

## The haptic moment: sparring with Paolo Conte in Ozon's 5x2

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The screaming point is where speech is suddenly extinct, a black hole, the exit of being.<sup>1</sup>

Render Duration sonorous.<sup>2</sup>

Paolo Conte's 'Sparring Partner' is one of several Italian popular songs used as part of the soundtrack for Ozon's 5x2. Unlike the others, it is given particular prominence by being used as the end-credits accompaniment, as well as at a crucial point of the narrative. And unlike the other songs, Conte's enigmatic and highly poetic lyrics -- at least for those who know his work, and/or might understand Italian -- create ambiguities which seem to undermine the film's highly structured narrative. This paper will explore the use of the song, with particular reference to what Barthes called the 'grain' of the voice: Conte's gravelly voice has often been compared to Leonard Cohen's or Tom Waits's. I shall show how the song, unlike the other Italian pop songs used in the film, does not work anempathetically, cutting across characters and narrative and undermining them; but neither does it work empathetically to support the characters or reflect their emotions in a straightforward way. Rather, the song creates a complex haptic moment, where affect and gender fluidity combine to form what I shall call a haptic metaspace, which acts as a frame for productively unstable embodiments, marked by nomadic transitions and volatilities. Those unstable embodiments are focused on the male of the couple.

First, a brief synopsis. As the film's title indicates, it is structured around five moments in the life of a couple, told in reverse. We begin with their divorce and final painful lovemaking in a hotel room, where Gilles anally rapes Marion. This is followed by an earlier dinner at their place with Gilles's gay brother and his partner, where the conversation revolves around infidelity, and we learn that Gilles was involved in a hetero- and homosexual orgy while Marion, apparently approvingly, looked on. The third section deals with the birth of their child, which Gilles does not attend out of cowardice. Working backwards still further, the fourth section recounts their wedding, where Gilles falls asleep before they make love, and she makes love with a stranger in the hotel grounds. The final section tells of their first meeting when Gilles and his then girlfriend, as well as Marion, are on holiday in Italy.

There are several diegetic musical numbers, the most prominent of which is The Platters' 1959 rendering of the Jerome Kern and Otto Harbach song from 1933, 'Smoke Gets in Your Eyes', as Marion watches her parents as they dance on an almost empty wedding dance-floor, just before she makes love with the stranger. There is also music composed specifically for the film by Philippe Rombi, who had already been the composer for three previous Ozon films.<sup>3</sup> Rombi's backscore occurs three times: once during the bedroom scene of the wedding section, and twice in the final section, the final time being the last few minutes of the film as Gilles and Marion swim away from the beach at sunset. But the key

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<sup>1</sup> Michel Chion, The Voice in Cinema, edited and translated by Claudia Gorbman (New York, Columbia University Press, 1999), 79.

<sup>2</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, translated by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1987), 343; their emphasis.

<sup>3</sup> Les Amants criminels (Criminal Lovers, 1999), Sous le sable (Under the Sand, 2000) and Swimming Pool (2003).

numbers are all non-diegetic Italian pop-songs, mostly from the 1960s, which act as transitions from one section to another (see the filmography for details). Their simple tunes and rhythms are intentionally sentimental, as Ozon commented in the press-pack:

At first the film was going to be called ‘the two of us’, an ironic title which is also the name of a magazine in France. I was going to use the covers of the magazine as an opening credit sequence. I didn’t in the end, but I needed something to offset the darkness of some scenes and I thought of Italian songs, which are almost a cliché of sentimentalism.

The songs therefore work anempathetically with the narrative. For example, in the opening section, there is no music at all as we follow the harrowing bedroom scene. Marion walks out of the bedroom without responding to Gilles’s plea that they might try one last time. Bobby Solo’s ‘Una lacrima sul viso’ -- which was fifth in the Italian hit-parade of 1964 -- bursts in raucously and incongruously, reflecting what we have seen, tears on her face, as she walks down the corridor to the lift, but commenting ironically and dispassionately on those tears by its very excess.

