Lorraine Noir: Didier Daeninckx and the writing of deindustrialisation

Thibaut Raboin

Senior Teaching Fellow, Department of French, University College London

thibaut.raboin.09@ucl.ac.uk

Abstract (ENG)

This article studies Didier Daeninckx as a writer of deindustrialization. In the novel *Play-Back* (1986) and in short stories such as "Traverse no 28" (1998), he weaves a multifaceted critique of France as haunted by its industrial past. Daeninckx's first tool is to write a noir history of deindustrialization, thus producing a subaltern history of Lorraine. Reflecting on the uses of memory (and of his own work in that regard), Daeninckx also writes a criticism of the nascent business of industrial heritage. Finally, this article appraises Daeninckx's critique by examining his writing's nostalgia for a lost industrial world, as well and its denunciation of post-industrial subjectivations.

Abstract (FRE)

Cet article propose d'analyser Didier Daeninckx comme écrivain de la désindustrialisation. Dans le roman *Play-Back* (1986) et dans des nouvelles telles que "Traverse no 28" (1998), il tisse une représentation de la France post-industrielle qui est en rapport constant avec son passé industriel, offrant ainsi une multiplicité de points de vue critiques. Son premier outil est l'écriture d'une histoire de la désindustrialisation en tant que récit noir, et la production d'une histoire subalterne de la Lorraine. Réfléchissant aux usages de la mémoire (et par là, de son propre travail) Daeninckx offre également une critique de la patrimonialisation industrielle

naissante. Enfin, cet article analyse le discours critique de Daeninckx à l'aune de la relation ambiguë que ses écrits entretiennent entre la nostalgie d'un monde ouvrier perdu, et la dénonciation des subjectivations post-industrielles.

Introduction

In the first pages of Didier Daeninckx's *Play-Back* (1986), a noir novel set in deindustrialized Lorraine, the protagonist walks through the fictional town of Longrupt looking for the mortuary. The pages describe, not without dark humor, a dead town where all shops have closed and the people have left. From the "boue visqueuse" on the track, to the rows of "pavillons ternes", the description is relentlessly grim, and plunges the reader into an atmosphere that would be aptly described as postindustrial noir. The dereliction of the town, where factories, housing and the train station appear to be abandoned, create an initial mystery for the reader to ponder, even before the murder mystery that will unfold. Daeninckx's noir novels have usually been analyzed in relation to history, especially hidden and difficult moments of French history (most notably with *Meurtres pour mémoire* in 1983), and in relation to writing politically committed *polars*. In this article, I wish to show him as an important writer of deindustrialization, focusing on *Play-Back* and on short stories set in the North and the North-East of France. Existing analyses of *Play-Back* have not looked in detail at the question of deindustrialization, focusing instead on the question of ghost-writing and authenticity (Daeninckx, Écrire en contre 57–58; Modenesi). Taking as a cue Daeninckx's assertion that locations are central in his writing process, I wish to shift the focus of analysis to the specificities of Lorraine's landscape and history and put the novel in dialogue with other cultural production on the region's deindustrialization.

Play-Back follows Patrick Farrel, a young writer who, in a bargain to get his first novel published, must ghost-write the autobiography of Bianca B., a young popstar from Longrupt.

The locality is a portmanteau of two existing towns, Longwy and Villerupt, in the *pays haut*, the former heartland of steelmaking at the French-Luxemburgish border. Traveling there to meet her and learn more about her origins to fabricate a compelling rags-to-riches story, he ends up investigating the murder of Prima Piovani, Bianca's childhood friend and songwriter. Doing so, he uncovers the morally bankrupt practices of the music and publishing industries and learns more about the lives of those who have stayed in the region after the demise of the steel industry. In the end, Farrel refuses to write the biography, and decides to write a novel about Lorraine, entitled "Play-Back".

Deindustrialized Lorraine appears to be a fertile ground for noir novels. For most people, aside from the history of successive German annexations, the Lorraine region usually evokes an industrial past: once nicknamed the French Texas, it is often perceived as particularly hard hit by deindustrialization. For the past forty years, Lorraine has undergone a series of crises, with the closure of mines, followed by that of steelworks and finally by the delocalization of the factories attracted to the area by generous public subsidies to create jobs in the region. Mass redundancies in towns living almost exclusively off large steel factories led to social unrest, culminating in 1979 with a long strike and worker's movement in Longwy. Although they marked a moment of great creativity and solidarity, the 1979 movements did not stop the redundancies. This recent history has inspired a number of politically committed noir novels since the 1980s with established noir authors such as Daeninckx (*Play-Back*, 1986), Dominique Manotti (*Lorraine Connection*, 2006) and Roger Martin (*Skinheads,* 1988; *Un Chien de sa chienne*, 2000), alongside younger authors, including the winner of the Goncourt prize in 2018 Nicolas Mathieu (*Aux Animaux la guerre*, 2016) and authors better known locally such as André Faber (*La Quiche était froide*, 2016) and Zilber Karevski (*Vive la F.A.R.C.E.!*, 2013). *Play-Back* was published in 1986, in the aftermath of the 1979

movement, still at the height of the process of deindustrialization. The history that Daeninckx uncovers is, in this respect, "warmer" than for authors like Manotti or Mathieu.

