

CHAPTER 5

A Home on the Road in Claire Denis's *Vendredi soir*

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Home often appears in opposition to travel. Throughout the road movie genre in particular, we encounter male protagonists who undertake self-reflective quests *away from home*, with 'home' often representing a conservative lifestyle that they hope to escape. In their *Road Movie Book*, editors Steve Cohan and Ina Rae Hark write that 'the road movie promotes a male escapist fantasy linking masculinity to technology and defining the road as a space that is at once resistant while ultimately contained by the responsibility of domesticity: home life, marriage, employment' (1997: 3). Home becomes at once a space of conventions and one of lost intimacy that the protagonist hopes to regain on the road. The road thus becomes an alternative to 'home' where the main character searches for the self and for a more authentic space of intimate relations.

In contemporary cinema, and in road movies in particular, the notion of home often signifies a familiar domestic space associated with women, and that stands in opposition to mobility and the 'masculine' (see de Lauretis 1984; Frederick and Hyde 1993; Robertson 1997; Bruno 2002; Rollet 2003; Mazierska and Rascaroli 2006; Royer 2011; Fullwood 2015; Blum-Reid 2016). Giuliana Bruno describes how the notion of home, of one's origin, of *domus* – domesticity, domestication – in male narratives of travel 'continues to be confused and gendered feminine' (2002: 86). As such, home has acquired a meaning of 'the womb from which one originates and to which one wishes to return' and has become 'the very site of the production of sexual difference' (Bruno 2002: 86). In travel narratives, returning to and 'repossessing' home often emerge as repossessing the feminine subject or 're-housing gender' in Bruno's words.

In Claire Denis's subversion of the road movie genre *Vendredi soir* (2002), I argue that the domestication of place happens through the film's haptic aesthetic, which disentangles home from a gendered conception of travel. Spaces such as the home and the road carry a whole different meaning when we consider the mobility of women in films. When

Virginia Woolf wrote *A Room of One's Own* (1929), she expressed the difficulties women experienced when they sought to inhabit both 'public' and private spaces (whether a public library, a park or a private house), as all were dominated and ruled by men. In a way that recalls Woolf's essay, women protagonists in road movies tend to leave the domestic space to find a space for themselves elsewhere; outside of confining gendered binaries situating women into stasis, passivity and dependance, in opposition to men's mobility, activity and independence. In *Vendredi soir*, the main character, Laure (Valérie Lemercier), creates a 'home' on the road as she reconnects to her spatial environment, *domesticating* it through sensations, desire and intimacy. This chapter first shows how the film uses magical realism to challenge our idea of home as we know it from other travel narratives, as fixed, gendered and immutable. Second, I argue that *Vendredi soir* invites the viewer to observe and analyse how the characters' bodies *micro-relate* to space, re-creating thus home as *domus*, as a space of intimacy.

In line with the notion of space in contemporary social geography, *Vendredi soir* portrays domestic spaces as fluid and evolving with social relations. Following the work of geographers Henri Lefebvre, Gillian Rose, Doreen Massey, Linda McDowell, Nigel Thrift and Tanu Priya Uteng and Tim Cresswell, places must be regarded as processes in constant transformation through practices, relations and representations. Massey asserts that places are not neutral, 'fixed and unproblematic in [their] identity' but are instead evolving sources of meaning and social relations, produced and reproduced within power configurations (1994: 5). As such, any place – the household, the workplace, the street – is an 'ever-shifting geometry of social/power relations' (Massey 1994: 4). In *Vendredi soir*, as Laure is moving from her own apartment to her (male) partner's one, the film places emphasis on the gendered power relations of the household. Laure rediscovers her spatial environment through body sensations and affective relations, and extends her *spaces of intimacy* into other spaces, her car and a motel room.

