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# Gesture in French Post-New Wave Cinema

François Giraud

PhD in French  
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## **Declaration**

I declare that this thesis was composed by myself, that the work contained herein is my own except where explicitly stated otherwise in the text, and that this work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification except as specified.

Signature:

François Giraud

Date: 12.09.2018

## **Abstract**

This thesis examines gesture in French post-New Wave cinema. This overlooked period in French film history emerged in the wake of the decline of the New Wave from the second half of the 1960s onwards. Made by Francophone filmmakers, writers, and artists such as Georges Perec, Bernard Queysanne, Chantal Akerman, Jean-Luc Godard, Pierre Klossowski, Pierre Zucca, Fernand Deligny, Renaud Victor, and Jacques Rivette, the films of my corpus reaffirm the primacy of gestures in talking cinema and explore new manners of filming, performing, and/or editing them. The post-New Wave develops a profusion of cinematic approaches and styles to represent the body as well as the ritualisation of attitudes, postures, and gestures. Drawing on the origins of cinema and, to a certain extent, on other arts such as painting and sculpture, the filmmakers under discussion reveal the pivotal position of gesture in the aesthetics of cinema. Through an interdisciplinary approach, the thesis aims to understand the role of gesture in post-New Wave cinema, by analysing its interplay with film technology, its relationship with the visual and performing arts, as well as its reception by the spectator. Gesture is a non-verbal form of expression and communication which enables us to consider, on the one hand, the ontology and the medium specificity of cinema, and, on the other hand, the concept of intermediality, that is, the relations between the moving image and other arts and media.

## LAY SUMMARY

This thesis analyses how human gesture is filmed, performed, and perceived in French post-New Wave cinema. This overlooked period in the history of French cinema, which emerged from the second half of the 1960s onwards, proves to be very rich in gestures. My approach to human gesture encompasses not only bodily motions that are viewed as intentional and codified, but also nervous and unconscious gestures, such as reflexes, tics, compulsive, and impulsive motions. By focusing mostly on narrative film, I will demonstrate how, through its specific expressive and communicative means, cinema transforms the spectator's perception and understanding of human gesture, including the most ordinary gestures of everyday life.

Through an interdisciplinary approach, the thesis aims to understand the role of gesture in post-New Wave cinema, by analysing its interplay with film technology, its relationship with the visual and performing arts, as well as its reception by the spectator.

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## Introduction

In film history, the first screening of Louis Lumière's *L'Arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat* (1896) has become crystallised as 'cinema's founding myth'.<sup>1</sup> The legendary – and historically unverifiable – anecdote is well-known: the vision of a locomotive getting closer to the foreground of the shot supposedly caused a movement of panic in the audience who, by naively confusing reality with its representation, vividly reacted to the shock of the moving image.<sup>2</sup> Paradoxically, by focusing mainly on the spectators' reactive gestures of panic, this mythical narrative has tended to overlook the gestures of the characters filmed by Lumière's static camera. Indeed, if the train is often regarded as a metaphor for the impact of the moving image – which is also mechanised – on the spectators, it is worth noting that the mechanical movement of the train also influences and conditions the gestures and reactions of the extras, who 'have been instructed not to look into the camera during the shooting'.<sup>3</sup> While keeping a safe distance from the railway line, they lean forward in order to watch out for the train. As the locomotive slows down, the crowd starts to follow the train and congregates near the wagons. Some people run to get to the front or enter the closest carriage [Fig. 1-2]. In the film, the train animates and sets the crowd in motion: the characters' gestures are turned into a moving image by the apparatus invented by the Lumière brothers. Through the metaphor of the train, the myth of *L'Arrivée d'un train* is emblematic of how the cinematic machine and human gesture interact in film, not only on the level of reception, but also of performance.

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Loiperdinger, 'Lumière's "Arrival of the Train": Cinema's Founding Myth', *The Moving Image: The Journal of the Association of Moving Image Archivists*, 4.1. (2004), 89-118.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 90-91.

<sup>3</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 109.

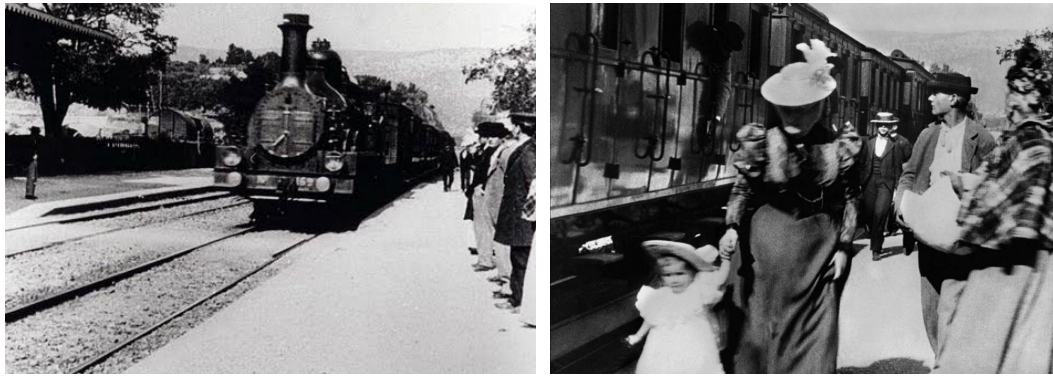


Fig. 1-2. *L'Arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat* (1896)

To date, studies on gesture in cinema tend to mainly focus on the silent era of film history, in which gesture appears as a fundamental expressive means of conveying meaning and emotion.<sup>4</sup> By contrast, research on gesture in post-war European modern cinema remains relatively scarce,<sup>5</sup> even though gesture during this period is symptomatic of deep cinematic transformations, notably in Italian neorealism, French New Wave and post-New Wave cinema.<sup>6</sup> In this thesis, I will focus on a selection of post-New Wave films, in which gesture appears as a central preoccupation for their authors. Although rooted in the specific sociocultural, political, and ideological contexts of their time, the films examined all refer to the origins of cinema to some extent. Reviving chronophotography, silent cinema, slapstick comedy, city symphony, and *tableau vivant*, they show the extent to which

<sup>4</sup> See Roberta E. Pearson, *Eloquent Gestures: The Transformation of Performance Style in the Griffith Biograph Films* (Oxford, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Giorgio Agamben, 'Notes on Gesture', in *Means Without End. Notes on Politics*, trans. by Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), pp. 48-59; Mary Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time. Modernity, Contingency, the Archive* (Cambridge, Mass., London: Harvard University Press, 2002); Pasi Väliäho, *Mapping the Moving Image. Gesture, Thought, and Cinema circa 1900* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010); Janet Harbord, 'Gesture: Cinema Muto Mutato', in *Ex-centric Cinema. Giorgio Agamben and Film Archaeology* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), pp. 57-99.

<sup>5</sup> It must be noted that essays have been published on the aesthetics of film performance in post-war American and, to a more limited extent, European and world cinema. See James Naremore, *Acting in the Cinema* (Berkeley, London: University of California Press, 1988); Christophe Damour, ed., *Jeu d'acteurs: corps et gestes au cinéma* (Strasbourg: Presses universitaires de Strasbourg, 2016); Nicholas Chare and Liz Watkins, eds, *Gesture and Film: Signalling New Critical Perspectives* (London, New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis, 2017).

<sup>6</sup> As will be discussed in this introduction, Italian neorealist filmmakers, notably Roberto Rossellini (*Rome, Open City* (1945), *Germany, Year Zero* (1948)), influenced major directors of the New Wave, such as François Truffaut and Jean-Luc Godard.

the stylistic innovations of the post-New Wave are actually rooted in the first gestures of film history. My thesis aims to investigate and theorise the nature of the interplay between gesture and the cinematic medium – as exemplified by the myth of *L'Arrivée d'un train* – in modern cinema. Before presenting and contextualising the corpus of my study, this introduction must first define how gesture will be conceptualised throughout the thesis.

## **Definition(s) of gesture in film: an interdisciplinary and intermedial approach**

From antiquity to the present day, gestures have been examined as sociocultural, expressive, and rhetorical signs that most often accompany speech. In the field of *chironomia* (i.e. the art of gesture in rhetoric), John Bulwer's *Chirologia, or the Natural Language of the Hand* (1644) and Gilbert Austin's *Chironomia, or a Treatise on Rhetorical Delivery* (1806) – which draws on classical oratory practices theorised by Cicero and Quintilian in Roman antiquity – emphasise the crucial role of gesture in the delivery of speech by establishing a semiological classification of codified gestures. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the semiotic analysis of gestures has developed in sociology, anthropology, cognitive psychology, and kinesics. Erving Goffman, Adam Kendon, and David McNeill study gesture – an 'instrument of human communication'<sup>7</sup> – within the frame of ordinary social interactions.<sup>8</sup> For Kendon, gesture is a visible action used as an 'utterance' to provide information. Necessarily voluntary and intentional, a human gesture is regarded as an act of communication that intends to convey meaning to another individual or a group of individuals:

[...] There is always the implication that the actor is deemed to exercise at least some degree of voluntary control over any movement regarded as 'gesture' and

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<sup>7</sup> David McNeill, 'Introduction', in *Language and Gesture*, ed. by David McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 9.

<sup>8</sup> Adam Kendon, *Gesture. Visible Action as Utterance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Erving Goffman, *Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face-to-Face Behaviour* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982); Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (Boston, Mass.: Northeastern University Press, 1986).

what it expresses. Usually 'gesture' is not used to refer to those visible bodily expressions of thoughts or feelings that are deemed inadvertent or are regarded as something a person cannot 'help'.<sup>9</sup>

In this sense, Kendon excludes nervous gestures (e.g. 'clothing adjustments'), since a gesture has to be the deliberate expression of an individual who ostensibly wants to convey meaning.<sup>10</sup> This classical conceptualisation of gesture is only partly shared by other thinkers. Keith Thomas and Yves Citton suggest that a gesture can be a sign (i.e. the result of an intentional act of communication) or a symptom (i.e. an inadvertent expression like a grimace of pain).<sup>11</sup> The immediacy of gestures, their 'pure mediality' to borrow Giorgio Agamben's phrase,<sup>12</sup> can indeed reflect the individuals' lack of control and self-awareness. A gesture can prove revealing and meaningful precisely due to the lack of conscious intention behind it.

Since its invention, cinema has contributed to transforming the classical understanding of gesture as an intentional and voluntary act of communication. In the second half of the nineteenth century, gestures were no longer exclusively considered as the product of will, the manifestation of a stable self, and the propriety of the symbolical code: they also entered the realms of the unconscious and the involuntary. In continuity with Charles Darwin's research on reflex, involuntary action and gesture in *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872), Freud's attempt to perceive 'le visuel de l'inconscient' in gestures,<sup>13</sup> and Aby Warburg's study of symptom and *Pathosformel* in art history,<sup>14</sup> the medium of cinema, and more specifically 'the optical unconscious' of the camera,<sup>15</sup> developed means of

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<sup>9</sup> Kendon, *Gesture*, p. 8.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Keith Thomas, 'Introduction', in *A Cultural History of Gesture: From Antiquity to the Present Day*, ed. by Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), p. 1; Yves Citton, *Gestes d'humanités. Anthropologie sauvage de nos expériences esthétiques* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2012), pp. 28-32.

<sup>12</sup> Agamben, 'Notes on Gesture', p. 58.

<sup>13</sup> Catherine Cyssau, *Au lieu du geste* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1995), p. 13.

<sup>14</sup> See Georges Didi-Huberman, *L'Image survivante: Histoire de l'art et le temps des fantômes selon Aby Warburg* (Paris: Minuit, 2002).

<sup>15</sup> See Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility. Second Version', in *Selected Writings. Vol. 3, 1935-1938*, ed. by Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, trans. by Edmund Jephcott and others (Cambridge, Mass., London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 117.

perception that gave new visibility to the body's impulsive gestures. According to Agamben, cinema emerged in the late nineteenth century when Gilles de la Tourette's research on bodily disorders, and neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot's studies on hysteria revealed 'a generalised catastrophe of the sphere of gestures' that manifested through 'an amazing proliferation of tics, spasmodic jerks, and mannerisms'.<sup>16</sup> Crucially, Charcot made use of different scientific and pre-cinematic devices – such as Etienne-Jules Marey's chronophotography – to observe the facial and bodily reactions of patients.

When commenting on Agamben's thesis, several scholars validate the idea that, between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, silent cinema captured the 'gestural crisis' that was occurring in fin de siècle Western society.<sup>17</sup> According to Pasi Väliäho, such a crisis, which affected bodily rhythms, the coordination of gestures, and the nervous system, proves notably perceptible and exemplified in Georges Méliès's films. Significantly, Väliäho suggests that the cinematic medium, which has been "pathological" from its inception as a kind of nervous gesture',<sup>18</sup> modifies the traditional perception of the body through the use of technology that highlights and amplifies the body's nervousness:

[...] The crisis of gestures implicated in the emergence of the moving image can be understood in terms of changes occurring in the history of life, changes that incorporate bodily rhythms such as breathing, the heartbeat and walking, for instance. Nervous gestures signal how the body becomes caught in a novel type of medial arrangement in the cinema, as well as the occurrence of a new form of life that the technology of self-moving images implies.<sup>19</sup>

According to Emmanuelle André, cinema provides a new model of gesture in which '[l]e corps pathologique devient un modèle esthétique de la représentation cinématographique'.<sup>20</sup> Referring to sociologist and philosopher Georg Simmel's essay *The Metropolis and Mental Life* (1903),

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<sup>16</sup> Agamben, 'Notes on Gesture', p. 50.

<sup>17</sup> Erin Brannigan, *Dancefilm. Choreography and the Moving Image* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 66.

<sup>18</sup> Väliäho, *Mapping the Moving Image*, p. 73.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>20</sup> Emmanuelle André, *Le Choc du sujet: de l'hystérie au cinéma (XIXe-XXIe siècle)* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2011), p. 14.

Marielle Macé regards nervousness as the ‘nouvelle passion collective’, which intensified in the urban spaces of the early twentieth century through the ‘multiplication des appels perceptifs, superposition des stimulations, omniprésence des horloges, changements de rythme, changements de pouls...’<sup>21</sup> Similarly to Walter Benjamin, who argues that human consciousness, perception, and behaviour became accustomed to being constantly jolted with the shocks of modern life – see Chapter 1 –, Agamben suggests that nervousness, resulting from the crisis of gestures, may have become the norm in the twentieth century.<sup>22</sup> In film aesthetics, and more particularly during the French post-New Wave – as this thesis will demonstrate – the nervous gesture proves to be of prime importance, especially when considered in relation to the specific expressive and perceptual means of the cinematic medium.

As many theorists, critics, and filmmakers have pointed out, film technology can record and amplify the slightest gestures of the body, not only through the use of certain techniques such as the close-up but also thanks to the device of projection onto the big screen. According to Eric Rohmer, the specificity of cinema lies in its ability to develop its own expressive means, ‘par exemple en rendant perceptibles des mouvements de très faible amplitude (battement des paupières, crispation des doigts)’.<sup>23</sup> He adds that ‘[l]a nature même de l’écran – espace rectangulaire entièrement rempli qui occupe une portion relativement étroite du champ visuel – conditionne une plastique du geste très différente de celle à laquelle les arts de la scène nous ont habitués’.<sup>24</sup> If the actors and actresses’ gestures are usually less pronounced in cinema than in theatre, cinematic techniques of magnification, distortion, fragmentation, and interruption enhance their emotional and sensuous impact on the spectator. Similarly to Rohmer, Peter Brook also analyses gestures when performed and perceived in film in comparison to theatre. ‘The great magnifier, the lens’ can grasp the

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<sup>21</sup> Marielle Macé, *Styles: critique de nos formes de vie* (Paris: Gallimard, 2016), p. 145.

<sup>22</sup> Agamben, ‘Notes on Gesture’, pp. 51-52.

<sup>23</sup> Eric Rohmer, ‘Le Cinéma, art de l’espace’, in *Le Goût de la beauté*, ed. by Jean Narboni (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, 2004), p. 42.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

slightest impulses and tremors on the surface of the body.<sup>25</sup> In contrast to stage actors and actresses who need to amplify these impulses with ostensive gestures, film actors and actresses have to adjust their own expressivity according to the communicative and expressive means of cinema. In this sense, a gesture in film is performed not only by the actor or actress, but also by the cinematic medium itself. As Jacqueline Nacache argues:

Il fallait au cinéma le temps de comprendre que l'expression était non la seule affaire de l'acteur, mais du film tout entier; qu'émotions et sentiments ne sont pas assignables à un seul geste, à un seul visage, mais produits par l'ensemble des rapports à l'œuvre dans le film; qu'enfin cela n'enlève rien à la valeur du jeu des comédiens, mais le situe sur une autre échelle que la gamme expressive de la pantomime.<sup>26</sup>

Filmed gestures are thus engaged in a process of exchange with all the media components of cinema, from the soundtrack to the projector.

Furthermore, the cinematic medium also blurs the distinction that is often made between a gesture and a movement. Barbara Formis suggests that gestures are less predictable than movements, which result from automatic reflexes and bodily mechanisms.<sup>27</sup> For that reason, in line with Leroi-Gourhan's theories that highlight the crucial role of the hand and upper parts of the body in the development of humanity,<sup>28</sup> definitions of gesture usually tend to focus on the hand, arms, and face, which are more likely to be directed through intention and will. While the theatre theorist Jerzy Grotowski argues that gestures are mainly peripheral and thus result from the movement of the hands and the face,<sup>29</sup> Bernard Vouilloux asserts that individuals gesture exclusively with their hands and arms:

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<sup>25</sup> Peter Brook, *The Empty Space* (London: Penguin Books, 2008), p. 122.

<sup>26</sup> Jacqueline Nacache, *L'Acteur de cinéma* (Paris: Nathan, 2003), p. 51.

<sup>27</sup> Barbara Formis, *Esthétique de la vie ordinaire* (Paris: P.U.F., 2015), p. 18.

<sup>28</sup> As André Leroi-Gourhan demonstrates, human agency originated in the progressive development of the vertical position and the liberation of the hand, which, in the history of humanity, enabled individuals to transform their reality and develop innovative gestural practices, for instance through the production and use of tools and technologies. See André Leroi-Gourhan, *Le Geste et la parole I. Technique et langage* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1964); Leroi-Gourhan, *Le Geste et la parole II. La Mémoire et les rythmes* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1965).

<sup>29</sup> See Thomas Richards, *At Work with Grotowski on Physical Actions* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 75.

[...] Nous faisons des gestes avec nos mains, avec nos bras, mais ni avec notre tête (autre extrémité sémiophorique), ni avec nos jambes. La tête, les jambes bougent, sont en mouvement et, avec les gestes, entrent dans la composition des attitudes, des poses, des postures.<sup>30</sup>

However, by emphasising the mechanics of the body in an expressive way, the cinematic automaton widens the definition of gesture. As Jacques Aumont explains, '[l]e cinéma, c'était aussi ce qui fait voir le geste humain *en général*, dans son humanité ou son animalité et contradictoirement dans ce qu'il a de mécanique, parfois carrément de machinique.'<sup>31</sup> Through the intersection of the human body and film technology, the human and the inhuman, cinema builds a different understanding of gestures. If hand and arm gestures occupy an essential position,<sup>32</sup> other gestural categories become prevalent in film, such as human gait, feet and facial gestures, tics, and inadvertent motions. Moreover, although cinema tends to isolate certain body parts, Sergei Eisenstein considers that a gesture always involves the effort of the whole body: 'Un geste est le résultat du travail de tout le corps,' he notes.<sup>33</sup> The performance of a gesture involves the coordination of numerous transitory movements, from the lower to the upper parts of the body. For example, when people grab objects with their hands, their chests, backs, thighs, legs, and feet move accordingly with the trajectory of their arms. With the device of slow motion, the moving image makes the complex coordination between all the body parts involved in the execution of one gesture, as well as the subtle transitions from one gesture to another, visible.

Consequently, every bodily motion can potentially be perceived as a gesture: 'What the actor tries to impart – the physical existence of a character – is overwhelmingly present on the screen. The camera really isolates a fleeting glance, and inadvertent shrug of the shoulder,' Siegfried

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<sup>30</sup> Bernard Vouilloux, 'La Pesanteur et la grâce du geste. Jean Starobinski dans l'espace des peintres', *Littérature*, 161 (2011), 33-50 <<https://www.cairn.info/revue-litterature-2011-1-page-33.htm>> [accessed 02 August 2018] (para. 3 of 26)

<sup>31</sup> Jacques Aumont, 'Avant-propos', in *L'Invention de la figure humaine. Le Cinéma: l'humain et l'inhumain*, ed. by Jacques Aumont (Paris: Cinémathèque française, 1995), p. 7.

<sup>32</sup> See Harun Farocki's film essay *The Expression of Hands* (1997).

<sup>33</sup> Sergei Eisenstein, 'L'Art de la mise en scène', *Cahiers du cinéma*, November-December 1970, p. 42.

Kracauer explains.<sup>34</sup> According to him, films are able to reveal the most transitory and ephemeral elements of physical reality, such as '[s]treet crowds, involuntary gestures, and other fleeting impressions'.<sup>35</sup> Finally, by stressing all the minuscule and microscopic motions which are made visible through the cinematic lens, Jean Epstein argues that '[...] les gestes qui portent le plus à l'écran sont des gestes nerveux'.<sup>36</sup> Tics, muscular motions, nervous reflexes, jerks, spasms that agitate the skin, and all the movements which were regarded as too insignificant and not deliberate enough to be called gestures, suddenly appear as such on the big screen. The vocabulary used by Epstein to describe gestures in silent cinema eloquently evokes psychoanalysis and clinical terminology: 'hypnose'; 'intensités imprévues'; 'la lèvre est arrosée de tics [...]'; 'mouvement, déséquilibre, crise'; 'nervosisme'; or 'neurasthénie photogénique'.<sup>37</sup> When Epstein observes '[...] les petits gestes courts, rapides, secs, on dirait involontaires de Lilian Gish qui court comme l'aiguille des secondes d'un chronomètre',<sup>38</sup> he insists on the mechanical and involuntary dimension of her gestures, as they are at once performed by the actress, spectacularly transformed by the cinematic machine, and ultimately perceived as such by the spectator.

However, it would be an exaggeration to reduce film performance to a catastrophic choreography of tics and involuntary gestures. Indeed, beyond the specificity of its medium, cinema has also assimilated various theatrical and painterly traditions since its invention. In this regard, intermediality is a key concept to consider gesture in film. As Ágnes Pethő explains,

[a]lthough the idea that film has indissoluble ties with other media and arts is one of the oldest concerns of theorising about the movies, it is the theory of intermediality that has brought into the spotlight the intricate interactions of different media manifest in the cinema, emphasising the way in which the moving pictures can incorporate forms of all other media, and can initiate fusions and 'dialogues' between the distinct arts.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film. The Redemption of Physical Reality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 94.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. ix.

<sup>36</sup> Jean Epstein, *Écrits sur le cinéma, tome 1: 1927-1953* (Paris: Seghers, 1974), p. 97.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 93 and 97.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.

<sup>39</sup> Ágnes Pethő, *Cinema and Intermediality: The Passion for the In-between* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2011), p. 1.

The intermediality of gestures in cinema can be conceptualised in two different ways. On the one hand, through the interrelation between the mediality of human gesture and the expressive and perceptual features of film technology, the cinematic medium spectacularly highlights gestures that pass unnoticed in other media such as painting and photography. On the other hand, the performance of gestures proves intermedial in the sense that it appropriates gestural codes and techniques developed in other arts and practices, such as dance, sculpture, opera, and theatre. It is in this respect that Christian Viviani and Roberta E. Pearson highlight the migration of theatrical and painterly gestural codes in cinema, especially during the silent era.<sup>40</sup>

Furthermore, gesture conveys not only the dialogue between the arts, but also the proximity between art and life. In his seminal essay on film acting,<sup>41</sup> James Naremore argues that performance – in a film such as Jean-Luc Godard's *A bout de souffle* (1960), for example – reveals the theatricality of everyday life. Drawing on Goffman, he stresses the proximity and permeability between film and stage performance and performance within society and everyday life: “Performance” [...] is understood in its broadest, most social, sense, as what we do when we interact with the world – a concept embracing not only theatre but also public celebrity and everyday life.<sup>42</sup> Through the construction of a social identity, performance enables one to forge the image of a united and stable self: ‘the self is more like an effect of structure – a crowd of signifiers, without any particular origin or essence, held in place by ideology and codes of representation.’<sup>43</sup> Performance is therefore ideologically and socially codified, through gestures, behaviours, speech, costumes, roles, etc. According to Richard Dyer, gestures are ‘performance signs’ that are ‘culture- and history-bound’: ‘The signification of

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<sup>40</sup> See Christian Viviani, *Le Magique et le vrai: l'acteur de cinéma, sujet et objet* (Aix-en-Provence: Rouge profond, 2015); Pearson, *Eloquent Gestures*.

<sup>41</sup> It should be noted that if acting and performance are often used as synonyms, the term acting refers more specifically to the craft of actors and actresses who develop certain techniques to play a role in theatre, fiction films, and TV shows.

<sup>42</sup> Naremore, *Acting in the Cinema*, p. 19.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

a given performance sign is determined by its place within culturally and historically specific codes.<sup>44</sup>

In this respect, scholarship on gesture often examines the notion in relation to cultural studies and semiotics. Although silent cinema reactivated the myth of a universal language of gestures<sup>45</sup> implying 'a universal comprehensibility of facial expression and gesture',<sup>46</sup> Thomas explains that '[...] most modern writing on the subject [of gesture] starts from the assumption that gesture is not a universal language, but is the product of social and cultural differences'.<sup>47</sup> For example, in *La Raison des gestes dans l'Occident médiéval*, Jean-Claude Schmitt demonstrates the extent to which the ritualisation of gestures, which were endowed with a strong symbolic value, structured social life and political order during the Middle Ages in Western culture.<sup>48</sup> Far from being natural, human gestures, which are acquired through learning processes and contact with society, result from cultural influence. While in the famous essay 'Les Techniques du corps', the anthropologist Marcel Mauss studies how the most elementary gestures vary from one society to another,<sup>49</sup> the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu argues that gestures, which play a fundamental role in the cultural construction of the body, reflect differences of culture, gender, and class.<sup>50</sup> Pointing out the lack of a clear boundary between the performance of ordinary gestures in life and art, Formis remarks that '[à] bien regarder n'importe quel geste se fonde sur un apprentissage gestuel, il n'y a pas de gestes spontanés chez l'adulte et nos mouvements les plus quotidiens sont en réalité des techniques'.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Richard Dyer, *Stars* (London: British Film Institute, 1979), p. 152.

<sup>45</sup> See Anthony Paraskeva, *The Speech-Gesture Complex: Modernism, Theatre, Cinema* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), pp. 26-34.

<sup>46</sup> Béla Balázs, *Theory of the Film. Growth of a New Art*, trans. by Edith Bone (London: Dennis Dobson, 1952), p. 45.

<sup>47</sup> Thomas, 'Introduction', p. 3.

<sup>48</sup> See Jean-Claude Schmitt, *La Raison des gestes dans l'Occident médiéval* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990).

<sup>49</sup> See Marcel Mauss, 'Les Techniques du corps', ed. by Jean-Marie Tremblay (Québec: Chicoutimi, 2002). Electronic edition (first publ. in *Journal de Psychologie*, 32 (1936), 271-93).

<sup>50</sup> See Pierre Bourdieu, *La Distinction* (Paris: Minuit, 1979).

<sup>51</sup> Formis, *Esthétique de la vie ordinaire*, p. 18.

Similar to the actor or actress on stage, people, on a daily basis, perform gestures that build their self, identity, and social role.

However, while being socioculturally conditioned, gestures also express the idiosyncratic nature of human existence. According to Vilém Flusser, it is through intersubjective relationships that gestures, which manifest 'l'être dans le monde (l'existence)',<sup>52</sup> can free themselves from their conditioning: 'Un geste est libre, et non un mouvement conditionné, quand il signifie quelque chose dans une relation intersubjective.'<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, Carrie Noland argues that individuals have the agency to alter socially acquired behaviours and beliefs, in spite of the pressure of conditioning on their bodies: 'Gestures, learned techniques of the body, are the means by which cultural conditioning is simultaneously embodied and put to the test.'<sup>54</sup> Within the society they belong to, individuals perform socially codified gestures in a singular manner, according to their bodily features, interpersonal experiences, ways of being, moods, and agency.<sup>55</sup>

As Citton, Formis, Macé, Guillemette Bolens, and Judith Butler suggest, the notion of style makes it possible to consider singular nuances within the performance of gesture. 'Chaque geste, exécuté de façon personnelle, est nourri d'un ensemble de nuances corporelles et d'impressions émotionnelles, de sorte qu'il devient indissociable de notre façon d'être,' Formis explains.<sup>56</sup> In *Gender Trouble*, Butler demonstrates how gender is culturally shaped on the surface of the body and performed through ritualised acts and stylised gestures.<sup>57</sup> A gestural style refers to the singular manner in which an individual makes gestures (even when these are already codified), in everyday life or in the theatrical frame of an artistic performance. Bolens argues that each individual develops his or her own kinesic style:

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<sup>52</sup> Vilém Flusser, *Les Gestes* (Paris: Hors commerce Cergy, 1999), p. 185.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 193.

<sup>54</sup> Carrie Noland, *Agency and Embodiment. Performing Gestures/Producing Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009), p. 2.

<sup>55</sup> For Noland (2009) and Citton, the notion of gesture, which cannot be reduced exclusively to a non-verbal act of communication, invites us to rethink the concept of agency. See Citton, *Gestes d'humanité*, pp. 28-32.

<sup>56</sup> Formis, *Esthétique de la vie ordinaire*, p. 20.

<sup>57</sup> See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 140.

Le style kinésique concerne la facture singulière de l'ensemble des mouvements effectués par une personne lors d'opérations qui produisent du sens chez soi (perception et pensée) et chez l'autre (expression et communication), à l'inclusion des nuances les plus ténues, perçues ou non, intentionnelles ou non.<sup>58</sup>

The notion of style invites us to distinguish between action and gesture. In his essay on *mise-en-scène* entitled 'Mise en Jeu and Mise en Geste' (1948), Eisenstein explains that a character's inner conflicts and motives have to be transposed into elements of visible action, which have to then be transposed into 'the actor's gesture and physical change of location'. Gestures confer on 'concrete actions and events' an 'idiosyncratic, unique and inimitable' style, that mirrors 'the individual quality of a character's behaviour as well as the author's perspective on the events'.<sup>59</sup> If an action corresponds to *what* happens in a scene, the 'mise en geste' refers to *how* this action will be performed by the actor or actress, according to the character's singularity and the author's vision and method of directing.

Finally, the circularity between art and life in relation to gesture can be considered in terms of spectatorship and reception. Drawing on the work of the anthropologist Marcel Jousse, who studied how human beings assimilate new gestures in interaction with reality and other humans,<sup>60</sup> Citton demonstrates the ability of media – such as cinema and television – to instil interpersonal gestures in spectators across different cultures, through the process of empathy. Citton describes '[...] une remarquable circularité [qui] se met ainsi en place entre des êtres dont les mouvements et les affects se constituent en se reflétant les uns dans les autres'.<sup>61</sup> It is in this sense that mainstream cinema, as a globalised industry that fabricates mass-produced and homogenous gestural stereotypes, was regarded by Balázs as 'one of the most useful pioneers in the development towards an international universal humanity'.<sup>62</sup> Largely amplified through audiovisual technologies, the

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<sup>58</sup> Guillemette Bolens, *Le Style des gestes. Corporéité et kinésie dans le récit littéraire* (Lausanne: BHMS, 2008), p.14

<sup>59</sup> Sergei Eisenstein, *Mise en Jeu and Mise en Geste*, trans. by Sergey Levchin (Montreal: Caboose, 2014). Ebook.

<sup>60</sup> See Marcel Jousse, *L'Anthropologie du Geste* (Paris: Resma, 1969).

<sup>61</sup> Citton, *Gestes d'humanités*, p. 121.

<sup>62</sup> Balázs, *Theory of the Film*, p. 45.

idea of circularity between art and life was already suggested by Diderot in his writings on eighteenth-century theatre and painting.<sup>63</sup> According to Diderot, the energy (*energia*) of gestures that circulates between the stage (or the *tableau*) and the spectators crosses the invisible frontier (i.e. the fourth wall) that separates the stage from the audience. Carrying emotions, affective forces, sensations, and ideas, gestures leave a dynamic trace in the spectator's mind and body. In the modern age, Bertolt Brecht's epic theatre, which also reveals the circularity between art, politics, and social life, breaks the fourth wall through distancing effects in order to enable the spectator to critically engage with the social situation embodied by the actors and actresses' *gestus* on stage.<sup>64</sup> '[A]t once gesture, gist, attitude and point', *gestus* refers to an overall attitude that intersperses the delivery of the lines and aims to reveal a certain social condition with an educative effect.<sup>65</sup>

Referring to Brecht's words, Anthony Paraskeva writes that:

Brecht defines the *gestus*, which includes both speech and gesture, as the 'attitudes which people adopt towards one another, wherever they are socio-historically significant' and the 'mimetic and gestural expression of the social relationship prevailing between people of a given period'. A *gestus* is a composite representation of behaviour which defines a person from outside himself, indicating social status and the relation of the person to institutions in order to critique and potentially transform those institutions.<sup>66</sup>

The intersubjective dimension of gestures thus defines the position of individuals in society, whether they are spectators or actors and actresses.

The five chapters of this thesis will develop an evolving and interdisciplinary model of gesture which incorporates different ways of conceptualising the notion. By drawing on a broad theoretical corpus, I aim to reveal the multiplicity of angles through which gesture in film can be analysed. First of all, the thesis will mainly focus on the embodied gestures of

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<sup>63</sup> See Inès Guégo-Rivalan, 'Energie du geste et représentation: Denis Diderot, précurseur d'une "théâtralité" moderne?', *ATALA Cultures et sciences humaines*, 17 (2014), 337-49.

<sup>64</sup> Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, ed. and trans. by John Willett (London: Methuen Drama, 1990); Walter Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht*, trans. by Anna Bostock (London: Verso, 1973).

<sup>65</sup> John Willett, *The Theatre of Bertolt Brecht. A Study of Eight Aspects* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1977), p. 173.

<sup>66</sup> Paraskeva, *The Speech-Gesture Complex*, p. 13.

performers. On the one hand, the performance of socioculturally codified gestures will be scrutinised through an interdisciplinary lens, with references to sociology (Bourdieu), anthropology (Mauss), semiotics (Kristeva), acting studies (Naremore, Pearson), and art history (André Chastel). On the other hand, the cinematic expression of performed gestures – and more specifically nervous gestures – will be examined in light of philosophical and theoretical discussions in film studies. As explained above with reference to Benjamin, Agamben, Epstein, Väliaho and André, nervous gesture is a crucial notion to understand the specific nature of the cinematic medium by contrast to other arts. However, this thesis will not restrict the analysis of gesture to the question of medium specificity. By examining gesture from an intermedial perspective, I will demonstrate how its performance can also draw on numerous artistic migrations that question the purity of the cinematic medium.<sup>67</sup>

Secondly, I will focus on two other types of gestures, which will be considered in conjunction with the performers' embodied gestures. By referring to film theorist Vivian Sobchack in Chapter 1, I will focus on the gestures of the film camera in Georges Perec and Bernard Queysanne's *Un homme qui dort* (1974). Although a camera is an instrument manipulated by the filmmaker and technicians' hands (as highlighted in Chapter 3 on Jean-Luc Godard), I will argue that the movements of the camera in this film can be perceived as gestures, especially when the apparatus moves in interaction with the characters' filmed gestures.

Finally, by drawing on Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, Michel Foucault, Tim Ingold, Fernand Deligny, and Konstantin Stanislavski, I will coin the concept of gestural line in Chapter 5 in order to explore imaginative new ways of analysing gesture in a selection of post-New Wave films.

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<sup>67</sup> The notion of 'impure' cinema has been coined by film critic André Bazin. See Bazin, 'Pour un cinéma impur. Défense de l'adaptation', in *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma?* (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1987), pp. 81-106.

## **Gesture in New Wave and post-New Wave cinema**

This thesis aims to contribute to the understanding of gesture in cinema by focusing on a selection of French post-New Wave films, made between 1968 and 1984. Without being representative of all the aesthetic facets of the post-New Wave, the corpus includes Georges Perec and Bernard Queysanne's *Un homme qui dort* (1974), Chantal Akerman's *Saute ma ville* (1968), *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975) and *L'Homme à la valise* (1984), Jean-Luc Godard's *Prénom Carmen* (1983), Pierre Zucca's *Roberte* (1979, co-written with Pierre Klossowski), Godard and Anne-Marie Miéville's *France/tour/détour/deux/enfants* (1977), Fernand Deligny, Josée Manenti and Jean-Pierre Daniel's *Le Moindre Geste* (1971), Renaud Victor's *Ce Gamin-là* (1975, written by Deligny), and Jacques Rivette's *Out 1: Noli me tangere* (1971). As will be discussed in more detail in the next section, rather than being a movement in the proper sense, the post-New Wave is a label that brings together a constellation of diverse and often isolated cinematic ventures. Made by established directors, emerging major filmmakers, as well as little-known directors, writers, intellectuals, educators, and artists, the chosen films are often attributed to multiple authors. If many post-New Wave directors worked on the fringes of the mainstream film market, their marginalisation, self-imposed or otherwise, did not hinder the emergence of ephemeral networks, artistic communities, groups, and collaborations. The examination of gesture in their films will emphasise the collective process of cinematic creation between the directors and their actors and actresses, cinematographers, musicians, editors, and technicians. Finally, within this French corpus, Belgian-born director Akerman occupies a singular position, due to the transnational dimension of her work. Associated with major French post-New Wave directors such as Jean Eustache and

Philippe Garrel, but also with American avant-garde cinema of the 1970s,<sup>68</sup> Akerman crossed borders throughout her career, as Marion Schmid explains:

[...] her truly international output, shaped by both American and European film traditions, and her own status as a transnational director working between France, where she has settled since her return from New York, her native Belgium and the United States, eschew simplistic appropriations of her as a quintessentially Belgian or French *auteur*.<sup>69</sup>

In *Jeanne Dielman*, which is a Franco-Belgian co-production set in Brussels,<sup>70</sup> she cast the French actress Delphine Seyrig, an icon of French cinema known for her performance in Alain Resnais's *L'Année dernière à Marienbad* (1961). Furthermore, the French public institution Institut national de l'audiovisuel (INA) produced *L'homme à la valise*. Chapter 2 will focus on Seyrig's performance in *Jeanne Dielman*, as well as on Akerman's performance as an actress in her first short film *Saute ma ville* – which was self-financed and shot in Brussels – and *L'Homme à la valise*. Focusing on the notions of conditioning and everyday gesture, the study of gesture in her films will bring out numerous parallels with the other films of the corpus, especially with Perec and Queysanne's *Un homme qui dort*.

Permeated as they are by the ideological, sociocultural, artistic, and intellectual context of their time, the films of the corpus were made in a period of French history marked by the political and economic decline of the *Trente Glorieuses*, a term coined by French economist Jean Fourastier which refers to the economic prosperity of French society between 1946 and 1975.<sup>71</sup> As Kristin Ross explains, French society drastically changed in the years and decades following the application of the Marshall Plan, piloted by the United States after the Second World War in order to fund the economic

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<sup>68</sup> Marion Schmid, *Chantal Akerman* (Manchester, New York: Manchester University Press, 2010), p. 5; see also Philippe Garrel's documentary *Les Ministères de l'art* (1988) that focuses on French post-New Wave cinema and features Akerman.

<sup>69</sup> Schmid, *Chantal Akerman*, p. 12.

<sup>70</sup> The film was produced by Paradise Films (Brussels) and Unité Trois (Paris). See Schmid, *Chantal Akerman*, p. 176.

<sup>71</sup> See Jean Fourastié, *Les Trente Glorieuses ou la révolution invisible de 1946 à 1975* (Paris: Fayard, 1979).

reconstruction of European countries.<sup>72</sup> Influenced by Henry Ford's systems of mass production and mass consumption, state policies favoured the massive development of capitalism through the accelerated modernisation of industries.<sup>73</sup> This fast-growing modernisation introduced new everyday gestures in French society, as Jacques Tati's films reveal in an acute way.<sup>74</sup> From the postman of *Jour de Fête* (1949) who tries to apply rationalised methods of mail delivery to Monsieur Hulot in *Playtime* (1967) who wanders in an ultramodernist setting, Tati provides a playful and critical depiction of the impact of Fordism on the everyday gestures of French people. As Ross writes, '[Tati's films] make palpable a daily life that increasingly appeared to unfold in a space where objects tended to dictate to people their gestures and movements – and that for the most part had to be learned from watching American films.'<sup>75</sup>

In response to these rapid developments, new preoccupations with the anthropology of everyday life emerged in post-war French thought.<sup>76</sup> Analysing the impact of capitalism on French modern society, Marxist philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre pioneered the study of everyday life in academia.<sup>77</sup> In addition, novelists such as Simone de Beauvoir or Perec, as well as filmmakers such as Tati depicted and criticised the alienating structures propagated by mass consumerism.<sup>78</sup> Such a criticism took a political turn during the events of May 1968, considered by Ross as 'a protest against Fordist hierarchies of the factories and the exaggerated statism that had controlled French modernization'.<sup>79</sup> Bringing out the dissatisfaction of a large part of the French population towards the increasing role of capitalism in the conditioning of everyday life, '[May '68] marked the

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<sup>72</sup> Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies. Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: MIT Press, 1995), p. 4.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>77</sup> See Henri Lefebvre, *La Vie quotidienne dans le monde moderne* (Paris: Gallimard, 1968).

<sup>78</sup> See Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies*, p. 13; Simone de Beauvoir, *Les Belles Images* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966); Georges Perec, *Les Choses: une histoire des années soixante* (Paris: Julliard, 1965).

<sup>79</sup> Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies*, pp. 3-4.

political end of that accelerated transition into Fordism', Ross explains.<sup>80</sup> Ultimately the 1973 oil crisis foreshadowed the end of the triumphant economic success of the *Trente Glorieuses*.<sup>81</sup>

Made in the aftermath of May 1968, utopian film *L'An 01* (Jacques Doillon, 1973) celebrates the end of market economy, mass production and mass consumption. In this emblematic film of the post-New Wave, society refuses collectively to comply with the principles of capitalist society and aspires to think about alternative ways of life. Released the same year, Claude Faraldo's satire *Themroc* (1973) also expresses the rejection of capitalism and authority through the subversive gestures of a working class hero (Michel Piccoli) who disrupts social rules. Both films reveal the extent to which the questioning of alienation, conditioning, and high productivity became more radical in French culture after May 1968. While Beauvoir, Perec, and Tati critically examined the transformation of society and the emergence of new behaviours in the 1960s, post-New Wave films often focused on the crisis of everyday gestures. According to film critic Gérard Lenne, this crisis, which is anticipated by Pierrot's (Jean-Paul Belmondo) self-destructive gesture at the end of Godard's *Pierrot le fou* (1965), corresponds to a more general crisis in French film after 1968, and more precisely after the end of the New Wave: 'Car nous comprenions soudain que, pour le cinéma, 1968 réalisait ce que Pierrot nous avait annoncé: une crise sans précédent, un effondrement général, les indices de quelque chose d'autre, en tout cas de la fin d'une époque.'<sup>82</sup>

As demonstrated in this thesis, in French cinema made directly after the New Wave, normative, codified, and pre-programmed behaviours are disrupted by unpredictable nervous gestures that contradict the imperatives of efficiency and standardisation promoted during the *Trente Glorieuses*. Made after the watershed of May 1968, the films of the corpus have been chosen because they offer a particularly pertinent exploration of the crisis of the characters' ritualised, customary, and everyday gestures. In *Un homme*

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>82</sup> Gérard Lenne, *La Mort du cinéma: film/révolution* (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1971), p. 6.

*qui dort*, Perec and Queysanne convey the feeling of anxiety aroused by the mechanisation and automation of gestures in the private sphere of the main character's everyday life. In *Saute ma ville*, *Jeanne Dielman* and *L'Homme à la valise*, Akerman questions the pressure of gender norms on the female characters' gestures by filming the progressive malfunction of their daily routines. In *Prénom Carmen*, Jean-Luc Godard depicts a fragmented and chaotic world in which human gesture appears as a means of re-connecting the scattered elements of the film. In *Roberte*, made in collaboration with writer and artist Klossowski, Zucca shows how codified gestures are disrupted by the impulsive expression of the characters' and performers' nervous gestures, to the point of disorienting the spectator's interpretation. In Godard and Miéville's television series *France/tour/détour/deux/enfants*, the directors focus on the social and ideological codification of children's everyday gestures. By referring to the late nineteenth-century technique of chronophotography, they attempt to reveal how gestures can express margins of resistance to social conditioning. In *Le Moindre Geste* and *Ce Gamin-là*, made at the instigation of Deligny's ideas, two types of gestures are interwoven: on the one hand, the wandering gestures of mentally handicapped children and teenagers and, on the other hand, the customary gestures of workers who reiterate the same gestures everyday. Finally, in *Out 1*, which has been made in the context of post-May 68, Rivette experiments with improvisation and explores radical modes of performance, which not only force the actors and actresses to invent their own gestures, but also show their difficulties and failures in doing so.

I have chosen films from directors who develop remarkable styles of filming, performing, and editing gestures. Importantly, for these filmmakers, gesture appears as a fundamental element to think about the aesthetics of cinema. Godard, who occupies a central position in this thesis, has meditated on the relationship between gesture and thought for a long time.<sup>83</sup> Drawing on Denis de Rougemont's essay *Penser avec les mains* (1935) in *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1988-98), Godard believes that '[l]a vraie condition de l'homme,

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<sup>83</sup> Regarding the link between gesture and thought, see Michel Guérin, *Philosophie du geste* (Arles: Actes Sud, 2011).

c'est de penser avec ses mains'. The act of thinking proves gestural in the sense that 'la pensée [...] est transformatrice du réel'.<sup>84</sup> For Godard, gesture in film turns the real into 'une forme qui pense' through the director's style.<sup>85</sup> The films within the corpus highlight the links between gesture, style, form, and thought – it is through the gestures of these films that I myself will attempt to consider their aesthetics and ideas. Furthermore, as will be shown throughout the thesis, the corpus reveals the strong interest in gesture within the French intellectual milieu of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, as Leroi-Gourhan's, Jousse's, Gilles Deleuze's, Julia Kristeva's, Michel Foucault's, and Michel de Certeau's publications show.<sup>86</sup> It is in this context that writers and intellectuals such as Perec, Klossowski, and Deligny experimented with film to explore their ideas on gesture.

The aesthetic quality of gestures in the post-New Wave must first be considered in light of the New Wave, which represents a major turning point in the history of French and world cinema. After the Second World War, in the wake of critic André Bazin, a young generation of French critics and aspirant directors such as François Truffaut, Eric Rohmer, and Jacques Rivette strongly condemned the conventions of the established cinema of *qualité française*,<sup>87</sup> attacking its stilted codes of representation and obsolete theatrical and literary traditions. 'La vérité du langage des corps et de leur affrontement dramatique s'évanouissait derrière un jeu d'acteur théâtral reposant sur des grimaces attendues et l'académisme des poses, des attitudes et gesticulations,' Jean Douchet explains in his monograph on the New Wave, published in 1998 on the occasion of the movement's 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary.<sup>88</sup> In reaction against this outdated academism, the generation of the New Wave praised French *auteurs* such as Jean Renoir, Jean Vigo,

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<sup>84</sup> See *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, chapter 4(a) *Le Contrôle de l'univers*.

<sup>85</sup> See *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, chapter 3(a) *La Monnaie de l'absolu*.

<sup>86</sup> See Julia Kristeva, 'Le Geste, pratique ou communication?', *Langages*, 10 (1968), 48-64; Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir. Naissance de la prison* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975); Michel de Certeau, *L'Invention du quotidien. 1. Arts de faire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990); Michel de Certeau, Luce Giard, and Pierre Mayol, *L'Invention du quotidien. 2. Habiter, cuisiner* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994).

<sup>87</sup> See François Truffaut, 'Une certaine tendance du cinéma français', *Cahiers du cinéma*, January 1954, pp. 15-29.

<sup>88</sup> Jean Douchet, *Nouvelle Vague* (Paris: Cinémathèque française, Hazan, 1998), p. 137.

Jacques Becker, Robert Bresson, and Jacques Tati, who were able to reveal remarkable stylistic potentialities of the body in the *mise-en-scène* of their films. Influenced at once by American cinema, in which the characters' behaviours lead the *mise-en-scène*, and Italian neorealism, that stresses the presence of the body in its interaction with the physical reality of the world, the New Wave authors were seeking truth 'par et dans le corps'.<sup>89</sup> From their first short films onwards, they were preoccupied with inventing singular ways of filming and performing gestures.<sup>90</sup> At the end of the 1950s, the New Wave authors created a physical cinema in which gestures became the sensitive expression of their modernist aesthetics. If they refashioned Hollywood genres, such as the codes of film noir in Godard's *A bout de souffle* and of musicals in Jacques Demy's *Les Parapluies de Cherbourg* (1964), they also invented a modern theatricality that appropriates Brechtian aesthetics and weaves references to art history and modern literature – more specifically the *nouveau roman* –, notably in Agnès Varda's pioneering first long feature *La Pointe Courte* (1955), Godard's *Le Mépris* (1963), and Alain Resnais's *L'Année dernière à Marienbad* (1961, written by the novelist Alain Robbe-Grillet).

Furthermore, the New Wave revealed 'the new bodies of young actors [and actresses]'<sup>91</sup> such as Jean-Paul Belmondo, Jeanne Moreau, and Ana Karina, who found a fertile ground for their expressivity in the city. In order to capture the gestures of everyday life, New Wave filmmakers developed modern acting styles in urban spaces – such as the Parisian streets in Varda's *Cléo de 5 à 7* (1962) or the city of Nantes in Jacques Demy's *Lola* (1961) – viewed as places of social interaction, chance, agency, and continuously renewed possibilities. In this dynamic environment, attitudes and gestures could drive the narrative without necessarily resulting from the logical succession of action and plot that normally structure classical screenplays. 'La déambulation, la ballade, la drague, la flânerie occupaient le

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<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 151.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 152-53.

<sup>91</sup> Michel Marie, *The French New Wave. An Artistic School*, trans. by Richard Neupert (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell), p. 109.

terrain. La rue redevenait un vecteur de l'errance et n'était plus un but,' Douchet explains.<sup>92</sup> As if echoing Diderot who, in the eighteenth century, encouraged painters to go out of the studio in order to observe 'le vrai mouvement dans les actions de la vie',<sup>93</sup> New Wave authors also left the studio to shoot on location and film the characters in their wanderings, encounters, and interactions with the real. According to the film historian Antoine de Baecque, the New Wave, which forged the spectators' imagination by filming the everyday world and gestures in a stylised way, quickly became a myth, with a long-lasting influence: 'Reste un mythe. La force de la Nouvelle Vague est en effet d'avoir imposé un imaginaire, une mythologie, un univers de gestes, d'apparences, de corps, d'objets, un univers que visite très rapidement la nostalgie.'<sup>94</sup> At its peak between the late 1950s and early 1960s, and starting to decline in 1962,<sup>95</sup> the New Wave was an 'expérience éphémère'.<sup>96</sup>

Although the post-New Wave turns out to be indebted to the gestural innovations of the New Wave, the films under discussion develop a contrasting approach to gesture and speech. While the art of speech and dialogue was at once central and playful in many New Wave films,<sup>97</sup> it underwent a deep crisis during the post-New Wave. By referring to the origins of cinema, some films of the corpus emphasise the muteness of gesture and reflect on its ontological difference with speech. Coined by Michel Chion, the genre of 'mute cinema' refers to neo-silent films 'where characters express themselves through actions, gestures, and looks'.<sup>98</sup> If mute cinema can be nostalgic about the origins of cinema, it manifests above all a problematic tension, if not a rupture, between gesture and speech:

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<sup>92</sup> Douchet, *Nouvelle Vague*, p. 125.

<sup>93</sup> Denis Diderot, *Essais sur la peinture. Salons de 1759, 1761, 1763*, ed. by Gita May and Jacques Chouillet (Paris: Hermann, 2007), p. 16.

<sup>94</sup> Antoine de Baecque, *La Nouvelle Vague. Portrait d'une jeunesse* (Paris: Flammarion, 1998), p. 149.

<sup>95</sup> See Geneviève Sellier, *Masculine Singular. French New Wave Cinema*, trans. by Kristin Ross (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008), p. 2.

<sup>96</sup> Baecque, *La Nouvelle Vague*, p. 149.

<sup>97</sup> Douchet, *Nouvelle Vague*, p. 190.

<sup>98</sup> Michel Chion, *Film, a Sound Art*, trans. by Claudia Gorbman (New York, Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2009), p. 328.

Mute cinema is a genre situated at a crossroads between cinephilic nostalgia for a lost golden age of silent film and a modern-day idea of the human species as shaped by cutthroat competition, drives and appetites, and the relentless fight for survival – and therefore for whom speech can only be an ideological smokescreen, masking cynical hard reality.<sup>99</sup>

Paraskeva coins the phrase ‘speech-gesture complex’ to consider the discrepancy and dialectical tension between gesture and speech (or the visible and the sayable) in modernism, notably in Kafka’s literature, Brechtian and Beckettian theatre, and Charlie Chaplin’s silent cinema.<sup>100</sup> In post-New Wave films such as *Un homme qui dort* and *L’Homme à la valise*, gestures emerge from the characters’ decisive silence and act out their problematic relationship with the world. The characters’ solitude and refusal to interact with others is expressed through nervous gestures, evoking pathologies of the late nineteenth century, such as ambulatory automatism and hysteria. The difficulty of dealing with speech also appears in the autistic children’s gestures filmed by Renaud Victor in *Ce Gamin-là*, and through the process of desynchronisation between the voice-over and image in *Un homme qui dort* and *Le Moindre Geste*. While Godard attempts to revitalise the aesthetics of silent cinema in *Prénom Carmen*, Zucca and Klossowski also explore the muteness of gestures, as well as the difficulty in deciphering their meanings, through the mise-en-scène of *tableaux vivants* in *Roberte*. As Agamben argues, the mediality of gestures expresses and communicates something that cannot be put into words, manifesting ‘the being-in-language of human beings’ and their need or desire for communicability.<sup>101</sup> In post-New Wave cinema, gestures often convey taboos, pathologies, traumas, fantasies, and conflicts that prove difficult to translate into words. The crisis of speech mirrors other sorts of crises, such as the crisis of the everyday, the crisis of authorship, the political crisis resulting from the disenchantment at the end of May 1968, and, in a manner that recalls the preoccupation with nervousness at the end of the nineteenth century, a gestural crisis.

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> See Paraskeva, *The Speech-Gesture Complex*.

<sup>101</sup> Agamben, ‘Notes on Gesture’, p. 58.

## The post-New Wave: a complex critical category

If literature devoted to the New Wave is abundant, scholarship about the post-New Wave has been more sporadic. Critics and scholars usually use two main approaches to outline the developments of the New Wave in the 1960s and 1970s. Either the term post-New Wave is used to name the generation of filmmakers who followed the New Wave from the mid-1960s onwards. Or the post-New Wave is regarded as essentially rooted in the sociocultural context of post-May 1968. On the one hand, Deleuze, Philippe Mary, and Jean-Michel Frodon opt for the genealogical approach. The terms 'après-nouvelle vague'<sup>102</sup> or, less frequently, 'nouvelle Nouvelle vague'<sup>103</sup> point to the emergence of new authors, considered as the 'heirs' of Truffaut and Godard, including Philippe Garrel, Jacques Doillon, Jean Eustache, André Téchiné, Maurice Pialat, and lesser-known directors such as Zucca. Extending beyond the frontiers of France, the influence of the New Wave is also acknowledged internationally by filmmakers such as Alain Tanner, Akerman, Jerzy Skolimovski, Bernardo Bertolucci, Martin Scorsese, and Nagisa Oshima.<sup>104</sup>

On the other hand, certain scholars consider the political and sociocultural events of May 1968 in France as the dividing line between the New Wave and the post-New Wave. Although Truffaut, Godard, Rivette, Resnais, and other artists and intellectuals came together in February 1968 to defend Henri Langlois – the co-founder of the Cinémathèque française – after his dismissal by the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, the political events of 1968 ultimately accentuated the process of fragmentation of the group. According to Ginette Vincendeau, 'May '68 introduced a break with New

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<sup>102</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *L'Image-temps. Cinéma 2* (Paris: Minuit, 1985), p. 254; Philippe Mary, *La Nouvelle Vague et le cinéma d'auteur. Socio-analyse d'une révolution artistique* (Paris: Seuil, 2006), p. 239.

<sup>103</sup> Jean-Michel Frodon, 'Une nouvelle Nouvelle Vague ?', in *Le Cinéma français de la Nouvelle Vague à nos jours* (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, 2010), pp. 405-29.

<sup>104</sup> See Baecque, *La Nouvelle Vague*, p. 151.

Wave issues and concerns, with the rise of the political agenda.<sup>105</sup> The rupture within the original group of the *Cahiers du cinéma* manifested symbolically through the falling-out between its two major figures, Truffaut and Godard.<sup>106</sup> More precisely, the sociocultural, ideological, and political context of May 1968 fundamentally influenced the aesthetics of the post-New Wave. According to Jill Forbes,

[t]he 'post-*nouvelle vague*' is also the period after May 1968 and it would be difficult to overstate the impact of this great social and cultural caesura on the cinema. May 1968 forced filmmakers to confront the influence of mass communications and to ask questions about the 'truth' and the 'reality' of the image. It presented filmmakers with the challenge of television and made them consider the politics of representation. It introduced new social actors to the screen and to film making, it called for the reinterpretation of history and, in exposing the problematical absence of the 'people' which in Marxist literature had long been unquestioningly assumed to exist, it forced all those working in the culture industries, but especially in the cinema, to reconsider the nature of this par excellence 'popular' art.<sup>107</sup>

Framed in the context of post-May 1968, the post-New Wave encompasses not only the pioneering *auteurs* of women's cinema like Nelly Kaplan, and members of the Zanzibar Group (1968-70) such as Serge Bard, Garrel, and Jackie Raynal, but also more established filmmakers like Rivette and Godard who radicalised their methods of filmmaking in the wake of May 1968, in continuation or rupture with their earlier films. According to Forbes, the label of French post-New Wave also includes a category of transnational filmmakers 'who position themselves in relation to French cinema', such as the Belgian Akerman, the Swiss Tanner, the French couple Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet who made films mainly in Germany, or the Franco-Chilean director Raoul Ruiz.<sup>108</sup>

However, instead of highlighting May 1968 as the boundary between the end of an era and the beginning of a new one, Forbes suggests

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<sup>105</sup> Ginette Vincendeau, 'Introduction. Fifty Years of the French New Wave: From Hysteria to Nostalgia', in *The French New Wave: Critical Landmarks*, ed. by Peter Graham with Ginette Vincendeau (London: BFI, 2009), p. 13.

<sup>106</sup> See *Truffaut-Godard, scénario d'une rupture*, dir. Claire Duguet (France Télévisions, 2015).

<sup>107</sup> Jill Forbes, *The Cinema in France after the New Wave* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), p.

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<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 260.

considering the post-New Wave in its continuity with the New Wave. According to her, 'the post-1968 French cinema' (which Forbes uses as synonym for 'post-*nouvelle vague*'), without overtly mourning the end of the New Wave nor denying its legacy, 'built on its achievements'.<sup>109</sup> Indeed, as I will discuss in this thesis, post-New Wave filmmakers continued to explore the representation of the body, stylise gestures of everyday life, and shoot on location. Albeit in different ways, filmmakers of both eras also tackled political issues. During the New Wave, Godard and the authors of the left bank such as Resnais, Marker, and Varda were preoccupied with urban change, the emancipation of youth, the Algerian war, the politics of memory, the critique of consumer society, social conditioning, and, more exceptionally in Varda's cinema – the only woman in a predominantly masculine milieu<sup>110</sup> –, the emergence of the female gaze. While pursuing, expanding, and even radicalising the cinematic exploration of similar political concerns in the ideological and sociocultural context of post-May 1968, certain post-New Wave authors not only sought to make films about political matters, but also attempted to find ways of producing and shooting films politically: 'The problem is not to make *political* films but to make films *politically*,'<sup>111</sup> argued Godard, by now working with the Dziga Vertov Group.

During the post-New Wave, many directors preoccupied with politics reflected on the necessity of reorganising the film crew as a political community, developed self-reflexive and meta-cinematic strategies to unveil the political nature of representation, and reconsidered their relationship with their actors and actresses. Consequently, 'both a political and aesthetic self-consciousness'<sup>112</sup> lies at the core of films such as Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman* (see Chapter 2), Luc Moullet and Antonietta Pizzorno's *Anatomie d'un rapport* (1976), and Godard's political works made with the Dziga Vertov Group. From 1967 to 1974, Chris Marker also initiated the Medvedkine groups in Sochaux and Besançon, which gathered workers and film

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>110</sup> See Sellier, *Masculine Singular*.

<sup>111</sup> Colin MacCabe, with Mick Eaton and Laura Mulvey, *Godard: Images, Sounds, Politics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), p. 19.

<sup>112</sup> Forbes, *The Cinema in France after the New Wave*, p. 20.

technicians who made militant films together and expressed their voices collaboratively. In the late 1960s and 1970s, for a few filmmakers such as Marker, the practice of filmmaking became a collaborative process engaging a community of artists and technicians, rather than promoting the author's individuality within the market-oriented system.<sup>113</sup> In the mid-1970s, after having made four traditional author films in the 1960s, Alain Cavalier decided to rethink the means of production and the conditions of filmmaking of his cinema. For example, he wrote the screenplay of the road-movie *Le Plein de super* (1976) in close collaboration with the actors and shot the film with a reduced crew and a small camera, avoiding the constraints of conventional shootings. Like Rivette, Cavalier aims to stimulate the agency of his actors and actresses, who thus become responsible for the narrative and get involved in the *mise-en-scène*.

A review of Rivette's *L'Amour fou* (1969) is revealing of this new conception of shared authorship: 'Pour une fois le metteur en scène a tenté de n'être pas dieu. Cet effacement est un grand effort.'<sup>114</sup> As Vincendeau explains, '[...] trends in literary theory (Roland Barthes) and philosophy (Michel Foucault) were dealing severe blows to the notion of the auteur.'<sup>115</sup> At that time, it is notable that the dogmatic vision of the *politique des auteurs* was even questioned and redefined in the *Cahiers du cinéma*.<sup>116</sup> Yet, Forbes argues that '[t]he *auteur* film continued to be a distinctive category within the French cinema and this was a trend which, if anything, was exaggerated after 1968'.<sup>117</sup> Although the crisis of authorship impacted on the style of filmmaking for certain post-New Wave authors, such a crisis was also strategically staged by some of them in their films, in order to reflect on their marginal position in the film market and reaffirm their authority as artists. As I will demonstrate in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, self-representation enables

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., pp. 14-15.

<sup>114</sup> Sylvie Pierre, 'Le Film sans maître (*L'Amour fou* de Jacques Rivette)', in *La Politique des auteurs. Les textes*, ed. by Antoine de Baecque (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, 2001), p. 146.

<sup>115</sup> Vincendeau, 'Introduction. Fifty Years of the French New Wave', p. 15.

<sup>116</sup> See Jean-André Fieschi, Jean-Louis Comolli, Michel Mardore, André Téchiné, Gérard Guégan, and Claude Ollier, 'Vingt ans après. Le cinéma américain, ses auteurs et notre politique en question', in *La Politique des auteurs. Les textes*, ed. by Baecque, pp. 122-42.

<sup>117</sup> Forbes, *The Cinema in France after the New Wave*, p. 259.

directors such as Akerman and Godard to critically reflect on their practice of filmmaking and on their condition as authors working at the margins.

However, if the genealogical approach to the post-New wave shows limitations, the 'post-May 1968' approach can also prove problematic from an historical and hermeneutic perspective. First of all, when Forbes argues that '[t]he French cinema after 1968 did [...] come to terms with the *nouvelle vague*, but it used this process as a springboard for the creation of a new cinema',<sup>118</sup> it must be noted that the 'new cinema' started to emerge before 1968. In 1967, Garrel released the documentary entitled *Le Jeune Cinéma: Godard et ses émules*, which portrays 'un petit noyau de cinéastes virulents', including the young directors Francis Leroi, Jean-Michel Barjol, Eustache, and Moullet who, by disrupting the traditional hierarchies of the French film industry, attempted to amplify the revolution initiated by the New Wave. Aspiring to make free independent films with reduced film crews and less money, these filmmakers, who remain little-known compared to their prestigious forerunners, were already facing important problems of distribution.<sup>119</sup>

Secondly, another limitation of eliding the post-New Wave with the term 'post-May 68 French cinema' would be to systematically read and interpret the films made during this period in the light of the ideological, sociocultural, and political events of May 1968. In Chapter 1, the discussion of *Un homme qui dort* reveals the difficulty in providing a consistent interpretation of the film through this lens. Although the themes of conditioning, alienation, and marginalisation were in the spirit of the times, the film – which adapts a novel written by Perec in 1965, itself inspired by an episode of depression experienced by the writer in 1956 – consciously avoids alluding to the political context of the 1970s. Similarly, in Chapter 4, if

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., p. 259.

<sup>119</sup> In post-New Wave cinema, numerous first features, non-standard and low-budget films such as Jean-François Stévenin's *Passe montagne* (1978), Benoît Jacquot's *Les Enfants du placard* (1977), Zucca's *Vincent mit l'âne dans un pré (et s'en vint dans l'autre)* (1976), Perec and Queysanne's *Un homme qui dort*, Rivette's *Out 1*, and Garrel's experimental works, only benefited from a reduced exposure in cinemas if they were not outright condemned to invisibility – though an increasing number of titles have been released in DVD and Blu-ray in recent years, enabling contemporary spectators to (re)discover them, many films, such as Garrel's *La Concentration* (1968), remain difficult to access.

Zucca reflects on gender politics as well as the nature of the cinematic image in *Roberte*, the film, which adapts Pierre Klossowski's *La Révocation de l'Edit de Nantes* (1959), is imbued with ideas about the *tableau vivant*, gesture, image, and performance that the writer had developed since the 1930s.

In the films under discussion, gestures potentially interweave multiple historical and temporal lines as well as activating multiple readings and possible interpretations. Ancient rituals and forgotten pathologies are revived in gestures performed in the present. Pregnant in all the chapters (more specifically in Chapter 4), the idea of revival evokes Warburg's anachronistic conception of art history. Attempting to map the reiteration of similar gestures from Antiquity to Weimar Germany in the unfinished project entitled *Mnemosyne Atlas*, Warburg, through the notion of *Pathosformel*, explored the revival of antique visual forms in various time periods and places, especially during the Renaissance. Gesture, 'a crystal of historical memory'<sup>120</sup> at the intersection of multiple and dynamic temporal lines, haunts the present in a 'ghostly' movement, like a fossil in motion.<sup>121</sup> When referring to Warburg's ideas and Nietzsche's concept of the eternal return in the essay 'Notes on Gesture', Agamben suggests that early cinema recorded and archived gestures, which, while being revived and experienced again in the cinema, were on the verge of disappearing in society. To a certain extent, post-New Wave filmmakers prove to be preoccupied with the risk of the disappearance of certain gestures in modern societies, and on the necessity of recording them, as exemplified in fiction films such as *Un homme qui dort* and *Jeanne Dielman*, and documentaries like Eustache's *La Rosière de Pessac* (1969), Varda's *Daguerréotypes* (1975), and Jean-Daniel Pollet's *Pour mémoire (la forge)* (1978). Crucially, the post-New Wave not only scrutinises the disappearance and/or resurgence of gestural forms in modern Western societies, but also, as we will see, stresses the revival of silent cinema and late nineteenth-century motion studies in contemporary films.

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<sup>120</sup> Agamben, 'Notes on Gesture', p. 54.

<sup>121</sup> See Didi-Huberman, *L'Image survivante*, p. 202.

Divided into five chapters, this thesis begins with an investigation of everyday gestures, conditioning, and memory in Perec and Queysanne's *Un homme qui dort*. This will demonstrate the complex interplay between the mediality of human gesture and the media components of the cinematic machine: to what extent do the character's conditioned gestures mirror the mechanisms and features of the cinematic automaton, in terms of camera movement, *découpage*, and editing? Through a different lens, Chapter 2 develops the reflection on sociocultural conditioning and its impact on the performance of gestures in film: the styles of women's gestures in Akerman's cinema are analysed from an interdisciplinary perspective, including anthropological, sociological, and gender theories. By comparing Akerman's different approaches to film acting, I examine the extent to which the style of gestures informs the style of her filmmaking, especially regarding the quality of framing and the crucial role of sound.

The question of the correlation between gesture and form is also addressed in Chapter 3. In *Prénom Carmen*, Godard refers to silent cinema to reflect on the gestural ontology of the cinematic image. Drawing on Beethoven's music and Rodin's sculpture, the filmmaker develops intermedial strategies to strengthen the connection and circularity between the gestures of creation, the image, and the spectator's gaze and hearing. Chapter 4 explores a different perspective on the role of gestures in the dialogue between cinema and the other arts. By referring to Klossowski's ideas on body language and comparing ways of representing and perceiving gestures in painting, photography, and film, I discuss how the performance of gestures in the cinematic *tableaux vivants* of Zucca's *Roberte* problematises the tension between code and impulse, stereotype and idiosyncrasy, that proves crucial to the conceptualisation of gesture in film.

Finally, by considering Godard and Miéville's television series *France/tour/détour*, the various film projects involving Deligny, as well as Rivette's improvised film *Out 1*, the last chapter focuses more directly on the sociocultural, political, and ideological context of post-May 1968. Through the notion of 'gestural line', the chapter examines the tension between the

straight lines of the social order and conditioning and the serpentine lines that animate the singular lives of children, adults, mentally handicapped persons, marginal characters, intellectuals, and artists, who live either at the centre of society or on its fringes. In this way, the thesis concludes the reflection on gesture in post-New Wave cinema by emphasising the links between aesthetics and politics.

In these five chapters, my analysis of gestures will be guided by the following questions: how do we define gesture in cinema in comparison with other arts like dance, theatre, or painting? To what extent do the visual and aural qualities of gesture concern all the creative aspects of cinema, from acting to editing? To what extent can gesture enable us to rethink, on the one hand, the ontology and the medium specificity of cinema, and, on the other hand, the concept of intermediality and cross-fertilisation between the arts? How does film technology transform gestures and impact on their perception or interpretation by the spectator? How is the cinematic image not only the result of film technology, but also crafted by the filmmakers' gestures? And, finally, to what extent is gesture an existential form that contributes to moulding the aesthetic forms of a film?

# Chapter 1. Everyday Gestures, Automatism, and the Archive in Georges Perec and Bernard Queysanne's *Un homme qui dort* (1974)

'De quoi s'agit-il "au fond" de cet *Homme qui dort* qui a ce caractère original d'être une recherche de la banalité, du dérisoire?

D'un être au point mort de sa vie qui fait des gestes, se meut dans un décor anonyme où son mouvement s'inscrit non dans un rythme mais dans une durée. C'est le signe d'un temps immobile à la mémoire confuse.<sup>1</sup> – Georges Franju

## *Introduction*

The cinematographic adaptation of the novel *Un homme qui dort*, which is devoid of dialogue and plot, performed by a silent actor, read by an omnipresent voice-over, and financed by a very low budget, was a challenge for the writer and Oulipo member Georges Perec, who particularly liked working under creative constraints.<sup>2</sup> More than a formal exercise in style, the film can be considered as a critical examination and cinematic exploration of everyday gesture in its most fundamental aspects. On the one hand, the mechanics of ritualised and automatic gestures, reiterated daily by the character, reveal the interplay between the human body and the cinematic machine. On the other hand, the film stresses the crisis of everyday gestures: the predictable programme of daily life is disrupted by nervous, compulsive, and anxious gestures, which crack apart the character's desire for control and self-conditioning. Through the character's gestures, in their

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<sup>1</sup> Cited in Georges Perec, *Entretiens et conférences. Volume I 1965-1978*, ed. by Dominique Bertelli and Mireille Ribière (Nantes: Joseph K., 2003), p. 154.

<sup>2</sup> 'A *Man Asleep* is a film made under constraint – the constraint of an unprecedentedly tiny budget.' See David Bellos, *Georges Perec. A Life in Words* (London: Harvill, 1995), p. 520. Founded by Raymond Queneau and François Le Lionnais, Oulipo (Ouvroir de littérature potentielle) is a group of writers and mathematicians who explore, invent, and apply writing constraints.

interaction with the urban spaces of Paris and the components of the cinematic medium, the film ultimately undertakes a reflection on memory and the archive, evoking the autobiographical projects that Perec developed in the 1970s.

In 1971, Perec decided to adapt his novel *Un homme qui dort* (1967) in collaboration with Bernard Queysanne.<sup>3</sup> Unlike his first novel *Les Choses* (1965) that describes the materialistic fascination with consumer goods in 1960s French society, *Un homme qui dort* relates the search for indifference of a twenty-five-year-old anonymous student who breaks away from society. The character drops out of education and takes refuge in his Parisian *chambre de bonne*. He walks in the streets of Paris, 'il mange quand il a faim, il dort quand il a sommeil'.<sup>4</sup> Perec shows how important his gestures, which reflect his detachment from the world, are: 'Il n'a plus de gestes sociaux, il n'a plus que des gestes absolument neutres.'<sup>5</sup> His automatic bodily movements seem to have no particular significance and no social value. In fact, he only seeks to carry out elementary actions that are necessary to his solitary and daily survival, such as eating, dressing, and walking. According to André Leroi-Gourhan, '[l]es pratiques élémentaires constituent les programmes vitaux de l'individu, tout ce qui dans les gestes quotidiens intéresse sa survie comme élément social,'<sup>6</sup> such as gestures of subsistence, of social interactions, or working activities. In *Un homme qui dort*, the character's solitary survival proves paradoxical. By sticking to elementary practices, which he seeks to reiterate daily indifferently, he

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<sup>3</sup> The French writer did not plan on making the film alone, due to his lack of technical knowledge. On 31 March 1971, he wrote a letter to his friend Queysanne: '1°/As-tu lu "Un Homme qui dort" 2°/ Penses-tu qu'on puisse en faire un film? (moi oui) 3°/ Aimerais-tu en faire un film?' Although Queysanne had not read the book, he seized the opportunity to work with Perec and direct his first feature film. (See David Bellos, *Georges Perec. Une vie dans les mots*, trans. by Françoise Cartano (Paris: Seuil, 1994), p. 492.) From the development to the promotion of the film, Perec and Queysanne showed a strong complicity. In an interview, Perec explains their relationship in these terms: 'Nous avons préparé, tourné, monté et mixé le film ensemble, mais je n'ai jamais cherché à être "metteur en scène". J'ai voulu travailler avec Queysanne sur l'esprit du film, sur son univers, au niveau le plus général comme au niveau de chaque choix, qu'il s'agisse des décors, des gestes ou du rythme.' (See Perec, *Entretiens et conférences. Volume I 1965-1978*, p. 155.)

<sup>4</sup> 'Georges Perec à propos de *Un homme qui dort*', *Lectures pour tous*, Office national de radiodiffusion-télévision française, 3 May 1967.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Leroi-Gourhan, *Le Geste et la parole II*, p. 28.

attempts to withdraw from society while being constantly in contact with it. *Un homme qui dort* is regularly compared by Perec, as well as by his critics, to Hermann Melville's short story 'Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street' (1853) in which the famous formula 'I would prefer not to' symbolises the character's refusal to act in society.<sup>7</sup> If Perec's novel explicitly refers to Bartleby's stillness,<sup>8</sup> the filmic adaptation, which shows a young man constantly in motion, reduces Melville's influence, except when the student, sitting on his bed, stares at the camera without moving [Fig. 1]. Most of the time, his gestures betray his vital need to move and, gradually, his profound anxiety. At the end of the film, the character fails in his impossible search for indifference and, as we suppose, returns to society.

Although Perec did not seek to convey a political message about alienation (a recurring topic in 1970s French cinema) or about any other contemporary ideological concern,<sup>9</sup> the writer was aware that the character's anxiety and marginal condition could ultimately reflect the fears of the whole society, and be symbolic of a 'désarroi contemporain en face du monde

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<sup>7</sup> See Jacques-Denis Bertharion, *Poétique de Georges Perec. '... une trace, une marque ou quelques signes'* (Saint-Genouph: Librairie Nizet, 1998), pp. 37-38; Jacques Neefs and Hans Hartje, *Georges Perec. Images* (Paris: Seuil, 1993), p. 95.

<sup>8</sup> See Georges Perec, *Un homme qui dort* (Paris: Denoël, 1967), p. 136.

<sup>9</sup> During their media campaign in 1974, Perec and Queysanne insisted on the topicality of the story. (See Perec, *Entretiens et conférences*, p. 154.) The character's marginality and his desire to break out from the conventions of society were indeed in the spirit of the times, especially if we consider the works of some post-New Wave filmmakers such as Garrel (*Marie pour mémoire*, 1967) or Peter Emmanuel Goldman (*Wheel of Ashes*, 1968). As Serge Daney wrote in *Libération* on 9 May 1974: 'Si *l'Homme qui dort* est un film intéressant, c'est parce qu'il propose sa propre version, sa version de ce qui est en train de devenir le sujet de tout le cinéma français: la marginalité.' (Cited in Perec, *Entretiens et conférences*, p. 147.) However, in many regards, it seems that Perec and Queysanne's emphasis on the topicality of the film was principally a media argument addressed to critics. In more recent interviews, Queysanne highlighted the timelessness of *Un homme qui dort*, arguing that the film, which already looked old in 1974, was not particularly rooted in the 1970s. (See Bernard Queysanne and Cécile De Bary, 'Entretien avec Bernard Queysanne – Propos amicaux', in *Cahiers Georges Perec. Vol. 9: Le Cinématographe*, ed. by Cécile De Bary (Bordeaux: Castor Astral, 2006), p. 121.) Finally, in 2009, Queysanne explained that he and Perec had sought to avoid all political references to May 1968 and protest movements of the 1970s, in contrast to *L'An 01* (1973) which tells the collective refusal of capitalist society. Directed by Jacques Doillon (with Alain Resnais's and Jean Rouch's participations), the film alludes to the anti-establishment movements of the 1970s: the population suddenly decides to stop everything by common consent. (See Bernard Queysanne, 'Nous étions inspirés par la ville et la lumière', *Vertigo*, 35 (2009), 78-83 <<http://www.cairn.info/revue-vertigo-2009-1-page-78.htm>> [accessed 01 April 2016] (para. 19 of 22))

contemporain'.<sup>10</sup> If the character seems alienated and wanders like an ambulatory automaton, if his gestures are repetitive, automatic, and mechanised, he paradoxically acts of his own free will. He attempts to have absolute control over his body by avoiding making spontaneous movements. This idle student is not a worker conditioned by Taylorism – unless, as will be discussed in Chapter 5, it turns out that Taylorism has infiltrated the slightest gestures of everyday life in Western society. His social conditioning is replaced by his own ability to condition himself, which is the illusory proof of his freedom. The political significance of the film lies in the character's failure to neutralise the social meaning of his gestures and to live outside the community. As Marie-José Mondzain writes, '[le mot] politique est à entendre non pas comme une référence à l'exercice du pouvoir mais à la force particulière des liens qui font une communauté, une cité, comme le terme grec de *polis* nous invite à le penser.'<sup>11</sup> The prologue of *Un homme qui dort* shows how the character's gestures are originally integrated in society before he decides to leave it. The end of the film suggests the character's reintegration in the *polis*.<sup>12</sup>



Fig. 1. *Un homme qui dort*

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<sup>10</sup> Perec, *Entretiens et conférences*, p. 180.

<sup>11</sup> Marie-José Mondzain, 'La Shoah comme question de cinéma', in *Le Cinéma et la Shoah. Un Art à l'épreuve de la tragédie du 20<sup>e</sup> siècle*, ed. by Jean-Michel Frodon (Paris: Cahiers du Cinéma, 2007), p. 30.

<sup>12</sup> According to Perec, the last shot 'réintroduit le personnage dans la ville'. Disagreeing with Perec on this point, Queysanne thinks that the character reached a point of no return. The end, as well as the whole film, is opened, and the ambiguous effects of desynchronisation between the image and the voice-over increase the possibility for the spectator to build his or her own interpretation(s). See Perec, *Entretiens et conférences*, pp. 176-77.