These novels have in common an overtly political nature. As Claire Gorrara has noted, "the French *roman* noir has, since its inception, functioned as a form of social investigation, a disabused narrative of its times, often narrated from the perspective of the dispossessed, excluded and marginalized" (Gorrara, 'Post-War French Crime Fiction' 54–55). This political orientation declined over time, especially throughout the 1960s, but was revitalized after May 1968, when leftist cultural politics outside of political parties gave rise to what has been called the *néo-polar* (Deleuse 70–74; Gorrara, Dark Fictions 59; Lee 72). Noir novels, unlike detective novels, tend to depict crimes that emerge out of social conditions, rather than individual ones: they often denounce collective and institutional violence, using the narrative device of the investigation to reveal forms of injustice that are usually invisible (Desnain 4–5).

In this article, I take as a starting point Daeninckx's professed position as a noir author as "écrire en contre" -- against power and amnesia (Daeninckx, Écrire en contre 68). The emphasis on "contre" as a position is reminiscent of Luc Boltanski's analysis of detective novels in *Énigmes et complots*, where he describes detection as staging "RÉALITÉ / contre / réalité". With the birth of detective fiction, sociology and the diagnosis of paranoia, Boltanski identifies a moment when a general worry about the solidity of reality arose; there is in modernity an "incertidude de ce qu'il en est de ce qui est" (36). Being able to refer to something akin to "reality" presumes that we can rely on certain regularities that happen whatever the situation: social reality is thus maintained by institutions, especially the state, which guarantee the distinction between the possible and the impossible when one conceives of society (30–31). Detection, for Boltanski, is an undertaking stemming from the worry that behind the apparent social reality guaranteed by the state, there might lurk another reality, a

hidden one, with different laws and regularities. Boltanski reveals the kinship between detection, sociology, paranoia and conspiracies. In this regard, the noir novels of deindustrialization uncover another reality behind the public discourses of deindustrialization. In this article, I will analyze the techniques used by Daeninckx to engender this critical revelation.

The political subversion at the heart of *néo-polar* must be examined afresh in a contemporary context where it has become difficult to imagine new modes of existence outside of neoliberal ideology and indeed of capitalism (Pepper 229). This follows critiques of the reorganization of capitalism in the neoliberal era, such as Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello's discussion of what they call "the new spirit of capitalism". With this coinage, they describe the new modes of justification of capitalism since the 1970s, and emphasize how the demands of autonomy and liberation voiced in 1968 have been partly incorporated by capitalism, through for example, the commodification of difference and authenticity (241–90). In this context, the revitalization of social critique in noir literature after May 1968 can be reappraised for neoliberal times. In *Unwilling Executioner*, Andrew Pepper offers an analysis of what he calls "capitalist noir", which he conceives as

> the noir equivalent of what Jacques Rancière characterizes as "a disenchanted knowledge of the reign of the commodity and the spectacle" in which we are inevitably "absorbed into the body of the beast, [and] where even our capacities for subversive, autonomous practices and the networks of interaction that we might utilize against it, serve the new power of the beast" (232).

For Philippe Corcuff, this noir disenchantment leads to a radicalization of social critique with contradictory effects: on the one hand, it can open up new spaces to reimagine society; on the other hand, it can be fatalistic and find refuge in disabused inaction (104–06). Daeninckx's

writings on deindustrialization illuminate the conjunction of the spread of neoliberal policies, deindustrialization, and the absorption of critique. Noir's relationship with disenchantment is crucial here: from *Play Back* in 1986 to "Traverse no 28" in 1998, two decades of failed policies of reindustrialization in the North-East of France made disenchantment a central feeling in the affective economy of deindustrialization. Moreover, the erasure of industrial memory tracked by Daeninckx, including in the landscapes themselves, has effaced traces of dissent against the march of history towards a post-industrial, neoliberal future.

In this article, I thus look at how Daeninckx turns the landscapes of deindustrialization into a capitalist noir setting, attentive simultaneously to the erasure of the past crimes of industrialization and to the failings of post-industrial futures. I will first study how Daeninckx employs his trademark techniques of historical detection in the context of deindustrialization, especially his efforts to uncover subaltern histories. I will then look at the specific noir temporalities of deindustrialization in his works, especially in relation to past utopias and to the current development of industrial heritage. Finally, I will examine Daeninckx's ambiguous discourse on authenticity and simulation in post-industrial times.

Historical detection

Much analysis of Daeninckx's work concentrates on the way he tells history as, and in, noir narratives (Belhadjin; Florey; Forsdick; Hurcombe; Jeannerod; Morris; Reid). Dominique Jeannerod has characterized Daeninckx's output as a "subaltern history" that attempts to centralize voices and testimonies that had been moved to the margins of memory (40–41). In the case of Daeninckx's writings on deindustrialization, I propose that such history simultaneously unearths social suffering and celebrates working class culture, leading to a bittersweet depiction of Lorraine.

