

3.2. The universal and the superfluous: Godard reads *Carmen*.

Godard's riddance of the Spanish setting in *Prénom Carmen* did certainly not go unnoticed at the Venice Film Festival of 1983, where the film was competing against a fair number of adaptations of novels and plays, notably Gilles Carle's *Marie Chapdelaine*, Euzhan Palcy's *Rue Cases-Nègres*, and Robert Altman's *Streamers*. Upon the film's screening, Anne de Gasperi expressed her admiration: « Quelle bouffée de vitalité après toutes ces histoires enchanteresses, mais tellement immobiles dans leur contexte! Carmen explose de son cadre habituel, nue comme la vérité sort du puits »¹. Was de Gasperi indirectly criticising *Marie Chapdelaine* (1983), an adaptation which she described as « un superbe roman d'amour qui, une fois de plus, ne fonctionne pas »²? Or was *Prénom Carmen* compared against Palcy's adaptation of Joseph Zobel's novel, *La Rue Cases-Nègres* (1950)? The latter film was ranked second after *Prénom Carmen*, which won the Golden Lion. The critical and popular acclaim of Palcy's film had multiple explanations. On the one hand, *Rue Cases-Nègres* (1983) was praised for the fact that its biographical dimension opened discussions on Martinique's colonised past. On the other hand, the film distinguished itself due to the director's personal commitment to the story: Palcy is a woman who shares a common Martinican background with the writer. In between 1983 and 1984, filmmakers like Palcy and Carlos Saura questioned colonial tropes by staging a more personal and "local" vision of their respective countries. In fact, the rewriting of *Carmen* in the first half of the 1980s created a new set of challenges which emerged from the pressing desire to revise the Franco-centric, paternalistic, and mythologised representations of the Spanish folklore, its women, and the Romany culture. Saura and the choreographer Antonio Gades, for instance, challenged the underlying Imperialist view of Spain instituted by Bizet's *Carmen*, through a choreo-film made in Spain by native Spaniards. In fact, Saura established a critical distance between the audience and the flamenco dancers, who are shown rehearsing in front of mirrors, wearing rehearsal clothes, and listening to the choreographer's indications. In addition, Rosella Simonari notes that Saura's

¹ "What a breath of fresh air, after all these charming stories which stubbornly cling to their context! Carmen explodes from her customary setting, and appears naked like the truth which comes out in the wash". [My translation, ZTZ]

Anne de Gasperi, "Venise. Deux heroines jetées aux lions", in *Le Nouvel Observateur*, (September 9, 1983): 33.

² "a superb love novel which, once more, fails to work" [My translation, ZTZ]

de Gasperi, "Venise. Deux heroines jetées aux lions": 33.

characters express their psychological states through flamenco steps instead of communicating their emotions through dialogues, hence undermining the more touristic, entertaining and ornamental representations of Flamenco³. Arguably, Saura's focus on body language over the reconstitution of pre-constructed fantasies about Spain possesses a common ground with Godard's interpretation of *Carmen*. Both directors approached acting through a strict refusal of psychological characterisation. In this regard, the scenes involving Carmen and Joseph are, above all, rhythmic and physical, if not carnal. On three different occasions, the two lovers are seen undressing, in a determined and energetic manner. In uncle Jean's apartment, near the seaside, Joseph removes his soldier boots and throws them against the walls, whilst Carmen joyfully wanders around the empty living room. When the former asks Carmen « Chez qui on est? » the latter pushes him abruptly against the wall and says « Tirez-vous! »⁴. Joseph replies with a « Non ! », and whilst she orders him « Attirez-moi ! », he grabs Carmen's waist and, this time, pushes her against the same wall⁵. Godard exteriorised the power game between Carmen and don José (which has always characterised the novella as well as the opera) through marked and unrestrained movements and gestures. It is therefore the rhythm of Carmen and Joseph's actions, and not so much their words, which evoke moments of tenderness, sexual desire, frustration and contempt. The comparison with Saura's film, nonetheless, ends here. Saura and Godard gave very divergent readings of the myth of *Carmen*, which, in my opinion, have an intrinsic connection with the directors' cultural identities. Where Saura's film aimed to recover a certain idea of Spain, which attempts to escape the nineteenth century Orientalist discourse on Andalucía, Godard uprooted the novella (and, thereby, the opera) from its traditional setting, and located the story back in France⁶. The reason behind Godard's transposition of the myth in between Trouville and Paris is complex, and cannot be merely reduced to pragmatic grounds, like the management of a tight budget. Godard's return to narrative filmmaking in the 1980s meant to reconnect with, and at the same

³ Rosella Simonari, "Bringing Carmen back to Spain: Antonio Gades' Flamenco Dance in Carlos Saura's Choreofilm", in *Dance Research* 26, 2, (October 2008): 196, Accessed November 3, 2015, doi: 10.3366/E0264287508000182

⁴ "Whose place is this?"/ "Go away!" [My translation, ZTZ]

⁵ "No!"/ "Pull me!" [My translation, ZTZ]

⁶ The Francoist regime encouraged the glorification of "Spanishness" and its National Catholicism, through films representing, for instance, Andalusian folkloric tales (the children films starring Joselito, or *Lola*, *La Piconera* in the early fifties).

Simonari, "Bringing Carmen back to Spain: Antonio Gades' Flamenco Dance in Carlos Saura's Choreofilm", 193.

time to criticise, the aesthetical premises inherited from his formative years at the *École Schéerer*⁷. In fact, Éric Rohmer's film criticism revolved around the provocative analogy between classical tragedy and classical Hollywood cinema⁸. Rohmer argued that classical Hollywood encapsulated the narrative paradigm of classical tragedy by carrying, within a singular plot, the universal dialectics between freedom and constraint. His younger followers, which were Truffaut, Rivette, Godard and Chabrol, supported such theoretical premise⁹. Despite the political resonance of their surname, the *Jeunes Turcs* were far from advocating the foreign aesthetical alternatives proposed by "World Cinema" directors¹⁰. Indeed, in the aftermath of World War II, debates opposing Hollywood cinema to "minor" national cinemas coincided with the advent of the European New Waves (the Italian Neo-Realist cinema, for example, emphasised the national dimension of the culture and modes of production it drew upon)¹¹. The development of film festivals and forums in the late 1940s led French film critics to write about Egyptian, Brazilian, Japanese, Mexican, Indian, Czech, Austrian and other foreign films, alongside the hegemonic Hollywood cinema. Rohmer and his clique were sceptical of the singularity and peculiarities of these new cinematic forms, to the extent of referring to American Westerns (*Red River* by Howard Hawks and *The Lusty Men* by Nicholas Ray) as reviving the antique traditions of the Occident:

Cette factice, inhumaine, monstrueuse Amérique reprendrait-elle de nos mains le flambeau de la plus pure tradition de l'Occident – grecque ou chrétienne, chevaleresque ou tragique, peu importe, si intimement se sont-elles mêlées au cours des siècles ?¹²

⁷ Pierre Kast first used the expression *École Schéerer* in 1952. See Pierre Kast, "Fiançailles avec le notaire. Notes sur Conrad et le cinéma", *Cahiers du cinéma* 12 (May 1952): 22.

⁸ Marco Grosoli, "The Politics and Aesthetics of the 'politique des auteurs'", in *Film Criticism* 39, 1 (Fall 2014): 38.

⁹ Grosoli, "The Politics and Aesthetics of the 'politique des auteurs'": 41.

¹⁰ Whereas the term "Young Turks" designates, in the realm of 1950s French cinema, the group of film critics writing in both *Cahiers du Cinéma* and *Arts* (Rohmer, Truffaut, Rivette, Godard, Chabrol), the origin of such expression relates to a group of senior officials, young officers, journalists, who fought against the authoritarian regime of Sultan Abdülhamid II and advocated a democratic, constitutional government, which they helped establishing in 1876. European Nationalism, positivist sociology and Balkan freemasonry influenced the movement of the Young Turks. See Hasan Kayali, *Arabs and Young Turks, Ottomanism, Arabism, and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1909-1918*, (London: University of California Press, 1997), 38-44.

¹¹ Marijke de Valk, *Film Festivals, from European Geopolitics to Global Cinephilia*, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007), 59.