Paolo Conte’s song, ‘Sparring Partner’, to which the characters dance in the second section, the dinner scene, is different. It is different for three reasons. First, it is written in the 1980s rather than the 1960s. Second, it is intensely poetic and melancholic. Conte is a well-known as one of Italy’s *cantautori*, or singer-songwriters, with a large following in Germany and France as well as Italy.<sup>4</sup> His songs, and his musical arrangements, are whimsical and nostalgic, his lyrics often intensely poetic, largely precluding pop-song sentimentality. Third, it occurs within the confines of a scene, not as a transition. It is this third reason which will lead us to consider what I have called haptic metaspace. It is the nature of that space that I shall go on to investigate, suggesting how dancing bodies and gender instabilities intertwine with the soundtrack to create a metadiegetic and haptic moment, which takes us out of space and time into embodied feeling.

### **Timeless and feminine metaspace**

The scene we are considering functions as a pause, a musical interlude rather than as a musical punctuation or transition from one sequence to the next. Even if it marks a clear temporal ellipsis -- the convivial dance followed by the later clearing up of dinner by the couple -- that ellipsis, which we construe as an hour or two’s gap in the same evening, is as nothing compared to the gaps of years between each of the main sequences in the film. Moreover, more of Conte’s song is heard proportionately (about two thirds) than is the case for the snatches of transition songs. The transition songs are like semi-colons or oblique strokes, separating narrative sequences, confining each sequence within clear temporal boundaries. Conte’s song, on the other hand, is more like a statement. It draws attention to itself more than the other songs; and it functions to split apart one of the five sequences into two segments, rather than establishing boundaries between separate time-sequences.

The term interlude is most appropriate, because the film is structured so rigorously, like a machine, on the premise of reversible time, which accentuates inevitability as it dissects this couple’s relationship. Marion’s dance is a moment of ludic release from that methodical and meticulously cold anatomization, a moment of sensuous feeling anchored in bodily release, that counters the brutal count backwards towards a beginning whose luminosity, rather like Noé’s *Irréversible* (Irreversible, 2002) is ironized because always

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<sup>4</sup> For an introduction to the *cantautori*, see *Poesia cantata: Die Textmusik der italienischen Cantautori*, edited by Frank Baasner (Tübingen, Niemeyer, 1997). They include Franco Battiato, Edoardo Bennato, Lucio Dalla, Ivano Fossati, Giorgio Gaber, Fabrizio De Andre, and Francesco De Gregori.

already predicated on failure.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, Ozon commented in the press-pack on how this particular scene was fundamentally different from the rest of the film: ‘The moment of perfect happiness (occurs) before the wedding. It is in the dance scene. And the truth is that happiness as a couple is not really something I find inspiring.’

The song seems to exist in an in-between space, neither diegetic nor non-diegetic, given that we hear no other sound on the soundtrack while it is playing. In that sense, it conforms to the musical number in a musical where one only hears the song at the expense of ambient sound.<sup>6</sup> That in-between space could therefore be described as metadiegetic

The song is more than just an interlude in purely structural terms. Normally, the integrated number’s function is that it allows the characters to celebrate an excess of emotion:

The integrated number comes at a point in the musical narrative when the need for emotional expression has reached a particularly high point. Often this is an expression of feeling which can no longer be contained by the character(s), or an emotion which must be acknowledged and shared in order to progress the narrative.<sup>7</sup>

Although the characters in this film do not burst into song, they express themselves through dance; and the song, particularly when contrasted with the other songs in the film, manifests an emotion which in some sense transcends narrative structures, as ‘the otherwise rational narrative is (...) taken over by (...) the logic of the emotional’ (‘Emotion’, 8). It is not just a moment of non-differentiation; it is a moment of excess, which exceeds narrative logic in the construction of embodied affect. It is both in history and yet outside it; as Wendy Everett remarks of song in European film, song emphasizes ‘the lack of distinct boundaries between past and present’,<sup>8</sup> and as a result ‘is able to capture the sense of disparity between self as historical phenomenon and self as outside and perhaps at odds with history’ (‘Songlines’, 113). As a corollary, the musical number is in narrative and yet outside it, because it is anchored in the diegesis -- the characters get up and dance, what could be more natural?-- and yet it is outside of narrative, because diegetic logic is transformed into the logic of the emotional.