For Daeninckx, history comes hand in hand with an attention to geography. His writing usually starts from a consideration of places, rather than characters or situations. He explains: "Il y a quelque chose qui me happe, et qui s'impose ensuite. Le lieu est d'une importance capitale dans tout ce que j'écris. Ce n'est pas simplement le décor. Le lieu est le personnage principal de chacun de mes romans" (Daeninckx, *Écrire en contre* 56). The places that fascinate Daeninckx are situated at the margins, which he has explored not only in *Play-Back* but also in collections of short stories. *Hors Limites* (1992), *Autres Lieux* (1993), *En marge* (1994) and *Cités perdues* (2005) are all about marginal spaces from the Paris banlieue to the deindustrialized North. Factories are also recurrent places in his novels, from the fictional accounts of the *front populaire* he has written as an accompaniment to Willy Ronis's factory photographs in *À Nous la vie!* (1996), to the derelict factories of *Play-Back* and "Traverse no 28" (1994).

The inspiration for *Play-Back* came to Daeninckx after meeting a man from Villerupt in a bar who told him about the region's industrial history. A few years later, going there himself, Daeninckx witnessed the dismantling of factories and their delocalization to new centers of steel production in China: "Des bulldozers recouvraient les fondations des hauts fourneaux de terre végétale, les mines à ciel ouvert se transformaient en terrain de moto cross. Comme s'il s'était agi d'effacer les traces d'un crime" (Daeninckx, *Écrire en contre* 18). He also calls it the physical erasure of history: "on dit aux gens qu''il ne s'est rien passé.' On fait retourner la région à un état antérieur mais il reste que tout a été saccagé en sous-sol. Toutes les traces sont là pour qui veut bien les chercher" (58). The starting point of *Play-Back* is an impulse of historical detection, one where the novel's detective sees capitalism as a crime of exploitation of both land and people. What therefore are the clues, or the traces of this exploitation in *Play-Back*?

The first line of the novel starts: "On m'avait dit: 'La morgue? c'est à la gare…'" (11). An initial reading of this introduction is to think of it as a way of signifying the death of the post-industrial city. This type of image can be found in many films, photographs and books about Lorraine.[1] I would privilege however another reading: reminiscent of the tramway taking half-asleep workers from the factory to the slaughterhouse in the opening pages of Jean-Paul Sartre's *La Nausée*, the metaphor is not just about the place, but about the people too. The industrial towns' stations were indeed the port of arrival of countless immigrants, brought by labor prospectors who convoyed them by bus and train from Italy to the mines. The mortuary in the train station is thus also a way of remembering that arriving in the region for prosperous futures also meant a greatly reduced life expectancy, with the specters of both work accidents and siderosis -- the occupational lung disease that claimed the lives of many miners shortly after their retirement. Places in the novel can often be read in view of Daeninckx's interest in unveiling the social history of deindustrialization. The novel includes, for example, the story of the pirate radio *Lorraine coeur d'acier*, which broadcasted during the Longwy movement in 1979, and on which Daeninckx has Bianca and Prima starting their singing careers.[2] Others stories found in *Play-Back* are surprisingly little known, such as the willing abduction of popular singer Johnny Hallyday by unionists to visit Usinor factories in March 1979 (Daeninckx, Play-Back 166–67; 'Johnny Hallyday et les sidérurgistes lorrains - archives de La CFDT').

Sometimes, Daeninckx goes further and mythologizes this history: for example, the Italian immigrant family of Bianca is described as "une vieille famille de Longrupt" (81). The expression "vieille famille" is more often used to talk about old aristocratic families, and in the region of Longwy would immediately evoke the likes of the de Wendels, the steel barons with their self-aggrandizing chateaux and churches. A comparable patronymic play is used to greater effect in a later short story called "La Particule", also set in a post-industrial town, but

in the North this time. It tells the story of François Macarez, a former factory worker who lost

his job in the 1980s, and who was adopted as a child. Seeing a photograph in the newspaper

of a reunion of the descendants of a local aristocratic family, the Sauch de la Rhônelle, he

recognizes himself in the traits of one of the family members, and gradually becomes

obsessed with the idea that he might in fact be part of that prestigious family. Macarez suffers

a slow descent into irrationality, and every hurdle he encounters becomes proof that "they"

are trying to hide his true lineage, illustrating the linkage between detective stories,

conspiracies and paranoia analyzed by Boltanski (240–310). In "La Particule", post-industrial

subjectivations, especially that of the long-term unemployed, become pathologized, and

Macarez ends up in a mental health hospital. In *Play-Back*, the use of the expression "vieille

famille" has a very different effect: it rewrites the mythology of the region to place immigrant

workers at its center instead of local patricians, testifying to the fact that the whole region

relied, since the beginning of the twentieth century, on a very large immigrant population

from Italy, Poland, Portugal and the Maghreb, with the addition of Ukrainian prisoners of war

during the WW2 annexation, and Indo-Chinese workers -- all with different statuses, rights

and wages.

Daeninckx's attention to marginalized voices is exemplified in the novel by an elderly

hairdresser living behind the half-shut curtain of her abandoned shop who senses her town is

disappearing before her eyes. She asks Farrel to write about it to save it from complete

erasure and explains: "Ils veulent faire croire qu'il ne s'est jamais rien passé ici et bientôt

nous ne serons plus là pour dire le contraire…" (Daeninckx, Play-Back 179). Farrel's work,

which is both investigation and writing, uses the traditional techniques of detection: talking to

witnesses and exploring places. On the one hand, this exploration becomes akin to an

archaeology of ruins, as when Farrel arrives in the closed hair salon, the name of which is

barely visible on the shopfront, and the inside looks like a time capsule of the 1950s, covered

in dust (172–73).[3] On the other hand, talking to witnesses resembles oral history, as the hairdresser resurrects what Longrupt was before the industrial crisis, how people lived and what the streets looked like.

