

# ACOUSTICAL PROPERTIES

## *Practicing Contested Spaces in the Films of Philippe Grandrieux*

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*"I want to buy the girl."*

*"Not possible."*

(Seymour to pimp in *La Vie Nouvelle*)

### I. INTRODUCTION

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THE fiction films of Philippe Grandrieux could well be described as unsettling. The sexual violence inherent to *Sombre* (1998) and *La Vie Nouvelle* (2002) disturbs; the unorthodox handling of the mobile camera—carried through to *Un Lac* (2008)—rises in all three films to levels of visceral transcendence, more often associated with hardcore avant-garde experimentation than narrative fiction. The soundscapes move from explorations of minutia that play with thresholds of audibility to magnificent tests of the limits of auditory endurance. These films are challenging. Yet I argue that their greatest challenge to the audience is not specific to their narrative or aesthetic violence, but lies rather in the way that Grandrieux practices space through the relationships he sets up: between characters within the diegesis; between filmmaker and subjects; between the production contexts of sound and image; and between screen and audience. These relationships are defined by the ways in which bounded territories overlap, treating settled positions as unsettled by constructing and inviting these positions to shift and interact with each other. Grandrieux enacts these unsettling relationships in a variety of ways on and off screen in the hopes of implicating the audience within the complexity of his approach to the delineation of contested space.

In these films, characters vie for the same territories, as they continually engage in destabilizing relationships with one another. Grandrieux, as camera operator, shoots



in such a way that his corporeality transfers to the bodies of his actors. The director's differing approaches to the construction of image and sound keep these areas separate in production, only to force intriguing overlap in the finished product. And all of these factors are put in service of inviting us to engage with the spaces opened up by the films in ways that break down conventional understanding of the distance between screen and audience. I argue that these unsettling overlaps cannot be tracked without accounting for Grandrieux's approach to the representation of acoustic space. My purpose in this chapter is to demonstrate how this sonic representation works as an aesthetic strategy and marker of the ideological underpinnings of these unsettling films.

One of the defining thematic preoccupations in Grandrieux's fiction filmmaking is that of the politics of property. This theme is interwoven with the spatial practices enacted by Grandrieux's characters, which are traceable through the way that his use of sound engages with spatial representation. *Sombre*, *La Vie Nouvelle*, and *Un Lac* each explore relationship dynamics between a woman and a variety of agents competing to claim her as their own. *Sombre* follows Jean (Marc Barbé)—a puppeteer giving performances for children along the route of the Tour de France, while hiring and murdering a series of prostitutes along the way—until he meets the virgin Claire (Elina Löwensohn), who challenges his *modus operandi*. In *La Vie Nouvelle*, Seymour (Zachary Knighton), a young American soldier stationed in an unnamed area of Eastern Europe, is smitten with prostitute Mélanie (Anna Mouglalis) and becomes obsessed with buying her freedom from pimp Boyan (Zsolt Nagy), thus challenging the system of sex trafficking in which she is implicated. And in *Un Lac*, a small family living in a remote northern forest is disrupted by Jurgen (Alexei Solonchev), a stranger who comes for wood but leaves with the oldest daughter Hege (Natalie Rehorova), challenging her brother Alexi's (Dmitry Kubasov) deep love for his sibling.

The competitions in all three films are mapped out in geographical terms, where different registers of space overlap. This overlapping creates complex dynamics between the psychological and emotional interiority of individuals, the architectural interiority of the spaces these individuals inhabit, and the ways in which these interior spaces open up to the worlds outside. In Grandrieux's work the interaction between these spaces is tied to his very particular approaches to sound design—different in all three films and yet always put in service of articulating the dynamics of spatial practice.

The spatial practices that interest me the most in these films are those tied to questions of property, in which geographical territories become unbounded through contestations of use. This is a characteristic evident in Grandrieux's narratives, the source of the stylistics with which he shapes them, and the ideologies that inform these choices during production. It is in these respects that I understand the films to be most unsettling. In my exploration of the unsettling qualities of Grandrieux's work, I follow critical geographer Nicholas Blomley, who uses the term "unsettling" to refer to the processes by which we can come to question settled notions of property, which are defined by the ownership model predominant in capitalist society.

As Blomley argues, "the ownership model relies upon spatial boundaries," such that a property owner controls a certain demarcated space and has no power to assert property



rights outside that space (2004, 5). But this is a geographical understanding, privileging notions of private property over more open forms of spatial practice. If we consider space to be socially produced, it becomes layered with many claims to usage rights not accounted for under the ownership model. So property can be thought of as “bundle of relations” (2004, 6). Blomley thus argues that “property is not a static, pregiven entity, but depends on a continual, active ‘doing.’ As *settle* is a verb, so property is an enactment” and must thus be “continually settled,” challenging various notions of property as “settlement,” which imply a fixed and unchanging spatial demarcation (2004, xvi). For Blomley, to “unsettle” our notion of property is to disrupt commonly held ideas about how property is thought to be a form of settlement, rather than something that is practiced.

In adapting the concept of “unsettling” for considerations in the cinema, I think about different levels of property relations that become unsettled through Grandrieux’s treatments. The way in which he explores characters that challenge each other’s concepts of property, the way his films challenge our sense of the territory of cinema as defined by the world outside the walls of the theatre, and the domains of sound and image production are all spaces of practice whose overlap is often a problem in traditional modes of production, which so often keep the domains of sound and image separate in the production chain. The concept of property becomes a tool for understanding how Grandrieux demarcates different spaces and for examining the tensions that arise when these spaces are superimposed upon one another.

In my analyses of these films I will demonstrate how the notion of “unsettled” property in Grandrieux’s films can be read through his strategies for auditory representation and the issues these strategies raise on the levels of narrative, aesthetics, and production. Drawing upon the literature on Grandrieux’s work and the extended discourses they engage, I will focus on instances of spatial delineation that define elements of owned property in each of the narratives in order to examine the ways in which Grandrieux explores the social dynamics of these properties through the use of sound. The key to my analyses will be the idea of mobility: Grandrieux sets up diegetic spaces that continually shift as characters move through them. Each of his characters brings his or her own private space, delineated by a specific soundscape that can either combine with, replace, or be replaced by the soundscape of another. This dynamic of spatial practice is informed by Grandrieux’s approaches to production cinematography and post-production sound, ultimately in the service of inviting the audience to move with and be moved by the enactments of mobility within his films. This invitation for the audience to share in the spatial mobility enacted by these films becomes a means of prompting reflection upon their challenges to settled notions of proprietary space.

## II. CRITICAL REFLECTIONS

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I begin by surveying the territory of criticism surrounding Grandrieux’s work to map out discursive preoccupations that are essential to understanding the characteristics of



Grandrieux's spatial practice. Most commentators address the challenging qualities of Grandrieux's cinema in terms of the filmmaker's clear affinity for audiovisual strategies often associated with avant-garde traditions past and present, the limits of narrative rubbing up against the filmmaker's interest in abstraction, textures, ambiguity, and the processes of perception. It is no surprise that noted Austrian avant-garde filmmaker Peter Tscherkassky praises Grandrieux as one of the only true cinematic innovators working today (Brenez 2005, 183). Yet we would have to regard Grandrieux's films as rather mediocre if assessed only by the standards of the avant-garde, much of which is committed to vastly more extreme refutations of narrative, plunges into abstraction, and an emphasis on medium-specific materiality (exemplified by Tscherkassky's own work). While the narrative lines in Grandrieux's film are spread thin, these films are in no way works of pure abstraction. Nor are they solely concerned with the medium through which they are produced. Rather, key to Grandrieux's style is the level to which he pushes the tension between differing modes of cinematic address, fluctuating between stark realism, conventional naturalism, and more avant-garde aesthetics. Central to these fluctuations between differing modes of address is the relationship between bodies and space, and the materiality versus transcendence of both.

Critics generally do not talk about the fiction films of Philippe Grandrieux without some mention of his interest in bodies in space and the materiality of the medium of film. In his book *Brutal Intimacy* (2011), Tim Palmer positions Grandrieux in a canon of French films dubbed *Le cinéma du corps*, joining Catherine Breillat, Claire Denis, Bruno Dumont, Gaspar Noé, and others in fashioning an approach to cinema that emphasizes the corporeal and tests the limits of narration in feature-length film. Palmer argues that while all films in this cycle foreground sexual encounters as a form of "brutal intimacy," to understand these works we need to see through their challenges to the norms of sexual representation in the cinema and focus on their avant-garde underpinnings. Palmer describes these films as "unsettling"—a quality that comes from the challenge of their "motifs of physical and/or sexual debasement." This quality must be considered as "a kind of avant-garde phenomenon" that "brilliantly radicalizes the conventions of film style" and "overhauls the role of the film viewer, rejecting the traditionally passive, entertained onlooker to demand instead a viscerally engaged experiential participant" (2011, 60).

