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The Effects of Loss in the Sublime Moment: Jean Pierre and Luc Dardenne’s *Le Fils*

Abstract

Luc and Jean Pierre Dardenne, in their film *Le Fils* (2002), reveal the sublime through the repetition of the movement/act of watching, which are the temporal shifts between grief, mourning, and melancholia. These movements and acts become, in Judith Butler’s (2002) words, “The very means that loss is registered” (470). Jean-François Lyotard (1994) describes the sublime moment as “at the encounter of the two ‘absolutes’ equally ‘present’ to thought” (123) that can evolve from an ordinary perspective into a sudden awareness of a different perspective. In *Le Fils*, melancholia is not a state of mind chronologically arrived at as much as it is part of a cluster of loss effects—coupled with grief and mourning—that can be felt intermittently and simultaneously as a way of navigating the impact of loss. This dynamic state, this shifting cluster, unfolds in *Le Fils* as a disorientation, a metaphysical and temporal precarity. Gilles Deleuze (1986) points out that the sublime moment “is like two presents which ceaselessly intersect, one of which is always arriving and the other is already established” (106). In the context of loss, Deleuze’s “arriving” can be the temporal loss cluster of grief, mourning, and melancholia, while the other present (“already established”) can be loss itself—something that is always present in its effect. Each present exists for the other, one navigating the ongoing impact of the other. Still film frames will be presented like citations of lines from poetry or excerpts from written text to mark the sublime moment’s emergence. I will focus on three such moments in this analysis.

Keywords

Loss, Melancholia, Jean-Pierre Dardenne, Luc Dardenne, Sublime, Film

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“Choice is a kind of repetition, whereby one commits the world to something by making explicit something implicit” (Trahair 2016, 105). Luc and Jean Pierre Dardenne, in their film *Le Fils* (2002), reveal the sublime through the repetition of the movement/act of watching, which are the temporal shifts between grief, mourning, and melancholia. The act of watching, on the surface, is a physical casual everyday movement and action. In *Le Fils*, the repetition of watching (as a choice) takes many forms: teaching, monitoring, following, and surveilling—from which the sublime emerges. These movements and acts become, in Judith Butler’s (2002) words, “The very means that loss is registered” (470). In *Le Fils*, melancholia is not a state of mind chronologically arrived at as much as it is part of a cluster of loss effects—with grief and mourning being the other two—that can be felt intermittently and (or) simultaneously as a way of navigating the impact of loss. This dynamic state, this shifting cluster, unfolds visually in *Le Fils* as disorientation, a metaphysical precarity. As Judith Butler points out in *Precarious Life* (2004): “There is losing, as we know, but there is also the transformative effect of loss, and this latter, cannot be charted or planned” (21). As with Dardenne’s later work, *L’Enfant* (2005) and *Le Gamin au Vélo* (2011), *Le Fils* shares characters marginalized and compromised by their present and pasts, grappling with trying to navigate and understand their helplessness. This vulnerability heightens the possibility for the sublime moment to roil and emerge. There are at least nine sublime moments in *Le Fils*. There could be more sublime moments located in repeated viewings. I will focus on three such moments in this analysis.

In *Permanence and Change* (1954), Kenneth Burke remarks, “Reality is what things will do to us or for us. It is the expectation of comfort or discomfort, prosperity, or risk” (22). This reality—the discomfort and risk—is *done* to the main characters in the Dardennes’ films. Like most of the Dardennes’ work, *Le Fils* begins with the main character in the middle of and navigating a problem that stems from their immediate circumstance and crisis. The film takes place in Seraing, a post-industrial Belgian town a few miles outside Liege, where all the Dardennes’ films are set. The movie begins with Olivier (Olivier Gourmet), a carpentry instructor at a vocational reformatory school for boys, reacting, with his back to the camera, rushing to correct and solve a problem with the shop machinery. Despite his bullish, thick appearance, Olivier is agile, a quality that leads the narrative thread throughout the film. A minute or two later, Olivier is handed a note that he reads blankly and is asked, “Will you take him?” Olivier responds, “No,” emotionless, inscrutable. We find out later that the note was an assignment: that one of his potential

