EPHEMERON

Volume 2: Exegesis

Between two Worlds

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Contents

Chapter 1

Between French and English, Poetry and Cinema: Searching for a Creative Home

1.1 Introduction

This project began its life as a bilingual (English-French) collection of poetry and an accompanying exegesis exploring the theory and practice of self-translation. In order to provide the poems with some sort of thematic coherence, I decided to draw inspiration from the lives and travels of French explorers who had landed in Australia in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. I spent the better part of six months reading the diaries of quasi-mythological figures such as La Perouse and Baudin, drafting middling poems (the prosaically titled 'The Log' has thankfully disappeared into the detritus of my hard drive) and learning about Samuel Beckett's engagement with self-translation.

Self-translation seemed an obvious research topic insofar as it rendered my PhD perfectly symmetrical. The creative component would demonstrate the act of self-translation, while the exegesis would explore the theory underpinning my practice. Practicalities aside, I was also intrigued by the nature of the relationship between the original and translated work. At what point does an author stop 'translating' their poem and start 'writing' another version in a second language? Do the two works exist as part of a continuum? Taken together do they constitute a 'third' oeuvre, a sort of Cubist attempt to present the author's linguistic dimensions on one page?

To questions such as these there were more articles and books to read, more ideas to explore. Ideas which began to intersect with other, related areas of research. My interest in the contiguous relationship between self-translation and writing a new poem in a second language soon segued into a field of inquiry known as 'translingualism'. Translingualism may be defined as writing in a non-maternal language (Kellman ix). Authors who have been examined through the lens of this discourse include Samuel Beckett, Vladimir Nabokov, Joseph Conrad and the Russian-born Parisian Andreï Makine.

In what felt like a natural transition, I decided to alter the research component of my project: rather than studying self-translation, I would explore translingual authorship. This transition was facilitated by a conference paper entitled 'That marvellous lacuna: creative writing in French as a second language'. The paper, which sought to explore the unique creative potential of French translingualism, was intended to form the basis of my exegesis.

As part of the research for this paper, I read numerous interviews with translingual novelists, poets and playwrights working in French. These interviews yielded interesting anecdotes about translingual creativity; they also revealed that translingual writers were bound by a common experience: exile. While this was often the product of first generation diaspora or second generation displacement, there were other cases where the exile was 'self-imposed'. That is, rather than being thrust upon the individual by tangible forces, it appeared to be the product of a psychic drive to escape a 'self' connected to the country and language of origin. It seemed plausible,

for example, that Samuel Beckett's deeply fraught relationship with his mother, May, pushed him to seek creative refuge in French.

Of course this is pure hypothesis. Beckett himself said he switched to French after the war in order to 'cut away the colour, and to concentrate more on the music of the language, its sounds and its rhythm.' Concerned that English was overloaded with 'associations and allusions', he considered it easier to write in French 'without style', and thereby use language as a 'more direct expression of the search for being' (Kellman 357). Thus while Beckett may or may not have used French to evade his mother's tongue, he did feel compelled to escape the burden of intimacy that went hand in hand with the English language.

Other authors expressed different reasons for escaping into French. In an interview given shortly after the publication of his acclaimed novel, *Le Testament Français,* Andreï revealed that ten years after immigrating to Paris, he still viewed his fellow Parisians as characters in a Zola novel (Gallimard, *Rencontre avec Andreï Makine*). I take this to mean that his France was more imagined than real; an historical invention *in extremis* that somehow provided him with the possibility to live and write.

France and French have long been the land and language of exile. The early twentieth century saw artists from across Europe converge in Paris to create seminal works of poetry and cinema, to say nothing of Picasso's thrilling, unsettling tableaux. It has also been the culture and language of invasion, though perhaps these two

extremes are bound by a common trope: that of the ‘magnanimous’ emperor offering up his history and culture to anyone willing to adopt French customs and language.

In any case, the lineage of foreign poets, novelists and filmmakers who have chosen to inscribe themselves within the French artistic tradition is significant and growing. While translingualism offered one avenue into this tradition, I soon found that exploring the creative potential of writing in a second language had natural limitations. Principal amongst these was the fact that - anecdotes aside - it was ultimately impossible to prove that writing in a non-maternal language was more or less ‘creative’ than writing in a maternal language. While my conference paper intended to rely on Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of polyglossia and Roland Barthes’ notion of ‘le degré zéro’ to construct an argument regarding the unique creative potential of translingualism, I eventually realised that their work could only justify a thesis supporting the creative benefits of bilingualism or multilingualism. That is, if it is the encounter between languages and cultures that gives rise to new and exciting forms of creativity, this is as likely to manifest in the first language as it is in the second or third.

The project had other flaws. In Australia we tend to think of bilingualism as a rarefied practice. From a global perspective, however, it is common; indeed, there are more bilingual and multilingual individuals in the world than there are monolingual. It should therefore hardly seem surprising that Virgil, Lucretius and Rilke to name but a few all produced seminal creative works in languages other than their vernacular. That is to say, translingualism is indivisible from the history of Western literature, to say nothing of African literatures, Indian literatures and so on.

It therefore seemed strange to dedicate an entire exegesis to exploring the 'unique' creative potential of a rather common practice. Sinister, too, for there is something unnerving about naively singling out a handful of modern authors working in French when the broader practice of translingualism is indivisible from empire building and the complexities of migration. While the project could have been reoriented to focus on the links between translingualism and exile, I was not sure that I had anything to add to the already considerable canon of critical theory examining this question.

So began the transition into the next iteration of my project. In hindsight, I can see that I was searching to find a place - creatively, theoretically and culturally – that could accommodate both my Australianness and passion for French language and arts. I was also trying to capture a certain aliveness that I experienced when speaking, writing and reading French. In this sense, the project has been a search for an existential home, which does explain its epic (and at times unruly) dimensions.

My first attempt to find this home (that is, self-translating poems into French) came unstuck when I realised what a herculean task I'd set myself. Translation almost always involves moving from a non-maternal into a maternal language, and with good reason. The nuances of poetry are difficult to capture, and nothing less than absolute mastery of a language will suffice. Even then, only a skilled few will ever have the requisite sensitivity and flair to translate poetry well.

This realisation coincided with a growing interest in other forms of translation and transliteration. I was particularly drawn to the links between poetry and cinema, a subject I had first encountered when studying early twentieth century films written and directed by surrealist poets and artists.

Interest in the theory of 'poetic cinema' was accompanied by an epiphany concerning the creative component of my project. While translating poetry into a non-maternal language was arguably a foolish endeavour, writing French prose was not. Not only did I feel capable of drafting a screenplay in French, I was confident that I would find a way to connect a collection of English poetry with a French script. I also felt a certain modest legitimacy in inscribing the project in a tradition of foreign filmmakers who had worked in French. This was a form and broader cultural context that had admitted Man Ray, Louis Buñuel, Krzysztof Kieslowski, Gaspar Noé, Michael Haneke, Béla Tarr and Julian Schnabel, to name but a few. Not that I felt limited to studying this particular element of French cinema; rather, there was simply a certain *justesse* in developing a cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary project that drew on this cosmopolitan lineage.

After conducting a broad literature review of all French and English material devoted to examining the links between poetry and cinema (as well as reading a selection of Italian and Spanish articles), I was able to detect five key branches of inquiry.

The first of these may be described as historic in nature, focussing on the short avant-garde films made by early 20th century poets, in particular surrealists. Man

Ray's *L'Etoile de mer*, which was written by the French poet Robert Desnos, is emblematic.

The second is thematic, exploring the treatment of poetry and poets in film. The recent film by Jane Campion, *Bright Star*, immediately comes to mind.

The third is transliteral, examining the transposition of certain poems or poem cycles into cinematic form. Examples are limited and include *Dieu sait quoi* by Jean-Daniel Pollet, a plotless 'meditation' based on the poetry of Francis Ponge. Films that are loosely inspired by poems also form part of this category, and include *The Wings of Desire* by Wim Wenders (which drew on the poetry of Rilke).

The fourth, which examines the influence of cinema on poetic form, has attracted the appellation 'cinepoetics'. Susan McCabe's *Cinematic Modernism* is the authoritative text on the subject and analyses the work for four American modernist poets (Marianne Moore, Gertrude Stein, William Carlos Williams and H.G.) through the lens of early European Avant-Garde cinema (McCabe).

The fifth and to my mind most interesting branch is essentially stylistic. That is, it seeks to uncover the key features of a poetic film; to understand what a poetic film actually looks like. Pier Paolo Pasolini's 1965 essay, *The Poetry of Cinema*, is the most commonly cited (and controversial) example of this subgenre. Drawing on recent developments in literature and linguistics concerning free indirect discourse, Pasolini sought to construct an argument connecting a hybrid protagonist-director subjectivity to poetry. His vision of poetic cinema was arguably inspired by the films

of Michelangelo Antonioni, in particular *Il deserto rosso* (the Red Desert). In this film, the disturbed fuguing of Giuliana (played by Monica Vitti) is offset by what Pasolini calls 'obsessive framing'. Obsessive framing manifests in one of two ways: characters entering and leaving a frame that in turn forms part of an interminably long, plotless shot; and sudden reframing devoid of any clear motive (Bogue 72). According to Pasolini, these techniques remind us that the 'neurotic protagonist', the person whose consciousness appears to be driving the filmic world, in fact belongs to a larger universe: that of the filmmaker.

While the 'stylistic' branch of poetic cinema was by far the most appealing, it was clear from the outset that it would be necessary to circumscribe my inquiry. Poetry encompasses hundreds of distinct forms and genres which are more or less amenable to crossing the language-image divide. Not that this stopped me from earnestly examining whether different types of poetry were all bound by an essential element. Needless to say, while I was delighted to discover the non-verbal drum poetry of the Yoruba people, the search was otherwise fruitless and misguided. One person's Dickinson is another's collection of biros suspended from an art gallery ceiling in Helsinki. In other words (for that is just the point: there are always other words and worlds), there are as many ways to write a poem as there are to organise images on a screen.

This realisation reinforced the importance of bringing some degree of theoretical rigour to my analysis. I accordingly began researching philosophers who had interpolated the image, or representations of space. The eclectic nature of my project demanded ongoing vigilance to keep it from straying into discursive territory.

With coherence as my guiding principle, I therefore resolved to focus exclusively on post-war French theorists. Those who made the cut were Roland Barthes, Gaston Bachelard, Guy Debord, Jacques Rancière, Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze and Jean-François Lyotard. I was sifting – if such a word may be used to describe the sadomasochistic practice of reading French deconstructionism – for the appropriate theoretical boundary to place around my project.

While I could have chosen one or two theorists to frame the project from the outset, I was driven by the sort of neurosis that could only be calmed by broad reading. Though tiring, this method did act as a salve to my anxiety. It also enabled me to develop a more mature sense of the philosophical context within which my own project might sit. Discipline and limits had to be imposed at a certain point, so I did eventually settle upon two theorists whose work could be employed to examine the links between symbolist poetry and late twentieth century avant-garde French cinema. In this sense, the search for a theoretical framework was contemporaneous with the process of clarifying which forms of French poetry and French cinema were linked.

The project finally had a fulcrum, albeit a three-jointed one: the French theorist Deleuze, the Symbolist poet Rimbaud, and the contemporary avant-garde filmmaker Claire Denis. This small pantheon, though admittedly eclectic, could be wedded to provide my thesis with theoretical, linguistic and creative coherence.

A brief introduction to these three figures and their relationship – or rather their arranged marriage - is warranted. In short, I argue that the symbolist poetry of Rimbaud revolutionised creative practice by undermining formalism and destabilising

the subject. Unlike the neo-classical and Romantic poetry which dominated the nineteenth century, Rimbaud's work was devoid of rhetoric. It also employed unconventional rhyming and metrical schemes (or was free of both), elliptical language, metaphor, multiple voices and 'unsanctioned' symbols. As such, his prose poems and free verse not only reimagined the linguistic vehicle for poetry, but the act of communication itself.[1]

I go on to argue that this poetic revolution was a condition precedent to the development of a certain type of post-war avant-garde film, classified by Deleuze in *Cinéma 2: L'image-temps* as 'time-image' cinema. The films of Claire Denis, many of which are meditations on time and space, embody this cinematic form.

This theoretical framework underpins the creative component of my project, which comprises a collection of poetry in English and a film script in French. Specifically, poems are superimposed over certain scenes in order to demonstrate an aspect of the time-image known as the 'crystal image'. According to Deleuze, the crystal image is multidimensional, encompassing layers of history, language, discourse and of course time. Thus a sequence of images in the script constitute one or more sides of the crystal image, the superimposed poem or poems another.

[1] Symbolism is associated with a number of poets including (but not limited to) Stéphane Mallarmé, Paul Verlaine and Gustave Kahn, most of whom employed novel literary devices which disoriented, or alienated, the reader. However, it is arguable that the radical experimentation (and ontology) of *Illuminations* and *Une saison en enfer* went even further, redefining subjectivity and in turn modernity (Shultz 174, Bobillot 199-216).