¹² "This fake, inhuman, monstrous America is taking from us the torch of the purest Western tradition. Whether it is Greek or Christian, epic or tragic, has no real importance. All these traditions have thoroughly been mixed up over the centuries". [My translation, ZTZ]

To this day, studies on Godard commonly understand his filmic corpus as a reaction to the universalistic bias of the Young Turks' criticism in the 1950s. For scholars in charge of analysing his 1960s and 1970s films, Godard's famous comment against the *politique des auteurs* works like a refrain: « la notion d'auteur est une notion complètement réactionnaire »¹³. Ramona Fotiade recently defined Godard's filmmaking methods in *À bout de souffle* (1960) as a deconstructive approach to cinema, which consists in "working with existing conventions in order to expose and subvert the limitations of both genre and filming technique"¹⁴. The mission of the Dziga Vertov group was, according to Roberto Chiesi, to revolutionise the system of production and distribution through the intensive creation of "new" images which radically contrasted and challenged Bourgeois iconography¹⁵. In the 1980s, unprecedented attention to Godard's use of Western-oriented and universalistic iconography has nonetheless surfaced and revealed the director's desire to build a new discourse on artistic and literary traditions. Marc Cerisuelo referred to *Prénom Carmen* as a film which belongs to a "trilogy of the sublime", alongside *Passion* (1982) and *Je vous salue, Marie* (1985). The grouping together of these consecutive works has a rather simple explanation. Each of these films carried a new and much commented factor, which is none other than Godard's increasing and continuous use of classical and natural soundtracks in films exclusively dealing with the representation of Western mythologies¹⁶. More than audio components, music and Nature manifest themselves through striking visuals, which interrupt the narrative of the films in question. The recurring use of the musical and environmental elements reveals, in my opinion, Godard's desire to rethink cinema in terms of an inherently Western-oriented medium. In line with the geographical displacement of the Carmen story (from Spain to France), the reference to Nature and classical music adds to the idea that Godard wanted to capture "something" of the legend, which goes beyond the entertaining and exotic bias of Bizet's opera. Rather, it is the enigmatic and mysterious quality of Mérimée's novella that Godard seemed to restore. Like Racine's tragedies (*Andromaque*, *Britannicus*, *Bajazet*), Mérimée's *Carmen* is composed of a very simple action, which, according to Jacques Chabot, develops into a convoluted

Maurice Schérer, "Livres de Cinéma", in *Cahiers du Cinéma* 37, (July 1954): 58.

¹³ "The notion of author is a completely reactionary notion." [My translation, Z.T.Z]

Jean-Luc Godard, *Godard par Godard. Des années Mao aux années 80* (Paris : Flammarion, 1991), 64.

¹⁴ Ramona Fotiade, *À bout de souffle: French Film Guide*, (London: IB Tauris, 2013), 38-39.

¹⁵ Roberto Chiesi, *Jean-Luc Godard*, (Rome: Gremese, 2003), 49-50.

¹⁶ Marc Cerisuelo, *Jean-Luc Godard*, (Paris: Éditions des Quatre Vents, 1989), 207-231.

narrative¹⁷. It is precisely the simplicity of the novella's action (which could be summed up as a dialectical movement between the act of love and the act of death), which incited composers, playwrights, cinema and TV directors to profusely adapt the story of *Carmen* throughout these last two centuries. In *Prénom Carmen*, Godard exclusively preserved the story's fundamental connection between love and death, hence providing a variation on the theme of *Carmen*, rather than a pale copy of the novella or a filmed opera. The absence of the exotic components of the novella and the opera correspond to Pierre Brunel's idea according to which the mythical dimension of the Carmen story resides in the very *uncertain* and *indefinable* nature of the Bohemian's identity. To become a myth, the story of Carmen had to contain an unresolved mystery, and what's more, the enigma had to bear a universal dimension¹⁸. Yet, the opera *Carmen* did not acquire the status of myth on the grounds of the *Españoladas* it evokes. In contrast with Bizet, Mérimée took a more nuanced look at the Bohemian's identity by regularly referring to Carmen's manipulative skills and pronounced taste for lies and disguise. Indeed, Mérimée communicated the story of Don José and Carmen through a complex narrative which entangled the narrator's discourse with Don José's, hence levelling these characters' importance and decentering the figure of Carmen. When meeting Carmen for the first time, the narrator takes her for a Moorish or a Jewish, before she introduces herself as a Gypsy¹⁹. His description of the *gitanilla*, additionally, is full of contradictions: "her eyes in particular had an expression, at once voluptuous and fierce", her lips were "rather full but finely chiselled", her hair "rather coarse, and black" yet "long and shining"²⁰. The narrator concludes the portrait by suggesting that each of her flaws came with a contrasting and disconcerting quality²¹. Bizet, in turn, reinforced the centrality of the character of Carmen as well as the Gypsy clichés and extraneous components of the novella²². This partly explains the opera's great popular

¹⁷ Jacques Chabot, "Doña Carmen", in *Carmen, Figures mythiques*, ed. Elisabeth Ravoux Rallo, (Paris: Éditions Autrement, 1997), 28.

¹⁸ Pierre Brunel, "Carmen est-elle un mythe?", in *Carmen, Figures mythiques*, ed. Elisabeth Ravoux Rallo, (Paris: Éditions Autrement, 1997), 24-25.

¹⁹ Prosper Mérimée, *Carmen and Other Stories*, trans. Nicholas Jotcham, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 13.

²⁰ Mérimée, *Carmen and Other Stories*, 14.

²¹ Additionally, Don José bitterly recounts how Carmen manipulated him by making him believe she was Basque, like him: "She was lying, señor, as she always did. I wonder whether that girl ever spoke one word of truth in her life; but whenever she spoke, I believed her – I couldn't help it". Ibid., 24.

²² Suzan McClary, "Sexual Politics in Classical Music", in *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender and Sexuality*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 56-58.

appeal. Bizet's accentuation of the stereotypical assumptions about the Romany culture contradicts the original story. The opera's emphatic discourse on Carmen's cultural identity went, in fact, against the subtleties of the novella, and represented *Carmen* as a bewitching Bohemian spectacle, through music characterising the Gypsy woman as fascinating, threatening and sexual. In Bizet's opera, Carmen embodies sexual passion through rhythms that "tease and taunt", and hint at the "physical impulses of exotic, pseudogypsy dance"²³. I think *Prénom Carmen* was certainly more influenced by Mérimée's depiction of Carmen as an *oxymore vivant* than Bizet's more glamorous and Manichean idea of Carmen, whose role is antithetical to the virginal (and invented) figure of Micaëla. Free and dependent all at once, Carmen incarnates the tragic paradigm. In the early 1980s, actress Isabelle Adjani was already considered as the modern embodiment of tragedy through her performances as Ondine, Emily Brontë, and the vampiric role of Lucy Harker in Werner Herzog's *Nosferatu: Phantom der Nacht* (1979). The choice of Adjani reveals Godard's desire to borrow and, at the same time, to subvert the image of the actress, which was tainted with ideas of romanticism, conservatism, and Greek tragedy²⁴. Despite having famously withdrawn from the project, Adjani was, for the producers, a bankable choice due to her growing fame and dramatic potential²⁵. Her career not only combined the classical repertoire of the *Comédie Française* (*L'École des Femmes*, *L'Avare* by Molière, *Ondine* by Jean Giraudoux) with collaborations with acclaimed directors (Truffaut, Roman Polanski, André Téchiné, Werner Herzog, Claude Miller, Carlos Saura), but importantly enough, had a popular dimension through her remarked performances in French comedy dramas (*La Gifle* [1974], *Violette et François* [1977], *Tout feu tout flamme* [1982]). Lastly, her Algerian roots would appropriately represent Carmen's racial "otherness", without challenging the Caucasian standards of beauty²⁶. For all these reasons, Adjani was the perfect fit for Mérimée (and, by extension, Bizet)'s tragedy. The replacement of Adjani by debutant Dutch actress Maruschka Detmers did not affect Godard's willingness to

²³ Bizet opposed Carmen to the character of Micaëla, whose innocent and motherly nature is represented through "simple, lyrical, sweet" melody lines. McClary, "Sexual Politics in Classical Music", 57.