Although Grandrieux does not figure prominently in Palmer's analyses, his brief mention of the director's three fiction films suggests that they all "at times approach a level of visual abstraction most famously associated with [Stan] Brakhage, conveying piecemeal narratives of implicit murder and brutality through lyrical flashes of unfocused colors, dense visual textures, handheld camerawork, and barely perceptible figure movements" (2011, 64–65). And this is an approach to Grandrieux's work echoed throughout the literature. From the Harvard Film Archive's notes to their 2010 Grandrieux retrospective we read, "Often compared to the work of Stan Brakhage, Grandrieux's films similarly reject representational cinema in favor of a mode of filmmaking that, in Brakhage's famous phrase, realizes 'adventures in perception'" (Harvard Film Archive 2010, par. 1).



While there is no doubt of Grandrieux's interest in exploring a vast array of perceptual possibilities within the cinema, his films hardly reject either representation or narrative. Instead, he is often working within mainstream norms so that he might prompt viewers to engage differently with the perceptual processes involved in our experience of narrative and filmed reality. The critical preoccupation with moments of similarity to filmmakers like Stan Brakhage deflects attention away from Grandrieux's interest in realism and naturalism as modes of address that overlap with his more experimental strategies. These modes of address coexist in a kind of dance, vying for the same territories marked out by the screen and the acoustic profile of the sound system. Recognizing the relationship between these modes of address unsettles increasingly settled ways of assessing Grandrieux's work.

Adrian Martin defines Grandrieux's approach to *mise-en-scène* as "the art of bodies in space," an exploration of power relations between characters engaged in a "dance of death" (Martin 2004, par. 10). Martin suggests that "there is no space between bodies in Grandrieux; they are jammed together in a difficult, fraught intimacy" (par. 9). The spatial relations in the film, according to Martin, are governed by corporeality: the puppeteer serial killer Jean in *Sombre* who wants to work his women as he does his marionettes, and the pimp Boyan in *La Vie Nouvelle* who pulls Mélania's strings from a distance.

Rodney Ramdas extends the consideration of corporeality and spatial relations to questions about the way these films enact upon the bodies of the audiences that experience them. He charts how Laura Marks's notion of "haptic visuality" (where one might be said to touch a film with the eyes) gives way to a "skin-sensitivity," where the emphasis on vision as tactile experience is exchanged for one that is received by the entirety of the body (Ramdas 2011, par. 15). Ramdas argues that this haptic quality of Grandrieux's films makes them a candidate for categorization under Lyotard's concept of "acinema" (Lyotard 1989), in which excesses of either movement or stasis are explored purely for their own sake, expenditures without expectation of return that render the medium as a tangible material (Ramdas 2011, par. 5). For Ramdas, the corporeality of *Un Lac* draws a line from Grandrieux's camera through the bodies of the actors and the "flesh" of the screen to the bodies of the audience, agitating in our immobile spectatorship a feeling of being moved.

According to Greg Hainge, Grandrieux's films treat the body as a raw material, something to be considered simply in its own right, out of context with the world that might be read through narrative elements or moral structures. As such, he argues that we should think of the body in these films as the cinematic equivalent of *musique concrète* (Hainge 2007). Hainge's argument is particularly evocative for my interest in how Grandrieux's aesthetic treatment of acoustic space relates to narrative themes of property. Conceived as music created through the manipulation of sound materials fixed to a support, the goal of much *musique concrète* is to inspire *reduced listening*. In this mode of reception, attributed by Michel Chion to Pierre Schaeffer's notion of the *objet sonore*, sound is treated as an object abstracted from the contexts of causality and semantics, so that we can hear it as material in its own right (see Chion 2009). In Hainge's words, "if



every component of *Sombre* and *La Vie Nouvelle* must be apprehended as the cinematic equivalent of Schaeffer's *objets sonores*, this has radical implications for any analysis of the moral, ethical, political or diegetic spaces of these films" (2007, 166). Thus he concludes that "it serves no purpose to attempt to give an account of the film's narrative structure," suggesting that it is impossible to find an objective diegetic truth in a film like *La Vie Nouvelle* (2007, 167).

While there is certainly some truth to Hainge's assertions about narrative ambiguity in these films, he also brings forward problematic approaches to actual *musique concrète* that accept the idealized notion of *reduced listening* in which nothing is brought to the material that the material itself doesn't bring to us. Yet recent developments in thinking about Schaeffer's work recognize the composer's own view that *reduced listening* necessarily entails fluctuation between modes of perception, rather than embodying some purist state of abstract hearing (see Godøy 2006). Thus, as I have argued elsewhere, the acousmatic ideal of *musique concrète* is better understood as the intentional activation of multiple modes of perception (see Jordan 2007).

Hainge treats these films as though it is not important that Grandrieux chooses to fluctuate between images possessed of a stark naturalist clarity and those that blur the distinctions between figure and ground to render all elements part of the same material surface (2007, 162). Yet I argue that it is essential to account for Grandrieux's varying degrees of engagement with representation, so that we can consider why he chooses one mode at a given point and another mode at a different point. Hainge productively gets us to pay attention to the material qualities of these films, an essential step in recognizing how Grandrieux handles materiality. But we should not discount Grandrieux's interest in drawing some form of narrative lines through his audiovisual spaces. While often abstracted to one degree or another, these spaces are nevertheless engaging with referential materials that force audiences to negotiate what we see and hear in the film as a function of what we know of the world outside the walls of the cinema. In short, these films function as prompts to heightened audience engagement through continually fluctuating between approaches to cinematic representation, creating mobility across modes of address that can extend to mobilizing the audience to inhabit the spaces opened up by these films.

What is most interesting about Hainge's approach is what he does *not* talk about: the use of sound itself in Grandrieux's work. Describing any of a film's elements (e.g., lighting, cinematography, set design) as the "cinematic equivalent" of an *objet sonore*, these films, for Hainge, become an expanded form of *musique concrète*. Here he essentially replicates David Bordwell's assertion that a musical analogy might be useful in cinema if music were not thought of as organized sound for the ear, but rather a system for organizing any elements within an artistic work (see Bordwell 1980). Hainge's twist is to make this musical analogy work within the more specific confines of the premises of *musique concrète*, and he does this in order to think differently about the function of corporeality in Grandrieux's work. In so doing, however, Hainge neglects to consider how some of Grandrieux's auditory treatments might themselves be thought of as *actual* pieces of *musique concrète* that stand in contrast to music selections and auditory



treatments from decidedly different genres found in other parts of the films. To treat all these registers of sound as equivalent sound objects—merely rendered material to be heard in its own right—does not do justice to the work Grandrieux has done in carefully articulating the boundaries of the worlds he posits. Recognizing this articulation is essential to understanding Grandrieux's strategies for then breaking down these boundaries between differing sonic registers.

Further, the variation in Grandrieux's work demonstrates a keen awareness of the conventions of spatial representation in the cinema and a desire to explore the potential to represent space in ways that can speak to our experience of the world outside as well. So while it might be useful to treat Grandrieux's characters as existing outside a moral framework, we cannot ignore the fact that these bodies exist in space and that Grandrieux's films represent the corporeal articulation of that space. So we need to understand corporeal audiovisual materiality as a function of spatial representation grounded in Grandrieux's frequent appeal to naturalist aesthetics.

Rather than mapping the ideals of *musique concrète* onto Grandrieux's cinematic elements—visual as well as aural—I suggest that his strategies for alternating between representation and abstraction function more along the lines of soundscape composition. This musical genre is an extension of *musique concrète* that emerged from acoustic ecology's use of field recordings as a tool for soundscape research. Katharine Norman calls soundscape composition "real-world music"—a form that relies on a balance between the naturalism of the recorded environments that make up the compositional building blocks and their mediation through technologies of electroacoustic recording and transmission. In her words, "real-world music leaves a door ajar on the reality in which we are situated" while seeking a "journey which takes us away from our preconceptions," ultimately offering us a new appreciation of reality as a result (1996, 19). The soundscape composition, therefore, is premised upon a "dialectic between the real and the imaginary, as well as between the referential and the abstract" (Truax 2001, 237). This dialectic is the result of the composer's interventions into the material.

