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Discourse and the film text: Four readings of *Carmen*

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Faisons un film dont le text soit déjà établi: la légende sous l'image existe.[1]

'Quoi du reste', to paraphrase Derrida on Hegel in *Glas*, 'ici, maintenant, d'une *Carmen*?' What's left of *Carmen* here and now? Aside from its intrinsic interest, the question seems worth asking in light of a bias that recent treatments of opera – particularly those influenced by poststrucuralist theory – seem to betray. The most prominent, Catherine Clément's *Opera, or The Undoing of Women*, Michel Poizat's *The Angel's Cry* and Jeremy Tambling's *Opera, Ideology, and Film*, regard opera as an institution rather than as a body of texts.[2] Each of the authors, to my mind at least, allows a prior structure or structures – the systemic presence of male domination and its construction of women in society, a quasi-Lacanian understanding of unconscious fantasy, the bourgeois construction of operatic experience – to constrain what operas, and opera, can mean. They thus produce what are in effect reception studies or analyses of the audience, which is perhaps why they operate at some distance from the detail of the texts, musical or verbal, of the operas they analyse.[3]

The most striking result is the concomitant assumption that opera as a form, especially the traditional operatic repertory, has little to say to a critically informed modern consciousness. Tambling's Marxism, Clément's version of feminism and Poizat's psychoanalysis,[4] all posit that the fundamental constitution, as well as the appeal, of opera is bounded by the horizon of the naive subject, who experiences it 'as it is meant', without reflection, in an intensity of direct pleasure (*jouissance* indeed) that the modern, theorising, writing subject can love, but cannot entirely

[1] Jean-Luc Godard, 'Faire un film comme on joue un quatuor', interview with Jacques Drillon, April 1983, *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard*, ed. Alain Bergala (Paris, 1985), 574.

[2] *Opera, or The Undoing of Women*, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis, 1988); *The Angel's Cry: Beyond the Pleasure Principle in Opera*, trans. Arthur Denner (Ithaca, 1992); *Opera, Ideology, and Film* (New York, 1987). The most important, though necessarily partial, exceptions to this generalisation are Arthur Groos and Roger Parker, eds., *Reading Opera* (Princeton, 1988), and Carolyn Abbate and Roger Parker, eds., *Analyzing Opera: Verdi and Wagner* (Berkeley, 1989).

[3] Tambling, whose methodology is closer to my own, and whose materialist perspective allows for a greater appreciation of historical differences in the social and political meaning of an opera, is an apparent exception here, but he sees little progressive social use for the modern institution of opera, and his textual readings are almost all readings of films. His basic thesis is that film has the potential to ironise opera and make it available for progressive political reflection, in a way he seems to believe opera – as a bourgeois institution – cannot do for itself.

[4] The distinction between the last two is only relative. Both Clément and Poizat explore the implications for gender construction of a psychoanalytic perspective on opera, and both, especially Poizat, project a generic imaginary for the operatic subject that is in effect essentialist.

approve of. Opera in this reading is a politically regressive form and a psychically regressive pleasure, at best a seductive distraction from contemporary concerns and an example of what these concerns are most interested in changing.[5] There is not much beyond this unreflective affect and this exemplary function, little *reste* or supplement, to rejoin a Derridian vocabulary, to engage us in opera now. Opera may be richly comprehensible for these authors, but it is not surprising.

Since I am interested in a rather different version of what can be made of opera here and now, I would like to reopen the question, attending to a single extended text or discourse, and to a different field of reception. The text is *Carmen*, which I take to be still the most popular opera in the canon, and the reception is that of the four film versions of *Carmen* released in 1982-3: Jean-Luc Godard's *Prénom Carmen*, Carlos Saura's *Carmen*, a film about the making of a flamenco version of the opera, Peter Brook's *La Tragédie de Carmen* and Francesco Rosi's *Bizet's Carmen*. I will take these films as readings – implicit or explicit – of Bizet, and I will read them as essays in answer to my original question, as examinations of what might still be left of *Carmen* for the present.

1

'Carmen', of course, is – and always was – a lot more than Bizet's 1875 opera. It began life, under that name anyway, as Mérimée's 1845 short story (itself revised by the addition of a fourth part in 1846); it was transformed by Bizet, Meilhac and Halévy into an *opéra comique* with spoken dialogue, and then quickly converted by Guiraud, after Bizet's untimely death, into an opera with recitative. In the twentieth century the story was made into a Broadway musical for an all-black cast, *Carmen Jones*, with book and lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein to a pit-band version of Bizet's music (1943), and a movie of the musical, directed by Otto Preminger for Fox, was released in 1954. Although Bizet's opera has been the basis for most film versions,[6] as it was for Spike Jones's recorded parody in the forties, other versions have been based on Mérimée, as was the Columbia *Loves of Carmen*, with Glenn Ford and Rita Hayworth, directed by Charles Vidor in 1948. And who does not know the music, from a thousand commercials, documentaries on Spain, parodies: 'Toreador-a, don't spit on the floor-a, use the cuspidor-a, that's what it's for-a'?

To a degree unparalleled by any other opera, *Carmen* has become a *discourse*, a multiply-authoured, historically developing tangle of bits and pieces from Bizet, Mérimée, high-art criticism, the folk imagination and the movies; of stock images of Spain, opera, melodrama, *femmes fatales* and doomed lovers, and heaven knows what else.[7] This giant quasi-organism is a text, insofar as it is composed of a congeries of discrete verbal, musical and visual signifiers, but also a shifting collection of practices, the uses that have been made of the various bits and of the various

[5] These views thus reinscribe in their account of *opera itself* the very image of femininity they criticise opera for perpetuating.

[6] See the full listing in Tambling, chapter 1, supplemented by Susan McClary, *George Bizet: 'Carmen'*, Cambridge Opera Handbooks (Cambridge, 1992), 130–46.

[7] On this, see McClary, 130.

combinations of the pieces, for a variety of purposes; and the discourse itself is available for any number of further combinations and uses. No doubt this is one reason why 'Carmen' in particular (like opera in general) lends itself to an approach via reception: the thing seems to require definition according to its uses, precisely because it is so patently not defined solely by its origin. Conversely, the discourse continues to be called 'Carmen' in part because its elements carry with them an explicit sense of where they were before they got into the present arrangement: they signify 'Carmen' in addition to whatever else they are doing at the moment.

There are a number of reasons an approach to reception through film treatments of *Carmen* commends itself. The first is that films, for social reasons if no others, can – in some sense are expected to – read the discourse, not just the 'original text'. What one might call 'the performance tradition', both live performances of the opera and those recordings (audio, broadcast television or videotape) that present themselves as documents of stage performance, has historically committed itself to a conservative view of Bizet's text as an origin, constituting it as the *point de capiton* of the discourse,[8] so that Bizet can be considered the root or basis from which the various elements stem. A 'movie version' of a classic, on the other hand, is permitted and expected to be at variance with its original, and precisely in the direction of popular reception, since the institutionalisation of movies includes the understanding that the shift of medium, as well as the need to sell tickets, will necessitate such changes. A second reason is that films are themselves a kind of writing, composed of signifying traces in a form that is permanent and invariant: unlike a staging of an opera, a film will be the same every time it is projected. Thus, filmed versions of an opera are both readings of it and can themselves also be reread, in a way that live performances cannot. The video revolution has emphasised this difference – and newly textualised the movies – by placing the ability to view segments out of sequence, to slow down and speed up, and other such dislocations of real-time beginning-to-end projection, at the disposal of the viewer. This doubly textual relation to 'the discourse-*Carmen*' (a name for the original text *and* its discursive elaborations) means that filmed versions provide a richer and more precise field for reception study, a more detailed, moment-by-moment, textual response that can be more closely analysed than the plot summaries that served the critics I have cited.

There is a further reason, however, why the films considered here seem particularly useful for thinking about what's left of *Carmen*. Each is not only the sort of 'reading' that any performance of any text must be; it is also an explicit *presentation* of what it means to read *Carmen* here and now. Each has an agenda of reading *Carmen* that takes an active, interpretative stance towards the discourse and its putative origin, and for each the issue of modernity is an important determinant. This is perhaps easiest to see in their common attitude towards deploying the technical resources of the medium, an attitude more active than in films in the

[8] The term is Lacan's. See 'The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious', *Ecrits, A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York, 1977), 292–325, especially 303. The best gloss on this article is Slavoj Zizek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (New York, 1989), 87–129.

performance tradition. Such films, for example videotaped performances, are just as textual and just as mediated. What distinguishes these visual recordings from a film of an opera is their stylistic attitude towards what they record. A taped performance strives to maintain the fiction of the performance itself unaffected by the mediation of the recording process. 'Live From Lincoln Center', as the title of a programme, commonly broadcast some time after the actual performance, identifies not the actuality of the process but its *vouloir dire*, the way it wants to be taken. Other conventions, such as leaving the applause that follows an aria on the tape, disguise the way the recording apparatus punctuates the original performance with 'takes' no live viewers could all achieve – close-ups, reaction shots, images of the audience itself – and fixes them permanently. But the films that concern us here are conspicuously aware of the way the spectator's gaze, only minimally controlled in the opera house, has been pre-empted by the camera.[9] These movies take advantage not only of the changes they make in the 'story' of *Carmen*, but also of the features of the film medium that distance it from its content – the visual *reste* of *mise-en-scène* that fills the screen with an excess of potential signifiers, the interpretative guidance through that *plenum* that editing and camera-movement enable. They thus achieve a more active testing of *Carmen*, as opera and as discourse, than the performance tradition has generally been able to do.

