

Özgün Makale

Scratch and Mark:

Affective Intermediality Towards Mathilde¹

Sıyrık ve İz: *Towards Mathilde* Filminde Duygulanımsal Medyalararasılık

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Abstract

Claire Denis' cinema relies on in-betweenness of the film medium, combining it with other art forms and media through sensations. *Towards Mathilde* (2005) documents the correspondence between the director's own work and that of the famous choreographer, Mathilde Monnier, reflecting on artistic expression, movement, and embodiment with the senses. This article explores the intricate texture of affective intermediality within the film. Interweaving the theories of affect and intermediality within film studies, this analysis delves into the ways in which Denis embodies a wide range of intermedial elements to inspire emotional responses. Through a detailed examination of the use of cinematography, sound design, and music, it uncovers how Denis engages in different arts and media to create a deeply affective cinematic experience. By examining the interplay between visual, auditory, and sense in dance and cinema as two distinct but intertwined art forms, this article aims to illuminate the affective intermediality at work in the film, offering insights into the complex ways in which cinema and dance can move and communicate emotion.

Keywords: Claire Denis, Affective Intermediality, Cinematic Body, Affect Theory, Choreography.

Öz

Claire Denis'nin sineması, diğer sanat formları ve medya ile duyular aracılığıyla birleşen film mecrasının bu aradalığına dayanır. *Towards Mathilde*, onun kendi çalışması ile ünlü koreograf Mathilde Monnier'inki arasında var olan ilişkiyi duygularla kaydeder ve bunu yaparken de sanatsal ifade, hareket ve bedenlenme üzerine düşünür. Bu makale, filmdeki duygulanımsal medyalararasılığın karmaşık dokusunu araştırmaktadır. Film çalışmalarında duygulanım ve medyalararasılık kuramlarını harmanlayan bu analiz, Denis'in duygusal tepkiler uyandırmak için çok çeşitli medyalararası unsurları nasıl kullandığını araştırır. Filmin sinematografi, ses tasarımı ve müzik kullanımının ayrıntılı bir incelemesi yoluyla, ayrıca Denis'in derinlemesine duygusal bir sinema deneyimi yaratmak için farklı sanatları ve medyayı nasıl kullandığını ortaya çıkarır. Sonuçta iki farklı ama iç içe geçmiş sanat formu olarak dans ve sinemada görsel, işitsel ve duyu-

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sal arasındaki etkileşimi inceleyen bu makale, filmde var olan duygusal medyalararasılığı açığa çıkarmayı ve sinema ile dansın duyguları harekete geçirip temasa kurduğu karmaşık yollara dair iç görüler sunmayı amaçlar.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Claire Denis, Duygulanımsal Medyalararasılık, Sinemasal Beden, Duygulanım Teorisi, Koreografi.

Introduction

In the ever-evolving landscape of cinema, the convergence between different arts and media has always been a defining characteristic of artistic expression since its earliest days. In recent years, affective intermediality has emerged as a potential foundation for exploring complex realities and drawing on the power of sensory phenomena to deepen the immersive experience and evoke profound emotional resonance. Denis' experimental documentary film, *Towards Mathilde* (2005), presents itself as an *open work* (opera aperta) upon which to explore the intricate interplay between affect and intermediality in two intertwined arts: cinema and dance. In this film, the concept of affective intermediality takes center stage through the idiosyncratic choreography of corporeal and cinematic bodies. This paper embarks on an exploration of the affective intermediality within the cinematic realm, with a specific focus on the immersive techniques employed in *Towards Mathilde*. The film incorporates different intermedial elements with the movement essential for both dance and cinema, wherein diverse forms of media fusion and interaction to enhance the emotional depth and resonance of the documentary. Within this context, it emerges as a distinctive example, offering a nuanced lens through which to examine the interplay between affect and intermediality in cinema.

Towards Mathilde epitomizes the symbiotic relationship between film and bodily expression. Through a tender blend of visual imagery and tactile sensations, Denis transcends the boundaries between the persistent and the ephemeral, calling the audience to perceive the film on a carnal level. As in the haunting scratch and the delicate mark of a hand into the void, which stands out as a hallmark of the film, each sensory cue serves as a conduit for emotional engagement, amplifying the film's thematic undercurrents and dynamics. Moreover, the incorporation of tactile elements such as the texture of objects, and the skin of the bodies further heightens the sensory experience intimately with the cinematic image. From the musical score by PJ Harvey to the vivid imagery of the choreographer's work in progress, each noncinematic element contributes to the cinematic body of emotion, imbuing it with a sense of palpable immediacy and authenticity. From this perspective, this paper endeavors to reveal the nuances of affective intermediality within the world of *Towards Mathilde*, shedding light on how the film embraces the potentialities of sensory phenomena to explore how the film reveals the reciprocal, interactive, and dialogical relationship between the two artists and the way in which it involves the audience as an active agent in this experience. Through a comprehensive analysis of cinematic techniques, thematic motifs, and aesthetic sensibilities, it aims to elucidate the transformative potential of affective intermediality in shaping emotional engagement with the film experience. Intermediality is used here as a "critical category for the concrete analysis of specific individual media products or configurations" classified by Irina Rajewsky (2005, p. 47), but in an affective sense.