Katharine Norman refers to this awareness of compositional mediation as "reflective listening" (1996, 5). Elsewhere I have extended Norman's thinking about soundscape composition to similar experiences available to us in the audiovisual context of the cinema, where the "reflective listening" prompted by simultaneous referentiality and abstraction becomes "reflective audioviewing" to account for the ecology of listening while looking in the cinema (see Jordan 2012). Experiencing Grandrieux's films along the lines of reflective audioviewing allows us to account for the way his avant-garde practices intersect with his more naturalistic aesthetics, and to consider the audience's relationship to the continual mobility across modes of address.

Becoming attuned to shifting registers of spatial practice can, in turn, draw together the key critical threads cited thus far: the relationship between Grandrieux's oft-cited avant-garde practices and his interest in naturalist representation; the dance of bodies in space that Adrian Martin identifies as an expression of power relations; the haptic connection that Rodney Ramdas argues is crucial to establishing audience engagement with these films; and the role of materiality essential to all critics and which



Hainge situates within the ideological underpinnings of *musique concrète*. Reflective audioviewing allows us to experience the relationship between each of these dimensions as the unsettling qualities of these films, to move with them through their overlapping spaces, becoming moved by them as a result. Let us now consider in detail the aesthetic and narrative strategies that Grandrieux employs as a means toward the unsettling practice of cinematic space.

### III. SPATIAL DELINEATIONS AND RUPTURES IN *SOMBRE* AND *LA VIE NOUVELLE*

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Early in *Sombre* there is a short sequence that establishes three distinct registers of spatial articulation that clearly demonstrate Grandrieux's interest in shifting modes of representation. Introduced as a serial killer on the road, Jean beds down in a motel room, a rented space defined by the walls that define its borders and his occupation of this space for a limited time. With no visual access to the world outside the room, he nevertheless hears the sounds of sexual activity coming from the room next door, treated here in a naturalist fashion, muffled as though heard through the wall. The sound's causal relationship, and its implied distance from Jean, set up the main theme of the film: that sexual relationships, for Jean, are a function of property, articulated through the buying of women and the enclosed spaces that go along with them. He steps over to the window and draws back the curtain, as we cut to a shot revealing a wind-blustered landscape. The sound of wind is brought in on the soundtrack, which then carries over to a cut to Jean, now lying on the bed. At this moment the sound takes a step away from naturalist synchronization as the soundscape from one environment is layered with the image of another. Then the sound slips into something less representational, more acousmatic, as we watch Jean on the bed, an auditory treatment that carries over another cut-back out onto the road with Jean's car traveling the winding roads of the French countryside (Figure 14.1).

Exterior shots of Jean driving are frequent in the film, and are often treated as a bridge between stark realism and total abstraction, a liminal space between Jean's encounters. But when we cut into Jean's car, the acousmatic auditory treatment ceases and the compartmentalized nature of enclosed space is re-established in a naturalistic fashion. The interior of the car is, throughout the film, defined as Jean's private space, regularly disrupted when he exits the car for the world outside. So within this sequence there are three different approaches to sound/image relationships: one where visual space and sound space are attached in naturalistic fashion; one where the sound of one space is presented while we see another; and a third where sound space becomes ambiguous and is able to slip across several visual spaces.

Grandrieux's interest in exploring spatial intersections is governed by the narrative significance given to compartmentalized auditory spaces, often tied to one character's desire for interaction with another. The prime example comes early in *La Vie Nouvelle*.





FIGURE 14.1. *Sombre*, Jean on the road along the French countryside.

Seymour is at a strip club, the sound of pounding electronic dance music dominating the soundtrack. We see pole-dancing women intercut with Seymour's searching gaze. With a shift to a close-up on Seymour's face against an abstracted background, all sounds associated with the club fade away. We are left with music of an entirely different order: sparse airy tones, bells and a few picks of an electric guitar. As Mélania emerges seemingly from nowhere, detail shots of her dress are paired with unnaturally present Foley renderings of her movements. She begins to lap dance for Seymour, and his revelry before her is represented, in part, by the way the soundtrack carves out a private space for the two of them, isolating them from the soundscape of the club, just as the narrowed field of the cinematography does on the image track. Once the dance is done, wider and more deeply focused shots of the club space return, along with the driving dance music.

This moment is exemplary of how definitions of property must entail questions of social practice that layer geographical space with multiple uses. The nightclub is a privately owned space open to the public, in which various commodities are available for purchase; and these purchases allow spaces of temporary private ownership within the already overlapping domains of public and private space within the club. The tensions between these overlapping spaces, defined at once by the demarcations of spatial boundaries and the patterns of use within them, are given articulation by Grandrieux through the particularities of how his sound design interacts with the images. In this instance, sonic isolation matches visual isolation to create private space for Mélania and Seymour. This isolation is physically impossible within the space as previously delineated, and thus marks out new territory within that space based on the psychological experience of these two characters. The space of the club is unsettled as we move with the characters through different modes of audiovisual representation.



Importantly, the spatial demarcation opened up by the lap dance is tied to Seymour's idealized relationship fantasy, enacted by Mélania's performance in the context of sex work. The naturalist counterweight to this is provided a moment later. After Seymour negotiates with the pimp to buy some time in a private room, a direct cut on both the image and soundtrack bring us to the hallway of the hotel upstairs as the pimp emerges from the elevator with Seymour and Mélania (Figure 14.2). Money changes hands and the couple enters a room. The soundscapes of both the hallway and the room are rendered in a highly naturalist fashion, different ambiances in both but equally attentive to the kinds of environmental sound common to such spaces. Here we are in a starkly realist mode: Seymour struggles with his feelings for Mélania (Figure 14.3), at first apparently unable to perform sexually and then, in a fit of lust, climaxing prematurely. Mélania exits and Seymour is left alone. The idealized fantasy of Mélania's seduction in the club space downstairs has not matched the reality of full physical encounter with the woman—a reality maintained by the naturalist approach to the audiovisual delineation of the space of the room in contrast to the highly rendered quality of the lap dance in the night club.

These examples from *La Vie Nouvelle* demonstrate Grandrieux's clear desire to carefully control fluctuations between naturalism and abstraction. Based on narrative situations, these fluctuations involve the loaded quality of bounded spaces occupied by two characters who follow divergent paths. When Seymour's time with Mélania is paid for and contained within an actual private space, his experience is different from his private encounter within the public space of the club downstairs. This juxtaposition of spaces, both psychological and architectural, will drive the film forward so that, however elliptical and ambiguous, there is a clear arc stemming from Seymour's first fraught encounters with Mélania through to his desire to liberate her from the confines