Putting in dialogue social geography and affect theory, I consider that human bodies inhabit, create and transform space through social relations, themselves affected by power-geometries (in Doreen Massey's terms). Following Spinoza, contacts with other bodies influence how we perceive and experience space, through our accumulative memory of the ways in which our 'body's power of activity [has been] increased or diminished' (1982 [1677]: 104). It is due to the negative impact of patriarchal and misogynist attitudes towards women that 'women's mobility, for instance, is restricted – in a thousand different ways, from *physical*

violence to being ogled at or made to *feel* quite simply “out of place” – not by “capital”, but by men’ (Massey 1994: 148, emphasis mine). In a first instance, for being made to feel out of place in the past, Laure moves through Paris with the fear of violence. However, when a giant traffic jam immobilises the whole city, mobility loses its gendered significations. This allows Laure to inhabit the city more playfully and affirmatively, and to open up to affective exchanges with the male ‘other’.

While cinema tends to produce and reinforce social and spatial dichotomies, I argue that Denis’s haptic aesthetic contributes to dismantling them. I refer to haptic aesthetic following Laura U. Marks’s work, as triggering the sense of touch through the textures of images and sounds. By creating a ‘habitable world’ that emphasises the *lived*, textural and affective dimensions of space, the film invites the viewers to *touch* and *experience* what is being shown. As Marks writes, ‘haptic images can give the impression of seeing for the first time, gradually discovering what is in the image rather than coming to the image already knowing what it is’ (2000: 178). The haptic aesthetic of *Vendredi soir* functions as a political strategy that takes viewers beyond what they already know of gender, mobility and the domestic space.

When watching *Vendredi soir*, viewers experience a sensory world that is in continual production and transformation through their own and the characters’ senses. In *Carnal Thoughts*, Vivian Sobchack asserts that films create a ‘habitable world ... a space that is deep and textural, that can be materially inhabited’ (2004: 151). For Jennifer Barker, drawing on Sobchack’s work, the film’s body is a lived-body (not a human one) that exists

haptically, at the screen’s surface, with the caress of shimmering nitrate and the scratch of dust and fiber on celluloid; kinaesthetically, through the contours of on- and off-screen space and of the bodies, both human and mechanical, that inhabit or escape those spaces; and viscerally, with the film’s rush through a projector’s gate and the ‘breathing’ of lenses. (2009: 3)

Barker asserts that attention to texture, space and rhythm allows us to determine ‘the fleshy, muscular, and visceral engagement that occurs between films’ and viewers’ bodies’ (2009: 4). In order to understand how the woman protagonist in *Vendredi soir* makes a space for herself, I argue that the film asks for a micro-analysis; looking at the scratches of the screen’s surface, the micro-movements of bodies into space, and how the film ‘breathes’, creating thus the rhythm of the film. As the haptic aesthetic of *Vendredi soir* invites viewers to experience the film through their senses, it redefines the home as a domesticated space and a space of intimacy.

A Liminal Domestic Space

It is by bringing Paris to a standstill that *Vendredi soir* challenges the gendering of mobility and the domestic space. The paralysis of traffic reduces both men and women to a state of *immobility*. In this ‘exceptional’ static state (or crisis of mobility) the commonly gendered narrative of travel is suspended, or of limited value. The car, which is ordinarily an index of ‘masculine’ power within the logic of mobility, converts into a space in need of re-appropriation and re-definition. The car becomes an instrument for appraising the urban space as one’s own.

Claire Denis challenges the idea that the road quester finds a space for himself or herself through mobility, and assimilates it instead into the ‘domestication’ of space. If *Vendredi soir* echoes Jean-Luc Godard’s *Weekend* (1967) in the absurd immobility and strangeness of human contacts, the cars stuck in traffic do not epitomise the purposelessness and meaninglessness of human existence. On the contrary, Denis’s camera affirmatively converts the modern apocalyptic imaginary about immobilised cars into an opportunity for embracing one’s desires and transforming the power-geometries of space.

Several recent filmic examples also convert the car into a space of dwelling whose ‘inhabitants’ somehow challenge gender binaries, such as *Night on Earth* (Jim Jarmusch, 1991), *No Sex Last Night* (Sophie Calle and Greg Shephard, 1996), *Crash* (David Cronenberg, 1996), *Ten* (Abbas Kiarostami, 2002), *Lluvia* (Paula Hernández, 2008), *Wendy and Lucy* (Kelly Reichardt, 2008), *Drive* (Nicolas Winding Refn, 2011), and *Locke* (Steven Knight, 2013). Denis’s car in fact turns into a ‘poetic’ vehicle – a medium of *poiesis*, or else ‘story-making’, in which intimacy and connections are generated. Domesticating space emerges as inhabiting space through one’s senses, through a body that affects and is affected.