One year before he began writing *Un homme qui dort*,<sup>13</sup> Perec appears to have been struck by Alain Jessua's *La Vie à l'envers*,<sup>14</sup> released in 1964. The main character of *La Vie à l'envers*, played by Charles Denner, destroys all his social relationships and seeks happiness in solitude. At the beginning of the film, in the middle of a conversation with friends in a café, he suddenly leaves the table, and, in a moment of absence, starts playing pinball, one of the favourite pastimes of the character in *Un homme qui dort* [Fig. 2, 3]. Later, he learns how to see things differently, perceiving their slightest details or paying attention to what people do not usually care about. He counts the steps of the staircase of his building, or keeps staring at a tree for hours. Such a mode of perception certainly fascinated and inspired Perec, whose notion of the *infra-ordinaire* consists in closely considering the most mundane things, actions, or gestures of everyday life.<sup>15</sup> In *Un homme qui dort*, the character stares at the cracks that draw lines on his ceiling or, as in *La Vie à l'envers*, fixedly looks at the trunk of a tree. Finally, both characters believe they will find the key of happiness by imposing on themselves a solitary and austere discipline that regulates their bodily movements. In Jessua's film, the character insists on the necessity of making only voluntary and useful gestures: 'Une question de discipline, s'économiser, pas de geste inutile, comme les fauves.' It is notable that Perec, with the concept of the *infra-ordinaire*, seeks to be astonished by the most obvious objects.<sup>16</sup> The notion of astonishment ('étonnement') appears to contradict the character's quest for neutrality and indifference in *Un homme qui dort*, who learns how to 'voir sans regarder, à regarder sans voir', or the fact that, in *La Vie à l'envers*, Denner contemplates an object to the point of forgetting it. The *infra-ordinaire*

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<sup>13</sup> In December 1965, Perec explained that the writing of *Un homme qui dort* was in progress. Later, in 1974, he confirmed having written the book in 1965. See Perec, *Entretiens et conférences*, pp. 51 and 163.

<sup>14</sup> In 1967, Perec mentioned *La Vie à l'envers* in the programme 'Georges Perec à propos de *Un homme qui dort*'. (See also Perec, *Entretien et conférences*, p. 179.) David Bellos also points out its influence on the adaptation of *Un homme qui dort*. (See Bellos, *Georges Perec. A Life in Words*, p. 479.) However, contrary to what Bellos writes, Queysanne did not like Jessua's film. (See Queysanne and De Bary, 'Entretien avec Bernard Queysanne', p.115.)

<sup>15</sup> For instance, Perec wonders: 'Combien de gestes faut-il pour composer un numéro de téléphone? Pourquoi?' Georges Perec, *L'Infra-ordinaire* (Paris: Seuil, La Librairie du XXe siècle, 1989), p. 13.

<sup>16</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 12.

refers to a new way of looking at the world, rather than escaping social life. In this respect, the end of Jessua's film, in which Denner ends up in a mental hospital, was not to Perec's taste: 'A aucun moment le discours n'est bloqué sur quelque chose de précis, comme par exemple l'entrée dans la folie, dont la précision thématique ruine la fin d'un film pourtant fort intéressant comme *La Vie à l'envers*, de Jessua.'<sup>17</sup>



Fig. 2 *La Vie à l'envers*



Fig. 3. *Un homme qui dort*

In the 1960s and 1970s, Queysanne was assistant director to Robert Enrico, Philippe Labro, and especially Georges Franju, whose influence strongly permeates *Un homme qui dort*. The latter, who directed the well-known *Les Yeux sans visage* (1960), seeks strangeness in everyday life, creates a 'cool expressionism'<sup>18</sup> by filming on location, and, inspired by surrealism, poetic realism, documentary, and silent cinema, explores the dreamlike nature of reality. His films '[perturb] our sense of the real, pulling it in unfamiliar directions'<sup>19</sup> and amplify the feeling of anxiety aroused by our interaction with the ordinary world. At the beginning of the short film *La Première Nuit* (1958), which tells the dreamy wandering of a young boy in the Paris Métro, the tandem of writers Boileau-Narcejac signs this epigraph: 'Il suffit d'un peu d'imagination pour que nos gestes les plus ordinaires se chargent soudain d'une signification inquiétante, pour que le décor de notre vie quotidienne engendre un monde fantastique.' Just like Franju, Queysanne's mise-en-scène shapes banal gestures in an expressionistic

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<sup>17</sup> See Perec, *Entretiens et conférences*, p. 179.

<sup>18</sup> Raymond Durnat, *Franju* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), p. 24.

<sup>19</sup> Kate Ince, *Georges Franju* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), p. 118.

way, especially in the second half of the film, and suggests the oneiric world of the sleeping man in the real location of Paris. Moreover, *Un homme qui dort*, which was technically shot like a black-and-white silent film, without any sound, directly quotes Franju's *Le Sang des bêtes* (1949) by incorporating a brief shot of the documentary [Fig. 42]. In this short film that documents the tasks of slaughterers and butchers in the slaughterhouses of Vaugirard and La Villette, the workers' everyday gestures, commented by a neutral voice-over, create a sensation of shock for the spectator, which deeply inspired Queysanne and Perec in the last part of their film.

By drawing on Walter Benjamin's ideas on modernity, this chapter will analyse the concept of shock through the notions of conditioning and memory. Regarding the latter, it is notable that some fundamental aspects of Perec and Queysanne's film – such as the character's failure in his attempt to escape memory and history – also echo Alain Resnais's *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959). In both films, the influence of the *nouveau roman* and the formal dialectics<sup>20</sup> of the editing cast doubt on the apparent truth of moving pictures through a process of desynchronisation between the text, the soundtrack, and the image.<sup>21</sup> In his correspondence with Jacques Lederer, Perec conveys a genuine enthusiasm for *Hiroshima mon amour*.<sup>22</sup> In May 1960, the writer published a review of Resnais's film in *La Nouvelle Critique*. According to him, the film makes the audience aware of Hiroshima's impact on history, by representing a process of 'prise de conscience' that helps us to understand 'ce qu'implique aujourd'hui la participation de l'homme à l'histoire'.<sup>23</sup>

Finally, in order to tackle the notion of memory, it must be mentioned that *Un homme qui dort*, written in 1965, is directly inspired by an experience

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<sup>20</sup> Noël Burch theorises such a dialectical approach to film aesthetics in *Theory of Film Practice*, trans. by Helen R. Lane (London: Secker & Warburg, 1973), pp. 49-101.

<sup>21</sup> See Mathieu Remy, 'L'évidente nécessité de la mémoire', in *Cahiers Georges Perec. Vol. 9: Le Cinématographe*, ed. by De Bary, p. 48.

<sup>22</sup> In October 1959, Perec wrote to Lederer: 'Pas exclu que j'aïlle demain à Toulouse pour voir 2 ou 3 fois Hiroshima dont je sens petit à petit que j'en deviens dingue.' See Jacques Lederer and Georges Perec, '*Cher, très cher, admirable et charmant ami...*' *Correspondance Georges Perec-Jacques Lederer (1956-1961)* (Paris: Flammarion, 1997), p. 519.

<sup>23</sup> Cited in Remy, 'L'évidente nécessité de la mémoire', p. 44.

of depression lived by Perec in 1956.<sup>24</sup> Its recurrence in his work demonstrates the slow and difficult emergence of his autobiographical project that followed many byways until the mid-1970s. In the film, the writer left traces of his personal and literary life in the character's room. For instance, the reproduction of the painting *Portrait d'un homme, dit Le Condottiere* (1475) by Antonello de Messine is a very significant leitmotiv, not to say a signature, in Perec's writing [see Fig. 8].<sup>25</sup> In many respects, the gestures of *Un homme qui dort* take on a new dimension when they are considered in the light of the writer's autobiographical work, which he intensely developed in the first half of the 1970s, with on the one hand the unfinished project entitled *Lieux*, and, on the other hand the publication of *W ou le souvenir d'enfance* in 1975. For Philippe Lejeune, '*Lieux* est la matrice de tout le travail autobiographique de Perec entre 1969 et 1975.'<sup>26</sup> The writer planned to write – over the course of twelve years – a book describing twelve Parisian places which had a personal resonance in his life, such as the rue Vilin, where he spent the first years of his childhood, or the Ile Saint-Louis. Each month, he described one of the places and carefully kept his notes in a sealed envelope, sometimes with other documents such as photographs. The writer's interest in the archive, time, memory, and urban change permeates the adaptation of *Un homme qui dort*. If Perec suspended his

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<sup>24</sup> See Bellos, *Georges Perec. A Life in Words*, p. 149.

<sup>25</sup> In *W ou le souvenir d'enfance*, Perec explains his fascination with the Renaissance portrait with which he identifies himself; indeed like the Condottiere (and by coincidence like Jacques Spiesser), the writer has a scar above the upper lip. The mark has become significant in Perec's life since childhood:

'C'est cette cicatrice aussi qui me fit préférer à tous les tableaux rassemblés au Louvre, et plus précisément dans la salle dite "des sept mètres", le *Portrait d'un homme, dit Le Condottiere* d'Antonello de Messine, qui devint la figure centrale du premier roman à peu près abouti que je parvins à écrire: il s'appela d'abord "Gaspard pas mort", puis "Le Condottiere" [...] Le Condottiere et sa cicatrice jouèrent également un rôle prépondérant dans *Un Homme qui dort* (par exemple, p. 105: "... le portrait incroyablement énergique d'un homme de la Renaissance, avec une toute petite cicatrice au-dessus de la lèvre supérieure, à gauche, c'est-à-dire à gauche pour lui, à droite pour toi...") et jusque dans le film que j'en ai tiré avec Bernard Queysanne en 1973 et dont l'unique acteur, Jacques Spiesser, porte à la lèvre supérieure une cicatrice presque exactement identique à la mienne: c'était un simple hasard, mais il fut, pour moi, secrètement déterminant.'

(See Georges Perec, *W ou le souvenir d'enfance* (Paris: Denoël, 1975), pp. 142-43.) Warren Motte analyses the scar as 'a site of mourning' in Perec's work. (See Warren Motte, 'The Work of Mourning', *Yale French Studies*, 105 (2004), 56-71 (pp. 63-65).)

<sup>26</sup> Philippe Lejeune, *La Mémoire et l'oblique. Georges Perec autobiographe* (Paris: P.O.L., 1991), p. 146.

work on *Lieux* during the shooting of the film in 1973, '[c]es lieux [...] auraient dû, en principe, figurer tous dans le film.'<sup>27</sup> In the film, gestures embody a living and moving memory of places.<sup>28</sup> Cinema is a medium that archives gestures, things, and places as they are at the moment of their recording. Considering *Un homme qui dort* as a cinematic appendix of *Lieux* makes it possible to reflect on one of the most elusive aspects of the film: the relationship between gesture and memory. The character wants to forget something that is never explicitly mentioned, but only metaphorically suggested by the representation of his childhood home. In the film, although the character's intention is to condition himself to forget, the reiteration of everyday gestures becomes the driving force of a memory process that highlights Perec's interest in archive images.

## 1. A Cinematic Laboratory of Gestures

The term laboratory is used by Giuliana Bruno to describe city films of the 1920s, such as Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927) and Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929), which scrutinise the 'mechanics of the body' as well as the movements of urban life.<sup>29</sup> Influenced by silent cinema, *Un homme qui dort* also shows the city as a place of experimentation in which the actor's body is examined by the camera. The film reveals the interaction between the human body and the cinematic machine or, in Vivian Sobchack's terms, 'the film's body'.<sup>30</sup> According to Sobchack, film technology indeed forms a body, which, in its perceptive and expressive potentialities, proves comparable to the human body, albeit made of a different substance. The film's body is '[s]imilarly functional to the human body in realising perception

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<sup>27</sup> Perec, *Entretiens et conférences*, p. 161.

<sup>28</sup> For instance, Perec and Queysanne shot a picture of the character's hand punching his bus ticket in Place d'Italie. See *ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Giuliana Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion. Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film* (New York, London: Verso, 2002), p. 22.

<sup>30</sup> Vivian Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye. A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 164-259.

and its expression, and yet different in material and means from the human body [...].<sup>31</sup> Like the human body, the film's body is characterised by movement: 'From the first, the film's body functions to visibly *animate* perception and expression in existence. Thus, its primary function always already entails *movement*.'<sup>32</sup> Drawing a parallel between the evolution of film technology and the 'development of the human lived-body from infancy to adulthood',<sup>33</sup> Sobchack compares the human body's gestures, which become more and more sophisticated and precise 'with exercise and experience',<sup>34</sup> to the gestures of the camera which has freed itself from its initial passivity and stasis to move and 'perform' with assertiveness in the world:

Constituted in its material nature from cinematic technology, the film's body has appropriated its gestures similarly. From the initially stationary camera with a fixed gaze at a world that moved, to the capacity of the camera 'to liberate' itself from the paternal studio by virtue of its new-found portability, to the development from the awkward jerkiness of hand-held camera to the current invisible immediacy and appropriated fluidity of Steadicam, the technology of the cinema has seemed to respond to the intentional imperatives of the film's body as a series of perceptive and expressive tasks in need of performance.<sup>35</sup>

In *Un homme qui dort*, the character's body and the body of film technology (including the camera, the editing and mixing table, and the projector) constantly interact in urban spaces. The interplay between the mediality of human gesture and the mediality of the cinematic body (a mediality which already involves the interrelation of various media) enables us to rethink, as Ágnes Pethő suggests, the notion of intermediality in a phenomenological perspective :

A phenomenological, inter-sensual understanding of the concept of the 'medium' seems to be very close to what I have earlier described as the idea of mediality as being fundamentally intermediality. Phenomenology does not see images as representations or signs; it sees them foremost as events and corporeal experiences [...].<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 247.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 205.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 250.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 252.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., pp. 253-54.

<sup>36</sup> Pethő, *Cinema and Intermediality*, p. 70.

In Perec and Queysanne's film, through complex constraints of mise-en-scène, intermedial exchanges can be observed between the actor's gestures which integrate the mechanical and automatic features of the cinematic machine, and the cinematic body which is endowed with certain qualities of human gestures, in terms of motility, expression, perception, intentionality, and as I will demonstrate in the second part of this chapter, memory.

### 1.1. Gestural Scales: A Cinematic Approach to Everyday Gestures

From January to July 1973, Perec and Queysanne shot the film with a small crew, mostly on weekends.<sup>37</sup> The writer showed the actor Jacques Spiesser<sup>38</sup> how to perform some specific gestures or postures: 'Je lui ai appris à faire la réussite, à se ronger les ongles, à se tenir assis les pieds très à plat, les mains sur les genoux. Pour le reste, je ne suis pas intervenu, je ne savais pas quoi lui dire.'<sup>39</sup> As a director, Queysanne used his technical skills to create complex movements of camera with the collaboration of the cinematographer Bernard Ziztermann, and also gave precise instructions to Spiesser. The actor's silent performance essentially rests on his gestures and solitary gait ('démarche de solitaire').<sup>40</sup> The actress Ludmila Mikaël reads Perec's text<sup>41</sup> that has the distinctive feature of using the second-person singular in order to address the character, as well as the spectator. In the film, oral expression is at the same time absent – the actor does not talk, his gestures are his only mode of expression –, and omnipresent – the voice-over constantly dialogues with the image and the spectator. By focusing on 'une approche purement physique et tactile', Perec and Queysanne decided

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<sup>37</sup> Georges Perec and Bernard Queysanne, *Un homme qui dort* (Paris: La Vie est belle, 2007), p. 40. DVD booklet.

<sup>38</sup> Spiesser belongs, with Francis Huster, Jacques Villeret, and Jacques Weber, to the new generation of the Conservatoire national d'art dramatique. Far from being unknown, Spiesser is a prolific actor who appears in 1974 in four other films: Edouard Molinaro's *L'Ironie du sort*, Alain Resnais's *Stavisky*, Claude Pinoteau's *La Gifle*, and Costa-Gavras' *Section spéciale*.

<sup>39</sup> Perec, *Entretiens et conférences*, p. 166.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 156.

<sup>41</sup> In the film adaptation of *Un homme qui dort*, the text in voice-over uses the same sentences as in Perec's novel.

to exclude the passages of the novel that explore the character's consciousness and hypnagogic experiences (hypnagogia refers to the intermediary state between wakefulness and sleep).<sup>42</sup> They essentially removed 'tout ce qui venait en plus de ses gestes quotidiens'.<sup>43</sup> The word 'geste' is mentioned thirteen times by the narrator, and, in the English version of the film, is translated by the words 'gesture', 'movement', 'motion', and 'act'.<sup>44</sup> In the literary text written by Perec, gestures correspond to elementary actions, such as eating, sleeping, walking, shaving, etc. The cinematic adaptation proceeds differently in relation to gesture, since actions are visually transposed, thanks to the actor's performance, into a series of distinct bodily movements. Despite its apparent simplicity, the 'mise en geste'<sup>45</sup> of actions is particularly rich in the film, which, for its most part, revolves around elementary gestures that are repeated daily.

Perec and Queysanne divided the film into six chapters entitled 'La Rupture' [06:35-21:10], 'L'Apprentissage' [21:10-41:24], 'Le Bonheur' [41:24-53:05], 'L'Inquiétude' [53:05-61:40], 'Les Monstres' [61:40-67:06], and 'La Destruction' [67:06-69:20], in addition to the prologue and to the epilogue entitled 'Le Retour', which consists in a long panoramic shot – for the sake of clarity and precision, the photograms of the film will be captioned with their time codes throughout the chapter. Such a structure had a significant impact on the directors' choices of mise-en-scène. Perec attempted to invent a cinematic equivalent of the sestina, which is a poetic form composed of six stanzas of six lines each.<sup>46</sup> The words that conclude each line are repeated from one stanza to another, but in a different order. During the shooting, Perec and Queysanne planned to film each object, action, and set, in six

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<sup>42</sup> Perec, *Entretiens et conférences*, p. 160.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 173.

<sup>44</sup> Perec's text is translated by Harry Mathews and read by Shelley Duvall in the English version.

<sup>45</sup> See Sergei Eisenstein, *Mise en Jeu and Mise en Geste*, trans. by Sergey Levchin (Montreal: Caboose, 2014). Ebook.

<sup>46</sup> The literary form of the sestina inspired Oulipo writers, including Perec, who applied and reinvented the constraint. See Michèle Audin, 'Mathématiques et littérature: un article avec des mathématiques et de la littérature', *Mathématiques et sciences humaines*, 178 (2007), 63-86 (p. 65).

different ways according to the tone of each chapter. As Queysanne explains,

[c]haque élément devait donc être filmé six fois, une fois pour chacune des parties. Filmer des escaliers ou un interrupteur de six façons différentes était un exercice formidable. Georges imaginait également des sextines sur les actions ou sur les mouvements.<sup>47</sup>

As a result, similar sequences of gestures are shown from different angles, for instance when the character prepares his breakfast or eats at the restaurant. Although reiterated throughout the film, the same gestures are perceived differently, according to the psychological evolution of the character from one chapter to another. Although Perec and Queysanne failed to strictly apply this principle of *mise-en-scène* to the editing, the *sestina* impacted on the way gestures are expressed and perceived in the film.

According to Lesley Stern, '[g]estures migrate between everyday life and the movies, but where the gestural often goes unnoticed in the everyday, in the cinema (where it travels between the quotidian and histrionic) it moves into visibility.'<sup>48</sup> Through processes of 'inflation',<sup>49</sup> the cinematic medium can modify and amplify the perception of quotidian gestures. In his theoretical essays, Jean Epstein demonstrates the capacity of the cinematic medium to describe and interpret bodily movements in an infinite variety of ways. Epstein compares the process of cinematic reproduction with mirrors which, when facing each other, enable someone to look at his or her body and gestures from different perspectives at the same time – in this respect, the cinematic experience, which provides an unfamiliar perception of the body, can evoke Magritte's painting *La Reproduction interdite* (1937) that Perec and Queysanne refer to [see fig. 1]. Through the use of different shot sizes and camera angles, a film can generate a multiplicity of points of view on a character's gestures:

[...] La reproduction cinématographique surprend une étonnante géométrie descriptive des gestes. Ceux-ci, happés sous tous les angles, projetés sur

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<sup>47</sup> Queysanne, 'Nous étions inspirés par la ville et la lumière' (para. 7 of 22)

<sup>48</sup> Lesley Stern, 'Paths that Wind through the Thicket of Things', *Critical Inquiry*, 28.1 (2001), 317-54 (pp. 328-29).

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 326.

n'importe lequel des plans de l'espace ou sur plusieurs d'entre eux, cotés par rapport à des axes continuellement variables et inhabituels, apparaissent à volonté grandis ou diminués, multipliés ou divisés, déformés, expressifs. Car chacune de ces interprétations angulaires d'un geste a son sens profond et qui est intrinsèque puisque l'œil qui le révèle est un œil inhumain, sans mémoire, sans pensée. C'est de ce sens profond de la géométrie cinématographique que maintenant le drame peut se servir.<sup>50</sup>

The cinematic medium has the unequalled capacity to invent new angular interpretations of gestures. In *Un homme qui dort*, a trifling gesture can suddenly grow out of all proportion. For instance, when the character starts to bite his nails in the second half of the film, this mundane gesture first looks insignificant. In a shot of the chapter 'L'Apprentissage', Spiesser, who is located far from the foreground, on the extreme right side of the screen, walks towards the camera, and bites one of his nails [Fig. 4]. The gesture goes unnoticed because the mise-en-scène does not highlight it in any way. One minute later, he performs the same gesture while playing cards [Fig. 5]. The camera moves towards the actor's face, from a medium shot to a close-up. Although the contrasted light conveys an uneasy feeling, the act of biting one's nails could be interpreted as a simple gesture of concentration: the character does indeed look absorbed by his game. Moreover, the camera angle, which is at the character's level, is relatively neutral. Later, in the chapter 'L'Inquiétude', this gesture is repeated in a compulsive way, and isolated in a series of extreme close-ups and high-angle shots, with very expressive lighting [Fig. 6]. In addition to this, the voice-over emphasises the character's suffering:

Tu arraches la corne jusqu'au milieu de l'ongle, meurtrissant les endroits où elle s'attache à la chair; tu déchires les peaux mortes sur presque toute la longueur de la phalange, jusqu'à ce que le sang se mette à perler, jusqu'à ce que tes doigts te fassent si mal que, pendant des heures, le moindre contact te soit à ce point insupportable que tu ne puisses plus rien saisir et doives tremper tes mains dans de l'eau bouillie.

This highly detailed description insists on the physical pain provoked by the compulsive gesture. While the soundtrack produces an oppressive sound effect, the editing connects the gesture with the mechanised movements of a

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<sup>50</sup> Epstein, *Ecrits sur le cinéma, tome 1*, p. 128.

pinball machine. The physical details provided by the voice-over contribute to increasing the feeling of anxiety that torments the character. Thus, between the chapters 'L'Apprentissage' and 'L'Inquiétude', this gesture, which first looks insignificant, then relatively neutral, and finally highly expressive, is spectacularly transformed by the cinematic medium, thanks to the lighting, the soundtrack, the voice-over, the camera angle, the field size, and the editing. According to Queysanne's terms, 'la recherche sur l'image, expressive par le cadrage, l'éclairage'<sup>51</sup> makes it possible to interpret the same motion differently.

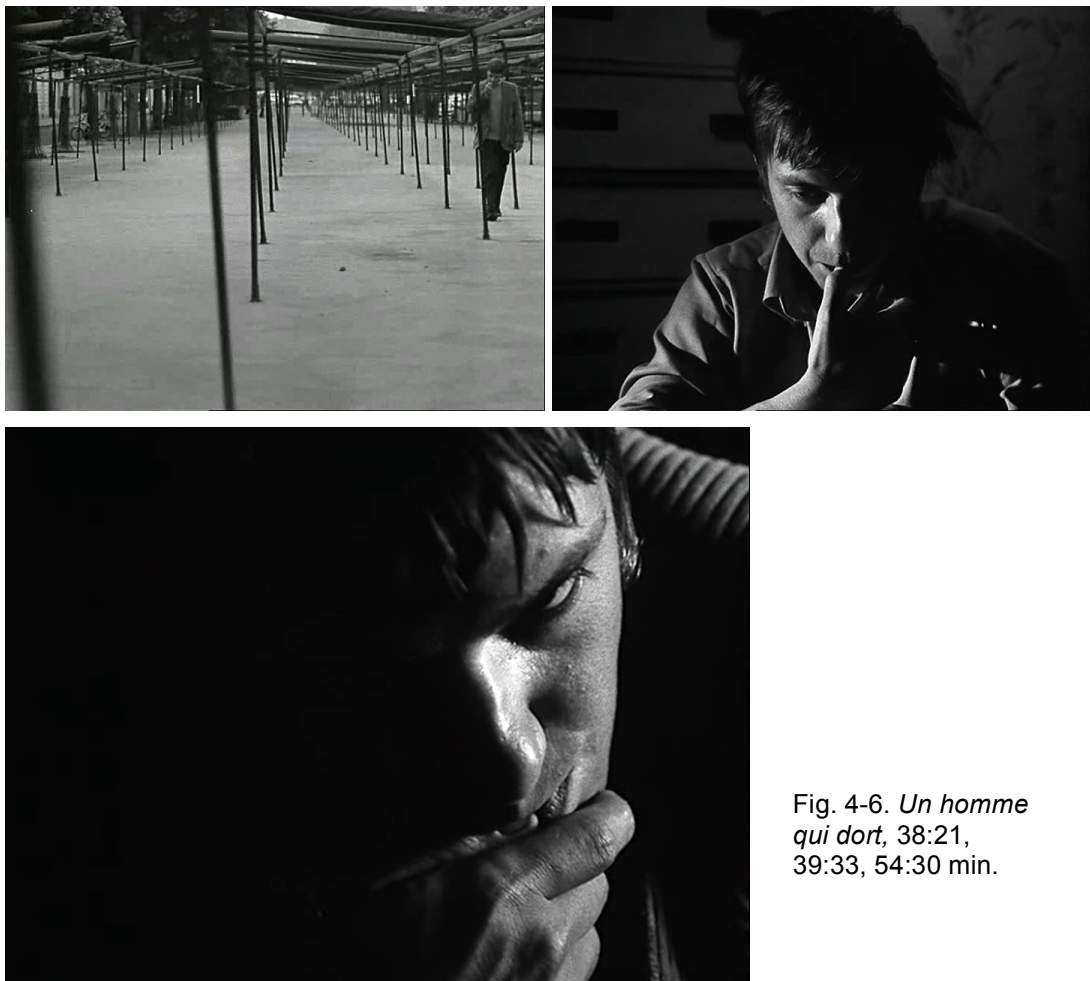


Fig. 4-6. *Un homme qui dort*, 38:21, 39:33, 54:30 min.

By traversing different scales – from long shot to extreme close-up –, the character's gesture of biting his nails is gradually isolated from its

<sup>51</sup> Percec, *Entretiens et conférences*, p. 175.

environment and context. As Douchet suggests, gestures can become autonomous in cinema.<sup>52</sup> Thanks to the *mise-en-scène* that puts emphasis on them, they have 'une vie quasi indépendante'.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, the photographic features of the cinematic medium give them a great precision. Evoking 'la netteté de la photographie de la main', Douchet adds that '[les gestes] peuvent s'abstraire du reste du jeu, s'isoler de l'ensemble des corps et de la situation'.<sup>54</sup> In *Un homme qui dort*, the character's gestures are often separated from the rest of his body through extensive use of close-ups. Unlike in theatre, in cinema bodies are rarely integrally exhibited. The camera and editing can isolate, fragment, and decontextualise gestures. The French term *découpage*<sup>55</sup> designates a fundamental task in the process of filmmaking, which consists in cutting (*découper*) the sequences into a series of shots, and the bodies into a series of gestures. Before the shooting, a director can write a shooting script (*découpage technique*), which, for each shot, details all the necessary information regarding the props, the special effects, the lighting, as well as the camera's and the characters' positions. Although Perce and Queysanne, who worked with a small team and used an unconventional screenplay,<sup>56</sup> did not develop a shooting script,<sup>57</sup> they carefully reflected on 'la nécessité de la découpe'.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Jean Douchet, 'Le Visage comme révélation, le geste comme signe, le corps découpé comme figure, le corps plein comme opacité', in *L'Invention de la figure humaine*, ed. by Aumont, p. 118.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> See Burch, *Theory of Film Practice*, p. 3.

<sup>56</sup> In the first version of the screenplay, inspired by Ermanno Olmi's *Il Posto* (1961), Perce and Queysanne wrote the prologue with dialogue in the tradition of Italian neorealism. As they were not convinced by the result, they decided to use Perce's literary text in order to create a duality between the voice-over and the silent image, in the same way as Sacha Guitry in *Le Roman d'un tricheur* (1936). See Queysanne, 'Nous étions inspirés par la ville et la lumière' (para. 5 of 22)

<sup>57</sup> According to Queysanne, Spiesser was frustrated by the absence of a shooting script. See Perce, *Entretiens et conférences*, p. 166.

<sup>58</sup> Douchet, 'Le Visage comme révélation', p. 118.



Fig. 7, 8. *Un homme qui dort*, 'Prologue', 03:07, 03:58 min.



Fig. 9, 10. *Un homme qui dort*, 'La Rupture', 08:47, 08:55 min.

What is the difference between filming a sequence of gestures in three different shots or in a single movement of camera, in a medium long shot or in a close-up? In accordance with the sestina constraint, the same actions in *Un homme qui dort* were filmed in multiple different ways. Queysanne and Perec made specific choices of mise-en-scène, which mirror the character's evolution throughout the film. For instance, in the prologue, the character prepares his breakfast, plugs the kettle in to boil water, and pours Nescafé instant coffee in his bowl [Fig. 7, 8]. He is an ordinary student getting ready to sit an exam in sociology in the morning. The camera follows him moving about in his room, films his body in American shots, and without fragmenting them much, captures his gestures in the continuity of their movement. At the beginning of the chapter 'La Rupture', the spectator realises that the directors used the conditional tense to narrate the prologue: if the character had sat the exam, he would have been an ordinary student who revises his course,

prepares his breakfast, and joins the other students in the examination room. Instead, he decides to stay in bed and not to graduate:

Tu ne finiras pas ta licence, tu ne commenceras jamais de diplôme. Tu ne feras plus d'études. Tu prépares, comme chaque jour, un bol de Nescafé; tu y ajoutes, comme chaque jour, quelques gouttes de lait concentré sucré. Tu ne te laves pas, tu t'habilles à peine.

Perec and Queysanne represent this breaking point in the character's life by de-composing his gestures. In the chapter 'La Rupture', his body, as well as his identity, are broken up. In a first close-up, his left hand grasps the instant coffee jar; then in a second close-up, his right hand seizes the electric kettle [Fig. 9, 10]. His gestures are isolated in close-ups, and separated from the rest of his body. In the same way that the cracked mirror fragments his face in three irregular pieces, the *mise-en-scène* divides his body and cuts his movements.

Finally, by highlighting the essential role of editing in giving meaning to the gestures, the prologue remarkably exemplifies the nuance between ordinary and everyday gestures. According to Formis, while ordinary gestures are impersonal, intersubjective, social, collective, and manifest a '*potentialité d'exécution*' (they could be made by everyone at any moment), everyday gestures, which are subjective, intimate, and individual, are inscribed in a determined and ritualised temporality.<sup>59</sup> 'Si le quotidien est privé et intime, l'ordinaire est collectif et social,' Formis explains.<sup>60</sup> In *Un homme qui dort*, the character's gestures are at first integrated in society thanks to the parallel editing. The neighbour fills a bucket of water in the corridor, workers are active in the street, and crowds of people are walking through the underground station [Fig. 13]: the city awakens just as the character. His ordinary movements are rooted in a social project, symbolised by his morning preparation for the exam in sociology. At the end of the prologue, the character's gestures converge with those of his fellows. Like the other students, he is filmed entering the examination room and writing his essay – though, as I just mentioned above, this sequence is told in the

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<sup>59</sup> Formis, *Esthétique de la vie ordinaire*, p. 50.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

conditional tense. They all perform the same gestures and postures [Fig. 11], which are 'ordinary' in the sense given by Formis: 'L'ordinaire se projette dans le conditionnel.'<sup>61</sup> Significantly, the end of the prologue shows the transition between ordinary gestures – made in the conditional tense – and everyday gestures – made in the present tense. The break with society starts when the character silently crumples his friends' messages slipped under his door [Fig. 12]. In the rest of the film, while the character reiterates the same everyday gestures, the absence of parallel editing highlights his isolation and marginalisation. Throughout the film, his slightest gestures are reiterated daily in an increasingly pre-programmed way. As Henri Lefebvre writes about the everyday in the modern world,

[l]e quotidien dans sa trivialité se compose de répétitions: gestes dans le travail et hors du travail, mouvements mécaniques (ceux des mains et du corps, et aussi ceux des pièces et des dispositifs, rotation ou allers-retours), heures, jours, semaines, mois, années; répétitions linéaires et répétitions cycliques, temps de la nature et temps de la rationalité, etc.<sup>62</sup>

Perec and Queysanne explore the mechanics of everyday gestures by stressing the interplay between the cinematic machine and the character's body in motion.



Fig. 11, 12. *Un homme qui dort*, 05:56, 10:13 min.

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *La Vie quotidienne dans le monde moderne* (Paris: Gallimard, 1968), p. 40.

## 1.2. The Mechanics of Gestures

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the precursors of film, such as Etienne-Jules Marey and Eadweard Muybridge, experimented with the photographic medium to de-compose the corporeal movements of animals and people. As will be discussed in Chapter 5, chronophotography is a device that makes it possible to de-compose the trajectory of a gesture into a series of frames. In 1878, funded by the industrialist and politician Leland Stanford, and influenced by Marey's research on animal locomotion, Muybridge developed a multicamera system to capture the gallop of a horse. For the first time, by showing the mechanical nature of the animal body, the technical features of the photographic apparatus enabled the human eye to scrutinise the mechanics of gestures in detail. For Stanford, who was one of the railway industry leaders, this scientific and artistic experiment was a means to 'consolidate, promote, and naturalise the developments of industrial capitalism',<sup>63</sup> by linking 'the speed and power of the locomotive to the gait and beauty of the racehorse'.<sup>64</sup> The industrial age deeply believed in the mechanisation of bodies. After having attempted to animate the horse's gallop by creating an illusion of cinematic movement, Muybridge started to observe the human body. Thanks to the use of multiple cameras, he succeeded in capturing the gestures of athletes from different angles at the same time. He documented some elementary and previously unrepresented everyday gestures by examining them from different perspectives. For instance, women, whose body was often eroticised, were asked to perform domestic actions, such as ironing clothes, or getting into bed. Considered as a machine, the body was scrutinised in its slightest motions. According to Philip Brookman, 'Muybridge proposed a synthesis of people and machine in his work, reimagining the body and its movements through industrial systems of cameras, shutters, electrical wiring, batteries, and telegraphic apparatus'.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> John Ott cited in Philip Brookman, 'Helios: Eadweard Muybridge in a Time of Change', in *Eadweard Muybridge*, ed. by Philip Brookman (London: Tate, 2010), p. 84.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100.

In the wake of chronophotography, cinema contributed to exploring the mechanisation of gestures in urban environments. As Bruno points out, the speed of modernity defines both ‘the motion of the city’ and the cinematic movement.<sup>66</sup> More specifically, the city and cinema ‘are machines of reproduction, bound together by mechanicalism and by the mechanics of the body’.<sup>67</sup> In cities, or in cinema, factories invent new bodies, produced in series and shaped by industrialism, as Lang’s *Metropolis* shows. By accelerating, decelerating, or even freezing the motion of images, the cinematic machine has the power to manipulate urban and gestural rhythms. In René Clair’s *Paris qui dort* (1925), some pictures of empty Parisian streets and petrified bodies anticipate Perec and Queysanne’s film which also manipulates the temporality of the city. For example, the solitary character admires the ability of an old man, ‘un vieillard momifié’, who stares into space during hours, to remain perfectly immobile. Although the student tries to imitate the old man’s posture, the voice-over ironically insists on his urge to move. His desire for stillness is thwarted:

Tu voudrais lui ressembler, mais, sans doute est-ce l’un des effets de ton extrême jeunesse dans ta vocation de vieillard, tu t’énerves trop vite: malgré toi, ton pied remue sur le sable, tes yeux errent, tes doigts se croisent et se décroisent sans cesse.

The cinematic and urban machines shape his gestures. Absorbed by the rhythm of the city and carried away by the movement of the camera, the character cannot stop himself walking.

*Un homme qui dort* echoes the city symphonies made during the silent era of cinema. Perec and Queysanne sought to structure the film in this way: ‘Nous avons cherché à construire le film sur une heure et demie comme une symphonie, avec une ouverture, une monnaie très progressive, un apogée et un final.’<sup>68</sup> The style of filmmaking – notably the fluid movements of the camera – evokes André Sauvage’s *Etudes sur Paris* (1928). In the overture of his documentary, Sauvage films the gestures of workers who bustle out along the banks of the Seine. Paris is presented as an industrious city, or

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<sup>66</sup> Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion*, p. 21.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>68</sup> Perec, *Entretiens et conférences*, p. 155.

according to Bruno's expression, as a 'labor-atory'<sup>69</sup> in which the flow of moving images embraces the flow of human activity. Similarly, in the prologue of *Un homme qui dort*, Perec and Queysanne depict the city as a social machine which starts working at sunrise. Street sweepers clean the avenues, dustmen collect the bins, cars swamp the streets, and people rush into the metro entrance and use the escalators. People's gestures, movements, and activities necessitate the use of automatons [Fig. 13, 14]. As Citton explains – by referring to the palaeontologist André Leroi-Gourhan's ideas –, if automation always governed our everyday gestures, the externalisation of human movements in the form of increasingly sophisticated machines considerably altered gestures at the age of industrialisation:

Sur la base de comportements qualifiés par le paléontologue d'automatiques', en ce qu'ils relèvent du programme génétique (respirer, mâcher, marcher), des comportements 'machinaux' toujours plus précisément coordonnés se mettent en place, qui passent eux aussi 'dans une pénombre psychique' nous permettant de les accomplir sans y consacrer notre attention, mais qui rassemblent 'des chaînes opératoires acquises par l'expérience et l'éducation', des 'chaînes de gestes stéréotypés dont la répétition assure l'équilibre du sujet dans le milieu social et son propre confort psychique à l'intérieur du groupe'.<sup>70</sup>

In the prologue, the character's routine echoes the stereotypical gestures of Parisian people who potentially repeat the same ordinary movements every day.



Fig. 13, 14. *Un homme qui dort*, 04:24, 17:11 min.

<sup>69</sup> Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion*, p. 22.

<sup>70</sup> Citton, *Gestes d'humanités*, pp. 64-65.

Furthermore, machines do not only contribute to the mechanisation of human gestures; they can also simulate them. According to Citton, '[m]achinisation et simulation sont en partie liées entre elles: c'est l'avènement de certaines machines (photographie, cinéma, radio, vidéo, télévision ordinateur, internet) qui a précipité la prépondérance de la société du spectacle et de la simulation.'<sup>71</sup> *Un homme qui dort* reflects on the capacity of the cinematic machine to simulate gestures. In the previous section, I explained how the prologue shows the gestures that would have been made by the character if he had gone to his exam. Instead, he does not move and stays in his room while the voice-over says:

Tu ne bouges pas. Tu ne bougeras pas. Un autre, un sosie, un double fantomatique et méticuleux fait, peut-être, à ta place, un à un les gestes que tu ne fais plus: il se lève, se lave, se rase, se vêt, s'en va. Tu le laisses bondir dans les escaliers, courir dans la rue, attraper l'autobus, arriver à l'heure dite aux portes de la salle d'examen.

At this moment, Spiesser and the spectator find themselves in the same position. Motionless, the character stares at the camera, as if he was seeking the spectator's identification with him [Fig. 1]. Not only is the character a film viewer who often goes to the cinema [Fig. 15], but he also seems to become the spectator of his own life. In the chapter 'La Rupture' [15:48-16:40 min.], the sound of a film projector can be heard when the character wanders alone in the streets of Paris. Moreover, he wants to escape the world by simulating his existence. In *L'Homme ordinaire du cinéma*, Jean-Louis Schefer, who explains the process of simulation experienced by the spectator's body, argues that cinema 'nous efface du monde d'un seul coup'.<sup>72</sup> The feeling of having been absent from the world is striking when one goes out of the theatre – particularly in daylight – after having watched a film. 'On est sans cesse frappé, sortant à la lumière du jour, que les autobus roulent, que les mouvements se poursuivent,' Schefer writes.<sup>73</sup> At the end of *Un homme qui dort*, the trajectories of both spectator and character converge, when on the

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 75.

<sup>72</sup> Jean-Louis Schefer, *L'Homme ordinaire du cinéma* (Paris: Cahiers du Cinéma, Gallimard, 1997), p. 109.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 111.

one hand the former leaves the cinema and on the other hand the latter is about to return to the world.



Fig. 15. *Un Homme qui dort*  
15:19 min.

To what extent is the identification between the character and the spectator revealing of the mechanisms of film reception? The process of simulation is twofold. First, through the actor's performance, the cinematic medium mechanically reproduces gestures of everyday life; secondly, the spectator simulates these gestures in his or her own body. In *Un homme qui dort*, the voice-over seems to address not only the character but also the spectator who, without moving, internally assimilates the gestures that are performed by the actor.<sup>74</sup> For Citton, '[l]e "cinématique" désigne donc la capacité biomécanique qu'ont les gestes perçus d'entraîner des gestes chez leur spectateur.'<sup>75</sup> In the field of dance studies, the critic John Martin postulated, in the late 1920s and early 1930s, that a spectator could simulate the gestures of a dancer in his or her own body. As Dee Reynolds explains,

[Martin believed that] watching dance could lead spectators to simulate dancers' movements by activating their neuromuscular system without actually leaving their seats, and [...] this simulation could in itself enable them to access

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<sup>74</sup> In several interviews, Perec and Queysanne insisted on the spectator's active role in their film. According to Queysanne, they attempted to 'tendre un miroir au spectateur'. (See Queysanne and De Bary, 'Entretien avec Bernard Queysanne', p. 121.) The spectator's involvement is stimulated by the voice-over, which addresses the spectator: 'C'est quelqu'un qui s'adresse à la fois au personnage et au lecteur ou au spectateur, par le truchement du personnage,' Perec explains. (See Perec, *Entretiens et conférences*, p. 160.)

<sup>75</sup> Citton, *Gestes d'humanités*, p. 80.

the emotions being expressed by the dancer.<sup>76</sup>

While the term kinaesthesia indicates the way someone feels and perceives the movement and the position of the parts of one's own body, the notion of kinaesthetic empathy refers to the spectator's ability to assimilate and simulate the gestures performed by a film character or a dancer, without moving from his or her seat. In *Un homme qui dort*, beyond the actor's gestures, the features of the cinematic machine amplify the process of kinaesthetic empathy. The camera's gestures not only interact with the actor's gestures, but also with the spectator's body. The great mobility of the camera, which often performs complex motions, becomes a powerful factor of simulation.

### 1.3. Cinema and Simulation: The Reign of Automatons

The character's automatic behaviour mirrors the nature of the cinematic machine which can be considered as an automaton that reproduces the illusion of life. His gestures embody his search for neutrality and indifference. As Claude Burgelin explains, '[c]et exercice de la "vie suspendue" suppose de parvenir à une indifférence parfaite avec des gestes anonymes, automatiques.'<sup>77</sup> The voice-over insists on the character's ability to repeat the gestures of an automaton ('gestes d'automate') and to execute basic actions. In the novel, Perec describes his mechanical gait – '[...] tu avances d'un pas mécanique, interminablement, jusqu'à oublier que tu marches'<sup>78</sup> –, which, in the film can be compared to the movements of the camera.

How did the actor Spiesser perform his character's automatic gestures? It would be tempting to draw on Robert Bresson's ideas about film performance, based on the concept of automatism. Spiesser shares with

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<sup>76</sup> Dee Reynolds, 'Empathy, Contagion and Affect. The Role of Kinesthesia in Watching Dance', in *Touching and Being Touched. Kinesthesia and Empathy in Dance and Movement*, ed. by Gabriele Brandstetter, Gerko Egert, and Sabine Zubarik (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2013), p. 216.

<sup>77</sup> Claude Burgelin, *Georges Perec* (Paris: Seuil, 1988), p. 62.

<sup>78</sup> Perec, *Un homme qui dort*, p. 93.

Bresson's 'models'<sup>79</sup> a certain lack of facial expressivity; he had to avoid acting his role. According to Queysanne, '[l]e plus dur a été de gommer son métier d'acteur, de l'empêcher de faire un numéro, de placer des "trucs"'.<sup>80</sup> Just as Ludmila Mikaël had to articulate Perec's text with a flat voice, Spiesser had to perform his gestures in a neutral way. Bresson's method consists in revealing the automatism of his models' behaviours, by preventing them to be conscious of their gestures.<sup>81</sup> As he explains, '[l]es 9/10e de nos mouvements obéissent à l'habitude et à l'automatisme. Il est anti-nature de les subordonner à la volonté et à la pensée.'<sup>82</sup> Bresson requires his models to repeat the same scenes numerous times. Through the mechanical process of repetition, they are conditioned to speak and gesture without thinking. The director wants to show their 'véritable nature'<sup>83</sup> by capturing their most spontaneous, imperceptible ('insensibles') and inward ('intérieurs') bodily movements.<sup>84</sup> 'Attraper des instants. Spontanéité, fraîcheur,' he writes.<sup>85</sup> Bresson's approach, which aims to reveal the model's existence by looking at his or her unwilling gestures (see Chapter 4), differs from Perec and Queysanne's intentions.

While, in *Un homme qui dort*, the character is compared to a laboratory rat, Queysanne uses the same analogy to describe Spiesser's performance: 'Il est rat et on lui dit: "tu fais ça, tu ne fais pas ça, tu vas là, etc"'.<sup>86</sup> In 2009, Queysanne confessed that Spiesser was disconcerted by their method to the point of leaving the set:

Sur le plan 'direction d'acteur', il n'a jamais eu d'autre indication que ne rien faire, d'aller de la porte au lit, de s'asseoir, de se lever. D'ailleurs, il en avait un peu marre. Comme c'était notre premier film, il devait se dire que nous faisons

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<sup>79</sup> Linking the notion of acting with theatre, Bresson prefers to use the term 'modèle' instead of film actor or actress. See Bresson, *Notes sur le cinématographe* (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), pp.16-18.

<sup>80</sup> Perec, *Entretiens et conférences*, p. 166.

<sup>81</sup> Rose-Marie Godier analyses Bresson's method of acting in the light of Pascal's definition of the automaton, which has profound religious implications. See Godier, *L'Automate et le cinéma. Dans 'La Règle du Jeu' de Jean Renoir, 'Le Limier' de Joseph L. Mankiewicz, 'Pickpocket' de Robert Bresson* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2005).

<sup>82</sup> Bresson, *Notes sur le cinématographe*, p. 34.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>86</sup> Perec, *Entretiens et conférences*, p. 160.

n'importe quoi! À un moment il n'est plus venu, pendant deux ou trois week-ends de suite.<sup>87</sup>

As a result, the character's gestures appear to be 'performed' by the cinematic machine itself, more than they are by the actor. Perec and Queysanne used him as a soulless machine only able to perform gestures indifferently, just as his character. The latter keeps to the gestures he has learnt ('gestes appris') like an automaton whose movements are pre-programmed. As Michel Estève writes about Bresson's films, gestures evoke 'la vie intérieure de l'homme, substance même de ses films'.<sup>88</sup> By contrast, the character's gestures in *Un homme qui dort*, which are not supposed to manifest his inner being, are reduced to their most obvious and superficial surface. 'Manger, dormir, marcher, t'habiller, que ce soient simplement des actions, des gestes, des évidences, mais pas des preuves, pas des monnaies d'échange,' the narrator says. The character seeks to neutralise the meaning of his gestures by refusing to engage in social interaction.

In *L'Image-temps*, Gilles Deleuze defines the two complementary, although contradictory, meanings of automaton. On the one hand, the spiritual automaton is a highly sophisticated instrument of thought (i.e. cinema as a spiritual art) in the tradition of Spinoza and Leibniz; on the other, the psychological automaton, which is dispossessed of his thought, is able to perform elementary gestures only, like a somnambulist.<sup>89</sup> At the end of the nineteenth century, Pierre Janet and Jean-Martin Charcot studied the psychological automaton in the field of psychiatry. More particularly, Charcot researched on the case of ambulatory automatism (*automatisme ambulatoire*). This syndrome, which was only diagnosed between the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, referred to the automatic quality of the bodies of vagabonds who, compared to somnambulists, wandered in a neutral and indifferent state. Jean-Claude Beaune describes their mechanical behaviour in his extensive research on the topic:

Le vagabond résiduel et pourtant proliférant en raison du chômage, des

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<sup>87</sup> Queysanne, 'Nous étions inspirés par la ville et la lumière' (para. 11 of 22)

<sup>88</sup> Michel Estève, *Robert Bresson* (Paris: Seghers, 1974), p. 81.

<sup>89</sup> Deleuze, *L'Image-temps*, p. 343.

incertitudes économiques dans de nombreux secteurs, prend une identité nouvelle, relève pour les médecins qui s'en occupent (ils sont relativement nombreux à avoir laissé des témoignages et des écrits) d'une *vision mécanique, automatique*. Charcot le nomme 'automate ambulateur' en 1888 et cette image semble bien résumer sa qualité principale: répétition, monomanie, régularité inconsciente et monotone des gestes et des comportements.<sup>90</sup>

In a pathological way, the vagabonds' behaviours mirrored the impact of the social machine on the conditioning of gestures at the age of industrialisation. They embodied 'le *mythe négatif* de la société industrielle en marche',<sup>91</sup> and were considered as an anomaly and a threat to the social order. The vagabonds' silent and solitary lives were regressive, at once animal and primitive, and indifferent to 'the rules of human society defined by affective units of husband, wife, children, parents, relatives, bound by traditions, patrimonies, and other customary memories'.<sup>92</sup> According to Beaune, they could stroll without stopping, while looking perfectly normal to others.<sup>93</sup> Like somnambulists, they forgot what they had done during their strolling crisis: 'L'homme s'endort et se réveille, oublieux de la quasi-totalité de ses actes nocturnes. Lorsque la conscience dort, le corps continue d'agir, mieux il conserve même les dehors de la normalité.'<sup>94</sup> In *Un homme qui dort*, although we will not go as far as diagnosing the syndrome of ambulatory automatism in the character's behaviour, his condition evokes some of the symptoms described above. In Perec's text, he is regarded as a 'somnambule'; his primitive life ('vie végétale') as well as his animal metamorphosis – he is compared to a (laboratory) rat, a cat, a spider, even a monster – are the marks of his social desertion. Most of all, he is left without any memory during his experience of detachment. The voice-over insists repeatedly on the character's progressive amnesia: 'L'oubli s'infiltré dans ta mémoire.'

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<sup>90</sup> Jean-Claude Beaune, *Le Vagabond et la machine. Essai sur l'automatisme ambulateur, médecine, technique et société en France 1880-1910* (Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 1983), pp. 15-16.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 131.

<sup>92</sup> Matt K. Matsuda, *The Memory of the Modern*, New York (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 126.

<sup>93</sup> See Beaune, *Le Vagabond et la machine*, p. 187.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

Moreover, in the film the notion of ambulatory automatism could be considered in a cinematic perspective. The character seems to identify himself with the camera which, just like him, strolls in the streets of Paris and dollies in or dollies out. According to Balázs, walking is a 'quite specific cinematic gesture'. By contrast, stage actors 'rarely have an opportunity to use the walk as a characteristic gesture, because of the lack of space'.<sup>95</sup> The movements of the camera enable the actors and actresses to walk long distances, and can be more or less synchronised with them. Moreover, the camera also looks indifferently at things and people. It is an inhuman eye without memory, without thought, according to Jean Epstein.<sup>96</sup> Bresson describes its 'indifférence scrupuleuse'.<sup>97</sup> In several shots, Perec and Queysanne show the surveillance cameras that permanently scan the streets of Paris. They create an analogy between the film camera and the surveillance camera, which both move or pivot as if they were endowed with an autonomous life [Fig. 16].



Fig. 16. *Un homme qui dort*  
24:07 min.

When, in the chapter 'Le Bonheur', the character reaches his goal to live in a complete state of indifference, he and the camera move at the same rhythm, which was not always the case in the first chapters. Throughout the film, their gestures gradually merge. In order to illustrate this idea, I traced a white arrow and a black arrow on the figures 17 to 22, in order to represent respectively the camera's and the character's movements. First, in the

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<sup>95</sup> Balázs, *Theory of the Film*, p. 135.

<sup>96</sup> See Epstein, *Ecrits sur le cinéma, tome 1*, p. 128.

<sup>97</sup> Bresson, *Notes sur le cinématographe*, p. 38.

prologue, the character's gestures lead the camera's movements. His agency enables him to impose himself on the camera [Fig. 17]. Secondly, in the chapters 'La Rupture' and 'L'Apprentissage', the character's trajectory is often perpendicular to that of the camera which is no longer dependent on his gestures [Fig. 18]. Thirdly, in 'Le Bonheur', the character's neutral and automatic behaviour sets him on equal footing with the camera. The harmony between both character and camera is translated into synchronised movements. For instance, when the student walks down the stairs that lead to the quay of the river Seine or strolls the upper part of the city, the camera stops when he stops, moves when he moves, and vice versa: their mimetic relationship reaches its climax in this sequence [Fig. 19]. Fourthly, the symbiosis between the man and the machine results in their fusion. At one point, they both move around a city square, but in opposite directions [Fig. 20]; while the camera still performs its circular movement, the character vanishes [Fig. 21]. This surrealist scene is symbolic of the process of substitution between the character and the camera. Finally, the chapter 'Le Bonheur' includes numerous tracking shots, filmed in the streets of Paris without the actor. The character and the camera's automatic gestures seem to have merged, at least temporarily [Fig. 22].



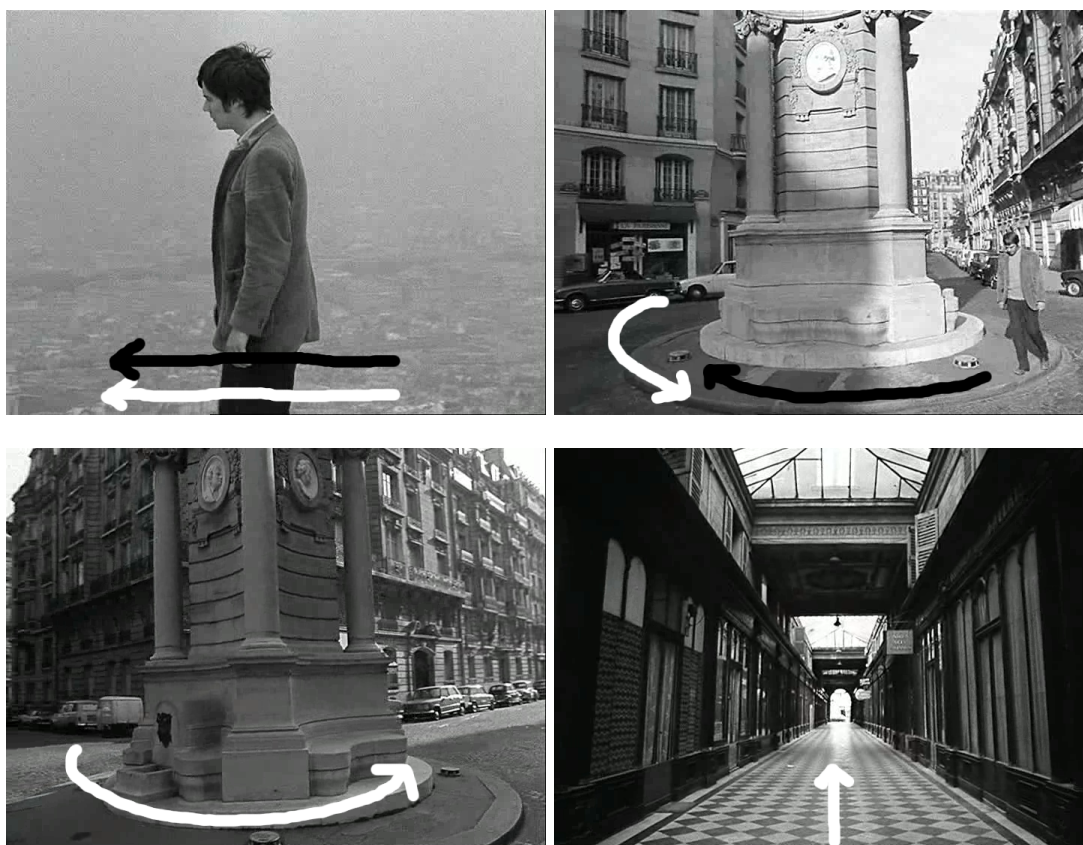


Fig. 17-22. *Un homme qui dort*, 05:21, 28:38, 50:17, 47:22, 48:00, 52:30 min.

#### 1.4. A Paradoxical Automaton

The character's trajectory throughout the film is not only progressive, but also paradoxical. From the beginning, his metamorphosis into an automaton appears to be problematic. What is it that essentially distinguishes the character from Charcot's vagabonds? As Beaune explains, '[l]e vagabond est imprévisible.'<sup>98</sup> The vagabonds' gestures were regular but uncertain, repetitive but arbitrary.<sup>99</sup> Deprived of reason, willpower, desires, feelings, and even pain,<sup>100</sup> they did not know in which direction they walked. Matt K. Matsuda suggests that, '[i]n this impulsive vagabond, the reflex, the instinctive primordial imprint overwhelmed the "representative" coordination of the memory-will, the *volonté*, which made individuals responsible

<sup>98</sup> Beaune, *Le Vagabond et la Machine*, p. 296.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 157.

<sup>100</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 301.

members of human society.<sup>101</sup> Conversely, in *Un homme qui dort*, the character conditions himself voluntarily. As Perec points out, '[c]e qu'il fait, il veut le faire. Il se laisse aller, mais par rapport à lui-même, il est toujours témoin de ce qui se passe, il est spectateur de sa propre indifférence.'<sup>102</sup> The voice-over insists on the character's willpower and consciousness: 'Tu veux l'attente et l'oubli'; 'tu découvres, avec presque, parfois, une certaine ivresse, que tu es libre.' Even his elementary reflexes ('réflexes élémentaires') are conditioned and predictable: 'Tu ne traverses pas quand le feu est rouge, tu t'abrites du vent pour allumer ta cigarette.' When he believes he has fulfilled his dream of automatism, his gestures start resisting his own conditioning. In the chapters 'L'Inquiétude' and 'Les Monstres', he experiences a deep crisis that breaks apart his indifference. His programmed motions turn into compulsive gestures exacerbated by frustration, anxiety, fatigue, suffering, and loneliness: the mechanics of his gestures goes wrong.

His project is paradoxical by definition. He wants not to want, he desires not to desire, he wishes to leave society, but wanders in society. Certainly the streets of Paris empty as his indifference grows, but most of the time he never stops roaming among the crowd. Like an automaton, he temporarily manages to simulate neutral gestures, but he lives in the illusion of his own indifference. Such illusion is suggested by the often-ironical discrepancy between the voice-over and the image, which highlights the gap between the young man's disproportionate ambitions ('tu es le maître anonyme du monde') and the banality of his gestures. For instance, in the chapter 'L'Apprentissage', the character plays a game of skill, the 'Foxhunt puzzle', and then prepares a bowl of Nescafé with powder milk, while the voice-over says:

Ici, tu apprends à durer. Parfois, maître du temps, maître du monde, petite araignée attentive au centre de ta toile, tu règues sur Paris: tu gouvernes le nord par l'avenue de l'Opéra, le sud par les guichets du Louvre, l'est et l'ouest par la rue Saint-Honoré.

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<sup>101</sup> Matsuda, *The Memory of the Modern*, p. 130.

<sup>102</sup> Perec, *Entretiens et conférences*, p. 180.

Compared to the ordinariness of his gestures, this disproportionate vocabulary creates an adversarial relationship between the text and the image. By producing oppositions between two images, the image and the text, the image and the sound, and the sound and the text, the editing enables the spectator to question the potential significance of the gestures. The ambiguity of *Un homme qui dort* consists in creating a contradictory movement between the character's intentions and the film itself. Indeed, he wants to dissolve language, but language is omnipresent through the voice-over, which insistently addresses both the character and the spectator; he seeks to be amnesiac, but the film inscribes his gestures in a process of memory; he believes his gestures are indifferent, neutral, and meaningless, but, in the eyes of the spectator, they mean his refusal of the world and, ultimately, his distress.

Such discrepancies contribute to confusing the ideological interpretations of *Un homme qui dort*. Does the film depict a conditioned and alienated society? Are people's gestures controlled by the surveillance cameras, which turn Paris into a disciplinary space [Fig. 16]? At the beginning of the film, Perec ironically reduces ideologies to an enumeration of academic topics taught to students in sociology.<sup>103</sup> The effects of desynchronisation between the image, the soundtrack, and the text counter all doctrines. Rather than denouncing alienating social structures, Perec and Queysanne show the character's ability to build his own prison walls, and alienate himself. As the philosopher Jean Brun puts it,

[l']homme peut bien être aliéné par des structures et par des groupes de pression, mais, *en définitive*, il est aliéné par lui-même. Car l'homme demeure l'être perpétuellement emmuré à la recherche de trompettes de Jéricho, toujours plus puissantes, capables d'abattre les murailles de son moi et celles du monde où il est né.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Perec's text read in voice-over sums up the character's sociological knowledge in these terms: 'Tu ne diras pas sur quatre, huit ou douze feuillets ce que tu sais, ce que tu penses, ce que tu sais qu'il faut penser sur l'aliénation, sur les ouvriers, sur la modernité et sur les loisirs, sur les cols blancs ou sur l'automatisation, sur la connaissance d'autrui, sur Marx rival de Tocqueville, sur Weber ennemi de Lukacs.'

<sup>104</sup> Jean Brun, *Les Vagabonds de l'Occident. L'Expérience du voyage et la prison du moi* (Paris: Desclée, 1976), p. 213.

The walls erected by the character collapse in the chapter 'La Destruction'. The film tells not only the story of his indifference, but also of his corporeal resistance to self-alienation. The character, who wanted to erase his past, realises that he cannot escape his memory.

## 2. Archives of Gestures

'Tu veux l'attente et l'oubli', the narrator says in the chapter 'L'Apprentissage', referring to Maurice Blanchot's *L'Attente, L'Oubli* (1962). Oblivion is at the core of the character's quest of indifference, and certainly his first motive. No actual memories are represented in *Un homme qui dort*. Memory is not highlighted through a psychological process – via the inclusion of flashbacks, for instance – that could help to enlighten the character's present condition in the light of his past. Instead, the presence of memory is abstract and unclear, symbolically represented by the empty house of the character's childhood, perceptible in the urbanity of Paris itself, and embodied in everyday gestures.

The relation between gesture, memory, and archive can be conceptualised in two interrelated rather than opposite manners. First, as demonstrated by the anthropologist Marcel Jousse, the human body incorporates and archives gestures on a daily basis, through experience and social interactions.<sup>105</sup> Secondly, as highlighted in the literature on memory in film, the cinematic medium, and more particularly the camera as 'eye-witness',<sup>106</sup> has the ability to index, incorporate, catalogue, store, and archive 'gesturing human forms'.<sup>107</sup> As Mary Ann Doane explains, '[w]hile photography could fix a moment, the cinema made archivable duration itself. In that sense, it was perceived as a prophylactic against death, ensuring the

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<sup>105</sup> See Marcel Jousse, *L'Anthropologie du Geste* (Paris: Resma, 1969).

<sup>106</sup> See Scott McQuire, 'Eternity's Hostage: The Camera and the Archive', in *Visions of Modernity* (London: SAGE, 1998), p. 134.

<sup>107</sup> Stephen Barber, *Projected Cities. Cinema and Urban Space* (London: Reaktion Books, 2002), p. 21.

ability to “see one’s loved ones” gesture and smile long after their deaths.’<sup>108</sup> In this sense, the film’s body forges a ‘prosthetic’ memory of gestures, which is communicable to future generations. According to Allison Landsberg, ‘[prosthetic memories] are not natural, not the product of a lived experience, but are derived from engagement with a mediated representation.’<sup>109</sup> In the early ages of film history, the technology of cinema mediated a collective and intersubjective memory of urban life, by capturing the fleeting gestural traces of anonymous passers-by and city-dwellers. As Stephen Barber explains, ‘[b]y the opening of the twentieth century, the film city had amassed into a vast accumulation of bodies and gestures, of urban surfaces and movements.’<sup>110</sup> While evoking the origins of cinema, the depiction of Paris in *Un homme qui dort* remains rooted in the context of European post-war cinema. ‘In the decades after the Second World War, a primary preoccupation of European cinema was the slow-burning impact on cities and their inhabitants of that conflict’s residue,’ Barber writes.<sup>111</sup> At the end of *Un homme qui dort*, the memory of the war resurfaces in the character’s roaming in the ruins of Paris.

## 2.1. Gesture and Memory

Influenced by Pierre Janet and Mauss, Jousse studied the fundamental role of gesture (*le Geste*) in human knowledge, expression, and memory. Published posthumously in 1969, *L’Anthropologie du Geste*, which summarises several decades of research, examines the gestural process that causes humans (*Anthropos*) to interact with the world and its physical reality (*Cosmos*). *Cosmos* is a place of constant interactions, which are received and integrated by humans. Jousse distinguishes four phenomena. Firstly, humans unconsciously assimilate the interactional gestures (*Gestes*

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<sup>108</sup> Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time*, p. 22.

<sup>109</sup> Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory. The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), p. 21.

<sup>110</sup> Barber, *Projected Cities*, p. 27.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

*interactionnels*) that shape their sense of the real (*le Réel*): 'Le "jeu", c'est l'extérieur interactionnel qui s'insère en nous, s'imprime en nous, malgré nous, et nous oblige à l'exprimer.'<sup>112</sup> Secondly, humans replay the gestures that they have integrated in their body (*Mimèmes*) by expressing them unconsciously. This process of replay (*rejeu*) shapes human memory: 'La mémoire n'est et ne peut être que le rejeu des gestes macroscopiques ou microscopiques qui ont été préalablement montés dans toutes les fibres diversifiées de l'organisme humain.'<sup>113</sup> Thirdly, humans become aware of the interactional gestures that they have integrated and, then, expressed. By exerting their will, they have the agency to perform them in an intentional way. Finally, habit gives a new autonomy to gestures which are then automatically replayed. As Jousse explains, '[q]uand nous parlons de mémorisation, nous parlons donc de ce montage interactionnel, souvent inconscient, dont on prend claire conscience, et qu'ensuite on "laisse aller" dans les mécanismes gestuels et rythmiques.'<sup>114</sup>



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<sup>112</sup> Jousse, *L'Anthropologie du geste*, p. 60.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.



Fig. 23-30. *Un homme qui dort* 16:20, 34:01, 34:46, 35:11, 36:15, 48:50, 54:19, 55:54 min.

In *Un homme qui dort*, the character metaphorically wishes to leave the Cosmos, and by cutting himself off from others and from the real, attempts to refuse all interactional gestures. By neutralising the social significance of his gestures, he tries to destroy the possibility of memory. A human being, who would live completely alone, outside the world, would have no memory at all. In *L'Évolution de la mémoire et de la notion du temps* (1927-28), Pierre Janet explains that memory is essentially a social phenomenon. In order to illustrate his thesis, he uses the example of

Robinson Crusoé who writes his journal because he hopes to return to society:

[Le souvenir], pour un homme isolé est inutile. Robinson, dans son île, n'a pas besoin de faire un journal. S'il fait un journal, c'est parce qu'il s'attend à retourner parmi les hommes. La mémoire est une fonction sociale au premier chef.<sup>115</sup>

Furthermore, as Bergson writes in *Les Deux Sources de la morale et de la religion* (1932), individuals are never totally cut off from society. Like Janet, the philosopher uses the example of Crusoé:

En vain on essaie de se représenter un individu dégagé de toute vie sociale. Même matériellement, Robinson dans son île reste en contact avec les autres hommes, car les objets fabriqués qu'il a sauvés du naufrage, et sans lesquels il ne se tirerait pas d'affaire, le maintiennent dans la civilisation et par conséquent dans la société.<sup>116</sup>

In *Un homme qui dort*, the character always wanders in society, among people. Even the character's room, which is described as a desert island, is permeated with the noises of the street and of his neighbour. Although the character is not 'idéalement attaché'<sup>117</sup> to society, he continues to keep minimum contacts with others, for instance with his concierge. He eats daily at the restaurant, and mingles with the crowd. He observes the world that surrounds him. He turns around to look at people, such as a police officer or his neighbour. He goes to cafés and bars, social places such as movie theatres, and looks at people dancing at night. Despite his desire for neutrality, he interacts with others, at least by looking at their gestures [see fig. 23-30]. The processes of *jeu* and *rejeu* conceptualised by Jousse are at the core of the *mise-en-scène* and the editing of the film.

The media of moving images, such as cinema and television, are essential in Jousse's thought on gesture. For him, cinema, which is a revolutionary anthropological tool, makes it possible to gain a cinematic understanding of human gesture. He writes: 'L'Anthropos est un perpétuel

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<sup>115</sup> Cited in Stéphane Laurens and Toshiaki Kozakaï, 'Pierre Janet et la mémoire sociale', *Connexions*, 80 (2003), 59-75 (p. 59).

<sup>116</sup> Henri Bergson, *Œuvres* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1959), p. 987.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

film vivant et fixateur qu'on ne peut arrêter. Le montage se fait dès notre naissance.<sup>118</sup> Human memory is compared to a film on which interactions with the real are recorded. Such interactions are 'edited' in the Anthropos's body throughout his or her life. Jousse further develops his metaphor by creating an analogy between the Anthropos and the camera: 'L'Anthropos [...] est une caméra preneuse et enregistreuse de gestes.'<sup>119</sup> Thus, humans are endowed with three essential cinematic features: the film, the camera, and the editing. Reciprocally, cinema, which is not here considered as a disembodied machine, is endowed with human qualities, especially regarding its ability to constitute a living memory of gestures, which are not only recorded, but also constantly replayed, in interaction with the spectator.

In *Un homme qui dort*, the film's body produces a gestural process of memory that contradicts the character's desire for amnesia. For instance, in the chapter 'L'Apprentissage', two children, who look like twin brothers, run in the street and overtake the character. They make noise by sliding their ruler on the bars of a metallic fence that separates the pavement from the road. Two similar takes of the same scene are successively edited, creating a strange effect of repetition and resonance, amplified by the metallic sound effects. In the first take, the character seems surprised by the children, and looks at them intermittently [Fig. 31]. In the second take, he follows them with his eyes, without looking away [Fig. 32]. The editing creates an impression of déjà-vu that illustrates the impact of interactional gestures on human memory.

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<sup>118</sup> Marcel Jousse, *L'Anthropologie du Geste*, p. 60.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.



Fig. 31, 32. *Un homme qui dort*, 28:15-28:25 min.



Fig. 33, 34. *Un homme qui dort*, 67:35-67:47 min.

When, in the chapter ‘La Destruction’, the character runs in the rubble of buildings being demolished, Perec and Queysanne repeat the same editing process [Fig. 33, 34]. Apart from the prologue, in which he hurries to catch his bus, the character runs for the first time in the last part of the film, in the ruins of these Parisian buildings. The editing creates an effect of resonance (or, in Jousse’s terms, an effect of *rejeu*) between the children’s and the character’s running. The character spontaneously expresses a gesture which has been symbolically communicated to him by the children.

The character’s memory is constantly brought back to his childhood, which, in an abstract way, is represented by an empty house located outside Paris. Although the house is not explicitly described as his childhood home in the film, Perec confirms this assumption by designating it as the character’s ‘*maison d’enfance*’.<sup>120</sup> When, in the chapter ‘La Rupture’, the character detaches himself from society, the house looks empty and lifeless. The slow

<sup>120</sup> Perec, *Entretiens et conférences*, p. 159.

movements of the camera give the impression that the character gradually deserts his memory. At the end of the film, after his long dreamlike run in Paris, the character is shown crossing the empty rooms of his childhood home. Similarly to the scene with the children, the editing repeats the same shot twice, creating the strange effect of an instantaneous flashback. Although the character quickly walks straight ahead as if he was trying to escape the house, the editing gives a sense that he moves backward.



Fig. 35. *Un homme qui dort*, 14:57, 55:45 min.

The repetition of similar, and sometimes identical shots gives a particular rhythm to the editing. In the film, the character's obsession with the game of solitaire is metaphorical of the editing process.<sup>121</sup> The character spends hours shuffling the cards, spreading them, moving them, and creating new configurations, before reshuffling them. Like the shots of the film, the same cards reappear, but never in the same order. The narrator implicitly compares the cards manipulated by the character with shots (*plans* in French): 'Selon leur place, selon l'instant, chaque carte acquiert une densité presque émouvante. Tu protèges, tu détruis, tu construis, tu combines, tu tires plan sur plan.' In this regard, the character's gestures seem to activate the editing and memory processes of the film. The card game can be viewed

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<sup>121</sup> In his analysis of Perec's novel *Un homme qui dort*, Bertharion compares the game of solitaire to an Oulipian constraint. See Bertharion, *Poétique de Georges Perec*. '...une trace, une marque ou quelques signes', p. 45.

as a metaphor of the character's life, which takes the form of an editing of replayed gestures. For instance, in the chapter 'La Rupture', the character walks down the stairs of a movie theatre, and stubs out his cigarette; the exact same shot is reused in the chapter 'L'Inquiétude' [Fig. 35]. Finally, the effects of desynchronisation and repetition between the image and the voice-over stimulate the spectator's memory through his or her interaction with the character's gestures. For example, while the character is shown playing cards in the chapter 'La Rupture' [Fig. 36], the narrator describes his fascination with solitaire at the end of the next chapter [Fig. 37]. As a result, the process of *rejeu* invites the spectators to weave links between the text and the visual fragments of the film.



Fig. 36, 37. *Un homme qui dort*, 19:45, 37:53 min.

## 2.2. Gestural Shocks and the Archive

In *Un homme qui dort*, memory is not only shaped by habit, but also stimulated through the gestural shocks of modern life. In the chapters 'L'Inquiétude', 'Les Monstres', and 'La Destruction', the rhythm of the film gradually speeds up. Textual and visual shocks disrupt the mechanics of the character's everyday gestures. The notion of shock is at the core of Walter Benjamin's thought on modernity. According to the latter, modernity unsettles the nature of human experience, and by extension, of memory. He distinguishes between immediate, partial, fragmented, and isolated experience, which is shaped by urban shocks (*Erlebnis*), and authentic and

long experience, which roots human beings in an historical continuity  
(*Erfahrung*):

The greater the shock factor in particular impressions, the more vigilant consciousness has to be in screening stimuli; the more efficiently it does so, the less the impressions enter long experience [*Erfahrung*] and the more they correspond to the concept of isolated experience [*Erlebnis*].<sup>122</sup>

The industrial age endangers *Erfahrung* in favour of *Erlebnis*. Consequently, '[t]he human organism increasingly becomes a surface. [...] What are lost in this process are memory traces and the full experience of the event [...],' Doane explains.<sup>123</sup>

According to Benjamin, people who experienced the movements of a metropolis for the first time were terrified.<sup>124</sup> In the wake of the industrial development of cities in the nineteenth century, urban masses were subjected to sensorial shocks which turned city life into a traumatic experience. The automation imposed upon human bodies by industry conditioned the behaviour of urban masses, making them capable of absorbing the violent stimuli resulting from modern everyday life. As Doane explains, consciousness and the rationalisation of time are defence mechanisms that enable individuals to shield themselves from the pathological effects caused by shocks.<sup>125</sup> For instance, the masses of automatons in Edgar Poe's short story 'The Man of the Crowd' (1840) seem to be indifferent to shocks: 'His pedestrians act as if they had adapted themselves to machines and could express themselves only automatically. Their behaviour is a reaction to shocks.'<sup>126</sup> Moreover, the automation of gestures, as we have already noticed in our study on automaton, works like a protective shield which brings about memory loss: 'They live their lives as automatons and resemble Bergson's fictitious characters who have

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<sup>122</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire', in *Walter Benjamin. Selected Writings. Vol. 4, 1938-1940*, ed. by Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, trans. by Edmund Jephcott and others (Cambridge, Mass., London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 319.

<sup>123</sup> Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time*, p. 13.

<sup>124</sup> See Benjamin, 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire', p. 327.

<sup>125</sup> See Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time*, p. 14.

<sup>126</sup> Benjamin, 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire', p. 329.

completely liquidated their memories.<sup>127</sup> Unlike the Baudelairean *flâneur* who partakes the frightening and exhilarating experience of the city by observing the thousand tiny gestures of Parisians, but like in Poe's short story, the character of *Un homme qui dort* dreams of letting himself be dragged by the flow of an undifferentiated, out of focus, and reassuring crowd [Fig. 38].<sup>128</sup> Until the chapter 'Les Monstres', the character believes that his neutrality can protect him from shocks.

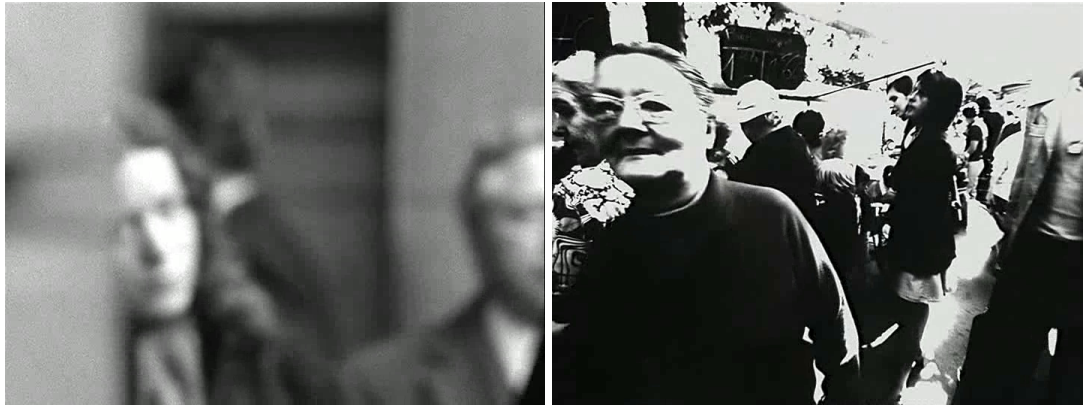


Fig. 38, 39. *Un homme qui dort*, 17:36, 62:12 min.

According to Benjamin, cinema is a medium that conditions the spectators to be stimulated by urban shocks, in the same way that machines accustom workers to respond to jolts, and that the traffic signals or escalators regulate the movements of the crowd:

In a film, perception conditioned by shock [*chockförmige Wahrnehmung*] was established as a formal principle. What determines the rhythm of production on

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., p. 330.

<sup>128</sup> See Baudelaire's poem 'Les Petites Vieilles' which highlights the impact of urban shocks on the gestures of passers-by. The chapter 'Les Monstres' in which Perec and Queysanne film old ladies on several occasions evokes Baudelaire's poem [Fig. 39]:  
 'Dans les plis sinueux des vieilles capitales, |Où tout, même l'horreur, tourne aux enchantements, |Je guette, obéissant à mes humeurs fatales, |Des êtres singuliers, décrépits et charmants. |Ces monstres disloqués furent jadis des femmes, |Eponine ou Laïs! - Monstres brisés, bossus| Ou tordus, aimons-les! ce sont encor des âmes. |Sous des jupons troués et sous de froids tissus| Ils rampent, flagellés par les bises iniques, |Frémissant au fracas roulant des omnibus, |Et serrant sur leur flanc, ainsi que des reliques, |Un petit sac brodé de fleurs ou de rébus; |Ils trottent, tout pareils à des marionnettes; |Se traînent, comme font les animaux blessés, |Ou dansent, sans vouloir danser [...]'  
 See Charles Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du mal*, ed. by Graham Chesters (London: Bristol Classical Press, 1995), pp. 90-91.

a conveyor belt is the same thing that underlies the rhythm of reception in the film.<sup>129</sup>

In Perec and Queysanne's film, the character is a city dweller who often goes to the cinema. Although he is conditioned to experience shocks, his indifference is not permanent, his gestures resist the mechanical monotony of his conditioning, and his solitude makes him vulnerable to anguish. By rejecting others, wallowing in solitude, and repeating the same gestures that nobody imposed on him, he weaves the threads of his misfortune and feeds his anxiety. Refusing to blame society, the narrator takes a critical look at the character's behaviour:

Combien de fois as-tu refait les mêmes gestes mutilés, les mêmes trajets qui ne conduisent jamais nulle part? Tu n'as d'autre secours que tes refuges de quatre sous, ta patience imbécile, les mille et un détours qui chaque fois te ramènent à ton point de départ.

In the last chapters of the film, the rise of anxiety in the character's behaviour is rendered through visual, sound, and textual effects. For instance, in the chapter 'Les Monstres', the lexical field of Perec's text, which strikingly evokes Baudelaire's 'Les Petites Vieilles' (see footnote 127), highlights the character's anxious experience of the urban crowd:

Bannis, parias, exclus. Ils marchent en frôlant les murs, têtes baissées, épaules tombantes, mains crispées s'accrochant aux pierres des façades, gestes las de vaincus, de mordeurs de poussière. Tu les suis, tu les épies, tu les hais: monstres tapis dans leurs chambres de bonne, monstres en chaussons qui traînent leurs pieds près des marches, monstres aux yeux glauques, monstres aux gestes mécaniques, monstres radotant.