It is true that this functions more clearly when the characters might themselves be singing and dancing a musical number; in such a case, the presence of a non-diegetic orchestra playing the music as the diegetic character sings will distort the diegesis much more fundamentally. Nevertheless, Conte’s song in this film still suggests a metadiegetic imperative, as the song apparently articulates emotion to the exclusion of some diegetic realities. In the process, space is fissured, consonant with the more general point made by Michel Chion, that ‘music is the cross-roads for space and time, the space of spaces which transcends all material boundaries’.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ozon commented on the film’s structure in the press pack: ‘When a love affair comes to an end and you try to remember the salient moments, the bits that come to mind are the most recent, those that culminate in the break-up. So starting at the end and working one way’s backwards to the first encounter seemed a good way of attaining a more judicious and lucid account of how a couple came to be in the first place.’

<sup>6</sup> See Rick Altman, The American Film Musical (Bloomington and Indianapolis/London, Indiana University Press/British Film Institute, 1987), 64.

<sup>7</sup> Heather Laing, ‘Emotion by Numbers: Music, Song and the Musical’, in Musicals: Hollywood and Beyond, edited by Bill Marshall and Robynn Stilwell (Exeter: Intellect, 2000), 7.

<sup>8</sup> Wendy Everett, ‘Songlines: Alternative Journeys in Contemporary European Cinema’, in Music and Cinema, edited by James Buhler, Caryl Flinn and David Neumeier (New England: Wesleyan University Press, 2000), 112.

<sup>9</sup> Michel Chion, Le Son au cinéma (Paris, Editions de l’Etoile, 1994), 151; his emphasis.

The logic of the emotional, combined with the sensuousness of dance and song, creates not just a metaspace, but a haptic moment. The song sequence, by virtue of its intensity of feeling, is what Deleuze terms an ‘affection-image’,<sup>10</sup> an image that arouses emotional responses. As Laura Marks observes of such images, ‘the emotion or feeling opens us to the experience of time’.<sup>11</sup> That experience is one that involves ‘sublimation (...) contemplation, rather than the reaction of movement’ (*Skin*, 73); in other words, the sequence with Conte’s song establishes a moment out of narrative time, a metaspace. Rather like a musical number in a musical film, the dance sequence set to Conte’s music functions as embodied display, which, as Marks comments in relation to the affection-image, ‘can bring us to the direct experience of time through the body’ (*Skin*, 163; her emphasis). In the dance sequence, we do not necessarily identify ourselves with the characters, partly because they are, at least momentarily, ciphers subordinated to the overwhelming acoustic presence of the music, which drowns ambient sound. Our relationship to the image is that described by Marks as haptic cinema: ‘a bodily relationship’, where ‘it is not proper to speak of the object of a haptic look as to speak of a dynamic subjectivity between looker and image’ (*Skin*, 164). Nonetheless, that space, because of its focus on Marion, is coded as feminine, and as a kind of release from the difficulty of the preceding conversation on the orgy, which has made her cry.

However, Marks’s concept of haptic cinema, so useful in conceptualizing how the senses might function in cinema, is nevertheless closely tied to the visual. She indicates parallels between aural signs and visual signs in haptic cinema, suggesting, for example, that haptic hearing is undifferentiated hearing before listening choices are made. In haptic hearing, ‘the aural boundaries between body and world may feel indistinct: the rustle of trees may mingle with the sound of my breathing, or conversely the booming music may inhabit my chest cavity and move my body from the inside’ (*Skin*, 183). This is a far cry from the wide-ranging tactility of haptic cinema she describes elsewhere; to describe haptic sound as the almost amniotic non-differentiation of the soundscape seems restrictive. I shall turn to Barthes’s discussion of the grain of the voice, which seems to me to provide an excellent framework for discussing the particular emotional intensities of Conte’s song and the way they could be identified as markers of the haptic.

It is difficult not to see the parallel between Conte and the quality of the Russian cantor’s voice which is ‘beyond (or before) the meaning of the words’,<sup>12</sup> in other words ‘something which is directly the cantor’s body’ (*Image*, 181). Difficult not to see Conte in Barthes’s subsequent discussion of Fischer-Dieskau’s far-too-perfect diction, which he contrasts with Panzera’s ‘patinated’ consonants, betraying the materiality of the body; Fischer-Dieskau’s lungs contrasted with Panzera’s throat. Conte’s gravely voice, layered with the passing of time, redolent of elegiac world-weariness and chain-smoked cigarettes that suggest the nostalgia for moments lost, gives us the grain before the meaning. As Barthes points out -- and it is all the more the case if we do not understand Italian -- ‘the “grain” is the body in the voice as it sings’ (*Image*, 188). It is more particularly, I would suggest, the inscription of temporality in the body, insofar as embodiment immediately calls up materiality, and, no sooner called up, materiality signals its own destruction.