students, sixteen-year-old Francis Thirion (Morgan Marinne), is the same boy who murdered Olivier's son five years ago. Soon after, we see Olivier running about the stairwells and hallways of the school, trying to catch glimpses of Francis; we see the boy as Olivier sees the boy in glimpses—part of his head, his legs, going through a door, his hands signing a document, waiting on line in the cafeteria. This fifteen to sixteen-minute segment is seen and shot over Olivier's shoulders and behind his back. In between glimpses of Francis, we see Olivier teaching. Olivier is stoic and no-nonsense in his approach to instructing his students. He calmly and evenly demonstrates attention to detail and repetition, much the same way the Dardennes capture and highlight the repetition of Olivier's movements, actions, and gestures.

"In the Dardenne films, where we are typically offered only a side-on view of a face or are confronted by a character's back, there is most often a reservation about the display of emotion, a certain blankness" (Rushton 2014, 311). The Dardenne brothers frame and shoot every movement and action up close to highlight and approximate Olivier's perspective. We see everything Olivier sees and everything he does, close up, as a way of possibly measuring and trying to understand Olivier's thinking and actions. This measuring mirrors the way Olivier approaches his trade as a carpenter—measuring, approximating for an eventual result. Much of the movie is shot from behind Olivier's back and over his shoulder—letting us follow, monitor, and surveil him as he monitors, follows, and surveils Francis. Not seeing Olivier's face straight on through most of the film makes his movements and thoughts much more inscrutable, adding dramatic tension to the film and making the movements and actions in the frame seem faster and quicker. There is also an inexplicable visual disjointedness to this way of framing and shooting that mirrors Olivier's disorientation. We see everything we would not usually see up close and in detail. What does long-held grief look like when someone has not yet come to terms with that grief?

The Dardennes offer little backstory in providing clues or motives to what or how Olivier thinks. The Dardennes' camera, always close and tight on Olivier, in Phillip Mosley's words, "Seems at once to embrace in its vision both Olivier's and our anxiety as we seek clues to his thoughts and actions... Words are few and little, but what we see at close quarters bears much meaning" (100). Olivier's apartment does not have much; it is bare and reflects a solitary life. He does exercises for his back, checks his messages, and warms his beans from a can on the stove. We are introduced to Magali (Isabella Soupert), his ex-wife, who comes by on this day to inform Olivier that

she is going to remarry and that she is pregnant. Magali reports this casually as a common courtesy, with no intended malice. She is also checking up on Olivier to see how he is doing. Olivier takes this news stoically, with no visible emotion. Magali, in contrast to Olivier, seems to be moving on with her life and trying to adjust as best she can to their son's death. Magali, we find out later, is the only person that can question Olivier to measure his self-awareness, asking him questions that he cannot or will not ask. When she leaves, he rushes after her to ask why she decided to tell him now of this news—thinking that it might have to do with the timing of Francis coming to his school. The timing is just a serendipitous coincidence that alters Olivier's earlier decision concerning Francis.



Fig. 1. Making the choice, 21:00-21:40, LFF, 2002.

The next day Olivier decides to take Francis on as a student. There are a series of shots to consider here that set up the film's first expedition into the sublime. When Olivier tells his supervisor that he will take Francis on as a student, he is told that Francis is in the locker room. The camera then follows Olivier in an extended behind-the-back tracking shot through the same maze of stairwells and hallways he traversed at the film's beginning when he was trying to catch a glimpse of Francis. As Olivier nears the locker, his walk becomes a tip-toe creep. The first series of shots shows (Fig. 1) Olivier peering around a wall to catch his first complete look at Francis and then going around the wall to be in the same space as Francis. For about twenty seconds, we are staring at Olivier staring at Francis, unseen in the frame. Olivier seems transfixed and blank. The motion and movement of watching and looking become a suspended moment of discovery and something else. The next shot (Fig. 2) shows us Francis, motionless and defenseless, asleep on a bench. This shot is the first full glance that Olivier has of Francis in repose. Olivier seems dumbfounded as he stares at the boy. The last shot (Fig. 3) is a closeup of Olivier from the side, transfixed, staring (still) at the sleeping

