Towards a Feminist Cinematic Ethics

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Troubling the Body: *Trouble Every Day*, Dance and the Non–Mythic Body

The previous chapters have worked towards developing a cinematic ethics of sense and aesthetic of alterity, through Nancy and Levinas respectively. In this chapter, I focus on the body as it relates to the ethical and argue that Denis, Nancy and Levinas make important contributions to rethinking the body in terms that challenge dominant Western narratives. I also examine the ways in which Denis's films reveal the notion of an autonomous bodily identity to be a Western construction that has relied on the colonisation or dehumanisation of certain bodies to maintain its privileged status.[1]

To do this I choose a difficult film: *Trouble Every Day* is a sophisticated engagement with the horror genre that addresses themes of bodily violence, vulnerability and non-immunity. Yet, because of its difficulty, the film is worth a sustained look. I have argued that Denis's cinema reveals the insufficiency of dominant film language when it comes to fostering ethical modes of encounter. Here I turn specifically to genre, to examine how *Trouble Every Day* probes the limitations of generic modes in cultivating new practices of looking. Genre films tend to rely on conventions for making meaning that often foreclose the kinds of open ethical encounters that I have foregrounded throughout this project. By touching on but also moving away from the dominant tropes and formal and narrative conventions of the horror film, *Trouble* asks us to look differently, while drawing attention to our customary patterns of viewing. The film deals with a disease that compels those afflicted to deface and dismember their sexual partners. Rather than condoning or refusing to moralise regarding sexual violence, I read the film as highlighting a condition of bodily vulnerability that the Western subject has historically disavowed. In *Trouble*, Denis highlights our current moment as one of crisis for the Western subject – perhaps one that she is especially attuned to given her own biography.[2] This film in particular presents a challenge to the myth of the self-contained monadic modern body and therefore asks us to start from a place where we

recognise our shared dependency.[3] However, as I argue in the final section of
this chapter, where I turn to the motif of dance in Denis's work, the flip side
of this exposure to violence and outrage is the joy and beauty of our shared
embodiment. The account of embodiment that I develop here shares concerns
with postcolonial theory, disability studies and queer theory. Levinas, Nancy
and Denis provide resources for thinking the ethical as embodied in a way that
does not privilege gender, ability or other categories of identity.

Denis's career evinces a sustained engagement with filming the body. This
is perhaps most evident in her striking use of movement and dance, but is also
apparent in her sensuous camerawork and soundscapes, which call affectively
and sensorially on the body of the spectator. In the scholarly literature, Denis
is often discussed in terms of her haptic or sensual engagement with the body,
be it through Deleuzian, phenomenological or other frameworks.[4] Well-noted
features of her style include her capturing of bodies in motion, the unique
approach to filming the body that she has developed (along with director of
photography Agnès Godard), and the ways in which she uses sounds and
images to evoke a variety of sensory experiences.

Ethics, as I formulate it in this project, entails remaining attentive and unre-
solved with respect to the meaning of our co-existence with all of the messiness
that it entails. The body as the space of existence and thus of *with*ness remains
central to this ethic. The bodily relationship between film and viewer can
evoke an ethical sensibility by reminding us of our mutual exposure. It does so
through offering an encounter with the image that acts on us in a visceral way,
which denies us a sense of autonomy and mastery over the image. Watching
a film is an encounter in which we are exposed to the images before us, which
alter us as the characters we see alter each other. Nancy reads the relation
between viewer and image as one of exposure, rather than representation,
where exposure is a kind of interruptive or non-appropriative contact between
spectator and image. We are in touch with the film, as a body that *compears*, or
co-appears, with us as viewers.[5] This exposure is exaggerated in horror, where
the viewer is open to extreme feelings of disgust, fear and shock. But in every
case viewing film is a potential encounter with the unknown and a susceptibil-
ity to information, sound and image. Denis's cinema in particular harnesses
this facet of the cinematic experience to cultivate a mode of encounter that is
bodily and ethical, or bodily *because* it is ethical.

Trouble Every Day asks us to think the body outside of representational
approaches, such as those offered by semiotics or psychoanalysis – not to
search for meaning outside of the body as it *is*. This does not mean that Denis
negates the historical specificity of embodiment, but rather she reveals how the
body works in excess of any referential system of meaning. It refuses knowl-
edge at the same time as it asserts its materially and historically located exist-
ence. In contrast to many genre films that draw out audience emotions through

well-known conventions, Denis's alternative practice refuses her spectators the comforts of encountering the bodies on screen through pre-determined generic and cinematic codes. This means that as viewers we are open to a higher level of both risk and wonder, as each film is a singular and unforeseen encounter.

The effect of this vulnerability in viewing is to challenge the illusion of the spectator as unified subject, controlling or at least ultimately achieving cognitive mastery over the action she witnesses on screen. This relates to a major theme in this chapter, which is Denis's critique of the myth of bodily immunity as a privileged and perhaps dying myth of Western modernity. I read the dismantling of identity as ethical according to the sense in which it relates to myth's interruption, as advocated in Nancy's writing. When we suspend the grand narratives that myth offers us, we reveal our finitude and non-identity, and our existence as shared beyond the borders of group identities.[6] The impetus to resist fixed meaning, totality and closure in favour of openness, flux and fragmentation is evident in Denis's work both at the level of the film's narrative structure and at the level of the filming of the body itself. I play with this idea of interrupting myth by examining the body itself as a site of heavy cultural and philosophical mythologisation. Denis, Levinas and Nancy all provide deconstructive tools in this regard. Here again, Denis pushes us further than the philosophers in revealing the particularly Western privilege that is entailed in the myth of the body as a site of self-propriety and immunity. She does this in part by filming the body in fragments and, in *Trouble* specifically, by pushing to its limit the condition of human susceptibility that the film takes as its theme. The body troubles identity – it reveals that the self is never continuous and is a space of opening outward onto the world rather than inner containment and mastery. On screen, the body's proximity can interrupt the potentially totalising narrative tendency of a film. Its expressive capacity always exceeds the fixity of identity-based labels that would tell us what to make of this or that body in advance, for example 'female' or 'male', 'young' or 'disabled'. When cinema foregrounds rather than disavows our fragmented and susceptible bodily condition it works against myth, and troubles the certainties of identity in the name of which so many ethical *and* political injustices are committed.

IMMUNITY AND EXPOSURE: GENRE, NARRATIVE AND SPECTATOR

In one of the final shots of *Trouble Every Day* we see an almost completely white image of a translucent shower curtain hanging in a bathroom. The vibrant red of one trickle of blood provides the only contrast to the pale background as

it runs down the curtain. The blood running across the pure white image makes visible the intrusion of the body into and on film. The red line runs through an otherwise pure landscape – symbolising the inability of the central character, Shane Brown (Vincent Gallo), to fully cleanse the space, his marriage and himself of the murderous desires that afflict him. It acts as a trace of what cannot be eradicated of Brown's gruesome crime. He and June Brown (Tricia Vessey) are in Paris for their honeymoon. Unbeknownst to June, her new husband suffers from a mysterious disease, contracted in Guyana through experimental research with plant life. This illness turns sexual desire into destruction – arousal produces uncontrollable urges to bite and tear flesh and to sexualise blood as a fluid of play. Washing off the evidence of his recent kill, Shane leaves a trace of his act in the blood running down the shower curtain. The blood contradicts the illusion of immunity – of the space to contamination, of the characters to each other, and of the body to disease and desire.

Shane has also come to Paris in search of answers – the film chronicles his search for Dr Léo Sémeneau (Alex Descas), the head researcher in Guyana and a colleague of Shane's from his previous life in Paris. Sémeneau's wife has contracted the same disease (Coré, played by Béatrice Dalle). It is unclear how the disease was transmitted – it is said that Shane disobeyed Léo's injunction against testing on humans. Reduced to inmate status in her own home, Coré seems to be at a much more advanced stage of illness. Léo locks her in the bedroom when he leaves for the day. Two neighbourhood boys are drawn to the seductive and mysterious woman trapped in the home: one of them will become her final victim. The film follows Coré during several of her 'escapes' as she hunts for prey on the outskirts of town, turning excitable truckers into mutilated corpses. Sémeneau, with Sisyphusian endurance, repeatedly tracks his wife down and brings her home, burying her victims and lovingly washing the gore from her face and shoulders (Figure 4.1). Notably, the only central character that is *not* white, Sémeneau has been exiled from the medical research community because of his controversial studies, which have introduced a foreign element that erodes the boundaries between animal and human, body and mind, desire and destruction. That is to say, the disease challenges the notion of the Western subject as bounded, rational and 'civilised'. This is despite the film's suggestion that the greed for knowledge of the white American doctor is the *true* source of human contamination.

Trouble Every Day is Denis's sole engagement with horror. It 'troubles' the generic limits of horror, specifically as it relates to thinking about embodiment and subjectivity. As one of the three 'body genres' that Linda Williams identifies in her seminal essay, horror offers a useful framework for exploring Denis's continued preoccupations with the body, particularly in relation to the spectator-film relation.[7] The horror film displays bodies in fear (particularly female bodies) and calls on the body of the spectator to share in the anxiety,

Figure 4.1 Sémeneau lovingly washing the gore from Coré's body.

tension and terror presented on screen.[8] *Trouble Every Day* pushes the definition of a body genre to its limit, removing the psychological dimensions of horror to examine the pleasure and pain of non-identity that is embodiment. The film experiments with the threat of bodily invasion (or *intrusion*) so characteristic of the genre, which has focused on deep-seated fears associated with the loss of self or the breakdown of identity. Several people are reported to have fainted at the film's premiere at Cannes.[9] This anecdote illustrates the bodily ways in which film can affect its spectators, and these visceral reactions are perhaps most extremely evoked by horror. Many other audience members booed or walked out of the same screening.[10] The film was criticised as being too much and not enough at the same time; its gory excesses did not include the heightened tension and moments of shock that characterise much horror.[11] Devoid of the typical horror soundtrack that encourages extreme emotional responses, the film uses sensual slow music by Tindersticks throughout, refusing sensationalism but evoking sensation. Some scholars, such as Tim Palmer, have taken up the film in terms of its representation of abject sexuality, placing it alongside other contemporary French films such as those of Bruno Dumont or Gaspar Noé to argue for a trend in tackling darker aspects of embodiment.[12] With respect to Denis's work specifically, the film represents a limit case in her sustained exploration of the body, as many including Nancy have suggested.

By exploring the bounds of horror's bodily preoccupations, Denis comments on the limitations of genre which, like elements of the classic Hollywood style, tend to both shape and meet audience expectations, rather than ask the audience to look more closely or to see *otherwise* than the ways in which they

have been trained by conventional film language.[13] By using a loose generic framework, Denis is able to draw attention to our habitual ways of making meaning, while challenging their efficacy, much as she locates subjects within particular identities and histories only to expose their limitations in understanding the singularity of each. While certain films may cause us to suffer sympathetically and cathartically, often according to well-worn generic conventions, a counter cinema such as Denis's offers an opportunity for a less controlled encounter with the bodies exposed on screen. This is precisely because our generic expectations cannot provide a mental buffer of sorts, mitigating in advance our vulnerability to an encounter with what is unknown.