When the film begins, Laure is packing up boxes: she is moving, we find out, to her (male) partner’s house the following morning. She is leaving her ‘home’, that is her ‘space of her own’, to live with her partner in *his* apartment, which, as she admits, she has not yet learned to call ‘home’. After a day by herself packing up boxes, she takes a bath and drives to a friend’s house for dinner. As Laure leaves the security of her apartment, from where she could look at the city unobserved, she is immediately confronted with the ‘dangers’ that a city like Paris represents for a woman who is on her own at night.

Soon after Laure enters her car, a man slaps his palm on her window, startling her. Only slightly lit by street lights, the white face of the

man contrasts with his dark outfit and the darkness of the street, which endows him with a frightening appearance. Instead of opening the car as the man wanted, Laure locks the doors and starts the engine. Even though we come to understand that the man was in fact only asking for a lift (because of a general transport strike), the chiaroscuro lighting, the strident musical phrase and the rapid montage of the scene portray him as a threat, aesthetically conveying how Laure perceives the urban space as dominated and controlled by men. For a moment, the immobility of the car lets the 'threats' of the 'public' space penetrate its private sphere and reminds us of Godard's film.

As soon as she leaves her street Laure is caught in a gigantic traffic jam, which blocks the whole city of Paris. An array of cars are at a standstill, cold people wrapped up in their winter jackets and looming out of the mist overrun the pathways and walk on the road in between cars. Stuck in traffic, Laure treats her car like an extension of her apartment: she dries her hair with the ventilation and sits in the backseat as she goes through boxes that she packed earlier. On the one hand, the car protects Laure from the world outside. Her hostile relation to the city as well as close-ups, tight narrow shots of Laure (imposed by the exiguity of the car), and frames-within-the-frame convert the car into a space of intimacy, albeit one of containment. Laure's car fulfils the role of a familiar space that is no longer to be found in her 'old' home or indeed in her new one with her partner. The car provides her with a refuge (in a moment of homelessness) and protects her from the patriarchal city that negatively affects her capacity to inhabit space fully.

On the other hand, the car functions as a liminal space that opens onto the outside. At various times, the camera wanders off from Laure's car and explores the city, which appears through fog, fumes and neon lights. Instead of a familiar view of Paris, gaseous textures, bright lights and slow movements invade the screen. Rather than a solid material 'house', the haptic aesthetic of the film converts the car into a poetic gaseous object; a liminal space that comes into existence through social contacts and affective relations. Through haptic images and sounds, *Vendredi soir* encourages the viewers to establish an 'embodied and multisensory relationship to the image', in Marks's words (2000: 172). By portraying cars and windows of shops as forms, colours and textures, the film invites us to experience the city through other senses that go beyond cognitive functions.

In opposition to Laure's stationary body, the film's body is a mobile one. While Laure is stuck, the camera and editing create movement in the image. As the camera escapes and 'wanders' out of the confines of

Laure's car, it connects Laure with a collectivity of car-bodies similarly affected by the traffic jam, a connection that is reinforced by the close-ups on other cars and passengers. More permeable than the windows of Laure's apartment through which she is a distanced observer, the windows of the car appear as 'soft screens', at once marking the boundary of the domestic space and facilitating imaginative travel through the city.

Denis creates a world that merges realist and magical elements, stimulating both our cognitive and sensory functions, and opening up possibilities to reinterpret differently the gendered vision of private domestic space. As the camera films parts of cars, roofs, bright lights, smoking hoods, sleeping passengers and drivers getting busy in their cars, it draws us little by little into a world of textures and sensations, a 'habitable world'. The wandering camera merges human bodies with their cars and creates a lyrical city in which cars almost become characters themselves that move and dance. Fixed a little above the ground, the camera films in close-up the lights of slowly moving cars shrouded in mist from car fumes and winter fog. In combination with Dickon Hinchliffe's classical music, these abstract images, with the cars' and the camera's very slow movements, produce a magical atmosphere, a *ballet of cars*, that transforms modern purposeful objects of transport into poetic abstractions. This representation disconnects the car from its construct in the road movie as a symbol of man's freedom, violence and desire. Instead, in this dance, car-bodies establish a relationship with others while keeping a space for themselves. The traffic jam creates a unique situation that *resets* the power-geometries of space, producing thereby a possibility for the woman protagonist to domesticate the urban space from a place of relative safety.