Francis. Jean-Francois Lyotard (1994) on the sublime moment, "If in the object or the circumstance there is some 'thing' that leaves thought dumfounded even as it exalts thought" (69). This moment could approximate Olivier's feelings and thinking as he stares at his son's murderer, sleeping, seemingly harmless, in a semi-fetal position a few feet away, whom he agreed to take on as an apprentice. This shot lasts about fifteen seconds before Olivier knocks loudly on the lockers to wake Francis up. The sublime moment, "thought that is felt on the occasion of an absence of the object's form" (Lyotard 1994, 231), has passed, and something has started and changed. Absence (Olivier's son) and presence (Francis) exist momentarily. Oliver has now chosen to engage his loss.



Fig. 2. Francis at first sight,
21:48-21:54, LFF, 2002.



Fig. 3. Transfixed,
22:00-22:15, LFF, 2002.

Kenneth Burke (1941) remarks, "If you look for a man's burden, you will find the principle that reveals the structure of his unburdening [...] if you look for his problem, you will find the lead that explains the structure of his solution. His answer gets its form by relation to the questions he is answering" (92). The unburdening for Olivier is coming up with questions that lead to answers. At times, it seems that Olivier is searching simultaneously through his watching, surveilling, monitoring, and teaching for a question and answer. This results from the immediacy and urgency of knowing the problem but not knowing how to form it into a question that can be answered. Burke's sentiment relates to what Olivier does in movement and action, watching, following, surveilling, teaching, and monitoring Francis. One of Olivier's burdens is coming up with a question that can be answered, leading to a lightening of his burden. The apparent burden for Olivier is the reality of his son's death and its effect at the hands of Francis (who was 11 at

the time) five years earlier. This burden becomes fourfold in its existential weight on Olivier and affects Olivier's movements and actions as a result. With the arrival of Francis (his son's murderer) as a student and apprentice, we can now, as viewers imagine the four-fold aspects of Olivier's burden: Francis's appearance reminds Olivier of his son's murder (past) while teaching Francis reenacts in a way what Olivier would be doing with his son if his son were still alive (past/present); Francis, in turn, becomes a surrogate son (present/future), pushing further Olivier's need to know now (present) what kind of person would kill his son. All of this for Olivier is his burden, which is his reality, and his movement and actions are of a disoriented man trying to orient himself to a degree of understanding and coming to terms with the fluidity of a shifting world—that took his son's life—around him. Francis is the presence that reminds Olivier of his son's absence.



Fig. 4. Orientation attempt,
46:54-46:58, LFF, 2002.



Fig. 5. Imagining presence,
47:11-47:20, LFF, 2002.



Fig. 6. Another perspective,
47:29-47:37, LFF, 2002.



Fig. 7. Still dumbfounded,
47:48-48:20, LFF, 2002.



Fig. 8. Disorientation complete, 48:40-49:00, LFF, 2002.