Contrary to many contemporary horror films (for example, *Scream*, 1996; *Cabin in the Woods*, 2011), *Trouble Every Day* never ironises its subject matter or pastiches the genre. It draws on various subgenres of horror including Gothic tropes such as the madwoman in the attic (Coré), Dracula and Frankenstein, with its focus on mad scientists and experiments with human life, and also more gory subgenres like the slasher film. It presents a complex mix of typically Denisian slow pacing and minimalist imagery with incredibly difficult scenes of gruesome sex, in which bodies are torn apart, chewed up and penetrated through newly created orifices. The film's scenes of bodily destruction align it with a slasher/splatter film tradition, although here the slash is a bite and the splatter more a trickle or a smear, almost as if Denis had taken the genre's scenes of slaughter, slowing down their frantic editing and asking the spectator to really *look* at the body in its ecstasy and agony. The body is here not only that which is torn apart and tortured, but also the instrument of torture itself: rather than a knife, chainsaw or any other implement it is the hands and mouth that perform the bloody deed. It evokes the vampire's deadly kiss, but also gestures towards the cannibals and beasts that populate the genre. The body of the perpetrator is heavily implicated in the killing, itself infected with foreignness, as the mouth moves from an instrument of pleasure to an instrument of pain. This is a notable divergence from the typical slasher film killer, where the violence of killing usually acts as a substitute for an active sex drive.[14] Here sex and violence are manifestly linked. In all of these ways, Denis pushes the genre to the limits of its engagement with the bodily. Because she does not sensationalise bodies, she is able to explore the body in ways that typically lie beyond the reach of horror.

Meditating solely on the body, the film refuses any element of character psychology/*psycho*pathology, looking only to the physical as the source of malady and also keeping with Denis's non-psychological approach to her subjects. Psychoanalytic frameworks have been particularly enduring within scholarly writing on the horror genre. For example, key texts on horror such as Barbara Creed's *The Monstrous-Feminine* and Carol Clover's *Men, Women,*

and Chainsaws focus on feminine abjection or the psychic drives and anxieties that are manifested on screen. These readings often address a larger cultural unconscious as it expresses its deepest (psychoanalytically interpreted) fears through the symptom of the horror film. Whereas Denis's 'predators' refuse psychologisation, by contrast in what is perhaps the ur-slasher film, Hitchcock's *Psycho*, the murderer effectively demands a psychoanalytic reading of his actions – a man who has introjected his overbearing mother.[15] As Carol Clover points out in her groundbreaking work on horror, the location of evil in a childhood incident or trauma is a convention of the genre, present in many less-regarded films than *Psycho*.[16] The Hitchcock film is obviously referenced in the shower curtain image described above (albeit in the most paired-down and minimalist fashion). Notably, the shower scene in *Trouble* is centred not on a female victim but rather on the murderer cleansing his body of the woman's blood, again gently nudging the history the film participates in and implicating the body of the killer to a much greater extent than is typical. Hitchcock is also cited in the character of June Brown – who despite her non-blonde status visually quotes the archetypal Hitchcock woman, with her pixie haircut and well-tailored suits. Yet Denis turns away from any psychosexual or Oedipal explanation towards the threat of bodily contagion, dialling down the heavy suspense of Hitchcock to a slow-burning malaise. As Lisa Downing comments, '*Trouble Every Day* undercuts the necessity for such theories as Freudian psychoanalysis, by deconstructing the supposed underlying meanings of the generic conventions, which are relocated at the surface of the filmic narrative' – in other words, the film foregrounds the sexuality of its monsters.[17] In *Trouble* the characters' illness is resolutely not tied to some developmental trauma, innate sociopathy or insanity. The violence is one that literally infects the body. Coré is so reduced to her body that there is no possibility of psychoanalysis. Diminished to pre-linguistic desires and despairs, she groans and grunts, but almost never speaks. When she finally does, she simply says she wants to die.[18] Even the perpetrators are victims in the sense that they have been contaminated and suffer from their urges, and the *actual* victims give themselves over to their killers in a fury of desire that only belatedly turns to horror and non-consent. Just as Denis's film sidesteps the psychoanalytic conventions of the genre, I offer a non-psychoanalytic reading of the body and spectatorship to suggest alternatives to more entrenched approaches to thinking through the viewer/film relation. The film touches on the limits of the genre, while opening beyond its conventional borders, echoing the narrative's play with exposure and containment at the level of genre itself.

The film plays with themes of immunity and contagion as they relate to body and environment. The critique of the sovereign and bounded body present in the film is also found in Nancy and Levinas. But Denis relates

this post-phenomenological body to a history of colonialism, and racial and class privilege not present in the accounts of the two philosophers. The post-phenomenological account of the body developed here overlaps with critical disability studies and queer theory because these modes of thought have also attempted to rethink discourses of bodily integrity. In *A Body Worth Defending*, Ed Cohen examines the emergence of biomedical discourses of immunity in the late nineteenth century, which came to replace models focused on the body's contiguity with the environment. He asks how concepts taken from legal and political/military language came to dominate the contemporary biomedical field, constructing the body as a sovereign territory to be defended from outside forces. Importantly, in relation to *Trouble Every Day*'s colonial echoes, there are notable links between discourses of immunity or biological defence and the colonial project past and future. By locating the story in Paris, the film suggests the threat of the colonial other insidiously returning to the centre. As Susan Sontag notes in 'AIDS and Its Metaphors',

> Part of the centuries-old conception of Europe as a privileged cultural entity is that it is a place which is colonized by lethal diseases coming from elsewhere. Europe is assumed to be by rights free of disease. (And Europeans have been astoundingly callous about the far more devastating extent to which they – as invaders, as colonists – have introduced their lethal diseases to the exotic, 'primitive' world: think of the ravages of smallpox, influenza and cholera on the aboriginal populations of the Americas and Australia.)[19]

Yet rather than reaffirming the need to shore up boundaries both national and bodily, the film works towards revealing that these borders were always already illusory.

The body in *Trouble Every Day* traverses many sanitised spaces from laboratories to aeroplanes to hotel washrooms. The upmarket hotel in which the Browns stay is ceaselessly cleaned by a legion of maids, one of whom will become Shane's victim. In his searches, Shane visits labs whose cleanliness, blinding whiteness and bright lights suggest the desire for knowledge, reason and the full revelation of the body's secrets. Ironically, the disease itself refuses visibility. This is brought into relief in a scene where Shane parodies a monster-figure for June at Notre Dame (Figure 4.2).

Shane's play at a recognisable monstrosity hides the imperceptible sickness he carries within. The laboratories evoke the dream of the body as a containable object, fully penetrable by the scientific gaze. Here, brains are objects to cut into pieces and classify, organic life is catalogued and refrigerated, and mysterious fluids are agitated by the rhythmic click of automated mixers. The darker side of Sémeneau's experimental research and the deadly flows of

Figure 4.2 Shane parodies a monster-figure for June at Notre Dame.

desire it unleashes are cleansed from these clinical spaces. In her reading of the film through Foucauldian ethics, Downing rightly points out that science has produced the illness in question. However, Western science has also been unwilling to name or even examine the sickness, complicating the claim that the disease is discursively brought into being. By focusing on the discursive production of subjects, we may overlook the ways in which Denis uses the materiality of the body to undermine medical and scientific discourses, discourses that within the colonial context produce the Western body as rational and bounded and Western science as a narrative of progress. Because of the establishment's refusal to acknowledge its own vulnerability, Léo's home itself has become a lab of sorts – exiled from mainstream medical research, he now keeps his samples and medicines in the basement. A living 'specimen' for a disease without name, Coré is carefully locked in her room every morning, her sick body quarantined in the upper floor of the house. This containment is visually emphasised by an image of Coré peering through the bars of her cell-like room. Yet these efforts at containment are unsuccessful: Coré escapes regularly from her cell to find more victims. Her condition eludes medical classification, refusing containment in the realm of knowledge as well. In the case of the lab, the aeroplane and the hotel, these spaces of immunity are also spaces of economic and racial privilege which here become sites of crisis for the Western subject. Despite the attempts at securing, cleaning and standardising these spaces, they are penetrated by alterity.

An early scene in *Trouble Every Day* takes place in the anonymity of an aeroplane as Shane and June fly to Paris. The grid of Denver's lights appears below

them, orderly and rational ('It's so geometrical, it's like a computer chip,' remarks June). The plane suggests a modern, safe and clean environment, reinforced by June's soft white sweater with matching skirt, her tiny pearl earrings, the pristine glasses of champagne the couple hold, and the civilised tenderness of their interaction. The sound and framing work together to give a sense of the plane as a contained environment, but yet a space within which bodies are exposed to each other, sharing the recycled air and trapped in the area of the cabin. The first shot from outside the plane shows June and Shane peering out through the aeroplane window. The sounds of the aeroplane flying through the air and the two faces peeking through the small window suggest that the aeroplane is both protected from the outside and spatially contained – the quintessential controlled environment. This sense of containment is reinforced through slightly high angle shots within the cabin that emphasise the cramped spaces and the constant humming sound that accompanies flight. An image of sleeping passengers all in a row – businessmen in suits, some of whom wear eye-masks – further highlights the bodily proximity of the space. Shane studies the smooth, pale forearm of his wife and begins to kiss/bite it as he makes his way towards the elbow. Later, suffering from his unseen affliction, Shane retreats to the tiny aeroplane washroom to shake off his impulses. Visions intrude into the confined space as he sees his young wife, naked and peaceful, covered in a generous smearing of blood. This image remains striking given June's childlike innocence throughout the film. Dressed in modest and tailored clothing, often in lighter colours with gloves to protect her hands, her skin is smooth and pale. Yet her husband's fantasies intrude upon her purity, covering her snow-white body with (possibly infected) blood. Here in the confined and regulated space of the aeroplane, desire and otherness intrude into an otherwise mundane scene, dramatically exposing the fallacy of immunity.