Towards Mathilde is an experimental documentary by Denis' intimate and embodied observation that explores the work in progress of French choreographer Monnier in rehearsing

her dance work *Déroutes* in the studio, then performed in 2004. Denis searches for the affinities between her filmmaking style and Monnier's artistic vision for performance, and she documents the performance of a new piece. From performing to directing, the relationship with the body is explored in all its facets, revealing the common language of two artists, and weaving infinite bridges between dance and cinema. The documentary acts as an intellectual dance between Denis and Monnier, two provocative artists who continually push the limits of their own artistic boundaries from the perspective of intermediality. Denis has one and only question in mind in the film: the origin of choreography and its relationship with the moving image. The rehearsals, intercut with the choreographer's reflections on the dance and final performance, were recorded on Super8 and 16mm film by Agnès Godard and H  l  ne Louvart. Godard and Louvart also worked on Wim Wenders' *Pina* (2011), which is a 3D documentary film on choreographer and founder of the *Tanztheater* (dance-theatre), Pina Bausch. Reproducing a sense of affective intermediality in the film, they often shoot the performers' bodies in tentative and fragmented close-ups, make abrupt cut, and zoom in and out suddenly. Denis uses dance and movement sequences as character and narrative development tools in her films.

The Affect and Intermediality in Cinema

The concept of affect, which has become central to all areas of the social sciences and humanities in recent decades, has shifted the research focus from the traditional rationalist approach towards the affective one previously ignored or neglected between the body, objects, and the world. The term "affect" carries a wide range of meanings lexically, including sensation, feeling, emotion, influence, action, and effect, etc. Affect studies bring these phenomena back to the center of research, which previously seemed to be an intelligible, fixed, and descriptive set of concepts. It refers to their various irreducible meanings as corporeal, material, and affective phenomena, although they have been the object of curiosity throughout the history of thought and have always been subordinated in ontological and epistemological terms. Drawing on various contemporary philosophies, mainly from critical theory to its different ramifications to new materialism, phenomenology, and post-humanism, it extends the boundaries of research to include the relationship between human and non-human and/or corporeal and incorporeal bodies. In this respect, the very concept of affect is intensely nourished by the in-betweenness in the body and in the world. Patricia Ticineto Clough refers to the "affective turn" as the growing importance of affect as a focus of analysis across several disciplinary and interdisciplinary discourses, which occurred at a time when critical theory faced the analytic challenges of (then) ongoing wars, trauma, torture, massacre, and counter-terrorism. The notion of affect developed a line of thought running from Baruch Spinoza through Henri Bergson to Gilles Deleuze and F  lix Guattari (Clough, 2007, p. 1). The early wave of affect theory led by Silvan Tomkins (1995), Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1997) and Sedgwick (2003), and Brian Massumi (2002) aimed to reconceptualize the unconscious or assumed non-intentional intensities of affect as phenomena irreducible to definitions of consciousness. In his notes on the translation of Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Masumi remarks that affect/affection does not indicate a personal feeling (sentiment in Deleuze and Guattari) but an ability to affect and be affected. The affect is a pre-personal intensity that corresponds to the transition from one experiential state of the body to another, implying an increase or decrease in that body's ability to act, whereas the affection is each such state viewed as an encounter between the affected body and a second, affecting body

(Massumi, 1987, p. xvi). From this perspective, it can be said that there has been an ontological affinity between affect and intermediality. Because both consist of encounter, interaction, and becoming. They have ambiguous or liminal forces or intensities. Gregory Seigworth and Melissa Gregg point out, "Affect arises in the midst of inbetween-ness: in the capacities to act and be acted upon. (...) affect is found in those intensities that pass body to body (human, nonhuman, part-body, and otherwise), in those resonances that circulate about, between, and sometimes stick to bodies and worlds, and in the very passages or variations between these intensities and resonances themselves." (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010, p. 1)

Affect theory emerged within media and film studies in the 1990s, providing an understanding of the affective dimensions of film experience. Rooted in the works of theorists like Deleuze and Massumi, affect theory shifts the focus from traditional film analysis, which often emphasizes narrative structure and character development, to affective analysis which considers the immediate and embodied experiences revealed by the moving image. Affective film theory focuses on the cinematic apparatus itself, considering how the combination of visual, auditory, and temporal elements contributes to the affective process. Cinematographic choices, such as framing, lighting, and editing, are no longer taken solely as vehicles for storytelling but as means of modulating affective intensities. This perspective highlights the importance of the audiovisual elements in creating an affective resonance that goes beyond narrative comprehension. In contemporary film studies, Laura U. Marks (2000) discussed haptic images and their connections to representations of cultural difference. Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener (2009) had made their way into theorizing the cinema through senses. There has also been the ever-evolving research field of film phenomenology in different and intersectional directions, from Vivian Sobchack (2004) to Martine Beugnet (2007). According to Steven Shaviro (2010), when exploring film, we must consider the body as well as the senses. He discovered that films were no longer created solely for meaning but rather to have an effect on the viewer's senses, "a moment-by-moment manipulation of the spectator's affective state" (p. 118). These studies have mainly taken their theoretical foundation on the bodily sensations from contemporary philosophy, especially Deleuze's thinking the "logic of sense," Jacques Rancière's reflecting the "distribution of the sensible," or, as it appears in the analysis of the film below, Jean-Luc Nancy's "sense of the world." Theorists who are firmly committed to the specificity of the film medium opposed this idea, but film has always been an intermedial medium from the very beginning. This assumption does not contradict the specificity of the medium. The in-betweenness of an art or medium with other art forms and media does not eliminate its specificity but makes it more authentic. For if it were not a specific medium, we would not be able to speak about its in-betweenness with other media. This must have been André Bazin's (2004) idea when he wrote about impure cinema in a 1951 essay intimately related to the recent theory of cinematic intermediality. Intermediality persisted from the early cinema to the medium's recent convergence into digital media. The so-called post-cinema debate can also be approached from this intermedial perspective. Joachim Paech, who explores the concept of intermediality in film studies, emphasizes that film has always been an "intermedial fact" that remains in interaction with other types of media and an intermedial phenomenon even in the process of digitization. According to Paech (2011), film has always had a range of forms that interpret and represent changing media conditions. Furthermore, considering the cinematographic characteristics of digital production, he notes that digital films are also an appropriation of media forms (p. 18).