The second sublime moment happens after Olivier takes Francis's keys from the boy's locker. After checking on and admonishing a truant student outside the school, Olivier enters Francis's apartment. This scene is remarkable in that it is one continual shot lasting about four minutes, following Olivier surveying (an aspect of watching) the lay of Francis's small one-room apartment. As Phillip Mosley notes, "More time and space opens up for moments of stillness and silence" (102). The room is similar to Olivier's apartment in its sparseness and also speaks to a solitary life. Because of the shot's duration, the initial shock of Olivier sneaking into Francis's room fades into trying to figure out what Olivier is trying to figure out. For the viewer, the suspense of Olivier being caught also fades into sharing Olivier's curiosity, discovery, and obsession. It is hard to categorize what we are sharing with Olivier aside from this particular experience. Olivier's behavior is unusual but understandable. On the one hand, there is rationality in this irrationality, as we see in the selected still frames. It is as if Olivier is trying to reenact what being Francis is like on a day-to-day basis. Olivier seems to linger at each spot in the room. First, he goes to the sink (Fig. 4) and then to the bed (Fig. 5), looking at the alarm clock and radio. Olivier then goes to the window to peer through the curtain (Fig. 6). He then sits blankly at the table (Fig. 7), as this excursion into feeling empathy through reenactment makes Oliver even more disoriented. Each spot where Olivier lingers has a day-to-day purpose, an area, and a spot where Francis most likely lingers. In Lyotard's words, "Thought is not only attracted by a given circumstance, it is alternately repelled in an uncertain, incessant movement [...] It involves recoil, as if thinking came up against what precisely attracts it" (68). Finally, Olivier lays stiffly in Francis's bed (Fig. 8) due in part to the intimacy of the spot and gesture. Olivier is uncomfortable—though for a long while, he tries, in repose, to create a moment and memory that might recreate something about Francis that he can understand or at least relate to. Maybe Olivier's mind is wandering, thinking about his lost son. "The objects are also an eternal re-

minder of the emptiness after all meaning and faith is gone. The power of this emptiness lies in its capacity to be filled with meaning again. The image of the world of things is an image of loss, but a loss which has potential, albeit partial, for recuperation" (Ferber 2006, 6). This exercise does not seem to give Olivier any sense of understanding or knowing Francis any better, or maybe it does. It is hard to tell. Butler would describe these acts as a form of grief: "Moments in which one undergoes something outside one's control and finds that one is beside oneself" (2006, 28). To a degree, Olivier is trying to imagine and see presence in absence.

In Jean-Pierre Dardenne's words, "We are more interested in trying to give meaning to a scene by the way we film the relations between the characters and what gestures a character makes—how he passes a cup to someone else, how he pours coffee into his cup. This is more interesting than presenting actions as pretexts for talking" (West/West 16). The lack of dialogue also gives the film a sense of stillness and pause even when the characters and camera are moving and speak to the sublime moment's second scene. In the absence of one thing—dialogue in this case—the ear and eye start to notice other things. John Cage, the composer, wrote a famous piece entitled 4'33. The piece is composed for piano. The piece has a pianist sitting at the piano in silence for four minutes and thirty-three seconds. One of Cage's motives was to "provide listeners with a blessed four-a-half-minute respite from forced listening," allowing the audience to hear and notice other sounds that might be occurring then: muffled traffic outside, people rustling in their seats, footsteps up and down the aisles and so on. Music for Cage was sound in its most arbitrary and natural state, noticed and enjoyed by all through free will. The dialogue-less sections of *Le Fils* have a similar effect in that they stretch the duration of what is seen and heard in the frame and can isolate the movement in a way that seems like language, movement equaling meaning. This effect leads to another effect in Paul Schrader's words, "Watch an image long enough and your mind goes to work" (9). The images seem sans dialogue, both enlarged and amplified, slowed and pared down. The sustained silence and the lack of dialogue heighten these moments and can draw the viewer to pay closer attention to what Olivier is thinking or could be thinking and to the viewer's relation to Olivier's circumstance in terms of what they might think and do in a similar situation.

Olivier navigates his relation to this *differend* of absolutes, absence, and presence and is in between the different states of loss of grief, mourning, and melancholia, making his actions seem unrepresentable. Jacques Rancière would describe this as "the scene of the irreconcilable" (2007, 103). This

irreconcilable scene of absence and presence negates the general assumption/expectation that loss follows a process of grief, mourning, and melancholy. For Olivier, these two absolutes emerge from the random murder of his son (marking absence) and the active presence of his son's murderer (Francis). Here, there are no temporal boundaries or logic between these effects of loss because there does not seem to be any logic in the loss itself other than that it happened. Moreover, in a way, Olivier's actions and reactions reflect the random (and unintentional) murder of his son.