Compared to monsters, people appear to have lost their humanity. Like in an expressionistic film, they are represented in a distorted way through the character's subjectivity. In the sequence, the experience of shock is amplified by the frenetic movements of the camera, the rhythm of the editing, the highly contrasted black-and-white photography, the expressive intonation of Ludmila Mikaël, and the aggressive soundtrack, which artificially and artfully convey the character's anxiety. The cinematic medium turns people into a

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<sup>129</sup> Benjamin, 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire', p. 328.

mass of automatons, for instance by obliterating the upper parts of their bodies in order to emphasise the mechanical aspect of their gait [Fig. 40].

However, if we pay attention to the documentary dimension of these images shot in the streets of Paris, people seem neither excluded, nor monstrous; they do not make the weary gestures of the defeated ('gestes las de vaincus') or mechanical gestures ('gestes mécaniques'). Some of them walk alone, while others speak to each other or smile at the camera [Fig. 41]. Masses are like forests of gestures ("arbres de gestes" en mouvement),<sup>130</sup> which, in their movements, shape the experience of the city. According to Certeau, '[c]es arbres de gestes remuent partout. Leurs forêts marchent dans les rues. Elles transforment la scène, mais ne peuvent être fixées par l'image en un lieu.'<sup>131</sup> The cinematic medium moves these forests from the streets to the movie theatres, and makes it possible to preserve a trace of their movement.



Fig. 40, 41. *Un homme qui dort*, 62:35, 64:44 min.

In the chapter 'Les Monstres', the mise-en-scène itself produces shocks. In some shots, the camera movements force people to move, walk rapidly, or recoil [Fig. 39, 41]. The intrusive camera creates the reality of the film by causing and capturing people's spontaneous reactions in the streets. In the essay film *Level Five* (1996), Chris Marker suggests that the camera has the power of provoking actions. For instance, he speculates that, in 1912, Franz Reichelt would have never dared to jump from the first level of

<sup>130</sup> Certeau, *L'Invention du quotidien*, p. 154.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

the Eiffel Tower with his prototype of parachute, if a camera was not filming his prowess. The camera is compared to a hunter who targets a prey. As Susan Sontag puts it, '[...] there is something predatory in the act of taking a picture.'<sup>132</sup> Although, in *Un homme qui dort*, the camera does not cause tragic actions, its movement triggers reactions in the crowd. People start to become agitated, turn their heads, and make gestures of surprise. In *La Vie filmée. 1930-1934*,<sup>133</sup> a documentary made up of amateur films shot in the early 1930s, Percec observes the behaviour of anonymous people who did not exactly know how to react in front of the camera: 'D'un côté comme de l'autre de la camera, cinéastes amateurs et acteurs bénévoles mettent un certain temps à comprendre qu'on peut bouger, et même qu'on doit bouger. Il ne faut pas rester immobile.' By feeling the necessity of moving, they perform gestures they would have never done if a camera was not staring at them. Their gestures and nervous reactions generate micro-shocks in the image, which attract the spectator's attention.

For Deleuze, shock is a key notion in film aesthetics. The philosopher suggests that cinema, as a spiritual automaton, can produce thoughts in the spectator's mind through shocks: 'C'est seulement quand le mouvement devient automatique que l'essence artiste de l'image s'effectue: *produire un choc sur la pensée, communiquer au cortex des vibrations, toucher directement le système nerveux et cérébral*.'<sup>134</sup> During the silent era, Soviet filmmakers, especially Eisenstein, aimed to strike the spectator's mind through the shocks of the editing. In the early 1960s, familiar with Eisenstein's theories, Percec wanted to create a journal, entitled *La Ligne Générale*, to pay tribute to the Soviet director. He also acknowledged Eisenstein's influence on *Un homme qui dort*:

Au niveau du montage, ce n'est plus quelque chose de linéaire comme l'est nécessairement la littérature. Ça retrouve quelque chose qui, pour moi, appartenait à l'époque du cinéma russe (chez Eisenstein par exemple) où le montage a un sens, où la succession, la confrontation de deux images produit

<sup>132</sup> Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), p. 14.

<sup>133</sup> *La Vie filmée. 1930-1934*, dir. by Claude Ventura and Michel Pamart, written by Georges Percec (France Régions 3, 1975). *La Vie filmée* is a series of documentaries which, by using footage of home movies, present the everyday life of French people from 1924 to 1954.

<sup>134</sup> Deleuze, *L'Image-temps*, p. 203.

un effet particulier, spécifique, une émotion particulière qui vient de ce que ces images se contredisent, s'accompagnent, se détruisent l'une l'autre.<sup>135</sup>

As Deleuze explains, the effects of opposition in Eisenstein's films create a shock that enables the spectator to conceive the totality of the film by unifying its parts. Simultaneously, the emotional power of images stimulates the spectator's subconscious:

Le tout n'est plus le logos qui unifie les parties, mais l'ivresse, le pathos qui les baigne et se répand en elles. C'est de ce point de vue que les images constituent une masse plastique, une matière signalétique chargée de traits d'expression, visuels, sonores, synchronisés ou non, zigzags de formes, éléments d'action, gestes et silhouettes, séquences asyntaxiques.<sup>136</sup>

All the expressive elements of the image shape a 'pensée primitive'.<sup>137</sup>

Gestures in particular generate and release the emotional power of a film.

The editing of *Un homme qui dort* is structured according to a principle of opposition, which consists in juxtaposing – sometimes in a contradictory way – visual, sound, and textual elements. In the chapter 'La Destruction', Queysanne and Perec implicitly refer to the end of Eisenstein's *Strike* (1925), in which the violent suppression of a strike is cross-cut with the slaughter of a cow. The two directors inserted a brief shot of Franju's *Le Sang des Bêtes*, which shows the slaughter of a white horse in a Parisian slaughterhouse [Fig. 42]. A worker shoots down the horse with a captive bolt pistol. The animal abruptly collapses on the ground. The rapidity of the gesture amplifies the violence of the shock. Struck by 'the unfathomable shot of the calves' heads'<sup>138</sup> in *Le Sang des Bêtes*, Kracauer explains the extent to which dreadful images can remain engraved in one's memory: 'The mirror reflections of horror are an end in themselves. As such they beckon the spectator to take them in and thus incorporate into his memory the real face of things too dreadful to be beheld in reality.'<sup>139</sup> In his monograph on Franju, Raymond Durnat writes that, despite the 'intense experience' provided by *Le Sang des Bêtes*, spectators usually remember the film 'in a very abstract

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<sup>135</sup> Perec, *Entretiens et conférences*, p. 175.

<sup>136</sup> Deleuze, *L'Image-temps*, p. 207.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., p. 208.

<sup>138</sup> Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, p. 305.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., p. 306.

way'.<sup>140</sup> They are unable to describe the film in detail, and often remember the death of the white horse, which is 'the film's first shock'.<sup>141</sup> Similarly, in *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, Godard suggests that if spectators usually forget the ins and outs of the narrative in Hitchcock's films,<sup>142</sup> they remember emblematic objects, such as the glass of milk in *Notorious* (1946) or the hairbrush in *The Wrong Man* (1956). Juxtaposing short clips of Hitchcock's films, Godard's editing highlights the dynamic relationship between object and gesture: a foot knocks over a key in a manhole, a hand grasps a hairbrush, or Norman Bates's hand stabs Marion Crane's body. Gestural shocks impact on the spectator's memory beyond the narrative context of the film. In this respect, gestures can be potentially decontextualised and interact with the images and gestures of other films, while preserving their emotional intensity.



Fig. 42. *Un homme qui dort*, 68:37 min.

In the documentary *La Vie filmée*, Perce is aware of the capacity of cinema to archive gestures: 'La pellicule devient mémoire,' he says. Before the invention of film, memory was mainly archived in the form of fossilised images, architectural relics, and written documents. By archiving movement and gesture, cinema can constitute a 'prosthetic' memory of ephemeral traces of life. Agamben gives the cinematic gesture the power of liberating

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<sup>140</sup> Durgnat, *Franju*, p. 34.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>142</sup> See *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, chapter 4(a) *Le Contrôle de l'univers*.

the traditional image from its intrinsic immobility.<sup>143</sup> Similarly, in *La Vie filmée*, Perec considers gesture to be the key element that defines the specificity of cinema:

On connaissait ce qui dure, ce dont on fait mémoire ou archive: des entassements de pierres ou des entassements de tableaux, des épitaphes, des comptes d'apothicaire, des minutes de procès; et plus tard des visages, immobilisés par la photographie. Mais pas les gestes, pas ce temps intact immortalisé dans ce qu'il a de plus fluide, de plus inconstant. Ce qui n'aurait pas laissé de trace, ce dont on ne serait jamais souvenu: un homme qui se trémousse en imitant un chef d'orchestre; une femme qui rectifie une mayonnaise; deux hommes qui allument des cigarettes; une journée à la mer, une belle journée où il a fait bien chaud.

In *La Vie filmée*, Perec notices that the silent pictures are not rich in information. A man opens his mouth and articulates silent sounds, but what is he saying? Who are these anonymous characters moving in front of the camera? In which contexts do people perform their gestures? Information seems to be located somewhere around the image. Due to the lack of context, gestures imbue the silent pictures with indeterminate meanings. These fragile traces of an incomplete memory ceaselessly question the spectator, as Perec argues in *La Vie filmée*: 'Les images sont muettes et restent muettes. On ne peut que les interroger sans fin.' In Perec and Queysanne's film, the images also prove to be interrogative.



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<sup>143</sup> See Agamben, 'Notes on Gesture', pp. 54-55.



Fig. 43-45. *Un homme qui dort*, 31:45-33:00 min.

The editing of *Un homme qui dort* juxtaposes fragments of different gestural sequences. Throughout the film, the shots are decontextualised, giving the gestures a dreamlike quality. Perec and Queysanne often seem to awaken ‘the dream of a gesture’, to borrow a phrase from Agamben.<sup>144</sup> In an enigmatic sequence of the chapter ‘L’Apprentissage’, the character, as well as two anonymous men get out of a black Citroën DS, driven by a chauffeur, in the courtyard of a prestigious building (that resembles the Elysée Palace).<sup>145</sup> In accordance with the editing process analysed in the previous section, the same shots are repeated several times, with slight variations. In two different shots, Spiesser’s character reads the daily newspaper *Le Monde* and smokes a cigar, in an elegant black suit, before getting out of the car [Fig. 43]; a man with grey hair, who waves and smiles at the camera as if greeting journalists [Fig. 44], and another man, who puts his hat on without looking at the camera [Fig. 45], also get out of the black car. The same gesture of opening the car is shown six times, with three different characters. To whom are their gestures addressed? Are these images the last fragments of a memory on the verge of vanishing? Or do they represent a fantasy? The lack of narrative context highlights the indeterminacy of the gestures. As Agamben suggests, cinematic gestures can communicate with

<sup>144</sup> Agamben, ‘Notes on Gesture’, p. 55.

<sup>145</sup> The scene was filmed in the courtyard of the CNRS (Centre national de la recherche scientifique), in Gif-sur-Yvette. ‘Il y a une vue de sous-bois qui n’est pas à Paris et un endroit qui ressemble au devant de l’Elysée et où tournent des voitures, c’est à Gif-sur-Yvette,’ Perec writes. See Perec, *Entretiens et conférences*, p. 159.

the spectator beyond their narrative purpose<sup>146</sup> – indeed, as will be discussed throughout the thesis, gestures can express taboos, emotions, sensations, fantasies, pathologies, and ways of being. In *Un homme qui dort*, the spectator wonders about the potential meaning of gestures, and, like the first spectators of the Lumière brothers' films, is filled with wonder, confronted with images that escape all preconceived significations and permeate his or her memory.

In *Un homme qui dort*, the indeterminate quality of the silent images is amplified by the directors' refusal to delineate their meaning by the text. Similarly, through the neutral, rational, and technical commentary that describes the slaughterers' activities in *Le Sang des bêtes*, Franju refuses to put the emotional shock of gestures into words.<sup>147</sup> According to Agamben, '[...] the gesture is essentially always a gesture of not being able to figure out something in language.'<sup>148</sup> In *Le Sang des bêtes*, gestures communicate something unsaid that cannot be determined by words. Critics often compared Franju's short film with Resnais's *Nuit et Brouillard* (1956).<sup>149</sup> In the post-war context, the systematic slaughter of animals could evoke – in the collective memory – the mass killings that took place in the concentration camps during the Second World War. Without considering these two realities equivalently, the spectator, with his or her historical knowledge, can reshape the reality depicted in Franju's documentary through his or her imagination, memory, and emotions.<sup>150</sup> For instance, Kracauer significantly collects the horror of *Le Sang des bêtes* and the Holocaust in the same sentence:

In experiencing the rows of calves' heads or the litter of tortured human bodies in the films made of the Nazi concentration camps, we redeem horror from its

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<sup>146</sup> Agamben, 'Notes on Gesture', p. 57.

<sup>147</sup> See Nina Perivolaropoulou, 'Le Travail de la mémoire: dans *Theory of Film* de Siegfried Kracauer', *Protée*, 32.1 (2004), 39-48 (p. 46). 'L'image cinématographique devient, dans *Le Sang des bêtes*, et chez Franju plus généralement, le lieu où peut se montrer soit ce qui échappe au discours, soit ce que le discours se refuse ou s'interdit de désigner. L'image cinématographique permet une perception telle que le perçu ne soit pas investi de part en part par le déjà-connu, une perception qui peut aller jusqu'au vertige de l'indétermination.'

<sup>148</sup> Agamben, 'Notes on Gesture', p. 58.

<sup>149</sup> Durgnat, *Franju*, p. 43.

<sup>150</sup> See Perivolaropoulou, 'Le Travail de la mémoire', p. 47.

invisibility behind the veils of panic and imagination. And this experience is liberating in as much as it removes a most powerful taboo.<sup>151</sup>

More than a tribute to Eisenstein and Franju, the gesture of *Le Sang des Bêtes* provokes a memory shock that resounds in the last sequences of *Un homme qui dort*. In the film, the character's gestures obliquely communicate a taboo which I will approach in the light of Perec's autobiography.

### 2.3. In the Footsteps of Perec's Childhood: The Archives of the City

One year after the release of *Un homme qui dort*, Perec published *W ou le souvenir d'enfance* in which he attempts to trace his childhood memories.<sup>152</sup> His parents, who were both Jewish, got married in 1934. Perec was born in 1936 and grew up at 24 rue Vilin, in the neighbourhood of Ménilmontant, in the 20th arrondissement. Enlisted in the French army, his father died from a wound incurred in combat in 1940. His mother was deported to Auschwitz in 1943, and was murdered in the camps.<sup>153</sup> As Perec tells in *W ou le souvenir d'enfance*, the Second World War disrupted his life and memory:

'Je n'ai pas de souvenirs d'enfance': je posais cette affirmation avec assurance, avec presque une sorte de défi. L'on n'avait pas à m'interroger sur cette question. Elle n'était pas inscrite à mon programme. J'en étais dispensé: une autre histoire, la Grande, l'Histoire avec sa grande hache avait déjà répondu à ma place: la guerre, les camps.<sup>154</sup>

From 1969, Perec started to investigate his childhood. In the project *Lieux*, the writer attempted to constitute a literary archive of twelve Parisian places, including the rue Vilin.<sup>155</sup> Every year, he returned to the street where he grew up in order to meticulously describe it. On 27 February 1969, he wrote: 'Du côté impair, la rue fait, à la hauteur du n°49, sur la gauche, un deuxième

<sup>151</sup> Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, p. 306.

<sup>152</sup> According to Bellos, '[i]t was during their work on the film of *A Man Asleep* that Perec told Queysanne about his next book, which would be called *W*.' See Bellos, *Georges Perec. A Life in Words*, p. 538.

<sup>153</sup> See Bellos, *Georges Perec. A Life in Words*.

<sup>154</sup> Perec, *W ou le souvenir d'enfance*, p. 13.

<sup>155</sup> In the documentary *En remontant la rue Vilin* (1992), Robert Bober tells the relationship between Perec and the rue Vilin.

angle, également d'environ 30°: cela donne à la rue l'allure générale d'un S très allongé (comme dans le sigle 44).<sup>156</sup> In Perec's mind, the street remains strongly associated with the Second World War and the deportation of his mother. In the 1970s and 1980s, the street was gradually destroyed, creating, for Perec, a necessity to record the memory of the place before its total disappearance. Although, in 1973, Perec suspended the writing of *Lieux* during the shooting of *Un homme qui dort*, he used this experience of filmmaking to pursue his meditation on archives. In the final shot of the film, the character walks along the rue Vilin. Perec felt the need to create an effect of resonance with his own childhood.<sup>157</sup> In *W ou le souvenir d'enfance*, Perec mentions the shooting of *Un homme qui dort*:

#### La rue Vilin

Nous vivions à Paris, dans le 20<sup>e</sup> arrondissement, rue Vilin; c'est une petite rue qui part de la rue des Couronnes, et qui monte, en esquissant vaguement la forme d'un S, jusqu'à des escaliers abrupts qui mènent à la rue du Transvaal et à la rue Olivier Metra (c'est de ce carrefour, l'un des derniers points de vue d'où l'on puisse, au niveau du sol, découvrir Paris tout entier, que j'ai tourné, en juillet 1973, avec Bernard Queysanne, le plan final du film *Un Homme qui dort*). La rue Vilin est aujourd'hui aux trois quarts détruite. Plus de la moitié des maisons ont été abattues, laissant place à des terrains vagues où s'entassent des débris, de vieilles cuisinières et des carcasses de voitures; la plupart des maisons encore debout n'offrent plus que des façades aveugles.<sup>158</sup>

Perec's memory resurfaces in the ruins of the street. The shots that show the character running in the rubble of demolished buildings were probably filmed in Belleville, close to Ménilmontant [Fig. 33, 34]. These images could evoke post-war Italian neorealist films, such as *Germany, Year Zero* (1948), in which the characters live in the ruins of Berlin, making the most mundane gestures of everyday life in this disaster zone. According to Aumont, '[l]e cinéma n'a pas besoin de parler des événements pour en parler. Il lui suffit d'en montrer la trace visible: soient les ruines, qu'est-ce qui les cause sinon la guerre ? Et la guerre induit-elle autre chose que l'errance ?'<sup>159</sup> Ruins can threaten human memory with destruction, and cause the loss of the self ('la

<sup>156</sup> Perec, *L'Infra-ordinaire*, pp. 20-21.

<sup>157</sup> See Perec, *Entretiens et conférences*, p. 161.

<sup>158</sup> Perec, *W ou le souvenir d'enfance*, p. 67.

<sup>159</sup> Aumont, 'La Traversée des ruines', in *L'Invention de la figure humaine*, ed. by Aumont, p. 31.

perte de “soi”).<sup>160</sup> In *Un homme qui dort*, the ruins are the abstract expression of the character’s memory and, by extension, of Perec’s own memory. Overexposed, the ghostly presence of the character disappears in a bright white light that annihilates his gestures and identity [Fig. 46]. He has to run away from the ruins in order to have a chance to remember and find his sense of self, his humanity, again.



Fig. 46. *Un Homme qui dort*, 66:52 min.

Although such ruins were not caused by war, the trauma of the Second World War is projected onto the ruins of Perec’s childhood neighbourhood, where he lived with his parents from 1936 to 1942. In *La Vie filmée*, Perec comments on pictures shot in 1931 in Ménilmontant, in the streets where he grew up. These images show children playing in the streets and looking into the camera. Describing the capacity of images to awaken buried memories and sensations, Perec imagines that he could have been one of those children. Other images represent large crowds in the boulevard de Ménilmontant. Perec suggests that, perhaps, his father, mother, and grand-parents are walking among these gesturing crowds. Certeau argues that places are ‘présences d’absences’ since they are haunted by people’s gestures and spirit.<sup>161</sup> By capturing the trace of gestures, film can make the

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>161</sup> Certeau, *L’Invention du quotidien. 1. Arts de faire*, p. 162.

memory of a place at a precise moment of its history visible. For Certeau and Luce Giard, '[l]es gestes sont les vraies archives de la ville.'<sup>162</sup> Every day, people make gestures that shape the experience of the city, as well as the history of places. By filming those gestures, the camera records their trace, which would otherwise remain invisible.



Fig. 47. Ménilmontant, 20th arr. Raymond Denaës, *Guide général de Paris* (Paris: L'Indispensable, 1984). I have circled the location of the rue Piat, the rue Vilin, and the rue de Transvaal in black.

The rue Vilin, especially the upper part of the street, became an iconic place in the history of French cinema. This picturesque street of the old Paris was accessible by two famous stairs, the first one between the rue Vilin, and the crossroads of the rue Piat, the rue de Transvaal, and the rue des Envierges,<sup>163</sup> and the second one between the rue Vilin and the passage Julien-Lacroix [Fig. 47]. These two stairs appear in numerous films, such as René Guissart's *Ménilmontant* (1936), Jean Cocteau's *Orphée* (1950), Albert Lamorisse's *Le Ballon rouge* (1956), or Gene Kelly's *Gigot* (1962). The end of *Un homme qui dort* consists in a long panoramic sequence shot at 540 degrees, which starts at the junction of the rue de Transvaal and the rue Piat, at the top of the stairs (that are not visible on screen). The camera makes a

<sup>162</sup> Certeau and Giard, 'Entre deux', in *L'Invention du quotidien. 2. Habiter, cuisiner*, p. 202.

<sup>163</sup> Coincidentally Queysanne first had the idea to shoot the final shot of *Un homme qui dort* at the junction of the rue Piat and the rue de Transvaal, without knowing that Perec had spent his childhood in this place. (See Bellos, *Georges Perec. A Life in Words*, pp. 528-29.) In 1976, in the television programme *Chemins*, Perec goes down the stairs and walks in the rue Vilin. (See 'Le Belleville de Georges Perec', *Chemins*, Antenne 2, 22 March 1976.)

first slow movement at 360 degrees, and films the facades of the rue de Transvaal, the rue des Envierges, and the rue Piat, as well as the heights of the rue Vilin. After the completion of the first lap, the camera performs the same circular movement again, and stops when the character crosses the rue Vilin and goes down the stairs leading to the passage Julien-Lacroix. If the first part of the panoramic shot is luminous and enlivened by the silhouettes of a few passers-by and inhabitants, the rue Vilin is conversely reduced to a dark street corner [Fig. 49]. The shot lasts eight minutes; it was supposed to last at least four more minutes but the laboratory partially destroyed the film.<sup>164</sup> Two long fade-outs made it possible to preserve the fluidity of the panoramic shot,<sup>165</sup> although a part of the film representing the rue Vilin disappeared in the accident, which, in a symbolic way, anticipated the total destruction of the street. Perec and Queysanne film a place, the memory of which is in the process of disappearing.<sup>166</sup> By contrast, Lamorisse, in *Le Ballon rouge*, provided a vivid and bustling representation of the neighbourhood, inhabited by the gestures of numerous children [Fig. 48]. In the final minute of *Un homme qui dort*, life reappears in the background, at the intersection between the passage Julien-Lacroix and the rue des Couronnes, enlivened by the gestures of people in the distance: the character seems to return to the world of the living.



Fig. 48, 49. *Le Ballon rouge*; *Un homme qui dort*, 75:00 min. The two films represent here the upper part of the rue Vilin which leads to the passage Julien-Lacroix.

<sup>164</sup> See Perec, *Entretiens et conférences*, p. 161.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>166</sup> Bellos recounts that, during the take, a five-years old child suddenly went out of 24 rue Vilin, where Perec had grown up, and ran in the street. Such a scene is not visible, probably because of the partial destruction of the film. See Bellos, *Georges Perec. A Life in Words*, p. 529.

The filmic adaptation of *Un homme qui dort* enabled Perec to archive the fleeting trace of gestures in a changing city. Cities do not change only through the demolition of old buildings and the construction of new neighbourhoods. People also transform the memory of cities, as well as their own memory, through their everyday practices, changes of life, and gestures. As Jean Duvignaux writes:

Perec refait, dans *Espèces d'espaces* et dans *W*, le parcours qu'il accomplit avec Queysanne au moment du tournage de son film *Un homme qui dort*, dans un Paris perdu que la spéculation immobilière détruit et où s'effacent les traces de son passage: en fin de compte, les choses, immobiles, se détruisent pour nous qui changeons.<sup>167</sup>

*Un homme qui dort* is part of Perec's autobiographical journey. The character's wanderings mirror Perec's life and personal history. Claude Burgelin interprets the character as a sort of wandering Jew who lives in the city as if he was living in a ghetto, seeking for a refuge, and paralysed by the burden of his past:

A se faire l'exclu, obsédé d'îles et de refuges, vivant la ville comme un ghetto tout en y étant une sorte de juif errant, celui qui vit à côté des autres, jamais avec, Perec met en images et en mots quelque chose de son destin historique, une malédiction originelle dont il reconnaît à la fin qu'elle n'existe pas.<sup>168</sup>

In 1978, Perec pursued reflection on places, memory, archive, and autobiography in the film *Les Lieux d'une fugue*, which he directed with the cinematographer of *Un homme qui dort*, Bernard Zitzermann. The writer and director attempted to apply the Oulipian constraint of the sestina again. *Les Lieux d'une fugue*, which is a film without any actor, tells the story of the eleven-year-old Perec who ran away from his aunt's home in Paris. Rather than recreating the Paris of the 1940s, Perec filmed the places as they were in the 1970s. Bearing the invisible traces of past gestures, the places are haunted by Perec's literary text which reconstructs the memories of tiny events, things, gestures, actions, and dialogue. The film highlights the difficulty of recollecting, as well as the absent presence of the past. Memory is also embodied, and indirectly re-enacted by the gestures of passers-by

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<sup>167</sup> Cited in Neefs and Hartje, *Georges Perec. Images*, pp. 132-33.

<sup>168</sup> Burgelin, *Georges Perec*, p. 72.

and city-dwellers who walk by chance in front of the camera. Their gestures involuntarily revive the past in the light of the present. Finally, Perec appears in the reflection of a mirror, and symbolically shows himself wandering in the footsteps of his childhood [Fig. 50].



Fig. 50. *Les Lieux d'une fugue*

### **Conclusion**

*Un homme qui dort* explores the relationship between human gestures and the film's body. Everyday gestures mirror the mechanical and automatic features of the cinematic machine. On the one hand, by analogy with the camera, the character turns into an ambulatory automaton who wanders in Paris and simulates gestures of everyday life. On the other hand, by analogy with human consciousness, the film integrates the character's gestures into a memory process. To follow Väliaho's argument, the moving image 'becomes a sort of gesture itself', with its own means of expression: 'The moving image does not simply re-present bodily gestures, poses and movements but, instead, harnesses gestures into its technological positivity by becoming immanent to them in terms of dynamically modulating the body.'<sup>169</sup> As a

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<sup>169</sup> Väliaho, *Mapping the Moving Image*, p. 31.

result, gestures, in their interaction with the various components of the cinematic medium, prove fundamentally intermedial. The intermediality of gestures in film will be examined more extensively in the other chapters, especially in Chapter 3.

Furthermore, *Un homme qui dort* forms an archive of bodily traces, which are at once fleeting and reiterable. Through the ghostly presence of the character who wanders in the changing urban spaces of Paris, Perec and Queysanne use the cinematic medium to convey a 'mémoire spectrale', to borrow Derrida's expression.<sup>170</sup> The relationship between the archive and gesture in film is paradoxical. The cinematic medium is at once 'an effective way of "preserving" the past' and 'a most efficient way of liquidating traditional forms of memory',<sup>171</sup> as we have seen through Benjamin's analysis of shocks in urban modern life. Although the meaning of gestural traces can be indeterminate and unstable in the decontextualised fragments of Perec and Queysanne's film, gestures preserve their emotional and spectacular impact. The complex and problematic relationship between gesture, semiotics, temporality, and memory will be addressed in greater detail in Chapter 4.

By analysing *Un homme qui dort*, I approached gesture in relation to some fundamental features of filmmaking, such as *découpage*, lighting, editing, and camerawork. Focusing on crucial aspects of performance and film acting, the next chapter aims to conceptualise the notion of gestural style in Chantal Akerman's cinema. The Belgian director shares with Perec certain preoccupations with memory, Jewishness, and everyday life.

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<sup>170</sup> Cited in Adolfo Vera, 'Le Cinéma ou l'art de laisser revenir les fantômes: une approche à parti de J. Derrida', *Appareil*, 14 (2014) <<https://journals.openedition.org/appareil/2115>> [accessed 17 August 2018] (para. 4 of 14)

<sup>171</sup> McQuire, *Visions of Modernity*, p. 150.

## Chapter 2. Gestural Styles and Acting Styles in Chantal Akerman's Domestic Territory

### *Introduction*

In the context of a re-assessment of 'la politique des auteurs' by the *Cahiers du cinéma* in the mid-1960s, the writer and film critic Claude Ollier argued that the notion of authorship, similar to the notion of style, cannot be reduced to the repetition of personal themes and obsessions, but rather raises the question of the invention of original forms and/or of the renewal of traditional forms on every level of cinematic creation (image, sound, narration, performance, etc).<sup>1</sup> Focusing on the example of Jerry Lewis's slapstick comedies, Ollier suggested analysing the extent to which the American actor and director succeeded in the 1950s and 1960s in re-inventing the aesthetics of gag popularised in the 1910s and 1920s by filmmakers and actors such as Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton. In this sense, the analysis of style requires identifying the singularity of an author in relation to the history of forms in which s/he inscribes her/himself. Besides, as Meyer Shapiro argues, style involves the creation of forms expressing not only the artist's individuality, but also the common traits of a group, as well as the ideology of a specific period of time:

Style is, above all, a system of forms with a quality and a meaningful expression through which the personality of the artist and the broad outlook of a group are visible. It is also a vehicle of expression within the group, communicating and fixing certain values of religious, social, and moral life through the emotional suggestiveness of forms.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jean-André Fieschi, Jean-Louis Comolli, Michel Mardore, André Téchiné, Gérard Guégan, and Claude Ollier, 'Vingt ans après. Le cinéma américain, ses auteurs et notre politique en question', in *La Politique des auteurs. Les textes*, ed. by Antoine de Baecque (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, 2001), pp. 141-42.

<sup>2</sup> Meyer Shapiro, *Theory and Philosophy of Art: Style, Artist, and Society* (New York: Georges Brazillier, 1994), p. 51.

This chapter will examine the extent to which the notions of quality, expression, communication, and sociocultural values can be used to describe and analyse the correlation between style and gesture, and between aesthetic forms and forms of life.

First of all, gestural styles can be defined as the expression of *styles de vie*. Drawing on numerous thinkers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Marielle Macé discusses the notion of ‘stylistique de l’existence’ by stressing the relationship between life and style: ‘De Balzac ou de Nietzsche à Kafka et Perec, de Simmel à Mauss, Bourdieu, Agamben, la vie est en effet conçue [...] comme un engagement de formes.’<sup>3</sup> While the sociological concept of lifestyle has become one of the slogans of consumer society since the 1950s,<sup>4</sup> Macé attempts to re-conceptualise the idea of *style de vie* in a philosophical and interdisciplinary perspective. She defines a style as the singular manner that shapes a form of life in a collective process of sociocultural and political exchanges: ‘c’est l’individuel (le “tel”) qui s’ouvre au partage, au commun, et donc aussi à l’expropriation.’<sup>5</sup> In this sense, a *style de vie* can be regarded as the individual’s singular manner of living within society. His or her behaviours, postures, rhythms, and gestures are at once collectively shaped and markers of individuation: ‘Ce n’est pas un hasard d’ailleurs si l’attention individuante se déploie volontiers sur le terrain des *gestes*, qui ouvre l’un des plus riches espaces de nouage entre l’individu et le monde – forme même de la participation, de l’engagement du vivre.’<sup>6</sup> According to Citton, if gestures are socially and culturally shaped, they also bring nuances that singularise the individual: ‘Loin de n’être qu’un supplément ou une décoration, la nuance apportée par le geste constitue l’essentiel de l’action humaine, en ce qu’elle exprime et réalise le “contraste” par lequel chacun de nous se distingue de son environnement.’<sup>7</sup>

In the mise-en-scène of a film, the relationship between the character’s body and its environment determines the way the actor or actress

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<sup>3</sup> Macé, *Styles*, p. 25.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 255.

<sup>7</sup> Citton, *Gestes d’humanités*, p. 36.

performs in the space delineated by the director. Each individual has his or her specific way of moving and gesturing to comprehend his or her environment. When actors and actresses create their characters, they need to take into consideration the coordination between their body image and body schema. Shaun Gallagher insists on the difference between the body image and the body schema, i.e. 'between a conscious awareness of one's own body and a non-conscious performance of the body'.<sup>8</sup> On the one hand, the awareness of one's body image is at once 'perceptual, cognitive, and emotional'.<sup>9</sup> First, one's body is partially perceived in immediate consciousness, secondly, it is conceptually constructed through consciousness and intellect, and thirdly, it is affectively and emotionally felt. On the other hand, the body schema supposes a 'non-conscious [and operative] performance of the body', in which '[...] the body acquires a certain organisation or style in its relations with environment':<sup>10</sup> the postures and movements are non-consciously activated – often by habit – by the sensori-motor apparatus. Gallagher insists on the idea that the body schema is the 'style' that gives a shape to the body within a specific environment. In film acting, the actor or actress needs to construct the character's body image first in order to let his or her body schema move in the environment of the film.

In Chapter 1, I examined the relation between the character's gestures and the modern environment of Parisian urban spaces through the notions of automation, conditioning, everyday gesture, wandering, and memory. This second chapter aims to explore the concept of gestural styles by focusing on three films by Chantal Akerman in which the physical and dynamic relationship between the body and domestic spaces structures the *mise-en-scène*. When the Belgian director performs as an actress (or '*joue à l'actrice*')<sup>11</sup> in her films, she uses the stylistic features of her body schema

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<sup>8</sup> Shaun Gallagher, 'Body Image and Body Schema: A Conceptual Clarification,' *The Journal of Mind and Behavior*, 7.4 (1986), 541-54 (p. 544).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 546.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 548.

<sup>11</sup> Chantal Akerman, *Chantal Akerman: Autoportrait en cinéaste* (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, Centre Pompidou, 2004), p. 12.

and body image in order to mould her characters. In her first short film *Saute ma ville* (1968), the eighteen-year-old director plays the role of a solitary young woman who blows up her mother's kitchen and herself. In *L'Homme à la valise* (1984), Akerman, who 'plays a caricatured version of her own persona rather than her real self',<sup>12</sup> explores issues of gender, borders, and confinement. Although they were made sixteen years apart, both films, which are reminiscent of slapstick comedy, present strong similitudes in terms of gestural style.

I will compare Akerman's expressive and slapstick acting style with Delphine Seyrig's iconic performance in *Jeanne Dielman, 23, quai du commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975). 'Establish[ing] Akerman as a leading proponent of women's and feminist filmmaking, as well as a director to be reckoned with in European independent cinema', this pivotal long feature film focuses on the daily life of a housewife in Brussels and 'epitomise[s] an era with its pressing questions about class, identity, gender and social oppression', Marion Schmid explains.<sup>13</sup> Although both Akerman in *Saute ma ville* and *L'Homme à la valise* and Seyrig in *Jeanne Dielman* act in a similar domestic environment – i.e. a flat located in a metropolis –, they coordinate their body images and body schemas in opposite ways and develop different acting styles. While Akerman, as an actress, exaggerates the clumsiness of her characters' gestures, Seyrig reiterates everyday gestures, such as peeling potatoes, with a metronomic and austere precision. The difference of acting styles, between the slapstick expressivity and the austere stylisation of gestures, is determined by the characters' reactions to framing and space.

In Akerman's cinema, the environment is always perfectly framed by the camera. According to Youssef Ishaghpour,

[l]e cadre est délimitation, partition de l'espace, grâce à ses bords; et en même temps il est producteur d'une grille homogène d'horizontal et de vertical, de cadres dans le cadre, à partir des angles droits de l'écran. [...] Ces

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<sup>12</sup> Marion Schmid, *Chantal Akerman* (Manchester, New York: Manchester University Press, 2010), p. 74.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

délimitations, ces grilles, Akerman les impose aussi aux gestes, aux paroles, une sorte de jeu réglé comme les cadres imposés à la banalité du quotidien.<sup>14</sup>

The characters move in a rigid grid that influences their behaviours and gestural styles. When Deleuze analyses Akerman's cinema of the 1970s, he insists on the rigorous stylisation of her actresses' bodily movements: 'C'est ce gestus qui réagit sur le corps en lui donnant un hiératisme comme une austère théâtralisation ou plutôt une "stylisation".'<sup>15</sup> In this context, the term stylisation seems to refer to a non-naturalistic style of performance, which simplifies the forms, removes the unnecessary details, and sticks to the main traits. Deleuze views Akerman's mise-en-scène as a slow ceremony of theatricalised gestures. Influenced by American experimental cinema and minimalist art in the early 1970s,<sup>16</sup> Akerman directs the actors and actresses' movements with precision without letting them make unnecessary or 'natural' gestures. The hieratic acting described by Deleuze is particularly visible in Aurore Clément's slow, controlled, and steady gestures in *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna* (1978) and Seyrig's performance in *Jeanne Dielman*.

Drawing on an interview between Akerman and Alain Philippon, Deleuze discusses the limits of the 'excès de stylisation', which results from the mastery of Akerman's framing.<sup>17</sup> The rigidity of the framing tends to contaminate the style of acting, and to confine women in interior spaces. Thanks to slapstick, Akerman introduces disorder and chaos in a space and frame that usually structure and regulate the female rhythms and behaviours. Indeed, as Deleuze and Margulies explain, the slapstick influence helps Akerman to subvert the relation to the frame: 'Akerman has said that she breaks down her own structural mastery as a filmmaker by the use of different acting styles and personas. These different rhythms (including her own as a performer) counterpoint her dry, minimalist sobriety.'<sup>18</sup> The comic exaggeration enables Akerman to escape the excess of gravity thanks to the lightness of humour: 'Le gestus peut devenir plutôt burlesque, sans rien

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<sup>14</sup> Youssef Ishaghpour, 'Le Flux et le cadre: Chantal Akerman', in *Cinéma contemporain: de ce côté du miroir* (Paris : Ed. de la Différence, 1986), pp. 260-61.

<sup>15</sup> Deleuze, *L'Image-temps*, p. 255.

<sup>16</sup> See Ivone Margulies, *Nothing Happens: Chantal Akerman's Hyperrealist Everyday* (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 1996), pp. 48-53.

<sup>17</sup> See footnote 10 in Deleuze, *L'Image-temps*, pp. 255-56.

<sup>18</sup> Margulies, *Nothing Happens*, p. 166.

abandonner, et communique au film une légèreté, une irrésistible gaieté.<sup>19</sup> In *L'Homme à la valise*, Akerman's body image and Charlie Chaplin-like gait, emphasised by the choice of specific clothes, especially the heels and trousers, underlines the slapstick quality of her acting style. Yet the *burlesque* tone, close to the tragicomic spirit of *Saute ma ville*, also conveys a strong feeling of uneasiness, oddness, and anxiety.

In order to analyse and compare gestural styles in Akerman's cinema, I will first examine the 'making-of' *Autour de 'Jeanne Dielman'* (1975-2004), filmed by Sami Frey during the rehearsals of the shooting of *Jeanne Dielman*. In a unique way, this document shows the collaborative process between the director and her leading actress. In a first phase, this chapter will thus study the stylistic elements of gestures by taking into consideration Seyrig's performance as well as Akerman's direction during the rehearsals. According to Shapiro, '[...] the description of a style refers to three aspects of art: form, elements or motifs, form relationships, and qualities (including an all-over quality which we may call the "expression").'<sup>20</sup> The criteria of expressivity, quality, and productive interrelation of forms are relevant in the analysis of the gestural style in *Jeanne Dielman*, which intertwines artistic, social and ideological traits. The interconnection between *style de vie* and performance, in society as well as in the film, reveals the social and ethical construction of gesture. Secondly, I will analyse Akerman's slapstick acting style in *Saute ma ville* and *L'Homme à la valise*. The revival of slapstick can be considered in two main ways. On the one hand, Akerman's acting style mirrors her characters' rebellions against gender norms. She deregulates the homemaker's habitus and the conventions of gender differences that are embedded in her characters' postures, gestures, and attitudes. Playing with the stereotypes of female hysteria, the filmmaker-actress interrogates the social construction of the female body as well as the performativity of gender. On the other hand, she stages tragic gags that betray her characters' inability to use verbal language, and ultimately convey their anxieties in a way that recalls Perec and Queysanne's *Un homme qui dort* (1974). Akerman's

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<sup>19</sup> Deleuze, *L'Image-temps*, pp. 255-56.

<sup>20</sup> Shapiro, *Theory and Philosophy of Art*, p. 54.

gestures are rooted in a long *ressassement* that results from an incommunicable taboo: the legacy of her mother's traumatic experience in Auschwitz. Entering Akerman's room or kitchen makes it possible to trace the genesis of gestures in their relation to sound and image, and to analyse the formal, autobiographical, and political strategies that result from their performance.

## 1. In Jeanne Dielman's Kitchen: Acting, Directing, and the Reason of Gestures

### 1.1. The Creation of Jeanne Dielman: The Housewife and the Star

Made in the context of the feminist movements of the 1970s and financed thanks to the 'avance sur recette' provided by the Belgian Ministry of Culture, *Jeanne Dielman* records the daily life of a housewife in Brussels. The character repeats the same rituals, gestures, and tasks every day. As Schmid writes, while the housewife's gestures have been underexplored in cinema, Akerman emphasises

the daily routine of preparing breakfast, washing dishes, making beds, shopping and cooking, repetitive gestures performed by millions of housewives around the globe, yet neither recognized nor valued in production-centred capitalist societies, nor traditionally deemed worthy of study or filmic representation.<sup>21</sup>

If *Jeanne Dielman*, a key film in modern European cinema, has already been extensively analysed, especially by Margulies<sup>22</sup> and Schmid,<sup>23</sup> the 'making-of' *Autour de 'Jeanne Dielman'* has been much less commented on.

First of all, the film crew has the distinctive feature of being composed almost exclusively of women, except for the set designers and one of the assistant directors. From Seyrig's point of view, who was a leading actress in

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<sup>21</sup> Schmid, *Chantal Akerman*, p. 37.

<sup>22</sup> See *Nothing Happens*.

<sup>23</sup> Schmid, *Chantal Akerman*, pp. 32-50.

European *cinéma d'auteur*<sup>24</sup> as well as a feminist activist, the fact that women hold the key posts – director, leading actress, cinematographer, sound engineers, and assistant directors – changes the practice of filmmaking itself and modifies the relations of power and authority between the filmmaker, the actress, and the technicians. The 'making-of' ends with an argument between Seyrig and the other female members of the crew about the work conditions of women in film industry. The actress argues: 'Rarement vous aurez l'occasion de travailler dans des conditions aussi peu dominatrices.' This lack of male domination impacts on the crew's ways of working, behaving, and speaking, and disrupts the conventional hierarchy of traditional shootings.<sup>25</sup>

In the 'making-of', Seyrig is asked by a journalist to develop her feminist views. First, she believes in the potential of women filmmakers to represent femininity and female stereotypes differently than male filmmakers do. Akerman shares the same conviction, arguing in another interview that the form of the films made by female filmmakers depend on their ability to express their own language and rhythms:

Donc, si on arrive à ne pas imiter [les hommes], et il ne s'agit pas seulement de ne pas vouloir, si on arrive à pouvoir ne pas les imiter, si on arrive à être au plus près de soi-même, on aura forcément un autre rythme. Ça j'y crois foncièrement. On n'a pas les mêmes intérêts, au niveau du langage et de la forme.<sup>26</sup>

Secondly, Seyrig fights against the idea of the predestination of women in patriarchal society and the fabrication of female gender identity from birth, echoing Simone de Beauvoir's well-known assertion: 'On ne naît pas femme,

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<sup>24</sup> She played in the films of Alain Resnais's *L'Année dernière à Marienbad* (1961) and *Muriel ou le temps d'un retour* (1963), François Truffaut's *Baisers volés* (1968), Jacques Demy's *Peau d'Âne* (1970), Luis Buñuel's *La Voie lactée* (1969) and *Le Charme discret de la bourgeoisie* (1972), Harry Kümel's *Les Lèvres rouges* (1971), and Marguerite Duras's *La Musica* (1967), *India Song* (1975), *Son nom de Venise dans Calcutta désert* (1976), and *Baxter, Vera Baxter* (1977).

<sup>25</sup> Two years after the shooting of *Jeanne Dielman*, Seyrig directed the documentary *Sois belle et tais toi* (1976-81) which discusses the issue of sexism in the film industry. She interviewed twenty-three actresses from different countries.

<sup>26</sup> Chantal Akerman, Danièle Dubroux, Thérèse Giraud, and Louis Skorecki, 'Entretien avec Chantal Akerman', *Cahiers du cinéma*, July 1977, p. 36.

on le devient.<sup>27</sup> Through the embodiment of Jeanne Dielman, a female character with multiple identities (housewife, mother, widow, prostitute, and murderer), the actress reveals her desire to explore differently the representation of woman. In previous films, she had already performed more stereotypical types of female characters. In a way, Jeanne Dielman appears to be the concentrated image of Seyrig's previous mythical roles, from the widow in Resnais's *Muriel ou le temps d'un retour* or the prostitute in Buñuel's *La Voie Lactée* to the fairy in Demy's *Peau d'Âne* (the perfect housewife being stereotypically known as *une fée du logis*). Quoting Akerman, Margulies notes that '[the director] deliberately chose Seyrig "because she brought with her all the roles of mythical woman that she played until now. The woman in *Marienbad*, the woman in *India Song*...'"<sup>28</sup> Regarded as 'an independent aesthetic object in herself' as well as a star by Susan Sontag,<sup>29</sup> Seyrig was used by Akerman, according to Margulies, to 'subvert not only naturalism, with its categorical essences (The Mother, The Housewife), but also the realist notion of type (individual traits epitomizing some collective configuration)'.<sup>30</sup>

As a result, Seyrig's performance in *Jeanne Dielman* is anti-naturalist. The 'making-of' shows her difficulty of embodying this character devoid of psychology and envisioned by Akerman as a pure moving image. *Jeanne Dielman*'s shooting highlights the decisive question of incarnation in cinema. Embodying 'an existence reduced to pure functioning'<sup>31</sup> is alienating for the character as much as for the actress herself. Akerman's interest in alienation, automation, anxiety, everyday gestures, and self-control recalls Perec and Queysanne's *Un Homme qui dort*. Like Seyrig, the actor Jacques Spiesser felt alienated during the shooting, unsettled and exasperated by the lack of invention. However, far from being a 'pion sur un échiquier' as she says, Seyrig creatively contributes to the performance by reflecting on the reason

<sup>27</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième sexe II. L'expérience vécue* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949), p. 13.

<sup>28</sup> Margulies, *Nothing Happens*, p. 145.

<sup>29</sup> See Susan Sontag, 'Muriel ou le temps d'un retour', *Film Quarterly*, 17.2 (1963-64), 23-27 (p. 27).

<sup>30</sup> Margulies, *Nothing Happens*, p. 145.

<sup>31</sup> Schmid, *Chantal Akerman*, p. 38.

of her gestures, not so much in their psychological dimension, than in terms of logic, practice, technique, habitus, and ethos. The performance of a housewife's everyday gestures involves a level of cultural knowledge, experience, savoir-faire, and technical mastery. This constructed image of the housewife raises the question of the construction of gender identity in the performance of gesture as social codes are embedded on the surface of the body, in gestures and postures.

## **1.2. Decoding Gesture: The Use of Kinesics in the Art of Directing**

Filmmakers are the active spectators of their actors and actresses' performances. As directors, they have to observe, assess, and direct their gestures and movements according to the meaning of the scene. The empirical practice of kinesics, i.e. the study of bodily motions in space and in social interaction, is a prerequisite for directing as well as for acting. Filmmakers, actors as well as actresses have to be able to understand the expressive qualities and the cultural codes of gestures. As Warren Buckland explains, '[f]or kinesics, gestures and posture are not simply anatomical movements, but are ideological, because each society prescribes certain expected forms of behaviour over others yet presents that behaviour as natural, to be taken for granted.'<sup>32</sup> This semiotics of gestures is particularly visible in gender differences. Drawing on Ray L. Birdswhistell's works in kinesics, Buckland underlines the significance of the social construction of gender and shows how it is reflected in the way individuals move, behave, and dress. The corporeal style, which differentiates in its expressive qualities, is rooted in sociocultural patterns.

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<sup>32</sup> Warren Buckland, 'Bodies in Filmic Space: The *Mise en Scène* of "Courtship Readiness" in *The Big Sleep*', *Senses of Cinema*, 66 (2013).  
<<http://sensesofcinema.com/2013/feature-articles/bodies-in-filmic-space-the-mise-en-scene-of-courtship-readiness-in-the-big-sleep/>> [accessed 10 May 2017]

Maxine Sheets-Johnston insists on the 'intimate connection between style and quality'<sup>33</sup> in relation to bodily movement: '[...] *style* is originally a matter of the qualitative structures of movement.'<sup>34</sup> She adds: 'Each behaviour is distinctively what it is precisely in virtue of its temporal – spatial and energetic – quality.'<sup>35</sup> The terms amplitude, magnitude, effort, flux, dynamic variations, straight or curved lines, regularly used by Sheets-Johnston, makes it possible to describe the quality of gestures, not only in aesthetic fields such as dance or cinema, but also in everyday life. During the rehearsals, Akerman pays close attention to the speed, amplitude, and effort of Seyrig's gestures. The quality of her movements shapes the spectator's perception of the character and scene. When Seyrig does not know how to act, Akerman performs the gesture in front of her to indicate the degree of expressiveness she desires. The actress perceives the filmmaker's gesture, assesses it, and decodes it. The director and the actress use their bodies to exchange and create the character. Following Bolens's study on kinesic style, it seems here necessary to distinguish kinesis – which designates the visio-motor perception of gestures in all their expressive components (amplitude, extension, coordination, or speed) – from kinesthesia, which is the sensation of one's own movements.<sup>36</sup> The kinesic style embraces all the movements that a person A makes in actions that produce meaning both for A and for the person B who observes the gestures. Gestures are a source of perceptions, sensations, and thought for B, and a way of being, expressing, and communicating for A. The notions of kinesis and kinesthesia are useful to analyse the interaction between Akerman and Seyrig during the film rehearsals. They both simulate the character's gestures thanks to the perceptions and sensations they had experienced in their everyday life.

Furthermore, during the rehearsals, Seyrig seeks to communicate feelings in the gestures she has to perform. While Akerman refuses to psychologise Jeanne Dielman's gestures, Seyrig wants to understand the

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<sup>33</sup> Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, *The Primacy of Movement* (Amsterdam, Philadelphia: J. Benjamins, 2011), p. 137.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 138.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Bolens, *Le Style des gestes*, pp. 1-2.

character's interiority. This contradiction often leads to a lack of understanding between the actress and the filmmaker. Seyrig attempts to explore Jeanne Dielman's inner life: what does she think when she cooks? What are her secrets? Akerman is often unable to answer these questions. As Schmid writes, she opted for a 'resolutely anti-psychological approach to character construction'.<sup>37</sup> Yet, as James Naremore explains, the actor or actress's urge to express the character's thoughts is essential in cinema. The expression of everyday actions differs in cinema and reality: 'It is wrong to assume that expression in films is equivalent to behaviour in daily life. For one thing, most film actors are acutely sensitive to the purely rhetorical need to make their "thought" visible to the camera.'<sup>38</sup> Even in naturalist cinema, there is 'a degree of ostensiveness that marks it off from quotidian behaviour'.<sup>39</sup> While Akerman wants to neutralise the character's expression of her inner life, Seyrig expresses the rhetorical need to give the gesture an inner impulse. The actress, who was trained by Tania Balachova as well as by the Actors Studio in New York in the tradition of Stanislavski's acting method,<sup>40</sup> often questions Akerman about Jeanne Dielman's intentions. For the actress, the quality of a gesture is the expression of an intention or feeling.



Fig. 1. *Jeanne Dielman*

<sup>37</sup> Schmid, *Chantal Akerman*, p. 36.

<sup>38</sup> Naremore, *Acting in the Cinema*, pp. 71-72.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>40</sup> See Carmen Fernandez, 'Seyrig, Delphine', in *Le Dictionnaire universel des créatrices*, ed. by Beatrice Didier, Antoinette Fouque, and Mireille Calle-Gruber (Paris: Des femmes, A. Fouque, 2013). Ebook.

For instance, the character, before going to bed, does her hair [Fig. 1]. Akerman asks Seyrig to make slow, regular, and long gestures when she combs her hair, rather than the irregular, jerky, and hasty ones she made during the rehearsal. The actress asks Akerman to explain the reason of Jeanne Dielman's gesture: why such pace and rhythm? Instead of explaining, Akerman performs the gesture in front of Seyrig. While the latter attempts to pinpoint the psychological intention of the gesture, Akerman is only interested in the visual quality of expression, i.e. in the difference between an abrupt and a slow movement. Unconvinced, Seyrig insists on characterising Dielman's feeling. The director ends up suggesting that the gesture corresponds to a break in the character's day ('un moment de repos'). This indication helps Seyrig to qualify the character's thought and inner life: 'Tu veux qu'elle soit plus rêveuse,' 'elle prend plaisir à ça.' The words dreamy and pleasure psychologise in a way Dielman's behaviour and reveal Seyrig's need to understand the character's inner life ('comment veux-tu que je joue si je ne connais pas ses secrets?') in order to perform the gesture of combing her hair. While Seyrig remains frustrated in her wish to build the character's interiority, she succeeds in influencing the mise-en-scène by focusing on the technical precision of gestures, rather than on their psychological components.

### **1.3. Ethnic Style, Lost Rituals, and Technical Precision**

The bodily interactions and verbal exchange between Akerman and Seyrig raise the question of transmission, especially in the domestic framework of the film. The kitchen is traditionally a space in which cultural codes, rites, traditions, cooking practices, and specific gestures are transmitted to women through education and repetition. Cooking is an art of living that requires the learning of techniques and recipes, often transmitted from one generation to another. For example, in *Jeanne Dielman*, Seyrig follows the recipe of Akerman's aunt to prepare Wiener Schnitzel, a traditional Austrian dish made of breaded thin slices of veal or poultry, popular in European Jewish

culture.<sup>41</sup> Being ‘the first child of Jewish Polish immigrants who settled in Belgium in the late 1930s’, Akerman grew up in a Jewish community.<sup>42</sup> As Schmid explains, ‘[Akerman] has revealed her continuing attachment to Jewish ritual despite the fact that, as she states, she is not a religious person.’ She adds that

[h]er marginal status as a Jew in a predominantly Christian society and her belonging to a minority group of immigrants with distinct cultural customs and traditions fostered in her, from an early age, a sense of alterity and non-belonging, which has crystallised as a major theme in her work.<sup>43</sup>

In *Jeanne Dielman*, Akerman reiterates certain family rituals and cooking traditions, which tended to disappear after the death of her grandfather.<sup>44</sup> As Akerman admitted, *Jeanne Dielman* is a film on the loss of rituals: ‘[...] c’est un film sur la perte, sur la nostalgie du rituel perdu.’<sup>45</sup> To a certain extent, Seyrig helped her reconstruct and re-enact the ritual.

In *Le Geste et la parole*, Leroi-Gourhan studies the aesthetic dimension of gestures in everyday life, especially the aesthetic behaviour (‘comportement esthétique’)<sup>46</sup> and ethnic style (‘style ethnique’)<sup>47</sup> of human beings. The concept of ethnic style highlights the significance of transmission in everyday life: ‘Certaines attitudes, certains gestes de politesse ou de communication, le rythme du pas, le savoir-manger, les gestes d’hygiène ont des tonalités ethniques qui se transmettent à travers les générations.’<sup>48</sup> The example of cooking is particularly enlightening. Giard notes that

[...] les travaux quotidiens de la cuisine semblent, dans la sphère privée, tout entiers voués à la répétition, de structure archaïque, un savoir lié à des codes sociaux très anciens, stabilisé en de vieilles formes d’équilibre, c’est-à-dire en un agrégat obscur et peu rationnel de préférences, de nécessités et d’usages reçus.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> See Akerman, *Chantal Akerman: Autoportrait en cinéaste*, p. 23.

<sup>42</sup> Schmid, *Chantal Akerman*, p. 2.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>44</sup> Akerman, *Chantal Akerman: Autoportrait en cinéaste*, p. 23.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* p. 24.

<sup>46</sup> Leroi-Gourhan, *Le Geste et la parole II*, p. 99.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92.

<sup>49</sup> Giard, ‘Séquences de gestes’, in *L’Invention du quotidien 2*, pp. 283-84.

Yet she observes the revolution of cooking practices in contemporary Western societies on account of the accelerated changes of *styles de vie*. With the development of electrical appliances, some technical gestures sank into oblivion:

Déjà nombre de gestes et de procédés courants pour la génération de mes grand-mères, des manières de faire qui faisaient partie de l'apprentissage normal d'une jeune fille et de son capital (moyen) de savoir-faire, se sont effacés de la conscience commune et ne subsistent plus que dans les souvenirs d'enfance de certains [...].<sup>50</sup>

It is no coincidence that Giard starts the chapter on cooking practices by quoting Seyrig sharing her experience in *Jeanne Dielman*. According to the actress, Akerman loved the domestic gestures she was performing, such as 'laver la baignoire, tricoter, faire la vaisselle' because they belonged to 'le monde de son enfance'.<sup>51</sup> Indeed, the filmmaker stands in the position of the 'little girl observing her own mother's gestures, intently and from a certain distance', Margulies writes.<sup>52</sup>



Fig. 2, 3. *Autour de 'Jeanne Dielman'*

In the 'making-of', the actress and the filmmaker are rehearsing the scene in which Jeanne Dielman prepares Wiener Schnitzel [Fig. 2, 3]. Seyrig and Akerman discuss every step of the recipe that the director punctiliously wrote in the screenplay, based on the observation of her mother's and aunts'

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 284.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 280.

<sup>52</sup> Margulies, *Nothing Happens*, p. 90.

gestures.<sup>53</sup> Akerman describes and slightly mimes her mother's way of cooking: 'Ma mère, tu sais ce qu'elle fait après, elle prend l'œuf, elle prend un peu de chapelure, elle le met dans l'œuf, et elle le fait cuire en même temps.' Drawing on her own experience and memories, Seyrig, even if she follows Akerman's instructions, does not hesitate to contradict the young director. Their exchange makes it possible to consider the difference between the performance of everyday gestures in life and in cinema, as well as the nuance between the technical accuracy and the expressiveness of gestures. Giard explains that '[l]e geste technique, à distinguer du geste d'expression qui traduit un sentiment ou une réaction, se définit d'abord par sa visée d'utilité, son intention opératoire'.<sup>54</sup> Cinema blurs the distinction between the technical and the expressive gesture. Akerman pays more attention to the manner of doing and to the stylistic qualities of the gesture than to the actual efficacy of the movement. She wants to emphasise the sensual (not the psychological) expressivity of the movement. At the same time, Seyrig is concerned about the realisation of the purpose. For the actress, the aim of the action influences her way of performing it. When Seyrig spreads the escalope in the flour, she holds the meat with her fingertips, while Akerman incites the actress to take the escalope in her hand firmly, in order to feel the 'sensation de la viande dans la main.' Seyrig refuses and argues that the technical gesture is not correct: if she uses her fingertips, it is because she needs to cover all the surface of the escalope with flour. The filmmaker and the actress have to negotiate the tension between the technical precision of the gesture and its visual perception, its accuracy and its sensuality. They also express different ways of doing, practising, and cooking, because of their own personal experiences and memories that impact deeply on the style of the performance. Interestingly they often ask the make-up artist Eliane Marcus for advice on the way of cooking or performing in the kitchen, using her experience to strengthen the precision of gestures.

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<sup>53</sup> See *I Don't Belong Anywhere: The Cinema of Chantal Akerman*, dir. by Marianne Lambert (2015).

<sup>54</sup> Giard, 'Séquences de gestes', in *L'Invention du quotidien 2*, p. 285.

In her essay on film acting, Jacqueline Nacache notes the ambiguity of technical gestures that, by contrast with the excess of expressiveness in silent cinema, have become more and more precise in modern cinema.<sup>55</sup> If their exactitude produces an effect of truth, especially when they are filmed in long shots (and thus do not seem to be feigned by the actor or actress), they can consequently reduce film acting to the execution of a 'répertoire de gestes tellement précis et documentés que, même luxueusement détaillés, ils perdent toute valeur sémantique, opacifient un jeu de l'acteur réduit à l'économie gestuelle [...]'.<sup>56</sup> Although Seyrig is preoccupied with the technical precision of Jeanne Dielman's gestures, she also attempts to understand the reason of the character's gestures, in accordance with her habitus and ethos of housewife, in order to avoid acting them in an impersonal way.

#### 1.4. The Habitus and Ethos of the Housewife

Cinema can reproduce and convey the bodily techniques of a specific cultural and social milieu, which in *Jeanne Dielman* is the Brussels petit bourgeois domestic space. In his famous essay 'Les Techniques du corps', Mauss considers the impact of cinema on the construction of female behaviours. Indeed he observes that French young women walk in the same way as New York nurses. According to the anthropologist, the only rational explanation of such a phenomenon has to be found in cinema. 'En fait, les modes de marche américaine, grâce au cinéma, commençaient à arriver chez nous.'<sup>57</sup> This preliminary observation is the starting point of Mauss's demonstration. He adds: 'C'était une idée que je pouvais généraliser. La position des bras, celle des mains pendant qu'on marche forment une idiosyncrasie sociale, et non simplement un produit de je ne sais quels agencements et mécanismes purement individuels, presque entièrement psychiques.'<sup>58</sup> With the notion of habitus, he analyses how our bodily

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<sup>55</sup> Nacache, *L'Acteur de cinéma*, pp. 58-59.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>57</sup> Mauss, 'Les Techniques du corps', p. 7.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

techniques are imparted by social practices. Habitus is the corporeal expression of the sociocultural norms, structures, and values, which shape the way of being of an individual.<sup>59</sup> The social construction of human postures and gestures proves particularly visible in terms of gender differences.

According to Macé, the notion of habitus in Mauss's theory is 'modal', in the sense that it invites anthropologists to observe corporeal forms and capacities as well as gestural modes and styles: 'les corps apparaissent en effet ici comme des instruments affûtés et affûtés "individuellement et collectivement", et c'est cette affûtabilité qui fait les styles.'<sup>60</sup> When Bourdieu develops the concept of habitus in the 1970s, he rather insists on class differences. According to him, habitus is a system that both generates classifiable practices ('pratiques classables')<sup>61</sup> and makes it possible to classify and differentiate these practices. In Bourdieu's thought, the social indicators (such as rich and poor) and the differences in taste resulting from class differences need to be taken into account in the analysis of those practices. Habitus produces 'styles de vie',<sup>62</sup> i.e. a system of sociologically qualified signs – which can be gendered for instance – visible in the bodily expression of individuals:

Porteur de signes, le corps est aussi producteur de signes qui sont marqués dans leur substance perceptible par le rapport au corps: c'est ainsi que la valorisation de la virilité peut, à travers la manière de tenir la bouche en parlant ou de poser la voix, déterminer toute la prononciation des classes populaires. Produit social, le corps, seule manifestation sensible de la 'personne', est communément perçu comme l'expression la plus naturelle de la nature profonde.<sup>63</sup>

During the rehearsals, Seyrig tries to characterise Jeanne Dielman's habitus, both in the modal and sociological sense of the term, and to decode the signs that are embedded in the character's acts, behaviours, and

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., pp. 7-8.

<sup>60</sup> Macé, *Styles*, p. 76.

<sup>61</sup> Bourdieu, *La Distinction*, p. 190.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 214.

gestures.<sup>64</sup> By doing so, she makes suggestions to Akerman, adds new gestures, and slightly influences the *mise-en-scène*. The rehearsal during which Seyrig prepares the Wiener Schnitzel is particularly instructive for two reasons. First, Seyrig concludes that Jeanne Dielman is not a very good cook, since she prepares food in advance. After preparing the breaded escalopes, the character puts them in the fridge, rather than cooking them or serving them immediately, which impacts on the quality of the food. Secondly, Seyrig pinpoints the character's habit of wasting nothing. When she starts throwing the flour out, she realises that her character, due to her social milieu, would not waste so much flour [Fig. 4, 5]. Her gesture itself – she tries to put the flour in her hand before throwing it away – reveals to her that what she is doing is irrelevant. She says to Akerman: 'Alors la farine je l'enlève avec les mains d'abord, mais tu vois, il en reste beaucoup, c'est beaucoup de gaspillage. Je crois qu'elle en met beaucoup moins que ça. [...] Cette femme ne jetterait certainement pas toute cette farine.' Seyrig's attempt to characterise Dielman's habitus enables her to construct the rest of the scene. Indeed, she suggests pouring the egg in a cup to keep it in the fridge, rather than wasting it, and ending the shot on the immaculate kitchen table. 'Il faut que tu restes sur la table sans rien,' Seyrig says, showing Akerman how to finish the shot [Fig. 6]. Seyrig's suggestions were partially followed by Akerman. The 'making-of' does not show the next steps of the rehearsal, such as the precise timing of the scene. Some gestures certainly changed during that process, as the film in its final version demonstrates.

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<sup>64</sup> Regarding the issue of class, it is notable that the actress and the director come from different social backgrounds – while Akerman was raised in a lower middle class family, Seyrig grew up in an intellectual milieu.



Fig. 4. *Autour de 'Jeanne Dielman'*



Fig. 5, 6. *Jeanne Dielman*

During the rehearsals, Seyrig, who refuses to be a passive performer, influences the micro (and not the macro) aspects of the *mise-en-scène*. She does not aim to take control of Akerman's *mise-en-scène*, but to construct and inhabit her character. Thanks to a good understanding of the housewife's *habitus* and *ethos*, she can appropriate her character's gestures and incorporate her personal experience in order to embody Jeanne Dielman. Unlike *habitus*, *ethos* refers to a character's moral attitude within a social group, in terms of way of being, behaviour, gesture, or clothing. According to Agamben, gesture in cinema 'opens the sphere of *ethos* as the more proper of that which is human.'<sup>65</sup> Overstepping the binary distinction between gesture as a means to an end and gesture as an end in itself – like dance for instance –, Agamben suggests that gesture shows a means without end. In this sense, gesture must not be confused with action and must not be reduced to the finality of an act of production. Gesture reveals

<sup>65</sup> Agamben, 'Notes on Gesture', p. 56.

itself in its corporeal qualities (such as effort, endurance, dexterity, clumsiness, or amplitude) that reflect an individual's moral attitude and ethical relationship with the world and others. I will further discuss the notion of ethos in the section 2.2. of this chapter by analysing Akerman's slapstick films.

In the Stanislavski method of acting, the actor or actress needs to understand and analyse the operative, psychological, moral, and social purpose of the character's actions in order to construct his or her inner life and to give the gestures their true quality. The understanding of the finality of the act (in relation to the broader meaning of the narrative and of the character's trajectory) determines the style of gestures. In *Jeanne Dielman*, one can observe the reverse. It is the austere, hieratic, and rigorous quality of Jeanne Dielman's gestures, imposed by Akerman from the beginning, which enables Seyrig to progressively understand Jeanne Dielman's behaviour and actions and to consequently change certain acts (such as avoiding wasting food). For Akerman, the style of gestures appears to matter much more than the profound meaning of the action. Seyrig, who does not have the possibility to internalise Jeanne Dielman's psychology, constructs her role gesture after gesture, assimilating her character's habitus and ethos gradually. Strikingly, in *Saute ma ville* and *L'Homme à la valise* Akerman's acting style and her characters' ethos contrast with Seyrig's and Dielman's.

## 2. Slapstick Gestures and Tragic Gags

While, during the first two days of the filmic diegesis, Jeanne Dielman reiterates her domestic rituals with the same regularity and exactitude – as 'an attempt to control and displace anxiety'<sup>66</sup> –, during the third and last day her routine is gradually disturbed and shows signs of disorder. As Schmid explains,

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<sup>66</sup> Schmid, *Chantal Akerman*, p. 44.

[t]he third day sees an increasing build-up of the disordering process. Jeanne's daily activities and impeccable appearance are compromised: objects fall to the ground whilst she is cleaning shoes and polishing cutlery, her negligently open dressing gown prompts a disapproving comment from her son, the Post Office and shops are still closed as she sets out on her morning tour too early.<sup>67</sup>

These mishaps in the character's metronomic routine evoke the aesthetics of disorder and chaos which Akerman develops more spectacularly in her slapstick films such as *Saute ma ville* and *L'Homme à la valise*. The slapstick (or *burlesque*) stages the malfunction of the mechanics of gesture, expressing suffering through certain behavioural pathologies. Bergson considers gestures in physical comedy as essentially automatic, mechanical, and involuntary ('*du mécanique plaqué sur du vivant*').<sup>68</sup> He argues that the body can make people laugh, in a social context, due to its stiffness and marionette-like appearance. By contrast, Macé sees the sign of a corporeal resistance in the intensity of slapstick gestures:

Le cinéma muet, depuis les premiers *slapsticks* de Keaton et de Chaplin jusqu'aux subtiles inventions kinésiques de Tati ou de De Funès, a en effet redonné à des corps comiques, souffrants, ou laborieux, quelque chose d'une puissance, transfigurant en intensités la mécanique de gestes réifiés. Restitutions, résistances par lesquelles un médium redonne aux sujets une force qui est déjà la leur, pour reprendre le pas sur les programmations des gestes par l'ensemble des dispositifs, des scripts et des *process* qui peuplent notre quotidien, notamment au travail. Pourquoi valoriser aujourd'hui la notion de geste? Précisément 'parce qu'elle nous aide à résister à la tyrannie des programmes'.<sup>69</sup>

Stressing the idea of resistance in her study of Akerman's cinema, Jenny Chamarette analyses the performance of carnivalesque and *burlesque* gestures in Akerman's comedy *Demain on déménage* (2004). Chamarette defines the *burlesque* as an 'intermedial mode',<sup>70</sup> which developed in Vaudeville theatre in Europe and the United States in the nineteenth century, and later in French cinema with Max Linder and in Hollywood with Buster Keaton's, Roscoe 'Fatty' Arbuckle's, and Charlie Chaplin's slapstick

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>68</sup> Bergson, *Le Rire. Essai sur la signification du comique*, in *Œuvres*, p. 405.

<sup>69</sup> Macé, *Styles*, pp. 256-57.

<sup>70</sup> Jenny Chamarette, 'Burlesque Gestures and Bodily Attention: Phenomenologies of the Ephemeral in Chantal Akerman', in *Phenomenology and the Future of Film. Rethinking Subjectivity beyond French Cinema* (Basingstoke, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 156.

comedies. The French term *cinéma burlesque*, which is used to describe Jacques Tati's and Pierre Etaix's as well as Chaplin's and Jerry Lewis's comedies, has 'generic relations to slapstick, physical comedy and screwball comedy'.<sup>71</sup>

Inspired by Chaplin,<sup>72</sup> Akerman's use of slapstick, which is not necessarily comical, can express an anxious feeling of uneasiness. In her self-portrait *Autoportrait en cinéaste*, Akerman often gives tragic connotations to the term 'burlesque' or uses it as a counterpoint to the lexical field of sadness: '[...] c'est comique. Burlesque même. Non tragi-comique'; 'Burlesque. Et tragique aussi'; 'C'est moins comique, et pas du tout burlesque, c'est même triste'; or when she describes Seyrig: '[...] j'ai mis des années à comprendre qu'elle avait à la fois une drôlerie qui pouvait aller jusqu'au burlesque, et que derrière ce sourire se cachait quelque chose de tragique'.<sup>73</sup> While Jean-Michel Frodon describes Akerman's character in *Saute ma ville* as a 'clown destroy et féminin, sérieux comme une officiante, concentré sur sa tâche paradoxale, préparer la tambouille, préparer sa mort, préparer la catastrophe générale',<sup>74</sup> Akerman portrays herself as a 'clown triste'.<sup>75</sup> As Schmid explicates through her discussion of Akerman's *Histoires d'Amérique: Food, Family and Philosophy* (1989), the intersection of 'tragic and comic registers' and the 'juxtaposition of traumatic tale and burlesque performance' are bound to Akerman's Jewishness. 'As Akerman explains in *Autoportrait*, sadness and laughter are inseparably linked in Jewish culture and Jewish humour – that oft evoked quintessentially Jewish trait – is directly born out of the horrors of History,' Schmid writes.<sup>76</sup>

With the aim of defining the essential features of Akerman's slapstick acting style in *Saute ma ville* and *L'Homme à la valise*, I will first analyse the revival of slapstick in the context of the post-New Wave. Indeed, the notions

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 155.

<sup>72</sup> See Chantal Akerman and Elisabeth Lebovici, 'Losing Everything that Made You a Slave', in *Chantal Akerman: Too Far, Too Close*, ed. by Dieter Roelstraete and Anders Kreuger (Antwerpen: Ludion, M HKA, 2012), p. 98.

<sup>73</sup> Akerman, *Chantal Akerman: Autoportrait en cinéaste*, pp. 76-79.

<sup>74</sup> Jean-Michel Frodon, 'Saute ma ville', in Akerman, *Chantal Akerman: Autoportrait en cinéaste*, p. 172.

<sup>75</sup> Akerman, *Chantal Akerman: Autoportrait en cinéaste*, p. 29.

<sup>76</sup> Schmid, *Chantal Akerman*, p. 91.

of self-representation, tragic gags, and crisis of authorship, which are crucial in Akerman's slapstick films, are also problematised in other post-New Wave films.

### 2.1. The Revival of Slapstick in Post-New Wave Cinema

In *L'Image-temps*, Deleuze analyses the New Wave and post-New Wave cinema in terms of body representation.<sup>77</sup> He contextualises the New Wave in the framework of the 'cinéma des corps'<sup>78</sup> which emerged in the late 1950s and 1960s with John Cassavetes, Michelangelo Antonioni, and Andy Warhol. The New Wave filmmakers explore the intense relationship between the characters' bodies and their environment by theatricalising their everyday gestures, attitudes, and postures. The characters are constantly moving in spaces that modulate their gestural styles. They are running, falling, bumping into each other, and closely interacting with all the tangible elements of the setting. Hence the parallel that Deleuze draws between the New Wave and slapstick cinema.<sup>79</sup> This preoccupation with space and gesture was already at the centre of Eric Rohmer's first major article, 'Le Cinéma, art de l'espace', published in the late 1940s in *La Revue du cinéma*, which examines the specificity of gesture in cinema and, more particularly, the spatial language of slapstick comedy. In the space and frame of a film, the expressive lines of the body shape what Rohmer calls 'une "cinéplastique" du geste'.<sup>80</sup> He considers the relationship between body and space as the driving force of cinematic expression, and slapstick comedy as the paradigm of such a relation.

The confrontation between the character's body and the world lies at the heart of the New Wave filmmakers' cinematic research, influenced by American behaviourism, Keaton's cinema, and Rossellini's neorealism. As Douchet explains very well, the New Wave directors organise the stylistic

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<sup>77</sup> See Deleuze, 'Cinéma, corps et cerveau, pensée', in *L'Image-temps*, pp. 246-65.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 254.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 251-52.

<sup>80</sup> Rohmer, *Le Goût de la beauté*, p. 42.

and narrative principles of their mise-en-scène from the characters' roaming in space. The finality of their actions matters less than the expression of their moral attitude: 'Le déplacement en tant qu'acte en soi rompt avec l'action – aussi profitable que l'action à Wall Street – du cinéma hollywoodien.'<sup>81</sup> The street becomes the New Wave's most emblematic space. The physical relationship to the world manifests itself in urban environments open to encounters, chance, accidents, and surprises.

Emerging from the mid-1960s, the post-New Wave, in line with the New Wave, focuses on the ritualisation of gestures and the violent coordination of attitudes and postures. According to Deleuze,

[...]l'après-nouvelle vague ne cessera de travailler et d'inventer dans ces directions: les attitudes et postures du corps, la valorisation de ce qui se passe par terre ou couché, la vitesse et la violence de la coordination, la cérémonie ou le théâtre de cinéma qui s'en dégage [...].<sup>82</sup>

Deleuze is aware of the limits of what he calls the 'cinéma des corps', which, in some cases, highlights the everyday life of marginal characters to the point of wallowing in blandness, unjustified physical violence, or pathological behaviours:

[...] Le cinéma des corps ne va pas sans danger: une exaltation des personnages marginaux qui font de leur vie quotidienne une insipide cérémonie; un culte de la violence gratuite dans l'enchaînement des postures; une culture des attitudes catatoniques, hystériques ou simplement asilaires [...].<sup>83</sup>

Some post-New Wave filmmakers critically examine these pitfalls and stereotypes. In Perec and Queysanne's *Un Homme qui dort*, the character's excessive quest for solitude, as we have seen in Chapter 1, is undermined by the critical distance emerging from the interconnection between the voice-over and the image. Thanks to the editing and the post-synchronisation of the soundtrack, the actor's bodily movements are reintegrated in a network of signs which highlights the polysemy of his gestures. In the last part of the film, through camerawork, editing, and sound effects, Perec and Queysanne

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<sup>81</sup> Douchet, *Nouvelle Vague*, p. 153.

<sup>82</sup> Deleuze, *L'Image-temps*, p. 254.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 254-55.

develop an aesthetic of shock which produces metaphors on conditioning, alienation, self-destruction, and memory. Some other directors prefer to embody the critical discourse in the actor or actress's body itself. Drawing on the codes of slapstick comedy, Akerman, Godard, Moullet, Cavalier, and Tanner give prominence to the expressivity of the body in order to negotiate the notions of marginality, violent gestures, and/or pathological behaviours.

Etymologically, the term slapstick (which originates from the clapper (*battacio*), a percussive instrument used in *commedia dell' arte*) refers to two wooden slats used to create a loud noise and exaggerate the physical violence of the actors and actresses' gestures in a comic purpose. In this genre of comedy, laughter is profoundly associated with pain, suffering, and even death as the French idiom *mourir de rire* indicates. Muriel Andrin, who analyses 'the darker side of an apparent joyful genre,' insists on the 'extreme violence' of the tradition of slapstick which, in Hollywood, emphasises the mechanics of gestures in the context of American industrialised society.<sup>84</sup> Hyperbolic, emphatic, excessive, and destructive, the comedians' gestures evoke the behaviours of hysterical patients. Andrin explains that '[...] the burlesque character, soiled, disfigured, deprived of its physical and moral integrity, embodies the disintegration of the self'.<sup>85</sup> Such a description relevantly characterises the slapstick aesthetics in post-New Wave cinema – although the slapstick is often much more discreet than in classical Hollywood cinema and sometimes appears in a few scenes of a film only.<sup>86</sup> Post-New Wave Filmmakers do not necessarily aim to pay tribute to classical Hollywood slapstick comedy. They refashion some essential features of the genre in a personal and/or political way.

The renewal of the slapstick tradition has been formalised by Samuel Beckett and Alan Schneider in the short experimental film entitled *Film*

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<sup>84</sup> Muriel Andrin, 'Back to the "Slap". Slapstick's Hyperbolic Gesture and the Rhetoric of Violence', in *Slapstick Comedy*, ed. by Tom Paulus and Rob King (New York, London: Routledge, 2010), p. 227.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 230.

<sup>86</sup> Bergala considers Tati's and Godard's slapstick style as being 'erratique' and 'discret', two adjectives which can more broadly qualify the revival of slapstick in post-New Wave cinema. See Alain Bergala, *Godard-Tati, un burlesque erratique et discret*, online video recording, Cinémathèque française, 30 April 2009, <<http://www.cinematheque.fr/video/132.html>> [accessed 16 April 2017]

(1965) starring Buster Keaton. The old man played by Keaton hides his face, turns his back to the camera, walks along the walls, avoids the look of others, and confines himself in a room which alienates him from the outside world. His body is less a body that provokes laughter than a body that suffers. The actor's physical presence in the cinematic space reveals his problematic relationship to the world and others. Keaton's solitude and clumsiness, for example when he tries to chase his domestic animals away, are two trademarks of his filmography, as Rohmer explains: 'Tout au long de ses films, Buster Keaton exprime cette obsession d'un certain espace de maladresse et de solitude dont nous ne pouvons trouver au cinéma d'équivalent.'<sup>87</sup> The issues of marginalisation and solitude, as well as the tension between interior and exterior spaces are often central in post-New Wave films.

In traditional slapstick comedies, actor-directors such as Keaton and Chaplin usually represent their characters' bodies in difficult positions. Their bodies are tested in their ability to withstand shocks and to get back on their feet. Their relation to power, but also their authority, is put to the test. Similarly, when Akerman, Godard, Moullet, and Cavalier play themselves in front of the camera in films that intertwine social and political considerations with autofictional or autobiographical preoccupations, their suffering bodies also occupy a central position. For example, in *Anatomie d'un rapport* (1976), Moullet and his partner Antonietta Pizzorno reflect on the sexuality of a heterosexual couple. In a very humorous way, Moullet performs the crisis of the post-New Wave male author, at a time when feminist discourses developed in post-May 68 society thanks to the Mouvement de Libération des Femmes and started to challenge gender stereotypes in cinema. Penniless and threatened by impotency, Moullet's manner of considering women, sexuality, and cinema is called into question. His character's sexual frustration gives the film its slapstick tonality.