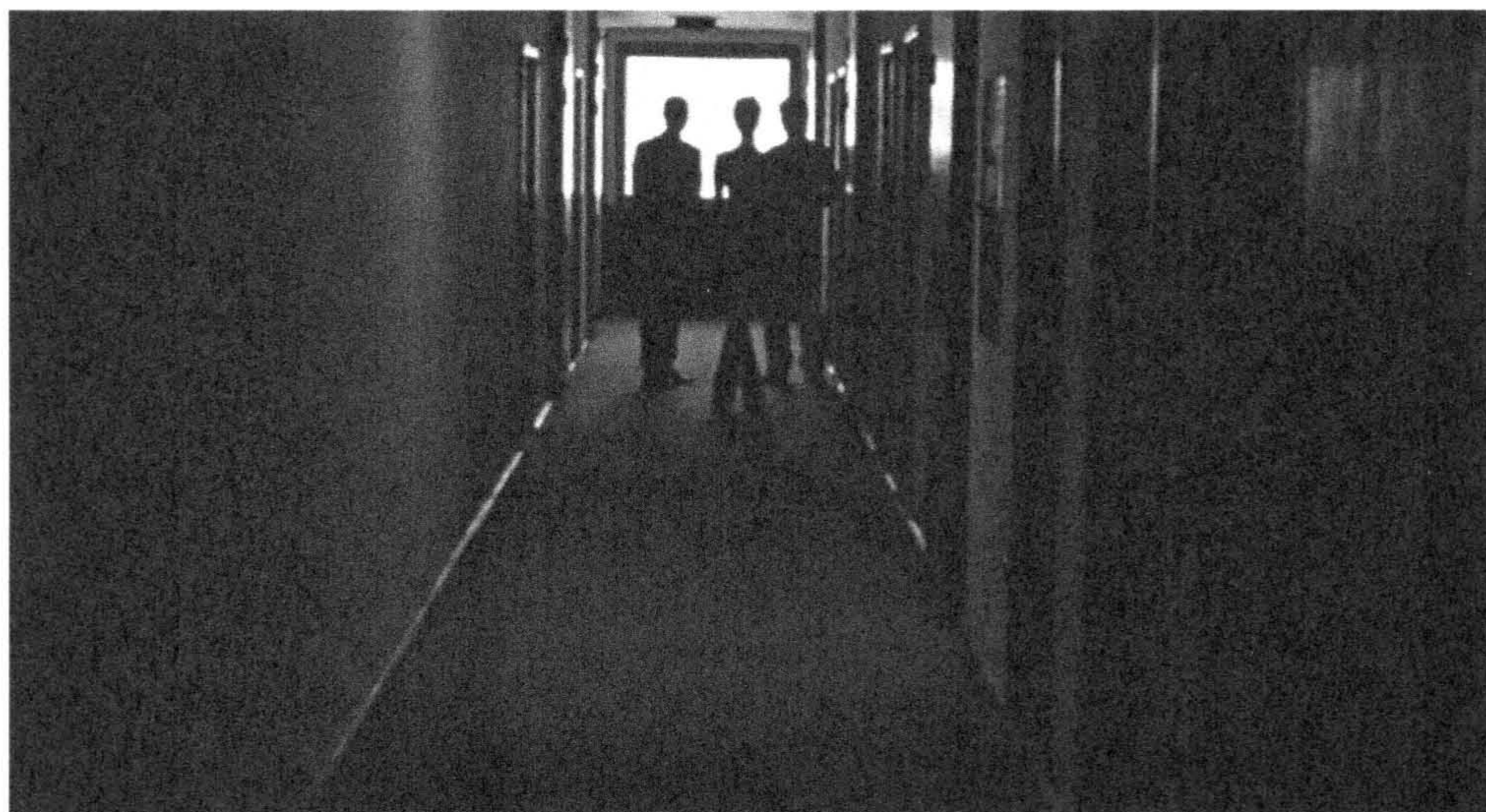


FIGURE 14.2. *La Vie Nouvelle*, Seymour purchases time with Mélania outside hotel room door.



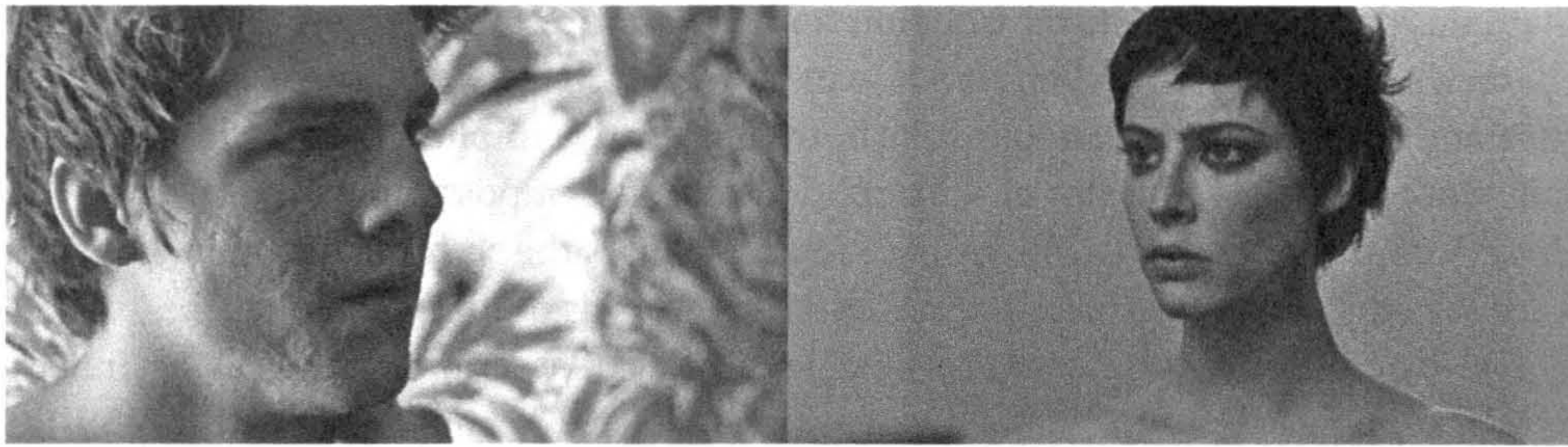


FIGURE 14.3. *La Vie Nouvelle*, Seymour is troubled; Mélania asks if she should leave.

of Boyan's control. He wants to buy Mélania's freedom, imagining that he can recapture his first experience with her. But this first experience was a fiction represented by the impossible isolation within a public environment that proves unattainable in the realistically represented spaces he later navigates while trying to find her again. Across the rest of the film, the private space that Seymour seeks with Mélania will be the dragon that he chases. His inability to catch it is carefully represented through the young man's travel from hotel to hotel. The rooms and hallways in which he waits are regularly defined by the sounds of pounding club music emanating from walls through which he cannot pass, a sound now associated with Mélania's work and Seymour's first experience with her.

Grandrieux's interest in using sound to explore the compartmentalization of space, whether architecturally or psychologically, is tied to what I have elsewhere referred to as "space replacement" (Jordan 2007, 132). Here I refer to the ideological goal of modernist architectural design that seeks to compartmentalize space, to create quiet and neutral soundscapes that can be managed independently of the environment that surrounds them. In *The Soundscape of Modernity* (2002), Emily Thompson charts the development and implementation of this architectural ideal, referring to the success of such projects as resulting in a severance of sound from context. Tellingly, she equates this situation with R. Murray Schafer's concept of *schizophonia* (Thompson 2002, 321).

Schafer's original intention for the term *schizophonia* was in reference to the separation of sound from source through electroacoustical transmission, which he imbued with negative psychological effects of spatial and temporal disorientation (1977, 90–91). Thompson shows how *schizophonia* can be understood as an architectural possibility as well: the separation of a contained soundscape from the context of the environment just beyond its walls. And, as Schafer suggests, "[w]hen the space within is totally insulated it craves reorchestration: this is the era of Muzak and of the radio," which he says have been used as a kind of "interior decoration," intended to make these dry spaces "more sensorially complete" (Schafer 1993, 73).

Indeed, Thompson describes how the use of electroacoustically transmitted sound within these contained environments went on to complete the modern soundscape, first erasing any spatial characteristics of the architecture and then filling it in with sounds from elsewhere (2002, 321). Thus I use the term *space replacement* to evoke the



Platonic ideal of architectural isolation and the erasure of a given room's acoustical characteristics, in order to be filled in with a manufactured soundscape from another time and place. Here I mean to invoke both the negative implications of such isolation inherent to Schafer's concept of schizophonia, and the impossibility of fully achieving this effect in architectural reality. Space replacement is the stuff of fantasy, and as such it can be effectively suggested in the constructed worlds of the cinema.

The idea of space replacement is valuable as a way of describing an aesthetic strategy in film sound design, in which a given represented space can be supplanted by a shift on the soundtrack. Charting space replacements in Grandrieux's work is one way to navigate the audiovisual practice of space in his formal strategies, and to understand this practice in the context of the issues of community and isolation raised by his narrative lines. In these films, differentiating between total space replacement and more naturalist renditions of containment can be used to track the power relations between the characters. Complete space replacement, as in the example of the lap dance, represents ideal states, while more realistic spatial demarcations ground the desire to attain these ideal states within the materiality of the world in which these characters operate. In short, isolated spaces that contain sonic bleed into the worlds outside their walls are markers of reality, while perfect containment (often occurring in open spaces where such containment would be impossible), along with an unnatural crossing of spatial boundary lines, suggests an unsettling possibility that marks an overlap of two different uses of any one bounded territory.