However, voices do more than oral history in *Play-Back*. As Farrel leaves, the old lady gives him a tape of early songs recorded by Prima Piovani, her great-niece and Bianca B.'s songwriter. This tape is a literal record of local working-class culture and Italian immigration, with songs called "la gare de Longrupt", "la Termacadamisation" and "Le café Francini" (177). Three songs about building and living in Longrupt, which contrast greatly with the opening pages of the novel and their description of ruins. As Farrel listens to the tape in his car, he suddenly solves the novel's mystery: Prima was not only the writer of Bianca's songs, but also their ghost-singer, and it was for this reason she was killed. The tape as recording technology allows the novel to be haunted by both Prima and Longrupt's prosperous past. Haunting refers here to the use of Jacques Derrida's concept of hauntology in sound studies, with the idea that ghosts may be "media effects, invisible, technologically induced agencies that emerge, under appropriate circumstances, as autonomous self-enunciating entities" (Rotman 113). In the novel, the tape recording is a noir take on this function, as it gives Prima and Longrupt a post-mortem agency that the recording industry denied them. The recorded medium is by definition "noisy": it is full of unwanted sounds to which we are not usually attentive (Hainge 115-22). Bianca B's record, love songs cleared of any trace of the record industry's exploitation of its ghost singer, as well as of the social history of Longrupt, contrasts with the tape found by Farrel, which is haunted not only by the assassinated ghost-singer, but also by the social history of Italian immigration. It then falls to the ghost-writer to be attuned to the hauntings of history and turn *Play-Back* into a testament to the return of the ghost of industrialization.

The uses of memory

This attention to history leads Daeninckx to produce a discourse that it critical about the uses of memory, and disenchanted about the post-industrial present. A first dimension of this criticism concerns the past utopias of industrial modernity that have been lost, and a second articulates a critique of the capitalist uses of memory in the post-industrial economy of enrichment.

Play-Back's treatment of ruins is clearest in a passage set in Le Corbusier's *Unité d'habitation* in Briey. This modernist housing block, also called *cité radieuse*, is one of a series of five similar apartment blocks designed by Le Corbusier in France and Germany. It was the only one of the series built as social housing by local authorities with a much-restricted budget compared to its Marseilles forebear. Construction started in 1959 and the first inhabitants moved in 1961: the building was designed to house the families of miners, workers and engineers from the nearby mines and factories. Its opening however coincided with the closure of mines in the region; and this, alongside a desire on the part of the local authority to get rid of a building that was costly to maintain, led to its abandonment in 1973 (Sbriglio 213–14).[4] In the novel, Farrel is looking for an ex-convict on the run hiding in the abandoned block, which had become "un coupe-gorge signé le Corbusier" (Daeninckx, Play-Back 192). A masterpiece of modernism, with many ground-breaking design ideas to afford domestic comfort hitherto unknown to its working inhabitants, the *cité radieuse* symbolizes the promises of modernity that were consubstantial with the industrialization of the region. Daeninckx's interest in such buildings is also visible in later short stories, such as "Cités perdues", set around the demolition of a block in La Courneuve in Paris' suburbs. In his writing about the suburbs (such as 1993's "Quartier du Globe"), Daeninckx highlights the mass dismantling of utopian ideas that happened in the programmed dereliction of the *grands ensembles* built after the Second World War. In *Play-Back* deindustrialization condemns not

only the building, but also the social utopia it represented. This symbolism is carried by the physical building, placed in the middle of a forest, hidden from the main town, a topographical black hole that the character has trouble finding.

By 1994, when Daeninckx published the short story "Traverse no 28", he had started to articulate how memory, and by extension his own work, can be appropriated by new forms of capitalism. The story follows Bertrand Lemoens, an artist working on a public commission in Trith-Saint-Léger, near Valenciennes in the North. The story starts in an abandoned Usinor factory (the same industrial group that also had steel mills in Longwy), where Lemoens trawls for material to salvage to make a sculpture. The story places at its heart the "enrichment" described by Luc Boltanski and Arnaud Esquerre in *Enrichissement*, as the process of reconversion of dead (industrial) capital, its enrichment by culture professionals, and its marketisation as an object with new value (21–66). This cultural labor of enrichment, in this case involving reusing a railroad tie (the titular "traverse no 28"), quickly turns into an investigation: the passage set in the abandoned factory reads like a detection where the artist tries to make sense of the traces of industrial history left in the ruins, reimagining the toil and exploitation of thousands of workers. Following noir tropes, shortly after noticing the graffitied logo of the factory USINOR turned into USIMOR, the protagonist discovers a skeleton hidden in a ventilation shaft.