The particular feature of film as a medium that will serve most usefully as a primary focus here is the constructed relation between sound and image. Films are made in parts – frames and tracks – that can be combined in ways a live performance cannot duplicate. While it is true that in opera the orchestra functions something like the soundtrack in a movie, allowing a variety of relations between the music and the characters, a singer in opera has to open her mouth and sing in real time, and if she stamps her foot it will be heard then and there. The separate sound tracks of a film allow speech (dialogue and voice-over), music (either background music or made by the characters), and non-vocal, non-musical sounds (the 'noise track' – footsteps, crickets, creaking doors) all to be treated separately, and used in a variety of relations to one another as well as to the image track.[10] In opera, an aria may well represent a character's private thoughts, which are conventionally unavailable to other characters on stage, but in film a voice-over can be used much more precisely to distinguish between public expression and silent thinking even in the same aria, as when, in the last part of 'Je dis que rien ne m'épouvante' in Rosi's version of Act III, Micaëla's singing continues on the soundtrack while the woman imaged on the screen shuts her mouth and goes about her business climbing mountains. Effects far more complex than this are common.

Although some attention to matters of plot and incident will be convenient (all four productions, for example, allude to both Bizet and Mérimée), I will concentrate

[9] It is perhaps worth pointing out that the camera does not pre-empt the looking of the actual, as opposed to the virtual, spectator. That looking remains located in the body – it is only that what it looks at, the filmed image, has been pre-visualised, so that now one looks at a looking.

[10] See Mary Ann Doane, 'Ideology and the Practice of Sound Editing and Mixing', in *Film Sound: Theory and Practice*, ed. Elisabeth Weis and John Belton (New York, 1985), 54–62.

here on the use made of Bizet's music by each of the films under discussion, as a way of focusing on how they read *Carmen*. This perspective facilitates consideration of a basic theme that runs through all the works, and through Bizet as well: the relation of hearing to seeing, of sound to image, of music to the body. All are conscious of, and interested in, the basic oddness of musical drama, of what it means to present a set of human events with musical accompaniment.

2

Having delimited my project so confidently, I have to admit at once that an account of Godard's use of Bizet's music in *Prénom Carmen* finishes so soon as to be almost silly. The film uses very little of the *Carmen* music, substituting a collage of late Beethoven quartets that are rehearsed and discussed throughout by a group of musicians in one of the subplots, and also played at various points behind episodes of the main action. Similarly, although the plot of *Prénom Carmen* has some relation to the Meilhac–Halévy libretto – set in modern times, the story concerns a girl named Carmen who is involved in a plot to kidnap a rich industrialist and his daughter under cover of making a movie; she gets involved with a cop named Joseph, and he kills her at the end – the film dispenses with the entire Escamillo episode, and most of Micaëla, while adding the string-quartet rehearsal and a further subplot about Carmen's uncle Jean, a crazy filmmaker played by Godard himself. What Godard does use is discrete bits of *Carmen* – or rather his characters do. On two occasions someone whistles the 'Habañera' for no reason at all, and on another the gang makes a joke about the heroine's name – somebody says 'where's Carmen?' and somebody else answers 'do re me fa sol la, ha ha', playing pointlessly on the operatic connections of the name.

Such references suggest that the characters in the film 'know *Carmen*', but that they know it at the level of people who may not even have seen the opera, but can whistle some of its tunes or allude to its story. They know it, that is, as bits of the discourse-*Carmen* that float free of the opera but still carry its name, and none of them seems to have any sense that 'Carmen' might be the name of the story they themselves are in. Somewhat more central to the action is the moment when Godard's Carmen, who has some sense of the similarity of her situation and prospects to those of her operatic counterpart, threatens Joseph in the style of her namesake – 'si je t'aime . . .', she says, but finishes not with 'prends garde a toi', as in Bizet, but 'tu est fichu', which she later translates into English: 'if I love you, that's the end of you', Hammerstein's version of the 'Habañera' in *Carmen Jones*. Since she refers to this phrase as coming from 'un filo américain', it is clear that her notion of the role she is trying out is derived from Preminger's movie: she draws not from 'the source', but from what the subsequent discourse has made of it.[11] In

[11] This also seems to be why she keeps calling Joseph 'Joe', because she wants to fit him into the version of *Carmen Jones* she is trying out. He as constantly corrects her and insists on 'Joseph', in resistance to being captured by her or her story, though in doing so he succeeds only in putting himself into Godard's own *Pierrot le fou* instead, where this struggle over naming is a running gag.

fact, the central section of *Prénom Carmen* is a remake of *Carmen Jones*, taken from a sequence in which the José of that movie, Joe – hiding out from the law after going AWOL from his army base with Carmen Jones, who works in a parachute factory nearby – has to sit around in a hotel in Chicago doing nothing while Carmen plays the masculine role, supporting them, exercising authority and getting things done. The sense of emasculation this dependence enforces fuels Joe's fatal jealousy, and if Hammerstein's plot reflects wartime and postwar anxieties about the decay of masculine power and authority when women are allowed to work, Godard refigures it as a more contemporary social comment. In *Prénom Carmen*, Joseph remains dependent on Carmen to persuade the gang leader to let him join them – and has to sit in the hotel where the kidnapping is to take place, twiddling his thumbs while she goes out to implement the plan – because in Godard's France a high-toned criminal-revolutionary gang is as hard to get into as the civil service. For both you need a *bac*, and when Joseph admits he has not been to college, he is turned down.

Thus, Godard's answer to the question 'what's left of *Carmen*?' is pretty clearly 'not much'. The characters in the film scarcely know the original except as a minor part of their cultural furniture; except for Carmen herself they seem to have no sense of the characters they might represent in the story, and even Carmen thinks of herself mostly in relation to an American movie, not a French opera. Insofar as the characters make music, hear it or have it around them as atmosphere or commentary, that music is not Bizet's, which makes no substantive contribution to the complex musical agency the film presents. Godard seems to take more seriously than Clément, Poizat and Tambling the position I have ascribed to them. He accepts – or insists – that Bizet's opera in its 'original' form has next to no relevance to modern lives. It has been fragmented and diffused into discourse, into pieces and sequences of sounds and images that have been abstracted from their original locations and conjunctions, and recombined in new ways. Godard refuses in principle to recognise Bizet's *Carmen* (or anybody else's) as an origin, concentrating instead on the ways people now use what has been made of it, not how they reenact it, but how they reconstitute it, as he himself does with the sequence *Carmen, Carmen Jones, Prénom Carmen* in giving a new meaning and direction to 'si je t'aime'.

Yet this conspicuous exclusion of Bizet's opera – conspicuous precisely because the issue is raised in order to be largely ignored – is accompanied by a programmatic concentration on the 'operatic' question of sound and music in relation to the image. It is as if the diffusion of the opera into discourse resulted in the spread of 'opera' out into the entire world of the film; to produce a radical musicalisation of both the noise track and even of the images themselves, which are similarly broken into discrete units that can be deployed for the same purposes. According to Godard: 'Ce qui m'interesse effectivement, c'est de voir la musique . . . d'essayer de voir ce qu'on entend et d'entendre ce que l'on voit. D'inverser.' (What really interests me is to see music . . . to try to see what we hear and hear what we see. To invert.)[12]

[12] 'Faire un film', 576.

As an example of this musicalising process, consider two image–sound complexes that begin the film and run through it. The first is the image of breaking waves, accompanied by the sound of rushing water and the cries of gulls; the second is an image of two elevated trains passing each other on a bridge above water. In both cases the sound is detachable from the image, so that the first occurrence of the trains has the waves-and-gulls as its soundtrack, while at other points the images may interrupt other visual narrative sequences without interrupting an ongoing conversation. These complexes function as leitmotifs, signifiers that take on meaning from their recurring contiguity with other elements of the film in a 'Wagnerian' manner: the sea is continually intercut with scenes of intimacy between Joseph and Carmen, so as to become a signifier of the romantic sexual passion between them;[13] this refers, of course, to the classic Hollywood use of breaking waves as a code for sex that cannot be shown on screen – the famous instance, invoked deliberately by Godard, is Fred Zinneman's *From Here to Eternity* (Columbia, 1953). The trains, from their various contexts, seem to have to do both with the 'fated' or pre-known character of the lovers' relationship and its outcome, and also with their failure to communicate with or understand one another. They become emblems of the way desire (like the waves) can be socially directed and channelled, as it were on rails, and emblems as well of the way this channelling can produce brief encounters and missed connections, 'trains that pass in the night'. 'Music' in *Prénom Carmen* is transformed from a set of specific sounds or even specific techniques into something much more Cagean, a kind of use of and attention to sounds of any sort, and images as well.