Two years before he wrote ‘The Grain of the Voice’ (1970), Barthes tried to pin down what exceeds signification in the filmic image, calling this ‘The Third Meaning’ (the title of

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<sup>10</sup> Even if they are not close-ups: ‘The affection-image is the close-up, and the close-up is the face’, remarks Gilles Deleuze in *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* (London, Athlone, 1986), 123.

<sup>11</sup> Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 2000), 28.

<sup>12</sup> Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, essays selected and translated by Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977), 181.

the article in Image, 52-68). He suggests that the third meaning is connected with emotion (Image, 59), and is ‘outside (articulated) language while nevertheless within interlocution’ (Image, 61); it is ‘a sort of anaphoric gesture without significant content’ (Image, 62), and ‘can only come and go, appearing-disappearing’ (Image, 63), ‘a structuration which slips away from the inside’ (Image, 64; his emphasis). He was later to redefine this concept in his meditations on photography (1980) as the punctum, whose determining characteristic was its relationship to death: a photograph signals the future anterior -- the ‘what will have happened’ -- indicating that the photographed subject will have died. He comments thus on an 1865 photograph of Lewis Payne, the would-be assassin of the then American Secretary of State:

The photograph is handsome, as is the boy: that is the studium. But the punctum is: he is going to die. I read at the same time: This will be and this has been; I observe with horror an anterior future of which death is the stake. By giving me the absolute past of the pose (aorist), the photograph tells me death in the future. What pricks me is the discovery of this equivalence. In front of the photograph of my mother as a child, I tell myself: she is going to die: I shudder, like Winnicott’s psychotic patient, over a catastrophe which has already occurred. Whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe.<sup>13</sup>

The grain of the voice, which I am here eliding with the third meaning and the punctum as the beyond-meaning of any image (a sleight of hand, one could argue, given that the film image is clearly not the same thing as the photographic image), is therefore folded into the materiality of the body and its dissolution. It slips away, displaying the passing of time located in the body as matter which ‘will have died’. We shall see later how this apparently dystopian view of the haptic moment is different from the jouissance implied by Marks’s view of the haptic, with its immersive lability and unmediated presence (see Skin, 188).

So far, however, we have seen how the song creates a metadiegetic and metaspatial moment, which functions like a hiatus in the narrative, a gap which slips away, and yet which is attached to the narrative by virtue of the emotion it seems to carry. The fact that this moment is predicated on a woman’s body as she dances will come as no surprise, since it seems to confirm all the traditional binaries. The patriarchal law of narrative, even if it has been reversed so that it is irreversible, is contrasted with a punctuating irrational and emotional moment -- mind versus body -- just as the masculine-coded visual is contrasted, however briefly, with the feminine-coded aural. Music, which in this sequence is foregrounded at the expense of diegetic reality to create a haptic metaspace, has more often than not been coded as feminine, creating a womb-like environment. As Robynn Stilwell points out in the course of her brief review of this position in film music literature, Julia Kristeva’s use of the chora to articulate aspects of this space suggests just how intimately music is bound up with womb-like spaces, given that the term in Plato originally signified ‘a space, but more specifically one where a chorus was trained or where a choral dance was performed’.<sup>14</sup>

This is, moreover, consonant with much of Ozon’s previous work. Films such as Sous le sable, 8 femmes (8 Women, 2002) and Swimming Pool are predicated on the expulsion of the male from the narrative so that female bodies and feelings can be articulated, this

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<sup>13</sup> Roland Barthes, Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography (London, Jonathan Cape, 1982), 96; his emphases.

<sup>14</sup> Robynn J. Stilwell, ‘Sound and Empathy: Subjectivity, Gender and the Cinematic Soundscape’, in Film Music: Critical Approaches, edited by Kevin J. Donnelly (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press), 172.

happening through song in 8 femmes. Even Marks has to work very hard to avoid her conceptualization of the haptic being coded as feminine when she admits that ‘in a sexual positioning that oscillates between mother- and father-identification, it seems that haptic visuality is on the side of the mother’ (Skin, 188). She goes on to point out, however, that her phenomenology of embodiment is not coterminous with the psychoanalytic model, and that there is ‘nothing essentially feminine’ about the use of haptic images in films (Skin, 188).