The influence of slapstick becomes symptomatic of the crisis of authorship that emerged in the late 1960s. In Jacques Tati's *Playtime* (1967),

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<sup>87</sup> Rohmer, *Le Goût de la beauté*, p. 48.

the character Monsieur Hulot roams and disappears within the anonymity of the crowd. Several extras wear his clothes, move and gesture in the same way as he does. His perfectly identifiable style loses its singularity in the modern world of consumer society and mass tourism. In this capitalist and technocratic environment, the author's identity and originality appear to be vulnerable and, even worse, are threatened by dissolution. One year later, the most emblematic author of the New Wave decided to disappear of his own free will and to occupy a marginalised position in the film industry in order to reflect on the politics of image and sound: 'In 1968, after a decade of influential and prolific filmmaking, Jean-Luc Godard disappeared from view,' as Colin McCabe writes, adding that '[h]e disappeared by refusing to make films as he had done before'.<sup>88</sup> Breaking with his image of New Wave author, Godard started shooting militant films with Jean-Pierre Gorin and the Dziga Vertov Group. The act of shooting becomes the framework for a socio-political deconstruction. In *Vladimir et Rosa* (1970), the political discourse and the cinematographic language are deconstructed and disrupted by the irruption of slapstick comedy, evoking the Marx Brothers, the Three Stooges, and the Keystone Cops.<sup>89</sup> In the opening sequence, the filmmakers literally associate slapstick with political demonstrations: three cops violently beat some demonstrators with exaggeratedly large wooden sticks. Godard performs the role of an idiot, a character he will embody again in the particular context of the 1980s (Chapter 3 will discuss more extensively Godard's crisis of authorship in *Prénom Carmen* (1983)).

Finally, in *Ce Répondeur ne prend pas de message* (1979), Cavalier grieves the death of his wife and attempts to exorcise his pain. He covers his head with bandages, like a badly burned person or a casualty of war.<sup>90</sup> Despite its desperate and self-destructive tone, the film is not devoid of dark humour. The filmmaker's relation to objects and to the space of the building

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<sup>88</sup> MacCabe, *Godard: Images, Sounds, Politics*, p. 18.

<sup>89</sup> See Federico Rossin, 'Marx au grand magasin. L'idiotie et le burlesque dans les films du groupe Dziga Vertov', trans. by Jean-Pierre Cometti and Andrea Paganini, *Vertigo*, 40 (2011), 73-79.

<sup>90</sup> Alain Cavalier and Jean-Louis Jeannelle, 'Alain Cavalier: le filmeur, la caméra et le spectateur', *Itinéraires*, 4 (2009), 175-191. <<https://journals.openedition.org/itineraires/1282>> [accessed 17 August 2018]

in which he confines himself is a source of tragic gags. For instance, Cavalier tries to melt soap on the hotplate of his kitchen (in an explicit reference to the Holocaust),<sup>91</sup> rings the door bell of his absent neighbours, breaks down the door of a *chambre de bonne*, or paints the windowpanes of his flat in black. Jean Cocteau coined the notion of ‘gag tragique’ to characterise Buñuel’s surrealist inventions in *L’Âge d’or* (1930). Referring to Cocteau, Pierre Kast analyses how the tragic gags are ‘épars dans le film et apparemment étrangers à l’action’, shaping the surrealist aesthetics of Buñuel’s film.<sup>92</sup> In Cavalier’s film, the tragic gags produce metaphors on the difficulty to communicate on death, mourning, absence, and trauma. Gesture becomes a means to overcome the loss of meaning of words and images. ‘Les mots avaient perdu leur sens, leur utilité tout comme les images,’ Cavalier confesses in voice-over. According to Agamben, gesture is a gag in the sense that it expresses the impossibility of communicating something through verbal language. The gag ‘indicates first of all something put in someone’s mouth to keep him from speaking and, then, the actor’s improvisation to make up for an impossibility of speaking’.<sup>93</sup> This obstruction of language leads the actor or actress to use his or her body as a medium of expression. The paralysis of language is central in Akerman’s cinema. In *Saute ma ville* and *L’Homme à la valise*, she films the painful (and sometimes playful) interaction of the character’s body with the domestic space, as well as with the opposite sex.

## **2.2. Subverting the Domestic Space in Akerman’s Slapstick Cinema: Ethos and Acting Style**

The resurgence of slapstick in modern cinema engages a critical distance. Instead of simply paying tribute to it, Tati – and, to a lesser extent, Godard –

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Pierre Kast, ‘Une fonction de constat. Notes sur l’œuvre de Buñuel’, *Cahiers du cinéma*, December 1951, p. 11.

<sup>93</sup> Giorgio Agamben, ‘Kommerell, or On Gesture’, in *Potentialities. Collected Essays in Philosophy*, ed. and trans. by Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 78.

refashions the genre to scrutinise the mutation of behaviours in modern society.<sup>94</sup> As for Akerman, she delineates a specific territory: the kitchen, and more broadly the domestic space. In *Saute ma ville*, made in her mother's kitchen in November 1968, Akerman pictures herself as a clumsy young woman resisting and subverting the conventional rhythms assimilated by women in patriarchal society. Her character disrupts the tasks that are conventionally associated with women, such as cooking or cleaning.

When Akerman describes herself as 'a female Charlie Chaplin',<sup>95</sup> she does not intend to pastiche Chaplin, but to construct a sense of slapstick based on feminine rhythms, gestures, and postures. The reference to Chaplin seems to reveal a lack of great slapstick actresses in the history of film. Slapstick comedy is a genre that is traditionally dominated by male stars. The great authors like Chaplin, Keaton, or Tati are also the leading actors and main characters of their films. According to Peter Král, such a situation prevents actresses from conveying their own rhythms and escaping the stereotypes that limit their means of expression:

C'est un fait connu: il n'y a pas – ou presque – de comiques féminins; les rares exceptions (une Mae West plutôt qu'une Shirley McLaine) ne font que confirmer la règle. Encore semblent-elles enfermées dans des limites trop étroites pour qu'on puisse vraiment les comparer à des comiques d'hommes. Faire rire, nous l'avons vu, n'entre chez l'homme en aucune contradiction fondamentale avec son sex-appeal. La femme, quand elle est belle, ne fait pas trop rire; et, quand elle ne l'est pas, elle n'est qu'une mégère plus ou moins anecdotique. D'une part, elle représente une valeur trop 'idéale' pour s'accompagner des humiliations que le réel lui inflige; d'autre part, elle s'intègre si bien à la réalité qu'elle manque de recul, pourtant nécessaire au comique.<sup>96</sup>

However, Peter Král, who does not mention the first major female slapstick star Mabel Normand, seems to exaggerate this sense of incompatibility between actresses and slapstick (not to mention a certain misogyny in his remarks). Significantly, the French New Wave revitalised the representation of the female body, sometimes by drawing on the codes of slapstick comedy, for instance in Godard's films starring Anna Karina. Michel Marie, who underlines the 'fantasy and spontaneity' of Karina's acting style notes that

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<sup>94</sup> See Bergala, *Godard-Tati, un burlesque erratique et discret*.

<sup>95</sup> Akerman and Lebovici, 'Losing Everything that Made You a Slave', p. 98.

<sup>96</sup> Peter Král, *Le Burlesque ou morale de la tarte à la crème* (Paris: Stock, 1984), p. 321.

'Godard returned to a certain Hollywood tradition, a close partnership between director and actress. They renewed the model established between Mack Sennett and Mabel Normand, Charlie Chaplin and Paulette Godard'.<sup>97</sup> Akerman's singularity consists in refashioning certain features of slapstick as a filmmaker and as an actress. Her position of author enables her to film her body according to her own desires, rhythms, and preoccupations.

Akerman considers *Saute ma ville*, in which she invades her mother's kitchen and subverts all the domestic tasks which are supposed to be done by women, as 'the opposite of *Jeanne Dielman*: the story of a girl who talks back to her mother, who explodes the norms that confine women to womanly tasks, who breaks everything in the kitchen and does everything in a crooked way'.<sup>98</sup> Her style of acting is highly expressive. Her exaggerated gestures, gait, attitudes, and postures convey 'the mocking, chaotic and self-annihilating subjectivity of a young woman'<sup>99</sup> as well as expressing the character's inner impulses on the surface of the body. When she frenetically polishes her shoes with very large and imprecise gestures to the point of blackening her legs, she certainly aims to disrupt the bodily techniques her parents imparted to her, and that Seyrig re-enacts in *Jeanne Dielman*. Indeed, when Jeanne Dielman polishes her son's shoes, she stands straight and makes only necessary gestures in a rigorous manner. Although their acts are similar, the visual perception of the characters' ethos is fundamentally contrasted. While Jeanne Dielman's gestures manifest an excessive need for control and exactitude, Akerman's character makes clumsy and self-aggressive gestures [Fig. 7, 8]. In *L'Homme à la valise*, Akerman still makes hasty and large gestures that prove inadequate to the tasks she has to do; for example, she drops the lid of the tea jar by trying to open it with a spoon. She voluntarily insists on her lack of bodily coordination in order to create visual gags.

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<sup>97</sup> Marie, *The French New Wave*, pp. 122-24.

<sup>98</sup> Akerman and Lebovici, 'Losing Everything that Made You a Slave', pp. 97-98.

<sup>99</sup> Chamarette, *Phenomenology and the Future of Film*, p. 143.



Fig. 7, 8. *Jeanne Dielman/Saute ma ville*

In interviews, Akerman has often highlighted the clumsiness and the lack of efficiency of her gestures. Her clumsiness is the mark of her nonconventional *style de vie* which conveys class and gender tensions in normative society, therefore contradicting the two requirements theorised by Mauss: tradition and efficiency. There is indeed a correlation between Akerman's gestural style in life and her acting style:

My body is very important in a movie, it says something by itself; it has the weight of the Real. I can't have actresses playing my clumsiness. It seems impossible for me to be in a restaurant without knocking something over – my gestures are too large, or I'm pursuing my thoughts and get startled. You're out of convention with your own body, with your own way of moving. When I was a child, and being raised in such a conventional bourgeois high school, I thought it was a question of class, I attributed my non-conformity to the fact that I was a Jew. I didn't attribute it to gender then, but I realised later that the other girls were already built to fit what a young woman was raised to become, in conformity with their future as women in a normative society.<sup>100</sup>

The filmmaker became aware of the weight of conventions and norms in the patriarchal educational system, and of their impact on the habitus of young girls. Akerman considers clumsiness as the bodily expression of her resistance against the heteronormative behaviours which are imparted to women. The quality of her gestures mirrors a moral attitude, which is indeed subversive:

Au cinéma, on peut tout se permettre, on peut casser des assiettes, cirer ses jambes, hurler pipi dans les escaliers. J'ai commencé par ça. Burlesque. Et tragique aussi. [...]  
Et puis faire des spaghettis, ça, c'est ni bien ni mal, mais les manger salement, ça c'est pas très bien. Sans se laver les mains d'abord.

<sup>100</sup> Akerman and Lebovici, 'Losing Everything that Made You a Slave', p. 98.

Se frotter la bouche avec ses mains, sans serviette, ça, ce n'est pas grave mais pas très bien. Mais jeter tout par terre, faire tout tomber des armoires, les casseroles et les boîtes de maïzena et la passoire et enfin tout ou presque, et puis jeter de l'eau sur ce tout, c'est pas grand chose, c'est presque rien, mais c'est presque mal.<sup>101</sup>

When Akerman describes her character's behaviour in *Saute ma ville*, she distinguishes the neutrality of the act ('faire des spaghettis') and her manner of eating ('les manger salement'), insisting, similarly to Agamben, on the intimate interrelation between the style of gesture and the character's ethos.

### **2.3. The Visual and Sound Interplay of Gestures: The Ethics of Gag**

Sixteen years after her first short film *Saute ma ville*, Akerman explores the ethical relation to the other in the domestic space of *L'Homme à la valise*, a medium-length film produced by I.N.A. (Institut National de l'Audiovisuel) for the French television anthology series 'Télévision de chambre', which includes eleven episodes directed by post-New Wave filmmakers such as Pierre Zucca, Jean-Claude Brisseau, Benoît Jacquot, and André Téchiné. In the film, Akerman's character, who is a filmmaker, goes through a personal crisis. After two months of absence, she returns to her flat where Henri (Jeffrey Kime), an acquaintance, has moved in, and to her utter despair, does not intend to move out. As she becomes obsessed with the man's presence, the writing of her new screenplay becomes impossible: she loses the mastery of her language. She tries to avoid him as much as possible and progressively confines herself in her bedroom. At the end, her only link with the outside world is a television set connected to a video camera which is filming the street. Structured as a *huis clos*, the film raises the question of the relationship between language and gesture. The woman is unable to express her desires through words. She does not succeed in asking the man to move out. Rather than using verbal language in order to communicate with him, she is paralysed and cannot articulate an audible sentence, hence the

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<sup>101</sup> Akerman, *Chantal Akerman: Autoportrait en cinéaste*, pp. 76-77.

performance of gags. Recalling *The Great Dictator* (1940), in which Chaplin plays the role of a persecuted Jewish barber living in a country equivalent to Nazi Germany, Akerman questions the relationship between the mute vulnerability of the slapstick gesture and the power of verbal language.

Symbolically, the neurosis strikingly develops in relation to the bathroom (which adjoins the female character's bedroom), a place where sexual differences are expressed in a very intimate way and where the presence of the man loudly resounds. Every day, the noise of the electric razor, or his early morning singing and whistling performances disturb her. In the morning of her first day with him, she enters the bathroom and sees the man who stands completely naked near the bathtub. The appearance of male nudity reveals the 'colonisation of the woman's space'<sup>102</sup> by the man's body image. In his sociological analysis of the body image, Paul Schilder has demonstrated how the social and emotional distance between individuals manifest through the interplay between their postural models:

It is clear that social distance is partly concerned with the question of how near to ourselves we want to have the body of the other person concerned, and that the whole conception of social distance gets its real meaning only when we consider the postural model of the body in its relations to the postural model of the bodies of others.<sup>103</sup>



Fig. 9, 10. *L'Homme à la valise*

<sup>102</sup> Schmid, *Chantal Akerman*, p. 76.

<sup>103</sup> Paul Schilder, *The Image and Appearance of the Human Body. Studies in the Constructive Energies of the Psyche* (New York: International Universities Press, 1950), pp. 242-43.

From the beginning of *L'Homme à la valise*, Akerman's character tries to create a distance between her own body image and the man's body image, which are diametrically opposite to one another. As Schmid notes, Akerman has voluntarily underlined the visual contrast between the two, in terms of gender, height, behaviour, clothing, or manner:

As in a Laurel and Hardy piece, the film's comic effect is produced first and foremost through the contrast between the two character's physical appearance and behaviour: the female character is petite and plump, the male tall and thin; he is bright and cheerful, she passive-aggressive and visibly disturbed; he is elegant in dress and demeanour, she, unstylish and awkward.<sup>104</sup>

Such strong oppositions appear to create irreconcilable differences between the two characters. The man's efforts to interact or communicate are systematically denied by the woman's behaviour and postures. She avoids eye contact, turns her back on him, and answers to his questions by briefly saying 'non' [Fig. 9]. At the beginning of the film, the configuration of the flat, and by extension the female character's relation to her own territory symbolically changes when she realises she will have to share the flat with Henri. She decides to move the desk from the living room (where the man sleeps) to her bedroom. He makes slight movements towards her, showing his intention to help her, which she ignores. Their bodies are desynchronised in terms of tempo and rhythm. He strides, but moves slowly; she walks fast, but takes small steps. They get in each other's way and their bodies bump into one another. When the man stops following her and stands in the corridor, the frame cuts his head and gives a truncated image of his body, partly obliterated by the woman's refusal to look at him or, at least, to acknowledge his presence [Fig. 10]. As Maurice Merleau-Ponty writes, gestures, in order to make any form of communication possible between individuals, need to be intentionally reciprocal:

La communication ou la compréhension des gestes s'obtient par la réciprocité de mes intentions et des gestes d'autrui. Tout se passe comme si l'intention d'autrui habitait mon corps ou comme si mes intentions habitaient le sien. Le geste dont je suis le témoin dessine en pointillé un objet intentionnel.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Schmid, *Chantal Akerman*, p. 75.

<sup>105</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945), p. 215.

In *L'Homme à la valise*, the two characters' gestures clearly lack reciprocity. Although she rejects the man's intentions, those intentions nevertheless inhabit her body. Indeed, she moves, behaves, and gestures in reaction to his presence, and also to his movements. For example, she speeds up in the corridor when the man tries to catch her up. Their two postural schemas are in discord, but respond to each other.

The female character's 'paranoid sensibility'<sup>106</sup> structures her problematic relation with the other. Rather than considering Henri as someone to discover, she attempts to reduce him to a surface, a predictable routine, and a familiar stereotype, to the point of constructing a reversed image of herself. Drawing on her experience of screenwriting, Akerman's character notes all the steps of Henri's daily routine on a big sheet of paper. She unsuccessfully attempts to predict his actions from the sounds his gestures make (at what time he wakes up, goes to the bathroom, or leaves the flat). The sounds disrupt the perception of Henri's monolithic image. While she tries to control Henri's life, her own daily routine becomes structured by the man's presence or absence. All the sounds that he produces symbolically modulate her postures and impact on her rhythms. She often stands in a posture of listening, orienting her body towards the source of the noises. As Roland Barthes explains in his essay entitled 'Ecoute', noises crucially shape our perception of space. Barthes focuses on the domestic space which, similarly the animal territory, is saturated by familiar sounds ('claquement différencié des portes, éclats de voix, bruits de cuisine', and so on).<sup>107</sup> Like animals on the lookout, human beings are sensitive to unfamiliar noises that invade their (domestic) territory. In *L'Homme à la valise*, the female character's body is tense when, keeping Henri under close surveillance, she listens to the noises he makes. If the man's body resounds through space and time, it also resounds within her. As

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<sup>106</sup> Margulies, *Nothing Happens*, p. 164.

<sup>107</sup> Roland Barthes, 'Ecoute', in *L'Obvie et l'Obtus. Essais critiques III* (Paris: Seuil, 1982), p. 218.

a result, gestures need to be considered not only in their visual but also aural qualities.

When analysing Tati's *Playtime*, Bolens notes how the spectator is often encouraged to investigate the source of a sound irrupting in an image, at first non-identified. The complex relationship between the sound and the movement that produces it stimulates the spectator's kinesic intelligence.<sup>108</sup> As Véronique Campan writes, '[i]l y a, au cinéma, une parenté entre le traitement du geste et celui du son',<sup>109</sup> which helps to construct the perception of the space, and often of the off-camera space. Spreading through time and space, sound transcends the boundaries of the visible and the invisible, and can draw the characters' as well as the spectators' attention towards the off-camera space. Therefore, sounds physically inscribe gestures in space: 'Il s'agit là d'une opération de cadrage, qui consiste à déterminer l'espace dans lequel le son est émis, celui dans lequel il est perçu, et par conséquent celui dans lequel il se propage,' Campan explains.<sup>110</sup>

In cinema, the acoustics of gesture also structures the perception of time. In *L'Homme à la valise*, the division of the narrative in twenty-eight days highlights the weight of time in Akerman's mise-en-scène. This film belongs to the modernist tradition of 'ritualised cinema', defined by Michel Chion as a genre which, by limiting dialogue, 'frees the ear and allows to hear how sounds and movement organise time'.<sup>111</sup> Margulies compares the use of off-screen sound in *L'Homme à la valise* to Bresson's *Un condamné à mort s'est échappé* (1956), a corner stone of ritualised cinema.<sup>112</sup> While attempting to dismantle his wooden cell door with a spoon, a prisoner, named Fontaine, carefully listens to the movements of the guards who are patrolling. Being on the watch for any suspicious noises, he performs slow, cautious, and irregular gestures. The effort of the process, combined with the necessity to

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<sup>108</sup> See Bolens, *Le Style des gestes*, pp. 131-32.

<sup>109</sup> Véronique Campan, *L'Ecoute filmique. Echo du son en image* (Saint-Denis: Presses universitaires de Vincennes, 1999), p. 74.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Chion, *Film, a Sound Art*, p. 111.

<sup>112</sup> Margulies, *Nothing Happens*, p. 164.

hear the slightest noise which resonates in the corridor, creates a tension between the on-screen and off-screen actions and between the prisoner's and the guards' gestures. 'There is a dynamic correlation between the body producing the sound and the body of someone listening to the sound,' Martine Huvenne notes about Bresson's film.<sup>113</sup> She adds: 'The more I listen to the details in the sound, the more I am able to experience and to replay his movements and gestures in my own body.'<sup>114</sup>

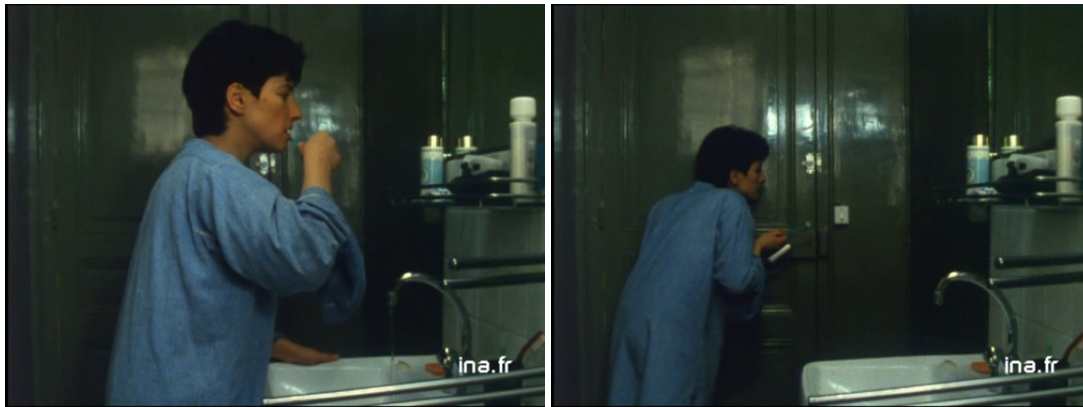


Fig. 11, 12. *L'Homme à la valise*

However, pinpointing the source of a sound can be a complex exercise. As Chion argues, there is often a certain degree of 'indeterminacy' and mystery in acousmatic sounds (i.e. the sounds one can hear without seeing their source).<sup>115</sup> For example, while Akerman's character starts brushing her teeth in the bathroom, she carefully listens to the noises her flatmate is making [Fig. 11]. These sounds, which have a metallic and irritating resonance, are indeterminate and thus stimulate the character's 'acousmatic imaginary',<sup>116</sup> which involves not only the inner simulation of the action but also a process of interpretation and speculation: the 'motor image'<sup>117</sup> generated by the sound does not necessarily correspond to the reality of the performed gesture. Because her attention is focused towards

<sup>113</sup> Martine Huvenne, 'Sound in Film as an Inner Movement. Towards embodied Listening Strategies', in *Moving Imagination. Explorations of Gesture and Inner Movement*, ed. by Helena De Preester (Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2013), p. 141.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142.

<sup>115</sup> Chion, *Film, a Sound Art*, p. 39.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> See Huvenne, 'Sound in Film as an Inner Movement', pp. 141-42.

the off-camera space, her gestures are particularly slow. She delicately grabs the tube of toothpaste and puts it down without making the slightest noise. Then she slowly gets closer and leans her ear against the door [Fig. 12]. When the man moves in the corridor, she shudders, quickly moves back to the washbasin, turns on the tap, and very energetically brushes her teeth. By making a lot of noise, she wants to be heard by the man, and thus to appear normal. But, disturbed by the silence in the off-camera space, she slows down her gesture as well as the flow of water. The man knocks on the door and offers to buy something for her at the bakery. She refuses and tries to hear his reaction. She moves closer to the door once more while the man is leaving the flat. In this quiet environment, the two characters' worlds are permeable, despite the spatial separation. The sounds circulate and resonate from one room to another. One can listen and be heard. Their sonic bodies coexist in an anxious choreography which plays with the acousmatic imaginary of the characters and of the spectator. The resonance of the man's movements through space affects the woman's gestures, especially in terms of speed, rhythm, and coordination. Jennifer M. Barker defines a sonic body, not as a body that makes sound, but as a body which 'resounds',<sup>118</sup> thus following Jean-Luc Nancy who writes: 'La résonance est à la fois celle d'un corps sonore pour lui-même et celle de la sonorité dans un corps écoutant qui, lui-même, sonne en écoutant.'<sup>119</sup> When the sound propagates in space, it resounds within and outside the body (*en soi et hors de soi*).<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Jennifer M. Barker, 'Sonic Bodies. Listening as Acting', in *Theorizing Film Acting*, ed. by Aaron Taylor (New York: Routledge, 2013), p. 252.

<sup>119</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *A l'Ecoute* (Paris: Galilée, 2002), p. 77.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

## 2.4. Slapstick Tragedy

### 2.4.1. Hysteria

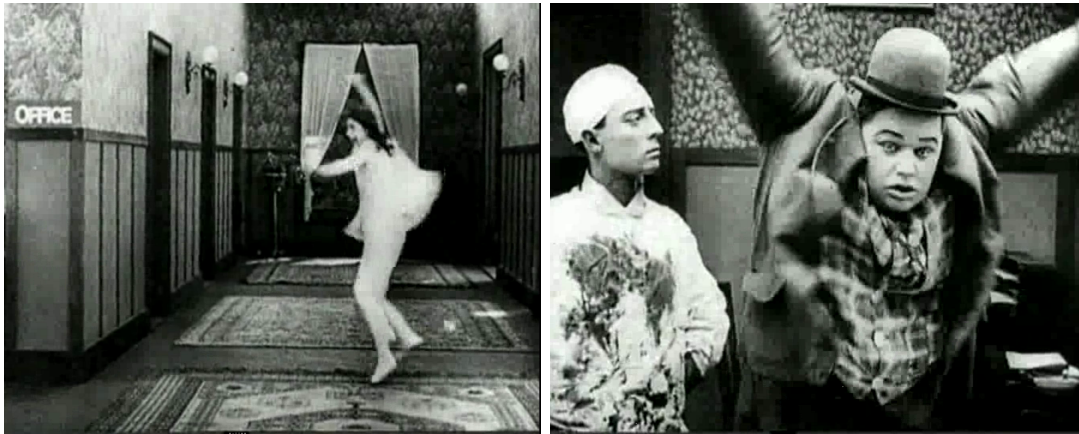


Fig. 13, 14. *Good Night, Nurse!*

In *L'Homme à la valise*, Akerman's slapstick style of acting appears in the way she acts 'the symptoms stereotypically associated with female hysteria',<sup>121</sup> such as nervous breakdown, bulimia, or emotional dependence. These symptoms produce gestures and postures, which are stereotypically viewed as 'theatrical'. Rae Beth Gordon has demonstrated the strong relationship between pathologies, such as hysteria, and slapstick performance. In her essay *Why the French Love Jerry Lewis*, she analyses the influence of hysteria on early French comedy, and more broadly on slapstick cinema. At the end of the nineteenth century, the hysterical gesture and gait, popularised in the press, were imitated by performers in cabaret and early films:

Gestural exaggeration is an hysterical trait because the *expression* of desire is an absolute need for hysterics. At the same time, it earned them the label of 'theatrical'. Corporeal anomalies, along with automatic, repeated gestures, tics, grimaces, and contractures, characterise the pathologised body at the centre of performance style in cabaret and early film comedy.<sup>122</sup>

<sup>121</sup> Schmid, *Chantal Akerman*, p. 78.

<sup>122</sup> Rae Beth Gordon, *Why the French Love Jerry Lewis: From Cabaret to Early Cinema* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), p. 22.

For example, the permeability between the hysterical behaviour, studied by the neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot at the Pitié-Salpêtrière Hospital, and the slapstick performance is strikingly visible in the short film *Good Night, Nurse!* (1918) in which Roscoe Fatty Arbuckle and Buster Keaton imitate the disordered gestures of a nymphomaniac female patient [Fig. 13, 14]. Hysteria deregulates bodily rhythms and thus provokes arrhythmia, which is, according to Lefebvre, symptomatic of a pathological trouble.<sup>123</sup> Arrhythmia is an essential stylistic feature of slapstick comedy which celebrates the catastrophe of gestures and exalts the fall of bodies. Naremore underlines the 'exaggerated forms of *bodily* incoherence'<sup>124</sup> in comic films, while Didi-Huberman, drawing on Bergson, describes the comic gesture as a 'geste compulsif-arythmique',<sup>125</sup> irregular and unpredictable. Král insists on the idea that the actors' slightest gestures reveal a malaise, 'malaise dans la civilisation',<sup>126</sup> at the root of several pathologies, such as anxiety, bulimia, or frenzy. The nightmarish quality of slapstick comedy always feeds on reality, everydayness, and ordinary objects. The irrationality results from the inner impulses expressed on the surface of the body itself: 'Rien qu'à force d'accumuler des gestes, des grimaces, des heurts et des chutes "primaires", le burlesque en élargit le sens en leur ajoutant une dimension inquiétante, nocturne, où toute notre irrationalité cachée semble monter à la surface.'<sup>127</sup>

As a filmmaker and actress, Akerman disrupts everyday order through arrhythmic gestures. While obscurity grows in *L'Homme à la valise* until total darkness, she develops several gags, constructed on very ordinary situations, which reveal the character's impulsive temperament and the irrationality of her relationship with the man. For example, after realising she forgot her key, she decides to enter the flat by passing through the window of the kitchen, rather than ringing the bell and letting Henri open the door. Furthermore, the first and last breakfast she shares with him highlights the way the filmmaker plays on arrhythmic gestures. The female character's

<sup>123</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *Éléments de rythmanalyse* (Paris: Syllepse, 1992), p. 62.

<sup>124</sup> Naremore, *Acting in the Cinema*, p. 76.

<sup>125</sup> Georges Didi-Huberman, *Le Danseur des solitudes* (Paris: Minuit, 2006), p. 92.

<sup>126</sup> Král, *Le Burlesque ou la morale de la tarte à la crème*, p. 119.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 207.

movements are weary, listless, weak in terms of amplitude, while the male character makes large and dynamic gestures, noisily grabbing all the objects on the table, and eating with appetite. Disturbed in her routine, she becomes more and more withdrawn, and looks in the opposite direction, as if she wanted to turn her back on him [Fig. 15]. Finally, she suddenly leaves the dining room by knocking over the chair [Fig. 16]. The arrhythmic interaction between the man and the woman escalates in this impulsive and antagonistic gesture, which explicitly expresses her deep anxiety and her urge to exit the room.



Fig.15, 16. *L'Homme à la valise*

In feminist theory, hysteria has been reconsidered as the symptom of the impossibility for women to access their own language. Therefore, they are condemned to imitate the masculine language. According to Luce Irigaray, the hysterical woman is imprisoned in her own body. She has two modes of expression: muteness and mimetism. Irigaray explains:

L'hystérie, *ça parle* sur le mode d'une gestualité paralysée, d'une parole impossible et aussi interdite... *Ça parle* comme *symptômes* d'un 'ça ne peut ni se parler ni se dire'... Et le drame de l'hystérie, c'est qu'elle est schizée entre cette gestualité, ce désir paralysés et enfermés dans son corps, et un langage qu'elle a appris en famille, à l'école, dans la société, qui ne fait absolument pas continuité, ni, bien sûr, métaphore, avec les 'mouvements' de son désir. Il lui reste donc, à la fois, le mutisme et le mimétisme. Elle se tait et, en même temps, elle mime.<sup>128</sup>

<sup>128</sup> Luce Irigaray, *Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas un* (Paris: Minuit, 1977), p. 134.

In *L'Homme à la valise*, hysteria generates gags. The character played by Akerman is unable to express her desires through words. Rather than communicating verbally with the man peer to peer, she is paralysed and cannot articulate an audible sentence. She attempts several times to talk to Henri by whispering through the bathroom door. When, for the first time, Akerman's character expresses her dissatisfaction, the noise of the electric razor symbolically covers her speech, which Henri therefore cannot hear. Facing the powerlessness of her words, she furiously kicks the man's shoes in the corridor, miming what she cannot say out loud.

#### **2.4.2. Gestures of exile**

The anxiety that is conveyed in Akerman's slapstick performance exceeds the question of gender differences. Akerman belongs to the second generation of Holocaust survivors, and the taboo of her mother's deportation to Auschwitz, which was never mentioned during Akerman's childhood, deeply impacted her whole work.<sup>129</sup> In her last film *No Home Movie* (2015), she questions her mother on the Second World War. Although Akerman's very close relationship to her mother, as well as the trauma of the Holocaust, have been frequently evoked in interviews, books, radio programmes, or video installations,<sup>130</sup> *No Home Movie* expresses for the first time in the form of a film the matrix of her cinema. The central figure of the mother, the trauma of the Shoah, and the meticulous exploration of the domestic space converge like a self-evident fact. Until *No Home Movie*, she kept these recurrent issues at a distance through fiction, or she implicitly expressed them through the muteness of gestures. Although, at first glance, nothing in *L'Homme à la valise* appears to be reminiscent of the Second World War, Schmid interprets the character's confinement in such a perspective: 'Her

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<sup>129</sup> Schmid, *Chantal Akerman*, p. 2.

<sup>130</sup> See Chantal Akerman, *Marcher à côté de ses lacets dans un frigidaire vide*, installation (2004); Chantal Akerman, Philippe Langlois, and Franck Smith, 'Marcher à côté de ses lacets dans un frigidaire vide', *Atelier de Création Radiophonique*, France Culture, 09 March 2008.

room resembles a watch-tower or a prison cell, the character's self-imposed confinement evoking the concentrationary universe which is present in so many of Akerman's films independent of their tone and style.<sup>131</sup> Akerman insists on the thematic relationship between borders and the concentration camps in her films:

My obsession with borders comes from the camps. When you touch on that limit – and I touched it very closely through my mother, who was in the camps but was never able to talk through her anxiety – this border becomes the source of anxiety, it becomes an 'anxious Object'.<sup>132</sup>

If I put myself into a kind of a prisoner situation, it is because my mother passed that along to me.<sup>133</sup>

A border can be geopolitical, as in *De l'autre côté* (2002) – a documentary examining the physical frontier between the United States and Mexico –, or domestic, as in *L'Homme à la valise* wherein the dividing walls of the flat can be viewed as borders separating the woman's territory from the man's. The anxiety generated by the traumatic experience of the camps is passed down from the first to the second generation,<sup>134</sup> and, in *L'Homme à la valise*, is conveyed through a double conflict: the difficulty of writing, on the one hand, and of interacting with the opposite sex, on the other. Although the mother figure is absent from the film, Akerman's inability to cut the umbilical cord could be considered, in a psychoanalytical perspective, through the gender conflict that opposes the female character to Henri. As Irigaray suggests,

[a] woman, if she cannot in one way or another recuperate her first object, i.e. the possibility of keeping her earliest libidinal attachments by displacing them, is always exiled from herself. Yet, it is very difficult for her to find in her relationship with men the means for overcoming that loss of the first relationship with the mother's body.<sup>135</sup>

The rejection of the man's presence, which is felt as a source of invasion, conflict, and oppression, could be interpreted in relation to Akerman's refusal

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<sup>131</sup> Schmid, *Chantal Akerman*, p. 77.

<sup>132</sup> Akerman and Lebovici, 'Losing Everything that Made You a Slave', p. 96.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., p. 103.

<sup>134</sup> The process of transmission of traumatic experiences from one generation to another has been analysed by Marianne Hirsch in her seminal article on postmemory. See Hirsch, 'The Generation of Postmemory', *Poetics Today*, 29.1 (2008), 103-128.

<sup>135</sup> Luce Irigaray, 'Women's Exile', trans. by Couze Venn, *Ideology and Consciousness*, 1 (1977), 62-76 (p. 76).

to distance herself from the primary attachment with her mother, hence the filmmaker's self-portrait as a woman in exile and a prisoner re-enacting the experience of the 'anxious Abject', i.e. Auschwitz. Akerman admits herself: 'The only person I didn't succeed in making that split with was my mother, because she was a camp survivor, and I was born when she was older, in 1950. I still think of myself as an old child...' <sup>136</sup>

Similarly, Ishaghpour highlights the significance of Akerman's Jewish identity to explain the very strong relationship with her mother, as well as the nomadic imprisonment ('emprisonnement nomade') of the filmmaker Anna – Akerman's fictive double in *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna*:

Malgré son nom, Akerman ne peut filmer les champs: c'est une citadine, sans terre natale. De là peut-être l'importance de la figure maternelle comme remplacement, dans une tradition judaïque qui ne peut toujours supporter l'exil définitif, ni être à la hauteur exigée par 'l'irreprésentable'. Du judaïsme, Anna a l'enfermement nomade, l'exil imposé du dehors, la profonde anxiété, une identité peu assurée, donc blessée, rigide, mais pas encore le désert ni le chemin toujours tendu vers une réalité proche d'une parole. <sup>137</sup>

The notion of exile, at the core of Akerman's filmography, is conveyed through the compulsive repetition of similar rituals, acts, postures, and gestures from one film to another, such as eating, writing, or waiting. The motifs are repeated, ruminated, or more exactly *ressassés*. In 2004, in the self-portrait she published on the occasion of the Centre Georges Pompidou retrospective, Akerman describes herself as a '*ressasseuse*', and considers her life and work as a long '*ressassement*'. <sup>138</sup> The word refers to the idea of obsessively brooding over the same words, stories, ideas, or potentially traumatic memories. The theme of *ressassement* has been analysed by Schmid who aims 'to capture the dynamics of *ressassement*' <sup>139</sup> in Akerman's work, and Hannah Mowat who also analyses the processes of repetition in

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<sup>136</sup> Akerman and Lebovici, 'Losing Everything that Made You a Slave', p. 98.

<sup>137</sup> Ishaghpour, *Cinéma contemporain*, p. 264.

<sup>138</sup> Akerman, *Chantal Akerman: Autoportrait en cinéaste*, p. 9.

<sup>139</sup> Schmid, *Chantal Akerman*, p. 13.

her films.<sup>140</sup> In order to expand the reflection on the notion, I will demonstrate how Akerman *ressasse* through gestures in her films.

In the essay 'Le Geste ressassant', Bernard Vouilloux analyses the meaning of *ressassement* in the literary work of Maurice Blanchot. In 1983, by reworking the Freudian concept of repetition compulsion, the writer revisited certain texts he published before the Second World War, and reconsidered them afterwards ('après coup'), in the light of the 'absolute' event, Auschwitz and the concentrations camps, which continues ('se poursuit') in post-war society.<sup>141</sup> 'De cet absolu, la littérature produite *après la guerre* porterait le signe, y compris celle qui n'en témoigne pas directement à la façon du livre de Robert Antelme, *L'Espèce humaine*,' Vouilloux explains.<sup>142</sup> Similarly, Akerman's work cannot escape the absolute event – an event that preceded her birth, but that she diffusely broods over in a creative process of postmemory. Vouilloux attempts to develop the notion of *ressassement* in the visual arts, as well as in music, and wonders whether it is possible to *ressasser* – a word which essentially relates to verbal repetition – through gestures. Painting being a spatial art, the temporal dimension of the *ressassement* is visible in the creative process of production which reveals the repetitive and obsessive nature of the artist's gesture, for example through the numerous sketches which culminate in the painting. The idea of *ressassement* is especially visible in the lines and strokes that the artist continuously applies to the surface. The artwork that results from the *geste ressassant* records the different layers of the creative process, sometimes to the point of becoming confused.

In the light of Vouilloux's essay, the *geste ressassant* appears to be fundamental in Akerman's work, especially in *L'Homme à la valise*. The act of rumination does not only develop itself by the everyday repetition of the same gestures, but especially in relation to her previous works such as *Saute ma ville*, *Je, tu, il, elle* (1974), *Jeanne Dielman*, or *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna*,

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<sup>140</sup> Hannah Mowat, 'Gesture and the *cinéaste*: Akerman/Agamben, Varda/Warburg' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Cambridge, Trinity Hall, 2015), pp. 56-68.

<sup>141</sup> See Bernard Vouilloux, 'Le Geste ressassant', in *Le Geste, suivi de Le Geste ressassant* (Bruxelles: Lettre volée, 2001), pp. 48-49.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

and to her future ones, like *Golden Eighties* (1986). Schmid notes that '[s]cenes from *Les Années 80* which she watches on a video screen in the sitting room – another playful autotextual and autobiographical reference – indicate to the spectator familiar with her filmography that she is preparing her musical *Golden Eighties*.'<sup>143</sup> Akerman's gestures in *L'Homme à la valise* are rooted in the temporal continuity of her filmography. Gesture in cinema integrates time – past and future – in the actor or actress's body. As Deleuze explains, the body in cinema does not exist in present time, but integrates what comes before and after each phase of movement; the embodiment of time is particularly visible in the everyday attitudes of fatigue and waiting:

L'attitude quotidienne, c'est ce qui met l'avant et l'après dans le corps, le temps dans le corps, le corps comme révélateur du terme. [...] Peut-être la fatigue est-elle la première et la dernière attitude, parce qu'elle contient à la fois l'avant et l'après.<sup>144</sup>

As a source of impatience, stress, impulsivity, and self-awareness, time puts pressure on the body and generates gestures. The pressure of time on the body is forceful in situations of boredom. At the end of *L'Homme à la valise*, while Akerman is waiting for Henri after he left the flat, she is disconcerted, does not know what to do, and cannot work. Waiting time leads to boredom and fatigue. She paces up and down the corridor with her right hand in her pocket, smokes, and sometimes leans against the wall and looks at her feet. She seems to be drawn by the ground and the walls, as if the weight of time made her body heavier to the point of changing its relation to gravity. The weariness of her body makes all the transitional movements – 'l'avant' and 'l'après' – perceptible.

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<sup>143</sup> See Schmid, *Chantal Akerman*, p. 75.

<sup>144</sup> Deleuze, *L'Image-temps*, p. 247.



Fig. 17-20. *Saute ma ville/Je, tu, il, elle/Les Rendez-vous d'Anna/L'Homme à la valise*

Through the work of *ressassement*, gestures link the past and the future of Akerman's cinema. As Margulies points out, Akerman's tics in *L'Homme à la valise* 'replicate, in a comic register, the ideas that inform her films in general'<sup>145</sup> through the agency of the filmmaker's body. The character's compulsive gestures are often related to the act of eating, as exemplified by the scene when she voraciously eats Henri's ratatouille after having refused it. Interestingly Mowat draws a parallel between *ressassement* and mastication.<sup>146</sup> As Margulies explains, food and the act of writing reveal the paradox of Akerman's domestic exile:

The issues here, as in *Meetings with Anna*, are those of nomadism and celibacy. Discussing Franz Kafka, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari explore nomadism in terms of a complex articulation of relations to food and to writing. By this scheme, food is linked to a fixed place, that of planting and harvest, and territorialisation connotes an attachment to family and to conservative values. Conversely, writing – the use of language, and the creative act – results in exile, a deterritorialisation from social conventions (though not all writing is necessarily deterritorialised).<sup>147</sup>

Food, as a marker of territorialisation, is often associated with patriarchal values in Akerman's cinema. For instance, in a scene of *Les Rendez-vous*

<sup>145</sup> Margulies, *Nothing Happens*, p. 165.

<sup>146</sup> Mowat, 'Gesture and the *cinéaste*', p. 67.

<sup>147</sup> Margulies, *Nothing Happens*, p. 164.

*d'Anna*, the main protagonist (Aurore Clément), who travels across Europe and stays in hotels, sees a food tray and male black shoes on the ground, near one of the hotel room doors. She bends over, squats, and slowly manipulates the shoes which, like in *Jeanne Dielman*, are symbolical of the patriarchal order, before compulsively eating the peas in the plate [Fig. 19]. With uprooting arises the anxious feeling of the loss of the self. Food appears to reveal the need to survive and the urge to regain, through gestures, the lost rites which structure the affective and nostalgic relation to home. There is a close relationship in Akerman's cinema between the act of feeding and the practice of filmmaking, that is to say between the biological and affective needs and the mechanical and technological process of filmmaking which can potentially be dehumanising. Ishaghpour writes about Akerman's cinema: 'N'y a-t-il pas avec la reproduction technique disparition de la subjectivité, un sentiment sans recours de perte et de mort, une régression, nostalgique d'un état de dépendance, d'un "home" disparu?'<sup>148</sup> When Akerman voraciously swallows the spaghetti in *Saute ma ville* [Fig. 17] or the pack of sugar in *Je, tu, il, elle* [Fig. 18], her gestures are regressive: she bends over her plate or eats on her bed, in an impulse of retreat from the outside world.



Fig. 21.  
*L'Homme à la valise*

<sup>148</sup> Ishaghpour, *Cinéma contemporain*, p. 262.

In the last part of *L'Homme à la valise*, before cloistering herself inside her room, she orders food, as if she was preparing for survival, including ten bags of frozen spinach, two green salads, four cans of green peas, and a gas camping stove. A few shots show her in the dark, as though in a cave, eating on her bed [Fig. 20], next to the television set, which she connected to her video camera in order to watch the street and keep an eye on Henri going back and forth. The high-angle shot from the camera emphasises the grid pattern of the street which becomes a place of surveillance. Paradoxically, the television set, like a window, opens the room onto the outside world, but it is a mediated and framed world without any horizon, which reflects the filmmaker's own entrapment and marginality as she essentially remains in the liminal border of the frame. Akerman has placed a stack of film reels on the television set, thus highlighting the metacinematic meaning of the scene. Indeed the shot thematises Akerman's relationship with cinema. The image in the image reveals the divide between the interior space, the *huis clos*, which culturally confines women to domestic tasks, and the public sphere of the street which is the traditional territory of men. When she touches the screen, following with her finger Henri crossing the street and leaving the frame, Akerman also reflects on her own practice of filmmaking which consists in distancing herself from the object [Fig. 21]. The other becomes tangible and approachable only in the form of a domesticated and separated image. Strikingly, *L'Homme à la valise* anticipates the essay film entitled *Là-bas* (2004), shot in Israel, where the same tension between inside and outside, the food and the practice of filmmaking can be observed, and where Akerman broods over her 'condition as an exile and a Jew'.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Schmid, *Chantal Akerman*, p. 123.

## Conclusion

The concept of gestural style shows the proximity and difference between the aesthetics of gesture in life and in film. This is best exemplified in the female characters' clumsy gestures in *Saute ma ville* and *L'Homme à la valise* that evoke and exaggerate Akerman's clumsiness in her daily life. Throughout her filmography, the Belgian director develops acting styles that are stylised or exaggeratedly expressive rather than naturalistic. In cinema, even a 'natural' manner of acting amplifies certain stylistic features of the body schema and body image. Imbued with specific sociocultural markers, the 'natural' gestural style of an actor or actress is shaped by specific acting techniques. As Jacqueline Nacache observes,

[c]omme dans tous les domaines esthétiques, le naturel est, tout bien pesé, le comble de l'art; c'est un *style*, à coup sûr, fondé sur des compétences techniques, gestuelles, vocales, exigeant la plus grande précision. Les grands acteurs naturels, qui parlent, bougent et agissent de façon infiniment plus plaisante que Monsieur Tout-le-Monde, donnent du sens à l'insignifiant, simplifient l'extraordinaire.<sup>150</sup>

That being said, the difference between gestural styles in life and acting styles in film often proves to be a matter of nuances or degrees, as the discussion about the technical accuracy and the expressiveness of gestures in *Jeanne Dielman* shows. Beyond their differences, acting styles and *styles de vie* both entail the subject's performance, either in the context of a film or in the framework of domestic life for instance. The notions of ethnic style, aesthetic behaviour, habitus, gender identity, and ethos are useful to analyse gestural styles in terms of performance, corporeal modalities, and social distinction. As will be discussed in Chapter 5, the inscription of gesture in a specific territory, which is mostly domestic in the films examined in this chapter, manifests collective and singular gestural potentialities. In the social, cultural, political, and ideological grid of the domestic territory, Jeanne Dielman and the characters played by Akerman do not behave, react, and gesture in the same manner.

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<sup>150</sup> Nacache, *L'Acteur de cinéma*, p. 55.

Just as in Perec and Queysanne's *Un homme qui dort* which we discussed in Chapter 1, the analysis of Akerman's films reveals a crisis of the everyday. The characters' needs for daily rituals and predictable gestures convey their anxiety. The aesthetics of violence and (self-)destruction result from a gestural *ressassement*, which imbues daily routine with psychotic repetition, obsessive constraints, and disruption. The mechanical performance of everyday gestures eventually goes wrong to the point of announcing a catastrophe in the making. The ruins of Paris in *Un homme qui dort* echo the final scene of *Saute ma ville*, in which the character commits suicide by turning on the gas stove: the explosion of the kitchen is rendered through sound effects evoking war. In Akerman's cinema, slapstick amplifies the catastrophe of gestures through gags, extreme behaviours, and bodily disorders. The frame and environment of daily routine is threatened by disaster, imbalance, and destruction. In Perec's and Akerman's works, the themes of repetition and *ressassement*, gesture and automatism, rituals and obsessive behaviours are reminiscent of the historical disaster and family tragedies of the Second World War. Discussing 'how gestures can serve as vital indicators of traumatic experience'<sup>151</sup> in Claude Lanzmann's film *Shoah* (1985), Nicholas Chare argues that '[g]esture permits the past to be felt in the present'.<sup>152</sup>

Finally, gestural styles develop and produce cinematic forms. The aural and visual qualities of gesture must be considered in relation to the style of *mise-en-scène*, especially in terms of framing, sound, and editing. Focusing on Godard's *Prénom Carmen*, the next chapter expands on the correlation between gestures and cinematic forms. Similarly to Akerman in *L'Homme à la valise*, Godard portrays himself as a filmmaker in crisis. He identifies himself not only with Chaplin, but also with Buster Keaton, another major master of slapstick comedy.<sup>153</sup> Unlike the paternalist director embodied by François Truffaut in *La Nuit américaine* (1973), Godard goes through a

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<sup>151</sup> Nicholas Chare, 'Gesture in *Shoah*', in *Gesture and Film*, ed. by Chare and Watkins, p. 46 (first publ. in *Journal for Cultural Research*, 19.1 (2015), 30-42).

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>153</sup> In the film, the character played by Godard holds Robert Benayoun's book *Le Regard de Buster Keaton* (1982).

crisis of authority. Far from showing himself in a position of strength, he performs a vulnerable character. Self-representation becomes a strategy to critically reflect on his own practice of filmmaking. Reaffirming the primacy of gestures in cinema, Godard draws on silent cinema, Beethoven, and Rodin to reflect on the gestural ontology of the audiovisual image and reveal the intermedial potential of gestures in cinema.



## Chapter 3. Gesture, Image, and Intermediality in Jean-Luc Godard's *Prénom Carmen* (1983)

### *Introduction*

After a decade of militancy and exploring the possibilities of video, Jean-Luc Godard returned to cinema in the late 1970s. According to Colin McCabe, Godard started with *Sauve qui peut (la vie)* (1980) 'a postmodern survival course', working with small crews and focusing on 'the questions of art, sexuality, and politics'.<sup>1</sup> Jean-Louis Leutrat adds that '[t]he work of the 1980s can only be evaluated in the light of everything that preceded it'.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, this period in Godard's cinema is often considered a return to mythical texts, the great masters of art history, and, to a certain extent, the themes of the New Wave. Like Leutrat,<sup>3</sup> Laura Mulvey sees a strong connection between *Prénom Carmen* (1983), a free adaptation into contemporary France of Prosper Mérimée's tragic short story *Carmen* (1845), and *Pierrot le fou* (1965), which 'was already a version of the Carmen story'.<sup>4</sup> Adapted to the screen numerous times in the early 1980s,<sup>5</sup> *Carmen*'s canonical narrative, a story of love and death that inspired Georges Bizet's famous *opéra comique* in 1875, 'in which an essentially respectable and law-abiding hero is seduced by an irresistible, unfaithful woman into a descent into an underworld and a

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<sup>1</sup> Colin McCabe, 'Jean-Luc Godard. A Life in Seven Episodes (to Date)', in *Jean-Luc Godard. Son + Image, 1974-1991*, ed. by Raymond Bellour and Mary Lea Bandy (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1992), pp. 20-21.

<sup>2</sup> Jean-Louis Leutrat, 'The Declension', in *Jean-Luc Godard. Son + Image, 1974-1991*, ed. by Bellour and Bandy, p. 23.

<sup>3</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Laura Mulvey, 'The Hole and the Zero. The Janus Face of the Feminine in Godard', in *Jean-Luc Godard. Son + Image, 1974-1991*, ed. by Bellour and Bandy, p. 84.

<sup>5</sup> Godard considers Francesco Rosi's and Carlos Saura's adaptations of *Carmen*, both released in 1983 when the copyright restrictions protecting the use of the music of Bizet's opera lapsed, as the 'illustrations of a classical theme'. By contrast Godard, who refused to use Bizet's music, attempted to scratch the surface of the myth and 'to find what a woman and a man have said to each other'. See Jean-Luc Godard and Gideon Bachmann, 'The Carrots are Cooked: A Conversation with Jean-Luc Godard', *Film Quarterly*, 37.3 (1984), 13-19 (p. 15).

life of crime, on the run from the police',<sup>6</sup> does indeed permeate the themes and motifs of both films. Yet the rewriting of the Carmen story emphasises the gap that separates the New Wave and Godard's post-New Wave long feature films. The commonalities between the 1960s and the 1980s paradoxically highlight the discrepancies between the two periods. In this sense, Guy Scarpetta is right to note the difference of tone between *Pierrot le fou* and *Prénom Carmen*. The horizon of Carmen and Joseph's story is no longer utopia and dream, but manipulation, ratios of power, domination, lies, and ploys: 'La cavale de *Prénom Carmen*, elle, entraîne immédiatement les personnages vers des stratagèmes, des alibis, des simulacres, des mensonges: tout est *déjà* corrompu, il n'y a plus de vérité.'<sup>7</sup>

While robbing a bank with the help of her gang, Carmen (Maruschka Detmers) falls in love with the watchman Joseph (Jacques Bonnaffé). Manipulating her Uncle Jean (also named Monsieur Godard), a retired filmmaker living in an asylum performed by Godard himself, she plans to use the shooting of a film as a ploy to kidnap a rich industrialist. Godard parodies himself as an author in crisis, an insane person interned like Jean-Pierre Mocky, another director of his generation who, in the film, repeatedly shouts in the courtyard of the psychiatric hospital the title of his last film: 'Y-a-t-il encore un Français dans la salle?' Godard stylises his own body image by insisting on a few recognisable traits – the slightly bent silhouette, a persona lost in his thoughts with a somewhat unkempt appearance – and on iconic objects – his black coat, the black rimmed glasses, the woolly hat, the cigars, the typewriter, and the books.<sup>8</sup> In the meantime, Joseph's fiancée Claire (Myriem Roussel) rehearses Beethoven's string quartets with the Prat Quartet.

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<sup>6</sup> Mulvey, 'The Hole and the Zero', p. 84.

<sup>7</sup> Guy Scarpetta, 'Docteur, est-ce que l'âme a un corps?', *Artpress*, January 1985, p. 45.

<sup>8</sup> Like Chaplin and his bowler hat, cane, and worn clothes, or Hitchcock's cameos, the filmmaker creates a perfectly identifiable persona, which in *Prénom Carmen* parodies the authorial image that he constructed in the media. Through specific props, gestures, and clothes, he gives an easily identifiable shape, quality, and ethos to his body image. Interestingly Cecilia Sayad also compares the 'similar silhouette[s]' of Godard and Woody Allen who met in Godard's *Meetin' WA* (1986). See Cecilia Sayad, *Performing Authorship. Self-inscription and Corporeality in the Cinema* (New York, London: I.B. Tauris, 2013), p. 111.

When *Prénom Carmen* was released in 1983, Godard predicted that '[...] the cinema and [himself might] die at the same time'.<sup>9</sup> In the film, the director portrays himself as a powerless author waiting for 'la fin du cinéma'<sup>10</sup> and the survivor of a 'civilisation du cinéma'<sup>11</sup> that seems to be on the verge of vanishing. Godard's binding of the history of the cinema to his own life cannot be reduced to a merely narcissistic and egocentric posture. According to Antoine de Baecque, the idea of the death of cinema, which proves particularly persistent from the 1980s onwards with the approach of the end of the twentieth century, can be defined in three different ways in Godard's cinema, particularly in his magnum opus *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1988-98): 'La mort du cinéma est la fin de Godard comme homme, du cinéma comme art inventé au 19<sup>e</sup> siècle et la chute d'un temps historique.'<sup>12</sup> The end of the cinema corresponds to the end of a century which became increasingly 'amnésique, dévoré par l'argent, la télévision, se précipitant lentement vers sa mort'.<sup>13</sup>

In the 1980s, Godard condemned the power of television, which, according to him, threatens the essence of the cinematic image, and fails to address the spectators as active subjects. The filmmaker, who explored the potential of video and made films for French television in the 1970s and 1980s (see the analysis of *France/tour/détour/deux/enfants* (1977) in Chapter 5),<sup>14</sup> criticises less the medium itself than its use by the audiovisual industry. As Ishaghpour puts it, 'l'effet télévision', which annihilates the distance between the image and the spectators, does not stimulate the latter's faculties of listening, seeing and imagining.<sup>15</sup> Unlike the cinematic screen, which is a surface of projection, '[l'image vidéo] est une surface plate

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<sup>9</sup> Godard and Bachmann, p. 19.

<sup>10</sup> Antoine de Baecque, 'Jean-Luc Godard et la critique des temps de l'histoire', *Vingtième Siècle*, 117 (2013), 149-164 <<https://www.cairn.info/revue-vingtieme-siecle-revue-d-histoire-2013-1-page-149.htm>> [accessed August 2018] (para. 27 of 51)

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. (para. 29 of 51)

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. (para. 32 of 51)

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. (para. 31 of 51)

<sup>14</sup> Throughout the 1980s, he never stopped experimenting with video and making films for television, including *Soft and Hard* (1985) and *Grandeur et décadence d'un petit commerce de cinéma* (1986).

<sup>15</sup> Ishaghpour, 'La Télévision', in *Cinéma contemporain. De ce côté du miroir*, p. 19.

dépourvue d'imaginaire,'<sup>16</sup> Ishaghpour argues, while pointing to contemporary cinema's struggle to exist as a distinctive medium.<sup>17</sup> Godard defines cinema, as it was invented during the nineteenth century, as a medium 'which deals in human gestures and actions (unlike painting or music and dance) in their reproduction'.<sup>18</sup> Similarly to Agamben, he considers gesture as the key element that defines the essence of cinema. However, television, which also reproduces the movement of the human body and exhibits the corporeal qualities of gestures, challenges the medium specificity of cinema. Given that both media share their respective techniques, what is it that fundamentally distinguishes the televised moving image from the cinematic image? Ishaghpour argues that television – especially from the 1980s onwards when the multiplication of channels encouraged the practice of channel hopping – broadcasts a continuous flow of impersonal and interchangeable images without any aura.<sup>19</sup> 'C'est un monstre froid, l'effet de ce qui se préparait depuis l'invention de la reproduction technique et n'a trouvé qu'en elle sa parfaite réalisation, et qui dépasse de loin l'effet de la photographie,' he explains.<sup>20</sup> By contrast, as I will demonstrate in this chapter, the cinematic image for Godard is not the disembodied product of the technique of mechanical reproduction, but is essentially shaped by the filmmaker's gestures. Ever since the Lumière brothers and Méliès, the filmmakers' hands have indeed formed the history of cinema. The productive relationship between the filmed gestures and the gestures of creation gives birth to the cinematic image.

According to the philosopher Marie-José Mondzain, the New Wave contributed to the emancipation of gestures, both in the practice of filmmaking and film acting, changing the spectators' relation to the real and the image, and stimulating their imagination:

C'est sans doute à partir de Jean Rouch et la nouvelle vague que la liberté des gestes cinématographiques et le rapport au réel ont radicalement déplacé le

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>18</sup> Godard and Bachmann, p. 19.

<sup>19</sup> Ishaghpour, *Cinéma contemporain*, p. 26.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

noyau fictionnel pour l'inscrire dans l'imaginaire du spectateur. Désormais faire des films est pensé comme un acte de résistance ou bien comme un geste de collaboration.<sup>21</sup>

In *Prénom Carmen*, the gestures of filmmaking are indeed conceived of as an act of resistance. The film reflects on the crucial role of gesture in the creation of cinematic images. The disenchanting criticism of television and, more broadly of the pressure of capitalism in society,<sup>22</sup> is counterbalanced by the filmmaker's attention to the gestures of creation. In this respect, the concept of the death of cinema becomes a productive idea that enables Godard to reaffirm his 'love of the cinema'.<sup>23</sup>

While criticising the rising power of television and video which threatens the nature of the image as well as the spectator's imagination, Godard develops intermedial strategies to revitalise the cinematic image. In *Prénom Carmen*, the filmmaker creates what Deleuze names a 'gestus pluridimensionnel, pictural, musical',<sup>24</sup> weaving a complex network of gestures in order to 'compose' the film, from the rehearsals of the string quartet to the visual and sonic bodily attitudes of the lovers, inspired by Rodin's sculptures. In a fictional world which is at once violent and chaotic, the interplay between Rodin's sculptures and Beethoven's music becomes a source of gestural exchanges that interconnect the scattered fragments of the film while shaping the spectator's perception of the sound and image. As Albertine Fox argues, '*Prénom Carmen* continues the work undertaken in *Sauve qui peut (la vie)* and *Passion* in its efforts to re-conceptualise notions of the "visible", and the process of "making visible", through the organisation

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<sup>21</sup> Marie-José Mondzain, *Homo spectator* (Paris: Bayard, 2007), p. 262.

<sup>22</sup> The film insistently refers to Godard's militant work of the late 1960s and early 1970s. More than fifteen years after *La Chinoise* (1967), Godard shows himself dwelling on similar political ideas. Strikingly both in *Prénom Carmen* and in an interview for *L'Avant-scène cinéma* published after its release, Godard uses the same words to condemn the excesses of capitalism. In *Prénom Carmen*, the fictional filmmaker says: 'Les machines se sont mises à produire des biens qui ne correspondent à aucun besoin depuis les bombes atomiques jusqu'aux gobelets en plastique.' In the interview, Godard declares: 'Comme disait Norman Mailer, on produit de plus en plus, mais des choses inutiles: la bombe nucléaire et les gobelets en plastique...' (Jean-Luc Godard and Sylvie Steinebach, 'Les Signes du mal à vivre. Entretien avec Jean-Luc Godard', *L'Avant-scène cinéma*, March 1984, p. 8.)

<sup>23</sup> Godard and Bachmann, p. 15.

<sup>24</sup> Deleuze, *L'Image-temps*, p. 254.

of sound and the activity of listening.<sup>25</sup> In Godard's cinema, '[s]ound and image are presented as the two autonomous but inseparable "images" of cinema [...].<sup>26</sup> Indeed, *Prénom Carmen* highlights the relationship between sound and image, between the gestures of music-making and the gestures of filmmaking, between the act of listening and the act of seeing. As Fox, who refers here to Adorno, suggests, this relationship manifests itself in the choice of Beethoven's late string quartets: 'Whilst Beethoven suffered from drastic hearing loss during the composition of the late quartets, his music possesses "the gift of sight".<sup>27</sup> Inspired by the relationship between music and image in silent cinema, Godard seeks to restore the capacity of the image to communicate with the spectator through 'non-verbal forms of communication',<sup>28</sup> such as gesture, listening, gaze, rhythm, and music. Finally, by developing an analogy between the gestures of performing music, of carving, and of filmmaking, Godard invites us to rethink the concept of intermediality in a gestural perspective.

## **1. Rethinking the Ontology of Cinema: Gesture, Image, Sound, and Music**

The philosophers Mondzain and Agamben both see in gesture the essential feature that defines the ontology of cinema, but in different ways. On the one hand, according to Agamben, gesture is the element that forges the medium specificity of cinema. Unlike the traditional arts like painting, the camera mechanically reproduces gesture and releases it from the paralysis of the image. It is in this sense that Agamben argues that, fundamentally, '[t]he element of cinema is gesture and not image.'<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, in contrast

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<sup>25</sup> Albertine Fox, *Godard and Sound. Acoustic Innovation in the Late Films of Jean-Luc Godard* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2018), p. 67.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>29</sup> Agamben, 'Notes on Gesture', p. 54.

to Agamben, Mondzain, who focuses on the gestures of filmmaking rather than only on the filmed gestures, suggests that the notions of gesture and image are closely related. She argues that, similarly to the traditional still image, the cinematic image is crafted by human hands, and not only by the technology of mechanical reproduction: 'Un film est un geste et les objets qui composent l'histoire du cinéma valent par les gestes qu'ils adressent au spectateur. L'image est faite "de mains d'hommes"'.<sup>30</sup>

In the essay *Homo Spectator*, Mondzain emphasises the gestural dimension of the image in a way that is relevant to the understanding of Godard's cinema of the 1980s. She conceptualises the image by analysing the paintings of the Chauvet Cave in the Ardèche, inhabited during the Upper Palaeolithic period. By focusing on the role of gestures in their creation, she attempts to problematise the relationship between the artist, the image, and the spectator. First of all, she postulates that the birth of the image requires a certain distance between the artist's body and the wall: the human hand guides the eye on the rocky surface, and the arm maintains a distance between the body and the image to come.<sup>31</sup> Secondly, the body and the wall are united when the artist places the pigments on the surface by using his or her hands or mouth.<sup>32</sup> Thirdly, the body moves away. The gesture of separation and linkage, 'geste d'écart et de lien',<sup>33</sup> structures the human relation to the image. After having merged with the image, '[i]l faut que la main se retire'.<sup>34</sup> It is through this fundamental gesture of separation that the image is thus able to reach the spectator. 'Voir, c'est devenir spectateur de l'image que nos mains produisent pour inscrire la trace de notre passage',<sup>35</sup> Mondzain writes. The margin that separates the body from the image structures the act of seeing.

In his famous essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility', Benjamin emphasises the significance of the work of the

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<sup>30</sup> Marie-José Mondzain, *Images (à suivre): de la poursuite au cinéma et ailleurs* (Paris: Bayard, 2011), p. 25.

<sup>31</sup> See Mondzain, *Homo spectator*, p 28.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

hand in the production of the aura of images, which disappears with the techniques of mechanical and industrial reproduction: 'For the first time, photography freed the hand from the most important artistic tasks in the process of pictorial reproduction—tasks that now devolved upon the eye alone.'<sup>36</sup> By contrast, Mondzain argues that the artistic use of modern technologies such as photography and cinema also requires 'l'exigence d'écart et de séparation'<sup>37</sup> that characterises the non-mechanical forms of art. Only the filmmaker's gesture is able to give birth to the image and to acknowledge the spectator as a subject. 'D'une certaine façon, il n'y a pas de regard sans main, c'est-à-dire sans geste,' she concludes.<sup>38</sup> Through tactility ('la palpation du monde'),<sup>39</sup> the hand enables the image to communicate with the spectator.

### 1.1. Tactility and Rhythm

Mondzain's definition of the image, which emphasises the notions of gesture, tactility, trace, distance, margin, and spectatorship, resonates with Godard's *Prénom Carmen*. Godard crucially stresses the role of human gesture in the fabrication of the cinematic image, which he considers to be a trace, like the traces left on the walls of the caves: 'Ce sont les traces de vie qui resteront, comme les traces sur les murs des cavernes, de l'époque ou même avant.'<sup>40</sup> As Pethő points out, in *Histoire(s) du cinéma* Godard, like Agnès Varda in *Les Glaneurs et la Glaneuse* (2000), [seems] to work on the reconstruction of a certain "aura" of the moving image' by foregrounding the role of the filmmaker's hand and tactile gestures in its production.<sup>41</sup> 'By these gestures of indexicality and touch that emphasise both the physical presence of reality before the apparatus, before the director's body and the palpable experience

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<sup>36</sup> Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility. Second Version', p. 102.

<sup>37</sup> Mondzain, *Homo spectator*, p. 202.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 203.

<sup>40</sup> Godard and Steinebach, p. 8.

<sup>41</sup> Pethő, *Cinema and Intermediality*, p. 351.

of images they behold or handle, [Varda and Godard] at least manage to effectively mediate a kind of auratic experience,' Pethő explains.<sup>42</sup>

Referring to Leroi-Gourhan, Godard argues that the style of filmmaking depends on the relationship between the camera and the gesture: 'Le geste [...] fait les formes.'<sup>43</sup> In the 1980s, Godard experimented with new cameras in order to rethink the link between the artist's gesture and the image. In the summer of 1983, just before the release of *Prénom Carmen* in September, *Cahiers du cinéma* published a long interview with Godard and the engineer Jean-Pierre Beauvalia about the Aaton 8-35, a new prototype of camera that the two men tried to design from the mid-1970s [Fig. 1]. Originally Godard had wanted a small and high-quality 35 mm camera that he could keep close at hand in order to be able to use it quickly in any situation of everyday life. For instance, in the first shot of *Passion* (1982), the sky is filmed with the Aaton 35, a model that is slightly larger than the Aaton 8-35.

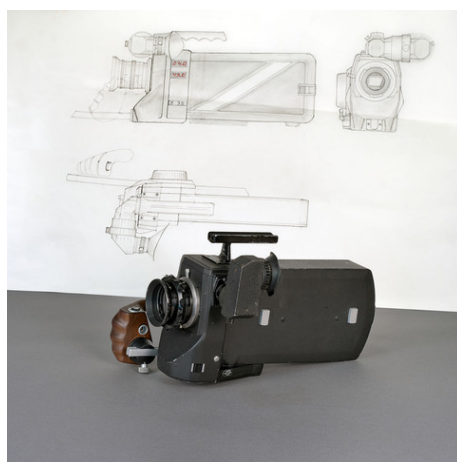


Fig. 1. Camera Aaton 8-35, designed in Grenoble in 1977. Collection La Cinémathèque Française. Copyright photo: Stéphane Dabrowski

With this small camera, Godard intended to invent a new way of shooting a film, with a reduced crew and less movement around the camera. He aimed to avoid the constraints ('le pli') of classical shootings, as Bergala explains:

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Alain Bergala, Jean-Luc Godard, and Jean-Pierre Beauvalia, 'Genèse d'une caméra. Premier épisode', in *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard*, ed. by Alain Bergala (Paris: Edition de l'étoile, 1985), p. 522.

[...] La mise en scène finit toujours par *se plier*, plus ou moins à des gestes qui sont déterminés par le matériel dont on dispose et à des habitudes de travail qui sont liées à la nature même (nombre de personnes, division du travail, normes professionnelles) de l'équipe du tournage classique.<sup>44</sup>

During the first days of the shooting of *Prénom Carmen* Godard used the Aaton, but had to hire a focus puller because of technical problems with his camera. Godard considers the arrival of Isabelle Adjani, to whom he had originally given the role of Carmen, as the 'instant fatal'.<sup>45</sup> When she arrived with her make-up artists and assistants, the crew widened, and the gestures of filmmaking changed. 'On redevenait une mise en scène normale où chacun reprenait ses fonctions et où les autres commençaient à s'ennuyer'.<sup>46</sup> After Adjani left the shooting a few days later, due to feeling unprepared for Godard's demands, the filmmaker switched cameras, giving up the Aaton 35 (and its unresolved problems of focus) and choosing instead the Arriflex, a more conventional apparatus. As a consequence, the form and style of the film evolved. With the Aaton 35 Godard had sought a certain freedom as a filmmaker, a lightness of movement thanks to the new manageability of the object. In the interview with Beauviala, the director describes the sensations he experienced during the rehearsals of *Prénom Carmen*, highlighting the crucial relationship between the hand, the object, and vision: 'Même si elle est un peu lourde, j'ai quand même eu un sentiment de légèreté, le sentiment d'avoir un petit objet qui ne bourre pas la pièce, qui ne remplit pas l'espace. Et du coup, tu as *le temps de voir*'.<sup>47</sup> By contrast, he spends a lot of energy managing the crew on a classical shooting: 'C'est pas moi le maître sur le film, je fais ce que je peux avec quinze techniciens'.<sup>48</sup>

While with the camera Aaton 8-35, Godard had wished to develop the agility of the filmmaker's hand, he actually succeeds in conveying the sense of touch when performing in front of the camera. In *Prénom Carmen*, his performance does indeed remain very tactile. At the beginning of the film,

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 520.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 537.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., cited by Bergala, p. 536.

<sup>47</sup> Alain Bergala, Jean-Luc Godard, Jean-Pierre Beauviala, Romain Goupil, Vincent Blanchet, Renato Berta, and Serge Toubiana, 'Genèse d'une caméra. Deuxième épisode', in *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard*, ed. by Bergala p. 553.

<sup>48</sup> Godard, *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard*, p. 534.

Uncle Jean makes the objects of his hospital room resound. Like a blind man, he frantically and noisily touches the windowpanes, as well as the other objects, such as the bed, the typewriter, and his own body [Fig. 2, 3]. As Deleuze writes regarding Godard's cinema, '[l]e corps est sonore autant que visible.'<sup>49</sup> Godard shows the filmmaker's ability to manipulate and design the sounds that have, in the sequence described above, a particular resonance and precision, as if the author had carefully selected, isolated, and intensified them. Michel Chion analyses how filmmakers can emphasise the sounds of gestures and 'give noise to the body through sound effects' by recreating the sounds in real life and giving them a 'rendering' adapted to the cinema.<sup>50</sup> Although Godard uses direct sound,<sup>51</sup> he reveals the musicality of gestures by emphasising the rhythmicity of the human body. His urge to touch all the components of his environment reveals his wish to 'touch the image',<sup>52</sup> to create a trace within the film, and to be connected to the filmed world, framed by the camera, before becoming separated from it. He touches the surface, then pulls back his hands. As Leroi-Gourhan points out, rhythm and trace are two interrelated notions. He defines human rhythm as a dynamic image (*image dynamique*), shaped by gesture and voice, which can take the form of a graphic trace thanks to the work of the hand.<sup>53</sup> Rhythms generate forms, and model the relation of an individual to space and time. Indeed, '[l]es rythmes sont créateurs de l'espace et du temps, du moins pour le sujet. [...] Les rythmes sont créateurs de formes,'<sup>54</sup> Leroi-Gourhan writes. By highlighting the rhythmical nature of his gestures, Godard draws the spectator's attention to the sound quality of the image and, ultimately, emphasises the crucial role of the musicians' gestures in the creation of the forms of the film.

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<sup>49</sup> Deleuze, *L'Image-temps*, p. 252.

<sup>50</sup> Chion, *Film, a Sound Art*, p. 237.

<sup>51</sup> Fox, *Godard and Sound*, p. 67.

<sup>52</sup> Raymond Bellour, '(Not) Just an Other Filmmaker', *Jean-Luc Godard, Son + Image 1974-1991*, ed. by Bellour and Bandy, p. 226.

<sup>53</sup> Leroi-Gourhan, *Le Geste et la parole II*, p. 144.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 135.



Fig. 2, 3. *Prénom Carmen*

## 1.2. The Gestural Creation of Cinematic Images

### 1.2.1. *Distances, Relations, and Interplays*

Drawing on silent cinema, Godard reflects on the audiovisual dimension of gesture and on the productive relationship between the soundtrack and the image. In the title *Prénom Carmen*, the word *prénom* points to what comes before the name, or, in other words, before language. And what comes before language, according to Lacan, is the Imaginary,<sup>55</sup> or, in cinematic terms, the image. Alternatively, however, it might be music, as Godard considers in the film synopsis: ‘Ce qui vient avant le nom. Et ce qui vient encore avant. Est-ce la musique?’<sup>56</sup> Godard attempts to show things before they are named by returning to a form of cinema which precedes the advent of talking pictures: ‘Les enfants vont jouer à Carmen; comme autrefois Chaplin. Car c’est vrai que c’est un film muet. Un film qui serait devenu muet à l’annonce du parlant.’<sup>57</sup> From this perspective the director develops the interplay between images, gestures, and music, which, in silent cinema, tends to stimulate the spectator’s imagination: ‘La bande muette s’appuyait sur des idéogrammes sonores, vagues, fournis par un accompagnement

<sup>55</sup> See Powrie’s Lacanian interpretation of *Prénom Carmen* in Phil Powrie, ‘Godard’s *Prénom Carmen* (1984), Masochism, and the Male Gaze’, *Forum for Modern Languages Studies*, 31.1 (1995), 64-73 (pp. 67-68).

<sup>56</sup> Cited in Raymond Lefèvre, ‘Avant le nom (le langage) des enfants jouent à Carmen’, in *Jean-Luc Godard* (Paris: Edilig, 1983), p. 115.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

musical qui préservait le jeu entre l'image imposée et l'individu,' Leroi-Gourhan argues.<sup>58</sup> By contrast, the perfection of representation in sound films and television tends to plunge the spectator's perception into a state of passivity that neutralises his or her effort to interpret and imagine:

La marge d'interprétation individuelle se trouve excessivement réduite puisque le symbole et son contenu se confondent dans un réalisme qui tend vers la perfection et puisque d'autre part la situation réelle ainsi recréée laisse le spectateur hors de toute possibilité d'intervention active.<sup>59</sup>

Although Leroi-Gourhan's assertion is debatable, as sound, for example, enables filmmakers to develop the off-camera space and explore the boundaries between the visible and the invisible and, thus, to stimulate the spectator's kinesic intelligence (as pointed out above in Chapter 2), his argument indirectly evokes Godard's criticism of the 'terrorism of language' pervasive in television, due to the domination of the text over the image.<sup>60</sup> 'There are no more images today. As Jean-Pierre Gorin used to say in the time we worked together: "Films are no longer seen, they are read",' Godard states.<sup>61</sup> Strikingly, his resistance to the dominant use of the audiovisual medium manifests itself in *Prénom Carmen* through the relationship between the image and the music and, more broadly, the soundtrack. The combination of heterogeneous forms, the hybridisation of the audiovisual medium, and the proliferation of analogies between music and film aim to foster the spectator's active reception.

Godard considers that the spectator's position is threatened by television, as the latter is an instrument of 'power in its pure state'.<sup>62</sup> The filmmaker denounces the dominating power of the medium of television, which is 'causing the decline of the images' and makes the spectator feel 'impotent'.<sup>63</sup> The relationship between the image and the spectator is annihilated: "Video" means "I see", but what is happening is that with the

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<sup>58</sup> Leroi-Gourhan, *Le Geste et la parole I*, p. 295.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Godard and Bachmann, p. 14.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., pp. 18 and 15.

complicity of the masses video becomes the medium of those who do not want to see.<sup>64</sup> In *Prénom Carmen*, Godard associates video with violence, robbery and kidnapping. Before the hold-up, Joseph, armed with a rifle, scatters people who stand in front of the bank, while a voice-over repeats: 'Vidéo, vidéo, qui veut de la vidéo? Tous les films, toutes les couleurs, PAL et SECAM, vidéo, vidéo.' As Guy Baudon explains,

[u]ne fois de plus, Godard interroge la télévision et son rôle de plus en plus envahissant. A une époque où le marché de la vidéo étend partout ses tentacules (satellites, câbles, canaux), diffuse en permanence sur un nombre de plus en plus important de 'chaînes' des images concurrentes et qui se poussent les unes les autres.<sup>65</sup>

According to Godard, the dominant use of television annihilates the distance necessary to constitute the subjectivity of the spectator who is hypnotised by the image, or rather by the semblance of image. The filmmaker argues that the medium of television does not fully communicate with the spectator: 'A la télévision, rien ne se crée, rien ne se perd, rien ne se transforme. Il n'y a que des moyens de communication, mais il n'y a plus de communication,' Godard argues.<sup>66</sup> Television fabricates oblivion rather than memory and blocks off the connectedness between the image and the spectator: 'La télé est une masse amorphe, où rien ne circule, où tout se bloque.'<sup>67</sup> In *Prénom Carmen*, Godard denounces the perceptive alienation of the masses caused by the power of television. Scarpetta considers Godard to be a post-Brechtian author in the sense that the filmmaker manipulates the Brechtian distancing effects to denounce the alienation of perception itself:

Godard s'attache surtout à dénoncer [...] l'aliénation *dans la perception en tant que telle*: celle qui fait que nous sommes programmés, non seulement dans notre 'conscience', mais dans notre façon de voir et d'entendre (ou plutôt: d'être incapables de voir et d'entendre hors de certains codes, de certaines homogénéités).<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>65</sup> Guy Baudon, 'L'Horreur et la beauté du monde', *L'Avant-scène cinéma*, March 1984, p. 15.

<sup>66</sup> Cited in Dominique Païni, 'La bonne distance', *Artpress*, January 1985, p. 53.

<sup>67</sup> Godard and Steinebach, p. 8.

<sup>68</sup> Scarpetta, 'Docteur, est-ce que l'âme a un corps?', p. 44.

