

# ***Le Corps concret: Of Bodily and Filmic Material Excess in Philippe Grandrieux's Cinema***

GREG HAINGE

*Bien sûr. C'est le corps. Mais c'est le corps pour tout, aussi bien pour le cinéma que pour la philosophie... C'est le corps, c'est le rythme, c'est la chair, c'est le poids du corps, c'est les os. C'est avec ça que ça se pense... la relation à la lumière... C'est plus ça qui m'intéresse que de me dire: je vais raconter l'histoire d'un... Cette histoire de personnage, j'y crois pas.<sup>1</sup>*

This opening quotation is the response filmmaker Philippe Grandrieux gave as a reaction to an interviewer's observation that during the opening scenes of Grandrieux's 1999 film *Sombre* he felt a very real and physical sensation of falling.<sup>2</sup> Whilst the interviewer's comment points us to the very bodily experience that watching Grandrieux's fictional films<sup>3</sup> can be, then, Grandrieux's response perhaps contains the two keys required for the apprehension of his cinematic vision: i) the body is everything; ii) the story is nothing. In what follows I will attempt to bring these two contentions together in a reading of *Sombre* and *La Vie nouvelle* (2002), and I will do so by way of a hypothesis which will require us to think of the cinema in a way we are not accustomed to seeing it and which will bring together the cinema and

---

<sup>1</sup> Interview with Philippe Grandrieux, *Balthazar: Revue d'analyse du cinéma contemporain*, 4, interview available online at: <http://cyrilbg.club.fr/grandrieux.html>, accessed 3 October 2005.

<sup>2</sup> This reaction to the opening scenes is analyzed in depth by the interviewer in a separate article: Stéphane Delorme, "La Première impression (*Sombre* précipité)", *Cinergon: Cinéma & Image*, 12 (2001/2002), 53-58.

<sup>3</sup> Grandrieux's early cinematic works are in the documentary genre, so it is necessary to draw a distinction between these films and his more recent fictional films, especially since he himself conceives of the two genres along very different lines, as becomes clear in interviews. However, for the sake of economy, since we are to deal here solely with his fictional output (to date *Sombre* (1999) and *La Vie nouvelle* (2002)), when we refer to Grandrieux's films in the rest of this paper it should be taken that we refer only to these fictional films.

what might at first sight appear to be a somewhat unlikely bed partner, *la musique concrète*.

### *La Musique concrète*

Some confusion reigns as to precisely why *la musique concrète* is called *concrète*. Thom Holmes, for instance, suggests that this was a term coined by Schaeffer “to denote the use of sound objects from nature, ‘concrete’ sounds of the real world”.<sup>4</sup> Such, however, goes against the grain of the widely known fundamental premise of *musique concrète*, which is to say its desire to apprehend sounds in isolation from the source of that sound and thus present the sound as an *objet sonore* to be heard, analysed or studied for its own intrinsic qualities and properties and not, therefore, relegated to the inferior status of signifier always deferring to the more important and essential signified. Not only this, to claim that the term *concrète* refers to this music’s use of “real”, “concrete” sounds is to disregard Schaeffer’s own pronouncements. He states, for instance:

Le mot “concret” ne désignait pas une source. Il voulait dire qu’on prenait le son dans la totalité de ses caractères. Ainsi un son concret, c’est par exemple un son de violon, mais considéré dans toutes ses qualités sensibles et pas seulement dans ses qualités abstraites, qui sont notées sur la partition.<sup>5</sup>

If *musique concrète* is called *concrète*, then, it is so firstly because it allows us to apprehend sound as though it were an object, as if it possessed, that is to say, an opaque materiality which enabled the listener to consider it in itself as an *être en-soi*, divorced from the relational world of language and consciousness. Apprehended “dans toutes ses qualités sensibles”, the *objets sonores* produced by this music were able to act upon the listener in a way that music produced through cerebral and

---

<sup>4</sup> Thom Holmes, *Electronic and Experimental Music: Pioneers in Technology and Composition*, second edition (New York & London: Routledge, 2002), p. 91.

<sup>5</sup> Pierre Schaeffer quoted in Michel Chion, *L’Art des sons fixés ou La Musique Concrètement* (Fontaine: Éditions Metamkine / Nota-Bene / Sono-Concept, 1991), pp. 13-14.

abstract composition techniques did not. It is in this relation to its effect upon the listener that we can grasp the second dimension to the term *concrète*. For if Schaeffer qualified his music with this adjective, it is also because the effect produced by this music was experienced as a bodily, sensual (as opposed to emotive) event whose transmission to the listener was direct and material as opposed to cerebral and abstract. As Abraham Moles writes:

Dans un article écrit pour la revue musicale française *Polyphonie*, il [Schaeffer] proposa d'employer le terme "musique concrète" pour désigner ce genre de musique. Le mot aurait été forgé par le poète surréaliste, Antonin Artaud, dans sa brochure *Le Théâtre de Cruauté* qui proposait l'idéal d'une musique nouvelle pour un théâtre neuf — musique nouvelle qui devait être directement — concrètement — perçue par la sensibilité du spectateur.<sup>6</sup>

If *la musique concrète* was called *concrète*, however, it was so also, and perhaps primordially, because it was to an unprecedented degree dependent in its conception, composition and performance or elaboration upon a material support. As Holmes rightly notes, "Composing a work of *musique concrète* began with the sound material itself rather than with a mental schema laid out by the composer beforehand, such as a score. The *material* preceded the *structure*."<sup>7</sup> It is not only in this respect, however, that the creation of *musique concrète* is more material than that of other musics; for Schaeffer, the manual work involved in tape manipulation is an integral part of the process, since it allows the composer to work directly on the matter of which his art is forged — sound — without a visual interface (such as that which is integral to computer music composition) interfering with or "colouring" the sound

---

<sup>6</sup> Abraham A. Moles, traduction de Daniel Charles, *Les Musiques expérimentales* (Paris: Éditions du Cercle d'Art Contemporain, 1960), p. 32.

<sup>7</sup> Holmes, p. 93. Something similar is suggested by Jean-Claude Risset who suggests that in *musique concrète* the work is realized "as a concrete recording rather than an abstract score". Jean-Claude Risset, "Foreword", in Thomas Licata (ed.), *Electroacoustic Music: Analytical Perspectives* (Westport CT & London: Greenwood Press, 2002), pp. xiii-xviii, p. xiv.

with a sensibility that ultimately has nothing to do with the specificity of the medium in which the composer is working.<sup>8</sup>

From this brief examination, we can then propose a new typology of *musique concrète* that links it at all times to the materiality implied by its name:

- (i) *Musique concrète* removes sound from an abstract, relational or linguistic structure so as to foreground sound itself rather than condemning sound merely to point towards its source and efface itself in the process.
- (ii) *Musique concrète* thus present *objets sonores* which possess a certain opaque materiality.
- (iii) *Musique concrète* requires that matter precede structure at all times, which is to say that it is dependent in its very conception and elaboration upon its material support.
- (iv) The compositional sensibility of *musique concrète* requires the artist to work as directly as possible with the material medium upon which the art form is dependent.
- (v) *Musique concrète*, because its objects are removed from an abstract linguistic system, acts directly upon the embodied material sense of the listener.