*Sombre* is replete with examples of Grandrieux's interest in the unsettling of bounded spaces, exploring the range of acoustic spatial representation from naturalist to highly stylized and abstracted. The first murder sequence finds Jean with a woman in a hotel room, the quietude and privacy of the space emphasized by the prominence of a consistent hum on the soundtrack, typical of air conditioning or other industrial infrastructure. Jean sets in for the kill, and once complete the hum disappears entirely as we slip into the sounds of light wind, birds, and a vague buzzing like that of distant bees. This shift occurs just before a cut on the image track brings mysterious images of a young boy walking blindfolded in the countryside in front of an ominous corrugated shed (Figure 14.4). The soundscape continues in this vein as we cut to the image of a dead woman lying in the woods. She is found by the boy, who may be a young Jean, as suggested next by a cut to a high angle shot of the killer lying on his hotel room bed, opening his eyes suddenly as if from a dream. From here the soundscape of the countryside shifts back into that of the hotel room.

This momentary replacement of the space of the hotel, marked by heightened abstractions and ambiguities on both the image and sound tracks, sets up a pattern that will recur throughout the film. Following the second murder of a stripper in her trailer home, the realistic sounds of muffled traffic just outside take on an amorphous quality, breaking down the boundary between interior and exterior space, and ultimately serving to abstract the sounds of the outside world, leading into a cut to Jean driving at night, set to an ominous yet strangely peaceful soundscape. The third murder, of a woman he meets in a hotel lobby, is suggested only through a cut from the two driving



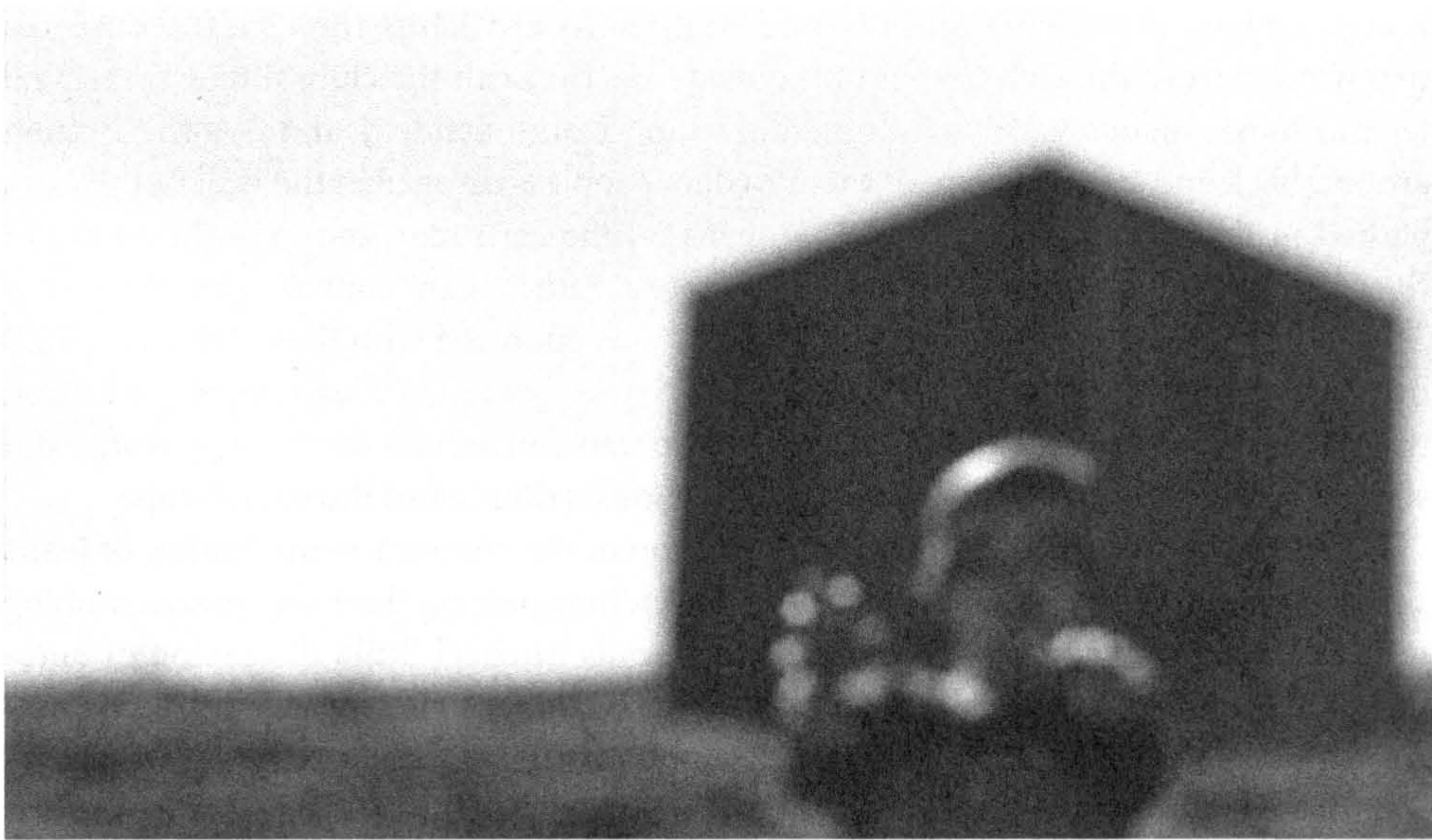


FIGURE 14.4. *Sombre*, mysterious imagery following the first murder.

in Jean's car to her lifeless body next to a lake in severely unnatural quietude, marked by the sound of a light breeze gently rustling the tall grass. Jean's mastery over the corporeality of his victims is regularly represented through these moments of abstract quietude following the killings. Jean's challenge to other people's private spaces, thus, is supported by Grandrieux's challenge to the realist representation of these spaces through appeals to avant-garde modes of address. These are moments of space replacement made complete, but they do not last. They are not settled, continually open to disruption by overlapping uses that other people make of the spaces Jean occupies, especially after he meets Claire.

When they first meet, it is raining heavily and Claire's car has broken down by the side of the road. Jean pulls over to offer assistance. While there is some distinction between the interior of his car and the outside as he opens his window, the sound of the rain hitting the car creates less of a sharp boundary between the two spaces. This auditory overlap signals an overlap of their personal spaces that will trouble Jean's clear understanding of his relationship to women as purchased objects of property. Beginning with this first meeting, the nature of the relationship between Jean and Claire is ill defined: the two are drawn together and torn apart throughout the film as they circle each other in a decidedly unsettled pattern of intimacy.

The crucial moment in *Sombre* comes about midway through the film. Jean has been driving around with Claire and her sister. They end up at a motel adjacent to a nightclub called L'Olympe. Claire sits in the room smoking as her sister sleeps, while Jean goes about his usual routine downstairs, looking for a working girl to rent. The soundscape inside the bar is dominated by an overwhelming techno soundtrack. The distance between this space and that of the hotel room is clearly delineated by the



pounding bass of the club music, heard muffled from Claire's room. Jean convinces two women from the club to join him outside. As they exit the club, similarly muffled techno music blends with environmental sound from outside. Jean takes the women around back and instructs one of them to dance topless up against the wall of the club, bathed in the headlights of his car. He turns on the car radio, and here the sound of the music instantly takes on the register of "score" rather than "source"—an example of Michel Chion's category of *on-the-air sound* that is endowed with the privilege of fluid movement between diegetic and non-diegetic space (1994, 76). Jean begins to assault the second woman inside the car as the first woman dances unawares, her screams and struggles receding into the background as the music dominates the soundscape.

This presentation of the music is an extension of the compartmentalization of Jean's car, his privatized space through which all his victims pass on their way to succumbing to his control. The auditory treatment here recalls Michael Bull's discussion of automobile habitation, in which "the aural privacy of the automobile is gained precisely through the exorcizing of the random sounds of the environment by the mediated sounds of the cassette or radio" (2003, 355). Following Adorno, Bull equates the experience of music in these compartmentalized environments with "a substitute for community, warmth and social contact" (2003, 363), a substitution Jean wants to impose on the world outside of the confines of the car as well. The music that occupies the majority of the soundscape here opens the private space of Jean's car outward into the space around it, as he attempts to control the dancer through this music, aiming for full space replacement in an impossible setting.

However, it is Claire who brings complete sonic isolation to this space, as she leaves her room to find Jean and emerges from the shadows to witness the scene behind L'Olympe. When she sees Jean struggling with the woman inside the car, he looks up to meet her troubled gaze and the music from the radio fades entirely away, leaving only the sound of the wind. The two women are not shown again, and the scene plays out with a tense shot/reverse-shot between Claire and Jean in an unnatural quietude (Figure 14.5). This moment is an expressionistic play on Claire's ability to challenge the spaces carved out by Jean's predatory practices, as though she is possessed of her own soundscape that supplants Jean's when she moves through his realm.