Criticising television for not taking the margins into consideration, Godard argues that his position as a filmmaker, which is 'in the margin', is similar to the position of the spectator. 'I am in the place of the public, of the onlookers. In fact to be in the margin, that is the real position of the public.'<sup>69</sup> As considered above with reference to Mondzain, the image, which exists from the moment the artist's hand moves away, addresses the spectator's gaze in the margin that separates them. In the video essay *Scénario du film 'Passion'* (1982), in which the director discusses the process of the creation of *Passion*, Godard argues that the image, in order to be seen, needs first to be received by the artist and the spectator. Godard raises the palm of his hands in the direction of the white video screen in order to 'see' ('Tu veux voir'), and then directs them towards his gaze in order to receive (or re-see-ve) ('Tu veux rece-voir') [Fig. 4, 5]. He argues that the filmmaker, like a spectator, faces the image, contrary to the television newscaster who sits with his or her back to it. As Raymond Bellour writes on Godard, '[the filmmaker] must maintain with respect to the image, and to the life from which it emanates, the distance necessary for it to exist as an image, in its dimension of belief and revelation.'<sup>70</sup> Godard aims to restore the spectator's gaze by showing the image as a trace left by the artist's gesture. By distancing himself from the image, the filmmaker enables the spectator to exist as an active subject.



Fig. 4, 5. *Scénario du film 'Passion'*

<sup>69</sup> Godard and Bachmann, p. 17.

<sup>70</sup> Bellour, '(Not) Just an Other Filmmaker', p. 226.

The necessary distance between the image and the spectator is problematised in a pivotal sequence of *Prénom Carmen*, in which the languorous song 'Ruby's Arms' by Tom Waits temporarily replaces Beethoven (before the end of the sequence when Godard interweaves Beethoven and the popular song). While waiting for Carmen in the hotel room, Joseph sensually strokes the television screen with his right hand. The screen shows an absence of image, i.e. a blurred screen as if reception is disturbed. Joseph's tactile gesture does not leave any imprint or trace: the blurred screen, like all the television screens of the hotel, remains imperturbably the same, an object without image indifferent to Joseph's desperate urge for affectivity. The character, who cannot detach himself from the surface of the screen [Fig. 6], does not look at it, and consequently, does not exist as a spectator. His hand, which merges with the screen, becomes itself a semblance of a hand. Following this, a long shot shows Joseph lying over the television set, inert and weakened, before falling down on the ground, annihilated and defeated [Fig. 7], while Carmen enters the room and opens the curtains. Joseph gets back onto his feet and kisses her [Fig. 8]. The bluish and cold colour of the shot, which differs from the yellow and warm tones of the other scenes in the hotel, evokes the glazed paper-like quality of advertising images, as well as the bluish light of the television screen. The image, and more particularly the image of Carmen, filmed in close-up, is turned into a fetish, a product of male fantasy. However, unlike the inert and lifeless television screen, Carmen responds to Joseph's stroke and detaches herself from his gesture. In the next shots, closely followed by her lover, Carmen crosses the rooms of the suite, which all include a television set with a blurred screen [Fig. 9]. Although the eroticisation of her naked body could remind us of the representation of Brigitte Bardot in *Le Mépris* (1963), Carmen resists Joseph's possessive and aggressive gestures. Against the fetishisation of her body, she affirms her subjectivity ('J'ai envie de dormir toute seule'), imposing a distance between herself and Joseph who is too frustrated to listen to her. Significantly, not only is she filmed in full shot rather than in close-up, but she also repeatedly leaves the

frame of the camera when Joseph approaches her too closely. Her image is constructed, with difficulty, in the distance that separates her from the male gaze.

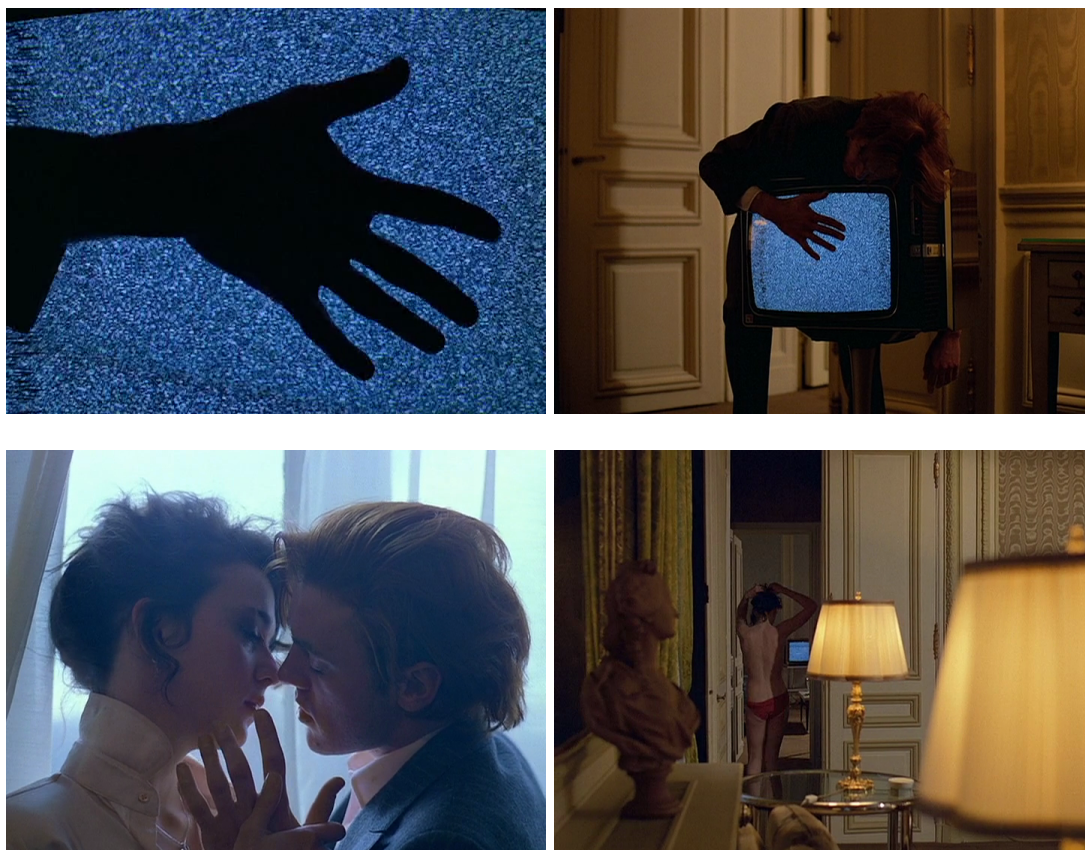


Fig. 6-9. *Prénom Carmen*

In *Prénom Carmen*, Godard seems to question his way of representing women during the New Wave. According to Geneviève Sellier, the female characters of the New Wave, rather than being constructed as subjects, are mostly subjected to the male gaze (with only a few exceptions such as Agnès Varda's *Cléo de 5 à 7* (1962) or Alain Resnais's *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959)). She demonstrates how Anna Karina, a 'woman-child', is infantilised by Godard who represents his actress as the Pygmalion-like artist would his model.<sup>71</sup> Through Carmen's story, Godard reproduces the pattern of the femme fatale fetishised by the male gaze, which is emblematic of the New Wave, as Sellier explains: 'Female characters in these films are the

<sup>71</sup> Sellier, *Masculine Singular*, pp. 153-64.

male hero's fears and desires made concrete and the viewer only has access to them through his gaze.<sup>72</sup> However, Godard, who remains influenced by the feminist discourses of the late 1960s and 1970s, calls into question the powerful figure of the paternalistic author. According to Mulvey, the filmmaker's 'self-parodic' performance challenges the fetishist representation of the female body. In *Prénom Carmen*, the male gaze ultimately proves impotent:

He depicts the film director's dilemma as hopelessly fetishistic, his obsession with cinema and the female body as helplessly dependent, masochistic, exploitative. Cinema and sexuality merge into a condensation that is unashamedly masculine while also being apologetically impotent.<sup>73</sup>

The incestuous relationship between Uncle Jean and Carmen ironically mirrors the ambiguously exploitative relationship between the misogynistic filmmaker, who Godard intentionally embodies, and the heroine. However, Carmen succeeds in manipulating the male gaze by at once attracting it and keeping it at a distance. A dialectical gesture of attraction and rejection, which is first initiated in the film by Uncle Jean, sets the rhythm of the love story between Carmen and Joseph throughout the film. When Carmen visits Uncle Jean at the hospital, the director, who appears out of focus while the heroine is filmed in a fetishist close-up, strokes her face [Fig. 29]. She immediately rejects his possessive hand gesture. Uncle Jean disappears off-screen but tries to compensate his lack of physical presence through language, by making a regressive pun in a disillusioned tone: 'C'est fou les jeunes. Ils oublient tout et ils n'ont que de la mémoire. Ils sont dans le trou... noir.' Similarly, Joseph mentions the black hole when he says to Carmen: 'J'ai trouvé... la prison... pourquoi ça s'appelle le trou,' negatively linking, as Scarpetta points out,<sup>74</sup> female sexuality to masculine entrapment. On the one hand, Godard's character contaminates both Joseph's language and gestures, highlighting the sensitive process of bodily and verbal exchanges that structures the relationship between the filmmaker and his leading actor.

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 149.

<sup>73</sup> Mulvey, 'The Hole and the Zero', p. 82.

<sup>74</sup> Scarpetta, 'Docteur, est-ce que l'âme a un corps?', p. 47.

On the other hand, Godard's physical engagement in the film crucially challenges his own authority as a filmmaker.

### 1.2.2. *Transmissions*

Analysing the situation of filmmakers acting in their own films, Mondzain explains the extent to which they reflect on their own relation to power and authority. The philosopher distinguishes power, when it establishes itself to the detriment of freedom and human relationship, from authority, which involves recognition, transmission, and trust.<sup>75</sup>

L'auteur dans le corps de l'acteur interroge alors les rapports du pouvoir et de l'autorité au cœur du cinéma lui-même. Il est frappant de voir comment la problématique du pouvoir fait dans ces films l'objet d'un retournement symptomatique: le pouvoir trouve dans le corps de l'acteur le lieu d'une décomposition critique qui permet à l'autorité de l'auteur de surgir en devenant le lieu d'une transmission invisible de l'autorité de l'auteur au spectateur lui-même.<sup>76</sup>

The transmission of authority from the filmmaker to the spectator, who is thus acknowledged as an active subject, emerges through the filmmaker's act of resistance against power and through his struggle to live and exist as an artist. Indeed, far from being in a position of strength, Godard shows his vulnerability. '[Les films] ne sont pas vraiment des signes de la vie, mais plutôt du mal à vivre,' he argues in an interview.<sup>77</sup> In the film, Uncle Jean is shown lying in his hospital bed in semi-obscure, repeating in a guttural voice 'être... être' [Fig. 10]. According to Mondzain, the creation of images is a difficult and demanding process which emphasises the artist's weakness, and paradoxically constructs his or her authority:

Dans cette geste primitive, je ne vois pas un geste souverain de pouvoir, mais une mise en scène par l'homme de sa propre faiblesse – l'obscurité, l'exiguïté, la paroi, l'infranchissable, le face-à-face avec ce qui ne répond pas –, et dans

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<sup>75</sup> Mondzain, 'L'Auteur au risque de l'autorité de l'acteur', *Cahiers du cinéma*, July-August 2005, p. 14.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>77</sup> Godard and Steinebach, p. 8.

cette position d'extrême faiblesse la construction de quelque chose que j'appellerai [...] son *autorité*, sa position d'auteur.<sup>78</sup>

In *Prénom Carmen*, as in *Soigne ta droite* (1987) and *King Lear* (1987), Godard portrays himself as a powerless and marginal filmmaker, playing the role of the fool. By nature, the fool belongs to the margins of the narrative and mediates the author's perspective of the fictional world, as Cecilia Sayad demonstrates by drawing on Bakhtin: 'It is by the way as an outsider that the fool becomes the author's mask, representing the author's point of view and positioning this figure as marginal to the narrated world.'<sup>79</sup> Godard's marginalisation as a fool ultimately represents his 'increasing marginal position in the film market'.<sup>80</sup> Throughout the film, Godard, as a fictional character, shows himself being subjected to the professionals – 'On est des professionnels,' the leader of Carmen's gang affirms –, who substitute the cinema for a kidnapping. 'Cette soumission fictive indique que l'auteur fait "comme si" il renonçait à son autonomie de sujet libre,' Mondzain explains.<sup>81</sup>



<sup>78</sup> Marie-José Mondzain and Pierre Lauret, 'Sans Image, il n'y a pas de *logos*. Entretien avec Marie-José Mondzain', *Cahiers philosophiques*, 113 (2008), 52-63 <<https://www.cairn.info/revue-cahiers-philosophiques1-2008-1-page-52.htm>> [accessed 18 August 2018] (para. 10 of 29)

<sup>79</sup> Sayad, *Performing Authorship*, p. 112.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114.

<sup>81</sup> Mondzain, *Homo Spectator*, p. 263.



Fig. 10-13. *Prénom Carmen*

While performing the role of a fallen author manipulated by cynical gangsters, Godard symbolically transmits his authority as a fictional filmmaker to the musicians who lead the *mise-en-scène* thanks to the productive resonance of their gestures in the narrative. Indeed, as Scarpetta notes, Godard distinguishes the self-proclaimed professionals, like the leader of Carmen's gang, from the real ones, such as the musicians.<sup>82</sup> In the final sequence, Uncle Jean, who is supposed to direct a scene in the dining room of the hotel, meets the Prat Quartet, which repeatedly performs Beethoven, and shakes hands with the first violinist; through this symbolic gesture, he acknowledges the quartet's essential presence and creative role in the film. Then Uncle Jean, who uses a knife to make a wine glass and a plate tinkle, gives musical indications to the crew (Carmen's gang) behind him; he is always isolated in space, marginalised in the group; he stands still, holding a cassette player (his music-camera) in his arms, and then gradually retreats in a corner, near the quartet [Fig. 11], saying to his assistant: 'Je ne travaille pas dans ces conditions.' Manipulated as he is by Carmen, he is not the master of the film and has no hold on the material. In the second part of the sequence, which becomes much more chaotic and fragmented, the criminals shoot with their guns instead of using their camera, which leads to miscommunication, destruction, and ultimately death [Fig. 12, 13].

Godard argues that unlike the gangsters' rifles, '[the camera] is not an instrument that sends out [...]':<sup>83</sup> the cinematic image exists first in the way it

<sup>82</sup> See Scarpetta, 'Docteur, est-ce que l'âme a un corps?', p. 44.

<sup>83</sup> Godard and Bachmann, p. 18.

is received by the camera, thanks to the light. By comparing the camera, on the one hand, to a rifle,<sup>84</sup> and on the other, to a cassette player which plays music, Godard brings into opposition, in a metaphorical way, the act of shooting with a gun and the act of making a film with music. As a filmmaker-actor, Godard symbolically delegates the direction of the film to the quartet. By moving aside, he brings the musicians' gestures to the forefront. He uses Beethoven's music to 'compose' the film and gives the quartet the responsibility to 'direct' it. As Scarpetta notes, '[...] tout le film, en définitive, est littéralement *produit* par la musique de Beethoven (qui fonctionne non seulement comme un embrayeur d'images, mais encore comme un modèle compositionnel.'<sup>85</sup> By exhibiting the craft of the musicians, Godard shows how their gestures produce the forms of the film and forge the spectator's reception of the image. Ultimately, the editing stimulates the spectator's active engagement by emphasising the link (*geste de lien*) and the interval (*geste d'écart*) between the musicians' gestures and the moving image.

## **2. The Intermediality of Gestures: A Productive Dialogue between Film, Music, and Sculpture**

In *Prénom Carmen*, gesture not only causes subjects to interact, but also interconnects various media and arts, in spite of their differences. By stressing the relational and intersubjective qualities of gestures, Godard emphasises their crucial role as a medium of in-betweenness and invites us to rethink the concept of intermediality in cinema. According to Pethő, intermediality designates an 'in-between' space where arts and media circulate and interact:

Cinema seems to consciously position itself 'in-between' media and arts, employing techniques that tap into the multimedial complexity of cinema,

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<sup>84</sup> Sontag discusses the analogy between cameras and guns in her well-known essay 'Plato's Cave'. See Sontag, *On Photography*, pp. 14-15.

<sup>85</sup> Scarpetta, 'Docteur, est-ce que l'âme a un corps?', p. 48.

exploiting the possibilities offered by the distinctive characteristics of the media components involved in the cinematic process of signification, and bringing into play the tensions generated by media differences.<sup>86</sup>

By drawing on this definition, I aim to demonstrate the extent to which gesture in *Prénom Carmen* interconnects different media and subjects, and interrelates art forms and heterogeneous modes of expression. According to Chamarette, '[g]esture, in all its philosophical and embodied complexity, offers a means of thinking about intermediality and intersubjectivity, as a migratory, transitory process of meaning-making.'<sup>87</sup> She adds that '[g]esture is [...] what transmits expression, but also the modality through which expression is made perceivable'.<sup>88</sup> Making a film involves not only the interaction of different media, but also of different modes of expression which enter into dialogue and exchange their gestural properties.

Godard establishes intermedial equivalences between the script and the musical score, between the musical rehearsal and the shooting of the film, between the rhythm of the musical phrase and the rhythm of the editing, between the musical instruments and the actors and actresses' bodies. Furthermore, the filmmaker interconnects the musicians' gestures with the lovers' gestures, which echo Rodin's sculptures and the movement of waves. Gesture is the element which incorporates, develops, and sets in motion the features of the other arts, not only by creating an in-between space that forges links between media, but also notably by exhibiting the process of making itself. The relation between the performing, musical, and visual arts is made visible in the exhibition of the corporeal effort of making (whether it be making music, film, or love) which tends to open the boundaries separating the different arts. The aural and visual qualities of gestures communicate between one another, generating rhythms and forms that circulate in the continuous flow of moving images. By fostering the analogy between the gesture of carving, of performing music, and of making film, Godard

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<sup>86</sup> Pethő, *Cinema and Intermediality*, p. 2.

<sup>87</sup> Jenny Chamarette, 'Between Women: Gesture, Intermediality and Intersubjectivity in the Installations of Agnès Varda and Chantal Akerman', *Studies in European Cinema*, 10.1 (2013), 45-57 (p. 46).

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

highlights what unites the arts in cinema, while productively playing on their differences.

## 2.1. Beethoven, a Film Composer

### 2.1.1. Heterogeneity, Co-presence, and Musical Dialogue



Fig. 14. Eric Rohmer, *Le Signe du Lion*

At first sight, the use of Beethoven's music in *Prénom Carmen*, which replaces Bizet's original score, appears to manifest Godard's return to the New Wave aesthetics. In *Le Nouveau monde* (1962), *Une femme mariée* (1964), and *Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle* (1966), Godard makes use of numerous fragments from Beethoven's late string quartets. In this respect, Aumont considers *Prénom Carmen* to be 'un retour, et peut-être même critique, sur les précédents [films]'.<sup>89</sup> Although Godard reweaves an old leitmotif of his filmography, his reappropriation of Beethoven's music is revealing of a stylistic evolution between the New Wave and the post-New Wave. First of all, Godard's passion for the quartets is foregrounded in Rohmer's *Le Signe du Lion* (1959) in which a solitary character, played by Godard himself, repeatedly listens to the second movement of the fifteenth quartet during a party. He obsessively listens to the same fragment by replacing the stylus of the phonograph on the same groove [Fig. 14].

<sup>89</sup> Jacques Aumont, *A quoi pensent les films* (Paris: Séguier, 1996), p. 268.

According to Aumont, Godard's gesture of interruption and repetition is similar to an act of editing. Due to being fragmented and repeated, the music has no decorative function here, but becomes a 'figure'. 'C'est ce geste que, dans ses films des années soixante, Godard a pratiqué avec la musique pour quatuor de Beethoven (la seule musique qu'il ait alors empruntée, mais fréquemment, à ce compositeur).'<sup>90</sup> In *Une femme mariée* for example, fragments of the quartets, limited to a few bars, are edited in relation to the other visual and aural elements of the film, as Aumont points out, such as the sound effects, the dialogue, the advertising posters, and the actors and actresses' fragmented gestures.<sup>91</sup> Some critics were scandalised by this treatment of classical music, 'devant le fait que ces citations fragmentaires ne respectaient "même pas" les phrases, et coupaient souvent au milieu d'un thème, voire d'un motif.'<sup>92</sup>

Although the quartets are still interrupted in *Prénom Carmen*, they are played in chronological order (the quartets 9, 10, 14, 15, and 16) and developed in the continuity of the sequences. The music 'n'est plus coupée "à contresens"',<sup>93</sup> but is performed in relation to the cinematographic and narrative meaning of the film. The editing makes the continuity between Beethoven's music and the script visible and audible. The ideas, actions, and gestures stem from the music. As Godard admits, '[...] the attack on the bank came to be after I heard a certain part of the 10<sup>th</sup> Quartet.'<sup>94</sup> Inspired by the collaboration between Eisenstein and Prokofiev in *Alexander Nevsky* (1938),<sup>95</sup> the filmmaker described each sequence in the script by referring to the tone, tempo, and musical intentions of the quartets. The music enabled

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p. 265.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

Moreover, Godard's interest in Maillol's sculptures in *Une femme mariée*, combined with Beethoven's music, anticipates the double influence of music and sculpture in *Prénom Carmen*. See Suzanne Liandrat-Guigues, *Cinéma et sculpture: un aspect de la modernité des années soixante* (Paris, Budapest, Torino: L'Harmattan, 2002), p. 83.

<sup>92</sup> Aumont, *A quoi pensent les films*, p. 265. On the same topic, see Eric Rohmer, *De Mozart en Beethoven. Essai sur la notion de profondeur en musique* (Arles: Actes Sud, 1998), p. 230.

<sup>93</sup> Aumont, *A quoi pensent les films*, p. 265.

<sup>94</sup> Godard and Bachmann, p. 16.

<sup>95</sup> For a detailed analysis of Eisenstein's influence on *Prénom Carmen*, see Fox, *Godard and Sound*, pp. 75-81.

Godard to envision the actors and actresses' gestures. For instance, in sequence 14, he writes:

La musique termine elle aussi ses accents graves et profonds. De plus en plus profonds, ainsi les gestes de Joseph envers Carmen, comme s'il voulait s'imprimer dans la peau de la femme pendant qu'elle boit et mange maintenant normalement.<sup>96</sup>

The intimate relationship between the music and the gestures alters the aesthetics of heterogeneity that usually defines Godard's style. Contrary to Akerman's theatricalisation of the body, which has been compared to Ozu's and Bresson's 'aesthetics of homogeneity',<sup>97</sup> Godard constantly plays with formal contrasts and variations of tempo. In *Prénom Carmen*, the filmmaker uses the jump cut to juxtapose the gestures of the string quartet with Joseph and Carmen's bodily movements, thus dilating the time-space of the film. Furthermore, as Phil Powrie notes, the film is a patchwork of genres, which subverts the codes of family melodrama, thriller, love story, and trial film, and mixes different acting styles: 'The love story is on the one hand made of elliptical gestures and violent clashes, and on the other intimate moments which combine the poetic with the vulgar.'<sup>98</sup> Yet, instead of emphasising the effects of 'dislocation' as Powrie suggests,<sup>99</sup> the film, especially its editing, creates a productive and unifying dialogue between the heterogeneous components which constitute it, such as the shots of the sea, the musical rehearsals, and Carmen and Joseph's love story.

According to Jacques Rancière, Godard, in *Prénom Carmen*, highlights the mysterious co-presence of the heterogeneous elements which usually compose the world (including music, as Rohmer points out).<sup>100</sup> Rather than highlighting their antagonism, he reveals 'la parenté des hétérogènes', the relatedness of the heterogeneous components, 'dans la musique fusionnelle des images qui unit, en une même respiration, le bruit

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<sup>96</sup> Godard, 'Prénom Carmen: scénario', in *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard*, p. 565.

<sup>97</sup> Margulies, *Nothing Happens*, p. 56.

<sup>98</sup> Powrie, 'Godard's *Prénom Carmen* (1984), Masochism, and the Male Gaze', p. 66.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>100</sup> According to Rohmer, music in Godard's cinema does not aim to accompany the image, but is filmed as being part of the world: 'La musique n'est pas utilisée comme un élément filmique d'appoint. Elle est simplement filmée comme peuvent l'être les arbres, la mer, le ciel. Elle fait partie du monde.' See Rohmer, *De Mozart en Beethoven*, p. 234.

des cordes, celui des vagues et celui des corps'.<sup>101</sup> Although the adjective 'fusionnelle' is not the most adequate term to qualify Godard's editing and gestural research given that he also emphasises the distance between these heterogeneous elements, the interrelation between the musicians' and actors and actresses' gestures indeed generates shared motifs and rhythms.

### 2.1.2. *Gestus and Hypergesture*

Godard makes use of all the potential of editing to create a complex musical *gestus*, and of the quartet's performance to compose the film musically and visually. By referring to musical terminology, gestures can be in tune (*accordé*) and out of tune (*désaccordé*). In addition to *accords* and *désaccords*, gestures are also objects of *raccords* (match cuts) which aim to give its coherence and harmony to the film by connecting the shots of a scene like the pieces of a puzzle. For instance, during the bank attack, Godard creates a subtle match cut between the movement of Joseph's rifle, which is waved in all directions, and the bow, which attacks the strings of the violin [Fig. 15, 16]. The filmmaker connects the musical rehearsal to the act of shooting. The musical gestures are both *gestes de lien*, because the quartet rehearsals accompany the on-going action of the bank robbery, and *gestes d'écart*, because they are performed from a distance, in a separated time-space.



Fig. 15, 16. *Prénom Carmen*.

<sup>101</sup> Jacques Rancière, *Malaise dans l'esthétique* (Paris: Galilée, 2004), p. 81.



Fig. 17-19. First take



Fig. 20-24. Second take

During the rehearsals, the musicians stop playing, comment upon their performance, and try to improve it by reworking some parts of the piece: 'Là ça devient beaucoup plus dramatique'; 'Il faut que ce soit plus violent'; 'Il ne faut pas diminuer ici.' Such recommendations, with which they annotate their score, determine the colour, mood, energy, and rhythmic sensitivity of the musical phrase. The musicians adapt their gestures to the musical intention they want to achieve. Similarly, during the shooting of a film, filmmakers closely work with their actors and actresses in order to direct their performance. They ask them to make specific gestures appropriate to the meaning and/or form they want them to convey. After having recorded several takes of the same shot, they then select the best take for the editing. During the sequence of the bank robbery, Godard shows such a process by successively editing two takes of the same shot. Joseph strides across the corridor, chasing the gangsters among the victims and the remaining clients, and bumps into a table in a slapstick way [Fig. 17-19]. The second take is much longer and developed than the first one, but Joseph's choreography looks almost identical, and gestural differences are barely perceptible. Indeed, the actor Jacques Bonaffé shows great precision and technical dexterity. His exaggerated gestures, somewhat reminiscent of Chaplin's *Burlesque on Carmen* (1915), leave no room for improvisation. Using his body as a musical instrument, the actor closely follows the director's indications and the annotations of the screenplay, as if following a musical score.

Godard's method of editing seems to evoke the Brechtian intention 'to make gestures quotable',<sup>102</sup> as Walter Benjamin writes. The process of interruption and repetition in *Prénom Carmen* would appear nonetheless to differ from the Brechtian *gestus* that Devin Fore compares with Eisenstein's technique of transitionless acting. This acting style, based on discontinuity, incorporates the 'devices of montage and mechanical assembly [...] into the body of the actor': 'Like the *gestus*, Eisenstein's montage dramaturgy works

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<sup>102</sup> Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht*, p. 11.

by producing collisions between discontinuous emotional states, resulting in a performance that is disjointed and full of counterpoints. Hence the designation “transitionless”.<sup>103</sup> By contrast, in *Prénom Carmen* Godard seems to restore a certain sense of continuity, despite the lack of linearity of action, by making visible the relations between the heterogeneous parts of the film as well as the transitions in the actors and actresses’ performances. Indeed, in the scene with Joseph described above, Godard edits the missing images preceding and following the first occurrence of the shot, re-establishing its cohesion and unity, rather than creating an effect of disjunction, as if the shot was ‘torn’ and Godard intended to ‘mend’ it [Fig. 20-24].<sup>104</sup> The rehearsals of the Prat Quartet lend the film the shape of a work in progress, made up of interruptions and resumptions. Analysing the dialectics of disorder and order, discontinuity and continuity, disorganising and organising flux in Godard’s films of the 1980s, including *Prénom Carmen*, Didier Coureau admits that ‘les films de Godard sont, dans leur apparence première, morcelés, mais ils ne tombent pas en morceaux’.<sup>105</sup> What is it that makes the pieces hold together if not the dialogue of gestures or, to use Petra Löffler’s expression, ‘the linkage of gestures’?<sup>106</sup>

From this perspective, the concept of *gestus*, as defined by Deleuze in *L’Image-temps*, remains helpful when analysing Godard’s gestural process of filmmaking. Drawing on Brecht, Deleuze does not consider the *gestus* as a discontinuous, disjointed, and transitionless form of acting, but rather defines

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<sup>103</sup> Devin Fore, ‘Gestus Facit Saltus: Bertolt Brecht’s Fear and Misery of the Third Reich’, in *Realism after Modernism: The Rehumanization of Art and Literature* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2012), pp. 172-73.

<sup>104</sup> The gesture of mending significantly appears in a sequence of the film in which Uncle Jean is discussing the film project with the gang leader in a café. The filmmaker has indeed torn his coat on exiting the underground: the contact with the world outside the psychiatric hospital has provoked a tear. While he is ruminating on capitalistic economy, his assistant (and nurse) mends the torn sleeve and listens to his thoughts. The gestures of mending and listening, like operations of editing, reintroduce cohesion and continuity.

<sup>105</sup> Didier Coureau, ‘Jean-Luc Godard. Ouverture de l’ère de la complexité esthétique. 1979-1985’, in *Jean-Luc Godard 2, au-delà de l’image*, ed. by Marc Cerisuelo (Paris: Lettres modernes, 1993), p. 29.

<sup>106</sup> Petra Löffler, ‘Gesturing the Image. The Chain-Linking of Gestures in Jean-Luc Godard’s *Passion*’, in *Gestures of Seeing in Film, Video and Drawing*, ed. by Asbjørn Grønstad, Henrik Gustafsson, and Øyvind Vågnes (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017), p. 34.

the notion in terms of gestural interconnection and coordination of bodily attitudes:

Ce que nous appelons gestus en général, c'est le lien ou le nœud des attitudes, entre elles, leur coordination les unes avec les autres, mais en tant qu'elle ne dépend pas d'une histoire préalable, d'une intrigue préexistante ou d'une image-action.<sup>107</sup>

Deleuze notes the pluridimensionality of Godard's audiovisual gestus in *Prénom Carmen*.<sup>108</sup> His definition of gestus echoes the concept of the hypergesture which has been theorised by Guerino Mazzola in free jazz and developed more broadly by Yves Citton.<sup>109</sup> Hypergesture refers to the connection of disparate gestures that enter into dialogue with one another despite their physiological dissimilarities. For example, although the gesture of a drummer could not be more different from the gesture of a saxophonist, they are united in a collaborative process of creation which produces shared rhythms, shapes, colours, and sounds. When Godard films the rehearsals of the Prat Quartet, he shows, in the foreground, the movement of the violinist's elbow in dialogue with the cellist's arms and hands. Their posture and gestural techniques adapt to the shape of their respective instruments [Fig. 25, 26]. 'Le niveau *hypergestuel* résulte [...] des résonances subjectives perçues par les humains entre des gestes physiologiquement différents,' Citton explains.<sup>110</sup> The concept of hypergesture enables us to consider the intersubjective dimension of gestures which, rather than being isolated, achieve a common object, through interpersonal relations, exchanges, resonances, dialogue, affective linkage, and collaboration.

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<sup>107</sup> Deleuze, *L'Image-temps*, p. 250.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 253-54.

<sup>109</sup> See Guerino B. Mazzola, 'Geometry of Gestures', in Guerino B. Mazzola and Paul B. Charlin, *Flow, Gesture, and Spaces in Free Jazz. Towards a Theory of Collaboration* (Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 2009), pp. 79-87; Citton, *Gestes d'humanités*, pp. 52-56.

<sup>110</sup> Citton, *Gestes d'humanités*, p. 55.

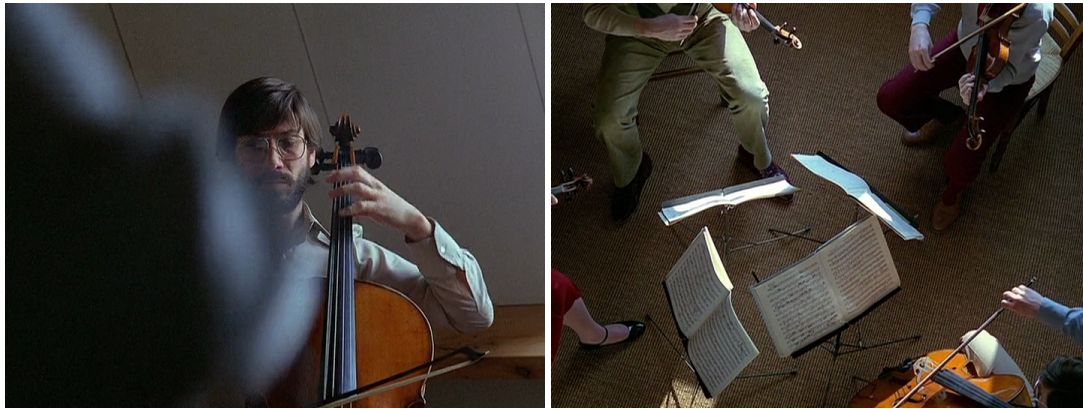


Fig. 25, 26. *Prénom Carmen*

In *Prénom Carmen*, Godard develops hypergesture on two levels. On the first level, within a single shot or scene, he highlights the hypergestural interaction between the musicians as they play, or between the characters as they make gestures. On the second level, Godard constructs hypergestural sequences by connecting the musicians' with the characters' gestures. The editing highlights the interplay between Beethoven's music and the narrative. For example, Godard creates a hypergestural choreography which simultaneously shapes the visual and aural perception of both the quartet's performance and the action taking place in the bank. Creative and destructive gestures are in dialogue with one another in a ballet of waving arms; the noise of the gunshots, typical of B movies – Godard made the film 'in memoriam small movies' –, contrasts with the elevated style of Beethoven, while the indications of the first violinist, insisting on the violence of the musical phrase, heighten the energy of the shooting scene. The music and the image communicate remotely due to the parallel editing, but do not merge. By showing the subtle interaction between the musicians and the actors and actresses, who work to different rhythms, as well as in different places and times, Godard draws the viewer's attention to the craft of filmmaking which is a hypergestural form of art involving the close collaboration of multiple artists and performers, and the coordination of a plurality of technical and artistic gestures, from the writing, the preparation, and the shooting to the editing, and the mixing of the film.

Furthermore, the musical *gestus* coordinates the attitudes of the couple. In Uncle Jean's flat, Carmen says to Joseph 'tirez-vous, attirez-moi,' rejecting Joseph (*re-pousser*), and then attracting him (*at-tirer*), similarly to the musicians who up bow (*pousser*) and down bow (*tirer*). When Joseph approaches Carmen, she rejects him; when Joseph remains at a distance, she attracts him. Godard's film emphasises the relational and affective nature of gesture ('geste relationnel' and 'geste affectif', according to the terminology established by Citton).<sup>111</sup> For instance, the editing causes the curve of the violinist's arm to resonate with the movement of the lovers' bodies when they embrace or caress each other. As Deleuze points out,

[...] dans *Prénom Carmen*, les attitudes de corps ne cessent de renvoyer à un *gestus* musical qui les coordonne indépendamment de l'intrigue, qui les reprend, les soumet à un enchaînement supérieur, mais aussi en libère toutes les potentialités: les répétitions du quatuor ne se contentent pas de développer et de diriger les qualités sonores de l'image, mais même les qualités visuelles, au sens où l'arrondi du bras de la violoniste ajuste le mouvement des corps qui s'enlacent.<sup>112</sup>

The formal continuity between Myriem Roussel's and Maruschka Detmers's curved movements had been envisioned by Godard when he wrote the screenplay. In sequence 10, he writes: 'Le bras de Myriam, qui fait la partie d'alto, a de beaux mouvements arrondis alors qu'elle pousse et tire son archet,' while in sequence 11 he continues: 'Le bras de Carmen qui se pose autour des épaules de Joseph a lui aussi un beau mouvement arrondi.'<sup>113</sup>

Similarly to the musicians' gestures, the loving caress and embrace are forms of gestural exchange, through which the respective rhythms of Carmen and Joseph resonate in harmony and which temporarily unite them. As Irigaray explains in several essays, the caress, as the fertile basis of community life and intersubjectivity, is the 'most elementary gesture' of 'the fecundity of a love':<sup>114</sup>

La caresse est éveil à l'intersubjectivité, à un toucher ni passif ni actif entre nous, éveil à des gestes, des perceptions qui sont à la fois actes, intentions et

<sup>111</sup> Citton, *Gestes d'humanité*, pp. 94-95.

<sup>112</sup> Deleuze, *L'Image-temps*, p. 253.

<sup>113</sup> Godard, *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard*, p. 565.

<sup>114</sup> Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. by Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill (London: The Athlone Press, 1993), p. 186.

émotions. Ce qui n'est pas dire qu'ils sont ambigus mais attentifs au touchant et au touché, aux deux sujets qui se touchent.<sup>115</sup>

In the kitchen of Uncle Jean's flat, Joseph strokes Carmen's naked thighs, and she responds to the caress by taking his hands and guiding his gesture [Fig. 27]. Here, the caress echoes Irigaray's words: 'La caresse est ainsi éveil à une autre vie que celle de la quotidienneté laborieuse, et appel au retour à toi, à moi, à nous: comme corps vivants, comme deux, comme différents et cocréateurs.'<sup>116</sup> Unlike Joseph's stroking of the television screen, the reciprocation and co-creativity of the caress, which does not imply the fusion of the bodies but on the contrary emerges from their differences, raises this gesture to the hypergestural level.



Fig. 27, 28. *Prénom Carmen*

Yet the caress does not always lead to the unison of the bodies. The couple's relationship is also disrupted by the conflicting rhythms of their gestures which become more and more arrhythmic, especially in the final part of the film as Joseph's solitude grows. In the hotel room, Joseph strokes Carmen's yellow dressing gown and says: 'On caresse des projets et je te caresse.' Here, Joseph tends to objectify Carmen: the caress becomes a gesture of possession. Carmen, who stops combing her hair, calls out to Joseph and grabs hold of him, quoting Preminger's *Carmen Jones* (1954): 'If I love you, that's the end of you.' The discordance of their gestures, which progressively leads to unsettled and violent behaviour, is at its height when

<sup>115</sup> Irigaray, 'Les Noces entre le corps et la parole', in *Être deux* (Paris: Grasset, 1997), p. 50.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 50-51.

Joseph assaults Carmen in the shower, and frantically tries to have an erection [Fig. 28]. The violence and tension of their bodies, which Jean Narboni compares to Rodin's sculptures and Bacon's paintings,<sup>117</sup> are amplified by the stridence of Beethoven's music and the nervous strokes of the musicians' bows. As noted by Miriam Sheer, who analyses the extent to which Beethoven's music resonates with the actors and actresses' gestures in the film, '[Joseph's] frantic motions as he tries to rape Carmen in the shower mimic the motion of the agitated Scherzo of Op. 135.'<sup>118</sup> The great diversity of rhythms, tempo, and moods in Beethoven's quartets generates contrasting bodily rhythms and enriches the gestural repertoire of the film.

## 2.2. Capturing and Perceiving Gestures: The Cinematic Resonance of Rodin's Sculptures

Understanding the creative process of *Prénom Carmen* requires taking into consideration Rodin's influence on the actors and actresses' performances, as well as on Godard's mise-en-scène and editing, which are permeated with the sculptor's techniques of gestural repetition, transitional gesture, and bodily fragmentation. In the preparation documents of *Prénom Carmen*, Godard juxtaposed some reproductions of Rodin's sculptures with Beethoven's quotes from his *Carnets intimes*.<sup>119</sup> Godard asked the cinematographer Raoul Coutard, as well as the actors and actresses, to view Rodin's work. Faced with their lack of interest, as he repeated in several interviews, he gave up the idea of imitating his sculptures:

Take Rodin, the sculptor. In the planning stage of *Prénom Carmen*, we had love scenes, which in the end did not become real love scenes in the film, and we wanted to make them like certain Rodin sculptures. In the end the actors didn't like the idea and we didn't do it like that, but we continued to call the love scenes 'the Rodin scenes'.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> See 'Jean-Luc Godard et Beethoven', *Le Matin des musiciens*, France Musique, 28 May 2014.

<sup>118</sup> Miriam Sheer, 'The Godard/Beethoven Connection: On the Use of Beethoven's Quartets in Godard's Films', *The Journal of Musicology*, 18.1 (2001), 170-188 (p. 185).

<sup>119</sup> See Godard, *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard*, pp. 557-73.

<sup>120</sup> Godard and Bachmann, p. 17.

Nevertheless, while editing and mixing the sound, Godard continued with his idea of giving the film a sculptural aspect. '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,' he explains.<sup>121</sup> By superimposing the sounds of the sea and the lovers' bodies, the filmmaker carves the spectator's perception of gestures through editing. Furthermore, even if they do not – strictly speaking – copy Rodin's sculptures, Godard, the actors and actresses, and Coutard who emphasises the bodies' volumes and angles through lighting remain inspired by the sculptor's manner of capturing gestures.

### **2.2.1. Hybridity, Cohesion, and Transition**

Analysed by Leo Steinberg in his well-known essay on the artist, the tension between hybridity and cohesion that characterises Rodin's sculptures evokes Godard's heterogeneous but cohesive aesthetics. This tension in Rodin's figures which 'imply that all cohesion is hybrid'<sup>122</sup> breaks with classical anatomy and reveals the 'loss of wholeness'<sup>123</sup> in the representation of the body, which is guided by imagination. Steinberg notes that many of Rodin's sculptures which are 'precariously balanced or hoisted' seem to lose their equilibrium. 'Many have to do with falling,' he adds.<sup>124</sup> In *Prénom Carmen*, Godard repeatedly films the fall of the bodies to the ground. When Carmen and Joseph fight in the bank, they *fall* to the floor and suddenly *fall* in love. In Uncle Jean's flat, their bodies are spontaneously attracted by the walls or the ground, as if they could lose balance at any moment. Joseph leans on the wall to untie his shoes, and has to move when Carmen hits him by opening the door. A few minutes later, Joseph voluntarily slams the window on Carmen's body. Subsequently, the young woman repeats the same gesture

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Leo Steinberg, 'Rodin', in *Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth-Century Art* (Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 2007), p. 382.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., p. 346.

to reject Joseph. Such repetitions echo Rodin's technique of multiplication which consists in combining identical figures, for example in *Les Sources tarries* (b. 1889) or *Les Troies Ombres* (b. 1886): the juxtaposition of the same gesture, but in different positions, generates 'a redoubling of energy'<sup>125</sup> and a 'rhythmic amplification'.<sup>126</sup> Although the repetitions in Godard's film are never exactly identical, the combination of similar gestures and the repetition of similar shots tend to heighten the energetic quality of the bodies and to amplify the rhythms they produce. Moreover, Steinberg analyses the isolation of 'anatomical fragments'<sup>127</sup> and the emphasis on 'a body's specific gesture'<sup>128</sup> in Rodin's art. Thanks to the framing, Godard also fragments the bodies and sometimes isolates the characters' hands in close-ups. Rodin sculpted 150 single hands, detached from the rest of the body, which condense 'the sum of gestures which a whole body can make'.<sup>129</sup> Uncle Jean's hand stroking Carmen's face is not without evocations of the plaster *Masque de Camille Claudel et Main gauche de Pierre Wissant* (c. 1895) which juxtaposes the portrait of the model with a disproportionate hand [Fig. 29, 30].



Fig. 29. Auguste Rodin, *Masque de Camille Claudel et Main gauche de Pierre Wissant* (c. 1895)



Fig. 30. *Prénom Carmen*

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., p. 355.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., p. 358.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., p. 361.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., p. 362.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., p. 339.

Rodin inspired filmmakers such as John Cassavetes in *Shadows* (1959)<sup>130</sup> and Eisenstein who, in his theoretical writings, considers his sculptures 'sous l'angle du dynamisme cinématographique'.<sup>131</sup> According to Rilke, Rodin succeeded in capturing the gestures of his time, which 'have become more and more impatient, nervous and hurried', as well as more 'hesitating'.<sup>132</sup> Echoing Agamben's thesis regarding the gestural crisis which occurred at the end of the nineteenth century,<sup>133</sup> Rilke's words indirectly draw a parallel between Rodin's sculptures, which capture all the 'innumerable transitions' and 'intervening moments' of the body,<sup>134</sup> and the invention of cinema, which breaks the temporality of ancient images. Conversely to photography which freezes movement,<sup>135</sup> Rodin's sculptures represent the development of a gesture, 'le déroulement progressif du geste',<sup>136</sup> by creating a visual sequence of transitory movements and bodily attitudes, which result from the character's pre-movement (a notion which I shall define in the next section). 'Notez d'abord que le *mouvement est la transition d'une attitude à une autre*,' Rodin points out.<sup>137</sup> The passage from one attitude to another involves the coordination of all the body parts. Each attitude sets the whole body in motion, and the transitory movements depicted by Rodin involve complex connections. For example, when someone walks, the feet move in coordination with the knees and the swinging of the arms, as well as with all the uncountable micro-movements of the body schema. If someone hails a taxi by waving, the transition from the walking attitude to the waving attitude impacts on the position of the feet and legs, and the movement of the arm changes the equilibrium of the body in space. If a gesture is transitory by

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<sup>130</sup> See Liandrat Guigues, *Cinéma et sculpture*, pp. 9 and 69-74.

<sup>131</sup> Didi-Huberman, *Le Danseur des solitudes*, p. 113.

<sup>132</sup> Rainer Maria Rilke, *Rodin*, trans. by Jessie Lemont and Hans Trausil (London: Grey Walls Press, 1946), p. 31.

<sup>133</sup> Agamben, 'Notes on gesture', pp. 48-52.

<sup>134</sup> Rilke, *Rodin*, p. 31.

<sup>135</sup> However, as Liandrat-Guigues explains, Rodin liked working with photographs, but without copying the image they show: 'Loin de fixer la forme définitive, la photographie devient support d'idées et de recherches, accueille les retouches, favorise l'évolution tout en gardant la trace de l'état antérieur. Elle assure le mouvement dans la création.' The development of the different phases of the gesture links Rodin's sculpture to chronophotography. See Liandrat-Guigues, *Cinéma et sculpture*, p. 73.

<sup>136</sup> Auguste Rodin and Paul Gsell, *L'Art* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1997), p. 62.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

nature, its measure depends on the linkage between plural bodily movements and postures. Rodin emphasises the ideas of passage and shifting in sculpture:

C'est en somme une métamorphose de ce genre qu'exécute le peintre ou le sculpteur en faisant mouvoir ses personnages. Il figure le passage d'une pose à une autre: il indique comment insensiblement la première glisse à la seconde. Dans son œuvre, on discerne encore une partie de ce qui fut et l'on découvre en partie ce qui va être.<sup>138</sup>

The figuration of the passage of time in the body echoes Deleuze's definition of the everyday attitude in film that he associates with a time-image embodying the shifting between the past ('l'avant') and the future ('l'après'), as discussed in Chapter 2.<sup>139</sup> In his interview with Rodin, Paul Gsell notes when contemplating *L'Age d'Airain* (1877): 'Ainsi le sujet de cette sculpture est le passage de la somnolence à la vigueur de l'être prêt à agir.'<sup>140</sup> By showing the transition from somnolence to awakening, from torpor to action, the sculpture, according to Rilke, 'indicates in Rodin's work the birth of gesture'.<sup>141</sup>

### **2.2.2. Pre-movement and the Birth of Gestures**

The fundamental notion of pre-movement, which enables us to consider the relationship between sculpture and cinema and the transition from posture to gesture, has been conceptualised by the dancer and scholar Hubert Godard in dance studies. The latter analyses a scene from Vincente Minnelli's *Ziegfeld Follies* (1946) in which Gene Kelly and Fred Astaire make the exact same gestures. Yet, the way they perform the choreography looks very different, on account of the pre-movement which is peculiar to each dancer: 'Malgré leur intention de produire les mêmes mouvements, l'anticipation de l'attaque du geste – le pré-mouvement – est à l'opposé chez l'un et

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>139</sup> Deleuze, *L'Image-temps*, pp. 246-47.

<sup>140</sup> Rodin and Gsell, *L'Art*, p. 60.

<sup>141</sup> Rilke, *Rodin*, p. 21.

l'autre.<sup>142</sup> The pre-movement anticipates the attack of the gesture and mostly depends on the weight of the body, which shapes the individual's attitude towards gravity.<sup>143</sup> Therefore, it is the attitude that not only pre-exists the birth of the gesture – for example in the way an individual stands –, but also produces the expressive impulsion of the performed gesture. The same gestural form varies in accordance with the pre-movement which involves the continuous non-conscious action of the body schema:

Tout un système de muscles dits gravitaires, dont l'action échappe pour une grande part à la conscience vigile et à la volonté, est chargé d'assurer notre posture; ce sont eux qui maintiennent notre équilibre et qui nous permettent de tenir debout sans avoir à y penser. Il se trouve que ces muscles sont aussi ceux qui enregistrent nos changements d'état affectif et émotionnel. Ainsi toute modification de notre posture aura une incidence sur notre état émotionnel, et réciproquement tout changement affectif entraînera une modification, même imperceptible, de notre posture.<sup>144</sup>

Hubert Godard's definition of pre-movement, which focuses on all the imperceptible motions which enable the body schema to find its equilibrium in relation to gravity, evokes this sentence of Rilke: 'Even stillness, where there was stillness, consisted of hundreds and hundreds of moments of motion that kept their equilibrium.'<sup>145</sup> Moreover, posture, through the activity of the muscular system, does not result from a purely mechanical force, but from emotional, affective, and often unintentional fluxes of energy which give its unique quality to the human gesture. Hubert Godard's concept echoes Rudolf von Laban's theories on dance. As the latter writes, each bodily movement, according to the body's weight and its environment, reveals one's inner life and 'originates from an inner excitement of the nerves, caused by [...] sense impression', resulting 'in the voluntary or involuntary inner effort or impulse to move'.<sup>146</sup> The pre-movement gives its impulsion to the gesture. The flow of vital energy (or 'the flow of movement', to use Laban's

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<sup>142</sup> Hubert Godard, 'Le Geste et sa perception', in Isabelle Ginot, Marcelle Michel, and Hubert Godard (postface), *La Danse au XXe siècle* (Paris: Larousse-Bordas, 1998), p. 225.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., p. 224.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Rilke, *Rodin*, p. 4.

<sup>146</sup> Rudolf von Laban, *The Mastery of Movement*, revised by Lisa Ullmann (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1988), p. 19.

terminology)<sup>147</sup> shapes the body through effort (like the effect of ‘three-dimensional “sculpting”’<sup>148</sup> according to Dee Reynold’s expression), in relation to its environment and in interaction with others.

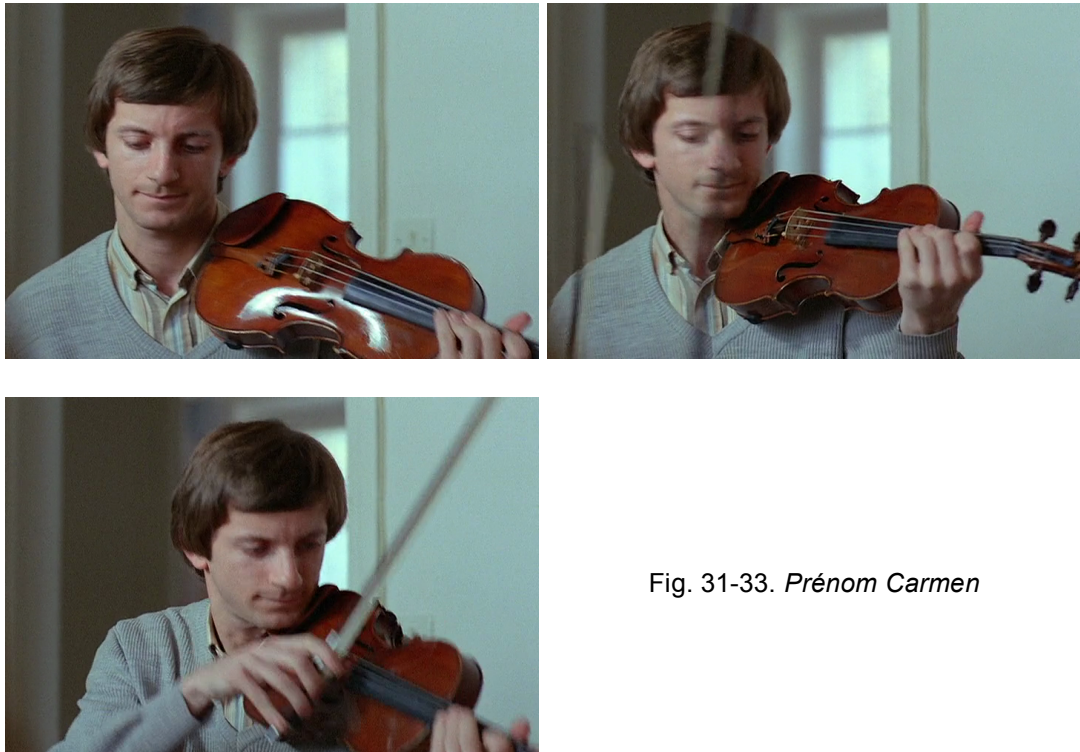


Fig. 31-33. *Prénom Carmen*

Pre-movement often structures the mise-en-scène of post-New Wave films. In *L'Enfant secret* (1979), Philippe Garrel films the birth of gestures, from the stasis of the body to its movement, in long shots which focus on the pre-movement for a long time, following Bresson’s recommendation: ‘Sois sûr d’avoir épuisé tout ce qui se communique par l’immobilité et le silence.’<sup>149</sup> Such a method of mise-en-scène enables the filmmaker to create a sense of escalation, to intensify the slightest gestures and to amplify the characters’ feelings through their bodily rhythms. Considering the significance of the notion of ‘temps faible’ in Akerman’s *Je, tu, il, elle* (1974) and *Prénom Carmen*, Damien Truchot demonstrates how both filmmakers emphasise pre-movement by expanding the time preceding the birth of the characters’

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>148</sup> Dee Reynolds, *Rhythmic Subjects* (Alton, Hampshire England: Dance Books), p. 8.

<sup>149</sup> Bresson, *Notes sur le cinématographe*, p. 33.

gestures. ‘Dans *Je, tu, il, elle*, comme dans *Prénom Carmen*, l’émergence du geste appelle un temps qui s’étire plus longuement que celui correspondant à l’élaboration du geste lui-même, proche de l’instant,’ Truchot writes.<sup>150</sup> He draws a parallel between the musical anacrusis and the notion of pre-movement, and insists on the role of breath not only in the birth of the first gesture, but also in the totality of the gestural sequence which is anticipated by the anacrusis. The purpose of the anacrusis consists in giving an impulsion to the musical phrase: ‘Dans la mesure musicale, un rythme repose sur un temps fort: l’*ictus*. Ces notes d’attaque ou d’élan qui précèdent l’*ictus* initial d’un rythme sont appelées “anacrouses”, littéralement “avant le coup frappé”.’<sup>151</sup> In *Prénom Carmen*, the musical attack, which mirrors the attack of the bank itself,<sup>152</sup> highlights the emergence of gesture. The musicians suspend the bow in the air before attacking a new phrase. In the String Quartet n°10 (Op. 74), which is rehearsed during the sequence of the bank robbery, the attack of the main theme is repeated several times and escalates during the first movement. The violinist takes a deep breath, positions himself in front of the musical score and gives a stroke of the bow, which brings in its wake the rest of the quartet [Fig. 31-33].

### 2.2.3. *Waves and Seascape: The Jaillissement of Gestures*

Finally, the emergence of the gestural flows in *Prénom Carmen*, as well as their sculptural dimension, needs to be considered in relation to the visual and aural motifs of the seascape. ‘Et les nuages feraient-ils voir des torrents de vie?’, the violist Claire asks, quoting Beethoven. In *Prénom Carmen*, the stream of life emerges through the co-presence of gestures, music, and natural elements, which enter into dialogue with one another through the

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<sup>150</sup> Damien Truchot, ‘Sur le temps faible: Akerman/Godard’, in *Sur le geste*, ed. by Suzanne Ljandrat-Guigues (Le Havre: De l’incidence, 2006), p. 156.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 146.

<sup>152</sup> Critics have often mentioned the parallel between the musical attack and the bank attack in *Prénom Carmen*. See Jean-Luc Godard, Guy Scarpetta, and Dominique Païni, ‘Jean-Luc Godard la curiosité du sujet’, *Artpress*, p. 13; Alain Bergala, *Nul mieux que Godard* (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, 1999), p. 116.

audiovisual medium, giving birth to the image in the spectator's eyes. According to Pethő, Godard uses the metaphor of ebb and flow in his cinema to stress the idea that '[t]he blank screen becomes the shore of a cinematic ocean where the waves can be either images or sounds [...]'.<sup>153</sup> The cinematic screen becomes this liminal space where gesture generates rhythms, forms, and traces that circulate in the continuous flow of sounds and moving images. It is through these gestural dynamics of interrelation and intermediality that Godard, as a filmmaker, aims to address the spectator as an active subject.



Fig. 34, 35. *Prénom Carmen*



Fig. 36, 37. *Prénom Carmen* / Rodin, *L'Eternelle Idole* (c. 1890-93), copyright Musée Rodin

<sup>153</sup> Pethő, *Cinema and Intermediality*, p. 280.

Throughout the film, the movement of the waves helps understand human gestures and the notion of pre-movement. The opening shot of the film starts with Carmen saying in voice-over: 'C'est en moi, en toi que se produit des vagues terribles.' The water retreats in an inward movement and then springs forward and outward. Godard films numerous shots of waves which, like a life force, constantly revitalise the movement of the sea. Such images evoke the choreography of the string quartet. The two violinists, the violist, and the cellist continuously push and pull their bows, creating a tide-like swaying movement which circulates between them. In the perpetual movement of ebb and flow, two opposing forces move the powerful liquid masses of the sea which, before the birth of each new wave, seems to be suspended in a brief, indecisive, and never completely still moment of silence [Fig. 34]. When Didi-Huberman describes the style of the flamenco dancer Israel Galván, he considers gesture as the encounter between two confronting movements ('deux mouvements affrontés'), which at their pivotal point creates a stop zone ('zone d'arrêt') where the silence of the gesture resounds.<sup>154</sup> Similarly, in Godard's film, the interplay of contradictory energetic flux, which manifests itself in the shots of the sea, structures the gestural choreography of Carmen and Joseph, for instance when they are firmly pressing the palm of their hands one against the other [Fig. 35]. Furthermore, the movements of rejection and attraction, which structure the rhythms of the couple, resonate with the backwash of the sea. For example, when Joseph, bare-chested, stands close to Carmen, who is looking at the sea through the window, his gestures are hesitant and are suspended halfway while he brushes the woman's green dress. Carmen says 'Allez-y, idiot' to encourage him, so he abruptly undresses her, in a movement which evokes Rodin's *L'Eternelle Idole* (c. 1890-93), but his impulsive gesture, which is interrupted by Carmen, suddenly withdraws [Fig. 36, 37].

The interrelation between the music, the seascape, and the bodily rhythms raises the question of the bodies' listening. Through the analogy between the characters' and the musicians' gestures, Godard explores what

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<sup>154</sup> Didi-Huberman, *Le Danseur des solitudes*, p. 114.

Bergala calls 'la profondeur de l'écoute'.<sup>155</sup> The filmmaker playfully refers to psychoanalytical theories,<sup>156</sup> for instance when he says to Carmen: 'Tu as toujours eu des histoires avec elle... le bord de la mer, avec ta mère, comme la petite Electre.'<sup>157</sup> According to Barthes, modern ways of listening developed with psychoanalysis and the exploration of the unconscious.<sup>158</sup> While listening was historically considered as an intentional and conscious act, from this point onwards, there are unknown territories which can be explored:

L'écoute inclut dans son champ, non seulement l'inconscient, au sens topique du terme, mais aussi, si l'on peut dire, ses formes laïques: l'implicite, l'indirect, le supplémentaire, le retardé: il y a ouverture de l'écoute à toutes les formes de polysémie, de surdéterminations, de superpositions, il y a effritement de la Loi qui prescrit l'écoute droite, unique; par définition, l'écoute était *appliquée*; aujourd'hui, ce qu'on lui demande volontiers, c'est de *laisser surgir*.<sup>159</sup>

Barthes's words, particularly the terms 'superpositions' and 'laisser surgir', relevantly describe Godard's editing techniques which combine and superimpose heterogeneous visual and aural elements. At the end of the film, in the hotel, while Carmen puts her hand under Joseph's chin before being rejected with a wave of his hand, the call of the seagulls suddenly resounds for a few seconds. Then, Carmen's gang leader enters the room, briefly strokes her hair and kisses her ear before leaving the room again. Joseph says: 'Il n'y avait pas le bruit de la mer avec,' putting words to his ability to listen to Carmen's body beyond what can be consciously heard.

Revealingly, the aesthetics of 'laisser surgir' and 'jaillissement' characterise Rodin's sculptures, which are often compared to the liquid movement of water and to the swell. Rilke's depiction of Rodin's work is particularly relevant to Godard's film in the way he describes gestures as rushes of water (*jaillissement*). For example, he observes how the gesture in

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<sup>155</sup> Aumont, *A quoi pensent les films*, p. 270.

<sup>156</sup> Regarding Godard's interest in psychoanalysis, see Powrie, 'Godard's *Prénom Carmen* (1984), Masochism, and the Male Gaze'.

<sup>157</sup> In *Prénom Carmen*, Godard refers to Giraudoux's *Electre* (1937) and quotes the play in the final dialogue of the film.

<sup>158</sup> Barthes, *L'Obvie et l'Obtus*, pp. 218-20.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 228-29.

*L'Âge d'airain* 'bursts forth like a spring that softly ripples over this body'.<sup>160</sup>

Claire Gheerardyn, who analyses Rilke's metaphorical language by comparing it to Bergson's description of movement, points out the powerful evocation of water in his essay, which underlines the suddenness and momentum of gestures:

Plus généralement, l'eau chez Rilke évoque surtout la pure mouvance du mouvement: elle est ce qui jaillit, c'est-à-dire ce qui se manifeste par l'élan, l'impétuosité, la soudaineté. Ainsi, observe Rilke, 'dans [les dieux] qui étaient debout, il y avait un geste qui, comme un jet d'eau, jaillissait de la pierre, puis y retombait en l'emplissant de nombreuses vagues.' Ce jaillissement se retrouve dans le geste de l'*Homme au nez cassé*, qui 'jaillissait là comme une grande source qui ruisselait doucement le long de ce corps', ou encore dans ceux des Bourgeois de Calais: 'On était surpris de voir comment les gestes émergeaient, purs et grands, du ressac des contours, jaillissaient, se figeaient et retombaient dans la masse.' Bergson lui-même, dans *L'Évolution créatrice*, faisait usage du terme de 'jaillissement' pour indiquer l'impétuosité difficilement concevable du mouvement.<sup>161</sup>

In the passages quoted by Gheerardyn, gesture takes maritime and aqueous shapes: the terms water jet ('jet d'eau'), waves ('vagues'), source, backwash ('ressac'), and the repetition of the verb 'jaillir' evoke the gestural flows in *Prénom Carmen*, especially during the 'Rodin scenes'. For example, during the sequence in Uncle Jean's flat, after Carmen rejects Joseph's gestures by pushing him off screen, the man's hand suddenly springs from the off-field space and grips the woman's shoulder [Fig. 38-40]. The *jaillissement* is emphasised by the way Godard turns off the diegetic sounds in favour of Beethoven and the sound of the waves. The sudden and mute apparition of Joseph's hand enables the viewer to perceive the birth of the gesture in the shot. Following this, after having inserted a shot showing the surging of the waves, Godard repeats the exact same take, but instead of editing Beethoven's music, mixes the sounds of the sea with Carmen and Joseph's dialogue. Again, Joseph's hand springs from the off-camera space and grips her shoulder, while she says: 'Je vous attire.' The cinematic process of

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<sup>160</sup> Rilke, *Rodin*, p. 21.

<sup>161</sup> Claire Gheerardyn, 'Geste révélé, geste révélateur: Rilke face à Rodin', *Fabula / Les colloques*, Penser le mouvement (2015)  
<<http://www.fabula.org/colloques/document2666.php>> [accessed 15 April 2017]

repetition makes the characters' gestures resonate with the continuous sound of the waves, and shapes the spectator's perception of gestures.

Similarly to the sculptor who shapes the forms with his two hands, Godard uses only two mixing tracks, because he has 'only two hands to manipulate them'.<sup>162</sup> The metaphor of the gesture of carving occurs repeatedly throughout the film. The filmmaker uses the sculptural motif to forge links between the images of the quartet, of the sea, and of the couple, and the editing to create associations, metaphors, or equivalences. 'The view of a violin which is carving [the audible space]' is associated with the 'image of the sea which does the same, carving with waves and crevasses, highs and lows', and finally with the image of the couple 'who will have moments of high and low feeling'.<sup>163</sup> Such a manner of constructing the film and creating cohesion defines cinema according to Godard: 'This is how it all hangs together, completely logically, that's the cinema.'<sup>164</sup>

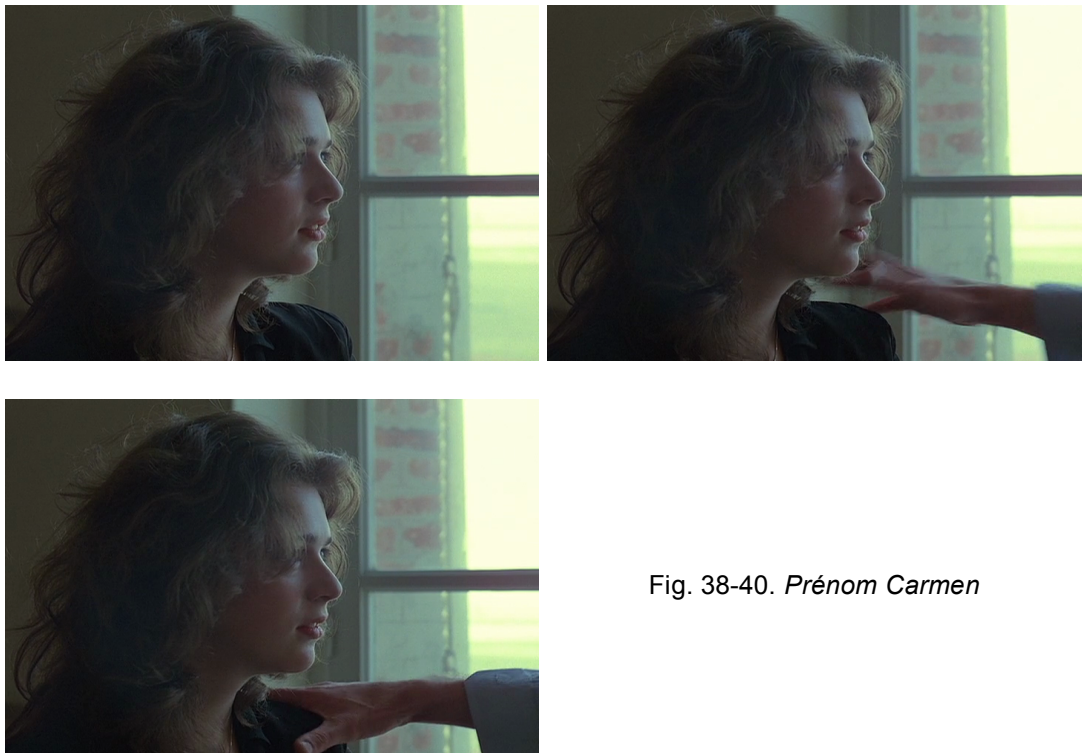


Fig. 38-40. *Prénom Carmen*

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<sup>162</sup> Godard and Bachmann, p. 16.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

## Conclusion

In the final sequence of the film, Uncle Jean's assistant quotes Beethoven to reveal the film's inner workings: 'L'union parfaite de plusieurs voix empêche, somme toute, le progrès de l'une vers l'autre.' Through the gestures of linkage and detachment, the heterogeneous elements of the films do not merge, but enter into dialogue and communicate.

First of all, in opposition to television which abolishes the necessary distance between the spectator and the image, Godard reveals how gestures in cinema prove to be essential in the process of fabrication and communication of the images. Secondly, the gestures, which shape the forms of the film and give cohesion to its hybrid aesthetics, emphasise the 'gesturality' of the cinematic image. Composed of a series of frames, the moving image captures the constant shifting between 'l'avant' and 'l'après' that characterises the transitory nature of corporeal movements. In *Prénom Carmen*, gestures create a liminal space between different attitudes, postures, actions, but also visual and aural perceptions. As Deleuze points out, Godard's cinema emphasises the interstice between two elements, 'entre deux actions, entre deux affections, entre deux perceptions, entre deux images visuelles, entre deux images sonores, entre le sonore et le visuel'.<sup>165</sup> It is in this sense that Löffler highlights the gestural dimension of the cinematic image in Godard's *Passion*, arguing that 'the images themselves become gestures entering into an exchange throughout the film'.<sup>166</sup>

Finally, gesture is the element which, in *Prénom Carmen*, incorporates and develops the features of the other arts, by highlighting the connection between the gestures of music-making and the gestures of filmmaking, and freeing Rodin's sculptures from their original paralysis. By expanding Agamben's argument, who postulates that cinema exhibits the 'mediality',<sup>167</sup> or in other words the intersubjective and relational qualities of gestures, we

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<sup>165</sup> Deleuze, *L'Image-temps*, p. 235.

<sup>166</sup> Löffler, 'Gesturing the Image', p. 32.

<sup>167</sup> Agamben, 'Notes on Gesture', p. 58.

can argue, in light of the analysis of *Prénom Carmen*, that Godard's cinema stresses the intermedial nature of gestures. On the one hand, as discussed in Chapter 1, they interact with the technological body of film (including the camera, the editing table, and the mixing deck), and on the other hand, they set in motion and interconnect the features of the other arts.

By referring to Klossowski's work, the next chapter will expand on the relationship between cinema and the other arts. By focusing on the semiotics of gestures in the film *Roberte* (1979), I will discuss the extent to which the *tableau vivant* is a device that enables Klossowski and Zucca to problematise the links between the representation, performance, and reception of gestures in film.



## Chapter 4. The Mystery of Gesture according to Pierre Klossowski: *Tableau Vivant* and Film Performance in Pierre Zucca's *Roberte* (1979)

'Tire de tes modèles la preuve qu'ils existent avec leurs bizarreries et leurs énigmes'<sup>1</sup> – Robert Bresson

### *Introduction*

In a film, the meaning of gestures seems to be immediately intelligible. According to Merleau-Ponty, '[l]e sens du film est incorporé à son rythme comme le sens d'un geste est immédiatement lisible dans le geste, et le film ne veut rien dire que lui-même.'<sup>2</sup> Yet, as seen in Chapters 1 and 2, gestures sometimes make us wonder about their potential signification, as if they were concealing a secret. Unveiling the characters' conflicting relationship with verbal language, they are the sensitive symptoms of trauma, taboo, pathologies, and fantasies. The apparent obviousness of gestures proves difficult to translate into words. As discussed in Chapter 3, the fabrication of cinematic images and the communication of their meanings to the spectator originate in a mysterious dialogue of heterogeneous gestures. In the 1980s, Godard often referred to Christian imagery in order to reflect on the mystery of creation and to criticise 'the spiritual bankruptcy of modern materialism'.<sup>3</sup> For example, in the *tableaux vivants* of *Passion* (1982), which lay emphasis on the corporeality of the cinematic image, models reincarnate masterpieces of European art history such as El Greco's *The Immaculate Conception*

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<sup>1</sup> Bresson, *Notes sur le cinématographe*, p. 33.

<sup>2</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'Le Cinéma et la nouvelle psychologie', in *Sens et non-sens* (Paris: Nagel, 1966), p. 103.

<sup>3</sup> Steven Jacobs, 'Tableaux Vivants 1: Painting, Film, Death and Passion Plays in Pasolini and Godard', in *Framing Pictures: Film and the Visual Arts* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), p. 108.

(1607-13). Resisting against industrial modes of communication in a manner comparable, albeit different to Godard,<sup>4</sup> the writer and artist Pierre Klossowski also draws on theology, iconography, and the genre of *tableau vivant* to consider the gestural nature of the image.

As a renowned translator, essayist, philosopher, novelist, prolific author of large format drawings, and occasional screenwriter and actor, Klossowski (1905-2001) developed a heterogeneous, and yet very coherent literary and artistic work that influenced a new generation of philosophers in the 1960s and 1970s, among them Foucault and Deleuze. All of his work – including the film adaptations *Roberte* (1979) by Pierre Zucca and, more indirectly, *L'Hypothèse du tableau volé* (1979) by Raoul Ruiz<sup>5</sup> – manifests his fascination with the mystery of human gestures. Klossowski was fully involved in the creative process of *Roberte*. His first known project of adaptation dates back to 1966,<sup>6</sup> before his first encounter with Zucca. Klossowski's interest in cinema significantly grew in the mid-1960s. In 1965, he was interviewed in Eric Rohmer's documentary *Le Celluloïd et le marbre* in which artists and writers such as Victor Vasarely and Claude Simon were asked to express their views on cinema. At that time, he also played the role of the merchant in Robert Bresson's *Au hasard Balthazar* (1966). In the 1970s, he collaborated with Ruiz on the adaptation of *La Vocation suspendue* (1978).

Interweaving literature and means of visual expression, such as painting and sculpture, Klossowski's work reveals his 'obsession visuelle du geste muet'.<sup>7</sup> His novels and essays cause two distinct modes of communication – gesture on the one hand and verbal language on the other – to interact. In *Le Bain de Diane* (1956) and *Les Lois de l'hospitalité* (1965), Klossowski uses the rhetorical device of ekphrasis to speculate on the

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<sup>4</sup> Deleuze suggests a parallel between the works of William S. Burroughs, Marshall McLuhan, Klossowski, and Godard. For the philosopher, these authors singularly succeed in revitalising the thinking on the image, at once in theory and in practice. See Gilles Deleuze, 'Lettre à Pierre Klossowski', *Europe*, 1034-35 (2015), 61-62.

<sup>5</sup> Although *L'Hypothèse du tableau volé* draws on his literary work, Klossowski did not contribute to the writing of the script.

<sup>6</sup> Pierre Klossowski, 'Argument de 1966', in Klossowski and Pierre Zucca, *Roberte au cinéma*, special issue of *Obliques* (Paris: Borderie, 1978), pp. 11-14.

<sup>7</sup> Pierre Klossowski, *Tableaux vivants. Essais critiques 1936-1983*, ed. by Patrick Mauriès (Paris: Le Promeneur, 2001), p. 134.

potential meanings of gestures in art: 'La pensée qui s'y exprime n'est obscure ou plus généralement abstraite dans ses démonstrations théoriques que pour la raison qu'à l'origine s'imposait à moi quelque chose d'aussi concret et inélucidable que peut l'être la persistante vision d'un geste.'<sup>8</sup> The meticulous description and interpretation of bodily movements, attitudes, and postures emphasises their unsolvable ambiguity, and suggests the limits of the mediation of language to convey vision.<sup>9</sup> In the early 1970s, Klossowski decided to devote himself almost exclusively to the visual arts. Defining himself as a 'monomane',<sup>10</sup> Klossowski used various media – including film – to reiterate the same visions, especially those depicting the fantasised heroine named *Roberte*. In the early 1950s, Klossowski asked his brother Balthus to illustrate *Roberte ce soir* (1953),<sup>11</sup> but, dissatisfied with the result, eventually decided to do it himself, first by making lead-pencil drawings that evoke the silvery texture of early silent films, before opting for coloured pencils in 1972.

The character of *Roberte* is modelled on the physiognomy of Klossowski's wife and muse Denise Morin-Sinclair. In 1970, the latter posed before Zucca's camera for photographs of *tableaux vivants*, published in Klossowski's essay *La Monnaie vivante*. In order to compose the pictures, Zucca drew on his experience of still photography, which he actively practiced from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s on the film sets of directors like François Truffaut (*L'Enfant sauvage*, 1970), Jacques Rivette (*Out 1*, 1971), and Jean Eustache (*Mes petites amoureuses*, 1974). Acting as a liaison between the New Wave and the post-New Wave generations,<sup>12</sup> Zucca is a filmmaker who reflects on the fabrication of images – 'la fabrication frauduleuse du réel'<sup>13</sup> –, exploring a liminal space between illusion and the real. In his first long feature *Vincent mit l'âne dans un pré* (1976), he depicts

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 130.

<sup>9</sup> See Alain Fleischer, 'Retours, détours, contours', in *Pierre Klossowski, tableaux vivants*, ed. by Agnès de la Beaumelle (Paris: Gallimard, Centre Pompidou, 2007), p. 47.

<sup>10</sup> Pierre Klossowski, 'L'Indiscernable', in *Pierre Klossowski*, ed. by Catherine Grenier (Paris: La Différence, Centre national des arts plastiques; Marseille: Ryōan-ji, 1990), p. 188.

<sup>11</sup> See Fleischer, 'Retours, détours, contours', p. 54.

<sup>12</sup> See Pierre Zucca, *l'homme, le cinéaste*, dir. Angela Romboni (Carlotta, 2007).

<sup>13</sup> Pierre Zucca, Jean-Claude Bonnet, Philippe Carcassonne, and Jacques Fieschi, '*Roberte*. Entretien avec Pierre Zucca', *Cinématographe*, June 1978, p. 41.

a world where falsification, simulation, and dissimulation interrogate the ambiguous nature of the cinematic image. Reality is experienced as a *trompe-l'oeil* by the characters who are at once captivated by phantasmagorical visions and stuck in the banality of everyday life.<sup>14</sup> 'C'est dans la perversion que Zucca est de 1976,' Pascal Bonitzer suggests, acknowledging Klossowski as a major influence on the director's work.<sup>15</sup> Sharing the same passion for the image, Klossowski saw Zucca as the ideal filmmaker to direct *Roberte*. In 1975, the young director shot a black-and-white short film with the cooperation of Klossowski and his wife, in preparation for the long feature.

*Roberte's* erotic adventures in post-war Paris are recounted in the trilogy *Les Lois de l'hospitalité* (comprising *Roberte ce soir*, *La Révocation de l'Edit de Nantes* (1959), and *Le Souffleur ou le théâtre de société* (1960)), in which the writer tackles the problem of identity. Of Calvinist origins, Klossowski's character *Roberte* was a member of the Resistance during the Second World War and has become an influential Member of Parliament and chief of the censorship board in the time of the Fourth Republic. She is married to Octave, a Catholic and reactionary upper-class old man, theologian, writer, and art collector, who is dismissed from his academic chair for having collaborated during the Vichy era. Octave subjects his wife to the perverse practice called 'les lois de l'hospitalité', defined by Klossowski as the 'prostitution' or the 'adultération' of the spouse by the husband.<sup>16</sup> In doing so, Octave hopes to grasp *Roberte's* authentic identity, which she supposedly conceals in his presence: 'Octave veut ainsi découvrir l'identité véritable de *Roberte* au contact de l'étranger, de l'inconnu, parce qu'il croit n'avoir connaissance dans son lien conjugal que d'une identité apparente, donc fallacieuse, de son épouse.'<sup>17</sup> But *Roberte's* identity proves indeterminate. She plays incompatible roles that reveal the plurality of her

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<sup>14</sup> See Pierre Klossowski, 'Simuler le simulateur (*Vincent mit l'âne dans un pré*)', *Cahiers du cinéma*, July-August 1976, pp. 83-84.

<sup>15</sup> Pascal Bonitzer 'Mateur menteur (*Vincent mit l'âne dans un pré*)', *Cahiers du cinéma*, July-August 1976, p. 82.

<sup>16</sup> See Klossowski and Zucca, *Roberte au cinéma*, pp. 11-12.

