



UNSW

School of International Studies Seminar Series

Tuesday 23 November, 3:00 - 4:30 pm | Matthews 125

Never Stand Still

Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences

School of International Studies

URBAN INERTIA: CINEMA, THE DYING, AND THE DEAD.

Presented by Prof Stephanie Hemelryk Donald



A Film by Carol Morley Dreams of a Life

WOULD ANYONE MISS YOU?

**WOMAN DEAD IN
FLAT FOR 3 YEARS**
Skeleton of

dreamsofalife.com A dogwool release

'Flies and a smell and nobody noticed' (Friend, Dreams of a Life, 2011)

'The face as the extreme precariousness of the other. Peace as awakens to the precariousness of the other' (Levinas, quoted in Sentilles, 2010: 526)

The argument of this paper derives from my viewing of a recent British film *Dreams of a Life* (Carol Morley, 2011). Mainly concerned with urban issues of anomie, race, domestic violence and the loneliness of death, the film led me to other films with similar intersecting themes. These include, Claire Denis' *I Can't Sleep* (*J'ai pas sommeil*, 1994), and Alain Gomis' *Today* (2011). In all three films [NB I will only discuss two today for reasons of time] the protagonist is seen as an outsider and – for very different reasons, - associated with death or violence, lonely but at the heart of urban bustle. In *Today* the protagonist is a returned migrant to Senegal, in *I Can't Sleep* he is a French Guyanese sleepless in Paris (the character Camille is based on a transvestite serial killer of the 1980s), and in *Dreams of a Life* she is a Black British woman whose White friends see her as 'exotic' and whose Black friends deem her to be in need of a decent Black man in her life. Considering these films together, however, I also begun to see that the focus on death in these texts presented a surprising view of inertia, both visually and conceptually. Whether through the presence of a corpse, or other organic remains, or even the through idea of such, the affect of these stories is contingent, for me, on inert matter.