The attempts at sanitisation and containment extend from environmental to bodily spaces in the film. One of the more personalising gestures made by the chambermaid early in the film is to massage and wash her feet in the basement sink after a day's work. We also see several scenes of the maid and other staff preparing their bodies to work upstairs, changing and pulling up their hair – transitioning from individuals to standardised staff members in the building's basement. The trickle of blood on the shower curtain belongs to a scene in which Shane showers to cleanse himself of the traces of his recent victim. Earlier in the film, a scene of Shane masturbating in the hotel bed is immediately followed by one of June running a bath, their juxtaposition highlighting the tensions in the film between purity and danger, immunity and infection. June, sweet and innocent, is shown in a slow pan as she soaks in the tub, after her husband, a victim of his sadistic sexual desires, writhes in pleasure and agony outside the door. He comes quietly into the bathroom and looks hungrily at his wife below him. Startling June, he asks, 'Are you

frightened?' We also see several scenes of Léo washing the human flesh and blood off Coré after her attacks, further highlighting the futility of sanitising the body from what is foreign within. The non-immunity extends beyond the two diseased characters to permeate most of the relations in the film. Victims are lured by desire to their perpetrators; a lab technician feels drawn to Shane's plight, and June is propelled by the mystery of her husband. By emphasising the undeniable desire that flows between bodies, the film stresses the fact that susceptibility to one another is our general condition. It draws attention to moments of cleaning both body and environment, reinforcing the quest for immunity while simultaneously raising the spectre of invasion.

This exploration of bodily risk and openness shares many of the major concerns of Nancy's bodily ontology. Nancy's account of the body is perhaps best articulated in his work *Corpus*, but his shorter essay 'L'Intrus' highlights the themes of non-immunity and bodily risk. In 'L'Intrus' Nancy takes up his experiences of a heart transplant and of his battle with cancer to meditate on the ways in which the body is never a proper space of identity. Instead, the body is always imbued, inside and out, with what is foreign. Receiving the heart of another intensively illustrates the openness and dependence of the body on what is outside of it. Autoimmune failures gesture towards the body's own inability to recognise a properly bounded self. The body's condition is one of ongoing intrusion – with both the promise and the risk that that entails. This porous condition is a consequence of the fact that we are always *with* – we are born into a world where our bodies are already intimately connected to and open onto others. One could say the body is *altered* by alterity, where alteration is an ongoing process rather than a state. From womb to world the body takes in air, bacteria, new organs, plants, animals, minerals and bodily fluids from what is outside of itself. The body is an opening and extension, rather than a boundary and enclosure. Connecting this to ethics requires an awareness of the body as an ongoing process of sharing out amongst bodies – alive, inanimate, on film or in writing. An ethical encounter is one in which we are aware of our own non-coherence and reminded of our non-mastery with respect to what we see before us.

The lack of mastery suggested by Nancy's use of the concept of exposure is meant to indicate an opening that does not return to the self. Levinas similarly uses the language of exposure to highlight the bodily non-immunity of the ethical relation, or, put differently, the way in which the relation of ethical responsibility always already undoes the propriety of the body. The relation to the other is vulnerability and exposure to the other.[20] In fact, Levinas often employs metaphors of maternity to suggest that ethical responsibility involves bearing the other within (in quite a bodily sense).[21] Counter to a phenomenological model, then, the body is radically not my own. It is from the outset a

space infected by alterity. This bodily dimension takes on a valence of perse-
cution, pain and suffering in Levinas's writing. Responsibility to the other is
a kind of suffering *because* of the other. Greek mythology tells the story of the
toxic blood of the centaur Nessus, rubbed into a tunic and given to Heracles
unknowingly by his wife Deianeira. Deianeira thinks the blood is a potion that
will renew Heracles' love for her, but instead it causes his skin to burn inces-
santly. The compromised hero begs for his body to be burned on a pyre to stop
the unbearable pain. Levinas draws on this story to describe ethical responsi-
bility: 'The irremissible guilt with regard to the neighbor is like a Nessus tunic
my skin would be.'[22] This unceasing inflamed torture of the skin is Levinas's
metaphor for the trauma and painful tactility of ethical subjectivity. Here
exposure sheds its potentially erotic valence to become pure pain.

Yet pain and pleasure are two intensities that reflect the reality of bodily
exposure. The characterisation of responsibility in terms of suffering is a very
real indicator of the power and impact that others have on our daily lives,
mentally, bodily and emotionally. As Judith Butler writes, we are 'undone'
by others, and this can be an extremely painful reality.[23] Our mutual expo-
sure is a consequence of our co-existence. Levinas neglects the origin of the
Nessus tunic in the myth, as a gift given in desperate passion by a lover who
fears losing her beloved and is clueless that her actions will cause him pain.
Translating into film, Denis reminds us that the erotic and painful dimensions
of exposure are not so easily separated. This is because we affectively experi-
ence both desire and repulsion at various sensory levels throughout the film.

Trouble Every Day succeeds in playing along the continuum between the
pleasurable and the painful dimensions of bodily togetherness. It reveals the
body as a space of penetration, of attraction and sensation, and of receptivity
to illness and to violence as much as to excitement and affection. The film's
opening credits are interlaced with images of an anonymous couple who kiss
passionately, their faces obscured by darkness. The image seduces its viewers
with these unknown characters who disappear after the credits, a lost thread
never to be taken up again. This scene foregrounds the seduction of images
and the desire for understanding and identification so intrinsic to film spec-
tatorship (we want to know who they are and how they fit into the narrative).
Its erotic pull makes the viewer complicit, through desire, with the scenes of
violence that she may later suffer through, extending the pleasure and pain
of exposure to the viewer/film relation. The hungry kisses of the unknown
pair and our desire to comprehend the image tie into the themes of lust and
devouring that the film takes to their extremes. Rather than stabilising the
spectator through mechanisms of identification, as does classical cinema, the
film highlights the viewer's vulnerability to the film as itself a risky encounter.
The scene also illustrates the film's own 'exposure', where again exposure is
thought of as an interruptive contact: the image touches on a fleeting moment

only to withdraw from it, creating an opening within the film that does not go back to the film's larger world.

The themes of immunity and risk gesture beyond the immediate narrative of the film – the disease bears the trace of the French colonial past in its Guyanese origins, typical of Denis's concern with France's postcolonial history. Judith Mayne notes the connections between the film's plot and discourses about AIDS, and argues,

> I believe that *Trouble Every Day* subtly but forcefully undermines many of the myths about AIDS. The deadly desire has virtually nothing to do with homosexuality in the film. And the curiosity and greed of the white, heterosexual man (Shane) is at the origin of the affliction.[24]

These references reiterate that the film's interest in bodily vulnerability carries with it historical dimensions, along with a critique of race- and sexuality-based epidemiological discourses. Rather than otherness originating from a source that the Western body *already* recognises as other, that is to say from the non-white body, the disease in *Trouble* challenges the assumption of who the other is. Both Shane and Coré are attractive middle-class white people, and Shane, at least, possesses a significant amount of mobility. It is in fact their seeming 'likeness' that makes their prey so easily deceived. Denis troubles the Western body through her choice of perpetrators and victims, revealing newly vulnerable Western subjects in her alienated anonymous landscapes.

BODY MYTHS

In revealing the non-immunity of the subject, *Trouble* works to undermine (Western) myths about the body more generally by foregrounding the body in parts and filming it as an indistinct proximal surface rather than a unified and distant object. Throughout her work, Denis develops a new visual language for representing the body.[25] As discussed in previous chapters, Denis's interruption of cinematic mythology parallels Nancy's advocacy of myth's interruption – or the privileging of openness and fragmentation over the fixity of a singular meaning or explanatory framework. Working against the ideological construction of the subject or a people, interruption offers in place of myth an awareness of singularity, relationality, ephemerality and finitude.[26] Writing on Nancy, Marie-Eve Morin comments, 'myth has the form of subjectivity (defined by Hegel as that which can include within itself its own contradictions, that is, as "remainderless totality.").' [27] The dismantling of this mythic subjectivity necessitates a related troubling of dominant approaches to filming the body.

Denis offers an alternative to the dominant film language that perpetuates certain myths about the body and its relation to subjectivity. Typically, in classical narrative film the spatial relationships on screen are configured according to a particular construction of the spectator's body. As Noël Burch argues, 'The dominance of the Western mode of filmic representation was determined neither by ideological factors alone nor by sheer economic opportunism. Rather, it corresponds broadly to the mode of constitution of the Subject in our culture, and it developed into an ideological vehicle of unprecedented power.'[28] The spectator's body, then, supposedly echoed in institutionalised film language, is in fact an ideological rather than a natural body. It is the mythic-subject body, spatially unified, and both separated from and in possession of what it sees. By contrast, Nancy's description of the body in *Corpus* argues for a non-mythic body:

> The body-place isn't full or empty, since it doesn't have an outside or an inside, any more than it has parts, a totality, functions, or finality. It's acephalic and aphallic in every sense, as it were. Yet it is a skin, variously folded, refolded, unfolded, multiplied, invaginated, exogastrulated, orificed, evasive, invaded, stretched, relaxed, excited, distressed, tied, untied. In these and thousands of other ways, the body *makes room* for existence (no 'a priori forms of intuition' here, no 'table of categories': the transcendental resides in an indefinite modification and spacious modulation of skin).[29]

Here we see both a rejection of idealist accounts of mind/body ('no "a priori forms of intuition" here' etc.) and also the refusal to think the body teleologically or in terms of a normative completeness. *Trouble Every Day* foregrounds this refusal of meaning in favour of sensation and affect – or, in other words, it highlights 'the indefinite modification of skin' and the openness of the body over its bounded permanence. Just as the body on screen is susceptible to and infected by alterity, so *Trouble* offers a relation of exposure between the bodies of film and viewer. The film is a body opening onto the viewer and, although not all films operationalise this potential, it can participate in cultivating an ethical sensibility by reminding us of our mutual bodily vulnerability and of the limits of control.[30]

This notion of bodily vulnerability is highlighted in Levinas's affective account of ethical subjectivity. Levinas works against the myth of the skin as boundary between self and other, emphasising the embodiedness of ethics, while disinvesting the skin of any connotations of propriety or own-ness. He writes that the ethical subject must be 'capable . . . of giving his skin'.[31] The closeness of skin works against totality or myth:

[Proximity] is *more determinate* than the relations that are ordered into a totality. Signifyingness, the one-for-the-other, exposedness of self to another, it is immediacy in caresses and in the contact of saying. It is the immediacy of a skin and a face, a skin which is always a modification of a face, a face that is weighted down with a skin.[32]

The use of his concept of 'saying', which I elucidated in the previous chapter, is that which refuses the 'said', or a fixed representation, in favour of movement and non-finality. Here the saying is linked to proximity. Applied to cinema, proximity as skin/materiality of the filmed image (also *pellicule* in French), like the saying, interrupts narrative progression in favour of an exposure to the non-identitarian body. Denis privileges the proximity of the body over traditional forms of filmic storytelling. Her camera tends to explore the body as a tactile landscape rather than seek a clear visual picture that would locate a figure in a stable ground. Thinking about the ways in which the immediacy of a body breaks up totality within the world of film brings to mind Laura Mulvey's well-noted observation that the spectacle of the female body tends to work in tension with a film's narrative development.[33] Mulvey is of course offering a psychoanalytic reading of classical Hollywood cinema. Because Denis offers a counter cinema, the psychoanalytic reading becomes less operative.[34] In fact, her filming of the *male* body is perhaps most exemplary in its challenge to classical cinema, and thus demands frameworks of analysis other than those offered by psychoanalysis or semiotics. Yet Mulvey's point that the body breaks up the linear narrative impulse is still very relevant to my analysis of the function of the body in Denis's oeuvre, which tends to focus on the corporeal in ways that most definitively privilege exposure over narrative development. The tension between linear progression and spectacle in film is perhaps most pronounced in the musical genre, and while not musicals in any traditional sense of the word, Denis's films are marked by the spectacle of bodies dancing. Dancing bodies present alterities and let the bodily encounter between viewer and characters take priority over narrative progression and meaning. Although *Trouble Every Day* (perhaps appropriately) does not itself contain any dance scenes, its focus on the body shares in the larger Denisian impulse to eschew classical narrative in favour of an affectively charged encounter with the body on film.