Laure's car, containing and protecting her from the outside, also becomes permeable through the soundtrack of the film. When Laure sings along to a 1980s French hit 'Manureva', the diegetic song becomes a soundtrack somehow magically. Although the volume of the song lowers when the camera leaves Laure's car, filming her through the driver's lateral window, the score remains at the same volume – as if still outside Laure's window – when the camera wanders and films other drivers and passengers. The song, evoking a boat that went missing in the 1980s, has a nostalgic affect to it; it is through its popularity and the sound editing that it unites drivers and passengers in their desperation with the heavy traffic. In a similar way to the ballet of cars, the soundtrack interrupts the realist aesthetic as it creates a spatial atmosphere based on affects. This reinforces the domestication of Laure's car, as a space that is open to the other and to intimate connections.

Magical Realism and Lived Spaces

The exceptional immobility of cars in the city creates a pause in Laure's journey and a moment (a Friday night, hence the title of the film) in which the 'magical' (or the unthinkable) can meet the real. The formal aspects of *Vendredi soir* introduce magical elements into the realism of the film. As magical realism brings about Laure's subjectivity and imagination, it also challenges the gendered portrayal of the domestic space by establishing a connection with the many possibilities of the real. When the song 'Manureva' finishes, a female voice announces 'you all know by now ... that Paris is at a complete standstill due to the public transport strike'. The presenter seems to address Laure personally, who has been packing up all day and is probably 'the only one who did not know' ('Y en a peut-être encore deux qui sont pas au courant'). The magical realism of this address is reinforced by the presenter's intimate-sounding voice, almost like a sensual whisper, playfully suggesting that drivers offer a lift to cold stranded pedestrians.¹ A little later, the camera, in one of its 'wanderings' from Laure's car, suddenly stumbles over Jean (Vincent Lindon). As if in response to the radio announcement, Jean walks towards Laure's car and asks if he can come in. As Laure accepts, she learns to domesticate space, make it her own, outside the safety of her apartment. Her change of attitude and the change in the aesthetic of the film since Laure's first encounter with the frightening man invalidate the gendered binaries that represent women as nurturer of private spaces and men as explorer of so-called 'public' spaces.²

In the film, two places take the form of potential homes, of *spaces of intimacy*: the car and a motel room that Laure and Jean occupy together. As Laure inhabits these spaces through the sensations that her encounter with Jean provokes, she rehearses the founding of a shared home with her partner François. Oscillating between living as a single woman and living as part of a (heterosexual) couple, Laure's habitation of space through seemingly fixed gendered norms is in fact both reiterated and challenged through Jean's presence.

When Jean enters Laure's car, the film seems to start again. Sitting mostly in silence, Jean and Laure make slow progress through the heavy traffic. As Jean steps into Laure's car his presence changes the film's body; its spaces, textures and rhythm. Writing on Claire Denis's cinema extensively, Martine Beugnet asserts that Laure instantly *feels* Jean's presence: she can smell him, and his body comes with its weight (2004: 194). Haptic images and sounds in particular create an atmosphere (in Ben Anderson's words)³ and a space of sensations, a lived space.

Phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty writes that we only exist *in space* through sensory experience: ‘our experience is the experience of a world ... a particular manner of being in space and, in a certain sense, of *creating space*’ (2012 [1962]: 230). The silence of the scene punctuated by highlighted diegetic sounds, in particular, give a materiality to the space (Donaldson 2014). The emphasised sounds of the door opening and closing, Laure turning off the inside light, Jean closing the window, his movement on the seat and the clearing of his throat both serve the realism of the film and create a space of contact and intimacy. Progressively in the film, the gendered aspect of the city disappears. If the urban space previously emerged in opposition to the safety of a closed space, a home, the home now takes a whole new meaning that is produced through the textures of the screen, the characters’ sensory experience of space and the rhythm of the film.