Ágnes Pethő (2011) considers that the theory of intermediality focuses on relationships rather than structures, emphasizing something that “happens” between media rather than simply existing within a given signification. The film medium has always had inextricable ties with other art forms and media, but the theory of intermediality has highlighted the interactions of different media in the cinema, emphasizing how moving pictures can engage forms of all other media and initiate fusions and “dialogues” between the distinct arts. According to Pethő, intermediality has the potential to become one of the major theoretical issues of contemporary thinking about cinema, precisely because it regards film as a continuous medium (p. 1). Classical narrative film has been frequently related to the illusion of the world’s immediacy, and it appears transparent as a realistic representation of it, with no mediation taking place. Pethő (2011) notes that effectively breaking the transparency of the filmic image, intermediality techniques can also open the image up to illusory inter-media and inter-art “transgressions” and “crossovers,” even though they also kind of close it in on itself (p. 96). She discovered that there are at least two fundamental “templates” that produce a more or less emphatic sense of “intermediality” in the cinema: a “sensual” mode that allows the audience to interact with a world that is portrayed close to, rather than at a distance, producing a cinema that can be understood in terms of architectural forms, music, paintings, or haptic textures; and a “structural” mode that makes the media elements of the film visible and reveals the layers of multimediality that make up the “fabric” of the cinematic medium, while also revealing the web of their intricate interactions. (p. 99). Affective intermediality means deepening an affective theory with cinematic intermediality. Such analysis aims to answer the question of what kind of emotional experience the film, as both an art form and a specific movie, can provide to the audience and what role cinematic intermediality plays in this affective experience. Laura U. Marks (2018) points out that affective analysis is a type of aesthetic analysis that goes beyond conventional cognitive techniques to comprehend the viewer’s experience by first examining emotive and embodied reactions. Affective analysis brings our ideas back to our bodies, whereas critical analysis frequently starts with formal perceptual analysis or discourse. Marks highlights the role affects—pre-cognitive and physiological reactions to stimuli—play in determining how we interact with films, artwork, and other phenomena. According to Marks, affective reactions are multifaceted and intricate, encompassing feelings, sensations, and physical experiences. At the molar and molecular levels, each of these works functions differently, and so do our reactions. In the context of cinema, Marks highlights the tactile and embodied qualities of vision (p. 152). Affect indicates the movement between thought and matter in itself. And the title of the movie indicates the movement between filmmaker and artist, or camera and dance, as a kind of intermediality in the same way.

Cinema has historically been associated with a sensory experience in which all the senses are engaged. Not only are the images themselves moving, but they also stimulate all our senses, as exemplified by the Lumiere Brothers’ first public film screening in 1895 at the Grand Café. Pethő underlines that some of the most recent developments and new technologies in art and commercial cinema have not only noticed these shifts but have also embraced and reflected upon them by specifically edging towards “cinemas of the senses” and “cinemas of the body.” The contemporary audio-visual landscape recognizes the relevance of the embodied act of viewing and the sensory experience of moving images, which collapse the space between the viewer and the image. Pethő (2015) recognized this change and first organized a conference (taking place between the 25th and 27th of May 2012) and then edited a book of selected papers presented at

this conference focusing directly on the “multisensory” nature of moving images by pairing the “cinema” and “sensation.” (p. 2). The concept of affective intermediality, which is the focus of this article, was borrowed from her latest and ongoing project² and the recent work exploring this concept. Pethő finds that Tacita Dean’s body of work explores and invites us to think in terms of an “affective intermediality,” focusing on sensuous excess and complex affective performativity. It connects with phenomenology and post-structuralist philosophies of art, highlighting the in-betweenness of media and the concept of “affect,” transcending media, representation, text, and humans. Pethő (2023) claims that considering the affective aspects of intermediality introduces a more elusive, precarious, “molecular” dimension that underlies the larger framework, as opposed to the “molar” perspective of media theorists, who have elaborated comprehensive concepts and taxonomies clarifying the implied relations in intermediality. The analogies between “molar” and “molecular,” which are drawn from the natural sciences by Deleuze and Guattari, seem fitting in this instance because they signify a similar perspective shift (from organized structure to multiplicity) and because “molecular” is a term that they use to refer to the order of affects (p. 2). Just as Pethő considered the intermediality between the visual arts and the medium of film in terms of affects in the Dean’s body of work, this article argues that Claire Denis’ cinema also be considered in terms of an affective intermediality between the performative arts and cinema.

