but Roxanne said, 'no, I was born an actress and that was the most beautiful scene of my life', and it's true […]. That (loss of virginity) scene was very difficult as Roxanne was naked for the first time on set, in front of the technicians, in front of everyone. The way it was positioned, I couldn't see her directly… it was a very small set. We shot the scene twenty times and it wasn't because she was bad; rather she was great, but in fact the fourteenth take is what I call the magic take. I don't know why I continued after that fourteenth take, but I had time and I was afraid of this scene as the actor was reluctant about it. I continued and continued and on the twentieth take, it was the longest take. There were silences, and because of the length and silences, it was even better than that fourteenth take. I write a lot of dialogue but the silences are also important.

With Rocco Siffredi it was the same sort of situation. I like it when actors understand what I'm going for and follow through. What was difficult for Rocco was not the sex, or being naked; that was obviously not a problem, but that was not what I wanted from him. In *Romance* we filmed from 10am until 4am. Finally at 4am both of the actors cracked. It wasn't the sex that was difficult. It was more that the actors couldn't stand each other any more […]. At that point, I spoke of 350 porno films of Rocco Siffredi and I think he understood that I didn't want Rocco the porn star. I wanted something else: Rocco, the private side; the vulnerable side of him. After that, he filmed the scene, and then didn't even want to come back for the synchronisation because at that point he had made himself vulnerable in the film. It wasn't Rocco the porn star; it was Rocco the person.

I really valued Rocco for his intelligence and was very touched by his work (in *Romance*). Because of this, I wanted to work with him again. I wrote *Anatomie de l'enfer* specifically for Rocco. It was the first time that I did that, as he understood me. He knew very well that even if there were somewhat pornographic scenes, it was the opposite of his image that I wanted. The fact that (his character) is a man who does not love women, who has trouble getting it up- it was something that was a risk to his career as a porn star. But he didn't hesitate. He gave it his all. In fact, he gave a gift of himself to the movie, for the art. There's a sacrificial aspect to this process and for me, the way I see sex scenes is that they have a ritualistic aspect to them, of sacrifice. Both Rocco and Roxanne know the difference between the artistic and the fiction in a sex scene. It goes beyond the sex.

Q. Has your relationships with these actors allowed for experimentation within your work and how are their performances approached differently than those of actors with whom you have no history?

R. I look for people who will become my actors. They give me something that hasn't been seen by anyone before […]. My work is like that of a painter- I look at the face, the colour, the character and I work that way. I use unknown actors. I see hundreds of them and I do the casting myself with my assistant. I don't use a casting director because they may not see the actors the same way I see them. I choose them because I see myself in them. I have to see myself in them and then they belong to me. They

are my actors and it's a mutual fascination. It's like falling in love- you don't choose who you fall in love with. You just do!

After I choose the actors there is a preparation process during which time I don't see them at all. I only see them again for costuming, because I'm very hands-on with the costumes. Since my work with the actors is like love at first sight when I choose them, I don't want to see them before we start filming lest I become disgusted with them. I love them as I film them, not in their daily life. I don't want to see them then.

I often say that I invent my actors. We never have rehearsal- I film them right away. What happens is that, on-set, I work out the choreography of the scene in the morning with my assistant and then I call in the technical people and work out the technical details like tracking, the focus, the shot and so forth, according to my very precise choreography. Then I insert the actors into the set and we calibrate the technical aspects as obviously people are different sizes and have different movements. We take that into account. Then we shoot right away without rehearsal. They say their lines and I film it right away because what if the first time works? You may never get that again. So I want to capture it from the very beginning.

Q. Roxanne Mesquida has commented, 'Travailler avec Catherine est une aventure très physique' (*Sex is Comedy* press kit, 2002). Describe your approach to actors in the stage of preproduction.

R. I have to pose the actors like a painter and I'm very particular. I move their bodies this way and that way. The hair, I might pat down with my own saliva to put it in place. I think in an English speaking country I might get in trouble for all this! In fact, as an example, in *Une vieille maîtresse (The Last Mistress,* 2007*)* I found that Fud (the lead male actor) wasn't kissing the actress like a man should, so I said 'No, you're not doing it right'. I grabbed Asia Argento (the lead female actor) and I showed him how I wanted him to do it. Asia told me that such a thing wouldn't work in the United States but of course she was happy that I did it, as it's a liberating approach to filmmaking when the director dares to do something. As a result the actors dare do more things and they're more open. They lose their inhibitions because if the director does it- I did it in front of the whole crew- and I'm the boss, the actors feel freer to open up. But it wasn't on purpose, I didn't plan to do it. I just followed my instinct.

With Roxanne, in the main scene where she loses her virginity in *Fat Girl*, I was bending her and she said, 'Hey, you're touching me!' And I said, 'No, the film is touching you'. It's true. Also, Rocco Siffredi, when he is with Caroline Ducey (in *Romance*): how should she act? I took his dick and I told Caroline Ducey, this is how I want you to touch it. It was an impulse and I followed it and that's the way I work. It is not premeditated. It's my style and I'm very faithful to what I feel.

Q. Do you encourage your actors to improvise or break from the script?

R. No. They don't have the right to improvise but they do have freedom. I'm very strict with the choreography and all that but a take can't be magical unless there is some sort of accident or something unexpected. Otherwise it's very academic and stilted. So the actors can't improvise but they have the freedom to let the magic happen and surprise me.

Q. You have commented that you dislike storyboards.

R. It's important otherwise it's very boring. There is more to a film than storyboards. It is on the set that we make the storyboard, except when there are special effects. There, a storyboard is needed.

Q. What are your greatest concerns on-set? Risk taking vs. control?

R. On the set I take control and then I can take a risk. Otherwise I might bore myself. Let me tell you a little story. I was very good friends with Andy Warhol- he was in Paris filming *Love* and Don Johnson was directing the filming. All the actors lived together closely in the same apartment and I was surprised to learn that Andy Warhol didn't visit the set during filming. I asked him why was that? And he said, otherwise, when I see the dailies I'd be bored. This way I'm not bored as I see them for the first time. Like Andy Warhol, I don't want to be bored. I like to possess the actors when they're on set but I don't like to take them with me into daily life.

