

Royal Holloway, University of London

School of Modern Languages, Literatures and Cultures

**ACOUSTIC SPECTATORSHIP: THE 1980s
FILM AND VIDEO WORK OF
JEAN-LUC GODARD**

by

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Declaration of Authorship

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed: _____

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on some of Godard's most complex, innovative and daring experiments in sound design in a selection of key films and videos made predominantly during the 1980s. It charts Godard's evolving experiments with live, electronic and pre-existing music, as well as his manipulation of voice, texture, spatiality and speed alteration. It aims to advance a theory of 'acoustic spectatorship', a term I have coined to establish and convey the depth and significance of the spectator's experience of film through sound and the sense of hearing.

The thesis develops an approach to Godard's films from the perspective of sonic art, arguing that an emphasis on the active process of listening enables the spectator to perceive more fully the multileveled and multifaceted experiences that the chosen films and videos provide. It foregrounds Godard's extraordinary sensibility to sound and his persistent efforts, which often go unheeded, to challenge the ingrained assumption that film is primarily a visual medium. The thesis will explore the expressivity of acoustic phenomena in a range of commercial feature films, video scenarios, short films and videos, along with a CD soundtrack release, engaging with Godard's approach to film history, his conception of projection and his theory of montage.

The close analysis performed in each chapter will be supported by a plural and interdisciplinary methodology. It draws on different intellectual and artistic disciplines, including musicology, sound theory, film theory, as well as writings by composers, writers, philosophers and poets, underpinned by the crucial discoveries of sound engineer Pierre Schaeffer, especially his fundamental concept of the acousmatic condition. By prioritizing the acoustic experience of the film spectator, this thesis constructs a new means of perceiving Godard's 1980s film work, which, in turn, calls for a reassessment and redefinition of the very notion of spectatorship itself.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The Evolution of a New Sound Cinema: Godard's film and video work of the 1980s

When we listen to (or play) music, especially music that is rhythmically complex, we sometimes perceive shapes and patterns that are not physically *there*. This is especially true in the minimalist music of composers Steve Reich and Philip Glass. Keith Potter has defined the psychoacoustic effects in Glass's music as 'the illusions conjured by the combination of fast repetition and high dynamic level',¹ while Paul Hillier touches on 'the illusion of an acoustic echo' conjured in Reich's phasing pieces, which involve two tape loops or two players falling out of sync with each other, producing an array of 'resultant patterns' in between.² These patterns or illusions, Reich reveals, are sometimes 'pointed out' by the musicians during a performance.³ The musicians are free to give substance to the resulting patterns by singing or playing them, causing them to rise transiently to the surface of the musical texture. In Reich's music in particular, the listening experience generated by the repetitive rhythmic structures allows the audience to hear these abstract patterns as 'images' of sound. The vital importance of the listener in bringing this music to life, and the markedly visual ways in which Reich conceives of his music, raise more general questions pertaining to the perceptual processes of seeing and hearing, which provide a broad framework for addressing the rapport between the visual experiences of the *listener* of music and the acoustic experiences of the *spectator* of film.

1.1 Acoustic spectatorship

Acoustic spectatorship is a term I have coined to convey the spectator's experience of film through sound and the sense of hearing. Whilst similar terms have been devised by

¹ Keith Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists: La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Steve Reich, Philip Glass* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 11.

² Paul Hillier, 'Introduction' in Steve Reich, *Writings on Music 1965-2000*, Paul Hillier (ed.) (Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 3-18 (p. 5). Reich describes these resultant patterns as the 'psychoacoustic by-products' in his music: 'When I say there is more in my music than what I put there, I primarily mean these resulting patterns.' See Reich, *Writings on Music*, p. 26 and pp. 19-25.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

theorists in the context of film sound studies,⁴ I am using the concept of acoustic spectatorship, which evolved from the idea of excess in repetitive music (the psychoacoustic effects generated from repetition), to explicitly engage with a form of seeing that is shaped by sound and a form of hearing that is influenced by the visual image. In the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the adjective ‘acoustic’ is defined as follows: ‘[d]esignating the sense or the organs of hearing; of or relating to the sense of hearing; auditory’, and ‘[r]elating to, involving, or of the nature of sound.’ The adjective also describes an instrument or mechanism that is operated by sound. The noun form of the word denotes ‘[t]he acoustic characteristics or ambience of some sound’, also known as ‘acoustics’, while special uses of the noun include the concept of ‘acoustic shock’, defined as ‘damage to hearing resulting from sudden excessive noise in the earphone of a telephone’.⁵ The concept of acoustic spectatorship recognizes the interconnectedness of sound, vision and spatiality, as well as taking into account the significance of the physical impact of sound on the body.

Each chapter in this thesis is guided by this basic but crucial concept, which I will put to the test by conducting a series of intensive close readings of pertinent sequences from a selection of films and videos made in the 1980s by Jean-Luc Godard. Each chapter will be anchored by the fundamental theories of the sound engineer, composer, media theorist and founder of *musique concrète* Pierre Schaeffer, whose inventions, compositions and pioneering thought in the 1950s and 1960s, which pre-dated the musical minimalists, shifted the study of sound and music into radically new territory and it will be important for us to review briefly his core ideas and discoveries.

1.1.2 The work of Pierre Schaeffer

During the 1960s, Schaeffer and his colleagues turned their attention to the creation and manipulation of ‘sound objects’ [*objets sonores*], as well as to the important act of listening, the proliferation of images and the possibility of communication in the age of mass media. In 1960, the Service de la Recherche of the Radiodiffusion et Télévision Française (RTF), an experimental research group, was founded.⁶ Tamara Chaplin points

⁴ Anahid Kassabian’s book *Hearing Film: Tracking Identifications in Contemporary Hollywood Film Music* and Michel Chion’s *L’Audio-vision: Son et image au cinéma* are prime examples.

⁵ See “acoustic, adj. and n.”. OED Online, March 2014, Oxford University Press, <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/1693?redirectedFrom=acoustic>> [accessed 15.04. 2014].

⁶ The RTF was replaced by the ORTF in 1964, which subsequently dissolved in 1974 and was divided into seven different companies (TF1, Antenne 2, FR3, Radio France, TDF [Télédiffusion de France], the

out that ‘Schaeffer had conceived of the Service as a laboratory for the “parallel study of the means of expression and diffusion as well as the perfecting of possible correlations between radio, cinema, and television and, more broadly, between the arts and technology.”’⁷ One of the highlights of the Service de la Recherche’s work was the broadcasting, after a struggle with the ORTF (Office de Radio-Télévision Française), of *Les Grandes Répétitions* (1965-68),⁸ a fascinating series of documentaries produced for French television by Schaeffer and the GRM (Groupe de Recherches Musicales).⁹

In 1966, Schaeffer published his groundbreaking *Traité des objets musicaux* that provided an original and detailed account of how to conceive of music, sound and the role of the listener outside the accepted parameters of traditional music theory.¹⁰ Schaeffer here sets out his theory of the four listening modes (‘Écouter’, ‘Oùïr’, ‘Entendre’ and ‘Comprendre’) as well as the important concept of the sound object. He had discovered by chance that when the needle of a phonograph got stuck in a groove on a record, the repeated sound, as perceived by a listener, floated free from its aural context and the resulting decontextualized, isolated sound became what he termed a sound object. In his study of electronic music, Simon Emmerson notes that Schaeffer referred to this technique of constant repetition as the *sillon fermé* [closed groove], which led to the concept of concentrated listening.¹¹

Schaeffer experimented with playing speeds and techniques of reversal, discovering that unexpected rhythms and idiosyncrasies could be generated. He also noted that a sound could be perceived from a range of different perspectives. Schaeffer likens the effect of repeating, isolating and manipulating recorded sound to the visual effects of slow motion and magnification that a filmmaker produces with a camera, as if to pre-empt Godard and Anne-Marie Miéville’s collaborative experiments with altered motion in the

SFP [Société Française de Production] and INA. See Alex Hughes and Keith Reader (eds.), *Encyclopaedia of Contemporary French Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 402.

⁷ Tamara Chaplin, *Turning on the Mind: French Philosophers on Television* (University of Chicago Press, 2007), p. 113. Chaplin quotes Schaeffer, whose comments (cited here) were printed in ‘Le programme de prospection du Service de la recherche de la R.T.F.’

⁸ This television series includes footage of Olivier Messiaen, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Hermann Scherchen, Cecil Taylor, as well as a homage to Edgar Varèse.

⁹ Schaeffer founded the GRM in 1958 to replace the former Groupe de Recherches de Musique Concrète (GRMC) that was established in 1951. The GRM included the composers Luc Ferrari, Iannis Xenakis, Bernard Parmegiani and François Bayle. See Nick Collins, Margaret Schedel and Scott Wilson, *Electronic Music* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 46-7.

¹⁰ In the same year as Schaeffer’s *Traité* was published, Godard conducted an interview with Robert Bresson. Here, Godard overtly states his desire to invert the relationship between sounds and images, emphasizing the former over the latter. He states: ‘Je pense à une sorte d’interversion des fonctions de l’image et du son.’ See Jean-Luc Godard and Michel Delahaye, ‘La Question’ in *Cahiers du cinéma*, 178 (1966), 26-35 and 67-71 (p. 30).

¹¹ Simon Emmerson, *Living Electronic Music* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007), pp. 67-68.

1970s, forging a link between the work of the video artist/filmmaker and that of the *musique concrète* composer. He discovered that a familiar sound could be radically disfigured and excitingly reinvented, thus transforming a process of reproduction into one of creative production.¹² In his treatise, Schaeffer notes that unlike the musician, the sound recordist does not *read* from a score, translating from symbols on a page, for *musique concrète* is not notated on paper but it is ‘composed’ from the raw materials of real-world sound sources.¹³

Some of Schaeffer’s most original ideas were recorded as early as 1948 in his diaries on *musique concrète*.¹⁴ In the first diary, he uses the verb ‘amputer’ to explain his method of separating a sound from its initial ‘attack’ to produce unique fragments of sound matter. When an object is struck we hear the initial attack or ‘shock’ along with the resulting resonance that enables us to identify the sound’s worldly cause. When the attack or cluster of noise heard when a sound is first sounded is omitted, it becomes almost impossible to identify the instrument making the sound. Rick Altman makes similar observations in his writing on recorded sound in cinema. He outlines the key stages that make up what he calls the ‘sound event’: the ‘attack’ (the initiation of a sound), the ‘sustain’ (the duration) and the ‘decay’ (the fading-away) of sound.¹⁵ Altman notes that if an element of ‘auditory realism’ is to be maintained, then each stage of the sound event must be preserved.¹⁶ Contrary to this, the founding act of *musique concrète* (‘l’acte générateur’) is the severing of a sound from its point of attack.¹⁷ Through the technique of repetition, a sound can be detached from its original context and fashioned using magnetic tape into a sound object, endowed with specific qualities. As Schaeffer puts it: ‘Répétez deux fois le même fragment sonore: il n’y a plus événement, il y a musique.’¹⁸

¹² Schaeffer’s findings prefigured music sampling, tape loop experiments and the art of the DJ turntablist.

¹³ Pierre Schaeffer, *Traité des objets musicaux: essai interdisciplines* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1966), pp. 86-7.

¹⁴ Schaeffer’s first and second diaries were published in Pierre Schaeffer, *À la recherche d’une musique concrète* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1952). The first English translation of this book appeared in 2012. See Pierre Schaeffer, *In Search of a Concrete Music*, trans. by Christine North and John Dack (University of California Press, 2012).

¹⁵ Schaeffer outlines a similar schema. He presents the ‘three *dimensions*’ of sound (*le niveau, la hauteur et la durée*) that he uses to measure the proportions of a musical note, or, in *musique concrète*, a manufactured ‘note complexe’. Schaeffer demonstrates that the form of every note is generated from an evolution of sound that involves the initial ‘attack’, the ‘body’ and the ‘extinction’ of sound. See Schaeffer, *À la recherche d’une musique concrète*, pp. 207-9.

¹⁶ Rick Altman, ‘The Material Heterogeneity of Recorded Sound’ in Rick Altman (ed.), *Sound Theory/Sound Practice* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 15-31 (p. 18).

¹⁷ Schaeffer, *À la recherche d’une musique concrète*, p. 16.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

Integral to Schaeffer's innovative method of creating sound objects is the concept of the acousmatic situation (*la situation acousmatique*),¹⁹ whereby the source of a sound is hidden from view, forcing the listener to hear differently by concentrating on the sound itself, rather than on its cause.²⁰ The word 'acousmatic' was first proposed in the 1950s by the French poet and writer Jérôme Peignot to capture the experience of listening to *musique concrète*.²¹ Schaeffer elaborates further: 'Quand Pythagore enseignait ses disciples en prenant soin de se dissimuler derrière une tenture, il ne créait certes pas la radiodiffusion mais en illustre le rapport essentiel, qu'il appelait *acousmatique* : entendre sans voir, s'emparer d'un objet sonore coupé de tout contexte visuel.'²² Schaeffer points out that upon first hearing we instinctively try to locate a sound's source in space. The subversive process of *listening without seeing* means that the audience's point of focus is deflected back onto the listener's body.²³ As we shall see, the evocative and mysterious dimension of acousmatic sound and the poetic ambiguity that it kindles are qualities that Godard also exploits fully in the films and videos to be examined in this thesis.

Most critical studies that draw upon Schaeffer's work concentrate on the aspects outlined above. However, in 1970 and 1972 there followed two extensive publications to accompany his ongoing research into television and audiovisual culture.²⁴ In these books, Schaeffer develops his own theory of communication, exploring in detail the political effect of mass media, its pervasiveness and its impact on culture, along with its bearing on the power structures that govern contemporary society.²⁵ In the second

¹⁹ Schaeffer, *Traité des objets musicaux*, p. 93.

²⁰ Chion first applied Schaeffer's concept of the acousmatic to the audiovisual in his book *La Voix au cinéma*. He adapts the term *acousmatique* to capture types of 'unseen' voices in cinema, introducing the notion of the *acousmètre*, as well as rendering the process of unveiling that shrinks the unseen voice back into an embodied being (*la désacousmatisation*). See Michel Chion, *La Voix au cinéma* (Paris: Éditions de l'Étoile / Cahiers du cinéma, 1982), pp. 29-39.

²¹ Schaeffer introduces the concept of the acousmatic in the *Traité*, where he provides a definition of the noun from the Larousse dictionary. See Schaeffer, *Traité des objets musicaux*, p. 91.

²² Pierre Schaeffer, *Machines à communiquer 2: pouvoir et communication* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1972), p. 18 (original emphasis).

²³ Linda Dusman foregrounds the importance of the listener's heightened bodily awareness in acousmatic experience. The 'unacknowledged threat' of acousmatic music in the classical music community, she suggests, is that 'not only does the absence of the performer break with the historical tradition, but it also makes the listener's body present in a public setting through a listening mode that is customarily private.' Through a metaphor of sexuality, Dusman describes our mode of engagement with acousmatic performance as autoerotic. See Linda Dusman, 'No Bodies There: Absence and Presence in Acousmatic Performance' in Pirkko Moisala and Beverley Diamond (eds.), *Music and Gender* (University of Illinois Press, 2000), pp. 336-45 (pp. 339-40).

²⁴ The volumes are entitled: *Machines à communiquer: 1. Genèse des simulacres* and *Machines à communiquer: 2. Pouvoir et communication*.

²⁵ In the second volume Schaeffer compares his ideas to those of other communication theorists, notably Abraham Moles, Marshall McLuhan and Claude E. Shannon.

volume, Schaeffer criticizes the commonly accepted linear schema supposed to account for the transmission of a message (*émetteur-message-récepteur*).²⁶ He calls attention to the ambiguities and discrepancies between the intentions and desires of the recipient and those of the sender. Schaeffer reiterates that the recipient rarely receives the sender's message in the manner intended. Whilst mass media allows for the diffusion of a message to large numbers of people, it also encourages indirect interaction and reduces the opportunity for recipients to *feed back* in a manner that has any considerable impact.²⁷

Early in the volume, Schaeffer indicates that the concept of the acousmatic is equipped to educate us about the processes of communication in the age of mass media. The acousmatic condition compels us to listen again. It demands that we question how a sound is produced, shaped and maintained and opens us to new levels of perception, as we become aware of the processes involved in the sound world that surrounds us – processes which determine the sounds we perceive and influence how we listen and respond.²⁸ For Schaeffer, communication is composed of a complex tangle of relationships, and the professed ease and simplicity of reception in contemporary media societies conceals a deficiency in our capacity to get through to others and make ourselves heard. The films examined in this thesis require spectators to exert themselves by listening and responding both impulsively and attentively and the ideas presented in Schaeffer's writings help us to perceive some of the ways in which Godard's films, videos and soundtracks animate and energise the spectator-as-listener who is charged with the task of *receiving* images and sounds.

1.2 An introduction to the 1980s corpus

This thesis will concentrate on the organization of sound, music and voice, including experiments with live, electronic and pre-existing music, in an assortment of Godard's films and videos made primarily in the 1980s. The primary material to be examined consists of Godard's most celebrated feature films, along with some of the more overlooked or lesser-known films and videos from this period. The decade of the 1980s stands as one of the most prolific episodes in the Godardian corpus, commencing in 1979 with the release of the pivotal feature film *Sauve qui peut (la vie)* (1979), which

²⁶ Schaeffer, *Machines à communiquer 2*, p. 228.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 236-37.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

was released a year later in the United Kingdom under the title *Slow Motion* (1980). Godard's intrepid, inventive and accomplished experiments with sound during this decade call for a plural, fluid and penetrating critical response. The thesis will engage with the video scenarios *Scénario de Sauve qui peut (la vie)* (1979) and *Scénario du film Passion* (1982) as well as with the commercial feature films *Passion* (1982) and *Prénom Carmen* (1983). It will also provide a detailed study of the short *Lettre à Freddy Buache* (1981), a critical but underanalyzed film that looks ahead prophetically to the multiform film *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1988-98),²⁹ while looking back to the past through music, evoking a key talk given by Godard in Montreal in 1978. The thesis will shift its focus to the latter part of the decade to explore Godard's manipulation of recorded sound in the video short *Puissance de la parole* (1988), as well as his manipulation of speed in the lively video short *On s'est tous défilé* (1987), made for the Swiss fashion team Marithé et François Girbaud. It will also call attention to two ambitious feature films whose soundtracks have received scant critical attention, namely the comedy *Soigne ta droite* (1987) that stars the rock group Les Rita Mitsouko, and *King Lear* (1987). Finally, I will perform a comparative analysis of *Nouvelle vague* (1990) and the ECM CD *Nouvelle vague* (1997), a soundtrack that exists as a fully-fledged *musique concrète* composition, produced explicitly for the eyes and ears of the listener who, I will claim, sees through sound.

The thesis will demonstrate that the astounding expressivity of acoustic phenomena in Godard's films and videos of this period suggest a redefinition of film spectatorship. Sound and music occupy a fundamental position at the heart of Godard's artistic practice and for this reason it is vital that we consider ourselves active listeners of his films and videos and that the spectator's acoustic experience is placed at the centre of the visual experience. However, to comprehend more fully the 1980s corpus, as well as Godard's approach to sound during this decade, we must turn first to certain key episodes in the preceding years, when Godard and his foremost collaborator Anne-Marie Miéville founded their own production company Sonimage. Miéville played a vital role in this creative partnership, working as co-director, co-scriptwriter and co-editor on the Sonimage films, before going on to co-write and co-edit *Sauve qui peut (la vie)*.³⁰

²⁹ *Histoire(s) du cinéma* will henceforth be abbreviated as *Histoire(s)*.

³⁰ Miéville has continued to collaborate extensively with Godard on films up to the present day. She collaborated on *Scénario du film Passion*, she wrote the screenplay for *Prénom Carmen* and worked as

1.2.1 A prehistory: the Sonimage years

The period immediately preceding Godard and Miéville's return, in 1979, to fiction filmmaking, was important in shaping their approach to sound. The Sonimage years spanned from 1973 to 1979, when Godard and Miéville began to make films together under their production company Sonimage.³¹ The principal films produced by Sonimage were *Ici et ailleurs* (1974, first released in 1976), *Numéro deux* (1975), *Comment ça va* (1976) and the two television series *Six fois deux (Sur et sous la communication)* (1976), made for FR3, and *France tour détour deux enfants* (1979),³² made for Antenne 2.³³ Before this time, Godard had ceased making commercial films and following May 68, he began to make films collaboratively under the newly formed Groupe Dziga Vertov (1969-73).³⁴ It was during the Groupe Dziga Vertov years that Godard and Jean-Pierre Gorin first purchased video equipment and began to experiment with the technology.³⁵ With Miéville, Godard set up a workshop of sounds and images, where they could experiment with equipment acquired specifically for the Sonimage studios.

Themes of power and communication are explored through metaphors of silence and noise in Sonimage's first film *Ici et ailleurs*, a film that, as Witt affirms, not merely launched but 'defined' the Sonimage project.³⁶ It performs a reassessment of the past following Godard and Gorin's unfinished film *Jusqu'à la victoire*.³⁷ *Ici et ailleurs* is framed by the statement that we can no longer see or hear because the sound is too loud

Art Director on *Nouvelle vague*, *Notre musique* and *Film socialisme*. See Filmography for further details on her collaborations with Godard during the decade of the 1980s.

³¹ Sonimage went on to co-produce *Sauve qui peut (la vie)* and *Passion* but Godard and Miéville were soon forced to change the company's name and thus Sonimage became JLG Films, followed by Périphéria. See Michael Witt, *On Communication: the work of Anne-Marie Miéville and Jean-Luc Godard as 'Sonimage' from 1973 to 1979*, Ph.D. diss., University of Bath, 1998, pp. 8-9.

³² These television series will henceforth be abbreviated as *Six fois deux* and *France tour détour*.

³³ All of the works listed here, with the exception of *Comment ça va* and *Numéro deux*, were produced in association with the Institut National des Archives Audiovisuelles (INA), founded in 1975.

³⁴ Godard had started to explore the political relationship between sounds and images in *Le Gai Savoir* (1968), a film essay shot in 1967 for French state television. The film was heavily censored before its release, resulting in the replacement of select lines of dialogue with a beep, particularly those that targeted the French media. Godard published the script from this film under the heading *Le Gai Savoir (mot-à-mot d'un film encore trop révisé)* to disclose the censored words and phrases. See David Faroult, 'Le livre *Le Gai Savoir*: la censure défiée' in Nicole Brenez, David Faroult, Michael Temple, James Williams and Michael Witt (eds.), *Jean-Luc Godard: Documents* (Paris: Éditions du Centre Pompidou, 2006), pp. 109-14 (pp. 111-12).

³⁵ Witt points out that Godard's interest in using video as an 'autocritical tool' can be traced back to his plans for *La Chinoise* (1967). See Witt, *On Communication*, p 55.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

³⁷ *Ici et ailleurs* includes an autocritique of the rushes from Godard and Gorin's *Jusqu'à la victoire*, shot in Lebanon, Syria and Jordan during the years 1969 and 1970. For a detailed account of *Jusqu'à la victoire* in the context of *Ici et ailleurs*, see *Ibid.*, pp. 39-44.

and masks the reality. It suggests that we have been replaced by the ‘noise’ of homogeneous images produced by the media, and we have passively accepted the loss of our own unique image and sound along with the ability to see and hear. The film concludes that we must learn to see at home and hear elsewhere, and to listen *in* silence rather than usurp the voice of the other for one’s own political ends.³⁸ The concept of listening is politically and ethically loaded in *Ici et ailleurs* and it is wholly interlinked with the need to slow down and attend to the intricacies of human experience, and to trace those voices masked by the cacophony of presumptive belief systems.

In his analysis of Godard and Miéville’s critique of the press and television in the Sonimage films, Witt refers to the ‘phatic circuits’ of stasis or ‘dead’ communication, which reproduce the stagnant chains of received ideas, clichés and accepted norms that inundate media society. He explores Godard and Miéville’s use of video and information theory, both of which function as essential ‘tools’ in their enquiries.³⁹ Sonimage doggedly fights against instances of blocked ‘phatic’ communication and one of the strategies employed to counter it is wordplay, hesitation and ellipsis, as we see (via the intertitles) and hear (in Godard’s opening monologue) in *Numéro deux*, a film that deals with blocked channels of communication, desire, sexuality, pornography, and instances of violence.⁴⁰

Throughout *Numéro deux*, music is associated with consumerism and politics, while dance is aligned with notions of revolution. Moments of relative calm occasionally break through the pervasive ambient backdrop, for example, when Vanessa, her grandfather, and her mother Sandrine, listen through headphones to music. We see a single television monitor, surrounded by blackness, displaying a video image of the family huddled together in the same shot. The grandfather holds some headphones to Vanessa’s ear and they take it in turns to listen to Léo Ferré’s forlorn *Tu ne dis jamais rien*, the music overflowing its private ‘frame’ as it penetrates the spectator’s space.⁴¹

³⁸ The ‘elsewhere’ space in *Ici et ailleurs* is primarily that of the Palestinian people (Jordan, Syria and Lebanon are listed as *ailleurs*).

³⁹ Witt, *On Communication*, p. 54.

⁴⁰ Douglas Morrey makes clear that some of the video images in *Numéro deux* were filmed twice, first on video and then on 35mm film as the video images played out on television monitors. This produces an effect of doubling, for the spectator is frequently presented with two video screens encased within the 35mm frame. See Douglas Morrey, *Jean-Luc Godard* (Manchester University Press, 2005), p. 116.

⁴¹ Music is associated at various points in the film with the act of seeing the unbelievable (‘voir l’incroyable’), an expression that derives from the lyrics of Ferré’s *Tu ne dis jamais rien*, underscoring the poetic idea of seeing beyond the parameters of the visible, or, more pragmatically, seeing what is normally hidden from view, namely, the sexual politics of family life. The key lyrics are: ‘Je vois le monde un peu comme je vois l’incroyable / L’incroyable c’est ça c’est ce qu’on ne voit pas’.

As this scene comes to a close, the electronic screen-text reads 'MUSIQUE', which swiftly morphs into 'POLITIQUE'. Although this episode presents us with familiar gender stereotypes (the grandfather occupies the centre of the frame, Vanessa brushes her doll's hair to the right, and Sandrine files her nails to the left), it constitutes one of the most poignant moments in the film. The music expresses sentiments of melancholy and hopelessness, while simultaneously generating feelings of relief from the stifling confinement evident in this 'picture-postcard' of family life. Music is capable of acting not only as a retreat but as a shared space, at a distance from the oppressive machine/USINE of sex and the home. These instances of intimacy, tranquility and spontaneity preserve a sense of hope that a sincere form of communication is still possible.

Witt writes of the 'videographic intervention' produced by Godard and Miéville's use of altered motion in their television series *France tour détour*, which engenders 'a whole new vocabulary of gesture, movement, and corporal interaction' that opened up new ways of approaching dialogue, *mise en scène* and montage, and revitalized their treatment of images and sounds in the 1980s.⁴² In his discussion of the Sonimage project, Philippe Dubois notes that *France tour détour* differs from the preceding television series, precisely in its utilisation of slow motion. He argues that the intellectual 'de-composition' of the image that occurs in *Six fois deux* is essentially videographic in *France tour détour*. Decomposition has become 'organic, material, physical – in other words, *carnal*. It affects the body of the image.'⁴³ Godard and Miéville's experiments with different speeds expands to encompass the incorporation of music into the body of the image, a process that arises markedly in *Sauve qui peut (la vie)*. This thesis will reveal how in the 1980s corpus the subversive potential of the electronic medium of video shares fertile points of commonality with the tactile, pliable nature of recorded sound, and with the polyrhythmic possibilities of music.

⁴² Michael Witt, 'Altered Motion and Corporal Resistance in *France/tour/détour/deux/enfants*' in Michael Temple, James S. Williams and Michael Witt (eds.), *For Ever Godard* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2004), pp. 200-13 (p. 212).

⁴³ Philippe Dubois, 'Video Thinks What Cinema Creates: Notes on Jean-Luc Godard's Work in Video and Television', trans. by Lynne Kirby, in Raymond Bellour (ed.) with Mary Lea Bandy, *Jean-Luc Godard Son+Image 1974-1991* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1992), pp. 169-85 (p. 177) (original emphasis).

1.2.2 The decade of the 1980s

Jacques Maumont, the sound technician for *Sauve qui peut (la vie)*, was perplexed by Godard's basic approach to the soundtrack of this film. For, instead of conceiving of sound in terms of 'height' [*en hauteur*], creating a vertical stack of different tracks to be organised in the post production phrase, in 1979, Godard was thinking 'lengthwise' [*en longueur*] with sound, working modestly and emphatically with just two tracks (and two hands).⁴⁴ Godard achieves a levelling of sound in *Sauve qui peut (la vie)*, spontaneously replacing fragments of dialogue with fragments of music, cherishing individual noises and blending sounds, words, music and silences organically into the texture of the whole. Godard's non-hierarchical treatment of sound continued steadily through the decade of the 1980s and by 1990, whilst Godard was still adopting the same organic approach, he was now working with 24 different tracks.

Although Godard collaborated with film composer Gabriel Yared on *Sauve qui peut (la vie)*, the two key collaborative partnerships that evolved significantly through the 1980s were between Godard and the sound technician François Musy, and the German record producer and founder of ECM Records, Manfred Eicher. Musy worked both alone and in collaboration as sound technician on almost every film that Godard produced in the 1980s. He also worked on *Nouvelle vague* and *Histoire(s)* and digitally remixed the ECM CD soundtrack releases of both of these films. Witt notes that Musy installed a sound recording, mixing and editing system in Godard's studio in Rolle to accommodate his distinctive compositional style and practice, allowing the filmmaker more freedom and control in his mixing of the sound material for *Histoire(s)*.⁴⁵

In 1984, ECM New Series, a subdivision of the German record label ECM Records, was launched and produced recordings of compositions by Heinz Holliger, Meredith Monk, Arvo Pärt, Giya Kancheli and many more. In 1999, ECM New Series released a box set containing 5 CDs of the soundtrack *Histoire(s) du cinema*, along with 4 multilingual art

⁴⁴ Alain Bergala (ed.), *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard*, new edn, 2 vols (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, 1998), I (1950-84), p. 469.

⁴⁵ See Michael Witt, *Jean-Luc Godard, Cinema Historian* (Indiana University Press, 2013), p. 199. The reader should also consult Thierry Jousse's recorded interview with Godard on his method of working with sound, music and voice in *Histoire(s)*. In Track 2 'La Voix, L'objet Sonore', Godard reveals how for episode 4A *Le Contrôle de l'univers*, he worked 'second by second' to create synchronisms between the images and sounds, likening his approach both to the picture-music correspondences created in Eisenstein's arrangements of Prokofiev's music, and to that of a painter, whose vision might gradually emerge piecemeal from colours and sketches. See *Godard/Jousse: Les écrans sonores de Jean-Luc Godard* (France Culture and Harmonia Mundi, 2000) [on CD].

books.⁴⁶ Furthermore, in 2006, a special CD/book edition of four shorts (*Je vous salue, Sarajevo, The Old Place, De l'origine du XXIe siècle* and *Liberté et Patrie*) made between 1993 and 2002 by Godard and Miéville was released as part of a new DVD series called ECM Cinema. The special collaboration between Eicher and Godard that began in the late 1980s, forged a lasting bond between filmmaker and record producer that led to the creation of unique musical experiences in films that include *Allemagne neuf zero* (1991), *Hélas pour moi* (1993), *JLG/JLG: Autoportrait de décembre* (1995), *For ever Mozart* (1996), as well as *Éloge de l'amour* (2001), *Notre musique* (2004) and *Film socialisme* (2010).⁴⁷

An important part of the 1980s corpus involves Godard's use of video. The video aesthetic that emerges from 1979 forms part of what critics have defined as a new poetic, metaphysical and cosmic epoch in Godard's oeuvre that mixes thinking, seeing, hearing and writing into the same gesture.⁴⁸ Dubois notes that the two videos *Soft and Hard* (1985) and *Meetin' WA* (1986) signal 'a transition to a new formula that Godard found after 1988 in the video works alone, where his mastery of speed became total, developing as much in the direction of slow motion as in a new direction, a conquest of acceleration.'⁴⁹ The videos listed by Dubois here voice Godard's continuing concerns about the toxic threat posed by the proliferation of television and the small screen in society. In standard televisual practices, as Godard and Miéville demonstrate in *Soft and Hard*, the spectator is 'subjected' to the message transmitted by the broadcaster. What is denied is the alchemical experience of being transported that places us in the unique darkened space of the cinema theatre, in contact with images that are themselves in contact with other images; images that are 'produced' and projected onto a big screen. These ideas will be explored in Chapter 5 of this thesis, particularly in relation to *King Lear*, where intriguing connections are established between electronic speed alteration and the metaphor of projection.

The burgeoning plasticity ('cet « effet-peinture »') that Dubois identifies in the 1980s corpus has clearly been influenced by the molecular temporalities of the electronic

⁴⁶ For more on this see Alexander Horwath, 'The Man with the Magnétoscope – Jean-Luc Godard's Monumental *Histoire(s) du cinéma* as SoundImageTextBook', trans. by Aileen Derieg in *Senses of Cinema*, 15 (2001) <http://sensesofcinema.com/2001/15/godard_horwath/> [accessed 28.11.2013].

⁴⁷ In his article 'The Periphery and the Centre', Eicher states that his collaborative relationship with Godard started when he began sending Godard music records, or, as he describes them, 'musical messages'. See Manfred Eicher, 'The Periphery and the Centre' in Steve Lake and Paul Griffiths (eds.), *Horizons Touched: The Music of ECM* (London: Granta Books, 2007), pp. 7-12 (p. 8).

⁴⁸ Philippe Dubois, *La Question vidéo: entre cinéma et art contemporain* (Crisnée: Éditions Yellow Now, 2011), p. 237.

⁴⁹ Dubois, 'Video Thinks What Cinema Creates', p. 182.

medium, and by Godard's accomplished handling of speed variation.⁵⁰ In sonic terms, snippets of music, sound and speech are integrated in the films and videos of this period with more buoyancy, acuity and fluidity than in his New Wave cinema, inviting more pliable listening positions. Just as Godard consistently advances a non-hierarchical approach to sound mixing, he takes full advantage of video's de-hierarchized, open system of audiovisual relations that enable more supple and atypical associations to form between bodies, sounds and spaces, and that allow for the revision, reassessment and reworking of the construction of images and sounds.

In 1978, having completed *France tour détour*, Godard gave a series of talks in Montreal that were published in 1980 in the French volume *Introduction à une véritable histoire du cinéma*.⁵¹ At the start of one of the Montreal talks, to which I will refer in Chapter 4, Godard projected Robert Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* (1922) alongside his own *Une femme mariée* (1964), Roberto Rossellini's *Francesco, giullare di Dio* (1950) and Ingmar Bergman's *Persona* (1966).⁵² This series of talks evolved from earlier plans for an audiovisual history of cinema, to be co-written and co-directed by Godard and the co-founder of the Cinémathèque française, Henri Langlois. The project, conceived as early as 1976 and abandoned following Langlois's death in 1977, has been interpreted with hindsight as a crucial 'prototypical vision' of the later *Histoire(s)*.⁵³ Indeed, if *Sauve qui peut (la vie)* and *Scénario de Sauve qui peut (la vie)* help us to look forward in 1979 to the emergence of a different kind of sound cinema, as well as to a new approach to history, these films also demand that we glance back to the political, social and cultural concerns that Godard was exploring in the preceding years.

⁵⁰ Dubois, *La Question vidéo*, p. 205.

⁵¹ For a revised and corrected version of Godard's Montreal talks (recorded on video and published in the 1980 French edition), see the English translation Jean-Luc Godard, *Introduction to a True History of Cinema and Television*, ed. and trans. by Timothy Barnard (Montreal: Caboose, 2014).

⁵² Godard reveals that he mistook the title of Bergman's *The Silence* (1963), the film he had originally intended to project, for *Persona*, which he had in fact never seen. See Jean-Luc Godard, *Introduction à une véritable histoire du cinéma* (Paris: Editions Albatros, 1980), p. 102.

⁵³ In 1968, Langlois was invited to Montreal by Serge Losique, a professor of French film, and soon began lecturing at the Conservatoire d'art cinématographique. After Langlois's death in January 1977 and once *France tour détour* had been completed, Godard began to give regular lectures at the Conservatoire, following in Langlois's footsteps. As Witt reveals, Godard's stated aim was to use the talks as 'preparatory research for a longer-term audiovisual study of the history of cinema and television'. See Michael Witt, 'Archaeology of *Histoire(s) du cinéma*' in *Introduction to a True History of Cinema and Television*, pp. xv-lxix (pp. xxvii-xxix).

1.3 Survey of literature: Godard and sound

The significance of sound and music in the Godardian corpus has rarely been a priority for critics of his films. Very few book-length studies exist that concentrate principally on the sonic and aural aspect of Godard's work. When his soundtracks do attract attention from commentators, these writers frequently overlook the extraordinary variety of Godard's creative output that encompasses feature films, shorts, video scenarios, video essays, books, recorded interviews and audio CDs. It is indeed fruitful to compare Godard's audio arrangements with those of other filmmakers, and to assess the extent to which his sound practices defy narrative film music customs but these approaches only engage with a fraction of his innovations with sound, and they force his work to comply with a narrow theoretical framework. In spite of these observations an exciting critical field to deal with sound and music in Godard's oeuvre has gradually emerged and I shall now provide an overview of some of these sources, focusing in particular on those that concern the 1980s corpus.

Royal S. Brown is one of the first critics to attend seriously to Godard's treatment of music in his soundtracks. In his study of *Pierrot le fou* (1965), Brown integrates portions of Antoine Duhamel's film score into his analysis to illustrate Godard's novel re-structuring of the music, while in his section on *Vivre sa vie* (1962), Brown fleshes out Godard's ordering of the nondiegetic musical extract composed by Michel Legrand. He makes the crucial point that Godard initially wanted the score to function as a parallel structure to the film, which he conceived of musically as a set of theme and variations, before envisioning the entire film itself as a 'quasi-musical structure.'⁵⁴ Godard whittles Legrand's music down to a mere fragment, which functions like a 'closed loop capable of indefinite repetition'.⁵⁵ It is the image-track, Brown suggests, that provides new angles from which to *hear* this musical object - the 'microstructure' within the 'macro-musical structure' of the film.⁵⁶ Brown's analysis demonstrates with clarity Godard's desire, at an early stage, to imbue his films with a musical logic and coherence, and to construe music, a non-verbal art form, as a metaphor for cinema.

⁵⁴ Royal S. Brown, *Overtones and Undertones: Reading Film Music* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), p. 189.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 191.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 191-2. To discover more about the compositional function of music and sound in Godard's New Wave cinema, the reader should consult Kareem Roustom, 'Michel Legrand Scores *Une femme est une femme*' in Tom Conley and T. Jefferson Kline (eds.), *A Companion to Jean-Luc Godard* (Chichester: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 2014), pp. 71-88 and Louis-Albert Serrut, *Jean-Luc Godard, cinéaste acoustician* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2011).

In 1990, a special issue of *Cahiers du cinéma* was published that included articles by Thierry Jousse and Jacques Aumont devoted to the subject of sound and music in Godard's films. Aumont suggests that Godard is not interested in music *per se* but in the musical *idea*.⁵⁷ In 'Godard à l'oreille', Jousse uses more concrete terms to define the filmmaker as a musician and a skilled radio programmer. He compares Godard's sound design to the work of poets, contemporary musicians, rap and rock artists, and to electro-acoustic composers, rather than to other filmmakers (Frank Zappa, Luciano Berio, John Zorn and Guy Reibel are among those mentioned). Jousse comments on Godard's programming of everyday sounds, musical phrases and textual quotations, likening his method and style to the cut-up technique of William Burroughs.⁵⁸

Prénom Carmen has generated a substantial body of criticism on the subject of sound and music. Ronald Bogue bases his reading of this film on Gilles Deleuze's thought on music in classic sound cinema. In *Cinéma 2: L'Image-temps* Deleuze draws upon Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*. Bogue suggests that the music of the string quartet in *Prénom Carmen* functions in a Nietzschean fashion, after Deleuze, as the 'kernel of fire' surrounding the Apollonian images.⁵⁹ Annette Davison's reading of the role of the string quartet in this film posits the music as an 'active participant' in the creation of an inquisitive and questioning 'viewing-listening subject'.⁶⁰ She demonstrates how *Prénom Carmen* is essentially deconstructive, being explicitly concerned with the conventions of classical Hollywood scoring, which this film sets out to destabilise. Finally, in her article on the circulations of music, narrative and popular reference, Amy Herzog makes reference to Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the refrain to show how *Prénom Carmen* moves beyond deconstruction toward the creation of the new, by creating tangles of ambivalent meanings from the intertextual references that 'serve to "clear the air" by destabilising the link between quotation and source.'⁶¹

A major collection of chapters on sound, music and voice in Godard appeared in 2004 in the co-edited volume *For Ever Godard*. Laurent Jullier explores the music of the ECM composers whose work features in the film *Histoire(s)* and in the feature film

⁵⁷ Jacques Aumont, 'Lumière de la musique' in *Cahiers du cinéma, Spécial Godard 30 ans depuis*, 437 (1990), 46-8 (p. 48).

⁵⁸ Thierry Jousse, 'Godard à l'oreille' in *Cahiers du cinéma, Spécial Godard 30 ans depuis*, 40-3 (p. 40).

⁵⁹ Ronald Bogue, *Deleuze's Way: Essays in Transversal Ethics and Aesthetics* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007), p. 72.

⁶⁰ Annette Davison, *Hollywood Theory, Non-Hollywood Practice: Cinema Soundtracks in the 1980s and 1990s* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2004), p. 91.

⁶¹ Amy Herzog, 'The Dissonant Refrains of Jean-Luc Godard's *Prénom Carmen*' in Chris Perriam and Ann Davies (eds.), *Carmen: From Silent Film to MTV* (Amsterdam and New York: Editions Rodopi B. V., 2005), pp. 140-50 (pp. 144-5).

Nouvelle vague. Jullier questions the unlikely pairing of Godard's 'rough, staccato and self-reflexive' modernist style with the 'homogeneous and polished records of ECM'.⁶² Jullier defines *Histoire(s)* as 'an attempt to reach the ineffable, mainly through the soundtrack'.⁶³ The subtle yet critical bond between music and the revelatory power of montage is brought to the surface in James S. Williams's chapter that concentrates on music's power to break through chiasmic boundaries to become part of an intersubjective process of memory.⁶⁴ Godard's treatment of music allows it to remain 'forever "open"', serving as a perpetual source of hope.⁶⁵ Williams proposes that music functions dramatically in Godard's films as 'the cinematic event' that unites key Godardian themes of human love and history. He affirms: 'By allowing music to enter freely into his work on its own terms and acquire the status of an original and unstoppable Event, he has traversed the "blind" fantasy whereby he was Theseus to music's Antigone. The desire for music has now become the love of music which, as we have seen, operates as the very essence of cinema in its ideal form.'⁶⁶

In an article on 'the audible life of the image' in Godard's films, David Wills responds to some of these key themes and ideas, suggesting that Godard's desire to *see* music is part of the filmmaker's general endeavour to have 'film function beyond the formal constraints of image and sound tracks'.⁶⁷ Wills constructs his analysis around the close tie between music and Godard's 'radical conception of montage', which he relates to Deleuze's notion of cinema as concerning 'a technological thinking in images'.⁶⁸ Wills examines music's progressive inhabiting of the image that begins as diegetic performance in *Week-end* (1967), becoming in *Éloge de l'amour* and *Notre musique* a virtual or potential 'image' that moves beyond vision toward a musical 'outside' of cinema and into what he terms the 'music-image'.⁶⁹

In my view, the musicality of Godard's artistic practice is there for us to hear. Whether Godard is a secret connoisseur or an avowed amateur of music, and whether he talks

⁶² Laurent Jullier, 'JLG/ECM' in Temple et al. (eds), *For Ever Godard*, pp. 272-87 (p. 272).

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 274.

⁶⁴ Williams performs close readings of arresting musical moments in *Je vous salue, Marie* (1985) and *Nouvelle vague*, followed by *Éloge de l'amour*.

⁶⁵ James S. Williams, 'Music, Love, and the Cinematic Event' in Temple et al. (eds), *For Ever Godard*, pp. 288-311 (p. 305).

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 306-7.

⁶⁷ David Wills, 'The Audible Life of the Image' in *Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy – Revue de la philosophie française et de langage française*, 18:2 (2010) <<http://jffp.org/ojs/index.php/jffp>> [accessed 01.03.2011], 43-64 (p. 43).

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

about music and sound verbally or not, does not have a bearing on the complexity of what we listen to, what we are shown and what we fathom for ourselves. As Williams suggests, Godard's strange silence on music is indicative of his awareness of music's power to exist as something that can never be definitively conveyed, decoded or resolved.⁷⁰ Yet it is also important to recognise that if Godard acknowledges music's power to 'speak' in nonrepresentational terms through his silence, he is forever performing non-verbal commentaries and interpretations, consciously or not, on the music in (and of) his films, which demand a musical response. His lack of words on the subject makes room for the spectator to *hear*.

In her book *Cinema and Intermediality: The Passion for the In-Between*, Ágnes Pethő comments on the 'aural sensuality' and increasing importance of the sense of hearing in Godard's later films. Sound serves to turn our attention inward 'beyond vision' as 'sounds and music become "passages" of transcendence'.⁷¹ Pethő's comments are couched in her discussion of a musical evolution in Godard's cinema, which moves from the 'mosaic' to the 'musical',⁷² producing in late Godard a complex 'polyphonic "score"' of sounds and images.⁷³ Pethő's reading, however, leaps from 'New Wave Godard' to 'late Godard', paying no attention to Godard's collaborative experiments with video and television undertaken in the 1970s. The arguments put forward in my thesis will attend to this omission by connecting the growing malleability and plasticity of sound in Godard to the electronic medium and the technique of altered motion, as well as to Godard's search, with Miéville, for a new approach to dialogue and a new mode of expression that evolved with force from 1979.

Miriam Heywood's comparative study of *Histoire(s)* explores the 'networks of meaning' produced from the connections between cinema, video and literature. She devotes an entire chapter to sound and gives special emphasis throughout to the presence of the anagram (the 'visual representation of non-signifying units of sound') that operates in conjunction with 'the untranslatable (silent) expression of music'.⁷⁴ The

⁷⁰ Williams, 'Music, Love, and the Cinematic Event', p. 292.

⁷¹ Ágnes Pethő, *Cinema and Intermediality: The Passion for the In-Between* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), p. 280.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 269. Pethő constructs her argument using the two metaphors that Godard deploys in the *Scénario du film Passion* to render his conception of the screen: the 'white page', which Pethő relates to the French New Wave, and the fluid 'white beach', which represents the musical flow of images and sounds.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 278. In this part of her section on Godard, Pethő's examples refer primarily to *Hélas pour moi*, *Notre musique* and *Film socialisme*.

⁷⁴ Miriam Heywood, *Modernist Visions: Marcel Proust's A la recherche du temps perdu and Jean-Luc Godard's Histoire(s) du cinéma* (Bern: Peter Lang AG, 2012), p. 14.

fragments of music, Heywood argues, are not expressive in isolation and must be read *in conjunction with* the other videographic elements that together generate a deeper form of musicality from the emergence of a silent ‘imagined music’.⁷⁵ Following a different trail, in an incisive and far-reaching engagement with *Histoire(s)*, Witt exposes a multitude of other ways in which sound and music function in this film. He comments on Godard’s innovations with sound, alluding in particular to the *Histoire(s) du cinéma* audio CDs: ‘Godard has charted the parameters of “sound cinema” – in the sense both of sound-image relationships and of stand-alone imageless soundscapes’.⁷⁶ Witt suggests that music is used in *Histoire(s)* for historical reasons, operating as a documentary record of the sort of music produced and listened to at a particular time. Music is selected to show up historical links and *rapprochements* between the development of cinema and other artistic mediums, particularly music. Music is often used as conventional underscore, or the rhythm and energy of an extract is sometimes deployed to invigorate the pace and momentum of the visuals. At other times, Witt observes, pre-recorded tracks are mixed with unrelated film soundtracks, or a piece of music might simply be chosen for the connotations of its title.⁷⁷

This thesis will reveal how these applications of music in *Histoire(s)* are active in the films and videos made in the years preceding and contemporaneous with this work. Although the thesis does not engage specifically with *Histoire(s)*, it is clear that Godard’s method of establishing historical links and *rapprochements* through music has been thoroughly trialled, tested and developed elsewhere in the 1980s corpus, especially, as we shall see, in *Lettre à Freddy Buache* and *King Lear*. Indeed, the latter film, made one year prior to the early drafts of episodes 1A and 1B of *Histoire(s)*, is often reduced by critics to a provocative indictment of the film industry. Curiously, the significance of Godard’s inimitable use of slow-motion sound has been unequivocally ignored. Yet along with the frequent jumps in volume level in *Histoire(s)*, and the sudden intrusion of loud noises that startle the listener, one of the most unnerving and powerful sound techniques deployed is that of slow motion sound, which, as Witt emphasizes, effectively realises the potential of the technique that Jean Epstein’s article on *Le Tempestaire* sketched out in 1948.⁷⁸ By calling attention to these nuances, detectable specifically through the ear, this thesis will demonstrate how Godard’s vision

⁷⁵ Heywood, *Modernist Visions*, pp. 155-6.

⁷⁶ Witt, *Jean-Luc Godard, Cinema Historian*, p. 200.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 202-7.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 207.

of cinema history performed in *Histoire(s)* both infiltrates and is nourished by other of his films and videos in ways that have yet to be explored.

The first book-length study to tackle the subject of music in Godard appeared in 2010, published in German and written by Jürg Stenzl, a professor of musicology. This book, entitled *Jean-Luc Godard - musicien: Die Musik in den Filmen von Jean-Luc Godard* discusses a range of films from the early and late corpus. Through a series of analytical case studies, Stenzl praises Godard's mastery in his approach to sound and music. He covers Godard's collaborations with composers during the New Wave era, the importance of Beethoven's scores and their influence on Godard's sound design, as well as discussions of *Je vous salue, Marie*, *Histoire(s)*, *For ever Mozart*, and a selection of tracks from the ECM catalogue.⁷⁹ A year later, the first book in French to deal with sound in Godard's films was published, entitled *Jean-Luc Godard, cinéaste acousticien*. Its author Louis-Albert Serrut concentrates on the arrangement of voices, music, noises and textual quotations, demonstrating how Godard expresses ideas and constructs meaning primarily through his handling of different sonic materials. Whilst Serrut performs case studies of *Passion* and *Nouvelle Vague* and includes in the annex an intricate breakdown of all the different sound types and their timings, his book limits itself to Godard's New Wave cinema, beginning with *À bout de souffle* (1960) and finishing with *Made in USA* (1966).

In 2014, a chapter by Stenzl was published on Godard and Miéville's 10-minute short *Dans le noir du temps* (2002). Here, Stenzl explores the significance of Arvo Pärt's *Spiegel im Spiegel* and the complex counterpoint Godard establishes between the 'processual autonomy' of the music (the 'musical temporal structure') and the contrasting images (the 'cinematic temporal structure'),⁸⁰ concluding that 'Godard's musico-pictorial montage is based on a masterly handling of time and motion within time – a mastery both cinematic and musical in nature.'⁸¹ Stenzl's rigorous analysis reminds us of Brown's comments on the 'closed loop' of music in *Vivre sa vie* and looks ahead to my own examination of circular motion in *Sauve qui peut (la vie)*, *Lettre à Freddy Buache* and *Nouvelle vague*. Cyclical structures allow Godard to make images

⁷⁹ For more detail on this publication, see David Neumeyer's review entitled 'Jean-Luc Godard—musicien: die Musik in den Filmen von Jean-Luc Godard, and: Jean-Luc Godard' in *Project Muse*, 68:2 (2011) <doi: 10.1353/not.2011.0145> [accessed 25.04.2014], 394-6.

⁸⁰ Jürg Stenzl, 'Jean-Luc Godard: *Dans le noir du temps* (2002) – The "Filming" of a Musical Form', trans. by J. Bradford Robinson in Douglas Morrey, Christina Stojanova and Nicole Côté (eds.), *The Legacies of Jean-Luc Godard* (Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2014), pp. 15-35 (p. 17 and p. 21).

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

expressive in a musical manner, by creating perceptual ambiguities that operate in a poetic, emotive and intellectual sense by asking us to turn back, reassess and reflect again, or, simply, *to listen*.

1.3.1 Review of the theoretical field

Claudia Gorbman's landmark study *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* published in 1987, introduces some of the central questions on film music that continue to be debated today, notably: 'What is music doing in the movies, and how does it do it?'⁸² Gorbman deals principally with the different ways music works with or against narrative logic, introducing readers to the concept of diegetic and nondiegetic sound, which she bases on Gérard Genette's identification of three main levels of narration in his theory of narratology (the diegetic, the nondiegetic and the metadiegetic). Anahid Kassabian's *Hearing Film* draws upon Gorbman's analysis while exposing its limitations by underscoring the neglected importance of 'the engagements between films and perceivers'.⁸³ Kassabian stresses music's role in the identification processes that take place, encompassing gender, sexuality and race, which shape the spectator's experience of film, thus recognizing film as something that is perceived and related to, along with its music, in different ways.⁸⁴ By giving emphasis to the listener of film, Kassabian highlights the limitations of the diegetic/nondiegetic dichotomy established by Gorbman, which, she claims, 'obscures music's role in producing the diegesis itself and fails to account for music that falls 'in between' these categories'.⁸⁵

Although my own study of acoustic spectatorship makes use of the concept of diegetic/nondiegetic sound, the works I discuss do not fit neatly into a narrative film music context. They expose, therefore, the lack of theoretical literature that currently exists on sound and music in other audiovisual media contexts.⁸⁶ In *L'Audio-vision: son*

⁸² Claudia Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 2.

⁸³ Anahid Kassabian, *Hearing Film: Tracking Identifications in Contemporary Hollywood Film Music* (New York and London: Routledge, 2001), p. 141.

⁸⁴ For some of the differences between Kassabian's study and Gorbman's approach to analysing classical film music, see *Ibid.*, pp. 40-2

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 42. Two key articles that explore this matter further are Jeff Smith, 'Bridging the Gap: Reconsidering the Border between Diegetic and Nondiegetic Music' in *Music and the Moving Image*, 2:1 (2009), 1-25 and Robynn J. Stilwell, 'The Fantastical Gap between Diegetic and Nondiegetic' in Daniel Goldmark, Lawrence Kramer and Richard Leppert (eds.), *Beyond the Soundtrack: Representing Music in Cinema* (University of California Press, 2007), pp. 184-202.

⁸⁶ Holly Rogers's study of the relationship between music, art and video technology is an exception. She forges an innovative approach to early video art (beginning in 1965), stressing that many early video

et image au cinéma, Michel Chion implements a more extensive approach to the sound-image relationship in cinema. He refers to spectators as ‘audio-spectators’ who are placed through their encounter with audiovisual media in a perceptual mode of reception that he calls ‘audio-vision’.⁸⁷ In this way, Chion accentuates sound’s power to change and transform our visual perceptions. His study includes passages on Dolby multitrack sound, a chapter on television, video art and music video, an outline of the different listening modes that audio-spectators adopt, as well as a useful account of modes of audible speech in film. Yet his brief, fleeting comments on several of Godard’s films from the 1980s corpus make no attempt to situate Godard’s soundtracks in any relevant context.⁸⁸ Remarkably, Chion disregards the relationship between his chosen examples from Godard’s work and other of Godard’s films, videos and video essays. There is no mention in his section on television of Miéville and Godard’s pioneering Sonimage television series or their video essay *Soft and hard*, nor of Godard’s long-standing collaboration with his sound engineer François Musy. He similarly pays no attention to Godard’s use of slow-motion sound in the late 1980s. Chion’s reductive analysis overlooks the crucial ideas, experiments and evolving theories that Godard develops on film history, projection and spectatorship practices, which influence and shape his soundtracks and the meanings they produce.

Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener make an array of discerning assertions on sound in their chapter ‘Cinema as Ear: Acoustics and Space’. Whilst Elsaesser and Hagener are not sound specialists, the questions raised in their chapter carry great potential when applied to my thesis on acoustic spectatorship. They stress that by turning our focus away from a visual conception of spectatorship and toward the ear and sound, we draw attention to ‘the spatiality of cinematic experience’.⁸⁹ They go on to make the crucial point that ‘[t]he spectator is no longer a passive recipient of images at the pointed end of the optical pyramid, but rather a bodily being enmeshed acoustically, spatially and affectively in the filmic texture.’⁹⁰ Their chapter introduces a new approach to spectatorship that gives voice to the generative dynamic set in motion between a film’s

artists were musicians and composers, which meant that early video became ‘a highly *musical* genre’. Rogers replaces the genre of video-art with ‘video *art-music*’, a term she uses to underscore ‘the audiovisuality of the medium’. See Holly Rogers, *Sounding the Gallery: Video and the Rise of Art-Music* (Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 1-2 (original emphasis).

⁸⁷ Michel Chion, *L’Audio-vision: Son et image au cinéma* (Paris: Éditions Nathan, 1990), p. 3.

⁸⁸ Chion makes passing references to *Prénom Carmen*, *Détective* (1985), *Je vous salue, Marie*, *Lettre à Freddy Buache*, *Soigne ta droite* and *Nouvelle vague*.

⁸⁹ Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener, *Film Theory: An Introduction Through the Senses* (New York and London: Routledge, 2010), p. 131.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 131-2.

soundtrack and its role in stabilizing the spectator's body in space.⁹¹ They contend that technological advances in sound technology (Dolby, MP3 files, iPods, mobile phones) have produced an interesting paradox: whilst sound-image combinations are capable of "centering" our vision' in perspectival space, the newfound mobility and plasticity of sounds in our everyday lives "transport" our senses and bodies', raising a question that gathers weight as my thesis progresses: 'how henceforth do we locate our bodies in this aural space?'⁹²

1.4 Methodology

The critical approach forged in this thesis will be thoroughly interdisciplinary, drawing on writings by sound theorists, musicologists, composers, literary theorists and philosophers. It will explore music's presence in the films to be examined as something seen and unseen, guided by the creative potential of the acousmatic condition. With the exception of Serrut's book in French and Stenzl's book in German, no film theorist, critic or film sound scholar has yet conducted a sustained study of sound in any period of the Godardian corpus. This thesis will therefore constitute the first extensive investigation of sound in the films and videos of the 1980s. It recognizes the significance of the Sonimage project and engages with Godard's video essays, his features films, his film and video shorts, as well as his use of audio CD. As Witt confirms, Godard is 'less a conventional feature-film director than a multimedia poet, philosopher, critic, and essayist'.⁹³ His sounds and images are deeply inflected by other media and his films and videos consequently necessitate a broad, fluid and inclusive approach that is not limited to narrative film sound theory but operates laterally to bring forth the different levels of meaning in each work.

The solo percussionist Evelyn Glennie, who lives with profound deafness, reiterates in her 'Hearing Essay' that auditory experience never concerns just one sense alone. She reminds us that '[h]earing is basically a specialized form of touch' and stresses that the sense of sight plays an important role: 'An electrical signal is generated in the ear and various bits of other information from other senses all get sent to the brain which then

⁹¹ Elsaesser and Hagener, *Film Theory*, p. 131.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 148.

⁹³ Witt, *Jean-Luc Godard, Cinema Historian*, p. 7.

processes the data to create a sound picture'.⁹⁴ In the same vein, this thesis will testify that film spectatorship cannot be construed in terms of sight versus sound, with one sense continually pitched against the other, for film is an audiovisual medium that generates multisensory experiences, and the spectator is involved in a multitude of complex, sensory processes simultaneously.

In this thesis sound will be considered in its widest context, through its subtle and complex interactions with other media, including literature, poetry, sculpture, painting and photography. The concept of acoustic spectatorship will be investigated through close analysis and my readings of particular sequences will integrate images and illustrations, including portions of musical scores, into the main body of the text, thereby setting up concrete juxtapositions to bear out my claims. My examples will be theoretically informed by a range of sources from disciplines not directly concerned with the moving image, which will allow me to assess more fully the extensiveness and depth of the sound-image relations that confront us. The arguments presented will consistently probe the perceptual processes of seeing and hearing, returning regularly to Schaeffer's writing on the acousmatic condition, with the relationship between the listener and the visible source of sound underpinning each chapter.

The work of musicologist Carolyn Abbate, particularly her theory of *voices* in music and her concept of musical narration as a rare *act* of 'performing narration within a surrounding music',⁹⁵ will be invoked to point up the various ways in which Godard 'composes with' his sonic materials, notably with Ravel's piano music and Beethoven's late string quartets. In my examination of Godard's short films and videos, I will exploit Deborah Mawer's insightful discussions of Ravel's orchestral compositions and their links to dance and visual media, relating some of the key stylistic and structural traits that Mawer identifies in Ravel's ballet repertory to Godard's audiovisual 'choreographies'. Roland Barthes's essay 'Rasch', with its emphasis on the excess and expressivity of the musical body, will be applied in my sections on the power and function of speech and the singing voice and I will respond throughout to the materiality and texture of voice, relying in part on Mary Ann Doane's basic categories to

⁹⁴ See Evelyn Glennie, 'Hearing Essay' (1993) <<http://www.evelyn.co.uk/literature.html>> [accessed 20.03.2014].

⁹⁵ Carolyn Abbate, *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton University Press, 1991), pp. 18-19.

differentiate between voiceover and ‘voice-off’.⁹⁶ Gaston Bachelard’s writing on the poetic imagination and intimate space will be called upon as the thesis progresses, in order to find ways of conveying the important ambiguities and incongruences produced by the conjunction of acousmatic sound and the visual image. Composer-theorist Denis Smalley’s notion of performed space in acousmatic music will shape my discussion of the projection of voice, as well as my writing on sound and spatial experience, while Simon Emmerson’s manner of conceptualizing the relationship between ‘local’ and ‘field’ activity in acousmatic performance and live electronic music, will prove increasingly useful as the thesis develops and as I construct an approach to Godard’s films and videos from the perspective of sonic art.