In-Between Dance and Film: The Embodiment of Intermediality

Communication is the process of conveying meanings, messages, and feelings to and from individuals or groups using both verbal and non-verbal means. It can take place through several channels, including writing, speaking, body language, gestures, and, with technological advancements, more mediated ways, through platforms like social media or moving images. And when the communication process is considered between various media and art forms, the concept of intermediality comes into play. From the point of view of intermediality, communication does not only take place between people; but also, it is an interaction and exchange between media and other art forms. The body becomes decisive precisely to ensure this communication both between people and between arts and media. Body language, paralanguage, and other forms of non-verbal and non-linear communication are central to intermediality, especially as it is thought between performative arts and cinema. Paralanguage is a type of non-verbal communication that has been studied for a long time and is one of the communication channels that is most widely used in human interaction. George L. Trager (1958) made the initial suggestion to study paralanguage in the 1950s. Trager notes that all the noises and movements entering the activity of people talking to each other and exchanging communications needed to be taken into account if a total picture of the activity was to be arrived at. Paralanguage is part of the metalinguistic area of communication activity. The newspapers and periodicals, radio, film, and television all contributed to institutional and cultural innovations that made it possible for a small number of people to communicate effectively and quickly with large populations. From this perspective, it can be said that paralanguage is essential for cinema as an intermedial and affective medium. However, the body is not just a medium through which different arts and media interact,

² This research, entitled “Affective Intermediality: Cinema between Media, Sensation and Reality,” explores the concept of “affective intermediality,” which extends the understanding of intermediality as a poetics or art of in-betweenness. It aims to conceive a wider area for an affective turn in intermediality studies, focusing on affects and sensations in film, media, and art studies. For further details, see also this project research website: <http://film.sapiientia.ro/en/research-programs/affective-intermediality>

but rather a liminal existence where these arts and media encounter, interact, and engage with each other.

Over the past decades, different methodological approaches have emerged in the social sciences and humanities that have disrupted conventional research methodology and challenged reader expectations, one of the most influential of which has been affect studies. Affective intermediality, merging affect theory with the convergence of media in the social sciences and humanities, on the other hand, relies on non-linguistic forces, or affects, for approaching culture, society, and history. This article aims first to reveal the concepts of affect and intermediality, respectively, and focus on applying the affect theory to cinematic intermediality studies. The intersection of affect theory with film studies, which allows thinking beyond the concept of representation, has gained importance, especially in recent years. Because the affect theory remediates the question of representation by transforming it into a thinking about mediality, it expands both different and interrelated critical views in touch with movies. Denis' cinema, from this critical point of views always in her mind, gives a Nancy touch to filmmaking with its affective intermediality. Denis and Jean-Luc Nancy collaborated on the discussion in a book, and she made a short documentary about him. Dance has been a frequent subject in early cinema because of the new medium's ability to capture movement and light. Recently, artists and filmmakers have expanded this field of work, fusing contemporary dance practices with a tradition of technologically mediated performance and reception started by Loïe Fuller with her serpentine dance. The choreographic quality of the film can be regarded as both a cinematic and artistic element because this article centers on the film performance as a concept of affective intermediality that incorporates all aspects of cinematic production. One could consider all these technical aspects of film performance because they are all powerful "performers" in the movie, including the lighting, editing, movement, and camera distance. These components have the power to alter the phenomenal body to the point where it is possible to argue that the body that cinema depicts did not exist prior to the development of film.



Figure 1. Loïe Fuller and her performance that would be known as the *serpentine dance*. (Source: Wikimedia Commons)

Early film theorists also discussed the relationship between the art of dance and cinema. Sidney Peterson (1978) said that the art of the dancer is a fugitive thing, and the only way it can be preserved as an inspiration and guide for future generations is through the cinema. However, this power of cinema has not been sufficiently utilized, which is why the art of important dance artists such as Isadora Duncan has not survived to this day. The main difficulty arises because dance is also an art of moving images according to him. Discussing the combining of the specific characteristics of various media, he reminds Rudolf Arnheim's suggestion that there must be artistic reasons for such a combination, it must serve to express something that could not be said by one of the media alone. The important thing here is the realization that the art of the moving image did not commence with Fred Ott's sneeze for Thomas Edison any more than it commenced with Loïe Fuller doing her famous *Bat Dance* for an anonymous cameraman (p. 75).



Figure 2. A still image from the *The Very Eye of Night*. Copyright owned by The National Gallery of Art.

Maya Deren's films were a kind of choreography of cinema reflecting on both the human body in motion and the filmmaking process itself. Her first two films began partly with this reflection, but Deren fully realized it in her third experimental film, *Study in Choreography for Camera* (1945). In *Study*, a male dancer moves within different environments, corresponding to his precisely choreographed movements with the film's editing process. Deren's last completed film, *The Very Eye of Night* (1958), was also made in collaboration with choreographer Antony Tudor. A constellation of stars is the background for negative images. Deren called it 'ballet of night', a kind of spiritual dance within a nocturnal space. Denis' intermediality of dance and filmmaking in *Towards Mathilde* takes its inspiration from Deren's experimental dance films, especially the last film.

The Cinema of Claire Denis: Bodies and Images in Motion

Denis has an unconventional approach to storytelling with her evocative visual style. Her films challenge traditional narrative structures that rely heavily on the plot, dialogue, and causal chain of events. Instead, they opt for a more sensory and visceral experience that engages the viewer on an emotional level. Denis tends to use non-linear narratives and elliptical storytelling. Her films invite the audience to piece together the narrative puzzle, providing a more experiential rather than expository mode of storytelling. Aesthetic sensuality is a characteristic of Denis' cinema. Her films are characterized by visually poetic and sensuous imagery, often exploring the tactile aspects of human experience. She pays attention to the physicality of bodies, textures, and landscapes. Denis, from her debut, *Chocolat* (1988), to the recent film *Stars at Noon* (2022) has shot a lot of fiction, documentaries, short films, music videos, and video art films, and besides, has taken her storytelling into ever more ambiguous and elliptical structure. Denis' filmmaking crosses over to other art forms and media, from performance to literature. Although seemingly different in terms of narrative and genre, all Claire Denis films share an experience of border and transgression, as Martine Beugnet (2007) has described in general terms for French film (p. 14). This transgression means not only identities, geographies, or existences but also in terms of medium. In this respect, her cinema is more amenable to interpretation from the perspective of intermediality than any other film. Moreover, intermediality is uniquely affective in its tactile and sensory nature. Her films embody a desire and ontological tension between being both an intruder upon and an intruder. Mostly, the body is the locus of such experiences of crossing borders. She has also made intricate documentaries for cinema and television: *Man No Run* (1989), *Jacques Rivette, Watchman* (1990), *Towards Mathilde* (2005), and *The Breidjing Camp* (2015). Although each documentary is made with her own unique style but *Towards Mathilde* differs in its "dreamy distance with reality" (Smith, 2006) from the others.