1.2 Conclusion

This thesis has evolved in an iterative fashion. Like evolution, each generation has inherited characteristics from its ancestors while developing new, hardier features. These features have now morphed into a project that I hope legitimately encompasses two genres and two languages. Ultimately, it has been a search for a home; a strange and at times mystifying quest that is finally coming to an end.

Chapter 2

Symbolist poetry: Deleuzian before Deleuze*?*

We are constructed in memory; we are simultaneously childhood, adolescence, old age and maturity.

- Federico Fellini

2.1 Introduction

Deleuze's study of cinema is indivisible from his engagement with the work of Henri Bergson, in particular *Matter and Memory*, *Creative Evolution* and *The Creative Mind: An Introduction to Metaphysics*, texts which Elizabeth Grosz has described as 'unique in the history of philosophy' (217). Their particularity arises out of Bergson's conception of matter as an aggregate of images, perception as indivisible from memory, and the symbiotic relationship between the (virtual) past and the (actual) present. Importantly, Bergson conceives of 'the data of consciousness' as temporal: as ongoing, heterogeneous sets of images operating on an immanent plane. In doing so, he constructs an ontology that explicitly rejects firstly transcendence, and secondly dualities such as subject-object, cause-effect, matter-simulacra in favour of something more elastic and to my mind, creative.

While 'Bergsonian immanence' is the clear foundation upon which Deleuze's movement-image and time-image are built, it is nevertheless arguable that these semiotics must be viewed through the lens of Nietzsche's 'eternal return' if we are to

properly understand the broader implications of Deleuze's cinematic project. Admittedly, Deleuze's reading of the eternal return as an affirmation of difference and becoming (Deleuze, "Difference and Repetition" 26) is broadly compatible with the 'perception-memory' circuit which Bergson claims underscores human experience. However, in Nietzsche's work he appears to locate something quite significant: a philosophy of *pure possibility*, which in turn finds its ultimate expression in time-image cinema.

Against this backdrop of immanence, of non-determinism, of difference and becoming, Deleuze posits a specific historical event – World War Two– as the dividing line between movement-image and time-image film, respectively. While it has been pointed out that the 'transition [from one semiotic to another] represents a distinct if gradual transformation in the nature of belief and the possibilities of thought' (Rodowick 12), Deleuze nevertheless identifies in Italian neorealism a specifically post-war crisis (Deleuze, *Cinéma 1: L'Image-Mouvement* 284-90). This 'crisis' is embodied in the breakdown of the 'action-reaction' schema of narrative-driven (movement-image) film and the appearance of unhinged, wandering characters, moral uncertainty verging on the intolerable, and a non-teleological camera (Deleuze, *Cinéma 2: L'Image-Temps* 12). For example, in his 1961 film *La Notte*, Antonioni depicts the dysphoric Lidia (played by Jeanne Moreau) drifting through the half-built, post-war suburbs of Milan. More affect than effect, Lidia's peregrination and ennui embodies the zeitgeist of neorealism, and in turn time-image cinema.

I am going to make a rather provocative claim: in tracing neorealism to a singular, historical event Deleuze appears to betray himself; to undermine his own engagement with 'the eternal return.' Even if we conceive of the Holocaust as a matrix of events, as a slow-burning psychosis that culminated in the ultimate form of insanity - the death camps - there is still something profoundly anti-Deleuze about focussing on this matrix to the exclusion of other possibilities. More specifically, in attributing neorealism to post-war poverty and geopolitics - in particular Italy's status as vanquished rather than victor (Deleuze, *Cinéma 2: L'Image-Temps* 285) - Deleuze undermines his own belief in the notions of 'becoming' and 'possibility'.

To be fair to Deleuze, all art must necessarily leave something out of the frame, especially if the frame is an endless swirl of difference and becoming. The entire universe (and its infinite alternatives) cannot possibly exist in language at any one time. However, while Deleuze may have been less than Deleuzian in his examination of cinema, in his own words the 'hors champ' - that which is out-of-frame - remains alive and relevant. In short, 'l'ensemble de tous ces ensembles forme une continuité homogène, un univers ou un plan de matière proprement illimité.' (Deleuze, *Cinéma 1: L'Image-Mouvement* 29).

While Deleuze was referring to the dynamic relationship between that which lies inside, and conversely beyond, the cinematic frame, his analysis is based on a general ontology applicable to all other phenomena. Thus in applying Deleuze to Deleuze, we may choose to locate his second cinematic semiotic – *l'image-temps* – within a metaphorical frame. While an infinite number of relational sets may lie beyond this zone, it is my intention to explore one of these. While Deleuze focuses on

links between the war and the emergence of time-image film, I propose to broaden the field to include another, possible dynamic: a dynamic that relies less on a Cartesian cause-effect relationship, and more on the idea of a creative gene pool, which by definition is diffuse, and its legacy uncertain.

It is possible that the ancestral gene pool of post-war time-image cinema includes late nineteenth century French poetry. While the poetry of this period has been variously labelled Symbolist, free verse and prose, the dividing line between the three is arguably unclear (Scott 54-73). As it is not my intention to engage in a detailed analysis of the genesis and taxonomy of these forms, I shall, for the sake of simplicity, use 'Symbolist' as an umbrella term. In doing so I acknowledge that there are creative and theoretical distinctions to be drawn between various schools and individuals poets. Nevertheless, the poets in question do share one trait: they all valiantly defied the strictures of traditional French verse. That is, they stared down hundreds of years of classical composition – in particular the Alexandrine – and dared to invent something new, modern, and deeply disconcerting.

Symbolism rejected classical rhetoric and form, decoupled subject and object, unleashed meaning from set codes and narratives, and wandered – not aimlessly, but in new and unpredictable ways - through mythology, landscapes, inner worlds, and in certain instances, across the page. Western literature had found (or lost) itself in unmapped territory. The sacred was rendered banal, the banal poetic. And all of this some half a century prior to the second world war, and the emergence of Deleuze's time-image cinema. Again, I do not wish to discuss the relationship between Symbolist poetry and time-image cinema in *causal* terms. Rather, I propose to

examine their rapport as one would the distribution of genes across time and space. That is, time-image cinema has arguably inherited something from late nineteenth century French poetry, as it has from mid-twentieth century entropy.

2.2 Deleuze's Bergson

I shall divide Deleuze's engagement with Bergson into three principal areas: the relationship between mind and matter, the relationship between past and present,[2] and the distinction between the actual and the virtual.[3] Out of this engagement emerges a cinematic ontology which 'explodes all of the basic assumptions of film theory to date…' (Herzog).

Arguably the foundational precept, that which underpins Deleuze's engagement with cinema, is Bergson's conception of mind and matter, according to which matter is an aggregate of images. By way of corollary, he suggests 'the object exists in itself, and, on the other hand, the object is, in itself, pictorial, as we perceive it: the image it is, but a self-existing image' (Bergson 10). In other words, matter –

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[2] Deleuze's interrogation of time, memory and identity pre-dates his engagement with Bergson. In *Proust et les signes*, Deleuze reads 'la Mémoire involontaire' as part of a larger constellation of sense signposts (or 'signes sensibles') within *A la recherche du temps perdu*. For example, he asks '[à] quel niveau, donc, intervient la fameuse Mémoire involontaire? On remarquera qu'elle n'intervient qu'en fonction d'une espèce de signes très particuliers: les signes sensibles. Nous appréhendons une qualité sensible comme signe; nous sentons un impératif qui nous force à en chercher le sens. Alors, il arrive que la Mémoire involontaire, directement sollicitée par le signe, nous livre ce sens (ainsi Combray pour la madeleine, Venise pour les pavées…, etc.)' (Deleuze, *Proust et les signes* 67).

[3] Elizabeth Grosz presents a slightly varied version of this thesis, stating that 'Deleuze's reading of Bergson can, for the purposes of this chapter, be divided into three central components: Bergson's understanding of matter and its relationship to memory; his account of the relations between past, present and future; and his understanding of the distinction between the virtual and the possible' (Grosz 217).

which includes consciousness or perception - is nothing more or less than a series of images interacting with one another on a plane of immanence.[4] In desacralising consciousness and democratising experience, Bergson turns Western transcendentalism on its head, dispensing with the traditional subject/object division and rejecting the Platonic notion of art-as-simulacra (Plato, Book 10, 601c).

The second philosophical 'trampoline' is Bergson's analysis of the relationship between past and present. Bergson describes the past as something more than an exhausted 'present', a moment that has disappeared from existence, that is anterior to the 'now'. Again, this constitutes a significant deviation from Western philosophy, in particular the Hegelian tradition of dialectics, according to which time unfolds linearly, thereby producing a distinct 'now' and 'then' (Hegel 58-66). Defiant in the face of this tradition, Bergson claims that as the present is constantly slipping into the past, the two must exist simultaneously. That is, they do not constitute two successive moments, but are part of the 'open Whole' which is time (durée). In the words of Deleuze, 'si le tout n'est pas donnable, c'est parce qu'il est l'Ouvert, et qu'il lui appartient de changer sans cesse ou de faire surgir quelque chose de nouveau, bref, de durer' (Deleuze, *Cinéma 1: L'Image-Mouvement* 20).

Out of this conception of time emerges Bergson's thesis concerning the relationship between the 'actual' and the 'virtual'. While the present and past are intertwined in an open Whole known as time, static objects nevertheless *appear*

[4] I note that 'plane of immanence' (or *plan d'immanence*) is a term used by Deleuze, rather than Bergson, though as Deleuze himself has pointed out 'peu importe': the concept is the same (Deleuze, *Cinéma 1: L'Image-Mouvement* 86).

impervious to duration. It is only by interacting with consciousness and memory that the temporal dimension of matter is revealed. As noted by Elizabeth Grosz:

> [m]atter can be placed on the side of the actual and the real, and mind, life or duration can be placed on the side of the virtual. What life (duration, memory, consciousness) brings to the world is the new, the movement of the actualisation of the virtual, the existence of duration. (Grosz 225)

For Deleuze, the movement from virtual to actual is a continual, pure flow of becoming (Deleuze 112-15). In this sense, life is unpredictable and infinitely creative, a labyrinthine circuit of possibilities that can never be exhausted. There is something profoundly ethical about this vision of mind, matter and time. While Deleuze finds evidence of this 'flow of life' at work in cinema, its implications for humanity are significant.

However my immediate focus is the manner in which Deleuze applies the aforementioned components of Bergsonian ontology to his study of film. The short answer is that he develops two cinematic semiotics: the 'movement-image' and the 'time-image'. Before proceeding to a discussion of these semiotics, it is important to clarify that Deleuze's film philosophy is vigorously anti-linguistic. That is, he rejects the formalist notion of cinema as language, describing it rather as an 'énonçable' or 'utterable' capable of producing 'énoncés' or 'utterings' (Deleuze, *Cinéma 2: L'Image-Temps* 44-45).

As one would expect of Deleuze, his opposition is not simple or unified. Nevertheless, it is arguably grounded in the idea that linguistics is a subset of semiotics specifically, and the plane of immanence more generally. Thus while language is 'part of the process of drawing planes over chaos in order to impose a form of order upon it', it does not occupy a privileged place within the 'collective assemblages of enunciation' (Lecercle 98). By way of corollary, cinema cannot be reduced to an essential 'grammar' or syntactical system. Rather, it is integral to the infinite temporal flow, out of which combinations of images and (as the case may be) sounds emerge. In that sense, it is not a closed system of signs (though an individual film may be composed of relatively closed frames which form part of the Whole) (Deleuze, *Cinéma 1: L'Image-Mouvement* 24) but an 'historical archive of folded layers of selves, of cracks and fissures of time that are multiple and co-extensive.' (qtd in Coleman 104). The following definition of semiotics, encountered by chance during the course of my research, also helped to clarify why Deleuze would resist the formalism of linguistic analysis: 'semiotics deals with sign activity as processes and sign possibility, exploring what sign 'can be' rather than contriving to define what sign 'is'' (Kuang-Jung). This explanation clearly resonates with Deleuze's notion of 'becoming', with his ontology of eternally returning difference and creative flow.

2.3 *L'Image-Mouvement* and *L'Image-Temps*

Bergson's radical vision of mind and matter, past and present, actual and virtual underpins Deleuze's two cinematic semiotics, the movement-image and the time-image. These two semiotics find expression in classical Hollywood cinema and post-war modern cinema (in particular neorealism), respectively.