Investigating this death, Lemoens learns about the strikes and protest during the closure of local factories in 1985, the victim being a protester. At the exhibition's opening at the Centre Andy-Warhol in Trith-Saint-Léger, he unveils his artwork: a projection of the faces of the protesters and demonstrators of 1985. All the audience members are affected by the artwork, those who remember family members and friends and even the "branchés de Valenciennes qui ne résistaient pas à l'émotion" (120). "Traverse no 28" is particularly interesting because it turns subaltern history into an artwork; doing so, the story not only works against the

erasure of this history, but comments on its appropriation by the economy of enrichment. Indeed, at the art show's opening, the two populations looking at the artworks represent two different economic positions in a post-industrial economy: culture professionals who are the workers of the economy of enrichment, and the people whose past is being raided to rebrand the Valenciennes region. The story shows a continuity between the workers who have lost their industrial jobs, and whose struggle is erased from memory and then excavated, and the people who are left aside by the economy of enrichment, that is those who do not take part in the cultural, scientific and marketing work involved in the redeployment of industrial heritage into valuable post-industrial commodity. The cultural labor of memory is thus questioned: following Boltanski and Esquerre's question "À qui profite le passé?" (373), mimicking the traditional "Cui bono?" of detective fiction, Daeninckx's capitalist noir shows industrial memory to be simultaneously a cultural practice that resists the erasure of workers' resistance and a cultural labor that serves to enrich and create value out of dead capital. The railroad tie on its own is post-industrial waste, but once combined with a narrative about working-class struggle, it becomes a marketable work of art, and a valuable form of heritage that forms part of strategies of valorisation or touristification of the area. In "Traverse no 28", Daeninckx therefore envisions a critique of his own historiographic work as appropriable by post-industrial capitalism.

The inauthenticity of post-industrial times

In Daeninckx's capitalist noir, the subversive capacities of individuals always run the risk of being absorbed by capitalism. In this context, what protects his postindustrial writing from falling into cynicism and inaction? To conclude this article, I propose that Daeninckx answers this quandary by offering an ethical position based on the distinction between authenticity and simulation and the condemnation of postindustrial times.

Throughout his work, Daeninckx has produced several texts about industrial times, very often tinted with nostalgia, even when they also portray social suffering. This ambiguous discourse is evident in the use by Daeninckx and his publishers of his own biography as a factory worker. His attention to the lives of working people in the banlieues and the industrial regions is explained in interviews by his growing up in Aubervilliers, near Paris, and his experience of leaving school to work aged fourteen as a "grouillot" (messenger boy) in a printing workshop (Daeninckx, Écrire en contre 8). It is partly deindustrialization that led Daeninckx to write novels: when the printing industry was in difficulty in the 1970s and it became harder to keep a job, Daeninckx ended up working for less and less interesting employers, printing for months on end the same Renault car repair form: "Je crois que c'est en réaction au fait d'avoir imprimé toujours la même chose que je me suis mis à écrire. Là, chaque mot est différent, on a le sentiment d'inventer" (Collovald 11). In this case, writing is an escape from the alienation of factory work. However, the intimate relationship between factory work and writing is not only one of opposition. In a short text about the artist Mélik Ouzani collected in *La Mémoire longue*, Daeninckx writes about how art supplies are all made and packaged in industrial zones on the outskirts of cities: there, art is not an escape from factory life but is conditioned by it (174). This seems to apply to Daeninckx's writing too, where the industrial is not simply a source of inspiration, but the positionality from which writing emerges.

Daeninckx's nostalgia usually relies on a bittersweet celebration of solidarity amid industrial exploitation. Typical of this output is "L'Écriture des abattoirs", an essay in which he describes how Aubervilliers used to reek of death, "parsemée d'usines de bouillons cubes, de conserveries, de peausseries, de boucheries industrielles, d'ateliers de 'noir animal', de cuves de polyphosphates, de montagnes d'engrais" (139), whilst simultaneously celebrating its atmosphere of solidarity: "Il y a cela dans la ville ouvrière, et peut-être plus encore dans celle-ci: une conscience qu'on y arrivera tous ensemble, et que le ciment de cette échappée

vers le haut s'appelle la dignité" (141). The collection of photographs *À Nous la vie!* displays a similarly equivocal nostalgia. For example, Ronis's photograph of a 47-year-old man suffering from silicosis, looking twice his actual age is a clear testament to the crimes of industrialization -- a photograph that was also used as cover for Daeninckx's short story collection *En Marge* (Ronis and Daeninckx 137). However, the prevailing mood of the book remains that of celebration: Daeninckx's imagined first-person account of a young man discovering the world of work during the *front populaire* in 1936 expresses excitement for things that today's reader experiences as nostalgia for what was lost by deindustrialization: a mass worker's movement, an urban working-class culture and industrial skills.

Compared to these texts, *Play-Back* appears at first to have a marked lack of nostalgia: its mode of historical detection attempting to uncover the crimes of both industrialization and deindustrialization goes against such a position. This mood also has to do with chronology: *Play-Back* was written in the aftermath of the defeat of the 1979 movement and does not look back at it in the same way as do Dominique Manotti's *Lorraine Connection* (2006) or Le Bar Floréal's photographic collection *Retour en Lorraine* (2009), which are haunted by it. In these two books, the memory of the 1979 strikes puts into relief the inadequacies of the present time (in Manotti, a failing strike, and in *Retour en Lorraine*, life in a leisure and consumer society).