1.5 Chapter outline

This thesis will begin in Chapter 2 with an analysis of the feature film *Sauve qui peut (la vie)*, supported by Schaeffer’s early essay on cinema and radio. The spotlight will be shone on the process of listening and I shall perform a close analysis of the arrangement of music, examining how a musical cutting from an opera by Amilcare Ponchielli constitutes an essential part of the film’s structure, content and form. I will turn to the video scenario *Scénario de Sauve qui peut (la vie)* to show up the subversive power of music, namely its ability to impede the narrative flow and reconfigure the sense-making process. The interaction between Yared’s electronic theme music and the operatic aria will be a key focus in this chapter, and the study will culminate in a discussion of the famous diegetic musical passage in the closing tracking sequence.

The correspondences between writing, sound and the recording surface of the screen will be fleshed out in Chapter 3, which commences with a commentary on the musical metaphors that pervade *Scénario du film Passion*. I will here highlight the close relationship between Godard’s notion of ‘seeing a scenario’, which serves to counter the constraints of the written script, and his conception of the image as a musicalized space. Godard’s manipulation of the *Adagio assai* from Ravel’s *Piano Concerto in G* will

⁹⁶ According to Doane’s categories of voice in cinema, the voice-off differs from voiceover in that “[v]oice-off” refers to instances in which we hear the voice of a character who is not visible within the frame. Yet the film establishes, by means of previous shots or other contextual determinants, the character’s “presence” in the space of the scene, in the diegesis.’ Unlike the voice-off, the voiceover commentary operates outside of diegetic space and speaks directly to the audience. See Mary Ann Doane, ‘The Voice in the Cinema: The Articulation of Body and Space’ in *Yale French Studies*, 60 (1980), 33-50 (p. 37 and p. 42).

dominate my analysis of *Passion*, which, inspired by Abbate's concept of the narrating voice, concerns two poignant musical interludes that I refer to as scenes of listening. The asynchronicity between body and voice, and the quivering and stammering of speech and diegetic sound, will be shown to function musically, in conversation with the rhythmic tension kindled in the *Adagio assai*. My analysis in this middle section of Chapter 3 concludes by defining the character Isabelle, through reference to a portrait by Giovanni Battista Moroni, as a 'musical figure' of montage and a personification of cinema itself, whose voice resounds at the intersection of literature, music, painting and video. I then turn to Rilke's essays on Rodin's sculptures to discuss the physical, plastic and spatial rendering of Beethoven's string quartets in *Prénom Carmen*. This third section will explore the relationship between bodily and musical gesture. By juxtaposing several of Godard's sea shots with fragments of Beethoven's unseen score, I identify pertinent moments when the score can be construed in visual terms, and when the seascapes can be perceived poetically as idiosyncratic images of music.

We proceed in Chapter 4 to consider the idea of 'live' performance in *Lettre à Freddy Buache*, where we see Godard bent over a record player, listening through headphones to Ravel's *Boléro*, later performing a critical splice that short-circuits the music's climactic breakdown. My analysis of this crucial work reveals that the performative 'event' of sound, executed surreptitiously through a single repeat, 'projects' a key archival document that, I maintain, motivates the entire film. Indeed, through reference to Flaherty's *Nanook of the North*, and to Godard's own discourse on the relationship between documentary and fiction, my study projects the composer Ravel and his newspaper article on mechanical noise, into the limelight. Godard's apt 'letter' to Freddy Buache becomes, through its appropriation of Ravel's music, an embodiment of a new form of audiovisual history and a new kind of 'silent' sound film.

Our focus then shifts to the video *Puissance de la parole*, where I refer to Mawer's writing on Ravel's ballet repertory to examine Godard's reuse of the aesthetic of deformation that governs *La Valse*, a 'choreographic poem' for the stage, described by music critics as a 'decomposition' of the waltz form. The music swings from balance and order to utter chaos as the archetypal waltz is progressively destroyed. Here I explore instances of sonic disturbance as well as the relationship between the extracts of recorded music and two key paintings by Francis Bacon (the static *Study from the Human Body* and the dynamic *Figure in Movement*) that are displayed, manipulated and electronically reconstructed. I illustrate how Godard exploits Ravel's 'study' of the

waltz genre to break down and recast familiar forms, spaces and images as part of his own eclectic electronic commentary on the cinema image, its future and its past.

In Chapter 5, I expose certain key references to the arrival of synchronized sound in cinema. I call attention to the productive power of acousmatic sound, as well as to stereo and slow-motion sound. In the first part, the plasticity of the image in silent cinema comes to be associated with the mix of music and the play of speed in *On s'est tous défilé*, in which a parade of fashion models file past the camera. In the second part, the relationship between the performing body and the exterior landscape will be examined through two salient vocal performances by Catherine Ringer (aka Les Rita Mitsouko) in *Soigne ta droite*. My examples will show this film to be a thoroughly musical-cinematic construction, corroborated by a unique act of montage. Indeed, through the juxtaposition of a series of resonant sky shots, I point up the film's visual and profoundly musical connection to *Passion*. The third section accentuates the undervalued yet fundamental significance of Virginia Woolf's experimental and auditory novel *The Waves* in *King Lear*. I argue that Godard exploits Woolf's modernist 'voice' through sound and allusions to hearing and silence to generate an imaginary site devoted to the lost space of cinematic projection.

Chapter 6 concentrates on the relational nature of sound and its capacity to remodel spatial experience. It engages with Claire Bartoli's vivid transcription of the CD soundtrack *Nouvelle vague* to perform a comparative study of the audio 'version' and the prior film release. My analysis will firstly explore instances of musical and visual recurrence, underpinned by the metaphor of dance. Then, in a section on inner space and recorded time I compare a dream-sequence in Andrei Tarkovsky's *Nostalghia* (1983) to a similarly mesmeric sequence in Godard's film, suggesting that through this play of imitation and recreation, Godard's 'new wave' carves out its place in history by entering into dialogue with great directors of the past, while interrogating more generally the *place* of cinema and its spectator. Through a commentary on two vivid sound events that launch each compact disc, the final part of Chapter 6 will confirm that Godard's soundtrack is structured and composed as a piece of sonic art. I establish how rich layers of sound and silence are imitatively shaped, with certain images operating musically and poetically as aspects of the audio arrangement. I suggest ultimately that it is the listener of *Nouvelle vague* who produces its music by listening, sensing, feeling and by actively imagining, thus heightening her/his visual perception of sound's unseen source.

The thesis will close with a short discussion of a series of close-up images from Godard's latest short *Les Trois Désastres* (2012) (from the 3D triptych *3X3D* (2013)). The central themes of the thesis will be drawn together in the Conclusion through an interpretation of these arresting images of an intimate, imaginative and co-creative act, namely the four hands of two pianists performing Ravel's quick-tempered *Prélude à la nuit* from his *Rapsodie espagnole*. The portion of soundtrack that accompanies the initial images of the pianists' hands is an extract from episode 2A *Seul le cinéma* of *Histoire(s)*. Through this telling connection, forged aurally through the soundtrack and visually through these engrossing images of a fleeting piano performance, Godard specifically addresses the listener, while adding another layer to his discourse on the allure and demise of the projected image.

The relational nature of sound and its capacity to touch, move and bring people together is frequently associated in Godard's film work of this period with the notion of cinematic projection and, therefore, with reinvention. Traditional spaces of musical performance are re-imagined in every film examined, whether through the half-speed strains of the acousmatic quartets in *King Lear*, through the CD soundtrack of *Nouvelle Vague* or through the dismantled opera house in *Sauve qui peut (la vie)*. If each chapter sets out to ascertain the depth and significance of the spectator's experience of film through sound and the sense of hearing, each analysis confirms Godard's status as an influential sonic artist who composes boldly, radically and perceptively. This thesis proposes an entirely new way of approaching, perceiving and conceiving of Godard's films, videos and soundtracks from the 1980s corpus, substantiating my overall claim that Godard's work with sound, music and voice not merely overturns and reformulates the basic notion of *seeing* film, but that it purposefully works to redefine the whole notion of what film spectatorship *is* and compels us to rethink the possibilities of what it *could be*.

Chapter 2

Constructing Voices in *Sauve qui peut (la vie)* (1979) and

Scénario de Sauve qui peut (la vie) (1979)

‘–Un souffle disperse les limites du foyer.’¹

‘Sauve qui peut (la vie) copyright 1979 Sonimage’ is written in black typeface over a lengthy pan of cloud and blue sky and is accompanied by the proliferating electronic theme music, composed by Gabriel Yared, which emerges from the loud humming and occasional squeak that pre-empt the cut to the first image. This could be wind, a train or an aeroplane flying by. As stated in the preceding credit title, this film was not directed but ‘composed by’ Jean-Luc Godard. In both design and intent *Sauve qui peut (la vie)* constitutes an explicitly musicalized audiovisual form, marked by its 18 instances of speed variation, which constitute the film’s most breathtaking, invigorating and brutal moments. At times, the impulsive altered-motion sequences work to isolate chaotic zones of bodily contact, while at other times they generate more poignant and affective areas of sensation. By focusing on the listening body, acousmatic sound and the mutations of speed, this chapter demonstrates, through a series of close readings, how in this film some of the key developments in the history of recorded sound are in play: sound and, crucially, an elusive singing voice are literally made to travel. Indeed, the whole film springs from the implicit act of tuning the silent vibrations of the airwaves, moving from static or perhaps cosmic noise into sonorous form at a frequency within reach of the human ear. In this opening act of divine intervention, which carries us from the artificial skies of the radio receiver to the depths of a tormented soul, the erratic pace of the film is set.

At the heart of *Sauve qui peut (la vie)* lies the desire to recover the nuances and idiosyncrasies in basic human actions, expressions and physical movements that have been smoothed over by the unflinching temporal regularities imposed in television and commercial cinema. In an article published in 1980 on the film, Godard discusses the creative potential of altered motion. He remarks: ‘Aujourd’hui pour les rythmes, tout reste

¹ Arthur Rimbaud, *Illuminations* in Rimbaud, *Œuvres complètes* (Éditions Gallimard, 2009), pp. 287-319 (p. 307).

pareil, on donne un baiser au même rythme qu'on monte dans une voiture, ou qu'on achète une baguette de pain. Moi je pense qu'il y a des mondes infinis, le cinéma ne permet pas, vu son état commercial, de les aborder de plain-pied sans un grand sujet'.² Godard notes that the spontaneous and irregular life of the body was expressed in the silent era through the rehearsed acts of silent film actors, citing Chaplin, Keaton and Langdon as prime examples.³ The 18 episodes of altered motion in the film can be understood as an aesthetic strategy to recover and rework the spaces of communication lost in acts of transmission, and to find new speeds, rhythms and to forge new correspondences between characters, scenes, gestures and sounds.

Anne-Marie Miéville, Godard's primary collaborator through the 1970s, co-edited *Sauve qui peut (la vie)* and co-wrote the screenplay. As Witt has meticulously shown, Miéville played a decisive part in the shift from the severe political framework witnessed in the Groupe Dziga Vertov films to an emphasis on the politics of the everyday, on the decentralisation of production and distribution, aided by a move from Paris via Grenoble to Miéville's hometown Rolle (Switzerland), and on the formation of a dedicated collaborative practice that united work, love and a way of life.⁴ From 1973, when the Sonimage studios were established, until the production company's official dissolution in 1981, an extensive array of material was produced which incorporated the findings of their formal and technological experiments with video, tape speed alteration and slow motion.⁵ Although *Sauve qui peut (la vie)* was co-produced by Sonimage and shares some of the political resonances that were previously brought to the fore in the Sonimage project, this film operates at a distance from any set of determined political allegiances, which are at times cynically referenced.⁶ The real zeal generated in Godard and Miéville's pivotal return to fiction filmmaking derives from an insistence on emotion, immediacy and physical exchange, aspects that are initially prompted by and later both questioned and deepened through music.

² Bergala (ed.), *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard*, I, p. 461.

³ Idem. A little later in the same article, Godard refers to *France tour détour* and to the use of 'decomposition' (*décomposition*) or altered motion, which he explored with Miéville and deployed in the Sonimage television series.

⁴ Witt, *On Communication*, pp. 9-13.

⁵ Witt, 'Altered Motion', p. 202.

⁶ Witt, *On Communication*, p. 26. Witt highlights the dismissal of politics in Milan Kundera's story of the blackbirds' migration to the cities, quoted by Cécile in the film, as well as Isabelle's positive appraisal of a poster in Denise's flat of a Chinese boy drinking Coca-Cola.

Some of the most innovative formal aspects of this film are explored in the self-contained *Scénario de Sauve qui peut (la vie)*, best described as a sketch or rough draft made on video to comment on key aspects of the film.⁷ Godard uses video as a tool that enables him to think *in* images. In the video scenario, he demonstrates how continuity is created by plunging from one image into another, snubbing the conventional shot/reverse shot editing principle, thereby forcing dialogue to pass elsewhere, to emerge from what he terms ‘le silence de la vitesse’ [0:13:43].⁸ This electrifying phrase describes the visual and temporal alterations that result from the video techniques of slow motion and superimposition, the image becoming a pliable recording surface on which new patterns can be impressed. At the end of the video scenario, the intersecting movements of the three protagonists are conflated with the idea of music *passing into* the image.⁹ A televised sequence showing a full orchestra mid-performance playing Schumann’s *Piano Concerto in A minor*, Op. 54, is faded in and out over shots of a field of crops, recalling the Vertovian ideology of production, labour and the machine. This archetypal concert-hall performance precipitates a reference to hell that closes the video scenario, haunted by memories of the voice of Rimbaud, whose acerbic poem ‘Démocratie’ from *Illuminations*, which charts the colonial quest of exploitation, corruption and recklessness, was silently relayed through the electronic screen-text near the start. If we think back to the Sonimage films, particularly *Numéro deux*, it is clear that this contained vision of music that floods the visual ‘field’, is connected in part to the overwhelming and inescapable colonisation of cinema by television and the electronic image.

In his writing on the scientific legacy of Godard and Miéville’s work with video during the 1970s, Witt underlines the important influence of Étienne-Jules Marey’s study of animal and bodily processes, his development of the photographic rifle and his pioneering work in chronophotography, a technique involving the decomposition of movement into a series of perceivable segments that could then be reproduced on a single photographic surface.¹⁰ Witt also places emphasis on the rigorous methods of Soviet filmmaker Dziga Vertov and

⁷ Dubois, ‘Video Thinks What Cinema Creates’, pp. 177-8.

⁸ All timings are taken from ‘Scénario vidéo Sauve qui peut (la vie)’ in *Slow Motion* (English title), dir. by Jean-Luc Godard (Artificial Eye, 1980) [on DVD].

⁹ Godard associates the movements of his three protagonists with three different trajectories: Denise moves *against* meaning (‘le sens contraire au sens’) from the centre to the outskirts and toward the beyond. Isabelle moves *with* meaning (le même mouvement que le sens de l’écriture’) from the margins to the centre, while Paul remains stuck where he is.

¹⁰ Witt, ‘Altered Motion’, p. 207.

states that by the end of the 1970s, Godard was directly concerned with forging a new approach to sound cinema: ‘Godard spoke explicitly at the end of the 1970s of having embarked on a conscious journey through the silent period in a quest for a fresh mode of sound filmmaking.’¹¹ Indeed, Vertov’s political conception of montage was guided by the principles of kino-eye which initially set out to deploy the camera as a superhuman ‘high-speed’ eye, and as a ‘microscope and telescope of time’.¹² However, before kino-eye was conceived of in visual terms, Vertov, who was already editing gramophone recordings and had become interested in documentary sound, expressed a desire to ‘photograph’ everyday sounds in order to edit and organize them.¹³

In a diary entry from 1942, Vertov concretised his definition of the sound film: ‘An audiovisual film is not the mechanical combination of a radio-film and a silent film, but the uniting of both so that independent existence of image or sound line is eliminated.’¹⁴ In this definition, image and sound recording are inseparable, resulting in a synthetic ‘third composition’, which Vertov here terms a ‘volumetric, crystalline form’,¹⁵ stating also that the film’s content should exist simultaneously in the music. A year later in Paris, Pierre Schaeffer, the sound engineer and future director of the Service de la Recherche de L’ORTF, established the Studio d’Essai of the Radiodiffusion nationale to experiment with radio production. In an essay dated 1941-42, inspired by the ideas of Walter Benjamin and André Malraux, Schaeffer discusses the exciting aesthetic and scientific possibilities of the ‘relay-arts’ and compares and contrasts the unique properties that unite and divide the two art forms:

ils [le cinéma et la radio] n’ont pas seulement la capacité de fixer d’une façon complète les formes d’un objet ou celles d’un bruit, d’une voix, mais d’agir, nous l’avons vu, sur les dimensions, le mouvement, les proportions de cet objet. Si le langage a pouvoir sur l’abstrait, le cinéma et la radio ont réellement pouvoir sur le concret.¹⁶

¹¹ Witt, ‘Altered Motion’, p. 205.

¹² Annette Michelson (ed.), *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, trans. by Kevin O’Brien (University of California Press, 1984), pp. 40-1.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 243.

¹⁵ *Idem.*

¹⁶ Pierre Schaeffer, *Essai sur la radio et le cinéma : esthétique et technique des arts-relais 1941-1942*, Sophie Brunet and Carlos Palombini (eds.) (Paris: Éditions Allia, 2010), p. 53.

These ideas stand as important forerunners to his subsequent research into noise, his pioneering tape compositions and the birth of *musique concrète* along with a detailed theory of listening. Furthermore, in his later research through the 1960s on the relationship between music and acoustics, Schaeffer heralds the tape recorder a quasi-scientific tool. It allows sound to be decontextualized, dissected and recomposed into new sonic blends, and enables listeners to hear traditional music with, as he puts it, a ‘new ear’.¹⁷ An integral part of Schaeffer’s theoretical writings is the concept of the acousmatic, whereby the source of sound is hidden, forcing listeners to hear differently by focusing not on the cause but on the sonorous form itself: ‘nier l’instrument et le conditionnement culturel, *mettre face à nous le sonore et son “possible” musical.*’¹⁸ What is evoked to great effect in *Sauve qui peut (la vie)* through its puzzling flirtations with diegetic and non-diegetic sound is the powerful capacity of the acousmatic to reshape the spectator’s sense of the familiar through the disorientating effect of experiencing a sound of which the source is made ambiguous.

Fittingly, the film is structured around a whole string of telephone calls, and one key location is the Radio Télévision Suisse studios where Denise Rimbaud (Nathalie Baye) and Paul Godard (Jacques Dutronc) work. Distance and transportation are stressed throughout the film, whether through the buzzing interruption of cyclists passing, the random interference of a train speeding through a station, or through radio, telephone calls or escapist fantasies. The spaces traversed and elided in simple acts of transmission are here accentuated, as we move from, following Douglas Kahn’s outline, the relational space of vibration, through the comforting but fragile anchor of inscription, to high-speed wireless transmission.¹⁹ As Elsaesser and Hagener have pointed out, 1979 was the year that marked Sony’s release of the Walkman, a mobile music player that enabled listeners to play sound outside, while receiving the sound ‘inside’ through the headphones. They place the Walkman in the lineage of mechanical reproduction devices, as a successor to the transistor- and car-radio, which in the second half of the 20th century mobilised the space of reception.²⁰ They then look forward to the advances of Dolby and surround sound in the digital era, which, much like the Walkman in the real world, position the spectator centrally

¹⁷ Schaeffer, *Traité des objets musicaux*, pp. 33-4.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 98 (original emphasis).

¹⁹ Douglas Kahn, ‘Introduction: Histories of Sound Once Removed’ in Douglas Kahn and Gregory Whitehead (eds.), *Wireless Imagination: Sound, Radio, and the Avant-garde* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1992), pp. 1-29 (p. 14).

²⁰ Elsaesser and Hagener, *Film Theory*, p. 141.

via the sound system so s/he is opened to the full weight and sensation of the acoustic experience.²¹ The intermittent confusion in *Sauve qui peut (la vie)* that arises when characters question the location of music works amusingly to muddle inner and outer auditory spaces, underscoring the drifting and indeterminate position of a listener caught up in the artifice of the film world.

The theme and variation genre is of vital importance in *Sauve qui peut (la vie)*, dramatized when Beethoven's Diabelli Variation XXIX (Op. 120) is introduced, later followed by a passage from Yared's contemporary score. Yared's theme music functions like a strange incantation that seeps into the fiction and continually reinvents itself. In *Sauve qui peut (la vie)*, the organisation of music reveals the desire not only to seize the 'body' of sound, wresting it from the temporal flow, but to create a new spatio-temporal arrangement through a startling and prolonged instance of desynchronisation. Indeed, the non-coincidence achieved in the final tracking shot is a statement on the restructuring of time, which is channelled emphatically through music. This film looks back both to the problematic status of the human body and voice in early sound cinema and to the anaesthetizing reliance on audio to shore up the realist illusion and the spectator's sense of self. The paradoxical struggle of time in this film blights the ebb and flow of human relationships and is experienced not only by the three protagonists but also the spectator. For Denise, it is a matter of getting out of time and searching for a more habitable terrain, while for Paul it is a question of falling out of sync in a way that threatens to eradicate any potential point of contact and return, while for Isabelle (Isabelle Huppert) it is a case of negotiating the dehumanising pulse of the capitalist machine.

Although the film has received a lot of critical attention, with an important trio of articles published in a special issue of *camera obscura* (1982) that examine the presentation of violence, the pornographic and sexual difference, few readings have addressed the significance of the audio arrangement, which has intrigued spectators and critics alike since its release. Kristin Thompson partially attributes the defective causal links in the film's narrative to the perplexing soundtrack. She asserts that the spectator's attention is often unexpectedly split between conflicting sounds, actions and locations: 'sound in general plays a tremendous role in rendering the film illegible – that is, difficult to grasp in the time

²¹ Elsaesser and Hagener, *Film Theory*, p. 146.

allotted for perception.²² Richard Morris's comments on the film's soundtrack make explicit the centrality of the operatic aria. Godard's refashioning of the melody and accompaniment, he writes, 'serves forcibly to split the music open, so that the body of the film can be said to occupy an imaginary space *inside* the music.'²³ Furthermore, Wills's article opens with a brief mention of the closing climactic moment when Paul, plagued by off-screen music, is 'struck' by the diegetic orchestral ensemble.²⁴ Wills goes on to demonstrate how Godard's desire to *see* music is not a synaesthetic yearning but the 'technological coincidence' of Sonimage. From these insights, it is clear that a key feature of the soundtrack in *Sauve qui peut (la vie)* is its capacity to confront us with new experiences of time, to unlock creative spaces of fantasy and to challenge and reconfigure the established sensory order.

One of the most striking intertextual references in the film is Amilcare Ponchielli's dramatic opera *La Gioconda* (1876).²⁵ Julian Budden has stressed Ponchielli's flair for



Figure 1: aria from 'Act IV: The Orfano Canal'. Gioconda contemplates her death. This example shows the octave leap and the start of the descending accompanying figure.

²² Kristin Thompson, *Breaking the Glass Amor: Neoformalist Film Analysis* (Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 277.

²³ Richard Morris, "'To Realise the Ideal": Miscellaneous Remarks on Godard's Conceptual Processes Apropos of *Sauve qui peut (la vie)*', in *Film Studies*, 5 (2004) <<http://filmstudiesforfree.wordpress.com/category/sauve-qui-peut-la-vie/>> [accessed 04.02.2011], 1-7 (p. 6).

²⁴ Wills, 'The Audible Life of the Image', p. 43.

²⁵ The librettist Arrigo Boito based the story of *La Gioconda* on Victor Hugo's play *Angélo, tyran de Padoue* (1835). The central theme of this play is social injustice and the battle of the sexes in a male-dominated world. The female protagonists, one a working actress and the other a respectable wife, were to typify the figures of woman 'within' society and woman 'outside' society. In the preface to the play, Hugo reveals that the symbol of the crucifix unites the characters, thus redeeming society of its sins, while in *Sauve qui peut (la vie)*, as in Ponchielli's opera, it is the musical event in the final 'act' (the final intertitle reads: '4 LA MUSIQUE') that provides the grand denouement. See Victor Hugo, *Théâtre complet II*, J.-J. Thierry and Josette Méléze (eds.), 2 vols (Éditions Gallimard, 1964), II, p. 555-7.

composing music for ballet, stating that many sections of the score contain dance rhythms that heighten the work's lyric mood.²⁶ Yared composed a set of variations based on a short phrase selected by Godard from the opera and this musical phrase features prominently in the final-act aria 'Suicide!', during which a striking descending arpeggio figure boldly prophesies death, accompanied by menacing accented minor chords (see Fig. 1).²⁷ The synthesized music associated with Denise parallels her free-wheeling, self-configured motion, full of nuanced inflections and jazzy flourishes, while for Isabelle it becomes a romantic piano waltz in a steady meter, reflecting her entrenchment in prostitution and the clogged up structures of trade and commerce. Yared's variations remain for the most part in the same tonal region (F# minor) as the first section of the final-act aria, which, as we shall see, is heard in part at both the beginning and end of the film. In Ponchielli's opera, *Gioconda* is a ballad singer cum femme fatale whose pious mother (La Cieca) to whom she is devoted, is blind. She is falsely accused of bewitchment and finally disappears, leading to her daughter's suicide, which is foreseen in the misery that pervades her grand aria and it is this solo that Godard incorporates into the film. The lyricism and dark charm of this highly charged emotional passage, prised from its musical context, is filtered through the artificial audiovisual tracks of *Sauve qui peut (la vie)*. Moreover, this particular cutting that frames the majority of the film, which Godard powerfully transfigures by separating melody from accompaniment, comes to function much like an image itself. Indeed, as the film closes it seems that the basic tenets of Eisenstein's concept of vertical montage, which he explains through comparison with a musical score, have been peculiarly appropriated.²⁸

²⁶ Julian Budden, 'Gioconda, La' in Stanley Sadie (ed.), *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, Oxford Music Online, Oxford University Press
<<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/O004514>> [accessed 28.03. 2011] (para. 9 of 9).

²⁷ The fragment of score in Figure 1 has been taken from Michele Saladino, *La Gioconda, English adaptation, complete arrangement for voice and pianoforte* (Italy: Ricordi's Editions, 1986), p. 317.

²⁸ In setting out his theory of vertical montage, Eisenstein likens the succession of images in film to the simple horizontal line of development in each instrumental part of a musical score; crossed through this is the complex vertical line or 'super-structure' that indicates the correlation of sound and picture within a particular unit of time. See Sergei M. Eisenstein, *The Film Sense*, ed. and trans. by Jay Leyda (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), pp. 67-8.

2.1 Filming the listening body

Whilst notions of seeing sound are alluded to throughout, Godard and Miéville's film complicates matters by calling attention to the ambiguous presence and the productive role of the listener. In a letter dated before the film's release, Godard comments on the nature of his project: 'Son direct, vous demandez, ou son témoin? Et si l'on était directement un témoin. Et si j'écoutais et que j'enregistrais en direct celui qui écoute, et pas celui qui parle. Pour filmer celui qui écoute, est-ce qu'il faudra une Nagra ou une Éclair?'²⁹ This tongue-in-cheek question highlights the significance of the receptive body and invokes the figure of the silent spy who overhears. Chion has stressed that in commercial television sound is a mandatory component. Television is a kind of radio that prioritizes sound and the spoken word: 'la télévision est fondamentalement une radio, « illustrée » par des images en sus, où le son a déjà sa place fixée, laquelle est fondamentale et obligatoire'.³⁰ In *Sauve qui peut (la vie)*, the location of sound is constantly called into question. Consequently, the fixed relation between frame and sound that exists in cinema is destabilized, thus hinting at the complex specificities that separate cinema from the electronic medium, while television's



Figure 2: « Qu'est-ce que c'est cette musique ? » [38:00:00].

audiovisual conventions are contested through an emphasis not on the message of the speaker but on the active process of listening. When Yared's non-diegetic music is first alluded to by Denise, who asks a waitress to identify it, she adds 'cette musique là qu'on entendait' and points through the window to the outside. In the second instance, an angel-like figure looks up and around to the space above, tuning in to the droplets of synthesised

²⁹ Jean-Luc Godard, 'Lettre numéro un aux membres de la commission d'avance sur recettes' in Brenez et al. (eds.), *Documents*, p. 307. This letter is dated April 1979.

³⁰ Chion, *L'Audio-vision*, p. 139.

music that fall, before asking the same question (see Fig. 2).³¹ In the third instance, the question is duly asked via voice-off while Isabelle turns the telephone dial. In his article on the early developments of electronic media, Erik Davis describes electricity as a force that straddles a material and otherworldly space. Alexander Graham Bell's invention of the telephone that was to translate 'the vibrating pressures of the human voice into an electrical signal that could pass along a wire' captivated the imagination of some, who believed they could pick up messages from the beyond.³² In *Sauve qui peut (la vie)*, the sparse musical phrases heard during two of the three fleeting moments when the question 'Qu'est-ce que c'est cette musique?' is posed, are versions of Yared's electronic ascending figure that trickled through the artificial skies at the start. In this respect, the film not merely mimics the spectator's state of disorientation and sensory confusion but suggests other means of rerouting habitual lines of communication.

These episodes can be usefully connected to the concept of the *fantastical gap*, a phrase used by Robynn J. Stilwell to capture the magic and danger of the unstable, ambiguous yet meaningful space between the diegetic and nondiegetic realms. The phrase evokes the musical sense of improvisation and the 'free play of possibility', as well as conjuring the obvious notion of fantasy, including dream and the cinematic technique of flashback.³³ The music, which plays such an integral role in *Sauve qui peut (la vie)*, is never steadfastly nondiegetic and is frequently made to hover hypnotically on the diegetic/nondiegetic border. As Stilwell writes: 'the border-crossing is not so much an event as a process, not simply a crossing, or even passing through distinct intermediary states, but a trajectory, a vector, a gesture.'³⁴ In the final tracking shot of the film, the musicians are situated in front (or behind) of a small red rectangle, as if the remnants of a silent film theatre, pit orchestra included, have been washed up and scattered across a single plane. Stilwell elucidates that diegetic/nondiegetic play is a question of placement, while the play between foreground and background is a matter of perception.³⁵ Yared's subversive electronic theme music that leaps arbitrarily into the foreground in *Sauve qui peut (la vie)* when characters acknowledge

³¹ All images are taken from *Slow Motion* (English title), dir. by Jean-Luc Godard (Artificial Eye, 1980) [on DVD].

³² Erik Davis, 'Recording Angels: The Esoteric Origins of the Phonograph' in Rob Young (ed.), *Undercurrents: The Hidden Wiring of Modern Music* (London and New York: Continuum, 2002), pp. 15-24 (p. 18).

³³ Stilwell, 'The Fantastical Gap between Diegetic and Nondiegetic', p. 187.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 184-5.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 189.

its presence, smudges the 'live' diegetic frame of opera, creating a strangely contemporary multi-screen effect through sound that climaxes aurally and visually in the final climactic sequence.

In the video scenario, the narrative thread (*la ligne du récit*) is frequently connected to music. Just after an extract from *France tour détour* is shown, which constitutes an instance of *musical* production (waitresses are filmed at work, accompanied by a recording of Handel's 'Lascia ch'io pianga' from his opera *Renaldo*), a close-up of a score is mixed with an image of Godard's typewriter and the score moves across the screen like writing [0:06:40]. Speed alteration, dissolves and superimpositions, offer ways of diverting the narrative flow and the phrase 'diriger l'histoire', uttered by Godard in the video scenario, not only implicitly addresses the spectator but ricochets from the slow-motion shots of footballers in action to the music conductor's guiding gestures displayed at the work's end. Indeed, the series *France tour détour* is divided into 'movements' to run against the venomous 'fact of flow' of television,³⁶ endowing each programme with a musical or dance-like form. In the 9th movement (POUVOIR/MUSIQUE) the singing voice, defined as a 'movement of the body', is identified as a potent means of subverting the 'power of speech'. In *Sauve qui peut (la vie)*, music and, in particular, the sensual force of the soprano solo, becomes a metaphor for making, distorting and unmaking sense, and it is a productive material example of this process.

³⁶ Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (London: The Chaucer Press, Ltd., 1974), p. 96.

The opening of Rimbaud's cyclical 'Nocturne vulgaire' resonates with the opening of *Sauve qui peut (la vie)*: 'Un souffle ouvre des brèches opéradiques dans les cloisons, - brouille le pivotement des toits rongés, - disperse les limites des foyers, - éclipse les croisées.'³⁷ This sequence of the film forms a key part of its musical frame and we here experience the film's longest musical excerpt in the tampered form of an *a capella* solo (stripped of its accompaniment by Godard) from Gioconda's desperate final-act aria 'Suicide!' Once the camera has sketched its path over the cloudy blue sky of the first shot, it pulls us down, etching us into the suffocating narrow interior of Paul's superluxe hotel suite, the quintessence of materialistic comfort and the chasm of the 'citta del diavolo!' (see Fig. 3). This exclamation, uttered by the hotel porter, whose sexual advances Paul irately rejects, is heard twice off-frame and taints the accompanying shot of Denise who is surrounded by lush landscape. As James S. Williams has suggested, the stray solo voices of both the soprano and porter that encroach upon Paul's sonic territory testify to the



Figure 3: Paul's hotel room [01:59:00].

ambivalent relationship demonstrated in other films by Godard between music and sexual disturbance.³⁸ It is at first unclear whether the soprano voice is coming from the adjacent room, the radio or if it belongs to the non-diegetic realm, thus constituting what Chion describes as a speaking shadow, which he defines as an '*acousmètre*'.³⁹ The powerful presence of Gioconda's death-laden voice is an acousmatic performance that traverses boundaries (the hotel walls), possesses its listener and continues its work in darkness. Moreover, since the hotel guest-singer is not explicitly remarked upon by the other

³⁷ Rimbaud, *Illuminations*, p. 307.

³⁸ Williams, 'Music, Love, and the Cinematic Event', pp. 293-4.

³⁹ Chion, *La Voix au cinéma*, p. 32. I will return to this concept in the next section.

characters, it is not difficult to entirely overlook her act. The peculiar tragicomic mood of the sequence does not discount the possibility that the guest-singer is a mime actor or a ventriloquist's dummy. The inconsistency between body and soul is a tension that pervades the film throughout, reinforced during the altered-motion episodes of physical violence that are aligned with the vaporous synthesized theme.

Rimbaud's 'Nocturne vulgaire' begins with a metaphor for the birth of a vision, deploying the neologism 'opéradiques' to evoke an operatic spectacle. In both poem and film this creative gust opens a space of possibility which signals an oncoming storm.⁴⁰ Rimbaud's derailing vision contains auditory patterns of alliteration and conjures moody images of intense colour that are painted ephemerally onto its surface. In Kahn's section on inscription he writes: 'While figures of vibration head for the heavens, figures of inscription pull sounds down to earth [...]. One thing that attached inscribed sound to the earth's surface was its tie to technology.'⁴¹ Kahn connects the figure of vibration to synaesthesia and highlights sound's lack of autonomy when caught up in the perpetual deflections of vibrational space. However, the fixed sonic object is vulnerable and, as exemplified visually through Roland Barthes's concept of the photographic spectre, embodies death, since the performer is no longer present. Ponchielli's stabbing opening string chord accompaniment is here replaced by the sound of Paul's electric razor, which not only intrudes upon the solo but anchors it to the whirring machinery of inscription. This decontextualized and hybridized operatic voice is then accompanied by the sound of Paul turning the telephone dial as the words 'ultima voce' ring out from the beyond and he drolly asks for 'Denise Rimbaud' before banging on the wall to extinguish the foreign sounds. The play of association that quietly binds the opening disclosure of Godard's 'composer' status to Rimbaud's unreferenced poetic voice during this initial collision of music and poetry also evokes Britten's song cycle *Les Illuminations* (1938-39) for high voice and string orchestra, which sets music to nine poems from Rimbaud's collection of the same name, as well as Poulenc's fraught telephone opera *La Voix humaine* (1948), written by Jean Cocteau and composed for the French soprano Denise Duval. However, if on first hearing Godard seems to treat his musical quotation as a mercurial image stripped

⁴⁰ Nocturne is also the name given to a musical composition which evokes a 'nocturnal atmosphere', often romantic in character with an expressive melody. See Michael Kennedy and Joyce Bourne (eds.), *The Oxford Dictionary of Music*, 2nd edn (Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 621.

⁴¹ Kahn, 'Introduction', p. 17.

of its history and able to morph through audio screens into other forms, this is merely one aspect of the design. The emotive connotations in the Ponchielli extract, in addition to the score's formal and visual qualities, are not simply bypassed but underlie the whole film in fundamental ways.

A crucial aspect of the human voice is its inimitable nature. Through its speed, inflections and capricious rhythms the constitution of the human voice was almost impossible to manufacture before computer technology was developed. In her article on musical tombs and automatism, Carolyn Abbate notes that almost a century before Edison's phonograph (1877), the physicist Ernst Florens Friedrich Chladni, who also invented a technique for measuring the speed of sound, discovered that vibrating plates covered with dust left material traces or *Klangfiguren* [sound figures] for the eye to discern. She then writes: 'Experiments that led to the phonograph were one by-product of a quest to reproduce the human singing voice; the problem of "reproduction" became the search for a "recording" almost simultaneously with the realization that singing could never be generated by machine.'⁴² This tension lies at the heart of Godard's audio arrangement, which is here composed of a professionally trained singing voice matched by a smart dress code, yet this voice stands for inimitable human passion and utter abandon and such qualities leave their traces in the expressive soaring melody and sudden octave leaps in the score.



Figure 4: Paul crosses the guest-singer on the escalator [04:06:00].

The climax of the aria, suitably fixated on the noun 'heaven', is reinforced in the image-track; when the high-point of the aria is reached, Paul brushes past a guest on the escalator

⁴² Carolyn Abbate, 'Outside Ravel's Tomb' in *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 52:3 (1999), 465-530 (p. 484) (<http://www.jstor.org/>).

who is singing Gioconda's solo (see Fig. 4). This moment comically stages Gioconda's death-wish, enacting a cinematic word-painting of the melodic run that follows the dramatic peak of the phrase. The culminating sequence of the film, where we see a static, grey iridescent staircase immersed in bright light, positioned off-centre and devoid of people, is haunted through the *mise en scène* by this memory of mechanical movement that invokes cinema's past (see Fig. 7). The anonymous guest-singer, who we can now posit not only as the pose of Gioconda but also as a figure of inscription, then navigates her way through the apparatus of the interior and sings herself out of the hotel doors into the exterior space of the film and is never seen again. At the centre of this image is both a simultaneous ascent and a Dantesque descent into the wretched synthetic regions of the film's underworld, recalling the pictorial layout of the musical score that shows the octave leap and descending quavers from the aria's opening (see Fig. 1).

When Schaeffer alludes to the telegraph's conquering of space and time, he maintains that the intrinsic loss resulting from the simulation and consequent mutation of the written letter also harbours creative possibilities that lie at the heart of cinema and radio, namely to transform objects into images and sounds into modulations.⁴³ Gioconda's potent vocal presence suffers Schaeffer's inventive 'mutilation de l'objet' to become what Kahn describes as 'submerged inscription', functioning much like a secret message carved into the inner textures of the film. Kahn uses this term in reference to the work of William Burroughs and states that, rather than written onto an external surface, sound can be invisibly encoded within an interior.⁴⁴ It seems Gioconda's voice has been, from this moment on, erased or consumed by electronics, for only traces of the opera's string accompaniment have been preserved and are, for the most part, ciphered through the artificial memory of Yared's theme music. Yet, as we shall see, aspects of Gioconda do reappear for the ear and the eye in various guises, namely the disembodied voice of Marguerite Duras as the anonymous hitch-hiker (LA DAME) from her radical film *Le Camion* (1977), and the concluding mother-daughter voyage that sees them irreversibly transported through the technological portal into a new reality.

⁴³ Schaeffer, *Essai sur la radio et le cinéma*, pp. 37-8.

⁴⁴ Kahn, 'Introduction', p. 19.

2.2 The return of the *acousmètre*

The multiple layers of signification produced in the film through both the physical and the more figurative encounters of Ponchielli's aria with other media come to flourish in the second part of the film, '2 LA PEUR'. It is here that we first hear a short passage from the soundtrack of *Le Camion*, soon followed by an audio excerpt of Duras's voice from a recorded interview. In *Le Camion*, we see shots of Gerard Depardieu and Duras sitting in the *chambre noire* reading through the script of a hypothetical film about an impossible relationship between a militant Communist lorry driver and a woman named 'LA DAME'. We see neither of these imagined figures, who remain enclosed together inside the vehicle's cabin, forever menaced by the possibility of visual exposure. Duras disturbs all sense of linear continuity by creating an 'essential lack' in the representational logic, producing a dislocation between the actual film and the film *to be made* with the conditional tense frequently being employed.⁴⁵ Images of a 32-ton blue SAVIEM lorry tracing a path along deserted roads in the suburbs of Paris are intercut with the *chambre noire* sequences, and are often accompanied by Duras's voiceover. The music on the soundtrack comprises Beethoven's *Diabelli Variations* but Duras reorders the music, playing Diabelli's waltz (the theme) after the 31st variation. Similarly, the novelty of Godard's audio arrangement is most evident in the positioning of Yared's music, which pre-empts its source (we hear it *before* the 'theme', namely the figure from the aria). Indeed, at the start and end of the film Yared's synthesized motif *precedes* the diegetic 'live' performance. In this way, the sequential order of theme and variation is disturbed, with Yared's composition distorting our hearing of Ponchielli's original score.

Duras's aural 'appearances' in *Sauve qui peut (la vie)* are significant for several reasons. First, her own cinema pushes the acousmatic voice to the extreme. For example, her soundtracks in *India Song* (1974) and *Son nom de Venise dans Calcutta désert* (1976) are teeming with unseen voices. Duras's own versatile voice that features so prominently in *Le Navire Night* (1978) and the *Aurélia Steiner* films (1979), is loaded with that sacrosanct power that belongs to the *acousmètre*, as explained by Chion: '[q]uand la présence

⁴⁵ See Marguerite Duras, 'Marguerite Duras : « Un acte contre tout pouvoir »', in *cinéma77*, 223 (1977), pp. 46-58 (p. 56). In this interview on *Le Camion*, Duras declares: 'Il y a alors un manque essentiel, dans *Le Camion*. Dans la chaîne représentative, dans la chaîne de la représentation, disons même dans la chaîne symbolique cinématographique, il y a un maillon qui saute, il y a un lieu blanc.'

acousmatique est celle d'une voix, et surtout quand cette voix n'a pas été déjà visualisée – quand on ne peut mettre encore sur elle un visage, on a donc un être d'une espèce particulière, sorte d'ombre parlante et agissante à laquelle nous donnons le nom d'*acousmètre*, c'est-à-dire être acousmatique.⁴⁶ Moreover, in Duras's written texts motifs of music, dance and sound, especially the radio, play an important role in framing the orchestrated encounters between the central figures. In *Sauve qui peut (la vie)*, Duras's lilting disembodied voice functions, in part, as a perfect parody of the radio voice, simulating the lofty tones of *France Culture*. It is framed visually by the interior of Paul's car in a satirical echo of her own assertion: '[e]t on aurait vu que la musique entendue dans le film était dispensée par la radio du camion.'⁴⁷ In the following episode, a group of students are watching a clip from *Le Camion* as they await Duras's arrival. Although physically present, we are told, in the adjacent room, she refuses to be filmed.

In a short text entitled 'La solitude', Duras remarks that the spoken voice parallels the written voice (*la voix écrite*) and, referring to *Le Camion*, she states: '[v]ous voyez, je ne cherche nullement à approfondir le sens du texte quand je le lis, non, pas du tout, rien de pareil, ce que je cherche c'est le premier état de ce texte, comme on cherche à se souvenir d'un événement lointain, non vécu mais « entendu dire ».'⁴⁸ In *Le Camion*, as in other of her films and interviews, the texture and cadence of Duras's voice, its sober delivery of the text and the value and fragility it draws from the pure timbre of each word are qualities that define her distinctive vocal performances. When Duras's voice plays for a second time (an excerpt from an interview conducted by Godard for the film) Duras likens the act of writing to a sort of disappearing and her words are interlaced and briefly interrupted by Yared's sprightly piano motif, which fixes her to the fiction of *Sauve qui peut (la vie)*. In the first stop-start sequence of the film, the images of Denise were initially accompanied by the same musical motif, which here functions to bring the two women together through a shared desire to write, to mark out a new temporality and to determinedly resist containment; an existence embodied by the visible *lieu nocturne* of Duras's slight, banal and invisible hitch-hiker, of whom she writes: '[n]on, ce qu'elle veut, c'est parler, c'est

⁴⁶ Chion coined the term 'acousmètre', drawing upon Schaeffer's notion of 'the acousmatic'. See Chion, *La Voix au cinéma*, p. 32 (original emphasis).

⁴⁷ Marguerite Duras, *Le Camion: suivi de entretien avec Michelle Porte* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1977), p. 14.

⁴⁸ Marguerite Duras, *Les Yeux verts*, 2nd edn (Paris: Éditions de l'Étoile/Cahiers du cinéma, 1996), p. 77.

écrire. [...] Pensez aux deux mouvements parallèles d'écrire. Je pense qu'il n'y a rien de plus près de cette femme, que le mouvement de l'écrit.⁴⁹ In the video scenario, Godard counters the stifling supremacy of writing and the uniform flow of predetermined movements, with the vertical eruptions of the stop-start images. Similarly, the off-beat rhythm and affecting movements of Denise (Rimbaud), who writes and moves *en contresens*, are linked favourably to notions of resistance and to the poetic force of visual sensation. By contrast, at the heart of Duras's cinema is the desire to massacre the image, which, she believes, unlike the subjective force of writing, deadens the imagination. Although the sketch of Duras as filmmaker in *Sauve qui peut (la vie)* is clearly amusing, Godard and Miéville's respect for her work, primarily her life as a writer, is self-evident and functions paradoxically to unite Duras's need to merge the life of the text with cinema, to write and speak into and *over* the image, with Godard and Miéville's desire to write and think *in* images. We shall now see how the mutations of time performed visually through the use of altered motion are productively entangled with both the listening body and, finally, with an expressive act of musical montage.

2.3 The silence of speed

The oscillating pattern of conflict and fusion between a body and its surroundings is particularly conspicuous in the poignant opening stop-start sequences of *Denise*, where we witness the exhilarating freedom exerted by her body's awareness of its porous existence and self-configured motion. As she cycles around a bend in the road the camera pauses at specific points when her movements tremble slightly and these more child-like and vulnerable instances are enhanced by the piano music, composed of short, suspended and repeated notes that coincide with the frozen movements, creating a sensitive bond between sound and image as one waits for the other. The speed variation here forces the spectator to constantly reconsider the form and gestures of the body, in order to perceive the fragmentary shifts in time. When normal speed resumes it is only for a moment before the camera catches her again and she appears to merge harmoniously with the multiple greenish shades.

⁴⁹ Duras, 'Marguerite Duras : « Un acte contre tout pouvoir »', p. 53.

The graininess, ambiguity and spontaneity of these shots of Denise cycling gently revitalize our visual experience in a manner that resonates with Laura U. Marks's thesis on touch, the senses and haptic visuality. Marks captures the feelings conjured by these stop-start images when she writes that haptic images 'can give the impression of *seeing for the first time*, gradually discovering what is in the image rather than coming to the image already knowing what it is.'⁵⁰ This visual experience can be translated aurally, as Marks goes on to recognize, in a short section on haptic sound. She defines 'haptic hearing' as the moment when sounds are heard as an undifferentiated whole, before our ears begin to listen out selectively for specific things. Haptic hearing can occur both in quiet environments and in overpoweringly loud ones. Consequently, she writes: 'the aural boundaries between body and world may feel indistinct: the rustle of trees may mingle with the sound of my breathing, or conversely the booming music may inhabit my chest cavity and move my body from the inside.'⁵¹ Marks equates the intricate relationship between aural textures and aural signs in sound cinema to the relationship between haptic and optical images.

In the first part of the film '1 L'IMAGINAIRE', the camera tracks backwards to film a frontal shot of Denise cycling through the countryside. On the soundtrack, we hear the start of the descending arpeggio figure from the aria, here starting an octave lower than in

Figure 5: image edited using superimposition [20:14:00].



Ponchielli's score, channeled through the hazy, undifferentiated and ominous tones of the synthesizer. This immersive sonic environment is soon interrupted by a brief onscreen musical performance (we see a man playing an accordion with his family at the roadside). The camera pans to the left as Denise cycles past, and the sequence is edited using altered

⁵⁰ Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000), p. 178 (my emphasis).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 183.

motion, the bumpy movements of the image-track mirroring her perplexed receptive state as she looks towards the visible source of sound. The image is grainy, complementing the muddled textures and harmonies in Yared's music that emerges from the faded accordion music. When the image cuts for the final time during this sequence of Denise, we hear the quiet squawking of birds. The shot is interrupted aurally by a loud engine noise and then distorted visually by a superimposed image of a tractor. The volume dramatically increases to mark the visual transposition, and Denise's negative silhouette is preserved beneath the positive image (see Fig. 5).

The superimposition presents us with an image and an estranged visual echo, just as we heard Yared's motif as if behind and in front of the contrasting accordion melody. During these sequences, the image-track is scarred by the primacy of the auditory axis, and its usual flow is skewed and adjusted instead to the order of the listening body. As Jean-Luc Nancy writes: '[ê]tre à l'écoute, c'est toujours être en bordure du sens, ou dans un sens de bord et d'extrémité, et comme si le son n'était précisément rien d'autre que ce bord, cette frange ou cette marge'.⁵² In Nancy's *À l'écoute*, two main questions are posed. One of which concerns the prioritizing of sound over the communicated message, while the second regards the listening subject's participation in the penetrating presence of sound and in the process of 'hearing' (*entendre*) as understanding. Although this episode in *Sauve qui peut (la vie)* does not involve verbal expression, it does underscore a sense of unease that disturbs not only the listener and the practice of meaning, but one that persistently unsettles the audiovisual relationship throughout, summed up metaphorically in the slow-motion fight scene that spins into action in the next sequence when Georgiana repeatedly shouts: 'Non, je ne choisis pas!'

If the altered motion episodes in *Sauve qui peut (la vie)* pull the spectator to the surface of the image, inviting us to listen to and inspect its textures, tints and tones, our proximity to what are often crudely aggressive assaults creates a distance that denies pleasurable immersion in the shifting visual detail. In the second part of his writing on the relay-arts, Schaeffer makes clear that whilst radio is equipped with dynamic force, cinema can 'write with speed', resulting in astonishing tricks of rhythm.⁵³ Later he affirms: '[r]endre

⁵² Jean-Luc Nancy, *À l'écoute* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 2002), p. 21.

⁵³ Schaeffer, *Essai sur la radio et le cinéma*, pp. 39-40.

réversibles de multiples phénomènes que la nature nous oblige naturellement à ne percevoir que dans le sens du temps: voici que ces images se mettent à parler, et leur langage est bien nouveau et bien surprenant.’⁵⁴ In *Sauve qui peut (la vie)* the disconcerting incongruence of Yared’s groovy electronic motif paired with atomized stop-start images of violence (Georgiana being beaten) or outbursts of frustration (Paul wrestling Denise to the floor) that are rooted in the body dislocates these episodes from the flow and loads them with a perverse, disquieting aura of the artificial. David Wills, writing on prosthesis, refers to the return of phantom pain ‘coming like some metallic specter to haunt the well-known surface of originary flesh’, marking a site of radical loss of the body’s inner wound from an irreparable rupture.⁵⁵ Elsewhere, Wills connects prosthesis to the loss of space and the unanchored state and lack of bodily contact resulting from the mutations of speed and technology: ‘speed always operates within the perspective of prosthesis to the extent that it is haunted by that sense of the monstrous and the mutant, never simply the threat of



Figure 6: altered-motion sequence of Georgiana [20:55:00].

displacement to another place without also being the threat of displacement to another state – what can perhaps be called “warped speed”.⁵⁶ During the vicious spat of this next sequence, we see Georgiana flinching, tossing herself back and forth in response to the swipes and blows (see Fig. 6). We hear the high-pitched alien moans of the fast-paced descending motif, which again is based on the accompaniment from Ponchielli’s aria, along with the muffled ghostly screams of the sustained tones, which both complement and oppose the irregular slow-motion bursts of visual energy. The spectator is faced with the

⁵⁴ Schaeffer, *Essai sur la radio et le cinéma*, p. 51.

⁵⁵ David Wills, *Prosthesis* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1995), p. 12.

⁵⁶ David Wills, ‘Technology or the Discourse of Speed’ in Marquard Smith and Joanne Morra (eds.), *The Prosthetic Impulse: From a Posthuman Present to a Biocultural Future* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), pp. 237-63 (p. 246).

uneasy combination of an alarming transgressive physical display immersed in the impenetrable sounds of a familiar, ethereal remixed melody. The music is accompanied by loud rattling train noises and in the later fight scene between Paul and Denise, the same motif emerges from the chaotic noise of smashed crockery.

Yared's music is here better construed as a metaphor for the dissident 'silence of speed', an audio close-up and mutation of the regular musical time of the aria, displacing the emphasis from the diegetic enclosures of musical performance to the pervasive sonorous 'silence' of ambient background 'noise'. The trace of death in the *opéradique* breath of Gioconda hums in time with the perfect circuits of technology. The liminal state of the listening body, embodied by Denise, whose profile is here filmed in close-up, as she witnesses the attack, creates a caesura in the temporal flow. In its aftermath, we are shown her disorientated reaction to the noise and speed of a passing train. Yared's synthesized score is here explicitly bound to the horizontal, colonizing the sonic environment, which, at the end of the sequence is tuned to the same tonal region as the encoded motif: the aural sign of death and of Gioconda's aria. These sequences expose aspects of the videographic medium that come to the fore in Godard's video work in the 1980s. The coded signal of video is here alluded to through the electronic music, which, having swallowed up the human voice, is, at the film's close, decoded and transformed through a process of listening. Kahn writes that 'inscription establishes the concreteness of "surfaces" in the interior that, in the process of reading or writing, may break through the skin and reconfigure the body',⁵⁷ suggesting that the violence of altered motion, of listening to the image to lay bare the encrypted message, is irrevocably connected to mutilation, metamorphosis and reinvention.

⁵⁷ Kahn, 'Introduction', p. 19.

The film finishes in the shadowy prism of the ‘Grottes’, the semi-visible street name opposite the sinister petrol station (*la station d’essence*) where the spectacle of music and the hellish red screen combine once Paul has been hit by a car. He then falls to the ground and is perilously made to confront his static existence.⁵⁸ The final lateral tracking shot halts



Figure 7: final sequence of the film. Cécile (Cécile Tanner) and her mother walk away from Paul and the orchestral ensemble [1:24:06].

mid-way through an alley in front of an open doorway, as if the initial cluttered shot of Paul’s hotel suite has now been blown open, the dark wooden panels here replaced by weightless shadows (see Fig. 7).⁵⁹ The dispersion of light that enters this ominous prism (‘CRISTAUX’ is the shop name that frames Paul’s accident) is refracted to reveal the high frequency of violet and the low frequency of red, here animated in hyperbolic fashion by the violet skirt of Cécile, a high-speed wavelength that glides with ease through the doorway, and by the blank red rectangle, which is stationary or, like Paul, *unmoved*. This optical prism is doubled by a musical prism, for the operatic vocal trace that modulates through the airwaves of this ‘radio station’, like a ray of light bending at a certain angle, is finally re-voiced and re-tuned to a new, always higher, single frequency; a luminous timbre that rings out for a short-lived moment, like a pure sine wave.

⁵⁸ Although Paul Godard is not simply a doppelganger of the director, his slow-motion virtual death, along with the inclusion of the back wheel of a motorbike in the final shot of the film, carries echoes of Godard’s own near-fatal road accident which he suffered in the early 1970s.

⁵⁹ The notion of re-birth and new life is evident in Godard’s description of *Sauve qui peut (la vie)*, which he describes as his ‘second life in cinema’. In an interview with Catherine David, published in *Le Nouvel Observateur* in 1980, Godard states: ‘C’est la deuxième fois que j’ai le sentiment d’avoir ma vie devant moi, ma deuxième vie dans le cinéma... ou plutôt la troisième’. See Bergala (ed.), *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard*, I, p. 449.

During the closing tracking shot, the camera passes a live orchestral ensemble performing a few bars from the accompaniment to the soprano solo heard at the start (see Fig. 1). This passage of music begins with Yared's electronic melody, which is continued by the diegetic ensemble and returns moments later, forming a dubious horizontal line of succession. When Cécile passes the orchestral ensemble, a movement that serves as a virtual enactment of Gioconda's missing melody, mother and daughter stride through the gateway into the sideways space of the unknown, as if to anticipate the fractioning of space in digital media. Yared's sonic fragment is exposed by the incongruous musical ensemble, which finally illuminates the relation between the theme music and the opera, now swept up in the same horizontal tracking shot. The smack of diegetic sound breaks the flow after Paul is hit by a car like a trip in the circuit, and the electronic continuation that ensues blurs our hearing as we finish ear to ear with the 'screen' of the loudspeaker. As Schaeffer writes: '[n]ous avons dit aussi que la radio n'était pas un spectacle mais une audition, et une audition monauriculaire. Les soixante musiciens sont véritablement projetés sur la membrane du haut-parleur, sur l'écran sonore.'⁶⁰ The morphological qualities of sound, heard throughout the film, are presented at the film's close as a positive force of poetic freedom in contrast to the stiffness embodied by the monosyllabic 'Paul', who refuses to *hear*, struck deaf to the imaginative potential of otherworldly space.

At the end of the final shot, the light intensifies while the acoustic trace resounds more powerfully for the last time, producing a spurious entrancing effect that nevertheless absorbs the spectator in a space of open-ended possibility. Since our attention is drawn to the artifices of radio and cinema throughout, the volatile modulations of Yared's prosthetic theme are not simply reduced to this primal scene of diegetic audio. The red rectangle recalls the video monitors in the studio shots of *Numéro deux*, which at times present us with a red image, described by Witt as 'visual noise', tied to the notion of political stagnancy.⁶¹ Yet if the final sequences of *Sauve qui peut (la vie)* maintain the association between the swift flow of capital (Esso), the tainted flow of images, music as a commodity and the inevitability of dead space, we are also confronted, through Yared's acousmatic theme, with the more optimistic notion of a noncompliant 'silence'. Indeed, compared with the film's anchoring musical frame of opera, the boundless and mutable electronic sounds,

⁶⁰ Schaeffer, *Essai sur la radio et le cinéma*, p. 36.

⁶¹ Witt, *On Communication*, p. 131.

which contain the faint intimations of otherness, carry with them the reverberations of a dynamic and regenerative acoustic ‘elsewhere’.

2.4 Conclusion

In his essay ‘Beethoven’, Wagner makes reference to Schopenhauer’s ‘Dream-theory’, which, founded on the notion of ‘facing inwards’,⁶² is tied significantly to the philosopher’s theory of music. Wagner connects the world of dream to ‘a second world’, illuminated by ‘an *inward* function of the brain’, which Schopenhauer terms the ‘Dream-organ’.⁶³ Then, Wagner notes that a second world also exists, perceptible through the ear, which presents itself through sound and forms a ‘*sound-world*’ next to the ‘*light-world*’.⁶⁴ He writes: ‘[a]s the world of dreams can only come to vision through a special operation of the brain, so Music enters our consciousness through a kindred operation’.⁶⁵ Wagner proceeds to relate these ideas to the onset of Beethoven’s hearing loss and to the figurative power of sight, a subject to which we shall return in Chapter 3. In this final tracking shot in *Sauve qui peut (la vie)*, the unexpected diegetic display (the musical ‘dream-organ’), glimpsed by the camera as it passes the ensemble, stands as the mechanical memory of sound and sight, like a *record* which is then diffused via the red ‘acousmatic screen’ to form an image: the seer’s inner aural vision ‘composed’ by the silent eavesdropper whose presence has been felt from the start. The dramatic uniform gestures of the musicians who, in automated fashion, perform the phantom music ‘live’ in this pseudo-void, recall Duras’s recurring descriptions of the *danse macabre* in her skeletal text *L’Amour* (1971), where the haunting hymn of S. Thala softly plays out. The blank red screen is teasingly symbolic of the spectator’s own terror, for s/he finally awakens from the nightmarish encounter with Ponchielli’s spectral accompaniment to construct her own aural vision from this confluence of sound and light.

Part of what Godard and Miéville achieve in *Sauve qui peut (la vie)* is a new angle from which to pursue their radical conception of sound cinema, for they prioritize listening as a process to be filmed. We are left with a red screen next to a skeletal static staircase, like a

⁶² Richard Wagner, ‘Beethoven’ in Wagner, *Actors and Singers*, trans. by William Ashton Ellis (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), pp. 57-126 (p. 67).

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 68 (original emphasis).

⁶⁴ *Idem.*

⁶⁵ *Idem.*

relic of the vocal climax, now bathed in light and ringing with the memory of Gioconda's voice. If the spectator is confronted with what appears to be a perfect example of Vertov's synthesis of sound recording and image ('a volumetric, crystalline form'), Godard and Miéville's new conception of sound cinema does not entirely abolish the independent sound or image line, the two aspects remaining recoverable but in an altered state. The alignment of sound-track and image-track in *Sauve qui peut (la vie)* bears a resemblance to two irregular tape loops that reflect each other but are not quite in sync, forming prisms of movement in between. Although Ponchielli's unaccompanied solo and then the voiceless accompaniment never coincide, the first two bars of the aria are heard in full. If we were to splice the section of the live performance heard at the film's close together with the octave leap of 'Suicide!' sung during from the opening sequences, we would have reconstructed the first two bars of the aria. The dividing of melody and accompaniment produces not only a repetition of the same bar, heard from a different auditory angle each time (upon first hearing: the solo voice; upon second hearing: the accompaniment), but this deliberate act of montage fashions a vast time-delay. This stretching of time means that the majority of the film action unfolds hypothetically in a staggered present moment like a giant decomposed gesture, looking ahead to the complex temporalities of co-existence in electronic media. In counterpart to the miniature stop-start episodes of the image-track, every vibration of the filmic body is here rendered for the ear. However, the accent that falls on the distorted 'second hearing' in this final sequence is inconclusive, for all aspects of this denouement are dislocated and approximate.