While both semiotics are representations of the open Whole, it is their relationship with time that distinguishes the one from the other. Drawing on Bergson, Deleuze describes movement-image film as comprising 'des coupes mobiles de la durée', whereby movement divides time into objects (Deleuze, *Cinéma 1: L'Image-Mouvement* 32-39). That is to say, time is expressed indirectly insofar as it is linear and subordinate to movement. Images that are organised in this manner produce sensorial experiences which accord with Cartesian logic. As one Deleuzian scholar has noted:

> …though the classic cinema allows us to see time's dynamic thrust, the inseparability of movement and objects, and the perturbations of the vibrational Whole, it does so only in conformity with the commonsense structures of our sensory-motor schema. (Lecercle 371)

Time-image cinema reverses this dynamic, providing a direct representation of time. Images which were once linked through action or clear motives are replaced with ostensibly irrational sequences. Coherent movement is subverted in favour of desultory wandering through empty landscapes. Films such as Antonioni's *La Notte* or *Il Deserto Rosso* leave us with a sense of pure entropy – both of the self and of the world at large. The absence of *telos* results in the dissolution of the sensory-motor schema concomitant with linear time. What remains are 'situations purement optiques et sonores' (Deleuze, *Cinéma 2: L'Image-Temps* 10) in which our senses are invested in processes above action (Deleuze, *Cinéma 2: L'Image-Temps* 11). The distinction

between subject and object, and subjective and objective truth, is consequently rendered uncertain:

> On tombe en effet dans un principe d'indéterminabilité, d'indiscernabilité: on ne sait plus ce qui est imaginaire ou réel, physique ou mental dans une situation, non pas qu'on les confonde, mais parce qu'on n'a pas à le savoir et qu'il n'y a même plus lieu de le demander. (Deleuze, *Cinéma 2: L'Image-Temps* 15)

In Antonioni's films we enter a strange, invisible subjectivity that persists with Resnais and the French New Wave (Deleuze, *Cinéma 2: L'Image-Temps* 16, 18). Lacking a central axis of movement, desire or creative force, these films depict layers or circuits of memory, dream and thought (Deleuze, *Cinéma 2: L'Image-Temps* 65) Indeed, while Deleuze never provides a precise definition of the 'time-image', it is arguably best explained in terms of these cinematic circuits which fuse past and present, virtual and actual. Deleuze calls these circuits 'crystal images,' (Deleuze, *Cinéma 2: L'Image-Temps* 92 – 110) the archaeological dimension of which is most relevant to my own creative project.

As previously indicated, Deleuze also draws on the work of Nietzsche to explain the significance of the time-image. These circuits are an example of pure becoming, of the flux of life. Out of this Deleuze derives a secondary concept known as 'the power of the false'. That is, in resisting easily discernible narratives, in presenting time directly (rather than as a function of movement, action and motive), time-image cinema eliminates a fixed, central truth. In Deleuze's own words:

> C'est une puissance du faux qui remplace et détrône la forme du vrai, parce qu'elle pose la simultanéité de présents incompossibles, ou la coexistence de passées non-nécessairement vrais. (Deleuze, *Cinéma 2: L'Image-Temps* 171)

Deleuze posits modernity's great apocalypse – the second world war – as the dividing line between the truth-affirming movement-image, and a cinema of the 'false'. While it is not my aim to refute this assumption, I do wish to problematise it by highlighting another 'circuit' of associations between Symbolist poetry and time-image film. This 'circuit' will form the basis of the following section.

2.4 *L'Image-Temps* and Symbolist poetry

The most radical aspect of Deleuze's project is its entirely philosophical character. That is to say, Deleuze is not interested in cinema in and of itself. Rather, he is interested in its implications for our understanding of time, matter and experience, as well as its relationship with other concepts:

> Une théorie du cinéma n'est pas 'sur' le cinéma, mais sur les concepts que le cinéma suscite, et qui sont eux-mêmes en rapport avec d'autres concepts correspondant à d'autres pratiques, la pratique des concepts en général n'ayant aucun privilège sur les autres… (Deleuze, *Cinéma 2: L'Image-Temps* 365)

It is therefore my contention that researching possible links between cinema and other phenomena, or more specifically delving into the Whole and fishing out

creative antecedents to neorealism and French New Wave cinema, is inherently Deleuzian. Thus in applying Deleuze to Deleuze, I would like to chart what are arguably meaningful parallels between late nineteenth century French poetry and time-image cinema.

At the risk of veering toward formalism, these parallels can only be understood if we contextualise Symbolist poetry. This is a primarily historical exercise, but one which yields interesting insights into the continent's drift toward modernity. In short, pre-Romantic French poetry was synonymous with highly codified verse, the dominant form of which was the twelve-syllable Alexandrine which was characterised by a non-negotiable medial caesura that created two lots of six syllables. As such, it was a binary method of ordering imaginative experience (Scott 13). This order was reinforced by acoustic regularity, pre-ordained themes and symbols, and strict use of enjambment. Masculine and feminine rhymes were alternated, and certain types of rhyme were prohibited (Caws 4). Taken together, these elements performed a mnemonic function, creating poetry which was easy to memorise (Scott 14). Consequently, the Alexandrine was able to project itself into a predictable, homogenous future. The readily identifiable subject was also significant insofar as it created a unified voice that directed and reassured the reader.

The first fissures in this tightly controlled ontological landscape coincided with Romanticism. Poets such as Hugo and Baudelaire took new risks, employing enjambment with less inhibition and loosening the trimetric structure underpinning the Alexandrine (Scott 75). While they continued to observe isosyllabism and regularly patterned rhyme, other techniques were employed to destabilise the line.

These included erasing the medial caesura and building sequences of short, expressive verse typified by Baudelaire's 'Courte Tache / La tombe attend; / elle est avide' (Baudelaire, "Chante d'automne").

Baudelaire is widely considered to be the most significant bridge between Romanticism and Symbolism. Indeed, André Gide is unequivocal in his assessment of Baudelaire's contribution to the evolution of French poetry, noting in his preface to the *Anthologie de la Poésie Française*:

> One did not notice at once the extraordinary innovation which Baudelaire brought to poetry. For a long time one condescended to see only the novelty of the subjects treated in the *Fleurs du Mal* […] But it was a revolution without precedent no longer to abandon oneself to the lyric flux, to resist the ease of 'inspiration', not to relinquish oneself to rhetoric, not to drift along with words, images and outdated conventions, but rather to treat the muse as an obstinate, unruly one, one to be subjugated, instead of yielding to her with fettered intellect and captive critical sense; in short, requesting art to discipline poetry. (qtd in Kahler 106).

Under Baudelaire's influence, poetry began to develop an unprecedented fluidity and subtle indeterminacy (Scott 75) which would soon explode into unmediated free verse and prose poetry. However to the extent that both free verse and prose poetry were deeply radical, they were viewed with suspicion and in many instances contempt. As one commentator noted of the former:

> …in its ousting of the aesthetic in favour of the expressive, of the formally anterior in favour of the instantaneous, of the enunciated in favour of enunciation, of the lapidary and pre-ordained in favour of the contingent, the aleatory, the unpredictable, it could not but present itself as anti-poetry. (Scott 2)

The prose poetry of Rimbaud was similarly revolutionary, inducing a sort of epistemological trauma in readers accustomed to the settled reference points of classical and Romantic verse. Indeed, his work has been described as seeking to do no less than 'bring complete disorder upon the house of French poetry, calling upon all senses, hinting at all meanings, and going in all directions' (Widden 129).

Like many artists who would come to redefine the borders of their chosen modality, Rimbaud began by imitating classical forms. His earliest poem in French, 'Les Étrennes des orphelins', was a traditional Alexandrine. Furthermore, with the exception of two octosyllabic quatrains in 'Bal des pendus', the first ten poems in *Poésies*[5] are Alexandrines ending in either rhyming couplets or alternating rhymes. The 'Dormeur du val' is arguably the first poem in which he more or less dismembers the Alexandrine *in situ*, employing such an abundance of enjambments that the 'dodecasyllabic meter breaks down completely' (Caws 8). From this point on, he continues to experiment with meter and verse until the remaining transgression is to abandon both (Caws 8), as demonstrated in *Une saison en enfer* and *Illuminations*.

[5] *Poésies* is the title attributed to the collections of poetry written by Rimbaud between 1869 and 1872.

While principally comprising prose poems, these two collections do include other ground-breaking forms. For example, *Une saison en enfer* contains numerous hybrid pieces comprising prose and verse fragments, of which 'Alchimie du verbe' is perhaps the most celebrated example. Similarly, *Illuminations* includes what are widely considered to be the first examples of free verse in the French language, namely 'Marine' and 'Mouvement'.[6] In short, he creates a new poetic language, one which he hoped would (and arguably did) induce a sort of 'dérèglement de tous les sens' (Brunel 143).

The poem 'Jeunesse*'* (from *Illuminations*) is indicative of his pioneering spirit. Divided into four ostensibly unrelated sections, 'Dimanche', 'Sonnet', 'Vingt Ans' and 'IV', the very first sentence presents the reader with unsolvable grammatical ambiguities:

> Les calculs du côté, l'inévitable descente du ciel et la
> visite des souvenirs et la séance des rythmes occupant
> la demeure, la tête et le monde de l'esprit.

The ambient level of obscurity increases throughout the poem. One can imagine nineteenth century readers, accustomed as they were to methodical verse, predictable symbology and rhetorical devices, left virtually anchorless following an encounter with the fragmented, itinerant voice(s) in 'IV'. The following extract is indicative of its overall fluidity:

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[6] *Marine* and *Mouvement* (from *Illuminations*) are *generally* considered to be the first examples of free verse in the French language. However I do note that this is a contentious matter (Scott 181 – 209).

> Mais tu te mettras à ce travail: toutes les possibilités harmoniques et architecturales s'émouvront autour de ton siège. Des êtres parfaits, imprévus, s'offriront à tes expériences? Dans tes environs affluera rêveusement la curiosité d'anciennes foules et de luxes oisifs.

Rimbaud's use of the informal second person singular (tu) is by no means uniform. Throughout 'Jeunesse', he employs a variety of subject pronouns in addition to 'tu', notably the first person plural (nous) and the third person (il/elle). He also glides between possessive adjectives, declaring in two bold, vertiginous sentences '…le monde votre fortune et votre péril. Mais à présent, ce labour comblé, toi, tes calculs, - toi, tes impatiences – ne sont plus que votre danse et votre voix…'

Consequently, the poem offers up no clear lyrical subject and to that extent no obvious psychic fulcrum. Rather, the usual ordering principle (that is, a consistent 'I' or 'you') is displaced by a disorienting creative impulse born out of sense, memory and prophesy. In fact, 'IV' provides a clue to the poem's crystalline construction of selfhood, declaring '[t]a mémoire et tes sens ne seront que la nourriture de ton impulsion créatrice.' In other words, this is poetry in which the sensory-motor schema has broken down in favour of something unhinged, layered and unpredictable, in which the lyric subject is 'pushing…the limits of its existence in matters of both time and space' (Widden 120).

Illuminations is replete with poems that thrust French verse into new territory. However as a collection dominated by prose poetry, 'Mouvement' is a stylistic curio, and to that extent particularly worthy of examination. I am not alone in thinking so: one commentator has credited it with nothing less than inaugurating modernity, (Bobillot 199-216) while another has described its liberated structure as a 'clean break from all conventions of versification' (Widden 195). Taken together, these comments reflect the significance of 'Mouvement' as a new poetic vehicle designed to carry a radically different lyric subjectivity. In analysing 'Mouvement', we can deduce that this 'new' subjectivity demanded an unconventional temporal structure and an altogether different use of space. For example, moments of silence are conveyed by both emptiness and punctuation:

> Car de la causerie parmi les appareils, — le sang; les
>
> Fleurs, le feu, les bijoux, —

The poem's varied line length and correspondingly uneven rhythm diverge wildly from the predictable, regular metre of the Alexandrine, giving rise to a new sense of possibility and ambiguity. That is, 'Mouvement' resists the certainty and closure that goes hand in hand with strict meter. Furthermore, in depicting what is essentially an epic journey across time and space, 'Mouvement' actually *diminishes* the importance of the subject, thereby problematizing/reinventing the lyric. In other words, it reduces humanity to a minor player in an enormous, pulsing universe. Thus while the protagonists 'emmènent l'éducation/Des races, des classes et des bêtes, sur ce Vaisseau', a subsequent reference to 'la lumière diluvienne' reminds us of the tiny

space occupied by any given human being in world history. This reference also forms part of a grammatical oddity: a 'sentence' without a verb:

Repos et vertige
A la lumière diluvienne,
Aux terribles soirs d'étude.

Thus amidst the movement of the voyagers and the many constituent parts of the ever-changing universe, we have space devoid of action. This invites the reader to enter into and fill the quiet (or disquiet) with their own reverie – or to merely sit in silence with these three lines. Again, Rimbaud is offering up an entirely new creative dynamic that will have profound implications for poetry specifically, and creative expression more generally.

Similarly 'Barbare'[7] begins with a verbless line that posits history and time as antecedent to the action in the poem, of which a part is mere fantasy:

Bien après les jours et les saisons, et les êtres et les
pays,
  Le pavillon en viande saignant sur la soie des mers
et des fleurs arctiques ; (elles n'existent pas.)

The opening sequence is disorienting both temporally and conceptually. Specifically, the movement in the poem is characterised as entirely post-history but

[7] Published in *Illuminations*.

partially imaginative (as opposed to entirely one or the other). That is, 'elles' arguably refers to 'la soie des mers' and 'des fleurs arctiques', but not 'le pavillon en viande saignant' (the latter being masculine). Thus the demise of civilisation is followed by a hybrid world where the real ('banner of bleeding meat') emerges out of an imaginary realm ('silken seas' and 'arctic flowers').