The domestication of space happens through both physical interactions and the negotiation of power. The car and, later in the film, the motel room oscillate between the social and physical exchanges within them, and their ‘housing of gender’ (in Bruno’s terms, 2002: 86) determined by heteronormative patriarchal norms. When Jean climbs into Laure’s car uninvited, asking a rhetorical question (‘Can I come in?’), his sense of entitlement comes to light: as a man he feels it is legitimate to enter this woman’s space as if it were his own. A micro-analysis of the film’s *mise en scène* and the characters’ movements reveals the tensions between affects and social power that come with the domestication of space. While Jean looks towards Laure with steady movements of the head, Laure glances at him repetitively with jerky movements of the head. The short takes that characterise the characters’ first interaction express Laure’s nervousness at having a male stranger in her car.

Through absurd elements that invade the realism of the film, Denis ridicules the machismo of the city and denounces the patriarchal heteronormativity of space. Echoing the overtly masculinist and theatrical tone of the opening scene of Godard’s *Weekend*, two men involved in an accident fight while the female partner of one of them hits the other with her handbag and is ordered to ‘shut up’. Given the greater immobility caused by the accident, Laure steps out of the car to call her friend Marie and cancel their dinner as she starts feeling desire for Jean. However, when she returns she cannot find her car. Denoting the gendered power-geometries of space, Jean too demonstrates a patronising attitude towards Laure. Although he himself moved the vehicle, he blames Laure for leaving it in the middle of the street (an absurd comment since nothing else has moved since she left). Jean takes Laure

by the arm, physically guiding her back to the car, and sits in the driver seat without hesitation, even though the car belongs to Laure. These gestures point to a male control over women's bodies and men's overall domination of space.

A micro-analysis of the film allows us to observe the liminality of the domestic space and its constant transformations. With Jean behind the wheel, the car magically overrides the traffic jam and fully regains, for a moment, its aspects of speed, freedom and travel, which have for long been deemed 'masculine'. The cinematography and editing of the scene, as well as a change in the music with its speedy violins, both produce the synesthetic sensation of the rapid motion,⁴ and invite the viewer to live through Laure's physical sensations. When she panics and asks Jean to stop the vehicle so she can get out, Jean points out that he is the one who should get out since the car is hers. Her reaction and his remark, made significant by the scarcity of dialogue in the film, emphasise that gender norms condition Laure's relation to space (the driver often being the male protagonist in road movies). If Jean brings in the patriarchal aspects of the city to the safety of Laure's car – her 'home' – his presence also transforms the concept of home. From a place that is fixed and above the city such as Laure's apartment, home becomes a space in '*transito*' (in Bruno's words, 2002: 86), which is continually created through the desires, and positive and negative affects of its inhabitants.

Vendredi soir illustrates how power dynamics and sensory experiences have affective impacts on both the body and one's making of a space for oneself. After Jean has left the car, Laure drives around looking for him. From outside through the window of a cafe, she sees him interacting with a younger woman. The haptic sound and images again reveal the subjectivity of the scene. Before Laure enters the cafe, she watches the young woman and Jean playing pinball. While the words of both Jean and the woman are muffled, as Laure comes closer, the sounds of the pinball grow louder and Jean's words become clearer. The cinematography and editing of this sequence underline the two women's internalisation of sexual norms and their play of power to *get to touch* Jean. When Laure comes in, the young woman appraises her, looking her up and down (Figure 5.1). Then, a close-up of Jean slightly touching Laure's hand with intention highlights the desire between the two protagonists. The camera films the young woman's gaze towards their hands and then her own hand on the pinball, in a close-up that blurs her uncovered belly in the background (Figure 5.2). Like many scenes in the film, this one requires the viewer's active vision of the characters' micro-relations to uncover how Laure's capacity to re-create a space for herself outside the



Figures 5.1 and 5.2 *Vendredi soir/Friday Night* (2002): focus on a younger woman's gaze and hands in a cafe. Film stills.

walls of her apartment happens as much through a play of power and sensory experiences.