Thinking through this aesthetic of exposure as an encounter with alterity opens up a way to address the bodily impact that films can have on us. For Levinas, the skin can never contain subjectivity. Because I *am* as the result of the pre-ontological ethical encounter with the other, my body in some sense contains the other. The face-to-face 'signifies in the form of one-penetrated-by-the-other'.[35] The other is in me, is in my skin. This is why Levinas's account of ethical subjectivity makes repeated reference to the skin as not quite

fitting, or as being too tight for the subject. The skin must make room for both myself *and* the other-in-me. He writes in *Otherwise than Being*, 'In responsibility as one assigned or elected from the outside . . . the subject is accused in its skin, too tight for its skin.'[36] The skin of both film and the spectator bear the trace of encounter.[37] Film offers opportunities for encountering that may alter us and which may scare or haunt us, causing chills that run along and even below the skin's surface. June's otherwise unblemished skin bears two marks in *Trouble Every Day*: first, a bite mark on the shoulder, and second, a cut on her lip. The first is given to her in pleasure and the second is the result of a struggle. Both are the traces of a relation and highlight the body's fragile exposure. For Levinas, our skin becomes a space of shared ethical relation, one that, like the traces on June's lip and shoulder, bears the risk and pleasure of our co-existence.

While both Nancy and Levinas speak abstractly of the body as 'indefinite modification and spacious modulation of skin' or as shared with the other for whom I am responsible, Denis reminds us that the skin is also always raced – that is, it is shaped by a relational world in which skin is read, experienced and felt in the context of complex histories of geopolitical encounters. This harks back to the discussion of the short film *Vers Nancy* in Chapter 2. In that film, which takes up many of the themes of Nancy's philosophy, it is the medium of film that is best equipped to generate an affective or pre-cognitive understanding of the ways in which the skin, young or old, black or white, is not in practice an uninscribed surface through which to theorise ethical subjectification. When Descas enters the train carriage, his black skin registers a difference that affectively underscores the conversation about foreignness between Nancy and Samardzija, herself a foreigner. His intrusion generates unspoken questions about citizenship, colonialism, assimilation and race that concretise the abstraction of the dialogue into the encounters of real bodies. Bringing an understanding of the historicity of the skin to the text enriches our readings of both Levinas and Nancy and insists on the materiality of the body of which they write.

The body in *Trouble* interrupts the Western 'mythology' around embodiment, specifically the myth of the body as a sovereign territory protected and contained by the skin. Denis inscribes these problematics both on the film as a kind of skin (challenging the false barrier between image and audience) and on the skin of her character.[38] The skin may seem the most obvious boundary of embodied selfhood, but it is a porous container. For Denis, Levinas and Nancy the skin refuses to be the demarcation of a discrete identity. The marks that June bears on her skin become a kind of non-linguistic bodily writing. This notion of the skin as bearing a pre-cognitive significance is captured in Nancy's concept of '*expeausition*', his highlighting of skin (*peau*) and exposure in the concept of *exposition*.[39] *Expeausition* deconstructs the notion of a split or hierarchy between mind and body.[40] Rather than exposition referring to

Figure 4.3 Coré paints the wall with the blood of her victim.

a 'comprehensive description and explanation' of an idea or theory, *ex-peau-sition* collapses the distinction between the sensible and intelligible, rethinking exposition as simply the opening of a skin onto the world, without a return to self.[41] The word itself suggests a movement outside – *ex*-position. This is not exposition in the sense of filling in the details or making legible. To *have* a meaning is to be open to co-optation by myth; rather, the body *is* meaning for Nancy. Similarly, the body in *Trouble Every Day* troubles any attempt at a reading based in semiotics or symbolic structures. This is perhaps most graphically illustrated in the scene where Coré paints the wall with the blood of her victim – an abstract image that insists on the materiality of the body as it both carries particular histories of colonial and other forms of violence and also exceeds discursive containment (Figure 4.3).

To further strip the body of myth, *Trouble Every Day* rejects any larger narratives that would give the body a meaning or purpose outside of itself. Religious discourses that valorise a less carnal body are absent from the film; Notre Dame merely provides a photogenic backdrop for the American honeymooners. Scientists endlessly study the brain, but are silent in the face of Coré and Shane's illness. Though the two perpetrators ravage and probe deep into the body of their victims and search their blood for satisfaction, the body refuses to be possessed or to yield up any deeper truth. In this respect, the body in *Trouble Every Day* rejects language or any deeper signification. In doing so it reveals that the body itself contains no inherent reason or madness, good or evil, and that these attributes are produced through historically located encounters rather than being the essential properties of particular bodies.

Denis highlights the body as a material force – its sensation, attraction and revulsion towards and with other bodies. In one scene Shane enters his hotel room after the chambermaid has left. She has lingered in his suite after cleaning, lying on the made-up bed and smoking a cigarette before she leaves. Shane approaches the depression her body has left on the mattress and smells the area where her sex would have lingered. This scene prefigures Shane's later oral dismemberment of the woman's clitoris and labia in the basement. The only truth of the body here is its material vulnerability, its susceptibility to other bodies. In place of a referential meaning we have the circulation of bodies as they draw each other across distances, resisting language but proliferating sensation, smell, taste and distinctive motion.

Just as the disease afflicting Coré and Shane seems to undo any simple distinction between mind and body (it is a physical condition that infects the brain and affects one's desires), so Nancy's concept of sense (*sens*) collapses any meaningful distinction between the sensible and intelligible. As discussed in the second chapter, *sens* connotes direction, suggesting a movement or process. It also indicates the bodily sensorium – touching, smelling, hearing, tasting and so on – but not a sensorium that would be integrated into a unified (mythic) body. In his book on Nancy, Ian James elaborates, 'Prior to any traditional distinction between mind and body, ideality and materiality, and prior to cognition per se, there is the passage of sense as a bodily event, as an opening up of meaningful spaces and a meaningful world in which such distinctions as mind/body, ideality/materiality can be made or be thinkable as such.'[42] In all of its valences, the body as sense suggests the *process* of meaning – meaning as that which is never fixed, never possessed, but that is constantly kept open to the questioning that is so key to an ethics. *Trouble Every Day*, in its rejection of discourses of science and religion as they would give a meaning to the body outside of the body as it is, open and vulnerable, giving and taking, shares in this impulse to expose the body outside of representational or explanatory systems. This shift away from a representational body, or the body as having meaning, and towards the body as sense, or as being meaning, would necessitate a new way of approaching the body in front of the camera's lens. This is one perspective through which we can contextualise the innovative ways in which Denis films the body.

We have seen how *Trouble Every Day* 'troubles' the body, both the bodies on screen and that of the viewer herself. The film refuses the body's discursive containment, undoes the notion of the skin as a container for subjectivity, and rejects a hierarchical and unified notion of the body. Because Denis does not take bodily identity as self-evident, the camera moves away from shooting the body as a totality or an object of visual mastery. *Trouble Every Day* exposes the body in fragments, yet in a way that highlights the tactility and singularity of the body rather than offering it as a fetishised object. Perhaps the most
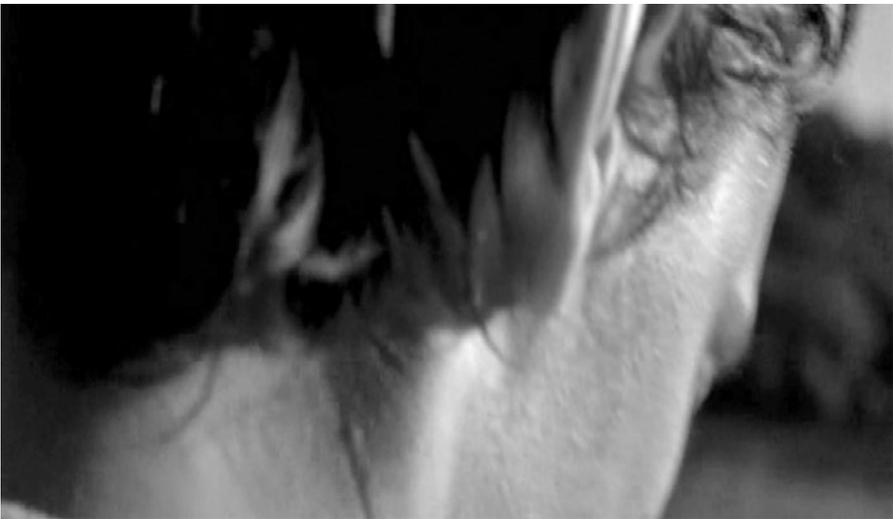
Figure 4.4 The maid's neck.

Figure 4.5 The camera obsessively captures glimpses of parts, often backs and hands, ears and feet (*The Intruder*).

memorable instances of this are the repeated shots of the maid's neck, which we follow down the hall of the hotel throughout the film (Figure 4.4). This focus on fragments is characteristic of Denis and Godard's work together, which obsessively captures glimpses of parts, often backs and hands, ears and feet, in an almost impressionistic mode (for example, an ear in *The Intruder*, Figure 4.5).

Figure 4.6 A brief glimpse of Louis's naked backside, atypically framed, as he walks through the forest.

These fragments are often framed in unconventional ways, using choker close-ups and employing shakier handheld camerawork that offers a fleeting impression. Godard employs the camera as a body in movement with other bodies, better capturing the tactile and sensory experience of sharing space with another body. For instance, an early sequence in the film *The Intruder* shows the lead character, Louis, at peace in the natural environment that surrounds his home in the Jura Mountains. We are given a brief glimpse of his naked backside, atypically framed, as he walks through the forest (Figure 4.6). He is depicted as at one with his surroundings, roaming nude, lounging with his dogs under trees, and swimming in the lake. Something happens to his heart as he is swimming – once ashore we see a close-up of his hand grasping the earth (Figure 4.7). Several frames later we see another shot of his hand covering the traitorous organ (Figure 4.8). This series of shots demonstrates the suggestive power of the part without using dialogue or more codified visual language (for example, the facial close-up as an indicator of character psychology). They create a sensory connection that privileges the affective content of the scene over the narrative (although, yes, we can infer that a heart attack has occurred and that Louis is very comfortable in his environment, both elements of narrative and characterisation). These fragmented glimpses ask us to encounter the body outside of any preconceived systems of meaning that would tell us in advance what to make of this or that body (for example, based on gender or age).[43] They make the body strange and extraordinary, as if to expose its singularity in *this* combination of glances, in *this* particular light,

Figure 4.7 Something happens to his heart as he is swimming – once ashore we see a close-up of his hand grasping the earth.