The poem continues to subvert classical notions of time and space, with any hope of establishing a rhythmic pattern being thwarted by the '…unités nominales juxtaposées (substantifs, adjectifs, constructions verbales en transformations nominales, etc.), rythmiquement ponctuées par des exclamations' (Kittang 299). In other words, 'Barbare' comprises a series of visual interruptions which undermine the possibility of the poem gathering rhetorical momentum, as exemplified by the following extract:

> Les brasiers pleuvant au rafales de givre, –
>
> Douceurs ! – les feux à la pluie du vent de diamants
>
> jetée par le cœur terrestre éternellement carbonisé pour
>
> nous. – Ô monde ! –

While the repetition of certain words and images ('Le pavillon en viande saignante', 'Ô', 'brasiers', 'arctique') gives rise to a thread of continuity, this nevertheless takes place within the context of highly discursive proclamations and ambiguous descriptions, as demonstrated by the preceding extract.

The poem's penultimate image – a 'voix féminine' resonating in the depths of volcanos and arctic caves – heightens the prevailing ambiguity. That is, the poem all but closes with something akin to a primordial genesis. Rimbaud does not attribute any language to this disembodied voice. Rather, it is at once sudden and diffuse, before being cut off by the final, open-ended line, 'Le pavillon…'. Thus the poem finishes with an incomplete sentence, a half-thought or image that is as likely to refer back to the 'pavillon' of the opening lines as it is to constitute a fragment of thought uttered by a semi-mad poetic consciousness.

Rimbaud's poetic revolution is not limited to *Illuminations*, *Une saison en enfer* being a discursive – and troubling – work in its own right. For example, the first person narrator in *Une saison* is split into multiple voices charged with dramatising a 'descending scale of spiritual perdition' (Houston 143). *Une saison* further breaks down traditional binaries, notably of heaven and hell. Indeed 'Nuit de l'enfer' constructs God and Satan as inseparable and therefore indistinguishable forces: 'Je suis esclave de mon baptême. Parents, vous avez fait mon malheur et vous avez fait le vôtre. Pauvre innocent! L'enfer ne peut attaquer les païens. - '

To these subversive manoeuvres we can add the rejection of mid-nineteenth century realism in favour of the imagination in *Alchimie du verbe*:

> Depuis longtemps je me vantais de posséder tous les paysages possibles, et trouvais dérisoires les célébrités de la peinture et de la poésie moderne…J'inventai la couleur des voyelles ! – *A* noir, *E* blanc, *I* rouge, *O* bleu, *U* vert. -

These words (which include synesthetic overtures) presage the narrator's flight (or descent) into a hallucinatory realm, at once a place of pure creativity and utter madness:

> Je devins un opéra fabuleux : je vis que tous les êtres ont une fatalité de bonheur : l'action n'est pas la vie, mais une façon de gâcher quelque force, un énervement. La morale est la faiblesse de la cervelle. À chaque être, plusieurs *autres* vies me semblaient dues. Ce monsieur ne sait ce qu'il fait : il est un ange. Cette famille est une nichée de chiens. Devant plusieurs hommes, je causai tout haut avec un moment d'une de leurs autres vies. — Ainsi, j'ai aimé un porc.

Oscillating between the sort of prosodic auto-analysis contained in the previous passage and stretches of rhyming verse which appear to mock (in form and substance) the traditional lyric, the poem ends on an ambiguous note, declaring that 'Cela s'est passé: Je sais aujourd'hui saluer la beauté.' What, exactly, has ended? Furthermore, 'saluer' variously means 'to greet', 'to bid farewell to' or 'to hail'. The ambiguous denouement is heightened by the use of multiple tenses throughout the poem (the imperfect, the simple past and the present), which seem to reinvent the relationship between time and subjectivity, or at least suggest that the self/selves are in any one moment compressions of past, present and presumably future. This is psychological poetry which embeds personal moments of lived experience in a behemoth of history, culture, space and time.

Une Saison finishes with a poem entitled 'Adieu', which given Rimbaud's propensity for temporal asymmetry is something of a surprise (though perhaps that is the point?). If the entire collection may be read as a chronicle of spiritual perdition anchored in a chaotic history (or histories), Adieu appears to take stock of both the real and imaginary elements of this past before declaring that 'il faut être absolument modern.' In other words, the time has come to sublimate the opposing forces of dissolute reality and imaginative reverie and to 'posséder la vérité dans une âme et un corps.' Thus the truth is transformed into a physical and spiritual force that belongs to a future devoid of phantasmagoric wanderings.

While some critics have argued that 'Adieu' quite literally marks the end of Rimbaud's engagement with literature (he famously stopped writing and took up gun running in Africa), more recent scholarship suggests that *Une Saison* was actually drafted before *Illuminations*. Thus his move away from the realm of the imagination and toward a life of adventure is not necessarily plotted out with chronological precision in his poetry. This seems fitting insofar as his individual poems dispense with classical notions of space and time, Cartesian dualities and rhetoric, which is precisely why his work shook the very foundations of Western literature and continue to generate debate amongst scholars.

2.5 Conclusion

As previously indicated, Rimbaud's work would have been deeply shocking to nineteenth century readers accustomed to the conventions of classical and romantic poetry, which include fixed meter, predictable themes and an immutable 'I' advancing

in a straight line into the future. Like movement-image cinema, these conventions accord with 'the commonsense structures of our sensory-motor schema.' By way of contrast, I would describe Rimbaud's oeuvre as inherently protean, bending and layering time and blurring the distinction between subject and object, reality and fantasy. What is left is a highly contingent universe of psychic peregrination and pure possibility akin to Nietzsche's eternal return, and by way of extension Deleuze's time-image cinema.

To reiterate, it is not my intention to mount a simple cause-effect argument linking Symbolist poetry to Deleuze's second semiotic. Rather, I wish to demonstrate that Rimbaud's poetry reshaped and repositioned the creative horizons of Western literature and to that extent forms part of the gene pool of time-image film. As previously indicated in this chapter, Rimbaud redrafted these boundaries by introducing hitherto unheard of devices (including the absence of a clear lyrical subject, 'verbless' sentences and unconventional spatiotemporal structures) which ultimately had the effect of imploding linear time (and notions of self).

It is interested to note that *Illuminations* and *Une Saison* predated Bergson's *Matière et Mémoire* by some twenty years.[8] That is to say, Rimbaud's poetry did not emerge out of the philosophical maelstrom of Bergson's work on time and space. A more general historical analysis of late nineteenth century Europe would no doubt generate interesting hypotheses linking their respective oeuvres, which would in turn bridge the gap between Rimbaud and Deleuze. However, I have veered away from strictly historical analysis and toward a Deleuzian methodology anchored in the study

[8] *Matière et Mémoire* was published in 1896. *Illuminations* was written between 1872 and 1875.

of circuits of meaning. The following chapter will attempt to animate the Symbolist/time-image circuit by drawing out similarities between Rimbaud's poetry and the cinema of contemporary French cineaste, Claire Denis. While Denis' films are arguably the product of multiple influences, I hope to demonstrate that their genetic heritage includes poems from *Illuminations* and *Une Saison en enfer*.

Chapter 3

Claire Denis: the image of time, the memory of Rimbaud

Mais l'idée de greffe est quelque chose qui m'a toujours intéressée. Souvent dans mon travail, je parle de greffe. Comme si pour moi, le cinéma n'était vraiment intéressant que greffé. Je pense qu'il n'y a pas la littérature d'un côté et le cinéma de l'autre, il y a quelque chose qui est greffé. C'est le cinéma qui se greffe.

- Claire Denis

3.1 Introduction

Deleuze saw in Italian neorealism the manifestation of a new cinematic semiotic: the disintegration of the Cartesian sensory-motor experience in favour of something approaching pure time. Moments hitherto obscured by the grand narratives of classical cinema were brought to the fore, forgotten characters were given a voice (or at least tracked through disjointed space) and subjectivity was not only privileged, but presented as troubled, changing and ultimately unresolved.

The previous chapter of this thesis questioned Deleuze's purely historical approach to time-image cinema. In applying Deleuze to Deleuze, it posited Symbolist poetry, as illustrated by the oeuvre of Rimbaud, as part of the crystalline universe of contingencies underpinning *l'image-temps*. This chapter will build on that premise by placing the work of French cineaste Claire Denis within this theoretical frame. In examining her oeuvre in general terms, and then through the lens of a particular film,

namely *Beau Travail* (1999), I will argue that her cinema incarnates a contemporary version of time-image film. I will go on to demonstrate a network of creative and philosophical veins linking Rimbaud's discursive poetic to Denis' universe of possibility, intrusion and layered subjectivity. In doing so, I will remain true to the Bergson/Deleuze manifesto of *pure possibility*, arguing that these veins are merely part of a larger circuit of influences, some visible, others not.

3.2 Denis and *L'Image-Temps*

As an auteur whose body of work 'is avowedly inscribed in a wider historical context, including a background of cultural and artistic references and a framework of cinematic traditions' (Beugnet 15), there is value in examining the links between her life, oeuvre and *l'image-temps*, before moving on to a more specific analysis of her most Deleuzian film (Beugnet 26), *Beau Travail*.

Claire Denis was born in either 1946 or 1948. There is a certain *justesse* in the birthdate of one the Europe's most elliptical filmmakers remaining a mystery. The usual biographical starting point – a fixed date in history – is subordinated to an anachronic web of information comprising moments of exposition captured in interviews, fragments of information gleaned from actors and technicians, and a body of work spanning twenty five years, and counting. The complexity and originality of her oeuvre has also generated bursts of interest from academics, with articles and

book chapters examining her films through the lens of various disciplines including gender studies, film theory, psychoanalytic theory and post-colonial theory.[9]

The affinity between Denis' work and post-colonial theory is arguably a natural one. Denis' father was an administrator in the French colonial services. She spent her childhood moving around West Africa, a period which coincided with the last ten years of French colonial rule. Returning to Paris at the age of fourteen after having witnessed the collapse of colonialism, she was understandably 'receptive to social and cultural conflicts' (Beugnet 8). Indeed, a childhood spent negotiating the complexities of European hegemony in Africa would have a profound influence on her choices as a filmmaker, with Denis herself stating that 'je trouvai moral – je ne peux pas dire autrement - d'expliquer ma place par rapport à l'Afrique, ma place symbolique' (qtd in Beugnet 7).

Denis' comments draw a neat arc between her status as coloniser and those films set in, or otherwise linked to, Africa. However, it is conceivable that Denis' early experiences influenced the substance and form of her entire oeuvre. Specifically, while many of her films explicitly deal with European presence in Africa or the complexities of post-colonial French society, the totality of her oeuvre is bound by the themes of alienation, power, transgression, and what I call the 'ethics of the everyday': the psychological and material vicissitudes of being human in a Daedalian world. For example *L'Intrus*, which is set in France, Switzerland, Polynesia and Korea (that is, everywhere but Africa), explores the fraught emotional and physical

[9] See for example, Mayne, Judith. *Claire Denis: Contemporary Film Directors*. Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2005. Print.

boundaries between the self and the other, notions of nationhood and belonging, and the precarious relationships that form over the top of barely concealed political and familial fault lines. Much like *Chocolat* or *White Material* (both of which are set somewhere in West Africa), this is cinema in which power, race, nation and identity are anchored in a nuanced depiction of (inter)personal trauma.

Building on these observations, I would argue that Denis' early exposure to the disfiguring consequences of colonialism predisposed her to a particular affinity with time-image cinema. Specifically, the personal and geopolitical trauma that typifies the (post) colonial experience is consistent with the fractured sensory-motor schema of time-image film. In keeping with the methodology of the preceding chapter, I wish to posit the relationship between Denis' childhood in Africa and her films as one within a broader circuit of meanings. This broader circuit includes the link between Symbolist poetry and (Denis') time-image cinema, which will be explored in more detail later in this chapter.

Commentators have both explicitly and implicitly aligned Denis' cinematic universe with the time-image. For example, Martine Beugnet observed that her films are based on elliptical, fragmentary narrative constructs where 'erased traces of a repressed past threaten to resurface, like a palimpsest.' (Beugnet 20). The disjointed nature of Denis' cinematic universe is the product of irrational montage which creates images that are an 'amorphous set or disconnected space' (Rodowick 74). This in turn results in the breakdown of the sensorimotor schema, which as indicated in chapter 2 is the essence of time-image cinema.

I would further note that the fragmented, layered narratives of Denis' films are indivisible from the complex inner worlds of her characters and the precariousness of modern, globalised society. That is, she tends to depict flawed beings struggling to survive – both psychically and physically – as civilisations crumble *(White Material*), or organs are trafficked (*L'Intrus*), or killers roam suburbia (*J'ai pas sommeil*). The combination of social entropy and personal neurosis/trauma is not only fuelled by 'irrational montage', but actively contributes to the overall sense of instability, of potential (rather than fixed) signification.

Indeed, a complex web of historical and interpersonal 'facts', 'facts' which are ultimately contingent and represented through ellipsis rather than diegesis, deprive her films of the teological focus of movement-image cinema. Rather, they infuse Denis' work with uncertainty and ambiguity and in so doing generate a sense of becoming rather than being, of possibility rather than static truth. The coming-into-being of time is embodied in images characterised by Deleuze as 'chronosigns', which in turn enliven the 'power of the false', the Nietzschean notion of 'pure difference'.