We would undoubtedly want to agree in the case of Conte’s ‘Sparring Partner’, because this discussion of feminine-coded haptic sound and its undermining of narrative has diverted us from an obvious problem. It is true that the song may in some senses express the emotion of the female character through her languorous dance, and be coded as a special moment within and beyond the narrative in what I have called haptic metaspace. However, its power comes at least as much from the music itself, and the grain of a male singer’s voice. And, of course, the words are not Kristevan choric babble; they mean something to those members of the audience who understand Italian, or who might have already been familiar with Conte’s work (remembering that he is a popular figure in France). In the next section, then, we need to return to the song and its verbal and gender specificities.

### **The cry of the macaque: masculine and repetitive time**

Conte’s lyrics are renowned for their poetic opacities. These are not standard popular songs with romantic clichés, as can be seen from ‘Sparring Partner’:

Un macaco senza storia,  
dice lei di lui,  
che gli manca la memoria  
infondo ai guanti bui  
ma il suo sguardo è una veranda,  
tempo al tempo e lo vedrai,  
che si addentra nella giungla,  
no, non incontrarlo mai

A macaque without history,  
She says about him,  
As he lacks memory  
At the bottom of his dark gloves  
But his gaze is a veranda  
Give it time and you will see him,  
Entering the jungle  
No, don’t ever meet him

Ho guardato in fondo al gioco  
tutto qui? ma – sai –  
sono un vecchio sparring partner  
e non ho visto mai  
una calma più tigrata,  
più segreta di così,  
prendi il primo pullmann, via  
tutto il resto è già poesia

Did you look inside the game  
Is this all? – well, you know  
I’m an old sparring partner  
And I never saw  
A calm more tiger-like  
More secret than this,  
Take the first bus, go  
Everything else is already poetry

Avrà più di quarant’anni  
e certi applausi ormai  
son dovuti per amore,  
non incontrarlo mai  
stava lì nel suo sorriso  
a guardar passare i tram,  
vecchia pista da elefanti  
stesa sopra al macadàm

He might be more than forty  
And that applause  
Is due to him for love,  
No, don’t ever meet him  
He was there in his smile  
Looking at the trams go by  
Old elephant track  
Spread over the tarmac<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> I am grateful to Laura Rascaroli for this translation.

The title of the song might (retrospectively, from the end-credits) make sense in the context of the analysis of a conflictual couple relationship. We might therefore wish at a surface level to read the song as a comment on Gilles and Marion's arguments; they are 'sparring partners' who wear 'dark gloves', fighting a melancholy contest. This is illustrated by the difficult discussion of infidelity that precedes the song, and which clearly upsets Marion; we learn later that it is because she too has been unfaithful, making love with a stranger on her wedding-night as her husband sleeps.<sup>16</sup>

The lyrics are not straightforward, however; the first two stanzas which we hear in the sequence suggest vague threats associated with the jungle and its animals -- the monkey and the tiger -- this being reinforced by the elephant of the final stanza heard over the credits at the end of the film. The metaphor of the jungle opposed to the sophistication of urban life (of which the elephant track spread over the tarmac at the end of 'Sparring Partner' is an eloquent reminder), or as an expression of raw desire, often associated with erotic jazz rhythms, is a familiar theme in Conte's work. In 'Azurro' (Azure), the character looks for Africa in a rose-filled suburban garden; in 'Boogie', a 'woman's body vibrated with African heat'. The first line of 'Sparring Partner' and its 'macaque monkey without history' is recalled in several songs, such as the clumsy orang-utan of 'Dancing', or the dancing monkey-man of 'Sotto le stelle del jazz' (Under the Stars of Jazz).<sup>17</sup> The jungle, with its connotations in Conte's work of dance as an expression of desire, corresponds well to Marion getting up to dance, we might argue.