Q. How do you prepare actors for scenes involving 'heavy material' such as the rape at the end of *À ma soeur*?

R. I don't prepare the actors at all. It's the same thing. All the things thought to be impossible before filming are filmed. Preparation would mean the actors would be stressed out with anxiety and fear. But when you're backed up against the wall,

everything is easy. You just do it. These private scenes… they seem impossible to do at first, but when you actually do them it's not difficult at all. It's cinema. What's difficult is the thought of taking your clothes off and doing private things with complete strangers. However, when it's on film it becomes normal and easy and it makes people happy when they know that the scene is a success. In fact, the more fear there is, the happier you are to have surmounted it.

Concerning the last scene of *À ma soeur,* the car windows had to be broken but in a very precise way, so I didn't use an actor but a stuntman. The scene in which Anaïs is thrown to the ground had to be done carefully so that she was not hurt. She was not able to be sexual. She was fourteen, a minor, a little girl. I mean, mentally she was obviously more mature than that, but physically she was a little girl. So there were questions about how to film this difficult scene. I had a great deal of responsibility because otherwise, it could border on paedophilia.

I thought a lot about it. It was necessary to cheat. How to go about it and create this strong content? So I came up with a solution in the middle of the night. I was not going to make her take off her underpants, thus there were two pairs. In the tracking shot, she was thrown on the ground. Then there was a close-up of her chest. You only saw the chest and then you saw the skirt go up over her head. The assistant gave the second pair of underwear to the stuntman to put in his mouth and you couldn't see the underwear that she was actually still wearing. It looks very violent but in fact you don't see anything.

So, the question is, what can you do in this situation? How do you make the scene powerful? How do you save the scene because you want the audience to believe that something violent is happening but it's actually only a thought? Something symbolic is needed.

Q. You have recently worked in digital formats. How has this affected your production methods?

R. It's great. Unfortunately there aren't many screens for that. Despite the fact that, for the past ten years everyone has been saying that High Definition is the future of film and that's the way things are going, which I agree with by the way. Previously the image was very raw and everything was very flat, like the crude images once

seen on television, but now they have new cameras and new equipment that allows the poetry of film to come through with a new quality. I like my images to be very sharp, not blurry, as perhaps some actresses would prefer.

The two fairytales (*Blue Beard* [2009] and *Sleeping Beauty* [2010]) were funded by television and so had to be delivered on HD. They gave (me) very little money for that. I had made all my previous films on 35mm. With, *Blue Beard*, I was afraid of the HD so I also shot it using super-sixteen, however it was never edited, and the film came out in HD.

Q. Emma Wilson (2001) has described your work as disrupting traditional means of showing distance and control. Films such as *Romance* and *L'Anatomie d'enfer* have explored this through the use of extreme close-ups of the female body. How did you approach these shots?

R. The frame is very cold, so in opposition, what is inside has to be very intimate. I tell my actors that I should be between them, between their bodies and that's where the viewer should be too. That creates a very intimate space. The viewer should be inside, between the bodies, not outside sitting in a seat.

Also, as far as the emotions go, there should be the element of the forbidden. I'm not saying physically. But on an emotional level, that is what is taboo. Emotional taboo. I want to specify here because I have shot very explicit scenes and I'm talking about the level of emotion. The emotion should be felt live, like you are sharing this very private emotion of love between the actors. I think that is the thing most specific to my films, right from the start. That's why you can love my films or hate them. In France unfortunately it's more hate.

Q. You seem to favour objective views of your protagonists, rather than subjective POV shots that allow us to see through their eyes. What is your approach to camera positioning?

R. I don't like the objective. Not at all. Pour me, objectivity equals reality and that's not what I am looking for. I'm looking for truth or the myth. Everyone- newspapers, TV, tries to show reality but for me realism is not interesting because reality is fleeting. It is temporary, whereas myth is timeless. Sophocles, Racine, Shakespeare:

they are eternal and even though they talk about kings and princesses, they're really talking about us. It's always us, as long as we can understand the literature.

Q. With a large number of female directors having made first and/or second feature films in the 1990s and 2000s, as well as those who have added to a considerable body of work, some writers have suggested a shift in the mainstream of film production in France. To what extent do you believe this to be true?

R. I think that each filmmaker is different. The first female filmmaker, for me, who created a masterpiece, was Barbara Loden with *Wanda*. And of course there are lots of male filmmakers who have created masterpieces. For me, what's important is the name, the signature, not whether the filmmaker is male or female. Films by Almodovar, Bergman, Kazan, Lynch, Tarantino, you recognise that they have a signature. As far as your question as to whether the mainstream has changed with the influx of female filmmakers, well the presence of these women certainly breaks the monotony. It gives a different point of view and of course female filmmakers aren't as much navel gazers as the male ones. They tend to do that less. Certainly they have a different point of view about women than a male filmmaker because men sometimes just don't know women; they have incorrect perceptions. Of course, having both points of view and having them cross and intercept- that's very interesting. The great filmmakers have their own point of view that they impose and it's not a matter of whether they are male or female. Some create works of art while others create films.

Q. What does the future involve in terms of projects?

R. My next project is to make a film based on my book *Abus de faiblesse* (*Abuse of Weakness*). This is about a legal definition that is specific to France. I know this area personally, based on my own experience, hence better than any other author, so I'm going to make a film about it. We lodge a complaint for it (in France), thus it is something very special.

It's a very strange phenomenon because, with a rape for example, it's very clear that there is a victim and a perpetrator but with this phenomenon is more difficult to understand. I wrote a book about it but it's only in the film that I can explain what it

is, the intimacy involved. It's difficult to explain, but you will see what I mean in the film. There is no clear limit between the one who commits the abuse of weakness and the one who becomes the victim […]. It's about when you become addicted to the manipulation. There's an addictive aspect so that you are aware of the manipulation but you can't help giving into it. That creates the ambiguous situation.