For example, it is through inference and the layering of discordant images and sounds (wolves in the forest, faceless characters fleeing in the night, a heart frozen beneath ice) that we piece together a sub-narrative of *L'Intrus*: that of organ trafficking across Europe's porous, post-cold war borders. However, the sub-narrative remains fragmented, more allusion than well-defined story. The absence of diegesis is both disconcerting and liberating: in withholding information, Denis leaves a great deal open to interpretation, or to imaginative engagement. Furthermore, in removing the possibility of simple dichotomies (right versus wrong, true versus false), Denis

eliminates reductionist constructions of humans and the world they inhabit. In its place, a dynamic spiral of difference and becoming challenges the spectator to see trafficking as part of an ever-shifting and inherently complex world where people flee, dodge, hide and maim in order to survive. While Denis does not appoint herself arbiter of good and evil, it would be wrong to classify her films as amoral, particularly given the fraught gender, race and class issues at the heart of her work. Rather, her films are non-didactic. Thus while organ trafficking is presented as part of a brutal post-communist Europe, Denis ultimately refrains from judging the phenomenon.

She is equally without judgement when representing deeply flawed characters, who themselves emerge out of these complex webs of social, political and interpersonal relations. Indeed, it is because characters such as Louis Trebor, the protagonist of *L'Intrus*, are entangled in a labyrinthine world of known, half-known and entirely mysterious (dis)connections that we come to see them as beings who are 'already implicated in a social temporality that exceeds [their] own capacity for narration' (Butler 7-8).

It is precisely this failure that infuses Denis' characters, and her films, with a sense of Deleuzian possibility. That is, her work is irreducible to a single point of resolution or clarity, which in turn generates Deleuzian 'lectosigns' (images that must be read, rather than simply observed) (Rodowick 80). Much like abstract art, which Lyotard qualifies as 'sublime' (in the Kantian sense), her films do not offer up a clear 'story' or simple characterisation and therefore demand engagement rather than easy spectatorship. To quote Lyotard, 'the sublime is not simple gratification, but the

gratification of effort' (67). Denis asks us to do more than watch: she requires us to think.

Indeed, the complexity of her films requires us to question thought itself, to ask 'what is thought?' and 'how does thought interact with the screen?' Deleuze describes this very process as the indirect imaging of cinematic thought, or the 'noosign' (Rodowick 80). Again, this is cinema that defies the hallmark of movement-image film: a rational, linear narrative that proceeds through a series of cause-effect relations and culminates in resolution.

The absence of clear resolution is further driven by an explicit or implicit sense of 'no place', with certain films devoid of any clear geographical location. For example, *White Material* is filmed in an unnamed, fictional West African nation a decade or two after the end of colonial rule. On the verge of civil war, the remaining French inhabitants are now entirely 'other': no longer welcome, but with no clear affiliation to metropolitan France. Against the backdrop of historical purgatory, (white) characters lose internal cogency, either refusing to accept that their reign has ended (Maria, the plantation owner), or descending into madness (Manuel, her son).

Even those films which are clearly tied to a specific location are steeped in an atmosphere of indeterminacy. For example, while *Beau Travail* is set in Djibouti, the legionnaire's barracks in the desert are a sort of 'half-place', or 'world-between-worlds', with the film's rhythm oscillating between dreamlike sequences of daily life, frenetic training sessions, and highly stylised, choreographed exercise routines. Similarly, *L'Intrus* is set in France, Switzerland, Korea and Polynesia. However,

Trebor's lodge on the French-Swiss border feels isolated, mysterious, far from reality. This is heightened by the complexities of frontier politics, a zone where notions of legal/illegal, legitimate/illegitimate are negotiated on an ongoing basis. Even *35 Rhums*, a quiet, intimate film set in Paris, depicts relationships in transition: a daughter moving toward independence and away from her father, a father and his colleague dealing with the 'limbo' of retirement. The apartment in which the father-daughter duo live is further situated on the boundary between Paris proper and the suburbs, and adjacent to train tracks leading to and from Gare de L'Est. A world-between-worlds.

While the indeterminacy of place and time are both typical of the Nietzschean false, Denis' films also embody another aspect of the time-image, namely the 'crystal-image', which in its perfect form may be defined as the convergence of past and present in a single moment (or the union of the actual and the virtual). I understand this in the Hegelian sense of 'coming-into-being', with the past coming into existence in the present, before the moment splits and both recedes into the distance and launces itself into the future (Rodowick 109). I also found the following explanation useful:

> Configuring the crystal as a temporal concept with affective properties enables Deleuze to address the associated implications for relationships generated by movement, time, memory, perception and affect – each within a particular circuit of meaning, medium or surround. (Parr 60)

In a filmic sense, the 'perfect crystal' manifests as a hermetically sealed world where the present continually refers back to the past while advancing into the future.

Deleuze illustrates this concept with Max Ophüls' 1955 film, *Lola Montès*, in which the protagonist, Lola, lives a 'dédoublement du temps', conserving in each moment the glorious past, miserable present and possible future of her life as a circus performer (Deleuze, *Cinéma 2: L'Image-Temps* 112). Similarly, the 'dédoublement du temps' is manifest at various points in *White Material*. Specifically, disorienting scenes depicting the frightful convergence of colonial past and post-colonial denial embody the perfect crystal, with Maria and spectator alike trapped in a nightmarish half-world clearly imprinted with the 'glory' and horrors of imperial rule, as well as the idea of a different future.

I wish to make one final comment regarding the overall affinity between Denis' films and Deleuze's second semiotic. While one commentator has claimed that 'the willful eclecticism that makes Denis' body of work consistently interesting also makes it difficult to situate within any definitive theoretical contexts' (Murphy), I contend that Denis' oeuvre displays, to varying degrees, an affinity with the key components of *l'image-temps* including: irrational montage; 'the power of the false'; the 'crystal-image'; and the use of 'chronosigns', 'lectosigns', 'noosigns'. While this does not mean all her films, or entire films, demonstrate a complete breakdown of the sensorimotor schema (this being relatively rare),[10] her work tends to include scenes which embody the aforementioned components.

[10] Deleuze considers that only three films demonstrate 'comment nous habitons le temps…': Dovjenko's *Zvenigora*, Hitchcock's *Vertigo* and Resnais' *Je t'aime je t'aime*. See Deleuze, Gilles. *Cinéma 2: L'Image-Temps*. Paris: Les Editions de Minuit. 110. Print.

3.3 *L'Image-Temps* of *Beau Travail*

Denis' 1999 film, *Beau Travail* clearly embodies core components of *l'image-temps*. Indeed, the film is unusual insofar as its montage, temporal structure, intertextuality and characters work in concert to create a filmic experience that is overwhelmingly consistent with Deleuze's second semiotic.

Beau Travail is set in contemporary Djibouti. Its subject is the lives of a small group of legionnaires stationed where the desert meets the ocean. The setting infuses the film with a distinct 'end-of-the-earth' ambiance, which complements the overall sense of mystery generated by the narrative.

The narrative unfolds through the eyes of second-in-command Galoup, whose diary, voice and memories give rise to a non-chronological and at times dreamlike version of events, the fulcrum of which is a triangular relationship between the narrator, legion captain Bruno Forestier, and new recruit Gilles Sentain.

Galoup's intense admiration for the older Forestier borders on Oedipal obsession. When Forestier singles out Sentain for his bravery following a helicopter crash, Galoup's jealousy of the young, quietly defiant legionnaire becomes increasingly malignant, culminating in a premeditated – but well veiled – murder attempt. As the film closes, it is unclear whether Sentain will survive or die, reinforcing the overall sense of ambiguity pervading the narrative.

While it is tempting to attribute the atmosphere of uncertainty to Galoup's unreliable narration, one commentator has pointed out that:

> Never is the relationship between Galoup's memories and what 'really' happened made clear. It isn't that Galoup is necessarily an unreliable narrator but that his narration is the very symptom the film explores. (Mayne 93)

This 'symptom' is the inherently labyrinthine, non-linear nature of memory. In constructing a film that questions the possibility of producing an objective, knowable self, Denis highlights the mysterious 'other' that lies at the heart of each individual. To the extent that memory is constitutive of both individual and group identity, Denis' film also draws attention to the unknowable – or at least contingent – aspects of community, culture and nation. This has broader implications, in particular the unhinging of colonial ideology, an ideology highly dependent on a series of dubious and ultimately racist dichotomies (civilised/native, master/slave, Christian/pagan and so on). In deconstructing these dichotomies, as well as the idea of an entirely linear, transparent 'story of the self,' *Beau Travail* reflects one of the core components of *l'image-temps*, namely Bergson's 'plane of immanence' (or of possibility).

Beau Travail's interrogation of memory and self is in part the product of irrational or non-linear montage, a key component of time-image cinema. This montage generates a temporally complex narrative, with Galoup's story fluidly moving between past, present and future without any obvious transitional signposts. For example, one 'circuit' of narrative takes place in Marseille, where Galoup is living in exile following expulsion from the legionnaires. Scenes of him shaving,

making his bed, writing in his diary and engaging in other mundane activities are interspersed with shots of the legion outpost, or the 'Djibouti circuit'. The movement between Marseille and Djibouti is not decodified – or able to be decodified – until relatively late in the film when it becomes apparent that Galoup has been expelled for attempting to kill Sentain by sending him into the desert with a faulty compass. Indeed, the film's own inhabitants remain ignorant of Sentain's fate, assuming he has deserted, until a chance encounter with nomadic merchants reveals otherwise. Their trestle table of odd treasures includes a worn compass, which a legionnaire touches, examines, appears to recognise. The film's imagery and the layered presentation of Galoup's expulsion (implied throughout the film, and then finally confirmed in an airport scene) suggest that his act of sabotage has been uncovered and punished.

The film's irrational montage is complemented by Agnès Godard's dreamlike cinematography which oscillates from image to (ostensibly) unrelated image. These include long and panning shots of the bare landscape and pale blue water; close ups of legionnaires' bodies (in training or otherwise); intimate portraits of local women in clubs, in their homes and on the street; and simple yet evocative images of men hanging washing, ironing, or eating together. The occasional use of superimposition – for example the ocean over Galoup's hand as he writes – reinforces the film's accordion-like structure and overall sense of non-linearity. Godard's camera also has a trance-like quality, moving slowly across landscapes and seascapes, bodies, faces and from scene to scene. Scenes appear to wander by rather than 'happen', reinforcing the film's non-teleological structure.

The absence of continuity shots (or use of irrational montage) and cinematography are also core constituents of *Beau Travail*'s temporal landscape. As previously indicated, the film has an accordion-like structure, folding in and out and across time without any reference to the sensorimotor schema. While the film's main temporal 'circuits' are Galoup's exile in Marseille (future) and the legion outpost in Djibouti (past), there are smaller, non-linear circuits within these two central circuits. Perhaps the most striking example is Galoup's meticulous grooming ritual – ironing a black shirt, shaving, combing his hair – in Marseille. These shots are interspersed with other scenes from the 'Marseille circuit', which are in turn interspersed with scenes from Djibouti. It eventually becomes apparent that Galoup is grooming himself for suicide. The final scene takes place in an empty nightclub, with Galoup's frenetic improvisation to 'Rhythm of the Night' a metaphoric suicide dance – or possibly the discursive denouement before literally taking his own life (with a gun glimpsed in an earlier scene). Like Sentain, his fate ultimately remains a mystery. However, the ritualistic nature of his preparation and the dance itself imply that he is striving toward the one, great historical moment that eluded him as a legionnaire – death by his own hand.

The film's temporal structure, interrogation of memory and identity, and use of mirroring and repetition embody aspects of the crystal-image. In addition to the 'perfect crystal' outlined in the preceding section of this chapter, Deleuze describes three other crystalline subgenres: the 'cracked crystal'; the 'crystal in formation'; and the 'decomposing crystal'. Based on my analysis, certain scenes in *Beau Travail* reflect the perfect, cracked and decomposing crystals, respectively.

The ‘perfect crystal’ is evident at several points throughout the film, with one of the most striking examples occurring in a relatively early scene set in Marseille. In this scene, Galoup evokes the name ‘Forestier’ in voiceover and written form (with the latter appearing on the captain’s identity bracelet, which Galoup has somehow acquired). It is a moment in which the ‘Marseille circuit’ (present) is indivisible from three past circuits: Djibouti, the Algerian war, and Godard’s 1963 film *Le Petit Soldat*. While the first is self-explanatory, the second and third involve an interesting layering of data. During his voiceover, Galoup reveals that Forestier (played by Michel Subor) fought in the Algerian war. Further research reveals that Subor’s character in *Le Petit Soldat* was also called Bruno Forestier and also fought in Algeria, creating a fascinating series of intertextual circuits. Denis appears to be drawing attention to the historical and cinematic antecedents to her own film, with Subor/Bruno Forestier acting as catalyst.