<sup>17</sup> Pierre Klossowski, 'Protase et apodose', in *Klossowski*, ed. by René Micha (Aix-en-Provence: L'Arc, 1970), p. 12.

natures. Her dissolute life dissolves the coherence of her selfhood. In the film adaptation this is demonstrated to the spectator through the unintelligibility of her gestures, which take the form of animated hieroglyphs ('hiéroglyphes animés'), to use Antonin Artaud's expression.<sup>18</sup> Performing Octave's role, Klossowski plays opposite Morin-Sinclair, his 'modèle conjugal',<sup>19</sup> to the point of creating a troubling confusion between reality and fiction: 'Amateurs d'expériences, ils s'amuse et se risquent à cette confusion, profitent de la parenté pour en déduire une ressemblance qui, on ne l'oublie jamais, leur demeure pourtant étrangère,' Jérôme Prieur suggests.<sup>20</sup>

According to Klossowski, '[...] il ne faut pas [...] que le cinéma fasse de la peinture ou de la littérature.'<sup>21</sup> Yet *Roberte* is a film that integrates other arts such as painting, photography, theatre, and literature. As I will discuss in this chapter, the cinematic specificity of gesture in the film emerges, paradoxically, from the interaction with other media, such as the literary descriptions of *La Révocation de l'Edit de Nantes*, Frédéric Tonnerre's paintings – a fictitious nineteenth-century *pompier* artist whose ridiculously emphatic and outdated academic style fascinates Octave –, and with the drawings made by Klossowski after the shooting of the film. The latter was deeply inspired and fascinated by the living embodiment of his visions on the film set:

Pour Pierre Klossowski, le cinéma n'est pas une technique d'enregistrement du réel en images animées et en sons, mais un dispositif de restitution des visions, de reproduction *in vivo* d'après un original, un négatif, d'avance enregistré: la caméra n'est pas là pour impressionner le film avec ce que l'objectif voit, mais pour forcer les êtres à se donner à voir.<sup>22</sup>

In his drawings, Klossowski, who fears representing his figures like inert wooden puppets or marionettes, breathes life into the characters thanks to the theatricality of their gestures. 'Je dirais que les personnages que vous

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<sup>18</sup> Antonin Artaud, *Le Théâtre et son double*, in *Œuvres complètes*, 26 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1956-94), IV (1964), p. 65.

<sup>19</sup> See Pierre Klossowski, *un écrivain en image*, dir. Alain Fleischer (1996).

<sup>20</sup> Jérôme Prieur, 'Hospitalité. Pierre Zucca: *Roberte*', in *Nuits blanches, essais sur le cinéma* (Paris: Gallimard, 1980), p. 53.

<sup>21</sup> Pierre Klossowski, 'Le Cinéma ne doit pas simuler la littérature', *Les Nouvelles Littéraires*, 15 March 1979, p. 14

<sup>22</sup> See Fleischer, 'Retours, détours, contours', p. 52.

donnez à voir sont des personnages doués de vie, comme des acteurs sur une scène de théâtre,<sup>23</sup> Rémy Zaugg suggests to Klossowski, who coincidentally defines himself as a ‘playwright’.<sup>24</sup>

However, unlike an actor or actress who performs on stage, a model poses and therefore does not act. According to Klossowski, ‘the picture [is] an instrument which acts by itself [...]’.<sup>25</sup> In his life-size drawings, the image originates in the interrelation between the model’s corporeal presence, the artist’s inner vision, and the work of his hand and gaze: ‘Quel que soit le tableau – dans quelque attitude que s’y trouve le “modèle” en tant que personnage central entouré d’autres imaginaires ou non – tout demeure imputable au seul artiste. Rien ne révèle ce qui le serait au “modèle”’.<sup>26</sup> By contrast, the practice of cinema essentially relies on the actors and actresses’ performances. If Klossowski considers Morin-Sinclair as Roberte’s ‘modèle’ even in Zucca’s film,<sup>27</sup> she is actually an actress who embodies a character and acts a part. Breaking the unilateral relationship between the artist’s gaze and the model’s passive body, the shooting becomes the locus of an intersubjective and playful experience where the theatricality of the *mise-en-scène*, the incongruous situations within the narrative, the expressive style of acting, and the comical, even *burlesque* tonality of certain scenes bring out the inextricable intertwining of seriousness and hilarity inherent to Klossowski’s work, – what Blanchot names ‘l’hilarité du sérieux’.<sup>28</sup>

Film performance in *Roberte* is closely related to Klossowski’s original conception of the *tableau vivant*. Popular in eighteenth-century theatre and nineteenth-century Parisian salons, this practice which consists in reproducing the composition of a painting – models hold the pose by

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<sup>23</sup> Pierre Klossowski and Rémy Zaugg, ‘Fragments d’une explication’, in *Pierre Klossowski*, ed. by Grenier, p. 192.

<sup>24</sup> Cited in Anthony Spira, ‘A Pantomime of Spirits’, in *Pierre Klossowski*, ed. by Anthony Spira and Sarah Wilson (Ostfildern, London: Hatje Cantz, 2006), p. 67.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>26</sup> Klossowski, ‘L’Indiscernable’, p. 185.

<sup>27</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Maurice Blanchot, ‘The Laughter of the Gods/Le Rire des Dieux’, in Pierre Klossowski and Maurice Blanchot, *Decadence of the Nude/La Décadence du nu*, ed. by Sarah Wilson and intro. by Alyce Mahon (London: Black Dog, 2002), p. 163.

precisely imitating the gestures of the painted figures –, develops ‘a site where the “figural” gives way to the “corporeal”’.<sup>29</sup> By giving life to a pre-existing representation, the models appear like living statues, suspended between stillness and movement, representation and life. For Klossowski, the ambiguous passage from a frozen position to the expression of motion (and vice versa) evokes the mechanically decomposed movements of automatons<sup>30</sup> and the jerky gestures of silent film actors, which deeply fascinated him as a child.<sup>31</sup> If the animation of the *tableaux vivants* in *Roberte* sometimes resembles a mechanical ballet, Zucca also leaves room for the actors and actresses’ spontaneous reactions. Crucially, the *tableaux vivants* are acted rather than posed. The term *tableau vivant* must be understood literally: the image is at once organised, staged, and ritualised like a *tableau* by the director, and living thanks to the actors and actresses’ singular performances. They imbue the space of representation with emotions and bodily sensations that they at once simulate and experience: ‘Actions, postures, sensations, sentiments, joués et forcément vécus, vécus et forcément joués, par des acteurs qui ne peuvent être que les personnes de la vie privée réelle, appartenant au cercle des intimes.’<sup>32</sup> On the one hand, Zucca – as well as Klossowski who contributed to the mise-en-scène by paying close attention to the position of hands and fingers<sup>33</sup> – draws on a repertoire of codified gestures, referring to the body language of figurative painting and the histrionic code of silent cinema. On the other hand, the film simultaneously shows how the actors and actresses’ performances escape the codification of body language. The camera captures the quivering of their skins, and grasps the impulsive life that agitates their bodies by making their corporeal presence palpable.<sup>34</sup> As will be discussed in the last section of this chapter with reference to Anne-Marie Dardigna’s criticism of the misogynistic

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<sup>29</sup> Pethő, *Cinema and Intermediality*, p. 381.

<sup>30</sup> See ‘Entretiens avec Pierre Klossowski’, *Les Nuits de France Culture*, France Culture, 12 May 2016 [1st broadcast 05-10 June 1972].

<sup>31</sup> See Klossowski, ‘Le Cinéma ne doit pas simuler la littérature’, p. 14.

<sup>32</sup> Fleischer, ‘Retours, détours, contours’, p. 52.

<sup>33</sup> See Zucca, Bonnet, Carcassonne, and Fieschi, ‘*Roberte*. Entretien avec Pierre Zucca’, pp. 40-41.

<sup>34</sup> In *La Révocation*, Octave significantly uses the neologism ‘épidermoscope’ to describe cinema. See Klossowski, *Les Lois de l’hospitalité* (Paris: Gallimard, 1995), p. 55.

dimension of Klossowski's *Les Lois de l'hospitalité*,<sup>35</sup> this approach to performance proves highly problematic when the female performer is asked to perform coerced sexual acts in which she expresses spontaneous gestures of discomfort. In Zucca's *Roberte*, the staging of male sadomasochistic fantasies played out on the female body is reinforced by the casting of Klossowski's wife Morin-Sinclair in the role of *Roberte*, while Klossowski plays her on-screen husband *Octave*.

Finally, through the disjunction between movement and stillness, the *tableau vivant* develops an unstable space where gestures seem to be caught in between different temporalities and media. According to Bonitzer, the cinematic *dispositif* of *tableau vivant*, or what he calls the 'plan-tableau', seems to reveal a secret deeply concealed in the film. Commenting on the adaptations of Klossowski's work, especially *L'Hypothèse du tableau volé*, he writes: 'Le tableau vivant, cet *oxymoron* incarné, est un monstre composite, un sphinx, qui pose des devinettes au spectateur-oedipe.'<sup>36</sup> In *Roberte*, the ambiguity of gestures ultimately renders the mystery of existence palpable.

## 1. Body Language

In his essay 'Klossowski ou les corps-langages', Deleuze notes the sophisticated relationship between body and language in Klossowski's literary work: 'L'œuvre de Klossowski est construite sur un étonnant parallélisme du corps et du langage, ou plutôt sur une réflexion de l'un dans l'autre. Le raisonnement est l'opération du langage, mais la pantomime est l'opération du corps.'<sup>37</sup> While highlighting their difference of nature, Deleuze analyses the parallel between the two, and the exchange of properties between the 'flexion' of verbal language and the flexion of gestures.<sup>38</sup> In *La*

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<sup>35</sup> See Anne-Marie Dardigna, *Les Châteaux d'Eros ou Les Infortunes du sexe des femmes* (Paris: F. Maspero, 1980).

<sup>36</sup> Pascal Bonitzer, *Décadrages. Peinture et cinéma* (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, Editions de l'Etoile, 1985), p. 32.

<sup>37</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Logique du sens* (Paris: Minuit, 1969), p. 325.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 332.

*Révocation*, the device of ekphrasis animates the body of the female figure depicted by Ingres in *La Grande Odalisque* (1814) and renders the frozen gestures fluid: 'Ce corps, nous en décomposons les prestiges pour le voir mieux s'animer.'<sup>39</sup> Language constitutes bodies made of words. Postures, gestures, and attitudes articulate sentences, arrange syntax, and deploy semantic fields. If Deleuze prefers the portmanteau word 'corps-langues' to conceptualise the language of the body, Klossowski and Zucca often use the more conventional notion of 'body language' (*langage du corps*) to refer to the codification of bodily expression in the realm of aesthetics:

Particulièrement illustré par la pantomime, le cinéma muet, les couvertures du 'Petit Journal', la bande dessinée, les sculptures allégoriques des monuments religieux ou publics, ce qu'il convient d'appeler: le langage du corps, – seul exprimé dans le tableau vivant – propose en effet à son observateur une signification immédiate qui se passe des mots dont il est justement l'image. Le regard, la bouche, la jambe, le costume participent tout entiers à la composition de ce langage particulier qui réussit, par des associations de postures, à communiquer les phrases les plus complexes.<sup>40</sup>

Costume, posture, gaze, and gesture transmit a code of embedded meanings that are supposedly immediately accessible to the spectator, although the intelligibility of a gestural code and the understanding of its subtleties often require being familiar with its cultural conventions. On this point, the art historian André Chastel notes how modern spectators struggle to grasp the meaning of codified gestures in ancient (especially religious) painting.<sup>41</sup> As Zucca suggests, the coordination of postures, attitudes, hand gestures, and looks can potentially articulate the most sophisticated 'sentences'. Drawing on the codes of religious iconography, antique statuary, late nineteenth-century academic painting, early twentieth-century illustrations, and silent cinema, Klossowski and Zucca explore how meaning is embodied in body language, and more precisely in the movement of the characters' gestures. By referring to the genre of *tableau vivant*, they show how the corporeal nature of this language – which is not frozen, but living

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<sup>39</sup> Klossowski, *Les Lois de l'hospitalité*, p. 22.

<sup>40</sup> Pierre Zucca, 'La Double Nature de l'image', in Klossowski and Zucca, *Roberte au cinéma*, p. 8.

<sup>41</sup> André Chastel, *Le Geste dans l'art* (Paris: Liana Levi, 2001), p. 22.

and in motion – imbues the code of gestures with sensations and impulses that unsettle the representation.



Fig. 1. *Roberte*

Remarkably, Zucca mimics the histrionic code of silent cinema in the ending sequence of *Roberte*, which, in the form of a flashback interspersed with intertitles, narrates the meeting between the wounded German officer Von A. (Jean-François Stévenin) and Roberte, who is working as a nurse for the Red Cross in Rome during the Second World War. The sequence establishes a clear correspondence between gestures and feelings: 'Le gestuel colle aux sentiments, les traduit aussitôt en actes et en signes.'<sup>42</sup> Eloquent gestures also convey the characters' intentions. When the head nurse asks Roberte to exit the room, she indicates the door with her index finger [Fig. 1]: 'D'un geste autoritaire, elle indique la sortie à ROBERTE,' Klossowski and Zucca write in the script.<sup>43</sup> The tradition of 'eloquent gestures'<sup>44</sup> in silent cinema draws on the histrionic code of theatre. Numerous pedagogues, especially in the United States, appropriated the methods of the French theoretician François Delsarte and developed the 'Delsarte system' or 'Delsartism' in order to codify the gestural expression of emotions and feelings. According to Roberta E. Pearson and Christophe Damour, the codified system of Delsartism largely caricatured and betrayed Delsarte's ideas, actually based on 'the observation of human behaviour' and 'nature' rather than on the imitation of artificial postures: 'Delsarte, it would

<sup>42</sup> Prieur, *Nuits blanches*, p. 61.

<sup>43</sup> Klossowski and Zucca, *Roberte au cinéma*, p. 69.

<sup>44</sup> See Pearson, *Eloquent Gestures*.

seem, desired to challenge the hegemony of the histrionic code but the wholesale acceptance of Delsartism perverted its founder's intentions.<sup>45</sup> According to Pearson, histrionic actors and actresses selected 'their gestures from a conventional, standardized repertoire'<sup>46</sup> which was very precisely described and illustrated in acting manuals. The histrionic code is often assimilated into a linguistic system in which each gesture or posture corresponds to an unequivocal meaning. Yet, Pearson notes that this very peculiar semiotics of gesture is not equivalent to verbal language: 'A gesture is not a word or a syllable but a whole phrase which cannot be further broken down.'<sup>47</sup> The combination of different postures and gestures enables the actors and actresses to express various meanings, although the 'Delsarte system' encompasses a 'limited lexicon'.<sup>48</sup>

However, in the broader framework of film performance, Nacache argues that establishing a semiology of gestures proves to be 'impossible' or, at least, highly problematic.<sup>49</sup> First of all, Delsartism remains exceptional in film history: not only did it not embrace all the diversity of acting styles during the silent era – for instance the expression of pathological behaviours in slapstick comedy disrupts any stable gestural code as discussed in chapter 2 –, but the craft of acting considerably evolved with the revolution of talking pictures. Indeed, with the rise of realism and naturalism, actors and actresses progressively developed a 'natural' and fluent style of acting. The understanding of the film tends to rely more on verbal expression than on the codification of gestures. Finally, Nacache argues that any attempt to translate a gesture into words signifies the erasure of the gesture to the benefit of a signification which becomes external to it. There is in gestural expression a *je-ne-sais-quoi* that seems to irreducibly escape verbal translation:

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<sup>45</sup> Pearson, *Eloquent Gestures*, p. 22. See also Christophe Damour, 'L'Influence de Delsarte sur le jeu de l'acteur de cinéma aux Etats-Unis', in *L'Acteur de cinéma. Approches plurielles*, ed. by Vincent Amiel, Jacqueline Nacache, Geneviève Sellier, and Christian Viviani (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2007), pp. 19-31.

<sup>46</sup> Pearson, *Eloquent Gestures*, p. 21.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>49</sup> Nacache, *L'Acteur de cinéma*, pp. 157-59.

S'il n'est rien d'autre, l'acteur est dans le film pure *partition de gestes* au sens large du terme (mouvements, mimiques, expression, gestes vocaux). Ce qui dans cette partition échappe aux codes échappe aussi à l'analyse: décrire un geste, comme décrire une image, c'est le faire s'évanouir dans la transposition même du visuel au verbal.<sup>50</sup>

The tension between gesture and language is analysed by Julia Kristeva in the influential article entitled 'Le Geste, pratique ou communication?' She pinpoints the difficulties encountered in kinesics studies to establish a semiology of gestures based on the communicative and linguistic model of verbal language. She argues that gesture should be considered as a practice that generates a semiotic text in the process of being produced – indeed, she seeks to define 'la gestualité en tant que texte sémiotique en cours de production, donc non bloqué par les structures closes du langage'.<sup>51</sup> A gesture shows the process of elaborating on a message and exhibits the activity that precedes the formation of meaning:

La gestualité, plus que le discours (phonétique) ou l'image (visuelle) est susceptible d'être étudiée comme une activité dans le sens d'une *dépense*, d'une production antérieure au produit, donc antérieure à la *représentation* comme phénomène de signification dans le circuit communicatif.<sup>52</sup>

In this perspective, Kristeva argues that gesture is above all 'anaphoric', in the sense that it indicates directions and establishes relations: 'Avant et derrière la *voix* et la *graphie* il y l'anaphore: le geste qui *indique*, instaure des *relations* et élimine les entités. On a pu démontrer les rapports de l'écriture hiéroglyphique avec la gestualité.'<sup>53</sup> Kristeva's theory of gesture proves useful to analyse acting. For instance, Peter Brooks, who argues that mute gestures in melodrama are too indeterminate and unstable to be analysed linguistically 'in terms of signifier and signified', directly draws on Kristeva's argument: 'Gesture is in fact desemanticized, it is anaphoric, in Julia Kristeva's term, in that it points *toward* meaning.'<sup>54</sup> For Brooks, gestures in melodrama must be deciphered like hieroglyphs, marks, or metaphors that point toward ineffable

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 158.

<sup>51</sup> Kristeva, 'Le Geste, pratique ou communication?', p. 64.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>54</sup> Peter Brooks, 'The Text of Muteness', in *Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1976), p. 71.

affects, emotions, desires, or moral dilemmas. Similarly, Naremore, in his seminal essay on acting, also refers to Kristeva's anaphoric function to analyse gesture in film: 'Meaningless in itself, the anaphora is a purely relational activity whose free play allows meaning to circulate, even when meaning is unintended.'<sup>55</sup>

The gesture of pointing is perhaps the most conventional anaphoric gesture. The French ethologist Boris Cyrulnik has demonstrated the crucial role of this gesture in relation to language. It is only after several months of neurological maturation that a baby starts using his or her index finger to point at things, instead of trying to catch them with opened fingers. This phase usually corresponds to the beginning of the learning of language: 'Le langage ne commence à apparaître que sur la base d'un ensemble comportemental désignatif, lequel suppose une maturation biologique déterminée,' Cyrulnik explains.<sup>56</sup> The gesture of the index finger paves the way to the articulation of meaning through verbal language. Chastel highlights the recurrence of this anaphoric gesture in painting. By pointing at a figure or an object within the representation, the gesture of 'admonition', to refer to Alberti's terminology, enables the spectator's gaze to circulate within the tableau and to establish relations between the different components of the picture. The gesture of the index finger exhibits a process of communication that develops between the space of representation and the spectator: 'L'index désigne l'objet et le regard de l'"admoniteur" vient chercher celui du spectateur.'<sup>57</sup>

By contrast, when it covers the lips of the painted figure, the index finger indicates the muteness inherent to the image. The *signum harpocraticum* suggests the character's desire to stay quiet, or intimates silence to the other figures or to the spectator. In *Roberte*, while preparing for the staging of a *tableau vivant*, a young extra puts his index finger on his closed lips in order to impose silence to his partner and then, by raising his index, points to the door through which *Roberte* is supposed to appear [Fig.

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<sup>55</sup> Naremore, *Acting in the Cinema*, p. 23.

<sup>56</sup> Boris Cyrulnik, *La Naissance du sens* (Paris: Hachette, 1991), p. 55.

<sup>57</sup> Chastel, *Le Geste dans l'art*, p. 38.

2, 3]. Similarly, Roberte's hands 'censurent la parole',<sup>58</sup> as Klossowski writes, for example when she puts her index on the mouth of her lover Vittorio (Barbet Schroeder) to prevent him speaking [Fig. 4]. The religious dimension of the *signum harpocraticum* signifies the primacy of vision over speech: 'La divinité se tait pour parler au cœur; si le fidèle ne fait pas le silence, il ne perçoit pas la leçon intérieure qui remplace le discours.'<sup>59</sup> By interlacing eroticism and theology, Klossowski explores the perversions and ambiguities of verbal and body language in a transgressive way.<sup>60</sup> According to Barthes, Klossowski borrows scholastic terms in his writings to unveil the taboos of language and sex.<sup>61</sup> By reusing the code of Christian iconography in erotic *tableaux vivants*,<sup>62</sup> Klossowski seeks to communicate the incommunicability of the fantasy through the silent corporeal presence of the characters. In this sense, Zucca suggests that the *tableaux* in *Roberte* can be viewed as rituals of incarnation.<sup>63</sup>



Fig. 2, 3. *Roberte*

<sup>58</sup> Pierre Klossowski, 'L'Idiome corporel est-il un simulacre de communication?', in *La Ressemblance* (Marseille: Ryôan-ji, 1984), p. 53.

<sup>59</sup> Chastel, *Le Geste dans l'art*, p. 67.

<sup>60</sup> Obsessed with the moral tension between bodily and spiritual pleasure, Klossowski is considered as a 'theo-pornologer'. See Alyce Mahon, 'Pierre Klossowski, Theo-pornologer/Pierre Klossowski, Théo-pornologue', in *Decadence of the Nude/La Décadence du nu*, ed. by Wilson, p. 38.

<sup>61</sup> Roland Barthes, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Eric Marty, 3 vols (Paris: Seuil, 1993-95), II (1994), p. 903.

<sup>62</sup> For example, Spira argues that '[...] the images of the parallel bars recall the scene of Christ's crucifixion'. See Spira, 'A Pantomime of Spirits', p. 76.

<sup>63</sup> Zucca, Bonnet, Carcassonne, and Fieschi, 'Roberte. Entretien avec Pierre Zucca', p. 41.



Fig. 4, 5. *Roberte*

## 2. Intermedial Migrations and Gestural Variations

At once relational and intersubjective, gestures establish a process of communication that, in *Roberte*, fosters the dialogue between the arts. As demonstrated in Chapter 3, intermediality in cinema interrelates diverse modes of expression that can exchange their gestural properties. In *Roberte*, the genre of *tableau vivant*, which Marie-Hélène Mello defines as a bridge between the arts,<sup>64</sup> explores an in-between space where gestural codes circulate from one medium to another. At the beginning of the film, Octave makes a gesture of *admonition* that invites the spectator to contemplate *Lucrèce*, a painting made by the nineteenth-century (fictitious) painter named Frédéric Tonnerre, supposedly a disciple of Courbet [Fig. 5]. Ironically, Zucca highlights the ambiguous nature of the *tableau*. Standing on the edge of a small stage that is surrounded with sculptures and pedestals, Octave theatrically opens a red curtain to unveil the painting. The *tableau* paradoxically looks like a coloured photograph of a *tableau vivant* figuring *Roberte* as a model. Indeed, it strangely resembles Zucca's photographs illustrating Klossowski's essay *La Monnaie vivante*. Significantly, a sculpture stands next to the characters on the right side of the *tableau*, highlighting the statue-like aspect of the models. The setting of the film and of the painting not only alludes to theatre – numerous scenes in *Roberte* are framed by

<sup>64</sup> Marie-Hélène Mello, 'Le Tableau vivant d'après Raoul Ruiz. Une esthétique de l'"inter-image"', in *La Circulation des images. Médiations des cultures*, ed. by Richard Bégin, Myriam Dussault, and Emmanuelle Dyotte (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2006), p. 140.

curtains or balustrades – , but also establishes a clear equivalence between the theatrical scene and the space of the *tableau*. While gesturing toward the painting with the index finger of his right hand, Octave interprets the characters' attitudes and deciphers the meaning of the representation. After having read a Latin quotation inscribed at the bottom of the painting, Octave comments on the painted gestures, covering the image with a speculative text. The scene shows the correlation between the gesture of the index finger, which points to the painting, and the articulation of its meanings by speech.



Fig. 6, 7. *Roberte*

The apparent convergence of different media in the same space paradoxically highlights their divergences. Firstly, Octave's animated gestures contrast with Tarquin's and Lucretia's petrified attitudes; secondly, the photographic quality of the image emphasises the artificiality of the pose; finally, the 'painted' figures remain deaf to Octave's words. In his writings on literature, drawing, and cinema, Klossowski always clearly defines, analyses, and compares the specific components of each medium. In contrast to the graphology of his literary texts, Klossowski considers images as hieroglyphs,<sup>65</sup> thus pointing out their gestural dimension – gestures being typically compared to hieroglyphs as we have seen with Artaud, Kristeva, and Brooks. He sees a clear opposition, if not a conflict, between verbal and painterly modes of expression. Speech 'semanticises' gestures and makes them speak, while the irreducible muteness of gestures in painting neutralises speech:

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<sup>65</sup> Klossowski, 'Entretien avec Alain Arnaud', in *La Ressemblance*, p. 102.

Comme chaque langue oppose à une autre ses propres idiomatismes et que d'un idiomatisme à un autre il n'y a pas de commune mesure d'expérience, ainsi chaque mode d'expression oppose son propre idiomatisme à un autre mode: région du geste muet que la parole cherche toujours à exorciser, quand le mutisme du geste la veut réduire au silence d'un motif irréductible.<sup>66</sup>

Literature opens a mental space where speech, description, argumentation, and narrative articulate the meaning of gestures and, more broadly, of images.<sup>67</sup> Interpreting gestures requires speculating on the meaning(s) that they seem to indicate. Unlike the specular nature of the image, Klossowski considers literature as being essentially speculative. Writing and drawing are thus two distinct modes of expression: 'Passant de la spéculation au *spéculaire*, je me trouve en fait sous la dictée de l'image.'<sup>68</sup>

In film, speech and image, word and gesture coexist in the same space. In that regard, Roberte's first appearance in the film is revealing. The camera does not show her face, but highlights the desk where she writes her diary [Fig. 6]. Zucca emphasises her ritual of writing. She first handles a key to open the drawer that conceals her diary, and then starts writing on a new white page with her fountain pen. The white page is the space of graphology and speech. She simultaneously reads in voice-over the sentence that she is writing. At the end of the first sentence, the camera suddenly moves upward, leaves the space of the diary to unveil the mirror that decorates the writing desk. In the mirror appears the phantasmagorical vision of a hand that strokes her breast [Fig. 7]. In the specular space of the mirror, visions and fantasies are silently conveyed to the spectator. Finally the camera returns to the diary, revolves and shows Roberte, who gazes at herself in the mirror. She goes back to her diary and writes: 'Trop fortes sont ces images d'il y a quinze ans.' The fantasmatic vision in the mirror announces the return of haunting images of the past, especially those of her aggression by Vittorio in 1944. In the same way that the troubling memory of the war resurges in Roberte's mind, Vittorio also surprisingly reappears in her life more than ten years later. In contrast to Roberte's earlier fantasy, where she was imagining the sensuous touch of his hand –

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<sup>66</sup> Klossowski, *Tableaux vivants*, pp. 126-27.

<sup>67</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 131.

<sup>68</sup> Klossowski, *La Ressemblance*, p. 102.

obliterating the rest of his body including his face – reality manifests on the other side of the mirror in a much more brutal way when she meets Vittorio again. At the first opportunity, he grabs her breasts in a gesture of possession [Fig. 8].



Fig. 8. *Roberte*

In *tableaux vivants*, gestures apparently buried in the past are reiterated and revived at other places and times. The *tableau vivant* is a porous site of performance that enables Klossowski to model and re-model his visions in different media. In *Les Lois de l'hospitalité*, gestures do not cease to migrate from one site of performance or from one medium to another. From the models' pose to the *tableau*, and from the *tableau* to its ekphrasis, the literary description of a painting implies at least two levels of migration. In *Roberte*, not only are gestures remediated from the ekphrasis to the *tableau vivant*, but also, in a cyclical way, they migrate again from the film to the drawings made by Klossowski after the shooting. All these gestural migrations reveal formal recurrences. Indeed, despite the variety of media, the repetition of similar gestures seems to indicate the reproduction of a gestural code that must be deciphered by the spectator. However, although Klossowski reiterates and reconstructs the same scenes, the expression of gesture is never identical. As Carrie Noland explains, '[...] when gestures change location, when they migrate from one site of performance to another, they in fact confront a different reception and may even be experienced in a

new way.<sup>69</sup> For example, slight, albeit significant variations can be perceived in the sequence of the 'parallel bars' that Roberte recounts in her diary.<sup>70</sup> A 'maniac' (also named 'le mollusque' in the script) harasses Roberte in the bus and chases her under the arches of the Palais Royal before kidnapping her and dragging her to a gym with the help of an accomplice. Roberte is then tied to parallel bars and assaulted by the 'maniac' who compulsively licks her opened palm. The sequence was reconstructed in Zucca's photographs that accompany Klossowski's essay *La Monnaie vivante* and in the black-and-white short film and full-length feature film in colour shot respectively in 1975 and 1977. Klossowski repeatedly 'painted' this vision in his life-size coloured-pencil drawings made before and after the shooting of the two films. Finally, in collaboration with Klossowski, the artist Jean-Paul Réti designed sculptures that depict two key moments of that sequence: the kidnapping of Roberte in the stairs and her rape.

In all these representations, Roberte's hands are endowed with a sexual connotation: 'Dans l'idiome du mutisme, la main de Roberte est bien ici la contrefaçon – le substitut du sexe – ou de l'âme – [...]'.<sup>71</sup> Her right hand is opened by force, finger after finger, by the aggressor. Several drawings depict the maniac holding two of her fingers, while the others remain closed on her palm [Fig. 9]. In Zucca's photograph, the maniac grips Roberte's wrist, but her fingers remain completely opened, as if she were showing no sign of resistance [Fig. 10]. On the contrary, she strongly squeezes her palm closed in the long feature film: the maniac must start again twice to force her to open her fingers [Fig. 11, 12]. Yet, when the maniac grabs her in the stairs of the gym, she simply places her hands on his shoulders [Fig. 13; see also fig. 16], while in the drawings or in the sculpture, Roberte struggles by making expressive arm and hand gestures [Fig. 14, 15]. Her right and left hands are either opened or closed: she shows the palm of one hand, and hides the other. As Deleuze suggests, hands in Klossowski's work express a dilemma

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<sup>69</sup> Carrie Noland, 'Introduction', in *Migrations of Gesture*, ed. by Carrie Noland and Sally Ann Ness (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), p. xvi.

<sup>70</sup> Klossowski, *Les Lois de l'hospitalité*, pp. 40-45.

<sup>71</sup> Klossowski, *La Ressemblance*, p. 53.

and a disjunction.<sup>72</sup> They ambiguously show and conceal, invite and resist, and indicate contradictory directions to the spectator. In all the *tableaux*, whether they are cinematic, pictorial, literary, or photographic, the gestural variations demonstrate the malleable rather than frozen nature of body language.



Fig. 9. Pierre Klossowski  
*Les Barres parallèles III* (detail), 1975  
Coloured pencil, 202 x 126 cm



Fig. 10. Photograph by Pierre Zucca for  
*La Monnaie vivante*, 1970



Fig. 11-13. *Roberte*

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<sup>72</sup> See Deleuze, *Logique du sens*, p. 331.



Fig. 14. Pierre Klossowski  
*La descente au sous-sol*,  
1979  
Coloured pencil, 225 x 150  
cm



Fig. 15. Jean-Paul Réti  
*L'enlèvement de Roberte*,  
1993  
Painted synthetic resin on  
wood, 250 x 130 x 90 cm

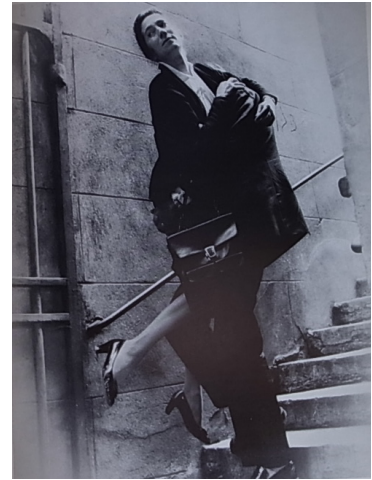


Fig. 16. Photograph by  
Pierre Zucca for *La  
Monnaie vivante*, 1970

### 3. The Suspension of Gestures: Puzzling Gestures and Interpretative Vertigo

In Klossowski's graphic work, gestures that suggest different possible meanings are linked with other gestures that potentially indicate other, often contradictory meanings: 'L'espace corporel (soit de la statuaire, soit projeté sur le tableau), la scène peinte, [...] reproduit dans son mutisme même le geste interprétable suggérant d'autres gestes possibles et contradictoires.'<sup>73</sup> The linkage of plural gestures that indicate various directions disorients the spectator and disrupts the intelligibility of the representation. The beholder faces the enigma of the hieroglyphs: 'Le spectateur est devant ces gestes figés comme devant une énigme. L'irrésolution est totale,' Bonitzer writes.<sup>74</sup> Klossowski transgresses the boundaries between the utterable ('dicible') and the unutterable ('indicible'), the representable ('montrable') and

<sup>73</sup> Klossowski, *Tableaux vivants*, p. 131.

<sup>74</sup> Pascal Bonitzer, 'Le Silence extérieur', in *Pierre Klossowski*, ed. by Grenier, p. 38

the unrepresentable ('immontrable').<sup>75</sup> For Laurent Jenny, gestures indeed point to something that exceeds representation:

[...] Dans les mises en scène de Klossowski, qu'elles soient littéraires ou picturales, il n'y a rien d'autre à voir que le désir de voir stimulé par un jeu de directions syntaxiques ou gestuelles pointant un irréprésentable. Dans ces directions, le spectateur ne peut que circuler: il n'y a rien à voir. Tout à éprouver.<sup>76</sup>

In *Roberte*, the code of body language is also turned into an enigma. Combining opposite stereotypes in the same bodily expression, Zucca obfuscates the meaning of gestures. Rather than clarifying an action in an unequivocal and homogenous way, stereotypes unveil Roberte's contradictions, especially in the *tableaux vivants* that intersperse the film: 'En rendant manifestes les différents stéréotypes qui concourent à l'accomplissement d'une action, le tableau vivant propose tout au contraire cette action comme hétérogène, en un spectacle cocasse dont le sens final disparaît au profit d'une multitude de sens contradictoires,' Zucca explains.<sup>77</sup> In this perspective, Roberte's gestures become deeply ambiguous. The complex attitude of her hands and fingers manifests the perverse nature of the image: 'Il convient alors d'observer ce que fait la main qui se cache quand l'autre main se montre: c'est là tout le propos de *Roberte*.'<sup>78</sup>



Fig. 17. *Roberte*

<sup>75</sup> See Klossowski, *Tableaux vivants*, p. 131.

<sup>76</sup> Cited in Mello, 'Le Tableau vivant d'après Raoul Ruiz', p. 148.

<sup>77</sup> Klossowski and Zucca, *Roberte au cinéma*, pp. 7-8.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

Klossowski theorises the concept of contradictory gestures in *La Révocation*. In his diary, Octave appropriates Quintilian's definition of solecism which in rhetoric postulates a contradiction between gesture and speech: 'Certains pensent qu'il y a solécisme toutes les fois que par un mouvement de la tête ou de la main on fait entendre le contraire de ce que l'on dit.'<sup>79</sup> Octave attempts to understand to what extent the notion of solecism could be developed in painting despite the muteness of the painted figures. In the opening sequence of *Roberte*, Octave explains how the logic of the contradictory ('la logique du contradictoire') animates the painting of Lucretia's rape [Fig. 17]. Tonnerre depicts a key moment: Tarquin threatens Lucretia with death if she does not consent; feeling ashamed, she then decides to commit suicide. Do Lucretia's right and left hands signify her resistance against Tarquin's assault or, on the contrary, betray a secret pleasure? Not only do her two hands indicate opposite directions, but also, in a more puzzling way, the attitude of each hand ambiguously suggests equivocal meanings. Indeed, if her right hand appears to reject Tarquin's gaze, its attitude could also be interpreted as a sign of invitation. The palm, which is opened and untightened, is indeed offered in Tarquin's direction. Likewise, the position of the left hand is ambiguous: does it seek to prevent Tarquin from approaching her sexually? Its position could also reveal the irruption of pleasure in her body. Octave actually suggests a third interpretation. Lucretia's hand gestures show the perfect and absolute simultaneity of moral repugnance and pleasure: 'L'irruption du plaisir coïncide exactement avec la répugnance morale dans son âme.'

As Daniel W. Smith notes, through the myths of Diana and Actaeon as well as Tarquin and Lucretia, Klossowski's work constantly repeats the same fantasy: 'The woman discovering the presence of her body under the gaze or the violence of a third party, who, whether an angel or a demon, communicates a guilty voluptuousness.'<sup>80</sup> In her erotic (mis)adventures that

<sup>79</sup> Klossowski, *Les Lois de l'hospitalité*, p. 14.

<sup>80</sup> Daniel W. Smith, 'Klossowski's Reading of Nietzsche. Impulses, Phantasms, Simulacra, and Stereotypes', *Diacritics*, 35.1 (2005), 8-21 (p. 14).

oscillate in an undecided way between prostitution, adulterous relationship, and rape, and even more ambiguously between reality and imagination, Roberte is indeed trapped in *tableaux vivants* which obsessively repeat the same solecism over and over again: she reacts in a contradictory way to the violent humiliations that men (Vittorio in the chapel, the maniac in the gym club) make her endure. In his monograph on Klossowski, Ian James interrogates the ethical significance of this 'cliché of male sexual fantasy': 'Roberte always begins by resisting her assailants but then part of her succumbs and begins, despite herself, to experience sexual pleasure in the encounter.'<sup>81</sup> However, as James rightly notes, the solecism does not consist in the successive expression of contradictory feelings (Roberte says no, then yes), but in their simultaneity, which gives to the *tableaux* their 'bizarre' and even 'disturbing' tonality:<sup>82</sup> '[...] it is important to note that it is not a transition from no to yes, that this gesture of the hands evokes rather a simultaneous and paradoxical no and yes which, as will become clear expresses Roberte's difference from herself.'<sup>83</sup> The solecism points to the character's 'lack of self-coherence',<sup>84</sup> to the fracturing of her identity that is disrupted by the 'impersonal movement of desire'.<sup>85</sup> Her gestures, which seem to negate each other, are suspended in an indecisive and unresolved moment that turns the stereotypical code of body language into an enigma and, ultimately, suggests Octave's inability to grasp Roberte's identity.

Finally, Klossowski draws on polytheist theology to develop the notion of solecism. Roberte's contradictions evoke those of the pagan gods who '[...] veulent se faire adorer, dans leur comportement le plus immoral, le plus honteux'. Condemned by St Augustine, '[c]es dieux prennent plaisir à leur propre honte.'<sup>86</sup> Through the mediation of theatre and scenic games (what Klossowski names *theologia theatrica*), divinities give to human passions a disproportionate and immoderate dimension. Like statues in motion, the

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<sup>81</sup> Ian James, *Pierre Klossowski: The Persistence of a Name* (Oxford: Legenda, 2000), p. 192.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 170.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 193.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 192.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 193.

<sup>86</sup> Klossowski, *Le Bain de Diane* (Paris: Gallimard, 1980), p. 111.

actors' gestures are simulacra that incarnate the incommunicable presence of the gods on stage: 'Incarnation toutefois sous les espèces du corps histrionnesque – divulguant par son jeu le secret du geste muet des statues divines (les *simulacra* proprement dits).'<sup>87</sup> At the heart of all the representations of Roberte – the goddess invented by Klossowski –, the silent ritualisation of gestures conveys the persistence of a haunting secret.

With the concept of solecism, Klossowski seems to parody the notion of pregnant moment (*instant prégnant*) theorised by Lessing in painting and used as a dramatic device in eighteenth-century theatre, mainly at the instigation of Denis Diderot, who postulates the equivalence between the theatrical stage and the *tableau* in his writings on dramatic arts, such as *Entretiens sur le Fils naturel* and *De la poésie dramatique*.<sup>88</sup> On stage, actors and actresses suspend their gestures in order to convey and intensify the meaning of a climatic scene, sometimes by referring to a well-known painting. As Steven Jacobs explains,

[t]ableaux thus represent fixed moments that halt the narrative development of the story and introduce stasis into the movement of the play. During a short period of suspended time, the action is frozen at a point of heightened meaning, a point at which the actor's gestures are especially capable of expressing the full significance and all the implications of the story.<sup>89</sup>

The pregnant moment is meant to resolve a contradiction inherent to 'spatial' arts such as sculpture and painting. In order to tell a narrative, the artist must choose one unique moment that will summarise, thanks to coordination of the characters' gestures, the continuity of an action. As Barthes explains, this instant, which enables the beholder to read 'le sens historique du geste représenté' by condensing the present, the past, and the future, is by definition artificial and abstract.<sup>90</sup> Because the painting requires interpretation by the beholder, gestures must be intelligible in order to translate an idea ('un

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p. 115.

<sup>88</sup> See Inès Guégo-Rivalan, 'Energie du geste et représentation: Denis Diderot, précurseur d'une "théâtralité" moderne?', *ATALA Cultures et sciences humaines*, 17 (2014), 337-49 (p. 343); Denis Diderot, *Entretiens sur Le Fils naturel. De la poésie dramatique. Paradoxe sur le comédien*, ed. by Jean Goldzink (Paris: Flammarion, 2005).

<sup>89</sup> Jacobs, *Framing Pictures*, p. 88.

<sup>90</sup> Roland Barthes, 'Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein', in *L'Obvie et l'Obtus*, p. 89.

sens idéal')<sup>91</sup> in visual terms: 'Le sens est mis dans le geste et dans la coordination des gestes.'<sup>92</sup> As the understanding of gestures depends on their accuracy, the artist's task consists in avoiding any ambiguity that could be detrimental to the interpretation of the picture. Indeed, the beholder must be able to reconstruct the trajectory of the painted gestures. However, the fixity of bodily movements often generates ambiguities.<sup>93</sup> For instance, in the article 'Promenades au Louvre', the nineteenth-century art critic Louis Edmond Duranty notices that the titles and descriptions that caption artworks in the Louvre Museum's catalogue contain errors due to a misunderstanding of the painted gestures. Duranty argues: 'Le geste est souvent fort obscur, et surtout, lorsque, comme en peinture, *on l'arrête* au cours de ses évolutions successives.'<sup>94</sup> For example, according to the angle chosen by the artist, it may be difficult to distinguish whether an individual respectfully bows down or simply bends down to pick up an object. The stoppage of a gesture becomes a source of uncertainty, doubt, and even misinterpretation.

In his famous essay entitled 'Le Moïse de Michel-Ange' (1914), Freud, who admits that the most praised masterpieces often remain obscure, reviews all the contradictory interpretations that have been written about Michelangelo's well-known sculpture.<sup>95</sup> By analysing the movements of Moses's gestures as well as details that have never been noticed by art critics, he seeks to reveal their true significance. Freud's method of interpretation is related to psychoanalysis: 'Elle a aussi coutume de deviner par des traits dédaignés ou inobservés, par le rebut ("refuse") de l'observation, les choses secrètes ou cachées.'<sup>96</sup> The complexity of Moses's attitude, which conveys a stark contrast between its apparent stillness and the internal turmoil of the character, is articulated by 'des motifs psychiques

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. 91.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 92.

<sup>93</sup> See Bernard Vouilloux, 'Le Geste dans le tableau vivant. Des arts de la scène à la photographie', in *Le Tableau vivant ou l'image performée*, ed. by Julie Ramos (Paris: Mare et Martin, Inha, 2014), p. 127.

<sup>94</sup> Louis Edmond Duranty, 'Promenades au Louvre. Remarques sur le geste dans quelques tableaux', *Gazette des beaux-arts*, January-June 1877, p. 172.

<sup>95</sup> See Sigmund Freud, 'Le Moïse de Michel-Ange', trans. by Marie Bonaparte and Mrs E. Marty, ed. by Jean-Marie Tremblay (Québec: Chicoutimi, 2002), p. 6. Electronic edition (first publ. in *La Revue française de psychanalyse*, 1.1. (1927) 120-148)

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., pp. 12-13.

internes'.<sup>97</sup> According to Sarah Wilson, Klossowski became increasingly familiar with psychoanalytical theories from the late 1920s onwards, and was familiar with Freud's essay:

Klossowski subsequently devoured the complete run of the *Revue Française de Psychanalyse* from 1927 onwards, as editorial assistant on publication. It published Freud's case histories and his *Moses of Michelangelo*, a case of 'applied psychoanalysis', where the work of art becomes the focus of interpretation.<sup>98</sup>

Although the ambiguity of gestures also results from the characters' turmoil in Klossowski's representations, the notion of solecism, based on the simultaneity of two contradictory signs, differs from Freud's psychoanalytical interpretation of *Moses*. Indeed, Freud analyses in detail how Michelangelo depicts the passage from one feeling – anger –, to another – calm. In the theory of the pregnant moment, the simultaneous coordination of different gestures and attitudes is supposed to enable the viewer to reconstruct the chronology of the action. By contrast, Klossowski uses the idea of the pregnant moment in the opposite (or perhaps literal) sense: the character's gestures that translate the simultaneity of contradictory impulses are caught in a suspended moment – as if life itself was suspended – that suggests neither a past nor a future nor a present. It is in this sense that Klossowski assimilates painting to the genre of *tableau vivant*. For instance, he notices that the characters depicted in Balthus's paintings often seem to pose, rather than moving, as if the *tableau* was actually the representation of a *tableau vivant*:

Ici l'artiste en arrive à contenir le temps dans lequel vivent les êtres, en un espace où ils subsistent hors de la vie, au-delà de la mort; d'où cette impression de '*tableau vivant*' inscrit à l'intérieur du tableau, de pantomime immobile que donnent certaines de ses grandes compositions.<sup>99</sup>

However, although the *tableau vivant* is a spectacle in which the suspension of gestures corresponds to the suspension of life in a contradictory temporality, the *dispositif* affects the senses of the spectator differently than a

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>98</sup> Sarah Wilson, 'Pierre Klossowski: Epiphanies and Secrets', in *Pierre Klossowski*, ed. by Spira and Wilson, p. 16.

<sup>99</sup> Klossowski, *Tableaux vivants*, p. 115.

painting, due to the models' slight involuntary movements that animate the representation:

Ce qui provoquait 'comme une sensation d'angoisse' chez les spectateurs de tableaux vivants tels que Goethe résidait pour beaucoup dans ces mouvements qui, infimes ou assumés, animaient irrésistiblement la chair en faisant surgir, au cœur de la pose codifiée, toute la force vitale du corps.<sup>100</sup>

How does the trembling of the body impact on the spectator's interpretation of the model's gestures? How does the spectator react to the vital expression of the pathos?

In *Roberte*, the medium of cinema complicates the traditional conception of the *tableau vivant*. The effect of suspension inherent to the *tableau* is acted and inscribed in the movement and the temporality of the *mise-en-scène*. Suspension is imbued with affect, stillness with movement, and representation with life. Gestures thus cannot be contemplated and interpreted like in a painting or a sculpture. According to Andrew Klevan, the 'fluency' in film performance generates a 'form of interpretative insecurity'.<sup>101</sup> Indeed, '[o]ne posture morphs into another quickly and continuously, making it difficult to track the variations and separate meanings,' he argues.<sup>102</sup> The furtive movement of one gesture, when associated with other bodily expressions, can be difficult to grasp. Gestures constantly transform, distort, or shift meanings that can thus be 'suspended, ambiguous, amorphous, generalized, embedded, in-between, transitional, becoming, developing and overlapping'.<sup>103</sup> While Klevan argues that gestures nonetheless continue to make sense, Noland, by contrast, suggests that the gestural expression of affective forms can 'overflow' the process of meaning-making:

Gesture can indeed transmit a predetermined, codified meaning, but it can also – and simultaneously – convey an energetic charge or 'vitality affect' that overflows the meaning transmitted. To some extent, all iterable signs possessing material (graphemic, phonic, phenomenal) supports 'overflow' their conventional meanings. However, gestures dramatize this extra-semantic

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<sup>100</sup> Valentine Robert, 'La Pose au cinéma: film et tableau en corps à corps', in *Entre code et corps. Tableau vivant et photographie mise en scène*, ed. by Christine Buignet and Arnaud Rykner (Pau: Presses universitaires de Pau et des pays de l'Adour, 2012), p. 74.

<sup>101</sup> Andrew Klevan, 'Living Meaning, the Fluency of Film Performance', in *Theorizing Film Acting*, ed. by Aaron Taylor (New York, London: Routledge, 2012), p. 35.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

dimension of signs, dependent as they are upon actual living bodies charged with eros, affect, and corporeal materiality.<sup>104</sup>

Affects, emotions, and corporeal forces modulate the performance of gestures and potentially suspend interpretation, especially in melodrama, where, as Brooks suggests, '[...] some gestures exist wholly in the medium of ineffability, as marks of an appalling significance beyond the power of interpretation.'<sup>105</sup>

In his essay on Nietzsche, Klossowski wonders: 'Qu'est-ce qui nous libérera d'une signification quelconque et nous restituera l'*existence ininterprétable*?'<sup>106</sup> According to him, the intrinsic properties of the cinematic medium tend to suspend the spectators' faculties of interpretation to the benefit of an immediate perception of pathos. Unlike the reading of a novel and the contemplation of a painting, which allow the reader and the beholder to take their time to interpret the meaning of the text and the image, a film triggers an emotional response that immediately reaches the unconscious of the film spectator. As Klossowski writes,

[à] la différence du lecteur ou du contemplateur de tableaux, qui vont d'une interprétation de signes à l'émotion proprement dite – le spectateur de l'écran se voit préalablement atteint dans son inconscient et n'arrive à interpréter l'intention de l'image qu'à partir de la donnée émotionnelle immédiate.<sup>107</sup>

Klossowski's definition of film reception echoes more recent theoretical discussions on 'the invisibility of the medium' that suggests 'a direct contact with the world and no sense of mediation'.<sup>108</sup> This apparently 'raw' and unmediated reality, albeit constructed and staged, thus generates an emotional shock that directly affects the spectator. In this sense, the film *Roberte* enables the viewer to immediately feel and see how the characters, through the singular performance of the actors, experience the scenes and endure the pose, without having the time to interpret the meaning of their slightest gestures. For example, when *Roberte* is immobilised in a *tableau*

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<sup>104</sup> Noland, 'Introduction', p. xiv.

<sup>105</sup> Brooks, *Melodramatic Imagination*, p. 76.

<sup>106</sup> Klossowski, *Nietzsche et le cercle vicieux* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1969), p. 253.

<sup>107</sup> Klossowski, 'Questions aux romanciers. Pierre Klossowski', *Cahiers du cinéma*, December 1966, p. 97.

<sup>108</sup> Pethő, *Cinema and Intermediality*, p. 57.

*vivant* by two aggressors named F. and X. who hold her tightly, she intensely reacts to the situation. She covers her underwear with her left hand, while her right hand resists against F.'s attempt to steal her glove. The quivering of her body, the nervous agitation of her hands, and the movements of the camera disrupt the 'reading' of the solecism. Filmed in a medium shot, her gestures result from a state of vivid emotion that strikes the spectator. The process of codification is overwhelmed by the immediate expression and perception of the pathos of the scene.

#### 4. The Cinematic Practice of *Tableaux Vivants* and the Fabrication of the Image

In modernist cinema, filmmakers like Godard, Resnais, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Varda, or Rohmer appropriate the genre of *tableau vivant* to reflect on time, death, stillness, slowness, memory, and more broadly on the place of cinema in art history.<sup>109</sup> According to Jacobs, the effect of arrested time in a *tableau vivant* imbues the representation with a morbid impression of petrification: 'Not unlike Barthes's famous description of the photograph, tableaux present bodies or poses arrested in time – though the tableau vivant realises this arrest with the help of real but seemingly lifeless bodies.'<sup>110</sup> *Tableaux vivants* reveal the tension between 'animation and mortification' that is often associated with the cinematic art.<sup>111</sup> Strikingly, the last *tableau vivant* in *Roberte*, entitled *La Belle Empoisonneuse*, ritualises the poisoning of Octave by Roberte. As the latter dies, all the protagonists, Roberte, her nephew Antoine (Martin Loeb), and Vittorio, perfectly hold the pose to the point of looking frozen [Fig. 18]. For the first and last time in the film, no perceptible movement animates or disrupts the representation: the effect of *tableau* is accomplished in death. The photographic quality of the shot, the period

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<sup>109</sup> See Jacobs, *Framing Pictures*, pp. 91-96.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

costumes, the painted background of the setting, and the eloquent gestures emphasise the excess of theatricality. As Vouilloux suggests, with the advent of instantaneity in the late nineteenth century, the photographs of *tableaux vivants* heightened the artificiality of the posed gestures: 'En un siècle, même le "beau geste" théâtral loué par Diderot, ce geste arraché par le *thumos* passionnel, aura perdu sa force première pour n'apparaître plus que comme un geste hyperthéâtral.'<sup>112</sup> The frozen gestures in the shot of Octave's death oddly contrast with the disjunctive aesthetics of suspension and animation that structure Zucca's *mise-en-scène* in the rest of the film.



Fig. 18. *Roberte*

While a painter conveys a synthetic representation of movement and time, a camera, by contrast, records each phase of movement in its temporal continuity. Contrary to the photographic or painted *tableau vivant*, cinema shows how the models endure the pose: 'Le cinéma y ajoute une dimension supplémentaire, puisque l'immobilisation des corps, qui n'est plus un effet du médium, n'est possible qu'à la condition que leur stabilité soit assurée, comme dans tout tableau vivant.'<sup>113</sup> The cinematic *tableau vivant*, which is, in a sense, a visual solecism, highlights the simultaneity of movement and stasis within the shot. The disjunction between the movement of the shot and the immobility of the *tableau* is also dialogic, as Bonitzer explains in his definition of the *plan-tableau*: 'Cette différence inscrite, cette disjonction

<sup>112</sup> Vouilloux, 'Le Geste dans le tableau vivant', p. 132.

<sup>113</sup> Vouilloux, 'Le Tableau vivant, entre genre et dispositif', in *Entre code et corps*, ed. by Buignet and Rykner, p. 98.

accentuée entre le mouvement du plan et l'immobilité du tableau, porte un nom: dialogisme.<sup>114</sup> To a certain extent, the *plan-tableau* in film reverses the logic of painting and sculpture. Indeed, while expressivity in sculpture tends to suggest movement, film stresses the statue-like aspect of the figures, and, through the models' poses, highlights what Vouilloux calls 'le tremblement de l'immobilité'.<sup>115</sup> The tension between stillness and movement restores the 'antinomic polarity' of still images, as defined by Agamben:

On the one hand, images are the reification and obliteration of a gesture (it is the *imago* as death mask or as symbol); on the other hand, they preserve the *dynamis* intact (as in Muybridge's snapshots or in any sports photograph).<sup>116</sup>

Although the model's pose is reified in a *tableau vivant*, his or her body can slightly tremble, suggesting the potential awakening of the gesture.

Zucca connects the genre of *tableau vivant* with a practice that is often overlooked in film studies, but nonetheless crucial in the film industry. Indeed he argues that film stills, which are used for commercial purposes and displayed in the windows of film theatres, create an effect of *tableau*. As Jacobs explains, film stills that must be distinguished from film frames or photograms 'have more in common with painting than photography', in the sense that they put the theory of pregnant moment into practice: 'In contrast with the film frame, which is drawn from a succession of moments, both a painting and a still are a constructed or fictitious moment, a kind of image synthesis of an entire action.'<sup>117</sup> Contrary to the instantaneity of photography that captures only one phase of movement and thus fails, according to Zucca, to convey the real meaning of a gesture, stills require operations of *mise-en-scène* that construct the image like a *tableau vivant*. After the shooting of a scene, the still photographer asks the actors and actresses to reconstruct the action by posing (without staring at the lens of the camera) rather than acting. Although '[s]ometimes, the gestures and positions of the actors differ from the way they are shown in the film',<sup>118</sup> stills must create the

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<sup>114</sup> Bonitzer, *Décadrages*, p. 30.

<sup>115</sup> Vouilloux, 'Le Tableau vivant, entre genre et dispositif', p. 99

<sup>116</sup> Agamben, 'Notes on Gesture', p. 54.

<sup>117</sup> Jacobs, *Framing Pictures*, p. 137.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132.

illusion that they have been extracted from the film itself. If the *tableaux vivants* in *Roberte* do not resemble photographs – except for the representation of Octave's death –, they exhibit the processes of preparation, rehearsal, and staging that fundamentally define the craft of the still photographer:

Déplaçant les accessoires, rapprochant les acteurs, décidant des regards, des gestes, des attitudes, selon les règles d'un langage du corps et de l'espace semblables à celles de la pantomime, il compose alors ce que la photographie composait quand l'instantané n'existait pas encore ou quand elle avait déjà conscience de ses risques: un tableau vivant.<sup>119</sup>

Similarly to Godard's *Passion*, the *tableaux vivants* in *Roberte* are shown in their process of elaboration and composition. All the phases of stoppage and movement, immobilisation and reaction are ritualised and acted in the sequences. Although the camera remains invisible, Zucca seeks to unveil the built nature of the image: 'Il est essentiel de conserver à l'image l'évidence de sa fabrication, afin d'être protégé des fausses vérités dont sa double nature peut se faire l'expression: maudit cinéma-vérité! Maudit naturalisme!'<sup>120</sup> Zucca suggests that any photographic or cinematic image is constituted of a double and inseparable nature, at once real and imaginary. Overcoming the distinction between documentary and fiction, two poles respectively personified by the Lumière brothers and Georges Méliès, Zucca points out the duality (or 'double-jeu')<sup>121</sup> of the photographic and cinematographic picture, which imposes a frame and a mise-en-scène on the represented event. For example, in the first shot of *Roberte*, the camera shows the decrepit façade of an *hôtel particulier* (specifically the Hôtel d'Albret), in which Octave and Roberte are supposed to live – then the camera moves through the seemingly abandoned entrance hall, crosses corridors and rooms which are too dilapidated to be liveable, and eventually arrives on the edge of a stairwell, freshly repainted in bright yellowish colours and illuminated by an artificial lighting effect [Fig. 20]. In this long take that

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<sup>119</sup> Pierre Zucca, 'La Photographie du plaisir', in *Images du cinéma. Photographies de plateau réalisées par Pierre Zucca* (Paris: Alain Moreau, 1980), p. 10.

<sup>120</sup> Klossowski and Zucca, *Roberte au cinéma*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

depicts a liminal and ambiguous space between ‘reality’ and ‘illusion’, the camera shows a room [Fig. 19] that is interestingly described in the screenplay as the workshop of a shutdown factory (the Hôtel d’Albret was occupied by artisans until the mid-1970s),<sup>122</sup> which is certainly not neutral for Klossowski who considers cinema as ‘un procédé industriel’.<sup>123</sup> In this shooting location, which has been partially refurbished for the purpose of the film, the characters get ready for their role. Antoine’s private tutor – playfully embodied by Zucca himself – falls down the stairs, brutally dismissed from his post, and immediately exits the field of vision – indeed, as the director of the film, Zucca needs to return to his place behind the camera. Later, the servant Justin (Michel Berto) sticks fake sideburns on his cheeks [Fig. 21], while Roberte tries different hats on in front of a mirror [Fig. 22], as if they were getting ready for appearing on stage.



Fig. 19-22. *Roberte*.

Crucially, the actors and actresses in the film, when they are not writers like Klossowski or Alfred Kern, are often filmmakers (Barbet Schroeder, Daniel Schmid, Jean-François Stévenin, and Juliet Berto) or even

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>123</sup> See Klossowski, ‘L’Indiscernable’, p. 185.

set designers (Max Berto). They embody characters who, like directors or film technicians, organise the action and coordinate the *mise-en-scène* in terms of scenography, choreography, and technical operations in a fictional world which is represented like a place of shooting. The terms used by Zucca to define his skills as a still photographer – ‘déplacer, arrêter les gestes, ordonner les regards, mettre en évidence ou en contradiction, créer des rapports, styliser en fait’<sup>124</sup> – eloquently describes the characters’ gestural operations. For example, in a *tableau vivant* dreamt by Antoine, two of his male friends named F. and X. (played by two actresses including Juliet Berto) devise a scenario to steal Roberte’s glove. As she enters the vestibule, a groom in a red costume clumsily handles a teapot and spills tea on her shoes. While two shoeshine boys start to clean them, F. and X. turn off the light and take their places in order to assault Roberte. Before the latter makes her entrance, Berto’s character supervises the preparation of the *tableau*. Silently and gently, she touches, manipulates, and immobilises the other characters, adjusting their attitudes, such as the position or the angle of their arms, suspending their gestures as if they were models [Fig. 23, 24]. They seem to rehearse the rituals of a secret ceremony. When Roberte appears, the *tableau* comes to life. While the models perfectly execute the scenario, Roberte is trapped in a chain of events that highlights the choreographed, almost mechanical quality of her behaviour and gestures. When the groom spills tea, she looks at her foot without reacting to the action. In the screenplay, it is mentioned that she is ‘indifférente à l’accident’.<sup>125</sup> Later on, when she gazes at herself in the mirror and waits for the boys to polish her shoes [Fig. 25], Zucca and Klossowski underline the automatism of her attitudes: ‘Machinalement, tout en se contemplant dans la glace, Roberte pose son pied taché sur le tabouret des cireurs.’<sup>126</sup> After turning the light off [Fig. 26], F. and X. immobilise Roberte by seizing her arms and feet. Like in the previous *tableaux* that punctuate the film,

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<sup>124</sup> Zucca, *Images du cinéma*, p. 11.

<sup>125</sup> Klossowski and Zucca, *Roberte au cinéma*, p. 55.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*

Roberte's body is paralysed by force. The suspension of her gestures turns out to be an act of violence.



Fig. 23-26. *Roberte*.

## 5. (Re)acting in the Frame of the Representation and Responding to the Common Use of Stereotypes

The notions of machine and automaton are central in Kossowski's narratives. In *La Révocation*, Octave plots erotic scenarios that are compared to 'machineries et machinations de fantasmés'.<sup>127</sup> Roberte criticises how her husband depicts her as an automaton, 'une infaillible mécanique dont [sa] volonté de résistance serait prisonnière',<sup>128</sup> trapped in a game which is 'minuté comme l'horlogerie d'une machine infernale'.<sup>129</sup> By acting like an automaton in a preconceived scenario, she becomes the main character of a

<sup>127</sup> Prieur, *Nuits blanches*, p. 52.

<sup>128</sup> Klossowski, *Les Lois de l'hospitalité*, p. 65.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

machination that neutralises her will. In the first flashback ('Impressions romaines'), that takes place in a Roman chapel in 1944, she is aware of performing a role and executing gestures that have been decided for her. Wearing a carnival costume, a purple cape and a black domino mask, she plays a character and executes instructions. As if in a spy film, she must collect hidden documents. In the novel, *Roberte* writes in her diary:

On savait que j'étais ici à cette heure, dans cette tenue, et je n'étais pas sûre qu'on ne surveillât mes gestes. [...] J'en étais là, le cœur battant à la pensée du geste que j'avais à exécuter, oubliant déjà tout ce que ce geste gardait de signification en dehors de la réussite ou de l'échec de mon coup de main.<sup>130</sup>

*Roberte* confesses her delight ('sensation délicieuse') at performing her part. Such a sensation of pleasure quickly evolves into apprehension ('l'appréhension glaçante d'être prise dans un engrenage').<sup>131</sup> In the film, she anxiously looks around, for fear of being caught. Emanating from the obscurity of the confessional, a male voice warns her: 'N'oubliez pas votre rôle... qui est de vous produire avec ou sans témoin.' The notions of acting, performance, and role underline the theatricality of Zucca's *mise-en-scène*. As Françoise Levailant writes, '[l]e personnage de *Roberte* est conçu comme quelqu'un qui réagit à une circonstance, en fonction de choses déjà connues ou évolutives.'<sup>132</sup> More than in the drawings, Morin-Sinclair's performance in *Roberte* renders the spontaneous reactions and 'effets "réactifs"',<sup>133</sup> which modulate the character's behaviour, perceptible.

From this perspective, the character of *Roberte* can be considered as an allegory that problematises the Western conception of the image, based on the paradoxical union of the unique and the reproducible.<sup>134</sup> According to Zucca, '*Roberte* doit se regarder comme doit se regarder toute image. "Fait" ambigu et contradictoire, *Roberte* ne peut être mise au jour que sous la contrainte rigoureuse d'un "cadre" qui lui échappe: l'image d'une femme

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>132</sup> Françoise Levailant, 'Des Moments suspendus. Aspects de la temporalité dans l'œuvre dessinée de Pierre Klossowski', in *Traversées de Pierre Klossowski*, ed. by Laurent Jenny and Andreas Pfersmann (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1999), p. 129.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> See Giorgio Agamben, 'Klossowski et la question de l'image', *Europe*, 1034-35 (2015), 59-60 (p. 59).

nommée Roberte, née de l'imagination d'Octave.<sup>135</sup> On the one hand, Octave projects onto Roberte's physiognomy the image of a fictional Roberte. She is framed in scenarios that obsessively reproduce the same schemas with slight variations. On the other hand, because she is a singular living being, Roberte experiences these situations in an idiosyncratic way. 'What makes every individual a "singular case" or an "idiosyncrasy" is the unique constellation of impulses of which it is constituted,' Smith explains.<sup>136</sup> The turmoil of her gestures unveils the contradiction between the incoherence of her impulsive life and the coercive frame in which she has to perform:

C'est donc dans *la contradiction* entre l'incohérence de Roberte – sa vie –, et sa cohérence – sa qualité de fiction de la pensée d'Octave –, que Roberte s'éprouve en tant qu'être vivant et se manifeste dans la plénitude de ses représentations.<sup>137</sup>

Revealing the tension between the stereotypical code of gestures and the impulsiveness of the body, the *tableaux vivants* show how life manifests itself in the frame of the representation (i.e. the *tableau*).

In this sense, Roberte's character in Zucca's film reveals the disjunction between stereotypes that convey conventional representations of women in Western culture, and the character's singular way of experiencing these stereotypical situations, through the actress's performance. According to Richard Dyer, stereotypes provide a codified vision of the world and society by creating categories 'grounded in social power'.<sup>138</sup> In Klossowski's thinking, stereotypes are the remains of simulacra that, emptied of their fantasmatic content, enter into the common code of representation and expression: 'Les stéréotypes ne sont que les résidus de simulacres phantasmatiques tombés dans l'usage courant, abandonnés à une interprétation commune.'<sup>139</sup> Institutionalised, schematic, and customary, they

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<sup>135</sup> Klossowski and Zucca, *Roberte au cinéma*, p. 7.

<sup>136</sup> Smith, 'Klossowski's Reading of Nietzsche', p. 9.

<sup>137</sup> Pierre Zucca, 'Autour de la notion de signe unique', in *ça cinéma 14* (Paris: Albatros, [n.d.]), p. 5.

<sup>138</sup> Richard Dyer, 'The Role of Stereotypes', in *Media Studies: A Reader*, ed. by Paul Marris and Sue Thornham, 2nd edn (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), p. 12.

<sup>139</sup> Klossowski, *Tableaux vivants*, p. 132.

belong to '[...] "the code of everyday signs" – which express the gregarious aspect of lived experience in a form already schematized by the habitual usages of feeling and thought (the herd)'.<sup>140</sup> Styles are formed in response to the common use of stereotypes. Klossowski develops 'une science des stéréotypes'<sup>141</sup> both in his literary and visual styles of expression. He attempts to bring out the incongruity of lived experience that stereotypes institutionally conceal and censor. In order to do this, he exacerbates stereotypes to excessiveness. Drawing on a large repertoire of stereotypical gestures (reminiscent of silent cinema, Renaissance painting, nineteenth-century academic painting, or early twentieth-century popular illustrations), Klossowski problematizes the conventional representation of women in society and inscribes it in the long-term memory of art history. By critically interrogating the obsessive appropriation of the female body by the male gaze, he emphasizes and ritualizes the violence that is usually neutralized in the academic representation of the nude.<sup>142</sup> As Spira explains about his drawings,

[h]e unveils the abuse, rape, kidnapping, assault and deception that form part of the collective unconscious at the heart of the European tradition. Underlining their absurdity and ridiculousness, his scenes and situations are mostly borrowed from elsewhere. Like the authors of Greek comedy, he chose theatrical stereotypes, heightened against a vague and undefined backdrop, to demonstrate exemplary human attributes.<sup>143</sup>

The revival of ancient stereotypes in Klossowski's work evokes Warburg's vision of art history, which stresses the constant resurgence of immemorial and ritualized gestures from Antiquity to present times. In the *Mnemosyne Atlas* that juxtaposes heterogeneous reproductions of Renaissance paintings, classical Greek sculptures, and news photographs, Warburg observes 'the continuity of the same gestures, the same human attitudes, and the same intensity of feeling throughout history'.<sup>144</sup> His concept

<sup>140</sup> Smith, 'Klossowski's Reading of Nietzsche', p. 16.

<sup>141</sup> Klossowski, 'Protase et apodose', p. 16.

<sup>142</sup> See Pierre Klossowski, 'Decadence of the Nude/La Décadence du nu', in *Decadence of the Nude/La Décadence du nu*, ed. by Wilson, pp. 103-123.

<sup>143</sup> Spira, 'A Pantomime of Spirits', p. 76.

<sup>144</sup> Raoul Ruiz, *Poetics of Cinema*, trans. by Carlos Morreo (Paris: Dis voir, 2005), p. 51.

of *Pathosformel* designates the primitive affective forms ('formes affectives primitives')<sup>145</sup> that symptomatically resurface in the expression of gestures and inhabit the body with an impersonal and anachronistic force that challenges the concept of identity: 'Les formules de pathos sont les symptômes visibles – figurés – d'un temps psychique irréductible à la simple trame de péripéties anecdotiques.'<sup>146</sup> According to Raoul Ruiz, while echoing the Nietzschean concept of the eternal return, the *dispositif* of *tableau vivant* in Klossowski's work puts Warburg's ideas into practice. The models do not simply imitate a painting, but reincarnate the gestures of the models who initially posed for the painter.<sup>147</sup> The tremor of gestures in the *tableaux vivants* – which symptomatically render the intensity of the *Pathosformel* apparent – betray a conflict between impulses and codes, or to use Georges Didi-Huberman's terms, between 'des *frayages* pulsionnels et des *formules* symboliques'.<sup>148</sup>

According to Klossowski, by spreading mass-produced stereotypes that are consumed by spectators to the point of permeating their manner of living and perceiving reality, cinema breaks with the traditional notion of style, which in art reveals the singular sensitivity of the artist or of a small group of artists in response to the rules of representation of a society.<sup>149</sup> As an 'instrument d'analyse',<sup>150</sup> cinema can overcome this industrial phenomenon on the condition that it critically examines the use of stereotypes, notably those forging the representation of women in society. In her seminal essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' (1975), Laura Mulvey eloquently demonstrates how 'the unconscious of patriarchal society' moulds the image of women in cinema, more particularly in Hollywood cinema.<sup>151</sup> The female body, which is highlighted in its sexual difference (the lack of penis), causes

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<sup>145</sup> Didi-Huberman, *L'Image survivante*, p. 212.

<sup>146</sup> Eric Van Essche, 'Le Geste survivant. Mouvements de mémoire et mémoires en mouvement chez Georges Didi-Huberman', *DITS*, 12 (2009), 50-65 (p. 63).

<sup>147</sup> See Ruiz, *Poetics of Cinema*, p. 51.

<sup>148</sup> Didi-Huberman, *L'Image survivante*, p. 234.

<sup>149</sup> See Klossowski, 'Questions aux romanciers', pp. 97-98.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>151</sup> Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema', in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, ed. by Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford UP, 1999), p. 833.

within the male unconscious a castration complex, that in Hollywood cinema (which mostly embraces the male point of view) is overcome through the sadistic and/or fetishist representation of women. The fetishisation of the woman's image (which is inherent to the cult of the star) generates stereotypes that not only turn her into an object, but also become the repository of male fantasies.<sup>152</sup>

In *Roberte*, Zucca reproduces and deconstructs these mechanisms of representation. In the sequence of the 'Impressions Romaines', although the mise-en-scène stresses the violence of the male gaze, the director also highlights the heroine's subjectivity. While *Roberte* takes possession of secret documents concealed in the tabernacle of the chapel, the camera slowly gets nearer to Vittorio who, dressed like a Swiss Guard, insistently watches her from the back of the nave. *Roberte* intentionally drops the chalice in order to provoke him. Punishing her for this sacrilege, the Swiss Guard removes her domino mask and purple cape and, while firmly holding her by the wrists, lights her corset and her naked flesh with a torch [Fig. 27].

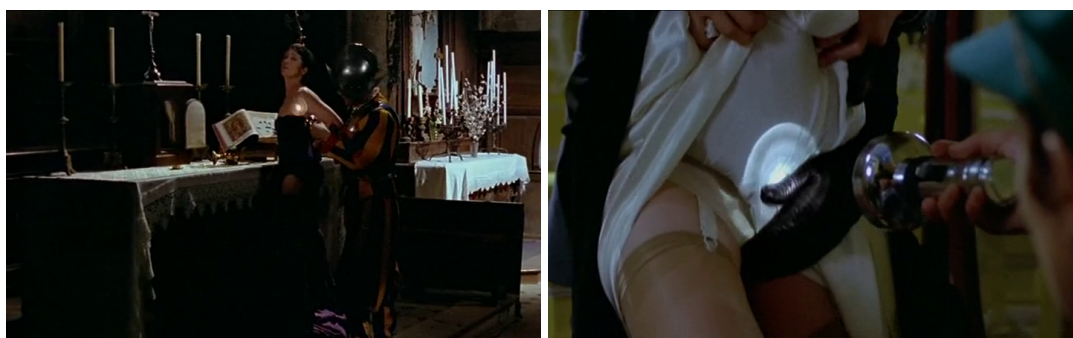


Fig. 27, 28. *Roberte*

The *tableau vivant* ambiguously highlights the conflict between *Roberte*'s agency and the male power that wants to direct her gestures and control her body, her image, and her narrative by force. 'Maintenue par le poignet, ROBERTE est aussi immobile qu'une statue,'<sup>153</sup> at once humiliated by a representative of the Catholic authority and subjected to his scopophilia. If the motif of the torch appears to be a metaphor for the complicity between

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<sup>152</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 840.

<sup>153</sup> Klossowski and Zucca, *Roberte au cinéma*, p. 30.

the mechanical eye of the camera and the male gaze, the camera starts to move backward when Vittorio lights Roberte's body, and thus distances itself from the Swiss Guard's viewpoint. Similarly, in the *tableau vivant* depicting Roberte's aggression by F. and X., although the camera follows the movement of the torch that slides along her body, the androgyny of the aggressors introduces an anomaly in the normative schema of sexual differences [Fig. 28].<sup>154</sup>



Fig. 29-32. *Roberte*.

In destabilising binary gender representations, Zucca and Klossowski distort the common use of stereotypes. Their ‘vision “disproportionnelle”’<sup>155</sup> imbues the code of everyday signs with fantasmatic apparitions. According to Elizabeth Cowie, fantasy is an imagined and distorted ‘mise en scène of desire’.<sup>156</sup> While in his graphic work Klossowski exaggerates the imbalance of proportions and distorts the reproduction of stereotypes, Zucca’s camera

<sup>154</sup> Klossowski discusses the Sadean theme of androgyny in the essay ‘Le Philosophe Scélérat’ (1967). See Pierre Klossowski, *Sade mon prochain; précédé de Le Philosophe scélérat* (Paris: Seuil, 2002).

<sup>155</sup> Klossowski, ‘Protase et Apodose’, p. 9.

<sup>156</sup> Elizabeth Cowie, *Representing the woman. Cinema and Psychoanalysis* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), p. 133.

reproduces reality with a 'regard gullivérien',<sup>157</sup> changing proportions and isolating parts of the body. In *Roberte*, the mechanical effect of amplification tends to codify gestures in an incongruous manner. For example, when Octave and Antoine examine a sequence of black-and-white photographs representing a mundane episode of Roberte's public life, Octave shows a particular interest for the manner that she puts on her leather glove – he ambiguously reverses the order of the pictures, giving the deceptive impression that she removes the glove [Fig. 29-32]. 'Sa main te semble naturelle... pour y glisser un gant?', the old man asks, attributing a perverse intention to this apparently spontaneous and insignificant gesture. Influenced by Octave's questions, Antoine notes the incongruous position of the thumb, without being able to explain the origin of his trouble. In *La Révocation*, Roberte's thumb is sexually connoted. When she describes the effect of sexual pleasure on her body, Roberte writes that '[son] attribut se développa jusqu'à atteindre l'épaisseur de [son] pouce'.<sup>158</sup> The conventional term 'attribut' is a 'stéréotype de la syntaxe'<sup>159</sup> that is used by Klossowski to pinpoint the incongruous proportion of Roberte's clitoris, which protrudes like a penis. The metaphor generates an effect of 'disproportion entre l'incongruité phantasmatique et sa localisation dans les termes stéréotypés qui l'exhibent sous prétexte de l'escamoter'.<sup>160</sup> The syntactical stereotype covers and uncovers the intensity of the fantasy in the text, in the same way that the glove, which circulates from hand to hand in the film, exchanged and traded like a fetish, covers and uncovers her palm and thumb. This codified gesture, often filmed in close-up, takes a fantasmatic dimension in the *tableaux vivants* [Fig. 33 – the parallel bars]. In Antoine's dream, Roberte offers her hand to X. who, having removed the glove, lights her naked palm and her erect thumb with the torch [Fig. 34].

<sup>157</sup> Klossowski, 'L'Indiscernable', p. 185.

<sup>158</sup> Klossowski, *Les Lois de l'hospitalité*, p. 69.

<sup>159</sup> See Klossowski, 'Protase et apodose', pp. 15-20.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

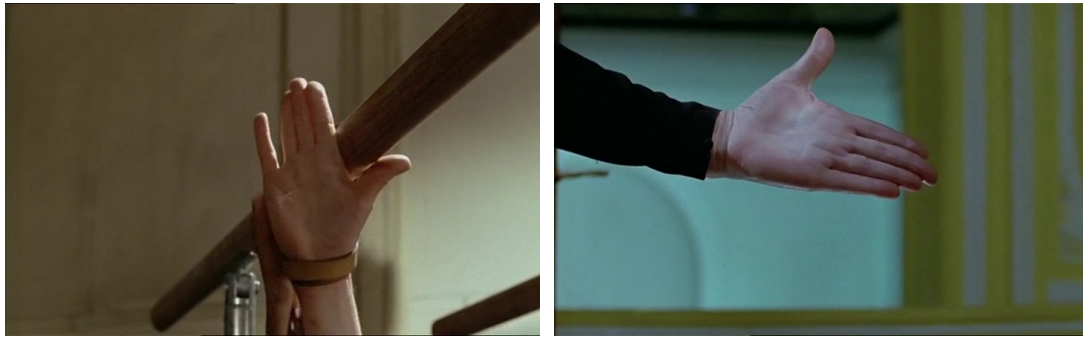


Fig. 33, 34. *Roberte*.

Furthermore, the camera amplifies reflexes, reactions, and small movements, which escape codification, giving unexpected proportion to the characters' slightest gestures. In 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', which Klossowski translated into French in 1936, Benjamin conceptualises the 'optical unconscious' of the camera in a way that evokes the idea of the disproportionate vision. According to Benjamin, the medium of cinema gives access to the unconscious of gestures by showing, more precisely than in real life, their most imperceptible details, for example thanks to the technological process of enlargement:

S'il n'y a rien que d'ordinaire au fait de se rendre compte, d'une manière plus ou moins sommaire, de la démarche d'un homme, on ne sait encore rien de son maintien dans la fraction de seconde d'une enjambée. Le geste de saisir le briquet ou la cuiller nous est-il aussi conscient que familier, nous ne savons néanmoins rien de ce qui se passe entre la main et le métal, sans parler même des fluctuations dont ce processus inconnu peut être susceptible en raison de nos diverses dispositions psychiques. C'est ici qu'intervient la caméra avec tous ses moyens auxiliaires, ses chutes et ses ascensions, ses interruptions et ses isolements, ses extensions et ses accélérations, ses agrandissements et ses rapetissements. C'est elle qui nous initie à l'inconscient optique comme la psychanalyse à l'inconscient pulsionnel.<sup>161</sup>

By capturing the split second of a stride, or the manner that an individual grasps a lighter, the camera magnifies minuscule gestural variations and fluctuations. When Octave and Antoine scrutinise *Roberte's* photographs, Zucca highlights the corporeal presence of the teenager, who sits in the foreground of the shot [Fig. 35, 36]. While holding his right wrist, his left hand and fingers gradually impart nervous movements and show signs of agitation. Do these minute gestures betray Antoine's reaction to the vision of

<sup>161</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'L'Œuvre d'art à l'époque de sa reproduction mécanisée', trans. by Pierre Klossowski, *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, 5.1. (1936), 40-68 (p. 60).

Roberte? Or do they reveal the actor's malaise in front of the camera? The scene emphasises the difference between photography that dissects and freezes each phase of gesture (and allows the viewer to examine them) and cinema that renders the excess of impulsive gestures perceptible.