What makes the film specifically 'operatic' is the particular conjuncture of sound and image. The disengagement of soundtrack and image track so as to deconstruct the conventional match between them creates a radically textualised surface of sounds and images that run along independently of one another (like the trains and the sea), and often produces unpredictable effects – flashes of wit, surprising conjunctions and the like, as when the voice of jazz-singer Tom Waits on the soundtrack, singing a ballad called 'Ruby Arms', is manipulated so as to connect with an image of Carmen, *seines nus* and pulling up her panties, just at the point where Waits sings 'Slowly past your *chest* of *drawers*', creating an outrageous bilingual, multimedia pun. For the characters themselves, such conjunctions of sound and image tend to be associated with moments of dramatic intensity, as when two parallel intercut story lines – Carmen and Joseph engaged in a gun battle with one another during a bank holdup, and the string quartet rehearsing Beethoven – come together just at the point where the two opponents are suddenly overcome by an unexpected erotic attraction. The sound from the quartet, detached from the musicians and turned into background music, plays over the image of the lovers embracing on the floor of the bank; the music and the image suddenly move into

[13] Joseph tacks this meaning down at one point when he speaks to the Micaëla-figure, Claire, of his feelings for Carmen as a 'tide' (she drily remarks that tides go out, too), and comes back to it at the end. Like Saura, who uses the Act III prelude for this purpose, and like Brook, who uses only José's half of the Act II love duet, Godard seems to feel the lack of a love-theme for Carmen and José in Bizet, and supplies it with the sea and the gulls.

consonance with one another in such a way as to produce a heightened event or *arioso* moment, which is conspicuously abstracted and foregrounded from the more diffuse action of the film. It is as if the 'Godard movie' we have been watching coalesces momentarily into a conventional Hollywood melodrama just at the moment of erotic encounter.

This comparison is more than just a metaphor. If Bizet's *Carmen* – as music, incident or quotation – is but a small selection from the total field of potential signifiers the film supplies, the same is certainly not true of other films. Godard's movie abounds in film references: to *Carmen Jones* and *From Here to Eternity*; to Jacques Becker's *Touchez pas au grisbi*[14] and all the other French gangster movies implied by the woman who at one point mistakes Joseph for Jean Gabin; to film noir conventions and romantic melodrama, and to other Godard films.[15] Thus, in common with many post-classic Hollywood cinema directors, Godard's use of other movies to make the movie in front of us is not simply a matter of homage to the classic tradition, but a way of exploring the extent to which movies themselves have come to form a vernacular imaginary.[16] His practice suggests how experience itself – of director, characters, audience – is largely constituted from the archive of films we have all seen and used.

This being so, we can say that the characters in the film have a vocabulary for imaging and 'singing' their lives to themselves that is composed of intensely integrated and heightened, yet conventional, sound-and-image moments such as the one in the bank, which function for them the way arias in Romantic opera do for its characters – as signifiers and bearers of passion, intensity, *jouissance*. The sound–image match in the bank scene, like the intercut sound-and-image of the sea and gulls elsewhere, is a conventional account for a trained film audience of how they are feeling, but – since the characters too are expert filmgoers – it is also the way they project their feelings to themselves. Joseph points this out explicitly near the end of the film, when he tells Carmen that her rejection of him is not sincere because 'the sound of the sea was missing' (alas, the remark is made over the noise of gulls on the soundtrack). The focus of *Prénom Carmen* on such aria-like moments of *jouissance* and ecstasy traces the ways the plot is conditioned and constructed by

[14] See the scenario, 'Séquence 17', *Godard par Godard*, 566.

[15] As several commentators have noted, *Prénom Carmen* is closely related in plot to *Pierrot le fou* (see n. 11). The vaguely revolutionary criminality of Carmen's gang – the way one cannot tell if their motives are criminal, political or just a hunger for excitement – is more than a little reminiscent of *Bande à part*, and especially of *La Chinoise*. In the larger sweep of Godard's career, especially after his 'return' to such themes in *Sauve qui peut (la vie)* and *Passion, Prénom Carmen* clearly looks back to the fascination with cultural representations (especially images) of women that informs the trilogy *Une femme est une femme* (itself a film about the musical accompaniment of everyday life), *La femme mariée* and *Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle*, and forward to *Je vous salue, Marie* as part of a duet of meditations on the stock figures of the whore and the virgin. See Laura Mulvey, 'Godard's Iconography of Women', in *Jean-Luc Godard's 'Hail Mary': Woman and the Sacred in Film*, ed. Maryel Locke and Charles Warren (Carbondale and Edwardsville, 1993), 45–6.

[16] The use of this word as a noun is now common in post-Lacanian theory. The word in French, as used by Bachelard, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre before Lacan, and by Barthes as well, is *imaginaire*, and it means not the mental faculty of picture-making but the repertory of images used by that faculty.

desire, the characters' hunger for those operatic conjunctions of sound and image that they feel transfigure both. These people have soundtracks in their heads with which they accompany their lives – which is why they whistle tunes from *Carmen*, among other things – and the place where the noise of the sea on the soundtrack breaks through into the image track of their more mundane affairs and becomes its music is what everyone in the film wants.

For this reason, the fact that *Prénom Carmen* 'works out', more or less, to a structural similarity with Bizet, is neither an accident that besets the characters nor a fate that overtakes them, though they themselves might prefer such a reading. The film shows that the particular collocation of aggression and eroticism that surfaces as a moment of *jouissance* in the bank scene is something the characters value, and continue to pursue through the rest of the movie. Their final confrontation is a conspicuous echo of that initiating moment. Joseph breaks into the attempted kidnapping after it has failed and has become a battle with the police, so that his last encounter with Carmen reads as a deliberate repetition of the initial gunfight in the bank, replaying its tense confrontation, wrestling over a weapon and pausing to see who will fire. The echo calls attention to the way Carmen and Joseph have tried to hold on to that initial moment, because it brings out retrospectively the constant element of aggression and competition in their lovemaking – the way, for instance, they are always pushing one another as part of their erotic encounters, or the way they struggle over possession of Joseph's *prénom*. It thus stresses the extent to which their thrill of that first moment of erotic combat seems tied to its surprise and the feeling of accompanying transcendence, and suggests how they have chosen to give it consequences by continually working to reenact it. As with the conventions of moviemaking, Godard's presentation of the characters also identifies the active construction and maintenance, the ceaseless stitching together of discursive fragments, that goes into the selves they desire and the elusive feeling of selfhood they pursue.

Thus, the exclusion of *Carmen* – of traditional opera – from *Prénom Carmen* and from the fragmentation of contemporary life as the film presents it, seems to produce an absence the characters themselves rush to fill. Godard's film, haunted as it is by the *Carmen* it alludes to yet withholds, turns out to be about the desire for *Carmen*, understood as the hunger for operatic directness and intensity embodied in characters who, in striving to compose the image-and-soundtrack of their stories, also strive to find contemporary models for operatic lives.

3

Carlos Saura's *Carmen* is a film about the rehearsal of a flamenco dance production of the Carmen story, and thus, like *Prénom Carmen*, about the uses of the opera rather than a performance of it. The movie is also about 'the performance tradition' more directly than Godard's, because it is a representation of the reception of *Carmen* by the flamenco dancer–choreographer Antonio and his troupe as they work up their version of the story. The principals are played by the dancer–choreographer Antonio Gades and his company, who did successfully produce such a dance-drama; this circumstance is one example of the pervasive play between fictional and actual events that is the film's most striking feature.

Bizet's opera is, in a certain sense, as much subject to dismissal in Antonio's production as it is in Godard's film. Antonio takes Mérimée as his key to the story, offering a copy of the book to his principal dancer (also named Carmen) – which she apparently refuses. He lectures the cast on the novella on two occasions, and two of the major scenes performed in the film are not in Bizet: the fight between Carmen and Manuelita in the cigarette factory, and the duel between José and Carmen's husband García. The opera does, however, have a greater presence here than in Godard, not only because the plot of the dance is much closer to Bizet, and not only because more of Bizet's music finds a place in it. The opera is also literally present in the form of a Decca recording of *Carmen* (the Guiraud version) conducted by Thomas Schippers and featuring Regina Resnik as Carmen, which is played on several occasions: as part of the accompaniment to the dance action, for the musicians to study in creating their own version, and as background music to events in the 'real-life' plot of the affair between Antonio and his dancer-Carmen.