Q. What stage is this project at?

R. I have the script and I am going to film with Isabelle Huppert. I'm also thinking of using a well-known French rapper (Kool Shen) who is not an actor at all. Yesterday I did trials with him. It's a bit like beauty and the beast or the petty criminal and the intellectual. Tomorrow I'm going to look at the dailies from the trials. Since he's not an actor, but is very well known in France, I decided to do it in a two-step process. The first stage involved him coming in and seeing how films work, and the second stage involved him entering into the role. He has experience on the stage performing in front of thousands of people but it's really not the same as filming with the camera. In fact, it's the opposite.

So far I've been pleasantly surprised. Some things have worked better than if he were a professional actor. I filmed him for 1 hour 45 minutes rather than just doing one take, which is a days worth of filming. Up until now I have been happy with what I've seen but now it is necessary to take a step back. If I choose him, then the theme becomes very obvious; however, if I used an actor playing a role, perhaps the theme would not jump out as much. Really the two of them (the rapper and Isabelle Huppert) are a world apart. When I say that […], it's not in terms of fame, as he is perhaps a bigger star than she is in France. What I mean is that they are worlds apart culturally, the rapper from the suburbs of Paris, the ghetto, and then the world of cinema. The actress Isabelle Huppert is very intellectual and has a very bourgeois image… their audiences are very different and his audience certainly wouldn't know Isabelle Huppert or me.

Q. It's interesting that he is interested in working with Isabelle Huppert…

R. He is terrific.

Q. And you will film in HD?

R. Yes, unless if due to funding, I have to film in 35 mm. I very much want to film in HD. But we don't have enough screens (in France) that are well suited to HD. I saw *Sleeping Beauty* in Toronto and it looked great on the screen. The colours were right and there were no lines. It was a sublime image on a very big screen adapted for the HD. I think that the infrastructure in France and the US is lacking when it comes to HD. It's like… last year you didn't have it but now you can't live without it. Everything moves very quickly in terms of technology. I think that by the time I'm finished with the movie, the infrastructure will have improved. At the moment, in French cinema complexes, the best screens are for 35mm. But if as Toronto has, they make a magnificent room for the HD, then it is better than the 35mm.

Q. Do people here often film in HD and transfer to 35mm?

R. That's archaic. Why do that? Why not have the movie theatre change to HD?

Q. Yes. It's rare to find HD cinemas in Australia too.

R. It's the future. In France we have more HD screens than in he US. The future is very close to us as the world is so rapidly changing.

Appendix F: Interview with Marina de Van

Conducted in English, Paris, 25 June 2011

Q. Two of your films seem to involve an idea of anxiety concerning space and moving furniture. Was that a conscious connection between the two films?

R. You mean *Psyche-Show?*

Q. Yes

R. Yes, I see the connection. These are my observations, how appearances are only appearances. You can't be sure that the real world is real or isn't real. This is the way I approach this moving furniture. It's only a criterion to see that the reality is fake.

Q. Both of your films have a protagonist with issues relating to her body in a corporate environment.

R. What is a corporate environment?

Q. Like business, La Defense. Also in *Ne te retourne pas*, the idea of consumerism in the home. With the character of Jeanne, it seemed like her apartment was a very consumerist environment- the changing furniture, the changing décor. Is this an idea that you are exploring consciously?

R. No. This is not conscious.

Q. Video cameras play an important part in *Ne te retourne pas*, and a stills camera in Dans ma Peau.

R. Which camera in *Dans ma Peau*?

Q. Where she is taking photos at the end. Is there a link there with the idea of recording yourself and taking your image from a photo?

R. Yes.

Q. What are your thoughts on this?

R. It's an echo of my own situation as director. Also the idea that the recorded image can reveal some aspects that we don't see in the living moments of life.

Q. It seems almost like Jeanne's image was being drawn from the photos and from the video rather than recorded by the video. Would that be fair to say?

R. No, the recorded image shows the reality that she doesn't see in her life, because there is a distance. The photos have the same function.

Q. The moment in *Ne te retourne pas* where she turns into the child reminded me of Hitchcock. Is he an influence?

R. Why does it remind you of Hitchcock?

Q. The camera angles and vertigo effects when she is walking down the hallway and shrinking.

R. I like Hitchcock very much. All directors are influenced by Hitchcock I think. That's basic. I'm not influenced by him more than any other director, I think. Not especially.

Q. With your first film, *Dans ma peau,* the beginning and end has the split screen sequence. Was that something that was written in the script or did it come in editing?

R. It was written in the script. Not the opening sequences but for the end, yes, it was written like that.

Q. In terms of being the lead actor as well as the director of the film- is that something that you intend to do again in the future?

R. No it's too much work.

Q. How did you approach it?

R. I had a coach who prepared me and who was there most of the time to direct me on the set.

Q. What sort of exercises did you do with him to prepare?

R. We repeated scenes of the script. I don't remember the exercises we might have done as it was too long ago.

Q. With the second feature, it was obviously a very high budget film compared to the first one. How did this change your approach?

R. It didn't change because it wasn't a big enough budget for what I had to do. It was very little money for what was needed, so I was still using a very straight economy. I had to make some compromises and efforts.

Q. Did you feel as though you had less control, having more coproduction partners?

R. No, we had some problems with the visual effects, because of the composition work. We had some problems with a society (company) that fucked up the work, so we had very little time to do it. Finally, we couldn't achieve them as I wanted in time. Really, it's not finished. This was a problem of coproduction but otherwise, it was only some obligations of shooting in this place rather than this place… of collaborating with people of different nationalities. It was okay.

Q. What was it like to work as a second-time-director with Sophie Marceau and Monica Belluci?

R. It was great. They were very nice and very easy to work with. So, it was cool.

Q. I read that you didn't have the two of them together on the set?

R. No, I had the two of them together for a few days.

Q. What did you do to rehearse them to play the same role?

R. I did nothing. I tried to catch some similarities with my camera but it was already written in the script and they had nothing special to do to be similar as there were the visual effects to assume the transformation. I didn't rehearse them especially.