The cracked crystal involves a play of mimicry between characters (for example actual characters and virtual/remembered characters) which is disrupted by an event. This event cracks the crystal, allowing the narrative to escape through a newly formed opening, thereby ending the seemingly endless mirroring (Deleuze, *Cinema 2: L’Image-Temps* 113-15). The two principal circuits in *Beau Travail* (Marseille/present and Djibouti/past) cycle each other in a discursive, but ultimately symbiotic fashion, with one particular event cracking the pattern of mimicry: the discovery of the broken compass. From this point on, escape seems synonymous with (possible death) – be it that of Sentain, or of Galoup.

The decomposing crystal, which manifests as the disintegration of grand narratives and more generally, power (*Deleuze, Cinema 2: L'Image-Temps* 124-28), is evident in *Beau Travail*. While the film is not ironic in tone – indeed it is mindful of the intense discipline demanded of each and every legionnaire (Barossa 96) – it does draw attention to the legion's demise following the end of French rule in Africa. Mock battles in abandoned, half-built structures highlight its irrelevance in a post-colonial world, as do purposefully Sisyphean exercises (such as digging holes) intended to punish aberrant soldiers, or build physical and mental fortitude. The 'decomposition circuit' reaches its climax with Galoup's expulsion. Exiled in a world in which the legion and its codes are quaint anachronisms, a world which does not recognise his training, rank or discipline, he chooses self-annihilation over irrelevance. In the words of Deleuze, 'ces milieux cristallins sont inséparables d'un processus de décomposition qui les mine du dedans, et les assombrit, les opacifie…' (Deleuze, *Cinéma 2: L'Image-Temps* 125).

The use of crystalline circuits or structures is complemented by complex intertextuality. In addition to Subor/Forestier generating historical and cinematic continuity between the Algerian war, *Le Petit Soldat* and *Beau Travail*, the film emerges out of a multiplicity of modalities including literature, music and dance.

In the first instance, *Beau Travail* is a (very) loose adaptation of Herman Melville's unfinished novella, Billy Budd, with Sentain standing in for Billy and Galoup for Claggart. Denis preserves little of the original narrative, though by way of exception a scene depicting a procession of legionnaires through deserted streets is drawn from the novella's preface (Renouard). Within the confines of the film, the

procession, repeated at unpredictable intervals, feels mysterious. While the scene certainly contains its own signifiers which connect thematically to the broader film (particularly around masculine honour and tradition within the legion), it is temporally disjunctive and dreamlike. However, read as part of a broader circuit of meanings, it develops a more concrete identity within the non-linear, layered narrative.

If Denis' adaptation is largely intertextual, it is arguably because her head is full of literature, poetry, philosophy and politics. Indeed, it is revealing that Denis chose to interpret the novella via Melville's later poems, stating that:

> Avec Jean-Pol Fargeau, mon co-scénariste, puis avec Denis Lavant and les autres comédiens, on se nourrissait des derniers poèmes de Melville. J'ai le sentiment que ce regret, cette perte des compagnons, d'une vie organisée comme l'est la vie d'un marin, se retrouvaient dans plusieurs poèmes. J'ai eu l'impression d'être plus fidèle en racontant l'histoire ainsi. Mais fidèle n'est pas le mot. Plus proche. (Renouard)

Denis' very mode of interpretation reflects the complex, crystalline structure of the film itself. That is, rather than confining herself to the text of Billy Budd, Denis finds her way into the novella by transcending its literal boundaries and drawing on extrinsic materials. The final film feels more like a distillation of the novella's key relationship and themes than a traditional adaptation. In this sense, Billy Budd haunts, rather than inhabits, the film.

However, the novella's ghostlike presence is largely attributable to Benjamin Britten's operatic version of Billy Budd which infuses the film with tragic élan. In addition to using Britten's opera as a soundtrack, Denis played it while filming in the desert, stating that 'c'était tellement beau d'entendre la musique lutter contre le vent que cela apportait quelque chose' (Renouard). Thus actors and audience alike are privy to the film's intertextuality, and to that extent multiple circuits of (possible) meaning.

Finally, Denis' collaboration with choreographer Bernardo Montet adds a dazzling layer of movement and ritual. With Britten's opera floating above the desert sandscape, bare chested men engage in almost liturgical 'training' sessions that fuse dance, yoga and martial arts. These scenes are interspersed throughout the film, culminating in a hypnotic stand-off between Galoup and Sentain, the men circling each other with unrelenting focus. As a spectator, it is difficult to locate these scenes within any known schema or mode of representation. Consequently, the immediate impact is more visceral than cerebral, but in watching and re-watching the film I found myself drawn into layers of possible meaning. For example, the scenes appear to draw attention to both the legionnaire's body-as-weapon and the hierarchical, codified world that it inhabits.

In summary, *Beau Travail*'s temporal structure, themes and intertextuality create a film in which time itself, and moreover entropy, prevail over linear narrative. The following section will interrogate critics' general tendency to label these elements as 'poetic', before fleshing out more specific links between *Beau Travail* and the work of Arthur Rimbaud.

3.4 *Beau Travail* / le Travail de Rimbaud

Academic papers and film reviews alike frequently describe Denis' work as poetic, though rarely is this idea explored in any detail. Indeed, there seems to be a tacit agreement that films lacking a linear narrative simply *are* 'poetic'; as if any further, explicit discussion is entirely unnecessary, or would spoil the mystery – and hence artistic credibility – of the film. By way of example, a critic from *Le Monde* described Denis' work as 'le plus remarquable bilan poétique du désastre colonial et de la barrière jetée entre Noirs et Blancs' (Mandelbaum), while Martine Beugnet has labelled Denis' cinematic universe 'a multifaceted, poetic vision of the contemporary world' (Beugnet 5). Curiously, neither elaborated on *why* Denis' work was poetic. There is arguably something essentialist, and to that extent anti-Deleuzian, about employing a word that connotes a diversity of forms with such reflexivity. While it is not the goal of this thesis to forensically analyse the roots of this phenomenon, it does seek to undermine essentialist constructions of poetry by drawing a more specific link between the work of Rimbaud and that of Claire Denis.

In an epic, two-part interview with French film critics Mathilde Blottière and Laurent Rigoulet, Denis was asked about her 'vision poétique et non narrative'. Though her response was impressionistic rather than deeply analytical, she nevertheless problematised the critics' underlying assumption, stating:

> J'ai une certaine appréhension à m'exprimer, et c'est pour cela que j'ai recours, non pas à des métaphores mais, parfois, à des scènes muettes. Je ne crois pas pour autant filmer « en poésie ». J'essaie de faire en sorte que certains

> sentiments naissent du silence, ou de mots qui n'ont rien à voir avec la scène, comme une bulle qui éclot à la surface d'un marécage. Pour moi, c'est ça une scène: quelque chose a longtemps germé et fermenté – ça peut aussi être un gaz nauséabond – et soudain affleure à la surface. C'est ce que j'essaie de capturer. (Blottière)

Denis' rejection of the qualifier 'poetic' is interesting on two counts. First, it contradicts most critical reception of her work. Second, it highlights the inherent nebulousness of the term. Regardless, her cinematic modus operandi – namely a desire to capture a certain coming-into-being, or to juxtapose language and image – reflects a certain approach to creativity that may be traced back to Symbolist poetry.

Indeed, it is my contention that *Beau Travail*'s protean texture is more closely aligned with Symbolism than any other poetic genre. The notable exception is modernist poetry (or poetries), however to the extent that the work of Ezra Pound et al. is indebted to French Symbolism,[11] we find ourselves circling back to Rimbaud and his ground breaking indeterminacy.

The basis of this premise was outlined in chapter two of this thesis. To recapitulate, I argued that the aforementioned indeterminacy redefined the boundaries of creative expression in the West. These new boundaries had significant ontological and epistemological implications, the echoes of which would be felt in post-war cinema almost a century later. As a product of *l'image-temps*, *Beau Travail* has Rimbaudian blood pumping through its veins.

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[11] See for example Perloff, Marjorie. *The Poetics of Indeterminacy: Rimbaud to Cage*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981. Print.

In the broadest sense, this 'blood' includes Rimbaud's pledge to revolutionise literature by generating art that causes a 'dérèglement de tous les sens' (Brunel 143). As outlined in chapter 2, Rimbaud's discursive prose poetry and free verse constituted a radical departure from the strictures of the Alexandrine, generating nothing less than epistemic trauma amongst late nineteenth-century readers.

By way of corollary, *Beau Travail* is devoid of normative reference points, in particular a consistent sensorimotor schema. While Denis is not driven by revolutionary ideals, her unique body of time-image cinema is arguably the beneficiary of creative fissures chiselled by Baudelaire and blown open by Rimbaud.

Rimbaud's radicalism is attributable to a range of anti-classical devices. For example, he abandoned the economy and clarity of rhetorical strategy in favour of highly ambiguous, iconoclastic verse. To reiterate, this was a daring move which turned nineteenth century poetry – and written expression – on its head. Rather than offering an easily navigable 'argument' that built, climaxed and resolved in accordance with classical norms, he challenged (and continues to challenge) readers to engage with complex ideas that form part of larger philosophical or historical circuits. In other words, his poetry is not bound by its own (rhetorical) form, or by traditional symbology. Rather, it generates unique symbolism and themes which by virtue of their unorthodoxy join larger circuits of possible meaning.

This is largely consistent with Denis' time-image poetry. That is, her work is distinctly non-rhetorical and as noted in the previous section, eschews pedagogy. Like Rimbaud's poetry before it, *Beau Travail* does not offer up a narrative or reference

points which are easily decoded. While contemporary critical theories provide a range of frameworks with which to approach and dissect its complexities, its appeal to theorists of varying stripes tends to reinforce its Rimbaudian core.

The absence of rhetoric in Rimbaud's poetry is underpinned by temporal instability. Dispensing with the Alexandrine and its multiple conventions, Rimbaud experimented with meter, enjambment, line length and space to create highly subversive free verse and prose poetry that moved between tenses and personal pronouns, and skipped articles. The result is conceptually fragmented pieces expunged of ideas and imagery that build and move across time in a predictable, linear fashion. While the poems have internal integrity (that is, they are not randomly constructed), multiple readings are required to elucidate the constellation(s) of circuits that lie within each work.

Temporal instability and narrative dissolution are reinforced by the strategic use of space and silence. Specifically, empty space disrupts the steady accumulation of meaning, replacing certainty with ambiguity and calling on readers to contemplate the role of 'nothing' within the poem's broader context. For example, the opening line of Aube, 'J'ai embrassé l'aube d'été', is followed by blank space, and then a new line enumerating a series of unrelated images. One tends to linger on the first few words before taking them into the empty space, contemplating their meaning, before finally turning to the second line. The absence of verbs performs a similar function, arresting movement and encouraging readers to dwell on an image or idea.

Like Rimbaud's poetry, *Beau Travail*'s temporal structure is disorienting, moving between and within two central circuits – the 'Djibouti circuit' (past) and the 'Marseille circuit' (present) – independently of rational, linear time. Indeed, the film's most complex temporal substructure manifests within circuits, with flashback occurring in accordion-like spasms rather than along a well defined axis. These complex networks of images and narrative are reminiscent of Rimbaud's wandering constellations of symbols, ideas and themes, as well as a propensity to fragment time by moving between tenses. Furthermore, Agnès Godard's slow panning of bare landscapes recollects Rimbaud's verbless lines in poems such as 'Mouvement', as well as the subtle use of space and silence in Aube.

Finally, both Rimbaud and Denis generate art that is deeply psychological. Rather than replicating linear sensorimotor schemas, they create multiple, internal circuits that are more closely aligned with the labyrinthine workings of the human mind, as well as the complex inter-subjectivity that is determinative of individual and group identity. While Rimbaud literally splits subjectivity into multiple, highly performative voices (for example in *Une saison en enfer*), Denis problematises Galoup's narration by highlighting the unstable, accordion-like nature of self and memory. In so doing, both draw attention to the 'other' within. In the words of Rimbaud, 'Je est un autre' (Brunel 143). That is, self-knowledge is partial, identity contingent.

3.5 Conclusion

While the horrors of World War Two generated seismic cultural shifts across Europe, Italian neorealism, the French New Wave and avant-garde film cannot be reduced to a single event or phenomenon. Rather, the genetic heritage of *l'image-temps* includes a range of cinematic, literary and philosophical sources. For example, it has been compellingly argued that the roots of neorealism include Soviet montage cinema, poetic realism (in particular the films of Jean Renoir and Marcel Carné), and the work of American novelists such as Jean Steinbeck, William Faulkner and Ernest Hemingway (Shiel, 17 - 20). Similarly, the 'core' filmmakers of the French New Wave – Truffaut, Godard, Rohmer, Rivette, Chabrol – developed 'sous la conduit spirituelle d'André Bazin…', who was himself influenced by Emmanuel Mounier, Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus (Frodon 24).

This genetic heritage also includes the work of Arthur Rimbaud. That is, Rimbaud's dazzling, layered poetry shook the foundations of French literature, reinventing notions of self, other, time and history. In so doing, he generated one of the most significant shifts in Western literary history, the echoes of which would reverberate through late Symbolism, American Modernisms, and as argued in this thesis, time-image cinema.