²⁴ de Baecque, *Godard, biographie*, 618.

²⁵ Michel David, *Isabelle Adjani: la tentation sublime*, (Paris: Éditions Imago, 2008), 70-71.

²⁶ To learn about the Hollywoodian construction of Afro-American identity and its relation to the case of Dorothy Dandridge in *Carmen Jones* (1954), see Yvonne D. Simms, *Women of Blaxploitation. How the action film heroine changed the American popular culture*, (Jefferson: McFarland and Company, 2006), 38-43.

represent Carmen through very canonical features. Indeed, De Baecque described Detmers in such fashion:

La plastique de Detmers est superbe : elle est grande, ferme, dynamique, les seins arrogants, et ressemble étonnamment à une beauté latine sélectionnée par Godard dans l'un de ses *Films-Tracts* de Mai 68, le n°15, qui est sans doute l'image source, l'icône fétiche dont s'inspire fantasmatiquement le cinéaste pour choisir sa Carmen²⁷.

The use of Detmer's nude beauty and "almost" Latin features was, however, conceived to better disrupt the spectators' expectations. The very fact that Godard presents himself as Carmen's "Uncle Jean" highlights the paradoxical aspect of the heroine: her physical features certainly resemble the standardised image of Carmen, but she is, at the same time, « la fille d'Élizabeth »²⁸. Godard's reference to Carmen's family connections allows him to emphasise the contradictions of Mérimée's Carmen, who embodies the singularity and ordinariness of a Gypsy-girl and, at the same time, seals her fate with don José in the most tragic manner. For instance, the character of Carmen alludes to the famous lines of Bizet's Habanera, « Si je t'aime, prend garde à toi », by paraphrasing the refrain with a more trivial expression: « Tu sais, Joe, je te le dis clairement. Si je t'aime, tu es fichu »²⁹. In contrast with other Carmen figures like Dorothy Dandridge in Otto Preminger's adaptation, *Carmen Jones* (1954), or Julia Migenes in Francesco Rosi's *Carmen* (1984), the dialogues of the Godardian Carmen are hesitant, repetitive and unfinished. The performance of Dandridge or Migenes was, in fact, modelled (to a lesser or greater extent) on the traditional opera performance of Bizet's Carmen, with its over-empowering music and lyrics. Godard, in turn, chose to name his heroine "Carmen" for deceitful purposes, just as with Pierrot and Marianne in *Pierrot le fou* (1965). By the very name of *Carmen*, the public imagines, on the one hand, the *femme fatale*, the feminine Don Juan, the devil's daughter – Western icons which Maruschka Detmers should supposedly embody. The addition of *Prénom* emphasises, on the other hand, the

²⁷ Detmers's physical appearance is superb: she is tall, firm, dynamic, with arrogant breasts, and resembles, surprisingly, a Latin beauty Godard selected from his *Films-Tracts* of May 68, n°15, which is certainly the source-image, the fetish icon that fantastically inspired him when choosing his own Carmen". [My translation, ZTZ]

de Baecque, *Godard, biographie*, 619.

²⁸ "Elizabeth's daughter" [My translation, ZTZ]

²⁹ "If I love you, you'd better beware"/ "Joe, let me put this straight. If I love you, you are screwed". [My translation, ZTZ]

word of *Carmen*, with its alphabetic and phonetic components. Through the title, *Prénom Carmen*, Godard suggested that Carmen is, first of all, a name, and echoed, as such, the cover of the *Nouvel Observateur*, whose headline, on August 19th 1983, claimed: « Toutes les femmes s'appellent Carmen »³⁰. Interestingly, at the time Mérimée published *Carmen*, the name of Carmen was extremely recurrent within the Gypsy community in Spain.

Les sorcières pullulent en Espagne à l'époque comme jadis les magiciens en Thessalie. Pour se convaincre et de cette multiplicité et du fait que la Carmencita, sans être Carmen, est un nom en quelque sorte générique pour ces sorcières, il suffit de relire la quatrième des *Lettres d'Espagne*, datée de Novembre 1830³¹.

Although the connotations of the name Carmen have varied from 1830 to 1983, it should be emphasised that both Mérimée and Godard were conscious of the various meanings and expectations such name would awaken. Indeed, Bouvier has asserted that Mérimée expressed an acute awareness of the European's stereotypical assumptions about Spaniards and Bohemians and acknowledged, more importantly, his own ignorance through narrative strategies which consist in combining written with oral speech, historical with mythological references, French with Spanish and Romany dialect, and so on³². Bouvier characterised the first chapter of *Carmen* as “an elaborate exercise of self-mockery” in which the narrator reveals “that from one end of the chapter to the other, he does not know what he is talking about, destroying his claims to narrative authority and capability, as well as his carefully constructed distinctions”³³. As an introduction to the story of Carmen, Mérimée wrote a paragraph in which the narrator observes that geographers have misguidedly located the battle of Munda near Monda, an Andalusian city which shares the same etymological root. The narrator adds

³⁰ “All women are called Carmen” [My translation, ZTZ]

Dominique Maingueneau, *Carmen les racines d'un mythe*, (Paris: Éditions du Sorbier, 1984), 9.

³¹ “Witches proliferated in Spain, just as magicians formerly abounded in Thessaly. For proof of such plurality and, of the fact that the name of Carmencita (without being ‘the’ Carmen) was commonly used by witches, one needs to read the fourth *Letters from Spain*, dating back from November 1830”. [My translation, ZTZ]

Brunel, “Carmen est-elle un mythe?”, 23.

³² Luke Bouvier, “Where Spain lies: narrative dispossessions and the seduction of speech in Mérimée’s ‘Carmen’”, in *Romanic Review* 90, 3, (May 1999): 354-357, Accessed November 2, 2015, URL: <http://library.kent.ac.uk/cgi-bin/resources.cgi?url=/docview/1291022620?accountid=7408>

³³ Bouvier, “Where Spain lies: narrative dispossessions and the seduction of speech in Mérimée’s ‘Carmen’”: 357.

that he is about to prove, in a future publication, that the battle of Munda happened, in reality, in the surroundings of Montilla. In a similar way, the concluding chapter breaks with the “little story” of Carmen, through the narrator’s scholarly reflections on the history and lifestyle of the Bohemian culture. In this way, Mérimée opened and closed his anecdote through the voice of a studious Orientalist who does not hide his fascination and, at the same time, unfamiliarity with the Spanish and Gypsy culture. As a matter of fact, the narrator many times refers to Greco-Roman mythology when depicting Spanish life. At his arrival to Cordoba, the narrator observes (accompanied with other Andalusian men) the spectacle of women enjoying leisurely time in the river of Guadalquivir during sunset and compares this daily life scene to the mythological tableau of Diana, the goddess of wilderness, bathing with her nymphs:

Yet those white and indistinct forms visible against the dark azure of the river set poetic minds at work, and with a little effort it is not difficult to imagine one is watching Diana and her nymphs bathing, without the risk of incurring the fate of Actaeon³⁴.

By doing so, Mérimée recognised the impact Western mythical figures have had on the representation of exotic experiences³⁵. The narrator’s position is, in this sense, paradoxical: on the one hand, he recounts his impressions of the landscapes and population of Cordoba, Granada and Gibraltar by regularly drawing comparisons with Western literary and artistic legacy and, on the other hand, he attempts to embrace the Spanish culture by evoking his own boldness and transgressive behaviour. Thus, the expression of Mérimée’s irony is to be found in the very textual nature of his storytelling. The image of Carmen is constructed through the curious gaze of the French visitor (the narrator), and shortly after, through Don José’s repentance speech. It seems to me that Godard, by complicating the main narrative of Carmen in *Prénom Carmen*, confirmed his ties with the Merimean vision of Carmen’s tragedy. Indeed, the story of Carmen and Joseph persistently digresses. The six opening minutes show everything but Carmen. Scenes from three parallel but intermingled stories get in the way of the Carmen story: the life of social recluse and ex-director “Uncle Jean”, the string quartet

³⁴ Prosper Mérimée, *Carmen and Other Stories*, trans. Nicholas Jotcham, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 12.