Q. In terms of future projects, what have you planned?

R. My next project will be in Ireland in October.

Q. Filmed in Ireland?

R. Yes, in English. A horror movie.

Q. Why Ireland?

R. Because I don't have the right… I'm not authorised to do it in France because it is with children. I don't have the authorisation of the child protection agencies in France.

Q. In terms of your career at the moment, what are the biggest challenges going towards a third film?

R. I don't think in those terms… of challenges, or career. I'm not this kind of person.

Q. I notice that there was a big break between the first and second film.

R. It took a very long time to find financial ways to do *Ne te retourne pas*.

Q. I noticed that sound is very important in *Ne te retourne pas*. There is a sort of thumping sound

(Discussion about the meaning of thumping)

Q. How closely do you work with your sound designer?

R. Very closely. I am very interested in sound design. I send some ideas and solutions.

Q. Do you think about music before shooting?

R. No. During editing only.

Q. What about art department- costume and props? Are you involved in that?

R. Not so much. I just check what is done but I like to let my collaborators work on their own.

Q. Some academic writers have labelled your work as part of the *cinéma du corps.* What do you think of this label?

R. I think that it is wrong as my cinema isn't about the body; it's about the mind and the identity. My interest is in identity and how the body escapes this identity, or doesn't escape. The body is just a vehicle for some questions and ideas. It's not just the body that interests me.

Q. Will your next film be following along the same lines in terms of theme?

R. No, because it is a horror movie. There is some telekinesis… I don't see a link.

Q. On the interview included in the special features for *Ne te retourne pas*, both Sophie Marceau and Monica Belluci described you as an 'auteur.'

R. It is logical as I wrote the film.

Q. In Australia, the term 'auteur' is used for grand directors, such as Jean-Luc Goddard, with expectation…

R. So it is a compliment. I am grateful that they compliment me.

Q. Did you feel pressure working with them?

R. No.

Q. In France, you have so many films produced each year, and there are so many female directors. Some articles I have read have suggested that the nature of cinema in France, in the mainstream, has changed in the last 10-20 years, as there are more women directing films. What do you think?

R. I don't know because I don't know very much of the French cinema of today. I don't go to the cinema very often and I don't know so many women directors.

Q. In terms of the industry here, it seems as though a lot of support is given to first and second-time directors, by the CNC…

R. I didn't have the CNC support for *Ne te retourne pas.*

Q. Do you think that France is a difficult place to make films.

R. It is a very difficult place to make films but I don't know how to compare, as I don't know other places. I'm not able to make a comparison but it is difficult, yes.

Appendix G: Filmographies

The following list comprises feature films and short works that each filmmaker has directed.

Catherine Breillat

Abus de failbesse (*Abuse of Weakness*)	2013
La belle endormie (*Sleeping Beauty*)	2010
Barbe Bleue (*Blue Beard*)	2009
Une vieille maîtresse (*The Last Mistress*)	2007
Anatomie de l'enfer (*Anatomy of Hell*)	2004
Sex is Comedy	2002
Brève traversée (*Brief Crossing*)	2001
À ma soeur! (*Fat Girl* or *For My Sister*)	2001
Romance	1999
Parfait amour! (*Perfect Love*)	1996
"*Aux Niçois qui mal y pensent*" in: *À propos de Nice, la suite* (TV segment)	1995
Sale comme un ange (*Dirty Like an Angel*)	1990
36 fillette (*Virgin*)	1988
Tapage nocturne (*Nocturnal Uproar*)	1979
Une vraie jeune fille (*A Real Young Girl*)	1976

Claire Denis

Les salauds (*Bastards*)	2013
To the Devil (short)	2011
White Material	2009
35 rhums (*35 Shots of Rum*)	2008
Vers Mathilde (*Towards Matilda*, documentary)	2005
L'Intru (*The Intruder*)	2004
Vendredi soir (*Friday Night*)	2002
"*Vers Nancy*" in: *Ten Minutes Older: The Cello* (short)	2002
Trouble Every Day	2001
Beau travail (*Good Work*)	1999
Nénette et Boni (*Nenette and Boni*)	1996
"*Nice, Very, Very, Nice*" in: *À propos de Nice, la suite* (short)	1995
Boom-Boom	1994
"*US go home*" in: *Tous les garçons et les filles de leur âge* (TV segment)	1994
J'ai pas sommeil (*I Can't Sleep*)	1994
"*Monologues*" in: *La Robe A Cerceaux* (TV segment)	1993
Keep It for Yourself (short)	1991
S'en fout la mort (*No Fear, No Die*)	1990
Cinéma de notre temps: Jacques Rivette, le veilleur (documentary)	1990
Man No Run (documentary)	1989
Chocolat (*Chocolate*)	1988

Marina de Van

Dark Touch	2013
Hop-o'-My-Thumb (Telemovie)	2011
Ne te retourne pas (*Don't Look Back*)	2009
La Promenade (*The Stroll*, short)	2007
L'épicerie (*The Spice Shop*, short)	2003
L'hôpital (*The Hospital*, short)	2003
L'hôtel (*The Hotel*, short)	2003
Dans ma peau (*In My Skin*)	2002
Psy-Show (short)	1999
Alias (short)	1999
La poseuse (*The Affected Person*, short)	1997
Rétention (*Retention*, short)	1997
Bien sous tous rapports (*Respectable*, short)	1996

Appendix H: *The Sister* Script

THE SISTER

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1. EXT. BEACH HOUSE- MORNING 1.

A group of YOUTHS in their early twenties sit or stand around the door way of a beach house. Their unkempt summer dress and the mess in the front yard suggest that it is the morning after a big party.

The youths exchange anxious and bewildered glances; their expressions are grave.

Two police officers exit from the front door and walk towards a car parked nearby.

The bewildered youths sit in silence.

2. EXT. BEACH- EARLY MORNING 2.

Small waves roll and crash onto the shore of an empty beach.

ROLL TITLE 'THE SISTER'

3. INT. LOUNGE ROOM- DAY 3.

TERRY (21) tall and dark haired in jeans and a work shirt, is pulling on a pair of heavy work boots. He grunts and strains as he pulls the long laces extremely tight, then ties them with a grimace.