Figure 4.8 Several frames later we see another shot of his hand covering the traitorous organ.

doing *this* specific activity. The body in fragments foregrounds an ephemeral yet sensual encounter with singularity.

Nancy suggests this collection of parts in his discussion of the body as *partes extra partes*. Nancy theorises the body as a corpus rather than *corps*, a collection of parts rather than a unified organism. It is without head or tail (acephalic and

aphallic), its sexed-ness exceeds binary sex and it lacks an organising principle, *telos* or intelligible purpose. In many ways, Nancy offers an account of the body sympathetic to a queer theoretical perspective – sexuality and sex are plural not only between bodies but also *within* bodies; becoming and fragmentation replace a notion of fixed and unified identity. This queer ontological perspective is also evident in his essay 'The "There Is" of the Sexual Relation'.[44] In this text, Nancy further emphasises the ways in which *sense* privileges acts over sexed and sexual identities and highlights the proliferation of desires that exists before and beyond any notion of sexual difference. Likewise, queer theory has challenged identitarian notions of sex or sexuality in favour of contingently produced and negotiated desires and acts. Nancy writes,

> Sex is not just its own difference but also, each time, the properly infinite process of its own differentiation. I am each time a certain degree of composition and differentiation between *man* and *woman*, *homosexual man* and *heterosexual man*, *homosexual woman* and *heterosexual woman* and according to the various combinations that open up to each other as well as close themselves off from each other, that touch and penetrate each other.[45]

As has been demonstrated in previous chapters, Denis's films themselves are *corpi* – working against closure and fixity at the level of narrative and character – but here we see how this refusal of totality (or myth) reaches down to the level of the depiction of the body itself.[46] In contrast to psychoanalytic or semiotic frameworks, approaching the body through Nancy allows us to see how the body can act in excess of signifiers such as sexual difference and beyond the level of narrative. The body's performative potential as it appears on screen is not fully encapsulated by our categorisations and representational systems. Just as the ethics elaborated in this project refuse closure, so the body as the space from which ethics *is* refuses a static unity and thus troubles rather than reifies notions of identity.

Additionally, in contrast to a psychoanalytic model, rather than the part standing in fetishistically for something else, the body in fragments simply is the condition of the body. This is key to Denis's fragmentary glimpses, which offer an alternative filmic representation to classical narrative cinema. These fragments are what make each body *this* specific body, or, put differently, what make each body singular in and across time. This fragmented account of the body has no negative connotations for Nancy – just as intrusion carries both risk and potentiality, the fragmented body is simply our condition, one to be celebrated as it gestures towards our singularity and adaptability, our relationality and connectedness. When we shift our understanding of the ethical to a respect for singularity, a refusal to fix the other into any one framework,

and an attentiveness to our ever-shifting relationality, we open ourselves up to thinking beyond the categories that discriminate or label based on race, gender or other visual markers of identity, such as ability. This makes it difficult to determine in advance what any one person can or will do, or what kind of relations might occur between specific bodies. This capacity to think beyond the confines of identity categories and to cultivate a respect for difference puts this approach in agreement with a feminist perspective. Denis challenges us not only to think the body differently, but to see it differently, disturbing dominant and codified ways of looking. The body's singularity as it is exposed *each time*, in each unique part, privileges a non-identitarian being, altered in her encounter with her environment and with other bodies.

This post-phenomenological reading of the body dovetails with major currents in critical disability studies, which has long challenged dominant constructions of the body as whole, sovereign and bounded. Before moving on to examine another facet of how Denis films the body I'd like to take a moment to think about the ways in which adding voices from disability studies enriches our discussion of cinematic ethics. This is a potential not fully explored in Denis's work thus far but is suggested by her approach to her subject matter. Although disability and film scholarship tends to look at disability as it appears thematically in films, here I am suggesting that rather than the content of the film per se, the way in which we are encouraged to encounter and relate to bodies on screen, narratively and formally, is sympathetic to a perspective that makes room for differently abled bodies. Just as her work does not have to treat women or 'women's issues' explicitly to evoke a feminist gaze, so questions of ability are opened up by the way in which we are asked to approach others on screen. The filmic ethics here suggests that *no* body can be encapsulated by our expectations – bodily identity is not stable, nor are bodies read the same way in every context. Nancy and Denis contribute to challenging notions of abledness that are used to marginalise certain bodies by foregrounding the body as a varying collection of parts.[47] Denis to date has not specifically dealt thematically with physical or intellectual 'disabilities' in her films; however, useful parallels are available in her concern with diasporic bodies and ageing bodies (notably in *I Can't Sleep*). Daïga's character in *I Can't Sleep* explores the situational disability of being unable to converse fluently in the dominant language, but, as discussed in the previous chapter, she does not present herself as needy, apologetic or even deserving of sympathy on that account. This demonstrates the insufficiency of categories with respect to human singularity and the ways in which limitations are contextual rather than essential.

Disability theorists have highlighted the ways in which the projection of contagion and vulnerability onto the 'disabled other' is a disavowal of the unmarked subject's own dependence and openness to alteration by the other. Although not diseased per se, the disabled body is often treated as if it were

contagious.[48] In this respect, the film evokes issues related to 'disphobia' just as Mayne suggests it elliptically refers to discourses around AIDS. The supposedly neutral body against which bodies labelled 'disabled' are held up and found lacking tends to be white and male, linking women, non-white and differently abled bodies in terms of their bodily difference or 'otherness'. Challenging binary notions such as that between same/other and abled/disabled, disability activists and scholars have advocated strategies such as using the term 'temporarily able-bodied' to name those bodies typically seen as able and to emphasise that disability is not necessarily a permanent state but something we move into and out of to different degrees throughout our lives. The overlap between disability studies' attempt to think the body as something in process rather than static and queer paradigms that seek to reclaim the body from normative notions of wholeness and identity has been noted by many disability theorists.[49] Nancy and Denis are useful contributors to this open 'body' of ideas – clearing paths that challenge the monadic modern body and may be useful to critical disability studies and queer theory.

The modern account of the body is underpinned by many discourses from biomedical and military to philosophical concepts of personhood, leading up through phenomenology. As Ed Cohen notes, '[M]odern bioscience's investment in the self-interiorizing and defensive organism betrays its unacknowledged debt to modern philosophies of personhood.'[50] In this light we can see how the Nancean body – open, dependent, technological and other to itself – follows necessarily from the ways in which Nancy reconsiders the subject after phenomenology. By altering our philosophical concepts and moving towards a more porous and connective model of 'personhood', a less bounded and defensive account of the material body comes into relief. As Margrit Shildrick writes apropos our conceptions of the body, 'although the *transcendent* split between mind and body may be problematised by our phenomenological experience of being-in-the-world, we do still see our bodies almost as though they were suits of armour protecting a core self.'[51] Nancy makes a critical intervention within the philosophical tradition here, challenging the notion of a stable and true inner self in favour of surfaces touching one another, parts combining with other parts – both technological and otherwise – and altering bodies in their course. The rethinking of the body is a move away from identity as the foundation of being and towards a processual and dynamic notion of the body plural. If disability is culturally related to brokenness, dependence, necessary co-existence and techo/biological intermeshing, then in a Nancean framework there is no difference between this 'other' body and the reality of each body – each bodily configuration enacts each time singularity rather than stabilising a universalising category. Denis's method of shooting the body in parts suggests that the body shares itself out more when the look relinquishes its power of understanding through assuming a meaningful whole.

Trouble Every Day highlights our general dis-ease with respect to our lack of bodily sovereignty by foregrounding our susceptibility throughout the film. It therefore challenges the notion of personhood constructed by the kinds of bio-medical discourses Cohen discusses. Shildrick similarly writes, 'At the beginning of a new millennium in which evermore detailed biomedical accounts of the body are passing into lay usage and in which we are invited to marvel at the capacities of biomedical technologies to remake the body, reminders of uncontrolled corporeal vulnerability are highly unwelcome.'[52] *Trouble* works to challenge the ways in which 'normative categories of ontology and epistemology' are secured by 'the notion of the diseased, the unclean or the contaminated'.[53] It also highlights the ways in which corporeal difference equals institutional invisibility. Moving away from sovereignty, instead it suggests we rethink our co-existence in terms of connection, a generalisable susceptibility and a non-normative core/corps. By refusing the sense of the body as identity, Denis is able to film bodies in an exploratory way, one that moves away from the body as a coherent totality and therefore does not start with maleness or femaleness, or other binary categories, as its point of departure.

In one of the more gruesome scenes in the film, Coré has sex with and mutilates/kills a neighbour boy who, infatuated with her, has broken into her home. The camera pans very slowly across human skin, but it is impossible to tell whose skin it is or what we are looking at (Figure 4.9). Tufts of hair that could be a woman's pubic area, a belly button or an armpit fill the screen. Flesh is exposed such that it is made strange to the eye – a landscape or a palpitating organism that is encountered without a sense of visual mastery or possession.[54]

Figure 4.9 The camera pans very slowly across human skin, but it is impossible to tell whose skin it is or what we are looking at.

Figure 4.10 Shane and June make love in their hotel room but we are given only mobile and fleeting glances . . .

The viewer is exposed to an image that does not allow an easy perspective.[55] This means that she must remain open to the image as it is slowly revealed in all its viscerality. While operating alongside horror's fascination with the body in ecstasy and agony, in pieces and torn apart, Denis employs her unique visual style. Because the gaze here is resolutely non-appropriative, she profoundly alters the conventions of horror, rendering her spectators as vulnerable to intrusion as the characters. Additionally, the film avoids a sado–pornographic depiction because it refuses to represent the body as an object of visual mastery (voyeuristically) or fetishism.

This mode of filming is also evident in the film's other sex scenes. Shane and June make love in their hotel room (Figures 4.10 and 4.11), but we are given only mobile and fleeting glances that close in on skin and hands as they explore and penetrate, rendering the gaze unsure of its own footing. *Friday Night* offers another example of this fragmentary and decentred style of shooting love scenes. When the two central characters – Vincent and Laure – finally have sex, we are not shown a medium shot of their bodies entwined and undressing each other, or a close-up of their faces kissing passionately. Rather we are exposed to *this* hand, as it touches the textured bedspread of the hotel, *these* hands clutching gently for the first time behind *this* nape of a neck, then *this* hand exploring *this* foot in close-up, rendering the image difficult to discern and inaugurating a series of more-difficult-to-master shots of *these singular* bodies touching and entwining (Figures 4.12 and 4.13). Instead of making love a feeling possessed by a 'subject', this mode of filming shows how

Figure 4.11 . . . that close in on skin and hands as they explore and penetrate, rendering the gaze unsure of its own footing.