³⁵ Likewise, Mérimée started a previous novella, *Les âmes du purgatoire* (1834), by drawing a parallel between the mythological figure of Jupiter and the legend of Don Juan. See Brunel, “Carmen est-elle un mythe?”, 14.

rehearsal, and the peripheral and unrequited love story between the Micaëla-based character named Claire and Joseph (the former, by the way, plays the violin in the rehearsal scenes). In the same way as Mérimée combined subjective accounts on Carmen and don José with more scientific (or “academic”) information, Godard’s mise-en-scène oscillates between moments of pronounced artificiality and dramatic acting and documentary-like scenes such as the music rehearsals. For instance, Godard’s dramatist talent is at its highest in the bank robbery scene, where Carmen, elegantly dressed in black, appears at the top of the marble stairs, and shoots, intermittently, on Joseph’s direction, at the bottom of the stairway (**fig. 3.1.**). Already in their first encounter, Godard placed Carmen several steps ahead of Joseph, hence creating a situation of dominance. Indeed, Godard showed, through the verticality of this gunfire exchange, that Carmen and Joseph’s relation conforms to the law of the strongest: there is no situation of equality or partnership, despite the fact that Joseph risked prison for Carmen. The detached presence of the stereotypical Parisian bourgeois, who is casually sitting on an armchair while reading his journal on the left corner of the shot, drives the spectator’s attention to the unfolding action between the main protagonists and, thereby, enhances the theatrical nature of the scene. Moreover, the warm lighting, which visibly emanates from the middle-left edge of the image as well as from the upper background situated on the off-screen space of the top floor, creates a remarkable impression of depth. The change of yellow tones between the foreground and the background produce a halo effect which encircles both Joseph and Carmen. Here, the trap, set by destiny, closes on Joseph. In contrast with this scene, which, from a narrative perspective, introduces the spectator to Joseph and opens the way to the lovers’ escape to Trouville, nothing really crucial happens, story wise, in the following sequence. Where the bank scene was continuously cadenced by Beethoven’s string quartet, the scene at the gas station remains, for the greater part, devoid of music. Now that Joseph has attached Carmen (using his belt) and driven her away from Paris, he decides to park the car near a convenience store. A corpulent thirty year-old man (played by Jacques Villeret) watches them walk towards the shop whilst sipping his coffee. From a reverse angle, we see this same man discreetly sneaking an indistinct product into his pocket and entering the public toilets. Carmen and Joseph, who struggle finding a solution to Carmen’s need to urinate, move towards the same restroom as this anonymous man. From inside the public W.C., the frame shows this odd man eating a baby-food jar with his fingers in front of the mirror on the right corner, while the left part of the image shows Joseph and

Carmen, slamming the door multiple times, and entering, eventually. The shot in which Carmen drops her panties and improvises a sitting position in one of the urinals while her left arm is tied to Joseph's, is punctuated by Beethoven's music. The counter shot shows this grotesque man finishing his potty as he stares at the couple (**fig. 3.2.**). The Merimean conflict between freedom and possession is here transposed in a rather trivial setting through cruder lighting and provocative dialogue: « Détachez moi, j'ai envie de pisser! »³⁶. Godard undermined the triumphant attitude of Carmen (as shown in the bank scene) by revealing the most primitive aspect of the heroine. The unquestionable beauty of Detmers is accompanied by images revealing the un-idealised and realistic dimension of womanhood. Such vision of Carmen connects, directly, with Mérimée whose closing chapter re-locates Carmen among the Bohemian people and informs the reader that Gypsy women are particularly known for their "very swarthy, always darker" complexion, and their tendency to beg and tell fortunes all around Europe³⁷. For these reasons, the character of Carmen, in Godard's film, possesses the very same contradictions as the Merimean Carmen. She is both inaccessible and ordinary, both the legendary Carmen and "Ms. Everywoman". Similarly, the identity of Pierrot, in *Pierrot le fou* (1965), conveyed to the spectator this very sense of instability. In fact, Belmondo played a character whose name is permeated with strong literary and theatrical references like the right-wing modernist writer Louis-Ferdinand Céline, as well as the endearing but cowardly lackey of the *Commedia dell'arte*, Pierrot (or Pedrolino). Be they self-referential allusions (the duo Karina-Belmondo calls to mind his musical comedy *Une Femme est une femme* [1961])³⁸, or culturally connoted names, Godard strategically submerged his characters in disconcerting series of signifiers (sounds, images, graphic letters, colours) so as to tear them away from social stereotypes inherited from the Balzacian realist novel³⁹. Furthermore, Godard approached Mérimée's novella with the same running joke previously applied to *Pierrot le fou*: Carmen calls her lover "Joe" on two occasions, and the latter corrects her, each time: «

³⁶ "Untie me, I want to pee!" [My translation, ZTZ]

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 333.

³⁸ In the first car scene, Marianne remarks « Ça fait drôle tout de même de se retrouver ». Ferdinand answers back : « Oui. Ça fait quatre ans », hence hinting at the year of release of *Une femme est une femme* (1961). The nickname Pierrot also referred to the French gangster Pierre Loutrel, who became the public enemy number one in the immediate aftermath of the Occupation. See Antoine de Baecque, *Godard biographie*, (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 2010), 285.

³⁹ It is indeed impossible for the French spectator not to recognise Marianne as the French Republican symbol nor to forget the popular song *Au clair de la lune*.

je m'appelle Joseph »⁴⁰. Be it in *Pierrot le fou* or in *Prénom Carmen*, the characters' dialogues often lack of causal connections and become, instead, a patchwork-like speech which, in the case of Ferdinand, is composed of literary quotes (Élie Faure, Garcia Lorca, Rimbaud, Céline...), literary references (« *Les Fleurs du Mal*, c'est bien »), old sayings (« Allez, allons-y les voyages forment la jeunesse! »), word play (« Allons-y Alonzo! »), self-quotations (« j'y vais pas, j'y vais pas, j'y vais pas » in relation to Camille in *Le Mépris*), advertisement slogans (« Sous mon nouveau pantalon, scandale, ligne jeune! »), and the list goes on. These defamiliarisation techniques are preserved, in a more or less emphatic way, in *Prénom Carmen*. Through his own presence as *Oncle Jean*, Godard gave a self-reflexive dimension to the film, and through Beethoven's "Harp" Quartet (Op.74), he incorporated his longest and most continuous musical quote⁴¹. Most of the time, uncle Jean expresses himself through verbal clichés, word play, political, literary and artistic references, as when he briefly refers to Proust's madeleine, when eating a piece of sweet bun at the yellow bakery: « En tout cas, je me réjouis beaucoup de refaire un film dans un casino, ça me fera... ça me fera une madeleine »⁴². Certainly, Godard's late narrative films still possess the counter-cinema strategies which Peter Wollen listed in 1972 as "narrative intransitivity, estrangement, foregrounding, multiple diegesis, aperture, unpleasure, reality"⁴³. However, to consider *Prénom Carmen* as a mockery or parody of the myth of Carmen would dismiss the most intriguing dimension of Godard's late narratives: the back and forth movement between moments of reverie and moments of sarcasm (whether they are visual or audio extracts).

3.3. The new gaze: the place of classical music and Nature in *Prénom Carmen* and *Passion* (1982).

In 1998, Rohmer defined music listening as an experience turned towards the idea. He suggested that despite the abstract nature of music, composers like Mozart and

⁴⁰ In *Pierrot le fou* (1965) Ferdinand Griffon keeps repeating to Marianne Renoir: « Je ne m'appelle pas Pierrot, je m'appelle Ferdinand ».

⁴¹ Godard also explored the music rehearsal with the Rolling Stones in *One + One* (1969), and the Rita Mitsouko in *Soigne ta Droite* (1987).

⁴² "In any case, I am very glad to shoot a new film at the casino. This will bring me... this will bring me a madeleine" [My translation, ZTZ]

⁴³ Peter Wollen, "Godard and Counter Cinema: *Vent d'Est*", in *Film Theory and Criticism*, ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 418.