In the first instance, this operatic recording is introduced in order to be dismissed – to be criticised, dismembered, rejected or reappropriated. Early in the film, Antonio plays the opera recording of the 'Seguidilla' for his guitarists, who comment that no one could dance to it in that form, and then proceed to transform it into flamenco rhythms as a *bulerías*. At stake here is a question of cultural authenticity, what recent writers on the film and on Saura call *hispanidad*, or 'Spanishness'. Bizet's *Carmen* is for many Spaniards the example *par excellence* of *españolada*, the caricatured Andalusianisms in dress and dance, the clichés about persistent feudalism and quaint customs, the myths of bullfighters, gypsies and the cult of hyper-masculinity that Spaniards have sold to tourists and laughed at among themselves since the nineteenth century. This generic tradition is also associated with the attempt of the Franco regime to attach its own ideological values to a version of 'Spanishness' that draws on many of the same commonplaces. Thus, in the Franco and post-Franco years, the representation of 'traditional' customs and attitudes became and remained politically charged, and the regime's 'authenticity' could be covertly challenged by subjecting such representations to caricature as a way of exposing their naturalising deceptions.[17] Although Saura's *Carmen* was made nearly ten years after Franco's death and contains no apparent political references, the company treats the 'toreador song' as an impromptu parody in the course of a birthday party. Someone puts the opera recording on the studio sound system as a dancer dressed as a toreador engages in mock combat with another pretending to be a bull, while an over-made-up Carmen slithers from the ladies' room batting her eyelashes; the rest of the troupe laughs and cheers.

The dancers and musicians in the movie distinguish between fake hispanisms and the authenticity of their own art, and on the surface the film supports this

[17] This account is, with individual inflections, the organising framework of recent discussions of Spanish film, and especially of the *Nuevo cine español* with which Saura is associated. See Marvin D'Lugo, *The Films of Carlos Saura: The Practice of Seeing* (Princeton, 1991); Virginia Higginbottom, *Spanish Film Under Franco* (Austin, 1988); Marsha Kinder, *Blood Cinema: The Reconstruction of National Identity in Spain* (Berkeley, 1993).

distinction, singling out Bizet's music as a primary locus of inauthenticity. As with Godard, Saura takes the score of *Carmen* as a pre-existing given that is already known (and already largely understood) in terms of plot and stock associations drawn from the discourse-*Carmen*. Both the characters and the film itself abstract from this pre-given musico-dramatic and discursive text a set of what amounts to sound-bites from the score, and repeat these detached motifs at various points. Although the film shows scenes from the dance-production being rehearsed more or less in the order of the Carmen story – the fight in the cigarette factory, Carmen's arrest, her seduction of José, etc. – the Bizet motifs that sometimes accompany them do not match the order of Bizet's plot: the rehearsal of the *pas de deux* between Carmen and Antonio/José, for example, is done to the 'Habañera', replacing the castanet dance that occurs at this point in the opera.

The same disjunction is even more apparent in the story of the 'real lives' of the dancers that is purportedly the movie's real subject; here the detachment of the motifs from Bizet is one of the film's most effective means of blurring the line between actuality and the simulations of performance. The most interesting of these is the Act III prelude music, which is used as a lover's theme in the film, something it is not in the opera.[18] This music plays on the soundtrack when Carmen first confronts José in the rehearsal of her arrest; it plays again when the dancer Carmen comes to visit the director Antonio in his apartment on the night they first make love. The prelude is played by an orchestra in both scenes, and since no orchestra is present on-screen, our conventional assumption must be that this is background music, not heard by the characters, that sets the mood.

But there are some ambiguating cues in the rehearsal scene, though the likelihood is that we are hearing a tape of the opera played over the studio sound system. There is foot-stamping from the dancers on the noise track, which is out of time with the prelude music; when the rehearsal breaks up we watch the cast relax and chat to the sound of a flamenco guitar experimenting with the Act III prelude – is the guitarist practising the version they will use at the real performance, as he did before with the 'Seguidilla'? It is just possible that the orchestral music in this scene is imaginary, a hint that the real dancers, not the characters, are falling in love at this moment in the rehearsal, joining up in real life with what their characters are doing in the performance. Even if it does not mean this when first played, it takes on this second meaning – or adds this imaginary component – in retrospect, since that is what the music has to mean later at Antonio's apartment. By the end of the second seduction scene the prelude music has come to signify the undecidability of the distinction between rehearsal and off-stage life,[19] a distinction the characters are no better able to sustain than we.

[18] See McClary, 136.

[19] It is, however, by no means the only thing to do so. As the film proceeds, Saura increasingly uses the trick (also common in Godard) of having the soundtrack bridge a cut between scenes, so that the same sounds, whether Bizet, flamenco or even the noise of stamping feet, are now diegetic (produced in imagination or reality by the characters), now extra-diegetic (unheard by the characters, functioning as background or commentary).

This appropriation of the prelude as a lover's theme, especially by Antonio to accompany his dance-drama, functions as a kind of dismissal of the opera. The theme is slow and pretty and can easily be used as sweet love-music without arousing too many associations with smugglers' camps in the mountains. Like Saura's other desequencings and reapplications to new situations of the *Carmen* leitmotifs, it says that Bizet's *Carmen* is so well understood, so clear, and so used up, that there is nothing left to do but slot it into our own projects wherever we can make it fit, perhaps only as muzak. It is of no real interest in its original form – only a flamenco version with a different music in a different order and new scenes reimagined in flamenco terms can save the story, recapture *Carmen* authentically for Spain.

This account of the relation of Saura's film to Bizet's opera has shaped the critical understanding of the 'modern' plot of the film, in which Antonio, overcome by jealousy of Carmen's sexual independence, pursues her off stage at the conclusion of a rehearsal of the end of the story, and appears to stab her – whether as a continuation of the rehearsal or in actuality is left unclear. Both D'Lugo and McClary take the plot to be a commentary on the dangers of exoticism, the story of how Antonio, 'an incurable romantic of the order of Mérimée's framing-tale narrator',[20] is seduced by an inauthentic, colonising image, until 'the prestige of Bizet's music and the power of Mérimée's story lure Antonio away from his community (its music, its wisdom) and into an obsession that destroys both him and his lover'.[21] To me, however, the film seems more radical in questioning the very notion of authenticity. The problem is not that *Carmen* is too far away from flamenco and its presumably more authentic values, but that flamenco itself, whatever its surface stylistic distinctiveness or its basic assumptions – particularly those having to do with gender-roles and erotic conflict – is far too close to the kind of imaginary and caricatured world represented in the opera.

A real development of this point would require more space than is available here, but I can at least sketch the directions such an argument might take. To begin with, what we call 'flamenco' in the movie (and in real life as well) is itself a recent construct. Antonio's overall contribution to dance is, like Gades's, the invention of flamenco dance-drama, a new form that integrates the traditional episodic genre-situations and traditional vocabulary of flamenco into an extended narrative. It is thus similar in structure to the traditionalising (as opposed to traditional) practices of the Franco regime – the product of a world in which tradition itself is always under construction, always being extended to cover and to justify new needs and desires.

From this point of view, what is striking about the flamenco episodes in the production, whether danced between rivals or between lovers, is their intense, confrontational competitiveness. Every dance, even a love-duet, is in effect a bullfight between two dancers – the fight between Carmen and Manuelita is as macho and aggressive as that between José and García, and so is the 'real-life' interaction between Carmen and Antonio, in which she challenges him (in a neat

[20] D'Lugo, 205.
[21] McClary, 137.

reversal of Bizet) to 'dance for love' for her. Flamenco in this film gets its dramatic effectiveness from intensity of confrontation, which is why Antonio consistently uses – and manipulates – real off-stage emotional relations, such as the jealousy his *prima flamencera*, Christina, feels towards Carmen for replacing her in the title role, to add fire to their dance-duel as Carmen and Manuelita. In its own most effective moments, flamenco draws on the same intensified ideas of maleness, honour, passion, jealousy and vendetta that supposedly make an absurdity of *Carmen's* pretentions to represent Spain.[22]

This reduplication suggests that the characters' surface rejection of *Carmen* conceals a continued involvement at a deeper level, and the film's use of Bizet's music carries this counter-reading. Consider, for example, the playing of Carmen's teasing refusal to Zuniga during his interrogation of her after the fight with Manuelita: 'Tra, la, la, la, la, la, la, la!/Coupe moi, brûle moi, je ne te dirai rien'. The passage occurs as a background to Antonio's search through the deserted studio, and his discovery of Carmen making love in the wardrobe to another dancer (who has no part as a rival to José in the dance-drama). As a description of Antonio's thoughts, this music records his inability to understand Carmen and her motives, in much the same way that José cannot understand his Carmen and hers; but in the context of the film as a whole, as Saura's comment on the action, it signifies a good deal more.