Godard's audio composition, his positioning of Yared's variations that disappear and reappear throughout, involve the spectator in a feedback loop, encouraging an act of retransmission. The final sound-image is the overhearing of a cinema that listens, caught between one frequency and another on the edge of meaning, leaving the 'third image' for the receptive body of the spectator to recompose. As Schaeffer writes: 'l'acte de compréhension coïncide exactement avec l'activité de l'écoute: tout le travail de déduction, de comparaison, d'abstraction, est intégré et dépassé bien au-delà du contenu immédiat, du « donné à entendre ».'⁶⁶ The musical relation in *Sauve qui peut (la vie)* serves as a force of resistance that plagues the image-track and reconfigures the spectator's manner of engaging with the film. As Barthes writes, 'toute relation « réussie » – réussie en ce qu'elle parvient à

⁶⁶ Schaeffer, *Traité des objets musicaux*, p. 111.

dire l'implicite sans l'articuler, à passer outre l'articulation sans tomber dans la censure du désir ou la sublimation de l'indicible –, une telle relation peut être dite à juste titre *musicale*.⁶⁷ The limits of music, voice and noise are certainly reached in this film, exemplified in the final metallic ring that, in one light, can be described as the instrumental 'voice', filled with echoes of past sensations, while, in another, as a simple pulsation. In this film then, sound functions as part of the diegesis and as something non-explicit; an identity that reformulates itself in its different contextual environments, extending the possibilities for communication at borders that will continue to expand in the films and videos that follow.

⁶⁷ Roland Barthes, 'La Musique, la voix, la langue' in Barthes, *L'Obvie et l'obtus: Essais critiques III* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1982), pp. 246-52 (p. 252) (original emphasis).

Chapter 3

Sound, Body and Audible Space in *Scénario du film Passion* (1982), *Passion* (1982) and *Prénom Carmen* (1983)

To cover the financial loss that Godard and his production team envisaged for *Passion*, he suggested they make another film on the subject of music. In a discussion on the making of *Prénom Carmen*, Godard revealed that the decision to use Beethoven's late string quartets as primary material for the soundtrack evolved partly from the early plans for *Passion*, which had initially been conceived as a film on Beethoven and Rubens but the project was never realized.¹ *Prénom Carmen* integrates shots of the Prat quartet rehearsing and discussing passages from a selection of Beethoven's late quartets, while in *Passion* masterpieces of art by Rembrandt, El Greco, Goya, Delacroix and Ingres are reconstructed in a film studio by actors and stand-ins. Together, the two films perform a commentary in images and sounds on the concept of seeing and hearing and they do so through the medium of painting and music, crossed through by cinema. Each work scrutinizes a process of composition: that of filmmaking in *Passion* and music-making in *Prénom Carmen*, while the spectator is invited periodically to watch and listen to the rehearsals.

In the preface to her book *Unsung Voices*, which explores uncommon moments of narration in 19th-century opera and instrumental music, Carolyn Abbate affirms that her conception of music's 'voice' denotes not vocal performance per se but 'a sense of certain isolated and rare gestures in music, whether vocal or nonvocal, that may be perceived as modes of subjects' enunciations.'² For Abbate, music's narrativity does not concern the 'acting out' of events or a mere 'unscrolling' that mimes actions through sound.³ Abbate draws upon Barthes's notion of music as 'carnal stereophony' in his writing on musical signifying [*signifiance*], to expose points of comparison between her theory of 'unsung voices' and Barthes's concept of 'grain':

Barthes' hearing is sensualized by his perception of what he elsewhere calls the "grain of the voice," which he describes in one passage as "the body in the singing

¹ Bergala (ed.), *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard*, I, pp. 574-6. Excerpts from Beethoven's late string quartets played a prominent role in the soundtracks of Godard's films of the 1960s, namely the short *Le nouveau monde* (1962), *Une femme mariée* (1964) and *Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle* (1966).

² Abbate, *Unsung Voices*, p. ix.

³ *Ibid.*, p. xi.

voice, in the writing hand, in the performing limb,” that is, something extra in music (the grain) conceived as a body vibrating with musical sound – a speaking source – that is not the body of some actual performer. In this he imagines the source of what I call “unsung voices.”⁴

Music is not inherently narrative, she asserts, but it ‘possesses moments of narration, moments that can be identified by their bizarre and disruptive effect.’⁵ Music narrates rarely and when it does it sounds like ‘voices from elsewhere, speaking (singing) in a fashion we recognize precisely because it is idiosyncratic.’⁶ The narrating voice ‘is marked by multiple disjunctions with the music surrounding it’ and constitutes ‘a rare and peculiar *act*, a unique moment of performing narration within a surrounding music.’⁷ Early in her discussion of musical narrative, Abbate makes reference to other time-based arts including film. Just as film theorists focus on the inserts, cuts, camera angles and the soundtrack (aspects that create distance between the film and the phenomenal world it depicts) to highlight a work’s ‘narrative force’, to understand musical narrative, she suggests, ‘we must see how it does *not* enact actions from a nonmusical world, but is instead non-congruent with that world in retelling it.’⁸

It is precisely the ‘zone of noncongruence’ in music as outlined in Abbate’s theory, which signals the presence of the musical *unsung* voice, that will underpin my analysis of the soundtrack in *Passion* and *Prénom Carmen*. This chapter will concentrate on the interchange between sight and sound and I will turn first to the video *Scénario du film Passion* to identify some of the key relationships established between writing, sound and visual space through a series of musical metaphors. I will then examine two scenes of listening in *Passion*, in an analysis shaped by Abbate’s concept of the narrating voice as well as by Barthes’s musical ‘figures of the body’, focusing in particular on the significant interaction between Ravel’s *Piano Concerto in G* (1929-31), the wider soundscape and Isabelle’s speech. The third part of this chapter will concentrate on the plastic treatment of sound and on the spatialization of music in *Prénom Carmen*, with an emphasis on the

⁴ Abbate, *Unsung Voices*, p. 13. Abbate is referring here to Barthes’s essay ‘Le Grain de la voix’ (1972), in which he writes: ‘Le « grain », c’est le corps dans la voix qui chante, dans la main qui écrit, dans le membre qui exécute.’ See Roland Barthes, ‘Le Grain de la voix’ in Barthes, *L’Obvie et l’obtus*, pp. 236-45 (p. 243). See also Roland Barthes, *The Responsibility of Forms*, trans. by Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1985), p. 276.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁶ *Idem.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 19 (original emphasis).

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 26-7 (original emphasis).

sculptural experience of the ‘Rodin’ love scenes. Special moments when the visual image falls into an ambivalent zone between sound and vision will be illuminated, and I will reveal how a correspondence is generated between the invisible ‘image’ of the musical score and its visual transcription in the image-track.

3.1 *Scénario du film Passion: the two images of cinema*

Unlike the video scenario of *Sauve qui peut (la vie)*, the *Scénario du film Passion*, produced by Télévision Romande and JLG Films, was made after the release of the feature film and was later broadcast on Channel 4.⁹ Sequences and stills from *Passion* are incorporated into the video scenario and are commented on and mixed with other images (a painting, a television broadcast and documentary footage), while Godard performs a demonstration of how *Passion* was created. The first four minutes of the *Scénario du film Passion* are filled with the central 4th movement of Fauré’s *Requiem*, Op. 48. A recording of the *Pie Jesu* plays out serenely while a muted visual sequence from *Passion* unfolds.¹⁰ Gradually, the edges of a white projection screen come into view and we see Godard sitting in his dark studio, like a spectator in a cinema theatre, looking up at the same sequence and operating the control desk. The images from *Passion* spill over the edges of Godard’s white screen and flow exuberantly into the studio space. This pristine four-minute ‘prelude’, during which no dialogue or other sound is permitted, introduces the video scenario as a multifaceted musical-cinematic form. The spectator listens and watches without interruption during this exquisite opening ‘movement’. We are invited into the studio and into the video artist’s space, and we quickly find our position in front of the screen as co-listener, co-viewer, co-thinker and co-image-maker. Occasionally, we see the trace of a faint wisp of smoke from Godard’s cigar, which fades away like a few ephemeral notes of music. As the *Pie Jesu* concludes, the extract from *Passion* terminates and during a lengthy silence the image cuts to a sober face-to-face encounter with Godard, who conducts a sound check before commencing his poetic monologue on the filmmaking process.

⁹ Witt, *On Communication*, p. 339. The *Scénario du film Passion* was broadcast as part of the series ‘Visions’ on Channel 4 in 1983. An earlier unreleased version of this video scenario, entitled *Passion, le travail et l’amour: introduction à un scénario (Troisième état du scénario du film Passion)*, was made in 1981.

¹⁰ In *Passion*, as this sequence begins, a fragment of the same excerpt from Fauré’s *Requiem* plays. A nude woman climbs up to a platform and then up to a higher platform, before the camera cuts and the music halts (the same woman later reappears in a reconstruction of El Greco’s *The Assumption of the Virgin* (1607-14)).

Early in the *Scénario du film Passion*, Godard reminds us of the important principle of ‘seeing a scenario’ (‘voir un scénario’), rather than working from a pre-written script. He states: ‘voir l’invisible et voir ce qu’il y a si l’invisible était visible, qu’est-ce qu’on pourrait voir.’¹¹ The verbs ‘voir’ and ‘recevoir’ are set against language and the constraints of the written script.¹² Godard compares the white screen in the studio to a vast white surface, to Mallarmé’s white page (‘la page blanche’), to a beach (‘la plage’), a memory lapse (‘« avoir un blanc »’) and later to a wall (‘un mur’). The ‘passage’ that transports us from the invisible to the visible is recorded and displayed on this plural surface, where the nascent traces of images are gathered for future use. The video medium enables Godard to slow down, re-mix and examine points of comparison between specific movements and gestures. In the first demonstration of his working method, Godard shows us a still image of Hanna (Hanna Schygulla) holding a bouquet of flowers. He fades the image in and out, slowly and then more rapidly. He flits between the first and second person as he speaks, frequently addressing the spectator, placing the accent on the participatory and imaginative creative act. We/he are to invent ‘waves’, ‘murmurs’ and ‘echoes’, which are just ‘vague ideas’ or ‘movements’ that come and go like glimmers or shudders of possibility.

Duncan White situates this film as a ‘video poem’ and associates the frequent metaphors of water that arise, as well as the notion of ‘uncertain thresholds’, with the malleability of the electronic medium: ‘Video has an immediacy to it that offers Godard the fluidity and gestural possibilities of a writer faced with the vertiginous promise of the infinite possibilities of language. Not just thought but its processes can be mapped on the screen as if it were the poet’s blank page.’¹³ Yet, there is also an important aural component to Godard’s working method and to the ambiguous forms and ‘idées *vagues*’ expressed in the video.¹⁴ Indeed, if the figure of the wave is conceived visually through the gentle flickering image, it can also be construed as a pattern of disturbance that transmits sound (a sound wave). The ‘echo’ denotes a reflection of sound and the ‘murmur’ signifies a quiet,

¹¹ Jean-Luc Godard, ‘*Scénario du film Passion*’ in *L’Avant-Scène Cinéma*, 323/324 (1984), 79-89 (p. 81).

¹² When Godard pronounces ‘re-ce-voir’ [to receive] he accents each syllable of the verb and in doing so, the word’s double meaning is stressed: ‘to see this’/‘to re-see this’. Spectators must learn how to see and receive through their physical, emotional and intellectual encounter with the images and sounds, and through an awareness of the processes and conditions of production.

¹³ Duncan White, ‘*Scénario du Film Passion: Writing Video at the End of Cinema*’ in *Vertigo*, 30 (2012) <https://www.closeupfilmcentre.com/vertigo_magazine/issue-30-spring-2012-godard-is/scenario-du-film-passion-writing-video-at-the-end-of-cinema/> [accessed 23.04.2012] (para. 2 of 16).

¹⁴ In French, ‘vague’ is a homonym and means ‘wave’ [*la vague*] (the feminine noun), ‘vagueness’ [*le vague*] (the masculine noun) and ‘vague’ (adjective).

indistinct voice or noise. Moreover, the metaphor of music plays a central role in this video scenario and in the feature film. The black silhouette of the filmmaker's hands are frequently displayed in front of the lit screen as he gesticulates expressively, pushing his body forwards into the image, or tracing smoothly over the visual movements, almost molding and shaping the space with his upper torso. His hands are sometimes spaced apart, resembling the manoeuvres of a pianist at the keyboard, performing leaps, withdrawing or moving fluently back and forth.

During this first demo in front of the 'white page', Godard equates the task ahead of him to that of a writer, whose challenge it is to find ways of filling the great white surface. This mysterious and playful space could be compared to the child's gadget invoked in Freud's essay 'A Note upon the "Mystic Writing-Pad"' (1925). This was a writing tablet composed of a wax slab, a sheet of waxed paper and a piece of transparent celluloid that served Freud as a metaphor to explain the processes of consciousness and memory. When the stylus marks the covering surface, the paper touches the wax beneath and dark writing appears on the celluloid. Although the writing vanishes magically when the two upper sheets are separated from the bottom layer, an indentation or trace remains on the wax as a stored inscription. Freud equates the wax slab to the concept of the unconscious and likens the presence and absence of the visible writing to the appearance and disappearance of consciousness.¹⁵ In this video scenario, Godard 'writes' organically, sensuously and spatially in sounds and pictures. In the final ten minutes of the film, once the fragments of hazy ideas have been assembled, Godard refers to himself in the third person (now fully merged with Jerzy, the fictional filmmaker in *Passion*) declaring: 'il dit: j'inscris dans la mémoire, il dit je note... notes de musique (*geste de noter*)', accompanied by a faint scribbling sound.¹⁶ The musical score was connected to the linear flow of writing in the video scenario of *Sauve qui peut (la vie)*, in which an image of a score was seen moving from left to right across the screen, mixed aptly with an image of a typewriter. Yet, the diachronic flow of the musical text is forever transformed by Godard into a special sort of

¹⁵ In her study of temporality and memory in the theses of Freud and Étienne-Jules Marey, Mary-Ann Doane discusses Freud's 'Mystic Writing-Pad', underscoring the important connection established in his work between the recording of traces and the forging of sites of memory or 'spaces of storage' that resist the onslaught of external stimuli. He seeks a kind of ideal virtual and timeless space of representation but one that is impossible to definitively locate. See Mary Ann Doane, 'Temporality, Storage, Legibility: Freud, Marey, and the Cinema' in *Critical Inquiry*, 22:2 (1996), 313-43 (pp. 319-21).

¹⁶ Godard, 'Scénario du film *Passion*', p. 88.

musicalized image that resists. Indeed, we shall see how the thrilling idea conjured here, of recording or installing music *inside* the image, rendering the ‘white page’ a visual score, while picturing music visually and spatially, returns powerfully in *Passion* and *Prénom Carmen*.

Music and painting are connected in the video scenario through the idea of ‘composing an image’ (‘composer une image’). We hear Godard utter these words as a silhouette of his hands appear outstretched, in his guise as pianist, over a still of Isabelle (Isabelle Huppert) at work in the factory [0:25:34].¹⁷ The movement of his hands accentuates both the programmed movements of the machine and the curved visual gestures depicted in Jacopo Tintoretto’s painting *Ariadne, Venus, and Bacchus* (1576), forging an important correspondence between the gestures of work and those of love. Similarly, a little later, Godard identifies a certain kinship between the camera movement and a musical melody.¹⁸ The affinity between visual movement and sound is solidified when a *mise en abyme* effect is produced in the visuals, as Godard refers to cinema’s ‘double image’: ‘Il y a une espèce de double image là, le cinéma il y a deux images: il y a le son, il y a l’image, les deux vont ensemble, sont toujours ensemble’.¹⁹ This utterance coincides with the insertion of a sequence from *Passion*, showing Jerzy (Jerzy Radziwilowicz) directing a crane shot and travelling swiftly through the air with his cameraman in front of an artificial backdrop of sky. Jerzy and the cameraman are intermittently outlined by the smaller frame of Godard’s white screen, mixed with a close-up of Godard’s own face, as he peers into this illuminated fictional world. The fundamental importance of sound is here made explicit, with Godard directing us implicitly to Robert Bresson’s dictum: ‘Images et sons comme des gens qui font connaissance en route et ne peuvent plus se séparer.’²⁰ Sound and image, Godard transiently asserts, constitute the two autonomous but inseparable ‘images’ of cinema.

As the *Scénario du film Passion* closes, we are placed in a more extreme encounter with the video artist, whose presence has now been trimmed down to its bare essentials, his shadowy profile resembling a moving cut-out, as if constructed from a large piece of black

¹⁷ All timings and images are taken from *Scénario du film Passion*, dir. by Jean-Luc Godard in *Jean-Luc Godard: Ensayos y Anne-Marie Miéville* (intermedio, 2011) [on DVD].

¹⁸ Godard makes this connection just as the first piano entrance in the 1st movement of Dvořák’s *Piano Concerto in G minor*, Op. 33 comes to a close and is succeeded by an orchestral *tutti*.

¹⁹ Jean-Luc Godard, ‘*Scénario du film Passion*’, p. 86.

²⁰ Robert Bresson, *Notes sur le cinématographe* (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), p. 48.



Figure 1: Godard utters: ‘et voici l’image, et voici le son, et voici le cinéma, voici le cinéma, voici le cinéma...’ [0:53:16].

fabric (see Fig. 1). Strangely, during this intimate and emotive episode of representational uncertainty, Godard is no longer facing the screen. As he delivers a moving eulogy to cinema, accompanied by the poignant, indeterminate language of the *Adagio assai* from Ravel’s *Piano Concerto in G*, he swivels his head restlessly. He looks over to the dazzling white screen and then tilts his head, like a camera, down to the right to confide in the ear of the spectator, ushering us into the silent space of music – an ambivalent acoustic region beyond sight of which he is a part.

3.2 *Passion*: musical figures and corporeal chimeras

Passion moves to and fro between a factory where Isabelle works, a film set where the Polish director Jerzy is attempting to make a film, and a hotel where the crew are residing. The soundtrack is composed of excerpts of pre-existing music by Mozart, Dvořák, Fauré, Beethoven and Ravel, encompassing choral music, four piano concertos and a sonata for violin and piano. The first shot in *Passion* is composed of a jerky documentary shot of a plane’s white exhaust fumes as it traces a path across the sky. We hear the faint rumblings of the double basses and the contrabassoon solo from the opening of Ravel’s *Piano Concerto for the Left Hand* (1929-30) as the orchestral build-up takes shape, producing an awe-inspiring crescendo.²¹ The early shots of Isabelle show her bent over a machine impressing some sort of nondescript object. The impressions made by the metal stamp are

²¹ The concerto, written for Paul Wittgenstein who lost his right arm in the First World War, is founded on an act of imposture, for while the concerto was written purposefully for one hand, the vast pitch range and dynamics suffer no loss of power, which gives the illusion that the work was scored for two hands.

matched by the pensive tones of the piano chords as she operates the equipment like an adept pianist operating the pedals and pressing the keys. Throughout *Passion*, Isabelle is infused with the magic and mechanisms at work in Ravel's music. Indeed, as Jankélévitch tells us, Ravel was fascinated by artifice, masks and machines: 'Ravel liked mechanisms that had gone wrong, and like Satie he must have had a particular liking for pianos out of tune and bleating gramophones'.²² In Ravel's own article 'Finding Tunes in Factories', published in the newspaper *New Britain* in 1933, the noisy workplace of the factory is described as a rich source of inspiration for composers, and Ravel sets musicians, along with historians and fiction writers, the task of continuing to tell what he calls the 'musical story' of the machine.²³ When Isabelle is filmed running alongside Jerzy's car during these early episodes, the sound of her harmonica harmonizes with the wind chords in the *Piano Concerto for the Left Hand*, before merging with traffic noise. We then see Jerzy making notes in his book as the reflective piano solo enters, thus creating an important connection between Isabelle, the piano music and the process of inscribing and recording.

In their discussion of this early episode, Kaja Silverman and Harun Farocki refer to the film's 'experiments with asynchronicity',²⁴ which here concern the dialogue between Isabelle and Jerzy. Farocki compares the disjunction between a character's moving lips and the use of intertitles in silent film to the dislocations established in *Passion* between audible speech and the filmed act of enunciation. Silverman speaks of the difficulty of classifying the voices of Jerzy and Isabelle during these shots, for their voices elude the standard categories of voiceover and voice-off (the characters are alternately visible in the frame but the sound of their speech is never in sync with their body). In this manner, Silverman proposes, Godard creates a new vocal category: the 'voice between'. She writes: 'he [Godard] suggests that voices do not speak "from" or "above" bodies, but in the interval which separates them. Although we are accustomed to thinking of speech as something highly individual and locatable, it is in fact intersubjective, traveling between a speaker and a listener.'²⁵ The separation of the voice from its visible source enables speech to function as a fluid sonorous texture like a wrinkle in the film's fabric.

²² Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Ravel*, trans. by Margaret Crosland (New York: Grove Press, 1959), pp. 79-81.

²³ Maurice Ravel, 'Finding Tunes in Factories', *New Britain*, August 9 1933, p. 367.

²⁴ Kaja Silverman and Harun Farocki, *Speaking about Godard* (New York University Press, 1998), p. 176.

²⁵ *Idem*.

Toward the start and end of *Passion* we find two understated yet arresting scenes that are rhythmically shaped by Ravel's *Adagio assai* (the 2nd movement of his *Piano Concerto in G*). During these scenes, the everyday diegetic sounds, which are knitted into the rhythm and texture of the music, find their force. The music is subtly embedded within the film's noisy soundscape, forming two soft musical interludes at each end of the film that recall Abbate's peculiar *act* of musical narration. In the build-up to the first scene, we hear a rumbling engine sound, footsteps, shouting, doors slamming and the boss's chronic cough. The loud beep of a car horn serves as a sonic node, approximating the pitch of the first note of the melody in the *Adagio assai* when it enters moments later, linking the noisy outside soundscape to the quieter musicalized interior. Then, a brief conversation commences



Figure 2: Magali and the *Adagio assai* [0:10:50].

between Magali and Isabelle and the jagged peripheral sounds soon fall away, supplanted by a more proximate, delicate clinking sound like a spoon in a cup. The first bars of the *Adagio assai* are faded in during a pause in the dialogue, as if to dissolve the discord between the two women. When Magali asks: 'Une fois que je l'aurai dit, qu'est-ce que ça fera?',²⁶ the melody of her speech blends evanescently with Ravel's *espressivo* melody (the final syllable of 'fe-ra' fuses in pitch with the tied B of bar 4). We hear only the first nine bars of the *Adagio assai* before the music is submerged once more in a livelier, more raucous soundscape. In the visuals, this cavernous interlude is composed of two close-up shots: we see Magali leaning against a wall, steeped in shadow, followed by Isabelle who is positioned in front of a window with her back to the white light. As the *Adagio assai*

²⁶ Jean-Luc Godard, 'Passion' in *L'Avant-Scène Cinéma*, 380 (1989), p. 15.

begins, Magali's dark face is suddenly lit up, warmed by the light and the entrance of the concerto (see Fig. 2).²⁷ The music, which trickles into the dialogue and soothes the characters' speech, seeps effortlessly into the entire visual scene. The light on Magali's face, joined by the faint tinkling sounds and the shuffling waltz bass of the *Adagio assai*, heightens the emotion in her expression, while spotlighting her sudden, unsettled movements, as well as the texture of her hair and the shadows and patterns of light from the window on the wall behind her.

In their analysis of the *Adagio assai*, Daphne Leong and David Korevaar note that in music, repeated figures lead to 'contrapuntal layering – the combination of different musical strands', and that this is particularly true in the work of Ravel.²⁸ They reveal how the *Adagio assai* 'presents the accumulation of layers derived originally from dance-like units, resulting in mechanical motion of surprising complexity', and that 'Ravel successively increases complexity through acceleration, modal clashes, metric dissonance and rhythmic transformations, and cumulative layering.'²⁹ They give emphasis to the intriguing rhythmic tension generated from the interaction between the movement's two primary layers: a waltz bass in 3/8 meter (in the pianist's left hand) and a slower sarabande-like melody in 3/4 meter (in the pianist's right hand), both of which are heard as the movement begins. Together, these layers form a hemiola effect between the two hands, which is felt as a shift between triple and duple meter, producing, as the movement progresses, 'a kind of infernal musical mechanism'.³⁰ This close-up of Magali is accompanied on the soundtrack by her strained conversation with Isabelle but both Magali and Isabelle's speech is permanently out of sync with their moving lips. The asynchronicity between body and voice is doubled by the slight disjunction between the two basic layers of the *Adagio assai*. Enhanced by the quivering, tinkling and rustling off-frame diegetic sounds, the fluidity and plasticity of the music and speech dislodge and delimit this scene of listening from and within the wider soundscape. An intensifying aural zoom is thus kindled from the atmosphere of magic and

²⁷ All images are taken from *Passion*, dir. by Jean-Luc Godard (Collection 2 films de Cahiers du cinéma, 1981) [on DVD].

²⁸ Daphne Leong and David Korevaar, 'Repetition as Musical Motion in Ravel's Piano Writing' in Peter Kaminsky (ed.), *Unmasking Ravel: New Perspectives on the Music* (Rochester, New York: University of Rochester Press, 2011), pp. 111-42 (p. 118).

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

³⁰ *Idem.*

melancholy that builds in the music and allows us to pause for a moment and notice the passing details, intimations and feelings otherwise lost in the ambient commotion.

Godard's treatment of the *Adagio assai* in *Passion* imitates Ravel's construction of the music. Rather than creating a contrast between one state, mood or tempo and another, this repeated and extended musical fragment, played near the start and end of the film, produces an 'accumulation of interludes', as Barthes writes of the 'Schumannian body': 'il ne se construit pas, il diverge, perpétuellement, au gré d'une accumulation d'intermèdes; il n'a, du sens, que cette idée *vague* (le vague peut être un fait de structure) qu'on appelle la signifiante.'³¹ We should here remember the pulsing echoes, murmurs, waves and 'vague ideas', recorded on the *page blanche* of the white screen in the *Scénario du film Passion*. Godard's arrangement of the *Adagio assai* in *Passion* produces, as Barthes writes of the intermezzi in Schumann's *Kreisleriana*, 'une écriture rayonnante, qui se retrouve alors bien plus proche de *l'espace peint* que de la chaîne parlée. La musique, en somme, à ce niveau, est *une image*, non un langage, en ceci que toute image rayonne, des incisions rythmées de la pré-histoire aux cartons de la bande dessinée.'³² The accumulation of layers that proliferate in the *Adagio assai*, propelled by the faint temporal conflict between one tempo, and one hand, and another, bleed into *Passion* and ripple through the entire film.



Figure 3: Laszlo, Isabelle, Jerzy and the *Adagio assai* [1:07:41].

³¹ Barthes, 'Rasch' in Barthes, *L'Obvie et l'obtus*, pp. 265-77 (p. 266) (original emphasis).

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 266-7 (my emphasis).

The second scene of listening constitutes another audiovisual layer, composed of a series of framed spaces encased within each other (see Fig. 3).³³ Isabelle is a musical figure caught between the literary text, the musical text, painted space as well as the white screen of cinema and the electronic medium. In his essay ‘Bégaya-t-il’, Deleuze explores the affective and intensive style of language that emerges when syntax is shattered and when the whole system begins to stutter. A sort of foreign language within language takes shape: ‘Ce n’est plus le personnage qui est bègue de parole, c’est l’écrivain qui devient *bègue de la langue*: il fait bégayer la langue en tant que telle.’³⁴ Deleuze’s literary examples include Herman Melville’s character Isabel in the novel *Pierre: Or, the Ambiguities*. Melville’s Isabel played the guitar to tell stories and ‘sang and murmured’ to her ‘human’ instrument which answered her sounds with a voice of its own. The mysterious youthfulness of her face, as well as her whispering ‘interior voice’, are traits that resonate with Isabelle in *Passion*.

In this second lengthier scene of listening, Laszlo intrudes upon an intimate scene between Jerzy and Isabelle in the kitchen, where we attend to the brief unraveling of a soft, elliptical lovers’ discourse [01:05:30 - 01:08:42]. Laszlo disrupts the conversation by banging persistently on the window, to which the piano music responds in its own way by halting periodically. This sense of spacing, enhanced by the protracted melodic phrase, temporarily distorts the time of the film and gently isolates the scene from its surroundings, thus indicating the presence of Abbate’s musical voice. The scene is twice framed by the doorway and windows, producing a *mise en abyme* effect that heightens its artificiality. Moreover, the stops and starts of the piano melody generate a concave, meditative space that pulls the listener gradually closer to the quiet stammering of dialogue. As Abbate makes clear, a narrating voice ‘is defined not by *what* it narrates, but rather by its audible flight from the continuum that embeds it.’³⁵ Another loud sonic intrusion comes in the form of Isabelle’s harmonica, which she plays throughout the film. Here, it serves as an obstacle, separating her body from the sentimental gestures and feelings that bind her to Jerzy. By contrast, Godard’s musical brushwork shimmers as he paints with the seamless piano melody, allowing it to saturate the diegetic noises with its sobering shades, endowing the

³³ The bright rectangular windows evoke the earlier exchange between Magali and Isabelle.

³⁴ Gilles Deleuze, ‘Bégaya-t-il...’ in Deleuze, *Critique et clinique* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1993), pp. 135-43 (p.135) (original emphasis).

³⁵ Abbate, *Unsung Voices*, p. 29 (original emphasis).

scene, Isabelle's voice and her precise physical features, with the pleasure and lyricism of the *espressivo* melody.

Critics have rightly read Isabelle's stammer as a symbol of working-class oppression. Laura Mulvey has commented on Isabelle's vulnerability, her 'lack of mastery over language and the discourses of culture' and her 'struggle for articulate speech'.³⁶ However, Isabelle's capacity to resist, as demonstrated in her fight for compensation, is signaled aurally by the pairing of her voice with the slight desynchronisations between the melody and accompaniment in the *Adagio assai*. Her uneven 'faulty' speech, whilst not literally song, is fleetingly freed from the personal, social and political constraints that limit her, and her speech is made to sing through its interweaving with the powerful sense of motion conjured in the music. When the body 'speaks' musically, Barthes tells us, it says nothing: 'dès lors qu'elle est musicale, la parole – ou son substitut instrumental – n'est plus linguistique, mais corporelle; elle ne dit jamais que ceci, et rien d'autre: *mon corps se met en état de parole: quasi parlando*.'³⁷ This body, which 'passes into music' and tips into 'a state of speech', marks a transgression, becoming one of Barthes's musical 'figures du corps' or 'chimères corporelles'.³⁸ This episode is full of sudden but minor physical gestures, accompanied by minimal sonic impulses like the tinkling of Jerzy's fork on his plate, the grating flicker of his lighter, the tapping on the window, the chink of glass on the table, along with Isabelle's stuttering speech and Jerzy's intermittent asides in Polish. The *Adagio assai* produces the 'body in the singing voice', for it runs into the diegetic speech and glistens with these other discreet sounds that are beguilingly brought to life, illuminating this microcosmic cinematic space.

In his discussion of the early Sonimage films (1974-76), Dubois defines video as the meeting point between processes of decomposition and recomposition. The tool of the 'video-scalpel' with which Godard and Miéville deconstructed, analysed and critiqued images previously, is riveted to the birth of a new kind of writing, to the creation of 'a new body of images' re-mixed from 'brand-new figures'.³⁹ Dubois explores the resistant

³⁶ Laura Mulvey, 'The Hole and the Zero: The Janus Face of the Feminine in Godard' in Bellour (ed.) with Bandy, *Jean-Luc Godard: Son+Image 1974-1991*, pp. 75-88 (p. 79).

³⁷ Barthes, 'Rasch', pp. 271-2 (original emphasis).

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 272-3.

³⁹ Dubois, 'Video Thinks What Cinema Creates', p. 170. Dubois is referring here to the films *Ici et ailleurs*, *Numéro deux* and *Comment ça va*.

‘antitelevision’ produced in the later Sonimage television series, underscoring the silence and stammering that television dreads, which, he writes, is ‘the language *of* video’.⁴⁰ He writes: ‘Along with the silence, there is language – floating, uncertain, hesitant, stumbling. Godard erases none of the gaps in speech, the trials and errors, the verbal digressions, neither his own nor those of others.’⁴¹ Unlike Yared’s waltzing piano figure that imprisoned the sedate Isabelle in *Sauve qui peut (la vie)*, the slow waltz bass from the *Adagio assai* merges with her faltering speech and together the audio elements join forces to recreate the ‘scrupulously crafted artefact’ of Ravel’s opening melodic phrase.⁴² The small rectangular space of the enclosed interior occupied by Isabelle and Jerzy reminds us of the recording surface of the white screen in the video scenario. The musical notes of Ravel’s concerto in *Passion*, inscribed with Isabelle’s utterances that shiver with the surrounding visual and sonic vibrations, constitute a special nebulous grain that moves laterally, as it carves out new paths which impede the incessant and cacophonous demand for ‘a story’.⁴³ Her clamorous part in the factory protest and the irregularities of her imperfect speech are filled with a communicative musicalized fluency when interspersed with Ravel’s tentative piano melody. She is a figure constantly in motion, caught between acts of sensual expression and the programmed movements of a machine, as if to embody Ravel’s ‘musical story’ of mechanical reproduction, becoming, with the music, the ‘unsung’ voice of the film.

3.3 The absent portrait

In his article on self-portraiture in the *Scénario du film Passion*, Jürgen E. Müller describes Godard as a ‘theatrical painter’ who plays with different media, noting that the shadow of his signifying body ‘paints and writes itself into and between the images of his film’.⁴⁴ To conclude this section on *Passion*, I will now turn to a portrait that haunts the film but is never explicitly reconstructed. Giovanni Battista Moroni’s portrait *The Tailor* (‘Il

⁴⁰ Dubois, ‘Video Thinks What Cinema Creates’, p. 174 (original emphasis). The two television series Dubois discusses in this passage are *Six fois deux* and *France tour détour*.

⁴¹ Idem.

⁴² Michael Russ, ‘Ravel and the Orchestra’ in Deborah Mawer (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Ravel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 118-39 (p. 133).

⁴³ Both Jerzy and the spectator are plagued by the question ‘Qu’est-ce que c’est que cette histoire?’ which is repeatedly asked by characters throughout *Passion*.

⁴⁴ Jürgen E. Müller, “‘I am Playing Leapfrog with Myself’” in *Vertigo*, 30 (2012) <https://www.closeupfilmcentre.com/vertigo_magazine/issue-30-spring-2012-godard-is/i-am-playing-leapfrog-with-myself/> [accessed 23.04.2012] (para. 24 of 26).

Tagliapanni') (1565-70), shows a tailor dressed in an off-white and red costume preparing to cut a piece of black fabric, marked diligently with white chalk lines. The tailor looks earnestly out at the spectator, his head bathed in light, which beams down behind him. On his hand he wears a gold ring with a red centre, drawing our attention to his skilled hands and glinting shears. This is not a portrait of one of Moroni's aristocratic sitters but a rare portrait of a manual worker.⁴⁵ Moroni's style remains, nevertheless, defiantly consistent, implementing the same conventions for his artisan subject as for his elite portraits. In *Passion*, moreover, Isabelle is dressed in a similar fashion. In the factory, she is filmed wearing a white patterned jumper over a red chequered dress, boasting the same elegant frills as the tailor's collar and sleeves. In the fifth shot of the film, we see her cycling next to Jerzy's car, wearing sunglasses, earrings, and like Moroni's tailor there is a gold ring



Figure 4: Isabelle [0:15:45].

with a red centre on her right hand. Later, during the workers' meeting when revolutionary slogans are quoted, a bright artificial light is positioned behind Isabelle's profile, to the left of the frame. She plays a few notes on her harmonica, before slowly turning her head to look directly at the spectator. Soon afterwards, in another close-up profile shot against a neutral background, she skilfully and almost unknowingly executes the astute gaze of Moroni's artisan, with the shadow now covering part of her face in accordance with the painting (see Fig. 4). A new hybrid image thus crystallizes, resonating with the moment in the video scenario when Godard's own wispy shadow falls elusively over the same striking

⁴⁵ Jonathan Jones observes that what is striking about this painting is not that Moroni shows us an ordinary artisan at work but that 'he gives him the same nobility of pose and countenance as his aristocratic clients. The Tailor holds scissors in the same way Moroni's nobles display swords.' See Jonathan Jones, 'Why Everyone Should See This Painting', *The Guardian*, 1 May 2007 <<http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2007/may/01/art>> [accessed 07.07.2014] (para. 11 of 15).

shot from *Passion*. The expert hands of Moroni's craftsman, ready to cut into the dark material, foresee the animated hands of the video artist in the *Scénario du film Passion*, who will later cut out the censorial black images of *Histoire(s)* to produce the undulating rhythm of the film.

3.4 *Prénom Carmen*: a writing of sound

Bizet's *Carmen* (1878) came out of copyright in the 1980s and straight away a series of opera-based films were released including Godard's *Prénom Carmen*, written by Anne-Marie Miéville.⁴⁶ Audiences in Europe witnessed the release of Claes Fellbom's *Carmen* (1983) in Sweden, Carlos Saura's *Carmen* in Spain (1983) and Peter Brook's *La Tragédie de Carmen* (1983), among others.⁴⁷ Each film borrows musical excerpts from Bizet's opera, which, as Ann Davies asserts, lends the mass medium of cinema a unique cultural prestige.⁴⁸ In Godard's case, this elite status is hyperbolized to the extreme through the soundtrack, which is dominated by Beethoven's venerated late quartets (Quartets 9, 10, 14, 15 and 16). The fractured presence of Beethoven's music in the film, spliced at one point with the gritty, sensual voice of Tom Waits, generates a hybrid cultural construct reminiscent of Bizet's own disgraced opera, which mixed cabaret songs with refined classical scoring.⁴⁹

In *Prénom Carmen*, the few quotations from Bizet's opera that are included on the soundtrack are quickly silenced by the stops and starts of the musicians' actions as they rehearse Beethoven's compositions, reminding us of the splintered and complex nature of the late quartets themselves. In Adorno's essay on Beethoven's late style, he refers to the 'boreness' of the music, its 'withering of harmony' and '*fractured* quality' as if the

⁴⁶ Cameraman Raoul Coutard and sound technician François Musy worked on both *Passion* and *Prénom Carmen*.

⁴⁷ See Ann Davies and Phil Powrie, *Carmen on Screen: An Annotated Filmography and Bibliography* (Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2006).

⁴⁸ Ann Davies, 'High and Low Culture: Bizet's *Carmen* and the Cinema' in Phil Powrie and Robynn Stilwell (eds.), *Changing Tunes: The Use of Pre-existing Music in Film* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited), pp. 46-56 (pp. 48-9).

⁴⁹ See Susan McClary, '*Carmen* as Perennial Fusion: From Habanera to Hip-Hop' in Perriam and Davies (eds.), *Carmen: From Silent Film to MTV*, pp. 205-16 (p. 205). McClary describes the 'Jekyll-and-Hyde polarities' of Bizet's opera, which scandalously mixes two contrasting musical genres. The Habanera, McClary asserts, was originally based upon the Afro-Cuban song, 'El Arreglito', with which Bizet became acquainted while frequenting cabarets in Paris's red-light district.

composer had destroyed all trace of its production, leaving behind something lifeless that resembles ‘an image of *autonomous motion*’.⁵⁰ Adorno associates Beethoven’s late style with an expression of alienation, of an extreme disdain for the individual subject and of a proximity to death, while the human element, Adorno suggests, is its gaze, for whilst Beethoven suffered from drastic hearing loss during the composition of the late quartets, his music, nevertheless, possesses ‘the gift of sight’.⁵¹ A loss of hearing compensated for through sight (a music that sees), is matched in Godard’s film by a loss of sight compensated for through sound. Indeed, early in *Prénom Carmen*, as the credit title ‘Son / François Musy’ flashes up, we hear a series of jerky clattering sounds, soon followed by images of Uncle Jean tapping and banging metal, wood and glass objects in his room, including his own chest and head.⁵² We then see a close-up of his typewriter and hear the keys being struck, as the blurry words ‘mal vu’ come into view which appear doubled on the paper. This is a reference to Samuel Beckett’s short fiction *Mal vu mal dit* (1981), written when the author was suffering from eye problems.⁵³ Beckett’s text is strewn with symbols of sight (the invisible sea, the face and eyes seen from behind, the shadowy photo album and the black ocular chasms of the soul) and the vivid auditory world of this fragmented fiction, divided into sixty-one short paragraphs, includes random creaks, the thud of stone, the woman’s fluttering steps and long periods of silence.

In the second part of Rainer Maria Rilke’s *The Rodin-Book* (1907), the poet performs a rich meditation on the powerful resonance of familiar and apparently insignificant objects that forge means of contact between the self and the world. Rilke questions the history of things and how they come into being. He asks his reader to recall objects from childhood endowed with affection and which later turn cold to become permanent things of memory. The word ‘things’, Rilke tells us, is without meaning and is easily overlooked but hovers as the bearer of inexpressible fullness.⁵⁴ These early scenes in *Prénom Carmen* present us with an array of interesting objects: a black woolly hat, a cigar, crumpled paper, a vase of flowers, a

⁵⁰ See Theodor W. Adorno, *Beethoven: The Philosophy of Music*, Rolf Tiedemann (ed.), trans. by Edmund Jephcott (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), pp. 154-61 (original emphasis).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

⁵² This sequence takes place in a nursing home where the filmmaker Uncle Jean (Godard) is residing.

⁵³ Charles Krance (ed.), *Samuel Beckett’s Mal vu mal dit / Ill seen Ill said: A Bilingual, Evolutionary, and Synoptic Variorum Edition* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996), p. xii. This story centres upon the to-and-fro movements of a dying woman and contains repeated descriptions of arresting images of white marks on the ground and of chalkstones under moonlight close to the ‘inaudible’ sea.

⁵⁴ Rainer Maria Rilke, ‘The Rodin-Book’ (Second Part) in Rilke, *Rodin and Other Prose Pieces*, trans. by G. Craig Houston (London: Quartet Books Limited, 1986), pp. 45-69 (pp. 46-7).

glass, a measuring stick, audio cassettes and a Sony ghetto blaster (a ‘music-camera’), to which Uncle Jean listens attentively, assuming the role of acoustician as he closes his eyes and lowers his head to focus. As Bogue has observed, the notion of a cliché-ridden ‘ill-seen’ (*mal vu*) dying world, drowned in the noise of dreary images and redundant notation, is tied to the urge to rewrite the common narratives of the everyday by returning to the barren origin of a nameless image.⁵⁵

In Édouard Léon Scott de Martinville’s early writing on sound recording, he predicts that a new graphic art will emerge from his invention of the phonautograph (1860), which was to replace stenography to perform a ‘writing of sound’. Léon Scott, a Parisian printer, alludes to the importance of authenticity, of creating a writing that moves as fast as speech and hints at the magical consequences that would prevail if the fugitive life of thought could be fixed as soon as it formed.⁵⁶ His device produced phonautograms by recording sound waves with an apparatus modeled on the human ear and his design involved paper covering a hand-cranked cylinder, a thin membrane and a tuning fork or chronometer to record time.⁵⁷ His subsequent sound recordings included a voice singing the first line of *Au Clair de la Lune*, an ascending scale (do ré mi fa sol la ti do) and the sound of a tuning fork vibrating at 435Hz (the note A), the recommended pitch standard in France in 1859.⁵⁸ These phonautograms are played out in *Prénom Carmen* via Uncle Jean’s muffled tape recording that includes an out-of-tune piano rendition of *Au Clair de la Lune*, the opening credit title ‘ALAIN SARDE PRESENTE DO RE MI FA SOL’ with the accompanying scale played faintly on a piano, and via the grave tuning ceremony that occurs at the end of the film, when Uncle Jean conducts a hearing test by tapping the glasses and crockery in the hotel dining room.

⁵⁵ Bogue highlights the parodic aspect of Godard’s treatment of myth in the film. He refers to the eighteen close-ups of Carmen, which work not only to extract her profile from the image-track but signal Godard’s attempt to reconfigure a simple, pure image from the deafening cliché. See Bogue, *Deleuze’s Way*, pp. 73-4 and p. 83.

⁵⁶ See Édouard Léon Scott de Martinville, *Histoire de la sténographie depuis les temps ancien jusqu’à nos jours* (Paris: Charles Tondeur, 1849), pp. 7-14.

⁵⁷ For more detail on the phonautograph, see Patrick Feaster (ed.), ‘The Phonautographic Manuscripts of Édouard-Léon Scott de Martinville’ <<http://www.firstsounds.org/publications/articles/Phonautographic-Manuscripts.pdf>> [accessed 04.04.2012].

⁵⁸ Don Michael Randel (ed.), *The Harvard Dictionary of Music*, 4th edn (Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 663.

At the end of *Prénom Carmen*, we witness the heroine's final moments, which are accompanied by an ominous drilling sound like a vast film projector. Before this, Carmen



Figure 5: two close-ups of the ornate balustrade [1:19:54], [1:19:57].

looks towards the metal balustrade of the balcony, which is encased like an illuminated screen in darkness. The camera cuts to two short-lived close-ups of a line of chandeliers, traced over by the curvy black patterns of the ornate balustrade that resembles both a film reel and a musical clef (see Fig. 5).⁵⁹ These shots are separated by the sound of a gunshot that marks the cut, as if the images have been definitively punctured by the dark hieroglyphs and the spectator has finally been sucked into the ear of the recording technology, brushed up against the thermal noise of the hear-stripe.⁶⁰ We have been pressed into the film's musical mechanism, enmeshed in the giant notation and made to *see* and *see through* the prism of this visual score. As the film closes, we are thus brought to our senses and made aware of the screen, the equipment and of the noisy processes of cinema's production in which we are ensnared, as spectators of sound as well as of sight.

⁵⁹ All images are taken from *First Name: Carmen*, dir. Jean-Luc Godard (Studiocanal image/France 2 cinéma/Universal Studios, 2007) [on DVD].

⁶⁰ In his essay 'The Radio Symphony', Adorno uses this term to convey the undercurrent of continuous noise in broadcast music. He proposes, evocatively, that the psychological effect of the hear-stripe could be compared to the spectator's awareness of the screen in cinema, and that 'music appearing upon such a hear-stripe may bear a certain image-like character of its own.' See Theodor W. Adorno, 'The Radio Symphony' in Adorno, *Essays on Music*, selected with introduction, commentary and notes by Richard Leppert; new trans. by Susan H. Gillespie (University of California Press, 2002), pp. 251-70 (p. 251).

3.5 The birth of gesture: points of contact

In Alain Bergala's edited collection of Godard's writings, interviews and images, we find photographs of Rodin's sculptures integrated with the sequence breakdown, along with photographs of the musicians, which are framed with captions from Beethoven's notebooks. Above one of the photographs we read: 'études sur des morceaux de musique/et de morceaux de chair/le corps de la mélodie', highlighting the connection between the physical gestures of the quartet players, the visceral poses of Rodin's sculptures and the plastic rendering of the music.⁶¹ In music, gesture is most broadly defined by theorists as a movement or sound invested with human significance by a performer or interpreter.⁶² Robert S. Hatten's definition of musical gesture is based upon an understanding of human gesture as '*any energetic shaping through time that may be interpreted as significant.*'⁶³ Hatten's definition encompasses hand gestures and facial expressions (and their perception), as well as 'the "translation" of energetic shaping through time into humanly produced or interpreted sounds', including intonation patterns, song, instrumental music and 'the representation of sonic gesture in notation'.⁶⁴ He affirms: 'Human gestures include characteristics that we can associate with a fundamental musicality shared by all: the capacity to perceive, and roughly reproduce, characteristic shapings of rhythm, timing, pitch contour and intensity.'⁶⁵ Non-verbal forms of communication permeate *Prénom Carmen*, stressing the importance of bodily gesture, mutual listening and imitation, all of which are vital to successful musical communication, particularly in the intimate genre of the string quartet. Much like Godard's approach to the video image, ensemble musicians often oscillate between playing and pausing, alternating discussion with demonstration in order to determine how best to interpret a passage.

Throughout the film, the musicians' gestures, sounds, as well as the emotion in the music seem to drive the narrative and the characters' actions. During the coastal scenes that precede the Trouville love scenes (dubbed the 'Rodin scenes' by the production team), sea shots and images of Carmen and Joseph are interspersed with shots of the quartet

⁶¹ Bergala (ed.), *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard*, I, p. 569.

⁶² Anthony Gritten and Elaine King, 'Introduction' in Gritten and King (eds.), *Music and Gesture* (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2006), pp. xix-xxv (p. xx).

⁶³ Robert Hatten, 'A Theory of Musical Gesture and its Application to Beethoven and Schubert' in *Music and Gesture*, pp. 1-23 (p. 1) (original emphasis).

⁶⁴ Idem.

⁶⁵ Idem.

rehearsing a passage from the slow sixth movement of *String Quartet No. 14 in C# minor*, Op. 131, which includes a prominent four-note phrase that moves from part to part. In the sequence breakdown, following a description of Claire's rounded gestures, we read: 'Le bras de Carmen qui se pose autour des épaules de Joseph a lui aussi un beau mouvement arrondi, auquel répond le mouvement du volant que tient Joseph, et que l'auto suit les courbes d'un embranchement de l'autoroute'.⁶⁶ Claire is filmed moving her bow in even circles, miming with her arm to mark the first beat of each bar [0:25:30].⁶⁷ In the first part of Rilke's *The Rodin-Book* (1903) the poet refers to Rodin's armless statues before listing different kinds of hands fashioned by the sculptor.⁶⁸ Prominent 'Rodin' poses in the film include an allusion to the erotic figure of the *Femme accroupie* during the love scenes at Trouville, or the fleeting *Faunesse à genoux* as Carmen glides past the camera with her hands raised to her hair while Waits' *Ruby's Arms* plays. As Phil Powrie points out, the Rodin intertext in *Prénom Carmen* warps the visual flow as we are suddenly attracted to the



Figure 6: Carmen and Joseph in the car [26:38:00].

familiar poses enacted by characters, which fleetingly catch our eye.⁶⁹

When Joseph and Carmen are filmed in the car by the sea at Trouville, Joseph's palm and curled fingers droop over the steering wheel in a pose that enacts the unfurled hands of Rodin's *Bourgeois de Calais* (see Fig. 6). Rilke writes: 'A hand laid on the shoulder or

⁶⁶ Bergala (ed.), *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard*, I, p. 565.

⁶⁷ Throughout the film, deliberate confusion is generated concerning Claire's identity in the quartet. She is often seen miming to non-existent notes in the score and she alternates between the viola and the second violin part. At other times, she can be heard citing lines from Beethoven's notebooks.

⁶⁸ Rilke, 'The Rodin-Book' (First Part) in Rilke, *Rodin and Other Prose Pieces*, pp. 3-43 (pp. 18-20).

⁶⁹ See Phil Powrie, 'Godard's *Prénom: Carmen* (1984), Masochism, and the Male Gaze' in *Forum for Modern Language Studies* XXXI:1 (1995), 64-73 (pp. 65-6).

limb of another body is no longer part of the body to which it properly belongs: something new has been formed from it and the object it touches or holds, something which was not there before, which is nameless and belongs to no one'.⁷⁰ In this example, we see an image of Carmen resting her head on Joseph's shoulder and pausing, sustaining an undulating pose that drolly simulates a self-absorbed Rodinesque cluster, accompanied only by the sound of waves. As Christopher Hasty affirms, rhythm denotes process and dynamic becoming rather than product and static being.⁷¹ The word rhythm can be used to describe 'a fluid gesture of the hand, a still life, the course of a narrative, the "shape" of a musical phrase', in addition to the common notion of periodicity.⁷² These applications are 'aesthetic', he comments, 'from *aisthanesthai*, to sense or feel, related to *aiō* – or Latin *audio* – "I hear"', for they depend upon human sensory perception.⁷³ In Figure 6, the black



Figure 7: the four-note phrase from the *Adagio*, played here by the 2nd violin (Op. 131), bb. 20-21.

line in the rearview mirror, which resembles a misplaced vertical bar line, accents the point of intensity in the image, like the crest of a wave, that fades gracefully with the contour of Joseph's draped hand. In the score, the slight accent in the four-note phrase that plays on the soundtrack in the lead-up to this sculptural pose, is notated with a crescendo marking ('< >'), and the melodic descent and the slur indicate the swell heard in the music, which is shaped by the musicians as they lean into the string to exert more physical force with the bow (see Fig. 7).⁷⁴ In an interview on the film, François Musy, Godard's sound technician, refers to the generation of movement produced by brutal cuts in the soundtrack: 'quand tu as un arrêt cut, ça veut dire que tu as une rupture de rythme et que le rythme va reprendre

⁷⁰ Rilke, 'The Rodin-Book', p. 19.

⁷¹ Christopher F. Hasty, *Meter as Rhythm* (Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 4.

⁷² Idem.

⁷³ Idem.

⁷⁴ The fragment of score in Fig. 7 has been taken from Ludwig van Beethoven, *String Quartet No. 14 in C# minor, Op. 131*, rev. by Wilhelm Altmann (London: Ernst Eulenburg, 1970), p. 39.

différemment.⁷⁵ This sequence in the film is edited to accentuate the recurring four-note figure, which, shaped like a sigh, is made to stand slightly apart from the musical fabric like a sound object, before the melody is cut abruptly, immediately loading our gaze with its slow falling curve, as well as with its energy and affective power, encouraging us to perceive the gestural pose enacted by Carmen and Joseph in the car, as a musical figure.⁷⁶ The sophisticated musical form is flattened out by the sudden screeching horn and the loud wind and sea sounds that sporadically merge with and mask the music. The isolated bodily cluster in this example, that produces a momentary breach in the visual flow, is exaggerated further by the marginal location of the car (on a side road), and the sequence can be construed metaphorically as a self-reflexive swerve that hints at the latent presence of one of Carmen's overt 'phenomenal' performances in Bizet's opera.⁷⁷

3.6 Seascapes: carving audible space

The undercurrent of opera that pervades the film dwells in the operatic nature of Beethoven's instrumental writing. Joseph Kerman highlights the 'new vocal impulse' in the late quartets, which is felt through the curves of melodies, the tempo, performance directions, and through the music's utter immediacy: 'One is carried away, astonished, and ravished by the sheer songfulness of the last quartets – by recitative and aria, lied, hymn, country dance, theme and variations, lyricism in all its manifestations.'⁷⁸ In preparation for the filming of *Prénom Carmen*, the actors, musicians and technicians received an audio

⁷⁵ François Musy, 'Les Mouettes du pont d'Austerlitz: entretien avec François Musy' in *Cahiers du cinéma*, 355 (1984), 12-17 (p. 17).

⁷⁶ In a similar manner, Godard alludes to another sort of 'musical figure' during an interview with Jean-Michel Frodon on *Notre musique*. When asked about the significance of the film's title, Godard refers to an image included in the article, taken from the film, consisting of a close-up of some feet (belonging to the Native American woman). One foot is placed in front of the other, balancing on a marble staircase. The stairs are patterned with scrawling black lines and on each step is a thick black horizontal line. Godard remarks: 'Je n'avais pas remarqué que la photo des pieds qui descendent l'escalier évoque une portée musicale, c'est Anne-Marie qui l'a vu'. The image is therefore likened, with hindsight, to the stave and notes of a musical score. See Jean-Luc Godard with Jean-Michel Frodon, 'Jean-Luc Godard et *Notre Musique*: Juste une conversation' in *Cahiers du cinéma*, 590 (2004), 20-2 (p. 22).

⁷⁷ See Abbate, *Unsung Voices*, p. 122. Abbate makes reference to Bizet's *Carmen* and to the heroine's seductive power as well as to her 'scandalous femininity', expressed through her unashamed desire to sing. She notes that Carmen's 'phenomenal' performances constitute striking reflexive moments in the opera. Abbate defines phenomenal performance (a key concept to which she returns throughout) as 'a musical or vocal performance that declares itself openly, singing that is heard by its singer, the auditors on stage, and understood as "music that they (too) hear" by us, the theater audience.' See *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁷⁸ Joseph Kerman, *The Beethoven Quartets* (Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 195.

cassette to listen to, assembled by Godard and consisting of a reading of the entire film, along with the extracts of music.⁷⁹ Musy has referred to the autonomy of the audio elements in *Prénom Carmen* and likens parts of the soundtrack to a musical score. The dialogue, sea sound and the music were treated as ‘instruments’ with equal weighting. He reveals how the gull sounds derived from a recording he had made himself two years prior to the making of *Prénom Carmen* at a different location, and he draws attention to the melodic ‘dialogue’ of the gull cries, a sound that sticks to the notes of the violin and to the hiss of Carmen’s speech during the love scenes. Musy states: ‘Les mouettes, d’ailleurs, c’est déjà une composition de chants: tu en as qui crient plus fort, tu as une espèce de mouvement. La mer aussi, même si c’est un peu plus linéaire. Les mouettes, c’est déjà plus musical, plus proche du dialogue.’⁸⁰ Musy reveals that the sound mixing was carried out at the same time as the visual montage, enabling the sounds and images to be conceived and fashioned organically and plastically, in relation to each other.

Godard has likened his approach to sound in *Prénom Carmen* to that of a sculptor, stating: ‘Au montage du son, j’ai eu l’impression de sculpter dans le son, comme en sculpture, qui est un art que j’ai un peu méprisé longtemps parce que je ne le connaissais pas, mais là, j’ai vu ce que c’était de taper sur un bloc pour en faire sortir des volumes, des formes.’⁸¹ During the love scenes, the rhythmic refrains of the fragments of music are juxtaposed with still shots of sea, with images of Carmen and Joseph, and with images of the musicians rehearsing. Godard states that the love scenes were purposefully made to resemble some of Rodin’s sculptures and that this idea influenced his manner of editing and mixing the sound: ‘The sculptor works with two hands against a surface, he carves space, and since musicians are always speaking of audible space I think that the thing I’d like to lead them to do is to carve this audible space.’⁸² In his essay ‘Beethoven’, Wagner reflects upon Beethoven’s hearing loss, referring to the composer’s fading outer world and his decisive retreat into ‘the figures of his inner world’.⁸³ This, Wagner writes, brought him into contact with the essence of things as his powers of vision turned inward.⁸⁴ Wagner compares the

⁷⁹ Musy, ‘Les Mouettes du pont d’Austerlitz’, p. 14.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁸¹ Bergala (ed.), *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard*, I, p. 584.

⁸² Gideon Bachman, ‘The Carrots are Cooked: A Conversation with Jean-Luc Godard’ in David Sterritt (ed.), *Jean-Luc Godard: Interviews* (University Press of Mississippi, 1998), pp. 128-39 (p. 134).

⁸³ Wagner, ‘Beethoven’, p. 91.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 91-2.

inner eye of the blind to the deaf musician: ‘Now thrives apace that power of shaping the unfathomable, the never-seen, the never experienced, which yet becomes a most immediate experience, of most transparent comprehensibility.’⁸⁵ While Wagner reiterates that the nature of music is entirely different from that of the plastic arts, he stresses the importance of rhythm, which constitutes the glue that ties the musician to the plastic and visual world. For Wagner it is the rhythmic sequence of tones that endows the musician with a ‘plastic hand’.⁸⁶ If light enables us to see bodies moving, it is rhythm that lets music be seen: ‘Music speaks out Gesture’s inmost essence in a language so direct that, once we are saturated with the music, our eyesight is positively incapacitated for intensive observation of the gesture, so that finally we understand it without our really seeing it.’⁸⁷

In Abbate’s discussion of deafness as metaphor in Mahler’s instrumental writing, she cites the feared chimera of meaninglessness, the ‘object congealed out of false metonymic juxtapositions’ that signals the deaf subject’s inability to hear music’s rhythm: ‘Deafness is an inability to interpret the sounds that thrash the air, or the black notes that wind across the pages of score. The text – Mahler’s (interpretation of) deafness – becomes a bleak vision of incomprehension.’⁸⁸ In non-vocal music, the schism or disjunction that marks, for Abbate, the onset of musical narration can be marked by ‘musical *blankness*’ and ‘a sense of substance that is leached away’.⁸⁹ The fragments or ‘isolated images with a certain resonance’ that embody Mahler’s “deafness” suggest, Abbate infers, ‘a means of hearing a gesture of musical narration in music without a referential object’.⁹⁰

The love scenes are dominated by the 3rd movement of Beethoven’s Quartet No. 15 (Op. 132 in A minor) entitled ‘A Convalescent’s Holy Song of Thanksgiving to the Deity, in the Lydian Mode’. Beethoven was very ill during the period he spent composing this landmark quartet, and in the profoundly expressive movement heard here, Beethoven’s turn to the old church modes signalled a shift in his musical language.⁹¹ The movement has an ABABA structure, with two main sections: the *Molto adagio* A section, and a lively *Andante* B

⁸⁵ Wagner, ‘Beethoven’, p. 92.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

⁸⁸ Abbate, *Unsung Voices*, p. 125. The subject of Abbate’s discussion is Mahler’s *Todtenfeier*, the 1st movement of his Second Symphony.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

⁹⁰ *Idem.*

⁹¹ Robert Winter and Robert Martin (eds.), *The Beethoven Quartet Companion* (University of California Press, 1994), p. 269.

section. Beethoven composed a chorale, hymn-like melody that forms the central melodic material of the A section. In Godard's rendition, the two B sections are reversed so that the first, entitled '*Sentendo nuova forza*' ('Feeling new strength') is paired with the morning scenes when the lovers begin to stir. The Lydian hymn of the A section is reordered by Godard but it is not disfigured. The *Molto adagio* and its special core melody is described by Kerman as a 'self-contained, hermetic world' that is almost obliterated by the 'ordinary world' of the B sections. The 'rarefied atmosphere' and 'vague untional mysteries' of this basic hymn,⁹² which is divided into five simple and even phrases, is preserved and respected during these scenes in the film, with the entirety of the chorale melody sounding except for one note.