Beethoven were capable of expressing the richest and most complex human feelings, to the point of competing with, and eventually transcending, real-life emotional experiences⁴⁴. In contrast with music, Rohmer suggested that cinema, by its photographic nature, reflected on the metaphysical through the objective reproduction of reality. The recording of Nature, which divests the image of unequivocal meaning, was the closest way for the director to connect with the metaphysical. Rohmer described the relationship between director and film as antithetical as that of the painter, whose pictorial techniques attempt to overcome the mimetic and illusionist representation of the physical world. Now, the role of music and Nature in late Godard has been, in the past three decades, a great subject of attention, as shown through Maryel Locke and René Prédal's edited books and, more specifically, through Daniel Morgan's extensive study on the significance of Nature in films like *Soigne ta Droite* (1987), *Nouvelle Vague* (1990), *Allemagne 90 neuf zero* (1991), *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1988-1998)⁴⁵. The interest of exploring Godard's approach to Nature and music resides, precisely, in the fact that his previous films, be they from his "cinema of youth and transgression" (as designated by Chiesi in relation to his 1960s films), or from his Marxist film collective, were very critical of the Aristotelian/Rohmerian communion between body and soul, between the sensible and the intelligible. Godard's cinema challenged Rohmer's belief in cinema as the "the revelation, in the universe, of the Creator's hand"⁴⁶. Indeed, a significant amount of scholarship has explored the connection between poststructuralist Marxism and films as diverse as *Alphaville* (1965), *Pravda* (1970), or *Hélas pour moi* (1993)⁴⁷. For instance, the linguistic framework of Jacques Derrida's *De La Grammatologie* (1967) could certainly clarify the political significance of *La Chinoise*, a film released during the same year. Derrida's reflection on the origins of language and critique of the logocentric speech (a term which is closely associated

⁴⁴ Éric Rohmer, *De Mozart en Beethoven*, trans. Loreto Casado, (Madrid: Ardora Ediciones, 2005), 94.

⁴⁵ See Maryel Locke and Charles Warren, *Jean Luc Godard's Hail Mary: Women and the Sacred in Film*, (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1993); René Prédal, *Où en est le God-Art?*, (Courbevoie : Cinémaction – Corlet, 2003); Daniel Morgan, *Late Godard and the Possibilities of Cinema*, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2013)

⁴⁶ Keith Tester, *Eric Rohmer: Film as Theology* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 13.

⁴⁷ See, for instance, Allen Thiher, "Postmodern dilemmas: Godard's *Alphaville* or Three things that I know about her," in *Boundary 2* 4, 3, (Spring 1976): 947-964; Trevor Stark, "Cinema in the Hands of the People: Chris Marker, the Medvedkin Group, and the Potential of Militant Film", *October Magazine* 139, (Winter 2012): 138-150; James S. Williams, "'C'est le petit livre rouge/Qui fait que tout enfin bouge': The case for revolutionary agency and terrorism in Jean-Luc Godard's *La Chinoise*", in *Journal of European Studies* 40, 3, (September 2010): 206-218, doi: 10.1177/0047244110371901; Lucie Dugas, *Allemagne 90 neuf zero. La Mémoire fait l'histoire*, in *Où en est le God-Art?*, ed. René Prédal, (Courbevoie : Cinémaction – Corlet, 2003), 32-38.

with ethnocentrism) shares common grounds with Godard's political cinema, which tackled, among other themes, the Babelian idea of incommunicability, through desynchronised image and sound, the accumulation of authorless quotes and, as developed by K. Malcolm Richards, the taste for word play and the amalgamation of different languages⁴⁸. In *La Chinoise* (1967), for instance, Godard represented the collective voice of the Maoist Chinese students through Jean-Pierre Léaud's reported speech. Facing the camera, Léaud answered to Godard's off-screen and low-toned questions and defined theatre by reporting, in French, a Chinese student's discourse and act of protest. Like this, Godard created a Brechtian situation, which challenged the classical premise according to which the actor is responsible for impersonating a psychological individuality. Léaud's reported speech brought the spectator's attention to the constructed nature of discourse and, by extension, reality, through the self-reflexive nature of Léaud's theatrical performance. In a former film, *Pierrot le fou*, Godard alluded to the Vietnam war through Belmondo's caricatured impersonation of an American naval officer, and Karina's parodic performance of a Vietnamese woman. Karina's face is covered in yellow paint; her colourful makeup is accompanied with a Vietnamese conical hat. Marianne faces and looks at the camera whilst imitating an incomprehensible Vietnamese dialogue which is punctuated by background bombing noises (**fig. 3.3.**). The unintelligibility of the "Vietnamese Marianne" parodies the traditionally Western assumptions on the enigmatic and therefore threatening character of Asian communities. Furthermore, Marianne's performance is centred on the physical aspect of the Vietnamese woman and, as such, alludes to the "yellowface" performance tradition, whose roots belong to nineteenth century vaudeville⁴⁹. In the same way as *Pierrot le fou* and *La Chinoise* challenged the conservative politics of nineteenth century realism, by interrogating the role of the actor as well as the moral responsibility deriving from traditional acting, *Prénom Carmen* worked towards the demystification of contemporary womanhood and criticised, thereby, the traditionally phallogocentric

⁴⁸ K. Malcolm Richards, *Derrida Reframed* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2008), 129.

⁴⁹ In parallel with the Caucasian embodiment of African-Americans on stage (the "blackface" performance), the expression "yellowface" appeared in the 1950s and referred to "the continuation in film of having white actors playing major Asian and Asian American roles and the grouping together of all makeup technologies used to make one look "Asian". See Rae Fuller, *Hollywood goes Oriental, Caucasian performance in American film*, 9 and 20; Krystyn R. Moon, *Yellowface: Creating the Chinese in American Popular Music and Performance 1850-1920s*, (London: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 164.

representation of Carmen⁵⁰. However, it is impossible not to acknowledge Godard's persisting desire, throughout *Passion*, *Prénom Carmen*, and *Je vous salue, Marie*, to grant the spectator with short moments of temporal unity. As developed above, the refusal to geographically displace the story of Carmen outside the French borders should be read as Godard's desire to look at the "same things" (the city, love and Nature) with a *different* eye. To quote Morrey, Godard is seeking "a new way of seeing, a way of looking afresh" at the world⁵¹. Indeed, Godard's observations of the 1980s French society are less doctrinaire than his questioning of the Gaullist cultural politics in the 1960s. Where the aesthetics of *Pierrot le fou* foreshadowed Godard's wish to act upon current social stakes, *Prénom Carmen* expresses the fall out of the possibility of revolutionary success. The sense of disenchantment conveyed in *Pierrot le fou* is, in fact, of very different nature than in *Prénom Carmen*. Céline Scemama suggested that Godard's 1960s films took an active interest in capturing the beauty of modern life, hence revealing "a sort of political heroism"⁵². The term "heroism", in my opinion, alludes here to the expression of this very impossibility to get away from the despair and sufferings of modern world, as once defined by Baudelaire. In contrast with the heroes of Ancient Times embodied by mythical figures like Hercules, Achilles or Agamemnon, Baudelaire suggested that the heroism of modern life was to be found in the private subjects of the everyday world:

The pageant of fashionable life and the thousands of floating existences – criminals and kept women- which drift about in the underworld of a great city; the *Gazette des Tribunaux* and the *Moniteur* all prove to us that we have only to open our eyes to recognize our heroism.⁵³

⁵⁰ See, for instance, Phil Powrie, "Godard's *Prénom Carmen*, (1984), Masochism and the Male Gaze", in *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 31, 1, (1995): 70 ; Laura Mulvey, "The hole and the zero: the Janus face of the feminine in Godard", in *Jean-Luc Godard: Son + Image*, ed. Colin McCabe and Raymond Bellour, (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1992), 75-88; Phil Powrie, "Jean-Luc's women", in *Carmen on Film: A Cultural History*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 132-142 ; Jeremy Tambling, "Ideology in the cinema: Rewriting Carmen", in *Opera Ideology and Film*, (Glasgow: Manchester University Press, 1987), 33-34.