### ***Le cinéma concret***

From this typology, one might be tempted to suggest that *la musique concrète* and the cinema have very little in common. Whilst this is perhaps true with regard to many aspects of the majority of cinematic texts produced today — and that have come to condition our common sense perception of what the cinema *is* — it is at the same time very far from the truth. Firstly, both *musique concrète* and the cinema are

---

<sup>8</sup> Schaeffer has said on this point: “les traitements numériques colorent pour moi beaucoup trop les sons, et enfin ils impliquent un relais visuel, qui me gêne considérablement, car pendant le travail en studio, je me sers le moins possible de partitions ou de graphiques mnémotechniques”. Quoted in Chion, p. 86.

temporal arts which require an active deployment in order to pass into being.<sup>9</sup> Secondly, even though Pierre Schaeffer's first experiments in *musique concrète* (the *Études de bruits* which were performed at a *concert de bruits* on 5 October 1948) were produced with turntables,<sup>10</sup> the greater availability of tape recording equipment shortly after these initial experiments and the relative facility that this medium brought to the elaboration of *musique concrète* have meant that it, like the cinema, is now considered a celluloid-based art form.<sup>11</sup> Being tape or film-based forms, of course, both *musique concrète* and the cinema also have in common a fundamental technical specificity required for the elaboration of the final texts that are produced within these media, for both require film or tape to be cut (or spliced) and reassembled so as to create the final product, which is only then fixed as a print or recording.

For some, the similarities between *musique concrète* and the cinema go even further. Michel Chion goes so far as to suggest that

on pourrait [...] esquisser l'idée d'une *théorie des arts concrets*, où le cinéma muet et le cinéma parlant viendraient se placer aux côtés de la photographie, et la musique concrète et non loin de la peinture traditionnelle sur chevalet. Les arts concrets sont des arts de *simulacre fixé*, et s'opposent aux arts de texte, comme la musique de partition ou le théâtre traditionnel.<sup>12</sup>

Chion goes on to explain his point further, writing:

Un art concret a deux pôles: le pôle figuratif du simulacre, de l'imitation ou de la reconstitution du réel (mais il peut aussi tourner à l'abstraction totale); et le pôle de la matérialité pure, puisqu'une œuvre d'art concret, figurative ou non, comporte un grain, un aspect, une surface d'objet, et un nombre de détails infinis — par opposition à quelque chose qui se joue d'après un texte, d'après un livret, d'après une partition,

---

<sup>9</sup> One could suggest that all music is a temporal art but this assertion is complicated somewhat by the distinction raised in the above analysis regarding the difference between "traditional" music in the Western tradition, which is conceptualized in advance as a mental schema, and *musique concrète*, which exists only in a material elaboration. Ultimately for the purposes of this discussion this matters little, for what remains incontrovertible is that *la musique concrète* is inescapably a temporal form.

<sup>10</sup> For a discussion of the extremely arduous, cumbersome and difficult process of producing *musique concrète* with turntable technology, see Holmes pp. 91-93 and Moles pp. 31-32.

<sup>11</sup> Ironically, as Douglas Kahn points out, Schaeffer's early pieces could have been made much more simply using the soundtrack of optical film. See Kahn, "Audio Art in the Deaf Century", in Dan Lander and Micah Lexier (eds), *Sounds by Artists* (Toronto: Art Métropole, 1990).

<sup>12</sup> Michel Chion, *La Toile trouée: la parole au cinéma* (Paris: Éditions de l'Étoile, 1988), p.164.

et dont la concrétisation variera selon les “versions”, les interprétations, les mises en scène.<sup>13</sup>

Chion’s first pole here is problematic because, as we have seen, *la musique concrète* does not aim at either an imitation or reconstitution of a pre-existing real which would then necessarily render the sounds of the palette of *musique concrète* always secondary and subordinate. Rather, sound as used by the artist of *musique concrète* is of interest only in regards to its own reality and not as a sonic window onto another reality belonging to a different sensual regime. Indeed, as Chion notes in his book, *L’Art des sons fixés: ou La Musique Concrètement*:

Mieux inspirés sont les compositeurs qui, comme l’a très bien dit le critique David Rissin, ont compris qu’au lieu de se laisser obséder par la source sonore à dissimuler, on pouvait “traverser le miroir qui nous renvoie d’un son l’image causale” — entendez par là : tout en laissant éventuellement reconnaissable une cause, réelle ou non, mettre en évidence la forme, la dynamique, la matérialité du phénomène sonore.<sup>14</sup>

Nor does Chion’s bracketed alternative — “(mais [le pôle figuratif] peut aussi tourner à l’abstraction totale)” — absolve his assertion from criticism, for the removal of sound from a subordinate position in relation to the real does not mean that it becomes pure abstraction; rather, sound in this usage merely obeys the exigencies of a *different* regime, the regime, following Kittler, of the discourse network of 1900 in which the material signifier of modernism reigns as opposed to the regime of a prior Classical and Romantic era which maintained a transcendent relation to the signified.<sup>15</sup>

The second pole of *les arts concrets* identified by Chion, meanwhile, is entirely in line with the typology of *musique concrète* proposed above. What is perhaps less certain, however, is whether or not Chion’s second pole can be happily mapped onto the cinema. For whilst his notion of the cinema as an art form which

---

<sup>13</sup> Chion, *La Toile trouée*, pp. 165-166.

<sup>14</sup> Chion, *L’Art des sons fixés*, p. 16. Note also that in Chion’s own typology of what he prefers to call “la musique des sons fixés” but which is essentially the same as *la musique concrète*, we find: “pour la musique des sons fixés, il n’y a pas de sons qu’on peut dire a priori ‘naturels’”, *L’Art des sons fixés*, p. 24; and later: “Aux sources réelles elle substitue des ‘sources imaginaires’”, p. 25.