Daeninckx achieves a similar critique, albeit by other means. If, in the early 1980s, there was not enough distance with the worker's movement to avoid confronting its failure, Daeninckx, by moving away from it and focusing on the post-industrial present of the mid 1980s, enables a criticism of post-industrial subjectivations. As Pierre Verdaguer notes, in *Play-Back*, Daeninckx portrays post-industrial society as chiefly preoccupied with the production of simulations and deceptions (48). This critique is articulated in a *mise-en-abyme*: by the end of *Play-Back*, Farrel decides to drop the ghostwriting of Bianca B.'s biography in order to write

his own novel, telling the story of Prima Piovani's exploitation and of deindustrialization, a work he decides to call "Play-Back". The novel within the novel stages a conflict between the music industry's need for fantasies to sell discs, and the ethical imperatives of the writer confronted with the reality of Lorraine. The ghost-written biography could only turn Lorraine into the place from which Bianca can escape, in a celebration of individualism that is central to much marketization of pop stars. As Greg, Bianca's partner, explains to Farrel: "on vous a demandé d'écrire l'histoire de Bianca B., l'histoire de sa réussite-éclair dans le show-biz, et pas la saga d'une famille d'immigrés italiens en Lorraine! C'est de l'eau de rose qui doit couler, pas des larmes" (94). Greg's knowledge of the record and publishing industries is a form of noir cynicism, in which moral action is prevented by a deep knowledge of the social reality behind appearances. On the contrary, the figure of Farrel as writer-as-investigator, by eventually refusing to ghost-write the biography, reinjects ethics in *Play-Back*'s capitalist noir. The device of the *mise-en-abyme*, as it plays with the notions of original and copy, reality and simulation, mirrors at the formal level the central concern of Daeninckx's novel, in which there are doubts over what exactly has replaced the clearer social contract of the industrial era and its class struggle.

The post-industrial present is thus a world of appearances obfuscating both past and current crimes. Daeninckx explains: "Quand je suis allé dans l'Est pour *Play-Back* il y avait un travail de modification des apparences pour dire 'le crime industriel n'a pas eu lieu'. Le show-biz c'est la même chose, un travail sur les paillettes" (Daeninckx, Écrire en contre 58). The inauthenticity of the culture industry stands for and magnifies the prevalence of simulation in post-industrial societies. In Daeninckx's post-industrial noir, what distinguishes industrial from post-industrial times is the availability of a counter-narrative of struggle for the working-class: from the scenes of joy in Ronis's images of the *front populaire* to the anomie of Longrupt.

The ambiguity of Daeninckx's writing about this shift is exemplified by a passage in *Play-Back* where Farrel speaks to an angry ex-convict:

> Pendant cent cinquante ans on nous a gonflé avec la virilité du travail, avec l'homme domptant le fer, le prolo en bleu canalisant la matière en fusion. Et maintenant? Va voir les costauds: ils sont prêts à se transformer en guignols du Schtroumpfland! Toujours en bleu, d'accord, mais en se rajoutant de grandes oreilles et un pompon dans le cul! (194)

The real-life Big-Bang Schtroumpf park in Maizières-lès-Metz was established on the site of blast furnaces damaged during the Second World War and never rebuilt: celebrated by the government as an opportunity to turn Lorraine into a tourist economy, it was perceived as a humiliation by workers in the region. This Smurfland can be found in several novels and plays, including in the second play of Jean-Paul Wenzel's diptych *Loin d'Hagondange* (1975) and *"Faire bleu"* (2000). The latter title refers to the double meaning of this expression: according to the author, *faire bleu* was said when people would leave the mine and be in the open again; in the play, it also refers to the Smurf costume donned by the adult children of the main character, a former steelworker.[5] The Smurfland seems to be a popular theme for writers on deindustrialized Lorraine because of the powerful juxtaposition of masculinist representations of laboring Lorraine alongside the putatively degrading position of working in an infant-oriented section of the tourism industry. The ridiculous figure of the Smurf, and its blue color reminiscent of overalls, is a metaphor for the loss of status and the *déclassement* brought forth by deindustrialization.

The line of dialogue about the Smurfs encapsulates the ambiguity of Daeninckx's writing on deindustrialization. On the one hand, he highlights how the masculinist myth of the steel worker is an obfuscation of industrial exploitation. On the other hand, the devaluation of the new workers is specifically gendered, and the shame of having the *bleu de travail* replaced by

the Smurf costume is made more abject by the way it destroys masculinity. "On nous a gonflé avec la virilité du travail" says the ex-convict, and yet the loss of industrial employment, far from freeing the workers from masculine ideals of proud subjectivity leads him to lament industrial subjectivations. In *Play-Back*, post-industrial subjectivations are a series of dead ends that have in common to be forms of what Lauren Berlant calls "cruel optimism"[6]: whether it be the story of Prima's and Bianca's suffering in the music industry, or the ironies of remaining "toujours en bleu" in the Smurfland. *Play-Back* may not display the nostalgia of his later works, but the condemnation of the post-industrial present already bears the seeds of a reappraisal of the industrial past.