Francis, now sixteen, looks and acts like an older version of eleven, the age he murdered (not intentionally or in a premeditated way, we learn later) Olivier's son. Francis seems passive and doe-like, vulnerable, and almost angelic. He takes medication that makes him sleepy. Francis also seems eager to learn from Olivier and admires his mentor's skill and evenness. Some scenes are painful and extraordinary where we see Francis emulate Olivier's work rituals—the way a son might learn from his father—something that Olivier notices as well. All of this intensifies the weight of Olivier's burden, a conscious overload of what once was, what could have been, what is now, what could be, all swirling and competing, unresolvable, denying Olivier any sense of balance, orientation, and reliable perspective continually navigating the *differend* effect of the memory of his son brought on by the presence of his son's murderer. For Olivier, the day-to-day work “of measurement, of balance in carrying and leveling wood, and of gauging distances between persons and objects” (Mosley 2013, 98) is a source of stability because it involves orienting objects and making things fit. As Wendy Brown points out, “melancholy is loyal ‘to the world of things’” (1999, 21).

Much of the film's tension stems from what Olivier knows and what Francis does not know. Francis is starting to trust Olivier without knowing his motives for taking him on as a student. In the film's second half, Olivier surveils Francis less and interacts with him more. Like the other boys, Olivier instructs Francis in the basics of carpentry. Francis is very open to being led and taught. We see Olivier breaking Francis's fall from a wood-carry-up-the-ladder gone wrong exercise, with Francis falling on Olivier's back and then being visibly shaken by having possibly injured Olivier. Francis starts to openly emulate Olivier's rituals, protocol, and routines for work—something that Francis could only achieve by actively watching—right down to the content, relaxed after-work whistle. There is another scene where Olivier and Francis run into each other serendipitously one night at a hot dog stand. Francis admires Olivier's measuring ability—and asks Olivier to estimate certain distances before measuring the distance himself, very much a fa-

ther/son, teacher/student moment. Conversations between the two are generally punctuated by long silences that outwardly indicate, to a certain degree, a shared ease in silence and being comfortable in the other's presence. Francis is no monster, making Olivier's dilemma about who and what to be with Francis much more daunting.

Olivier also has to contend with his ex-wife Magali and her feelings about Francis, whom she characterizes as a monster. There are two scenes where Olivier is less than forthcoming with Magali about his contact and interactions with Francis. In the first scene, Olivier visits Magali at her gas station cashier job to tell her of Francis's appearance at the vocational training center. Magali is visibly alarmed. Olivier then lies and tells her that Francis has left the center and will not return. Then, to gauge her reaction, Olivier tells Magali that he was floating the idea of teaching Francis. This semi-admission further upsets Magali, and she suggests to Olivier that they never discuss it again. Olivier's next encounter with Magali occurs when Magali confronts Olivier about taking Francis on as a student. She has stalked him (presumably in the same manner Olivier followed Francis) and is standing in the parking lot of the vocational center when Olivier is about to pull out and give Francis a lift home. Olivier notices and stops to park the car, getting out to face Magali, who is near hysterics because she senses correctly that the boy in the car is Francis, her son's murderer. She faints when Olivier admits that the boy in the car is indeed Francis and that he has taken Francis on as a student. Olivier runs to get hot coffee from his car to give to Magali. When Magali comes to, she stares at Olivier face-to-face and asks, "Who do you think you are?" When Olivier does not respond, Magali does not miss a beat and asks, "So why you?" To which Olivier responds, "I don't know." The answer is the truth and not an evasion. Judith Butler speaks to this disorientation: "When we lose some of these ties by which we are constituted, we do not know who we are or what we do" (2004, 22). Olivier's disconnect (and distance) from Magali, a constituted tie, intensifies his bewilderment, an existential unmooring. Even when confronted with answerable questions, Olivier still seems unable to express and locate an answer.