Denis prepared the audience for the next documentary with floating close-ups and long takes in *Jacques Rivette, Watchman*. She appeared for fleeting moments in the film. In the next film, she pushes all the techniques and elements to the extreme and fills this distance through sensations. The camera moves towards mostly the choreographer, but we sense the filmmaker's own body and uncanny movements within/out the of the frame. Denis expressed this with her own words: "All my films function as a movement toward an unknown Other and toward the unknown in relation to other people" (Beugnet, 2019, p. 4). She meditates on how bodies move and sense space. The presence of affective intermediality in the documentary makes her cinema more special in this sense. She takes the genre of documentary into an experimental and intermedial terrain where she can push the limits of the cinematic medium. Denis introduces the other art forms and media into her films as modes of expression that cross the boundaries of the film medium itself. The film is a manifestation of the ambiguous irreducibility to any narrative exposition as an affective phenomena. The film becomes an experiment in the impossibility of representing reality, which the cinematic image itself can transform through intermedial sensory traces at the same time. Through this liminal experience of the real, Denis challenges the audience with the aesthetics of the sensations. She engages with the artist's creative process and how the choreographer and the dancers use the rhythm of their bodies to convey abstract emotions as a kind of paralanguage. The camera records whisperings and isolated moments of Monnier while thinking about her own creative process. Monnier's and the dancers' hands are frequently the subject of Denis' attention. A woman dances ferociously in one scene. She is pounding the floor with her bare feet. Denis

offers contemplative examination of moments and sensuous images neglected in conventional storytelling, transcends mere documentary in an experimental artwork that explores affective intensities in the fusion of two arts, cinema, and dance. Denis, and Monnier share a common way of perceiving the body and its movements and making it the essential meaning of the existence.

Denis depicts sensations in a complex and unconventional way. The complexity of bodies, objects, and spaces remains deeply sensual. Beugnet (2019) considers her cinema as a kind of “cinema of the senses”: a cinema that relies, first and foremost, on the sensuous apprehension of the real, on a vivid and tactile combination of sounds and images that expands cinema’s primarily visual powers of evocation.” Beugnet observes that Denis’ use of a *mise en scène* of desire confuses the conventional processes of identification and point of view in addition to establishing correspondences between the senses. Thus, desire manifests in all its complexity and ambivalence and is inextricably linked to transgression (p. 132). Indeed, this idea can be applied not only to her fiction films but also to her documentaries. In Denis’ filmmaking style, the cinematic and intermedial elements precede the narrative ones, regardless of the genre. It evokes sensations with these elements by showing the actual movements or through sequences of experience in/out of the frame. Denis’ cinema has often been cited for its unique aesthetic sensibility and its ability to evoke emotions through non-verbal and sensory experiences. She often takes a rhythmic and choreographic approach to cinematography. Her films are characterized by carefully composed visual sequences and fluid camera movements that evoke the movements and gestures of dance. The camera becomes a choreographic apparatus, capturing the materiality of the characters and the spaces they inhabit with rhythmic precision. Her films frequently emphasize the physicality and embodiment of characters, like dance, where the body communicates emotions, relationships, and narratives. The movements and gestures of characters in her films are often expressive, like movements in dance performances. In this sense, Denis’ films always explore sensuous and physical encounters between characters/bodies. The emphasis on the tactile, corporeal, and even visceral aspects of relationships allude to intimate and physical expressions found in dance. The body, as a site of emotional expression, takes center stage in Denis’ exploration of movement. Denis’ cinema is known for its tendency to convey emotions through visual and sensory elements without relying heavily on dialogue. The cinematic language resonates with the non-verbal communication inherent in dance, much like how dance communicates through the language of movement and expressive silence. Beugnet (2019) thinks that sensations are evoked either directly (by showing the actual act of looking, smelling, touching ...) or indirectly, through shots of objects and textures, through shades of color and light that establish correspondences between the different senses in Denis’ films (p. 152). Through her affective intermedial approach to the cinematic image, she also displaces the priority of the gaze over the other senses. In this documentary on Monnier, the choreographer and director at the Montpellier National Centre for Choreography reveals [two] artists’ creative process in a deeply sensual way. Interpreting Denis’ cinema as a kind of choreography, there is no need to rely on a loose assumption such as the density of dance scenes in her films. She has frequently described choreography as a framework for considering the interaction between acting and directing: “I don’t have a concept for directing actors. In a way, I see it more like *choreography*. This is to say that for me, directing is something that goes through the body. Directing and acting exist in an organic relationship similar to a dance between director and actors.” (Denis, 1996, p. 72). Denis calls on the audience to engage in an active and affective

manner with this choreography. She uses the handheld camera to make this sense. This kind of camera movement and filmmaking style are especially decisive for *Toward Mathilde*.³