The three locations—the club's interior, Claire's room, and the parking lot out back—are set apart from each other by the treatment of the music from L'Olympe in varying degrees of intensity. Here there is a shift from a highly realistic approach to sound's propagation through space to an idealized abstraction, giving way to Claire's quietude, suggesting her ability to bring Jean to the same level of isolation usually reserved for his post-murder experiences.

After a series of further episodes that eventually bring Jean and Claire to a party that leads to their separation, the film's climax comes as the two find each other again on a road bordered by woods, where they copulate for the first time. The encounter proves intolerable for Jean, who shuns her afterward. He flags down a passing car from which opera is blasting at full volume, heard at a distance until the door is flung open. The sound comes to dominate the soundtrack in a moment of intensity, where diegetic





FIGURE 14.5. *Sombre*, Claire discovers Jean at work, who stops under her gaze.

music takes on the gravity of the narrative situation. Jean shoves Claire into the car, moving her into another person's private space.

This transference seals Jean's break from her and re-delineates the distance between them that has been systematically broken down over the film. Jean returns to his tricks, and Claire, in the now silenced car of her new companion, is left to invent a story about her relationship with Jean. This is a moment of contrived emotional proximity to the woman who has taken her away from Jean, filling the now quiet space of the car with her own invented soundscape, just as she had done with Jean previously. Jean kills again, and recaptures the quietude instilled by his own actions, now free of Claire's ability to replace his soundscape with her own.

#### IV. BRINGING IT ALL HOME IN *UN LAC*

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*Sombre* and *La Vie Nouvelle* are governed by characters with the capacity to charge their surrounding sonic environments with particular qualities. The interaction between these characters forces overlap between these acoustic spaces to varying degrees. Tracking the shifting representation of acoustic space in relation to the power dynamics between characters reveals Grandrieux's thematic preoccupation with the politics of property. Time and again, the unlikely replacement of one soundscape with another is tied specifically to the community that characters seek with each other, while the intrusion of one sonic environment into another is a naturalistic marker of the realities of overlap in spaces with contested patterns of use.

The relationship between community and compartmentalized space reaches its formal peak in *Un Lac*. The film dramatically simplifies things to explore a single family housed within a small enclosure amidst the forbidding wilderness landscape of a northern forest (Figure 14.6). The young woman Hege's belonging is established by the home on the edge of the forest, where she lives with two siblings, mother, and possibly father (whom she addresses by his first name, Christian) (Vitaly Kishchenko). The house is the only refuge from the harsh winter environment just outside her door, and





FIGURE 14.6. *Un Lac*, the family house (recalling the mysterious image of the young boy in *Sombre*).

she is challenged to leave this environment upon the arrival of the handsome stranger Jurgen. Clear distinctions between interiors and exteriors shape questions of propriety regarding Hege, whose bond with her brother Alexi overlaps with the bond she develops with Jurgen.

The film's first hour slowly introduces us to the family of five. We start by watching Alexi as he chops wood for the family fire. Grandrieux frames a close-up on the axe blows repeating with incredible vigor and agitation, the sound of each contact being more felt than heard. Then Alexi falls into an epileptic seizure; the camera takes on his uncontrollable shaking, abstracting the already misty environment to an impressionistic palate (Figure 14.7), then cutting to a nearly static shot of Alexi shaking violently in the snow. So the film begins with a violent charge that could easily set us up for more of what one might have to come expect based on Grandrieux's previous work. Yet instead of developing this tension toward the climax of physical conflict, Grandrieux reveals a family dealing with the stark brutality of their environment by showing each other a remarkable level of gentleness. In fact, much of the film operates like an intimate case study of the physicality of human tenderness, marked by the very precise delineation of the interior space of the house as separate from the world outside.

Though we spend a lot of time inside the family's tiny home, we are given no real sense of how this space is laid out, or even what it looks like. Within this veritable absence of interior *mise-en-scène*, Grandrieux concentrates on his characters as they move slowly around their domicile in shallow focus. He emphasizes the details of an eye, a hand, a pair of lips, as characters converse, hold, and caress each other in the dark. The sound design for these scenes is incredible in its attention to the minutiae of





FIGURE 14.7. *Un Lac*, the landscape of seizure.

the environment: the stranger's breath as he sleeps under Alexi's suspicious gaze; the creaking of the floorboards under inaudible footfalls; and whispers of longing that keep the exterior's howling wind at bay. This is space that is rendered audible as a conglomerate of bodily functions, most notably breathing. And this interior is kept dramatically separated from the exterior world, connected only symbolically through the equation of breath with the wind that howls outside. This aesthetic strategy suggests the imperfect containment of the house, a corporeal connection between the inside and outside that foreshadows Jurgen's eventual departure with Hege.

The moment that aligns this film with *Sombre* and *La Vie Nouvelle* comes toward the end. The film's dramatic *lack* of composed score or preexisting pieces of music sets it apart from the other two films, charging the filmmakers instead with pure soundscape composition as the art of defining spaces along auditory lines. So it is with great surprise that, near the end of the film, one piece of preexisting music—Schumann's *Mondnacht*—is heard at a crucial moment.

One night Jurgen and Hege make love, apparently her first sexual experience and one that seems to confirm her destiny to remain with the stranger (the opposite of the situation between Jean and Claire in *Sombre*). The following day, Hege sings for her brother while out on the land. We find Alexi marching agitatedly through the snow with his horse, repeating the words "she has done it," expressing his distress over his sister's encounter with Jurgen the night before. Then we cut to a relatively static series of shots as Alexi and Hege share a moment of prolonged intimacy: she touching his face amidst a dramatic quietude uncharacteristic of the outdoor environments previously presented in the film, carving out a moment of privacy within the exposed landscape that harkens back to similar moments in *Sombre* and *La*





FIGURE 14.8. *Un Lac*, Hege sings for Alexi; Alexi listens to her.

*Vie Nouvelle*. She takes a step back and begins to sing the melody of *Mondnacht* (Figure 14.8).

Hearing her sing, Alexi tells Hege that her voice has changed, that it is different now. Then, out of nowhere, a piano emerges on the soundtrack to accompany her, a dramatic break from the rest of the film's heavily nuanced treatment of environmental sound and stark absence of musical score. Significantly, once the piano accompaniment enters, the sounds of the environment return. A howling wind is heard along with the music over images of Alexi's lone silhouette, stark against the bleak landscape, eventually finding him lying in the snow following another one of his seizures. This moment allows for an oneiric reading of the film, in which everything between here and the first seizure at the film's opening—or perhaps another in the film's middle—could have been but an epileptic's dream. Differing interpretations, however, do not affect the need to recognize the use of music here as the marker of a turning point after which Hege will leave with Jurgen. Thus the film ends with Hege and Jurgen setting off across the lake of the film's title, the family's children now divided for the first time.

Hege's sexual encounter with Jurgen changes her status of belonging, marked by a shift in the quality of her voice as it engages with the environment in which she lives. As such, Hege literally embodies sound's transgressive potential in breaking down the boundaries of property, and in suggesting the power of overlapping claims upon the same space to reveal the contradictions in the simultaneity of differing practices within the same space. Aaron Cutler says he does not understand what the Schumann piece is doing there (nor, he says, did Grandrieux when asked about it during a Q+A after the film's first New York City screening in 2010) (Cutler 2010, par. 13). Perhaps, Cutler suggests, it signals another world calling Hege out from her homeland to someplace new (par. 13). I suggest that the song gains significance by identifying its predecessors in Seymour's first encounter with Mélanie in *La Vie Nouvelle* and Claire's intrusion upon Jean's voyeurism in *Sombre*, both of which feature an established soundscape replaced by another at a moment when two people come together within a single bounded locale.

In the previous two examples, however, the established soundscape is dominated by preexisting pieces of music—a dance track in the nightclub in *La Vie Nouvelle* and Jean's car stereo in *Sombre*—which then yield to the subtleties of environmental



sound that replace the previously established sonic space. These replacements form a bubble of isolation around the characters as they interact, a fantasy bubble that conceals the world just outside, to which they inevitably must return. Hege's song in *Un Lac* reverses the situation: we begin with a bubble of isolation defined by the quietude of environmental sound around Alexi and Hege, within which she begins to sing. This bubble gives way to its accompaniment from outside the diegesis—accompaniment, but not full replacement, as the music here begins to mingle with environmental sound. The private spaces that Alexi and Hege share throughout the film, marked by the absence of music, here open up to the world beyond this bubble through the influence of the outsider Jurgen. This moment thus functions opposite to the previous examples, wherein a momentary privatization of space is marked by space replacement. Here spaces truly overlap and coexist, an instance of simultaneous multiple use of this space that provocatively suggests Hege's commitment to both her brother and Jurgen.