Conclusion

In this article, I have explored Daeninckx's noir writing on deindustrialization, focusing on the Lorraine of *Play-Back.* Uncovering the recent history of deindustrialization as if it were a crime, he casts a critical eye on the uses of memory in the economy of enrichment, and the deployment of a nascent industry of industrial heritage. Finally, I have shown how Daeninckx addresses noir disenchantment through a condemnation of the post-industrial present that leads to a reappraisal of the industrial past.

Looking at the newly post-industrial 1980s, Daeninckx's Lorraine noir professes a form of reorientation: one that displaces our gaze away from the happy, yet unreachable, objects of work, reindustrialization and reconversion, to keep it firmly focused on the changing living conditions of inhabitants and workers.[7] Doing so, Daeninckx produces a form of noir pessimism that is a moral relationship to the social landscape of deindustrialization: it constitutes a practical orientation, emerging out of the characters' conditions of existence, towards learning how to live in an inadequate world.

Later noir novels by other authors have attempted to reimagine Lorraine beyond its industrial history (Roger Martin did it in relation to nature, and Dominique Manotti with brownfield sites). Likewise, a writer like François Bon, with whom Daeninckx feels a certain affinity in interests (Daeninckx and Reuter 121), has reinvented the deindustrialized landscapes of the region in books like *Daewoo* (2004) and *Paysage Fer* (2000). Daeninckx's later works on deindustrialization, from *Cités perdues* to *En Marge* and *Autres Lieux* show a comparable interest in the hidden agendas and power relations at play in post-industrial reconversions. The Lorraine in *Play-Back*, on the contrary, is stuck being the shadow of its former self. In some ways, the value of *Play-Back* is precisely to have been written shortly after the 1979 movement and to still bear witness to the ambiguities of a radically uncertain future.

Notes

[1] To cite only a few significant examples: the photographic works of Gilbert Fastenaekens for the DATAR's photographic mission; films such as Jean-Pierre Mocky's *Ville à vendre* (1992); or the psychogeographic writings of Gilles Ortlieb (Raboin).

[2] The works of Ingrid Hayes are illuminating concerning the history of Lorraine Coeur d'Acier (Hayes). A collection of CDs has also been published with selected broadcasts and a documentary (Poirier et al.).

[3] There are similar works on ruins in non-noir literature about Lorraine, but they do not weave a working-class history of Lorraine. For example, if Gilles Ortlieb, in *Liquidation totale*, calls his own practice of photographing and collecting similar half-effaced shop fronts in the region "archaeology", he clearly distances himself from working class history, and keeps open the question of the purpose of his work of poetic documentation (Ortlieb 9–10). Likewise, while the work of Gilbert Fastenaekens (photographing industrial ruins at night-time and turning them into classical ruins) is emblematic of the emergence of a post-industrial *Ruinenlust* in the 1980s, it focuses on the tension between permanence and erasure in industrial time, leaving aside the raw social history of deindustrialization and its present consequences (Fastenaekens and Buttard).

[4] By the second half of the 1980s the *cité radieuse* had already become the object of a push for renovation. It is now rehabilitated and has been heritage listed, with a period apartment to visit, and an art gallery run by the Lorraine Fonds Régional d'Art Contemporain.

[5] The expression, specific to Alsace and Moselle, comes from the German *blaumachen*, which means "to not work". It is mostly used to talk about children playing truant.

[6] Berlant sees cruel optimism as a central relation of neoliberalism: it describes the cases when longing for certain objects actually prevents the subject from attaining them (Berlant).

[7] I use here the concepts of orientation and happiness as Sara Ahmed conceptualises them in *Queer Phenomenology* and *The Promise of Happiness*.

Works cited

Ahmed, Sara. *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. Duke University Press, 2006.

---. *The Promise of Happiness*. Duke University Press, 2010.

Belhadjin, Anissa. "From politics to the roman noir." *South Central Review*, vol. 27, no. 1-2, 2010, pp. 61–81.

Berlant, Lauren. *Cruel Optimism*. Duke University Press, 2011.

Boltanski, Luc. *Énigmes et complots: une enquête à propos d'enquêtes*. Gallimard, 2012.

Boltanski, Luc, and Ève Chiapello. *Le Nouvel Esprit du capitalisme*. Gallimard, 1999.

Boltanski, Luc, and Arnaud Esquerre. *Enrichissement: une critique de la marchandise*. Gallimard, 2017.

Bon, François. *Daewoo*. Fayard, 2004.

---. *Paysage fer*. Verdier, 2000.

Collovald, Annie. "Entretien avec Didier Daeninckx : une modernité contre la modernité de pacotilles." *Mouvements*, vol. 15-16, no. 3, 2001, pp. 9–15, doi:10.3917/mouv.015.0009.

Corcuff, Philippe. "Désenchantement et éthiques du polar." *Mouvements*, vol. 15-16, no. 3, 2001, pp. 103–09.

Daeninckx, Didier. *Écrire en contre*. Paroles d'aube, 1997.

---. *La Mémoire longue : textes et images, 1986-2008*. Le Cherche Midi, 2008.

---. "La Particule." *Hors limites : nouvelles*, Julliard, 1992, pp. 151–208.

---. "L'Écriture des abattoirs." *Écrire en contre*, Paroles d'aube, 1997, pp. 125–45.

---. *Meurtres pour mémoire*. Gallimard, 1983.

---. *Play-Back*. Folio Policier, Gallimard, 2001.