The choreography is not only a metaphor for her cinematography but also an important narrative element in Denis' cinema. Denis collaborated with renowned choreographers, such as Bernardo Montet and Monnier, on her other film projects. For instance, in *Beau Travail* (1999), Denis worked with Montet to choreograph the ritualistic military exercises performed by the French Foreign Legionnaires (FFL). Montet put the players through rigorous preparation before the movie's actual filming. This collaboration highlights the integration of dance elements into the fabric of Denis' cinema. The body can be used for an art that requires discipline, such as dance, or it can be used for military purposes. Movement takes precedence over everything else as the film unfolds. The characters move in synchrony, giving the impression that they are performing on a stage. Denis shows a sensitivity to spatial dynamics in her films, like the spatial considerations in dance choreography. She arranges bodies within the frame, uses physical spaces, and choreographs character movements to create a sense of spatial rhythm that evokes dance performances. This intersection between cinema and dance draws attention to the tension between materiality and transcendence in the body. Music plays an important role in Denis' films as much as in the visual arts and performances, contributing to the overall atmospheric and emotional qualities. The integration of music, much like in choreography, enhances the sensory experience of the audience. The auditory elements in Denis's films, including rhythmic soundtracks and ambient sounds, create a sonic landscape that parallels the immersive quality of performances. Denis also collaborated with musicians. She has made films on music or directed music videos. Her first documentary film, *Man No Run* (1989), follows *Les Têtes Brulées*, a group of musicians from Cameroon, as they were on tour in France. In her later documentary and fictional works, she explores themes directly related to the music and performance arts.

There has been an intellectual exchange between Denis and Nancy, who have collaborated in a dialogue including films, texts, and adaptations. Denis made the short film *Towards Nancy* (2002), focusing on the philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy. In this short film, the conversation takes place on a moving train; the people are physically static, but the ideas flow, while in the latter film, the movement becomes the most decisive element for the filmic space. As the film unfolds, both the movement of the characters and the handheld camera merge carnally to the extent that it is no longer clear which one determines the other or that the boundaries between cinema and dance almost completely disappear, creating an affective liminality. Her film, *The Intruder* (2004), is based on Jean-Luc Nancy's essay of the same title. Nancy wrote essays on Denis's three films, *Beau Travail* (1999), *Trouble Every Day* (2001), and *The Intruder* (2004). They also collaborated in the fields of dance, literature, and film with the choreographer Monnier in the book titled *Allitérations: Conversations sur la danse* (2005). Denis's film on the choreographer shares its spirit with the short Nancy film; it is entitled *Towards Mathilde* (2005).

Liminal Bodies and Spaces in *Towards Mathilde*

The prefix *vers* in the film's title means "towards," implying that the filmmaker, no matter how far she goes towards the artist she would document, cannot reach, and capture her reality with the camera even if the film seems to follow its natural course of events and rehearsals for a

³ In her essay, Danica van de Velde examined critically the cinematic choreographies visible in Claire Denis films. See also: van de Velde, D. (2023). "In the Cracks: Claire Denis's Cinematic Choreographies," in *Refocus: The Films of Claire Denis*. Ed. Peter Sloane. Edinburgh University Press. (p. 166-181).

final performance. Denis' camera appears to be driven by the ethics of the Other, affected by the philosophies of Emmanuel Levinas and Jean-Luc Nancy (Hole, 2016, p. 4). Other, according to this idea, is someone I can never capture or describe and is always beyond my cognition. Denis (2000) denies the explanation in the cinema and accepts it as a kind of encounter: "Cinema is not made to give a psychological explanation, for me cinema is montage, is editing. To make blocks of impressions or emotion meet with another block of impression or emotion and put in between pieces of explanation, to me it's boring. Again, I am not trying to make it difficult, but I think, as a spectator, when I see a movie one block leads me to another block of inner emotion, I think that's cinema. That's an encounter."

The opening sequence recording Monnier's fragmented body from behind while wandering barefoot at the seashore cuts to a shot of her fragmented body again, but this time in the rehearsal studio. Monnier's voice becomes an editing device that connects the two scenes. In the latter scene, her voice accompanies the image of hands making a move in space and she analogizes this gesture of the hands in space:

Whenever you make an incursion into a space, that space is altered. I like this idea of leaving a scratch because that space is altered by that scratch afterward. It's like a piece of paper that has a mark on it and is no longer blank (...) In other words, the memory leaves a mark. The mark is always there. And the memory (...) So this mark leaves a mark on the body. On mine, in any case. (Denis, 2005).

There are different ways of leaving a trace; for example his own hand gesture leaves a mark on the body. There is then a close-up cut to Monnier's face, where she explains the details of the project to the dancers. The camera tracks a dancer's rehearsal moves as she is directed by the choreographer and different body parts in an almost chaotic, shifting, and occasionally blurry and twitching shot. As the camera is mostly left to the natural lighting in the interior studio environment, the image is sometimes obscured and barely distinguishable. And the film progresses, the camera records Monnier's body in/against space. Denis does not give a typical establishing shot, revealing the storyline as happens in classical narrative structure. Instead, the bodies are always in motion from the first moment to the end. It suggests that the focus of the movie is the embodied and emotional experience. In the film, Denis explores the world of contemporary dance scene at the Montpellier National Centre for Choreography and in Gennevilliers during the dress rehearsal of *Déroutes* prepared by Monnier. The film emphasizes the process, implying that the preparation and rehearsal phases are just as crucial as the actual performance in the filmmaking process. She takes on implicitly a self-reflexive attitude in this way through the lens of another artistic medium to evaluate her own artistic expression. The camera keeps track of the testing set and probs, exercising the dancers during the process. The film grains seemingly have their own choreography in this process and the diegetic sound of the analog camera apparatus reminds us of Denis' distinctive filming technique and style. As Monnier's team move towards the end, the final performance, Denis's team analyzes their progress at the same time. Denis focuses on adapting the choreographer's method to cinema, while Monnier engages in adapting Georg Büchner's incomplete short story *Lenz* into a dance performance that will eventually become *Déroutes*, which means "collapses". The film is a plurality of diverse intermediality from literature to dance, from dance to cinema each of which is imbued with an affective experience.