But the monkey, both within the song itself, and within Conte's work more generally, refers to a man. The song therefore seems to refer more to Gilles than to Marion, paradoxically, given that the camera follows Marion and her sensuous abandonment to the pleasures of the dance rather more than it does Gilles. Ozon comments in the press-pack on how the songs might persuade us to focus on Gilles and his suffering: 'In the film, it is the man who suffers most, so I chose songs by men.' Indeed, Ozon appears initially at least to have wanted to present Gilles as a fundamentally weak character: 'In the dinner scene, for instance, originally, Gilles was seen to be unemployed while his wife was in work, so he stayed home to look after his child. But that was all a little too harsh on the character, it made him seem depressed compared to the energetic, feisty quality of his wife.' Although this aspect of the narrative was changed, we still have a character who is, as Ozon comments on his choice of Stéphane Freiss to play the part of Gilles, 'not quite there', both fragile and childlike. The film, which begins with an anal rape, suggesting an essentially violent man, works to make Gilles gradually more complex, revealing his fragility, such as his inexplicable desertion of his wife as she gives birth. We see him, eating in a café, pensively smoking a cigarette, sitting in car, but there is never any attempt to explain his abandonment of his wife in labour. Further back in time, we see him being ordered to pick up tennis balls his previous girlfriend has dropped, and meekly acquiescing. As the film progresses, therefore, it slowly reveals that the problem character is not so much Marion as Gilles.

Whereas the haptics of Conte's song seem to indicate a timelessness associated with the feminine, 'a moment of perfect happiness' as Ozon called it, bracketed out of the generally dystopian feel of the film, it also draws attention, paradoxically, to repeated patterns by its strophic nature. The repeated pattern is one of male abandonment of the female: Gilles abandons his first girl-friend for Marion, then abandons Marion on her wedding-night, and abandons her again when she gives birth. This is a man who has problems with commitment, with the opacity and thickness which the passing of time and the

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<sup>16</sup> We shall return to the issue of faithfulness. It is piquant that Ozon's production company, with whom he has worked for all of his films since 1994, is called 'fidelity'.

<sup>17</sup> See Monique Malfatto, *Paolo Conte* (Paris, Seghers, 1989), 123, 209, 215, 155; my translation from the French.

constitution of a couple's history brings; Gilles wants to be out of time, a 'monkey without history' as the first line of the song has it, lost in the haptic moment of the song. He cannot access the choric, however; all he and we are left with is the repeated chorus of the song, a wordless lament for what lies beyond words and beyond history, a lament scored by the passing of time in the form of Conte's gravelly, world-weary voice. As we shall now go on to see, costume, genre and sexual orientation all work to undermine the utopian drive to haptic embodiment, anchoring the male body in fragmentation and repetition.

Gilles is more obviously marked by time than Marion. Apart from minor variations in her hairstyle (and more obviously her pregnancy), she never changes. Gilles, on the other hand, goes from being clean-shaven, to stubble, to a full-blown beard, demonstrating the work of the body in time in a more sustained and graduated way. The song suggests that he might be without history, but the film is constructed in reverse time so as to give him a history from which he cannot escape. That enclosure within bounded time is itself made all the more obvious by the song; while Marion dances sensuously, moving her body across the set, all Gilles can do is stay seated and watch. The song contains him within a history which repeats itself: not only does he keep on abandoning women, but the song, with its persistent and returning trope of the jungle, and its repeated refrain, foregrounds the possibility of the utopian and desiring male body, while at the same time imprisoning it within structures from which it cannot escape.

Moreover, the film works at a formal level to ensure that the male body, in particular, is fragmented across time. This is because each section of the film is consciously composed within a specific and discrete genre, as Ozon explains in his press-pack:

I needed to try and make each episode of the film belong to a different genre of cinema. The first episode is a psychological drama, a 'chamber film'. The second part is more socially aware, a more classic French film. For the wedding section, I turned to certain American films and for the section in which they first meet, I looked to Rohmer's summer films. I wanted the movie to alter during its 90 minutes of screen-time so that the tone and issues would shift from chapter to chapter.

The shifting Ozon refers to is more obviously paralleled by the changing male body than by the unchanging female body.