The love scenes, like Beethoven's score, are paced by and structured around this core hymn-like melody. Beethoven frames it with imitative textures, while Godard frames it visually and aurally, using the loud sounds of waves crashing to punctuate the rhythms, as the physical gestures of the characters (Joseph touches Carmen's shoulder, then Carmen



Figure 8: the 3rd movement of *Quartet No. 15 in A minor*, Op. 132: bb. 1-6 [0:30:18].

turns her head) perform a silent choreography, their bodies moving in time to the music. The lack of ambient background sound allows the opening phrase of the *Molto adagio*, consisting of the imitative texture and the chorale melody, to resound peacefully. The music is matched in the visuals by a still sea shot, pattered by a beam of light that spreads over a dark rock in the centre and permeates the water's rippling surface that vibrates

⁹² Kerman, *The Beethoven Quartets*, pp. 254-6

deeply with the slow vibrato of the strings (see Fig. 8).⁹³ The duration of this sea shot matches the duration of the opening phrase in the music, with a final wave surging forwards in the image, accentuating the weak fourth beat of the penultimate bar of this musical fragment, producing a slight syncopation. The waves move steadily from right to left, contravening the left-to-right motion of the music as it would conventionally be ‘read’ by the musicians. Yet if we ‘see’ the score as a visual image – as a page peppered with black marks and signs, separated by white spaces – we start to see Godard’s sea shot a little differently. Indeed, the white space (the white ‘beach’) of the screen in the *Scénario du film Passion* returns to haunt these scenes in *Prénom Carmen*, recalling the video artist’s persistent efforts to defy the law of language and the constraints of the written script.⁹⁴ The screen as a memory-space, as the poet’s white page on which waves were invented, or as a visual score on which musical notes were inscribed, underlies the visual composition of this sea shot. The shape of white light echoes the right-angled triangle on the left-hand side of the score, where it is marked out with rests (the small black rectangles, like rocks, on the staff), with the entry points of each part forming a diagonal line. Moreover, the performance direction *sotto voce* (‘in a low voice’) written beneath each line, reveals Beethoven’s desire for each instrument to draw on vocal experience to interpret the music. We are reminded of Carmen’s low, gentle voiceover with which the film began, that was intermittently masked by ambient sound during the opening seascape. The ambiguous voice of Bizet’s heroine, as relayed at the start of *Prénom Carmen*, reverberates here with the subliminal instrumental ‘voices’ in Beethoven’s score.

⁹³ The fragment of score in Fig. 8 has been taken from Ludwig van Beethoven, *String Quartet No. 15 in A minor, Op. 132*, rev. by Wilhelm Altmann (London: Ernst Eulenburg, 1911), p. 22.

⁹⁴ Although the juxtapositions I am making in my examples (see Fig. 8 and Fig. 10) between a strip of score and a frame of film introduce types of cross-media synchronization, these do not adhere strictly to Eisenstein’s notion of audio-visual correspondence. In his analysis of the ‘Battle on the Ice’ sequence in *Alexander Nevsky* (for which Prokofiev composed the score), Eisenstein draws attention to ‘a complete correspondence between the movement of the music and the movement of the eye over the lines of the plastic composition’, deducing that ‘exactly the same motion lies at the base of both the musical and the plastic structures.’ In Fig. 8 and Fig. 10, it is rather the shapes and surface textures produced in these seascapes that resonate with the shapes and textures depicted in the static musical score (never shown in the film), if, indeed, the score is *seen* and not *read*, in keeping with Godard’s concept of ‘seeing a scenario’ and ‘seeing the invisible’, as demonstrated in the *Scénario du film Passion*. See Eisenstein, *The Film Sense*, p. 139 (original emphasis). For a discussion of Eisenstein’s analysis, including a commentary on the criticism and controversy it provoked, see Nicholas Cook, *Analysing Musical Multimedia* (Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 57-65.

As the movement progresses, the harmonies gradually come undone. In the film, these motions are matched by the quickening onset of night, the accelerating vacillations between exterior and interior space, and the increasing proximity of the lovers' bodies. After an interval of dialogue and sea sound, another portion of the *Molto adagio* is played and we hear the scratchy timbre of the first violin, followed by the other instrumental 'voices',



Figure 9: the coast at Trouville [33:16:00].

entangled with ambient gull sounds. In the visuals, we see a vast expanse of sand, the distant black specks of human form, strips of shadow and lighter patches, and a large stretch of water whose shape echoes the gentle crescendo heard in the music (see Fig. 9). The wet sand is saturated with small pools of water, and tracks from a vehicle have been scored into the mushy texture, as if the four staves of the score have broken their ties and now run anarchically into the image. The musical and sonic details provide a sense of proximity, while visually this open coastal expanse creates a sense of distance. A distinctive sonic cluster, like one of Rodin's sculptural fragments, is crafted from the mix of gull cries, a dog yapping and the fragile thread of the violin melody. Godard's splicing of the seascapes with shots of the musicians working, loads these images with the physical touch and energetic exertion of the players, as well as with the cutting force of the vibrating strings.

When the *Molto adagio* A section returns for a third time in Beethoven's score, the first phrase is more rhythmically complex, accompanied by the performance direction '*Con intimissimo sentimento*'. As the delicate texture of this section of music unfolds, led by the first violin and joined by the chorale melody in the second violin part, the camera cuts to a nocturnal sea shot, composed of the lips of two silvery waves. The sea is filmed at a slightly skewed angle as it rolls across the sand on the beach towards us (see Fig. 10).⁹⁵ The

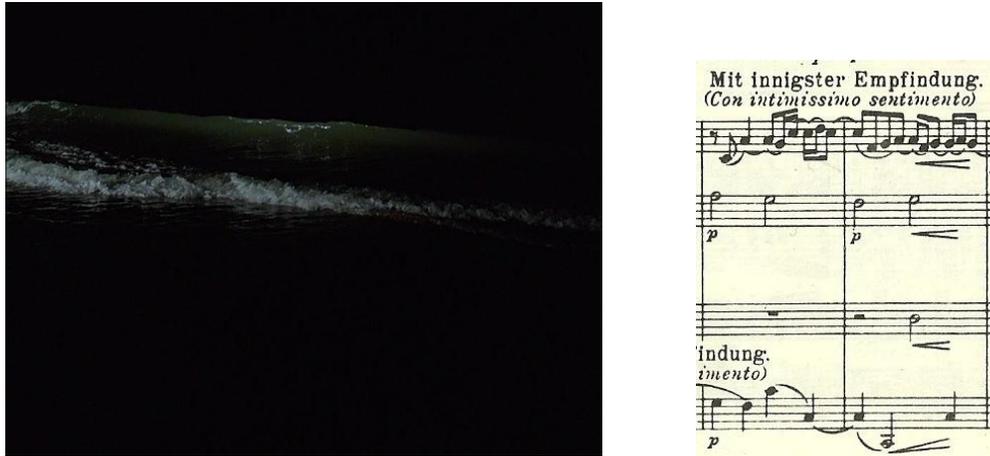


Figure 10: the nocturnal return of the *Molto adagio*, bb. 171-2 [0:36:27].

two outer parts in the music, composed of a delicate violin figure that ascends, accompanied by the power of the quiet cello line that moves down the octave, generate a sense of depth. The image-track alternates between nocturnal seascapes and interior shots of Carmen and Joseph, and the whole episode is framed by shots of Claire who cites lines from Beethoven's notebooks, which she occasionally writes into her score, conveying an idea of recitative in keeping with the film's preliminary subject of opera. The music is fractured into pieces, dispersed by lengthy pauses filled with quiet snippets of dialogue. Gradually, as the ambient sea sound increases, Carmen's voice falls to a whisper. The loud rush of waves dampens and masks her speech that mixes ambiguously with her stammering, amnesiac thoughts, and the inaudible music lingers as a memory, revived with the rhythmic motion of the sea, as we move further inside the lovers' physical space. Indeed, the sparse nature of the music heard during the love scenes, fractured by the sounds and images of sea, wind, screeching gulls and by the dramatic gestures of the musicians,

⁹⁵ The fragment of score in Fig. 10 has been taken from Beethoven, *String Quartet No. 15 in A minor*, Op. 132, p. 28.

indicates the faint presence of Abbate's disruptive, marginalized and musical 'voice from outside'.⁹⁶

In his writing on Minimalist sculpture and the viewing experience, Alex Potts remarks that '[a]ny viewing of a three-dimensional work involves some form of repetitive looping – as one moves right round a work back to the position where one was first standing, or moves in closer and gets absorbed by various local effects of surface shaping and texture and shadowing and then steps back again. The rhythm of such viewing has something of the sense of passing through repeated circuits, which may be more or less regular, more or less expansive, more or less open or closed.'⁹⁷ The returns of the chorale melody in the 3rd movement of *String Quartet No. 15*, which are configured a little differently each time, are matched during the love scenes by different types of sea shot. Godard carves the open, voluminous shape of the chorale melody into the film's textural surface where it remains intact, functioning as a sculpted emblem of song that pulls us in and pushes us away. The sense of continuity and flow, with unceasing variation, during this rhythmic process of listening, seeing and feeling, allows the spectator to 'move around' and experience these musical and visual forms from a range of different angles. Treated spatially and poetically, as stilled images composed of a swarm of black lines, curves and words, the fragments of score in my examples exist, like Moroni's portrait in *Passion*, as *unseen* and *unheard* images, which Godard transposes to the visual sphere to inspire the arrangement of his seascapes.

3.7 Conclusion

In her intricate study of *Histoire(s)*, Miriam Heywood performs an anagrammatic reading of the video essay to trace the multiple intertexts formed from the fragments of images, words and sounds. She shows how the expression of *authentic* music comes not merely through the significance of the chosen excerpts themselves, but through an 'imagined music', generated by the silent and endless linkages between the different fragments. The musical fragments, she writes, 'are never simply heard, but read in relation to images and

⁹⁶ Abbate, *Unsung Voices*, p. 152.

⁹⁷ Alex Potts, *The Sculptural Imagination: Figurative, Modernist, Minimalist* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), pp. 196-7.

words from their hypotextual contexts as well as from their new sites of contact. The conversations between these elements form the most vital of the musical expressions in *Histoire(s) du cinéma*.⁹⁸ Toward the start of episode 1A *Toutes les histoires*, the screen text ‘LE CINEMA SUBSTITUE’ appears, accompanied by the 2nd movement of Beethoven’s *String Quartet No. 10 in Eb Major*, Op. 74, part of which played during the aftermath of the bank heist in *Prénom Carmen*.⁹⁹ Then, in the middle section of 1A, we hear the voice of Julie Delpy reciting a passage from Jean Genet’s *L’Atelier d’Alberto Giacometti*. The camera becomes a detective’s torch, searching for lost artefacts among a collection of film negatives scattered over a white surface. The first chord of the 2nd movement ‘Absence’ [*Abwesenheit*] from Beethoven’s *Piano Sonata No. 26 in E-flat major*, Op. 81a (the *Lebewohl* Sonata) enters just as the camera cuts to black. This chord forges a faint but powerful metaphorical bond between the dark inverted master images and the invisible musical harmony. The next image we see is a photograph of a young Eisenstein wielding scissors and gazing intensely at a strip of film tape, joined by Delpy’s reading of Rilke’s *Letters to a Young Poet*. During a discussion with Ishaghpour on *Histoire(s)*, Godard comments: ‘[c]’est du cinéma, c’est-à-dire non pas comme la littérature qui est plus liée au sens, mais dans le film il y a le rythme, c’est plus proche de la musique, c’est comme ça que pour le rythme j’ai utilisé le noir...’.¹⁰⁰ It is clear that Godard’s conception of montage and substitution is bound intimately to the silent space of music, to the materiality and malleability of sound, and to its displacement in different media. Indeed, in the next chapter, we shall return to the artist’s studio and to the music of Ravel, to explore themes of temporal distortion, deformation and re-composition, with a special focus on the electronic medium.

As we saw in *Passion*, the hands of the factory worker were also those of the dexterous, humble cutter and, Isabelle, the musical figure of *Passion*, whose voice was filled with the enthralling layers of Ravel’s *Piano Concerto in G*, was also, finally, a figure of montage, shaped by the hands of the pianist, the video artist, and by those of the filmmaker – hands

⁹⁸ Heywood, *Modernist Visions*, p. 157.

⁹⁹ During this section in episode 1A, we see a series of sequences from Murnau’s *Faust* (1926), Minnelli’s *Tous en scène* (1953), Renoir’s *La Règle du jeu* (1939) and Mizoguchi’s *Les Amants crucifiés* (1954) among others. As episode 1A draws to a close, a short extract from Bizet’s *Carmen* plays, spliced with Hindemith’s *Phantasie* from his *Viola Sonata No. 4*, Op. 11.

¹⁰⁰ Jean-Luc Godard and Youssef Ishaghpour, *Archéologie du cinéma et mémoire du siècle* (Tours: Farrago, 2000), p. 21.

that work simultaneously but at different speeds, playing, painting or, simply, *making* 'images' from an accretion of different musical strands. The foreign body of the diegetic quartet that muddies the fiction in *Prénom Carmen*, disturbs the unscrolling of the narrative and marks out a musical territory in the image, embodied in the love scenes by the pure, sculpted basin of music. In Rilke's short essay 'Primal Sound', he explores his first experience of the phonograph, referring to the needle, the parchment, the sound waves and the receptive surface, followed by the trembling hesitations of the resultant recording. What he remembers most are the traces, the 'unforgotten grooves' etched into the wax cylinder. Then something strange happens. During an anatomy class at the *École des Beaux-Arts*, Rilke had the novel idea of resting the needle of the phonograph on the coronal suture of the skull. He asks: 'What would happen? A sound would necessarily result, a series of sounds, music... / Feelings – which?'¹⁰¹ The primal sound of the body is what Rilke was striving for, yet, in the *Scénario du film Passion, Passion* and *Prénom Carmen*, it is the disjointed body of musical thought that provides the life force with which the sonic eye sees.

¹⁰¹ Rainer Maria Rilke, 'Primal Sound' in Rilke, *Rodin and Other Prose Pieces*, pp. 127-32 (p. 129).

Chapter 4

Musical Mechanisms, Turbulent Flows and Sonic Pleasure in *Lettre à Freddy Buache* (1982) and *Puissance de la parole* (1988)

The films under analysis in this chapter provide transfixing audiovisual experiences that push the spectator into ambiguous spaces where unexpected assemblages of rhythms, bodies and sounds meld together. The videographic medium is a fluid body of raw noise that quivers and murmurs. It is composed not of a sequence of single images but of transitions *between* images and generates non-fixed, flexible and variable visual forms.¹ *Lettre à Freddy Buache. À propos d'un court-métrage sur la ville de Lausanne*, an 11-minute short made to celebrate the 500th anniversary of the city of Lausanne, was initially made on video before being transferred to 35mm film. The 25-minute video *Puissance de la parole*, named after Baudelaire's translation of Edgar Allan Poe's prose poem 'The Power of Words', was commissioned by France Telecom. Both works share the same sound technician (François Musy) and although they were made six years apart, one key aspect that binds them together is each work's concern with expressing, manipulating and distorting time.

In *Lettre à Freddy Buache* and *Puissance de la parole* subversive areas of sensation unfurl and contorted flakes of speech, melody and movement curl into our ears. Attempts are made to dodge rigorous structures, to evade the exactitude of geometrical form and embrace a risky existence that thrives on the freedom to surprise. In this chapter, we shall examine the production of performative moments through the organisation of recorded sound. Both of the films in question can be construed as short experiments that deal with the process of reflecting upon the past, while composing anew with electronic media, notably, with the medium of recorded sound. Our attention is drawn to the raw material of sound, to the mechanics of cinema and to the relation between the listener and the world, as the frames of traditional performance spaces are spectacularly reimaged.

My readings in this chapter are bound together by the music of Ravel, which plays a marked role in each film. The two orchestral compositions by Ravel that Godard selected

¹ See Yvonne Spielmann, *Video: The Reflexive Medium*, trans. by Anja Welle and Stan Jones (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), pp. 4-5.

are the *Boléro* (1928) (in *Lettre à Freddy Buache*) and *La Valse* (1919-20) (in *Puissance de la parole*). These pieces were originally envisaged as twin projects for the ballet, involving the same collaborative team (Ida Rubinstein, Bronislava Nijinska and the designer Alexandre Benois).² The conflation of mechanical motion and dance-like rhythms plays a key role in each composition. Indeed, the presence of repetition, circularity and an inclination towards automatism and dysfunction, grants them their fundamental place in Ravel's 'dance-machine' trajectory.³ As Mawer asserts, if *La Valse* has been associated by commentators with the fall of the Habsburg Empire and the demise of high European culture after the First World War, *Boléro* has been interpreted as a symbol of torment, madness and death.⁴ The crux of each piece is appropriated by Godard, recontextualized and revitalized to form a new audiovisual choreography that straddles the nonlinear temporalities of electronic media and the indexicality of cinema.

I will demonstrate how the slow-paced *Lettre à Freddy Buache* and the fast-paced *Puissance de la parole* explore the boundaries between calculated, abstract forms and a visceral physicality by drawing upon movements and musics of dance, the machine and the body. Although Godard never ceases to expose the damaging effects of television and new media on both cinema as an art form and spectatorship practices, his exploitation of the flexible vitality of the electronic medium is thoroughly entangled with his manipulation of the expressive value and affective impact of recorded sound, which, as we move through the 1980s corpus, hits our ears at a fresh pace. Critics have noted that in the videos of the late 1980s, Godard develops distinctive ways of working with speed. Rather than focusing solely on slow-motion, as demonstrated prominently in *Scénario vidéo de Sauve qui peut (la vie)*, we find what Raymond Bellour terms 'images in search of a new speed'.⁵ In his succinct analysis of *Puissance de la parole*, Bellour writes:

Pictures in slow motion, frozen, shattered; or reconstructed, transformed, represented anew thanks to the swiftness of montage and the potency of the special

² Deborah Mawer, *The Ballets of Maurice Ravel: Creation and Interpretation* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2006), p. 219.

³ Mawer applies this term to three works in Ravel's ballet repertory (*Daphnis et Chloé*, *La Valse* and *Boléro*) that involve 'the creation, exploration and destruction of mechanised (often high-speed) dance'. See Deborah Mawer, 'Musical Objects and Machines' in Mawer (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Ravel*, pp. 47-67 (p. 57).

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 52

⁵ Raymond Bellour, 'The Double Helix' in Timothy Druckrey (ed.), *Electronic Culture: Technology and Visual Representation* (New York: Aperture Foundation, Inc., 1996), pp. 173-99 (p. 197).

effects. In short, images in search of a new speed, which Godard has been looking for since *France Tour Détour Deux Enfants*, but this time really capable of changing speed, for instance, of going from a “photographic” representation to (more or less emphatic) sketches of distortion.⁶

By the late 1980s, therefore, a new emphasis is given to the metamorphic potential of fast-paced movement that exerts a creative force, which is heard and felt with just as much verve through sonic as well as visual experience.

Godard’s own slippery disembodied speech in *Lettre à Freddy Buache*, and his arrangement of the repetitive *Boléro*, along with the slow, wandering camera, makes speed an important part of the aural and visual thinking processes performed in this film. Moreover, the attentiveness not only to speed but to the transformative force of music, showcased stunningly in *Puissance de la parole*, underscores the intimate tie between music and montage; a crucial relationship that hinges for Godard on the poetic and visionary act of composing or ‘putting together’ and uniting incongruent worlds. Witt has pointed out that Godard’s early work in the 1950s as a critic, a dialogue writer, an editor of documentary and silent travel films, and his undertaking of the responsibility of editor in his own projects from the 1970s on, solidifies his self-defined status as a radical ‘combiner’.⁷

I will begin by performing a new analysis of the interaction of Ravel’s *Boléro* in *Lettre à Freddy Buache* with the poetic meanderings of the disembodied voice, as well as exploring the significance of the human operator (Godard) performing in the studio. I will then examine the arrangement of recorded sound in *Puissance de la parole*, concentrating in particular on the appropriation of Ravel’s *La Valse*, a sinister exploration of the waltz form. Godard’s audio mixing reaches a new high in this later video, a work that performs, on the surface, a critique of communication in the modern age, while beneath in full swing is a vibrant videographic kaleidoscope of collisions between the body and technology. I will demonstrate how a vital link is repeatedly forged between music, evocations of cinema’s

⁶ Bellour, ‘The Double Helix’, p. 197.

⁷ Michael Witt, ‘Montage, My Beautiful Care, or Histories of the Cinematograph’ in Michael Temple and James S. Williams (eds.), *The Cinema Alone: Essays on the Work of Jean-Luc Godard 1985-2000* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2000), pp. 33-50 (p. 34). We could add to this Godard’s self-inscription as Moroni’s 16th-century tailor in *Scénario vidéo du film Passion*, through the cinematic portrait of the working-class music-maker Isabelle, whose profile is mixed with Godard’s silhouette. Of course, this is not to forget Godard’s self-acknowledged role as ‘composer’ in *Sauve qui peut (la vie)*.

past and the electronic medium through notions of recomposition, as the dynamic life of the listener is continually challenged and reformulated anew.

4.1 *Lettre à Freddy Buache: the Buache-Boléro mechanism*

Lettre à Freddy Buache was originally commissioned to celebrate the anniversary of the city of Lausanne but instead the spectator is presented with the ‘failed’ film that fell short of expectation.⁸ Ravel’s *Boléro*, the backbone of this film, takes centre-stage, a piece made famous in the cinema by Blake Edwards’s comedy *10* (1979), in which it gained status as perfect ‘background’ music. The *Boléro* premiered at the Paris Opéra in 1928 and in the following decade twenty-five recordings were made.⁹ Godard’s appropriation of Ravel’s most popular and most commercialized orchestral work shifts the significance of the music from background to foreground in a way that enriches the filmmaker’s serious musings on the time of documentary and the time of fiction, the music becoming, ironically, a sort of obscure mechanism of thought. *Lettre à Freddy Buache*, dedicated to the German director Ernst Lubitsch and the American documentary filmmaker Robert Flaherty, is composed of images of the cityscape, of people walking in the streets of Lausanne and images of Godard himself, silently operating a tape deck and a record player in the studio.

During the film, the music is caricatured as Godard reminisces about his journeys through the city. The vertical ‘rises’ and ‘falls’ of Lausanne’s infrastructure are associated through the camera movement with the playful glissando slides in the *Boléro*. The freer Phrygian harmonies of the more sensual and exotic melodic material are at one point synchronized with the sudden furtive sprint of a passer-by, as the struggle between the precarious, libidinous human body and the de-sensitized actions of the machine plays out. At times, we are led by the erotic energy in the unrelenting line of sound (the familiar ostinato-machine in the *Boléro*), while at other times we are required to take charge and perform our own coaxing letter of digressions through our active auditory relationship with the images. In his study of inscriptive processes through the figure of the line, Douglas Kahn focuses on avant-garde music and sound practices from the late 19th to the mid-20th century, to

⁸ *Lettre à Freddy Buache* was co-produced by Sonimage and Film et Vidéo Production Lausanne.

⁹ Mawer, ‘Ballet and the Apotheosis of the Dance’ in Mawer (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Ravel*, pp. 140-61 (p. 155). For a detailed study of Ravel’s *Boléro* see Chapter 7, ‘Spain, machines and sexuality: *Boléro*’ in Mawer, *The Ballets of Maurice Ravel*, pp. 215-48.

expose lines not merely as traces and residues but as intensifications. They function, he writes, as reservoirs that both store and suppress noise and in some cases form part of a highly complex system such as the musical score. Kahn affirms: ‘The line is a point where the meeting of *audio* (“I hear”) and *video* (“I see”) has been particularly conspicuous.’¹⁰ The line may function as a boundary that separates, or it may signify inclusion, excess or silence. The margin between extramusical sound and music, one that became so pertinent toward the end of the 19th century in the fields of science, acoustics and Western art music, is a notion brought to the fore in the *Boléro* through key musical devices such as the glissando and the ostinato mechanism.

One of the key rhythmic features of the music is the clockwork precision and regularity provided by the ostinato figure that if slowed down or sped up, would ruin the rigorous process, thus shattering the mechanical illusion.¹¹ Throughout the video we see the sound technician (Godard himself) busy at work but his speech is never synchronized with his body and his face remains inexpressive. The images of Jeannot (Godard) at the end of *Numéro deux*, lying on his arms with his exhausted hands grasping the sound-mixer, finally defeated by the fragmentary energy of the electronic medium, have been fully revitalized in *Lettre à Freddy Buache*, for in this film Godard silently and cunningly takes full control of the sound machinery. He sits with headphones covering his ears, as we witness the ‘live’ physical performance of a body, listening assiduously and operating the music from the enclosed space and alternative time zone of the studio.

The play of imitation and aesthetic conceit runs at full throttle in this film. Godard exploits Ravel’s composition, famous for its presentation of extreme control and its subtext of erotic desire and death, in a way that shrewdly fixes our attention, through the *Buache-Boléro* mechanism, on another endangered mechanical body: cinema. Radically diverse influences constitute the huge tension that lies at the heart of the music, which swings between mechanical movement, inspired by the noise of modern life, and a thoroughly uninhibited bodily dance. The *Boléro*, originally written for the ballet, was initially entitled ‘Fandango’,

¹⁰ Douglas Kahn, *Noise Water Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1999), p. 72.

¹¹ An ostinato is defined as follows: ‘Ostinato (It.). Obstinate, persistent. A persistent mus[ical] phrase or rhythm. A basso ostinato is a figure in the bass which is persistently repeated.’ See Kennedy and Bourne (eds.), *The Oxford Dictionary of Music*, p. 647.

evoking the racy Castilian and Andalusian courtship dance.¹² The fetishistic power of the *Boléro*, in which the meticulous mechanics of seduction, enchantment and madness are slowly and steadily magnified, is driven by an excess of ritualistic repetition, producing mesmeric feelings of stasis, followed by a calamitous release.

4.2 Handling sound and time

Although we assume that the recording of Ravel's composition derives from the cassette tape inserted at the start, Godard is filmed throughout *Lettre à Freddy Buache* devotedly operating a record player, which at a later point in the film *appears* to coincide with the music heard on the soundtrack. Trickery, forgery and illusion are under the spotlight here as the deceptive surface, the lie of the image and the lost enigma of cinema are boldly presented to us. The passage of time literally unfolds before our ears as the linear temporality of the ostinato drum-beat refuses to give way, while the mobile exploratory camera takes us along a different path, joined by the winding diversions of the voiceover, until we reach the strange otherworldly quality that envelops the stop-motion episodes when the camera searches the gestures of the city's inhabitants for the seeds of fiction.

The fetish object of the phonograph, whose trace dwells in the guise of the LP record, with its spiral groove, hole and stylus, is strongly associated with the desire to capture time itself and illumine the invisible. Kahn expands further:

It [phonography] foregrounded the parameters of *a sound* and *all sound*, presented the possibility of incorporating all sound into cultural forms, shifted cultural practices away from a privileging of utterance toward a great inclusion of audition, placed the voice of presence into the contaminated realm of writing, and linked textuality and literacy with sound through inscriptive practices.¹³

New advancements in sound technology that took place in the 1920s, including developments in phonography and the arrival of sound film, meant that 'dramatically new approaches to sound began to materialize.'¹⁴ This was a crucial period in cultural history and in the history of recorded sound. In his article on the phonograph, Charles Grivel writes

¹² Deborah Mawer, 'Ballet and the Apotheosis of the Dance', p. 156.

¹³ Kahn, *Noise Water Meat*, p. 70 (original emphasis).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

that the marvel of reproduction has forever been entangled with notions of rapture, repetition, horror and deformation. Through a study of six essays on the phonograph, Grivel highlights how the cold unaccented ‘soulless breath’ that vacantly mumbles into the ear of the listener, enticing and devouring its victim, leaks out from this cannibalistic ‘animal machine’ of the phonograph that splits apart body from voice.¹⁵ In his study of electronic music, Emmerson notes that from the mid-19th century to 1910, three major ‘acousmatic dislocations’ took place, encompassing time, space and mechanical causality, catalyzed by the inventions of recording, the telephone, radio and electronic synthesis.¹⁶ The fracturing of body and voice is on display throughout this audiovisual *letter*. We alternate between images of Godard listening in silence to the *Boléro* in the dark shell of the studio, and images of the rough urban terrain outside that in conjunction with Godard’s sinuous, disembodied speech, create a sort of figurative vocal ‘body’.

Ravel’s inhuman *Boléro* generates a vast illusion of stasis through the use of the relentless ostinato figure. In the original composition this illusion is dramatically shattered during the climactic ‘breakdown’ that occurs in the final six bars. The *Boléro*, a work Ravel himself described as ‘orchestral tissue without music’,¹⁷ stands in one sense as the musical epitome of the celluloid strip and in another, as Mawer fittingly asserts, as ‘a stark twentieth-century photograph’.¹⁸ In his writing on the *punctum* in *La Chambre claire*, Barthes refers to the overpowering immediacy, agitation and emotion generated from the most banal of details in a photograph, as well as the resulting disorientation experienced by the spectator, which he connects later in the book to an awareness of time passing and ultimately to an awareness of death.¹⁹ These qualities are articulated silently, musically and visually in *Lettre à Freddy Buache*, especially during the stop-start sequences in the closing moments of the film.

The objects of sound reproduction that dominate the studio shots call up the revelatory moment in Villiers de l’Isle-Adam’s *L’Eve future* (1885) when the inventor (a fictional

¹⁵ Charles Grivel, ‘The Phonograph’s Horned Mouth’, trans. by Stephen Sartarelli in Kahn and Whitehead (eds.), *Wireless Imagination*, pp. 31-61.

¹⁶ Emmerson, *Living Electronic Music*, p. 91.

¹⁷ See Mawer, *The Ballets of Maurice Ravel*, p. 219.

¹⁸ Mawer, ‘Ballet and the Apotheosis of the Dance’, p. 161.

¹⁹ Barthes defines the notion of the *punctum* as a piercing arrow: ‘car *punctum*, c’est aussi: piqûre, petit trou, petite tache, petite coupure – et aussi coup de dés. Le *punctum* d’une photo, c’est ce hasard qu’en elle, *me point* (mais aussi *me meurtrit*, une poigne).’ See Roland Barthes, *La Chambre claire: Notes sur la photographie* (Paris: Éditions de l’Étoile, Gallimard, Le Seuil, 1980), p. 49 (original emphasis).

'Edison'), shows off his *court métrage*, which he projects with a powerful 'lampascope'.²⁰ This is the story of the android Hadaly, whose soul is electric and whose lungs are made from the golden cylinders of a phonograph.²¹ In a section of the novel entitled 'Danse macabre', we find an epigraph from Baudelaire's poem 'Confession' from *Les Fleurs du Mal*, in which Baudelaire's own 'Danse macabre' is published. An inspired vision of cinema unfolds in this part of Villiers's novel, as the inventor shows Lord Ewald a short film of Evelyn Habal dancing a fandango. When she suddenly begins to sing, her stiff, flat and unattractive voice soon transforms her spectacular image into something monstrous:

La vision, chair transparente miraculusement photochromée, dansait en costume pailleté, une sorte de danse mexicaine populaire. Les mouvements s'accusaient avec le fondu de la Vie elle-même, grâce au procédé de la photographie successive, qui, [...] peut saisir dix minutes des mouvements d'un être sur des verres microscopiques, reflétés ensuite par un puissant lampascope. [...] Soudain une voix plate et comme empesée, une voix sottie et dure se fit entendre; la danseuse chanta l'alza et le ollé de son fandango.²²

Villiers thus privileges the ear, emphasizing the dangerous and delusional act of trusting the attractive reality that lies before our eyes. This is precisely the passage quoted by André Bazin in his essay 'Le Mythe du cinéma total', in which he refers to this astonishing vision of the dancer captured by Villiers just a few years before the real-life Edison began investigating the possibility of connecting the phonograph with photography to produce motion pictures.²³ The seductive movements of the dancer come undone through sound, as her lacking voice shatters the fantasy of perfection that the idealistic Ewald sadistically craves. In Godard's *eleven-minute* film, this fundamental lineage that charts the coordination of sound and image is humorously staged, speedily taking us back through cinema's anatomical history to its birth.

²⁰ John Anzalone notes that in Jacques Noiray's 1982 study on the image of the machine in the French novel (1850-1900) the machines in Villiers's novel are described as 'objets poétiques', rooted in the imaginary. See John Anzalone, 'Danse macabre, ou le pas de deux Baudelaire-Villiers: essais sur un chapitre de *L'Eve Future*' in John Anzalone (ed.), *Jeering Dreamers: Villiers de L'Isle-Adam: Essays on L'Eve Future* (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Editions Rodopi B. V., 1996), pp. 117-25 (p. 119).

²¹ Mulvey describes Hadaly as a 'figure of transition, which will mutate into the beautiful woman typically featured in the magic shows of Georges Méliès, living but subject to the mechanical tricks of the cinema.' Mulvey cites Annette Michelson's analysis of Hadaly, whom Michelson defines as 'the phantasmatical ground of the cinema itself'. See Laura Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 2006), p. 49.

²² Villiers de L'Isle-Adam, *L'Eve future* (Lausanne: Éditions L'Age d'Homme, 1979), p. 160.

²³ André Bazin, *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma ?*, 19th edn (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2010), pp. 22-3.

John Anzalone suggests that the process of unveiling, which traditionally plays a vital role in the shaping of narrative structure, is symbolically enacted through the death-dealing ‘undressing’ of the bewitching dancer in this part of Villiers’s novel, whose costume falls apart, thereby spoiling Ewald’s scopophilic pleasure and undermining his controlling gaze: ‘Toute l’intrigue du roman – si mince qu’elle puisse nous paraître par ailleurs – est donc déclenchée, en quelque sorte, par une danse, ce mouvement de séduction qu’Edison a capté sur sa « longue lame d’étoffe gommée, incrustée d’une multitudes de verres exigus... »²⁴ Yet Godard surreptitiously omits the climactic collapse of the *Boléro*, when the mechanism goes awry and thus literally and figuratively *finishes off* the piece. The process of unveiling is spoiled, for Godard short-circuits the goal-directed motion of the mechanical ostinato, undermining the allure of its fatal end, deflating its narrative drive and rechanneling the spectator’s musical desire in the process. *Lettre à Freddy Buache*, Godard’s *billet-doux* to cinema, spins us at a high rotation speed, from the materiality of the real world into the poetic object of the record player and slowly and sensuously, through myth and fantasy, onwards.

4.3 Banality, trickery and enchantment

As the film unfolds, it becomes apparent that Godard’s ‘straight-forward’ *letter* of commemoration, in which the clockwork motion of the *Boléro* plays a lead role, works through various strands of a story about cinema’s sound history and the temporal developments that ensued, while subtly highlighting key components of the electronic medium, including the process of writing, the chaotic waveform of noise and the equal status of audio. The film begins in the shielding cocoon of the studio and we are straightaway presented with fragments of a body. We see the anonymous hands of a technician delicately handling the mixing console and we hear Godard’s soft voiceover affectionately addressing the eponymous recipient ‘Cher Freddy’, who at that time was the director of the Cinémathèque Suisse. The image cuts to another shot of the technician’s arms adjusting the film reel while the voiceover continues, joined here by the background sounds of cars speeding past, accompanied by the off-frame dialogue of Godard disputing with Swiss police. The next cut takes us to a close-up of a tape machine as Godard alludes

²⁴ Anzalone, ‘Danse macabre, ou le pas de deux Baudelaire-Villiers’, p. 118.

to the fast-approaching demise of cinema. The technician's giant hand quickly flicks the switches, puts a cassette into the tape deck and a recording of Ravel's *Boléro* commences.

As Yvonne Spielmann reiterates in her study of the electronic medium, since the raw material of video is noise, the 'audiovisuality' of the medium dictates that the electronic signal can be produced both aurally and visually.²⁵ The equal status of audio and the visual image in the electronic medium, and the fundamental process of writing that translates audio and video signals into vertical and horizontal scan lines, reminds us of the close tie between sound, writing and the desire to capture and store time. Owing to new developments in electricity and the telegraph, time preservation was being extensively examined in the second half of the 19th century. Indeed, as Trond Lundemo asserts, graphic notation and the materiality of sound are fundamental aspects of the medium of video, which shares its past, like cinema, with the sound technologies of the telegraph and telephone: 'The phonograph relates to the recording and "storage" principles of the video technology, whereas the "direct transmission" potential of the video signal is prefigured in telegraph wires and phone calls.'²⁶ In *Lettre à Freddy Buache*, the mobile camera functions as if to transcribe the voice of Godard, who sits behind his mimesis machine playing the part of the inventor Edison, as an imprint, a vocal trace or sound signature, etched into the lines, jagged contours and shapes in the images. The texture and tone of his voice float freely with the more lyrical images of trees swaying in fields, while at other times his speech is absorbed by the hypnotic ripples in still close-ups of water.

The shots in semi-darkness of Godard operating the studio equipment signify a safeguarding of what Emerson terms the '*tactile relationship* to sound production' that soon became a 'paradise lost' when computers, sequencers and more advanced samplers re-defined the nature of 'live' performance in the 1980s.²⁷ Emerson's provisional definition of 'live' in the context of electronic and acousmatic music is this: "'Live" will here mean: The presence of a human performer: who takes decisions and/or makes actions during a performance which change the real sounding nature of the music'.²⁸ The performer may

²⁵ Spielmann, *Video: The Reflexive Medium*, p. 8.

²⁶ Trond Lundemo, 'The Dissected Image: the movement of the video' in John Fullerton and Jan Olsson (eds.), *Allegories of Communication: Intermedial concerns from cinema to the digital* (Rome: John Libbey Publishing, 2004), pp. 105-21 (p. 108).

²⁷ Emerson, *Living Electronic Music*, pp. 91-2.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

produce sound mechanically or on electronic substitutes but equally, Emmerson writes, s/he might not cause the sound but may influence it through electronically mediated interfaces. Furthermore, acousmatic music created in a studio and then projected via a loudspeaker system also constitutes a 'live act'. Emmerson also emphasizes that electroacoustic composers sometimes create deliberate ambiguity for audiences by manipulating the cause-effect patterns that link visible gesture to sound production.

Although we are here concerned with a short audiovisual work and not an 'authentic' electroacoustic composition, Godard's film certainly broaches questions of appearance and deception through sound production. As we shall soon see, the performative 'event' of the film could be reduced to the magic moment when we see Godard adjust the record lever and stylus in order to turn over the record. We see the human gesture and hear the result, yet the 'imaginary relationship' cannot be ruled out, for we are never entirely sure where the music in *Lettre à Freddy Buache* emanates from; is it from the cassette player, the record player or from somewhere else entirely? However, as Emmerson states: 'what sounds causal is effectively causal.'²⁹ The listener's perception of and belief in a causal relation is, therefore, what matters most, whether s/he has been duped by appearance or has indeed perceived the 'real' source.

In *Lettre à Freddy Buache*, the inviting pared down voice-mask of the outside world, composed of natural elements (stone, water, trees), man-made objects (trains, buildings) and people, is made to resonate uncomfortably with the interior images of Godard listening to and 'playing' the music in the mysterious studio space of unstable imaginary relations and potential secret truths. During the film, Godard sets out his scientific method, which he compares to that of Bonnard and Picasso. He aims to capture, using three basic shots, the descent from green to blue, passing through grey (the 'middle shot' of stone).³⁰ Godard provides a brief history of the city, referring to the Lausanne near the mountains and the Lausanne near the water, stating that the 'periphery' and the 'centre' have exchanged places, to form a new spatio-temporal configuration. This is indeed what has happened, for

²⁹ Emmerson, *Living Electronic Music*, p. 93.

³⁰ Richard Morris compares what he terms the 'algebraic formula' that Godard deploys to structure *Lettre à Freddy Buache*, which is based on three co-ordinates of colour and space, with the approach pursued in the earlier *Scénario vidéo de Sauve qui peut (la vie)*, in which the fiction is generated from three co-ordinates of speed and their poetic offshoots: *l'enfer*, *le milieu* and *au-délà*. See Morris, "'To Realise the Ideal'", pp. 1-4.

when the *Boléro* enters [01:38], the composition has already past the halfway point.³¹ The opening is omitted, along with the catastrophic conclusion, defined by Mawer as the ‘ultimate gesture’,³² triggered by the sudden transposition of the whole piece up a major 3rd (a lurching movement that has been associated symbolically with a flicked switch or pulled lever).³³

During one sequence, the camera pans over the outside of a building, passing a window with warped blinds, serving to echo visually the lines and contours in other images of city-



Figure 1 i, ii: stop-start motion, fluid pans and slanted lines [03:26], [04:17].

dwellers as they file past. Through this faint patterning of visual tension, a gradual smudging of perspective results as we move to and fro between straight geometrical structures and the curved contours of the body (see Fig. 1 i, ii).³⁴ The sense of building drama and anxiety in the *Boléro*, and the connotations of war, sex and death, are powerfully conjured by the music’s painstaking and obsessive repetitive structures. The contrasting temporal patterns (duple versus triple) between the opening melody and the snare-drum ostinato set up, as Michael Lanford has demonstrated, an entrancing, fantastical, and tension-inducing mixture of enchantment and mechanism.³⁵ In this orchestral work, the

³¹ The *Boléro* enters in *Lettre à Freddy Buache* at Fig. 9⁺³ in the score. See Maurice Ravel, *Bolero* (Paris: Durand & C^{ie}, 1929), p. 23.

³² Mawer, *The Ballets of Maurice Ravel*, p. 221.

³³ Mawer, ‘Ballet and the Apotheosis of the Dance’, pp. 156-60.

³⁴ All images are taken from *Lettre à Freddy Buache*, dir. by Jean-Luc Godard (Éditions du Centre Pompidou, 2006) [on DVD], included in Brenez et al. (eds.), *Documents*.

³⁵ Michael Lanford, ‘Ravel and “The Raven”’: The Realization of an Inherited Aesthetic in *Boléro*’ in *The Cambridge Quarterly*, 40:3 (2011) <doi:10.1093/camqtly/bfr022> [accessed 30.04.2013], 243-65 (p. 255). Lanford explores the connection between Ravel’s *Boléro* and the ‘Poe aesthetic’, claiming that the aesthetic ideologies showcased in Edgar Allan Poe’s short essay ‘The Philosophy of Composition’, in which Poe draws upon his own poem ‘The Raven’, play a fundamental role in Ravel’s *Boléro*. The bewitching, pleasurable

instruments are not permitted to sing out expressively but are exploited to imitate machinery.

The *Boléro* is a composition built upon two melodies that repeat nine times, forming a vast crescendo, as the whole structure moves from high C to low C down the octave. Mawer asserts: ‘the piece is not concerned with organic growth but with the phased depression of a lever, stopping only at inevitable mechanical failure. Its basic plan comprises two related, repeated melodic materials (AABB) of thirty-four bars’ duration’.³⁶ She notes that Ravel himself likened the two main themes of the piece that alternate rationally throughout, to the links of a chain, as well as to a *chaîne* (an assembly-line). In the build-up to Godard’s disfiguring act (a pastiche of mechanical failure) when the music stops as he turns the record over, the film itself manufactures a mini-climax. A miniature crescendo is crafted in cinematic fashion, beginning when the camera pans from right to left over the outside surface of a building, over the thick red, dusky letters ‘A’ then ‘R’. The camera then



Figure 2 i, ii: encoding messages into the image [07:30], [07:50].

continues to travel upwards, catching sight of the word ‘composition’, framed by several chimneys (see Fig. 2 i, ii). Godard is here playing with the concept of the musical cryptogram, when composers encoded messages into their compositions by using the letters names of musical notes, often to form encryptions of their own name or the names of friends. Shostakovich’s personal DSCH motto (his initials in German musical notation) is a famous example, as are Ravel’s own cryptogrammic compositions (*Menuet sur le nom*

‘pivot’ of Poe’s poem (the refrain ‘nevermore’), which spirals ‘from wonderment to horror’, is adopted by Ravel, as Lanford’s analysis suggests, through the distinctive figure of the descending tetrachord (traditionally linked with feelings of sorrow and death). See Lanford, ‘Ravel and “The Raven”’, pp. 259-60.

³⁶ Mawer, ‘Ballet and the Apotheosis of the Dance’, p. 156.

d'Haydn and *Berceuse sur le nom de Gabriel Fauré*).³⁷ Godard objectifies Ravel's signature during this sequence by lingering over the red letters 'A' then 'R', the camera moving like a needle on a stylus, retracing the graphic notation in reverse.

In this section of the film, the slow lithe movement of the camera, accompanied by our tricky voiceover guide, soon changes direction, moving like writing from left to right and smoothly traversing the stony surfaces. The camera moves steadily closer to the hard, grainy rock face, until we leave the jagged terrain behind altogether and plunge into a still close-up of water, before returning to the recording studio in preparation for Godard's aural edit; his own 'soggetto cavato' (a subject carved from words) to render homage to Flaherty, Lubitsch and of course Ravel, inscribed manually, through the illusive functioning of the LP record, into the sonic support (the *Boléro* vertebrae) of the film.³⁸ Godard's elliptical speech, having accompanied the camera over various circles, lines and rocky surfaces, loses itself in the vague background din, and in the strident tones of the *Boléro*. This fluid screen-space unites for a moment with the pure form of cinema as we recall the final sequence in *Pierrot le fou* when the camera pans, from left to right, past rocks and black smoke to find a serene image of a line of sea, sky and a patch of white light, accompanied by the lovers's whispered utterance: 'éternité'.

In *Lettre à Freddy Buache*, Godard's love letter to cinema, the solid and eternal 'middle shot' of *bruit-gris*, like the silent fact of the void at the record's centre or the messy *foule* of urban life, throws up new life from tactics of displacement that pervade this work. A percussive pattering of consonants leads us gently into the liquid stasis and ambiguous fullness of this visual pause, which precedes the cut to the studio (we hear an alliterative flurry of 'pierre', 'remplacer', 'paysage', 'échapper', 'esprit', 'pierre des rochers', 'pied'). This full-screen image of rippling water, soon echoed by the spinning record, is a pure form that absorbs Godard's deterritorialised vocal tones, implying a transition to a new temporal order.

³⁷ The process of communicating secret messages visually and aurally has played a key role in many of Godard's films. For example, in the Sonimage film *Ici et ailleurs*, electronic screen text was embedded, for the first time in Godard's oeuvre, into the surface of the image. This process was advanced in *Sauve qui peut (la vie)*, where the haunting accompaniment of the live soprano solo was filtered through the electronic synthesizer, and in *Histoire(s)* through the intricate audiovisual word-plays.

³⁸ Mawer describes Ravel's *Menuet sur le nom d'Haydn* and *Berceuse sur le nom de Gabriel Fauré* as examples of 'symbolic objects of homage', after the Renaissance technique of 'soggetto cavato'. See Mawer, 'Musical Objects and Machines', p. 52.

In the context of early video, Christine Ross inadvertently invokes some of the stylistic features heard in the *Boléro* (the circular patterns, the pulsing bass, the counter-rhythms and the monotonous repetitions) in her discussion of the treatment of time in the work of certain video artists. Early video was concerned, she writes, with exploring the *making* of time and artists used the medium to disturb the oppressive temporal structures dominating contemporary society, namely acceleration and linearity. For example, Ross demonstrates how the video artist Bill Viola uses the aesthetic strategy of expanded time in his video productions to emphasize seemingly uneventful actions, to challenge viewing habits and to counter the fast pace of modern life where time is scarce, efficiency is overvalued and sensitivity, concentration and contemplation are pushed aside.³⁹ The slow pensive camera style that flourishes during these sequences of Godard's audiovisual *letter*, accentuates the urgent need, as he declared at the start, to film in the right light, to slow down and take the time to see, hear and remain attentive and receptive to the world outside.

The tension that lies at the heart of the *Boléro*, namely the contradictory bind of mechanical beauty, imprisoning repetition and free bodily expression, is one that Godard and Miéville investigated in their Sonimage television series in the late 70s. Witt deduces that if *À bout de souffle* is credited as Godard's short-lived 'manifesto of cinematic modernity' that privileges outbursts of corporal expression, in the early 1980s, when the 'economic domination and aesthetic infiltration by television' was taking its toll, cinema itself had undergone irreversible changes:

the cinematic and corporal discontinuities revealed by the videographic anatomy of the body in *France/tour* interrogate the form, nature, and existence of filmmaking in the age of television and 'neo-television' (satellite, cable, VCRs). By identifying and collating moments of resistance, Godard and Miéville open a gap through which a mature form of cinema can pass.⁴⁰

The deadening programming grid of television was imitated and subverted in *France tour détour* and speed alteration became a powerful tool of resistance. As Witt has underscored, occasional unprompted outbursts of emotion and lyricism in Godard and Miéville's two series for television, often expressed through dance or music, conveys a sense of optimism

³⁹ Christine Ross, 'The Temporalities of Video: Extendedness Revisited' in *Art Journal*, 65:3 (2006) <doi:10.2307/20068483> [accessed 10.09.2012], 82-99 (p. 84).

⁴⁰ Witt, 'Altered Motion', p. 212.

in the medium.⁴¹ To a similar end, in his cultural critique of television, Raymond Williams suggests that new ways of looking can be elicited when we mute the sound, freeing our attention and thus permitting us to perceive inconsequential arbitrary effects that constitute television's most exciting possibilities: '[w]hat can then happen, in some surprising ways, is an experience of visual mobility, of contrast of angle, of variation of focus, which is often very beautiful. I have known this while watching things as various, in their overt content, as horse-racing, a street interview, an open-air episode in a play or a documentary.'⁴² At times in *Lettre à Freddy Buache*, the visual patterning or the subtle rhythm of the camera movement function almost to silence the repetitive music, generating a similar experience of visual mobility as noted in Williams's description, endowing certain images with an ephemeral, elegiac and musical power.

4.4 Gestures of return

The critical studio sequence when the surreptitious aural edit occurs, immediately follows the timeless close-up of water outlined in my previous example. Godard refers to a quotation by Lubitsch, which he had cited during a discussion of the silent film *Nanook of the North*, projected with *Une femme mariée*, *Francesco*, *giullare di Dio* and Bergman's *Persona* as part of a series of talks he gave in Montreal in 1978.⁴³ Godard turns the record over and the music obediently stops. He then cleans the vinyl surface and re-positions the stylus, as if to prepare us for the fast-approaching musical carnage with which the *Boléro* famously concludes (see Fig. 3, i).⁴⁴ Godard declares presciently: 'de partir du... du documentaire, de l'endroit [*Boléro* returns] où on habite, où on a habité. Quelque chose que l'on a connu...'⁴⁵ However, instead of the music continuing logically to its end, what we hear is a pause, a slight sonic distortion as the stylus re-touches the vinyl surface, and a *repetition* of a passage of music heard moments earlier.

⁴¹ Witt, 'Altered Motion', pp. 211-12.

⁴² Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (London: The Chaucer Press, Ltd., 1974), p. 77.

⁴³ For more on this, see 'Chapter 1' in this thesis, p. 20.

⁴⁴ Godard cuts the music at Fig. 18⁴ in the original score, thus preventing us from hearing the composition's catastrophic end. See Ravel, *Bolero*, p. 62.

⁴⁵ Jean-Luc Godard, 'Lettre à Freddy Buache' in *L'Avant-Scène Cinéma*, 323/324 (1984), pp. 68-75 (p. 75).



Figure 3, i: Godard repositions the stylus [09:14].

During the Montreal talk alluded to here, Godard begins to articulate his ideas on the elusive bond between fiction and documentary:

La fiction effectivement est l'expression du document, le document c'est l'impression. L'impression et l'expression sont comme deux moments différents de la même chose ; je dirais l'impression relève de ce moment. Mais, quand on a besoin de regarder ce document, à ce moment-là, on s'exprime. Et c'est de la fiction, mais la fiction est aussi réelle que le document, elle est un moment autre que la réalité.⁴⁶

Godard refers to a moment in Flaherty's film when Nanook goes hunting, raises his harpoon and simply waits (see Fig. 3, ii).⁴⁷ He gives emphasis to the creative potential that lies in the juxtaposition of different 'gestures' in cinema to point up similarities between them (in the case of *Nanook*, the gesture, he suggests, is the 'fact of waiting'), gestures that in the right circumstances might provide the embryonic seeds or the vital 'document' from which a fiction might materialize.

One of the most telling moments in Godard's talk is when he describes Flaherty's *Nanook* in a way that captures perfectly the mood and manoeuvres of *Lettre à Freddy Buache*:

Et *Nanook* c'était, je crois que c'est un sentiment de filmer un drame et filmer le temps où le temps dans le documentaire n'est pas exactement la même chose que dans la fiction; il faudrait tout retrouver dans la fiction. Alors pour moi un film si

⁴⁶ Godard, *Introduction à une véritable histoire du cinéma*, pp. 104-5.

⁴⁷ This image has been taken from *Nanook of the North*, dir. by Robert Flaherty (Special Collector's Edition, 2004) [on DVD].

vous voulez comme aussi bien *Nanook* ensuite... c'était un aspect documentaire... un aspect fragmenté de la réalité avec une certaine dramatisation.⁴⁸

In his essay 'L'Évolution du langage cinématographique', Bazin identifies a certain tendency in silent cinema, present in the work of Eric von Stroheim, F. W. Murnau and Flaherty, that continued with the arrival of sound film. Bazin proposes that it was not the technical revolution of sound film that prompted an aesthetic revolution in cinema, leading to the destruction of 'la « gêne exquise » du silence', cherished and subsequently yearned



Figure 3, ii: Nanook awaits his catch [0:19:00].

for by filmmakers of the silent era: 'mais surtout, qu'il s'agit moins d'opposer le « muet » au « parlant » que, dans l'un et l'autre, des familles de style, des conceptions fondamentalement différentes de l'expression cinématographique.'⁴⁹ Bazin pinpoints two opposing trends in the cinema between 1920 and 1940, namely, there were the filmmakers who believed in the image and there were the filmmakers who believed in reality. Bazin saw in the work of Stroheim, Murnau, Flaherty and Dreyer, the possibility for a new type of film language, founded not on the fragmentary effects of editing but on 'le temps réel des choses, la durée de l'événement',⁵⁰ a language that could find in the realism of sound its 'natural extension'.⁵¹ Bazin claims *Nanook of the North* as a work that privileges the *waiting* ('l'ampleur réelle de l'attente'), a time-span that comes to constitute the substance and object of the image itself, and it is this emphasis on duration, underscored in Bazin's

⁴⁸ Godard, *Introduction à une véritable histoire du cinéma*, p. 103.

⁴⁹ Bazin, *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma ?*, pp. 63-4.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 78. Bazin cites Orson Welles and Jean Renoir as exceptions, for these filmmakers were attentive to composition in depth and to the re-instilling of ambiguity into the structure of an image.

essay, that Godard's own film entertainingly reawakens, primarily through audio – through the simultaneous channels of the repetitive *Boléro* and the meandering voiceover speech.⁵²

In Ravel's newspaper article entitled 'Finding Tunes in Factories', he explores the creative possibilities of noise and the relationship between noise and music, not without alluding to the ominous hum of oppression, isolation and silence that dwells in the factory environment. On the adjacent page in the same newspaper is an article by the critic and documentary filmmaker John Grierson, entitled 'Flaherty's Latest', in which *Man of Aran* and other upcoming releases are discussed. The sections 'Cinema' and 'Music' are printed next to each other in the newspaper, thus juxtaposing typographically the two founding 'images' in *Lettre à Freddy Buache*: Ravel's *Boléro* and Flaherty's pioneering documentary work (see Appendix, Figs 1 and 2). Mawer likens Ravel's article to Pratalla's 1912 'Technical manifesto of Futurist music', commenting: '[a]lthough classified as an article, the style of this piece is more like newspaper journalism. Various subtitles read as soundbites or editorial additions and the ensuing short paragraphs function mainly to whet the appetite rather than to detail a comprehensive aesthetic stance.'⁵³ In the penultimate section of his article, Ravel reveals: 'Honegger, Mossolov, Schönberg, and others have gained much of their inspiration from machinery. My own *Bolero* owed its inception to a factory. Some day I should like to play it with a vast industrial works in the background.'⁵⁴ Godard's short film recreates Ravel's personal dream. A fiction is awakened from the 'indexical sign' of the newspaper source to illuminate cinema's original task and for Godard, its definitive failure: '[e]t il [le cinéma] n'a pas pu remplir sa fonction principale de regard documentaire, qui consistait à assembler diverses formes de regards pour qu'on puisse voir quelque chose'⁵⁵ Yet this is exactly what Godard has achieved in this *court-*

⁵² We should remember that Godard's first film was the short documentary *Opération béton* (1955), almost double the length of *Lettre à Freddy Buache* and shot in black and white. This film focuses on a concrete dam in Switzerland and the passage of time makes itself known as images stream past composed of pulley mechanisms, turning wheels, and viscous lumps of concrete. In an important sense, *Lettre à Freddy Buache* constitutes an affectionate return to the documentary voice, the assembly-line and to the rhythms of labour, alluded to through the *Boléro*, that inhabit the emergence of Godard's first filmic imprint.

⁵³ See Mawer, 'Musical Objects and Machines', p. 59.

⁵⁴ Ravel, 'Finding Tunes in Factories', p. 367. Ravel's fascination with mechanical toys, artificiality, vehicles, high-speed motion and the mechanisation of the factory is well-documented. His father was a civil engineer who designed a railway, patented a steam generator and invented a circus-act involving a somersaulting car described as 'the Whirlwind of Death'. Ravel's brother, also an engineer, wrote in 1940 of the late composer's interest in the construction works at Le Vésinet (Paris), which Ravel referred to as 'the Boléro factory' See Mawer, 'Musical Objects and Machines', p. 59.

⁵⁵ Bergala (ed.), *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard*, II, p. 424.

métrage, which itself stands as a crucial early document, for it looks back to cinema's birth, while simultaneously preparing us for the large-scale experience of *Histoire(s)*, where Godard, rooted in his studio, is steadfastly entwined with his noisy machinery. As Witt makes clear, *Histoire(s)* accentuates the 'documentary root and duty of cinema', for 'Godard is careful to counterbalance his reading of cinema's role as true art and purveyor of myth with an insistence on its inherently and properly *journalistic* function.'⁵⁶ Ravel's article stands as an important archival record that Godard subtly 'projects' via this performative 'event' of sound in *Lettre à Freddy Buache* and his expressive 'gesture of return' thus works to assemble, expose and preserve something fundamental in cinema's history that might otherwise be forgotten.

To conclude this section, we should return to the cultural artifact of the LP record, which reverberates troublingly with the opening shot in Renoir's *La Grande Illusion* (1937), composed of a close-up of a gramophone record and accompanied by the hands and dreamy singing voice of Jean Gabin.⁵⁷ We then hear Captain de Boieldieu call over French officers to help him decipher a grey mark on a reconnaissance photograph. De Boieldieu describes the ambiguous stain in the image as 'a little enigma' to be solved. As Colin Davis notes, the opening of *La Grande Illusion* constitutes an ominous introduction to the rest of the film, warning of the danger and defectiveness of the medium and its incapacity to reliably represent the real world. The mysterious 'enigma' of the image, Davis writes, which, for de Boieldieu signifies 'a failing within the photographic process' leads eventually to death (the death of de Boieldieu who is shot down by the Germans and later killed).⁵⁸ In *Éloge de l'amour*, we again find a poignant image of an LP record, preceded by documentary footage of men observing skeletons from the Holocaust, followed by a cut to black. We see the record spinning, cloaked in darkness as the soundtrack cuts to a grainy recording of the distant mechanized sound of Paul Celan reading a line from his Holocaust poem 'Todesfuge' ('Death Fugue'), a poem haunted through repetition by the music of its title.

⁵⁶ Witt, 'Montage, My Beautiful Care', p. 44.

⁵⁷ Lubitsch's *To Be Or Not To Be* (1942), Chaplin's *The Great Dictator* (1940), Renoir's *La Grande Illusion* and *La Règle du jeu* (1939) are films that Godard has cited as examples of works containing signs of impending catastrophe. As Monica Dall'Asta summarises: 'according to Godard, the death of Captain de Boieldieu in *La Grande Illusion*, 1937, and the death of the little rabbit in *La Règle du jeu*, 1939, were saying something that spectators didn't want to hear, thus revealing their passivity as a form of complicity, for "the forgetting of extermination/is part of the extermination".' See Monica Dall'Asta, 'The (Im)possible History' in Temple et al. (eds), *For Ever Godard*, pp. 350-63 (p. 59).

⁵⁸ Colin Davis, *Scenes of Love and Murder: Renoir, Film and Philosophy* (London: Wallflower Press, 2009), pp. 117-18.

Both music and poetry become signifiers of danger and suffering but also of hope as Godard continues to explore and communicate his thoughts on cinema's 'failure' and its uncertain future. As David Wills suggestively writes of *Éloge de l'amour*: 'Godard suggests by means of the LP, and then with Celan, that there remains, miraculously even, miraculously and torturously, the potential for more music, another lyric.'⁵⁹ If the spinning record constitutes an 'image of music', it is through this image, Wills proposes, that we gain access to 'the music of history', delivered verbally by the poet's own voice to be heard and re-heard. In *Lettre à Freddy Buache*, we are made to confront cinema's history through its prosthetic successor: the electronic medium.⁶⁰ This synthetic replacement is embodied for us by the LP record, an object of reproduction and production that reminds us of the beautiful automaton Hadaly and her phonograph-lungs from Villiers's proleptic novel.

4.5 *Puissance de la parole*: the relations between

In *Puissance de la parole*, words, actions and the electronic montage are supercharged with energy and emotion. Unlike the gentle movements, slick gestures and deviant strategies of *Lettre à Freddy Buache*, this work offers a prismatic tornado of musical montages, unusual sonic conglomerations and vivid visual superimpositions. This is a video brimming with outbursts and overflows of colour and sound. Scraps of music, voice and gesture are treated as fertile visceral matter and trigger capricious leaps of thought. Human thought and emotion migrate from the body and expand into the visual textures and acoustic environments, while speech is stretched and smeared across the evolving soundscape. The extravagant flash shots and skulking electronic palpitations lend the work a visceral, paroxysmal charge. Racing clouds, freeze-frames of rushing water, full-screen images of liquid surfaces, steam pouring from barren rocks, volcanic explosions and billowing purple, pink and red vapours, are juxtaposed with tight grid-like figures and an array of framing structures.

⁵⁹ Wills, 'The Audible Life of the Image', p. 58.