Re-writing Home: The Haptic as Feminist Statement

Whereas Laure at first appears negatively affected from inhabiting the city as a woman, she reaffirms her right to a home on the road through renewing with her body and desire. Sensuous connections transform the car and the motel room, where the lovers spend the night together, into homes, spaces of intimacy. In a point of view shot from Laure's perspective, Jean's hand in close-up enters the opening of his shirt and makes contact with his own skin. This simple gesture, filmed in close-up, emphasises both the texture of Jean's skin and Laure's desire for him. Similarly, when Laure watches Jean extend his legs, putting himself at ease, another series of close-ups edited together shows the tights on her feet rubbing against each other, her knees extending and her fingers lightly stroking the steering wheel. By constantly drawing attention to textures and sensations, the haptic aesthetic of *Vendredi soir* illustrates how the domestication of space builds on micro-relations between bodies rather than on gender norms.

In the car and in the motel room, the intimate connection between Laure and Jean brings to mind Laure's imminent reconstruction of a home with her partner. When Jean gets into Laure's car, he immediately lowers the passenger seat so that he can lie down comfortably. Through this overly familiar gesture, Jean 'makes himself at home' almost as if he were Laure's partner François. Denis also nourishes this confusion by giving very little information on either man, making them indistinguishable from other men (the only signs of François's existence are his keys left with a short note in Laure's apartment, we neither see him nor hear him speak).⁵ Jean's magical appearance on screen, almost coming out of Laure's fantasy, and the possible confusion between the two men support an interpretation of the film as a rewriting of an ideal domestic space.

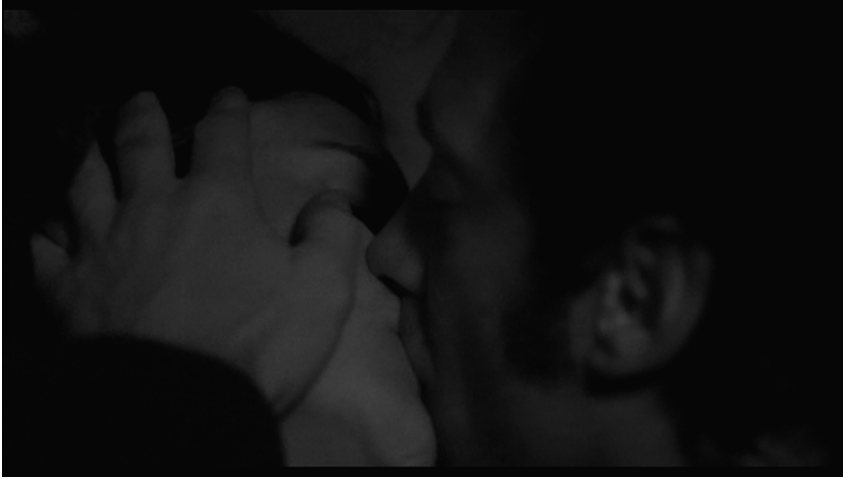


Figure 5.3 *Vendredi soir/Friday Night* (2002): Laure's and Jean's faces almost become indistinguishable as they kiss. Film still.

Rather than moving into François' apartment, Laure imagines moving into a *neutral* place, and so not losing her space but reconstructing one anew with a man, from an equal position.⁶ The motel room, marked as pre-personal and undefined, forms an adequate space for Laure to make her own. By noticing the same objects as in her old apartment into the motel room, Laure appropriates the space. Laure and Jean take possession of the motel room through embracing on the bed and placing their personal objects on the tables and in the closet. From being dark, cold-lit and blue-hued (similar to Laure's empty apartment), the room becomes golden hued and inviting. As such, Laure's apartment has ceased to be a domestic space since it has lost its aspect of space of intimate contacts. Objects from Laure's apartment resurface in the motel room, such as her electric heater and a red lamp that she threw away. Bathed in the warm orange lighting from the heater and the lamp, images of the motel room and the apartment merge. The common objects, colours and textures of both places mingle, and establish a material and sensory parallel between Laure's apartment and her new home. In fact, these objects enclosed Laure's sensory memories, and leaving them behind amounts to being left without a place to call home. In *Vendredi soir*, creating a home develops into creating new sensory experiences. When Laure and Jean kiss for the first time in the street, the *mise en scène* and cinematography blur the characters' (gendered) identities and convey the reversibility of their touch (Figure 5.3). There is no relation of subject–object anymore,