4. INT. BAKERY- DAY 4.

Bubbly dark-blonde haired SALLY (20) is serving several customers in the busy bakery. A customer makes an order but Sally's concentration is broken for a moment. Sally stares out through the window at the several people passing by outside.

5. EXT. STREET- DAY 5.

VICTOR (23) wears a baseball cap and carries a skateboard as he walks along a busy city street.

6. EXT. SKATE PARK- DAY 6.

Victor sits alone at the side of the busy skate park. With his hat pulled down, he appears to be avoiding the gaze of others.

We see that Victor has graffiti-like tags drawn on his arm with blue ball-point pen.

7. INT/EXT. FURNITURE WORKSHOP/RETAIL OUTLET- AFTERNOON 7

Terry exits the workshop through a back door, waving over his shoulder to a seated COLLEAGUE.

TERRY
Catch you Monday!

COLLEAGUE
See ya Terry.

8. INT. PUB- EVENING 8.

Terry sits with the similarly aged JONNO and several other men, watching football on a large screen TV. The other men are dressed in corporate wear, unlike Terry. Each man has a beer in hand. Suddenly they break into cheer, suggesting that the team has scored a goal. Terry raises his hands into the air, like an umpire proclaiming a goal, and grins widely.

JONNO (TO TERRY)
...They've given me a heap of boring discovery work to do.

TERRY
You're still the new boy at the firm. Must be better than fixing cupboards.

JONNO
You reckon?

TERRY
Wish I had the brains for law.

Terry knocks back the remainder of his pint and heads to the bar.

Sally enters the pub and sits nearby as he waits to be served. Terry looks. Sally looks back with a smile as the barman approaches her.

SALLY
Hi.

TERRY
Hi.

Terry glances back to his mates as another round of football related cheering breaks out. Then he smiles at Sally.

9. INT. LECTURE THEATRE- EVENING 9.

OLIVIA (19) is distracted as she listens to the monotone voice of a psychology lecturer.

She fingers a silver ring worn on her left hand, nervous.

The lecture ends and the many students stand up to leave. Olivia follows suit.

10. EXT. UNIVERSITY- EVENING 10.

Olivia leaves the university through wrought iron gates, crossing a narrow street and adjacent footbridge. The reflection of lights glisten on the surface of a medium sized river below.

Olivia looks down at the water and shivers.

11. EXT. RIVERSIDE- EVENING 11.

With a backpack over her shoulder, Olivia walks briskly along a bitumen track at the side of the river, in and out of the light.

12. INT. SUPERMARKET- NIGHT 12.

Olivia browses supermarket aisles, holding a plastic basket half full with assorted vegetables and canned goods. She reaches the end of the aisle and circles into the next. Then suddenly Olivia freezes.

Victor, now dressed to reveal his status of supermarket employee, is stacking canned goods onto a shelf several metres away.

Olivia stares, distressed, but unable to look away.

Victor turns and sees her. He too freezes, so that they stare at one another with locked gazes. After a moment, Olivia breaks away. She flees into the neighbouring aisle, dumping her basket of groceries onto a shelf as she passes.

KANE, (25) in mangers uniform, passes and observes Victor, who is still reeling from the exchange.

KANE
Victor! Pick up the pace.

13. INT. TOWN HOUSE LOUNGEROOM— NIGHT 13.

Terry sits in a lounge chair, picking the strings of an acoustic guitar to produce a quiet melody. He hums along. Behind him, the front door opens and Olivia enters. She approaches, surprising him. Terry jumps.

OLIVIA
You never play for me anymore.

Terry kisses Olivia on the top of the head.

TERRY
Have you eaten?

Olivia slumps into an adjacent chair and doesn't respond.

TERRY (CONT'D)
What's up?

OLIVIA
I saw him.

TERRY
Who?

OLIVIA
Victor. Victor Mills.

Terry absorbs this information with a frown.

TERRY
I thought he moved away.

OLIVIA
Well he's back.

Terry hugs Olivia's shoulders from behind. She pulls away.

TERRY
Did he say anything?

Olivia shakes her head.

TERRY (CONT'D)
Maybe you should talk to him.

Olivia recoils. Terry observes her twisted expression.

OLIVIA
If it wasn't for him Rose would still be alive.

Terry frowns.

14. EXT. APARTMENT BLOCK- NIGHT 14.

A large two-storey block of suburban cream brick apartments.

15. INT. BEDROOM- NIGHT 15.

Loud metal music blasts from a stereo.
Pen is applied onto skin in close-up.

Victor sits on a small bed, pressing a ball-point pen, hard, against his inner forearm, almost drawing blood as he sketches a small female face.

Several attractive and well executed paintings, including a portrait of a young dark haired woman that somewhat resembles Olivia, are pushed up against the wall in his room, along with paint brushes and other tools.
We hear banging on the door.

Victor ignores it.

The bedroom door bursts open and Kane, now in casual dress, bursts in. He storms towards the stereo and turns it off.

KANE
How many times have I gotta ask you to turn that down, huh?

Victor turns away, lying down on his bed.

KANE (CONT'D)
Shit. I get you a job. I let you move in...

VICTOR
You sound more like dad by the minute.

Kane glares at him, then notices that Victor has the remnants of a joint in an ashtray nearby. He curses.

KANE
Get your shit together or you're out.

Kane exits and slams the door.

Victor lights up the remainder of the joint and takes a drag.

16. INT. OTHER APARTMENT BEDROOM- NIGHT 16.

Sally is lying on her bed, staring up at a string of painted Chinese lanterns that dangles over head. We hear the metal music coming from an adjacent apartment. She flicks on a small radio, and a more agreeable rock tune overrides the other music. Sally flicks through a collection of newly printed photos.

17. INT. BATHROOM- NIGHT 17.

We see many, many photographs of people, places and animals pinned to bathroom walls. Sally enters and blue-tacks two new photos- of people passing in the street near the bakery- to the wall.

She looks.

Sally pulls a picture loose from the wall. It is an older photograph of a blonde haired woman nursing a similarly blonde haired child.