⁶⁰ In a filmed interview with Régis Debray broadcast on Arte in 1995, Debray asks Godard: '[e]st-ce qu'aujourd'hui il y a un organe de substitution possible au cinéma?' Godard responds: 'C'est la télévision, pour employer ce terme. C'est un rein artificiel.' See Bergala, *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard*, II, pp. 423-31.

The video's title derives from Baudelaire's translation of Edgar Allan Poe's poem 'The Power of Words', in which Poe sets out his 'theory of vibrations'. The video is structured around a telephone conversation between ex-lovers Franck (Jean-Michel Irribarren) and Velma (Lydia Andrei) and Franck's gloomy utterance 'Allo' is played at different speeds, evoking the first word allegedly recorded by Edison's phonograph.⁶¹ The text for this dialogue derives from James M. Cain's novel *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, a classical cinema text (Visconti's *Ossessione*, 1942, was based on the same novel). Encircling this drained inner text is an outer metaphysical circle composed of a dialogue between the angels Oinos (Laurence Côte) and Agathos (Jean Bouise), from Poe's eponymous poem.

As the video unfolds, the orgiastic rhythms and lethal vortex of Ravel's *La Valse* sucks us into an absolute embrace with the screen. The simultaneous circular movements that define the waltz as a dance, that is, the formation of a small inner circle performed by the couple, who trace a larger circle as they move around the ballroom, creates an illusion of stasis like a stilled image or a photograph. Sevin Yaraman notes that the centrifugal and erotic force of these circular motions depends absolutely upon the firm eye contact and intense embrace of the couple.⁶² Through the distant memory of a waltz the enthralling vestiges of cinema's past are, in *Puissance de la parole*, recovered, re-examined and configured anew. Indeed, the electronic imagery is flooded with the colour schemes and consistencies of certain key paintings that include Francis Bacon's *Study from the Human Body* (1949) and *Figure in Movement* (1979), and Max Ernst's luxuriant bird goddesses from *Attirement of the Bride* (1940), injecting into the visuals a variety of dream-like, palpable and energetic forms. Just as the tableaux are made to break beyond their frame, the audio arrangement is knocked into an irregularly shaped object by the dissolving temporalities, the sheer pressure and the raw dynamism of the layered extracts of music, sporadically blown through and distorted by the shrill gusts of electronic noise. Ravel's *La Valse*, which swings between balance, order and destructive discord is disfigured and whirls out of control, and Godard's video matches this mass distortion as the intensity is stepped up through speed. The blurry boundaries separating the inner 'cinematic' dialogue between Franck and Velma from the outer 'videographic' dialogue between the angels, serve to mirror the relations staged in

⁶¹ Frank Hoffmann (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Recorded Sound*, 2 vols (New York: Routledge, 2005), I, p. 526.

⁶² Sevin H. Yaraman, *Revolving Embrace: The Waltz as Sex, Steps, and Sound* (Hillsdale and New York: Pendragon Press, 2002), p. 6.

this video between the single frame in cinema and the fluid, undefined space of electronic imagery.

Ernst van Alphen's study of Bacon's paintings offers intriguing ways of perceiving the function of sound in Godard's video. Van Alphen demonstrates that often in Bacon's work, looking-relationships between subjects are avoided and figures are frequently pushed to the margins, being psychologically isolated or imprisoned in confined structures. The visual regime, according to a conventional Western model of representation, is blocked and challenged in Bacon's work, as he questions how images are constructed and viewed, transforming established representations of bodies in the process: 'While the position of the figures in their space obstructs their self experience, the ambiguous identity of the space itself prevents it from providing a clear and comfortable frame. This lack of capacity to frame means that Bacon's spaces do not bestow shape.'⁶³ Confusion between background and foreground, inside and outside, along with the flattening of perspective, constitute significant aspects of the two paintings by Bacon displayed in Godard's video. Moreover, the coarse dissolution of sonic reference points in *Puissance de la parole* generates a similar sense of fragmentation, liquidity and the merging of subjects with their environment, rendered largely through techniques of amplification, mixing and sound masking.

In his analysis of textuality in *Puissance de la parole*, Lundemo underscores the capacity of the electronic medium to scrutinize relations between signs and other art forms. He writes: 'The electronic image puts the complex signifying systems in perspective. The capacity to decompose the movement of the image interlaces the work with its analysis. Video functions like a wedge that opens up the distances between movement and the photogram, between image and writing.'⁶⁴ Near the start of the video, we hear a bewildering mesh of shrieks and screams, as the speech from a film soundtrack is disfigured. The opening of *Puissance de la parole* mirrors *Lettre à Freddy Buache*, for we are presented straightaway with the brute mechanics of cinema. A close-up of some film tape being sped up and slowed down as it crosses the editing table is followed aurally by a quotation from Alfred Van Vogt's science-fiction story *Defence* (1947), read by both a male and female

⁶³ Ernst van Alphen, *Francis Bacon and the Loss of Self* (London: Reaktion Books Limited, 1992), p. 143.

⁶⁴ Lundemo, 'The Dissected Image', p. 115.

voiceover.⁶⁵ The ‘tired’ old mechanism of the filmstrip is set alongside high-speed computerized editing that involves wipes, flash shots, superimpositions and accelerations, to constitute what Dubois proclaims as ‘a video-vibration, like a cardiac pulsing that carries into and echoes throughout the whole universe the infinite marks of thought and speech.’⁶⁶ Godard exposes us to the pure mechanism of cinema and to the unbinding of sound and image in an invasive investigation of communication conducted by the electronic medium, which produces new points of contact between sounds, images, objects and spaces.

This video features the husky vocals of Leonard Cohen and Bob Dylan, along with intrusive electronic distortions, sirens, bleeps and screeches. In his article on the video, Bellour focuses on the amorous telephone *liaison* between the lovers, whose bodies melt into the landscape.⁶⁷ He describes *Puissance de la parole* as the culmination of Godard’s work with words *in images*:

words identified with the material spaces they cross, thought forming one body with the earth, everything in the universe opening double and single fires of emotion. Amorous transports – passion – become transports for word-images between united and separated bodies in a sort of essence of (impossible) Communication...⁶⁸

Godard transfers the sense of longing for contact, unity and spiritual extension that pervades this video into the molecular textures of the audiovisual landscape which tremors with human emotion and plunges the spectator into a multisensory electronic mesh of artistic and technological data.

In video, as Spielmann’s detailed study makes clear, the medium’s ‘audiovisuality’ refers not to a synaesthetic system of relations, nor to an additive process of sound plus image, for sound and image are not separate entities as they are in cinema, where they function together multimedially. In video, she states, the ‘interchangeability of optical and acoustic signals’ denotes the reversibility and ‘the common technical basis’ of the image and sound elements.⁶⁹ In *Puissance de la parole* it is sometimes impossible for the spectator to clearly

⁶⁵ The quotation reads: ‘Within the entrails of the dead planet, a tired, antique mechanism quivers. Tubes radiating a pale, vibrant glow awoke. Slowly, as though reluctantly, a switch in neutral changed position.’ See Raymond Bellour ‘Puissance de la parole’ in Brenez et al. (eds.), *Documents*, pp. 335-6.

⁶⁶ Dubois, ‘Video Thinks What Cinema Creates’, p. 182.

⁶⁷ Bellour, ‘The Double Helix’, p. 196.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 197.

⁶⁹ Spielmann, *Video: The Reflexive Medium*, p. 8.

distinguish a sonic from a visual experience.⁷⁰ This video is awash with speed changes, brimming with quiet but menacing stirrings, and the strident telephone rings at times synchronize, like the lovers's shouted utterances, with the flickering images of hazy light or overflowing clouds, as if the sonic vibrations and agitated human passions are controlling the visual pulsations.

4.6 Sonic textures and audio freeze-frames

The somber opening from César Franck's *Symphony in D minor* (I. *Lento; Allegro ma non troppo*) enters as the video commences but is temporarily overshadowed by the initial flash shot and the first of John Cage's *Sonatas and Interludes* (1946-48) for prepared piano – a work that also featured in Stan Brakhage's *In Between* (1955). The prepared piano involves objects such as screws, bolts, fabrics and wood being placed on the strings, thereby altering the pitch by dampening the tones. The piano, as James Pritchett notes, when prepared in this way, becomes a 'miniature percussion orchestra' able to produce highly intimate, precise and lyrical sounds.⁷¹ In Godard's cutting of this extract, the percussive sound of electronic palpitations, loud running water, birds chirping and crow-like squawks constitute the filmmaker's own additions to Cage's preparations. This initial burst of action is full of abrupt scuffles, splutters and slight de-synchronizations. A spilling-over of thought and feeling is immediately conveyed through a reproduction of Bacon's *Study from the Human Body*, mixed via flash shots with fast-moving white clouds or what could be steam blasting from an active volcano. Franck's repeated utterance ('Allo') is elongated, disfigured and made to stammer, while high-pitched electronic palpitations accompany a flashing grayscale image of a satellite in space. The strident fortissimo descent of the *Allegro non troppo* then begins, hurrying us into Velma's colourful Degar-esque abode. The galactic ringing, electronic screeches and fierce staccato string chords harmonize at the end of this frenetic opening section that culminates in a frenzied array of flash shots.

⁷⁰ A similar effect occurs, for example, in Steve Reich's composition *Drumming*. The visual element is, although not essential, a powerful part of the musical experience. Being able to *see* the physical gestures and rhythmic nuances carried out by the performers, heightens our connection with the visceral dynamic of the work and makes us attentive to the precision of the complex patterns that are gradually constructed.

⁷¹ James Pritchett, *The Music of John Cage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 23-4.

In his article on electronic music, Drew Hemment calls upon Paul DeMarinis's motif of the 'Edison effect' that invokes the perils of objectification, introduced to music and sound when recording became commonplace.⁷² In the eyes of many, this new technology destroyed the spontaneity and uniqueness of musical performance. Hemment replaces this concept with 'the Edison *defect*' that, to the contrary, celebrates the zone of indeterminacy established through the play of slippage and recontextualization facilitated by the technology. Hemment perceives the sonic imperfections that result from 'the *rupture of recording*' as fertile matter, capable of producing 'a new kind of music and another sonic realm'.⁷³ He notes that the '*musical potential*' of sonic disturbance was appropriated by electronic music artists during the 20th century, whose work moved away from 'the *telos* of representational technologies', evolving instead from 'accident, manipulation and reuse'.⁷⁴ The 'audio documents' captured and preserved thanks to the phonograph, inadvertently led to a new '*plastic art*' that involved the reworking and remixing of sonic textures to produce new species of sound and new mixtures of time.⁷⁵ Hemment comments on the types of editing techniques that subsequently developed and freed sound up from the restrictions imposed by sequential past-present-future trajectories:

Sound cut up, looped, reversed. But also, and most interestingly, in wresting the audio image out of time, the recording process freezes and isolates a fragment of time, making possible the capture – and reworking – of a plurality of temporalities encoded in individual sounds or passages of music. In morphing a movement in sound the perception of the very passing of time can be toyed with or subverted; time brought into view by being taken out of focus in a twist of the lens.⁷⁶

The initial metallic chink of Cage's first Sonata is embellished, when *Puissance de la parole* begins, with the delicate sound of trickling water, deepened via the electronic pulsations and extended via the bird chirps to form a dense audio image. These sonorous particles that disrupt César Franck's symphonic statement hit our ears all at once. Then, the echoes of the film voices that rise up from the editing table, mixed with the raspy vocals of Bob Dylan, followed by the male/female voiceover text and accompanied by the snarls of

⁷² Drew Hemment, 'Affect and Individuation in Popular Electronic Music' in Ian Buchanan and Marcel Swiboda (eds.), *Deleuze and Music* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, Ltd., 2004), pp. 76-94 (pp. 79-80).

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 80 (original emphasis).

⁷⁴ *Idem* (original emphasis).

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 79-80 (original emphasis). Hemment borrows the term 'audio documents' from Michael Chanan's study *Repeated Takes: A Short History of Recording and its Effects on Music* (London: Verso, 1995).

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

the film mechanism, immediately form another dense audio image, this time through a staggered vocal cluster.

As this first section peaks, in visual intensity and in volume, we return to earth, re-rooted in an enclosed domestic space. The camera zooms in erratically and dramatically on a fertile clump of vegetation with which Velma's body is confused through the fast visual flickering motion, producing a strange electronic frottage effect.⁷⁷ The vivacity of the visuals that pelt us from the start, and the exuberant musical clusters and low sonic pulsations, stitch and scrunch together through the shared kinetic and rhythmic energy of the flash shots. Godard creates a series of quick-fire sonic events that forge their own path, bound up with but not led by the visuals, climaxing in this opening section with the material presence of the human voice, which then shoots off into electronic infinity.

In the middle part of the video, we hear the quick three-time beat of Leonard Cohen's pop song 'Take this Waltz', which is interrupted prophetically by a short passage from the 1st movement of Beethoven's *Piano Sonata No. 26 in E-flat major*, Op. 81a (the *Lebewohl* Sonata). Indeed, the three movements of the *Lebewohl* are suitably titled 'Farewell' [*Das Lebewohl*], 'Absence' [*Abwesenheit*] and 'Reunion' [*Das Wiedersehen*], for Beethoven composed this work at the time of the French occupation of Vienna in 1809, when many of his friends were forced to leave the city, including his patron the Archduke Rudolph of Vienna, to whom the sonata is dedicated.⁷⁸ Adorno has written fondly of the 'crude' design of Op. 81a, commenting on its 'impulse for extreme humanization and subjectification'.⁷⁹ He detects in the opening movement the *sound* of disappearance through a three-bar phrase that suggests the jangling of horse hooves. This musical motif of disappearance becomes for Adorno a poignant, simple and deeply expressive image of hope (the hope of return): 'Hope is one of the imageless images which are conveyed specifically, directed by music; that is, it is a part of music's very language.'⁸⁰

⁷⁷ The lineage of Villiers's objectified mechanical woman is resuscitated in this video, for Velma's body is deployed throughout as a site of negotiation between the electronic medium and the cinematographic image.

⁷⁸ See William Kinderman, 'The Piano Music: Concertos, Sonatas, Variations, Small Forms' in Glenn Stanley (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Beethoven* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 105-28 (p. 119).

⁷⁹ Adorno, *Beethoven*, p. 174.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 174-5. See also p. 243, n. 295.

Soon after an image of Velma fades, to show a backdrop of a brightly-lit forest, accompanied by the faint notes of the piano sonata, the hazy white shape of her body reappears, striated by lines and shadows. This image resonates with an earlier image of Velma in her boudoir, brushing her hair in a white towel and positioned in front of some



Figure 4 i, ii: re-programming *Study from the Human Body* [10:13], [17:18].

shutters, mixed with a blue-tinted image of rippling water to create a similar striated effect (see Fig. 4 i, ii). Toward the end of the video, just before the explosive finale commences, we see the return of an image that flashed up at the start: Bacon's *Study from the Human Body*, accompanied by the same excerpt from the *Lebewohl*. *Study from the Human Body* constitutes Bacon's first significant adaptation of the serial photography of Eadweard Muybridge, in particular, his photographs of male wrestlers.⁸¹ As Martin Hammer notes, Bacon's work of this period (from 1949) marks a radical break with formal conventions and launches a new type of engagement with the photographic medium, montage techniques, superimposition, as well as with texture and paint application.⁸² Bacon's use of photographic sources, including x-rays, medical textbook drawings and newspaper photographs, to inspire details in his paintings, such as the tiny safety-pin in *Study from the Human Body* and the grainy photographic quality produced by the grisaille technique, resonate with Godard's own mixing of documentary-style images in *Puissance de la parole* (satellite graphics, scientific utensils, a computer keyboard, the stamen of a flower). The human body merges with its surroundings in this painting, generating an unfamiliar and moving appearance of the body through an ambiguous mixture of primal sensation and

⁸¹ Martin Hammer, *Bacon and Sutherland* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 47.

⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 46-8. Hammer also emphasizes Bacon's interest in cinema and his use of film stills. Bacon's grafting of stills of the screaming nanny from the Odessa steps sequence in Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* is a striking example of this.

feelings of detachment, all the while preserving a sense of singularity within this expanse of grey.

Bacon was equally fascinated by Edgar Degas's pastels, especially his use of parallel lines in the series *After the Bath, Woman Drying Herself* (c. 1890-5), composed of photographs of women in contorted positions, as well as monotypes, drawings, paintings and pastels. Indeed, the various pained, isolated postures performed by Velma throughout *Puissance de la parole* function as the redundant leftovers of the painter's tableaux.⁸³ Bacon noted how the striation of form in Degas's pastels works to intensify and diversify the image's reality: 'I always think that the interesting thing about Degas is the way he made lines through the body, you could say that he shuttered the body, in a way, shuttered the image and then he put an enormous amount of colour through these lines. And having shuttered the form, he created intensity by putting this colour through the flesh.'⁸⁴ Godard's electronic re-programming of the use of striation in *Study from the Human Body*, like a visual membrane or screen, captures similar feelings of melancholy, absence, stasis and desire as expressed in Bacon's painting (see Fig. 4).

As Hammer writes of *Study from the Human Body*: 'It can indeed be seen to capture, or trap, an image of a human being passing through – passing through a curtain, but also, we might feel, passing through life, or moving in and out of one's own life.'⁸⁵ The unique associations forged in *Puissance de la parole* between notions of disappearance, expressed aurally in Beethoven's music and evoked visually in Bacon's painting, communicate something precise and articulate on the ephemerality and fragility of the cinema image and of life itself, while fusing feelings of loss with a sense of new hope and possibility in the regenerative potential of the electronic medium. It would be a mistake, therefore, to pass over these audiovisual montages as blithe reproductions of famous works, rendered impotent in their new videographic outfit, since this video is devoted to its task of

⁸³ Throughout the video, Velma is filmed at the sink, drying herself with a white towel, brushing her hair or dressing, surrounded by yellow and greenish shades. These images tease the spectator through such literal references to Degas's studies of female ritual, ciphered through the horizontal and vertical 'writing' of the electronic medium.

⁸⁴ David Sylvester, *The Brutality of Fact: Interviews with Francis Bacon*, 3rd edn (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd, 1987), p. 176. The shallow space, photographic quality and the atmospheric smudgy effect in Bacon's *Study from the Human Body* creates a suggestive, mysterious image juxtaposed with the crudeness of flesh, inspired in this case by Degas's crafting of the spine. Bacon describes how in Degas's famous pastel *After the Bath* (1903), the spine almost appears to come out of the skin, which points up the vulnerability of the rest of the body. See *Ibid.*, pp. 46-7.

⁸⁵ Hammer, *Bacon and Sutherland*, p. 231.

producing memory and fearlessly re-instilling past forms of the image in new technological contexts, while embracing the instantaneousness of the medium's present tense. These audiovisual reconstructions gather meaning when read as part of the whirlwind of referencing and reuse evident in *Puissance de la parole* as a whole, where the intensification and diversification comes potently through sound. Through an effect of acoustic striation, through the weight and directness of the dispersed audio flow of voices, music and shrill noises, the *déchets* of past sensations come to recover their aesthetic force in this video-vibration, as the rush of sonic fragments pummel us from new angles.

4.7 A study of a study of the waltz: Ravel and Bacon

Halfway through *Puissance de la parole*, and in the concluding moments, Ravel's *La Valse* sweeps in to disrupt the flow of things, setting in motion the video's eventual self-annihilation. The composer first conceived this work as a 'choreographic' poem for the stage, providing a 'French perspective on the Viennese waltz.'⁸⁶ The violence, passion and impressive spiraling momentum of the waltz, the invigorating energy and intense concentration it demands, its circular motion and illusions of stillness, are aspects of the dance appropriated through the visual montage in *Puissance de la parole*. Ravel's *La Valse* involves what Volker Helbing terms a 'distancing appropriation', which he defines as 'the ever-alienating incorporation of pre-found musical material into one's own musical language', along with the 'formal conception of the "spiral"' that drives the composition to its end.⁸⁷ This piece can be construed as a study or decomposition of the waltz itself ('a realization of a conception of "the waltz" as a music-choreographic action for the stage'),⁸⁸ and the brutality inflicted by Ravel on the archetypal waltz, which bursts out beyond itself, is also inflicted on the spectator of *Puissance de la parole*, who is pressed into the messy electronic flurries of human passion that inflame this short work.

⁸⁶ Mawer, 'Ballet and the Apotheosis of the Dance', p. 150.

⁸⁷ See Volker Helbing, 'Spiral and Self-Destruction in Ravel's *La Valse*' in Kaminsky (ed.), *Unmasking Ravel*, pp. 180-210 (p. 180). In his analysis, Helbing discusses the structure and 'formula' of this work, which is composed of a series of nine miniature waltzes, modelled on the stylistic clichés that Ravel associated with the genre. For example, Ravel draws upon musical tendencies in waltzes by Johann Strauss, exaggerating particular figures and patterns.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 182.

As Mawer states, music and choreography are closely related through movement and a desire to animate space and time. She writes: ‘Ballet offered Ravel a multi-dimensional projection of dance; visual spectacle of exquisite elegance and beauty; a vehicle for fantasy and opportunity for distancing and detachment’.⁸⁹ Music and choreography are connected in *Puissance de la parole* via the video image, which comes to embody an abstract stage or space. Ravel wrote a scenario for *La Valse*, of which a shortened version was published in the 1921 edition of the orchestral score. The first few lines evoke aspects of Godard’s video montage, which both conjures and undercuts the representational logic in Ravel’s scenario. We recognize, for example, the significant visual element of the swirling clouds and the whirling crowd, as well as the sense of scale and the synaesthetic aspect of the musical-visual crescendo.⁹⁰ The aesthetic of deformation that pervades the music is present in *Puissance de la parole*, as notions of traditional perspective and realistic representation are frequently alluded to and destroyed. Whilst connotations of revolution, violence and disorder in *La Valse* have led critics to interpret this piece variously as an allegory for the Franco-German unrest of 1848, the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, the fall of the Habsburg Empire and the devastation of World War One, Ravel rejected the tragic connotations, allegorical play and notions of parody associated with his composition, highlighting instead its aesthetic qualities and inclinations, namely, the close interaction generated from the building intensity of fragments of sound, light and movement.⁹¹

From the start of *Puissance de la parole*, the complication and disintegration of simple regular time signatures is highlighted through techniques of simultaneity and syncopation. First, we witness Franck’s limp as he shuffles across the garage floor and then later we see Oinos stumble while swaying balletically through a cluster of trees. Oinos’s off-beat movement triggers a flash shot of Bacon’s falling *Figure in Movement*, which is mixed via high-speed visual fluttering with Ernst’s *Attirement of the Bride*. The words of the angels are superimposed over each other as the signals become confused in this spasmodic instance of simultaneity. In the lead-up to Oinos’s trip, the electronic siren becomes unbearably shrill as the illustrative image is rendered redundant through the erasing

⁸⁹ Mawer, ‘Ballet and the Apotheosis of the Dance’, p. 140.

⁹⁰ The scenario reads: ‘Des nuées tourbillonnantes laissent entrevoir, par éclaircies, des couples de valseurs. Elles se dissipent peu à peu : on distingue (A) une immense salle peuplée d’une foule tournoyante. / La scène s’éclaire progressivement. La lumière des lustres éclate au *ff* (B). / Une Cour impériale, vers 1855’. As quoted in Mawer, *The Ballets of Maurice Ravel*, pp. 155-6.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

capacity of sound, matched by the faint sight of white vapour thinning out across the screen, while the silhouettes of Poe's angels appear and disappear within this surface of noise. Bacon's desire to get to the real, raw energy of something by capturing a sense of immediacy and intensity is seized upon by Godard in *Puissance de la parole*. David Sylvester has associated *Figure in Movement* with Bacon's drive to strip something down to its essence. It was, Bacon concurs, 'an attempt to make a figure in movement as concentrated as I could do it.'⁹² Similarly, the primitive rumblings and the catastrophic high-point of Ravel's idiosyncratic Viennese waltz are extracted from their context and integrated into the video in a way that creates micro-motors of extreme force that twirl in and out of the second half of *Puissance de la parole*, returning ferociously at the film's end.

Godard's musical montage flattens out harmonically as the earth-shattering conclusion begins, for the D major key signature of *La Valse* is twisted together dissonantly, like a distorted mirror image, with the dark chords of Franck's Symphony in D minor. Bacon's *Figure in Movement* returns for a brief moment to disrupt the closing credits, where it is displayed with a flashing graphic of volcanic lava, as the climax of *La Valse* thrashes

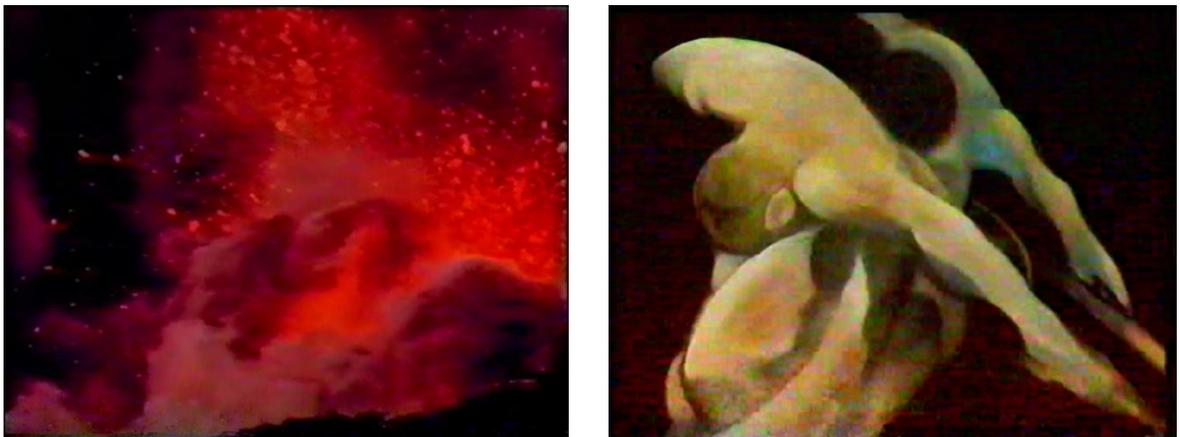


Figure 5 i, ii: Bacon and Ravel: the dazzling finale [24:02], [25:03].

around beneath. In Bacon's original painting we see a falling figure positioned in front of a black panel or mirror, with a purple stain on the floor. As Ernst van Alphen observes: 'The figure is not reflected in the mirror; our gaze at the figure is repeated, not mirrored, in the mirror. Looking itself, not the object in front of the mirror, is reflected.'⁹³ Notions of mirroring, traditional perspective and realistic representation are undermined in this

⁹² Sylvester, *Interviews with Francis Bacon*, p. 168.

⁹³ Van Alphen, *Francis Bacon and the Loss of Self*, p. 63. Van Alphen demonstrates how in Bacon's oeuvre the eye does not reveal but it dissolves, destroys and unmakes the object of looking.

painting. In *Puissance de la parole*, we see only the figure and a section of the black screen behind. Godard revitalizes the crux of Bacon's aesthetic concern by dropping this diving figure into the abnormal surface of the videographic image to question and challenge not just the process of viewing but the process of *listening*, for we are made to confront, at the same time, the fitful vibrations of a disintegrating waltz (see Fig. 5 i, ii).

The textured decal effect of the attendant's lavish headdress in Ernst's painting, through which Bacon's figure's arms glimmer in the middle section of the video, returns in its new electronic guise during the video's final moments through the textured patterns of the explosions of coloured smoke that enact *La Valse*'s demise. Mawer sums up: 'This is a road of no return. Civilized control becomes lost in a hallucinatory, disorientated whirling which approaches the barbaric, and the orchestral waltz is robbed of its very identity: in the penultimate bar, its triple metre mutates into four, heavily accented beats.'⁹⁴ Like the patterns of contrary motion, conflict and inner tension, generated by the freeze-frames of gushing water in *Puissance de la parole*, these culminating images evoke something of Ravel's original piano manuscript for this choreographic poem. The manuscript, as Mawer reveals, includes swirling ink doodles drawn onto the score by the composer himself, thus underscoring the important visual and physical dimension of this piece. She affirms: 'Certainly, up to a point *La Valse* does explore the sheer physicality of dance through the aural domain of music.'⁹⁵ Mawer identifies a similar pictorial effect in an anonymous painting named '*La Valse de Ravel*', printed in 1932 in *Le Courrier musical*. In this painting, a vortex effect is fashioned from thick dark lines and marks, as if the artist has attempted to revive for the eye Ravel's original vision.⁹⁶ The idea of a physicality of dance explored through music dwells in the molecular imagery of *Puissance de la parole*, particularly in the freeze-frame images of flowing water. The water simply congeals for a second as we are confronted with a compelling instance of stasis like an object to possess, before melting back into its original liquid state and running off at high speed. Moreover, by stopping the video image, the spectator can also attempt to capture, after Ravel and the anonymous artist, visual traces of the intoxicating physical force heard in the music.

⁹⁴ Mawer, *The Ballets of Maurice Ravel*, p. 154.

⁹⁵ Van Alphen, *Francis Bacon and the Loss of Self*, p. 152.

⁹⁶ A reproduced image of this painting is printed in Mawer, *The Ballets of Maurice Ravel*, p. 150.

The immediacy afforded by the electronic medium, the simultaneous reception and transmission of the image and its capacity for instant feedback, are features that have attracted criticism by theorists, including Frederic Jameson and Rosalind Krauss, who focus on the medium's dangerous privileging of instantaneity, its neglect of the past, its inability to generate memory, its narcissistic functioning and its production of a 'collapsed present' cut off from a sense of its own history.⁹⁷ Yet, as Ross points out, this view is by no means universal and many artists and critics have embraced video's capacity to produce a flowing present that generates, in the process, a sense of involvement, intimacy and newness.⁹⁸ She notes that the figure of the loop, a central mode of presentation in video, has become 'a key mechanism in the task of addressing the viewer through time'.⁹⁹ Emerson makes a similar observation but concludes a little differently. He suggests that whilst the 'local gesture' of the live performance act has been absorbed into the computer, the body gestures of the live performer return 'in their indicative form of *metre*', produced, for example, via looping techniques that imitate metrical action.¹⁰⁰ He states:

Since the inception of *musique concrète* in 1948, human presence in general and human body sounds specifically have haunted the soundworld. This is not just through the obvious intrusion of the human voice into the discourse, but in reference to the body rhythms of limb, breath and heartbeat, and in the representation of personal and psychological spaces.¹⁰¹

In this video, the repeated acousmatic sound types, including the deep electronic palpitations, the telephone rings, the overlapping voices and the cyclical returns of musical extracts, engage the spectator in an invigorating audiovisual encounter, while fuelling the momentum that preserves and sustains the figure of dance, and the trace of human presence and memory, lost in this technological deluge of movement.

As *Puissance de la parole* terminates, this concentrated sonic block, a synthesis of most of the video's music, turns like a giant prism with the visuals. The spectator is immersed in an acoustic space of abandon, which overwhelms and refreshes our sensory experience. Ravel's appropriation and 'decomposition' of the waltz genre as a model for expressing his musical commentary on movement, is matched in important ways by Godard's own

⁹⁷ See Ross, 'The Temporalities of Video', p. 86.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

¹⁰⁰ Emerson, *Living Electronic Music*, p. 103 (original emphasis).

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

videographic commentary, through subtle references to the fixed frame of the image in cinema, the temporality and audiovisuality of the electronic medium of video and the lingering presence of the photographic domain. As Lundemo asserts:

Decomposition implies an analysis of the image, since its components may be studied in isolation. This necessarily transforms the image, since the freeze-frame in video merely simulates an entity in the cinema, the photogram. The freeze-frame is a short-circuited video movement, where the scanned signal repeats itself continuously, like a scratched vinyl record. This evokes both cinematographic and sound technologies, as well as it puts these elements in relation to graphic writing.¹⁰²

The evocative connection Lundemo makes between the short-circuited movement in the freeze-frame image, the photogram and the scratched record, reminds us of the spatio-visual spectacle of the waltz, specifically, the impression of stasis within movement. Furthermore, we are also reminded of the Schaefferian notion of the *sillon fermé* [the closed groove] and the crafting of sound objects from repetitive looping patterns. The freeze-frame images in this video can be compared also, therefore, to morphed sound objects, there for us to scrutinize, re-play and re-hear.

In *Puissance de la parole*, Godard channels both the human body and the single unit of the frame into the nonfixed forms and dispersed temporalities of the electronic medium to be heard and seen anew. The inhuman power to hear and see beyond the perceivable reference points of reality, is equated with the flexible space and envisioning power of the videographic domain. The ‘angelic vision’ of video, its capacity to actualize, visually and aurally, the invisible micro-variations of movement and thought, functions as a space in which the physical matter of cinema, like Ravel’s waltz, can be decomposed and re-invested with meaning.¹⁰³ In this video, all sonic and visual vibrations expressed by the electronic medium remain connected to both bodily experience and to the rhythms of the material world. The acousmatic condition of the fragments of recorded sound, music and speech works not to alienate us from ourselves but to re-anchor us as listeners and spectators, placing us in a more proximal and alert manner to the screen. The artificial glow that emanates from the musical fragments engage us in a multisensory experience with the particles of speech, noise and with the short-lived glimmers of the still frame, loaded with

¹⁰² Lundemo, ‘The Dissected Image’, p. 118.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, pp. 117-18.

memories of cinema's past. The thrilling shock of sensation generated in this video jerks us out of our usual viewing habits, if, that is, we are prepared to open ourselves to the sonic pleasure of this erratic affective encounter.

4.8 Compose: compute: conclude

In the final chapter of Vilém Flusser's exploration of technical images, he refers to the interrelationship of image and music and states that computer art is veering in the direction of 'sounding images' and 'visible sound' and that visionary power and music have become irreversibly entangled. By this, he means not the literal translation of image into sound (and vice versa) via electronic mixers but, as Spielmann points out, 'the common traits of abstraction in images and music' that signal a tendency toward musicality and can be fully realized only by a non-semantic mathematical-abstract model upon which the numerical computer image is based.¹⁰⁴ Flusser writes: 'The world of music is a composed universe. *Compose* and *compute* are synonyms. We don't need to wait for electronic music to recognize this quality about music: the universe of music is as calculated and computed as that of technical images.'¹⁰⁵ This new universe of technical images in which we are all now submerged is a 'hyperconscious dream world' that, for Flusser, consists of dreamers pressing buttons to generate pictures ('envisioned surfaces') constructed from particles and clear concepts. They are tangible dreams, he adds, that involve no deep insight and are not destined to be interpreted but emanate simply from a superficial world of pure imaginative play.¹⁰⁶

Stretched proportions and feelings of limitlessness are profoundly stirred up in *Puissance de la parole* by the charged musical fragments and strident sonic distortions that, with the mix of celestial and primal landscapes and the fluctuations in speed, remind us of Siegfried Kracauer's description of the deviant close-up in cinema that produces unexpected patterns by isolating and transforming familiar objects: 'skin textures are reminiscent of aerial photographs, eyes turn into lakes or volcanic craters. Such images blow up our environment in a double sense: they enlarge it literally; and in doing so, they blast the prison of

¹⁰⁴ Spielmann, *Video: The Reflexive Medium*, pp. 39-40.

¹⁰⁵ Vilém Flusser, *Into the Universe of Technical Images*, trans. by Nancy Ann Roth (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), p. 164.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

conventional reality, opening up expanses which we have explored at best in dreams before.¹⁰⁷ The overflow of sounds, colours and textures in *Puissance de la parole* leads to the construction of fantastical spaces that warp the common angle of spectatorship.

The ‘yawning emptiness’ of the timeless illusory world that has, according to Flusser, consumed us in the West, is countered, he writes, by our new-found power to calculate, compose and compute the ‘whirring nothingness’, returning us to some sort of concrete experience. However, we can lucidly conclude that, contrary to Flusser’s thesis, *Puissance de la parole* does not embody a sharp binary divide between the frenetic disembodied particle universe and the human sphere, for we remain firmly rooted in the fragile, primitive domain of basic life processes and our memory is awakened as we are invited to explore critical facets of cinema’s past. If the rush of visual, sonic and kinetic stimuli that confronts us signals a crisis of representation, a breakdown in communication, de-stabilizing the position of the viewing-subject in the process, it also encourages the spectator to surrender to an ecstatic state of dissolution by focusing on inner bodily sensation.

In the first part of this chapter, we saw how in *Lettre à Freddy Buache* a sonic wound was carried out ‘live’ on the repetitive *Boléro* with the *objet trouvé* of the record player, which allowed this decentred film to spring to life like a fresh cog in the machine or a dancer freed from the music box. The spectator was enticed into the temporal haziness of an illusion, engendered by a single repeat, and the circulation of power converted us into active desiring listeners, inducing us to participate in and help fashion the performative event of sound. Similarly, in *Puissance de la parole* we saw how Godard’s reuse of the aesthetic of deformation that governs Ravel’s ‘decomposition’ of the waltz, provided the impetus for the dissolution and recasting of familiar forms, spaces and images. We examined instances of sonic disturbance as well as the relationship between the extracts of recorded music and two key paintings by Bacon, which were manipulated and electronically reconstructed. The parameters of human experience were challenged and expanded, while a sense of finality and rootedness was retained, as key aesthetic concerns linked to the status of the image were re-grafted, re-coloured and sounded anew.

¹⁰⁷ Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (Princeton University Press, 1977), p. 48.

Puissance de la parole transports us back in time and it does so through reuse, manipulation and speed alteration, while shuttling or ‘shuttering’ us into the future through the fractured patterning of the electronic medium of video, thereby introducing us to some of the central themes to be studied in Chapter 5. The important status afforded the body and the materiality of sound and speech are paramount to the impact of this video. *Puissance de la parole* and *Lettre à Freddy Buache* help us to actively re-think the relations between different media in imaginative and productive ways through an important process of listening. Indeed, it is primarily through the aural domain, and through an engagement with the inner workings of the music, in combination with both the moving image and the frozen tableaux, that Godard’s audiovisual recompositions bind the image’s past life to its future.

Chapter 5

Listening Through Curves: spatial contexts and auditory experience in *On s'est tous défilé* (1987), *Soigne ta droite (Une place sur la terre)* (1987) and *King Lear* (1987)

In his theorizing of the acousmatic, a term that denotes ‘la réalité perceptive du son en tant que tel, en distinguant celui-ci des modes de sa production et de sa transmission’,¹ Schaeffer poses the pertinent question: ‘si l’on nous présente une bande sur laquelle est gravé un son dont nous sommes incapables d’identifier l’origine, qu’est-ce que nous entendons?’² We hear, writes Schaeffer, an ‘*objet sonore*’ which, severed from its source, can be fully exploited in the acousmatic experience. He adds: ‘L’objet n’est objet *que* de notre écoute, il est relatif à elle.’³ Our curiosity and instinctive desire that prompts us as listeners to identify a sound’s worldly cause is exhausted and rechannelled when a sound is constantly repeated. When we fail to recognise a sound’s source we begin to lose our bearings and through repeated listening we become immersed in the sound itself. Schaeffer affirms: ‘dans l’objet sonore que j’écoute, il y a toujours *plus* à entendre; c’est une source jamais épuisée de potentialités’.⁴ By training our ear we learn to hear differently. By challenging our assumptions about sound, which rely most often upon sight to guide our acoustic perceptions, we begin to recognise the complex experience of listening to sound, as well as our difficulty with describing it. Writing on recorded sound in the context of cinema, Altman makes similar observations. He emphasizes the ‘multiple, complex, heterogeneous, and three-dimensional’ nature of sound,⁵ and describes the production of sound as a ‘material event’ that involves ‘the disruption of surrounding matter’.⁶ Yet, for a sound to be ‘actualized’, Altman writes, to evolve from vibration into ‘the sensation of sound’, it must be registered by a listener.⁷

¹ Schaeffer, *Traité des objets musicaux*, p. 91.

² *Ibid.*, p. 95

³ *Idem* (original emphasis).

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 115 (original emphasis).

⁵ Altman, ‘The Material Heterogeneity of Recorded Sound’, p. 16.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

By focusing on the auditory experiences of two feature-length films made in the late 1980s, the comedy *Soigne ta droite (Une place sur la terre)* and *King Lear*, films too swiftly dismissed by commentators as incoherent, fragmented, fusty and frustrating, I will explore the significance of the weighty contribution made by the radical manipulation of the audio elements.⁸ Whilst Dubois spotlights *Soigne ta droite* and *King Lear* as films that mark the start of a new philosophical-literary phase in Godard's cinema, my analysis will demonstrate how the daring experiments in sound design performed in these works are integral to this intellectual gear change, and they signal important shifts in Godard's work with sound and in the spectator's listening experience.⁹ Although Godard's use of sound and music in these films has been largely neglected by scholars, James Norton, for example, has called for a CD release of the soundtrack of *King Lear*, suggesting that the aural potency of the web of voices, the 'lurking undercurrent of music' and the refreshing sound of waves lapping, generates an overall effect of '3D in sound'.¹⁰ Furthermore, in a new study of *Soigne ta droite*, James S. Williams emphasizes the propulsive power of the soundtrack, specifically the 'sensuous, sensurround wrap and sonic extension',¹¹ generated by the electroacoustic music, for in this film it is music that 'can help restore objects into focus and bring them back to life.'¹²

To aid our comprehension of the more extensive auditory arrangements in *King Lear* and *Soigne ta droite*, I will begin by examining the fast-paced video *On s'est tous défilé*, which will serve as a miniature case study. In this video, accelerations and decelerations of speech and visual movement greet us, as a parade of fashion models file past the camera. Dubois captures the vivacity of this work when he states: 'Godard's work on speed becomes amplified majestically in a new figure of style: the repetitive, blinking effect of super-fast flash shots.'¹³ Following this, I will show how the auditory dimension of *Soigne ta droite* and *King Lear* opens the spectator to new levels of affect and meaning. These films

⁸ *King Lear* has received considerably more critical attention than *Soigne ta droite*, owing to its explicit references to montage, projection, its photographic meditation on the 'fathers' of cinema, as well as its novel casting of a great tragedy of the Western literary canon.

⁹ Dubois, 'Video Thinks What Cinema Creates', p. 182.

¹⁰ James Norton, 'King Lear' in *Vertigo*, 30 (2012)

<http://www.closeupfilmcentre.com/vertigo_magazine/issue-30-spring-2012-godard-is/king-lear/> [accessed 30.04.2013] (para. 9 of 10).

¹¹ James S. Williams, 'Silence, Gesture, Revelation: The Ethics and Aesthetics of Montage in Godard and Agamben' in Asbjørn Grønstad and Henrik Gustafsson (eds.), *Cinema and Agamben: Ethics, Biopolitics and the Moving-Image* (New York and London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), pp. 27-54 (p. 37).

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 36.

¹³ Dubois, 'Video Thinks What Cinema Creates', p. 182.

maintain a powerful audio focus and below the noisiness of disjunction, dissonance and dispersal, they constantly whisper sober thought patterns into the spectator's ear. Their special emphasis on origins and sound distortion draws attention to the creative potential of the acousmatic soundscape, which lacks rootedness, sketching vague shadows and abstract outlines that work to expand our perception of the frames of musical performance.

The performative and subversive dimension of voice will feature prominently in this chapter, as we shift from the excessive, impassioned vocal of Catherine Ringer in *Soigne ta droite* to the veiled voices in *King Lear*, a film hallmarked by Cordelia's transgressive silence.¹⁴ In my analysis of *Soigne ta droite*, I will concentrate on decentred sites of performance, drawing primarily upon Emerson's writing on live electronic music and the relationship between the production of sound, spaces of performance and the active imagination of the listener, to provide an original critical reading of two key vocal performances. In my study of *King Lear*, I will reveal the significant part played by Virginia Woolf's radical novel *The Waves* (1931), a text composed during a complex period of transition in cinema history, namely the arrival of sound cinema. I will place the emphasis on Godard's manipulation of sound texture and speed alteration, examining how Godard *composes with* stereo and slow-motion sound. The incorporation of Woolf's text into *King Lear* has never been taken seriously enough by critics, yet we shall see how her modernist 'voice', in its various guises, serves to expose the vital dimension of sound, hearing, and aspects of spatiality, while drawing our attention to the crucial metaphor of projection.

¹⁴ In her essay 'A New Type of Intellectual: The Dissident', Kristeva lists three types of intellectual dissidents: the intellectual, the psychoanalyst and the experimental writer. She suggests that women and 'the female exile in relation to the General and to Meaning' form another type of dissident: 'Exile is already in itself a form of *dissidence*, since it involves uprooting oneself from a family, a country or a language.' An interesting parallel can be drawn here between the particular matter of the nomadic, subversive and creative nature of the acousmatic condition, especially in its relation to the female voices of Ringer and Cordelia in these films, and the notion of 'dissidence' set out in Kristeva's essay. See Julia Kristeva, 'A New Type of Intellectual: The Dissident' in Kristeva, *The Kristeva Reader*, Toril Moi (ed.) (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp. 292-300 (p. 298) (original emphasis).

5.1 Unusual couplings

i) Rollins on Mozart

On s'est tous défilé, a 13-minute offshoot from an advertising film made by Godard for the Swiss designers Marithé et François Girbaud, establishes from the beginning a relationship between bodies filing past the camera and notions of projection. In her study of this video, Christa Blümlinger works through the various levels of meaning associated with Godard's appropriation of the performative figure of the *défilé*, which represents 'the idea of the passage of the moving, "living" image.'¹⁵ This video comprises a *défilé* of bodies streaming past, thus invoking the term *défilement*, which in the context of cinema denotes the movement of the celluloid film passing through a projector. Blümlinger points out that the wordplay of this video's title (*défiler/se défiler*) conjures not only the military action of marching, or the idea of something passing across the field of vision, echoing the first filmed processions captured by the Lumière brothers, but signifies also an act of undoing, while alluding figuratively to the concept of 'stealing away'.¹⁶ In his analysis of this video, Jean-Louis Leutrat demonstrates how at the start, Godard refers us, through the use of two captions, to the etymology of *angoisse* (anxiety), namely the Latin noun *angustia* that denotes a restrictive or narrow passage (a 'defile').¹⁷ The captions read: 'anxiety, from the Latin *anguista*' and '*défilé*, from the Latin *anguista*'.¹⁸ Through the visual montage, the notion of *angoisse* is connected with ideas of abduction and violence, as well as with the parade of beautiful bodies filing past the camera.¹⁹ Leutrat notes that even the sound of *défi-lé* is meaningful, for it directs us to the word '*défi*' (a challenge) and invokes Godard's theory of cinema's culpability, its failure to record and bear witness to the horror of the concentration camps: its *shirking of duty* (*se défiler*).²⁰

Towards the start of the video, the violin melody from the final movement of Mozart's *Violin Concerto No. 5 in A major*, K. 219 emerges from a sound bath of traffic noise. The

¹⁵ Christa Blümlinger, 'Procession and Projection: Notes on a Figure in the Work of Jean-Luc Godard' in Temple et al. (eds), *For Ever Godard*, pp. 178-87 (p. 178).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 178-9.

¹⁷ Jean-Louis Leutrat, 'The Power of Language: Notes on *Puissance de la parole*, *Le dernier mot* and *On s'est tous défilé*' in Temple and Williams (eds.), *The Cinema Alone*, pp. 179-88 (p. 183).

¹⁸ *Idem* (original emphasis).

¹⁹ Leutrat draws attention to two images in which the word *angoisse* appears. In one of these images we see the silhouette of a woman's neck, which effectively severs the word into two parts ('*an/goisse*'). The various meanings of *défilé*, as a procession and a narrow 'gorge', are associated here with the throat (*la gorge*).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 184.

strict triple time of the Rondo (*tempo di minuetto*) is soon merged with Sonny Rollins's more open, roaming improvisatory jazz melody. Strings, solo sax and traffic noise come together as an image of François Girbaud is arrested and faded in and out, superimposed with an image of a model untying her shoelace. Slow motion and reverse motion are used throughout this protracted 'study' of physical movement [03:20 - 06:10] that centres on these two contrasting images.²¹ Just as the body of the model comes into view, superimposed over Girbaud's profile, the sax melody neatly takes over from the violin to continue seamlessly with the second note of the next phrase. When Girbaud's image reappears, the sax solo fades out but there is no clear-cut break to mark the return of the concerto. The sax timbre gradually becomes infused with the lower string accompaniment of the concerto, generating with the visuals a mesh of sonic and visual lines and textures. This pattern, a kind of musical cross-dressing of tone, style and genre, occurs incessantly until the distant irrational pairing of sax and violin (contrasting instruments from different historical periods) is recontextualised in a new sonic frame and starts to sound harmonious.

The brash sound of machinery returns to overwhelm these shoelace choreographies, creating a space of unformed noise in the heart of the musical arrangement and preventing a stable sense of pulse from being established. Visual collages of lines and curves fill the screen in this section of the video, as the decompositions of the model's movements are continually repeated, her laces resembling floating staves, as if freed from a musical score. The Mozart/Rollins partnership that dominates the first half of the video slowly begins to confuse our perception of time, as the musics fade in and out over an extended period and our attention fixates compulsively on aspects of timbre, surface texture and rhythmic detail in the image. The undulating patterns of recorded music that slide over and under each other throughout this episode start to scoop or beat out a space inhabited by this chunk of violin-sax that having migrated from its various points of origin now flows as one. Sonic particles are wrested from the extracts of music, the inner tensions in the music are re-weighted in their new mixed state and tone colours are made ambiguous, honing the attentiveness of the spectator's ear in the process. Indeed, although these sequences are not stripped of the contradiction that runs through the video that binds exciting instances of modification and regeneration through manipulation of sound, speed and rhythm to notions

²¹ All timings and images from this video are taken from *On s'est tous défilé*, dir. by Jean-Luc Godard (Éditions du Centre Pompidou, 2006) included in Benez et al. (eds.), *Documents* [on DVD].

of reification and violence, the interesting rhythmic nuances and strange tonal mixtures keep our senses alive and alert. With the intrusive spacing of street noise, they create a distinctive and disorienting aural experience that never quite settles.

ii) Cohen on Cohen

A pertinent point of reference on physical movement and rhythm can be found in the writings of the Swiss composer and music educator Émile Jaques-Dalcroze. His mission revolved around the concept of ‘moving plastic’, which he sets out in his essay ‘The Technique of Moving Plastic’ (1924). Jaques-Dalcroze sought primarily to explore the possibility of creating ‘new habits of motion’ and ‘fresh combinations’ of physical movement.²² He states that the restrictive customs and etiquette that we adopt in everyday life, including posture control, an elegant walking style and tight-fitting clothes, are factors that prevent the body from truly expressing itself through its natural spontaneity.²³ Jaques-Dalcroze’s study of kinaesthetics attempted ultimately to create a kind of (silent) plastic music of gesture. The preparatory studies listed in this essay, which, as the author states, ‘form the basis of the new education “par et pour le Rythme,”’ involve seventeen different inquiries into bodily motion.²⁴ In Godard’s video, it is through the superimposition of two Leonard Cohen tracks, the hymnal *If It Be Your Will* and the enigmatic *Dance Me to the End of Love*, through the clashing time signatures and harmonies, and through the rhythmic flash-shots and intoxicating speed changes, that a sort of dream-sequence is conjured, lighting up aspects of Jaques-Dalcroze’s study in the rather different context of a supple videographic ‘body’, composed of electronic lines and mutative curves. For example, under Jaques-Dalcroze’s list of proposed enquiries we read: ‘14. Relations of the voice (speaking or singing) with walking and gesticulations’ and ‘16. The study of the relations between two associated human bodies, harmonization of their gestures or gait. The stopping of one individual set against the activity of the other, the opposition of two like or unlike activities

²² Émile Jaques-Dalcroze, ‘The Technique of Moving Plastic’, trans. by F. Rothwell in *The Musical Quarterly*, 10:1 (1924), 21-38 (pp. 22-3).

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

²⁴ Jaques-Dalcroze’s theory of education relies upon ‘the fundamental laws of music’ and involves the development of rhythmic instinct, the regularization of movement as well as allowing for ‘the unexpected modifications’ produced by outbursts of spontaneity. See *Ibid.*, pp. 24-5.

both in displacements and in dynamisms at any particular speed'.²⁵ An intriguing phrase deployed by Jaques-Dalcroze in this section of the essay is what he calls a 'muscular ungearing', which describes the 'starting-points in gesture', caused by a moment of unbalance in the body or by a breathing effect.²⁶ The flow of space, the scrunching of mismatched tempi and the different types of step enacted are aspects thrown into sharp relief by our next musical coupling, as two separate songs are faded in and out, and are made to intersect and disfigure each other in one vibrating topsy-turvy channel of movement.

The second key coupling of *On s'est tous défilé*, then, comprises the superimposition of two signature tracks from Cohen's album *Various Positions* (1984), creating a plethora of temporal and harmonic dissonances in a novel interpretation of the album title. This section of the video [9:36 - 10:46] makes fleeting reference to the original music video (1985, b/w) of *Dance Me to the End Of Love*, directed by the French photographer Dominique Issermann, in which we see a woman emerge from a doorway of light who then twirls balletically down a narrow hospital corridor towards Cohen and the camera. The images in



Figure 1: Defying the law of meter [10:20 - 10:25].

this section of *On s'est tous défilé* display a whole range of actions, from hesitant steps to models walking, skipping and jumping in unison, filmed in fast-motion and extreme slow-motion. One model is captured freestyling down the catwalk, improvising alongside another model, who remains stuck at the right-hand edge of the screen, as if to challenge the straight 'law' of meter with a rebellious rhythmic variation (see Fig. 1). The same model then hurtles across the catwalk space, enacting a disorderly diagonal line of flight

²⁵ Jaques-Dalcroze, 'The Technique of Moving Plastic', p. 24.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 23.

that shatters the mirroring body language. The sudden accelerations and sustained use of slow motion, as well as the constant flash shots, work to distort the model's body, as the image is intercut with throbbing images of legs and strappy sandals.

This part of the video is dense, excessive and indulgent through its rich resonant strata of visual and sonic mutations. Godard uses speed alteration to heighten the excitement of this display of movement, while Cohen's pitches bend and the singing voices linger, reverberating through each other as one tonality stretches into the next. The sequence begins when Girbaud's hand gesture is suddenly caught in slow-/reverse motion and is drawn into the rhythm of the musical introduction of the solemn track *If It Be Your Will*. When the catwalk procession begins, the relentless flash shots commence, and the image-display alternates between two pairs of legs facing inwards, creating a visual tension (see Fig. 2, i), and two dancers dressed in white, whose movements are manipulated using slow-motion as they skip towards the camera (see Fig. 2, ii). It was Girbaud's mutated hand



Figure 2 i, ii: The mesmeric catwalk (with slow motion, acceleration, and rapid flash shots) [09:55 - 10:05].

gesture that gave way to this unexpected, haunting black and white interlude and after the initial involution of limbs, the models also find their rhythm and begin striding forward together in time.²⁷

²⁷ In an interview in 1985, Cohen revealed that the idea for *Dance Me to the End Of Love* sprung from his discovery that in Nazi concentration camps musicians were made to perform in string quartets while fellow-prisoners were led to the gas chambers. The harrowing undertones of the lyrics ('Dance me to your beauty with a burning violin'), along with the narrow corridor of the catwalk in these sequences, return us to the paradox of the video's title ('we all ran away'): the *défilé* of fashion models filing past, combined with, as Leutrat suggests, 'the sense of panic, disorder and abdicated responsibilities.' See Leutrat, 'The Power of Language', p. 184.

In his analysis of Godard's video-scenarios from the early 1980s, Dubois writes: 'In video (and, according to him, nowhere else, especially not in the written word), seeing is thinking and thinking is seeing, both in one, and completely simultaneously.'²⁸ Seeing, thinking and doing are the verbs enacted by the video-maker who can see 'live' as s/he creates and can thus criticize, modify and instantly remake the image in question. Dubois states that one of the main effects of Godard's work with video slow-motion in the late 70s, which enabled him to re-discover a way of relating to the cinematographic image, is a sense of seeing images and seeing the world with fresh eyes: of 'the gaze being renewed'.²⁹ He adds: 'And we're aware (the spectator is here strictly in synch with Godard) that with each manoeuvre, with each change in speed, we feel violently the pleasure of a perceptual revolution, the "aha" effect of "so that's what's *in* images, and what I'd never before seen *that way*.'"³⁰ The spectacular nature of this catwalk parade in *On s'est tous défilé* is not simply a showcasing of special effects. The rhythm of the pulsing flash shots throughout the Cohen/Cohen episode is not synchronized perfectly with the beat of the music, which is itself skewed due to the mixing of tracks. The important level of opacity that results from this exuberant performance piece prevents any finite interpretation from being formed. Indeed, the overflow of music leaks abundantly into the visual commotion, softening the corners that separate sound from vision. Yet, the rhythmic independence of the flash shots and the staggered corporeal movements during this *mise en abyme* of video preserve the heterogeneity of aural and visual movement, thereby maintaining a tension that establishes a space for reflection.

In Adorno's article on regressive listening, a concept he places in direct relation to advertising, he defines the regressive listener as an 'acquiescent purchaser' who, incapable of listening attentively to music, seeks familiarity and peace at all costs. Adorno writes: 'A sort of musical children's language is prepared for them; it differs from the real thing in that its vocabulary consists exclusively of fragments and distortions of the artistic language of music.'³¹ He states that fetishized works become cultural goods that are vulgarized and thus destroyed. Listening only to the slow movement of a symphony, or isolating and exploiting the climactic phrases of a long work, simply objectifies the musical detail and so vulgarizes

²⁸ Dubois, 'Video Thinks What Cinema Creates', p.178.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 177.

³⁰ Idem.

³¹ Theodor W. Adorno, 'On the Fetish-Character in Music and the Regression of Listening' in Adorno, *Essays on Music*, pp. 288-317 (p. 307).

and disfigures what Adorno terms ‘the multilevel unity of the whole’.³² Yet this ‘children’s language’ of fragments and distortions, recalling Isabelle’s ‘broken’ speech in *Passion*, contains the crucial elements of primitivism, materiality and vitality that Godard protects and exploits in order to re-animate the fragments of sound matter in his search for new rhythms. Just as the super-fast flash shots, the blocks of traffic noise and the musical montages in *On s’est tous défilé* eradicate all trace of succession or continuity, the use of sound in this video activates the ear and levers us into crevices of paradox and ambiguity, all the while making us aware of our participation in the challenging task of creating, listening to and receiving images. *On s’est tous défilé* challenges relations between time signatures, genres, bodies and sounds and between listening, seeing, thinking and feeling in a garish and circuitous journey of mutation and expansion. We are presented with a gamut of dialectical sound mixtures that inject new visceral patterns of thought into the veins of the misshapen items that pass before our eyes, as the somatic energies of this glitzy fashion parade are seized and realized anew.

5.2 *Soigne ta droite*: spaces of performance

Throughout *Soigne ta droite* (*Une place sur la terre*), the soaring vocal of Catherine Ringer sublimely takes flight and astounds spectators with its versatility. Her voice is seductive, shifting with ease from one singing style to another, sounding gutsy, gritty, piercing, fragile, fluid and unbound. Music is connected early in the film with themes of time, timelessness and death, and the camera returns intermittently to the intimate space of the recording studio, where we see the French rock duo Les Rita Mitsouko (Catherine Ringer and the guitarist Fred Chichin) rehearsing and discussing tracks from their second album *The No Comprendo* (1986).³³ Indeed, the first studio sequences of the film capture Chichin and Ringer trying to steady the beat and establish the speeds of the backing rhythms. The basic story of the film follows the journey of the Idiot/Prince (Godard), who has been assigned the task of producing a film. His transport has been arranged to ensure his film is delivered on time for an evening screening (this coincides with the end of *Soigne ta droite*).

³² Adorno, ‘On the Fetish-Character in Music’, pp. 298-9.

³³ In his analysis of the film, Morrey notes that Godard was given a key to Ringer and Chichin’s studio, which enabled his crew to film the band unobtrusively while they worked. Godard was also given access to the master tapes of the album. See Morrey, *Jean-Luc Godard*, p. 185.

Yet, when the film (within the film), entitled *Une place sur la terre*, is projected, we do not see the images. Similarly, we never hear a complete version of any of the tracks that the band rehearses throughout. No conclusive musical performance takes place and our attention is focused instead on the emotion, struggle, patience, rapture and physical exertion involved in the productive process of music-making.

From the beginning, aspects of the film become caught up in the speeds, rhythms and distortions of the musical recording process. At the start, the voiceover narrator utters his lines in a distinctive manner that lifts them slightly from their context. He declares: ‘À ce prix mais, à ce prix, seulement’. The rhythm of his speech resonates with his later line: ‘Et il se demande, oui exactement, il se demande’, now accompanied by a complex drum beat in the music.³⁴ The film is strewn with quotations from texts by authors who include André Malraux, Lautréamont and Racine, in addition to extensive readings from Hermann Broch’s *The Death of Virgil* (1945).³⁵ Towards the start of *Soigne ta droite*, we see a young couple arrive at the airport check-in desk. The woman stares hopelessly down past the camera with a glazed look in her eyes as she quotes the opening couplet from Act V, i of *Andromaque*.³⁶ The cohesive sound of the rhyming Alexandrines that the woman continues to cite through the film, swathe her words in a strange paranormal glow. Her lines sound out of kilter here with both the robotic tapping of the airline agent’s keyboard and the general aural chaos that surrounds them, as we dive further into the film’s multi-temporal universe.

In his discussion of human presence in live electronic music, Emerson focuses on the relationship between the production of sound and the spaces of performance. He uses the adjectives ‘local’ and ‘field’ to differentiate between the localizable stage of the live performer and the more open stage area of the surrounding context or landscape: ‘I am interpreting the term *field* in a broader sense as any activity not localizable to the performer as source and which gives us a picture of what goes on around the instrument to establish a sense of wider location.’³⁷ Our senses are disoriented when our auditory reference points turn hazy and when our perception of the precise location of a sound’s source is unclear. As

³⁴ The actor François Périer, who features in *Soigne ta droite* as ‘l’Homme’, provides the voiceover narration throughout.

³⁵ For further detail on Godard’s use of Broch’s text in this context see Williams, ‘Silence, Gesture, Revelation’, pp. 27-54.

³⁶ ‘Hermoine: Où suis-je? Qu’ai-je fait? Que dois-je faire encore? / Quel transport me saisit? Quel chagrin me dévore?’