Reflecting on *Towards Mathilde* through affective intermediality involves examining the ways in which different art forms and media contribute to the film's emotional and sensory structure.

Affective intermediality explores the convergence of various artistic elements to create a rich and immersive affective experience. From this point of view, the visual elements of film, including cinematography, color schemes, and framing, contribute to the affective atmosphere. Denis uses visual metaphors or symbols that enhance emotional resonance. The spatial organization of scenes affects the emotional dynamics and the *mise-en-scène* and makes an impact on the viewer's affective engagement. The choreographer and dancers' expressions and body language call for an affective reception. Denis utilizes the visual portrayal of characters to evoke emotions. Ambient sounds, silence, and music are used to enhance emotional depth. These auditory elements interact with the visual components. The film's musical score contributes to its affective complexity. The music complements the visual narrative to create a multi-sensory, affective experience. And the non-linear and elliptic narrative structure of the film directs the ebb and flow of the emotions. Denis' engagement with the affective qualities of the film image is most evident in blurred, moving, and fragmented close-ups. Arms and legs slice through the air as a female voice speaks about movement at the opening of the movie. Denis frequently employs the camera technique known as *décadrage* (deframing) by Pascal Bonitzer. Bonitzer (2000) accepts the deframing as a process quite different from the "oblique view" of classical painting. He notes that cinema invented empty shots, strange angles, and bodies alluringly fragmented or shot in close-up (p. 199). The human body is fragmented either with strange angles or unusual close-ups, as well as with empty shots taking precedence over the image. And the sound and music are never secondary to the visual in Denis' cinema; rather, these are all constituent elements that make up the sequences with the same importance. Moreover, sound functions as a connection between inside and outside of the frame with the editing to make a kind of rhythm. The film keeps Denis' own affection for the medium itself. She used celluloid film to give a sense of tactility. Film images are so transient and ephemeral, like dancing, that before we can grasp them, we are left only with the feeling. That's why her film can be considered intermedial, as it bases itself on the movement of bodies, images, and emotions in-betweenness.

The voice-over of a woman reads sentences from a book, while the image shows Jeff Wall's *Dans la forêt - Deux ébauches d'étude sur l'oeuvre de Rodney Graham* [In the Forest - Two Draft Studies on the Work of Rodney Graham]. This reference is important for our analysis of affective intermediality because Wall is a documentary photographer known for his rich and complex interrogation of pictorial traditions and visual regimes of painting and film. The audience realizes that Monnier and the dancers has been discussing the book. Monnier says that the story is an ellipsis and that the choreography should be in a similar form. While the collective rehearsals of the dancers continue, Monnier discusses the jingles and tracks to be used for the choreography. There are scenes where Monnier dances alone, doing arm and leg exercises with PJ Harvey's "A Place Called Home," "A Dog Called Money," and other songs suggested by Denis in the rehearsal process. Denis's cultural move puts dance as a high art on the same plane as rock music, which is considered a lower art from the beginning. This move also makes room for thinking about the affective interplay between dance, music, and film. During the choreographic process, the dancers move through latex stretched over wooden frames, huge rubber and inflatable tubes, and each other's bodies. They walk, make ambiguous sounds, and wear wires that trigger electronic beeps. In the next scene, Monnier talks with the stage designer about the materials to be used, accompanied by a maquette of the project. Monnier then goes over the plan with the dancers and sound engineers, and we see someone following the process with them. This is French

philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy. Not only does Nancy infiltrate Denis' camera with his immanent philosophical thinking, but he is also present in the film and participates in the process in a way that corresponds to his philosophy. Monnier expresses the encounter with these words: "We are unsettled to see a philosopher there."

Nancy uses *télos* to distinguish between dancing and walking. While dancing has its measure within itself, walking is a specific stretch of movement with its measure outside of itself, in a destination. Nancy believes that dancing is not a sign of worldly sensitivity, but rather a logical intensification. It heightens the body's awareness of its own presence in the world. A body constantly senses itself and knows how it differs from other bodies. Dancing is a way to "articulate" how the world is multiple and "pluriversal," with each other serving as a reference to an incomplete texture. Dance can be seen as a place for self-consciousness and self-sensing, unburdening it from its pure interiority and spirituality, where the body senses itself as a world that experiences itself as a mutual referral of all things. The body serves as the milieu between place and passage, separating oneself from the world and the self. It is not a pure being-in-itself but rather a mediation with oneself, retreating to a spirit and identity. This mediation opens the outside, itself infinitely separate. The dancing body reveals diverse, heterogeneous tangencies to the world and oneself, revealing the possibilities of this tangency up to the impossibility upon which it inevitably verges, becoming concretion or absorption. Dance involves transforming a body and intensifying a relation-to-onself through rhythm. It involves returning the same but not a "subject" or "to-itself." The soul, or form of a body, takes place in the syncope, the simultaneity of cut and junction. The syncopated return of the same function adds and combines, creating form and figure. The return not only turns into contour but also engenders an image (Nancy, 2017, pp. 44-45). As it can be seen, Nancy not only reveals the relationship between dance and image but also allows us to reflect on an affective intermediality through the film medium. Nancy gets involved in the rehearsal process with the following quotations he reads in the film:

Another . . . if it's another, it's another body. I don't join it, it keeps its distance. I don't observe it, it's not an object. I don't imitate it, it's not an image. The other body replays itself in mine. It passes through it, it mobilises it or shakes it. It gives it its pace. The observation of a male dancer or a female one has more than once illustrated what was once known as empathy or 'intropathy': the reproduction of the other within oneself, the sensation, the echo of the other person (Denis, 2005).