<sup>15</sup> See Friedrich A. Kittler, *Discourse Networks. 1800 / 1900*, translated by Michael Metteer with Chris Cullens (Stanford University Press, 1990).

resolutely does *not* structure itself “d’après un texte” but, rather, in relation only to its own pure materiality, can be applied to *certain* cinematic texts (indeed the analysis of Grandrieux’s films I develop here hangs on this very possibility), the majority of contemporary cinematic texts are precisely ones in which the scenario is primary and predominant — thus proving that the concerns of Eisenstein and other early pioneers of the cinema at the time of the introduction of synchronous sound were well founded.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, one could argue that Deleuze’s two-volume work *Le Cinéma* is, in the final analysis, but a historical tracing of this gradual shift towards the conversion of the cinema into a mere vehicle for the conveyance of a story and, simultaneously, an attempt to recover from that dominant history specific instances and movements that bucked this general trend and refused to obey the sensorimotor schema, proposing instead a truly philosophical vision of the world which presents us, at a certain historical juncture, with an indirect image of time and later with a direct image of time.<sup>17</sup>

Nonetheless, we would be wrong to dismiss Chion’s insight here entirely for it is in fact crucial. However, it is important to note that the second pole of his two-part typology of *les arts concrets* cannot be applied to all cinematic texts equally. For an analysis of the fictional films of Philippe Grandrieux, however, it (as well as our own typology of *musique concrète*) will be vital.

### ***Grandrieux concret***

---

<sup>16</sup> Paradoxically, when thought through in terms of Kittler’s discourse networks (and this *contra* Kittler), the cinema, which is generally considered to be *the* modern art form of the Twentieth Century, may actually have come, through modern usage, to relinquish its modern relation to a material signifier and to have regressed to a Classical discourse network.

<sup>17</sup> See Gilles Deleuze, *Le Cinéma 1: L’image-mouvement* (Paris: Minuit, 1983) and *Le Cinéma 2: L’image-temps* (Paris: Minuit, 1985).

The quotation that opened this article led us to suggest that Grandrieux's basic attitude towards the cinema could be summed up by two simple maxims: i) the body is everything, and ii) the story is nothing. Both of these statements intersect with the typology of *musique concrète* established herein, for the first statement emphasizes the importance of materiality, whilst the second echoes *musique concrète*'s fundamental *modus operandi* which consists of removing sound from the referential source or context, which is generally considered vital to it just as in common usage the script of a film is considered to be that structural element which determines the form of all of the individual components and processes that make up a film. What is even more striking, however, is that Grandrieux seems to conceive of his cinema in terms very similar to those we have used to talk of *la musique concrète* not only on this macro level but specifically in relation to all five aspects of the typology we have drawn up.

For instance, in relation to his rejection of the dominant motivating element of modern-day cinema, the story, Grandrieux says, "le cinéma ne sert pas à fabriquer des histoires au sens de la psychologie",<sup>18</sup> and he condemns the scenario-driven product commonly called cinema as an abandonment of cinema:

c'est terrible comment on a pu abandonner le cinéma pour tomber dans toute cette attitude comportementaliste, où A+B=C alors il faut écrire un scénario qui montre bien que A+B=C. C'est affligeant.<sup>19</sup>

Such is absolutely not the way in which Grandrieux works. His scripts do not conform to the Robert McKee school of filmmaking, as Grandrieux remarks:

je n'écris pas de scénario du genre "intérieur, cuisine, jour", c'est tellement déprimant, je me flingue si j'avais à écrire comme ça. J'écris des petits bouts, des notes, je cherche dans le rythme des phrases aussi. Je prends beaucoup de notes sur les acteurs, la lumière, le son...<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> Nicolas Renaud, Steve Rioux, Nicolas L. Rutigliano, "Au commencement était la nuit: Entretien avec Philippe Grandrieux", *Hors Champ* (October 1999), available online: <http://www.horschamp.qc.ca/Emulsions/grandrieux.html>. Accessed 3 October 2005.

<sup>19</sup> Renaud et al.

<sup>20</sup> Renaud et al.

Furthermore, even when he does have a script, it does not necessarily serve any purpose for him in the actual filming process. Indeed, he explained that for *Sombre* he had written a complete forty-page script which enabled him to finance the film, this script then being augmented with co-writers to 130 pages with a lot of dialogue, nearly all of which was abandoned for the actual process of filming — for, as anyone who has seen *Sombre* will know, dialogue in the finished film is extremely sparse. Whilst anathema to most modern-day production techniques, for Grandrieux this was all part of the process of creation. As he explains: “c’est ce que je voulais dans le processus de création, m’écarter de ces 40 pages initiales, et plus tard au moment de tourner, j’ai abandonné les dialogues des 130 pages. Je n’avais pas le scénario quand je tournais [...]”.<sup>21</sup>

If Grandrieux does not create his films “d’après un texte” (to reuse Scheaffer’s words), his methodology would appear to be far closer to that of the *musique concrète* composer who forms the work only through an ongoing process in the moment of direct contact with the sensual and material qualities inherent to the medium itself.<sup>22</sup> Thus for Grandrieux filmmaking derives from both an internal compulsion and at the same time a material, embodied contact with cinema as a form. As he explains:

[Le cinéma] c’est une question aussi de relation à son désir, qu’est-ce qui met en mouvement son désir de faire un film, donc cette réalité “charnelle”, corporelle du cinéma, en documentaire ou en fiction, est quelque chose de très important pour moi. Alors quand je filme un visage, l’engagement que j’ai en tant que cinéaste en train de filmer ce visage — ma distance, la focale que j’utilise, la manière dont je prends la lumière — tout ça ce sont des actes dans lesquels il y a un engagement de nature morale de la part du cinéaste. Si la distance n’est pas la bonne, que la focale n’est pas juste, etc. la parole ne sera pas véritablement engagée dans une relation à l’autre, ce sera quelque chose de pris, de volé, une certaine malhonnêteté du cinéaste au moment où il filme. [...] C’est la question d’essayer de toucher quelque chose en soi qui fait

---

<sup>21</sup> Renaud et al. Similarly, in relation to the shooting of *La Vie nouvelle*, Grandrieux states: “Ce qui reste du scénario original ce sont des traces qui permettent de tisser un mouvement minimal.” Stéphane du Mesnildot, “Philippe Grandrieux: Un cinéma visionnaire”, *Le Technicien du film*, 530 (2003), 23-27, p. 24.

<sup>22</sup> This returns us to points (iii) and (iv) of our typology of *musique concrète*.

que, à un moment donné, cette chose puisse être représentée par l'image, ou le son, la lumière, un cadre, un corps...<sup>23</sup>

For Grandrieux, then, it is the materiality of the medium in which he works that precedes the structure. As he says: “le récit doit être pris dans cette matérialité très présente du cinéma. [...] Cette histoire, elle doit venir à travers la matérialité du film”.<sup>24</sup> And as is the case with the composer of *musique concrète*, this inverted hierarchy leads to the presentation not of a transcendent story for which the medium is merely a transparent vehicle but, rather, of a series of objects formed of the very materiality of the medium.