The characters may have a point, at least in terms of readings of *Carmen* they are familiar with,[23] in dismissing the opera and its characters as empty clichés; but the film shows clearly that the stock situations of flamenco have no greater purchase on such things as the vagaries and complexities of desire, especially female desire, and especially Carmen's. We are allowed to see the personal and professional situation of this young dancer, until halfway through the movie still married to a man incarcerated for drug-dealing, conducting an affair in which she manifests convincingly genuine affection with the mentor who can make or break her career, and insisting at the same time on her independence and right to free sexual choice. While she offers no comprehensive statement of her desire, she seems to be trying to honour all these obligations and opportunities as best she can. She is unwilling, for instance, simply to dismiss the husband she no longer loves without reaching some kind of accommodation, however awkward; she therefore asks Antonio to help pay him off so he will leave them alone – a far less romantic termination of potential rivalry than the fatal duel between José and García in the ballet. This uncomfortable scene tags Antonio's subsequent decision to stage that powerfully dramatic duel between himself and another dancer dressed and wigged to look like Carmen's

[22] From this point of view, the nearest analogy in operatic terms to 'flamenco' as the film represents it is *verismo*, the attempt in Italian opera at the turn of the century to give new purchase to the intensity of operatic emotions by relocating them in low or popular culture. The strategy in both cases is to justify and protect the purity, simplicity and directness of feelings by ascribing them to a society more innocent than the contemporary audience. The kinship of the other two ballets by the Gades troupe filmed by Saura, *Blood Wedding* and *El amor brujo*, to works like *Pagliacci* and *Cavalleria rusticana* is evident.

[23] As in *Prénom Carmen*, the characters in Saura's film do not know the opera well, and are willing to take their reading of it on faith from Antonio – who prefers Mérimée.

husband, as a compensatory fantasy on his part, a use of his power over the company to indulge in an imaginary retreat to a simpler vision flamenco can handle. Carmen's desire and its entailments are problems for her as well as for Antonio, and the camera, at least, sees it. In the light of this complexity it appears that Antonio's musically tagged construction of her as 'Carmen' the incomprehensible gypsy is not merely a failure of sympathy but an active flight from understanding and difficulty; it is not separate from but parallel and identical to his construction of her as a dancer in a flamenco drama.

So far, we might still see the film, even its questioning of flamenco, as concentrated on Antonio's misprisions and failures of insight, on his inability to distinguish between life and art. The final scene, however, generalises the problem to the rest of the dancers' world. Antonio's enactment of the finale of *Carmen* may be a continuation of the rehearsal, but it may be an actual killing, and this indeterminacy is enforced at the very end of the film, as the camera draws back from him standing over Carmen's body to survey 'the other members of the troupe . . . sitting around relaxing, as though what we witnessed was just a trial run of the production's final scene, rather than the murder of Antonio's lover who has been playing the part of Carmen . . . We are left not knowing.'[24] The reason we are so left, however, is not because of the end, but because of a break between the rehearsal and the final events that cannot be located in naturalistic time and space. Carmen walks away from the confrontation between José and Escamillo, or walks out on the rehearsal (finally exasperated, perhaps, at having her private life appropriated yet again for dance purposes) – take your pick. The camera concentrates in medium close-up on the interaction between her and Antonio/José as she walks through a door and is stabbed (or not) and falls. Only then does the camera pull back to the final pan.

If the stabbing is a continuation of the rehearsal, one would expect some response from the cast to mark the end of the drama, some visual account of Escamillo and his party, some sort of freeze and relaxation such as has occurred in similar situations before. If, on the other hand, the murder is real, one would expect some notice, if not of the murder itself, then at least of the break in the fiction when Carmen storms out – it is odd that this disruption should be universally taken as the signal to break for lunch. A group of dancers sits at various tables chatting, and we have no idea how they got there. The uncanny indifference of the cast as the camera surveys them thus moves beyond an undecidability between performance and actuality to a third (non-)place that is metaphorical, emblematic, surreal.[25] Equally

[24] McClary, 135–6.

[25] The closest analogue in Saura's career is the ending of his 1970 *Garden of Delights*. The family of an industrialist who is amnesiac and wheelchair-bound spends most of the movie acting out scenes from his past for him, in an effort to get him to remember the number of his Swiss bank-account and the combination of his safe. The failure of this project (and its reversal) is conveyed in the last frames by an image of the industrialist in his wheelchair in the middle of an open field, surrounded by the entire family circling around him in wheelchairs of their own. The *mise-en-scène* departs from the generally realistic mode of the rest of the movie in order to sum up in a single surreal image: the underlying identity between the family superficially in possession of their faculties and the crippled victim of repression at the centre of their attention.

important is the fact that, from the point where Carmen walks away, the soundtrack begins to play the recording of the ending of Bizet's *Carmen* (behind additional dialogue between the characters, which identifies it as background), from 'frappe-moi donc, ou laisse-moi passer!' to the final chords of the opera and the final frame of the film – the *only* point in the entire movie when Bizet's plot and its music is in synch with the story (whatever it is) of the film.

The totality of the scene thus conveys, first, that there is no real difference between these stories, that the end of *Carmen*, discredited though it may be, is a proper accompaniment for the events at the end of the film (by now no surprise in the case of Antonio), but second, that the studied inattention of the rest of the company marks their complicity, conscious or not, in these events. It picks up the way they have all – in their own commitment to flamenco, to Antonio's power and imagination, in flight from the messy complexity of their own lives and into the simple intensities of dance – supported the development of this plot. Flamenco dance in this film is the site of *jouissance* in the same way that arias are in traditional opera, and that *jouissance* has the traditional property of ecstatic self-forgetfulness, suppression of critical awareness. I have remarked that Antonio continually uses his own emotional life and that of those around him as material for the dance, a point the film makes over and over. What is astonishing is that no one in the movie ever mentions or alludes to this fact, even when, as in the case of Christina, they have their noses rubbed in it. Like him, they persist, in the face of the evidence, in treating 'the story of Carmen' as something they play in their art and dismiss in their lives, but if Antonio has adopted a course of action whose logic guarantees – indeed requires – that his dance and his life will coalesce, the ability to do this depends on the tacit support of his entire community.[26]

While Saura seems to concur in taking for granted the inauthenticity of Bizet's *Carmen*, his attention to the nature of that construction, like the application of his camera and soundtrack to the detail of his characters' lives, is far closer and more analytical than theirs. There is no doubt of his attraction to the power of flamenco, whose representations of *jouissance* his camera continually abets with dramatic angles and dancing movements. Like Godard and my specimen critics, he participates in the fundamental problematic of loving something of which one cannot approve that runs through all these films, perhaps because *Carmen* itself is about this dilemma. More like Godard than the critics, however, he uses the interplay between this understanding of the opera and the events of the film to establish the continuity behind their apparent differences. What his camera sees is the self-imposed blindness necessary to sustain notions like 'Spanishness', or 'authenticity', in the face of the complexities of history and desire.

4

Both Godard and Saura attend to *Carmen* as it has been shaped and diffused in discourse; Bizet's text and music are not treated as an origin to be investigated or

[26] I am indebted to Dion Farquhar for this point.

replayed for its own sake, but only as something already received and reinterpreted, part of the discursive field their characters make use of, and in which they move. With Peter Brook's *La Tragédie de Carmen*, we encounter something that purports to be an actual performance of the opera, in fact a film based on Brook's 1981 staging with the Théâtre Bouffes du Nord in Paris. However, the film like the production takes full cognisance of what, in Brook's view, has happened to *Carmen* and opera since the nineteenth century, in the interests of undoing it:

> At a certain moment, the art form became frozen; it began to be admired because it was frozen, and operagoers began to express a tremendous admiration for art as artificial . . . I would say the greatest challenge now, at this point in the twentieth century, is to replace – in the minds of performers as well as audiences – the idea that opera is artificial with the idea that opera is natural. That's really the most important thing, and I think it's possible.[27]

Or, as Susan McClary writes:

> Brook intended his *La Tragédie de Carmen* to strip away the layers that had stultified what he takes to have been Bizet's original vision.. . . Brook and his collaborators (composer–conductor Marius Constant and playwright Jean-Claude Carrière) reduced *Carmen* to what they perceived as its basic elements and reconstituted the opera, so that the story seems at once familiar and alien: 'We are doing a new investigation of [*Carmen*] – hence the new title – and what we have done is to separate its central core from the rest of the material, like boning a fish'.[28]

Brook's image here is unfortunate, since to follow it leaves only the bone, not much to eat; but its violence is justified by his practice. The story departs in radical ways not only from Bizet – José's murder of Zuniga, and fatal duel with Carmen's husband, García, both of which are in Mérimée – but from Mérimée as well at the end, where Carmen refuses José only until she sees that her new protector, Bizet's Escamillo, has been killed in a bullfight. At that point she immediately relents and goes off with José, only to be murdered by him anyway. Musically, the production is equally radical: as in Saura, the overture is replaced by something else, in this case a solo cello theme based on Carmen's 'En vain', the card song from Act III, which is also used as a finale. The chorus is completely eliminated, and the orchestra reduced to a fifteen-piece chamber group; often there is no more than a piano tinkling away at the 'fate-theme' on the soundtrack. Most striking of all is the extreme compression visited on both story and music. In the opening scene, for example, a figure that will turn out to be Carmen is sitting centre-stage, bundled up in a blanket. Micaëla enters and sings only her half of the dialogue with Morales and the soldiers that opens Bizet's opera. She sings it to Carmen, who does not answer, but reads Micaëla's fortune in the cards. When José enters (a moment I will return to), he and Micaëla launch into their duet about the letter from home and the kiss from mother, only to be interrupted by an unveiled Carmen, who first sings a snatch of the chorus's cigarette song, 'C'est fumée' (which can thus be read as a comment on the duet, 'all this is nothing but smoke'), and then moves at once into the

[27] Peter Brook, 'The Art of Noise', in *The Shifting Point: Theatre, Film, Opera, 1946–1987* (New York, 1987), 170.
[28] McClary, 137–8.