The fragmentation of the male body across time and formal cinematographic structures is compounded by Gilles's bisexual leanings, as opposed to Marion's faithfulness, with the exception of her wedding night, to the idea of the couple. Gilles's brother, Christophe, is gay, and the dinner-party scene engages closely with sexual orientation and the nature of constancy, which one could suggest is commitment repeated over time. Christophe's partner, Mathieu, praises inconstancy and the pleasure of desire, while Marion praises constancy and resistance to passing temptation:

Mathieu: I don't really believe in faithfulness. It isn't possible, and is pretty pointless.  
Marion: Do you agree with him Christophe?  
Christophe: He's right. Why force yourself to be faithful? It isn't natural.  
Marion: Well, out of respect for your partner. Trust.  
Christophe: You know as well as I do that all couples lie to each other, hide things from each other. You can't share everything, and that's OK.

- Mathieu: And frankly, why resist passing temptation? What's the point? You just end up with regrets.
- Marion: No, to feel stronger, to be able precisely to say to yourself that you are resisting passing temptation.

When asked, Gilles claims at first not to have been unfaithful to Marion, but shortly afterwards, after asking Marion's permission, he explains that eighteen months before, he had engaged in an orgy with both men and women, at a friend's party that he and Marion had attended. Marion had chosen not to participate, and had just watched, just as he watches her dance a little later in the dinner-party sequence. Freiss explains in the press-pack how he had worked on his role by developing the homosexuality of the character: 'I imagined that Gilles was sexually unsure, that his failure with Marion, like his previous failures, showed that he was always trying to meet women, when in fact it was a man he should have been seeking to meet.'

So far then, we have seen how Conte's song articulates a utopian haptic embodiment, an abandon to pleasure out of time, associated with the woman and utopian repetition. However, the song, when probed more deeply, suggests that there is another facet to this embodiment, coded as masculine, and bogged down in dystopian repetition, imprisoned in history. To conclude, I would like to bring some of these ideas together in a reworking of Chion's point de cri (translated by Claudia Gorbman as the 'screaming point').

### **Conclusion: the point de cri and the refrain**

Chion speculates that films in which we see and/or hear, or merely assume a woman screaming, are constructed precisely to lead to that scream. He suggests that it is not the scream itself which is important, but its place in the narrative (hence the 'screaming point'). That point, he writes, 'is a point of the unthinkable inside the thought, of the indeterminate inside the spoken, of unrepresentability inside representation. It suspends the time of its possible duration; it's a rip in the fabric of time'.<sup>18</sup> He contrasts the scream of a woman and that of a man in film, suggesting that the scream of a man is less a scream than a shout, and that it tends to indicate mastery and territorialization, which he contrasts with being confronted by death as represented by the woman's scream:

The man's shout delimits a territory, the woman's scream has to do with limitlessness. The scream gobbles up everything into itself – it is centripetal and fascinating – while the man's cry is centrifugal and structuring. The screaming point is where speech is suddenly extinct, a black hole, the exit of being (Voice, 79).

The woman's scream occurs at the end of the first scene when Gilles anally rapes Marion. The man's scream is, arguably, the one we can only surmise from Conte's song, the silent scream of the monkey-man, sublimated in the wordless chorus of the song. However, Chion's view of the voice is not much different from Barthes's view of the grain of the voice, which in turn is not much different from Marks's haptic visuality. All suggest the arguably feminine, and all are apparently structured as binaries: emotion/logic, loose structure/tight structure, form/formlessness, utopia/dystopia.

The haptic, I am arguing, does not have to be caught within binary structures. The example I have used here suggests that haptic aurality can take us beyond binary structures. It

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<sup>18</sup> Michel Chion, The Voice in Cinema, edited and translated by Claudia Gorbman (New York, Columbia University Press, 1999), 77.

does so first because it is sound rather than image, and sound affects us in a more immediate way than does the visual track. Moreover, Conte's song tells us that what Barthes called the grain of the singer's voice can affect us more immediately because it is prior to the meaning of the words. More specifically still, the particular combination of lyrics and visual images in this example deconstructs gender identities. Conte's song creates an interlude, a bisexual and haptic metaspace, where the listener is unable to identify only with the male or the female on screen, but shuttles between both ludically.