In this regard, just as the very term *musique concrète* may appear to be somewhat oxymoronic — music generally being considered to be the most evanescent, fleeting and immaterial art form because, in large part, of the disembodied nature of sound which is propagated by waves always travelling away from the sonorous or resonating body that produced them — Grandrieux recognizes that to conceive of the cinema as a primarily material medium producing material forms is somehow paradoxical. In response to an interviewer’s observation that the filmmaker refers to his cinema not in terms of images but in terms of “corps”, for instance, Grandrieux explains:

Oui, parce que c’est inscrit dans le plan. La notion de plan m’intéresse plus parce qu’elle contient déjà la notion de durée, et celle d’une proximité ou d’un éloignement. Il y a déjà une relation à la focale, *c’est très concret*. C’est d’ailleurs curieux, c’est un paradoxe parce que le cinéma est fait de projection, et d’immatérialité — une espèce de pellicule traversée par un faisceau lumineux. Mais en même temps cette immatérialité est nourrie d’un investissement très matériel, très charnel, très érotique.<sup>25</sup>

### ***Une technique concrète***

*Le cinéma est fabriqué avec des choses très concrètes et archétypales.*<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> Renaud et al.

<sup>24</sup> Grandrieux in *Balthazar*.

<sup>25</sup> Grandrieux in *Balthazar*, emphasis added.

<sup>26</sup> Grandrieux in du Mesnildot, p. 24.

As we have noted, there is a primary technical activity proper to both *musique concrète* and the cinema, namely the cut, splice or edit. For the *musique concrète* composer, it is this technical activity that enables him to overturn sound's subordinate position in relation to its source and to propel sound instead into a new autonomous realm. For Grandrieux (unlike diegesis-driven filmmakers for whom the edit is merely the means to switch between successive or contemporaneous plot developments), the editing process serves precisely this same purpose as it opens the cinema up to a realm of infinite possibility. As he states, "Dans son principe même de montage, dans la coupe, le cinéma est fabriqué avec ça: 1/24<sup>e</sup> de seconde plus tard, nous sommes ailleurs, dans un autre possible. Nous sommes sans cesse sous la menace que quelque chose d'autre peut arriver."<sup>27</sup> Whilst this provides a very transparent link between Grandrieux's cinema and *musique concrete*, and whilst the technical work involved in the process of editing involves a bodily interaction with the material support on which the film is printed, there are, however, more sustained points of contact between the two that come from the infusion of corporeality in many aspects of Grandrieux's cinema, most notably his use of light, camera technique and the frame. In *Sombre* many scenes are filmed in what appears to be extreme darkness or else shot into the light so that the overexposure of the shot's extremities render the body or form at its centre a dark, opaque mass, this effect coming, then, from the chemical and physical interplay of light and the material medium.<sup>28</sup> Grandrieux himself explains this relation of light to the very materiality of the cinema as a film-based chemical process:

C'est un peu une banalité mais c'est au cœur de mon travail, de mes sentiments. Cette sensation d'éblouissement, d'aveuglement, d'un corps qui serait perçu à contre-jour,

---

<sup>27</sup> Grandrieux in du Mesnildot, p. 25.

<sup>28</sup> Grandrieux has said of the shooting of *Sombre*: "Nous avons tourné sous un soleil presque toujours éblouissant mais en prenant tous les moyens pour que la lumière ne parvienne pas à impressionner la pellicule; l'idée qu'elle doive traverser quelque chose de trop dense." Renaud et al.

qui viendrait obturer la lumière. Ce sont des choses dont on a tous fait l'expérience, qui viennent de la toute petite enfance, avant qu'on puisse encore articuler quoi que ce soit sur ces événements, qui sont colossaux sans doute et qui ne sont rien. Cette matière lumineuse qui nous constitue, nous enveloppe, qui nous oriente, c'est extraordinaire, cette matérialité du corps qu'on "entend" par la lumière, comme des tournesols qui se dirigent vers un appel. [...]La lumière est décisive. C'est presque une banalité puisque la lumière est au cœur même du processus de l'alchimie de la pellicule. C'est ce qui vient toucher le grain d'argent, c'est ce qui est projeté, ce rayon lumineux dans le noir. Tout cela fait partie du dispositif, du côté archaïque de la *camera oscura*.<sup>29</sup>

At the same time as techniques such as this assert the colossal materiality of the body and increase the apparent density of the form at the centre of the shot, they also — as anyone who has tried to look at a figure only partially obscuring a very bright light source will know well — have the somewhat paradoxical effect of blurring the boundary between the figure and the background, the figure's opaque, dense materiality thus seeming to infuse the entire frame (Grandrieux's "sensation d'éblouissement"). A similar effect is achieved in both *Sombre* and *La Vie nouvelle* with the use of low lighting, under exposure, post-production intensification of the films' black zones, or various camera techniques such as excessive hand-held camera movement,<sup>30</sup> or else a decrease of the speed of frames per second used so that the image when projected at normal speed seems to vibrate.<sup>31</sup> All of these techniques create what many of the critics writing in Nicole Brenez's edited collection *La Vie nouvelle: nouvelle Vision* call "une image floue".<sup>32</sup> Elsewhere Martine Beugnet describes the opening shots of *La Vie nouvelle* as follows:

In the low but contrasted, brownish glow that lights them, faces and bodies detach themselves, as if sculpted out of the dark, the deep wrinkles and lighter tones of the

---

<sup>29</sup> Philippe Grandrieux and Éric Vuillard, "Contre-Culture Générale No. 1: Entretien collectif", in Nicole Brenez (ed.), *La Vie nouvelle: nouvelle Vision: à propos d'un film de Philippe Grandrieux* (Paris: Éditions Léo Scheer, 2005), pp. 187-202, p. 191.

<sup>30</sup> Grandrieux prefers hand-held cameras to Steadicam technology because the former, as he says, is "lié au corps". Grandrieux in *Balthazar*.

<sup>31</sup> See Grandrieux in du Mesnildot, p. 25.