³⁷ Emerson, *Living Electronic Music*, p. 94.

Emmerson explains: ‘Perceived as a direct result of a live performance gesture the sound’s rightful place is in our local domain; but without this relation – I stress this is the listener’s interpretation – it has more of a field function, as the result of the dislocation from performer as cause.’³⁸ The whole film is precariously balanced on this fruitful ambiguity, which Emmerson defines as ‘play’. He writes: ‘Between the two poles of local and field lies the more subtle world of *play*. The *interplay* of these two spheres of operation.’³⁹

As the garage sequences terminate at the start of *Soigne ta droite*, we hear the first sounds of Les Rita Mitsouko singing the first line of *C’est comme ça*. This brief burst of music, which crescendos with the revved up engine of the Ferrari as it speeds off, precedes the first shots of Ringer and Chichin working in the studio. Just before we cut to the first studio sequence, another car pulls up alongside the Prince, who is now sitting on the pavement in an airport car park. The noise of the car engine is temporarily replaced by the low hum of the electric bass line from the start of the same track and this subterranean musical activity is melded, almost imperceptibly, with the diegesis [0:03:38 - 0:03:55]. Godard’s decision to render inaudible the drum beat and guitar chords from this extract, which would enable us to situate the bass line within a specific harmonic context, serves to emphasize the confusion between ‘local’ and ‘field’ activity, and this ambiguity expands our perception of the parameters of acoustic space, a process that continues throughout.

There are numerous moments during the film when the musicians manipulate the volume level, reverb and vocal tone in order to fine-tune the acoustic balance. Just after one such moment, a comedy sketch unfolds, modelled on the fable *La Cigale et la Fourmi* by Jean de La Fontaine. We hear the bass line and raspy vocal from the track *Stupid Anyway* as the Fourmi/gardener (Jacques Villeret) places a spirit level on the stylish bonnet of the Cigale’s (Jane Birkin) car, as if the visuals are functioning as strange incongruent figments of the soundtrack’s imagination.⁴⁰ At other times in the film, Ringer’s floating voice, aligned with dizzying aerial shots of clouds, plunges in and out of whistling and buzzing noises. This film renders literally the complex relationship between sound and space, between rootlessness and the steady pulsed territory of ‘UNE PLACE SUR LA TERRE’ (a recurring inter-title). As Emmerson puts it, whilst live performers are anchored to a specific location,

³⁸ Emmerson, *Living Electronic Music*, p. 95.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

⁴⁰ The comic actor Jacques Villeret plays ‘l’Individu’, an alienated character who performs a variety of roles throughout the film, including a gardener, a golfer’s caddy, a prisoner and a dance companion.

‘the electroacoustic sound can defy gravity and fly anywhere.’⁴¹ Just as the ambient electronic music that drifted in and out of the foreground in *Sauve qui peut (la vie)* seeped beyond the dislodged frames of diegetic performance, Ringer’s voice glides beyond the confinement of the body, exceeds the visible locus of the studio and fills its new spatial contexts with sensations of fullness and absence.

i) Un soir un chien

The longest studio sequences of vocal performance in *Soigne ta droite* are intercut with a contrasting high-angle aerial shot that shows the earth through floating clouds. Following a close-up of Ringer singing the first line of the track *Un soir un chien* in the studio, the camera pans slowly to the left and cuts to a sky shot, as her full, slow, resonant vocal soars steadily above loud humming engine noises, emanating from what sounds like a plane mid-flight. These background noises were initially tuned to the notes of the electric bass line that we heard, along with the synth chords, seconds earlier in the quiet darkness of the studio. The ‘glue’ of the bass line that here fuses with the unformed ambient sound, stretches the beat of the music, which dissolves into memory as the exterior environment is musicalized, ‘local’ activity is fleetingly destabilized and the overall sound is dilated

**Figure 3: After the cut:
from studio to sky [0:25:23].**



⁴¹ Emmerson, *Living Electronic Music*, p. 96.

spatially to form this unexpected ‘vocal’ landscape (see Fig. 3).⁴²

The inner diegetic passageway of ‘live’ and pre-recorded music that tunnels through the whole film is interjected here with an incongruous unit of displaced space – this interim aerial view. When the camera cuts from studio to sky the musical process is distracted. In his discussion of performed space and acousmatic music, the composer-theorist Denis Smalley states that ‘gestural space’ (the intimate space of individual performer and instrument) can be ‘contextualised in spaces which differ considerably from an habitual arena.’⁴³ Smalley notes that in a public performance that includes both live instruments and acousmatic sound, a ‘duality of play’ can take place between the enclosed acoustic setting of the performers and audience, and what he terms “‘arenas’” of otherness created by the interaction of, or contrast between, gestural/ensemble space and the spatial contexts carried by acousmatic sounds.’⁴⁴ Smalley’s idea of ‘play’ nuances Emerson’s conception of the same notion, which, in both cases, is based on the listener’s perception of local activity, wider location and the sonic-spatial ambiguities that lie in between. These processes are exemplified powerfully during Ringer’s vocal performance, for the camera transports us away from her anchoring body, haphazardly focusing our attention on the exterior landscape, while her voice is transmitted as a diegetic sound but as a sound *out of sight*. Feelings of vastness and disorientation fracture the intimacy of the studio, as this ‘field’ of sound, like a peculiar visual interlude, produces a sort of ‘outside’ bodyscape of vocality.

When we return to the studio, a foreboding extract from *Les Histoires d’A* is mixed with the opening section from *Un soir un chien* that dominates this part of the soundtrack and soon produces a satisfying commingling of harmony and discord.⁴⁵ The building tension in *Un soir un chien*, and the crescendo and ascent of Ringer’s melody line is released as her voice becomes enmeshed dissonantly with the crescendo of the doubled vocal in the chorus of

⁴² All images from this film are taken from *Keep Your Right Up! (Soigne ta droite!)*, dir. by Jean-Luc Godard (Facets Multimedia, Inc., 2001) [on DVD].

⁴³ Denis Smalley, ‘Space-form and the Acousmatic Image’ in *Organised Sound*, 12:1 (2007), 35-58 (p. 44).

⁴⁴ Smalley defines ‘ensemble space’ as ‘the personal and social space among performers: a group of performers produces a collective performed space.’ See *Ibid.*, p. 42.

⁴⁵ During the film, Godard mixes completed versions of tracks from the *No Comprendo* album with earlier unreleased versions. As Morrey notes, during the *Un soir un chien* rehearsals, Godard mixes part of the finished release of the track, where Ringer sings in a very high voice, over her naturally lower voice that we hear during these sequences. See Morrey, *Jean-Luc Godard*, pp. 185-6.

Les Histoires d'A.⁴⁶ By scrunching together these concentrated phrases from two different tracks, Godard re-weights the first track, disturbs its flow and adds new emphasis and nuance to the sonority of the voice rather than to the meaning of each word. Moreover, the bass line in this second track is louder and more vigorous than the funkier beats of the first, hurrying and intensifying the exuberant climax of this sequence, when Ringer relaxes into the hook of the song, taking us right to the end of every note and syllable, watched avidly by the low-angle, proximal camera. The searing line of sound produced by Ringer's voice that takes us from the depths of the beating body to the dizzying upper atmosphere of the earth, collapses, after the sudden cut, into this mobile transit space above, around and between (refer to Fig. 3). This fluid zone of indeterminacy, rendered visually and spatially, becomes loaded with a tone-full overflow of feeling and functions like a short pause or a change in texture within the fabric of the film, producing a resonant image. The groaning quality of Ringer's voice, its breathiness, presence and sensual power, revels in its own production of meaning that remains inconclusive, uncertain and endless.

As Michel Poizat notes in his article on the voice in opera, when the materiality of voice comes to the fore, the vocal object becomes an object of *jouissance*, which intrudes into language and subverts or destroys signification. Opera entails the 'radical autonomisation of the voice, its transformation into a detached object' that stimulates the *jouissance* of the listener.⁴⁷ The singer's body is almost annihilated and the visual order 'falls away', along with the whole signifying process, when an instance of pure voice arises, which places us on the cusp of the 'radical antagonism' of emotion and meaning.⁴⁸ During this episode in *Soigne ta droite*, the temporary dislocation of Ringer's voice as we move skyward, exposes its power as an affecting object of pure voice that entrances listeners with its fluid sound. When a body expresses itself musically, Barthes tells us, it speaks silently and signifies simultaneously, in the plural:

mon corps frappe, mon corps se ramasse, il explose, il se coupe, il pique, ou au contraire et sans prévenir..., il s'étire, il tisse légèrement [...] car dès lors qu'elle est musicale, la parole – ou son substitut instrumental – n'est plus linguistique, mais

⁴⁶ The lyrics from *Un soir un chien* ('Mais je serai à tes pieds') are mixed to coincide with the lyrics 'Les histoires d'amour finissent mal en général' from *Les Histoires d'A* (my emphasis).

⁴⁷ Michel Poizat, "The Blue Note" and "The Objectified Voice and the Vocal Object", trans. by Arthur Denner in *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 3:3 (1991), 195-211 (p. 197).

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 199.

corporelle [...] c'est le geste d'une voix; cette voix parle pour ne rien dire d'autre que la mesure (le mètre) qui lui permet d'exister – de sortir – comme signifiant.⁴⁹

The rhythms in the music, as well as the openness and expressive power of Ringer's voice, infect both the body of the singer and the spectator. The renewal of the gaze that Dubois associated with speed variation in Godard's video work, its dynamic capacity to transform our perception of an image, can be extended to encompass Barthes's description of the 'stunned' musicalized body of the listener, the performer and of the music itself.⁵⁰ Musical expression is affective and sensuous, and it is capable of sharpening our sense of hearing and our sensitivity to the world.

The frequent returns to the studio throughout the film, the estranged cadences of the accruing verbal citations, and the drifting, humming and buzzing sounds that hover in a state of liminality, on the threshold of locatable aural experience, train us as spectators to listen actively, dynamically and attentively. The acute visual emphasis on Ringer throughout the film interrogates the complicity of the spectator-as-listener, through this heightened relation that binds vocalization and affect to our capacity to *see*. In *Soigne ta droite*, Godard straightaway establishes a link between the harsh indecorous sound of the telephone *rings*, highlighted by the voiceover in the film's opening sequences, and the 'noisy' presence of Ringer-as-singer (Périer: 'là là là [*ring*], le téléphone sonne là'). Ringer's eclectic style, the playful insolence of the band's songs and her extraordinary vocal agility that recalls the dexterity of Bjork's vocal range, bring to our attention the 'dissident' potential of acousmatic sound. It is the uprootedness of acousmatic sound, its dislocation from a single physical location, that resonates with the subversive potential of the female voice in this example, specifically, with the expressive intrusion and physicality of female vocalicity that shakes us, as it coils up to the sky and down again.

ii) *Tonite*

As Ringer's vocal performance terminates, the camera takes us to the flight runway and her final lyric coincides with an image of the pilot reading a suicide manual in the flight deck

⁴⁹ Barthes, 'Rasch', pp. 271-2.

⁵⁰ In his writing on pulsion in the essay 'Rasch', Barthes describes the 'Schumannian body' as 'un corps pulsionnel, qui se pousse et repousse, passe à autre chose – pense à autre chose; c'est un corps étourdi (grisé, distrait et ardent tout à la fois).' See *Ibid.*, p. 266.

next to the luminous windows. A little later, just after the next track *Tonite* commences, the camera takes us from a dark apartment room that faces the beach at Trouville to an exterior shot of sky, before returning us transiently to the airborne flight via a shot of the pilot, who is now looking distractedly through the white windows – the blank screen – in front of him. Following an unusual shot of Ringer gesturing to the beat of the music in darkness, the cockpit scene returns to conclude this section of the film.⁵¹ During the apartment scenes, we see the Individual clinging to a tabletop, listening to extracts of works by Samuel Beckett on a cassette player. The first derives from Beckett's set of short stories *Textes pour rien* (1951), a title inspired by the musical term 'mesure pour rien', which denotes a silent bar's rest that a conductor sometimes gives at the start of a piece to set the tempo.⁵² While the Individual listens numbly to a few lines of the recording, the camera, positioned inside the apartment and facing a mirror, captures a distant, muted reflection of a young girl facing the room with her arms raised, encased within the window pane to form a distinctive dark mark.⁵³ Above the girl is an empty white panel of glass, which, like the conductor's 'bar for nothing' – the soundless interval of time – opens our ears as if to prepare us for the arrival of a musical sign, or indeed, for an isolated, stagnant unheard nothing (*pour rien*).⁵⁴

⁵¹ Following the *Tonite* scenes, after a fourth shot of the plane's white windows, the pilot proceeds to fall asleep at the controls and the passengers experience a bout of turbulence.

⁵² See S. E. Gontarski and C. J. Ackerley, "The Knowing Non-Exister": Thirteen Ways of Reading *Texts for Nothing* in S. E. Gontarski, *A Companion to Samuel Beckett* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), pp. 289-95 (289).

⁵³ The girl's image in this shot imitates the pose of a young boy who appears with his arms raised in the foreground of an iconic photograph of women and children under arrest in Warsaw, which Alain Resnais included in *Nuit et brouillard* (1955). It is one of a series of visual signs rendered in *Soigne ta droite* that make reference to the Holocaust. For more detail on this photograph see Libby Saxton, 'Night and Fog and the Concentrationary Gaze', in Griselda Pollock and Max Silverman (eds.), *Concentrationary Cinema: Aesthetics as Political Resistance in Alain Resnais's Night and Fog (1955)* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2011), pp. 140-51 (pp. 142-3).

⁵⁴ The location (Trouville), and the relationship throughout these scenes between the filmed bodies, the luminous French windows and the intermittent sea sound produces a rather crooked glance back to the love scenes in *Prénom Carmen*. Indeed, Godard referred to his nascent plans for *Soigne ta droite* during an interview on *Prénom Carmen* in 1983. See Bergala (ed.), *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard*, I, p. 581.

After the embers of the previous track have finally dimmed, the thudding beat commences that signals the start of *Tonite* and the image cuts from a shot of the Individual's shadow on the floor, to the sky. The camera pans vertically upwards before floating across to the right in a circular motion, while the electric guitar snarls torridly and Ringer's meandering vocal tone fades into the soundscape. The pitch of her voice wavers slightly, the volume dips a little, and her sound bends into the slow circling camera movement. The camera then begins to descend but pauses on a dazzling smear of white cloud, which is traversed by a diagonal white line, matched by this ecstatic instant of pure, simmering vocal energy (see Fig. 4, i). As Deleuze argues, the close-up, whether of a person or a thing, *facializes* the



Figure 4, i: An image of music [0:38:44].

object and extracts from it an affective quality or power. He writes: '[e]t chaque fois que nous découvrirons en quelque chose ces deux pôles, surface réfléchissante et micro-mouvements intensifs, nous pourrions dire: cette chose a été traitée comme un visage, elle a été « envisagée » ou plutôt « visagéifiée », et à son tour elle nous dévisage, elle nous regarde... même si elle ne ressemble pas à un visage.'⁵⁵ The micro-movements that emerge from this mix of three distinct sounds (the heavy drum beat, the guitar distortion and the floating vocal tone), which enter consecutively, paired with this surface of inscription (the sky), produces a decontextualized 'faceified' [*visagéifiée*] image.

During this short visual pause, when the camera lingers on this stain of white opacity, the heavy drum beat halts for a couple of seconds, as if suspended below the shifting tones above, setting adrift the pulsing electric guitar accompaniment, which crystallizes with the incandescent visible blotch in the centre of the image and merges deliriously with the white

⁵⁵ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinéma 1 : L'image-mouvement* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1983), p. 126.

line of Ringer's smooth, soft open vowel sound. Her vocal line reads like a vapory scratch or memory-trace in the image, adding volume and depth to the flatness of this spatial deviation. As the camera approaches this image in *Soigne ta droite* (Fig. 4, i), the pitch of Ringer's voice moves from F# to A, harmonizing with the guitar drone, which temporarily settles on the note D, forming an ephemeral D major triad. This faceified visual 'harmony' of sound and image that confronts the spectator constitutes an act of montage, for it reconstructs a properly cinematic moment. Indeed, Godard forges a subtle relation, both visually *and* musically, with the spontaneous opening shot in *Passion* where we saw the white trace of a plane moving from right to left across the sky. The camera panned erratically to the left to follow its trajectory, accompanied by the creeping crescendo of the contrabassoon solo, succeeded by the horns, from the opening of Ravel's one-movement *Piano Concerto for the Left Hand* in D major. The transitory D major harmony that Ringer



Figure 4, ii: the opening sequence in *Passion*.

and Chichin produce at this precise instant when the camera pauses on the white smear of cloud, returns us self-reflexively, and harmonically via the keynote, to the first spontaneous visual and musical 'movement' of *Passion* (see Fig. 4, ii). If we rotate the first flatter, more blanched image in *Soigne ta droite* 180 degrees (refer to Fig. 4, i), it becomes a distorted enlargement, or rather, a mutation, at a slightly different angle, of the cloud pattern in *Passion*, which is surrounded on the left by a much deeper, more painterly blue.

This richly expansive short-lived instant in *Soigne ta droite*, which presents us with an amplified detail and a distended echo of a past cinematic moment, operates at the intersection of aural and visual experience. Godard's musical arrangement in this sequence of the film generates a fertile spatial and tonal ambiguity and the spectator is encouraged to

see the shape, texture, and intensity of the sounds *as* a visual image. Ringer's voice here slides faintly, sculpturally, almost inaudibly and inhumanly, into the sonic foreground. The visible image serves literally, as Emerson writes of the acousmatic condition, to 'fill in' our scant perception of the sound object's worldly source, in the manner that our imagination does during performances of acousmatic music.⁵⁶ Emerson notes that his sense of hearing is enhanced when his eyes remain *open*, while listening to acousmatic music. The visual aspect, namely what he terms the listener's envisioned 'images of the music',⁵⁷ constitutes an important part of her/his aural experience. He details: '[t]he imagination constructs a quasi-visual mindscape with many of the characteristics of 'real' vision',⁵⁸ adding that the combination of video/film with electroacoustic music might actually intensify the listener's response, rather than distract and destroy her/his imaginary world, for 'the 'real' visuals might complement, even meld in ('consonantly') with my aural-visual world.'⁵⁹ The curves, blurs, eruptive disturbances and the feelings of disorientation that pervade *Soigne ta droite* are traits of a film to be perceived acoustically – a film that melds harmoniously and discordantly with the spectator's own aural-visual world.

During this episode in the film we never see Ringer singing live. We are gradually lowered into a series of ritualistic studio sequences, in which we see her lip-synching in darkness with her eyes shut, to a playback of herself singing. A little later, the music breaks off and Ringer remains in the same position in a deep meditative trance-like state. The constant dislocation of body and voice persists and the image-track becomes increasingly truncated, producing an extreme sense of detachment and dispersal. At times, the recording falters and lyrics overlap, while at other times the electric bass line surges forth from loud blocks of sea sound. Segments of the image-track are repeated (the close-up of the young girl, the woman in the white coat, the Individual on the floor, the half-open window) several times, and as the episode progresses we become increasingly entangled in what could be described as a compressed playback loop. The hypervisible fantasy figure of the woman dressed in a white fur coat who sporadically appears in the apartment and strips off for the Individual before vanishing, provides an apt reference to Federico Fellini's comic and nostalgic film

⁵⁶ Emerson, *Living Electronic Music*, pp. 168-9.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 168.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 169-70.

Amarcord (a form of the verb *mi ricordo*, ‘I remember’) (1973).⁶⁰ During this bawdy vignette, the ‘white noise’ of the sea sound repeatedly interrupts the *Tonite* track like a break in time, and this isolated interval of ‘interference’ evokes Godard’s long-running critique of pure media spectacle, of passive spectatorship, political indifference and the amnesia induced by television cultures. The productive power of montage that engenders new kinds of time is contrasted with the dead white screens of television, associated during these sequences with the thoughtless, distracted suicidal pilot.

The *Tonite* episode concludes with a strangely beautiful, skeletal sequence, like the underside of the image-track, which shows Ringer gesturing silently to the melody as she conducts Chichin from the adjacent studio. The musicians communicate with each other intimately and precisely via eye contact and by listening incessantly to each other’s rhythm and sound. The hands of the musicians that set the tempo, twiddle the controls, adjust the volume and control the acoustic balance, mirror those of the video artist, capable of revitalizing our acoustic perception by instilling memory, thought and emotion into the *unheard* image. Indeed, Ringer’s uninhibited, free-flowing singing voice and her self-directed pacing expose the similarities between the musician and the video operator. During these sequences in *Soigne ta droite*, the musical spectacle is atomized, it is detached from its anchoring body and is emitted acousmatically. The affect and excess of the music is spread, as my analysis has endeavoured to show, into unusual and ambiguous spatial contexts. The disorienting merging of ‘local’ and ‘field’ activity on the soundtrack, which confuses our auditory reference points, expands and enhances our perception of aural and visual space.

In his chapter ‘La Dialectique du dehors et du dedans’ in *La Poétique de l’espace*, Gaston Bachelard criticizes the metaphysics of contemporary philosophy, which, he affirms, harbours an implicit and restrictive geometry that spatializes thought and produces a dialectic of division. Through an exploration of what he phrases ‘cette concréisation géométrique du tissu linguistique’,⁶¹ Bachelard uncovers the fertile uncertainty and creative expansiveness stimulated by the poetic imagination that is freed when the rigid geometrical opposition of inside and outside collapses: ‘Où est le poids majeur de *l’être-là*, dans *l’être*

⁶⁰ When the woman (a takeoff of Gradisca/Magali Noël) first appears in the white-washed room in *Soigne ta droite*, the Individual utters a variation on a line from *Amarcord*, pronounced during the evening dance at the Grand Hotel.

⁶¹ Gaston Bachelard, *La Poétique de l’espace* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1957), p. 192.

ou dans le *là*? [...] Dans la tonalité de la langue française, le *là* est si énergique, que désigner l'être par un *être-là*, c'est dresser un index vigoureux qui mettrait aisément l'être intime dans un lieu extériorisé.⁶² Then, in a discussion of *L'espace aux ombres* by Henri Michaux,⁶³ Bachelard summarizes the poem's subject matter: 'D'une âme qui a perdu son « être-là », d'une âme qui va jusqu'à déchoir de *l'être de son ombre* pour passer, comme un vain bruit, comme une rumeur *insituable* dans les on-dit de l'être.'⁶⁴ This spirit, like Ringer's meandering vocal tone at the start of the *Tonite* episode, has lost its 'being-there'. Its source cannot be located and the clear line that separates inside from outside is troubled. Consequently, our fixed geometrical coordinates are flattened: 'Cette âme, cette ombre, ce bruit d'une ombre qui, nous dit le poète, veut son unité, on l'entend du dehors sans pouvoir être sûr qu'elle est dedans. [...] Dans cet espace équivoque, l'esprit a perdu sa patrie géométrique et l'âme flotte.'⁶⁵ Michaux's nightmarish vision that sees boundaries dissolve, separations effaced and spaces merge, sets the spirit adrift. Like the electroacoustic sound, it 'can defy gravity and fly anywhere'.⁶⁶ This spirit or shade, or this noise of a shade that has lost its 'being-there', describes perfectly the fragile vocal scratch of Ringer's disembodied voice. The poetic imagination, Bachelard writes, crushes the accepted logic of geometrical certainty and allows the imagination to wander. Indeed, the mutated close-up of the sky shot from *Passion*, and the exaggerated synthesized keynote of Ravel's piano concerto in my previous example, form a contorted conjunction that rekindles acoustically the timeless aura of the poetic image – 'une petite folie expérimentale, comme un grain de haschisch virtuel' – of Bachelard's study,⁶⁷ which captures the disturbing, dynamic and generative fluidity of ambiguous (sound) space.

5.3 The hidden pattern

Towards the end of *Soigne ta droite*, the musicians are filmed rehearsing *Les Histoires d'A* and Godard captures them arguing about the key of the chorus. Chichin's harmony is based on F#, while Ringer should be playing a B. He shows her how to play the correct finger

⁶² Bachelard, *La Poétique de l'espace*, pp. 192-3 (original emphasis).

⁶³ See Henri Michaux, *Nouvelles de l'étranger* (Paris: Mercvire de France, 1952), pp. 73-94.

⁶⁴ Bachelard, *La Poétique de l'espace*, p. 195 (original emphasis).

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 196-7.

⁶⁶ Emmerson, *Living Electronic Music*, p. 96.

⁶⁷ Bachelard, *La Poétique de l'espace*, p. 197.

position on her guitar. In order to find the right harmony, she needs to keep the same chord position but adjust her finger pattern. Chichin repeatedly exclaims ‘Regarde!’ to which Ringer responds irately ‘J’entends!’. In his study of the acoustic environment, R. Murray Schafer introduces the concept of ‘keynote sounds’, defined after the musical term ‘keynote’, which denotes ‘the note that identifies the key or tonality of a particular composition.’⁶⁸ These sounds provide the anchor or ‘fundamental tone’ that becomes the reference point for all other sounds in the soundscape. In *Soigne ta droite*, the musicians seem to be forever searching for a firm sonic anchor point that will both ground their playing and root the film itself within a stable and locatable aural and spatial context. The auditory dimension plays a subtle, intricate but vital role in crafting a type of complex formal patterning in this film, which remains, nevertheless, vulnerable to a deeper unknown flux of pulsation that continues to pound beneath.

After witnessing images of the stranded flight passengers lying piled on top of each other, accompanied by a backdrop of sports stadium noise (chanting, whistling, clapping and shouting), the camera cuts to a close-up of a single line of barbed wire that crosses the frame diagonally (see Fig. 5, i). We can relate these sequences to a particularly striking



Figure 5, i: Barbed wire / abstract line [1:12:11].

scene that takes place in a concert hall in Woolf’s poetic novel *The Waves*, a work that features more prominently in Godard’s *King Lear*. In this richly visual scene in *The Waves*, the visionary figure Rhoda experiences a sudden feeling of human contact and inclusion, which grants her a rare moment of insight. She describes the experience of watching an opera singer hitting her first note. She provides a vivid account of the ‘somnolent people’ in

⁶⁸ R. Murray Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (Rochester: Destiny Books, 1994), p. 9.

the audience, whom she likens to clustering maggots, to ‘walruses stranded on rocks’, to ‘heavy bodies incapable of waddling to the sea’ and, like the inert flight passengers at the end of *Soigne ta droite*, they ‘lie gorged with food, torpid in the heat’.⁶⁹ The affective impact of the music is for Rhoda closely tied to death and revelation, which provides her with an instant sense of shelter, belonging and unity. Her description focuses not on the sound but on the solid visual shape of the geometrical pattern that she *sees* in, through and beyond the music.

In *Soigne ta droite*, this image of barbed wire is made blurry from the focus pulls, a non-narrative device that, as Daniel Morgan has proposed, underscores the *look* of the images, causing the spectator to stop, pause, hear and absorb its perplexing beauty that vibrates for a moment in silence.⁷⁰ Yet Godard is also foregrounding the *sound* of the image, recalling our earlier encounter with the faceified ‘image of music’ that created a hesitant hiatus in the film’s flow and pushed us into an immediate confrontation with a visual ‘harmony’ of sheer intensive acoustic energy. This image of barbed wire, which dissolves into a faint abstract line like a suspension in a piece of music awaiting its resolution, resembles an enlarged guitar string, as if extracted from the diagonal of Chichin’s fingerboard as we move ever closer to the substance of music itself. Like the tension generated between the musicians from the harmonic confusion, the vague dark mark near the centre of this image of wire



**Figure 5, ii: Fred Chichin:
‘Moi je fais un fa dièse, tu fais
un si.’ [1:08:10].**

⁶⁹ Virginia Woolf, *The Waves* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 2000), p. 90.

⁷⁰ For more on both the aesthetic and ethical importance of this series of focus pulls, including the connection between these images and iconography of the Holocaust, see Daniel Morgan, *Late Godard and the Possibilities of Cinema* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 2013), pp. 44-50 and 91-2. See also Williams, ‘Silence, Gesture, Revelation’, pp. 34-6.

gradually comes back into focus to form a clear knot of metal, which is linked via the voiceover to music (*'la musique de cristal'*). These sequences in *Soigne ta droite* operate as strange metallic overtones of the diegetic quartet in *Prénom Carmen* and enact Godard's double discourse of showing while simultaneously revealing the filmmaker's basic creative system (his 'key'), namely, his method of composition. The thin, fragile line of wire that cuts through the image space, reminds us of the white scratch of Ringer's vocal line in the earlier close-up of sky (refer to Fig. 4, i). Similarly, the blue-black *mise-en-scène* of the studio sequence that precedes the blurry focus pulls of wire is split vertically down the centre and Chichin's eyes and his right ear are illuminated, while the rest of his profile remains more or less enveloped in darkness (see Fig. 5, ii).

Our attention is thus drawn to the special dialogue between sight and sound, through the miscommunication between the musicians as they search for the right harmony. We see them immersed in a process of listening apperceptively to each other's sound, and the reciprocity of their incessant interaction (*'Regarde!/J'entends!'*) that has pervaded the whole film, obstructed temporarily by this productive 'chink' of conflict, remains open, flowing and incandescent. Like the 'attack' that is heard when an object is first struck or a note is first sounded, which enables listeners to identify the precise source of a sound, these instances of disagreement re-energise the film's continuing search for new territory, for a new music and a revitalized sense of 'being-there' (*'UNE PLACE SUR LA TERRE'*). Godard purposefully privileges the interplay of acousmatic and non-acousmatic sound in *Soigne ta droite*, to place us in a continual state of confusion, alertness and heightened sensitivity, while opening us to the alterity of voice and to the expansive imaginative power of the music's affecting vitality. The hovering vocal hums, the revving electric bass-line motors, and the constant rhythmic pulsations disorient our sensory compass, for the sounds are forever bending perceptions while fostering a new acoustic sensibility via the musicalized cinematic processes enacted in this film.

5.4 *King Lear*: to hear is to see

It is in *King Lear* that Professor Pluggy (Godard) presents us with his definition of the image and his theory of montage, which is based upon a model of analogy, inspired by

Pierre Reverdy's prose poem 'L'Image' (1918).⁷¹ *King Lear* is set in a post-Chernobyl world, at a time when cultural memory has been lost and everything has disappeared. William Shakespeare Jr. the Fifth (Peter Sellars) has been set to work by the Cannon Cultural Division and the Royal Library of Her Majesty the Queen to recover the lost works of his famous ancestor. In the final part of this chapter, I will explore the significance of background sound and slow-motion sound in this film, attending to rich pockets of sonic detail in the hubbub of voices and the shrieks and whines of birds and music. During *King Lear* we hear extracts from a number of Beethoven's late string quartets, as if portions of the soundtrack of *Prénom Carmen* have been absorbed acoustically into its soundscape. We hear accelerated and decelerated phrases from the 2nd movement (*Vivace*) of *String Quartet No. 16 in F Major*, Op. 135, as well as passages played at half-speed from the 3rd movement (*Molto adagio*) of *String Quartet No. 15 in A Minor*, Op. 132, the 4th movement (*Grave, ma non troppo tratto*) of *String Quartet No. 16 in F Major*, Op. 135, and the 3rd movement (*Lento assai, cantante et tranquillo*) from the same work, as well as a passage played at quarter-speed from the 2nd movement (*Adagio ma non troppo*) of *Quartet No. 10 in Eb Major*, Op. 74. *King Lear* returns us to cinema's birth and to the medium of film itself, and it does so primarily through the manipulation of time, which is expressed powerfully through the aural domain.

Witt has drawn attention to Godard's trials in stereo sound collage in *King Lear*.⁷² He points out that stereo plays a crucial role in Godard's compositional method and it can even be construed as 'a resonant metaphor for his historical image-making practice in general'.⁷³ Witt affirms: 'it [stereo] provides him with an invaluable means of pursuing his technique of *rapprochement* through sound. [...] On a practical level, it facilitates the simultaneous presentation of two sounds while ensuring that both remain audible, even when played at high volume.'⁷⁴ When Jonathan Rosenbaum comments on *King Lear*'s 'dazzling contrapuntal sound work', he highlights the remarkable use of Dolby that demands a sound

⁷¹ Pluggy cites an altered version of part of this poem during the film, while displaying two images simultaneously on video monitors to demonstrate the basic components of his theory of montage. Godard will continue to cite Reverdy's poem in *Histoire(s)* and in other of his films. Frequently cited lines are: 'Une image n'est pas forte parce qu'elle est *brutale* ou *fantastique* – mais parce que l'association des idées est lointaine et juste' and 'Ce qui est grand ce n'est pas l'image – mais l'émotion qu'elle provoque'. See Pierre Reverdy, *Nord-sud, Self Défence et autres écrits sur l'art et la poésie (1917-1926)* (Paris: Flammarion, 1975), p. 74 (original emphasis).

⁷² Witt, *Jean-Luc Godard, Cinema Historian*, p. 199.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 206.

⁷⁴ *Idem.*

system equipped to cope with ‘the multiple separations needed for Godard’s split, staggered, and overlapping channels – which play a variety of tricks with distance, space, depth, and layered aural textures’.⁷⁵ Since the film has rarely been shown in Dolby and since most commercial film theatres are capable only of dealing with more conventional uses of Dolby sound, it is almost impossible, Rosenbaum writes, for the spectator to fully appreciate the intricate tapestry of the film’s sound design. However, in *King Lear*, by listening carefully to the timings, repetitions, the electronic speed alterations, the mesh of voices and the textural variations, we are, in effect, already listening to the soundtrack, and perceiving the film, from different angles, which enables us to trace from the outside the spatial richness of the uncharted regions generated by the split, staggered, and overlapping channels.

In an interview conducted in 1970, the pianist, composer and broadcaster Glenn Gould commented on the increasing importance of the rhythms, patterns and inclinations of the human voice and the spoken word in new music. Gould describes his work in the recording studio, which involves splicing tape, accentuating phrases, adding reverb, compressors and filters, as fully-fledged composition. He remarks: ‘I think our whole notion of what music is has forever merged with all the sounds that are around us – everything that the environment makes available’.⁷⁶ Gould links the developments he perceives in music to the compositions of the Renaissance contrapuntalists, for they were the first composers to realize ‘that it was possible and feasible and realistic to expect the human mind and the human ear to be aware of many simultaneous relationships, to follow their diverse courses and to be involved in all of them.’⁷⁷ Indeed, this assertion captures perfectly the auditory experience of the spectator in Godard’s *King Lear*. Elsewhere, Gould condemns the widespread rigid hierarchy in standard television and radio broadcasts that maintains the prioritization of the voice’s message over all other sound. In his own pioneering radio documentaries (his ‘contrapuntal radio’), Gould was interested in the spatiality of sound, in the separation of different voices, in depth, area, perspective and points of audition, as well as overlays and collage techniques, and he was especially interested in the possibilities

⁷⁵ Jonathan Rosenbaum, ‘The Importance of Being Perverse (Godard’s *King Lear*)’ in *The Chicago Reader* (1988), <<http://www.jonathanrosenbaum.com/?p=7695>> [accessed 26.09.2013] (para. 2 of 18).

⁷⁶ Glenn Gould and Curtis Davis, ‘The Well-Tempered Listener’ in John McGreevy (ed.), *Glenn Gould: By Himself and His Friends* (Toronto and New York: Doubleday Canada Limited, 1983), pp. 275-94 (p. 280).

⁷⁷ *Idem*.

offered by stereo radio and quadraphony (four-channel sound).⁷⁸ Gould sought ways of combatting what he termed ‘the problem of narration’,⁷⁹ which, he felt, merely trained listeners to think linearly in terms of precedence and priority, and he achieved this primarily through sound collage and changes in texture.⁸⁰

A critical undercurrent that pervades *King Lear* is Virginia Woolf’s experimental novel *The Waves*. Woolf began to work seriously at this text, published in 1931, in 1929, thus marking a period that coincided, crucially, with the transition from the late years of silent cinema to the early years of sound cinema. During the film, we see a paperback copy of this book lying on some sand and pebbles at the water’s edge. At the end, we see Edgar clutching the novel as he and his comrades await the arrival of their ‘first image’. Woolf described *The Waves* as a ‘playpoem’ and connected the novel to music, declaring: ‘I am writing to a rhythm and not to a plot’, a method that ran counter, she noted, to the tradition of fiction.⁸¹ When she was writing *The Waves*, Woolf was listening regularly to Beethoven’s late string quartets and sonatas. As Elicia Clements has demonstrated, she was listening quite specifically for ‘alternative formal models for her new, radical novel’.⁸² Woolf’s extensive correspondence with her friend Ethel Smyth, a contemporary composer of opera, helped her to develop her nascent ideas, evident in *The Waves*, on the connection between art and subjectivity and between sound, social relations and community.⁸³ The special significance of the aural dimension that shaped Woolf’s novel, accords with the film’s own radical and bold radiophonic experimentation with distortion, deceleration and interruption, which marks the start of a more daring and complex phase of sound design in Godard’s oeuvre.

Melba Cuddy-Keane has noted that Woolf lived through the first electronic media revolution and gave several radio broadcasts. From 1925, she owned an Alegraphone, which enabled her to listen regularly at home to new recordings of music. Although Woolf

⁷⁸ Gould produced a series of experimental documentary radio broadcasts for the Canadian Broadcasting Company in the late 60s.

⁷⁹ Tim Page (ed.), *The Glenn Gould Reader* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1984), p. 387.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 380-1.

⁸¹ Virginia Woolf, *A Reflection of the Other Person: The Letters of Virginia Woolf, Vol 4: 1929-31* (London: Hogarth Press, 1978), p. 204.

⁸² Elicia Clements, ‘Virginia Woolf, Ethel Smyth, and Music: Listening as a Productive Mode of Social Interaction’ in *College Literature*, 32:3 (2005), 51-71 (p. 61).

⁸³ Woolf and Smyth met in 1930 when Woolf was still writing and revising drafts of *The Waves*, which they discussed together. See *Ibid.*, pp. 51-2.

was skeptical about new sound technologies, Cuddy-Keane stresses that there were also other ‘strong indications that she [Woolf] connected technological development with a liberating expansion of space.’⁸⁴ Another crucial observation made in Cuddy-Keane’s study is that Woolf was keen for *The Waves* to be adapted for radio.⁸⁵ *The Waves* is composed of a chorus of six voices whose monologues take us from childhood to middle-age and are framed by a series of italicized interludes that describe the sun and the rhythm of the sea over the course of a day. As Cuddy-Keane has demonstrated, Woolf’s text can be compared to radiophonic and electroacoustic art, particularly in its nonhierarchical treatment of voices and noises: ‘The novel gradually builds in aural density out of layers and textures of sounds widely diffused in space – conveying in this “music” an apprehension of ongoing, interrelational life.’⁸⁶ For Woolf, *The Waves* constitutes an aural work for the ear that moves between a choric plurality and communal experience on the one hand, and the solo voice of individual existence on the other.⁸⁷ The radiophonic dimension of Woolf’s novel can certainly be felt in the text’s descriptive, impersonal interludes. These italicized passages are endowed with their own unique conception of time and they pace the text by adding a sense of spacing, generating what could be described as recurring periods of active stasis. These interludes provide an impassive sonic backdrop that hangs potently behind the web of human voices that occupy the foreground of the novel.

5.5 A shapeless mass: space and texture

The loud background rippling, rustling and clattering sounds, along with the sound of wind whistling, waves crashing and the disorienting chorus of froggy voices (produced by decelerated speech) with which the film is brimming, remind us of the crackling ‘snowy’ noise pattern of a television screen. Like Joseph’s dark hand print on the blank screen in *Prénom Carmen*, the ‘silence’ of Cordelia’s speech, as Shakespeare Jr. tells us, reveals her very presence, ‘her exactitude’. As if mirroring the background interludes in *The Waves* that provide a more amorphous soundscape against which the individual soliloquies are

⁸⁴ Melba Cuddy-Keane, ‘Virginia Woolf, Sound Technologies and the New Aurality’ in Pamela L. Caughie (ed.), *Virginia Woolf in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 2000), pp. 69-96 (p. 76).

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 87-8.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 88-90.

arranged, Godard's *King Lear* is constructed around this full shape of sonorous form (Cordelia's silence), made to stand out like an abundant shadow against the cacophony of the spoken word. The evening meal between Cordelia, Learo and Shakespeare Jr. at the hotel in Nyon, during which themes of listening, human judgment and truth arise, follows Pluggy's demonstration of his theory of montage, thereby connecting the spectator's ability to *see* the relations between images to Lear's ability (or his failure) to *hear* the significance of his daughter's words.

In Woolf's autobiographical essay *A Sketch of the Past* (1939), she describes her most important childhood memory as hearing the waves breaking outside the window behind a yellow blind, of hearing a splash, seeing light and experiencing a moment of intense sensation: 'the feeling, as I describe it sometimes to myself, of lying in a grape and seeing through a film of semi-transparent yellow'.⁸⁸ She continues 'If I were a painter I should paint these first impressions in pale yellow, silver, and green. [...] I should make curved



Figure 6: Learo alone at his table [0:59:40].

shapes, showing the light through, but not giving a clear outline. Everything would be large and dim; and what was seen would at the same time be heard; sounds would come through this petal or leaf – sounds indistinguishable from sights.⁸⁹ Some of the images during the restaurant scenes in *King Lear* can be traced directly back to *The Waves*. For example, in Bernard's final soliloquy, he refers to 'the riot and babble of voices' and the 'radiant yet gummy atmosphere'.⁹⁰ A sense of memory and loss is poignantly expressed by the strange

⁸⁸ Virginia Woolf, *Moments of Being*, ed. by Jeanne Schulkind, 2nd edn (London: The Hogarth Press, 1985), p. 65.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

⁹⁰ Woolf, *The Waves*, pp. 140-2.

surplus of dancing wine glasses in this dimly lit yellow-tinged room, filled with gurgling acousmatic voices and solemn puddles of funereal music, that recall the communal restaurant scenes in Woolf's novel (see Fig. 6).⁹¹ The recurring restaurant scenes form some of the most significant episodes of harmony, contact and wholeness in *The Waves*.⁹² The metaphor of absence haunts the restaurant scenes in Godard's *King Lear*, forging an important connection between melancholic notions of remembrance and, in *The Waves*, the silent seventh voice of Percival, who dies after falling from a horse in India. The premature death of the archetypal hero figure, whom Percival embodies in Woolf's novel, destabilizes the six voices, who then float around like 'hollow phantoms' with no solidity or background (or no projection 'screen'). For Godard, the communal experience of watching a film projected onto a large screen has suffered the chronic invasion of the small screen of television. In his ceaseless drive to refigure the remnants of the collective dwelling-place of cinema, Godard purposefully reconstructs these scenes of 'uninterrupted community' from Woolf's novel,⁹³ savoured by the speakers as they grieve the silent blank left by Percival, the character who personifies the pierced veil of semblances.⁹⁴

We should here recall Schafer's concept of keynote sounds, a term he deploys to describe sounds that are often non-consciously perceived (examples include sea sounds or engine sounds) by a society but are, nonetheless, 'ubiquitously there'.⁹⁵ The keynote sounds of a place, Schafer writes, exert 'a deep and pervasive influence' on human behaviour, while providing a sonic background that shapes people's perception of other sounds: 'The psychologist of visual perception speaks of "figure" and "ground," the figure being that which is looked at while the ground exists only to give the figure its outline and mass. But the figure cannot exist without its ground; subtract it and the figure becomes shapeless,

⁹¹ All images from this film are taken from *King Lear*, dir. by Jean-Luc Godard (Cannon Films and Cannon International, 1987) [on VHS].

⁹² The restaurant scenes in *The Waves* also include recurring references to a red carnation in a vase, which stands for the 'whole flower' and the 'seven-sided' flower that becomes 'six-sided' after Percival's death, matching the six voices (and the silent seventh) in the novel. This abstract symbol for both wholeness and absence is alluded to in Godard's *King Lear* during the first close-up shot of Shakespeare Jr in the restaurant, who is filmed facing a red flower, with the jagged outline of the petals forming a near-symmetrical pattern with the outline of his profile.

⁹³ Woolf, *The Waves*, p. 149.

⁹⁴ For more on the symbolic significance of Percival's name, see Maria DiBattista, *Virginia Woolf's Major Novels: The Fables of Anon* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1980), pp. 152-3.

⁹⁵ Schafer, *The Soundscape*, p. 9. Schafer's concept of 'keynote sounds' concurs with Gould's need, when making his radio documentaries, for a kind of 'bass foundation', composed of sea sound or train sound, which could act as a continuum or backdrop, against which other sounds, voices and ideas could be pitched. See Page (ed.), *The Glenn Gould Reader*, p. 383.

non-existent.’⁹⁶ Indeed, the strong focus on background sound in *King Lear* signals an attempt to create a shift in scale, proportion and perspective through sound. The recurrent rustling and crackling sounds in the film that play at various volume levels throughout, are associated visually with a field of crops, with water, fire, a burning sparkler and, at the end of the film, with an enormous mass of film tape in the editing studio, as if to push the spectator into increasing proximity with the raw materials of cinema through the sound of this pervasive sonic texture.

As Timothy Murray writes of the film: ‘the characters of *King Lear* reveal that the post-nuclear age has fused moving images and static words in a way that lends little solace to previously comforting cultural points of view and orientations which now lie “twisted without reason, as if perspective has been abolished... [as if] the vanishing point has been erased”’.⁹⁷ However, the sense of liquidity and blank space produced by death in *The Waves* is, like the murky colours, distorted sounds and skewed perspective of *King Lear*, not devoid of hope. Whilst the film is itself immersed in Godard’s ‘death of cinema’ discourse, we are forever encouraged to listen out for a new subversive body beneath, composed of a ‘silent’ aural plurality that carves out an alternative imaginative site through sound and the sense of hearing.

Music, in this film, is forever undermining traces of logocentrism by working sonically with the mass of voices and ambient noise to generate a form of expression that exceeds what for Woolf was ‘the inflexibility of language’.⁹⁸ Feelings of dislocation reverberate with the distorted flow of time and the broken course of history that can be perceived aurally and visually throughout Godard’s *King Lear*. The extracts of recorded music are unhinged and unbalanced, having undergone, like Schaeffer’s sound objects, a process of mutation through extreme deceleration. And yet, along with the excessive primal ‘music’ of gull cries, slurping sounds, grunts, squealing reptiles and chanting, they swamp the image-track in an aural aura of revolt. The choric babble of artifice is entwined with the bubbling

⁹⁶ Schafer, *The Soundscape*, pp. 9-10.

⁹⁷ Timothy Murray, ‘The Crisis of Cinema in the Age of New World Memory: the Baroque Performance of *King Lear*’ in Temple and Williams (eds.), *The Cinema Alone*, pp. 159-78 (pp. 164-5). Murray here quotes the voiceover speech of a passage uttered by Godard during the first restaurant scene.

⁹⁸ Deborah Parsons notes in her introduction to the novel that in *The Waves*, Woolf was working hard to achieve ‘a greater elasticity of expression with the novel form.’ See Deborah Parsons, ‘Introduction’ in Woolf, *The Waves*, pp. v-xvii (p. vi).

up of a fresh syntax, poised to emerge with new visions and sounds as we shift incessantly from Woolf's experimental 'playpoem' to Godard's 'twisted fairy-tale'.⁹⁹

5.6 The multitrack ear

In his writing on auditory experience, Steven Connor states: 'Where auditory experience is dominant, we may say, singular, perspectival gives way to plural, permeated space. The self defined in terms of hearing rather than sight is a self imaged not as a point, but as a membrane; not as a picture, but as a channel through which voices, noises and musics travel.'¹⁰⁰ Connor highlights the impact of radio technology in the early twentieth century, which showed up sound's ability to disintegrate and reshape space, producing 'a more fluid, mobile and voluminous conception of space, in which the observer-observed duality and distinctions between separated points and planes dissolve.'¹⁰¹ The multiple voices in *King Lear* seem to move in, around and through us, providing us with the plural, mobile conception of space outlined in Connor's description. They operate somewhere between voiceover, voice-off and interior monologue. The latter, Doane writes, manifests the 'inner lining' of the body: 'The voice displays what is inaccessible to the image, what exceeds the visible: the "inner life" of the character', becoming 'the privileged mark of interiority, turning the body "inside-out."¹⁰² In *King Lear*, we are constantly hearing voices as this film's insides spill out and reverberate through the image space.

In the early stages of the film, a sumptuous vocal canon is constructed, accompanied by a low string sound, as if to kindle, through this arrangement of speech, the imitative texture and sparse chorale melody of the 3rd movement (*Molto adagio*) of Beethoven's *Quartet No. 15 in A Minor*, Op. 132 that played at half-speed during the first close-up shot (a *tableau vivant*) of Shakespeare Jr. in the restaurant. The canon begins to take shape when we hear the voice-off of Cordelia (Molly Ringwald) reading the first six lines of Shakespeare's Sonnet 47, in which the poet is temporarily consoled by a 'picture' of his absent friend. Her recitation overlaps the whispered tones of an anonymous male, disembodied voice that

⁹⁹ When he first appears, we hear Shakespeare Jr. ask via voice-off: 'Why don't they just order some goblin to shoot this twisted fairy-tale?' as the intertitle KING LEAR/A STUDY flashes up.

¹⁰⁰ Steven Connor, 'The Modern Auditory I' in Roy Porter (ed.), *Rewriting the Self: Histories from the Renaissance to the present* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 203-23 (p. 207).

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 206-7.

¹⁰² Doane, 'The Voice in the Cinema', p. 41.

reads Lear's lines, accompanied by a strange droopy string sound, namely an excerpt from the 2nd movement (*Adagio ma non troppo*) of Beethoven's *Quartet No. 10 in Eb Major*, Op. 74.¹⁰³ In an extraordinary trick of slow-motion sound, Godard disobeys Beethoven's instructions by slowing this passage of music down to a quarter of the original speed, which produces a drastic two-octave drop in pitch, to form what sounds as an intimate yet disconcerting close-up of vibrato in slow-motion.¹⁰⁴

At times, it seems objects in *Soigne ta droite* have been scattered through the image-track of *King Lear*. The shiny film tin that fascinates Edgar in the latter film reminds us of the Prince's film tins that sparkle in *Soigne ta droite* and later clatter to the ground. In the late stages of *King Lear*, we see a particularly elusive image of a film tin floating downstream (see Fig. 7). The camera moves ever closer to the object, panning swiftly alongside it; a



Figure 7: a floating tin, rippling water and a minor scale [1:18:46].

movement matched by the sound of rippling water and a gloomy descending minor scale (played at half-speed) from the 4th movement (*Grave, ma non troppo tratto*) of *Quartet No. 16 in F Major*, Op. 135. The speed alteration causes the pitch of the violin part to jump down an octave, its sound mutating into a grubbier version of the original. The sequence finishes with a poignant shot of smooth pebbles in the green water, which resemble the shape of the silver tin that floats like an extra-terrestrial life form among the elements of the natural world. This example of pure motion evokes a powerful image of light falling on objects in the house in *The Waves*, when 'Everything became softly amorphous, as if the

¹⁰³ The same excerpt features in *Prénom Carmen* and *Histoire(s)* (episode 1A).

¹⁰⁴ We are reminded of a suggestion written into the shot descriptions for the love scenes in *Prénom Carmen*: when the quartet are filmed rehearsing the fast section of the *Molto Adagio* from Beethoven's *Quartet No. 15*, Op. 132, Godard suggests in brackets: 'Peut-être des ralentis ou décomposés des mouvements de doigts des mains d'hommes et de la jeune fille faisant les vibratos.' This suggestion is realised not visually but aurally and acousmatically in *King Lear*. See Bergala (ed.), *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard*, I, p. 565.

china of the plate flowed and the steel of the knife were liquid.’¹⁰⁵ During this fleeting sequence in the film, we are immersed in the trickles, shimmers, scratches and flickers of the sonic and visual textures. The sound of rippling water is merged with a sharper rustling sound and we soon see a reel of film tape coiled up like a black snake in a heap on the ground. This displaced reel of tape wriggles across the dead grass, partly camouflaged by the vegetation. As Doane notes of the acoustic space in the traditional cinema theatre: ‘despite the fact that the speaker is behind the screen and therefore sound appears to be emanating from a focused point, sound is not “framed” in the same way as the image. In a sense, it *envelops* the spectator.’¹⁰⁶ Indeed, it would not be a surprise to learn that Godard’s *King Lear* has surreptitiously crafted a clever net of audio that entangles us unknowingly in a sonic play of kinship, in keeping with the theme of Shakespeare’s play.

5.7 Auditory experience: silence and sound

During a lengthy sequence that takes place in a cinema theatre, at which ‘Virginia’ (Julie Delpy) is seen selling cigarettes at the door, we see Cordelia and Learo arrive for a screening of the Russian director Grigori Kozintsev’s film version of *King Lear* (*Korol Lir*) (1970). Cordelia’s profile is filmed in close-up as she watches this film in darkness. We never *see* what she sees as she looks up at the big screen. Instead, the camera focuses our attention on Cordelia and her father experiencing the film, like us, as spectators. Moreover, our eyes are drawn to the shape of Lear’s ear as well as to Cordelia’s silhouette in this



Figure 8: Cordelia and Learo at the cinema [1:09:07].

¹⁰⁵ This line appears in the second italicised background interlude in Woolf, *The Waves*, p. 15.

¹⁰⁶ Doane, ‘The Voice in the Cinema’, p. 39.

abstract and enigmatic image of ‘silence’. Although we are deprived of viewing Kozintsev’s film, its presence comes alive through sound, for we can *hear* a portion of its soundtrack, which is faintly marked by the soft intrusion of the slowed strains of Beethoven’s *Molto adagio* (no. 15 in A Minor, op. 132). We are, therefore, explicitly made to confront the spectator’s experience of film through the sense of hearing (see Fig. 8).

In 1926, Woolf’s essay ‘The Cinema’ was published. In this essay, she discusses cinema’s potential and power as a new art form, and she gives emphasis to the matter of film spectatorship. She comments on the collisions of emotion, the vivid contrasts and dazzling speed that cinema is capable of expressing in its own unique way.¹⁰⁷ Woolf alludes to her experience of attending a performance of the German silent film *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920), pondering the possibility that ‘thought could be conveyed by shape more effectively than by words.’¹⁰⁸ Soon afterwards, she asks: ‘For what characteristics does thought possess which can be rendered visible to the eye without the help of words?’¹⁰⁹ This image of Cordelia silently watching and listening to the eponymous film within a film, as her own name is pronounced on Kozintsev’s soundtrack, could also be construed as the ghostly trace of the writer herself, self-reflexively experiencing ‘glimpses of something vital within’, as Woolf wrote of the (silent) cinema.¹¹⁰

In a diary entry, Woolf explained how she came to shape Bernard’s final soliloquy in *The Waves* (we hear the last paragraph of this passage recited by a female voice in *King Lear*): ‘It occurred to me last night while listening to a Beethoven quartet that I would merge all the interjected passages into Bernard’s final speech, & end with the words O solitude: thus making him absorb all those scenes, & having no further break.’¹¹¹ As Clements deduces, the important tie between Woolf’s experience of listening to the quartets, and the form and content of the novel, reveals that it was specifically in the music that Woolf found ‘a model for enacting simultaneity’. Clements affirms: ‘From the time of *The Waves* onward, Woolf is listening extensively to Beethoven’s musical patterns and experiments, using them to

¹⁰⁷ Virginia Woolf, ‘The Cinema’ in David Bradshaw (ed.), *Virginia Woolf: Selected Essays* (Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 172-6 (p. 175).

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

¹⁰⁹ *Idem.*

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

¹¹¹ As cited in Clements, ‘Virginia Woolf, Ethel Smyth, and Music’, p. 61. In the final version of *The Waves*, Woolf finishes the final soliloquy with the words ‘O Death!’.

reconceptualise her novelistic methods.’¹¹² In Godard’s *King Lear*, following the shot of Cordelia leading a white horse through the trees, accompanied by the recitation of Bernard’s final soliloquy, we begin to hear the half-speed drones of the 3rd movement (*Lento assai, cantante et tranquillo*) of *Quartet No. 16 in F Major*, Op. 135. In *The Waves*, just before this soliloquy begins, we read: ‘there is a gradual coming together, running into one, acceleration and unification.’¹¹³ Godard thus assigns to us the task of the radical writer, as she composes her final image. We are placed inside her mind, listening as she was to a Beethoven quartet, attempting to *see* for ourselves the artist’s vision in the closing moments of the film.

In the concluding stages of *King Lear*, Shakespeare Jr. utters: ‘to accompany the dawn of our first image’. The word ‘image’ coincides with an exhilarating shot of a white horse galloping across the field of vision, followed on the soundtrack by an eruption of raucous gull cries and a 3-second period of silence. This visual sequence soon returns explosively in stop-start motion, shattering Mr. Alien’s (Woody Allen) splicing in the editing studio. In his analysis of this sequence, Williams writes: ‘Photographed in long shot by the water’s edge, the horse raced into the left foreground as if towards the camera and past the viewer in stop-start motion. The shot, lasting only a matter of seconds, had the electroshock force of a sequence in early primitive cinema projected and seen as if for the first time, like Muybridge’s horses captured in pristine motion.’¹¹⁴ Indeed, Godard has recomposed cinematically, through this final scene of ‘projection’, Woolf’s vivid finale of unification and defiance. The drastic decelerations that Godard has performed on the musical extracts from the start, slow the spectator into a thick bog of sound and immerse our ears in the ‘inner lining’ of the filmic body. Godard *plays* the music in *King Lear* by appropriating and reinterpreting Beethoven’s performance directions (the fast-paced *Vivace* and the slow *Molto adagio, Adagio ma non troppo, Grave, ma non troppo tratto* and the *Lento assai, cantante et tranquillo*) using the electronic devices at his disposal. The electronic speed changes imposed on the music force the spectator to undergo an experience of constraint through sound, and it is our ears that open our eyes to the surprise of this exalted poetic movement of fresh energy and pure visual emotion, which, like the visible ‘roar of time’

¹¹² Clements, ‘Virginia Woolf, Ethel Smyth, and Music’, p. 61.

¹¹³ Woolf, *The Waves*, p. 165.

¹¹⁴ Williams, ‘Silence, Gesture, Revelation’, p. 42.

experienced by the voices in *The Waves*, prepares the way for a new speed, a new rhythm and a new sound.¹¹⁵

5.8 Conclusion

In *King Lear*, Godard pushes us for the first time into the depths of sonic distortion, owing to a sustained use of half-speed (and a single instance of quarter-speed) playback, performed on the extracts of music, before snapping us back to the present and propelling us forward in a single moment of visual elation. The gloopy string sounds remind us of old, flaccid singing voices that retain a substantial measure of feeling and warmth. *King Lear* bears the rare and precious stamp of the ‘cinematic ethos’, which Dudley Andrews defines as ‘an attitude of curiosity, spontaneity, and responsiveness to a reality conceived of as indefinitely enigmatic and worthy of our care.’¹¹⁶ It is this attitude that Godard’s spectators are encouraged to develop, if they are to experience and appreciate the vastness and abundance that bursts out from the palimpsestic interactions of the separate fragments of visual, textual and sonic matter. Through reference to Woolf’s writings as well as her creative method, we have seen how her presence is exploited by Godard to generate an imaginary site devoted to the lost space of cinematic projection, usurped by the omnipresence of electronic imagery. Paradoxically, it is the electronic manipulation of audio that catalyzes our return to the materiality of the medium of film, and that draws our attention to the spectator’s experience of cinema through sound, encouraging us to listen out for signs of possible renewal.

The parade of bodies filing past the camera, crossing the field of vision in *On s’est tous défilé*, in which the images and sounds are mixed and manipulated to run at different speeds, can be construed, in conjunction with *Soigne ta droite* and *King Lear*, as forming part of Godard’s sustained resuscitation of the rhythms, energy and musical plasticity of the image in silent cinema. In *Soigne ta droite* and *King Lear*, the striking emphasis on the wider soundscape expands our perceptions of the productive power of acoustic space, which is organized to affect, destabilize and challenge the spectator. In each of these films,

¹¹⁵ Bernard refers to the ‘roar of time’ and ‘the huge blackness of what is outside us’, during a description of the group’s last dinner together. See Woolf, *The Waves*, p. 156.

¹¹⁶ Dudley Andrew, *What Cinema Is!: Bazin’s quest and its charge* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), p. 94.

accepted links between a sound and its source are constantly called into question. Godard's use of acousmatic sound provides him with a means of examining the complex period in cinema history when the arrival of synchronized sound destabilized the relation between body and voice. A scene of cinematic projection takes place during the closing moments of both *Soigne ta droite* and *King Lear*, reminding us vividly of the otherworldly portal (the open doorway) next to the ominous red screen in the musicalized corridor that concludes *Sauve qui peut (la vie)*. From the birth of silent cinema, encompassing Woolf's essay on the new art form, to the coming of sound and her experimental novel *The Waves* in *King Lear*, through the handling of stereo sound and the electro-acoustic environment in *Soigne ta droite*, we arrive, in reverse motion, at Godard's radical videographic 'play' with acceleration and deceleration in *On s'est tous défilé*. The three films explored in this chapter provide snapshots of sound history, as we are tossed from silence to sound, from aural chaos to sonorous form, while our visual perspective is reconfigured through auditory experience. It is the overwhelming substance and dynamism of sound that gradually establishes a new auditory anchor point, as an attempt is made to clear a space for intimate experience, emotion and thought.

Chapter 6

Between the Ear and the Screen: dance, doubling and changing space in *Nouvelle vague* (film, 1990) and *Nouvelle vague* (CD, 1997)

Nouvelle vague explores themes of nature and human love, as well as power, gender and class relations (we traverse private, domestic and occupational spaces) within a late-capitalist world, and at the heart of this multilayered film lie questions of form, notably, the interrelation of sight and sound. Indeed, in a unique move, the entire soundtrack of *Nouvelle vague* was released in 1997 by ECM New Series as a stand-alone audio CD set comprising two compact discs. The soundtrack was produced by Manfred Eicher and was digitally remixed by Musy. This chapter will focus on sequences from the film as well as passages from the audio CD to examine how through an impulse of dance and an emphasis on the tactile and visually stimulating qualities of sound, the CD soundtrack can be construed as another *version* of the film. In his essay ‘The Task of the Translator’, Walter Benjamin describes the translated text as the belated work that comes after the original, marking its ‘stage of continued life.’¹ The translation stands as the ‘afterlife’ of the source text, signalling change, transformation and renewal,² and in *Nouvelle vague* it is the process of listening and responding to the sounds, music and voices that animates the auditory afterlife of this film.