Sally stares at the picture of the woman and child, then replaces it on the wall.

18. INT. BEDROOM- NIGHT 18.

Sally hums along to the rock track, then begins to dance, staring at herself in the dressing-table mirror.

We see a small obituary card at the back of the dressing-table: a photo of the blonde haired woman, now obviously passed away.

The song ends and another, quieter song begins. Sally notices that the metal music coming from outside has stopped. She looks out her bedroom window.

Outside, we see Victor walking towards the garbage bin area with several paintings under his arm.

Sally picks up a small digital camera and takes a photo of him.

In a still image (photo) we see that Victor’s face is full of anger.

Sally watches as Victor attempts to fit the paintings in the bin, but they are too large. He eventually dumps them on the ground nearby.

19. INT. APARTMENT BLOCK STAIRWELL- NIGHT 19.

Carrying a plastic bag of kitchen rubbish, Sally descends the stairs as Victor ascends. She smiles as he nears. Victor does not smile back.

20. EXT. STREET- NIGHT 20.

Sally stares at the attractive portrait of the dark haired girl, now thrown on the side of the road. It seems too good to throw out. She picks it up, leaving Victor's other paintings next to the bin, and returns inside.

21. EXT. RIVERSIDE- NIGHT 21.

The moon's reflection glistens on the surface of the water.

22. INT. BEDROOM (FLASHBACK)- NIGHT 22.

We see a silver necklace fastened around the neck of a dark haired girl wearing a school uniform (Olivia). Her face is not visible.

OLIVIA (FACE OFFSCREEN)
C'mon Rose. Just once. I promise I'll look after it.

The arms of another girl, also in uniform, wrap around Olivia's shoulders. The necklace sparkles.

ROSE (FACE OFFSCREEN ALSO)
If you break it, you're dead.

Olivia smiles.

ROSE (CONT'D)
He'd better be worth it.

23. INT. BEDROOM- NIGHT 23.

Olivia lies under covers at the side of a double bed in the dark room. Her eyes blink open and she stares at the wall.

Terry lies at the opposite side, staring at the opposite wall. He turns and looks at Olivia's still body. Terry puts his arm over her side but Olivia wriggles, casting him off.

Terry turns onto his back and sighs.

Olivia closes her eyes.

24. EXT. CEMETERY- DAY 24.

Terry stands with his hands in his pockets, restless, surrounded by gravestones.

Nearby, Olivia stares at a small plaque on the ground, which is surrounded by flowers.

Suddenly Olivia turns and looks into the distance, feeling as though she is being watched.

From Olivia's point of view we see the cemetery, devoid of people other than the now slightly anxious Terry.

TERRY
Okay?

Olivia nods and turns back to the plaque.

25. INT. PUB- AFTERNOON 25.

Terry sits alone at the bar, watching sport as he finishes a beer.

Victor enters and sits down nearby. Terry recognises him but Victor is oblivious.

TERRY
Victor?

Victor looks, suspicious.

VICTOR
Yeah, so.

TERRY
I'm Terry. I'm with Olivia.

Victor looks uneasy.

TERRY (CONT'D)
She said she saw you.

Victor casts his eyes away.

TERRY (CONT'D)
It's hit her hard...

VICTOR
I don't need her help to feel bad.

Terry sips his beer in awkward silence. Victor nods at the approaching bar tender.

26. INT. TOWNHOUSE KITCHEN- NIGHT 26.

Olivia is chopping vegetables in preparation for dinner. She looks up as the front door opens. Terry appears and gives her a quick kiss.

OLIVIA
About time.

TERRY
Sorry.

Terry takes off his jacket and sits down at the kitchen table. Olivia scrutinises him as she chops, seeing that something is on his mind.

TERRY (CONT'D)
Victor came into the pub.

Olivia puts down the vegetable knife.

TERRY (CONT'D)
We had a beer.

OLIVIA
You spoke to him?!?

TERRY
He lives really close by. I think you should speak to him.

OLIVIA
I don't believe this. Are you taking his side?

TERRY
I'm impartial.

Olivia's eyes are enraged.

OLIVIA
It's got nothing to do with you.

Terry's expression turns to anger.

TERRY
What?? It’s got everything to do with me. Everything!

OLIVIA
This makes me feel sick.

TERRY
You’re like a ghost.

OLIVIA
Get out.

Terry pauses for a moment. Olivia holds her ground and returns his angry stare.

TERRY
Olivia...

OLIVIA
Get out!

Terry gathers his jacket and leaves.

Olivia, is stunned. She stares at her pile of cut vegetables.

27. INT. PUB- NIGHT 7PM 27.

Terry returns to the pub and sits down on a stool near the bar. He rubs his head in his hands before noticing that Sally is sitting nearby, scrawling in a small journal with an almost finished beer at hand. Sally smiles.

SALLY
Hello again.

TERRY
Hi... Sally.

SALLY
That’s right.

TERRY
You work in the bakery around the corner don’t you?

SALLY
I thought I’d seen you in there!

Terry orders a drink.

SALLY (CONT'D)
Do you like travel? I was just thinking of all the places I want to go.

TERRY
Yeah?

SALLY
I want to go everywhere, you know. To Brazil, to China... all over the world.

TERRY
Sounds great.

Terry is trying to hide his poor mood, but not doing a very good job of it.

SALLY
What's up?

Sally's sparkling eyes probe him gently.

TERRY
It's just.. I had a big fight... with my girlfriend.

Sally tries to hide her disappointment.

TERRY (CONT'D)
Stupid really.

SALLY
Do you fight a lot?

TERRY
Sorry to unload.

SALLY
It's okay. (Pause) I'm going to get another drink.

Terry nods.

TERRY
Are you here on your own?

28. EXT. PUB- NIGHT 28.

Olivia hugs herself in the cold as she approaches the pub on foot. She stops near the door and looks in through a window.

From Olivia's point of view we see Terry and Sally in animated conversation. Both are smiling.

Olivia observes them for some moments with a blank expression. Then she turns and leaves.