---. "Traverse no 28." *En marge : nouvelles*, Denoël, 1998, pp. 91–130.

Daeninckx, Didier, and Yves Reuter. "Entretien avec Didier Daeninckx." *Pratiques*, vol. 65, no. 1, 1990, pp. 113–24.

Deleuse, Robert. "Petite Histoire du roman noir français." *Roman noir: pas d'orchidées pour les T.M.*, edited by Jean Pons, vol. 595, Les Temps modernes, 1997, pp. 53–87.

Desnain, Véronique. "Style et idéologie dans le roman noir." *Itinéraires. Littérature, textes, cultures*, no. 2015–1, December 2015.

Faber, André. *La Quiche était froide*. Les Éditions libertaires, 2016.

Fastenaekens, Gilbert, and Alain Buttard. *Essai pour une archéologie imaginaire*. Arp, 1994.

Florey, Sonya. "Didier Daeninckx, du roman au récit: quand élucider le réel ne suffit plus." *Revue critique de fixxion française contemporaine*, no. 10, June 2015, pp. 44–50.

Forsdick, Charles. "'Direction les oubliettes de l'histoire': Witnessing the Past in the Contemporary French Polar." *French Cultural Studies*, vol. 12, no. 36, October 2001, pp. 333–50.

Gorrara, Claire. "Post-war French crime fiction: the advent of the roman noir." *French Crime Fiction*, edited by Claire Gorrara, University of Wales Press, 2009, pp. 54–70.

---. *The Roman Noir in Post-War French Culture: Dark Fictions*. Oxford University Press, 2003.

Hainge, Greg. *Noise Matters: Towards an Ontology of Noise*. Bloomsbury, 2013.

Hayes, Ingrid. *Radio Lorraine coeur d'acier, 1979-1980 : les voix de la crise*. Presses de
     Sciences Po, 2018.

Hurcombe, Martin. "Roman noir et drapeau noir: Didier Daeninckx and the libertarian
     legacy." *Modern & Contemporary France*, vol. 24, no. 2, April 2016, pp. 207–20.

Jeannerod, Dominique. "Mort du détective et fin de l'histoire chez Didier Daeninckx."
     Australian Journal of French Studies, vol. 44, no. 1, January 2007, pp. 32–43.

"Johnny Hallyday et les sidérurgistes lorrains - archives de la CFDT." *CFDT*, 5 June 2019,
     https://archives.memoires.cfdt.fr/Document-du-moment/p125/Johnny-Hallyday-et-
     les-siderurgistes-lorrains.

Karevski, Zilber. *Vive la F.A.R.C.E. !* Après la lune, 2013.

Le Bar Floréal. *Retour en Lorraine*. Trans Photo, 2009.

Lee, Susanna. "May 1968, radical politics and the néo-polar." *French Crime Fiction*, edited
     by Claire Gorrara, University of Wales Press, 2009, pp. 71–85.

Manotti, Dominique. *Lorraine Connection*. 2nd ed., Rivages, 2008.

Martin, Roger. *Skinheads*. Calmann-Lévy, 1988.

---. *Un Chien de sa chienne*. Seuil, 2000.

Mathieu, Nicolas. *Aux Animaux la guerre*. Actes Sud, 2016.

Mocky, Jean-Pierre, director. *Ville à vendre*. Pathé, 1992.

Modenesi, Marco. "Didier Daeninckx, Play-back." *Altre Modernità*, no. 19, 2018, pp. 335–
     44.

Morris, Alan. "An ever-present past: Didier Daeninckx and the Manouchian resistance
     group." *Journal of War & Culture Studies*, vol. 8, no. 3, August 2015, pp. 254–68.

Ortlieb, Gilles. *Liquidation totale*. Le Temps qu'il fait, 2011.

Pepper, Andrew. *Unwilling Executioner: Crime Fiction and the State*. Oxford University
     Press, 2016.

Poirier, Alban, et al. *Un morceau de chiffon rouge*. NSA La vie ouvrière, 2012.

Raboin, Thibaut. "Réimaginer la Lorraine désindustrialisée. Les psycho-géographies de la Lorraine chez François Bon, Gilles Ortlieb et Denis Robert." *Questions de Communication*, 2018.

Reid, Donald. "Didier Daeninckx: raconteur of history." *South Central Review*, vol. 27, no. 1-2, 2010, pp. 39–60.

Ronis, Willy, and Didier Daeninckx. *À Nous la vie !* Hoëbeke, 1996.

Rotman, Brian. *Becoming Beside Ourselves: The Alphabet, Ghosts, and Distributed Human Being*. Duke University Press, 2008.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. *La Nausée*. Gallimard, 1938.

Sbriglio, Jacques. *Le Corbusier: l'unité d'habitation de Marseille et les autres unités d'habitation à Rezé-Les-Nantes, Berlin, Briey en forêt et Firminy*. Birkhäuser, 2015.

Verdaguer, Pierre. "Mauvais genre et B. C.-B. G. policiers." *Sites*, vol. 1, no. 1, March 1997, pp. 31–50.

Wenzel, Jean-Paul. *Faire bleu*. Les Solitaires intempestifs, 2000.

---. *Loin d'Hagondange*. Les Solitaires intempestifs, 2008.