*Un Lac* marks a progression for Grandrieux. While Alexi and Hege are ultimately separated, like Jean and Claire in *Sombre* and Seymour and Mélanie in *La Vie Nouvelle*, the separation is premised not on violent articulation of the incompatibility of two people occupying the same bounded space, but rather the potential for productive sharing of space—in this case, the emotional spaces of the characters involved. Jurgen's arrival marks a great tension in overlapping claims to a space that is defined by their house but is ultimately about their hearts. When Alexi recognizes Hege's transformation by sharing space with Jurgen, he knows it is time to let her go. The theme of unsettled property is thus most fully explored in *Un Lac*, as Alexi must come to terms with the reality that Hege does not belong to him—a revelation beyond the purview of Jean's continual attempts at dominating Claire and Seymour's desire to buy Mélanie's freedom. Jurgen earns his time with Hege by sharing space with the family and contributing productively to their environment, and this shared use of space opens the world up to them in ways that the rest of Grandrieux's characters can only fantasize about.

## V. UNSETTLING ACOUSTICAL PROPERTIES

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As discussed in the introduction to this chapter, Nicholas Blomley's concept of "unsettling" the idea of property is about acknowledging the constantly shifting qualities of spaces, bound by legal title but opened up by multiplicities of use—the mobile nature of the social relationships that define any given plot of geographical space. The privatized mobility of the automobile in *Sombre* transitions to the fixity of the single domicile in *Un Lac* by way of the series of hotel rooms and club spaces in *La Vie Nouvelle*. Yet in all three films, the relationships between people in



specifically demarcated spaces unsettle these demarcations by throwing the propriety of these spaces into question.

In *Sombre*, Jean might be said to embody the tensions between settled and unsettled property. He moves through public space as a private entity, isolated from the world around him, until his implicit purchase of time with women opens his private space outward to enclose them, ultimately replacing their sonic environments with his own through the act of murder. In *La Vie Nouvelle* the issue of property is made explicit through the relationship between Seymour and Mélania, the former struggling to practice the spaces of the latter's property along lines different from those established by her pimp Boyan. Grandrieux continually emphasizes the separation of Seymour's proprietary space from those of Boyan and Mélania, while demonstrating the potential for these spaces to be opened up by overlapping use, such as when a private bubble encloses Seymour and Mélania in their first meeting. And in *Un Lac*, the idea of property is most clearly attached to the common association with real estate, the family's house serving as the center around which the story of mobility across relationships and geographical space unfolds. The house serves as anchor with clear boundaries, but its permeability is demonstrated by the ability for a guest on the property to open one of its residents to the world outside, challenging the relationship system defined by coexistence within one bounded area.

Mobility across carefully delineated spaces is the unsettling quality of Grandrieux's films. This unsettling can be productively linked to the kind of mobile habitability that Giuliana Bruno (2002) attributes to the *psychogeographical* potential of cinema. Guy DeBord defines the Situationist idea of psychogeography as "the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals" (1955, par. 2). Bruno places psychogeography within an expanded notion of *haptics*, in which she emphasizes the importance of our experience of motion as a tactile event. She extends the "reciprocal contact between us and the environment"—a contact that comes with a tactile experience of the world—to encompass "the ability of our bodies to sense their own movement in space," thereby bringing physical movement into the sphere of haptic experience (2002, 6). Following Lyotard's formulation of "emotion as a motion" (Lyotard 2004, 2), Bruno ties bodily movement in external space to the "movement" of emotions in our internal space, suggesting that the core of haptic space is that which extends from interior to exterior (Bruno 2002, 7). Finally, Bruno applies the connection between motion and emotion to a concept of haptic space in film as a "habitable" quality that relates to the awareness of one's bodily movement through space. This awareness of spatial movement is an aspect of experience that renders the cinema "as habitable as the house we live in" (251). Through a sense of the "motion of emotions" (251), we can occupy the space of a film with as much experiential tangibility as the world outside.



Here Bruno offers not only a way of thinking about the mobility between spaces carefully demarcated and then transgressed by Grandrieux's cinematography and sound design, but also a way of understanding the mobility he seeks in transgressing the screen as dividing line between film and audience. This mobility is a key to productively extending the preoccupation with corporeality and materiality that is expressed by most commentators on these films. Ramdas's idea of the film made flesh is inspired, like Bruno's, by Lyotard's "emotion as a motion"; the flesh of the film becomes tangible by connecting the figurative motion of internal experience to the body's ability to sense its own movement through space, a sense that can be triggered by the cinema. Here we can also extend Hainge's desire to treat Grandrieux's films as comprising material objects, for these are made manifest within the experience of the audience through the mobility opened up by thinking of cinema as "habitable." I argue that this habitability is opened up by Grandrieux's formal tactics for shifting between different registers of spatial representation, and how these are enacted by his production practices.

Grandrieux's audiovisual style, as discussed so far, merges with his production practices to enact transferences of energy between subject, camera, and the audience. But here his approach to image and sound differ, a point that will emphasize sound's role in transgressing carefully delineated spaces in both the fictional worlds of the films and the production realities in which they are made. As far as the image goes, Grandrieux insists on creating a shooting environment akin to what will be seen on screen so that he and his actors can inhabit the space of the diegesis without the need to imagine elements that are not present in the pro-filmic environment (Grandrieux 2012). Part of this process is evident through his shooting style, where his camera becomes a part of his body and enacts transferences of energy with his filmed subjects.

For example, in *Sombre*, Claire and Jean drive to a party. The camera frames Claire in the front seat as she begins to gesture with her hands as though in response to music that emerges from a source outside the diegesis. The camera becomes increasingly agitated as the music grows in intensity, then cutting directly to Claire dancing at an outdoor gathering. As her movements become increasingly frenetic, the camera stabilizes and begins framing her in wider shots, revealing the context of her surroundings. Finally, the score track fades into source music, presented as coming from the PA system at the party, Claire's intensity giving way to a smile and a moment of seeming amusement as she dances.

This shifting of vibrancy from camera to subject in conjunction with shifting registers of sound forms a template that can be traced in Grandrieux's other films as well. In *La Vie Nouvelle*, Mélanie dances as though a marionette tied to strings manipulated by her pimp Boyan. As she spins around in circles at the command of his gesturing hands, the camera takes on her movements and slips into an agitated state, rendering the couple increasingly abstract until we see only patterns of light morphing like pools of mercury rolling across a pitch-black plate (Figure 14.9).