29. INT. PUB- LATER 29.

Sally and Terry dance to a band playing at the back of the pub, along with many other patrons. Both appear to be having a great time.

We see a series of still photos of Terry smiling at the camera- happy, joking and drunk.

30. EXT. STREET- NIGHT 30.

Olivia walks along the dark and shadowed street, avoiding the gaze of late night passers-by.

31. EXT. SKATE PARK- NIGHT 31.

Victor is alone, skating up and down ramps in the concrete park.

Olivia stands in the shadows, watching from across the road.

Victor stops skating and looks up. Olivia catches his eye. He squints at her.

Olivia holds her breath.

Victor takes steps in her direction.

Olivia turns to flee.

VICTOR
Hey!

Victor stops. His expression is desperate as he watches Olivia disappear into darkness.

32. INT. SALLY'S BEDROOM- MORNING 32.

Terry opens his eyes, extremely hung over.

A string of Chinese lanterns dangles over his head.

He turns and sees Sally sleeping on the bed beside him. Both are still wearing their clothes from the night before, and are partially covered by a patchwork quilt. Terry rolls onto his back and rubs his eyes with a grimace.

Sally stirs. After a moment she turns to glimpse at Terry through strands of her unkempt hair.

SALLY
Hey Terry.

TERRY
Hey.

The situation is awkward as Terry gets his bearings.

TERRY (CONT'D)
What happened?

SALLY
I don't remember.

Sally begins to laugh. Terry sits up and rubs his eyes. His face wears an expression of guilt.

TERRY
Sorry... I've gotta go.

Sally nods, somewhat disappointed.

Terry climbs over her to get out of the bed and starts putting on his shoes in a clumsy fashion.

Terry moves towards the door, then turns back.

TERRY (CONT'D)
Can I take your number?

SALLY
Sure.

She scribbles her number on a scrap of paper nearby.

Terry takes it and forces a smile as he steps out through the bedroom door, leaving Sally alone.

33. INT. HALLWAY- MORNING 33.

As Terry moves towards the front door, he notices Victor's painting leaning up against the wall.

It looks remarkably like Olivia.

Terry stares, puzzled, then continues to the door.

34. INT. SALLY'S BEDROOM- MORNING 34.

Sally falls back into bed with a thoughtful sigh.

SALLY
A cup of tea Terry? Sure Sally, that would be great.

35. INT. HOUSE- DAY 35.

Olivia is sitting on the couch, reading a psychology textbook. She turns as she hears the sound of the front door opening.

Terry enters. He stops briefly to acknowledge her.

TERRY
I've come for some clothes.

OLIVIA
You do live here.

Terry retrieves a few items from an adjacent room.

OLIVIA (CONT'D)
Where did you sleep last night?

TERRY
At a mate's.

OLIVIA
Jonno's?

TERRY
What do you care?

They stare at one another and there is long moment of hostile silence.

TERRY (CONT'D)
I'll see you then.

Terry returns to the door.

36. INT. LAUNDROMAT- DAY 2PM 36.

Victor is shoving his clothes into a front-loader washing machine. He avoids Sally's gaze as she enters the laundromat with a bag of dirty clothes. Sally frowns.

Victor pauses to watch as Sally loads her washing into a machine, adds some powder detergent from a small box and gets the machine going.

VICTOR
Could I have some of your washing powder?

Sally stares at him.

SALLY
What's in it for me?

Victor scowls, but after a moment, Sally offers him her box of powder. He takes it and gets his load of washing going.

A moment later they are sitting on plastic seats opposite one another in the waiting area.

SALLY (CONT'D)
I saw you throw out your paintings. What's with that?

Victor glares at her.

SALLY (CONT'D)
They were really good. Why throw them out?

VICTOR
Is that what you do with your spare time... spy on people?

SALLY
Especially the one of the girl. Why would you want to throw that out? It seems such a waste.

VICTOR
Stop talking. Shit! Thanks for the powder but I don't need the talk.

Sally is taken aback. She glares back at Victor for a moment.

Victor stares at water and suds swirling in a front-loading machine.

Sally takes an old NEW IDEA magazine from a nearby shelf and begins to flick through it.

Close-up on the water and suds swirling through the round front-loader window.

37. EXT. BEACH- NIGHT 37.

Water swirls and crashes on the shore. We hear the sound of dance music and laughter.

38. EXT. PARTY- NIGHT 38.

We hear the sounds of many people dancing and having a good time. In close-up, we see a female mouth open. A male hand places a small pill on the tongue. The mouth closes and the girl swallows. The face moves out of focus.

ROSE (BLURRY IMAGE)
I wanna go somewhere else.

39. INT. SALLY'S BATHROOM- DAY 39.

Sally is submerged in soapy water in the bathtub. She lifts up her leg and takes a photo with her digital camera. Then her arm.

We see a series of grainy still photos of her leg, foot, hand in close-up.

Sally flicks through them on her digital camera. Her face is sullen.

We see a small journal lying open on the sink near the bathtub. Sally's handwriting is scrawled on the open page.

SALLY (V.O.)
This is my promise to myself. I will never give up on life. Life is a sweet fruit that we are given to eat and I'm going to suck every last drop of juice from it. I will never be like my mother.

Sally closes her eyes.

SALLY
I will never be like my mother.

Sally opens her eyes.

40. INT. VICTOR"S BEDROOM- DAY 40.

Victor holds and studies a photo of Rose and Olivia. There is a strong likeness between them, both with long dark hair and smiling faces.

In his other hand, Victor holds a cigarette lighter. He flicks it on in small bursts, producing a reasonable flame, that appears and disappears.

41. EXT. OLIVIA/TERRY'S TOWNHOUSE- LATER 41.

Dressed in an overcoat, Victor approaches the front door and knocks.

42. INT. BEDROOM- DAY 42.

Olivia is lying on her bed with a blank expression. She turns and freezes. We hear another door knock.

43. EXT. OLIVIA/TERRY'S TOWNHOUSE- DAY 43.

Victor glares at the door. He shakes the door handle but it is firmly locked. Victor takes a step backwards and looks upwards.