These ideas are articulated clearly in a text printed in the CD booklet entitled ‘Le Regard intérieur: *Nouvelle Vague* de Jean-Luc Godard’, written by Claire Bartoli, a French writer and storyteller who lost her sight at the age of twenty-three. The booklet is composed of an intricate account of her personal, sensory experience of listening to the soundtrack. Bartoli constructs a written transcription, through description and typographic detail, of her auditory experience of the film. Bartoli first recorded her feelings on a tape-recorder, after listening several times to the CD. She then copied up her notes and later began listening again to the film, recording more thoughts and feelings, rereading her previous impressions and making more notes in braille as her ideas took shape. With the help of the *L’Avant-Scène Cinéma* script, she extracted five main subjects from her initial impressions. The layout of the text is significant, for she distinguishes between her own thoughts, textual descriptions of sounds as she perceived

¹ Walter Benjamin, ‘The Task of the Translator: An Introduction to the Translation of Baudelaire’s *Tableaux parisiens*’ in *Illuminations*, Hannah Arendt (ed.), trans. by Harry Zorn (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1968), pp. 69-82 (p. 71).

² *Ibid.*, pp. 71-3.

them (these are indented and in capitals), her interpretation of the sounds, and fragments of the dialogues (printed in italics).

Bartoli describes listening as a pleasure and an effort. It demands intense concentration, especially in the cinema, and she draws upon her visual memories and her imagination to foster what she terms ‘mon « cinéma intérieur »’.³ In the fifth section of the text, Bartoli remarks:

C’est en perdant la vue que j’ai ressenti que la vision projette vers l’extérieur. L’oreille, elle, nous ramène vers notre monde intérieur. Le temps est à la fois à l’intérieur et à l’extérieur de nous. C’est ce que *Nouvelle Vague* me rappelle dans son entrelacs d’instant, de souvenirs, de germes de futur, où c’est l’être intérieur qui rassemble les moments épars de la vie.⁴

The soundtrack’s inner logic of memory, dream and feeling coalesces with the listener’s internal world in *Nouvelle vague*, forming an intimate and singular bond. As the music critic Paul Griffiths reminds us: ‘A record – the very word connotes this – is a memory, a slice of preserved time.’⁵ Bartoli’s active, spontaneous and thorough textual response demonstrates how the CD soundtrack provides access to what Eicher defines as ‘the other side of the musical listening experience’, namely, not that of listening to a performance or of playing an instrument but of ‘producing’ the sound ourselves.⁶

In his study of sound art, Brandon LaBelle emphasizes that sound takes place among bodies and constitutes a social, public event that reaches multiple destinations and generates listeners, who actively participate in the shared experience of a sound event. He writes: ‘it [sound] expands and contracts space by accumulating reverberation, relocating place beyond itself, carrying it in its wave, and inhabiting always more than one place; it misplaces and displaces; like a car speaker blasting too much music, sound overflows borders. It is boundless on the one hand, and site-specific on the other.’⁷ To return to the medium of film, our conception of space changes when the sense of hearing dominates and when we can no longer see the borders of the screen. It becomes

³ Claire Bartoli, ‘Le Regard intérieur: *Nouvelle Vague* de Jean-Luc Godard’ in the CD booklet to Jean-Luc Godard, *Nouvelle Vague*, prod. by ECM Records (1997) [on CD], p. 4. Translated versions of Bartoli’s text in English and German are included in the booklet.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁵ Paul Griffiths, ‘Against the Grain: Modernist Voices’ in Lake and Griffiths (eds.), *Horizons Touched*, pp. 287-93 (p. 287).

⁶ Manfred Eicher, ‘The Periphery and the Centre’, p. 10.

⁷ Brandon LaBelle, *Background Noise: Perspectives on Sound Art* (New York and London: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc, 2006), p. xi.

more fluid, more mobile and previously inconspicuous sonic details unexpectedly catch our attention. The medium of audio CD enables *Nouvelle vague* the film to be experienced in a different context, creating in the process a new musical community of ‘spectators’ who listen to and thus *hear* and *see* the film from different perspectives through its soundtrack.

The soundtrack starts and finishes with extracts from the mournful track *Winter* for bandoneon, composed by the Argentine musician Dino Saluzzi.⁸ The bandoneon, a portable box-shaped instrument designed to be held in both hands is operated by a musician’s fingers a little like a camera. Induced by this surging melody, the soundtrack absorbs the spectator in wave-like rhythms of tension and release that swell perpetually throughout like a long wave that fails to break.⁹ The first three notes of the bandoneon music, heard alone on the soundtrack as the film begins, are quickly interwoven with the first words uttered in the film.¹⁰ The melody collides with the word ‘récit’, a noun that denotes a story, a narrative or a written or oral account. This word also carries a musical connotation, the archaic meaning designating a vocal or instrumental solo passage.¹¹ In this manner, the gentle outbreak of musical activity that launches *Nouvelle vague* sets in motion a process of recording, attuning us to notions of time, memory and narration, all through the sense of hearing.

The formal significance of music in *Nouvelle vague* is underscored in the third of three possible scenarios that Godard sketched out for the film, where the succession of sequence shots are associated with different tempo markings in music (an *allegro*, a *vivace*, an *andante*, a *largo*).¹² The comings and goings of servants, waiters and passers-by constitute incidental ‘noise’ to be conveyed by the movement of the camera in order to illuminate the fundamental ‘silent sound’ that binds ‘elle’ and ‘lui’. Godard writes:

⁸ The five extracts of music by Saluzzi that infuse the soundtrack of *Nouvelle vague* with the distinctive bandoneon sound, along with the full-screen shots of water, the boat trips and the lapping and rippling sounds, evoke potent episodes in Jean Vigo’s *L’Atalante* (1934), to which Godard makes explicit reference in *Éloge de l’amour*.

⁹ *Nouvelle vague* refers explicitly in its title to the movement of cinema history *la nouvelle vague*, which Godard and his peers pioneered. This new ‘movement’ in film history that, as Daniel Morgan notes, was built on the cinema of others (Rossellini, Hawks, Renoir, Hitchcock etc.) and inspired future filmmakers, is resuscitated in *Nouvelle vague*, connoting a sense of progression, encased within a much larger progression, all the while referring us back to the past. See Morgan, *Late Godard and the Possibilities of Cinema*, p. 97.

¹⁰ We hear the voice of Lennox who utters: ‘Mais c’est un récit que je voulais faire.../cut/...et je le veux encore. De l’extérieur, rien ne vient distraire ma mémoire.../cut/...C’est tout juste si j’entends, de loin en loin, la terre gémir doucement, dont un rayon déchire la surface.’ See Jean-Luc Godard, ‘*Nouvelle Vague*’ in *L’Avant-Scène Cinéma*, 396/397 (1990), p. 13.

¹¹ Josette Rey-Debove and Alain Rey (eds.), *Le Nouveau Petit Robert : dictionnaire alphabétique et analogique de la langue française* (Paris: Dictionnaires Le Robert, 1993), p. 2193.

¹² Bergala (ed.), *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard*, II, p. 193.

‘Le fluide des mouvements sociaux et mondains, transmis par le mouvement de caméra, fait surgir comme solide la liaison amoureuse, un peu comme si de la musique faisait naître de la sculpture.’¹³ The intimate bond between Elena (Domiziana Giordano) and Lennox (Alain Delon), musically inflected through this metaphor of silence, is to emerge from the hubbub of musicalized motion as a special silent ‘image’ that is rhythmic, ambiguous and alive.

In this chapter, I will treat *Nouvelle vague* as a series of rhythmic movements and steps, revealing how the sonic and visual patterns that gradually establish themselves come to influence, shape and enrich our perceptual experiences. We shall attend first to instances of recurrence in an analysis underpinned by the metaphor of dance, before turning inwards to consider notions of recorded time and inner space through reference to a dream-sequence in Andrei Tarkovsky’s *Nostalghia*, in which Domiziana Giordano, who stars as Elena Torlato Favri in *Nouvelle vague*, plays a lead role. I will devote particular attention to texture and voice as we move to and fro between media, to expose the important dynamic relation between sound, space and the listener. My analysis will show how the musical organisation of sound in *Nouvelle vague* comes to form a ripe piece of sonic art and how the auditory-visual experiences produced serve to break down and reinvent notions of what *seeing* film entails.

6.1 Choreographic patterns and phrases

The powerful musicality of *Nouvelle vague* is conveyed largely through its repetitions, variations and reversals. Chanan identifies a sense of reconstitution and renewal in his review of the CD soundtrack, which he aptly describes as *musique concrète* or radio art. The separation of sound from the visual image leads to the formation of ‘a revolving time, like that of poetry and of memory, where events are resuscitated, but there are no endings, only new beginnings.’¹⁴ In their chapter ‘The Same, Yet Other: *New Wave/Nouvelle vague* (1990)’, Silverman and Farocki comment on the recurring scenes, the reprised images and the incessant quotations in the film, noting that many scenes ‘are placed in a metaphoric relation to each other through musical echoes.’¹⁵ Moreover, Williams has drawn attention to the chiasmic structure of the film, which is evident not

¹³ Bergala (ed.), *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard*, II, p. 193.

¹⁴ Chanan, Michael, ‘The Sound of Godard: Jean-Luc Godard, *Nouvelle Vague*’ in *Vertigo*, 1:7 (1997) <http://www.closeupfilmcentre.com/vertigo_magazine/volume-1-issue-7-autumn-1997/the-sound-of-godard/> [accessed 11.11.2013] (para. 4 of 7).

¹⁵ Silverman and Farocki, *Speaking about Godard*, p. 198.

only in the musical arrangement (the soundtrack begins and ends with the same two tracks: Saluzzi's *Winter*, Darling's *Far Away Lights/Darling's Far Away Lights*, Saluzzi's *Winter*), or in the opening credits ('*Vague Nouvelle/Nouvelle Vague*'), but also in the CD booklet.¹⁶

In the first of the three scenarios devised for the film, we read: 'Danse./D'où un couple de danseurs quotidiens tels qu'on peut les trouver chez A. M. Teresa de Keersmaeker qui fera un peu miroir dans la cour de l'usine./Musique.'¹⁷ In *Nouvelle vague*, rhythms of physical labour and mechanical motion are set against more organic rhythms of nature and the body. Linear movements are counteracted by cyclical patterns and the spectator is often plunged into fleeting periods of stasis, which expose us to zones of more intricate sonic detail. The noisy harmony of Jules's tractor engine that recurs throughout the film, the sounds and images of him sweeping, cutting and reciting verse, along with the two drowning scenes that mirror each other, the strange death of Roger and the 'return' of Richard Lennox, and the recurring extracts of music, all point to traces of the underlying dynamism of dance and music that shapes *Nouvelle vague* in important ways.

In his late writings, Henri Lefebvre, an amateur pianist, explores the relationship between space and time through a detailed study of rhythm. He affirms that the body is composed of a multiplicity of rhythms that are kept in balance in everyday life to produce the harmonious state of 'eurhythmia' [*l'eurythmie*], which he contrasts to the dangerous discordant state of 'arrhythmia' [*l'a-rythmie*] that throws the body into a disordered pathological state, causing suffering.¹⁸ An important aspect of rhythm for Lefebvre is its straddling of a regulated, mathematical time and 'le vécu, le charnel, le corps.'¹⁹ This is a crucial point to which Lefebvre returns in his writing on music and rhythm and one that he had previously stressed more generally in *La Vie quotidienne dans le monde moderne*, where he stated: 'dans la musique tout est nombre et quantité (les intervalles, les rythmes, les timbres) et tout est lyrisme, orgie ou rêve. Tout est vital et vitalité et sensibilité, et tout y est analyse, précision, fixité.'²⁰ The relationship

¹⁶ See Williams, 'Music, Love, and the Cinematic Event', pp. 301-2. Williams moves on to explore the non-chiastic use of music in the film, which inspires a 'soaring lateral tracking shot' and 'a sublime musical moment'. He demonstrates how in *Nouvelle vague* Godard exploits music's capacity to 'generate formally of itself the originality and emotion of montage.' See *Ibid.*, pp. 302-4.

¹⁷ Bergala (ed.), *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard*, II, p. 189.

¹⁸ Henri Lefebvre, *Éléments de rythmanalyse: Introduction à la connaissance des rythmes* (Paris: Éditions Syllepse, 1992), pp. 26-7.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

²⁰ Henri Lefebvre, *La Vie quotidienne dans le monde moderne* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1968), p. 44.

between a manufactured musical time, patterns of recurrence and the rhythms of the body is raised succinctly in Lefebvre's study of rhythm when he poses the question: 'Le rythme d'une valse de Chopin est-il naturel ou factice?'²¹ One of the most liberating pleasures for a musician is the capacity to manipulate time. To actively shape a phrase in a musical manner, that is, to kindle a sense of movement rather than mechanical accuracy, involves a tacit understanding of rhythm. Inversely, the same effect can be achieved by implementing a more passive and impersonal approach. In this case, the performer might be required to submit to the music in order to foreground the crude emotion that emerges from a strict rhythmic process.

Some of the ideas touched upon by Lefebvre are brilliantly illustrated in the work of choreographer Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker. After writing to the American composer Steve Reich, she was granted permission to use three musicians from his ensemble to perform four of his compositions live for her new choreography. This hour-long choreography was the groundbreaking work *Fase* (1982). In the first section, as Reich observes, the detailed use of lighting produces 'overlapping shadows that accentuate the repetitive motions that slowly move in and out of phase'.²² For Reich, the originality of

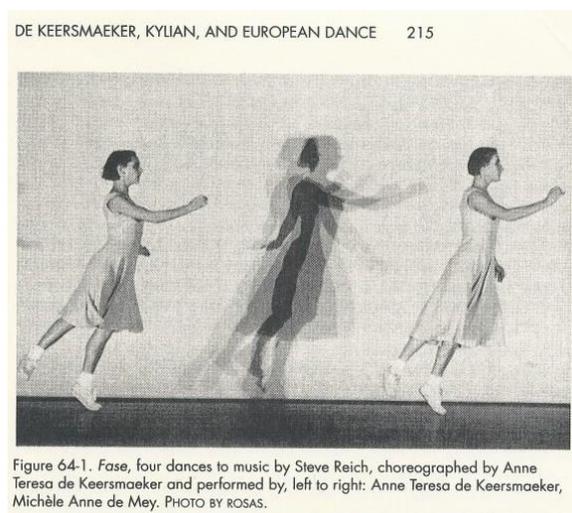


Figure 1: a still from *Fase*.

her choreography derives from the combination of '[a] highly systemic organization filled with intensely passionate movement', thus emphasizing the emotional power generated from the sudden, unexpected and idiosyncratic irregularities that burst into life from such rigorous, tense and intense, uniform straight-line motion.²³ The shadow

²¹ Lefebvre, *Éléments de rythmanalyse*, p. 18.

²² Reich, *Writings on Music*, p. 214.

²³ Idem.

in this photograph (see Fig. 1) evokes ideas of perception beyond ordinary sight and of sensing energies out of range.²⁴ The silhouette that hovers on the white wall constitutes a fragile transcription of the dancers's live physical gestures, resembling the permutations of movement captured by Étienne-Jules Marey's chronophotography. The mechanised repetitions of the dancers's energetic movements create a mesmeric shadow-play, a visible trace of the different phases of the body, on the blank screen behind, gradually placing the spectator in contact with the direct emotion of the body, as our eye is drawn in close to discern, step by step, how the body moves.

An apt passage of music, the serene opening four bars of the *Fantasia* from Paul Hindemith's *Sonata for Viola and Piano*, Op. 4, No. 11 (1919), is repeated three times toward the end of *Nouvelle vague*, in the space of two minutes [CD2, 27:03 - 29:00]. This section of the film is whimsical, lyrical and stylised. Before the music enters, we hear the disembodied voice of Jules repeating his earlier commentary about summer coming early and disturbing the order of things: 'L'été était en avance, cette année, et un peu déréglé. Tout a fleuri à la fois: les prés.../cut'.²⁵ The later commentary constitutes a very slight variation of the first: 'L'été était en avance, cette année, et un peu déréglé. Tout a fleuri à la fois./cut'.²⁶ The cuts are more frequent in the later version, quickening the pace, and the chauffeur's lines are now made to overlap Jules's words, forming two simultaneous channels of speech, one faintly masking the other, as our attention is drawn to the texture and shape of the layered speech sounds. When the music begins for the first time, the first two chords of the accompaniment are followed each time by Elena's slow, poised diction: [chord] 'Madame!' [chord] 'Madame.'. As the musical phrase plays out, it is marked by a succession of disruptive noises (a screeching engine, doors slamming and snatches of dialogue). After a short pause, the same phrase recommences. However, this time the music enters after a period of silence. The ambient noise is dampened and for the first time in the film we are made aware of a rare moment of total stillness, which prepares our ears anew for the first chord.

²⁴ The photograph in Fig. 1 (reproduced here) is printed in Reich, *Writings on Music*, p. 215.

²⁵ Godard, '*Nouvelle Vague*', p. 31.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

During this first repeat, accompanied only by a dog barking, the richness of the viola solo resounds with more power and volume. The tied note in the third bar is replaced by the sound of rushing water, whose entrance is timed perfectly. This refreshing and vibrant sound intrudes on the melody, which disappears gradually while the rushing



Figure 2: gushing water [1:14:56].

water continues through and beyond the fourth bar, as if to drown the musical form. The first repeat of the musical phrase is aligned in the film with an image of bordered space: we see some horses in a field and a horizontal red line runs across the centre of the frame, which splits the image in two, creating a neat symmetrical pattern. When the water sound commences, Lennox suddenly catches Elena and twirls her around, transforming our perception of the rushing water into rapturous applause. The camera immediately cuts to a strange high-angle shot of a more ambiguous, unbounded and disorienting image: we see water gushing spontaneously into a stream, and into a small drain (see Fig. 2).²⁷ Two circular shapes form an imaginary diagonal line that crosses the field of vision. One is a dark hollow that gravitates inward and the other is white and effervescent.

Auditory space, as Edmund Carpenter and Marshall McLuhan defined it in 1960, is ‘a sphere without fixed boundaries, space made by the thing itself, not space containing the thing. It is not pictorial space, boxed in, but dynamic, always in flux, creating its own dimensions moment by moment.’²⁸ As LaBelle made clear in the passage cited at the start of this chapter, sound overflows borders; it is plural, fluid, and not limited by its source or cause. In the above example, the sound of gushing water drenches the precision, order and intricacy of the musical form, creating a more voluminous and

²⁷ All images are taken from *Nouvelle Vague*, dir. by Jean-Luc Godard (Collection 2 films de Cahiers du cinéma, 1990) [on DVD].

²⁸ Edmund Carpenter and Marshall McLuhan, ‘Acoustic Space’ in Carpenter and McLuhan (eds.), *Explorations in Communication: An Anthology* (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd., 1970), pp. 65-70 (p 67).

expansive impression of space for the listener. As the gushing sound supersedes the viola melody, a vague feeling of displacement is produced, which this transient close-up shot of water communicates to the eye (see Fig. 2). The cyclic time produced and intensified by the musical reprise in this part of *Nouvelle vague* generates a pleasurable sense of forward movement, enchantment and change, rather than automated repetition. In his writing on the repeat in music, Vladimir Jankélévitch emphasizes: ‘[c]’est qu’entre la première fois et la deuxième un intervalle de temps s’est écoulé qui rend l’itération novatrice, qui fait de l’insistance une incantation, de la monotonie une magie, de la répétition stationnaire un progrès.’²⁹ Music’s inclination to autonomy is counterbalanced by its power to spill over its borders and imbue its surroundings with its tones, rhythms and emotions. The returns of the *Fantasia* open us rhythmically and poetically to the immediacy and fullness of its measured sound, and to the new colours, moods and impressions that form each time as the aural contexts modulate.

Whilst the soundtrack provides a multiplicity of ways of making sense of the film, on occasion the image-track creates connections between sections of soundtrack that may otherwise never be perceived. For example, toward the start of *Nouvelle vague*, we see a lush image of green foliage, sprinkled with reds, yellows and russet colours (see Fig. 3, i). There is a darker shadowy plant in the foreground with the idyllic blue lake just visible behind. In the closing stages of the film, the same image appears, but this time the colour contrast is a little lower, producing a softer, warmer hue. The first image is

Figure 3, i: this image is accompanied by Monk’s *Do You Be* and birdsong [0:16:00].



shown for only six seconds while the later image remains for a further ten, signalling a sense of development and change. Liesbeth Wildschut underscores how in dance ‘[r]epetition is an important choreographic principle. Repetition makes the audience

²⁹ Vladimir Jankélévitch, *La Musique et l’ineffable* (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1961), p. 32.

see',³⁰ In this instance, a visual repetition of the same image creates a bond between two dissimilar portions of soundtrack, spotlighting differences between them. The first time we see the image, it is aligned with a snippet of Meredith Monk's *Do You Be* for solo voice and piano. The track is mixed to harmonise with the end of the melody from Paolo Conte's *Blue Tango*, which swiftly dies away. The accordion accompaniment from the Conte track is replaced by the more stately piano chords of *Do You Be*, which are supported by the slow regular ticks of a clock that, like a metronome, steady the transition from one soundworld to another. Monk's first piercing cry rings out against an acoustic backdrop of lapping water and birdsong. Her cry is sporadically overlaid by the voice of Raoul, whose speech melody is sometimes tuned to the pitch of the vocal solo, as if the music is being sculpted into the heart of the film's soundscape.

In his chapter on language and paralanguage in the context of 'sonic art', the composer Trevor Wishart refers to the concept of the 'timbre fields' of a language. He details: 'any short verbal utterance contains a particular set of timbral objects, and these define a timbral field. [...] The objects may be grouped into 'timbral-motifs' (which may, in fact, be words or phrases).'³¹ Monk's strident cries, devoid of semantic content, constitute high-pitched timbral motifs that form an almost synaesthetic pattern with the shrill colours, sharp outlines and coarse textures of the foliage that trembles gently in this image, flickering and sparkling with the distant caws and pervasive birdsong. This image is placed between two black images that contain the screen-text (in Latin and French): 'RES, NON VERBA'/cut/'LES CHOSES, NON LES MOTS', thereby stressing the non-semantic aspects of speech, namely the sound, texture, shape, as well as the primitive power and directness of the colour and emotion generated by both sound and image. In an interview, Monk, a composer and singer with a three-octave range, emphasizes the importance of timbral colouration and resonance in her work with voice. She experiments with her voice to find different characters and vocal textures, aiming to produce a sound that has a 'centralized emotional quality to it'.³² For Monk, the voice is a language itself and the sound texture of language is just as important as its meaning. She states: '[l]anguage, in a way, is a screen in front of the emotion and the

³⁰ Liesbeth Wildschut, 'Reinforcement for the Choreographer: the Dance Dramaturge as Ally' in Jo Butterworth and Liesbeth Wildschut (eds.), *Contemporary Choreography: A Critical Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 383-98 (p. 394) (original emphasis).

³¹ Trevor Wishart, *On Sonic Art*, Simon Emmerson (ed.), *Contemporary Music Studies*, 12, rev. edn (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1996), pp. 303-5.

³² William Duckworth, *Talking Music: conversations with John Cage, Philip Glass, Laurie Anderson, and five generations of American experimental composers* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1995), pp. 356-7.

action. I like the idea of a direct communication that bypasses that step so that you're really dealing with a very primary and direct emotion; I think music can do that'.³³ Monk highlights the force of the body in her singing voice, which she treats primarily as an instrument rather than as a conduit for text, and she likens her compositional approach to the way a choreographer works with bodies.³⁴

The second occurrence of this image is accompanied on the soundtrack by the poignant asynchronous voice of Elena, whose native tongue is Italian. Her speech is delicate, soft and clear, and it is joined by birdsong and a peaceful, rhythmic cawing sound. Her speech then halts but the birdsong continues and a moment of calm is felt, providing us with time simply to listen and absorb ourselves in the vaguely warmer colours of the

Figure 3, ii: this image is accompanied by Elena's citation and birdsong [1:23:47].



same image of faint restless stirrings (refer to Fig. 3, ii). In her study of the female voice in film, Britta H. Sjogren notes that in French, *voix off* connotes ‘any voice which registers as non-synch – whether a narrating voice that is never seen, a voice emanating from a character who stands just offscreen, or an interior monologue expressing the thoughts of a character visible to us.’³⁵ She clarifies her own use of the term ‘voice-off’, which she prefers to the traditional notion of ‘voiceover’, asserting: ‘I prefer the term “off,” in part, because it registers an independent space. Whereas “over” suggests a top “layer” or cloak of some kind, “off” connotes otherness – a distinctness that moves alongside, “elsewhere.”’³⁶ She highlights the important amorphous nature of voice in film, and its ‘multiple spatiality in relation to imaged space’, warning against efforts to fix the voice as either ‘off’ or ‘over’ simply to adhere to conventional categories.³⁷ Instead, she suggests that ‘[i]t is the very mutability of the voice-off that characterizes it

³³ Duckworth, *Talking Music*, p. 359.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 367.

³⁵ Britta Sjogren, *Into the Vortex: Female Voice and Paradox in Film* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006), p. 6.

³⁶ *Idem.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

– the way it slips free of the image, glides in and out of its attachments to its apparent body'.³⁸ These comments are particularly pertinent to my analysis here, for during these sequences Elena's voice-off instils in the soundtrack an expressive heterogeneous force. Rather than operating as an overarching narrating voice, it creates meaning, formally and structurally as well as textually through the use of citation.

The voice-off exerts a distancing effect on the spectator, for it operates from an 'independent space', as Sjogren makes clear, but carries with it feelings of closeness and familiarity. A sense of distance is conveyed throughout *Nouvelle vague*, in part, through the foreignness of some of the film dialogues, which flit between French, Italian and English.³⁹ In the moments preceding this shot insert (Fig. 3, ii), Elena's words are mixed with the sound of trickling water, reminding us of Monk's first piercing cry. Her speech is composed of citations from Canto III of the second part ('Purgatory') of Dante's *The Divine Comedy*. When Darling's *Faraway Lights* for cello enters, the camera begins to track to the right and certain words are stressed owing to the sibilant speech sounds ('corso'/'stesso rimorso'). Then a small fragment of the same text, uttered by Elena moments earlier, is repeated, forming a sort of silent rhythmic and timbral patterning beneath the loud engine sound, and beneath Lennox's exclamations as he shouts out the names of tennis champions. If we listen hard, we can perceive the traces of sibilance ('stesso rimorso') heard seconds earlier. Elena's voice-off speech is briefly muddled and obscured by the low engine sounds and the reverb in the music, before her words are fleetingly unmasked. We are thus made to focus more pointedly on the act of listening to and recalling her words, while feelings of remorse are accentuated through this subtle and almost inaudible repetition of Elena's reading from Canto III.

When the second of these twinned images appears (Fig. 3, ii), the subject of Elena's reading moves to ideas of a growing clarity and coherence, to a sense of freedom, expansion and new movement.⁴⁰ The two images displayed in my example, inserted at opposite ends of the film, form a kind of open dialogue, one extending the other, with neither forming a direct, finite or 'closed' response to the other. The distant intimacy

³⁸ Sjogren, *Into the Vortex*, p. 9. Sjogren's terminology here derives from the taxonomies of voice set out by Mary Ann Doane and Kaja Silverman in their work on voice in cinema.

³⁹ In *On Sonic Art*, Wishart also states that the listener's recognition of the semantic content of a language influences the focus of our perception: 'Heard in 'normal' contexts, our native language will appear heavily semantic. A language which we know, but not well, will be heard in both semantic and timbral focus, whilst a language which we cannot speak or understand at all will be a largely timbral experience' See Wishart, *On Sonic Art*, p. 308.

⁴⁰ Elena: 'Le mente mia.../cut/...che prima era ristretta, lo'ntento rallargo, si come vaga.' The English subtitles read: 'My mind /cut/...till then so narrow... grew clearer and broader as it wandered...'

and ‘elsewhere’ space of Elena’s voice, musicalized through its association with Monk’s vocal solo, reminds us of Laura U. Marks’s writing on the proximal sense of smell, when she describes ‘that incommunicable dimension of sensuous experience’, which she theorizes through reference to Spinoza’s ethics: ‘We might refer to this incommunicable dimension, adapting Spinoza’s ethics, as *affect*. Between passive and active, affect is a *passion* (Spinoza): an intensity, an ‘excess,’ a suspension of the linear progress of narrative.’⁴¹ Marks notes that music and smell are very similar, for they are both bound to memory, affective intensity and to intimate and personal experience. A fragment of song or a scent, she writes, has the capacity to call up memories and emotions from the past with great power and exactitude.⁴² She affirms: ‘Affect is incommunicable per se; and that is its virtue. People may respond in common, but that response will be enriched and complexified by a core of absolutely individual and relatively incommunicable experience.’⁴³ The cyclical patterns that musicalize the image-track of *Nouvelle vague* beckon us to the film’s aural idiosyncrasies, and to the intricacies and variations that are woven into its fabric. The fragments of foreign speech, the echoes and inconsistencies, the sensitivity to timbral experience, and the periods of relative stillness and quiet whose presence and weight we are made to feel, preserve the presence of difference and keep alive the possibility for linguistic, physical and emotional contact and communication.

6.2 A sensory inner world: retracing steps in cinematic time

In his chapter on music and silence, Jankélévitch states that music is the language of memories and that silence frees us to perceive indiscernible sounds or those that strike us as inconsequential. He notes: ‘Le silence est bon conducteur: il transmet à l’homme les sous-entendus cachés sans la chose entendue.’⁴⁴ Silence enables us to discern the secret and hidden ‘supersensory’ and ‘infrasensory’ voices obscured by the noises of daily life. Jankélévitch continues: ‘Comme les clairvoyants et les ultra-lucides voient dans le noir, et d’une vue seconde, qui est intuition, les essences invisibles cachées derrière les existences visibles, ainsi le silence développe une sorte d’audition seconde, une finesse d’oreille par laquelle l’homme perçoit les plus légers murmures de la brise

⁴¹ Laura U. Marks, ‘Thinking Multisensory Culture’ in *Paragraph*, 31:2 (2008), 123-37 (p. 133) (original emphasis).

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 134.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

⁴⁴ Jankélévitch, *La Musique et l’ineffable*, p. 188.

et de la nuit.⁴⁵ My own experience of listening to the CD version of *Nouvelle vague* pointed up a section of the film that I had not found especially arresting before. By ‘silencing’ the image-track, an extended passage of sonic activity, no longer camouflaged by the hypnotic camera movement, became unexpectedly entrancing through the process of listening to the sounds alone, which created the conditions for a ‘second hearing’ and, in turn, unearthed new, hitherto unperceived details [CD1, 18:12-21:00].

The same part of the film to which I am alluding here is highlighted in the section ‘Elle et lui’ in Bartoli’s text. She underscores the deep, sombre voice of Lennox, which at times sounds withdrawn. Elena’s voice is rough and grave, then warm and mysterious, and her voice, as Bartoli notes, creates a point of contact between the hands touching each other: ‘Sa voix chaude et secrète resserre l’espace des mains qui se touchent.’⁴⁶ In his study of sonic environments, Schafer describes ‘touch’ as a special sense and the most personal of the senses. He observes: ‘Hearing and touch meet where the lower frequencies of audible sound pass over to tactile vibrations [...] Hearing is a way of touching at distance and the intimacy of the first sense is fused with sociability whenever people gather together to hear something special.’⁴⁷ The interweaving of different sounds and voices that stick together during this part of the soundtrack, heightens our sense of both touch and texture. Bartoli differentiates between the types of voice she can hear, for example, between Lennox’s low distant speech and the more sensual tone that emerges, which she associates with his inner thoughts (‘PUIS SA VOIX VIBRE UN PEU DIFFÉREMMENT, plus charnelle: *Ne dis plus rien.*’).⁴⁸ The tender and broody bandoneon music, Werner Pirchner’s *Sonate vom rauhen Leben*, mixes rhythmically with the sound of waves, periodically immersing the voices and soft murmurs. The intermittent overlapping of words, whispers, music, wave sounds, ticks, clock chimes and bird calls in this part of the film culminates in what Bartoli describes as a dance: ‘Pour moi c’est une danse, douce, étirée, douloureuse aussi. Écart et retour, de l’un vers l’autre.’⁴⁹ As this section comes to a close, the semi-silent sibilant uttered by the female voice-off dissolves like a mirage into the gentle splashing sound of water from the lake.

⁴⁵ Jankélévitch, *La Musique et l’ineffable*, p. 188.

⁴⁶ Bartoli, ‘Le Regard intérieur: *Nouvelle Vague* de Jean-Luc Godard’, p. 21.

⁴⁷ Schafer, *The Soundscape*, p. 11.

⁴⁸ Bartoli, ‘Le Regard intérieur: *Nouvelle Vague* de Jean-Luc Godard’, p. 21.

⁴⁹ Idem.

The scenario for the film, and the film version itself, reveal that we are here listening to the voices of both Elena, who is positioned in the main living area, and the servant Cécile (Laurence Cote) who remains in the hallway. Both women are dressed in white gowns and their voices mix as the latter woman repeats lines uttered by the former. Cécile also murmurs lines uttered by Lennox, as short words and phrases are passed

Figure 4, i: Cécile listens ‘(elle murmure)’ [0:19:37].



rhythmically between the three characters. This sensitive sonic interchange of speech transiently collapses the power dynamics of dominance and submission, acted out by Elena and Lennox during this episode in a strange role-play of frozen poses. The muted verbal exchange is swept along the horizontal axis, marked out in the visuals by the extended tracking shot. The enthralling audio arrangement temporarily dissolves the partitioning of social space, by blurring together the female voices, whose individual identities become indistinguishable in the ear of the listener. The soft dynamics of the soundscape are reduced even further as the episode draws to a close and the camera pauses to capture a close-up profile shot of Cécile standing motionless (see Fig. 4, i).

At the start of her exploration of the moving image and its connection to the spatio-visual arts, Giuliana Bruno deviates from film theory’s established concentration on sight, the ‘filmic gaze’ and the traditional Lacanian concept of the *voyeur*, to move instead ‘toward the construction of a moving theory of *site*’, shifting the focus from a perspectival, optical position to the *emotion* of viewing space and the ‘sensory spatiality’ of film.⁵⁰ Bruno later states: ‘The Latin root of the word *emotion* speaks clearly about a “moving” force, stemming as it does from *emovere*, an active verb composed of *movere*, “to move,” and *e*, “out.” The meaning of emotion, then, is historically associated with “a moving out, migration, transference from one place to

⁵⁰ Giuliana Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture and Film*, 2007 edn (New York: Verso, 2002), pp. 15-16.

another.”⁵¹ For Bruno, film is a means of transport, which she understands in a variety of ways. It encompasses not only the movement of objects and bodies, or the type of camera movement, but it also denotes a state of being carried away by a strong emotion or, after the Italian noun *trasporto*, connotes the attraction of one human being to another. She writes: ‘Cinematic space moves not only through time and space or narrative development but through inner space. Film moves, and fundamentally “moves” us, with its ability to render affects and, in turn, to affect.’⁵² The dominant camera technique used during this section of the film is the tracking shot. The camera moves incessantly from right to left and left to right, at times racing to the right to capture a dizzying close-up shot of the lake, the water flowing fast in the opposite direction to the camera.⁵³

This extended tracking sequence captures a series of artificial poses performed inside the house by Lennox and Elena, who present us with a deadpan, silent balletic role-play. From inside to outside and from one moment to the next, the leading couple (Elena and Lennox), and the secondary characters (Raoul, his girlfriend and Cécile) who listen in from the wings like statues, cross the field of vision. This section of *Nouvelle vague* shares notable resonances, visually and aurally, with Tarkovsky’s *Nostalghia*, in which Domiziana Giordano (Elena in *Nouvelle vague*) stars as Eugenia, the Italian interpreter-guide of the Russian poet Gorchakov.⁵⁴ During one of the slow fantastical memory-sequences that take place in the film, we see Gorchakov asleep on his bed in the hotel room. As he dreams, the camera cuts to a sepia-toned image, accompanied only by the clear sound of dripping water. A tracking shot (left to right) is used to capture Gorchakov’s Russian wife walking slowly forwards until she meets Eugenia (see Fig. 4, ii).⁵⁵ The women, from different countries who speak different languages, are strangers

⁵¹ Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion*, pp. 15-16.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁵³ Daniel Morgan focuses on the vertiginous back-and-forth movement in his analysis of this episode. For Morgan, the extended tracking shot, the stationary inserts of water and the sudden accelerations call attention to the visual patterns of rippling waves. Through this play of motion and stillness we are *made to feel* the movement of the camera and simply made aware of ‘the way the camera plays with a series of straight lines to produce an affective response.’ Our attention is focused on the apparatus of cinema itself and on ‘the embodied activity of perception.’ See Morgan, *Late Godard and the Possibilities of Cinema*, pp. 52-3.

⁵⁴ *Nostalghia* is about the poet Andrei Gorchakov (Oleg Yankovsky), who has come to Italy to research the life of a Russian musician (Pavel Sosnovsky), who studied in Bologna and used to visit Bagno Vignoni, where most of the film is set. The musician hanged himself upon his return to Russia, after suffering nostalgia for his home. Gorchakov, who is preparing to write the musician’s biography, also feels disorientated, alienated and lonely, overwhelmed by powerful recollections of his past. Gorchakov’s first line in the film is ‘Parla italiano, per favore’, in response to Eugenia’s initial gesture of friendship to communicate with him in his native tongue.

⁵⁵ This image is taken from *Nostalghia*, dir. by Andrei Tarkovsky (Artificial Eye, 1983) [on DVD].

to each other but here they turn towards each other and in a stylized encounter, they embrace with affection, while on the soundtrack a lone female singing voice enters and

Figure 4, ii: Gorchakov's wife meets Eugenia [0:28:39].



hums a sprightly melody. We then see Eugenia leaning over Gorchakov, her hair captured in close-up and dangling down to touch his face, forming an image that recalls the opening of *Nouvelle vague* when Elena tends to Lennox following the road accident. We then hear Eugenia whispering a succession of faint, indecipherable words. Just as Gorchakov stirs in his sleep, we return to the sepia-toned close-up shot of the two women embracing. However, this time the singing has ceased and it is Gorchakov's wife who now whispers inaudible words to Eugenia, who then turns to look straight at the camera with tears running down her face.

Instances of duplication and displacement, expressed through tracking shots and mirrors, occur frequently in *Nostalghia*. As Nariman Skakov suggests in his study of the theme of translation in the film, doubling and substitution undermine more consistent notions of space and time: 'The impossibility of remaining within his current spatial and temporal context (Italy) is, for Gorchakov, the catalyst for these leaps into other spaces and temporal frameworks (imaginary Russia or illusory non-existent places). These leaps do not sit comfortably with the conventional notions of singularity and homogeneity, while the imaginary spaces are able to accommodate their non-linear spatio-temporal essence.'⁵⁶ Skakov connects the phenomena of doubling and substitution, as well as the concept of the uncanny, including notions of the alien and the homely, to 'the otherness produced by translation'.⁵⁷ Tarkovsky himself described the film as 'the portrayal of someone in a state of profound alienation from the world

⁵⁶ Nariman Skakov, 'The (Im)possible Translation of *Nostalghia*' in *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema*, 3:3 (2009), 309-33 (pp. 319-20).

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 320.

and himself, unable to find a balance between reality and the harmony for which he longs, in a state of *nostalgia* provoked not only by his remoteness from his country but also by a global yearning for the wholeness of existence.⁵⁸

In the documentary and travelogue *Tempo di viaggio (Voyage in Time)* (1980/1983) produced by Italian television, which Tarkovsky made while travelling in Italy with his screenwriter Tonino Guerra, we watch the director, accompanied by Guerra, visiting different villages and places in their search for locations for *Nostalghia*. During the documentary we listen to them discussing cinema, painting and ideas for the feature film to come.⁵⁹ Like the poet Gorchakov and Eugenia in *Nostalghia*, Tarkovsky has come to Italy with Guerra to research a foreign territory, its countryside, architecture and language, while simultaneously undertaking a personal journey of self-exploration as he considers his past filmmaking career and his next film *Nostalghia*.⁶⁰ Like *Nouvelle vague*, this documentary has a cyclical feel. At the start, Guerra recites a poem to Tarkovsky that he composed the previous evening. At the end, Tarkovsky asks Guerra to read the poem again, this time in the regional dialect in which it was originally written. During the documentary, Tarkovsky reflects upon the silent film *Zemlya (Earth/La terra)* (1930) by Alexander Dovzhenko, the work of Bresson, Antonioni, Fellini, Parajanov and Bergman. He also recalls fond memories of seeing Vigo's films. Along with the faint underpinning of dance, mirroring, and imitative patterning in *Nouvelle vague*, and the notion of an eternal poetic narrative ('Lennox (*off*): Mais c'est un récit que je voulais faire... et je le veux encore'),⁶¹ a connection can be felt between this documentary, the history of cinema it evokes and Godard's own sonorous 'new wave' that here forms a subtle, silent dialogue, through the mediator Guerra, with the works of great directors of the past, while continuing the creative, mysterious and interminable search for the *place* of cinema and its spectator.

The understated play of voice in the section of *Nouvelle vague* described in my analysis above, as well as the rhythmic surges of music and waves, generates a similar sense of

⁵⁸ Andrey Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time: Reflections on the Cinema*, trans. by Kitty Hunter-Blair (London: The Bodley Head, 1986), pp. 204-5 (original emphasis).

⁵⁹ One of the paintings they discuss is Piero della Francesca's *Madonna del Parto*, a painting of the pregnant Virgin Mary robed in blue that plays an important role at the start of *Nostalghia* and resonates with images of Elena in *Nouvelle vague*.

⁶⁰ One of the sites they visit is a grand villa in southern Italy, owned at one time by the Russian princess, Elena Korchakova (a model for the Countess Elena in *Nouvelle vague*?). As Guerra and Tarkovsky learn about the villa's history, it is revealed that on the terrace is a plaque in memory of a party held at the property, during which the great ballet dancer Julia Sedova (a dance partner of Vaslav Nijinsky) gave a performance.

⁶¹ Godard, '*Nouvelle Vague*', p. 13.

timelessness and distortion, as conveyed during this memory-sequence in *Nostalghia* (refer to Fig. 4, ii). The delicate and muted sensory sonic power that gradually heightens in both films constitutes a point of contact between two sections from two different films, like an image and its negative. Whilst the electronic medium does not feature in *Nouvelle vague*, the key montage techniques of juxtaposition, superimposition and altered motion, deployed spectacularly in the contemporaneous film *Histoire(s)*, are certainly alive and active. The blending of present and past and the mixing of fast-paced movement and stillness, in this part of *Nouvelle vague*, evokes cinema's temporality and the concept of recorded time, immersing us through the sense of hearing in the sensations and emotions conjured from this retracing of rhythmic and sonic subtleties from one film, and one temporal order, to another. Godard's search for what he described in the *Scénario du film Passion* as a wave, a murmur, a movement, a faint stirring and a coming and going, like an echo, is enacted during these episodes of *Nouvelle vague*; a work that embodies the artist's endless search for the nascent origins of a story.

6.3 Sound, energy and boundaries

The migratory nature of acousmatic sound, unmoored from a state of causal rootedness, endows it with the capacity to reshape spatial experience, while immersing listeners in its sound. In his major work on space, Lefebvre identifies energy, space and time as the main attributes of the substance of the material world, and he contends that these attributes cannot be separated from each other.⁶² Lefebvre reiterates that physical space has no 'reality' without an expenditure of energy in space: '[e]lle [l'énergie] produit toujours un effet, un ravage ou une réalité. Elle modifie l'espace ou engendre un espace. L'énergie vivante (vitale) ne semble agissante que s'il y a excès, surplus disponible, superflu et dépense.'⁶³ In his study of the correspondence between acousmatic music and spatial experience, Smalley invokes *La Production de l'espace*, and associates Lefebvre's thought with 'spectromorphologies' in acousmatic music, specifically 'the interaction between sound spectra (spectro-) and the ways they change and are shaped in time (-morphology)'.⁶⁴ Smalley states that Lefebvre's extensive study of space inadvertently underscores important properties of the sonic arts, notably the relationship

⁶² Henri Lefebvre, *La Production de l'espace* (Paris: Éditions Anthropos, 1974), pp. 19-20.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 206.

⁶⁴ Smalley, 'Space-form and the Acousmatic Image', p. 36, n. 3. See also Denis Smalley, 'Spectromorphology: explaining sound-shapes' in *Organised Sound*, 2:2 (1997), 107-26.

between physical space, energy and the release of energy in space: ‘This is precisely how spectromorphologies, however directly or marginally source-bonded, function with regard to space in acousmatic music.’⁶⁵ Smalley forges a direct link between Lefebvre’s comments on the capacity of energy to modify space or produce new space, and the sound spectrum, namely, the strength of sound at different frequencies.

In his study of sound art and its history, LaBelle stresses the important spatial dimension of the relationship between sound and the listener. He declares: ‘[s]ound is intrinsically and unignorably relational: it emanates, propagates, communicates, vibrates, and agitates; it leaves a body and enters others; it binds and unhinges, harmonizes and traumatizes; it sends the body moving, the mind dreaming, the air oscillating.’⁶⁶ LaBelle underscores the key dynamic relationship between sound and space, which is activated in the practice of sound art, for ‘sound as relational phenomena immediately operates through modes of spatiality, from the immediate present to the distant transmission, from inside one’s thoughts and toward others, from immaterial wave to material mass, from the here and now to the there and then.’⁶⁷ The energetic force between sound and listener is also emphasized by the video artist Bill Viola in his remarks on the interactive dynamic between sound, space and visitor. For this artist, acoustics and sound are ‘thoroughly physical phenomena’.⁶⁸ Sound passes through walls, ‘goes around corners’ and ‘penetrates the body’ and Viola discerns that in any given space there is a sound content that gives life to what he terms ‘a kind of acoustic architecture’ that hovers between the unseen, the abstract and the interior world, and the external material world.⁶⁹

The incessant ticks, flickers and soft tremors in *Nouvelle vague* produce a constant gentle pulse on which this film floats. As the film opens, the deep, gruff voice of Lennox is joined by the hesitant notes of a bandoneon melody, which, chipped into by faint birdsong, becomes louder and more firmly established. The permeating rustling of different sound textures creates a shimmering effect, like a reflection on the water’s surface or a wavering silent image from early cinema. The first vivid sound event to occur is composed of a surreal road accident, involving Elena’s blue convertible, a red

⁶⁵ Smalley defines source-bonding as ‘the natural tendency to relate sounds to supposed sources and causes, and to relate sounds to each other because they appear to have shared or associated origins.’ See Smalley, ‘Space-form and the Acousmatic Image’, p. 37 (n. 7) and p. 38.

⁶⁶ LaBelle, *Background Noise*, p. ix.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. xi.

⁶⁸ Jörg Zutter, ‘Interview with Bill Viola’ in Bill Viola, *Unseen Images*, ed. by Marie Luise Syring (Düsseldorf: Verlag R. Meyer, 1993), pp. 99-105 (p. 100).

⁶⁹ *Idem.*

lorry with the words ‘HARSCH’ written across the back (a clue to the upcoming sonic activity), and Lennox on foot.⁷⁰ In the build-up to the accident, we hear a soft swishing sound, which is soon combined with a more animated crackling, accompanied too by heavy breathing. Unlike the bold and established sounds of the gardener sweeping, the phone rings and the flurry of footsteps, which lead into this quieter transition sequence, these shorter embryonic sonic tips form a more restrained acoustic space, crowning as the high-pitched notes and harmonics of Darling’s *Far Away Lights* enter. As the track’s opening cello melody descends, growing in intensity, a new sound object is added, in the form of a series of distant beeps [CD1, 3:10 - 14]. The second major melodic gesture then occurs as a forceful crescendo surges forth in the cello part, which is harmonized with a sustained mechanical screeching sound, with both the music and the mechanical noise extending each other, producing a sort of relay effect of timbre, texture and intensity on the soundtrack.

The initial percussive swishing sound that launches this episode, provides a kind of natural bass-line pulse to support this acoustic space as it forms, preparing for the entrance of the measured cello melody. Similarly, the distant beeps provide a more regular metronomic pulse, which paves the way for the protracted musical-mechanical crescendo that follows. The overpowering fusion of machine-sound and cello that rapidly emerges, where the car sound veers into the foreground, before fading again, adds depth to the sound image.⁷¹ Once the car sounds have died down and an affirmative chord has resounded in the music, a calmer, quiet moaning from the cello can be heard, which merges with the low frequency sound of a revving engine, generating a vibrational space of relative silence. Interestingly, the rhythmic and sonic patterns formed from this build-up of energy and affect are straight away repeated in a systematic and rigorous fashion. After the quieter interlude that ensues, following the screeching car/cello harmony, we hear the same few bars of the cello melody that played exactly one minute earlier [CD1, 3:10]. However, this time, instead of a recurrence of the car beeps, the cello melody is harmonized with the regular funky bass line of Patti Smith’s *Distant Fingers* [CD1, 4:10], which plays out for just over thirty

⁷⁰ For an extensive discussion of the notion of ‘event’ and its relationship to music in *Nouvelle vague*, see Williams, ‘Music, Love, and the Cinematic Event’, pp. 288-311.

⁷¹ Smalley uses the term ‘proximate’ space to describe space which is nearest to the listener, and ‘distal’ space to designate space furthest from the listener. The sonic action of the car in this section of *Nouvelle vague* demonstrates what Smalley terms a ‘vectorial wipe’, namely ‘a sound travelling across proximate space, that wipes out, in this case only temporarily, the ongoing distal image behind it.’ See Smalley, ‘Space-form and the Acousmatic Image’, p. 36 (n.4) and p. 37.

seconds.⁷² The track is cut abruptly with Elena's irate exclamation ('Vous êtes blessé!'), plunging the listener into a second, lengthier period of relative silence, during which we hear only the sound of birdsong and crows cawing [CD1, 4:53 - 5:04].

As Susan Sontag notes in her essay on silence: 'one must acknowledge a surrounding environment of sound or language in order to recognize silence. Not only does silence exist in a world full of speech and other sounds, but any given silence has its identity as a stretch of time being perforated by sound.'⁷³ Sound could here be construed, therefore, as a 'mechanical disturbance' that alters the previous state of things and *makes silence heard*. The contrasting periods of tranquillity and stillness that follow on from both the agitated sonic activity and the Patti Smith track provide access to a deeper temporality, rhythm and spatiality, cleansing the ears of the listener. Furthermore, the slight asymmetry produced during this imitative episode shows up Godard's attempt to create a structural compositional basis for his sound art. He purposefully tunes the non-musical sounds to the harmonies in the music, splicing the Darling track carefully, jumping slyly forwards and backwards, to engineer a repeat of the same few bars. Indeed, Godard links up two sections of soundtrack with two distinct beats (the high-pitched mechanical beeps and the electronic bass line), via the common factor of the cello melody, creating a continuation and an expansion, with slight variations in rhythm, pitch and tone colour. The motion in this part of the soundtrack, which builds in intensity, dips a little, and then climaxes with the pumping beats of *Distant Fingers*, resembles that of a wave. From the perspective of the listener, the sounds float free from their source, blend together and form a sound event that stands out, composed of a semi-autonomous audio-spatial mass.

In his remarks on the exacting musical organization of sound, heard during the opening minutes of the soundtrack, the composer Heiner Goebbels points up the interrelational nature of the auditory elements, stressing that 'even the noises, animal sounds and human voices are constructed in terms of pitch and rhythm.'⁷⁴ For Goebbels, the fusion of noises, words and music in *Nouvelle vague* challenges our usual modes of perception and our sensory faculties, for we cannot easily distinguish between the separate sound

⁷² The lyrics of the first verse are heard in full: 'When, when will you be landing? / When, when will you return? / Feel, feel my heart expanding / You and your alien arms'.

⁷³ Susan Sontag, 'The Aesthetics of Silence' in Susan Sontag, *A Susan Sontag Reader* (London: Penguin Books, 1983), pp. 181-204 (p. 187).

⁷⁴ Lake and Griffiths (eds.), *Horizons Touched*, p. 128. In a section of the book titled 'Sound and Vision: ECM and Film', we find a commentary by Goebbels on the soundtrack *Nouvelle vague*. In the introductory paragraph, Godard is listed as one of Goebbels's 'heroes'.

types. We listen to the strains of music in the same way that we listen to the noises and vice versa. He remarks:

Nothing is in its rightful place. Although the component parts are not all that unusual – dogs, cars, voices, instruments – this ‘muddle’ opens up our faculties of perception. The levels of meaning stretch apart revealing gaps that we fill with our imagination. The pleasure of *poetic listening* gives rise simultaneously to several theatres in which action takes place.⁷⁵

Goebbels writes of an exciting and varied ‘acoustical theatre’ created from the film’s unpredictable, multi-layered and non-hierarchized audio arrangement that grants access to multiple places at once. The notion of poetic listening, introduced here by Goebbels, is related to the role of the active imagination. As John Young writes in his article on the role of imagery in electroacoustic music: ‘A poetic dimension is afforded by the removal of visual sources since, in representational terms, acousmatic sounds become partial objects – potentially evocative of their sources yet at the same time introducing ambiguities, potentially impressionistic and requiring active imaginative input to effect reconstruction of a scene or resolve contradictions of context.’⁷⁶ A poetic and visual dimension is thus thoroughly entangled with the listener’s engagement with acousmatic sound, for the imagination responds spiritedly to the unfamiliar, the unrecognisable and the unusual.

The second compact disc of *Nouvelle vague*, begins with another striking sound event. The image-track in the film version is here more static than in my previous example, which featured alert, quick-fire camera movements and slower, gentle pans of tree branches during the quieter interludes. A cluster of music, birdsong and ambient wind sound suddenly fades when the soft eruption of horses neighing and a dog barking enter, as if to signal the start of something. Then, as before, a powerful thick-textured musical-mechanical crescendo begins, when the surging bandoneon melody forms a rich harmony with the low growls of an engine. This produces a loud, full and voluptuous elevated sonic space, which is multiplied with the arbitrary sound objects of a dog bark, shrill telephone rings and birds chirping. Manmade sounds and those usually anchored in an interior setting are thus merged with those of the external environment. The ‘gradations of symmetry’ generated from the bandoneon surges, the throbbing engine sound and the periodic overflow of ringing, muddy our effort to locate the sounds

⁷⁵ Lake and Griffiths (eds.), *Horizons Touched*, p. 129 (my emphasis).

⁷⁶ John Young, ‘Reflections on Sound Image Design in Electroacoustic Music’ in *Organised Sound*, 12:1 (2007), 25-33 (p. 25).

causally in space.⁷⁷ This undulating mass of sonic sensation peaks with the impulsive blend of the velvety bandoneon sound, the piercing telephone rings and the gruff engine noise, generating a slow, rhythmic and vibrant fusion of texture and tone colour from an unlikely combination of sources. Dislodged sounds and their spaces morph into each other, generating a special tangible constellation of atypical sounds, and the haze of images they evoke.

In their writing on acoustic space, McLuhan and Carpenter insist: ‘The essential feature of sound, however, is not its location, but that it *be*, that it fill space.’⁷⁸ Sound is capable



Figure 5: we hear Saluzzi’s *Andina*, a low-pitched engine sound, a dog bark and a shrill telephone ring [0:49:17].

of spreading beyond the limits of a circumscribed area. Acoustic space, McLuhan remarks, is always spherical: ‘[y]et it’s a sphere only in its living dynamics, for it’s neither contained in anything nor contains anything. It has no horizons.’⁷⁹ In the film version, during the episode described above, certain images become caught up in the hallucinogenic bubble of sonic space heard on the soundtrack. We see two cars passing each other, travelling at different speeds, with Cécile on her bicycle cycling between them.⁸⁰ In an arbitrary manner, the sound sources are made visible, for just after the animal noises enter, we see some white horses grazing in a field behind a red-wire fence, thereby highlighting visually the notion of bordered space. However, the shot inserts in this part of the film become precipitately more obscure. As the cluster of

⁷⁷ The phrase ‘gradations of symmetry’ is used by the composer Steve Reich. Reich, inspired by Michael Snow’s film work, specifically his use of a continuous or repetitive camera movement, deploys the phrase to signify, in musical terms, ‘the difference between the pulses of a metronome, the pulses of the human heart, and waves landing on the shore.’ See Reich, *Writings on Music*, p. 33.

⁷⁸ Carpenter and McLuhan, ‘Acoustic Space’, p. 67 (original emphasis).

⁷⁹ Marshall McLuhan, ‘The Effect of the Printed Book on Language in the 16th Century’ in Carpenter and McLuhan (eds.), *Explorations in Communication*, pp. 125-35 (p. 125).

⁸⁰ The occasional shots of Cécile cycling in *Nouvelle vague* recall those of Denise in *Sauve qui peut (la vie)*. Through this echo, Godard is making a connection between the ideas expressed by Denise in her diary, on the body imprisoned by the machine-like rhythms of work and its attempts to break free, and the programmed acts performed by the servants, waiters and the lower classes in *Nouvelle vague*.

sound, in my description above, begins to flourish, we see a close-up of a car pulling up alongside another, the front bumpers and headlights filling the whole screen (see Fig. 5). The gradual movement of the red car as it slinks up against the stationary blue car, aligned on the soundtrack with the bandoneon/engine cluster, is joined by the commencement of the brisk telephone rings, whose strident sound erases any trace of containment, scorching an invisible vertical line between the two mechanical objects, as if to foreground feelings of tension, intensity and friction produced by the vehicle's forward movement.

This strange and affecting close-up image kindles a sort of perspective distortion, and the feelings of ambiguity that accompany it continue on through the shot that follows. Here we see a surface of water, in which a reflection of the sky, trees and reeds can be



Figure 6: a liminal surface of contemplation [0:49:24].

seen, with flecks of pollen falling across the visual field like snowflakes. Then, reflected on the smooth water's surface, a figure appears, intruding upon the natural world by marking it with human presence. The passer-by approaches the pond and stands motionless at the water's edge (see Fig. 6). Finally, the camera cuts to the Rimbaldian intertitle 'JE EST UN AUTRE' as the sound event terminates.⁸¹ In this image we see the external world reflected in the water, while, at the same time, we become immersed in the reverberant hollow of man's contemplation, recalling the colours, visual memories and imaginings of Bartoli's 'internal cinema' and her rumination on the intimacy, depth and vividness generated by the sense of hearing ('L'oreille, elle, nous

⁸¹ Although the script refers to this anonymous figure as 'un homme', it is later suggested that this figure is Richard Lennox (Alain Delon), the brother, double or reincarnation of Roger Lennox (Alain Delon), who was previously seen drowning in the lake.

ramène vers notre monde intérieur’).⁸² The pool of water forms a liminal image that combines an immeasurable, affective inner space filled with feelings and dreams, with the space of the outside world.

The interdependent relationship between the ‘immensity’ of world space and the depth of ‘inner space’ is pondered by Bachelard in his chapter ‘L’Immensité intime’. Bachelard defines ‘immensity’ as a philosophical category of daydream and explores notions of affective space and poetic spatiality. He notes: ‘Donner son espace poétique à un objet, c’est lui donner plus d’espace qu’il n’en a objectivement, ou pour mieux dire, c’est suivre l’expansion de son espace intime.’⁸³ Poetic space is associated with an expansion of being, with depth, growth and magnifying powers. When human solitude deepens, Bachelard writes, the depth of intimate space and the immensity of exterior space combine and become interchangeable: ‘c’est par leur « immensité » que les deux espaces: l’espace de l’intimité et l’espace du monde deviennent consonnants. Quand s’approfondit la grande solitude de l’homme, les deux immensités se touchent, se confondent.’⁸⁴ The crescendo of sound produced in this part of *Nouvelle vague*, which culminates visually with this liquid surface of water, exerts a decentring force on the rest of the soundscape, for the more peripheral and minor sounds are here magnified and enlarged like the isolated full close-up in the previous shot, to create an altered sense of scale.

The concept of liminality arises in Bachelard’s discussion of the writer and undersea explorer Philippe Diolé’s experience both of the arid Sahara desert and deep-sea diving.⁸⁵ For Diolé, the ocean was a space of absolute depth and freedom that enabled him to experience the infinite ‘space-substance’ of water. Diolé describes how the experience of wandering in the hostile desert reminded him of plunging into the deep silent waters. The two experiences, he writes, involve a process of ‘changing space’. Bachelard comments: ‘et en changeant d’espace, en quittant l’espace des sensibilités usuelles, on entre en communication avec un espace psychiquement novateur. [...] On ne change pas de place, on change de nature.’⁸⁶ Leaving the space of one’s usual sensibilities permits access to a new unknown space, elsewhere, free from the temporality of the everyday. As Bachelard observes, to truly experience it concretely, to

⁸² Bartoli, ‘Le Regard intérieur: *Nouvelle Vague* de Jean-Luc Godard’, p. 25.

⁸³ Bachelard, *La Poétique de l’espace*, p. 183.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 184.

⁸⁵ In this part of the chapter, Bachelard refers to Diolé’s book *Le Plus Beau Désert du monde* (1955).

⁸⁶ Bachelard, *La Poétique de l’espace*, p. 187.

adapt to and merge with this elsewhere space ('pour « vivre » un espace nouveau'),⁸⁷ we must awaken our dreams and memories and imagine very actively. The poet's utopia of unification and unbound space, which produces harmonious states from incongruous and conflicting spaces, is alluded to largely through our sensing of acoustic space in this section of *Nouvelle vague*. Yet these particular images in the film (Figs 5, 6) are not merely illustrative, for they have a compositional function and are experienced musically and poetically, as aspects of the audio arrangement, owing to their mind-expanding incongruity, to the timing of sound and visual movement, and to the potency and magnetism of the soundtrack.