<sup>32</sup> See David Pellecier, "La Vue nouvelle", pp. 81-92, Safia Benhaïm, "L'antre de Saturne", pp. 111-115 and Pouria Hosseinpour, "Trajectoires de la transe", pp. 177-180, all in Nicole Brenez (ed.), *La Vie nouvelle*.

skin appearing with more accuracy, yet always seeming on the point of being swallowed back by the depthless obscurity that surrounds them.<sup>33</sup>

For Beugnet, these experimental techniques speak of a method of filmmaking ruled by the principle of the *informe*, which works to “disrupt the familiar order of dominant filmmaking’s formal economy” and that thereby links Grandrieux to the avant-garde filmmakers of the 1920s who envisaged cinema not so much as a means to tell stories but, rather, as a medium capable of evoking “that which lies at the borders of consciousness”.<sup>34</sup> Whilst she is undoubtedly right, what Beugnet’s emphasis on the *informe* risks losing sight of is the emphasis on materiality that is so important for Grandrieux and that all of these techniques serve to intensify through the bleed that they create between form and background, figure and support, the zone of indiscernibility that they create on the very threshold between matter and light. Rather than the *informe*, then, it might be better to invoke another concept also linked to Bataille, namely Lyotard’s notion of the figural (which takes its cue from Bataille’s notion of excess). For the figural (in opposition to discourse as understood by Lyotard) is that which always problematizes the full integration of any meaning into absolute coherence but which does so through the assertion of materiality as opacity.<sup>35</sup>

In a different vein, the indiscernibility or incommensurability between form and its other is brilliantly captured by Fabien Gaffez who does not talk of the figural nor use the adjective “flou” but, rather, qualifies the images produced by Grandrieux’s

---

<sup>33</sup> Martine Beugnet, “Evil and the Senses: Philippe Grandrieux’s *Sombre* and *La Vie nouvelle*”, *Studies in French Cinema*, 5, 3 (2005), 175-184, p. 181.

<sup>34</sup> Beugnet, pp. 182-183. Beugnet also links Grandrieux to Artaud, who, as we have seen, was an important precursor for Schaeffer also.

<sup>35</sup> See François Lyotard, *Discours, figure* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1971). It should be noted that Thierry Kuntzel’s ideas on the ideal film echo many of the concepts and processes underlying Lyotard’s figural but do not highlight materiality in the way that the latter’s theory does. For an excellent application of Kuntzel’s ideas to Grandrieux, see Adrian Martin, “Holy Terror: Philippe Grandrieux’s *Sombre*”, *Senses of Cinema*, 1 (December 1999), available online at: <http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/00/1/sombre.html>. Accessed 3 October 2005.

cinematographic techniques as “le tremblé, une image tactile”.<sup>36</sup> The apotheosis of this tactile image for Gaffez comes, however, from another technique employed by Grandrieux towards the end of *La Vie nouvelle*: the use of a thermal or heat-sensitive camera. Gaffez writes:

La séquence thermique — parce qu’elle transfère les puissances figurales de la forme vers l’informe du corps (sa chaleur propre), parce qu’elle propose une ontologie haptique du corps humain — invente une nouvelle manière de toucher. Le corps cinématographique n’est plus silhouette ou chair, mais un magma d’affects, dont la subjectivité ne se constituerait qu’à brûler sans cesse. La proposition grandrienne est effroyable tout autant qu’enthousiasmante: il n’y aura de sujet pur que les corps sachant s’immerger dans l’immédiateté tactile du vivant (et le monde n’existera qu’à ce prix) — à défaut de quoi toute individuation ne sera que greffe à un système clos, fantomal et duplicateur. Le film, en tant que matière et flux, circule en nous comme un toucher excroissant, un toucher qui, bien qu’humain et nécessairement humain, n’aurait plus besoin du corps pour exister, de ce corps exaspéré qu’on a abusé sans jamais en user, ce *corpus* pluriel qui demande à renaître non pas de ses cendres, mais des cendres de sa représentation.<sup>37</sup>

For Grandrieux himself, the materiality of his cinema comes perhaps first and foremost, however, from the frame, that element of cinematography that, more than any other, determines the intercorporeal relations between film and filmmaker, film and viewer and, thereby, filmmaker and viewer. It is inconceivable for Grandrieux that he could ever relinquish this aspect of the process of filming,<sup>38</sup> and he explains why he always positions himself behind the camera by saying:

C’est le regard, c’est la vision... C’est le regard: comment moi je vous regarde là maintenant, je ne peux le dire à personne. C’est vraiment une question sur l’altérité, c’est la limite. [...] Pour *Sombre* c’était très lié au mouvement, à la manière de me déplacer et aux choix de focale: tourner au 50 par exemple, par rapport au 40, ça modifie complètement la relation — c’est 10mm d’écart mais c’est considérable parce que les points ne sont plus les mêmes, la présence, la masse des corps dans le cadre n’est plus la même, les relations de perspective, l’écart des corps par rapport au fond, tout ça est complètement modifié et du coup on n’a pas la même relation, on ne bouge pas de la même manière.<sup>39</sup>

### *Le Corps concret*

---

<sup>36</sup> Fabien Gaffez, “Carnet de bord. Notes et contre-notes d’une incubation cinéphile”, in Nicole Brenez (ed.), 26-34, p. 34.

<sup>37</sup> Gaffez, p. 34.

<sup>38</sup> See Grandrieux in *Balthazar*.

<sup>39</sup> Grandrieux in *Balthazar*.

For Grandrieux, the cinema is much like music for the *musique concrète* artist. Its various components are apprehended and manipulated as if they were material objects, material objects which, however, are always intimately linked to the specific, immanent sensual qualities of the medium in which he is working and which requires both an intensification of the materiality of the medium as well as of the embodied presence of the filmmaker in relation to his cinema's constituent objects. This truly is the cinema made flesh. As Grandrieux began by telling us, "c'est le corps pour tout", and as Marc Mercier suggests:

[La caméra] ne filme pas la cruauté, elle est la cruauté. Elle ne filme pas la chute, elle est le vertige. Elle n'enregistre pas la souffrance, elle est le cri. Elle ne filme pas des corps, elle est la chair meurtrie, blessée, arrachée.<sup>40</sup>

Yet if from this we can surmise that Grandrieux's is a corporeal cinema, this is absolutely not what most critics are talking about when they describe Grandrieux's films' relationship to the body. Adrian Martin, for instance, states that:

Grandrieux is a filmmaker of the body, but rarely the variable space or interval between bodies, as in Visconti or Mizoguchi. There is no space between bodies in Grandrieux; they are jammed together in a difficult, fraught intimacy. All clinches, all embraces are potentially violent, charged with the alienness of the Other and the terror of negotiating his or her too-close presence.<sup>41</sup>

Many critics writing in the collection dedicated to *La Vie nouvelle*, meanwhile, stress the dissolution of corporeality in the film, the way in which lighting and camera technique seem almost to dematerialize the body and complicate its identity politics in the process. Delphine Agut, for instance, writes:

L'identité des personnages pourrait alors se fonder uniquement sur leur intégrité corporelle dûment reconnaissable, identifiable. Mais il n'en est rien. Les clairs-obscurs, les contre-jours empêchent de les identifier avec certitude. L'identité corporelle se dissout. On ne sait si Roscoe et Seymour se battent, font l'amour, leur corps ne se distinguent pas dans la pénombre.<sup>42</sup>

In a similar vein, David Pellecuer suggests that

---

<sup>40</sup> Marc Mercier, "Pour en finir avec l'art orthochromatique", in Nicole Brenez (ed.), 54-58, p. 55.