⁵¹ Douglas Morrey, *Jean-Luc Godard* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 135. **REVISER CITATION**

⁵² Céline Scemama, *Histoire(s) du cinéma de Jean Luc Godard. La force faible d'un art* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2006),

⁵³ Charles Baudelaire, "The Salon of 1846: On the Heroism of Modern Life", in *Modern Art and Modernism: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Francis Frascina and Charles Harisson, (London: Paul Chapman Publishing, 1982), 18.

The drawings of Constantin Guys and paintings of Eugène Delacroix embodied such heroic stance, not because they portrayed public events or political victories, but precisely because they shared the passion of crowds and the love of “everything that happens on the surface of our globe”⁵⁴. It could be argued that Guys and Delacroix’s heroism resided, according to Baudelaire, in their common and “compelling need, alas only too rare today, of combatting and destroying triviality”⁵⁵. Upon the release of *Pierrot le fou* Louis Aragon interestingly compared Godard to Eugène Delacroix. Aragon claimed that, just as Delacroix created beauty through scenes of murder and adversity, Godard brought to light new aesthetics, which remarkably expressed the beauty of modern days.

Tout le film n’est qu’un immense sanglot, de ne pouvoir, de ne pas supporter voir, et de répandre, de devoir répandre le sang. Un sang garance, écarlate, vermillon, carmin, que sais-je ? Le sang des *Massacres de Scio*, le sang de *La Mort de Sardanapale*, le sang de Juillet 1830, le sang de leurs enfants que vont répandre les trois *Médée furieuse*, celle de 1838 et celles de 1859 et 1862, tout le sang dont se barbouillent les lions et les tigres dans leurs combats avec les chevaux...⁵⁶

Like Delacroix, Godard’s engagement with modernity was less driven by political convictions than by a firm desire to return to cinema its artistic responsibility and freedom. In his study of *La Liberté Guidant le Peuple* (1830) Pierre Gaudibert described Delacroix as this spiritual aristocrat, not exactly known for his revolutionary nature but whose paintings became, nonetheless, a symbol of revolutionary will⁵⁷.

⁵⁴ Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans. and ed. Jonathan Mayne, (London: Phaidon Press, 1995), 7.

⁵⁵ Charles Baudelaire, *L’Art Romantique*, vol.3, (Paris: Hachette, DATE), 94-95.

⁵⁶ “The entire film is about an immense sob. It is a sob expressing, on the one hand, the incapacity to see blood being spilled and, on the other hand, the duty to shed blood. A madder-coloured, scarlet, vermillion, carmine blood, whatever. The blood of *The Massacre at Chios*, the blood of *The Death of Sardanapalus*, the blood of July 1830, the blood of their children, which were shed by the three *Furious Medea*, the one of 1838, and those of 1859 and 1862, and all the blood with which the lions and tigers got dirty in their fights against horses” [My translation, ZTZ]

Louis Aragon, “Qu’est-ce que l’art, Jean-Luc Godard?”, in *Les Lettres Françaises*, n°1096, (September 1965) : 10.

⁵⁷ Pierre Gaudibert, “Delacroix et le Romantisme Révolutionnaire”, *Europe: Revue Mensuelle* 41 (April 1963), 5.

In the period of the Algerian War, critics praised Godard's cinema for successfully engaging with present times through the creation of a new language able to transcend the political cleavage dominated by the imperialism of Hollywood classical realism and the Soviet socialist realism. Already in 1961, the leftist critic and filmmaker Luc Moullet expressed his admiration for Godard and, by the same token, contempt for the editorial leadership of Rohmer in *Cahiers du Cinéma*:

[Jean-Luc Godard] is not discreet; he paints his characters' psychological quirks in black and white. This is no longer the uniquely interior depth much vaunted over the previous five years by the young absolutists of *Cahiers du Cinéma*, but a depth which is both interior and exterior, and by token anti-commercial.⁵⁸

Although one hundred and thirty years (at least) separated the Parisian *Salons* in which Delacroix participated to the context of *À bout de souffle*, the public and the press commonly noticed the revolutionary quality of their creations, despite their deeply equivocal political position. In the early 1960s, *À bout de souffle* represented a model for the European New Cinema to follow, and for Moullet, an effective weapon against the influence of the Mac-Mahon's school (a group of extremely elitist critics whose idolatry for some American directors was known for its fascist tone)⁵⁹. Later in 1967, when Truffaut was asked to comment on the current state of cinema, he stressed the eminent role of Godard in shaping the French cinematic landscape throughout the decade: "the films which imitate Godard are indefensible because they miss the essential thing. They'll imitate his free and easy manner but forget – and for good reason – his despair. They'll imitate the word-play but not the malice."⁶⁰ Whether it is despair and malice, or disenchantment and irony, each one of these adjectives refer to Godard's ability to represent the modern struggle between inspirational moments towards "the ideal" and moments of discouragement, stricken by "the spleen".

⁵⁸ Luc Moullet, "Luc Moullet: 'Jean-Luc Godard'", in *Cahiers du Cinéma. 1960-1968: New Wave, New Cinema, Reevaluating Hollywood*, ed. Jim Hillier (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press), 40.

⁵⁹ de Baecque described the atmosphere prevailing in post-war French film criticism as an institution divided by diverse "chapels" sharing the same fervour towards cinema. The Bazinian will to maintain film criticism *sub specie aeternitatis* is replaced in 1963 by the Rivettian desire to see *Cahiers du Cinéma* as an "instrument of warfare". See Antoine de Baecque, *La Cinéphilie. Invention d'un regard, histoire d'une culture 1944-1968* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 2003), 210-211 ; 38.

⁶⁰ Jim Hillier, "François Truffaut: 'Evolution of the New Wave': Truffaut in interview with Jean-Louis Comolli, Jean Narboni (extracts)", in *Cahiers du Cinéma. 1960-1968: New Wave, New Cinema, Reevaluating Hollywood* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), 2, 109.

Baudelaire referred to these two notions to designate the beauty of modern life: “All forms of beauty, like all possible phenomena contain an element of the eternal and an element of the transitory – of the absolute and of the particular”⁶¹. As a matter of fact, Baudelaire’s verses oscillate between the expression of the poet’s desire to master the arena of the city sights and spectacles and, at the same time, the breaking off from these delights. It seems to me that in Godard’s early feature films, this back and forth movement between reverie and disgust was articulated through narrative strategies, which generally took the urban environment as a starting point, and the provinces, as well as the foreign lands as a much-fantasised finality. As shown in *À bout de souffle* (1960), Michel Poiccard plans to leave Paris for Italy but does not succeed due to Patricia’s fatal betrayal. Contrary to Michel, couples like Paul and Camille in *Le Mépris* (1963) and Ferdinand and Marianne in *Pierrot le fou* eventually move from town to the countryside for narrative purposes⁶². On the one hand, the urban settings (whether it is in *Le Mépris* or *Pierrot le fou*) exposed contemporaneous problems which relate to the realms of love and family relationships, business market, literary and artistic world patrimony, leisure activities, and so on. The seaside, country fields and roads, represent, on the other hand, the land of possibilities, risks and revival. However, despite the job opportunity brought by producer Jeremy Prokosch in *Le Mépris*, the trip to Capri doesn’t improve or resolve the sentimental conflict between Camille and Paul. Quite the reverse happens. Camille’s provocation, which consists in abandoning Paul by leaving the island in Prokosch’s car, leads her to death. Likewise, in *Pierrot le fou*, the experience of love and freedom in the South of France gives way to boredom, betrayal and, eventually, death and suicide. This conflict between impressions of love, joy, freedom and moments of deep melancholy and discouragement has always been at the core of Godard’s life work. Godard showed tenderness in the bed scene at the opening of *Le Mépris* as well as through Marianne and Ferdinand’s singing sequence in *Pierrot le fou*. Helplessness and sarcasm are constantly expressed through Godard’s taste for tragic endings, overly theatrical, parodic performances and, as mentioned by Aragon, the allegorical use of colours (like in *Pierrot le fou*, Godard used important amounts of vivid red paint *Weekend* [1967]).

⁶¹ Baudelaire, , “The Salon of 1846: On the Heroism of Modern Life”, 17.

⁶² Daniel Morgan, *Late Godard and the Possibilities of Cinema*, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2013), 69-70.