'Habañera' (accompanied only by drumbeats), while José and Micaëla (the latter visibly annoyed) listen and watch. Finally Carmen and Micaëla get into a real hair-pulling, rolling-around fight, and Carmen carves onto Micaëla the 'x' that Bizet awards to Manuelita, to the accompaniment of the chorus's argument music 'C'est la Carmencita, non, non, ce n'est pas elle'.

Similarly, most of what corresponds to Bizet's Act II is compressed into a series of confrontations, first between Zuniga and José, and then, jumping ahead to Act III, an inconclusive duel with Escamillo, before Carmen retires with Lilas Pastia, leaving José alone to sing his half of the flower duet to himself (partly in voice-over), then returns and falls into his arms without singing her half of the duet, 'non, tu ne m'aime pas'. In the part of the film that corresponds roughly to Bizet's Act III, Carmen's card song (without Mercedes and Frasquita) is sung while José and García are off duelling in the forest. When the victorious José returns he is almost immediately accosted by Micaëla singing 'Je dis que rien ne m'épouvante', which she then repeats as part of a duet in dissimilar style with Carmen, who sings a reprise of the card song. It is no wonder the producers were able to cut the opera from over three hours to eighty minutes.

The effect of this ruthless compression and reduction is, as Brook's fishboning image suggests, of a kind of cutting through what he sees as the deceptions and displacements of Bizet's plot. The production projects as its *vouloir dire* the ambition to recover an original even more originary than Bizet, a kind of primal *Carmen*, which would recapture the theatrical power Brook associates with Shakespeare, Greek tragedy and primitive religion, and to restore something of what McClary calls 'the dread, the unsettling feelings experienced by some of the opera's first audience'.[29] This ambition would seem to be behind the production's gypsy ritual and superstition – Carmen's sorcery and fortunetelling, the old witch who 'marries' Carmen and José with a mysterious ceremony – as well as the simple, raw brutality of the human relations it depicts and the weird, quasi-hypnotised way the characters move through their roles. This strand culminates in the final scene, where Carmen and José walk together, as if entranced, to the centre of the circular enclosure of the theatre and kneel together ritualistically until he stabs her. The scene is based more on Mérimée than Bizet, and couples the sense of fatality Carmen has read in the cards throughout this production with the general sense of the world reflected in her line 'Comme mon rom, tu as le droit de tuer ta romi' (as my *rom*, you have the right to kill your *romi*), though without the defiant spirit of the ensuing 'mais Carmen sera toujours libre, Calli elle est née, calli elle mourra' (but Carmen will always be free, *Calli* she was born, *calli* she will die).[30]

If one may judge an intention by its critical reception, this reading of the film's project has thoroughly succeeded, since almost everyone who has discussed the film

[29] McClary, 140.

[30] Prosper Mérimée, 'Carmen', in *Lokis et autres contes* (Paris, 1964), 240. Carmen's last words in the film, sung before she knows Escamillo is dead, are Bizet's version of the last sentence, 'Libre elle est née'.

adopts some version of it as a basis for description,[31] even when they do not entirely approve. David Wills speaks of Carmen as 'very much drawn from the description of the Bohemian/Basque/gypsy/necromancer given by Mérimée, and she first appears center stage, completely enveloped in a cloak, revealing herself to Micaëla as a sorceress who will entrap Don José with magic', attributing to such gestures the 'success of the production in making opera into convincing theater and not just an outmoded form of melodrama', even though it involves 'a retreat from the issues of sexual politics which the text inevitably raises'.[32] The *Time Out* reviewer characterises the heroine as 'displaying a malignity that is as motiveless as that of Shakespeare's Iago, but as resigned to the inevitable workings of fate as Lear',[33] while McClary also points to the importance of fate, 'there is no motivation, no agency here. The social presence so prominent in Bizet's opera is gone, leaving only this chain of [lovers'] triangles as a universal condition. The actors walk somnambulistically through their paces, cogs in a bloody Darwinian machine.' She too ends by agreeing with Wills about Brook's 'reaction against the advances won by women in the last two decades'.[34]

This set of responses seems odd, not because it is wrong (it is clearly intended, wanted, by the film), but because it is the reading that would dominate the performance if it were not filmed, and if the music were not so relentlessly drawn from Bizet. The fact of filming means, as Brook himself has pointed out, that camera movement and editing pre-empt the freer disposition of point of view enjoyed by a spectator in the theatre, and punctuate the events of the plot in a more determinate way.[35] The use of Bizet's music institutes an inescapable reference back to the opera, so that, no matter how much it is fragmented, recombined, reapplied in new locations, it continues to bespeak where it was before Brook got hold of it. These two facts about the film, the camera's control of emphasis and the intertextuality of the music, transform *La Tragédie de Carmen* into a much more detailed, sophisticated (indeed cynical) and aggressive rereading of Bizet, precisely in terms of male domination and female victimisation. The film is far more 'feminist' – if by that is meant the unmasking of women's exploitation – than any of the other movies discussed here.

Consider two examples. The first is the moment early in the film when the soundtrack plays a theme that belongs to Morales and the guard in Bizet as the

[31] Tambling's rather scattered discussion, *Opera, Ideology, and Film*, 33–5, is perhaps something of an exception.

[32] David Wills, 'Carmen: Sound/Effect', *Cinema Journal*, 25 (1986), 34.

[33] Frances Dickenson, in Tom Milne, ed., *The Time Out Film Guide*, 3rd edn (New York, 1993), 730.

[34] McClary, 138, 141.

[35] 'When I had directed [*Marat/Sade*] for the stage, I had not attempted to impose my own point of view on the work: on the contrary, I tried to make it as many-sided as I could. As a result, the spectators were continually free to choose, in each scene and at every moment, the points which interested them most. Of course, I too had my preferences, and in the film I did what a film director cannot avoid, which is to show what his own eyes see. In the theatre, a thousand spectators see the same thing with a thousand pairs of eyes, but also at the same time they enter into a composite, collective vision. This is what makes the two experiences so different.' 'Filming a Play', *The Shifting Point*, 190.

camera closes in on José's entrance climbing down a ladder. The unsung words are those of Micaëla's witty exchange with the soldiers, 'I'll return when the new guard relieves the guard that is going off duty' (quand la garde montante remplacera la garde descendante). Having José come down a ladder at this point punningly makes him the sole representative of 'la garde descendante', and invites a chuckle at the way Bizet's scene has been cut down to size. Like other reductions in the film, I take this one as self-consciously debunking the original, and doing so from a slightly contemptuous and superior position, an attitude that may extend to the audience, since the joke appeals to a detailed knowledge of the opera that only an elite is likely to have.

The second example is from the section of the film that corresponds to Bizet's Act III. José and García, engaged in a knife-duel, disappear into the forest. While they are gone, Carmen sings the card song. This framing shifts the emphasis of the card song from Carmen to the men, since she never refers the death in the cards to herself – she appears to be the gypsy witch trying to predict the outcome of the fight. But that very fact – her desire to know the outcome – stresses Carmen's dependence on what the men do rather than her involvement in a more abstract fate, and once again the reference of the song to its original location and reference in Bizet gives the scene its irony. We, who already know *Carmen*, have the advantage of this superstitious, primitive gypsy, because we know (as Bizet's Carmen does) that it actually applies to her.