Monnier appears again in another scene while making arm exercises in grainy images that overlapped her own words, and she explains that each gesture contained resistance and abandonment. Denis' camera gives us these movements in fragments of her body with these two principles. The dance uses the rib cage, the seat of emotion, as Monnier said. Nancy's quotations and Monnier's comments on dance are crystallized through practice in another scene. Monnier instructs a male dancer on how to feel and move. She suggests the moves of release, fall, and spread. It is important to focus on two ideas in a single movement for Monnier. There is an exchange of emotions between Monnier and the dancer that we can never perceive. Because she comments on the moves of the dancer when he is out of the frame. All we can see is the cinematic body of Monnier, showing the movements even while he is talking in the scene. Besides that, Monnier often uses elliptical sentences that she is sure the dancers will understand her, even if she does not complete them. Similarly, Denis adopted an elliptical filmmaking style. And then she whispers that she would need a film crew for this production on the scene where the camera

focuses on the body parts of dancers. She continues to say that she would have to use Denis in the show. There are always transgressions between reality and its filming. These sequences seem to inspire a haptic experience with the ways that image and sound's capacity to evoke the other senses.



Figure 3. A still image from the *Towards Mathilde*. https://www.mathildemonnier.com/fr/creations//vers_mathilde

Sounds are crucial elements of artistic and cinematic performance. In the following scene, Monnier and the other dancers practice their voices. We see Monnier in the frame, not the dancers producing different sounds. The camera records them elliptically before returning to Monnier. She asks them to keep the idea of progress through space and the word. Because the word, in its evolution, takes on other senses. She wants them to try to work it out vocally. But the result did not satisfy Monnier. She thinks that they are just imitating her system. She expects them to feel their body and to embody it with movements, as we will see her reaction to the performance of a Korean female dancer afterwards. Perhaps the most interesting part of the film is the involvement of the filmmaker herself, first vocally and then bodily. Monnier and Denis discuss the process, and the camera tracks them from their back. If there are no cracks, she can't invent things within them. Like Monnier herself, Denis searches for "cracks" within which to "invent things" in her performance. After this exchange of ideas between choreographer and filmmaker, the camera cuts to the scene where Monnier is lying on the sand of the beach. And we move back to the studio, and Monnier dances to a song titled "The Whore Hustle and the Hustlers Whore" by PJ Harvey.

In the other scene, Monnier and the male dancer practice, together but the sequence is blurry, vibrant, and dark from afar, almost invisible to the eye. For a moment, the image transcends the boundaries of documentary and evolves into an experimental performance of incomprehensible sounds and images. Denis constructs any logical or causal connection in the editing, as well as in the irreconcilable unity of these sounds and images. *Towards Mathilde* is not just a conventional documentary in which the camera records objectively a famous choreographer. There is not only the affective intermediality between dance and film but also the reflexivity of the two artists about each other's work in the movie. Monnier takes notes about the soldiers and the military march and seems to refer to Denis' previous fictional film, *Beau Travail*, with these notes. Denis' camera follows Monnier while dancing again and adopts her movements and herself. And she explains that these movements are a combination of Tai Chi movements and one she learned from Hans Züllig for the hands. In this scene, Monnier compares the preparation process in the dance with the arts like writing and acting. Warming up does not happen before anything and is already ground of work unlike other arts.



Figure 4. A still image from the *Towards Mathilde*. https://www.mathildemonnier.com/fr/creations//vers_mathilde

The film culminates in a sequence of Monnier's solo dance performance as it happens in different parts of the film, which is a very intense sequence in terms of affective intermediality at the same time. In this sequence, film and dance performance intertwine in a liminal space where the cinematic body is manifested through thoughts, feelings, and movements. Denis does not hesitate to play with documentary conventions. Before the ending sequence, she shows Monnier as a talking head, introducing the show to the audience both in front of and behind the

screen. And then, with a kind of plot twist that we might associate with affective intermediality, Monnier's expanded solo performance appears on the stage/screen. In this expanded solo performance, Denis cuts the frame into two pieces and shows the two Monniers. On the left of the frame, the image of the live performance is projected onto the floor and simultaneously the dancer performs on this projected image, while in the right of the frame, the same dance performance continues in a different temporality. And then these two images merge into a single frame, but the intermediality continues between the stage and the screen. It is impossible to decide whether it is a movie or an intermedial performance at this point. She gives the audience no choice but to experience this scene for its affectivity.

Conclusion: Scratch and Mark of the Film

Denis's filmmaking style and elliptical storytelling deny conventional approaches to narrative structure for the encounter of sensations. Denis' cinema of the senses is not only present in her fictional films but also in her documentaries. *Towards Mathilde* bears almost no relevance to conventional examples of the documentary. One reason for this is that the affective and intermedial forces and qualities of this documentary are more intense and crucial than in her other films. A close analysis of the film shows how its relationship to other art forms and media transforms the nature of the film image and affective experience. This analysis highlights that Denis' cinema has been a material, sensuous, and self-reflexive manifestation of affective intermediality. The film is an incursion into the space of the filmmaker and alters the space. She leaves a scratch like a memory leaves a mark. *Towards Mathilde* illustrates at best that dancing is a decisive element both in Denis' cinema and specifically for her affective intermediality.*

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