The last third of the film has Olivier taking Francis on a day trip to the lumber yard his brother owns. During the first half of the ride, Olivier quizzes Francis about different types of woods and trees. Between the questions and long silences, Olivier asks Francis about the crime he committed five years earlier. Francis reluctantly admits to stealing and some other "stupid stuff." Not a contrite confession, but also not a lie. Soon after, they stop at a roadside diner. As they eat, Francis asks Olivier to be his guardian. Olivier

asks why, and Francis replies that it is because Olivier is teaching him a trade. Olivier says he will think about it. They then play a game of Foosball. It is here where Francis casually and nonchalantly admits there was a “killing” involved in the theft that he was a part of five years ago. Soon after, there is a strange moment when Olivier goes into the washroom to wash and dry his hands thoroughly and stares at himself blankly (Fig. 9). Witnessing a man staring blankly at his reflection staring blankly back is unsettling. It seems like Olivier is trying to figure himself out and “resetting” or just saying to himself, “What next?” He also washes his glasses thoroughly as if this might help him see clearly and focus, which can also be a gesture of “washing your hands” of something; maybe getting to know Francis and all the complexities it entails, has not been worth the pain and time. Furthermore, maybe Olivier is trying to check himself, especially in light of Francis’s request that he would be his guardian. If that were to happen, Olivier would have to reveal himself as the father of the boy Francis murdered. It is anticipation overload, both a literal and figurative moment of reflection for Olivier, its impact and effect still obscure and hard to read. We see this movement/action/gesture without the finality or hint of what it might mean: the first moment of a cluster of moments that lead to the sublime in their eventual accumulation.



Fig. 9. Reflecting as watching,
1:15:44-1:16:11, LFF, 2002.



Fig. 10. Going too far,
1:19:14, LFF, 2002.

During the ride toward the lumberyard, Olivier asks more questions about what Francis did to be sent to the juvenile home. Olivier seems to be interrogating Francis. Francis is reluctant and sheepish in his answers—though he finally admits to stealing a car radio and strangling a young boy who would not let go of him—not knowing that he was Olivier’s son. Olivier admonishes the boy in anger, wanting Francis fully to take responsibility,

to show visible remorse maybe—then stops the car abruptly, realizing he missed his exit to the lumber yard. The camera then gets a full closeup of Olivier’s face as he glances over his shoulder to back the car up and says simultaneously (Fig. 10), “I went too far.” It seems to be an acknowledgment of sorts for Olivier, giving words to both his spatial and ethical disorientation: He has gone “too far” missing (temporarily) his literal destination but also going too far in proximity to Francis, that in wanting and getting to know him has brought Olivier to a moment where his disorientation feels like a point of no return. The expression or look on Olivier’s face (Fig. 11) is both inscrutable and desperate, and he is looking directly into the camera, giving the audience a face-to-face encounter—though this face-to-face encounter, oddly enough, gives no indication of what he is thinking or what he will do. It is a sustained up-in-the-air unsettledness that gives and offers no resolution, just blank anxiety.



Fig. 11. Inscrutable, 1:19:19-1:19:23, LFF, 2002.



Fig. 12. The reveal, 1:28:38, LFF, 2002.



Fig. 13. Face to face, 1:32:08-1:32:32, LFF, 2002.