Moreover, the song functions both centripetally and centrifugally, to recall Chion's terms. Centripetally, it marks an attempted escape from form through haptic granularity, as is conveyed by the jungle metaphor which postulates what Deleuze and Guattari would call the 'becoming-animal', a move to a more primitive state of elemental desire.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, the song, by its very structures of strophes and refrains, and recurring metaphoric patterns, marks the inevitable centrifugal collapse back into formal rhythmical structures which demarcate territory. This is nowhere clearer than in the epiphanic chorus, which, crucially, does not have lyrics, half-escaping the tyranny of meaning. The moment of the chorus is the haptic metaspace par excellence, and a good example of Deleuze and Guattari's definition of the refrain as 'a crystal of space-time' (Thousand, 348).

The haptic moment I have tried to identify does not rely just on the granularity of voice suggesting the oceanic or choric body, but a constant oscillation between the possibility of the haptic and the inevitability of its opposite. That opposite is not the visual, given that we are dealing with the aural, but directive vocality versus directionless vocality, the way in which song breaks out of its formal structures, in Conte's case by the tension between poetic lyrics and voiceless refrain. That tension is, I would argue, the 'screaming point', which here is neither male nor female, but unstably and chaotically both. The 'screaming point' is not an accurate rendition of 'point de cri', but then neither would 'shouting point' be. 'Screaming' might be more female, suggesting centrifugal flight; 'shouting' might suggest something more male, a centripetal attack for possession and mastery. But the French word 'cri', while it can mean both scream and shout, can be resolved in a more general term, the 'cry', which has the advantage of ambiguity, in English at least, where it might also hint at crying.

Both men and women cry to mark their tussles with time, the moments where speech fails. Conte's song, and more particularly its wordless chorus, helps to create a haptic metaspace. In that space, we feel the anguish of time inscribed in the bodies of the actors, but also, by virtue of the refrain, the possibility of transcending time. In that space, we feel the anguish of the arbitrariness of identity, but also, by virtue of the refrain and its anchoring territorialities, the possibility of transcending -- or at least ignoring -- the chaotic shapelessnesses of ontological contingency.

As Deleuze and Guattari put it: 'The starting point is a childlike refrain, but the child has wings already, he becomes celestial' (Thousand, 350).

## **Filmography for 5x2**

release: 1 September 2004  
awards: Venice Film Festival 2004, Pasinetti Award for Best Actress (Valeria Bruni Tedeschi)  
duration: 90 mins  
dir: François Ozon

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<sup>19</sup> Remembering that 'the becoming-animal of the human being is real, even if the animal the human being becomes is not' (Thousand, 238).

prod: Olivier Delbosc, Marc Missonnier

prod co: Fidélité Productions, Canal+, FOZ, France 2 Cinéma

actors: Marion (Valeria Bruni Tedeschi), Gilles (Stéphane Freiss), Valérie (Géraldine Pailhas), Monique (Françoise Fabian), Bernard (Michael Lonsdale), Christophe (Antoine Chappey), Mathieu (Marc Ruchmann).

camera: Yorick Le Saux

music: Philippe Rombi ('La danse des mariés', 'Valérie', 'Cinq fois deux')  
Bobby Solo, 'Una lacrima sul viso' (Mogol and Roberto Satti, 1964; 5<sup>th</sup> in Italian hit parade); transition from section 1 (divorce) to section 2 (dinner)  
Paolo Conte, 'Sparring Partner' (Paolo Conte, 1986); during the dinner sequence  
Wilma Goich, 'Ho capito che ti amo' (Luigi Tenco, 1964); transition from section 2 (dinner) to section 3 (hospital)  
Luigi Tenco, 'Mi sono innamorato di te' (Luigi Tenco, 1962); transition from section 3 (hospital) to section 4 (wedding)  
The Platters, 'Smoke in Their Eyes' (Jerome Kern and Otto Harbach, 1959); during the wedding sequence  
Nico Fidenco, 'Se mi perderai' (Nico Fidenco and Pasquale Tassone, 1963; 11<sup>th</sup> in Italian hit parade); transition from section 4 (wedding) to section 5 (holiday)

DVD: Fox Pathé Europa, 16 March 2005, ASIN: B0007988S0  
UGC Film, 12 September 2005, ASIN: B0009YVCYK  
Velocity/Thinkfilm, 25 October 2005, ASIN: B000ARXG0E  
Fox Pathé Europa, 4 January 2006, ASIN: B000BR101K

CD: 24 August 2004, ASIN: B0002IRXWS