no one ‘possesses’ the other with their gaze, as the camera films the characters’ faces in extreme close-up, illuminating them with a warm light while leaving all the rest in utter darkness. For Merleau-Ponty, there is always a *reversibility* of the touching experience; as he explains, two hands of one’s body, or another’s body, touching each other always simultaneously touch and are being touched (1964: 183). Foregrounding the rustling of their clothes and the faint sounds of their kisses, the direct sound of the scene creates an oneiric and tactile atmosphere. In contrast to the male domination of the city described earlier, the two characters now inhabit the street from an equal position, of touching and being touched. As the *mise en scène* focuses on the tactile, it erases the social, the ‘real’, and leaves the habitation of space up to reinterpretation.

Lived experiences and sensations come to the fore, leaving behind gender norms and power structures. Instead of filming the characters’ faces during intercourse, Denis’s camera shatters the mainstream cinematic conventions of sexual encounters. A shaky handheld camera films body parts in extreme close-up, a hand on a knee or on a back, upper and inner thighs, parts of a leg, a hand taking off underwear (Figure 5.4). As Martine Beugnet writes in her book *Claire Denis*, the ‘tactile gaze of the camera establishes an intimacy with [the characters] as physical beings’ (2004: 192). Extreme close-ups and chiaroscuro lighting disrupt the attributability of body parts to one specific sexed body. Both Laure and Jean have dark brown hair, dark clothes, very similar skin complexion

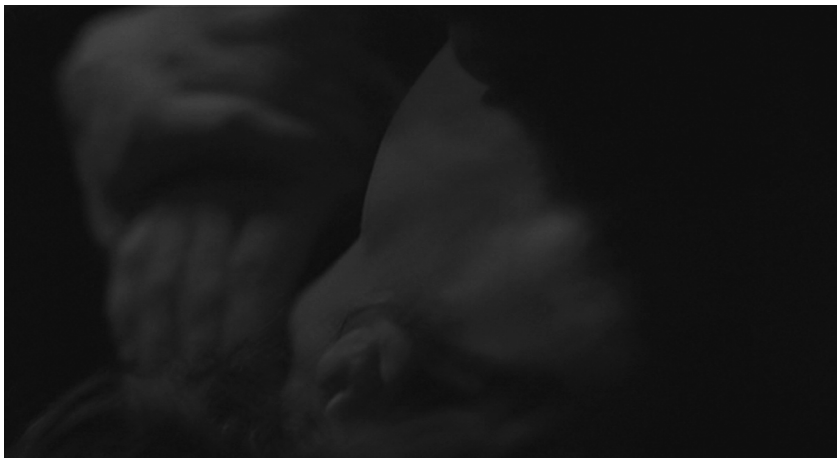


Figure 5.4 *Vendredi soir/Friday Night* (2002): close-up of the lovers’ erotic encounter. Film still.

and body proportions, all of which facilitates their appearance as one androgynous body. Denis in fact recognises the haptic dimension of her filming techniques: 'In the end, we knew the very texture of their skin' (cited in Beugnet 2004: 193), and avoids giving 'feminine' or 'masculine' attributes to her characters.⁷ Gender norms are continually counteracted by the mutual desire and the contagiousness of affects between Laure and Jean. The haptic aesthetic of *Vendredi soir* produces spaces that are lived and embodied, domesticated through intimate contacts, possibly beyond gender.

In this chapter, I have argued that a micro-analysis of bodies' relations to space helps uncover how home becomes a lived space rather than being gendered and associated with the feminine as in male travel narratives. For the woman protagonist, instead of escaping 'marriage, employment, and responsibility' through mobility (in Cohan's and Hark's words), finding a new home of the road signifies renewing one's desires and affirmation of oneself. As such, the film serves a feminist strategy. Contra Judith Butler, who argues in her early work that there is no escape from gender other than through its re-iteration (1993), I maintain that considering the body as a 'lived body' and gender as a situation which is dynamic and constantly being negotiated allows for transformations at the level of both spatial habitation and gendered discourse.⁸