When they reach the lumberyard, Olivier guides Francis again (as in class, mentor to student), identifying certain woods, carrying, measuring, and cutting the wood, going on for a few minutes. It is shortly after this mentor-teacher set of routines that Olivier abruptly reveals to Francis, “The boy you killed was my son” (Fig. 12). There is a moment of silence before Francis runs away, and Olivier gives chase explaining that he would not hurt Francis that he just wants to talk. When Olivier finally catches Francis, it is an open tackle in the woods. Olivier finds himself on top of Francis, with his hands around the young boy’s neck. Both are breathless. We see Francis from the side looking up into Olivier’s face—in what seems to be a moment of recognition; Francis might now have an idea of what Olivier has felt. Olivier’s hands around Francis’s neck (Fig. 13) might seem more of a simulation than a threat or cause to harm. Olivier’s hands now on the ground is a sublime moment in that it is a gesture from a man who is Francis’s teacher but is also a victim of Francis, who murdered his flesh and blood. Judith Butler speaks to this moment: “By virtue of being a bodily being, already given over, beyond ourselves, [we are] implicated in the lives that are not our not own” (2006, 28). At this moment, Olivier is coming to terms with his son’s death and revealing to Francis his sorrow, rage, love, and unbalance while giving Francis an idea of what his son might have felt in his last moments. An existential teachable moment and a shift in their perspectives. As Olivier and Francis catch their collective breaths together, it is still a guess of the effect of what just transpired (Fig. 14). Olivier walks away—without a word—to walk back to his car and pack the wood. A few minutes later, Francis approaches Olivier—dirtied and hesitant, without a word (Fig. 15). Then, in a shared movement action, without instruction, Francis helps Olivier load the wood onto the trailer (Fig. 16). The movie ends with a quick jump cut to black while they are wrapping up the wood. Work, a wordless action and gesture.

Luc Dardenne rhetorically asks, “Perhaps by filming gestures as precisely as possible, you can render apprehensible that which is not seen?” (West/West 2003, 17). The work here at the end, though similar in movement and action to Francis and Olivier’s previous teacher/apprentice interactions, feels collaborative as an understanding that can be expressed in acts.



Fig. 14. Shared grief,
1:32:58-1:33:33, LFF, 2002.



Fig. 15. Apprenticeship continued,
1:34:27, LFF, 2002.



Fig. 16. Wordless action, 1:35:50, LFF, 2002.

Jean-Pierre Dardenne once remarked about *Le Filles*: “I feel that in *Le Filles*, it is more of a question of waiting [...] It is more of a question of waiting for a word that is supposed to be spoken but is not forthcoming and of waiting to see what Olivier will do. Even Olivier does not know” (West/West 2003, 16). Waiting as the act of watching in *Le Filles* can take different forms. Everything Olivier does—watching, monitoring, instructing, surveilling—is a form of waiting as a way of anticipating something else about to happen. Rancière views the sublime moment temporally as a “conception of time cut into two by a founding event or by an event to come” (2007, 131). The sublime moment can also be felt as a residual effect of loss and as a way of navigating the impact of loss. These moments also mark the disorientation between these

three effects of loss—grief, mourning, and melancholia—that in Olivier’s sphere of absence and presence overlap and blend into each so that there are no temporal nor cognitive boundaries that experientially separate them. Grief, mourning, and melancholy for Olivier are “experienced in a certain configuration of simultaneity and succession” (Butler 2002, 272). The sublime moments in *Le Fils* emerge when the repetition of one movement/act quickly turns into another, becoming interchangeable, unveiling a sudden awareness of a different perspective. These moments are the temporal shifts that Judith Butler describes as “the disorientation of grief [that] posits the ‘I’ in the mode of unknowingness” (2004, 30). The unknowingness for Olivier is dynamic: explicit in his movement and actions that seem, at first glance, hard to explain; and implicit in his thinking, trying to understand his motives interacting with Francis. The act of mourning (a way of coping with the sadness that comes with loss) and melancholia (grieving a loss that is hard to identify)—are part of Olivier’s unknowingness and disorientation. Olivier’s actions, highly personal and unrepresentable at first glance, are acts and effects of his disorientation, unknowingness, and his own particular “configuration of simultaneity” and succession. The heightened moment of disorientation is the sublime moment, which feels suspended and unmoored temporally between a beginning and an end, and conceptually absence and presence. Rancière’s observation that “the feeling of powerlessness in the experience of the sublime is endured by reason” (2007, 93) is irreconcilable. This feeling of powerlessness can be felt through Oliver’s endurance and is anchored by a cluster of acts—waiting, watching, mentoring, surveilling, and teaching—the very acts where loss is registered.

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