In the early 1980s, Nature, for Godard, no longer formed part of the characters' aspirations and fantasies. Not only the countryside becomes, for most of Godard's late films, the main setting in which the narrative unfolds (*Sauve qui peut [la vie]*, *Passion*, *Je vous salue, Marie*, *Soigne ta droite...*), but images of Nature also possess a self-contained narrative. Morgan analyses the shot of waves in *Allemagne 90 neuf zero* (1991) as suggesting an "idea of escape or detachment, a space outside the trauma of history"⁶³. In Godard's early 1980s films, the images of Nature generally appear unexpectedly and intermittently, have a brief duration, and are generally accompanied by classical music. In *Prénom Carmen*, he treated music and natural landscapes as complementary phenomena through an editing which synchronises, from time to time, the blowing waves with the musical unfolding of Beethoven's piece. Contrary to the narrative shots (involving characters, dialogues and actions), shots of Nature, when linked with classical music, give way to a different temporality which goes beyond real-life duration, and comes closer to an aesthetical, if not metaphysical, time⁶⁴. In the opening of the film, the title card is associated, straightaway, with the image of a windy sea. In between these two shots, Carmen's sentence « c'est en moi, en toi, que ça produit des vagues terribles » is introduced in voice over, alongside other fragmented dialogues which are being "swallowed" by the sound of the waves and the seagulls⁶⁵. It seems to me that, through these association games, Godard reconnected with the universal through the linking together of contradictory elements from the realm of the ideal, of the eternal (Beethoven's String Quartet), and the realm of the concrete, of the real (the empirical phenomenon of rolling waves). The Rohmerian belief in the ontological correspondence between cinematic landscapes (dominated by Nature) and classical music is, therefore, alluded to, without being rejected. In the sequence in which Carmen, half-naked, talks with Joseph in the kitchen, Godard filmed Detmer's face in a close-up shot and increased the volume of the String Quartet audio track so as to make the end of her dialogue hardly intelligible: « Comment ça s'appelle?... Il y a quelque chose avec les innocents, là... Et les coupables là... Et puis... Et puis je sais pas... »⁶⁶. When Joseph answers « Moi non plus », Carmen turns her eyes towards him (situated off-screen, at the bottom left of the frame) before looking downwards and, finally,

⁶³ Morgan, *Late Godard and the Possibilities of Cinema*, 134.

⁶⁴ See Rohmer's discussion on classical music and its relation to cinema in Éric Rohmer, *De Mozart en Beethoven*, trans. Loreto Casado, (Madrid: Ardora Ediciones, 2005), 95-97.

⁶⁵ "It's in me, it's in you, it makes terrible waves" [My translation, Z.T.Z]

⁶⁶ "How do we call it?... There is something about the innocents, here... and the culprits, there... And then... And then, I don't remember..." [My translation, ZTZ]

glimpses at the camera for less than a second⁶⁷. Following this, a two-second close-up shot shows Joseph's right profile in front of Carmen's crotch. Her lower abdomen takes the centre of the frame and is touched by Joseph, whose hand is being held by Carmen. Shots of waves interrupt the scene, hence possibly alluding to Carmen's interiority. Along with Joseph's rather submissive position (this scene exclusively focuses on Carmen's bodily features and leaves Joseph off-screen or shows him partially), the String Quartet emphasises the central and enigmatic dimension of Carmen. Her face and sexual organs are momentarily associated with the seaside and allude to romantic imagery: Carmen is as mysterious as a disturbed sea. In a similar manner, the insert shot of a full moon, whose circular form remind us of the mother's womb (hence the mystery of the origin of mankind), repeatedly follow the image of Marie in *Je vous salue, Marie*⁶⁸. Sometimes a setting sun replaces the moon, and its declining and warm brightness conveys ideas of life and death (the French expression « voir le jour » is synonymous of "to be born"). It could be argued that Godard's continuous association of Nature with classical music in the 1980s put into question his former belief in cinema as an "agitational" and political tool⁶⁹. In the beginnings of *Passion*, Raoul Coutard's camera follows, from a low angle shot, the rectilinear movement of an airplane in a clear and sunny sky. The irregular movements of the camera flicker between languidness and attentiveness whilst being accompanied by Maurice Ravel's Concerto in D for the Left Hand. Interestingly, Baudelaire illustrated his vision of the romantic genius through the image of an old man which sees the world for the first time, through a juvenile gaze. In *The Painter of Modern Life* (1863), he referred to watercolour painter and draftsman Constantin Guys in these terms:

Supposez un artiste qui serait toujours, spirituellement, à l'état du convalescent, et vous aurait la clef du caractère de M.G.

Or la convalescence est comme un retour vers l'enfance. (...) L'enfant voit tout en nouveauté ; il est toujours ivre. Rien ne ressemble plus à ce qu'on appelle l'inspiration, que la joie avec laquelle l'enfant absorbe la forme et la couleur.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ "Me neither" [My translation, ZTZ]

⁶⁸ Morrey efficiently summarises the different approaches scholars have pursued when explaining the role of womanhood and Nature in Godard's early 1980s films. See Morrey, *Jean-Luc Godard*, 146-152.

⁶⁹ Stark, "Cinema in the Hands of the People: Chris Marker, the Medvedkin Group, and the Potential of Militant Film": 128.

⁷⁰ M.G. refers to Constantin Guys

Barbara Spackman defined the concept of convalescence as this transitional phase between the irreconcilable conditions of sickness and health. Like the convalescent, the romantic artist, according to Baudelaire, is caught in between moments of reverie, evasion, detachment, and moments of seriousness, anxiety, and depression⁷¹. Godard expressed, through the camera's undecided and meditative sky shots, the doubts, uncertainties, this very in-between state, that characterises the romantic genius. In *Passion* and *Je vous salue, Marie*, music pieces by J.S. Bach, Mozart, Ravel, Dvorak served to emphasise the elusive and repetitive nature of Carmen and Joseph's dialogues. In contrast with Godard's fragmented, unexpected, and roughly cut music soundtrack in the 1960s (the case of *Une femme est une femme* is an opportune example), classical music now appears as an index of continuity. Jacques Aumont remarked that classical and natural soundtracks in late Godard operate as "an infinitely retold melody" whose unity is counterbalanced by the characters' broken dialogues⁷². Godard's new commitment to respect the integrity of the musical sample is shown through musical soundtracks which dissolve without sharp interruptions⁷³. In a TV programme dedicated to classical music and opera, Godard explained the role of Beethoven in his reworking of the myth of *Carmen*: « Ce n'est pas une musique dans le film, c'est un film fait avec de la musique. Mon vrai producteur, c'était Carmen, et mon scénariste c'était Beethoven, qui a bien voulu m'écrire une attaque de banque avec de la musique »⁷⁴. The allusion to Beethoven as the main director of *Prénom Carmen* shows that the String Quartet rehearsal scenes occupy a much more important place than that of a parallel story within the narrative. Beethoven's composition takes on a totalising dimension, which embraces the narrative and the extra-filmic. For instance, when Carmen tells the gang leader that uncle Jean has agreed to lend his apartment for filmmaking purposes,

"Imagine an artist who was always, spiritually, in the condition of that convalescent, and you will have the key to the nature of Monsieur G. Now convalescence is like a return towards childhood. (...) The child sees everything in a state of newness; he is always *drunk*. Nothing more recalls inspiration than the delight with which a child absorbs form and colour".

Charles Baudelaire, *Le Peintre de la vie moderne* (Paris: Litteratura.com, 2004), Kindle edition.

⁷¹ Barbara Spackman, "The Scene of Convalescence", in *Decadent Genealogies. The Rhetoric of Sickness from Baudelaire to d'Annunzio*, (Ithaca: Cornwell University Press, 1989), 42.

⁷² Williams, James S., Temple, Michael and Witt, Michael, 'Three Lyrical Interludes' in *For Ever Godard* (London: Blackdog, 2004), 290.

⁷³ Jacques Aumont cited in Martin Adrian, "Three Lyrical Interludes", ed. Williams, James S., Temple, Michael and Witt, Michael, in *For Ever Godard* (London: Blackdog, 2004), 290.