As a time-image cineaste, Claire Denis is indebted to Rimbaud.[12] While her work is the product of multiple influences, including a childhood spent negotiating the

[12] Perhaps the most 'explicit' connection between Rimbaud and Denis is the memory of 'Africa'. By this I mean Denis' very personal memory of the continent on the one hand, and a broader cultural memory that has formed around the poet's (quasi

complexities of late French colonialism, its temporal indeterminacy and psychological structure bears more than a passing resemblance to Rimbaud's revolutionary verse. Indeed, her most 'Deleuzian film', *Beau Travail*, teems with Rimbaudian devices: multiple (non-linear) temporal circuits, juxtaposition of space and movement, absence of sanctioned reference points or symbols, complex subjectivities, dismantling of simple binaries. In the words of Deleuze, both artists generate 'nouveaux rapports… plus triés par la sensori-motricité' (Deleuze, "Vérité et Cinéma").

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mythological) marauding in East Africa, on the other. Denis herself claims that she chose to film *Beau Travail* in Djibouti as it was '[u]n pays mystérieux, à la géologie passionnante, un peu mythique par les caravanes de sel, Rimbaud, et, justement, la Légion qui l'a choisi comme terrain d'entraînement' (Creutz).

Chapter 4

Ephemeron: cinema, poetry and the plane of immanence

Ephemeron: an insect, which, in its winged state, lives but for a day

- Oxford English Dictionary

4. 1 Introduction

While the preceding two chapters were largely theoretical in nature, chapter 4 is exegetical, marrying philosophy and creative practice. As the script-poetry interface is a consciously Deleuzian manoeuvre, the links between *l'image-temps* and *Ephemeron* will be explored in detail. This process will in turn clarify the dynamic relationship between the film script, and individual poems and 'poem circuits', respectively. Spanning time and space, these relationships generate larger circuits of meaning. They also carry traces of my own creative odyssey, a journey spanning four cities and two continents. In this sense, *Ephemeron* reflects Claire Denis' subjective intertextuality, as well as Rimbaud's essentially (pre) psychoanalytic revelation that 'Je est un autre'.

Accordingly, *Ephemeron* is a multidimensional entity. While its outer 'shell' or circuit comprises a feature-length film script and a collection of poetry (written in French and English, respectively), its 'inner shells' includes circuits linking together

intergenerational trauma, imagined worlds, dementia, the collapse of civilisation(s), and my own personal encounters with art, place and culture.

These elements are bound together by absence or ellipsis, the function of which is to cleave open meaning, replacing fixed narrative with possibility. That is to say, the overall lack of diegesis is intended to facilitate multiple connections and readings. Thus while this chapter will elucidate key circuits and their connection to Deleuze's second semiotic, it cannot be considered an absolute or exhaustive authority on *Ephemeron*. Nor is it intended to explain the psychological minutiae of each character. Rather, it constitutes an account of my creative practice, theoretical encounters and personal influences.

4. 2 Poetry and cinema, English and French: the outer circuit

The decision to build a creative project around a script and interconnected poetry was, as alluded to in the introduction to this chapter, the product of my engagement with Deleuze's second semiotic. Specifically, as films embodying this semiotic may be characterised as elusive and non-teleological, it seemed valid to consider designing a hybrid work in which ellipsis operated on two interconnected creative planes. Furthermore, my feeling was that the overall sense of Deleuzian or Bergsonian 'possibility' could be heightened by poetry which was non-linear in both its individual and collective structure.

With that in mind, most poems were conceived as expressions of particular themes (such as entropy, environmental decline, individual and collective memory

loss, and so on), or as meditations on intergenerational trauma. The latter 'trauma' poems were to be anchored in the suicide of Jean-François' wife / Sylvie's mother / Léa's grandmother, as well as the almost-absent Paul's troubled past, though a conscious decision was made to circumscribe Paul's poetic backstory and focus on his role as seeker and oracle, as well as the object of Sylvie's (unrequited) fantasies.

Other poems still were drafted in response to certain encounters with art and place whilst studying abroad in France. It seemed not only legitimate but vital to modify and integrate these pieces into *Ephemeron.* Drawing on Rimbaud's notion of Je est un autre, I felt that the personal and creative fractures that had emerged over the course of my thesis should be woven into the project, thereby forming part of the characters' own unstable identities. My encounters with Claire Denis served to reinforce this decision. That is, Denis' films are inflected with the sort of auto-textuality consistent with knowledge around one's role as both creator and vector. For example, links can be drawn between characters and actors across films, generating complex, layered cinematic beings.

While I was seeking to create a creative work that reflected aspects of Deleuze's second semiotic, I was mindful that an entirely unstructured, elliptical work could be deemed wilfully obscure. I therefore gave considerable thought to the structure of the film-poetry interface. Accordingly, the original structure (or lack thereof) was replaced by a three-three rhythm. This imposed a certain rigour insofar as I had to think carefully about the precise structure of the film: there would be no room for gratuitous scenes. This specific, rather than random, structure also reflected my own poetry, much of which is quite sparse, with strong attention to regular lines

(for example two, three or four lines per verse). Thus within the endless swirl of possibility there would be a contrived synergy between individual poems and the overall poetry-script interface.

The linguistic component of the outer circuit is significant, and to that extent requires some elucidation. As indicated in chapter 1, I was determined to build a project that brought together the two languages that underscored (and split) my identity. Again, this reflected a certain engagement with the notion of the 'other' within, as well as a more primal drive to write in the language I had consciously adopted and which I associated with a sort of 'aliveness'. Beyond these considerations, I felt a certain affinity with a lineage of French cinema which included both French and foreign cinéastes alike. I was also particularly drawn to the cinematic precursor to the French New Wave, namely Italian neorealism. Filmmakers such as Robert Bresson, Alain Resnais, François Truffaut, Agnès Varda, Claire Denis, Michael Haneke and Michelangelo Antonioni had all shaped my cinematic consciousness. By way of corollary, it felt entirely natural to write the script in French and to set it on a fictional Francophone island somewhere in the Mediterranean.

The penultimate component of the outer circuit is place. While the island's terrain is based on my own experiences in Corsica, I made a conscious decision to avoid setting the film in a specific location. The reasons for this were twofold. First, as a non-native speaker, I was concerned that I would struggle to accurately capture the linguistic particularities of a specific town or region. Second and moreover, I wanted the indeterminacy of the narrative to be supported by a 'world-between-

worlds' ambiance. My hope was that this would induce a sort of intellectual reverie which complemented, rather than negated, the project's philosophical underpinnings.

Finally, some explanation of the title *Ephemeron* is also necessary. Operating along two axes, the term (Greek in origin) embodies both the literal and the metaphoric. On the one hand, it captures the physical transience of insects, and more generally the biosphere (when pushed to its limits). On the other, it reflects the infinite number of finite moments which connect, disconnect, and possibly reconnect in an endless swirl of non-linear signification.

4.3 Inner circuits: background

Drawing on Bergson and Deleuze, I argue that the various components of the outer circuit belong to a larger plane of immanence. This plane of immanence similarly includes inner circuits which inhere in, and emerge out of, the script-poetry/English-French interface. These dynamic inner circuits are largely structured around 'poem cycles' capable of generating multiple possible readings. Indeed, while I will go on to name and describe these cycles and certain associated meanings, identification of other circuits and readings is not only possible, but desirable. As noted by Michael Haneke in an interview about his latest film, *Amour*, '**[**e**]**very meaning is fine, all interpretations are OK. I do not choose between them, because I dislike explanations' (Conrad).

These cycles and the scenes to which they are connected further reflect Deleuze's 'crystal image', in particular the 'perfect crystal', 'cracked crystal' and

'decomposing crystal'. As outlined in the preceding chapter, these crystalline images embody particular temporal experiences, all of which are manifest throughout *Ephemeron.*

4.4 Inner circuits: poem cycles and crystal images

I have labelled the first poem cycle within the inner circuit the 'mother circuit'. Forming the backbone of *Ephemeron's* engagement with intergenerational trauma, these poems are in the first instance meditations on Jean-François' and Sylvie's respective relationships with their (dead) wife and mother, and their unresolved grief and guilt following her psychological decline and eventual suicide. In light of this denial, a conscious decision was made to preserve her anonymity. As a woman who had been written out of history by both husband and daughter, she is reduced to the general nouns of 'wife' and 'mother', a manoeuvre intended to highlight and critique the tendency to abolish 'mad' women from meaningful narratives.

The absence of resolution has important intergenerational consequences. For example, Sylvie's trauma is hidden beneath a veil of wilful denial and a phantasmagorically-driven parallel life. Lacking insight and unable to identify and negotiate the complexities of her inner world, she abandons Léa, who is in turn left alone to cope with the vicissitudes of her grandfather's dementia. Léa's 'navigation games' are therefore conceived as an antidote to the pervading sense of loss and chaos, providing both structure and security.

Thus a conscious decision was made to link scenes and poems from this cycle in a way that would reinforce the intergenerational 'archaeology' of an image or set of images. For example, scene 28, in which Léa observes her grandfather before attempting to break into the 'locked room', is coupled with 'Apotheosis and Reason', a poem exploring the psychological decline of Jean-François' wife (with Jean-François as subject). Similarly scene 49, which depicts Sylvie's encounter with Jean-François in this room is linked to 'The final viewing', a poem in which Sylvie as subject reflects on her mother's illness, death and funeral. Accordingly, her father's dementia and subsequent return to the room he shared with his wife is set against Sylvie's childhood trauma. Finally, scene 79, in which Léa searches for her grandfather (uncovering a clue linking him to the beach), is accompanied by 'Ontology'. Written from Jean-François' perspective, it explores (inter alia) a particular set of moments shared with his wife, including an encounter on that very beach.

The 'mother cycle' and corresponding scenes arguably embody the 'perfect crystal', capturing both the present and an aspect of the past in a series of inter-related (or at times disparate) images and words. While the scenes have an archaeological component, the underlying 'narrative' is not historically linear: rather, it is temporally complex meditation on events, themes, ideas and the asymmetric 'consequences' of unresolved grief.

The second inner circuit or poem cycle is the 'memory cycle'. These poems underpin, explore and at times foreshadow the (non-linear) progression of Jean-François' illness. For example, 'Mnemonic' not only complements the 'action' (in

this case, scene 46) but presages a possible future of complete aphasia and dependency on Léa. In this sense, the scene-poem interaction encapsulates elements of past, present and future. However – and as alluded to above - this dynamic is not fatalistic. Indeed, the ambiguous ending prevents narrative (or poetic) closure. What remains is the idea of any number of possible interactions between characters, places and history.

Similarly 'Lagerstätte,' together with scene 31, represents three broad temporal dimensions: past, present, and future. As with certain poems in the 'mother cycle', Léa's presence reinforces the intergenerational impact of Jean-François' condition. This impact is ultimately without closure insofar as the contours of Léa's psychological development (and the material circumstances of her adulthood) remain entirely mysterious. Indeed – and as suggested by the film's ambiguous finale - Léa may or may not survive her childhood. While uncertainty of almost every kind is part of the human condition, the poetry-script interface evoke specific questions about the fate of one human in particular: Léa.

The poem's title requires some explanation. Adopted into English from German, the term 'Lagerstätte' refers to 'a fossil deposit of exceptional richness or interest' (Oxford English Dictionary). Set against the backdrop of this evocative title, the poem explores what I call the notion of 'personal archaeology'. That is, it links place and relationship, constructing a layered notion of self-as-other (Jean-François' metaphorical inscription in the landscape, as well as he and his wife as 'Plato's / yearning halves'). The poem climaxes with a question regarding the nature of the self. That is, it asks whether 'I' is extrinsic and therefore preservable in a space beyond the

subject's mind and body, or conversely entirely intrinsic to that mind and body, or both. Like the script, the poem does not seek closure in the form of a definitive response. Rather, it contemplates the instability of memory and identity, and the philosophical complexities of progressive, dramatic memory loss.

The third poem in this cycle, 'Being and Nothingness', builds on the notion of self, memory and place. Standing watch over her father, Sylvie contemplates the genesis of amber (both a colour and fossilised tree resin), imagining that its 'pre-self' emerged out of some mysterious, unconscious swirl of primordial thought, as reflected in the 'look of surprise' on her father's face. The poem explores the idea of thought and its corollary, memory, as inextricably linked to the creation of a third entity, a sort of 'fossilised' loss preserved over time. It also draws on the notion of the 'self-as-double', or 'I' embedded in an other: 'and musing on the space / between two imagined halves, / hemispheres in orbit…', though problematises the concept by inserting the words 'imagined' and 'orbit' into the verse.

Like the 'mother cycle', the 'memory cycle' contains elements of the 'perfect crystal' insofar as past, present and future is captured by the script-poetry interface. I also believe 'Lagerstätte' and 'Being and nothingness' together form a sort of 'cracked crystal'. That is, the mimicry or mirroring between the respective scenes (Léa observing her grandfather in scene 31/Sylvie observing her father in scene 73) and poems ('Plato's / yearning halves' and '…two imagined halves,') is cracked open by the broken clock and the adjective 'imagined'. The fracturing of time provides an escape route through which circling trauma, mental decline and pervasive denial can flee, presaging the ambiguous (and ultimately troubling) denouement, while

interrogation of the fusional entity formed by Jean-François and his (dead) wife heralds the beginning of a new – though unstable - circuit of meaning.