The end of the scene makes a similar point, which depends on a similar sophistication, similarly withheld from the characters. Like Rosi, who does a lot more of it, Brook cites a movie cliché to identify what he sees as a nineteenth-century cliché. As Carmen finishes singing, García walks back into the clearing in the forest, glares at her for a moment in medium close-up, and then falls dead at her feet. The move is reminiscent of a suspense-trope of western and adventure films in which the wrong man appears momentarily to have won such a duel.[36] The point of this gag is to turn what we, Carmen and certainly the characters in Bizet's opera would be tempted to think a decisive event into a cheap, Hitchcockian suspense trick. The contempt it shows for Bizet (and for us insofar as we think that way) is aimed at the idea that anything important could be decided by this 'decisive' duel – as if it really mattered which of these men will get the chance to go on exploiting Carmen. I'm not sure the contempt for Bizet is justified, but I see the power of the interpretation, because this is exactly the point the movie as a whole makes, and it explains the title, *La Tragédie de Carmen*. The film applies such sophisticated second-order references over the heads of the characters to reveal the disenchanted truth: what they take to be fate is actually the ideological naturalisation of active oppression.

Thus, the conflation of Micaëla and Manuelita in the knife-fight in Act I is the last step in a series of direct confrontations between Micaëla and Carmen aimed at

[36] I think in particular of the end of Robert Aldrich's *Vera Cruz*, in which Burt Lancaster's final gun fight with Gary Cooper ends with him repeating the broad grin and juggler-like fancy holstering of his gun that he has practised after each of his victories in the movie, and then falling dead.

bypassing Bizet's surface contrast, as Brook sees it, of their styles, in order to identify their essential similarity, and this is also the reason they sing the contrasting solo arias in Act III as a duet. According to this reading – and there is warrant for it in Bizet – the good girl and the bad girl are a lot more alike than might otherwise appear, because both of them are competing for José's attention, and both of them are dependent on him for recognition and protection.

This solicitation of male attention and dependence on male power are equally central to the film's other revisions of Bizet. Especially in Act II, the movie makes it clear that Carmen is (as in Mérimée) a whore, and that Lilas Pastia (a real slimeball who looks like porn star Paul Thomas) is her pimp. What is more, Brook is the one reteller of this story who picks up on the hints in Bizet's libretto that Carmen and Zuniga have some previous relationship, sending them up to bed together just before José, fresh out of jail, walks into Lilas Pastia's. The fact that Zuniga is still upstairs waiting for her when she does the castanet dance for José stresses both the duplicity of her performance and its improvised, slightly desperate character – she is trying to keep the men from finding out about one another, which is not a problem Bizet's Carmen even considers. Similarly, her flirting with Escamillo over the toreador song is motivated by the need to distract him from the fact that José and Pastia are trying to hustle the corpse of the just-murdered Zuniga out of the door before Escamillo realises he is dead. The world of this film is one of consistent exploitation; violence is evaded or concealed only by treachery and the instrumental use of affection and sexuality to promote various male plots.

Cutting out the chorus does not really remove the social dimension of the opera; rather it ensures that this dimension is restricted to male domination and exploitation, at the expense of illusory feminine independence. Brook's changes and compressions stress the extent to which Carmen is continually put in the dependent, instrumental position of a whore. Her use of her body may be habitual, and she may consent to it, but it is almost always shown to be constrained by the need to exploit male power, or avoid male violence, or both. She cannot afford to alienate José by singing her half of the love duet, any more than she can stand him off at the end without Escamillo to protect her.

Such a view of the world is also in Bizet's opera – its most explicit locus is the quintet in Act II:

> Quand il s'agit de tromperie,
> De duperie,
> De volerie,
> Il est toujours bon, sur ma foi,
> D'avoir les femmes avec soi.

[When it's a matter of deceit, dupery or theft, it's always good, by my faith, to have women along.]

But in Brook's film this disenchanted and instrumental view of eros as a form of ownership, and of woman as property that has only the occasional luxury of a choice of owners, is consistently forced. The quintet, nowhere present in the film, in effect spreads out silently and becomes its landscape, a presence conspicuous by

its apparent absence. What is stressed, in direct and aggressive opposition to the way Bizet is usually read, is the way Carmen's sexuality does not belong to her, is continually exploited and frustrated by male domination. In that sense, Brook's film is an attack on the standard reading of Bizet. It says that the real tragedy of Carmen is not her death but her life; that a happy ending is as bad as a sad one; that she will be killed by a man whether she leaves him or stays with him; that this has been happening to her from the beginning. Brook claims to know this better than Mérimée, or Bizet, or the nineteenth century or opera.

The split between a 'tragic' reading of the story that makes eros into a ritual of fate, and a disenchanted one that analyses the relationships in terms of power and manipulation, is both absolute and absolutely contradictory: the film seems unable to master the contradiction. Brook's ambition to replace the artificiality of opera with what he calls the 'natural' testifies to his desire for naive subjects who can have such strong, ecstatic, unreflective *jouissance*, and to his attempt to supply audiences with the intense, 'operatic' kick traditional opera no longer delivers. In order to put the characters in this position, however, he must engineer their simplicity, surround them with a set of sophisticated manipulations they remain unaware of, constantly put them in theatrically effective situations *vis-à-vis* an 'original' they know nothing about.

Thus, in Brook's revision of the flower duet from Bizet's Act II, when Carmen descends the stairs, presumably fresh from Lilas Pastia's embraces, she comes up *behind* José, whose song has now switched from voice-over to visible singing that Carmen can overhear. She trails behind her the whole train of duplicities José has by now discovered, and on which, so to speak, his song turns its back. The camera, however, transforms her approach by presenting it in a series of reverse shots, first José singing, then Carmen nearing him, a technique activating the cinematic convention that such encounters take place face-to-face. In doing so, the camera, working in tandem with the music, dramatises Carmen's sincerity, which is then confirmed when she embraces José at the end of his solo, rather than singing Bizet's rejection. The point is that in order for Brook's Carmen to evince a 'deeper' (that is, a less complicated) feeling than Bizet's – in order for us to see that she experiences an ecstatic identification untrammelled by reflection – she must be placed in relation to an absent original of which she, but not the audience, is ignorant. The energy and complexity of the processes whereby her directness of feeling is constructed and presented for effect are the most evident things about the scene. Without Bizet's Carmen, without the surprise of her failure to respond as her original does, Brook's Carmen makes no sense; but she must not know this, and must remain unaware of the manipulations that have put her here. Most moments that seem to court a '*jouissance*-effect' in the film are surprise departures from Bizet's story: the false victory of García, the murder of Zuniga, the death of Escamillo, the moment when Carmen returns to José after rejecting him, the moment – some ritualistic minutes later – when he stabs her anyway. What distinguishes these events and makes them 'operatic' is precisely their theatricality. In retrospect they take on a different quality, contributing to the disenchanted view of the world that lies behind its striking moments, and to the atmosphere of deception and manipulation that pervades it.

To be aware of those manipulations is to enter into the film's other perspective, in which the 'natural' is a construction, the product of technique and misdirection – the sort of world the film's conspicuous theatricality entails, and the sort that produces the reading I have argued for as a more modern, disenchanted social tragedy about the oppression of women. The problem is that the film – and Brook – seems to want both: it wants to display its insight and critical power in a debunking reading of the opera, but it also wants to hold on to the primitive power it seeks to evoke from an opera that no longer delivers it. Brook's comments on ritual theatre, and his production of *Carmen*, suggest that he is nostalgic for the intensely theatrical *jouissance* true belief makes possible; he would like his audiences to make-believe as passionately as primitive worshippers are supposed to believe in reality, but with Brook himself as the technician-priest who engineers the spectacle.[37] He cannot – at any rate his film does not – sustain belief in a transcendence except when theatrically produced. From this perspective, Brook's Carmen, dying ecstatically in the service of a fatality to which she accedes, becomes in an odd way an image of the film's desired audience, spellbound by a song because she has been manipulated into forgetting what she knows about it.

5

Francesco Rosi's *Bizet's Carmen* is the only film of the four examined here that does not treat Bizet's opera as a foreclosed possibility. Godard, Saura and Brook assume that it is exhausted as a source of transcendence, a dead text that can only be criticised or exploited, not genuinely used or reread. Rosi, however, in adhering to the verbal and musical text of the opera while bringing to it a full range of cinematic techniques, produces a genuine rereading that opens the text to new possibilities and a new kind of life.

It seems important to insist from the beginning that Rosi's rereading of Bizet cannot be subsumed under the 'performance tradition', i.e., it is not just another performance of the opera – however innovative – that just happens to have been photographed.[38] The insistence is especially important because at first sight the film looks like an apotheosis of this tradition. One of the things that strongly differentiates *Bizet's Carmen* from the other movies discussed here is its lush, big-budget, shot-on-location look.[39] It treats the opera *à la* Zeffirelli (whose version of *La traviata* had been released two years earlier), occupying a relentlessly naturalistic world: real spaces, horses and dust, real houses and mountains and a full,

[37] See, for example, 'The Goddess and the Jeep', *The Shifting Point*, 164–5.