⁷⁴ "It is not music within the film, it is a film created with music. My true producer was Carmen, and my scriptwriter was Beethoven, who kindly agreed to compose a bank robbery". [My translation, ZTZ] Jean-Luc Godard, cited in de Baecque, *Godard biographie*, 617-618.

her boss replies with the following expression: « Ça devait être réglé comme du papier à musique ». Its English translation loses, alas, the musical image provided by the French metaphor: “the plan should be settled like clockwork”. The reference to music paper mirrors Godard’s desire to adjust the unfolding narrative to musical rhythm. The leader’s concern over the risk of improvising the bank robbery not only hints at the unpredictability of the storyline, but also elevates the diegetic music performed by the violinists as the “Father time” of the narrative. This providential metronome therefore aims at the binding of the plurality of stories. The principle of uncertainty and arbitrariness, which give place to human encounters, is constantly measured against the determined ambition of the music rehearsal. Falling, one after the other, on the slippery floor of the bank, Carmen’s encounter with Joseph wavers between improvisation and fate. In contrast with Joseph’s clumsy movements and agitated state, the bank robbery victims strike theatrical and extravagant stationary poses that emphasise the absurd interaction of traditional and immutable genres with the “transient, the fleeting, the contingent”, in other words, with the Baudelairian idea of modernity⁷⁵. For this reason, Godard’s approach to classical music goes beyond the comfortable use of soundtrack as a secondary tool, which serves to highlight the characters’ psychological depth and works towards the intelligibility of the director’s narrative intentions. On the contrary, music, in *Prénom Carmen*, pertains to the *contrepoint* mode, whose principle lies in the simultaneity of varied melodic lines. Godard borrowed to the *contrepoint* (or fugue) its equalitarian system, which refuses to privilege any primary tune⁷⁶. In this way, Godard approached the legend of Carmen through an “Absolute” piece of music, which moves away from the Bizetian narrative. Indeed, McClary suggests that Bizet’s use of dialogue served to accompany the musical characterisation of the protagonists. Bizet strengthened the vision of Carmen as a male fantasy through a musical discourse which McClary describes as “slippery, unpredictable, maddening”. Music in *Carmen* becomes a key-strategy for Bizet to manipulate desire and provoke a libidinal response from the male spectator at the vision of Carmen⁷⁷. The String Quartet, by its non-operatic and “purely” musical nature (the lack of narrative, lyrics and dramatic representation) is set in opposition to the opera. Whereas Bizet represented Carmen as a threatening, fascinating, exotic and immoral figure, Godard introduced Carmen through music

⁷⁵ Charles Baudelaire, *Le Peintre de la vie moderne* (Paris: Litteratura.com, 2004), Kindle edition.

⁷⁶ Isabelle Piette, *Littérature et musique: contribution à une orientation théorique: 1970-1985* (Namur: Presses universitaires de Namur, 1987), 98-99.

⁷⁷ McClary, “Sexual Politics in Classical Music”, 58.

which spectators commonly associate with “perfection, universality, extra-human truth”, detached from any social context⁷⁸. Beethoven’s String Quartet, unlike Bizet’s opera, does not refer to any narrative and claims no fixed meaning. Yet, the choice of Beethoven’s late composition should not exclusively be regarded as a deliberate affront to Bizet’s opera. In his interview with Gideon Bachman, Godard’s expressed his admiration of the “fundamental” dimension of Beethoven’s music⁷⁹. The fundamental quality of composers like Bach, Mozart and Beethoven resides in that they stand for “all the theory and the practice of music which has so far existed”.⁸⁰ In this day and age, Beethoven still provides work “to all the musicians of past and present throughout history” as shown through the music rehearsal in *Prénom Carmen*. Godard’s attempt to bring together divinised art with every day’s working life is transposed through the introduction of rehearsing musicians within the film narrative as shown through bourgeois atmosphere of the violinists’ Parisian living-room in *Prénom Carmen*, or extradiegetically, in the working-class background of *Passion*. In the final scene, when Carmen’s gang gather in the Intercontinental hotel so as to fake the shooting of a documentary, Godard introduced the musicians to the main narrative, by making them play Beethoven’s String Quartet in the fancy salon whilst rich clients enjoy their meal. Here, the place of Beethoven ironically changes from fundamental to the narrative to background music, at the service of the wealthy bourgeois. The role of uncle Jean, who appears dissatisfied by the filmmaking conditions and, at the same time, completely unaware of his niece’s terrorist scheme, is all the more sarcastic. Followed by his female assistant, uncle Jean enters the salon (filmed in a medium wide shot) and salutes one of the male violinist in the same way as a conductor shakes hands with the first violin as a symbol of hierarchical recognition and authority over the orchestral whole. This comparison becomes more obvious when the violinist says to Jeannot: « Ah, c’est vous. Vous savez que nous ne sommes pas un orchestre de thé dansant ! »⁸¹. The fact that Godard answered « Et oui, les temps sont durs pour des œuvres comme nous » alludes, on the one hand, to the inadequacy of Beethoven in this hotel setting, and confirms, on the other hand, the role of Godard and the String Quartet as co-founders of

⁷⁸ This also applies to classical music used in *Passion* and *Je vous salue, Marie*. See Susan McClary, “The blasphemy of talking politics during Bach year”, in *Music and society: the Politics of Composition, Performance and Reception*, ed. Richard Leppert, Susan McClary, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 13.

⁷⁹ Bachman, “The Carrots Are Cooked: A Conversation with Jean-Luc Godard”, 130.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ “Oh, it’s you. You know, we are not a tea dance orchestra!” [My translation, ZTZ]

*Prénom Carmen*⁸². In the following shot, Godard emphasised the musicians and uncle Jean's "out of place" feeling by enacting, in front of a dining table and surrounded by his assistant and customers, a gesture which could be associated to the Christian ritual of the sign of cross (**fig. 3.4**). Be they gestures of authority or ceremony, Godard referred to the musical and the religious spheres as two distinct but connected worlds, whose autonomous role in society is legitimised through a whole set of traditions and rules, and which consequently clash with the chaotic murders who are about to take place. Indeed, the image of a cleaning man polishing a series of crystal candelabra from the top of a ladder contrasts with the way in which Carmen's gang suddenly open fire and circulate around the tables holding hostage hotel clients. Interestingly, Godard's analogy between the film director and the music director in *Prénom Carmen* somehow foreshadowed the image of a future Godard, standing next to his bookcase, imitating a conductor in front of a music stand in the episode 3b "Une Vague Nouvelle" of *Histoire(s) du Cinéma*. The role of Godard as a social outsider and passé filmmaker, who struggles communicating with younger generations, has been the centre of focus of recent scholarship exploring the autobiographical dimension of Godard's self-fictionalisation in *Passion*, *Prénom Carmen*, *Soigne ta Droite*, *King Lear* (1987), *JLG/JLG* (1995), and *Histoire(s) du Cinéma*⁸³. Cecilia Sayad drew on Mikhael Bakhtin's literary theory to suggest that Godard's late appearances as "oncle Jean", "monsieur Godard", "L'Idiot", "Le Prince", or "Professeur Pluggy" reconnected with the traditional role of the fool, as defined by various art forms like popular theatre, circus shows and the novel⁸⁴. Sayad not only describes Godard's performances as an ambivalent state in between the narrative and the extra-filmic, but also emphasises that Bakhtin acknowledged the authority position of the fool: they have the right, within the narrative, to be outsiders, to criticise, to interrupt the plot, as well as to confuse the spectators⁸⁵. Although Godard did not properly act in the case of *Passion*, he created his own surrogate through the role of Jerzy Radziwilowicz, a misunderstood Polish filmmaker. In fact, Jerzy in *Passion* is not only reminiscent of the director's physical characteristics through his square glasses and smoking habits, but also mirrors Godard's

⁸² "Alas, these are difficult times for works like us" [My translation, ZTZ]

⁸³ Cecilia Sayad, *Performing Authorship: Self-inscription and corporeality in the cinema* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2013), 115.

⁸⁴ Sayad, *Performing Authorship: Self-inscription and corporeality in the cinema*, 109.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 110.

demanding nature when working on the reconstitution of classic paintings through *tableaux vivants*.

Figure 3.1.



Figure 3.2.



Figure 3.3.



Figure 3.4.