Figure 4.12 We are exposed to *this* hand exploring *this* foot in close-up, rendering the image difficult to discern . . .

desire flows and is produced through the encounter of bodies. It gives love a performative dimension rather than assuming it as a thing that we can always recognise and know. This approach opens up the body to an exploratory gaze that captures the sensuous singularity of *these* bodies at *this* particular moment, as they alter each other through their mutual exposure.

Figure 4.13 . . . and inaugurating a series of more-difficult-to-master shots of *these singular* bodies touching and entwining.

The lack of visual mastery in these scenes challenges a phenomenological approach, which tends to fall back on a transcendent consciousness. Like Denis, contra the phenomenological tradition, Nancy does not posit a self-identical spectator.[56] Denis's films are constructed, narratively and visually, in such a way that we are denied the satisfaction of resolution and understanding. In a post-phenomenological manner, the spectator finds herself affectively contaminated by an image that denies full intelligibility. Affective and pre-cognitive relations of exposure attune the spectator to her own ontological non-immunity, in a world in which all encounters are contact with the unknown. Despite the human vulnerability that this reworking of the subject and the body entails, if it is in fact our condition as beings, then the recognition of this fragility to one another as it pertains to all, *including* the Western and able-bodied subject, is a starting place from which to think more ethically about our actions in the world.

Shildrick's writing shares concerns with my own work here – connecting a generalised bodily vulnerability to a reconceptualisation of ethics but within a disability studies context. As she writes, 'Far from being a simple matter of prudent protection, what is at stake in our vulnerability to non-self factors is an *ethics of relationship*.'[57] Barbara E. Gibson likewise sees a connection between notions of the person, ethics and biomedical constructions of the bounded body. She argues for a reconceptualisation of dependency or vulnerability as connectivity: 'connectivity suggests a radically altered ethics that is no longer premised on the rights of the generalized autonomous subject. Instead it

compels the becoming-self to appreciate and acknowledge difference by recognizing its own vulnerabilities and dependencies.'[58] The narratives of people categorised as disabled reveal this connectivity and bodily malleability through their statements that various pieces of technology, service animals and/or aids feel like parts of themselves. For Gibson, disability is a privileged experience expressing our connectivity and ongoing connection making as part of human becoming. Nancy shifts our language towards singular plurality as his own term for becoming or for the 'with-ness', openness and constant alteration of what is thought of as the subject or existent.

Denis's larger project of dismantling identity as a useful signifier of character, her use of the fragment, and the way in which she films sex scenes all critique the dominant notion of the defensive body. Keeping in line with the thematic of encounters as shaping a singular plural subject and applying it to new ways of thinking embodiment, we can see how labels such as disability or race are produced through encounters between bodies, rather than properties held by stable selves. We can also highlight the insufficiency of a label such as 'female' or 'disabled' to account for the other's singularity or even to tell us what that body can do. The concept of the body that operates in Nancy and in Denis's work demands a reworking of *ethics* that overlaps with critical disability studies. Key to this is questioning the vilification of vulnerability and dependence and recognising these terms as a necessary reality of existing in a world with others. By understanding vulnerability as a generalised ontological condition, as does *Trouble Every Day* and as do theorists such as Price, Shildrick and Gibson, less effort will be made to shore up the illusion of the bounded self by displacing vulnerability onto 'others', whether these others be racially othered or othered in terms of age or ability according to a standard/neutral body that is implicitly white and male.[59] Can we rethink vulnerability as a condition of self-becoming, after Shildrick?[60] In generalising our susceptibility to one another we shift away from defence as a paradigm for the body and towards connectivity – albeit one that, after Nancy, is always interruptive. Whereas Shildrick and Price use a Derridean/Butlerian model focusing on the body's discursive construction and performativity, and Gibson looks to Deleuze and Guattari for models of becoming that conceptualise the body as a connectivity machine, I submit a Nancean contribution. Nancy's focus on the body as always in process, always becoming *with* bodies, human, animal and mineral, and as a collection of parts amongst parts can add to this 'toolbox' of philosophical resources for rethinking the body outside of binaries of healthy/sick, abled/disabled and integrated/broken.

Although I am offering some of Nancy's and Denis's insights as ways of adding to a conception of the body that aligns with the concerns of critical disability studies, I would note here that Levinas also makes vulnerability the property of the ethical subject. This 'subject' is the product of an encounter or

a relation that renders her vulnerable and weak before the other to whom she is responsible. This reversal – the ethical subject is not the neutral party who aids those who are in need or vulnerable per se, but is herself vulnerable and open to outrage – is part of why his philosophy provokes such strong feelings in his readers. I return to this aspect of his writing in the Coda, where I discuss our vulnerability to texts and the affective reorientations they demand of us. The next and final section will turn to Levinas for additional conceptual resources for developing an affect-based post-phenomenological account of film spectatorship. I turn to Denis's use of dance, going beyond the parameters of *Trouble Every Day* to offer a counter to the suffering so prominent in her exploration of the horror genre and to look instead at the potential joy and wonder of bodies exposed in movement. Dance functions as a kind of 'saying' – an affective and ephemeral encounter with the other.

EMBODYING THE ENCOUNTER

I have been working towards a post-phenomenological account of embodiment, to which, as I elaborate here, Levinas can also contribute. I go into some detail in this section to explore his relationship to vision and the body, because the bodily dimension of his thought is somewhat overlooked in Levinas scholarship.[61] In fact, he has even been read as emphasising vision at the expense of the bodily, a perspective which is countered in particular by a close reading of his final major work on ethics, *Otherwise than Being*.[62] In his emphasis on the bodily, tactile way in which the ethical is intimated, Levinas in fact *critiques* vision as a disembodied tool of a transcendental consciousness, which aligns with feminist critiques of the vision-centred history of philosophy. This perspective conceives of sight, or the phenomenological apperception of an object, as that which requires distance or separation from what is viewed, a distance which also encourages a mastery of the other/object. Because of this, vision is not the 'sense' of the ethical for Levinas. He writes, 'Sight, by reason of its distance and its totalizing embrace, imitates or prefigures the "impartiality" of the intellect and its refusal to hold to what the immediacy of the sensible would dispose, or what it would constitute.'[63] He similarly moves away from the representational or semiotic and towards the viscerality of encountering the other, or, put in other words, of being-with. The ethical encounter signifies in highly somatic ways and Levinas works hard to avoid language that connects this intimation to any notion of sight as mastery or possession. Terms like 'knowing', 'cognition' and 'experience' are always associated with the ontological in Levinas, and with the realm of light, enlightenment, vision and totality. Once I *know* something I have assimilated it to my own consciousness or worldview, thus I have repressed the alterity of the other and reduced it to my own understand-

ing. For Levinas, ethics takes place in darkness, in the space of *not* knowing, *not* mastering, and being vulnerable and exposed to the call of the other. In his emphasis on contact and proximity over language and visual mastery he argues that contact is 'a way of signifying quite different from that which connects exposition to sight'.[64] Here we see Levinas reworking the meaning of signification away from a representational schema and towards the idea of sensibility. In more current theoretical language, signification for Levinas is affect, where affect denotes the bodily sensations that precede any linguistic designators of emotion (such as happiness or fear). Signification is sensation, proximity and contact. This bears a strong affinity to the ethical approach of Denis, who gives precedence to the exposure of the body in all its strangeness over visual and narrative clarity. Her work illustrates how even within an (audio)visual medium such as film, contact prevails over cognition or representation.

There are moments in *Otherwise than Being* where Levinas opens the possibility of reworking the visual in a suggestive way. As articulated in the quotations above, vision 'announces' contact and exposure. He argues furthermore that the functions of sight 'may not be exhausted in openness and cognition',[65] 'openness' and 'cognition' being words that stand in for the phenomenological tradition that he is writing against. Levinas refigures vision in haptic terms. The eyes are most useful as indicators when they act like organs of touch. He writes, 'Sight is, to be sure, an openness and consciousness, and all sensibility, opening as a consciousness, is called vision; but even in its subordination to cognition sight maintains contact and proximity. The visible caresses the eye. *One sees and one hears like one touches*.'[66] Here the auditory is connected to vision and touch in a way that implies their interchangeability. What is significant is not the sense itself but *how* it senses, what alterities it leaves unthematised and remains exposed to, the way in which it touches on the other. This suggests the vital possibility that we may be able to see otherwise, or to disrupt our conventional patterns of looking to be open, even in an ethical sense, to what is unexpectedly other. As argued, Denis and Godard shift the codified terms of viewing such that we are placed in a kind of affective proximity to the bodies on screen, rather than looking at them from a perspective of distance and mastery.

This approaches a form of haptic spectatorship. In the sense that the image bears a highly tactile charge, it touches from across a distance. Touch troubles the bodily separation that enables one to totalise what is seen. Levinas writes that 'Sensibility must be interpreted as touch first of all'[67] and that 'To approach is to touch the *neighbor*, beyond the data apprehended at a distance in cognition, that is, to approach the other'.[68] This contact in proximity touches on the other without fusion; it retains the otherness of the other without reducing her to the Same. In language that comes surprisingly close to Nancy's model of interruptive touch, Levinas clarifies: 'To be in contact is neither to invest the other and annul his alterity, nor to suppress myself in

the other. In contact itself the touching and the touched separate, as though the touched moved off, was always already other, did not have anything in common with me.'[69] Referring back to alterity aesthetics, as discussed in the previous chapter, this is a touch that cannot grasp, refusing the comforts of categorisation. Levinas often refers to the encounter with the other as a caress, but because this interaction takes place in an ethical sphere that is prior to the ontological, it figures as a trace.[70] As a trace, the contact is present only in its absence; it is revealed only as it withdraws and is therefore beyond my reach. This tactile trace is the residue of the ethical encounter, one that is echoed in the bodily interaction between viewer and film.