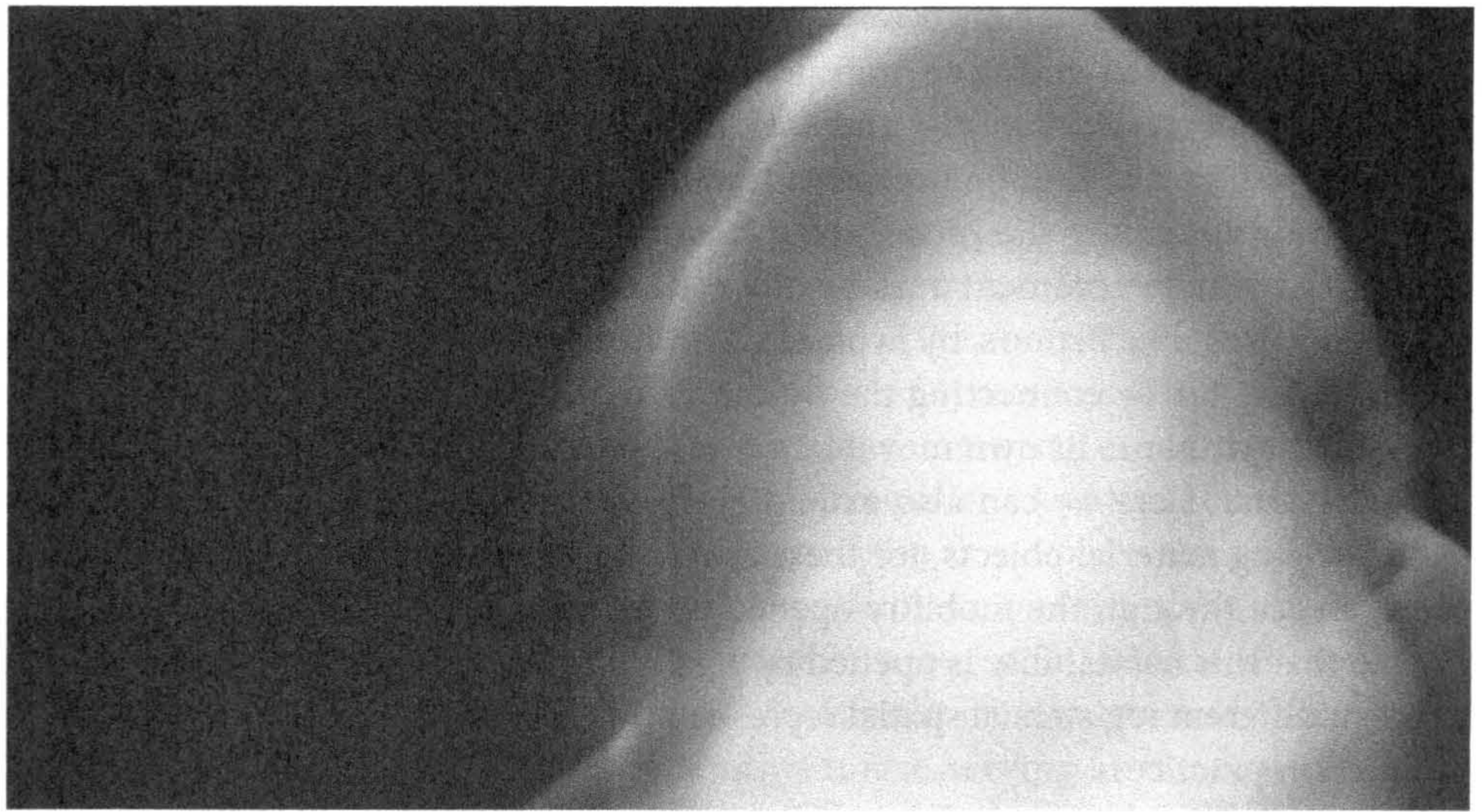


FIGURE 14.9. *La Vie Nouvelle*, Mélania dances with Boyan.

The sound corroborates with unidentifiable swishing noises that seem almost cartoonish in their emulation of her motion. But as in *Sombre*, we then cut from these abstract close-ups to wider shots that reveal a spatial transition from private quarters to a crowded nightclub, and here the camera stabilizes considerably as Mélania's dancing becomes ever more frenetic. Here the swishing sounds reveal themselves to be ornamental elements of a techno track that thunders in as we move into the nightclub.

In *Un Lac*, the film's intense opening begins with the camera enacting the vigorous movements of Alexi's wood chopping. Tight framing on axe blows creates an agitated synergy between subject and camera, which is then taken over by the cinematography alone. As Alexi slips into an epileptic seizure, the camera is living his spastic convulsions through point-of-view shots of the surrounding landscape, abstracted through the intensity of the movement (see Figure 14.7). This camera movement then switches to a stillness of framing when cutting to a shot of Alexi lying in the snow, his body twitching violently. Although the shifts in auditory register are subtler here than in the previous two examples, a quietude emerges once the camera becomes still, which contrasts sharply with the echoing axe blows that form the rhythm of the film's opening moments. This quietude returns in Hege's climactic singing of Schumann's *Mondnacht*, which ends with Alexi lying again in the snow bank. Grandrieux's audiovisual strategies here are designed to carry a transference of energy from his own corporeal engagement with his filmed subjects through to the audience, creating an environment of mobility in which we are invited to inhabit the spaces opened up by his aesthetics and practice.



Contrary to his insistence on the habitable quality of his shooting environments, Grandrieux maintains that nearly all of his sound is created in post-production—100 percent in the case of *Un Lac* (Grandrieux 2012). In demanding that the filming environment be as close to that which he envisions for the screen, Grandrieux conflates the reality of his production context with the fictional product, enabling transference between filmmaker, subject, and audience with a mobility carefully orchestrated by his post-production sound treatments. In terms of the image, he conflates the space of shooting with the space represented on screen. In terms of sound, he engages—with increasing intensity—in space replacement, as in the examples discussed earlier. Whether mostly a practical concern or a marker of a deep ideological divide between how he understands image and sound, his approach indicates that the realms of sound and image are of very different domains to him—a fact that opens the door to the use of sound to rework the spaces he so carefully captures on the image track. As production practices, his cinematography and his sound design are of very different orders, and yet they overlap within the space of the film.

This overlap is what allows for the mobility across different registers of acoustic space to create the unsettling potential that his films explore. The territories of sound and image are continually shifting in relation to one another, providing an effective cinematic environment. At the same time, his characters enact similarly shifting positions as they struggle to define their own territories within the narrative and aesthetic spaces of these films. In turn, the overlap of production practice with formal and thematic content extends to the audience, who are challenged to engage with the spaces opened up by these films from a reflective position, demanding continual assessment of one's own position in relation to the material.

Thus, in the films of Philippe Grandrieux, shooting style and post-production audio meet narrative and aesthetic situations on the level of habitability. They create an unsettling environment for the audience, which becomes implicated in the mobile transgressions of delineated spaces that Grandrieux so carefully articulates in his alternations between naturalistic and abstracted environments. In this sense, Grandrieux's work provokes a state of reflective audioviewing: the audience is attuned to the continually mobile enactments of property as defined by the overlapping of privatized spaces that, differently in each film, unsettle the characters' relationships with each other and, in turn, the relationship the films hold with their audiences.

## VI. CONCLUSIONS

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*La Vie Nouvelle* concludes with Seymour receiving a lap dance from a new woman, with no slip into abstracted space as there was with Mélanie, signaling a newly formed reality that keeps him at a now impossible distance from the woman



he really wants. He takes the new woman up to a room, but here turns into just another of the assholes we've seen paraded throughout the film, beating her and then screaming out in apparent agony. A few of the striking sound motifs from the past return, conflating various spaces encountered earlier in the film, as Seymour aims to make his voice heard beyond the confines of the prison that his life without Mélanie has become. His attempt to extend his voice beyond his immediate surroundings emphasizes the impossibility of his own fantasy being realized and the control that the pimp Boyan has in the articulation of space. Only Boyan can establish the crossing of boundary lines marked by the rules of the ownership model—a lesson Seymour has learned the hard way. Jean learned a similar lesson when Claire exerted too much influence over his own capacities for delineating the boundaries of his private domain. In Grandrieux's oeuvre, only Alexi has been able to come to terms with the challenges presented by the sharing of his formerly private space upon the arrival of the stranger Jurgen.

Grandrieux establishes space replacement as the stuff of fantasy, while exploring shared and shifting property dynamics as a marker of reality. In this way he points to a key factor in the politics of property: the challenge that sound poses to commonly held notions of bounded property defined along visual lines. To what extent can the ownership model of property, based on maps, fences, and walls, tolerate sound's tendency to cross boundaries marked out by visual borders? This question speaks to the reality that the notion of private property is itself troubled by the many overlapping claims to space in the real world. Just as an opaque wall can only mark a boundary so far, so too can our concepts of private property only extend so far before they must overlap with the concerns of others. In the films of Grandrieux, we are confronted with clearly demarcated spaces in order to reflect upon the permeability of these boundaries and their connection to narrative themes of human property.

Framing Grandrieux's work in terms of sound as a marker of the spatial practice of property is a logical extension of the critical responses to his films that emphasize the filmmaker's preoccupation with images of bodies moving in space rendered in avant-garde modes of address. At the same time, we must consider sound's role in establishing the structure of this corporeal movement, something I have demonstrated through my analysis of unsettling acoustical moments within these films. In the end, however novel certain aspects of Grandrieux's handling of the camera, *mise-en-scène*, or soundscapes may be, his approach to the pairing of sound and image maintains a serious investment in the conventions of naturalistic spatial representation so that it can make an emphatic point about the issues tied to the transgression of this space. Ultimately I believe he does this as a way of inviting audience engagement, extending the articulations of spatial practice in the films to our own reflections upon how we inhabit the spaces they have opened up.



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