<sup>41</sup> Adrian Martin, "Dance Girl Dance: Philippe Grandrieux's *La Vie nouvelle* (*The New Life*, 2002)", *Kinoeye*, 4, 3 (July 2004), available online: <http://www.kinoeye.org/04/03/martin03.php>. Accessed 3 October 2005.

<sup>42</sup> Delphine Agut, "*La Vie nouvelle* et l'inventivité narrative", in Nicole Brenez (ed.), 71-73, p. 71.

Le noir et le flou assurent des réservoirs figuratifs, zones de l'image en devenir où les formes peuvent disparaître mais aussi naître et surgir (Mélania dans l'avant-scène, Roscoe dans la chambre, les prostituées dans le bordel, les hommes de main dans la nuit). Des formes s'extraient de la matière optique indifférenciée, quelque chose résiste à l'engloutissement qui borde les choses et les habite.<sup>43</sup>

Pouria Hosseinpour, for her part, remarks that "La caméra rôde autour des corps, dans un champ de cadavres que le flou ne permet pas de distinguer, lieu de la viande, zone commune d'indiscernabilité de l'homme et de l'animal".<sup>44</sup> And for Safia Benhaïm, finally,

Dans la déflagration des formes, les flous, les déplis innombrables de sa figure, Mélania passe plastiquement du concret à l'abstrait et d'un état du corps à un autre : pareille à une matière solide pouvant connaître d'autres états de matière, liquide ou gazeux, Mélania, de corps solide, devient une sorte de corps liquide, avant de retrouver l'unité de son visage, repliée sur son identité.<sup>45</sup>

Although there can be no doubt as to the applicability of the problematisation of any fixed and stable notion of identity that these critiques posit, the movement they all trace from a concrete to an immaterial state is less suited to an analysis of Grandrieux's films, since this movement counters that which we have seen in operation in our analyses of his films' stylistics and in which, rather than all that is solid passing into air, all that is immaterial and evanescent is condensed into a solid form. Thus, whilst it is absolutely true, as David Pellecuer suggests, that "c'est l'incertitude, la précarité de telles frontières qu'interroge le film [*La Vie nouvelle*] de façon insistante", rather than this precariousness implying that "la figure humaine se trouve menacée de disparition, menacée de voir ses principes physiques ou psychiques engloutis dans l'altérité ou le néant",<sup>46</sup> it is rather the case that there is a zone of indiscernibility generated between the solid materiality of the film's embodied characters and the concreteness of cinematic space made flesh. Grandrieux writes:

---

<sup>43</sup> Pellecuer, p. 84.

<sup>44</sup> Hosseinpour, p. 177.

<sup>45</sup> Benhaïm, p. 113.

<sup>46</sup> Pellecuer, p. 81.

C'est à travers cette matérialité du film, que j'ai à disposition, que je veux transmettre la sensation la plus juste, qui permettrait au fond que ce personnage devienne un personnage de cinéma, de fiction.<sup>47</sup>

For Grandrieux, these two aspects of the cinema are indissociable, they are what enables the cinema to become “une expérience corporelle, physique, humaine”.<sup>48</sup> This is to say, then, that “[le cinéma] tisse indissociablement l'image et le corps, l'étoffe même de notre relation affective au monde, en nous plaçant sous la menace du surgissement stupéfiant de ce qui ne peut être ni vu, ni entendu”.<sup>49</sup>

To suggest that Grandrieux's cinema effects a becoming-immaterial of the body (which is not to rob it of its capacity to engage a becoming-imperceptible which can (and does here) come about in the very concrete materiality of an embodied identity) is simply to disregard what actually happens to bodies in his films. In *Sombre*, for instance, bodies are, for the main protagonist / puppeteer / serial killer Jean, simply objects to be gazed at, pried open, fucked, throttled, hit and killed. Similarly in *La Vie nouvelle* bodies are for everyone merely matter to be looked at, bartered, sold, exchanged, hit, slapped, shoved, shaved, bitten, torn, carried, caressed, fucked, flayed and ultimately eaten. As David Pellecuer writes: “Opaque, abyssal, résistant, étrange, méconnaissable, pesant, le corps est évalué, senti, touché, pesé, rasé, dénudé, désiré, échangé, vendu.”<sup>50</sup> This concrete treatment of bodies thus brings about an absolute confluence or indiscernibility between content and style, form and support just as the bodies in the films themselves seems always to emerge from and return to the opaque materiality of the frame or their surroundings, to exceed their own physical boundaries and become other than simply a human form. Two of the clearest examples of this come at the end of each film, as *Sombre*'s Jean is conjoined

---

<sup>47</sup> Grandrieux in *Balthazar*.

<sup>48</sup> Grandrieux in *Balthazar*.

<sup>49</sup> Philippe Grandrieux, “Vivement le désordre: sur l'horizon insensé du cinéma”, *Les Cahiers du cinéma*, hors-série “Le Siècle du cinéma” (November 2000), 88-92, p. 92.

<sup>50</sup> Pellecuer, p. 90.

with the woods and the entire physical being of *La Vie nouvelle*'s Seymour exceeds itself in the embodiment of a cry.<sup>51</sup>

With both content and form engaged in a process of becoming-material, we are here very close to the mechanics of *musique concrète*. However, if every component of *Sombre* and *La Vie nouvelle* must be apprehended as the cinematic equivalent of Schaeffer's *objets sonores*, this has radical implications for any analysis of the moral, ethical, political or diegetic spaces of these films. For if we are dealing with a concrete sensibility, then surely we must also map all points of our previous typology onto these films and suggest that all of their concrete components are entirely removed from any transcendent, relational, abstract linguistic structure, that the films' matter always precedes their structure. This is precisely what is suggested by Grandrieux when quizzed by an interviewer who obviously has some qualms about the moral or ethical context of *Sombre* as well as certain aspects of its diegetic content. Grandrieux replies:

S'il y a dans le film énormément de réel — au sens de la perception des choses, de ce qui n'est pas un symbole, qui ne peut être pris par le langage parlé — il y a toutefois très peu de réalité du monde, de réalité sociale. Je crois que le film se situe presque entièrement à l'extérieur de cette réalité. Alors si on pose la question de la morale dans le film, c'est peut-être parce que j'ai loupé mon affaire, mais pour moi, de la poser serait comme de poser la question de la morale quand on rêve.<sup>52</sup>

The ramifications of an analysis of Grandrieux's films as themselves *corps concrets* filled with *corps concrets* and *objets cinématographiques* thus require us to find ways of engaging with these films outside of any transcendent framework. Thus it serves no purpose to attempt to give an account of the film's narrative structure; indeed, one might suggest that any critic who attempts to do so when talking of *La Vie nouvelle*

---

<sup>51</sup> It should be remembered that any vocal emanation is normally considered to be an act of disembodiment but here sound is instead rendered concrete or material.