Fig. 35, 36. *Roberte*

Finally, imagination exaggerates the characters' experiences of the actions. By giving a fragmented rendering of reality and reproducing operations of the unconscious in the form of flashbacks or dream sequences, the discontinuity of the sequences mirrors the 'discontinuité morale' of Roberte's attitudes and behaviour.<sup>162</sup> Narrated in flashback, the sequence of the parallel bars does not consist in the accurate reproduction of the experience, but rather in an imaginary evocation:

La récapitulation que s'accorde Roberte n'a rien à voir avec la véracité que revendique le souvenir; il ne s'agit pas ici de faire vrai, par la production d'un document, mais de donner libre cours à l'imagination, maîtresse de l'incohérence et de la disproportion.<sup>163</sup>

Symptomatically, the maniac appears from all quarters of the Palais-Royal, like a demonic presence who inhabits Roberte's imagination. He waits for her to follow him into the obscurity of a gallery. Her body is tense, and the fingers of her right hand are opened wide. After a moment of hesitation, she deliberately follows the maniac, as if she knew what was going to happen. Morin-Sinclair, who performed the sequence twice before Zucca's camera in 1975 and 1977, shares the character's memory of the incident. When she

<sup>162</sup> See Klossowski, 'L'Indiscernable', p. 186.

<sup>163</sup> Jean Decottignies, *Pierre Klossowski: biographie d'un monomane* (Villeneuve-d'Ascq: Presses universitaires du Septentrion, 1997), p. 72.

strolls under the arches of the Palais Royal, her hesitating gait is imbued with a sensation of *déjà-vu* (or rather *déjà vécu*). The mise-en-scène renders a disproportionate vision of the event, while emphasising the discrepancy between stereotypes and life, 'en accentuant encore le décalage entre les stéréotypes et la réalité vécue, interprétée individuellement',<sup>164</sup> through the actress's performance.

The representation of women in Klossowski's controversial work has been studied in contrasting ways. In her book *Les Châteaux d'eros*, Anne-Marie Dardigna discusses the misogynistic dimension of Klossowski's work, especially in *Les Lois de l'hospitalité*, in which Roberte is subjected to fantasies of male domination as well as to the violence of the male gaze:

Mais Roberte se tait, elle n'est pas capable de résister au déferlement libidinal provoqué par Octave. Son désir de femme n'est rien d'autre qu'une réponse à celui de l'homme qui la désire, et sa volonté, sur laquelle elle comptait, se révèle souterrainement travaillée par ce qu'elle voulait cacher, exactement symétrique de ce qu'Octave, lui, avait le courage et le mérite d'écrire...<sup>165</sup>

While Dardigna points out the misogynist aspect of Klossowski's writing and art in which '*le corps de la femme joue le rôle de lieu privilégié pour l'attentat*',<sup>166</sup> other scholars and critics – as highlighted in this section – posit that Klossowski is a writer and artist who recycles stereotypes of sexual violence in critical, self-reflexive, ironic, and parodic ways. As James explains,

[o]n one level it is arguable that he does reproduce traditional schema of the reification of the female body and its appropriation by a violent desire. Yet in exaggerating these schema, in self-consciously playing upon them, his writing articulates a suspension of the very movement of violence itself.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Klossowski, 'Questions aux romanciers', p. 98.

<sup>165</sup> Dardigna, *Les Châteaux d'Eros ou Les Infortunes du sexe des femmes*, p. 14.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., p. 23. (emphasis in original)

<sup>167</sup> James, *Pierre Klossowski*, p. 217.

From a similar perspective, Zucca argues that 'la démarche de Klossowski est une méthode critique'.<sup>168</sup> The director describes his own mise-en-scène as 'un jeu sur la représentation', which parodies and distorts the conventions of a traditional 'bourgeois' narrative in an uncanny way.<sup>169</sup> Yet, by analysing Klossowski and Zucca's approach to film performance from a post-Nietzschean perspective, the following section will reveal how the performance of gesture in the staged sexual acts of *Roberte* blurs the line between parody and lived experience in a highly problematic way. Unlike literature and visual arts such as painting, the practice of cinema relies on the performance of actors and actresses. As gesture is endured by the performer's body, its performance in cinema raises ethical questions that will be addressed at the end of this chapter, in particular with regard to the female performer's subjection to coercive sexual acts performed by the male actors.

## 6. Performance and the Mystery of Existence

From the mid-1960s, Klossowski develops a particular interest in film performance. He plays the role of the cynical merchant in Bresson's *Au hasard Balthazar*, and acts in several of François Weyergans's short and long feature films between 1967 and 1972. In the novel *Jeune Fille*, Anne Wiazemsky, who embodies Marie in Bresson's film, recounts her experience during the shooting and describes Klossowski's difficulties in complying with the director's demands:

Comme toujours, Robert Bresson avait une idée très précise de ce qu'il souhaitait et, comme toujours, il en fit d'abord la démonstration à Pierre Klossowski. Celui-ci devait dans un seul mouvement et en se tenant bien droit atteindre puis ouvrir la porte. Or, malgré son extraordinaire bonne volonté, il n'y parvenait pas. Quoi qu'il fasse, il avançait un peu en biais, à la façon d'un crabe. Les prises se succédaient et Robert Bresson s'énervait, devenait agressif. 'Mais qu'est-ce que c'est que cette démarche ridicule? Est-ce que je marche comme ça, moi? Redressez-vous, à la fin!'<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Zucca, Bonnet, Carcassonne, and Fieschi, 'Roberte. Entretien avec Pierre Zucca', p. 39.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Anne Wiazemsky, *Jeune Fille* (Paris: Gallimard, 2007), p. 203.

Unable to move his body according to Bresson's instructions, Klossowski has to repeat the action until he correctly performs the gestures of his character. As discussed in Chapter 1, Bresson seeks to prevent his models from overthinking their words and gestures in order to convey the 'automatism' of human behaviour: 'I ask that the meaning comes from them, from their own impulse, in the moment when [...] I let them loose in the world of the film.'<sup>171</sup> Klossowski certainly shares Bresson's preoccupation for the impulsivity of life and spontaneity, as well as the desire to grasp the model's idiosyncrasy or 'substance',<sup>172</sup> defined by Keith Reader as 'something like the kernel of his or her being, akin to Christian conceptions of the uniqueness of the individual soul'.<sup>173</sup> However, while Bresson develops a method of directing opposite to theatre, Klossowski's approach to acting is theatrical. Indeed, he explores a liminal space where simulation and spontaneity, performance and life intertwine. In the 1950s, Klossowski used to rehearse *Roberte ce soir* with his wife Morin-Sinclair and friends Georges Peros and Michel Butor, in line with the eighteenth-century tradition of the *théâtre de société*. In a letter addressed to Klossowski, Butor remembers the unbearable sensation of malaise that permeated the rehearsals:

Inévitablement à un moment ou à un autre une gêne parfois intolérable s'emparait de nous; et nous savions bien que c'était l'enjeu même de l'affaire, le projet de représentation en théâtre de société s'éloignant de plus en plus dans un lointain vague. C'est avec d'autres moyens que vous avez poursuivi l'expérience. Mais vous teniez à continuer encore quelques répliques jusqu'à ce que, n'en pouvant plus, l'un ou l'autre se mettait à partir d'un fou rire qui nous gagnait tous.<sup>174</sup>

Their hysterical laughter is triggered by Klossowski's style, that, according to Agamben, lies on the verge of the laughable ('au bord du risible'),<sup>175</sup> and consciously uses comedy despite the apparent seriousness of the prose. The

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<sup>171</sup> Robert Bresson, 'To Create Life without Copying It', *Bresson on Bresson. Interviews 1943-1983*, ed. by Mylène Bresson, trans. by Anna Moschovakis (New York: New York Review Books, 2016), p. 169.

<sup>172</sup> Bresson, *Notes sur le cinématographe*, p. 41.

<sup>173</sup> Keith Reader, *Robert Bresson* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 129.

<sup>174</sup> Michel Butor, 'Souvenirs sur le théâtre de société', in *Pierre Klossowski*, ed. by Andréas Pfersmann (Paris: Centre Georges-Pompidou, 1985), p. 28.

<sup>175</sup> Giorgio Agamben and Thierry Tremblay, 'Un auteur messianique. Entretien avec Giorgio Agamben', *Europe*, 1034-35 (2015), 9-11 (p. 10).

malaise described by Butor indicates the nervousness of the performers who spontaneously express their embarrassment toward the situations within the narrative. Comparing *Roberte* with the ‘domestic eroticism’ of Andy Warhol’s amateur early films, the curator and art critic Catherine Millet pinpoints that ‘[t]his [impression of amateurism] is largely due to the touching awkwardness of the non-professional actors and a makeshift set’.<sup>176</sup> Simulation, falsity, exaggeration, theatricality, clumsiness, and malaise define the model of performance in Zucca’s film. Far from his austere performance in *Au hasard Balthazar*, Klossowski excessively accentuates the tone of his voice and the expressivity of his gestures.

Klossowski’s research on performance is profoundly indebted to Nietzsche’s philosophy. Translator of *The Gay Science* (1882), the writer has published several articles and essays on Nietzsche since the 1930s, including the well-known monograph *Nietzsche et le cercle vicieux* (1969). Although James and Smith have eloquently dissected and enlightened his ‘Post-Nietzschean thinking of the body’,<sup>177</sup> they have not specifically addressed the question of acting. In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche discusses the ‘problem of the actor’ several times, especially in the aphorism 361. The German philosopher defines acting in those terms:

La fausseté en bonne conscience; le plaisir à la simulation explosant comme puissance, refoulant le soi-disant ‘caractère’, le submergeant parfois jusqu’à l’éteindre; l’intérieur désir de prendre un masque et d’entrer dans un rôle, dans une *apparence*; un excédent de facultés d’adaptation de toutes sortes, qui ne savent plus se satisfaire à servir l’immédiate stricte utilité: tout cela ne constitue peut-être *pas uniquement* l’acteur en soi?<sup>178</sup>

Klossowski comments on this passage in the article ‘Nietzsche, le polythéisme et la parodie’, discussing the concept of existence through the notions of role and acting.<sup>179</sup> First of all, a role not only implies falsity and simulation, but also casts doubt on any stable identity. A role, which is a role

<sup>176</sup> Catherine Millet, ‘Klossowski our Neighbour’, in *Pierre Klossowski*, ed. by Spira and Wilson, p. 55.

<sup>177</sup> Ian James, ‘Klossowski, Nietzsche and the Fortuitous Body’, *Romance Studies*, 19.1 (2001), 59-70 (p. 61); see also Smith, ‘Klossowski’s Reading of Nietzsche’, 8-21.

<sup>178</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Le Gai Savoir*, trans. by Pierre Klossowski (Paris: Le club français du livre, 1965), p. 413.

<sup>179</sup> Pierre Klossowski, ‘Nietzsche, le polythéisme et la parodie’, *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, 63.2-3 (1958), 325-48.

among many others, either fortuitous or chosen, inscribes the possibility of a difference in the body:

[...] La simulation n'est pas seulement un moyen, mais bien une puissance, donc [...] il y a *irruption* de quelque chose d'incompatible avec le soi-disant caractère et, de ce fait, une remise en question de ce que l'on est dans une situation déterminée par l'indéterminable même.<sup>180</sup>

While major acting theoreticians of the twentieth century postulate 'a stable locus of selfhood' in performance,<sup>181</sup> Nietzsche's concept of the actor challenges the fiction of identity. For example, according to Philip Auslander, '[Stanislavski] insists on the need for logic, coherence, and unity – "the unbroken line" – in acting.'<sup>182</sup> Besides, studies in film performance often point out the consistency of the great actors and actresses' gestures from one film to another, to such an extent that they mould the perception of their characters according to their own originality, giving stability and coherence to their persona despite the variety of their roles.<sup>183</sup> As Klossowski sees it,

[...] la difficulté pour un cinéaste qui concrétise sa propre imagination au gré d'interprètes déjà consacrés par leur don de composition physiologique, tient au fait que chaque artiste, fût-il des plus impressionnants, tend à répéter ses propres procédés qu'il juge personnellement les plus efficaces dans des rôles toujours variables: soit à imposer au spectateur son originalité propre.<sup>184</sup>

According to Klevan, in film '[c]haracter and performer are inextricably intertwined; they coalesce', while '[t]he separation of character and performer is explicitly part of theatrical expression'.<sup>185</sup> Yet Youri Lotman suggests the possibility of a tension, even a conflict between the character and the film actor or actress: 'La signification d'un personnage de cinéma se compose du rapport (concordance, conflit, lutte, écart) entre ces deux organisations

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<sup>180</sup> Ibid., p. 342.

<sup>181</sup> David Kornhaber, "'The Art of Putting Oneself on Stage before Oneself': Theatre, Selfhood, and Nietzsche's Epistemology of the Actor', *Theatre Research International*, 36.3 (2011), 240-253 (p. 242).

<sup>182</sup> Philip Auslander, *From Acting to Performance. Essays in Modernism and Postmodernism* (New York, London: Routledge, 1997), p. 30.

<sup>183</sup> See Luc Moullet, *Politique des acteurs* (Paris: Ed. De l'Etoile, Cahiers du cinéma, 1993). Focusing on the gestural style of several major Hollywood stars, Luc Moullet analyses the stylistic features of Cary Grant's gestures and notices among other examples his singular way of bending or raising his finger.

<sup>184</sup> Klossowski, 'Simuler le simulateur', p. 84.

<sup>185</sup> Andrew Klevan, *Film Performance. From Achievement to Appreciation* (London: Wallflower, 2005), p. 4.

sémantiques distinctes.<sup>186</sup> When actors or actresses play against type, like Seyrig in *Jeanne Dielman* (see Chapter 2), they create an interval between their character and their conventional image by changing their habit of acting. For example, in *Vincent mit l'âne dans un pré*, starring Michel Bouquet and Bernadette Laffont, Zucca succeeds in revealing the characters' singularity by highlighting the difference, or even the disjunction between the characters' idiosyncrasy and the actors and actresses' persona:

Selon les rôles qu'il confiait ici à ses acteurs, Zucca s'était prescrit de leur faire accentuer une différence par rapport à des interprétations antérieures, de telle sorte que le personnage à figurer s'élaborât comme à contresens d'une représentation conventionnelle – celle-là même que le public se fait une fois pour toute de la physionomie de tel ou tel acteur.<sup>187</sup>

The character's singularity can be disclosed by an apparently unwilling gesture ('quelque geste spontané')<sup>188</sup> that would not be anticipated by the actor or actress, but suggested or provoked by the filmmaker.

Klossowski moulds Roberte's character like an actress who simultaneously plays opposing roles. She acts as the substitute mother of a teenager who is not hers, as an austere woman of power working in a patriarchal society, and as a wife torn between her will to emancipate herself and her husband's will to control her sexual adventures and fantasies. The possibility of changing masks calls her identity into question. Deleuze explains that '[t]oute l'œuvre de Klossowski tend vers un but unique: assurer la perte de l'identité personnelle, dissoudre le moi, c'est le splendide trophée que les personnages de Klossowski rapportent d'un voyage au bord de la folie'.<sup>189</sup> Roberte endures ordeals that exacerbate the contradictions between her different roles, to the point of dissolving her sense of self. Her gestures manifest a lack of self-coherence. For example, during a session with the censorship board, Roberte advocates the ban of Octave's manuscript *Roberte ce soir* which portrays her in a scandalous way. With eloquent

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<sup>186</sup> Iouri Lotman, 'Le Problème de l'acteur de cinéma', in *Sémiotique et esthétique du cinéma*, trans. by Sabine Breuillard (Paris: Editions sociales, 1977), p. 158.

<sup>187</sup> Klossowski, 'Simuler le simulateur', p. 84.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Deleuze, *Logique du sens*, p. 329.

gestures, she points out the incriminating passages with a red pencil before sensuously caressing the pencil in a suggestive way [Fig. 37, 38].



Fig. 37, 38. *Roberte*

Morin-Sinclair finds herself in the same position as that of her character, performing different roles in situations (especially the *tableaux vivants*) that are imposed to her. The actress's reactions in the environment of shooting and in fictional situations that contrast with her own life are ambiguous and unpredictable:

Compter sur les réactions – non point concertées d'une actrice – mais imprévisibles du 'modèle' au moment du tournage – donc sur la part de résistance ou de complaisance que le modèle laisserait transparaître dans les séquences pénibles ou scabreuses pour autant que sa propre 'expérience' y affleurerait.<sup>190</sup>

To imagine the sequence of the 'parallel bars', Klossowski very loosely drew his inspiration from an incident that Morin-Sinclair actually experienced. One day, while going to her workplace located at the Palais Royal, a man approached her on the rear platform of the bus, touched her hand, and, when she tried to avoid him, followed her inside the bus. However, unlike the maniac in the film, the man never sat down near her and did not follow her in the galleries of the Palais-Royal. When Morin-Sinclair acted the scene, she could thus feel the discontinuity between her fictitious role and the memory of her own experience, as she explains in Fleischer's documentary *Pierre Klossowski, un écrivain en images* (1996). It is this ambiguous and simultaneous relation of resemblance and distance between the 'real' person of Morin-Sinclair and *Roberte's* fictitious roles that Klossowski attempts to

<sup>190</sup> Klossowski, 'L'Indiscernable', p. 186.

stage in the film. By highlighting the multiplicity of roles and identities in the same physiognomy through exaggerated effects of theatricality, Klossowski hopes to reveal the bodily manifestation of existence in Roberte/Morin-Sinclair's gestures.

Expanding on Nietzsche's aphorism, Klossowski argues that a role is a simulacrum that manifests a possibility of being and, for that reason, unveils the fortuity of existence. A role reveals existence through the actor or actress's physiognomy:

[...] Ce qui se traduit par cet excédent de facultés d'adaptation à un rôle, c'est l'existence même. L'existence sans but, l'existence qui se suffit à elle-même. Mais encore une fois, revenons au premier mot: *la fausseté en bonne conscience*. Voilà de nouveau la notion de *l'erreur voulue*. *L'erreur voulue*, sous la raison même du simulacre rend compte de l'existence dont l'essence même est la vérité qui se dérobe, la vérité qui se refuse. *L'existence cherche une physionomie pour se révéler; l'acteur en est le truchement.*<sup>191</sup>

As James explains, Klossowski's Post-Nietzschean thinking postulates the embodiment of existence. Klossowski distinguishes the proper body ('le corps propre') and the fortuitous body ('le corps fortuit'). The proper body gives the illusion of a cohesive and stable self, while existence is 'an ungraspable flux or becoming, a becoming without end, without meaning or purpose'.<sup>192</sup> The proper body filters through consciousness and language the random, impersonal, and meaningless impulses of the fortuitous body, which is abstract, invisible, and chaotic. The linguistic code gives 'a fallacious interpretation of the random drives which constitute bodily existence'.<sup>193</sup> In acting, the simulation of a role implies a process of falsification ('l'erreur voulue') that at once conceals and reveals the incoherence of existence, in the sense that a role – apparently stable and coherent – indicates a possibility of difference and multiplicity within the individual. As Deleuze puts it, '[l]e moi dissous s'ouvre à des séries de rôles, parce qu'il fait monter une

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<sup>191</sup> Klossowski, 'Nietzsche, le polythéisme et la parodie', p. 342.

<sup>192</sup> James, 'Klossowski, Nietzsche and the Fortuitous Body', p. 63.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid., p. 64.

intensité qui comprend déjà la différence en soi, l'inégal en soi, et qui pénètre toutes les autres, à travers et dans les corps multiples.<sup>194</sup>

Drawing on Klossowski and Nietzsche to analyse Philippe Grandjeu's cinema, Chamarette argues that the fortuitous body 'cannot take an embodied corporeal form in the shape of human bodies',<sup>195</sup> and thus cannot be represented as such in a film. The chaos of impulses is by definition incommunicable and non-representable. Yet Klossowski seeks to grasp the ungraspable. By introducing a contradiction in the apparent self-coherence of the body and by dissolving identity, he hopes to see and feel, through the simulacrum of the actor or actress's gesture, the embodied manifestation of existence. As he argues, gestures indicate the passage from the chaotic life of impulses to meaning, – and to paraphrase Deleuze<sup>196</sup> – from intensity to intentionality:

De même que le masque cache une absence de physionomie déterminée, donc recouvre le Chaos, la richesse du Chaos, de même *le geste qui accompagne le masque*, le geste *histrionnesque*, est en étroit rapport avec la désignation de l'émotion vécue, avant qu'elle ne soit signifiée par la parole: geste improvisé, en soi dépourvu de sens, mais simulateur et donc *interprétable*, il signale la démarcation à peine perceptible où *les impulsions hésitent encore à se prêter à une identification quelconque, là où la nécessité qui s'ignore paraît arbitraire, avant de recevoir une signification extérieurement nécessaire.*<sup>197</sup>

The improvised, unwilled, and spontaneous gesture, which is first meaningless, simulates impulses that, once interpreted, are charged with meaning.

Through the simulation of Roberte's gestures, the ungraspable and impossible representation of the vision (or *phantasme*) that originates from the obscurity of the fortuitous body becomes palpable. Klossowski writes about the shooting of *Roberte*: 'Ainsi il me fut donné de vivre la transition de l'in vraisemblable vision à la palpable apparence de l'impossible.'<sup>198</sup> Although impulses remain indiscernible, they manifest in the actress's corporeal

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<sup>194</sup> Deleuze, *Logique du sens*, p. 346.

<sup>195</sup> Jenny Chamarette, *Phenomenology and the Future of Film. Rethinking Subjectivity beyond French Cinema*, p. 211.

<sup>196</sup> See Deleuze, *Logique du sens*, p. 346.

<sup>197</sup> Klossowski, 'Nietzsche, le polythéisme et la parodie', pp. 323-24. (emphasis in original)

<sup>198</sup> Klossowski, 'L'Indiscernable', p. 186.

presence and become a source of tactile sensations for the spectator. Klossowski points out the impossibility of differentiating the emotions feigned by the ‘model’ from the emotions that she spontaneously experiences during the shooting of the film. The indiscernible quality of her gestures and expressions – which reveals the indiscernibility of embodied existence – rightfully mirrors the ambiguity of Roberte’s reactions in the narrative, especially as the character has been indivisible from Morin-Sinclair’s “‘style’ physiognomique’ since its creation.<sup>199</sup>

Les émotions feintes et celles physiquement voire moralement ressenties par le modèle restent indiscernables: parfois le déséquilibre de la démarche ou la gène augmentent encore l’impression de justesse – d’autant plus forte que le personnage de Roberte se caractérise lui-même par cette indiscernabilité.<sup>200</sup>

The actress, who must act in front of the technical crew and sometimes before anonymous passers-by, potentially performs the erotic scenes with reluctance and embarrassment. Small gestures and facial expressions seem to betray her repugnance, and perhaps her *jouissance* to perform, mirroring Roberte’s feelings of shame and pleasure:

Exhiber la physionomie du ‘modèle’ d’un personnage n’est encore rien, si, sous le regard du spectateur, elle ne trahissait pas, ne fût-ce qu’une seconde par un sourire réprimé, sa répugnance à *se retrouver* telle quelle par ses propres ressources, dans pareille situation.<sup>201</sup>

Morin-Sinclair’s physiognomy enables the indiscernible to be seen and felt: ‘... et cet indiscernable, précisément, se voit; et l’on toucherait du doigt le galbe vivant de la présence qui rend cet indiscernable visible.’<sup>202</sup> The ‘palpability’ of existence, which is a crucial idea for Klossowski, is also discussed by Deleuze in *Logique de la sensation*. The intensity of the fortuitous body (or the ‘corps sans organe’) stimulates levels of sensation and vibration that manifest in flesh and nerves: ‘le corps sans organe est chair et nerf; une onde le parcourt qui trace en lui des niveaux; la sensation

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<sup>199</sup> Ibid. p. 185.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., p. 187.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

est comme la rencontre de l'onde avec des forces agissant sur le corps.<sup>203</sup>

The forces that animate the body affect the nervous system and generate sensations that become haptic or, in other words, tactile and palpable.

In the same way that Warburg considers the historian as a 'seismograph' who records the obscure movements of memory in bodily expression,<sup>204</sup> Klossowski defines himself as 'the seismograph of the life of the impulses'.<sup>205</sup> According to James, 'Klossowski's writing [...] simulates a fortuitous body within a semiotic which grounds itself in the un-grounding of chaotic flux and affect.'<sup>206</sup> He attempts to re-translate the 'sémiotique "consciente"' into a 'sémiotique impulsionnelle'.<sup>207</sup> Similarly in *Roberte*, the gestural code is re-translated into a constellation of reflexes – or to use Chastel's expression, 'une architecture de réflexes'<sup>208</sup> – through the actors and actresses' performances. The vital force of the body generates a myriad of micro-gestures that nervously disrupt the codification of body language. For example, when *Roberte*, Octave, and the bank clerk (Frédéric Mitterand) are having dinner, they conform to the protocols of politeness. Their gestures are very codified: Octave introduces *Roberte* to the bank clerk with a hand sign, then the bank clerk greets *Roberte* with a hand kiss and waits for her to sit first. When the valet serves food in a heavy silence, the bank clerk's malaise becomes more and more perceptible. The fingers of his right hand nervously play with the inside of his slice of bread. In a comical way, he suddenly cleans his glasses instead of eating. Unwilled, compulsive or impulsive gestures appear in almost all the scenes of the film. When *Roberte* angrily discusses Antoine's education with Octave, the angle of the camera highlights the exaggerated nervous swing of her leg and the impulsive choreography of her fingers, while improvised jazz music composed by Eric Demarsan covers the characters' dialogue [Fig. 39-42].

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<sup>203</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon. Logique de la sensation* (Paris: Editions de la Différence, 1996), pp. 33-34.

<sup>204</sup> See Van Essche, 'Le Geste survivant', p. 62; Didi-Huberman, *L'Image survivante*, p. 137.

<sup>205</sup> Cited in Smith, 'Klossowski's Reading of Nietzsche', p. 13.

<sup>206</sup> James, 'Klossowski, Nietzsche and the Fortuitous Body', p. 68.

<sup>207</sup> Klossowski cited in *ibid.*

<sup>208</sup> Chastel, *Le Geste dans l'art*, p. 20.



Fig. 39-42. *Roberte*

Finally, when the 'maniac' licks Roberte's palm while she is attached to the parallel bars, the fingers he uses to immobilise her hand are also nervously agitated. Roberte opens or closes her eyes, gazes in the direction of the man or looks away. Her face moves from one side to the other, while her thigh and knee impart slight movements. The camera records her reflexes, reactions, and her indiscernible movements of hesitation, revulsion, and/or of pleasure:

Là, les poignets attachés au barres, prestement déjupée, ne gardant que la veste de son tailleur noir, son large béret vert à voilette, tire de côté sur le front, le 'modèle' de Roberte imprime de nouveaux mouvements à ses genoux, 'cède' à de nouveaux reflexes aux titillements de la langue du maniaque sur sa paume largement ouverte, – roulant les yeux, s'abandonne.<sup>209</sup>

All these micro-gestures (reflexes, titillation) constitute a complex constellation of signs. The ambiguity and uncertainty of gestures and the irreducible hesitation that emanates from the actors and actresses' performances take a perverse dimension:

Ce qu'on appelle pervers, c'est précisément cette puissance d'hésitation objective dans le corps, cette patte qui n'est ni à droite ni à gauche, cette détermination par cascade, cette différenciation ne supprimant jamais

<sup>209</sup> Klossowski, 'L'Indiscernable', p. 187.

l'indifférencié qui se divise en elle, ce suspens qui marque chaque moment de la différence, cette immobilisation qui marque chaque moment de la chute.<sup>210</sup>



Fig. 43, 44. *Roberte*



Fig.45, 46. *Roberte*

The ambiguity of gestures generates shifts and ruptures that assemble and disassemble meaning. During the dinner with the bank clerk, Roberte gently pushes and brushes his right hand to grab the ladle on the table [Fig. 43, 44]. Similarly, at the end of the film, while she leaves Von A., who sleeps in his hospital bed, her hand almost imperceptibly touches the man's arm: the latter suddenly wakes up and grabs Roberte by the waist [Fig. 45, 46]. There is a discrepancy between the intention of Roberte's most mundane actions (grabbing an object, standing up) and the expressivity of her gestures that generates a friction between two bodies and renders the intensity of the fantasy graspable. Indeed, like a vicious circle, intentionality, or what Klossowski calls 'l'erreur voulue', ultimately reveals intensity. By capturing the actors and actresses' slightest gestures, the camera grasps *à l'improviste* the enigmatic manifestation of bodily existence.

Through effects of *mise-en-scène* that exhibit the staged and constructed nature of the image – as demonstrated in the previous

<sup>210</sup> Deleuze, *Logique du sens*, p. 326.

sections –, Zucca establishes a critical distance that questions stereotypes of male domination and sexual violence. Yet, the analysis of performance in this section shows the limits of Zucca's mise-en-scène. Indeed, the director himself confesses that his approach to mise-en-scène, which relies on exaggeration, distortion, and parody, ceases to work when the female performer is supposed to actually experience her character's feelings, especially during the sequence of the parallel bars where the boundary between the 'reality' of lived experience and the illusory nature of film performance is intentionally blurred:

Dans la scène des barres, la réalité de la volupté de Roberte résiste à l'analyse, au démontage, et fait que je ne peux pas agir; ce pourrait être la preuve de l'échec de toute la recherche, dans la mesure où l'émotion y est brute, sans humour, sans jeu. Les éléments de cette scène sont pourtant presque parodiques (ce qui, au demeurant, représente une menace permanente pesant sur le film), mais tout l'espace est organisé en fonction des barres, et on se trouve dans l'univers du fantasme, avec toute sa force, tout son insoluble. Car même dans la 'belle' analyse qu'est le film, ou les œuvres de Klossowski, il y a toujours un fantasme qui résiste, qui n'est pas réductible. C'est le moment où il y a le moins de jeu, et le plus de sérieux... et dont j'arrive le moins à parler!<sup>211</sup>

Occupying a voyeuristic position during the shooting (like his fictional character Octave), Klossowski seeks to observe spontaneous gestures of discomfort or pleasure expressed in Morin-Sinclair's face and body while she is subjected to coercive sexual acts which are performed by the male actors in their roles as sexual protagonists, notably in the sequence of the parallel bars. While it may be questionable the extent to which the actress really experienced pleasure in this sequence, as suggested by Zucca when referring to the character's 'volupté', it is clear that it was a deliberate choice on the part of Klossowski to create discomfort for the female performer during the sadomasochistic restraint scenes to the extent that her body would express involuntary gestures and uncontrolled reactions. By blurring the line between film performance and lived experience (i.e. between performed and spontaneous gestures), the film raises ethical questions regarding the performance of the female actress, since the latter was

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<sup>211</sup> Zucca, Bonnet, Carcassonne, and Fieschi, 'Roberte. Entretien avec Pierre Zucca', p. 41.

expected to endure gestures of discomfort during the staging of sexual scenes.

In line with Agamben's ethical conception of gesture (discussed in Chapter 2), Cowie explains that '[e]mbodied, and of the body and not of thought, gesture is the performing of the body as a living being in specific time and space and social context'.<sup>212</sup> At once embodied and endured, gesture is thus ethical in the sense that it bears responsibility.<sup>213</sup> This ethical dimension of gesture is particularly central in film aesthetics as the performance of gesture oscillates between life and representation as demonstrated throughout this thesis and, more precisely, in this chapter. Although Zucca's *mise-en-scène* stages stereotypes of sexual violence in a critical way, the analysis of performance in *Roberte* reveals the exploitation of male power over a female performer during the process of fabrication of the film. Ultimately, this echoes Dardigna's criticism of the problematic representation of women in Klossowski's work.<sup>214</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The notion of the *tableau vivant* in Klossowski's work opens a liminal space between sense and sensation, intentionality and intensity, the voluntary and the involuntary, which enables us to problematise the conceptualisation of gesture in film. On the one hand, Zucca and Klossowski reproduce codified gestures that originated in painterly and theatrical traditions. In line with Klossowski's novels and artworks, they put the emphasis on stereotypical gestural signs that indicate equivocal directions to the spectator. On the other hand, the migration of frozen gestures into the moving image accentuates the instability of the representation.

The simultaneity of movement and stillness in the *tableaux vivants* is revealing of the ambiguous nature of gestures that can simultaneously

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<sup>212</sup> Elizabeth Cowie, 'The Time of Gesture in Cinema and its Ethics', *Journal of Cultural Research*, 19.1 (2015), 82-95 (p. 83).

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 85-87.

<sup>214</sup> See Dardigna, *Les Châteaux d'Eros ou Les Infortunes du sexe des femmes*.

communicate codified meanings and manifest the impulsive expression of the body. In this sense, *tableaux vivants* contradict the distinction made by Kendon between gesture as a voluntary act of communication and non-gestural motions such as uncontrolled and nervous movements.<sup>215</sup> Indeed, through the trembling of gestures and the tremor of signs, the vitality of the body disrupts the stability and the fixity of the code of body language. The models as well as the actors and actresses who pose and perform do not have an absolute control over their body. The slightest motion can potentially affect the spectator's perception of the scene. As Bonitzer writes about Ruiz's *L'Hypothèse du tableau volé*, which is indebted to Klossowski's aesthetics of the *tableau vivant*, '[l]e moindre battement de cils, un tic facial, un ensemble circulaire orchestré par de gestes lents, relancent les interrogations, l'interprétation: toute la représentation est problématisée.'<sup>216</sup> In *Roberte*, gesture generates a tension that raises questions on the nature of the cinematic image, on film performance, as well as on the process of film reception.

By expanding on the idea of simultaneity, the following chapter will show the extent to which, within society, human gestures interweave heterogeneous lines. As discussed throughout the thesis, not only do gestures reveal the heterogeneity of the cinematic medium in its interaction with other media and arts, but also the heterogeneity of behaviours, ways of being, and existential lines which form social groups – even when at first glance these groups look homogeneous and ideologically conditioned by the same social codes. Individual and collective, conditioned and singular, gestures raise questions about how, beyond their differences, people live together within a community, in interaction with others and their environment. By analysing Godard and Miéville's, Deligny's, and Rivette's works, Chapter 5 will discuss the relation between the straight line of social conditioning and the serpentine line that animates human gesture.

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<sup>215</sup> See Kendon, *Gesture. Visible Action as Utterance*, p. 8.

<sup>216</sup> Bonitzer, *Décadrages*, p. 32.



## Chapter 5. Gestural Lines

‘As walking, talking and gesticulating creatures, human beings generate lines wherever they go.’<sup>1</sup> – Tim Ingold.

### *Introduction*

In Raoul Ruiz’s *L’Hypothèse du tableau volé* (1979) – in which an art collector attempts to interpret several *tableaux vivants* reproducing Frédéric Tonnerre’s paintings –, the narrator asserts that ‘tout mouvement effectué par un être humain laisse un tracé imaginaire assimilable à une courbe’. This commentary invites the spectator to envision gesture, no longer as a figurative form of representation, but as a dynamic and virtual trace of movement, i.e. a curved line. According to Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, the ‘linear design’ of bodily movement refers to the ‘linear contours of the body’, while the ‘[!]inear pattern describes the trajectory or trajectories that a living body creates in moving’.<sup>2</sup> When someone is gesturing, his or her linear pattern is most often not perceivable, but only imagined:

The patterns emerge in the form of imagined trajectories that a moving body draws in the process of moving. [...] What are imaginatively constituted in all instances are *lines*. Lines are clearly spatial entities, whether actually drawn and perceived or whether imaginatively followed and constituted.<sup>3</sup>

Resulting from ‘our imaginative consciousness of movement’,<sup>4</sup> the kinetic lines are at once spatial, temporal, and dynamic. Significantly, Sheets-Johnston explains that ‘[linear patterns] are always qualitatively distinct by

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<sup>1</sup> Tim Ingold, *Lines. A Brief History* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, ‘The Imaginative Consciousness of Movement: Linear Quality, Kinaesthesia, Language and Life’, in *Redrawing Anthropology. Materials, Movements, Lines*, ed. by Tim Ingold (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), p. 115.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 116.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

virtue of the dynamic reality of movement itself'.<sup>5</sup> In other words, a line is not a gesture, but a way to envision or map its trajectory. For example, in Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759-67) [Fig.1], Corporal Trim draws a serpentine line in the air with his stick in order to gesturally express the freedom lost by men once they get married.<sup>6</sup> Sterne reproduces the linear pattern of Trim's flourish in the form of a line, which is a synthesis and an abstraction of the gesture, translating its free trajectory into a 'dynamic and temporal' trace.<sup>7</sup> The line, which is not straight but serpentine, results from the improvised movement of the hand, 'free to go where it will for movement's sake'.<sup>8</sup>

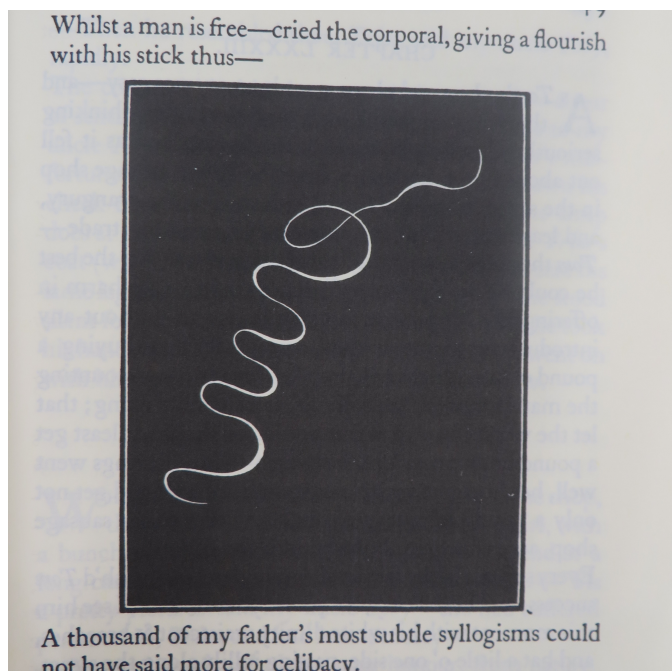


Fig.1. The 'free' line in *Tristram Shandy*

If film enables the spectator to see the linear design of gestures, linear patterns remain most of the time invisible. In a series of artworks entitled *Following the Right Hand of...* (2008-09), the French artist Pierre Bismuth follows the gestural trajectories of iconic Hollywood actresses with a black marker, translating their visual perception into black lines drawn on a

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 126.

<sup>6</sup> See Laurence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy* (London: Everyman's Library, 1991), pp. 148-49 (volume 3).

<sup>7</sup> Ingold, *Lines*, p. 72.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 73.

plexiglass sheet and superimposed on a film still [Fig. 2]. As Erika Balsom explains, '[t]he scribbled line indexes Bismuth's viewing of the film, its nervous energy pointing to a thorough redirection of attention away from the narrative progression and towards the movements of an actress' right hand.'<sup>9</sup> Giving a tangible form to the visual impulse produced by the actress's gestures within the spectator's mind and body, the line therefore materialises the spectator's kinesic engagement with the film. Moreover, the lines form an abstract expressionist drawing which evokes the process of light painting photography. Before being used by artists like Matisse, Man Ray, and Picasso, the device was originally invented with a scientific purpose in the field of motion studies. Entitled *Pathological Walk from in Front* (c. 1889), the first light painting photograph shows the inscription of an irregular, discontinuous, and serpentine line of movement on a black surface [Fig. 3]. Etienne-Jules Marey's assistants Georges Demenÿ and Bernard Quénu managed to capture the movement of walking by fixing incandescent bulbs on the body. The adjective 'pathological' is revealing of a line that is not straight, but tangled and confused.



Fig. 2. Pierre Bismuth, *Following the Right Hand of Cyd Charisse in 'The Band Wagon'*, 2008. Marker on Plexiglas over c-print, 30 x 40 inches



Fig. 3. Marey, Demenÿ and Quénu, *Pathological Walk from in Front, Made Visible by Incandescent Bulbs Fixed to the Joints*, c.1889. Archives of the Collège de France

Furthermore, Giorgio Agamben draws a parallel between Gilles de la Tourette's footprint method and the scientific inventions that announce the

<sup>9</sup> Erika Balsom, *Exhibiting Cinema in Contemporary Art* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013), p. 121.

birth of cinema at the end of the nineteenth century, like chronophotography.<sup>10</sup> In his method of imprint, Tourette uses the straight line as an instrument to observe and study the manner of walking of his subjects. As Janet Harbord explains:

Tourette's method was to attach a roll of white paper to the floor and draw a line down the centre whilst his subjects, their feet smeared with iron sesquioxide powder, were required to walk the line to the best of their abilities. The resulting footprints provided a trace of movement that could be calibrated and compared according to length of step, cadence, direction, symmetry and so forth.<sup>11</sup>

Tourette's method evokes a recurring gag in Jacques Tati's films. In *Les Vacances de monsieur Hulot* (1953) and *Mon oncle* (1958), Monsieur Hulot leaves, in spite of himself, the mark of his footprints on the ground. The line, which is not straight but digressive, manifests the character's disorientation, hesitations, clumsiness, and wandering [Fig. 4, 5].

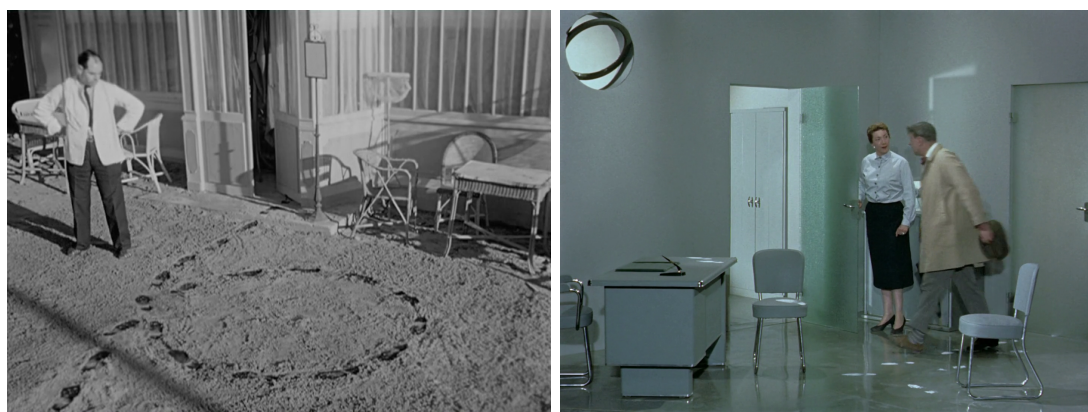


Fig. 4, 5. Jacques Tati, *Les Vacances de Monsieur Hulot/Mon Oncle*

'L'être vivant se caractérise par la ligne onduleuse ou serpentine, [...] chaque être a sa manière propre de serpenter, [...] l'objet de l'art est de rendre ce serpentement individuel,' Bergson writes, drawing on a passage of Leonardo da Vinci's *Treaty on Painting*.<sup>12</sup> The serpentine line, which is not necessarily visible, emanates from a 'centre virtuel',<sup>13</sup> beyond the linear

<sup>10</sup> Agamben, 'Notes on Gesture', pp. 48-50.

<sup>11</sup> Harbord, *Ex-centric Cinema*, p. 64.

<sup>12</sup> Cited in Georges Didi-Huberman, 'La Danse de toute chose', in Laurent Mannoni and Didi-Huberman, *Mouvements de l'air. Etienne-Jules Marey, photographie des fluides* (Paris: Gallimard, Réunion des musées nationaux, 2004), p. 282.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 283.

pattern of the body. In Loïe Fuller's famous choreography *Serpentine Dance*, which was filmed by several filmmakers, including the Lumière brothers [Fig. 7], the serpentine movement of the dancer's draperies produces volumes and surfaces in motion, expanding the virtual lines of her gestures beyond the corporeal limits of the body. In a similar vein, when Artaud analyses the choreographic style in Balinese theatre, he insists on the lines produced by the actors' costumes and gestures, which make them look like 'de grands insectes pleins de lignes'.<sup>14</sup> 'Chacun de leurs mouvements trace une ligne dans l'espace,' Artaud notes.<sup>15</sup> When gestural lines are captured in the act of their performance, they are often associated with dance. While Didi-Huberman sees the expression of a dance in Marey's graphs, light-painting photographs, and chronophotographs, Kandinsky in his writings on abstract art also connects the line with the dynamic movement of the dancing body.<sup>16</sup> In Degas's drawings of dancers, the linear pattern of movement, which exceeds the figurative contour of the body, becomes perceivable when the artist corrects the drawing: the trace of the dancer's gesture appears in the lines, which like a trail, overflow the boundaries of the linear design, as if the movement was decomposed like in a chronophotographic sequence [Fig. 6].



Fig. 6. Degas. Drawing published in Paul Valéry, *Degas Danse Dessin* (Paris: Ambroise Vollard, 1936)



Fig. 7. Auguste and Louis Lumière, *Danse serpentine* (II, vue N°765, 1), 1897-99

<sup>14</sup> Artaud, *Le Théâtre et son double*, p. 77.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> See Didi-Huberman, 'La Danse de toute chose', in *Mouvements de l'air*, pp. 177-316; Wassily Kandinsky, *Point and Line to Plane*, trans. by Howard Dearstune and Hilla Rebay (New York: Dover Publications, 1979), p. 100.

The serpentine line is commonly opposed to the straight line. Ingold points out the ideological dimension of the straight line, a product of authority, control, and power as the word ‘ruler’ reveals: ‘A ruler is a sovereign who controls and governs a territory. It is also an instrument for drawing straight lines.’<sup>17</sup> As Foucault demonstrates in the well-known essay *Surveiller et punir* (1975), the straight line indeed becomes – in the disciplinary grid-pattern of society – an instrument to discipline the body and condition gestures.<sup>18</sup> In the context of growing industrialisation, the straight line establishes itself as an ‘icon of modernity’,<sup>19</sup> especially in constructivist art and architecture, and the grid, as a tool to rationalise movement, space, and time. While the straight line evokes rationality, convention, norm, and order, the serpentine line, especially in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, becomes the emblem of fancy (*fantaisie*), freedom, oddity, *flânerie*, digression, madness, and feeling.<sup>20</sup> The dichotomy between the straight and the serpentine line highlights the tension between conditioned behaviours and idiosyncratic gestures, determinate trajectories and indeterminate impulses, gestural codification and the detours of wandering.

By examining the tension between serpentine and straight lines, this chapter aims to explore the notion of gestural line in post-New Wave cinema through cinematic, philosophical, political, and ideological perspectives concurrently. Throughout the 1970s, line becomes a central notion in Godard’s reflection on gesture and conditioning, in Fernand Deligny’s research on education, everyday life, and autism, and in Jacques Rivette’s approach to improvisation and film acting. In the television series *France/tour/detour/deux/enfants* (1977), Godard and Anne-Marie Miéville explore how the linear pattern of the body is conditioned by society. How can gestures disrupt the predictability of programs in a capitalist society structured by Taylorism? By focusing on the education of two children, the

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<sup>17</sup> Ingold, *Lines*, p. 160.

<sup>18</sup> Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir. Naissance de la prison* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), pp. 173 and 179.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 167.

<sup>20</sup> See Bernard Vouilloux, *Écritures de fantaisie: grotesques, arabesques, zigzags et serpentins* (Paris: Hermann, 2008).

filmmakers dissect the power of the norm and the potential resistance of gestures, in a way that not only evokes Foucault, as Michael Witt has already demonstrated,<sup>21</sup> but also Deleuze and Guattari's conceptualisation of the line. Around the same time, the educator and writer Fernand Deligny developed an alternative method of education on the fringe of psychiatric institutions. Deligny was involved in several film projects, such as *Le Moindre Geste* (1962-71) and *Ce Gamin-là* (1975), which both highlight the gestural trajectories of marginal characters and mentally handicapped persons. The two films bring out the multiplicity of lines (traces, threads, knots, *lignes coutumières* or *lignes d'erre*) that take root in the characters' slightest gestures. Finally, the practice of improvisation in Rivette's *Out 1: Noli me tangere* (1971), made in the context of the political crisis resulting from May 1968, questions the notions of spontaneity, freedom, and deconditioning. Gestural lines, which are no longer conditioned and planned in the script, result from the actors and actresses' agency.

## **1. De-composing Gestural Lines in the Social Grid: Godard and Miéville's *France/tour/détour/deux/enfants* (1977)**

In the television series *France/tour/détour/deux/enfants* produced by Antenne 2 – loosely adapted from the school book *Le Tour de la France par deux enfants* (1877), written by G. Bruno and used in the schools of the Third Republic –, Godard and Miéville reflect on the ideological dimension of education and on the impact of social conditioning on everyday life. Interviewing and filming two children named Camille and Arnaud at home, at school, or in the street, Godard and Miéville, who allude to scientific motion studies of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, use the device of

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<sup>21</sup> Michael Witt, 'Altered Motion and Corporeal Resistance in *France/tour/détour/deux/enfants*', in *For Ever Godard*, ed. by James Williams, Michael Temple, and Michael Witt (London: Black Dog, 2003), pp. 200-13.

slow motion in order to de-compose their gestures. Developing a 'type of antitelevision',<sup>22</sup> they distort and play with television conventions. Although structured in 12 episodes of 26 minutes that replicate the same standardised structure, the programme leaves room for irregularity, detours, digressions, and improvisation. As David Sterritt argues, '[...] the standardized shape of each episode serves the same function as the underlying chord structure of a bebop composition.'<sup>23</sup> In the rigid grid of television, the directors attempt to reveal lines of movement that escape or resist the predictability of the programme.

When the journalist Robert Linard (performed by Godard himself) interviews the children, he introduces the notion of line on several occasions. In the same way that 'programme' and 'grid' are terms that both define the working of television and social conditioning, line is also a polysemic word that, in Godard and Miéville's film, can refer to: the linear pattern of human movement, the city map, the lines of Camille's exercise book, and, ultimately, the TV image itself, which is indeed constituted of lines.<sup>24</sup> In the second episode ('Mouvement 2'), Godard asks Arnaud if he travels rather in straight lines or in curved ones. The boy answers that he moves in a straight line when he walks along the street, and that he moves in a curve when he turns a corner. He thus envisions the trajectory of his walking according to the outline of the city map and the pattern of the streets.

Furthermore, Godard encourages the child to understand the difference in nature between a point (immobility) and a line (movement):

Robert Linard: - Est-ce qu'on pourrait dire que tu es un point immobile dans l'espace?

Arnaud : - Non, je suis plutôt un point qui bouge dans l'espace.

[...]

RL : - Et entre les deux points – celui où tu étais avant et celui où tu es maintenant – ça fait une ligne?

A : - Oui, j'ai fait une ligne.

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<sup>22</sup> Philippe Dubois, 'Video Thinks What Cinema Creates. Notes on Jean-Luc Godard's Work in Video and Television', in *Jean-Luc Godard, Son + Image 1974-1991*, ed. by Bellour and Bandy, p. 174.

<sup>23</sup> David Sterritt, *The Films of Jean-Luc Godard. Seeing the Invisible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 257.

<sup>24</sup> From 1949 to 1983, French television adopted the 819-line high definition system E.

RL: - Et est-ce que tu fais partie de cette ligne ou tu fais seulement partie des points où tu étais et des points où tu es?

A : - Je crois plutôt que je fais partie de cette ligne.

Crucially, by altering the tape speed, Godard and Miéville de-compose (*décomposer*) the line of movement in a series of points. Like scientists, they observe particles of gestures. 'On numerous occasions in *France/tour*, we are suddenly conscious that the human body, whether in isolation or viewed as part of a crowd is being scrutinised in precisely the same way that a scientist examines particle motion through a microscope,'<sup>25</sup> Witt explains, comparing Godard and Miéville's use of video with the process of decomposition and re-composition in Muybridge's and Marey's chronophotography. The two directors highlight Camille's and Arnaud's everyday gestures such as: undressing before going to bed, turning the TV on, or playing in the school playground with friends. They also use the device to de-compose the urban movement of the crowd, for example showing people coming out of the escalator of the Parisian metro in 'Mouvement 2', people and cars crossing the street in 'Mouvement 3', or cars and trucks driving on the highway in 'Mouvement 8'. Just as in Perec and Queysanne's *Un homme qui dort* (1974), which also reflects on social conditioning (see Chapter 1), the crowd is named 'les monstres'. 'Les monstres ont inventé les machines qui leur dictent une série d'ordres auxquels ils obéissent,' the voice-over asserts. The reflection on the 'corps-machine' and on the relationship between people, machines, automatons, and programmes permeates all the episodes of the series which, through the metaphor of the monsters, plays with the codes of dystopian fiction (recalling Godard's 1965 film *Alphaville*, for example).

In line with Foucault's thought, '[t]he series examines the conditioning of the human infant as a docile subject of capitalism.'<sup>26</sup> School is viewed as a place of 'enforced incarceration'<sup>27</sup> that is ruled by le 'pouvoir de la Norme'.<sup>28</sup> In *Surveiller et punir*, Foucault, who analyses how power coerces the body

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<sup>25</sup> Witt, 'Altered Motion and Corporeal Resistance', p. 207.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p. 208.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Foucault, *Surveiller et punir. Naissance de la prison*, p. 186.

during the eighteenth century, demonstrates to what extent the slightest gesture becomes the result of a process of social codification. The social machine de-composes and re-composes the body in order to condition the quality of its gestures (in terms of trajectory, amplitude, or precision):

Le corps humain entre dans une machinerie de pouvoir qui le fouille, le désarticule et le recompose.<sup>29</sup>

L'acte est décomposé en ses éléments; la position du corps, des membres, des articulations est définie; à chaque mouvement sont assignées une direction, une amplitude, une durée; leur ordre de succession est prescrit. Le temps pénètre le corps, et avec lui tous les contrôles minutieux du pouvoir.<sup>30</sup>

The calibration and the control of the body supposedly guarantee a better gestural efficiency. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the criteria of efficiency, energy waste, and productivity were central concerns in motion studies. By de-composing and re-composing movement, Marey aimed to improve the quality of gesture by reducing fatigue, and '[increasing] productivity in almost all areas of social life'.<sup>31</sup>

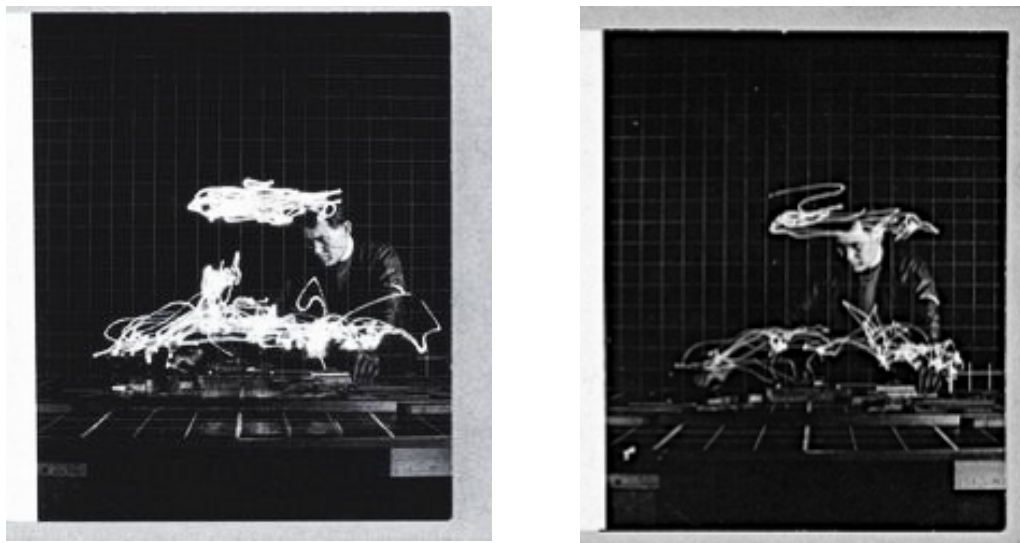


Fig. 8, 9. Frank Gilbreth, *Photograph of Inefficient Work Operation; Photograph of Efficient Work Operation*, c. 1935

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 139.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 154.

<sup>31</sup> Cited in Harbord, *Ex-centric Cinema*, p. 65.

Similarly, in the wake of Taylorism, the American scientists Frank and Lillian Gilbreth, who were both pioneers in time and motion study, used different media such as film, light painting photography, and three-dimensional models to measure and improve the gestural sequences executed by workers in factories, offices, and hospitals. They sought to eliminate waste motions, simplify gestures, and rationalise the number of movements for each task [Fig. 8, 9]. In their trials, gestures were precisely timed with a chronometer, before a grid-pattern backdrop. Altered motion speed was sometimes used to enhance the perception of gestures. Gilbreth's films highlight the likeness between the working of the assembly line and the cinematic machine that de-composes movement into a series of frames in order to mechanically re-compose it. Analysed, calibrated, and rationalised, the line of gestures is indeed segmented and divided into a series of points. Segmentation enables better control and a better motion efficiency in order to avoid irregularities, inconstancies, and hesitations. According to Ingold, '[o]nce the race of a continuous gesture, the line has been fragmented – under the sway of modernity – into a succession of points or dots.'<sup>32</sup> If the process of segmentation multiplies the possibilities of re-composition – through the creation of new programmes, new forms of life, new experiences –, Citton also points out the risk of losing the *élan vital* that animates human life.<sup>33</sup>

In *France/tour/détour*, Godard and Miéville focus on the segmental lines that codify everyday behaviours, gestures, and rhythms in late 1970s France. Assimilating segmental lines from birth, people reproduce certain patterns that, from generation to generation, divide an individual's life into different segments, such as home-school; school-military service; work-retirement. Conceptualised by Deleuze and Guattari, the notion of segmental line ('ligne segmentaire'), which echoes Foucault's concept of biopower, defines social ordering and its impact on the body. According to Deleuze,

La première sorte de ligne qui nous compose est segmentaire, à segmentarité dure (ou plutôt il y a déjà beaucoup de lignes de cette sorte); la famille-la

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<sup>32</sup> Ingold, *Lines*, p. 75.

<sup>33</sup> Citton, *Gestes d'humanités*, p. 271.

profession; le travail-les vacances; la famille-et puis l'école-et puis l'armée-et puis l'usine-et puis la retraite. Et chaque fois, d'un segment à l'autre, on nous dit: maintenant tu n'es plus un bébé; et à l'école, ici tu n'es plus comme en famille; et à l'armée, là ce n'est plus comme à l'école... Bref, toutes sortes de segments bien déterminés, dans toutes sortes de directions, qui nous découpent en tout sens, des paquets de lignes segmentarisées –.<sup>34</sup>

The segmental line frames the social but also intimate life of an individual. According to Luis de Miranda, it is 'a line of training, a line setting in motion the wheels of the social code according to operational models enabling mass containment of the vital flows – necessarily reductive, forced and simplifying'.<sup>35</sup> When Godard and Miéville film Camille in the bathroom of her home in the opening sequence of 'Mouvement 1' [Fig. 10-15], the sequence brings out such segmental lines. The directors slow down the tape speed to scrutinise Camille's gestures while she is undressing before putting her nightshirt on. Significantly, the tiles of the bathroom wall form a grid pattern in the background of the image, which is reminiscent of Gilbreth's motion studies. Embodying authority at home, Camille's mother can be heard off-screen. Firstly, she asks her daughter whether she has already prepared her school bag for the next day; secondly, she wonders what Camille is doing in the bathroom: 'Qu'est-ce que tu fais Camille? Qu'est-ce que tu fais?' Camille answers that she is taking her vest off; finally, her mother asks her several times to hurry up. Camille therefore must execute this everyday gestural sequence with a temporal constraint. The voyeuristic gaze of the camera highlights the lack of intimacy: Camille is a surveyed subject; her slightest gestures are under control, rooted in the segments home-school. As Witt suggests, it seems that '[a] contagious Taylorisation has spread far beyond the factory, infecting all gesture, from the most mundane (washing up) to the most intimate (love-making)'.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues* (Paris: Flammarion, 1996), p. 151.

<sup>35</sup> Luis de Miranda, 'Is a New Life Possible? Deleuze and the Lines', trans. by Marie-Céline Courilleault, rev. by Colette de Castro and Luis de Miranda, *Deleuze Studies*, 7.1 (2013), 106-152 (p. 111).

<sup>36</sup> Witt, 'Altered Motion and Corporeal Resistance', p. 209.

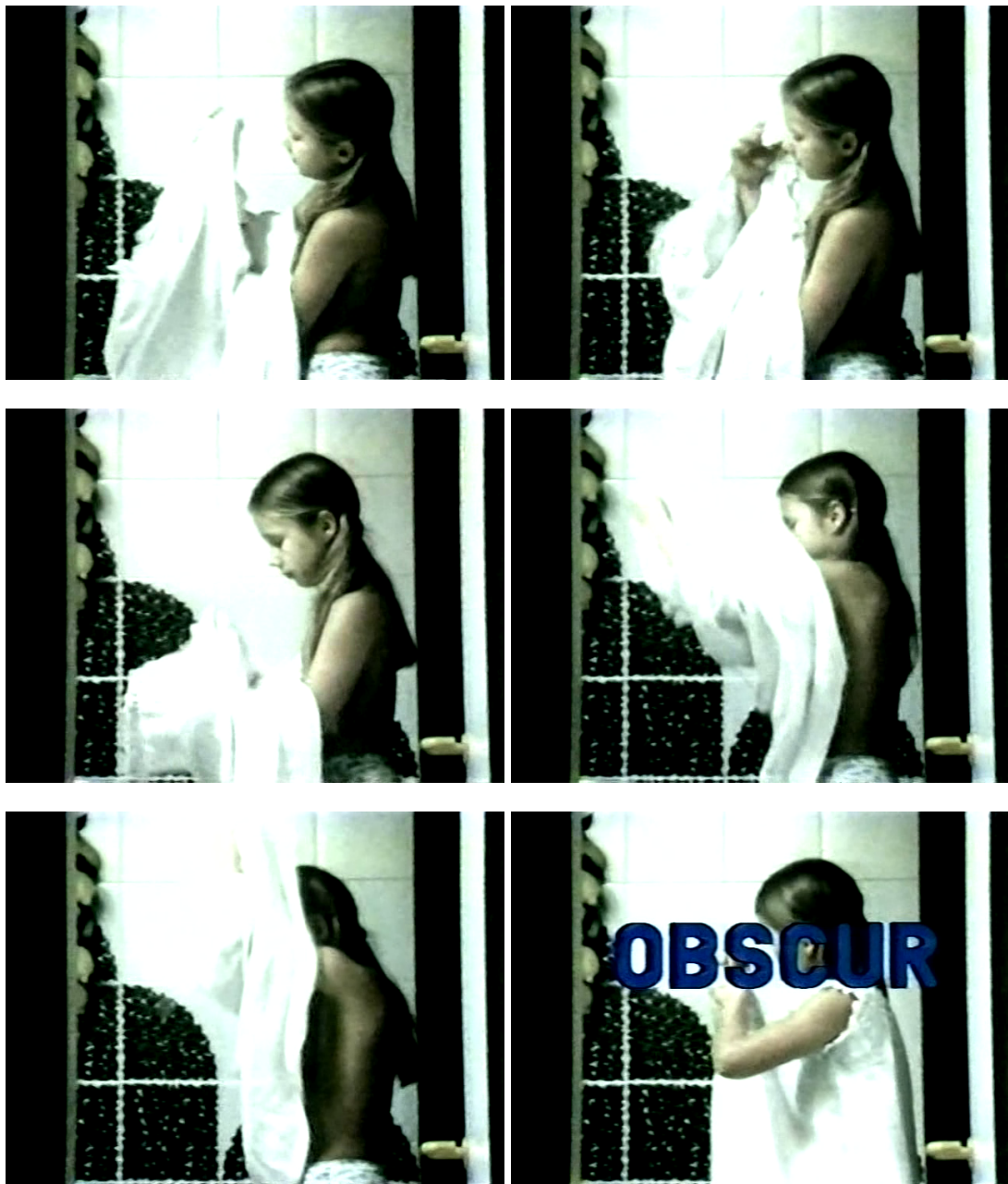


Fig. 10-15. *France/tour/detour/deux/enfants*

Yet the process of de-composition, which invites the spectator to look at Camille's gestures more closely, stresses their lack of efficiency, especially when she struggles to put her nightshirt on. She makes a lot of unnecessary and irregular motions to perform a simple action. Like the choreographed movements of draperies in Fuller's *Serpentine Dance* or Marey's *Etude de mouvements de danse et de draperie* (1886), her gestures give unexpected forms to the nightshirt. The rhythmicity and amplitude of Camille's gestures resist the Taylorist imperative of efficiency. In the 1970s

and 1980s, Godard was preoccupied with the potential resistance of gestures to social conditioning. In *Sauve qui peut (la vie)* (1980), he refers to the sociologist and communist activist Robert Linhart<sup>37</sup> who condemns the excessive rationalisation of workers' gestures in factories while pointing out the existence of small margins of bodily resistance:

[...] La vie se rebiffe et résiste. L'organisme résiste. Les muscles résistent. Les nerfs résistent. Quelque chose, dans le corps et dans la tête, s'arc-boute contre la répétition et le néant. La vie: un geste plus rapide, un bras qui retombe à contretemps, un pas plus lent, une bouffée d'irrégularité, un faux mouvement [...].<sup>38</sup>

In *France/tour/détour*, Camille's gestures, which are not standardised, reveal margins of individual interpretation within the social grid. According to Witt, 'Neo-Foucauldian denunciation of the disciplinary regulation of the body gives way to a systematic search for glimpses of the fissures and disjunctions – sudden and mysterious points of corporeal resistance – concealed beneath superficial homogeneity and continuity.'<sup>39</sup> Clumsiness, irregularity, confusion, and hesitation prove that Camille's gestures are not conditioned by segmental lines only, but are also made up of other lines.

'Individus ou groupes, nous sommes faits de lignes, et ces lignes sont de nature très diverse,'<sup>40</sup> Deleuze insists, distinguishing three different kind of lines: segmental lines, molecular lines ('ligne moléculaire'), and lines of flight ('lignes de fuite'). In contrast with segmental lines, molecular lines, which are much more flexible and unpredictable, result from the *élan vital*: 'Elles tracent de petites modifications, elles font des détours, elles esquissent des chutes ou des élans.'<sup>41</sup> The words *tour* and *détours* in the title *France/tour/detour* designate the tension between the codified system of segmental lines and the idiosyncratic expression of molecular lines. Finally, the line of flight is a

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<sup>37</sup> In the wake of May 1968, Robert Linhart was employed in a Citroën factory based in Paris, at La Porte de Choissy. He shares his experience in *L'Etabli* (1978).

<sup>38</sup> Robert Linhart, *L'Etabli* (Paris: Minuit, 1978), p. 14.

<sup>39</sup> Witt, 'Altered Motion and Corporeal Resistance', p. 211.

<sup>40</sup> Deleuze and Parnet, *Dialogues*, p. 151.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

line of rupture and of 'déterritorialisation'<sup>42</sup> which, like 'une espèce de délire', disrupts the code and deviates from the furrow.<sup>43</sup>

As we have seen through Walter Benjamin in Chapter 4, the 'optical unconscious' of the camera is able to grasp the slightest impulses, urges, and nervous reactions of disgust or attraction that manifest on the surface of the body. The de-composition of Camille's gestures reveals her sudden changes of mood. As Godard notes, '[...] even when she was doing extremely banal things, you'd go suddenly from profound anguish to joy a split second later.'<sup>44</sup> By contrast, Godard admitted to having been less interested in the boy's gestures, which seem to be much more conditioned by segmental lines: 'Between each image was always the same guiding line.'<sup>45</sup> For example, at the beginning of movements 2 and 3, Arnaud and Camille are respectively filmed in the street going to school. On the one hand, Arnaud prepares himself, energetically putting his jacket and schoolbag on. The process of slow motion highlights a certain determination and will in all his motions that do not deviate from everyday routine. On the other hand, when Camille is shown running in the street, she traces a straight line before making a detour. Indeed, she slows down, changes trajectory, and jumps on a bench. The detour is a useless digression and a loss of time. In the segment of her itinerary (going from a point A (home) to a point B (school)), Camille creates new lines, other lines, her own lines. 'Voyez comme quelqu'un marche dans la rue, s'il n'est pas trop pris dans sa segmentarité dure, quelles petites inventions il y met,' Deleuze writes.<sup>46</sup> Camille improvises, reacting to her environment, following her *élan vital*. Jumping on the bench is a playful gesture. The de-composition of movement emphasises the great diversity of her corporeal and facial expressions, which change very quickly. She also moves at different speeds, slowing down her running before speeding up again. The alteration of the tape speed stresses the changes of rhythm and the irregularities in Camille's gestures.

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>44</sup> Cited in Witt, 'Altered Motion and Corporeal Resistance', p. 201.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Deleuze and Parnet, *Dialogues*, p. 155.

For Godard, slow motion is a tool that reveals the unexpected and unknown in bodily movements that are supposed to be known, codified, calibrated, segmented, and classified:

All the possible permutations between these 25 images represent thousands of possibilities. I concluded that when you change the rhythms, and analyse a woman's movements, even movements as simple as buying a loaf of bread for instance, you realise that there are loads of different worlds inside the woman's movement.<sup>47</sup>

The process of slow motion does not fragment the gestural line into segments, but rather turns the line into an irregular dotted line (*pointillé*) which, according to the mathematician Gilles Châtelet, is different from the line and the dot: 'Le pointillé ne renvoie ni au point et à sa désignation discrète, ni à la ligne et à son tracé continu, mais à la pression de la virtualité qui inquiète l'image déjà disponible pour faire place à une dimension nouvelle.'<sup>48</sup> In Godard and Miéville's work, the dotted line generates new possibilities of perception which, by defamiliarising the most ordinary gestures, reveal a constellation of fleeting motions and emotions. 'La pression de la virtualité' inherent to the dotted line makes unexpected gestural potentialities visible.

While Godard and Miéville focus on social conditioning and gestural resistance in normative education, the educator Deligny searches new ways of living with and educating children on the fringe of society. In the late 1960s, by working with children and teenagers with behavioural, psychological, and mental troubles, he developed exploratory research on gestural lines, which significantly influenced Guattari, Deleuze, and Certeau. In the Cévennes, Deligny attempted to create a community in which autistic people and educators could coexist together in spite of their gestural differences.

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<sup>47</sup> Cited in Witt, 'Altered Motion and Corporeal Resistance', p. 201.

<sup>48</sup> Gilles Châtelet, *Les Enjeux du mobile. Mathématique, physique, philosophie* (Paris: Seuil, 1993), p. 33.

## 2. The Knotting of Heterogeneous Gestural Lines in *Le Moindre Geste* (1962-71) and *Ce Gamin-là* (1975)

Deligny, who deliberately occupied the margins throughout his lifetime, remains little known in France and abroad despite the re-publication of a large part of his writings in 2007.<sup>49</sup> After the Second World War, Deligny experimented with new ways of working and living with unstable children and teenagers, who most often had mental handicaps such as autism. In 1946, while working for the association *Travail et Culture* in the North of France, he met André Bazin and Chris Marker, two central figures in the history of post-war French cinema. On the advice of Bazin, François Truffaut contacted Deligny in the 1950s, while he was finishing the script of *Les Quatre Cents Coups* (1959). According to Toledo, Deligny suggested to the young director the idea of Antoine Doisnel's (Jean-Pierre Léaud) run towards the sea at the end of the film.<sup>50</sup> In the 1960s and 1970s, Deligny and Truffaut regularly corresponded;<sup>51</sup> Deligny requested Truffaut's help several times to produce his own film projects. From the 1950s to the 1980s, Deligny used the camera as an 'outil pédagogique'.<sup>52</sup> He did not consider himself a filmmaker and never 'made' films in the conventional use of the term. But he was the instigator and/or was involved in several significant projects: *Le Moindre Geste* was filmed by his assistant Josée Manenti in 1962-65 and edited by Jean-Pierre Daniel in 1968-70 (without Deligny's participation) with the material support of Chris Marker and his production company SLON/ISKRA; the documentary *Ce Gamin-là* was directed by Renaud Victor between 1972 and 1974 and co-produced by Truffaut's production company Les Films du Carrosse. These films document and reflect Deligny's ideas about gestural lines.

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<sup>49</sup> Fernand Deligny, *Œuvres*, ed. by Sandra Alvarez de Toledo (Paris: L'Arachnéen, 2007).

<sup>50</sup> Toledo, 'Le Moindre Geste', in *Œuvres*, ed. by Toledo, p. 599.

<sup>51</sup> Bernard Bastide, 'Correspondance François Truffaut-Fernand Deligny', *1895. Mille huit cent quatre-vingt-quinze*, 42 (2004), 77-110 <<https://journals.openedition.org/1895/281>> [accessed 19 August 2018]

<sup>52</sup> See Deligny, 'La Caméra outil pédagogique', in *Œuvres*, pp. 414-17.

## 2.1. Territory, Line, Trace, and Thread in *Le Moindre Geste*

Deligny's ideas about the line, which he developed from the late 1960s, are already prefigured in *Le Moindre Geste*. If the film is perhaps 'un film sans auteur',<sup>53</sup> it is ultimately, according to Daniel, 'un film de Deligny'.<sup>54</sup> 'Il ne s'occupait de rien, mais il était présent: pas toujours, mais souvent. De temps en temps, il donnait une idée,' Manenti, who was in charge of the shooting, explains.<sup>55</sup> Although Deligny was not directly engaged in the act of filmmaking, the film credits acknowledge and stress his paternity of the work. *Le Moindre Geste* is indeed considered as a film 'de' Deligny and Manenti, made 'par' Manenti and Daniel. At the beginning of the film, Deligny introduces the main character, Yves, in voice-over. Diagnosed as a 'débile profond', Yves has lived with Deligny and Manenti for several years. Like a game without strict rules, the film offers Yves the possibility not only to move freely, followed by Manenti's mobile camera, but also to speak. The images and his delirious speech, which was recorded on a tape recorder during the shooting, are desynchronised, heightening the fragmented quality of the editing. The film shows him gesturing, being in the world, getting lost, roaming alone, and interacting with others, often with difficulty.

The narrative loosely draws on a minor news item that reports the wandering of a bullock in the streets of Paris, having escaped from the slaughterhouse of La Villette. Deligny turns the news item into a fable: two teenagers, Yves and Robert, escape from the psychiatric institution in which they are educated and wander in the Cévennes. After Richard falls into a hole, Yves tries to save him by looking for a rope, but progressively forgets him. At the end of the film, Valérie, a young woman who lives in a village nearby, brings him back to the asylum. For Daniel, the loose narrative is a pretext to see Yves's gestures, 'des gestes tellement essentiels, d'une telle densité existentielle'.<sup>56</sup> Yves responds to the environment of the shooting –

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<sup>53</sup> Jean-Pierre Daniel in 'Le Moindre Geste. Autour de Fernand Deligny', *L'Image, le monde*, 2 (2001), 33-65 (p. 57).

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>55</sup> Josée Manenti in 'Le Moindre Geste. Autour de Fernand Deligny', p. 58.

<sup>56</sup> Daniel in 'Le Moindre Geste. Autour de Fernand Deligny', p. 59.

the mountains, the quarry, the river, the paths, etc. – which, like a playground, becomes an exhaustible source of potential actions and unpredictable gestures, ‘chaque lieu et ce qui s’y trouvait provoquant ce qui s’y passait’.<sup>57</sup>

According to Ingold, the world and the body are made of lines that are not only abstract, virtual or imaginary, like latitude and longitude for instance, but also real and observable, for example in designs, in the palm of our hands, in the mud-cracks, or in the paths which are traced by the recurring passages of human beings and/or animals. Lines can be of different natures, such as traces, cracks, and threads. The trace is ‘any enduring mark left in or on a solid surface by a continuous movement’<sup>58</sup> while the thread is ‘a filament of some kind, which may be entangled with other threads or suspended between points in three-dimensional space’.<sup>59</sup> *Le Moindre Geste* brings out the leitmotifs of the trace and the thread. First of all, at the beginning of the film, Yves traces simple human figures on a sheet of paper. Like in Clouzot’s *Le Mystère Picasso* (1956) in which Picasso paints for the camera, the black lines are filmed as they are drawn by Yves [Fig. 16, 17]. Although Yves’s hand appears through the sheet, the camera mostly focuses on the line itself rather than on the gesture. The prologue stresses Yves’s creativity and announces his freedom of gesture throughout the film. After escaping the asylum, though he is constrained by his immediate environment and by encounters with other characters, he can freely draw his own lines of movement. Full of agency and invention, he is presented by Deligny like the essential creator of the film rather than like the guinea pig of a pedagogical experiment.

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<sup>57</sup> Deligny, ‘Quand même il est des nôtres’, in *Œuvres*, p. 634.

<sup>58</sup> Ingold, *Lines*, p. 43.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.



Fig. 16, 17. *Le Moindre Geste/Le Mystère Picasso*

Secondly, the characters circulate in a territory which is constituted by a network of paths, roads, and railway lines. Rather than walking along these lines, Yves, most often, crosses them. While escaping, Yves and Richard deviate from the path to wander in wild nature [Fig. 18]. Yves's impulse to cross the line also manifests when he exits the frame on several occasions. As Comolli explains, 'la liberté qui définit le jeu du corps d'Yves est bien celle de risquer de n'être plus dans le film, d'échapper au cadrage, de sortir du champ. Menace d'évasion du cadre même des images.'<sup>60</sup> At the end of the film, when Yves is returning to the asylum with Valérie, he walks on the main road, which signifies the end of his free wandering [Fig. 19].



Fig. 18, 19. *Le Moindre Geste*

Finally, the film weaves another sort of line: the thread. Yves is a character who experiences great difficulty in making knots. He clumsily manipulates his shoelaces and struggles with ropes [Fig. 20-23]. The

<sup>60</sup> Jean-Louis Comolli, 'L'Évadé. *Le Moindre Geste*, de Fernand Deligny, Jo Manenti et Jean-Pierre Daniel, 1959-1970', *Voir et pouvoir: l'innocence perdue: cinéma, télévision, documentaire* (Lagrasse: Verdier, 2004), p. 586.

leitmotiv of the thread, which has been purposely stressed in the editing of the film, mirrors Daniel's difficulty in forging links between the different narrative fragments of the film. Deligny, who often compares cinematic images with chips (*copeau, éclat*), is aware of the discontinuous nature of the cinematic medium: 'Camérer, c'est peut-être mettre dans la caméra, dans la boîte, des éclats d'humain et c'est tout ce qu'on peut en retrouver, de l'humain commun, des éclats.'<sup>61</sup> The difficulty in knotting (or tying together) the threads of the narrative is also symptomatic of Yves's struggle to develop relationships with others. The threads can be potentially abandoned and unknotted. Yves's wandering develops in the margins of the fiction. His gestures gravitate around a forgotten centre, that is, the hole in which Richard has fallen. Moreover, Valérie and Yves's respective lines fail twice to be tied. The first time, Valérie observes Yves and then runs away; the second time, she tries to touch him, but Yves rejects her and pursues his solitary wandering. According to Comolli,

[s]i l'objet du film est bien de dénouer ce qui d'habitude est noué, lacets, cordages, filins, récits, situations, fictions, Yves à tout cela se refuse, ou tout cela à Yves se refuse, et comme il a du mal à nouer les lacets de ses chaussures d'évadé, par contagion signifiante tous les fils se dénouent ou se nouent à contretemps, les fils du destin, de l'histoire, du sens, restent défaits, flottants, en suspens.<sup>62</sup>

In the epilogue of the film, Yves drops his rope to follow Valérie. Although he first keeps his distance, both characters eventually walk next to each other, holding hands and following the same line. Their trajectories separate when Yves returns to the asylum.

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<sup>61</sup> Deligny, 'Camérer', in '*Le Moindre Geste. Autour de Fernand Deligny*', *L'Image, le monde*, p. 65.

<sup>62</sup> Comolli, *Voir et pouvoir*, p. 585.



Fig. 20-23. *Le Moindre Geste*

## 2.2. *Ligne d'Erre, Ligne Coutumière, and Community in Ce Gamin-là*

Beyond his difference, Yves is shown as being part of a community: 'Yves, costaud, rougeaud, toujours un peu "simple" mais tout de même, il est des nôtres,' Deligny writes.<sup>63</sup> However, *Le Moindre Geste*'s fragmented aesthetics emphasise the lack of interrelation between the different populations that inhabit the territory in which Yves is wandering: the 'nôtre' is disseminated. How can a common territory, shared by residents, workers, educators, and marginal people be constituted? In the late 1960s, a few years after the shooting of *Le Moindre Geste*, Deligny's preoccupation with the 'nôtre', the 'commun' and the 'corps commun' grew. He wanted to invent a space where the gestures of wandering and the gestures of dwelling could

<sup>63</sup> Deligny, 'Quand même il est des nôtres', in *Œuvres*, p. 635.

coexist.<sup>64</sup> He thus created a network in the Cévennes, bringing together autistic children, non-professional educators, farmers, and workers.<sup>65</sup> The network established an ecological mode of existence in which multiple lines of existence and heterogeneous forms of life could interrelate in the same territory. According to Marielle Macé, the ideas of network and cohabitation are at the core of ecological thinking:

De là la perspective écologique, c'est-à-dire le souci de la cohabitation des 'modes' dans un 'monde', qui est l'objet d'une tâche, qui est donc politique, et regarde chaque aspect de l'existence; une forme de vie n'y engage pas seulement le destin des hommes, mais aussi, en réseau, celui des choses, des techniques, des vivants non humains, des imaginations.<sup>66</sup>

By stimulating the interconnection between heterogeneous lines of existence, Deligny attempted to revitalise the notion of community through the emergence of a 'corps commun'.<sup>67</sup> In its political dimension, the notion of line can thus be defined as a device to see and analyse singular manners of dwelling in a territory and within a community.