This bodily encounter is intimated in the tension, anxiety and horror of *Trouble Every Day*, reminding us of our susceptibility and *co*-existence. As a counter to the pain of exposure that has predominantly figured in this chapter, the role of dance in Denis's oeuvre more pleasurably showcases the bodily impact that the image has on the spectator. Dance reveals the more joyous and often erotic side of exposure in contrast to the darkness of the horror genre. Furthermore, a turn to dance is necessary in relation to some of the larger implications of this study. The so-called 'death of the subject' or deconstruction of subjectivity need not be a cause for despair or a sign of nihilism. Importantly for feminism, which has a deep investment in the dismantling of the subject but also a troubled relation with the practical political need to assert the reality of the category 'women', it is crucial to emphasise the affirmative, generative and creative possibilities that the opening of the subject can offer. Dance thus provides a needed counterpoint to the discussion above, as it is exemplary of the kinds of bodily creativity that a rethinking of relationality and subjectivity enables. As opposed to *Trouble Every Day*, which takes some of Denis's bodily preoccupations to their extreme limits, dance is perhaps the most paradigmatic motif of her work, which showcases the elusive singularity that her films address. This can be thought of in terms of the affective trace of the encounter with the other – a bodily reminder of relationality and responsibility. It is an encounter that works in a pre-cognitive way. In lieu of dialogue or explanatory images we are offered a body in motion, exposing its ineffable uniqueness to us. Denis's use of dance connects to her powerful use of music and interest in filming bodies more generally. We saw this in the previous chapter, which discussed the familial dance scene in *I Can't Sleep* and Galoup's post-mortem discothèque romp in *Beau travail*.[71]

US Go Home, a film Denis made for a French television series, features many dance scenes, specifically of teenagers dancing at a party. In an early scene, Alain, the elder of the two teen siblings that the film centres on, plays a record of the Animals' song 'Hey Gyp'. He absent-mindedly sings along and lights a cigarette, then jumps on his bed and begins to move his arms, dancing back and forth, while singing and smoking his cigarette unselfconsciously. As

Figure 4.14 Alain dancing to 'Hey Gyp' in *US Go Home*.

the song grows increasingly frenzied, he sings and moves with corresponding abandon, giving himself over to the sexual and expressive affect of the music (Figure 4.14). Previously, Alain has appeared sullen and distant, coldly rejecting his sister's pleas to accompany her to a party and reading Seneca aloud in bed, railing against the pleasures of the body – sexual or otherwise. The lingering and delightful scene of Alain dancing to his record (which lasts the entire duration of the song, almost four minutes, and is shot in one take) evokes the tensions attendant on the ephemeral stage of adolescence – in it we witness both his irreducible singularity and the unspoken desires and capacities of his body. This scene is exemplary of the way that Denis uses dance not just to supplement narrative but also in place of it. The body interrupts narrative and operates in excess of articulable meanings. Like the fragmented and non-appropriable body discussed above, proximity ruptures myth through the exposure of the dancing body. The spectacle of the dance reveals a non-thematisable element of character that refuses to be pinned down, providing a bodily encounter with alterity. The moment when the body engages with music can never be exactly repeated, thus expressing the sensations of a unique and fleeting moment in time. The bodily relationship with film that is intensified in the horror genre is similarly concentrated through Denis's particular use of dance.[72]

In the more recent *35 Shots of Rum*, a pivotal sequence revolves around a dance scene in a small bar. The four main characters – a father and his daughter, who have a close and domestic co-existence, and two neighbours, one who has feelings for the daughter and a second who has a romantic past with the father – are all en route to a concert when their car breaks down in the pouring

Figure 4.15 The Commodores' song 'Nightshift' comes on in *35 Shots of Rum*, as the father and daughter dance.

rain. As they seek shelter after their plans have fallen apart, a bar owner reopens her tavern for them. The father dances with his former love interest; their comfortable intimacy is palpable. The Commodores' song 'Nightshift' comes on as the father and daughter dance – again their bodies express their closeness and the affection they have for each other (Figure 4.15). As the song plays on we see the young male neighbour cut in on the father and the immediate shift in the body language of the new couple (Figure 4.16). As they dance, their sexual attraction moves from tentative to explicit, as he undoes her hair and eventually they kiss. The father responds by reaching out to the bar owner as she delivers a late-night meal – their attraction is similarly palpable as we see their bodies move together (Figure 4.17), before the scene cuts to the dejected face of the father's former flame, who throughout the film has continued to carry a torch for him. The scene is central in the sense that key decisions seem to be made through body movement – the daughter and neighbour establish their romantic relationship; she is preparing for her wedding at the end of the film (presumably to him, although typically for Denis we never see the groom, so the film refuses clear answers). The father has also definitively rejected his former girlfriend, while still asserting his own sexuality and ability to find pleasure in life outside of his daughter, whom he knows he will have to let go. Yet this synopsis of inferable consequences hardly captures the scene's affective power. The bodies express so much that is not reducible to language or a list of character attributes. Dancing reveals singularities or alterities and affectively impacts the viewer. This of course connects to the alterity aesthetics previously discussed, while adding in the bodily dimension of this encounter

Figure 4.16 The neighbour cuts in and we register an immediate shift in the body language of the new couple.

Figure 4.17 The father finds his own romance on the dance floor.

with the other. Put into the Levinasian terms introduced in the previous chapter, dance functions as a kind of 'saying' – an ungraspable movement that refuses to be fixed into representation, or 'said'. Translated into the language of this chapter, it engages the body in a refusal of myth, showing how the body exceeds its own narrative containment and interrupts the linear progression of the film to expose a singular being in motion.

As I've argued throughout this book, we can see in Denis's work the attempt to move beyond identities that are fully encapsulated by the terms of the system and to challenge the sovereign subject. To return to Wendy Brown's writing on the perils of identity-based modes of organising, which was referenced in the introductory chapter, Brown advocates 'the partial dissolution of sovereignty into desire' in place of identity politics. Denis's images move away from the complete and psychologised body-person and towards sensual audio-visualscapes of desire. Instead of dialogue, we are given a dance. In place of communication, we are offered creative forces that challenge us to encounter the world differently. As Brown says,

> If every 'I am' is something of a resolution of desire into fixed and sovereign identity, then this project might involve not only learning to speak but to *read* 'I am' this way, as in motion, as temporal, as not-I, as deconstructable according to a genealogy of want rather than as fixed interests or experiences.[73]

We can add to *view* 'I am' in this way to describe the flowing progression of bodies on screen in Denis's cinema. Brown's argument resonates with Tamsin Lorraine's comment:

> If what feminists are trying to do is pursue the consistency of thought components in order to destabilize old identities and perspectives and stabilize more promising identities and perspectives in keeping with the life flows of becoming-other than we are, then feminist theory is more about creating ways of skillfully evolving with life rather than getting a static representation of reality 'right.'[74]

By reopening bodies to desire and failing to account fully for them in the mind of the spectator, Denis's work encourages us to reopen ourselves to a future that can't be known or anticipated through our current categories, even if it must also always be shaped in part by the histories that have come before us. She asks us to *see* 'I am' as in motion, temporal and singular each time differently.

Although Levinas's 'face-to-face' encounter may sound deceptively visual, it is in fact intimated in various somatic ways. The other 'excites' simply by virtue of her proximity.[75] The psyche 'pants and shivers',[76] multiple references are made to trembling at the presence of the other, and proximity is sensed as a restlessness.[77] The subject shudders in the ethical encounter; Levinas describes the 'shudder of subjectivity'[78] and the modality of an obsession as 'a shuddering of the human quite different from cognition'.[79] These references to trembling, shivering and shuddering and the aforementioned focus on bodily

pain take on a horrific valence when read alongside a film like *Trouble Every Day*. Perhaps this is because the film refuses a transcendence that Levinas relies on to give meaning to being – the suggestion of infinity or God as that which ultimately supports his ethical system. In this sense Denis diverges from Levinas, yet Denis participates in the attempt to evoke the ephemeral in her work, to avoid fixing things into frozen images, and to reveal a world where bodies move each other. But in the limit case that is *Trouble Every Day*, there is no redemption or meaning to be found outside of the diegetic world. Bodies are key to the ethics of Denis's cinema, as they are to Levinasian ethics. Yet, counter to the pain of exposure, Denis's oeuvre also gestures towards the unique power of bodies on screen to offer us more pleasurable affective encounters that are bodily reminders of the ethical relation. One of the key ways in which she does this is through her distinctive use of dance, facilitating encounters with the spectator, bodily in every sense, and impacting us in a place beyond the thematisable. Even in the horrific tale that is *Trouble Every Day*, there are moments of care between strangers – a lab technician offering to help Shane because she feels concern for him, a former landlady of Shane's offering company to a lonely and abandoned June, and a valet sheltering June, despondent, from the pouring rain and convincing her to come back in from the cold.

CONCLUSION

Whereas Levinas and Nancy primarily give an account of the body that applies to our existence outside of the cinema, films offer their own perspectives on embodiment – sometimes reinforcing our illusions of coherent subjectivity, and bodily and visual mastery, and other times challenging them and asking us to look and feel differently. Denis presents us with an ethical filmmaking practice, attentive to bodily singularity and privileging exposure over closure. Going further than the philosophers, her films acknowledge the historical and geographical dimensions of embodiment, even if they challenge the value of identity categories as a lens through which to understand the image. They thus attune us to a more general condition and establish a space of sensitisation to the bodily non-immunity key to the concept of the ethical I have elaborated.

The body is central to an account of ethical spectatorship – the subject is constituted *with* and the body's porousness and vulnerability is a constant reminder of this relationality. Denis's films evoke encounters that attune the viewer to this shared bodily condition, undermining illusions of autonomy from the external world. *Trouble Every Day* is a particularly difficult case study because it does not shy away from the risk inherent in challenging notions of the bounded subject. Despite the danger, the recognition of our susceptibility

to one another may be a place from which we can act in ways that better acknowledge mutual risk, and that also make visible the joy and beauty of our shared messy world that offers no meaning outside itself.

NOTES

1. For a critique of the ways in which European discourses of alienation or a fragmented subject are blind to their own privileged status, see Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 2008); Kelly Oliver, 'Alienation as the Perverse Privilege of the Modern Subject', in *The Colonization of Psychic Space: A Psychoanalytic Social Theory of Oppression* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), pp. 3–26.

2. Here I refer to Denis's upbringing in various parts of French colonial Africa, as referenced in Chapter 1. See, for example, Mark A. Reid, 'Claire Denis Interview: Colonial Observations', *Jump Cut* 40 (March 1996): 67–72.

3. I adopt the phrase 'monadic modern body' from Ed Cohen, *A Body Worth Defending: Immunity, Biopolitics, and the Apotheosis of the Modern Body* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009).

4. For Deleuze-inflected readings see Martine Beugnet, *Cinema and Sensation: French Film and the Art of Transgression* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007); E. Ann Kaplan, 'European Art Cinema, Affect, and Postcolonialism: Herzog, Denis, and the Dardenne Brothers', in Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover (eds), *Global Art Cinema: New Theories and Histories* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 285–302; Elena del Río, 'Body Transformations in the Films of Claire Denis: From Ritual to Play', *Studies in French Cinema* 3.3 (2003): 185–97. For readings in terms of haptics or touch see Laura McMahon, *Cinema and Contact: The Withdrawal of Touch in Nancy, Bresson, Duras and Denis* (Leeds: Maney, 2011); Ian Murphy, 'Feeling and Form in the Films of Claire Denis', *Jump Cut* 54 (Fall 2012), <http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc54.2012/IanMurphyDenis/> (last accessed 20 May 2015). For other body-based approaches see Adrian Martin, 'Ticket to Ride: Claire Denis and the Cinema of the Body', *Screening the Past* 20 (2006), <http://tlweb.latrobe.edu.au/humanities/screeningthepast/20/claire-denis.html> (last accessed 20 May 2015).