The third significant poem cycle within the inner circuit is the 'subjective theme cycle' comprising 'Exile', 'Observations on the Water's Edge # 1', 'The Fraternity of Objects', 'The Shoreline' and 'The Ento(M)usician'. Perhaps the least obscure of all the cycles, these poems encapsulate personal reflections or meditations which resonate with aspects of the image or images depicted in a scene. For example, 'Exile' and scene 4 introduce Sylvie's 'will to escape', as well as several key concepts that re-emerge in various guises throughout the piece. These include the notion of 'self as another' ('we three halves…'), temporal instability ('distant as unwound clocks') and humanity's place within the cosmos ('constellations'). Similarly, 'Observations on the Water's Edge # 1' juxtaposes otherworldly freedom with mourning, death and entropy, while 'The Fraternity of Objects', embeds anomie and its antidote, touch (or connection), within raw, dynamic landscapes. Finally, 'The Shoreline' and 'The Ento(M)usician', two of the only directly connected to Paul, contain elements of both history and imagination. Specifically, the former offers the briefest of glimpses into his trauma and subsequent isolation, while the latter is very much the product of Sylvie's imagination: an encounter between other and fantasy.

All of these poems place the personal in the flux of nature, with landscapes being depicted as both sanctuary and brutal soothsayer. Observed through a Deleuzian lens, they also capture elements of the 'perfect crystal' and the 'decomposing crystal'. That is, certain points embody past, present and future, while others contain within them the seeds of entropy ('Exile', and 'Observations on the Water's Edge # 1').

I have labelled the fourth poem cycle the ‘cosmic/ecological theme cycle’. This cycle includes: ‘Arkitos, in Memoriam’, ‘The Science of Life’, ‘North Star’, ‘Planet Earth’ and ‘Civilisation (noun, feminine?)’. These poems explore and build on the script’s own engagement with philosophical, scientific and environmental themes or questions. ‘Arkitos, in Memoriam’ contemplates the impact of climate change, connecting directly to scene 13 (in which Léa discovers the crab’s distant origins) and indirectly to scene 16, in which a Polish woman recounts a dream oddly reminiscent of said crab and the ‘glasshouse lurching in glossy water’. In this sense, scene 13 and ‘Arkitos, in Memoriam’, as well as scene 16 and ‘The Science of Life’, form part of quasi-real, quasi-oneiric hall of mirrors. Indeed, ‘The Science of Life’ forms a contrapuntal relationship with its companion scene, juxtaposing scientific experiment with esoteric dreamscape. Again, resolution is neither sought nor found. Rather, these musings form part of a circuit of ideas which together interrogate our ways of knowing and being.

With its cosmological overtures, ‘North Star’ intersects directly with scene 22 (in which Jean-François and Léa contemplate ‘l’étoile polaire’), and more generally with Léa’s navigation games. The poem also includes words and images which form part of a larger matrix of references. For example, ‘curled like a mollusc / on the naked earth’ recalls both ‘Mnemonic’ (‘a nautilus on television / drawing spirals, / infinity.’) and various scenes in which the audience observes characters sleeping, sleep here being a sort of half-state in which the mind enters a symbolic universe both connected to, and distant from, lived experience.

Finally, ‘Planet Earth’, a violent tableau inspired by ‘Leda and the Swan’, explores the nonchalant (and often sexually charged) brutality of nature. While the poem mirrors scene 25 (in which Steppenwolf plays with a dead fish), its core themes are reflected throughout *Ephemeron*. That is, ecological disturbances, Jean-François’ dementia and Sylvie’s primordial selfishness all bear traces of ‘Planet Earth’s’ *weltanshauung*. Similarly, ‘Civilisation, (noun, feminine?)’ explores the (sexual) violence of nature, humanity’s acquisitiveness and its propensity to dominate, disturb and destroy.

The poems forming part of the ‘subjective theme cycle’ contain several crystalline elements, including significant mirroring and mimicry. In the absence of any particular ‘fissure’ within the cycle, however, it would be inaccurate to classify these poems and scenes as ‘cracked’ crystals. Conversely, the particular focus on environmental decay and the decline of civilisation aligns with the core components of the ‘decomposing crystal’.

The penultimate poem cycle is the most complex insofar as it embodies a hybrid subjectivity, embedding aspects of my own personal encounters with art and place in the broader script-poetry interface of *Ephemeron.* Building on the notion of ‘Je est un autre’, I create a direct dialogue between artistic context (namely the two years I spent in France working on my thesis) and the three central characters. The result is an inter-subjective, symbolic universe capable of generating multiple, non-linear circuits of meaning.

Upon reflection, the ‘Je est un autre’ cycle was a product of both instinct and design. In the first instance, it felt entirely natural for the creative and emotional intensity of my time in France to be self-reflexively threaded throughout *Ephemeron*. In many respects, I literally did become – and still am – another as a consequence of my accumulated experiences in France, and more generally Europe. Indeed, it would have felt disingenuous to omit any direct references to these encounters.

This affective drive was complemented by my engagement with Rimbaud, whose poetry and *Lettres du voyant* provided a theoretical basis for exploring the other-as-self/self-as-other paradox. Indeed, with Jean-François, Sylvie and Léa psychically split along different axes (memory, time, place, desire, imagination) it hardly seemed radical to consciously (and transparently) superimpose my own subjectivity over their individual and interconnected identities.

The poems belonging to this cycle are those which remain: ‘Mediterranean Baroque 1 (A fugue in words inspired by an eighteenth century shipwreck)’; ‘Persephone’s Summer’; ‘Divinité Khmère (Musée Guimet)’; ‘A Flowing Chinese River, A Frozen Alpine Lake’; and ‘Remains: in memoriam’.

The first of these, ‘Mediterranean Baroque’, is an adaptation of a poem entitled ‘Pacific Baroque 1: A fugue in words inspired by a ship wreck in Vanikoro’. Written for the first iteration of my thesis, the original poem was inspired by Jean-François La Perouse’s diary, disappearance and the discovery of his vessel off the coast of Vanikoro some 200 years later. Based on a fugal structure, the poem’s repetition, imagery and themes resonated with Sylvie’s inner world and relationship

with the landscape, and more generally with the Deleuzian structure of *Ephemeron.* Minor modifications were made in order to facilitate the transposition, and to emphasise the themes of personal exile, loss and extreme nescience. For example, 'she / has good teeth, / is of average height, / thirty five years - / a private soul / found living / darkly / in an ocean rift.' refers directly to Sylvie's mental and physical fuguing, while the connecting scene (7) reinforces the impact of her absence on Léa.

I have always had a particular affection for Jean-François Millet's naturalistic depictions of peasant and rural life in France. 'Persephone's Summer' is inspired by 'Des Glaneuses', which forms part of the Musée d'Orsay's permanent collection. Breaking with artistic tradition, Millet 'painted' the poor (and poor women no less!) into the national collective conscience, a radical gesture condemned by the French establishment. In a similar vein, 'Persephone's Summer' operates as a sort of flashback, writing history's poor, rural women back into the landscape of *Ephemeron.* The poem forms a natural pair with 'Persephone's Winter', thereby (indirectly) placing Sylvie's mother in the summer landscape.

Like 'Persephone's Summer', 'Divinité Khmère – Musée Guimet' is an ekphrastic work, inspired by the sculpture of the poem's title. Complementing scene 55, in which Léa and Jean-François doze in the forest, the poem explores the brutality of the natural world, its carnality, and the ambivalence of sleep states. It also contemplates history's tendency to cast aside women (as represented by a female deity), in this sense referring back to the anonymous wife/mother figure who haunts *Ephemeron*.

The final two poems, ‘A Flowing Chinese River, A Frozen Alpine Lake’ and ‘Remains: in memoriam’ are perhaps the most obscure in the cycle both in terms of their references, structures and intent. The former emerged out of my engagement with the 8th century Chinese poet Li Bai (also known as Li Po) and his apocryphal biography, as well as a particular poem by Robert Hass, ‘A Swarm of Dawns, A Flock of Restless Moons’ (Hass). Against this backdrop I created a poem depicting Sylvie’s dream/nightmare of her father’s brush with death, forgotten until she encounters the strange assortment of symbolic objects in the cabin. As with the ‘mother poems’, ‘A Flowing Chinese River’ is set in winter, drawing it into this broader circuit of themes and ideas. The poem, together with scene 82, also constitute a definitive turning point in Ephemeron, thrusting Sylvie into the *réel.* In this sense, this particular poem-scene interface is characteristic of the ‘cracked crystal’, opening up a psychic space in Sylvie’s consciousness through which she can escape into the present, as traumatic as that may be.

‘Remains: in memoriam’ comprises the remnants of poems written but not included in the final collection. I inserted them into the final scene as a sort of homage to the fragmented memory of works produced over the course of my doctoral studies, ghosts which hovered in the background as I wrote, rewrote, edited and pared back the creative work. Put differently, these are the poetic fossil shards which lay beneath the filmic surface. The ambiguity of the final scene – Jean-François and Léa’s bodies, ecological genocide – seemed sufficiently epic to hold the phantasmagoric slivers of these broken poems, to form bold, new circuits of meaning.

A final word about the ‘Ephemera’ cycle. These four brief ‘moments’ are in many respects foundational works, reinforcing *Ephemeron’s* focus on the temporal, with a particular emphasis on intergenerational trauma. That is, ‘Ephemera 1’ and ‘Ephemera 2’ draw on Jean-François’ memories of his wife, while ‘Ephemera 4’ captures Sylvie’s fragmented recollections of her mother’s suicide.

4.5 Conclusion

The aforementioned poem cycles operate as a sort of archaeological chorus, threading images, themes, concepts, memories, and possible futures throughout the work. However, and as alluded to at various points throughout this chapter, these circuits are not exhaustive or definitive. Indeed, points of intersection in the form of imagery, language, ideas or themes join poems from different cycles, renewing and reinventing our understanding of *Ephemeron.* I would like to think that Deleuze would approve of this Solaris-like mass of moving parts, of the intention to fuse two mediums in order to represent the archaeology of the image. It is fitting that I will never be able to ask, that all I am left with is speculation and ambiguity.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

5.1 *Je est Ephemeron*

I must confess to finding conclusions – particularly in the context of a creative writing exegesis – somewhat challenging and possibly redundant. I would hope that the preceding chapters speak for themselves: that the theory and practice were adequately justified and clearly explained, and that any unanswered questions could sit in the reader's mind, percolate, and perhaps generate novel responses or critiques. A Deleuzian escape-hatch, perhaps?

However, in lieu of disappearing into a Deleuzian vortex, I will offer some concluding remarks about the process of writing *Ephemeron*. I began this thesis almost seven years ago. Several iterations later, I can claim that art does imitate life, that the endless reading, cogitating, doubting, agonising, writing, discarding, rewriting and editing felt (from the interior) like a time-image film. My thesis was not characterised by action-oriented montage, by neatly arranged cuts which progressed the narrative along a linear x axis. Rather, it was maddeningly crystalline, with a particularly traumatic period of personal transformation interrupting the work's progress, jettisoning me (and the work) into rocky creative and psychoanalytic territory.

This period of intense introspection and creative stasis eventually gave way to an entirely new world of possibility. A new treatment for the script, as well as fresh poems, were written. *Ephemeron* became a work-unto-itself, rather than a shifting extension of my personal struggle to process and resolve events of the past. While my interest in altered states of being, anomie, the consequences of unresolved grief and intergenerational trauma remained, these ceased to function as windows of inquiry into my own grief, and became *objects of inquiry*. A line had been drawn. It was at this point that I was able to quite literally move forward, to place firm boundaries around the project and contemplate an end point.

The final product represents my commitment to produce something that explores the spaces between languages, art forms, people, and the self and its 'other(s)'. Deleuze's time-image cinema, with its focus on indeterminacy and temporal complexity, proved to be an ideal foundation for both the creative and theoretical components of this project. Indeed, in the absence of Deleuze's second semiotic, it may have been difficult to justify the elliptical, bilingual double-headed creative work that is *Ephemeron.* Similarly, this semiotic stimulated a particular line of inquiry which culminated in the idea that the genetic heritage of post-war (time-image) cinema is diffuse, and arguably includes French Symbolist poetry. From this general assertion a more particular argument could be mounted: that the cinema of Claire Denis, in particular *Beau Travail,* bears the traces of Rimbaud's seminal works, *Iluminations* and *Une saison en enfer*.

While theorists, ideas, characters, narratives and poems have been discarded along the way, traces – and in certain instances, deep imprints – of these phenomena

are scattered throughout *Ephemeron*. I can't imagine that Deleuze, or Bergson before him, would object to these ghosts haunting the work. On the contrary, I maintain that it is inherently Deleuzian to interrogate the notion of closure, of a cordoned-off, symmetrical and entirely rational 'final' product independent of its own history. Others may disagree, and indeed I hope some do, if only to prove that readership is as much a part of the work as the words themselves, that the *lecteur* or *lectrice* are part of the ongoing coming-into-being of all literature and film.

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