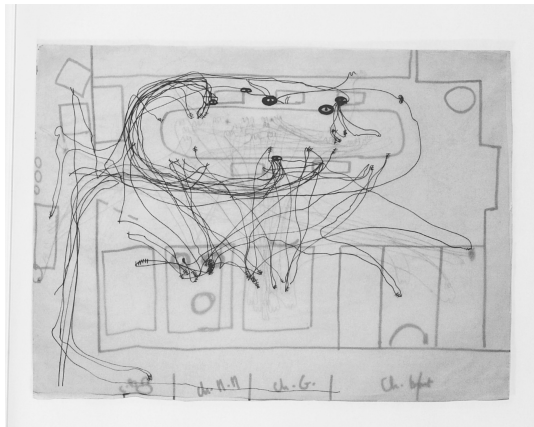


Fig. 24. Monoblet, November 1976. The wandering lines are traced on tracing paper. The background map represents the kitchen where three autistic children assist the making of bread.

In 1969, Deligny developed a system of maps in order to trace the gestures and movements of autistic children who lived under his team's care. Through the notions of *ligne d'erre* (wandering line) and *ligne coutumière*

<sup>64</sup> See Toledo, 'Le Moindre Geste', in *Œuvres*, p. 606; Toledo, 'Ce Gamin, là', in *Œuvres*, p. 1036.

<sup>65</sup> Toledo in 'Le Moindre Geste. Autour de Fernand Deligny', p. 41.

<sup>66</sup> Macé, *Styles*, pp. 111-12.

<sup>67</sup> Deligny, *Les Détours de l'agir ou le moindre geste*, in *Œuvres*, p. 1333.

(customary line), *gestes d'erre* and *gestes coutumiers*, he distinguishes, on the one hand, the autistic children's unpredictable trajectories and, on the other, the adults' everyday activities.<sup>68</sup> Deligny understands the word 'erre' in the same way as 'errer' (to wander):

Erre: le mot m'est venu. Il parle un peu de tout, comme tous les mots. Il y va d'une 'manière d'avancer, de marcher', dit le dictionnaire, de 'la vitesse acquise d'un bâtiment sur lequel n'agit plus le propulseur' et aussi des 'traces d'un animal'. Mot fort riche, comme on le voit, qui parle de marche, de mer et d'animal, et qui recèle bien d'autres échos : 'errer : -s'écarter de la vérité... aller de côté et d'autre, au hasard, à l'aventure.' J.J. Rousseau le dit : -'voyager pour voyager, c'est errer, être vagabond.' C'est aussi 'se manifester ça et là, et fuitivement, sur divers objets, sourire aux lèvres'.<sup>69</sup>

While the wandering line indicates a certain way of being that deviates from the main paths and randomly drifts at the margins, the 'coutumier' designates the everyday reiteration of subsistence gestures, such as making bread, doing the dishes, peeling potatoes, and sewing. Thanks to the practice of cartography, Deligny observes how both lines intertwine at once in the children's and the adults' gestures. The lines are the graphic trace of all the gestures and movements repeated by the community every day. The map is a medium that makes it possible to see what would otherwise go unnoticed, by bringing out the interconnection of everyday trajectories, reiterated patterns, and unexpected detours. By using their kinesic intelligence, the persons who traced the map from memory or in the field needed to be attentive to their own gestures and to the gestures of the autistic children who they were taking charge of [Fig. 25, 26].

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<sup>68</sup> See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Capitalisme et schizophrénie. 2, Mille plateaux* (Paris: Minuit, 1980), p. 248; Deligny, *Les Détours de l'agir ou le moindre geste*, in *Œuvres*, pp. 1247-344; Fernand Deligny and Isaac Joseph, *Cahiers de l'immuable 1/ voix et voir*, in *Œuvres*, pp. 847-59.

<sup>69</sup> Deligny, *Cahiers de l'immuable*, in *Œuvres*, p. 811.



Fig. 25, 26. *Ce Gamin-là*

While the *coutumier* forms a bare thread ('trame') which structures the autistic children's life and orientates their movements thanks to identifiable landmarks,<sup>70</sup> the children weave another sort of line, compared to a spiderweb by Deligny. The ideas of 'inné', 'agir', 'détour', 'échappée', and 'résistance' define the concept of 'arachnéen', which is the distinctive feature of the wandering line, as Ogilvie explains:

Le modèle analogique de ce réseau, qui évoque évidemment la guerre et la résistance, mais pas seulement, est la toile d'araignée, 'l'arachnéen', ce tissage obstiné qui offre l'image d'une échappée, d'un dehors, d'un 'pas de côté', qui ressurgit sans cesse à tous les moments de l'histoire, comme un filigrane, une persistance vitale.<sup>71</sup>

According to Deligny, the permanence of human life manifests in the innate gestures of autistic people, who are able to execute elementary gestures that prove essential in the everyday life of a community. Deligny distinguishes the adults' gestures of *faire* and the autistic children's gestures of *agir*.<sup>72</sup> Indeed, if the adults intentionally gesture to make something, the children repeat customary gestures without being preoccupied with the purpose of the action, '*l'agir étant de faire sur un mode où vouloir n'[est] pas de mise*',<sup>73</sup> Deligny explains. They react to the adults' routine, attracted by the trace of their customary lines. Their gestures, which are not driven by projects and intentions and can lack self-control, are often less efficient than the adults'

<sup>70</sup> Deligny, *Nous et l'innocent*, in *Œuvres*, p. 714.

<sup>71</sup> Bertrand Ogilvie, 'Vivre entre les lignes', in Fernand Deligny, *L'Arachnéen et autres textes* (Paris: L'Arachnéen, 2008), p. 246.

<sup>72</sup> See Deligny, *Les Détours de l'agir*, in *Œuvres*.

<sup>73</sup> Deligny, *Singulière ethnie*, in *Œuvres*, p. 1453.

ones. They are not subjected to the imperative of efficiency. Deligny writes about the young autistic person Janmari:

L'*agir* se déroule en beaucoup plus de temps que notre *faire*.  
Le surplus des gestes pourrait être mis au compte d'une sorte d'effervescence de l'activité quelque peu désordonnée, mal contrôlée, Janmari ne se dominant pas et pour cause, si bien que ces gestes lui échapperaient.<sup>74</sup>

In the network, customary and wandering lines are closely interwoven. Deligny observes that the autistic children's presence influences the adults' slightest gestures, which become modulated by the 'dérive' of wandering lines.<sup>75</sup> Through the constant co-presence of multiple lines of existence, the network thus enables the emergence of a common body – a 'CORPS COMMUN, réseau de repères et de traces qui s'étend entre l'un et l'autre, qui n'est ni l'un ni l'autre', as Isaac Joseph writes.<sup>76</sup> It is in this sense that Deligny's network inspired Deleuze and Guattari's concept of 'rhizome'. The rhizome is a cartographic model of thought, which, rather than organising elements according to a hierarchical and arborescent system, fosters the interconnection, crossing, and interweaving of a multiplicity of heterogeneous lines.<sup>77</sup> According to Deleuze and Guattari, 'Fernand Deligny a ouvert ses lignes d'écritures sur des lignes des vie. Et constamment les lignes se croisent, se recourent en un instant, se suivent un certain temps.'<sup>78</sup> The autistic children's wandering gestures not only weave lines of flight, but actually interweave several heterogeneous lines: '[...] *une ligne de fuite, déjà complexe, avec ses singularités; mais aussi une ligne molaire ou coutumière avec ses segments; et entre les deux (?), une ligne moléculaire, avec ses quanta qui la font pencher d'un côté ou de l'autre.*'<sup>79</sup>

But to what extent can the wandering lines traced by the adults translate all the indeterminacy of the autistic children's gestures? Barbara Formis criticises the process, which consists in obliterating the indeterminacy

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<sup>74</sup> Deligny, *Les Détours de l'agir*, in *Œuvres*, p. 1304.

<sup>75</sup> Deligny, *Acheminement vers l'image*, in *Œuvres*, p. 1684.

<sup>76</sup> Deligny and Joseph, *Cahiers de l'immuable*, in *Œuvres*, p. 852.

<sup>77</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *Mille plateaux*, pp. 9-37.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 248.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.* (emphasis in original)

of gestures by turning them into an abstract trace, a metaphor, or an image, like a line for example: 'Approcher le geste par le biais de sa manipulation corporelle et en indure par la suite une forme imaginaire ne peut que servir à "dessiner" le geste sans jamais le comprendre dans toute son indétermination.'<sup>80</sup> For instance, the serpentine line in *Tristram Shandy* paradoxically freezes a spontaneous and 'free' gesture in a determined and fixed form. In the late 1970s, Deligny progressively abandoned the practice of mapping in favour of the camera. Contrary to maps, film and video enabled Deligny, as well as the parents' children, to see the children's gestures directly in their immediate environment. However, in contrast to the maps, the filmic medium cannot give a synthetic and comprehensive understanding of the territory in which the children and adults cohabit. In the documentary *Ce Gamin-là*, the map and the moving image, which enable the spectator to see the trace of gestures differently, dialogue with each other and prove to be complementary. The map is a useful device to learn how to see gestures more carefully as they manifest in front of the camera. Although Certeau questions the relevance of the trace and the line to grasp the gesture of walking, given that '[l]a trace est substituée à la pratique',<sup>81</sup> he refers to Deligny's 'lignes d'erre' as a notion to rethink the manners of moving in modern cities and to revitalise the ways of looking at people's gestures.<sup>82</sup> While walking or exploring a city, people can indeed wander and traverse the rational grid of society by making unpredictable trajectories and meaningless detours, as previously seen in *France/tour/détour*.

Impressed by *Le Moindre Geste*, the filmmaker and communist activist Renaud Victor decided to make a documentary on Deligny's network in 1972. Truffaut, who produced *Ce Gamin-là*, asked Deligny to write a commentary and read it in voice-over. Due to a lack of money, the shooting of the film was sporadic. Even when he could not actually film for lack of reel, Victor could

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<sup>80</sup> Formis, *Esthétique de la vie ordinaire*, p. 118.

<sup>81</sup> Certeau, *L'Invention du quotidien 1*, p. 147. See also Doina Petrescu, 'The Indeterminate Mapping of the Common', *Field*, 1.1 (2007), 88-96 (p. 93).

<sup>82</sup> Certeau, *L'Invention du quotidien 1*, pp. xlv and 57.

plan the shooting without any difficulty, due to the monotony of the network's life. As Deligny's partner Jacques Lin tells,

[ce]s jours-ci, Renaud a bien une caméra, mais il n'a pas encore de pellicule. Il fait comme s'il filmait pour de bon. Il n'a pas à se tracasser; demain, après-demain et tous les jours qui suivront, ce qui se passe dans le campement se répétera, aux mêmes moments, avec les mêmes gestes et aux mêmes endroits.<sup>83</sup>

*Ce Gamin-là* focuses more particularly on the life of the young autistic Janmari, who was a constant source of questioning and interest for Deligny. The medical profession considered Janmari as being incurable and impossible to live with. At the beginning of the film, Deligny criticises the life conditions in psychiatric hospitals in which 'invivre' corresponds to isolation and where the perception of the outside world is reduced to walls and window bars. With the network, Deligny attempted to create a counter-model of existence where Janmari could live outside, within a community, and manifest a sense of belonging by walking, wandering, and gesturing.

The film traces the progressive evolution of Janmari's behaviour, year after year. At first, Janmari spends most of his time spinning around and swaying [Fig. 27]. He does not spin around himself, but around an absent centre: an absence of will, language, project, intention, and ultimately subject. According to Comolli,

[l]à, jour après jour, vivant avec ces enfants 'hors' du langage, partageant avec eux une vie en commun, Deligny est conduit à s'interroger sur l'errance de ces artistes, leurs *lignes d'erre*, comme il les nomme, qui dessinent à même la terre la trace obsessionnelle d'un désir de tourner autour d'un centre absent, car ces lignes tournent et retournent, font des nœuds, nouent et renouent inlassablement les mêmes fils cheminés à longueur de journée.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Cited in Toledo, 'Ce Gamin, là', in *Œuvres*, p. 1035.

<sup>84</sup> Jean-Louis Comolli, 'Un cinéma hors de lui', in *Corps et cadre: cinéma, éthique, politique, 2004-2010* (Lagrasse: Verdier, 2012), p. 439.



Fig. 27, 28. *Ce Gamin-là*

Like in *Le Moindre Geste*, the symbolism of the knot expresses the autistic children's difficulty living as subjects. According to Deligny, a knot is a 'projet qui serait la preuve de l'existence du sujet'.<sup>85</sup> He observes that autistic people, who are not conditioned by the structures of verbal language and the code of social interactions in the same way as others, are not able to make knots by themselves:

Voilà donc des enfants qui restent pantois devant le nouement. Au premier entrelacement, ils y arrivent; mais il en faut un autre qui réitère le premier, alors que le premier se relâche pendant que s'opère l'autre sans lequel le nœud ne sera pas fait, ne se fera pas. D'où la nécessité que la main de se s'en mêle, les deux n'y suffisant pas.<sup>86</sup>

In order to make knots, the autistic children, similarly to Yves in *Le Moindre Geste*, need a third hand, i.e. the hand of the subject 'se'. The knots, which interweave wandering and customary lines, structure the mode of existence of the network. As Deligny explains, 'Janmari s'y repère dans ce réseau des lignes de l'usage par nous suivies et dont il nous empreinte des tronçons et des séquences.'<sup>87</sup> Gradually, through contact with the adults, Janmari starts to take part in the life of the community by reiterating essential gestures, like making bread or chopping firewood [Fig. 28]. Although his gestures are of *agir* and not of *faire*, they manifest his sense of belonging. Contrary to Yves, he is no longer isolated: the film shows him progressively living and wandering in co-presence with others.

<sup>85</sup> Deligny, *Les Détours de l'agir*, in *Œuvres*, p. 1315.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1314-15.

<sup>87</sup> Deligny, *Nous et l'innocent*, in *Œuvres*, p. 786.

If gestures of knotting are essential to develop a community, they are also crucial to weave story lines in narrative cinema. As suggested in Chapter 3, the issues of cohesion, coexistence, and co-presence are not only political but also narrative. In *Out 1: Noli me tangere*, Rivette emphasises at once the difficulty to constitute a cohesive group of characters and to build a narrative in the political context of post-May 1968. The film, which was entirely improvised by the actors and actresses, raises questions that are also relevant to *Le Moindre Geste*: how not to lose the thread of the narrative? How to forge links between the scattered fragments of gestures and the disconnected trajectories of the characters? How to make knots through gestures of contact?

In *Un homme qui dort* and *Jeanne Dielman* (1975), Perce, Queysanne and Akerman direct the actor and actress's gestural lines by imposing on them specific gestures and postures (see Chapter 1 and 2). The characters' alienation mirrors the actor and actress's own alienation during the shooting. Albeit performing in different contexts and manners, Jacques Spiesser and Delphine Seyrig both struggle to invent their characters' gestures in the very rigid grid imposed by the directors. By contrast, Rivette uses improvisation to break with the constraining frame of the script, which like a program, tends to condition the actors and actresses' slightest gestures. Influenced by Jean Rouch's improvised film *Petit à Petit* (1971),<sup>88</sup> he develops an intuitive style of filmmaking which originates in the actors and actresses' improvised lines of movement.

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<sup>88</sup> See *Les Mystères de Paris: 'Out 1' de Jacques Rivette revisité*, dir. by Robert Fischer and Wilfried Reichart (2015).

### 3. Improvising the Line

#### 3.1. Liberating the Line during the Post-New Wave

The Soviet filmmaker Eisenstein was used to sketching his characters' 'lines of movement' before shooting, and to plan their 'spatial inscriptions' in the shot.<sup>89</sup> Fascinated by 'la dynamique des lignes et la dynamique de la "marche"',<sup>90</sup> Eisenstein was convinced that any director had to be able to perform the characters' gestures, even approximately, in order to rightly plan their lines of movement:

C'est pourquoi il ne faut jamais courir après une ligne gracieuse ou recherchée, mais il faut:  
Jouer réellement à *la place* de l'acteur lorsqu'on prépare la mise en scène chez soi; ou bien la jouer *devant* l'acteur lorsqu'on lui montre, ou encore *avec* l'acteur lorsqu'il cherche. *En ressentant la situation et l'action d'une façon intensément motrice, il faut jouer ce passage dans ses grandes lignes, puis voir le résultat – déceler la loi logique de son expressivité fondamentale et la transformer dans une certaine forme de construction.*<sup>91</sup>

From this perspective, the invention of gestures thus fundamentally results from the director's rather than from the actor or actress's agency. In the lesson on mise-en-scène entitled 'Mise en Jeu and Mise en Geste' (1948) in which he adapts the end of Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* (1869), Eisenstein describes the trajectories of the characters' slightest gestures. He envisions their gestural lines (or what he calls elsewhere the 'zigzag de l'expression'),<sup>92</sup> in a very expressive style, close to a drawing: 'The right hand sketches rapid zigzags of refusal in the air.'<sup>93</sup> In this expressive mise-en-scène, the character's interiority is transposed into lines of movement decided by the filmmaker himself. Yet Eisenstein is aware of a certain margin of individual interpretation, if not improvisation, from the actor or actress: 'Les

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<sup>89</sup> Eisenstein, *Mise en Jeu and Mise en Geste*.

<sup>90</sup> Eisenstein, 'Comment j'ai appris à dessiner', *Change*, 5 (1970), 21-23 (p. 23).

<sup>91</sup> Eisenstein, 'L'Art de la mise en scène', p. 35.

<sup>92</sup> Eisenstein, 'Dramaturgie de la forme filmique', trans. by Danièle Huillet, in *Cinématisme. Peinture et cinéma*, ed. by François Albéra (Dijon: Les Presses du réel, 2009), p. 28.

<sup>93</sup> Eisenstein, *Mise en Jeu and Mise en Geste*. Before shooting a film, Eisenstein drew the composition of the shots, as well as the characters' gestures.

personnages ne sont pas des poupées mécaniques qu'on lâche dans le drame. Des hasards font naître des possibilités, il y a des imprévus. Une réplique partie de la salle. Une réflexion captée au vol. Un geste fortuit.<sup>94</sup>

The notion of fortuity, already explored in Chapter 4, reveals the porous boundary between performance and life. Even when they are sketched and rehearsed in advance, gestural lines can be subjected to small, sometimes infinitesimal variations.

In *France/tour/détour*, Godard and Miéville explore how margins of individual improvisation manifest in the socio-political frame of everyday life. Through the process of slow motion, the characters' gestures reveal the entanglement of segmental, molecular, and rupture lines. Similarly to the approach to performance in *Roberte*, the television series questions how gestures can react idiosyncratically in a codified frame. While using different methods and having different aims, Godard/Miéville and Zucca/Klossowski attempt to grasp the fortuitous expression of life, either by filming young children, without any experience of film acting, who consent to perform their everyday life in front of a television camera, or by choosing a non-professional actress to perform the main part in *Roberte*. In both cases, constraint, framing, and sociocultural conditioning stimulate spontaneous reactions which might be the signs of a corporeal resistance.

When Godard returned to fiction films in the late 1970s, he explored the tension between the characters' determined trajectories and the indeterminate detours of their gestures. In the short essay film *Scénario de 'Sauve qui peut (la vie)'* (1979), made in preparation of his new long feature, Godard expresses the desire to weave the threads of the narrative from the gestural lines produced by actors and actresses during the shooting. While the trajectory of a screenplay (the story line) is conventionally generated by dialogue (the lines), Godard attempts to orientate the story lines by looking more carefully at the gestures themselves. By slowing down the scenes and giving one more time to see, 'on peut trouver un changement de direction de l'histoire et comment diriger l'histoire,' Godard argues. Looking at the

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<sup>94</sup> Eisenstein, 'L'Art de la mise en scène', p. 36.

gestures of waitresses (extracted from the 'Mouvement 4' of *France/tour/détour*) and of young people playing football, Godard uses slow motion to see – in the de-composition of their bodily movements – potential story lines and narrative trajectories, which could be developed in the editing. 'Que la ligne du récit parte de ce qui s'est produit, que ce qui se diffuse parte de ce qui se produit' is what Godard tries to achieve in *Sauve qui peut (la vie)*.

During the post-New Wave era, preoccupations with conditioning and deconditioning led directors such as Philippe Garrel (*Marie pour mémoire*, 1967), Jacques Rozier (*Du Côté d'Orouët*, 1973), Rouch (*Petit à petit*), and Rivette (*Out 1*) to develop methods of filmmaking fundamentally based on improvisation, inviting the actors and actresses, either professional or not, to invent their lines of movement by themselves.<sup>95</sup> By contrast, according to Mouëllic, most of the New Wave directors did not use the technique of improvisation (or only exceptionally in certain scenes of their films). If Godard's practice of filmmaking can evoke improvisation in *A bout de souffle* (1960), he did not let the actors and actresses improvise in the proper sense of the term:

[Godard] s'est toujours intéressé à la technique et son choix du Caméflex pour *A bout de souffle* témoigne d'un désir de légèreté et de réactivité. Il ne s'agit pas pour autant de laisser les acteurs improviser, mais de pouvoir improviser lui-même ses choix de mise en scène *in situ*, à la manière de certains tournages d'Orson Welles.<sup>96</sup>

During the shooting of *A bout de souffle*, Godard broke with the conventions of traditional shootings by developing last-minute ideas, day after day, while following a script which was already well structured: '[Godard] écrit les dialogues au fur et à mesure, au jour le jour, les donnant aux acteurs au dernier moment,' Bergala explains.<sup>97</sup> Although they could occasionally be put in a (limited) situation of improvisation, the actors and actresses followed Godard's precise indications.

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<sup>95</sup> See Gilles Mouëllic, *Improviser le cinéma* (Crisnée: Yellow Now, 2011), pp. 86-98.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>97</sup> Alain Bergala, *Godard au travail, les années 60* (Paris: Cahiers du Cinéma, 2006), p. 47.

'Les improvisations qui impliquent réellement les acteurs auront lieu en réalité dans les marges de la Nouvelle Vague, avec Jean Rouch et Jacques Rozier notamment, très attentifs à l'évolution rapide du matériel de prise de vues,' Mouëllic argues.<sup>98</sup> Indeed, the development of smaller and more mobile cameras (especially in television and live broadcast)<sup>99</sup> enabled filmmakers to follow more freely the actors and actresses' trajectories and gestural lines, like in *Le Moindre Geste* for example. Rouch advocated filming with a movie camera in hand: 'La technique de la caméra à la main me semble particulièrement efficace, car elle permet de s'adapter à l'action en fonction de l'espace, de pénétrer dans la réalité plutôt que de laisser se dérouler devant l'observateur.'<sup>100</sup> For Rouch, the filmmaker has to walk with the camera in order to 'improviser pour elle un autre type de ballet où la caméra devient aussi vivante que les hommes qu'elle filme'.<sup>101</sup> Such an 'improvisation dynamique' leads to better interaction between the cinematographer's gestures and the characters' filmed gestures.<sup>102</sup> In this sense, as Citton explains, the camera is not a machine which follows a programme and calibrates the actors and actresses' gestural lines, but an 'appareil' which can record something that has not been predicted and envisioned beforehand:

On peut certes la programmer partiellement en contrôlant sa focale, son exposition, son déclenchement et son interruption, mais ce qu'elle enregistre échappe à la programmation du cameraman, puisqu'une fois l'appareil en marche, il prendra tout ce qui (se) passe dans le champ choisi.<sup>103</sup>

Like in *France/tour/détour* and *Le Moindre Geste*, the camera in Rivette's *Out 1*, which is manipulated by the cinematographer Pierre-William Glenn, leaves room for indeterminacy, accidents, improvised gestures, and follows the characters' serpentine lines.

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<sup>98</sup> Mouëllic, *Improviser le cinéma*, p. 45.

<sup>99</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>100</sup> Jean Rouch, 'La Caméra et les hommes', in *Jean-Rouch ou le ciné plaisir*, ed. by René Prédal (Condé-sur-Noireau: Corlet; Paris: Télérama, 1996), pp. 43-44.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> Citton, *Gestes d'humanité*, p. 265.

### 3.2. Eccentric Lines, Broken Lines, and Spiderweb in *Out 1: Noli me tangere*

Co-written with Suzanne Schiffman, *Out 1: Noli me tangere*<sup>104</sup> was entirely improvised by the actors and actresses, including Jean-Pierre Léaud, Juliet Berto, Michael Lonsdale, Bulle Ogier, Jean-François Stévenin, and Bernadette Lafont. Rather than directing their gestures by following the script as in a traditional shooting, Rivette gave them the freedom to invent their role and lines. Loosely inspired by Balzac's *Histoire des Treize* (1833-39), the narrative follows the wanderings of two marginal characters, named Colin (Léaud) and Frédérique (Berto) in Paris, as well as the rehearsals of two distinct theatrical troupes that perform exercises of improvisation in view of staging Aeschylus's plays, *Seven Against Thebes* and *Prometheus Bound*. The film follows the dynamics within and between the different groups that progressively disintegrate. As Rivette has suggested several times, the progressive erosion of the groups can be analysed in the context of post-May 1968: 'Deux ans après Mai 68, où on en est? On ne sait pas, on attend. Le film essaie de décrire une période de crise, générale, à tous les niveaux.'<sup>105</sup> The film shows the disenchantment that results from the failures of political utopian projects. Coincidentally, Lonsdale practiced improvisation with Peter Brook during the events of May 1968 in Paris. He remembers the dissension within the troupe, constituted of American, English, and French actors and actresses: 'On n'était pas soudés.'<sup>106</sup> In *Out 1*, Lonsdale draws on this experience to embody and improvise the role of Thomas, a stage director who struggles to create cohesion in his own troupe.

Improvisation in film is often studied in relation to the other arts, such as dance, music, writing, or painting. *Out 1* has been compared to Ornette

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<sup>104</sup> The version entitled *Out 1: Noli me tangere*, released in 1971, is constituted of 8 episodes and lasts almost 13h in total. In 1972, Rivette edited a shorter version of 4h20, entitled *Out 1: Spectre*.

<sup>105</sup> See *Les Mystères de Paris*, dir. by Fischer and Reichart.

<sup>106</sup> Michael Lonsdale, *Abécédaire* (Paris: L'œil, 2012), p. 57.

Coleman's free jazz,<sup>107</sup> Trisha Brown's experimental dance,<sup>108</sup> or Julian Beck and Judith Malina's *Living Theater*.<sup>109</sup> The exploratory research on gesture remains the common denominator of all these artistic practices. Yet, distinctions must be made between, on the one hand, improvisation in dance and theatre, which is most often practiced in preparation for a performance and thus implies a level of reiteration, and improvisation in film, which aims to capture the unique occurrence of an unpredictable gesture, impossible to envision in advance. According to Mouëllic,

[s]i le travail du cinéaste avec les acteurs peut ressembler à celui du metteur en scène de théâtre ou du chorégraphe, son but est de faire surgir l'imprévisible, l'événement unique, le geste impossible à prévoir, geste qui perdrait une grande partie de sa force s'il était écrit ou répété dans une perspective de réitération: cette puissance de surgissement du moment improvisé au cinéma, proche alors du jazz, est un *au-delà* de l'écriture et non un *en-deçà* comme il l'est au théâtre.<sup>110</sup>

If theatre occupies a central position in *Out 1*, the characters are shown performing exercises of improvisation which above all aim to forge links and cohesion within the group. These exercises are not intended to be reiterated as such in the final performance. The two troupes dissolve before they actually start rehearsing Aeschylus's text. Rivette uses theatre as a way to critically explore the limits of improvisation: the lack of text, the lack of coordination between the actors and actresses, and, ultimately, the risk of a rupture within the group, the narrative line, and the overall creative process are aspects of improvisation which are questioned throughout the film. Following each session, the characters, especially in Thomas's troupe, share their impressions and reactions, analysing a process of creation together based on intuition, playfulness, abandon, and also failure. As I will

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<sup>107</sup> See Jonathan Rosenbaum, 'Out 1 and its Double', <<https://www.jonathanrosenbaum.net/2017/05/out-1-and-its-double/>> [accessed 09 May 2018]

<sup>108</sup> See Francesca Dosi, *Trajectoires balzacienes dans le cinéma de Jacques Rivette: 'Out 1', 'La Belle Noiseuse', 'Ne touchez pas la hache'* (La Madeleine: LettMotif, 2013), p. 69.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85.

<sup>110</sup> Gilles Mouëllic, 'Performance et improvisation dans *L'œuvre de l'art*', in *La Pensée esthétique de Gérard Genette*, ed. by Joseph Delaplace, Pierre-Henry Frangne et Gilles Mouëllic (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2011), pp. 227-28.

demonstrate, the characters' improvised gestures weave serpentine, eccentric, and broken lines.

The difficulty of forging a group is suggested in the title, *Out 1: Noli Me Tangere*. In opposition to the word 'in', used as a synonym for 'trendy' by young French people in the 1960s, 'out' means 'en dehors'.<sup>111</sup> While 'in' people are insiders, integrated in a group respecting certain norms, values, and cultural codes, 'out' people refuse or struggle to belong to a group or to constitute one. The relationship between outsider and insider characters, between the 'I' and the 'We', and between the individual and the group is usually defined from the perspective of the centre rather than of the margin. For example, as Mary Ebbott argues, 'Greek tragedy includes many types of marginal figures, characters who are outsiders from the perspective of the Athenian centre [...]'.<sup>112</sup> Yet, in *Out 1*, all the characters gravitate around an absent centre: the *groupe des treize*, which has been dissolved, becomes Colin's obsession; two central characters of the *groupe*, named Pierre and Igor, remain absent and haunt the narrative like ghosts; finally, the absence of script and indications from the director disrupt the actors and actresses' habits of acting (in this sense, it is significant that both troupes rehearse and improvise without using Aeschylus's text, keeping it at a distance). The lack of centre(s) in the narrative creates a sense of instability that blurs the lines between the supposed outsider and insider characters: the outsiders' wandering reflects the loneliness, the marginalisation, and the anxieties of the insiders who are not able to successfully forge a group. Thomas ends up alone and 'out' at the end of the film, isolated and abandoned by his partners.

More than 'outsiders', Colin and Frédérique can be considered as eccentrics: they are indeed literally off-centre. Colin's eccentric behaviour manifests in the fanciful and serpentine line of his gestures. When he wanders in private or public spaces such as his room, streets, shops, or cafés, he allows himself a certain freedom of movement. Analysing the

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<sup>111</sup> Stéphane Tchaladjieff, 'Note du producteur Tchaladjieff', in *Out 1 et son double/Out 1 and its Double* (Paris: Carlotta, 2015), p. 6. Booklet included in the box set of Rivette's *Out 1* [on DVD]

<sup>112</sup> Mary Ebbott, 'Marginal Figures', in *A Companion to Greek Tragedy*, ed. by Justina Gregory (Malden: Blackwell Publishing), p. 366.

notion of 'fantaisie' in post-romantic nineteenth-century literature, Vouilloux sees a convergence between the notion of eccentricity and the wandering lines of 'fantaisie':

On pourrait composer un florilège de ces expressions où la fantaisie est assimilée au caprice et où sa liberté est matérialisée par les chemins de traverse, les sentiers buissonniers, le vagabondage, la baguenauderie, les parcours zigzagants. Ces personnages, on commence à les qualifier de *fantaisistes* ou même à les nommer des *fantaisistes* (là où l'allemand emploierait l'adjectif *unseriös*): 'originaux' (Paul de Musset, 1848) et autres 'gens singuliers' (Loréan Larchey, 1867), dits aussi 'illuminés' (Nerval, 1852), 'grotesques' (Gautier, 1844), 'excentriques' (Champfleury, 1852) ou 'réfractaires' (Vallès, 1865), dont le comportement, en s'écartant des normes sociales, contrevient à toute idée d'utilité ou d'intérêt. L'inquiétante étrangeté dont s'accompagne l'évocation des anomalies, des bizarreries, des singularités que présentent certaines individualités proches, familières, double une interrogation sur les limites entre excentricité et folie qui a pour effet de déplacer les limites de la raison: 'Où est la route qui sépare la raison de l'excentricité, l'excentricité de la folie?'<sup>113</sup>

The thin boundary between eccentricity and madness is perceptible in Léaud's gestural lines and zigzag trajectories. In the last episode of the film, Colin meets two ex-members of the *groupe des 13*, Warok (Jean Bouise) and Lucie (Françoise Fabian), in a bourgeois Parisian flat which starkly contrasts with the lack of comfort of his *chambre de bonne*. As he confesses, his search for the truth about the enigmatic and fantasised *groupe* turned into a nightmare that led him to the verge of madness and death. While speaking, Colin walks in zigzag around the dining table and spins around, sketching serpentine lines that recall Corporal Trim's flourish. While framing Warok and Lucie in the foreground, the camera moves right and left to follow Colin's trajectory; his eccentric way of being decentres the shot [Fig. 29-34].

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<sup>113</sup> Vouilloux, *Ecritures de fantaisie*, p. 162.



Fig. 29-34. Out 1: *Noli me tangere*

Fig. 35.  
Giotto. *Resurrection (Noli me tangere)* c. 1304-06.  
Fresco, 200 x 185 cm



The second part of the title, *Noli me tangere*, is inspired by Giotto's painting representing Christ's refusal of being touched by Mary Magdalene the morning of his resurrection [Fig. 35].<sup>114</sup> *Noli me tangere* can be translated as 'do not touch me', or as the producer Stéphane Tchalgadjeff suggests in the context of Rivette's film, as 'gardez vos distances, ne me touchez pas, laissez-moi à l'écart, en dehors'.<sup>115</sup> The title, which emphasises the sense of touch and the refusal of contact, suggests, on a gestural level, the difficulty of working collectively. Crucially, Rivette and Schiffman structured the film using the various possibilities for encounters and interactions between the characters:

On a marqué sur une grande feuille de papier millimétré les points de rencontre des personnages, et puis j'ai tracé une espèce de graphique, sur lequel on avait à peu près la continuité de l'histoire [...] On a suivi le graphique: c'est là-dessus qu'on a organisé le tournage.<sup>116</sup>

The diagram reveals the necessity of framing the conditions of improvisation. The actors and actresses are constrained by the space and the environment in which they are playing, as well as by their interactions with the other members of the cast (although Léaud and Berto often improvise alone in their room or in the street). As Jacques Pouillaude writes about improvisation

<sup>114</sup> Dosi, *Trajectoires balzaciennes*, p. 101.

<sup>115</sup> Tchalgadjeff, 'Note du producteur Tchalgadjeff', p. 5.

<sup>116</sup> Schiffman cited in Dosi, *Trajectoires balzaciennes*, p. 66.

in dance,

[l']improvisation se donne généralement un *cadre*, lequel tient minimalement dans la détermination de l'espace et l'éventuelle présence des autres (on improvise rarement seul). L'une et l'autre agissent comme *contraintes*: simultanément, elles restreignent et démultiplient le champ des possibles.<sup>117</sup>

In *Out 1*, the entanglement of trajectories (Colin meets Thomas, Thomas meets Sarah, Sarah meets..., and so forth) multiplies the narrative potentialities and the possibilities of contact and rupture between the characters and within the groups.

The literature on Rivette's cinema, and more particularly on *Out 1*, reveals a constellation of notions and terms close to Deligny's style, such as: itineraries, trajectories, fluxes, lines, and spiderweb. In Rivette's films, the camera maps the characters' trajectories and gestural lines in the shot, and records 'les flux humains que trace, directement, la marche d'une personne dans les rues d'une ville, ou dans un autre lieu', as Coureau notes.<sup>118</sup>

Drawing on Deleuze's philosophy of line, the critic compares Rivette's work to 'une distribution de flux suivant une même énergie poétique qui en tire les invisibles fils, et compose un "agencement"'.<sup>119</sup> When the actress Bernadette Lafont describes her experience on the shooting of *Out 1*, she also uses the words 'toile', 'fil', and 'écheveau'.<sup>120</sup> According to her, '[s]ur le plateau, chaque acteur avait son morceau de toile d'araignée à tisser.'<sup>121</sup> Similarly, Francesca Dosi, who draws on Balzac's essay *Théorie de la démarche* (1833), analyses the 'lignes de force' that animate the actors and actresses' gestures, comparing *Out 1* to a 'réseau' and a 'toile d'araignée':

[...] Chez Balzac l'énergie est un 'fluide matériel' qui agit par transmission et par projection, s'actualisant dans le mouvement: ce fluide est générateur du

<sup>117</sup> Frédéric Pouillaude, 'Vouloir l'involontaire et répéter l'irrépérable', in *Approche philosophique du geste dansé. De l'improvisation à la performance*, ed. by Anne Boissière and Catherine Kintzler (Villeneuve d'Ascq: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2006), p. 152.

<sup>118</sup> Didier Coureau, 'Jacques Rivette, poétique des flux', in *Jacques Rivette. Critique et cinéaste*, ed. by Suzanne Liandrat-Guigues (Paris: Lettres modernes; Caen: Minard, 1998), p. 56.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

<sup>120</sup> Bernadette Lafont, *Le Roman de ma vie. Souvenirs* (Paris: Flammarion, 1997), pp. 152-54.

<sup>121</sup> Bernadette Lafont, *La Fiancée du cinéma* (Paris: Olivier Orban, 1978), p. 133.

geste et de la 'démarche' dont les effets sont aussi bien spirituels que matériels, il représente la force vitale, source de la création, mais la plus forte tension et le déséquilibre qu'elle entraîne peuvent se révéler destructeurs. Rivette incorpore à sa mise en scène la circulation du fluide énergétique qui est à l'origine de la philosophie synthétique balzacienne: sa caméra dessine un réseau graphique (une toile d'araignée) où d'un point à l'autre se transmettent des énergies linéaires, planes et spatiales, des forces en mouvement. Sources de trouble, déstabilisatrices, ces lignes de forces peuvent autant créer que détruire. Elles engendrent une quête qui est à la fois la matière et la forme du récit et arrivent à la pousser au plus loin, jusqu'à ce qu'elle dévoile son impuissance.<sup>122</sup>

In *Out 1*, the gestural lines are creative but also potentially destructive, continuous but also threatened by fragmentation and dissolution.

For example, in Episode 1, Thomas's troupe performs different exercises of improvisation. First of all, in order to forge connections between themselves, the actors and actresses play the game of the mirror, which is a classic exercise of ensemble building. Working in pairs, they closely interact with each other, trying to perform the same gestures. Béatrice (Edwine Moatti) champions the game's beneficial qualities, which enable them to make contact with each other: 'On a pris contact les uns avec les autres.' Then, in the second part of the session, the characters lie on the ground, and in a regressive manner, start to moan, gesticulate, make convulsive and aggressive gestures, and fight and bite. They play simple-minded children or disabled persons, without feet or arms, blind or mute. Achille (Sylvain Corthay) explains having tried to perform 'les grandes lignes du malade'. Going into a trance, they progressively merge together, forming a formless collective body, which continuously aggregates and disintegrates according to their initiatives [Fig. 36-39]. They become 'un organisme animal', turning into a 'monstre informe qui grouille, créature inhumaine qui, à travers le chaos, hurle à la mort'.<sup>123</sup> In contrast with the game of the mirror, which aims to develop human contact and kinesic intelligence, their regressive gestures express the struggle to form a cohesive group together.

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<sup>122</sup> Dosi, *Trajectoires balzaciennes dans le cinéma de Jacques Rivette*, p. 575.

<sup>123</sup> Hélène Frappat, *Jacques Rivette, secret compris* (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, 2001), p. 40.



Fig. 36-39. *Out 1: Noli me tangere*



Fig. 40. Hans Namuth  
Jackson Pollock Painting, 1950



Fig. 41. *Out 1: Noli me tangere*

The gestural lines are not clearly visible or readable, but rather entangled and confused like in Jackson Pollock's action painting. A reference to the painter's drip technique appears briefly in a shot of *Out 1* when an actor in Lilly's troupe drips water on the ground [Fig. 40, 41]. In the same way as Dosi and Lafont compare Rivette's film to a 'toile d'araignée', Allan Kaprow also uses the metaphor of the spiderweb to describe the 'écheveau de lignes et d'éclaboussures' that characterises Pollock's artworks.<sup>124</sup> Like other contemporary avant-garde artists, both Rivette and Pollock put the emphasis on the gestural process of creation: 'Pollock, Cage, et Cunningham ont une commune prédilection pour les "gestes" menant à la fabrication d'une œuvre, plutôt qu'à l'"œuvre" comme produit fini,' Formis explains.<sup>125</sup> Through the improvised gestures of the actors and actresses, *Out 1* takes the form of work in progress: the narrative unfolds as the latter invent their gestural lines. Hubert Damisch compares the aesthetics of 'déroulement' at the core of Pollock's action painting to John Cassavetes's 'acting cinema', which is partly based on improvisation.<sup>126</sup> The lack of straight line defines the unpredictability of acting cinema, 'l'*acting cinema* se déplaçant ainsi des mouvements imprévisibles du corps de l'acteur vers le mouvement tout aussi imprévisible du corps du (ou des) opérateur(s),' Mouëllic writes.<sup>127</sup> Instead of filming the *représentation* of Aeschylus's plays, Rivette, in response to Pollock's aesthetics of '*imprésentation*',<sup>128</sup> focuses on the muddled, shapeless, intuitive, discontinuous, and chaotic lines that emerge during the rehearsals.

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<sup>124</sup> Cited in Formis, *Esthétique de la vie ordinaire*, p. 155.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145.

<sup>126</sup> Hubert Damisch, *Ciné fil* (Paris: Seuil, 2008), pp. 81-84.

<sup>127</sup> Mouëllic, *Improviser le cinéma*, p. 83.

<sup>128</sup> See Formis, *Esthétique de la vie ordinaire*, p. 147.



Fig. 42. Henri Michaux, Untitled, 1979. Ink, 49 x 65 cm

To a certain extent, the session of improvisation in Episode 1 also evokes Henri Michaux's practice of drawing and painting [Fig. 42]: 'Né, élevé, instruit dans un milieu et une culture uniquement du "verbal" (et avant l'époque de l'invasion des images) je peins pour *me déconditionner*.'<sup>129</sup> Michaux, who started at first to draw random lines on paper, 'ligne d'aveugle investigation', 'ligne somnambule', 'ligne [...] qui erre', notes that the process of deconditioning often led him to failure, which encouraged him to risk new attempts and explore other paths.<sup>130</sup> In *Out 1*, the actors and actresses of Thomas's troupe also seek to decondition themselves from a verbal culture that reproduces codified patterns of thinking. At the start, their confused gestures are accompanied by unarticulated sounds, like grunts and groaning. Improvisation becomes a means to express a lost spontaneity. As Pouillaude explains, the dichotomy of nature vs. nurture feeds a certain ideal of improvisation: 'La "spontanéité" ne consiste peut-être en rien d'autre qu'en un oubli des déterminations propres, qu'en un fantasme de virginité par où l'on croit évanouie l'emprise du code, alors qu'elle n'agit que de façon plus intime et prégnante.'<sup>131</sup> The fantasy of spontaneity leads Thomas's troupe to an illusory freedom. Far from being deconditioned from linguistic and social codes, the characters progressively start to articulate vowels and

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<sup>129</sup> Henri Michaux, *Emergences-Résurgences* (Genève: Skira; Paris: Flammarion, 1972), p. 5.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

<sup>131</sup> Pouillaude, 'Vouloir l'involontaire et répéter l'irrépérable', p. 151.

consonants, then words, and finally sentences extracted from Aeschylus's play. 'A l'issue d'une de ces expériences de régression volontaire en deçà du langage, Thomas, le metteur en scène, doit bien se rendre à l'évidence que le *langage* résiste.'<sup>132</sup> Intention, will, artificiality, and cultural references interfere with the actors and actresses' search for gestural spontaneity. If they are 'free' in the sense that their gestures are not dictated by the director, that does not mean that their gestures are necessarily free or spontaneous. 'Those who work in improvisation have the chance to see with frightening clarity how rapidly the boundaries of so-called freedom are reached,' Peter Brook, who practiced improvisation in theatre, explains.<sup>133</sup> One of the risks of free improvisation is to reiterate certain clichés and patterns to the point of contradicting the impulse of life and hindering creativity. By trying to be spontaneous and avoid the conventions of the histrionic code, '[the actor] is reaching inside himself for an alphabet that is also fossilized, for the language of signs from life that he knows is the language not of invention but of his conditioning.'<sup>134</sup>

The lack of structure and cohesion constitutes another pitfall in improvisation. In his theories on theatre, Stanislavski points out the actors and actresses' crucial need for a continuous line in order to build their character. The 'disjointed exercises' of improvisation, which are 'useful in classroom work', break the continuity of the line of action.<sup>135</sup> Actors and actresses need a text and a 'superobjective' to develop their characters' inner lines: 'It is only when he comes to a deeper understanding of his part and a realisation of its fundamental objective that a line gradually emerges as a continuous whole.'<sup>136</sup> Stanislavski argues that every art must develop an 'unbroken line'.<sup>137</sup> For example, someone who 'make[s] certain unrelated movements with his arms, head and body' cannot be considered as a dancer

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<sup>132</sup> Frappat, *Jacques Rivette, secret compris*, p. 40.

<sup>133</sup> Brook, *The Empty Space*, p. 125.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Konstantin Stanislavski, *An Actor Prepares*, trans. by Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1937), p. 275.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., p. 253.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., p. 254.

due to lack of coordination and harmony of his gestures.<sup>138</sup> For the same reason, ‘some accidental and unrelated lines on a piece of paper’ cannot be called a design.<sup>139</sup> In contrast to the modernist aesthetics of fragmentation and discontinuity in Brecht’s theatre, Stanislavski’s preoccupation with coherence echoes the ideal of wholeness in classical sculpture: ‘Break up a beautiful statue and the small scraps of marble cannot be overwhelming in their effect,’ Stanislavski explains.<sup>140</sup> The unbroken line, which requires a certain self-coherence (as mentioned in Chapter 4), drives the character’s emotions and desires, and thus shapes the quality of his gestures throughout the play. All the ‘short lines’<sup>141</sup> and small objectives converge ‘into one superobjective’:<sup>142</sup>

The superobjective and through action are the inborn vital purpose and aspiration rooted in our being, in our mysterious ‘I’. Every play, every role, has concealed in it a superobjective and a line of through action which constitute the essential life of the individual roles and of the whole work.<sup>143</sup>

The line coordinates the multiplicity of actions, conflicts, and obstacles that the character experiences in interacting with other characters. If the actor or actress deviates from the line, he or she will fail to embody his or her character.

It is due to a lack of superobjective and unbroken line that Bernadette Lafont experienced great difficulty embodying her character during the shooting of *Out 1*. When Rivette offered her a role in the film, the shooting had already started. She knew nothing about her character, except that she was a writer named Sarah and a member of the enigmatic *groupe des treize*.<sup>144</sup> Thomas, a past lover, asks her character to join his troupe in order to take part in the sessions of improvisation. At first, Lafont did not know how

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid., p. 253.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., p. 253-54.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., p. 275.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., pp. 255-56.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., p. 274.

<sup>143</sup> Konstantin Stanislavski, *Creating a Role*, trans. by Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood (London: New English Library, 1970), p. 70.

<sup>144</sup> Lafont, *Le Roman de ma vie*, pp. 151-52.

do deal with the 'morceaux épars' that shape her character, feeling a sense of disconnection and powerlessness:<sup>145</sup>

En dépit d'une entière disponibilité, je ne parviens pas à y prendre part. Je ne suis pas une habituée des jeux d'improvisation et je ne comprends pas ce que je fais sur ce film. Au bout d'une semaine, je me sens totalement hors jeu. Une sensation d'impuissance me paralyse, la toile se tisse et s'organise comme si je n'existais pas.<sup>146</sup>

The actress's difficulties, which mirror her character's struggle to engage in the group, are highlighted in Episode 7. Thomas's troupe, including Sarah, works on an exercise of *disponibilité* that aims to develop the actors and actresses' attention skills. In the session, they perform twelve different situations. Each time Thomas names a new actor or actress, the troupe must freeze in order to interrupt the action and let the designated comedian initiate a new situation. Bergamotte (Bernadette Onfroy) plays hopscotch, then Quentin (Pierre Baillot) plays a marionette, then Achille imitates a monkey, and so forth. Gestural lines are constantly diverted, interrupted, and subjected to sudden changes of direction and arbitrariness. The actors and actresses need to adapt to these new situations by performing together in a playful and even childlike manner. When the comedians collectively analyse their performance at the end of the rehearsal, Sarah is criticised for having played against the rules. She has indeed put the cohesion of the group in jeopardy. For instance, when Béatrice takes the lead, Achille starts singing a Russian chant, which, like an incantation, encourages the troupe – except Sarah, who disappears off-camera – to improvise the ritualised gestures of an esoteric ceremony [Fig. 43-45]. With the complicity of another actress, Sarah runs, puts her hand on Achille's mouth and prevents him from singing and moving. Her aggressive gestures suddenly interrupt the situation. Achille reproaches Sarah for having introduced a new theme in an ongoing situation, only because she was personally irritated by the game:

Le but est de faire fonctionner les gens les uns par rapport aux autres dans le sens de l'attention, et non pas de violer une situation qui est en train de se faire

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid., p. 153.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., p. 152.

par un phénomène subjectif que tu appelles 'agacement' qui n'a rien à foutre dans le thème.

In the same session, Sarah interrupts another situation [Fig. 46-48]. Rose (Christiane Corthay) gathers the comedians one by one by joining their hands together in order to weave links between them: their gestural lines form a knot which is immediately unknotted by Sarah. Instead of joining the circle, she refuses to play the game and to move. When Rose encourages her, she deliberately falls on the ground. Once again, the action is brutally interrupted. Sarah's gestures of interruption and refusal manifest a corporeal resistance. She does not abandon herself in the exercise. According to Pouillaude, 'c'est en renonçant à tout projet individuel et volontaire, en s'abandonnant à la situation, que l'on devient capable de prendre les bonnes décisions, celles qui répondent effectivement aux nécessités de l'instant, et à rien d'autre.'<sup>147</sup>

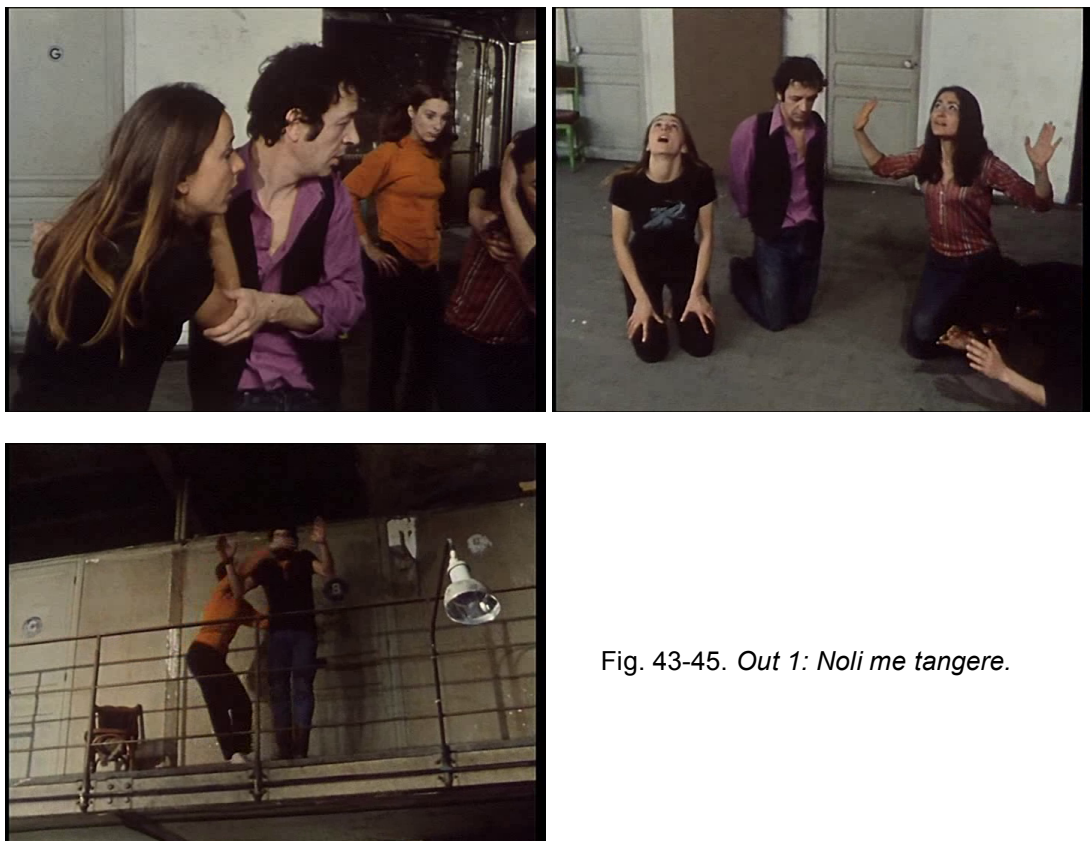


Fig. 43-45. Out 1: *Noli me tangere*.

<sup>147</sup> Pouillaude, 'Vouloir l'involontaire et répéter l'irrépérable', p. 156.



Fig. 46-48. *Out 1: Noli me tangere.*

‘When a line of physical action “dies”, one possible cause is that the actor has forgotten the contact with his partner,’ the theatre director Thomas Richards explains.<sup>148</sup> The attention to their partners and the ability to keep contact and react accordingly, ‘within a fixed line of actions’, are constraints which enable the actors and actresses to gesture more spontaneously.<sup>149</sup> Furthermore, according to the director and theorist Jerzy Grotowski, if the actor or actress overthinks or does not know what to do, he or she will be paralysed: “‘What to do next?’ – *is* the paralysis. “*What to do next?*” This is the question that makes all spontaneity impossible.’<sup>150</sup> During the shooting, Lafont, Ogier, or Léaud often wondered what to do next. Their lack of inspiration or spontaneity, their wanderings, their moments of doubts and hesitation, and their anxieties, which manifest in their verbal and gestural exchanges, were integrated by Rivette in the editing.<sup>151</sup> As Lafont tells, the

<sup>148</sup> Richards, *At Work with Grotowski on Physical Actions*, p. 81.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Cited in *ibid.*, p. 82.

<sup>151</sup> Lafont, *La Fiancée du cinéma*, pp. 152-53.

filmmaker turned the moments of 'panique and stérilité' into moments of dramatic tension:

Une scène avec Bulle. Elle aussi s'angoissait et la proximité de l'épreuve du face à face avec la camera la faisait déglutir sans arrêt, comme avant l'oral d'un concours.

- Il faut se serrer les coudes, sinon on n'y arrivera jamais.
- Qu'est-ce que tu veux que je fasse?
- Donne-moi une gifle et on verra bien.

Aussitôt dit, aussitôt fait. N'ayant pas une grande pratique de la gifle, je mets beaucoup de conviction dans mon geste. Bulle eut très mal. Après une seconde de stupeur, elle blêmit, et se jette sur moi.

Prise dans le feu de l'action, je rends coup sur coup. Les éléments du décor volent dans tous les sens, la scène se terminant sous une pluie de feuilles de papier.

Là, encore, Jacques Rivette saura scénariser cet instant qu'il avait su nous voler. Bulle venait récupérer des documents que, bien sûr, je ne voulais pas lui donner. Alors, chaque attitude violente, chaque regard haineux contribuaient à renforcer la fonction dramatique de Bulle et à alourdir le mystère autour de mon personnage.<sup>152</sup>

The anecdote is revealing of the great difference between improvisation in film and in theatre. The editing process enables the director to rearrange the scenes and weave, even loosely, the fragmented threads of the narrative by constructing a certain continuity of plots, motifs, postures, and gestures. Even when the actors and actresses' gestures lack spontaneity or result from an impulse that is apparently disconnected from the narrative – 'out' the line of actions –, they become the expression of a mysterious tension between the characters. Such a sense of mystery, which feeds the atmosphere of conspiracy at the core of the narrative, mostly manifests in the actors and actresses' gestures and dialogue, which can reflect their anxiety to improvise. The scattered fragments of the shooting eventually form a knot of heterogeneous fluxes and narrative lines which expand in multiple directions like a spiderweb.

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid., p. 135.

## **Conclusion**

In Godard and Miéville's series, Deligny's work, and Rivette's research on improvisation, the concept of line opens new ways of approaching the notion of gesture in film. Gestural lines, which can be visible, imaginative, or metaphorical, manifest in different forms and manners. First, the line can be the result of an act of perceptive imagination, which consists in visualising the trajectory of gestures as they are performed by the characters in their immediate environment; secondly, the line can be a visible gestural trace filmed by the camera, such as a pathway, the outline of a map, or a drawing. Thirdly, the line can take the multidimensional form of threads, knots, and spiderwebs: the metaphors of knotting and weaving not only reveal the characters' relations to their environment and others, but also highlight the role of gestures in the development, the spinning, and the editing of narrative lines.

Furthermore, through their intersection with spatial, ideological, and narrative lines, such as the Taylorist grid in *France/tour/détour* or the plot in *Out 1*, gestural lines map a liminal space in between borders and margins, determined and indeterminate trajectories, social conditioning and idiosyncratic behaviour, and, more broadly, in between the collective and the individual. While gestural lines appear to be programmed through social conditioning in *France/tour/détour*, they also reveal margins of bodily resistance, invention, initiative, and improvisation, in spite of the rectitude and the constraint of the social grid. By contrast, although gestural lines in *Out 1* do not follow the programme of a conventional script, they reveal the actors and actresses' difficulties in freeing themselves from conditioned behaviours to act spontaneously.

Finally, the liminal nature of lines strikingly appears in Deligny's network, in which the reiterated and determined trajectories of everyday life are interwoven with the indeterminate trajectories of wandering. The customary lines delineate a territory, with its pathways and landmarks, which structures the autistic children's existence while offering them the space to drift. By contrast with the fixity of borders, gestural lines prove to be dynamic

forms of life, which are essentially characterised by multiplicity and movement. The concept of gestural line in post-New Wave cinema thus makes it possible to consider the notions of heterogeneity, coexistence, and community, both in a political and aesthetic perspective.



## Conclusion

When Citton describes gesture as ‘un nœud de contradictions’<sup>1</sup> that mirrors the complexity of human life, he points out the impossibility of defining the notion in a definitive and exhaustive way. In this thesis, I regarded gesture as a concept *in movement* which resists the fixity of strict definitions and generalisations. Transitory and codified, ephemeral and culturally shaped, *actuel* and *inactuel*, singular and conditioned, existential and ideological, human gesture shifts meanings, temporalities, categories, and notions. Circulating and migrating between disciplines, media, and art forms, gesture fundamentally embraces the movement of human life, in its physiological, imaginative, emotional, sensual, artistic, intellectual, sociocultural, ethical, and political dimensions.

First of all, this thesis showed how gesture in post-New Wave cinema occupies an intermediary position between medium specificity and intermediality. Paradoxically, if gesture appears as a key element to define the medium specificity of film – cinema being the first art to reproduce gestures in motion –, it also stresses the heterogeneity of the cinematic medium. Indeed, in addition to dialoguing with other arts such as theatre, dance, and painting, gestures in the films examined in this thesis also interconnect the various media components that constitute the cinematic art, especially in terms of image and sound. Secondly, by insisting on the relation between performance in film and performance in society, the chapters emphasised how gesture problematises, on the one hand, the tension between sociocultural conditioning and individual existence, and on the other hand, the intersubjective relationship between the individual and the collective. Finally, this thesis revealed how gesture forges sensual, emotional, and intellectual links between the filmmaker, the filmed subject, and the spectator. In this sense, the notion of gesture enabled us to rethink

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<sup>1</sup> Citton, *Gestes d’humanités*, p. 28.

the nature of the links between the practice of filmmaking, the craft of film performance, and the process of reception by the spectator.

In the light of the arguments developed in this thesis, it could be argued that the cinematic medium does not exhibit a 'pure gesturality'<sup>2</sup> as Agamben claims, but rather transforms and impurifies the expression of gestures. While André Bazin regards cinema as an 'art impur' which integrates other artistic forms such as literature and painting,<sup>3</sup> Alain Badiou adds that the impurity of the medium is not only aesthetic, but also results from exchanges with non-artistic forms: 'The cinema is a place of intrinsic indiscernibility between art and non-art.'<sup>4</sup> Due to these various processes of impurification, gesture in cinema proves fundamentally intermedial, hybrid, composite, heterogeneous, plural, at once human and technological.

The interaction between human gesture and film technology is made of mutual exchanges. First of all, by mediating the movement of gestures, the technology of the moving image conveys a vision of gesture that is bound to the specific expressive means of film. For example, camera angle, shot scale, lighting, sound effects, music, the processes of slow or fast motion, the size of the screen, the rhythm of the editing, and the type of technology (analogue or digital) contribute to shaping the spectator's perception of filmed gestures. Framed, de-composed, and re-composed, gestures in film are endowed with a proper cinematic quality. They are at once performed by persons (whether actors and actresses or not) and conditioned by the media components of the cinematic machine, which contribute to moulding their potential meanings and mediating their emotional impact on the spectator.

If cinema transpires as a particularly pertinent instrument to reveal the impact of conditioning on the body, it also, simultaneously, makes it possible to see how the body resists sociocultural conditioning, homogenisation, standardisation, and mechanisation. Significant in the analysis of all the films,

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<sup>2</sup> Agamben, 'Notes on Gesture', p. 59.

<sup>3</sup> See Bazin, 'Pour un cinéma impur. Défense de l'adaptation', in *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma?* (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1987), pp. 81-106.

<sup>4</sup> Alain Badiou, 'Considerations on the Current State of Cinema and on the Ways of Thinking this State Without Having to Conclude that Cinema Is Dead or Dying', in *Cinema*, ed. by Antoine de Baecque, trans. by Susan Spitzer (Oxford: Polity Press, 2013), p. 139. See also Rancière, *Malaise dans l'esthétique* pp. 111-14.

the idea of gestural resistance manifests itself in various forms: anxious resistance to self-conditioning in *Un homme qui dort*, slapstick resistance to gender norms in the domestic setting of Akerman's films, resistance to the dominant use of the audiovisual medium in Godard's cinema, resistance to the industrialisation and mass-production of stereotypes in *Roberte*, resistance to predictability and Taylorist norms in *France/tour/détour*, and, finally resistance to the isolation and *invisibilisation* of autistic children and mentally handicapped persons in Deligny's (net)work. In post-New Wave cinema, gestures of resistance are not heroic. On the one hand, they can express individuality through bodily reactions, pathological behaviours, clumsiness, unpredictable and indiscernible impulses, and lines of flight. On the other hand, they can engage in a political reflection on collaborative work, agency, communication, exchanges, communities, networks, heterogeneity, co-presence, and coexistence. The existential density of gesture in cinema thus opens new ways of considering the links between aesthetics and politics. As discussed in Chapter 3, the notion of hypergesture proves particularly useful to analyse how, beyond their differences, gestures knot together and respond to each other.

Secondly, while cinema conditions the expression and perception of gestures, I demonstrated that the transitional and liminal qualities of gesture reciprocally inform the nature of the cinematic medium. Gesture is indeed a transitory movement between the past and the future, between fluctuating corporeal and emotional states, between different attitudes, postures, and meanings. The fluidity of gestures – and their imperceptible transitions from one phase of movement to another – embraces the flow of the moving image. In its encounter with the human body in motion, the cinematic art integrates the dynamic, tactile, affective, relational, and intersubjective qualities of human gesture in its own perceptual and expressive body. In Chapter 1, I discussed how the editing of *Un homme qui dort* activates a memory process, based on gestural shocks and replayed gestures. In Chapter 2, I highlighted how, by stressing the interval between the visual and aural qualities of gestures, Akerman's *L'Homme à la valise* generates effects

of resonance and linkage between the image and the soundtrack, thus stimulating the spectators' kinesic intelligence. In Chapter 3, the study of *Prénom Carmen* revealed how the hypergestural quality of the editing interconnects the heterogeneous artistic and non-artistic components that compose the film. In Chapter 4, through an extended analysis of gesture in *tableau vivant*, I demonstrated how the plurality of the heroine's identities in *Roberte* and the ambiguity of her gestures mirror the dual and heterogeneous nature of the cinematic image, which is simultaneously the product of a *mise-en-scène* and the result of a performance experienced by the actors and actresses. Finally, through the concept of gestural line, Chapter 5 expanded on the correlation between gesture and form, which lies at the heart of all of the chapters. When improvised, gestural lines can direct the movements of the camera, create changes of direction in the story lines, and influence the form of the editing. In this sense, instead of imposing pre-programmed gestures, the cinematic apparatus records the complex intertwining of existential lines woven by human gestures.

Throughout the thesis, I developed several approaches to conceptualise gesture in post-New Wave cinema without claiming to provide an exhaustive view of this period. While I brought obscure authors such as Zucca and Deligny to light, I also referred to important, yet often little-known filmmakers, such as Cavalier, Moullet, Tanner, Ruiz, Stévenin, Garrel, Eustache, Straub and Huillet. This list, which could be continued, demonstrates the richness of the post-New Wave as well as the extent to which this period still remains underexplored in the French and Anglo-Saxon academic worlds. Furthermore, by studying Godard in two chapters, I gave this major filmmaker a pivotal position in the thesis. Godard's post-New Wave films problematise and crystallise some of the main arguments of the thesis, notably the revival of silent cinema and the crucial role of gesture in the practice of filmmaking and the communication of images to the spectator. In the director's filmography, the post-New Wave represents a period of turmoil. From the post-May 1968 militant films and the first video essays in the mid-1970s, to his return to cinema in the late 1970s, not only did Godard

question his approach to filmmaking and politics, he also experimented with new media and technologies. As discussed in Chapters 3 and 5, by using smaller cameras and video, Godard sought to free the filmmaker's hands from the constraints of classical shootings, and open up the possibilities of experimenting with other styles and genres of filmmaking.

With the development of the camera Aaton, Godard anticipated the emergence of digital cameras in contemporary cinema. While the contemporary period is beyond the remit of my study, it is interesting to note that, at the turn of the century, the use of small DV (Digital Video) cameras reactivated the New Wave ideal of the *caméra-stylo*. Very easy to handle, DV cameras highlight the role of the filmmaker's gestures in the production of images. In the film essay and documentary *Les Glaneurs et la Glaneuse* (2000), Varda develops an ostensibly gestural style of filmmaking. Strengthening the links between the real and the imaginary, art and life, aesthetics and politics, she shows herself gleaning images with her small digital camera, connecting her practice of filmmaking with the elementary and ordinary gesture of peasant women gleaning a field, painted by Jean-François Millet in *Les Glaneuses* (1857) and performed by ordinary people every day in the modern world [Fig. 1, 2]. Not only does she stress the role of her hands in the artistic process of the film's fabrication, she also shows how she politically engages her own body in the world she films.



Fig. 1, 2. Varda gleanes images and potatoes in *Les Glaneurs et la Glaneuse*.

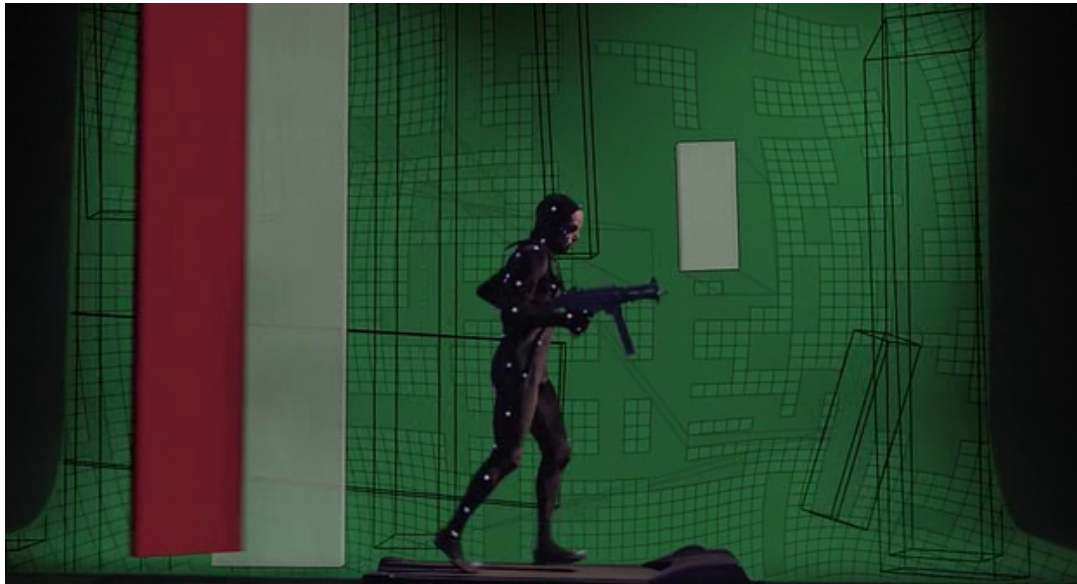


Fig. 3. CGI and motion capture in *Holy Motors*

Although Godard was predicted the death of cinema in the early 1980s, the cinematic art and Godard both survived the digital revolution which occurred at the end of the twentieth century. Like other filmmakers of his generation, such as Varda, Cavalier, and Marker, or his heir Leos Carax, Godard uses digital techniques less as a means to revolutionise cinema than an opportunity to meditate on the continuity of film history, from its origins to present time. In *3x3D* (2014) and *Adieu au langage* (2014), Godard experiments with 3D in order to reflect on the tension between the development of the illusion of depth through perspective since the Renaissance and the attraction towards flatness in modernity. Furthermore, in the same way that Godard and Miéville use video to revive the device of chronophotography in *France/tour/détour*, Carax experiments with digital cinema in *Holy Motors* (2012) to reveal the aesthetic and historical continuity between the most advanced film technologies, such as motion capture, and the origins of cinema, including pre-cinematic techniques like chronophotography [Fig. 3]. In line with the post-New Wave films examined in this thesis, *Holy Motors*, which is reminiscent of nineteenth-century motion studies, slapstick comedy, and Louis Feuillade's serials, is a film haunted by the ghost of silent cinema. Beyond the post-modern melancholy caused by the technological metamorphosis of cinema in the digital age and the

miniaturisation of cameras that seem to have infiltrated all areas of everyday life, the film proves essentially preoccupied with 'la beauté du geste', to refer to a line delivered by the main character Monsieur Oscar (Denis Lavant). 'On dit que [la beauté] est dans l'œil de celui qui regarde', his interlocutor (Michel Piccoli) points out. For Carax, the beauty of cinematic art could thus be regarded as the encounter between gesture and the gaze – which in cinema comprises the eye of the camera, the filmmaker's vision, and the spectator's look.

By way of conclusion, I will end by referring to a scene of *Les Glaneurs et la Glaneuse*, in which Varda films Marey's pictures of animal and human gestures with her digital camera. She observes that 'devant les images des expériences de Marey et ses bouts de films, on oublie complètement les prouesses techniques pour se laisser aller au plaisir des yeux'. For example, she moves her camera along a chronophotographic sequence that shows the de-composed gesture of a man who falls on his feet after a jump [Fig. 4, 5]. This playful shot not only stages the interaction between the digital camera and this pre-cinematic technique, but also shows the interplay between the gesture of the man filmed by Marey, the mobile eye of the camera manipulated by Varda's hand, and ultimately the gaze of contemporary spectators who, more than a century later, watch Marey's pictures with pleasure and wonder.



Fig. 4, 5. Marey's chronophotography in *Les Glaneurs et la Glaneuse*

Ultimately, when incorporated into Varda's film, the ghostly movement of the man seems to gesture toward the future of cinema. Indeed, throughout the

successive evolutions of cinema in film history, gesture occupies a paradoxical position. On the one hand, gesture manifests the historical continuity of film aesthetics from chronophotography to motion capture. On the other hand, the dynamism and ephemeral nature of gesture mirrors the ability of cinema to ceaselessly reinvent itself, not only through the contribution of new technologies and media, but most importantly through the emergence of singular styles of filmmaking and performance. For that reason, gesture remains a central preoccupation for contemporary filmmakers as well as an inexhaustible research area in film studies.

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*L'An 01*, dir. by Jacques Doillon, with Alain Resnais and Jean Rouch (1973)  
*Anatomie d'un rapport*, dir. by Luc Moullet and Antonietta Pizzorno (1976)  
*L'Année dernière à Marienbad*, dir. by Alain Resnais (1961)  
*L'Arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat*, dir. by Louis Lumière (1896)  
*Au hasard Balthazar*, dir. by Robert Bresson (1966)  
*Autour de 'Jeanne Dielman'*, dir. by Sami Frey, edited by Chantal Akerman and Agnès Ravez (1975-2004)  
*Baisers volés*, dir. by François Truffaut (1968)  
*Le Ballon rouge*, dir. by Albert Lamorisse (1956)  
*Baxter, Vera Baxter*, dir. by Marguerite Duras (1977)  
*Burlesque on Carmen*, dir. by Charlie Chaplin (1915)  
*Carmen Jones*, dir. by Otto Preminger (1954)  
*Ce Gamin-là*, dir. by Renaud Victor, written by Fernand Deligny (1975)  
*Le Celluloïd et le marbre*, dir. by Eric Rohmer (1965)  
*Ce Répondeur ne prend pas de message*, dir. by Alain Cavalier (1979)  
*Le Charme discret de la bourgeoisie*, dir. by Luis Buñuel (1972)  
*La Chinoise*, dir. by Jean-Luc Godard (1967)  
*Cléo de 5 à 7*, dir. by Agnès Varda (1962)  
*Un condamné à mort s'est échappé*, dir. by Robert Bresson (1956)

*Daguerréotypes*, dir. by Agnès Varda (1975)  
*Danse serpentine* (II), dir. by Auguste and Louis Lumière (1897-99)  
*De l'autre côté*, dir. by Chantal Akerman (2002)  
*Demain on déménage*, dir. by Chantal Akerman (2004)  
*Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle*, dir. by Jean-Luc Godard (1966)  
*Du Côté d'Orouët*, dir. by Jacques Rozier (1973)  
*L'Enfant sauvage*, dir. by François Truffaut (1970)  
*L'Enfant secret*, dir. by Philippe Garrel (1979)  
*Les Enfants du placard*, dir. by Benoît Jacquot (1977)  
*En remontant la rue Vilin*, dir. by Robert Bober (1992)  
*Etudes sur Paris*, dir. by André Sauvage (1928)  
*The Expression of Hands*, dir. by Harun Farocki (1997)  
*Une femme mariée*, dir. by Jean-Luc Godard (1964)  
*Film*, dir. by Samuel Beckett and Alan Schneider (1965)  
*France/tour/détour/deux/enfants*, dir. by Jean-Luc Godard and Anne-Marie Miéville (1977)  
*Germany, Year Zero*, dir. by Roberto Rossellini (1948)  
*La Gifle*, dir. by Claude Pinoteau (1974)  
*Gigot*, dir. by Gene Kelly (1962)  
*Les Glaneurs et la Glaneuse*, dir. by Agnès Varda (2000)  
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*India Song*, dir. by Marguerite Duras (1975)  
*L'Ironie du sort*, dir. by Edouard Molinaro (1974)  
*Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles*, dir. by Chantal Akerman (1975)  
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*Jour de fête*, dir. by Jacques Tati (1949)  
*King Lear*, dir. by Jean-Luc Godard (1987)  
*Là-bas*, dir. by Chantal Akerman (2004)  
*Level Five*, dir. by Chris Marker (1996)  
*Les Lèvres rouges*, dir. by Harry Kümel (1971)  
*Les Lieux d'une fugue*, dir. by Georges Perec (1978)  
*Lola*, dir. by Jacques Demy (1961)

*Man with a Movie Camera*, dir. by Dziga Vertov (1929)  
*Marie pour mémoire*, dir. by Philippe Garrel (1967)  
*Meetin' WA*, dir. by Jean-Luc Godard (1986)  
*Ménilmontant*, dir. by René Guissart (1936)  
*Le Mépris*, dir. by Jean-Luc Godard (1963)  
*Mes petites amoureuses*, dir. by Jean Eustache (1974)  
*Metropolis*, dir. by Fritz Lang (1927)  
*Les Ministères de l'art*, dir. by Philippe Garrel (1988)  
*Le Moindre Geste*, dir. by Josée Manenti, written by Fernand Deligny, and edited by Jean-Pierre Daniel (1971)  
*Mon oncle*, dir. by Jacques Tati (1958)  
*Muriel ou le temps d'un retour*, dir. by Alain Resnais (1963)  
*La Musica*, dir. by Marguerite Duras (1967)  
*Le Mystère Picasso*, dir. by Henri-Georges Clouzot (1956)  
*Les Mystères de Paris: 'Out 1' de Jacques Rivette revisité*, dir. by Robert Fischer and Wilfried Reichart (2015), documentary included in the box set *Out 1* (Carlotta: 2015) [on DVD]  
*No Home Movie*, dir. by Chantal Akerman (2015)  
*Notorious*, dir. by Alfred Hitchcock (1946)  
*Le Nouveau monde*, dir. by Jean-Luc Godard (1962)  
*La Nuit américaine*, dir. by François Truffaut (1973)  
*Nuit et Brouillard*, dir. by Alain Resnais (1956)  
*Orphée*, dir. by Jean Cocteau (1950)  
*Out 1: Noli me tangere*, dir. by Jacques Rivette (1971)  
*Out 1: Spectre*, dir. by Jacques Rivette (1972)  
*Les Parapluies de Cherbourg*, dir. by Jacques Demy (1964)  
*Paris qui dort*, dir. by René Clair (1925)  
*Passe montagne*, dir. by Jean-François Stévenin (1978)  
*Passion*, dir. by Jean-Luc Godard (1982)  
*Peau d'Âne*, dir. by Jacques Demy (1970)  
*Petit à Petit*, dir. by Jean Rouch (1971)  
*Pierre Klossowski, un écrivain en images*, dir. by Alain Fleischer (1996)  
*Pierre Zucca, l'homme, le cinéaste*, dir. Angela Romboni (2007), bonus included in the box set *Pierre Zucca* (Carlotta, 2007) [on DVD]  
*Pierrot le fou*, dir. by Jean-Luc Godard (1965)  
*Playtime*, dir. by Jacques Tati (1967)  
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*La Pointe Courte*, dir. by Agnès Varda (1955)  
*Pour mémoire (la forge)*, dir. by Jean-Daniel Pollet (1978)  
*La Première Nuit*, dir. by Georges Franju (1958)  
*Prénom Carmen*, dir. by Jean-Luc Godard (1983)  
*Les Quatre Cents Coups*, dir. by François Truffaut (1959)  
*Les Rendez-vous d'Anna*, dir. by Chantal Akerman (1978)  
*Roberte*, dir. by Pierre Zucca (1979)  
*Le Roman d'un tricheur*, dir. by Sacha Guitry (1936)  
*Rome, Open City*, dir. by Roberto Rossellini (1945)  
*La Rosière de Pessac*, dir. by Jean Eustache (1969)  
*Le Sang des bêtes*, dir. by Georges Franju (1949)

*Saute ma ville*, dir. by Chantal Akerman (1968)  
*Sauve qui peut (la vie)*, dir. by Jean-Luc Godard (1980)  
*Scénario de 'Sauve qui peut (la vie)'*, dir. by Jean-Luc Godard (1979)  
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*Section spéciale*, dir. by Costa-Gavras (1974)  
*Shadows*, dir. by John Cassavetes (1959)  
*Shoah*, dir. by Claude Lanzmann (1985)  
*Le Signe du Lion*, dir. by Eric Rohmer (1959)  
*Soft and Hard*, dir. by Jean-Luc Godard (1985)  
*Soigne ta droite*, dir. by Jean-Luc Godard (1987)  
*Sois belle et tais-toi*, dir. by Delphine Seyrig (1976-81)  
*Son nom de Venise dans Calcutta désert*, dir. by Marguerite Duras (1976)  
*Stavisky*, dir. by Alain Resnais (1974)  
*Strike*, dir. by Sergei Eisenstein (1925)  
*Themroc*, dir. by Claude Faraldo (1973)  
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*Les Vacances de monsieur Hulot*, dir. by Jacques Tati (1953)  
*La Vie à l'envers*, dir. by Alain Jessua (1964)  
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*Vincent mit l'âne dans un pré (et s'en vint dans l'autre)*, dir. by Pierre Zucca (1976)  
*Vladimir et Rosa*, dir. by Jean-Luc Godard (1970)  
*La Vocation suspendue*, dir. by Raoul Ruiz (1978)  
*La Voie lactée*, dir. by Luis Buñuel (1969)  
*Wheel of Ashes*, dir. by Peter Emmanuel Goldman (1968)  
*The Wrong Man*, dir. by Alfred Hitchcock (1956)  
*Les Yeux sans visage*, dir. by Georges Franju (1960)  
*Ziegfeld Follies*, dir. by Vincente Minnelli (1946)