5. *Compears* is a Nancean neologism that indicates that we always enter the world *with* others and continue to do so throughout our lives.

6. For example, group identities based on gender, race, religion or nationality.

7. Linda Williams, 'Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, Excess', *Film Quarterly* 44.4 (Summer 1991): 2–13. See also Carol J. Clover, 'Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film', *Representations* (special issue *Misogyny, Misandry, Misanthropy*) 20 (Autumn 1987): 187–228; Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 1993). All three read the genre through the lenses of body, identity and gender and come from a psychoanalytic perspective.

8. Williams, 'Film Bodies'.

9. This is recounted in Judith Mayne, *Claire Denis* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005).

10. Flachra Gibbons and Stuart Jeffries, 'Cannes Audience Left Open-Mouthed', *The Guardian*, 14 May 2001, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/may/14/cannes2001.cannesfilmfestival> (last accessed 20 May 2015); Serge Kaganski, 'Cannes 2001: Trouble Every Day de Claire Denis', *Les Inrockuptibles*, 22 May 2001, <http://

www.lesinrocks.com/2001/05/22/cinema/actualite-cinema/cannes-2001-trouble-every-day-de-claire-denis-11218534/> (last accessed 20 May 2015).

11. This paradox of the film being both too much and not enough is discussed in Philippe Met, 'Looking for Trouble: The Dialectics of Lack and Excess, Claire Denis' *Trouble Every Day* (2001)', *Kinoeye* 3.7 (9 June 2003), <www.kinoeye.org/03/07/met07.php> (last accessed 20 May 2015).

12. Tim Palmer, 'Style and Sensation in the Contemporary French Cinema of the Body', *Journal of Film and Video* 58.3 (2006): 22–32.

13. For a series of debates around genre and the status quo see Jean-Loup Bourget, 'Social Implications in the Hollywood Genres', *Journal of Modern Literature* 3.2 (April 1973): 191–200; Judith Hess, 'Genre Films and the Status Quo', *Jump Cut* 1 (1974): 1–18; Robin Wood, 'Ideology, Genre, Auteur', *Film Comment* 13.1 (January 1977): 46–51.

14. See Clover, 'Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film'.

15. In moving away from psychologisation, I mean to critique the idea that a diagnostic category or even a full biographical account of one's childhood can fully encapsulate who a person is; or that one can be reduced to or accounted for through psychological explanations.

16. For an overview of the psychological problems affecting the killers of the slasher canon, see Clover, 'Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film'.

17. In Lisa Downing and Libby Saxton, *Film and Ethics: Foreclosed Encounters* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 129.

18. This fact is often remarked upon as Dalle is known for her highly verbal performances and her popular nickname is 'La Grande Bouche', or 'The Big Mouth'.

19. Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors* (New York: Picador, 2001), p. 138.

20. Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998), p. 43.

21. For a feminist reading of Levinas and maternity see Lisa Guenther, *The Gift of the Other: Levinas and the Politics of Reproduction* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2006).

22. Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 109.

23. Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005).

24. Mayne, *Claire Denis*, p. 108.

25. It should be noted that Denis regularly works with Agnès Godard as her director of photography. Although I may refer solely to Denis as shorthand, Godard's own creative contribution and signature should also be understood as implied.

26. Mythology, in contrast to finitude, offers universal, eternal and immutable narratives.

27. Marie-Eve Morin, *Jean-Luc Nancy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), p. 88.

28. Noël Burch, 'Film's Institutional Mode of Representation and the Soviet Response', *October* 11 (Winter 1979): 77–96; 84.

29. Jean-Luc Nancy, 'Corpus', in *Corpus*, trans. Richard A. Rand (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), pp. 2–122; p. 15.

30. Mainstream Hollywood cinema deserves sustained examination in this respect. However, in its tendency towards closure and full comprehension, as well as its conventional and gendered ways of representing bodies, it seems to offer less of these open and unexpected bodily encounters.

31. Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 76. While Levinas's account of the skin is indeed more subject-centred than Nancy's, at the same time his rendering of the body works against any traditional notion of the subject as a space of bodily propriety. Nonetheless, Levinas wants to keep 'me' as the subject of ethical responsibility. Here I am more interested in the connections between the thinkers than the discrepancies, as I think they help us to develop

an account of the body that works against hegemonic constructions, even if they don't go far enough in historically locating the subject they work against.

32. Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 85.

33. Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen* 16.3 (1975): 6–18.

34. Mulvey's argument deals with a classical style of editing and shot construction (her main examples are von Sternberg and Hitchcock films). Because Denis is not operating within this idiom or with classical Hollywood narrative conventions (i.e. male protagonists pursuing linear narratives, who are distracted by dangerous and beautiful women who must be fetishised or punished to assuage the male viewer's castration anxieties), Mulvey's analysis has limited application.

35. Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 49.

36. Ibid. p. 106.

37. The film records an encounter with bodies and light and its meaning is further shaped by the histories and particularities of its many viewings and receptions. These are some of the ways in which film bears the trace of an encounter.

38. For a psychoanalytically inflected reading of the film in relation to skin see Sebastien Scholz and Hanna Surma, 'Exceeding the Limits of Representation: Screen and/as Skin in Claire Denis's *Trouble Every Day* (2001)', *Studies in French Cinema* 8.1 (2008): 5–16.

39. Nancy also focuses on the skin in his writing on *Trouble Every Day*, referring to the film as 'pellicule expeausée'. Jean-Luc Nancy, 'Claire Denis: Icon of Ferocity', in James Phillips (ed.), *Cinematic Thinking: Philosophical Approaches to the New Cinema* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), pp. 160–8.

40. There are also many examples in Levinas of terms that attempt to complicate an easy separation between mind and body. Megan Craig similarly notes this and focuses on his use of trauma. Megan Craig, *Levinas and James: Toward a Pragmatic Phenomenology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010).

41. *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, 11th edn (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 502.

42. Ian James, *The Fragmentary Demand: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jean-Luc Nancy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), p. 107.

43. As always, Denis exploits a tension between this exposure to singularity and the contexts in which subjectivities are made and unmade. In *The Intruder*, for example, we are exposed to many border crossings that are explicitly linked to Trebor's privileges of mobility and his past in colonial Tahiti where he fathered a child with a local woman. That said, the film maintains that we cannot 'understand' or pigeonhole his character based on these identity-based privileges.

44. Jean-Luc Nancy, 'The "There Is" of the Sexual Relation', in *Corpus II*, trans. Anne O'Byrne (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), pp. 1–22.

45. Ibid. p. 10.

46. This notion of her films as *corpi* also extends to thinking across Denis's body of work.

47. 'Abledness' is a term suggested by Fiona Kumari Campbell to address the risk of occluding forms of intellectual or mental disability with the term 'able-bodiedness'. While my focus here is on the depiction of the body, it could be extended to discussions of less visible 'disabilities', much as the illness in *Trouble* is itself invisible. See F. A. K. Campbell, *Counters of Ableism: The Production of Disability and Abledness* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

48. Margrit Shildrick, 'Contagious Encounters and the Ethics of Risk', *Journal of Medical Humanities* 21.4 (2000): 215–27; 219.

49. See F. A. K. Campbell, 'Re-cognising Disability: Cross-Examining Social Inclusion

through the Prism of Queer Anti-Sociality', *Jindal Global Law Review* 2 (August 2013): 209–38; Robert McRuer, *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability* (New York: New York University Press, 2006).

50. Cohen, *A Body Worth Defending*, p. 8.
51. Shildrick, 'Contagious Encounters', p. 221.
52. Ibid. p. 218.
53. Ibid. p. 216.
54. See also Douglas Morrey, 'Textures of Terror: Claire Denis's *Trouble Every Day*', *Belphégor* 3.2 (April 2004) for a discussion of the film in relation to its depiction of the body as landscape and its relation to the horror genre; available at <http://dalspace. library.dal.ca/bitstream/handle/10222/47680/03_02_Morrey_textur_en_cont. pdf?sequence=1> (last accessed 20 May 2015).
55. This is also a feature of the haptic cinema that Laura U. Marks discusses in *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), although she is interested in experimental intercultural works and uses different theoretical reference points than I do here, including phenomenology and Deleuze.
56. See also McMahon, *Cinema and Contact*, p. 19.
57. Shildrick, 'Contagious Encounters', p. 216; italics mine.
58. Barbara E. Gibson, 'Disability, Connectivity and Transgressing the Autonomous Body', *Journal of the Medical Humanities* 27 (2006): 187–96; 188.
59. See also Rosemarie Garland-Thompson, 'Misfits: A Feminist Materialist Disability Concept', *Hypatia* 26.3 (Summer 2011): 591–609 for a discussion of materialist feminism and disability that takes up the issue of a generalised vulnerability as a basis for rethinking the stability of the term 'disabled'.
60. Shildrick, 'Contagious Encounters', p. 222.
61. Catherine Vasseleu, *Textures of Light: Vision and Touch in Irigaray, Levinas, and Merleau-Ponty* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998) includes a discussion of the caress, but it remains relatively ungrounded in the materiality of the body. Lisa Guenther, in *The Gift of the Other*, does a wonderful job discussing the bodily metaphors of maternity in Levinas's writing from a feminist perspective.
62. See, for example, Narnia Bohler-Muller, 'Justice as Breath(ing)', *International Journal of the Humanities* 4.4 (2006): 25–34. The author discusses Luce Irigaray's and Adriana Cavarero's critiques of Levinas as privileging the visual. Conversely, see Craig, *Levinas and James*, for an account of Levinas that addresses the significant role of embodiment in his philosophy.
63. Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 63.
64. Ibid. p. 100.
65. Ibid. p. 100.
66. Emmanuel Levinas, 'Language and Proximity', in *Collected Philosophical Papers*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998), pp. 109–26; p. 117; italics mine.
67. Ibid. p. 118.
68. Ibid. p. 125.
69. Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 86.
70. For more on the caress see Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993); Diane Perpich, 'From the Caress to the Word: Transcendence and the Feminine in the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas', in Tina Chanter (ed.), *Feminist Interpretations of Emmanuel Levinas* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), pp. 28–52.

71. Denis has also made a film on choreographer Mathilde Monnier, *Vers Mathilde* (2005).
72. Of course, this affective engagement is further intensified by the music that accompanies the dance sequences. One of Denis's great talents is in choosing music that tends to linger with the spectator long after the film ends.
73. Wendy Brown, 'Wounded Attachments', *Political Theory* 21.3 (August 1993): 390–410; 407.
74. Tamsin Lorraine, *Deleuze and Guattari's Immanent Ethics: Theory, Subjectivity, and Duration* (New York: SUNY Press, 2011), p. 21.
75. Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 16.
76. Ibid. p. 66.
77. Ibid. p. 82.
78. Ibid. p. 84.
79. Ibid. p. 87.