The practice of sound art, as LaBelle's remarks on the relational condition of sound demonstrate, relies upon a special, active dialogue between the propagation of sound waves and space. The substance of sound, produced by vibrations of different sizes, is affected by contact with bodies and objects that alter its course and subject it to constant change, while remaining in direct communication with the listener's emotions. The colourful cluster of sound objects that forms the salient crescendo detailed in my analysis above, creates a sort of stylised protrusion in the flow of *Nouvelle vague*, at the half-way point. This dense mix of rough, rich, strident and fuzzy textures that emerge with force, reinvigorates the work's momentum by carving out a dynamic sonic and spatial encounter for the ears to engage with – one that recalls and extends the first auditory 'accident' of the film.

6.4 Conclusion

As my examples have demonstrated, the sheer sensuousness and enchantment of sound that flows, fluctuates and transcends boundaries in this film soundtrack, is capable of making and shaping space. Indeed, from *Nouvelle vague* the film to *Nouvelle vague* the soundtrack, the discharge of sound from one medium to another, like an expenditure of energy in space, generates, in one sense, an isolated sonic object for private consumption. Yet, in another sense, the CD soundtrack activates the spectator's own production of 'visions' conjured from the intermingling of senses with the imagination. As we listen to the soundtrack, a spatial transference occurs as we come to produce our own sensory recreation of the film. The listening process displaces the whole film, which has been flung in its entirety into the ambiguous space of audio, with the CD

⁸⁷ Bachelard, *La Poétique de l'espace*, p. 187.

version destabilizing the film's location in space and time. The blurring and erosion of borders that often occurs in the soundtrack itself, embodies in miniature the reconfiguring of perceptual boundaries – a process that results, on a larger scale, from the transmutation of film into audio CD, whose content is received and reworked anew by its listener.

The passion of affect produced by the sonic stimulation, made accessible via the CD version of *Nouvelle vague*, remodels the relational dynamic or 'harmony' between film and spectator. The strong emphasis on sound, enhanced by the CD release, awakens and involves the spectator-as-listener in a novel sensory encounter that helps us to break through conditioned perceptions and enables us to *see* more fully, carving out, in turn, a new acoustic space of reception and an alternative mode of engagement for the film spectator to come. The patterns, repetitions and echoes in *Nouvelle vague*, and the intricate shifts in texture and intensity, engender a *record* of memories for the ear to listen to and experience as a musical composition. *Nouvelle vague* is an aural and visual construct that draws us through sound, rhythm and the sense of hearing to matters of time passing, to movement and stillness, to repetition and return, and to the materiality of cinema itself.

During the press conference for the film, Godard compared the musical 'exchange' that occurs during a game of tennis to the 'silent dialogue' of cinema. This special, elusive and intimate dialogue of rhythm and gesture enacts the relational process of giving and receiving that constitutes for Godard the lifeblood of cinema: 'Il y a du découpage dans le tennis. Il y a un rythme et une cadence. C'est très musical. Il y a du dialogue muet. Le cinéma c'est du dialogue muet. [...] Mon film, sans le bande son, il sera meilleur. Mais si vous ne voyez que la bande son sans les images, il sera encore meilleur.'⁸⁸ It is the listener who produces the music of *Nouvelle vague* for the ears and the eyes. Between the ear, the screen, and the acousmatic screen which bars access to the visible source, an alchemical process takes place that generates a refreshed and indirect reflection of the film in the language of sound.

⁸⁸ Godard, '*Nouvelle Vague*', p. 11.

Conclusion

My objective in this thesis has been to advance a theory of acoustic spectatorship, a phrase I devised to capture and convey the spectator's cinematic experience through sound and the sense of hearing. I have focused in detail on Godard's audio arrangements, giving emphasis to the active process of *listening* to film, in conjunction with modes of *seeing* film. Rather than reduce Godard's work with sound in film to the category of the unconventional and the nonconformist, I have endeavoured to approach each film as a sonic composition in its own right, one that involves the spectator in complex sensory experiences. My thesis hails the soundtrack in *Sauve qui peut (la vie)*, the case study of Chapter 2, a pivotal composition in Godard's 1980s corpus, which marks the start of a new level of engagement with sound, music, speech and silence. Following a series of close readings of some of Godard's most well-known and more neglected films of the 1980s, this thesis concludes with a comparative analysis of the innovative audio CD soundtrack *Nouvelle vague* and the prior film release. By concentrating on the auditory dimension of the films of this study, and drawing upon a wide range of theoretical sources, which include writings by musicologists, sound theorists and composers, my analyses have revealed the richness and breadth of Godard's sound design.

We have come to understand how the audio elements play a crucial role in structuring each film, in fashioning the spatial experience of the spectator, and in constructing our perceptions of space and time. Whilst cinema's visual dimension is still privileged by commentators over its sonic and musical aspects, more acknowledgement and validation is increasingly being given to music, voice and sound design, as well as to the interactive role of the listener. By engaging with concepts, terminology and theories that do not rely solely upon a base of narratology or film theory, I have found fruitful ways of investigating and discussing the films studied, neither condensing nor dismissing but instead embracing the vital surplus of sensation and meaning in each case, and other areas of the Godardian corpus could now be revisited in the light of the approaches implemented in this thesis. Sound is both a material and an immaterial thing that we can never entirely account for and therein lies its lasting, compelling and regenerative power.

In the second chapter, I placed the accent firmly on the organisation of music in *Sauve qui peut (la vie)* to bring to the fore the intricacy and fecundity of the audio arrangement. We saw how a musical extract from Ponchielli's score was made to *pass into* the visual field. Godard and Miéville's 'return' to fiction filmmaking in 1979 called attention to both the restructuring of time and the question of the location of sound in space, bringing to the fore the relationship between what one sees and what one hears, while laying foundations for a reworking of the strong interrelation between sound and the film frame in cinema. From start to finish, the vaporous electronic theme music spilled disobediently over the edges of its 'live' diegetic *frame* of opera, the 'body' of the music having been mutilated, stretched and reconfigured through an ingenious act of musical montage that necessitated the intervention of the listener to refashion the extract anew. In this chapter I referred to Schaeffer's early essay on the relay-arts to investigate the important concept of acousmatic sound and I also drew upon *Scénario de Sauve qui peut (la vie)* to explore some of the main formal traits that underpin the feature film. I demonstrated that the constant ambiguity conjured throughout *Sauve qui peut (la vie)* between diegetic and non-diegetic sound, which confused characters's perceptions of inner and outer auditory space, concentrated our attention on the creative possibilities of the acousmatic condition, including its capacity to problematize the placement and identity of sound and to unsettle the position of the listening subject.

The act of inscribing sound into the space of the image became a central focus in Chapter 3, which explored the interchange between seeing and hearing. In my study of *Passion*, I concentrated on a series of noteworthy scenes of listening, drawing upon Abbate's theory of the narrating voice in her writing on musical narrative in opera and instrumental music, especially her notion of the 'unsung' voice as a disruptive sonorous texture. Turning first to *Scénario du film Passion*, we examined the correspondences between sound, visual space and the process of creating or 'composing' images, reflecting too upon the notion of installing music *inside* the image, thus rendering the screen a fluid and ambiguous site of musical writing.

I began my analysis of *Passion* by exploring Godard's treatment of Ravel's two piano concertos, both of which are intimately associated with Isabelle's movements, gestures, her harmonica-playing and her decentred stammering speech. I labelled Isabelle the 'unsung' voice of the film, as well as a musical figure of montage. We saw how the interweaving of Isabelle's unobtrusive broken speech with the mechanical motion and dance-like rhythms in Ravel's *Adagio assai*, infused her words with a communicative

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fluency. I demonstrated how the more discreet scenes of listening in the film that occur behind the ‘scenes’ of the film set, formed lucid interludes that separated themselves from the rest of the film and became imbued with a magnetic affective charge. This section was concluded with a glimpse of what I termed the absent portrait of the film, namely Moroni’s painting *The Tailor*, forging parallels between this portrait and Godard’s *unseen* cinematic re-enactment of it, through the gestures of the film’s factory worker cum music-maker.

These ideas were developed further in my study of *Prénom Carmen*, where I discussed the incongruent presence of the diegetic string quartet, as well as the subtle expression of voice and song. This section of the chapter examined the plastic treatment and rendering of music, with a particular focus on the sculptural experience of the ‘Rodin’ love scenes. I suggested that Godard’s seascapes function musically as visual, spatial and poetic extensions of Beethoven’s score, if the score is perceived as an image itself. I gave emphasis to the crafting of a physicality of sound, pointing up instances when the affective, intensive and somatic energies in pertinent passages of music are inscribed and spatialized in the image, and I compared the hands of the filmmaker to those of a composer and those of a sculptor, invoking Wagner’s powerful description of rhythm as the glue that binds the musician to the plastic and visual world, providing her/him with a ‘plastic hand’ and allowing music to be seen.

The first part of Chapter 4 focused on the ‘live’ physical performance of the sound technician in *Lettre à Freddy Buache*. I described this work as a love letter to cinema and a decentred act of electronic writing relayed via the filmmaker’s own nomadic speech. I identified the enlivening sonic wound produced by Godard’s sly aural edit as a seditious act that constituted a creative release from the imprisoning repetitions in the music, a tacit homage to Ravel through the illusion of the record, and an affectionate gesture of return to the memory of cinema’s past. Our attention then turned to the overspill of music, thought and feeling that engulfed the spectator in *Puissance de la parole*. Here, I emphasized the visceral charge and powerful rhythmic energy carried within this whirlwind of artistic and technological data, where sound and image come savagely undone. We attended to Godard’s appropriation of paintings by Bacon, concentrating on moments that expose aspects of cinema’s history, including references to the short life-span of the photographic medium and the fixed frame of the painter’s tableau. My analysis pointed up the aesthetic of deformation in Ravel’s *La Valse*,

stressing too the centrality of the materiality of speech and sound in a video that assaults its listener with the mutative blows of electronic noise.

As this thesis unfolded, the matter of the migration of sound from a locatable fixed point in space emerged as a central theme. Indeed, in the preliminary section of Chapter 5, I devoted special attention to the visual, sonic and temporal mutations that form the peculiar dream-sequence of the catwalk parade in *On s'est tous défilé*, which functions, I suggested, as a penetrating *mise-en-abîme* of video. I showed how the combinations of the speed alterations in the visuals, especially the use of accelerated motion, and the mesmeric superimpositions of the Cohen tracks, produced an important degree of opacity that immersed the spectator in the immediacy of sound, while conserving a measure of contemplative distance, making us consciously aware of ourselves as active spectators. I then turned my attention to the two feature films *Soigne ta droite* and *King Lear*. In my study of *Soigne ta droite*, I gave emphasis to the intimate dialogue of co-creativity that takes place between the musicians. Through reference to two striking vocal performances, we explored the creative potential of the acousmatic soundscape, particularly the compositional role of the singing voice of Catherine Ringer. I identified a transfixing 'image' of music, suspended on the cusp of both aural and visual experience, fashioned when an innocuous sky shot generated a compressed abstract graphic of the high-pitched vocal and the low pulsing bass-line of *Tonite*. This audiovisual pause that fleetingly anchored the spectator aurally formed part of a more expansive audiovisual montage by reverberating horizontally with a sequence from the opening of *Passion*, signalling, through this astonishing instance of scale distortion, the crafting of a new perspective and an altered point of view.

The final section of Chapter 5 uncovered the strong presence of Woolf's radical novel *The Waves* in Godard's *King Lear*. Here, I underscored the vital role played by sound and the listener in the text itself and in the writer's own compositional method. I began by outlining some of the connections forged between *The Waves* and radiophonic and electroacoustic art. My aim was to redefine *King Lear*, after Woolf's text, as an experimental work for the ear, arguing that this film succeeds in constructing a plural, choric and auditory space, while attempting to revive something of the unique public space of projection that typified the original film experience, which, as Godard's *King Lear* reminds us, has now disappeared. I connected each film in this chapter to silent cinema and to key shifts in the history of recorded sound that are subtly staged in each work. Indeed, while Godard was working on the contemporaneous early episodes of

Conclusion

Histoire(s), he was continuously readdressing and reassessing this complex period in cinema history when spatial boundaries dissolved, owing to the arrival of motion pictures *with* synchronized sound.

I have indicated throughout how a plural conception of space is moulded and shaped through sound and auditory experience, as the glassy musicalized corridor at the end of *Sauve qui peut (la vie)* adeptly envisioned. The manipulation of stereo sound, voice and sound texture in *Soigne ta droite* and *King Lear* in the late 80s blossomed in the following decade into a more poised and self-assured form of sound design, crystallizing with the release of the sumptuous CD soundtrack *Nouvelle vague*. My close readings in Chapter 6 focused on the relational nature of sound, with an emphasis on its affective and energetic properties, as well as on the intensity and spatiality of auditory experience. I probed the overlapping relationships between film/CD and spectator/listener, pointing up sound's special capacity to remodel spatial experience and to adjust perceptual boundaries. We saw how Bartoli's heightened auditory response to the soundtrack, expressed in the form of a written transcription, demonstrates very effectively the shift in emphasis that occurs when the sense of hearing governs our conception of space.

My examination of *Nouvelle vague* moved between film and audio CD, pinpointing moments when sound's agile, fluid and excessive nature and its potential to overflow borders, reconfigures or even generates our impression of space. In the second section of Chapter 6, I zoomed in on the film's sensory and tactile spaces of marginal utterances, echoes, stirrings and rich zones of sonic detail. I associated the sense of timelessness conjured in the image-track of the film during one of the extended tracking sequences to the concurrent interchange of speech, which I compared to a similar dream-sequence in Tarkovsky's *Nostalghia*, consequently bringing to the fore themes of memory, duplication, dislocation and displaced time and space that pass through each film. I closed my discussion by connecting the concept of acoustic space to Bachelard's writing on liminal experience and poetic spatiality, to underscore the integral active dialogue that flows through *Nouvelle vague* between sound, space and the listener.

We have seen throughout this thesis how acoustic energy and the physical properties of sound and music are deeply connected to the emotions and they affect and engage the spectator's body and shape her/his subjectivity in significant ways, for sound is both a vibratory and relational substance that gets right inside us. In an article by Bruno on the

concept and use of projection in the films and installations of Chantal Akerman, she invokes the history of the word *projection* in the context of screen history, notably its links to ‘the display of psychic processes’ and its connective role that ties cinema to psychoanalysis.¹ She goes on to demonstrate how Akerman works with a special kind of projection in her cinema and moving-image installations, namely empathy. Bruno here draws upon the definition derived from late 19th-century German aesthetics *Einfühlung*, to mean ‘the act of “feeling into”’, which describes ‘a material response to an object, an image, or a spatial environment.’² She expands: ‘This act of “feeling into” is a notion sensitive to the surface of the world. It depends on the ability to sense an inner movement that takes place between the object-space and the subject.’³ Consequently, we can empathize not just with other human beings but with the ‘expressive, dynamic forms of art and architecture’, including surfaces, textures, colours, sounds and, we should add, with music.

As *Soigne ta droite* demonstrated, music-making can be a reciprocal, common experience that involves checking one’s sound against another’s, making adjustments to accommodate the other and listening attentively to each other’s sound. Music is exploited by Godard for its malleability, its emotive power, its potential to destabilize the listening subject, to erode divisive boundaries and to create a shared, if transient, listening space. We have seen and heard how the non-verbal facet of musical communication, exposed to us most clearly during the rehearsal scenes in *Prénom Carmen* and *Soigne ta droite*, forms a unique type of contact, closeness and intimacy between musicians, as well as between the music and its listener. Music expresses always what is incomplete and indeterminable. It articulates experiences and feelings that we cannot fully grasp, condense, render or definitively pin down, and these are the qualities most cherished in the films that we have here explored. As I underscored at the end of Chapter 2, the *musical* relation acts as a force of resistance that preserves a measure of autonomy and persists in carrying forth its own kind of coherence and its own way of *making* sense.

A curiosity concerning location and placement is expressed powerfully through the aural domain in the films we have examined in this thesis, in particular, through the disorienting and creative ‘play’ between acousmatic and non-acousmatic sound. Whilst

¹ Giuliana Bruno, ‘Projection: On Akerman’s Screen, From Cinema to the Art Gallery’ in *Chantal Akerman: Too Far, Too Close* (Antwerp, Belgium: Ludion and M HKA, 2012), pp. 15-26 (p. 23).

² *Ibid.*, p. 24.

³ *Idem.*

the auditory experiences in the films of my study confuse our perception of inside and outside and render visual space ambiguous, at the same time these sonic compositions re-root us in our bodies, for we are made intensely aware of ourselves as listeners, while our sensory compass is altered and a different form of relationality takes shape.⁴ Acousmatic sound and music in visual media bring us to our senses by challenging unified forms, shapes and figures, and by activating the ear of the spectator. These ideas and concerns continue to feature prominently in Godard's most recent films, one of which is *Les Trois Désastres* to which I shall now briefly turn. This 17-minute short forms part of the 3D triptych *3X3D* and constitutes Godard's first experiment with stereoscopic film.⁵

A spatial act: *Les Trois Désastres*

In *Les Trois Désastres*, the transformational power of the musician's creative act is exposed in a series of striking close-up images of two pianists' hands performing a piano duet. The alluring mix of muscular and intellectual play, brought to the fore during these beguiling sequences, shares something with Steven Connor's idea of 'cultural phenomenology' that stresses the affective and somatic aspects of cultural experience: '[t]o say that something is cultural is to say simultaneously that it is shared and that it is made. Culture means shared conditions of making. It means the experiencing of the world as a way of repeatedly making the world, and making it in common.'⁶ Seeing the four hands gliding, leaping and brushing over each other during these scenes brings us face to face with an intimate, imaginative and co-creative act that involves mutual listening; a process that works 'in common' with the ear of the film spectator. In *Scénario du film Passion*, Godard spoke of 'composing an image' and 'composing a movement', which is here a communal and musical *movement* that causes the film to shudder. We are made to traverse, to *go through* an experience that in turn

⁴ A striking example of the abrasive and hostile effects of sound can be found in *Film socialisme*. Loud wind and sea sounds strike us from the start of the film, making us brutally aware of our vulnerability to the violence and force of sonic sensation. The brash sounds and the ruptures of silence cut into the soundtrack and the resulting auditory experience hammers, fractures and isolates the spectator. Our points of reference are eroded and we are left with the overwhelming feeling of not being able to hear properly and of not being heard.

⁵ The portmanteau film *3X3D* is 70 minutes in length and comprises short films by Peter Greenaway, Jean-Luc Godard and Edgar Pera. This trilogy, produced by Rodrigo Areias, was commissioned by the Portuguese city Guimarães, the 2012 European Capital of Culture, and it was screened at the Cannes Film Festival in 2013. Godard's contribution, *Les Trois Désastres*, contains footage from his latest feature film (also in 3D) *Adieu au langage* (2014).

⁶ Steven Connor, 'CP: or, A Few Don'ts By A Cultural Phenomenologist' in *parallax*, 5:2 (1999), 17-31 (p. 21).

helps us to make sense of and *hear* the making, unmaking and remaking anew of different, multiple and fragmentary meanings.

The first of these images is composed of the dead commodity of the cruise ship of *Film socialisme*, along with gushing white foam and dark green undulations of water that runs diagonally and voluptuously into the pianists' anonymous hands, as they overlap gently, majestically and soundlessly, sinking sensually into the black and white keys. A memory of the cross-fades in *Scénario de Sauve qui peut (la vie)*, of a televised performance of Schumann's *Piano Concerto in A Minor*, suddenly surfaces here, the soloist's hands having now been reanimated at a different angle, appearing in a multiplied, almost hypertrophic state, cut off from the rest of the body. During this episode in *Les Trois Désastres*, we hear not music but a whispered extract (the voice of Julie Delpy) from Baudelaire's 'Le Voyage', a poem dedicated to the travel photographer and writer Maxime du Camp. After a few exquisite moments of watching the ethereal hands moving silently up and down the keyboard, an extract from Bach's *Prelude in C* from *The Well Tempered Clavier* enters.⁷

The soundtrack in this section of *Les Trois Désastres* is an extract from episode 2A *Seul le cinéma* of *Histoire(s)*, where we heard an extensive quotation from the same poem, including the two stanzas heard here, read aloud by Julie Delpy, whose lips were filmed in extreme close-up. When the two stanzas in question are recited in episode 2A, Delpy faces the right-hand side of the frame, as if to anticipate the motion of the pianists' hands. Her profile is mixed with a black and white photograph of Orson Welles on a boat at sea. The contour of the boat's edge, the sails, the ripples in the water and the dark creases in Welles' jacket, return to haunt this parallel sequence in *Les Trois Désastres*, generating a similar visual tension in the image-space and bringing to the fore the pensive gaze of the filmmaker, the travelling spectator, the voice of the poet, and later, music. We then see another photograph in episode 2A, this time of Jacques Rivette looking out to sea in the opposite direction, mixed with an image of some dead bodies lying on the ground, before Bach's *Prelude in C* enters.

⁷ We hear the first two stanzas from section IV of Baudelaire's long poem 'Le Voyage', the final poem of *Les Fleurs du Mal*: '« Nous avons vu des astres / Et des flots; nous avons vu des sables aussi; / Et, malgré bien des chocs et d'imprévus désastres, / Nous nous sommes souvent ennuyés, comme ici. // La gloire du soleil sur la mer violette, / La gloire des cités dans le soleil couchant, / Allumaient dans nos cœurs une ardeur inquiète / De plonger dans un ciel au reflet alléchant.' See Charles Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du Mal*, 2nd edn (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1996), p. 179.

Welles's visionary, reflective gaze that gravitates to the right side of the frame, is returned by Rivette's searching gaze that looks outward to the left side, the two black and white photographs generating a sort of silent open dialogue that gestures forward to another world, inward to an imaginary world, while glancing back to the past. This section in episode 2A commenced with the screen-text 'LE VOYAGE', accompanied by a noisy projector sound. Behind the screen-text, we saw an image of a man operating a projector, which was pointed directly at us. In *Les Trois Désastres*, a similar sequence occurs in the run-up to Delpy's poetry recital, for we see two digital cameras, placed very close together in front of a mirror-screen, recording their own reflection. One of the cameras is positioned the right way up, while the other has been turned upside-down. This sequence in *Les Trois Désastres* stages a manual construction of the 3D effect, calling attention to Godard's commentary in *Histoire(s)* on the allure and demise of the projected image, a subject that pervades *Seul le cinéma*. Indeed, a little later in episode 2A, Delpy's reading is interrupted by Godard's interview with Serge Daney, as he continues to muse on the notion of projection in cinema and television, particularly its impact on the film spectator.

Through this first piano sequence in *Les Trois Désastres*, Godard exposes us to the resistant imaginary memory-space of the 'passage' of thought and sensation, now lost, like the passengers in Baudelaire's poem, in noxious ideas of progress and materialism, generating only bored faces and feelings of despair. Yet, simultaneously, we are made to tune in and listen to the dramatic prelude sparks of newness in the inauspicious *désastres* before us. Indeed, later in the film, when the image of the pianists' hands returns, sound replaces silence as the pianists' finger patterns that we witnessed in the first piano sequence are synchronized with the correct music: Ravel's mysterious and eruptive *Prélude à la nuit* from his *Rapsodie espagnole*.⁸ The initial asynchrony in this first molten musical performance in *Les Trois Désastres*, between the soundtrack and the musicians' hands, recalls the nascent movements, murmurs and rippling waves of the white screen – the *p[l]age blanche* – in the *Scénario du film Passion*, where, in the video's closing stages, we heard Ravel's *Piano Concerto in G* playing softly, while Godard repeated three times in darkness: 'Et voici le cinéma'.

When the image of the musicians' hands returns for the second time, the mood is nightmarish and the textured hands appear scratched and bloodied, as if engulfed in

⁸ Ravel's *Rapsodie espagnole* (1907-8), scored for orchestra, was first composed in 1907 for piano four hands. For an analysis of this work, see Russ, 'Ravel and the orchestra', pp. 118-25.

flames. The cut to this sequence falls on the third syllable of the noun 'politique', uttered by Godard's own voiceover and joined immediately by Ravel's *Prélude à la nuit*. The ominous phrases 'les fautes morales' and 'les crimes d'état' are faintly accented, bleakly evoking notions of guilt and corruption, reminding us too of the warped ethics and politics of a society atomized through consumerism, stripped of the power to act collectively and to listen with sincerity, that is, a society composed of alienated subjects, no longer capable of *listening*, to their past or to each other, or of sharing responsibility with and for others. The image grows increasingly abstract as the dynamics in the music increase, the *Prélude* almost hastening the image's disintegration with its sound. The hands and instrument then flicker, resembling a bundle of burning embers, before the music peters out. A form of impulsive rhythmic writing is explicitly 'performed' into the space of the image during these sequences, plunging us into the screen through the musicians' bodily gestures, energetically attempting to return to us the power to receive, to dream and imagine, to listen actively and respond to the world that surrounds us.

We should remind ourselves here of the omnidirectional nature of hearing and the penetrative, enveloping, invisible and affecting nature of sound. Sound and the sense of hearing share these qualities with 3D cinema, for the 3D image, like sound, breaks into the spectator's space.⁹ During these scenes of music-making in *Les Trois Désastres*, the concept of acoustic spectatorship is manifested before our ears and eyes. The spectator dives with the musicians' hands into the unknown, feeling into the rich mesh of tinctures, timbres, into the deep, rhythmic and melodic swells, and into the inner textural patterning of visual and acoustic space. Godard manipulates the audio elements in his films in a way that reconfigures our perceptions, making us question the construction of images and sounds, which, in *Les Trois Désastres*, are *made* and *played* in front of us, while our sensory acuity is distorted. We are asked, ultimately, to reconsider, re-imagine and *play back* our perspective on the world, through the musical thinking of an active ear.

In Hannah Arendt's *The Life of the Mind*, she describes the passageway or groove forged by the act of thinking as 'the small inconspicuous track of non-time beaten by the activity of thought within the time-space given to natal and mortal men.'¹⁰ It is this special 'timeless time' of thought that the presentness of music, sound and silent

⁹ See Rogers, *Sounding the Gallery*, p. 92.

¹⁰ Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind: Thinking*, one-volume edn (San Diego, New York, London: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1971), p. 210.

stirrings can kindle, creating small spaces of relief in our experiencing of film, in which productive activity can flourish. Arendt affirms:

It is the quiet of the Now in the time-pressed, time-tossed existence of man; it is somehow, to change the metaphor, the quiet in the center of a storm which, though totally unlike the storm, still belongs to it. In this gap between past and future, we find our place in time when we think, that is, when we are sufficiently removed from past and future to be relied on to find out their meaning, to assume the position of “umpire,” of arbiter and judge over the manifold, never-ending affairs of human existence in the world.¹¹

The spectator who listens to film experiences, reflects upon and constructs meanings from what s/he feels, hears and sees. The distinctive temporality of music removes us, in a sense, from the film world, or hollows into the image a different quality, texture and rhythm that cause it to stand out. A moment of silence in the midst of sound, or sound that bursts forth from silence, conjures Arendt’s timeless non-time space of thought, which relocates us, as listeners and thinkers, *in time*. It is clear from his most recent work that Godard is continuing tirelessly to critique, experiment with and test out the limits of his chosen medium, all the while expanding and innovating our conception of and relationship with sonic, visual and spatial experience. The reshaping of the space of projection through auditory experience, and the sculpting of a new auditory, imaginary space of thought and feeling, generates in turn a new kind of film spectator.

¹¹ Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, p. 209.

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This bibliography is divided into two parts. Part A lists all primary written material by Godard cited in the thesis, followed by all secondary material specific to Godard. Part B lists all other secondary material cited in the thesis.

PART A

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PART B

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Woolf, Virginia, *A Reflection of the Other Person: The Letters of Virginia Woolf, Vol 4: 1929-31* (London: Hogarth Press, 1978).

—*Moments of Being*, ed. by Schulkind, Jeanne, 2nd edn (London: The Hogarth Press, 1985).

—*The Waves* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 2000).

(iv) Musical scores

Beethoven, Ludwig van, *String Quartet No. 14 in C# minor, Op. 131*, rev. by Wilhelm Altmann (London: Ernst Eulenburg, 1970).

—*String Quartet No. 15 in A minor, Op. 132*, rev. by Wilhelm Altmann (London: Ernst Eulenburg, 1911).

Ravel, Maurice, *Bolero* (Paris: Durand & C^{ie}, 1929).

Saladino, Michele, *La Gioconda, English adaptation, complete arrangement for voice and pianoforte* (Italy: Ricordi's Editions, 1986).

Filmography

This filmography is divided into two parts. Part A lists the films and videos by Jean-Luc Godard cited in the thesis and the DVD editions consulted.¹ Part B lists films and documentaries by other directors cited in the thesis and the DVD editions consulted. Throughout, I have used the following abbreviations: ‘d’ for director, ‘sc’ for scriptwriter, ‘p’ for producer, ‘c’ for camera/director of photography, ‘ed’ for editor, ‘s’ for sound engineer, ‘art d’ for art director and ‘p.c.’ for production company.

PART A

1. Primary films and videos by Jean-Luc Godard cited in the thesis

Scénario de Sauve qui peut (la vie). Quelques remarques sur la réalisation et la production du film, d: Jean-Luc Godard, sc: Jean-Luc Godard, ed Jean-Luc Godard, p.c.: Sonimage/Television suisse romande, 1979, video, col, 21 min.

Sauve qui peut (la vie), d: Jean-Luc Godard, sc: Jean-Claude Carriere, Anne-Marie Miéville, p: Jean-Luc Godard, Alain Sarde, c: Renato Berta, William Lubtchansky, Jean-Bernard Menoud, ed: Jean-Luc Godard, Anne-Marie Miéville, s: Jacques Maumont, Luc Yersin, Oscar Stellavox, p.c.: Sara Films/MK2/Saga Productions/Sonimage/CNC/ZDF/SSR/ORF, 1979, 35mm, col, 84 min.

Lettre à Freddy Buache. À propos d’un court-métrage sur la ville de Lausanne, d: Jean-Luc Godard, sc: Jean-Luc Godard, c: Jean-Bernard Menoud, ed: Jean-Luc Godard, s: François Musy, p.c.: Sonimage/Film et Vidéo Production Lausanne, 1982, video transferred to 35 mm, col, 11 min.

Passion, le travail et l’amour: introduction à un scénario, ou Troisième état du scénario du film Passion, d: Jean-Luc Godard, sc: Jean-Luc Godard, ed: Jean-Luc Godard, p.c.: Sonimage, 1982, video, col, 30 min.

Passion, d: Jean-Luc Godard, sc: Jean-Luc Godard, p: Alain Sarde, c: Raoul Coutard, ed: Jean-Luc Godard, s: François Musy, p.c.: Sara Films/Sonimage/Films A2/Film et Vidéo Production Lausanne/SSR Télévision suisse romande, 1982, 35 mm, col, 87 min.

Scénario du film Passion, d: Jean-Luc Godard, sc: Jean-Luc Godard, in collaboration with

¹ In compiling this filmography, I have relied primarily upon Nicole Brenez, David Faroult, Michael Temple, James Williams and Michael Witt (eds.) *Jean-Luc Godard: Documents* (Paris: Éditions du Centre Pompidou, 2006).

Filmography

Anne-Marie Miéville, Pierre Binggeli, Jean-Bernard Menoud, p.c.: Télévision Romande/JLG Films, 1982, video, col, 53 min.

Prénom Carmen, d: Jean-Luc Godard, sc: Anne-Marie Miéville, p: Alain Sarde, c: Raoul Coutard, ed: Jean-Luc Godard, Suzanne Lang-Villar, s: François Musy, Oscar Stellavox, p.c.: Sara Films/JLG Films/Films A2, 1983, 35 mm, col, 83 min.

Petites notes à propos du film Je vous salue, Marie, d: Jean-Luc Godard, sc: Jean-Luc Godard, c: Jean-Luc Godard, ed: Jean-Luc Godard, p.c.: JLG Films, 1983, video, col, 20 min.

Je vous salue, Marie, d: Jean-Luc Godard, sc: Jean-Luc Godard, c: Jean-Barnard Menoud, Jacques Firmann, ed: Jean-Luc Godard, s: François Musy, p.c.: Pégase Films/SSR/JLG Films/Sara Films/Gaumont, 1985, 35 mm, col, 78 min.

Détective, d: Jean-Luc Godard, sc: Anne-Marie Miéville, Alain Sarde, Philippe Setbon, p: Alain Sarde, Jean-Luc Godard, c: Bruno Nuytten, ed: Marilyne Dubreuil, s: Pierre Garnet, François Musy, p.c.: Sara Films/JLG Films, 1985, 35 mm, col, 95 min.

Soft and Hard. Soft Talk On a Hard Subject Between Two Friends, d: Jean-Luc Godard, Anne-Marie Miéville, sc: Jean-Luc Godard, Anne-Marie Miéville, p: Tony Kirkhope, video: Pierre Binggeli, ed: Jean-Luc Godard, Anne-Marie Miéville, p.c.: JLG Films/Deptford Beach Productions for Channel 4, 1985, video, col, 52 min.

Grandeur et décadence d'un petit commerce de cinéma (Chantons en chœur), d: Jean-Luc Godard, sc: Jean-Luc Godard, from the novel *Chantons en chœur* by James Hadley Chase, p: Pierre Grimblat, c: Caroline Champetier, ed: Jean-Luc Godard, s: François Musy, Pierre-Alain Besse, p.c.: Hamster Productions/TF1/Télévision Romande/RTL/JLG Films, 1985, video, col, 91 min.

Meetin' WA, d: Jean-Luc Godard, sc: Jean-Luc Godard, ed: Jean-Luc Godard, s: François Musy, p.c.: JLG Films, 1986, video, col, 26 min.

Armide, (episode from the film *Aria*), d: Jean-Luc Godard, sc: Jean-Luc Godard, p: Don Boyd, c: Caroline Champetier, ed: Jean-Luc Godard, s: Philippe Lioret, François Musy, p.c.: Boyd's Company/Lightyear Entertainment/RVP Productions/Virgin Vision, 1987, 35 mm, col, 12 min.

Soigne ta droite (Une place sur la terre), d: Jean-Luc Godard, sc: Jean-Luc Godard, p: Jean-Luc Godard, Ruth Waldburger, c: Caroline Champetier, ed: Jean-Luc Godard, s: François Musy, Joël Beldent, p.c.: Gaumont/JLG Films/Xanadu Films/RTSR, 1987, 35 mm, col, 81 min.

King Lear, d: Jean-Luc Godard, sc: Jean-Luc Godard, p: Yoram Globus, Menahem Golan, c: Sophie Maintigneux, Isabelle Czajka, ed: Jean-Luc Godard, s: François Musy, p.c.: Cannon, 1987, 35 mm, col, 90 min.

Filmography

On s'est tous défilé, d: Jean-Luc Godard, sc: Jean-Luc Godard, c: Caroline Champetier, ed: Jean-Luc Godard, s: François Musy, p.c.: Marithé et François Girbaud Design, 1987, video, col, 13 min.

Puissance de la parole, d: Jean-Luc Godard, sc: Jean-Luc Godard, from Edgar Allan Poe's 'The Power of Words' and James M. Cain's *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, c: Caroline Champetier, ed: Jean-Luc Godard, s: François Musy, p.c.: France Télécom/JLG Films/Gaumont, 1988, video, col, 25 min.

Le Dernier Mot (episode from the film *Les Français vus par...*), d: Jean-Luc Godard, sc: Jean-Luc Godard, p: Anne-Marie Miéville, c: Jean-Luc Godard, ed: Jean-Luc Godard, s: Pierre Camus, François Musy, p.c.: Erato Films/Socpresse/JLG Films/Le Figaro magazine/Antenne 2, 1988, video, col, 12 min.

Histoire(s) du cinéma, 1A: *Toutes les histoires* (51 min), 1B: *Une histoire seule* (42 min), d: Jean-Luc Godard, sc: Jean-Luc Godard, p: Jean-Luc Godard, Ruth Waldburger, video: Pierre Binggeli, ed: Jean-Luc Godard, s: Jean-Luc Godard, Pierre-Alain Besse, François Musy, p.c.: Gaumont/JLG Films, 1988, video, col.

Le Rapport Darty, d: Jean-Luc Godard, Anne-Marie Miéville, sc: Jean-Luc Godard, Anne-Marie Miéville, c: Herve Duhamel, ed: Jean-Luc Godard, Anne-Marie Miéville, s: Pierre-Alain Besse, François Musy, p.c.: Gaumont/JLG Films, 1989, video, col, 50 min.

Nouvelle vague, d: Jean-Luc Godard, sc: Jean-Luc Godard, p: Alain Sarde, c: William Lubtchansky, Christophe Pollack, Franck Messmer, ed: Jean-Luc Godard, s: Pierre-Alain Besse, Henri Morelle, François Musy, art.d: Anne-Marie Miéville, p.c. Sara Films/Périphéria/Canal Plus/Vega Film/Télévision suisse romande/Antenne 2/CNC/DFI/Sofica Investimage/Sofica Creations, 1990, 35 mm, col, 89 min.

2. Other films, videos and television series by Jean-Luc Godard cited in the thesis

Opération béton, d: Jean-Luc Godard, sc: Jean-Luc Godard, p: Jean-Luc Godard, c: Adrien Porchet, ed: Jean-Luc Godard, s: Jean-Luc Godard, p. c.: Actua Film, 1955, 35 mm, b/w, 20 min.

À bout de souffle, d: Jean-Luc Godard, sc: Jean-Luc Godard (François Truffaut), p: Georges de Beauregard, c: Raoul Coutard, ed: Cécile Decugis, Lila Herman, s: Jacques Maumont, p.c.: Société nouvelle de cinématographie, Productions Georges de Beauregard, 1960, 35 mm, b/w, 90 min.

Vivre sa vie. Film en douze tableaux, d: Jean-Luc Godard, sc: Jean-Luc Godard, p: Pierre Braunberger, c: Raoul Coutard, ed: Agnès Guillemot, s: Guy Villette, p.c.: Les Films de la Pléiade, 1962, 35 mm, b/w, 85 min.

Le Nouveau Monde (episode from the film *RoGoPaG*), d: Jean-Luc Godard, sc: Jean-Luc

Filmography

Godard, p: Alfredo Bini, c: Jean Rabier, ed: Agnès Guillemot, p.c.: Société Lyre cinématographique/Arco Film/Cineriz, 1962, 35 mm, b/w, 20 min.

Une femme mariée. Fragments d'un film tourne en 1964, d: Jean-Luc Godard, sc: Jean-Luc Godard, p: Jean-Luc Godard, c: Raoul Coutard, ed: Agnès Guillemot, Françoise Collin, s: Antoine Bonfanti, René Levert, Jacques Maumont, p.c.: Anouchka Films/Orsay Films, 1964, 35 mm, b/w, 98 min.

Pierrot le fou, d: Jean-Luc Godard, sc: Jean-Luc Godard, from Lionel White's *Obsession*, p: Georges de Beauregard, Dino de Laurentiis, c: Raoul Coutard, ed: Françoise Collin, Andree Choty, s: Rene Levert, Antoine Bonfanti, p.c.: Productions Georges de Beauregard, Rome-Paris Films/Dino de Laurentiis Cinematografica, 1965, 35 mm, col, 110 min.

Made in USA, d: Jean-Luc Godard, sc: Jean-Luc Godard, based on *The Jugger* by Richard Stark, p: Georges de Beauregard, c: Raoul Countard, Jacques Maumont, ed: Agnès Guillemot, Geneviève Letellier, s: René Levert, p.c.: Anouchka Films/Rome-Paris Films/SEPIC, 1966, 35 mm, col, 90 min.

Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle, d: Jean-Luc Godard, sc: Jean-Luc Godard, p: Anatole Dauman, c: Raoul Coutard, ed: Françoise Collin, Chantal Delattre, s: René Levert, Antoine Bonfanti, p.c.: Anouchka Films/Argos Films/Les Films du Carosse/Parc Film, 1966, 35 mm, col, 90 min.

La Chinoise, d: Jean-Luc Godard, sc: Jean-Luc Godard, p: Philippe Dussart, c: Raoul Coutard, ed: Agnès Guillemot, Delphine Desfons, s: René Levert, Antoine Bonfanti, p.c.: Anouchka Films/Les Productions de la Guéville/Athos Films, 1967, 35 mm, col, 95 min.

Le Gai savoir, d: Jean-Luc Godard, sc: Jean-Luc Godard, loosely based on Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Émile ou De l'éducation*, c: Georges Leclert, ed: Germaine Cohen, p.c.: ORTF, and later Anouchka Films/Gambit/Bavaria Atelier, 1968, 35 mm, col, 95 min.

Ici et ailleurs, d: Jean-Luc Godard, Anne-Marie Miéville (Jean-Pierre Gorin), sc: Jean-Luc Godard, Anne-Marie Miéville, p: Jean-Luc Godard, Anne-Marie Miéville, Jean-Pierre Rassam, c: William Lubtchansky (Armand Marco), ed: Jean-Luc Godard, Anne-Marie Miéville, p.c.: Sonimage/INA/Gaumont, 1974, 16 mm, col, 53 min.

Numéro deux, d: Jean-Luc Godard, sc: Jean-Luc Godard, Anne-Marie Miéville, p: Georges de Beauregard, Jean-Pierre Rassam, c: William Lubtchansky, Gérard Martin, ed: Jean-Luc Godard, Anne-Marie Miéville, s: Jean-Pierre Ruh, p.c.: Sonimage/Bela/SNC, 1975, 35 mm and video, col, 88 min.

France tour détour deux enfants, d: Jean-Luc Godard, Anne-Marie Miéville, sc: Jean-Luc Godard, Anne-Marie Miéville, loosely based on G. Bruno's *Le Tour de la France par deux enfants. Devoir et patrie* (1884), c: William Lubtchansky, Dominique

Filmography

Chapuis, Philippe Rony, ed: Jean-Luc Godard, Anne-Marie Miéville, s: Pierre Binggeli, p.c.: Sonimage/INA for Antenne 2, 1979, video, col, 12x25 min.

Hélas pour moi, d: Jean-Luc Godard, sc: Jean-Luc Godard, p: Alain Sarde, c: Caroline Champetier, ed: Jean-Luc Godard, s: François Musy, Pierre-Alain Besse, p.c.: Vega Films/Les Films Alain Sarde/Canal Plus/Télévision, 1993, 35 mm, col, 84 min.

JLG/JLG. Autoportrait de décembre, d: Jean-Luc Godard, sc: Jean-Luc Godard, c: Yves Pouliguen, Christian Jacquenard, ed: Jean-Luc Godard, Catherine Cormon, s: Pierre-Alain Besse, Benoît Hilbrant, p.c.: Périphéria/Gaumont, 1995, 35 mm, col, 56 min.

Histoire(s) du cinéma, d: Jean-Luc Godard, sc: Jean-Luc Godard, ed: Jean-Luc Godard, p.c. Gaumont/Périphéria, 1998, video, col, 264 min.

Éloge de l'amour, d: Jean-Luc Godard, sc: Jean-Luc Godard, p: Alain Sarde, Ruth Waldburger, c: Julien Hirsch, Christophe Pollock, ed: Jean-Luc Godard, s: François Musy, Christian Monheim, p.c. Avventura Films/Périphéria/Canal Plus/Arte/Vega Film/TSR, 2001, 35 mm and digital, b/w and col, 94 min.

Dans le noir du temps, (episode from *Ten Minutes Older: The Cello*) d: Jean-Luc Godard, sc: Anne-Marie Miéville, p: Ulrich Felsberg, Nicolas McClintock, Nigel Thomas, c: Julien Hirsch, ed: Jean-Luc Godard, Anne-Marie Miéville, s: François Musy, p.c.: Matador Pictures, Odyssey Films, Périphéria, Road Movies, 2002, video, col, 10 min.

Notre musique, d: Jean-Luc Godard, sc: Jean-Luc Godard, p: Jean-Paul Battaglia, Alain Sarde, Ruth Waldburger, c: Julien Hirsch, ed: Jean-Luc Godard, s: François Musy, art d: Anne-Marie Miéville, p.c.: Avventura Films/Périphéria/Canal Plus/Arte/Vega Film/TSR/France 3, 2004, 35 mm, col, 80 min.

Film socialisme, d: Jean-Luc Godard, s: Jean-Luc Godard, p: Ruth Waldburger, Alain Sarde, c: Fabrice Aragno, ed: Jean-Luc Godard, s: François Musy, Gabriel Hafner, art d: Anne-Marie Miéville, Alain Sarde, p.c.: Wild Bunch, Canal+, Vega Film AG (Zurich), RTS, Suissimage, 2010, 35 mm, DCP, 1:1.78 Dolby SR/DTS, col, 102 min.

Les Trois Désastres, d: Jean-Luc Godard, 2012, DCP, col, 17 min. Part of the portmanteau film *3X3D* that includes films by other directors.

3X3D, d: Jean-Luc Godard, Peter Greenaway, Edgar Pêra, sc: Jean-Luc Godard, Peter Greenaway, Edgar Pêra, p: Rodrigo Areias, c: Reinier van Brummelen, Luis Branquinho, ed: Raphaël Lefèvre, s: Pedro Adamastor, Pedro Marinho, p.c.: Fundação Cidade de Guimarães, 2013, DCP 3D, b/w and col, 70 min.

3. DVD editions consulted

Slow Motion (English title), dir. by Jean-Luc Godard (Artificial Eye, 1980).

Lettre à Freddy Buache, dir. by Jean-Luc Godard (Éditions du Centre Pompidou, 2006), included in Brenez et al. (eds.), *Jean-Luc Godard: Documents* (Paris: Éditions du Centre Pompidou, 2006).

Passion, dir. by Jean-Luc Godard, 2-DVD set (Collection 2 films de Cahiers du cinéma, 1981).

Scénario du film Passion, dir. by Jean-Luc Godard in *Jean-Luc Godard: Ensayos y Anne-Marie Miéville*, 4-DVD set (intermedio, 2011).

First Name: Carmen, dir. Jean-Luc Godard (Studiocanal image/France 2 cinéma/Universal Studios, 2007).

Keep Your Right Up! (Soigne ta droite!), dir. by Jean-Luc Godard (Facets Multimedia, Inc., 2001).

King Lear, dir. by Jean-Luc Godard (Cannon Films and Cannon International, 1987) [on VHS].

On s'est tous défilé, dir. by Jean-Luc Godard (Éditions du Centre Pompidou, 2006), included in Brenez et al. (eds.), *Jean-Luc Godard: Documents* (Paris: Éditions du Centre Pompidou, 2006).

Nouvelle Vague, dir. by Jean-Luc Godard, 2-DVD set (Collection 2 films de Cahiers du cinéma, 1990).

PART B

1. Films and documentaries by other directors cited

The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari, d: Robert Wiene, sc: Hans Janowitz, Carl Mayer, c: Willy Hameister, p.c.: Decla Filmgesellschaft (Erich Pommer), 1920, b/w, silent, 72 min.

Nanook of the North, Robert Flaherty (d, sc., p, c, ed.), titles: Carl Stearns Clancy, Robert Flaherty, p.c.: Revillon Frères, 1922, b/w, silent, 75 min.

Zemlya (Earth), d: Alexander Dovzhenko, sc: Alexander Dovzhenko, c: Danylo Demutsky, ed: Alexander Dovzhenko, p.c.: VUFKU Studio (Kiev), 1930, b/w, 73 min.

L'Atalante, d: Jean Vigo, sc: Jean Vigo, Boris Kaufman, Louis Berger, Jean-Paul Alphen, ed: Louis Chavance, p: Jacques Louois-Nounez, p.c.: Argui-Films, 1934, b/w, 89 min.

Filmography

La Grande Illusion, d: Jean Renoir, sc: Jean Renoir, Charles Spaak, c: Christian Matras, ed: Marguerite Renoir, s: Joseph de Bretagne, p.c.: RAC (Réalisation d'Art Cinématographique), 1937, b/w, 113 min.

La Règle du jeu, d: Jean Renoir, sc: Jean Renoir with Carl Koch, c: Jean Bachelet, ed: Marguerite Renoir, s: Joseph de Bretagne, p.c.: Nouvelles Éditions Françaises, 1939, b/w, 112 min.

Ossessione, d: Luchino Visconti, sc: Luchino Visconti, based on James M. Cain's novel *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, c: Domenico Scala, Aldo Tonti, ed: Mario Serandrei, s: Tommaso Barberini, Arrigo Usigli, p.c.: I.C.I (Iniziativa Cinematografiche Internazionale), 1943, b/w, 140 min.

Francesco, giullare di Dio, d. Roberto Rossellini, sc: Roberto Rossellini, Federico Fellini, with Father Félix Morlion, Father Antonio Lisandrini, p: Peppino Amato, c: Otello Martelli, ed: Jolanda Benvenuti, s: Eraldo Giordani, Ovidio Del Grande, p.c: Rizzoli Film, 1950, b/w, 75 min.

Nuit et brouillard, d: Alain Resnais, sc: text by Jean Cayrol, c: Ghislain Cloquet, ed: Henri Colpi, Jasmine Chasney, s: Studios Marignan, p.c.: Argos Films/Como Films/Cocinor, 1955, b/w and col, 31 min.

In Between, d: Stan Brakhage, c: Stan Brakhage, 1955, 16 mm, col, 10 min.

The Silence, d: Ingmar Bergman, sc: Ingmar Bergman, p: Allan Ekelund, c: Sven Nykvist, ed: Ulla Ryghe, p.c.: Svensk Filmindustri (SFI), 1963, b/w, 96 min.

Persona, d: Ingmar Bergman, sc: Ingmar Bergman, p: Lars-Owe Carlberg, c: Sven Nykvist, ed: Ulla Ryghe, p.c.: Svensk Filmindustri (SFI), 1966, b/w, 84 min.

Les Grandes Répétitions (1965-68), d : Gérard Patris, Luc Ferrari, p: Pierre Schaeffer, le Groupe de Recherches Musicales du service de la recherche de l'ORTF - *Olivier Messiaen: Et Expecto Resurrectionem Mortuorum*, 1965, b/w, 44 min. *Karl-Heinz Stockhausen: Momente*, 1966, b/w, 45 min. *Hommage à Edgar Varèse*, 1966, b/w, 60 min. *Hermann Scherchen: Quand un homme consacre sa vie à la musique*, 1967, b/w, 57 min. *Cecil Taylor à Paris*, 1968, col, 44 min.

King Lear (Korol Lir), d: Grigori Kozintsev, sc: Grigori Kozintsev, c: Jonas Gritsius, s: Eduard Vanunts, p.c.: Lenfilm Studio, 1970, b/w, 139 min.

India Song, d: Marguerite Duras, sc: Marguerite Duras, p.c.: S. Damiani/A. Valio-Cavaglione/Sunchild/Les Films Armorial, 1974, col, 120 min.

Son nom de Venise dans Calcutta désert, d: Marguerite Duras, Benoît Jacquot, sc: Marguerite Duras, p.c.: Cinéma 9/PIPA/Éditions Albatros, 1976, col, 120 min.

Le Camion, d: Marguerite Duras, sc: Marguerite Duras, p.c.: Cinéma 9 (Pierre et François Barat)/Auditel, 1977, col, 80 min.

Filmography

Le Navire Night, d: Marguerite Duras, sc: Marguerite Duras, p.c.: MK2/Gaumont/Les Films du Losange, 1978, col, 94 min.

Aurélia Steiner, dit Aurélia Melbourne, d: Marguerite Duras, sc: Marguerite Duras, p.c.: Les Films Paris-Audiovisuel, 1979, col, 35 min.

Aurélia Steiner, dit Aurélia Vancouver, d: Marguerite Duras, sc: Marguerite Duras, p.c.: Les Films du Losange, 1979, b/w, 48 min.

10, d: Blake Edwards, sc: Blake Edwards, c: Frank Stanley, Bill Clark, ed: Ralph E. Winters, s: Bruce Bisenz, p.c.: Orion Pictures Corporation/Geoffrey Productions, 1979, col, 122 min.

Tempo di Viaggio, d. Andrei Tarkovsky, sc: Tonino Guerra, c: Luciano Tovoli, ed: Franco Letti, s: Eugenio Rondani, p.c.: RAI 2/Genius srl, 1980/1983, col, 63 min.

Nostalghia, d: Andrei Tarkovsky, sc: Andrei Tarkovsky, Tonino Guerra, p: Francesco Casati, c: Giuseppe Lanci, ed: Erminia Marani, Amedeo Salfa, s: Remo Ugolinelli, Danilo Moroni, p.c.: Rete 2 TV RAI in association with Sovinfilm (USSR) for Opera Film (Rome), 1983, col, 126 min.

Carmen, d: Claes Fellborn, c: Roland Sterner, p.c.: Cinemagi/Folkoperan, 1983, col, 109 min.

La Tragédie de Carmen, d: Peter Brook, c: Sven Nykvist, p.c.: Bentwood Television Productions/Channel Four Films/Bavaria Atelier/Antenne 2/Alby Films, 1983, col, 80 min.

Carmen, d: Carlos Saura, p: Emiliano Piedra, c: Teodoro Escamilla, 1983, col, 102 min.

2. DVD editions consulted

Nanook of the North, dir. by Robert Flaherty (Special Collector's Edition, 2004).

Nostalghia, dir. by Andrei Tarkovsky, 2-DVD set (Artificial Eye, 1983).

Appendix

Figure 1: John Grierson, 'Flaherty's Latest' in *New Britain*, August 9 1933, p. 366.

Left page:

366 NEW BRITAIN AUGUST 9, 1933

Cinema **JOHN GRIERSON**

Flaherty's Latest



From Flaherty's film of the Aran Islands

IT IS DIFFICULT TO HAVE COURAGE OF CINEMA ON THESE HECTIC NIGHTS, WITH nothing on the bills half so expansive as the sky across Piccadilly, or a Flaherty in from the Aran Islands. When Flaherty tells of the film he is making there, the *Narrow Corners* seem very narrow indeed. "Short is man's life, and narrow is the corner in which he dwells." The legend begins the film at the Regal, and ends it; as though high philosophy, significant of much, were sandwiched between. But the story only tells how a boy running from a charge of murder finds the girl of his heart on a South Sea island. You may find it difficult to generalize from so scanty a particular.

Flaherty with his tale of simple people living from the sea comes so much nearer the mark as to make the other ridiculous. Who more narrow in their corner than these islanders of the Arans, and who, by definite threat of nature and a scrumpy livelihood, shorter in their lives? If the legend is significant of anything it is that, within such limitations, man will take thought of starry heavens above and moral law within, or of some or such declaration of worth—Kantian or otherwise—as gives him a modicum of nobility. You may find illustration in Mr. Douglas Fairbanks Junior's very fortunate discovery of a pretty girl on an unpromising island, but I doubt it. Flaherty talks of a small boy fishing from a cliff, without sense of the three hundred feet of eternity beneath him, and of storms encountered in currachs for the sake of a meal: suggesting all the while that the drama is not in consciousness of danger and posturing over it, but in the very custom of danger. A delicate distinction still obscured from all eyes whatsoever in commercial cinema!

Man of Aran should come to the theatres with the New Year, and if only half the accounts of it are true, it must bring a new view-point altogether to our English schedules. English cinema has never been very brave about its subject matter. In a country built more than any on epic feats of exploration and discovery, and hard battles with alien horizons, we have confined ourselves very exclusively to the dithering diversions of the West End. How much, a film like *Ninety Degrees South* at the Polytechnic shows by its very exception.

This is the well-known record of the Captain Scott expedition, and it is a good record. But it was made before the War, and there is something as pathetic as the film itself in the resurrection of its worn negative. We have had nothing over the years to put with it. You may also wonder when you see it why a country so rich in individual braveries should have to emphasize a noble occasion so desperately. It is difficult to over-

dramatize a matter of death, but understatement, as Shakespeare very frequently demonstrates, will sometimes fly higher than rhetoric. Trotsky used to say that it was difficult to shout louder than the fact of the matter. Mr. Ponting, in his commentary, tries very hard to.

In *Hearts of Oak*, another film shown over the week, there is a similar phenomenon. This, too, is a resurrection. Its original version was *Zebrugge*, and Bruce Woolf, who made it, will tell you how he hawked it originally down Wardour Street and could not find a renter to take a chance on it. It made a minor fortune for him, but only after he had founded a company to force it through to the theatres. There is nothing very good about it, except its theme of silly, preposterous mass suicide. It is fussy and overdone, and now, with synchronized sound, it is also noisy. Following the dreadful fashion, the commentator will not allow a single bravery to escape you or leave a single agony to your imagination; and more nauseous, sickly, indecent, overpatriotic tripe I never heard in my life. But it does at least tell of something done and done bravely, and they resurrect it for lack of anything similar or anything better.

The summer number of the *Cinema Quarterly*, just out, will give you as fair an analysis as any of the deeper reaches of the situation. Sitting by sad sea waves, or musing on the king, thy father's ghost, you will find the bright men of Edinburgh have gathered in most of the information and, in a peculiarly uncritical world of discourse, enough critical talent to make cinema as exciting as it should be. I shall except my own lugubrious account of our film work at the E.M.B. Since writing it, the E.M.B. has been summarily executed and the account has become an epitaph: on things we did, but mostly hoped to do. Much more pleasant is Herbert Read's discourse on the possible poetics of cinema. You may find good cause for argument, for he associates his theory far too closely with sur-realist theory. You may properly argue that poetry is not exclusively from beyond life but, very commonly, from within it. Read, however, is the only man of academic worth in the country who deals with cinema, and he takes the whole business of criticism ten reaches higher than we are accustomed to. He says, only too rightly, that "the film of imagination will not come until the poet enters the studio". But what poet would?

R. S. Lambert has an article on the Film Institute; which grows slowly, and will presently, one hopes, take charge of our very muddled educational film world. There is an interview with Pabst in explanation of *Don Quixote*, notes on Expressionism by Leontine Sagan, on Superimposition by Stuart Legg, on Screen Adaptation by Victor Saville, and some excellent criticism by Forsyth Hardy and Basil Wright. You should also examine the very pretty parodies of the critics by J. N. G. Davidson: guessing if you will the identities of A. C. L'Imortelle, Osric Batsinthebelfry and the Verandah Brothers. They discuss the stardom of one Lilli Baumenturd.

An invitation to write about your holiday
see page 382

What Government would you choose?
see page 384

Figure 2: Maurice Ravel, 'Finding Tunes in Factories' in *New Britain*, August 9 1933, p. 367.

Right page:

AUGUST 9, 1933
NEW BRITAIN
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Music
MAURICE RAVEL

Finding tunes in factories

FOR CENTURIES MAN HAS BEEN INSPIRED BY MUSIC THAT OWES ITS INCEPTION TO THE works of Nature. The rippling stream, the rustling leaves, songs of birds, and cries of beasts, all have been interpreted into music of enduring beauty.

But all of these are now established. We cannot continue to use them as the inspiration for new works, for the time would surely come when the world would so tire of hearing new themes based upon old inspirations that all music would suffer an eclipse.

Inspiration from Noise

In our search for fresh inspiration we cannot overlook the appeal of modern life. Our cities are said to "hum" with traffic, machinery to "purr", and although these sounds may seem pleasant or unpleasant, there is no reason why they should not be interpreted into great music.

Unquestionably the mechanics of this age will leave their imprint on music that will be handed down through generations, and more and more of our composers will find inspiration in what some now regard as mere noise. In the past battles have been made the themes of world-famous symphonies, and surely the sound of battle is no more inspiring than the hum of a vast machine?

Tchaikowsky's *1812* and Von Suppé's *Light Cavalry* had their birth, not in the ordered sounds of the parade ground, but in the chaotic clash of arms and the irregular thunder of cannon. Beethoven composed a symphony based on the life of Napoleon; why should not a modern composer base a similar work on the life of a great captain of industry?

Business Man as Hero

It is the tendency of the age to look to our industrial leaders, rather than to our politicians and soldiers, for our advancement. This can very naturally be interpreted into music, and must be done if the music of this age is correctly to represent the life of our peoples.

The strange, disordered sounds of a great motor vehicle pulling up a steep hill may not impress with their beauty, but when translated into music they would have a different appeal. The song of the nightingale in the forest is very different from the musical interpretations that have found their way into our scores; similarly, the agitation of a great engine set to music would be quite unlike the actual sounds of the struggle.

To set such sounds to music is true art. Of course the music does not necessarily suggest the noises, but it can tell in music the story of the machine and interpret the machine's works.

Beauty in Industry

Let us consider the factory. Set on a great plain, or in the heart of a crowded industrial city, it is the life, the home, the entire being of thousands of workers. Throughout the day its mighty engines turn and turn and turn. Clanging bells punctuate its ordered progress, piles of finished goods pay tribute to the efficiency of the mechanism and to the greatness of the brain that conceived it.

At dusk the clash and clang and thunder of toil is stilled. The great gates open and the air rumbles with the voices of thousands of workers pouring out and back to their homes. A little later the last lights are extinguished, and where a few hours before was noise and toil is stillness and desolation.

Music of Machines

What a musical story there is in that factory! Musicians, together with historians and writers of fiction, must carry on the tale of the mechanics of this age to our children and our children's children.

We have had nature, war, and a hundred other themes in music, and it amazes me that musicians have not yet captured the wonder of industrial progress.

Honegger, Mossolov, Schönberg, and others have gained much of their inspiration from machinery. My own *Bolero* owed its inception to a factory. Some day I should like to play it with a vast industrial works in the background.

An Aeroplane Symphony

The aeroplane, which has done so much to bring greater convenience, faster travel, and to facilitate discovery in these times—what a theme for a symphony it would make! Great flights showing the epic courage of our aviators, the perils of earth, sea, and sky, could all be interpreted into music which would be a monument to our heroes of the air. A modern liner putting out to sea with her complement of many hundreds of souls on board, the coming of a storm, man's conquest of the elements—all these could be epitomized into musical story. The ordinary, everyday sounds of our railways could be made into works which would tell of our progress, which would show how we had overcome the obstacles of nature and permitted the ingenuity of man to triumph.

But over all would be the triumph of the machine, the vast monster that man has created to do his bidding. What a noble inspiration! Surely one that will in future years be felt by hundreds of our composers, who will bring into being music that will faithfully and beautifully reflect the spirit of the age in which machinery struggled to lighten the burdens of man.

A GREAT
ACHIEVEMENT

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