<sup>52</sup> Renaud et al.

(and many do) necessarily imposes on it a structure which is simply not there.<sup>53</sup> This is extremely difficult for both critics and audiences accustomed to dealing with either clear or convoluted plot lines and stories.<sup>54</sup> As Aïcha Bahcelioglu writes:

La critique aura beaucoup reproché à Philippe Grandrieux le manque de transparence du scénario, mais le cinéaste cherche à créer une autre logique, un autre type de circulation qui ne seraient plus redevables à un scénario obéissant aux seules logiques causales mais aux énergies plus instables, fluctuantes et libres des affects, des sensations, et des expérimentations.<sup>55</sup>

To read these films as *corps concrets* is to try and apprehend this other logic, and it requires, for instance, that we should regard the Eastern European landscapes in which the apparently corrupt and inhuman exchanges of *La Vie nouvelle* take place *not* as a commentary on the political state of countries destroyed by years of war and that have returned to an almost feudal state in a post-apocalyptic vision of an actual *Realpolitik*, nor as “la plus profonde des fictions jamais données à voir sur la Shoah et tous les génocides du cœur de l’Europe”<sup>56</sup> but, rather, as an *aesthetic* element. Nowhere is this made clearer than in a scene from *La Vie nouvelle* in which the camera tracks slowly down a corridor towards a window which provides a meticulous and perfect frame onto a scene of brutalist high-density architecture which is

---

<sup>53</sup> The jacket of the DVD of *La Vie nouvelle* gives a plot summary, but a group of students in a cinema class I have taught were positively amazed that this synopsis was supposed to account for the storyline of the film they had just seen. It should be noted also that there exist some inconsistencies between the accounts of the storyline as recounted by different critics, inconsistencies which themselves point to the impossibility of an objective diegetic truth.

<sup>54</sup> It should be noted that whilst it is essential to do so here, in removing these films from any pre-existing framework and refusing to talk of their diegetic, ethical, moral or political content, the present article serves as an exemplification of the difficulties inherent in the attempt to render a different, affective logic in words. In this respect we again find ourselves in close affinity with *musique concrète*, which frustrates many (and none more so than Lévi-Strauss) precisely because of its refusal to tell a story, a refusal which leaves many critics floundering and believing that this refusal is in actuality an inability. Lévi-Strauss writes, for instance: “*Musique concrète* may be intoxicated with the illusion that it is saying something; in fact, it is floundering in non-significance”, Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, translated by J. and D. Weightman (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), p. 23.

<sup>55</sup> Aïcha Bahcelioglu, “Expériences de la catastrophe, l’humanité tremblée”, in Nicole Brenez (ed.), 41-53, p. 45.

<sup>56</sup> Gaffez, p. 31.

presented simply in its very literal concreteness.<sup>57</sup> To read these films as *corps concrets* also means that we are mistaken in condemning Jean's murders from within an existing moral framework. Rather, we must try to see Jean for what he is, namely, in Grandrieux's words, less a serial killer than a wolf:

un homme très loin de nous, qui n'a pas d'accès à l'autre, pas d'accès à l'altérité, un homme totalement pris dans la répétition, l'obsession répétitive du "même". Il n'est pas pervers cet homme, il n'a pas de jouissance au moment où il tue... C'est plutôt un éblouissement.<sup>58</sup>

Or, as he explains in another interview:

Le personnage de Jean, qui est archétypal, n'a pas de finesse psychologique: il est donné comme un bloc d'enfance, un bloc de sensations coupé des autres hommes. Dès lors la question de la morale ne se pose plus. [...] Je n'ai pas placé le film dans un rapport au social, mais sur le plan de l'inconscient. *Sombre* évoque les pulsions les plus archaïques. L'ouïe et la vue, deux sensations qui nous fondent dès les premiers instants. Et le film mêle à travers elles, mais seulement à travers elles, la question de la forme et du fond.<sup>59</sup>

What is particularly striking about Grandrieux's statements here is his insistence that Jean is "un bloc d'enfance" and that his cinema in general merely plays upon two of our most primal senses as we experience those senses in a pre-linguistic or (to use Deleuze and Guattari's terminology for whom the concept of becoming-child is very important) pre-Œdipal phase. Far more than the "moral ambiguity [and] narrative enigma" that Adrian Martin finds in *La Vie nouvelle*,<sup>60</sup> Grandrieux's cinema is one in which there is *no* morality or narrative. This is not to say that it is amoral but, rather, that the question of morality simply has no place here.<sup>61</sup> Rather, Grandrieux's characters move in a pre-Œdipal universe where all action is governed merely

---

<sup>57</sup> Hélène Raymond also notes the aesthetic perfection of this shot in her article, "Les fleuves l'ont laissé descendre où il voulait", *fluctuat.net* (29 November 2002), available online: [http://www.fluctuat.net/article.php3?id\\_article=176](http://www.fluctuat.net/article.php3?id_article=176). Accessed 3 October 2005.

<sup>58</sup> Renaud et al. We should note that it is only when the film is entirely removed from all pre-existing frameworks that we can begin to accept the relationship between Jean and Claire and apprehend how it is possible for her to love him — an aspect of the film which remains entirely unbelievable or unnecessary for those unwilling to relinquish all a priori. See for instance the *Balthazar* interview.

<sup>59</sup> Antoine de Baecque and Thierry Jousse, "Le Monde à l'envers: entretien avec Philippe Grandrieux", *Les Cahiers du cinéma*, 532 (February 1999), 39-41, p. 39.

<sup>60</sup> Martin, "Dance Girl Dance".

<sup>61</sup> Martin's analysis of *Sombre* seems more in line with the present analysis in this respect for he states: "the persuasive, utterly compelling force of Grandrieux's artistic gesture is what, *above all external considerations of moral or social worth*, must guide our evaluation". Martin, "Holy Terror".

according to an instinctual desire that seeks corporeal pleasure and fulfilment. To qualify Grandrieux's cinema as a "cinema of evil"<sup>62</sup> or a "philosophic investigation of evil"<sup>63</sup> is, then, akin to claiming that the apparent cruelty of children is motivated by evil. And whilst from an adult perspective the cruelty of children may indeed appear to be both cruel and thereby evil, such condemnation fails to understand the sphere in which such actions are carried out and in which such categories do not exist. We are not here witness to the crumbling of the structures of civilization but prior to them, and nowhere is this made clearer than when Grandrieux explains the genesis of the thermal scene in *La Vie nouvelle*. He states:

Cette scène, presque originaire, nous est apparue très tôt avec Éric Vuillard, le co-scénariste. Nous avons travaillé sur un projet qui s'appelait *Une histoire naturelle du mal*. Je lui avais demandé d'écrire une scène se déroulant dans la nuit totale, dans une espèce de cécité absolue. Elle se déroulait dans une sorte d'enfer. Il y avait des groupes d'hommes et de femmes accomplissant des gestes énigmatiques, des bouts d'organes au sol, comme les restes d'un festin cannibale; une chose très ancienne comme une rumeur du fond des âges. C'était une fiction sur nos origines, en rapport avec *Totems et tabous* de Freud: le meurtre du père par la fratrie, un acte d'une violence extrême qui fonderait la possibilité de toute civilisation.<sup>64</sup>

Rather than a dystopian vision, then, Grandrieux presents us with a utopian vision that emphasizes this term's etymological fragment *outopia* to the exclusion of *eutopia*, which is to say that the bodily spaces of these films are "no places", spaces in which there are no pre-givens, no ruling transcendent structures, where everything is created anew at every turn and experienced as if for the first time in a quest for corporeal sensation.<sup>65</sup> Significantly, this aspect of Grandrieux's films brings his vision close in some respects to that of Sade. Martin has already suggested this link by remarking that *La Vie nouvelle* is a "punk-Sadean view of the human animal and

---

<sup>62</sup> Beugnet, p. 183.

<sup>63</sup> Martin, "Dance Girl Dance".

<sup>64</sup> In du Mesnildot, pp. 24-25.

<sup>65</sup> Grandrieux explicitly links childhood to the body's opaque materiality when he says of *La Vie nouvelle* in an interview: "Sans doute une partie de l'énergie du film est-elle issue de cette opacité très grande de la matière enfantine qui nous occupe encore, qui nous habite, qui nous émeut, qui nous bouge". Entretien collectif, "Contre-Culture Générale No. 1. Philippe Grandrieux, Éric Vuillard", Une émission de Zalea TV (2003), transcript reproduced in Nicole Brenez (ed.), 187-202, p. 192.

crumbling social structures”.<sup>66</sup> However, in his analysis, Sade’s name seems merely to serve as a shorthand for extreme decadent behaviour, whereas to apprehend in full Grandrieux’s proximity to Sade we have to continue along the path we are following and see Sade through Blanchot’s eyes. For Blanchot, philosophy or morality in Sade is a unique affair that rests solely on the fulfilment of personal corporeal pleasure. He writes:

Cette philosophie est celle de l’intérêt, de l’égoïsme intégral. Chacun doit faire ce qui lui plaît, chacun n’a d’autre loi que son plaisir. Cette morale est fondée sur le fait premier de la solitude absolue. Sade l’a dit et l’a répété sous toutes les formes: la nature nous fait naître seuls, il n’y a aucune sorte de rapport d’un homme à un autre. La seule règle de conduite, c’est donc que je préfère tout ce qui m’affecte heureusement et que je tiens pour rien tout ce qui de ma préférence peut résulter de mauvais pour autrui. La plus grande douleur des autres compte toujours moins que mon plaisir.<sup>67</sup>

Sade’s philosophy, then, rests on an assertion of a primordial equivalence between all men who live for the fulfilment of pleasure and not according to the rules and maxims of society’s prescriptions.<sup>68</sup> Such an assertion of absolute equivalence lies also at the heart of *musique concrète*, since, as Michel Chion points out, “Pour la musique des sons fixés, il n’y a pas de sons qu’on peut dire a priori ‘naturels’”, “nous devons [...] considérer a priori toutes les sources sonores comme équivalentes en dignité”.<sup>69</sup> If Grandrieux’s characters (in the diegesis or content of the film) and the filmmaker himself (in the style or form of the film) are driven by a similar impulse, by a desire to operate in a context devoid of any *a priori* principle, then we must submit to this drive when watching his films and allow them to reach us not on the level of intellect or emotion but on that of affect.

And here we come full circle, for we are brought back to the beginning of this article: to the interviewer describing his bodily affective reaction to *Sombre*, a

---

<sup>66</sup> Martin, “Dance Girl Dance”.

<sup>67</sup> Maurice Blanchot, *Lautréamont et Sade* (Paris: Minuit, 1963), pp. 220-221.

<sup>68</sup> See Blanchot, p. 221.

<sup>69</sup> Chion, *L’Art des sons fixés*, pp. 24, 25.

reaction we might call, after Laura Marks, “a bodily contemplation”.<sup>70</sup> Going further than this, however, we can posit that this bodily contemplation is necessarily synesthetic, refusing the *a priori* hierarchy of the senses and the body itself just as the film refuses the clear-cut distinction between matter and non-matter. It is only in this way that one can assert, as does Jean-Claude Polack: “Il y a des musiques, des sons dans *la Vie nouvelle* qu’on entend avec son ventre, avec sa peau plus qu’avec ses oreilles et certainement pas avec son cerveau”.<sup>71</sup> Taken out of context, this quotation could happily be applied to a *musique concrète* composition and, indeed, it brings us back in turn to the last point of our typology of *musique concrète* whose *objets sonores* were said to be able to act directly upon the embodied material senses of the listener precisely because they were removed from any abstract linguistic system. At the same time, our evocation of Sade’s characters who do not have access to an *a priori* structure with which to order their life ultimately returns us to the opening scenes of Grandrieux’s first film, for anyone who objects that the blocks of sensation he presents to us cannot be apprehended for pleasure, since their cruelty and terror is so great, need only cast their mind back to the children watching Jean’s Punch and Judy show at the beginning of *Sombre*.<sup>72</sup> Indeed, Grandrieux here may well be presenting his viewers with a vision of his ideal audience, eyes impossibly wide open, straining to absorb every moment, jumping with a start at every twist and turn and

---

<sup>70</sup> Marks, after Deleuze, suggests that the bodily contemplation of affection-images occurring in any-spaces-whatever brings about “neither the instantaneous reaction of movement, nor a purely intellectual response”. Laura U Marks, “Signs of the Time: Deleuze, Peirce, and the Documentary Image”, in Gregory Flaxman (ed.), *The Brain is the Screen: Deleuze and the Philosophy of the Cinema* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), pp. 193-214, p. 210.

<sup>71</sup> Jean-Claude Polack, “La forme cauchemar (entretien)”, in Nicole Brenez (ed.), 61-66, p. 63.

<sup>72</sup> A reading of Christiane Chaignon and Jean-Philippe Trias, “Ils furent (Les enfants de *Sombre*)”, *Cinergon: Cinéma & Image*, 12 (2001/2002), 60-67, would appear to contradict this assertion since their reading is based purely on an almost abject terror. However, this entire article is constructed around the critics’ own reconstruction of the opening scenes and is thus premised upon a misprision.

screaming (a pre-linguistic expression)<sup>73</sup> almost non-stop in enraptured, ecstatic  
terror.

*University of Queensland*

---

<sup>73</sup> See Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 4.