There is no sign of life in the apartment. The street, however, is busy.

Victor retreats in the direction from which he came.

44. INT. BEDROOM- DAY 44.

Olivia hides behind curtains and watches him through the upstairs bedroom window. She holds her breath.

45. INT. HOUSE (FLASHBACK)- DAY 45.

Victor is standing next to an easel, painting the portrait of Rose. We see a blur of her figure sitting some metres away in the room. Victor smiles as he paints.

VICTOR
Did you call your sister?

ROSE
I'll do it later.

VICTOR
No wonder she hates me.

ROSE
Can I see now?

VICTOR (MOCK STERN)
No!

46. INT. BAKERY- DAY 46.

Sally is alone in the shop. She wipes down the counter and bench tops around the cash register.

Olivia enters. She stares at Sally.

SALLY
Can I help you?

Olivia doesn't respond. Sally frowns and continues her cleaning.

Olivia watches her for a moment.

SALLY (CONT'D)
Nice day out, huh! I wish I was out enjoying it.

Sally looks up at Olivia, who is still quietly observing her. The exchange of gazes is unsettling.

Olivia turns and exits the bakery, leaving Sally puzzled.

47. EXT. UNIVERSITY- NIGHT 47.

Olivia walks through metal gates, parting ways with a few other students.

Victor stands in the shadows, watching. He takes a step to follow her.

48. INT. PUB- NIGHT 48.

Terry is sitting at the bar, drinking a beer. Jonno is in conversation with his corporate mates in the background. Terry stares into space, worried.

49. EXT. RIVERSIDE- NIGHT 49.

Sparsely placed street lights reflect on the surface of the water.
Olivia walks along the bitumen trail at the side of the river. We hear an echo of footsteps coming from behind her. Olivia hurries her step without turning to look.

Some metres away Victor follows.

Olivia walks quickly towards a narrow footbridge and crosses to the other, darker side of the river.

VICTOR (CALLS)
Hey!

Olivia turns and sees Victor's shadowed silhouette, but we cannot be sure that she recognises him. Scared, she hurries her step even more, approaching a large bridge over the river.

Victor hurries along the opposite side of the water. Olivia is enveloped in darkness underneath the bridge.

VICTOR (CALLS) (CONT'D)
Stop!

Olivia stops and stares anxiously across the water at Victor, also stopped on the opposite side of the bank. He stares back, the whites of his eyes bright, despite the darkness.

(Beat)

A fearful Olivia bolts back in the direction from which she has come.

Victor gives chase, crossing the narrow footbridge. In the darkness, he catches up and grabs her shivering body from behind.

VICTOR (SHOUTS) (CONT'D)
I saw you... At the skate park.
I saw you.

OLIVIA
Let me go!

Olivia struggles to break free of his grasp. She trips and falls towards the bank of the river, dragging Victor along with her. Victor pulls her backwards, meaning that

they narrowly avoid a fall into the water, but instead fall, entwined, upon the riverbank.

Olivia finds her self face-to-face with Victor. They stare at one another, alarmed and alert, breathing hard. Then, after a moment, Olivia pulls away.

OLIVIA (CONT'D)
Get away from me.

Victor rolls over into a seated position. He starts to cry.

Olivia watches him with a stunned expression.

OLIVIA (CONT'D)
What. What!

VICTOR
I can't do this anymore.

OLIVIA
Stop it.

VICTOR
I loved Rose too.

OLIVIA
Why didn't you look after her?

VICTOR
You know what she was like.

Their eyes meet for a moment. Then Victor looks away, sobbing to himself.

Olivia rolls over into a seated position and continues to stare.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
No one saw her leave the party. She said she wanted to go swimming. I told her no.

50. EXT. BEACH (FLASHBACK)- EARLY MORNING 50.

An unkempt and barefoot Victor crosses sand dunes and plods along dry sand onto the beach.

Something in the distance catches his eye. He frowns. Victor walks quickly.

Lying on the beach, some metres away, is the wet and lifeless body of Rose, clad in a black dress, now soiled and sandy.

Victor stares with an expression of shock.

51. EXT. RIVERSIDE- NIGHT 51.

Olivia stares at Victor as he wipes his eyes.

After several moments, Olivia places her hand on Victor's shoulder. They sit together on the riverbank.

52. EXT. BEACH- NIGHT 52.

Small waves roll and crash onto the shore of the empty beach.

53. INT. VICTOR"S BEDROOM- DAYS LATER 53.

Victor is starting a small painting on canvas.
Kane knocks and enters.

KANE
You missed your shift last night.

VICTOR
Yeah.

KANE
Victor...you're fired.

VICTOR
Thanks.

Kane looks at the sketchbook, nods and exits.

Victor returns to his drawing.

54. INT. LAUNDROMAT- DAY 54.

Victor enters the laundromat to find Sally waiting for her load to finish. He stuffs his clothes into a machine.

SALLY
I have some powder if you need it.

VICTOR
It's okay. Thanks.

Victor sits down on one of the chairs and begins scribbling in a small notebook.

Sally watches.

SALLY
That's really cool. Can I see?

Victor scowls, then gives a small embarrassed laugh.

SALLY (CONT'D)
C'mon. Let me see.

VICTOR
You don't stop, do you?

Sally holds out her hand. Victor passes her the book so that she can inspect his artistic scribbling. Sally is impressed.

VICTOR (CONT'D)
You draw?

SALLY
I take photographs.

VICTOR
Sorry about before.

SALLY
Can I take your photo?

Victor pauses long enough for Sally to retrieve her camera and take a shot.

We see a still frame of a slightly sheepish Victor trying to avoid her gaze.

55. EXT. PARK- DAY 55.

Terry and Olivia sit on a bench in a large leafy park.

OLIVIA
I think it's for the best.

Terry nods.

OLIVIA (CONT'D)
We can still be friends, right?

TERRY
Sure.

Olivia rests her head on his shoulder.

56. EXT. CITY STREET- DAY 56.

Victor is skating along a quiet city footpath. His eyes stare into the distance as he gathers speed.

THE END

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