In a way that is reminiscent of Godard's *Weekend*, the traffic jam situates individuals as part of a multitude within which social power is to be discussed and renegotiated. As the magical realism of Denis's film disturbs our perceptions of urban spaces and cars, it places emphasis on the malleability of space. From being structured by the gendered binaries woman/man and stasis/travel, the city and the home become spaces that are lived and produced through affects and sensory experiences. Jennifer Barker's description of the haptic particularly resonates with Claire Denis's film:

[The haptic] is a clever kind of political activism, in that it invites us not only to consider from a distance the film's feminist celebration of female desire but also, and more important, to partake in it, to experience this desire for ourselves in the act of watching the film. The power of the film's feminist political statement is thus not merely rhetorical, but profoundly tactile. (2009: 24)

By connecting viewers to the characters' micro-relations to space, the haptic aesthetic draws us into a domestication of space that is sensory and affective. Through its dream-like world and the characters' intimate connection, *Vendredi soir* in fact invites us to perceive home from an alternative perspective.

Acknowledgement

I am very grateful to Dr Catherine Fowler for her invaluable support, insight and advice.

Notes

- 1 This way of presenting the traffic is characteristic of the (exclusively) female announcers of France Inter Paris radio (FIP), among whom is Jane Villenet who plays the radio announcer in film. Jane Villenet has in fact made a short video titled *How to deliver traffic info on radio in a Fipette's way?* Available online: http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xp3100_jane-villenet-radio-france-comment-faire-un-bulletin-traffic-a-la-maniere-d-une-fipette_creation (last accessed 8 April 2018).
- 2 Women's bodies have often been paired with childbirth, mothering, nurturing and nature, and conflated with the domestic sphere. In opposition, the public sphere became constructed around notions of 'rationality, individuality [and] self-control' associated with the 'masculine' (Rose 1993: 35). These considerations have long unproblematically shaped and legitimated gender roles and power relations (Spain 1992; Rose 1993; Massey 1994; McDowell 1999).
- 3 Borrowing from Mikel Dufrenne, Anderson describes an affective atmosphere as 'how the "expressed world" overflows the representational content ... as "[a] certain quality which words cannot translate but which communicates itself in arousing a feeling"' (2009: 79).
- 4 About the synesthesia of cinema, Merleau-Ponty writes that 'the ambiguity of experience is such that an auditory rhythm fuses cinematic images together and gives rise to a perception of movement whereas, without an auditory contribution, the same succession of images would be too slow to provoke the stroboscopic movement' (1962: 237).
- 5 In Emmanuèle Bernheim's eponymous book (1998), from which the film is adapted, the stranger Laure meets (Jean) is called Frédéric, thus sharing the two first letters of his name with Laure's partner François. Laure also compares the two men in inner monologues. She wonders why François does not dress the way Frédéric does and imagines moving in with Frédéric just as she will (we suppose) with François.
- 6 The paratextual elements of the film also support this interpretation. For example, if one looks at the DVD menu, this part of the film is entitled 'Back home'. Additionally, Bernheim's book makes it very clear that Laure fantasises about the motel room as her home: 'Small, square and with a low ceiling, this room looked like hers. Laure stopped. It was hers. She was at her place with Frédéric [(Jean in the film)]. And just as every night, before going to bed, he would turn down the heating. Because together at night, they would never get cold' (Bernheim 1998: 92–3, translation mine).

- 7 When she meets Jean, Laure wears androgynous clothes and not the red sexy skirt that she wears in Bernheim's book. This is a change that I interpret as the film's will to shatter the boundaries of gender, in addition to the fact that Laure wears no make-up and is filmed from the back when showering. For his part, while Jean embodies, at least in part, the heterosocial dynamics of power, his masculine appearance is 'queered' by his soft voice and his availability as Laure's fantasy. Narratively, the story of *Vendredi soir* could in fact be interpreted as a reversal of the gendered practice of 'kerb crawling'.
- 8 Whereas for Butler the subject does not prefigure gender but is already born in gender, for Simone de Beauvoir and Toril Moi drawing on de Beauvoir's work, the lived body is a process rather than linked to sexual anatomy, the 'ongoing interaction between the subject and the world' (Moi 2001: 63).

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