[38] This description would apply more to Brook's version (despite its genuinely cinematic dimension), where the major 'new' effects are in the staging, the revised libretto and the newly orchestrated score. From this point of view, Brook's film is more akin to *Regieoper*, the directorial appropriation of traditional operas through productions that run aggressively against the grain not only of traditional performance values, but of the text itself, a practice common in contemporary Germany, and most familiar in the U.S. in Peter Sellars' versions of Mozart.

[39] The project was initiated by Gaumont, the French film consortium, in the wake of the spectacular success of their production of Joseph Losey's *Don Giovanni* (1979). According to D'Lugo, it was first offered to Saura as 'a film version of the Bizet opera to be made in France with a maximum of fidelity to the original text', *The Films of Carlos Saura*, 202.

'realistic' noise track in addition to the music of the opera. In Zeffirelli's practice this style of filmmaking, with its concentration on the transparency of what is seen, presses towards a form of hyper-performance. It de-emphasises the agency and mediation of cinema, and instead invites passive appreciation of filmed opera as a spectacle more spectacular than anything the stage can provide. For Zeffirelli the style also conduces to a performance-tradition view of opera, as a pre-eminently psychological drama of intense personal relations displayed for their own sakes, and much of Rosi's film, with its concentration on such things as facial expressions, also seems to offer such a reading of *Carmen*. But although the film is much more conventional in content, and far less theatrical and more 'realistic' in general pictorial style, than those of Godard, Saura or Brook, it displays its radicality precisely in the cinematic dimension. The resources of the camera and the possibilities of tracked sound enable Rosi to make Bizet's text new, and to question the very style and performance tradition he mimes.

A general instance of this transformative reading is the way Rosi reads more of Bizet, not only more than the other three films, but more than even performances of the opera normally present. *Bizet's Carmen* includes more of the score, especially in preludes and *mélodrames*, than would ever be performed in the opera house, in part because it can use it as background music for a richer panorama of images – landscapes, crowds, genre-scenes – than stage production is able to supply. The film also makes the incidental and introductory music part of the world of the opera in a more discursive, signifying way than a staging can. I will return to specific examples of this process in a moment, but it is worth pausing on the general implications of Rosi's practice. I remarked earlier that the performance tradition has taken a conservative view of Bizet's 'original' text, in part because it is committed to the idea of a stable origin, of a single thing that 'is' *Carmen*, against which particular productions and performances can be measured. The musicological project on which this idea rests is the establishment of a definitive text, usually from what are thought to be 'Bizet's final intentions'. Rosi's practice opens up the alternative view, namely that what is at the 'origin' of Bizet's *Carmen* is already an indeterminate body of verbal and musical text, variously selected out of Mérimée and elsewhere, then further shaped between the beginning of rehearsals and the first performance (and thereafter during the first run); reselected, altered and reshaped again for the Vienna run, and so on. Convenient emblems of this multiple textual origin might be the two earliest surviving texts of the score, the conducting version on which Oeser's edition is based, and the first edition published near the time of the first performances by Choudens.[40] Why choose – or rather, why make a choice final? Establishing 'the text' may be a congenial undertaking, even a practical necessity, but such a text – not to mention Bizet's intentions – is no less a construction and an interpretation than other uses of the material. Rosi's practice, by supplying images connected to the rest of the opera for the extra musical material he employs, raises the question of the text more insistently than would a similar

[40] See McClary, 25–6, and her notes for a summary with references to the Oeser–Dean controversy and the state of the text.

choice slotted into a curtain-raiser or an *entr'acte* in live performance, and identifies the textual multiplicity at the origin with respect to the music. What kind of thing is an opera for which more music exists than is ever played? Such music is a leftover, a supplement, a *reste*, and, as Derrida has shown, to think of it as that which may safely be excluded is at best only one choice among many. There is no way to be sure that what is left out is not the crucial element on which the sense of all the rest might depend, and Rosi activates such possibilities.[41]

The opening of the film provides a clear example of this approach. Its first sequence is a bullfight in which we follow a *torero*, who will later turn out to be Escamillo, through a number of passes, the killing of the bull and a triumphal passage around the ring to the cheers of the crowd. At first there is no music, only crowd noise and ambient sound (a brass band playing something not from the opera) on the noise track. Rosi's consistent practice, like Zeffirelli's, is to let the naturalistic sounds of the noise track, almost always running whether or not there is music, continue underneath or alongside the music of the opera. Unlike Zeffirelli, Rosi always makes something of their conjunction or lack of it. In this case, the music of the overture comes up on the soundtrack only at the moment Escamillo kills the bull, and then plays behind his march around the arena. It thus serves to identify a moment of drama and release: Bizet's music kicks in when people get excited. The disposition of music versus noise thus becomes, in addition to its narrative or illustrative functions, a way of registering the play of fantasy, excitement and emotional intensity in the characters, and it registers those things in relation to consciousness. That is, pure noise track represents everyday unselfconsciousness, people walking around, leading mules, talking, etc. Instrumental music on the soundtrack, as with the climax of the bullfight, indicates an unselfconscious access of excitement or emotion of some kind, which may seem to have unconscious sources: it appears the way a change of mood does in real life, and sometimes, as with José's first attraction to Carmen, seems to tag feelings people do not yet know they have.

Singing is more complex because it comes in a number of forms, from spontaneous song in the middle of a speech to self-conscious performance, and the impressiveness of Rosi's technique emerges in his ability to inflect and punctuate the unfolding action by adjusting the interplay of various levels. In the long sequence in Act II between Carmen and José at Lilas Pastia's, for example – from José's entry singing 'Dragon d'Alcala' to the prelude music, through Carmen's castanet dance, the flower song and the final quarrel and imminent separation of the couple just before Zuniga's re-entry – Rosi orchestrates the emotional flow of events by manipulating the noise track. Almost from the beginning of the act, which takes

[41] The *locus classicus* for this discussion is Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore, 1976), 141–64. The same considerations of course apply to the libretto, and here the open possibilities of the *reste* are even more pressing, since Rosi does not begin to make use of all the available words. See, for example, the libretto as printed in the ENO/Royal Opera *Carmen* (London and New York, 1982), which gives a full, if unscholarly, account of variant versions, material frequently cut in performance, etc., more valuable than a more 'disciplined' *editio variorum* precisely because of its witness to practice.

place at night, there is a steady rhythmic drone of crickets. At certain key moments, however, as when José gets into the flower song, the crickets disappear. In this particular case the aria is sung through a series of closer and closer reverse shots that bring the couple together, and when José finishes he and Carmen embrace and kiss in a set of close two-shots. Then, just as they separate, the crickets start up again on the noise track and sound through a long pause before Carmen begins her demurring 'Non, tu ne m'aimes pas', at which point the crickets again disappear.

What is achieved here is a musicalisation of the noise track in the manner of Godard, but applied to the exposition of an emotional narrative. The treatment of the crickets foregrounds the subjectivity of the characters, indicating that they are at one moment caught up in their interaction to the point of no longer hearing the ambient noises of the world (which are drowned out, as it were, by the music they make and the music in their heads), while at another moment they 'come down', lose contact, undergo a moment of scepticism or withdrawal, attend again to their wider surroundings. Rosi has found a code that allows him to map the interplay of emotions, here the interplay of Carmen's attraction to the sentiments of José's aria and her subsequent rejection of them, on to a text that contains but does not specify that reading. What might have been read, for instance, as her resistance from the beginning is here specified more complexly: a possibility of Bizet's text is inscribed as a meaning of Rosi's, and that meaning has to do with degrees of consciousness, a movement from unselfconscious ecstasy to self-conscious critical awareness of oneself *vis-à-vis* another.

This reading of Bizet's text in terms of varying degrees of awareness of self, world, and the interplay between them is characteristic of Rosi's treatment throughout. Indeed, the relation between individual subjectivity and the social world – the question of class – is a major theme of the film. The presentation of Carmen and Micaëla, for example, turns largely on the representation of a difference in awareness of others. Carmen continually interacts publicly with others, and Rosi's fluid, active camera doubles her interactions, moving now with her gaze, now around her as an audience, in easy interchange.[42] When she throws the flower at José, the camera stations itself in the crowd that is watching her do it, and catches her as she looks triumphantly over her shoulder at the onlookers (see Fig. 1). Later, when José is sent in search of the sources of the hubbub outside the cigarette factory, the camera takes advantage of a stretch of argument music ('C'est la Carmencita' 'Non, non, ce n'est pas elle!') to take us inside the factory (and give us a concrete image of Carmen and the other women as workers); it thus watches as Carmen spies José down a long corridor and plants herself to encounter him with

[42] One of the most characteristic shots in the film, repeated many times, is a medium-high-angle travelling shot in which the camera also pans, moving across and rotating in a field in deep focus. One function of this complex compound shot is to pick out and move with a given character while continuing to emphasise the fullness and bustle of the world around him or her. An example is the opening scene at the bullfight, in which the camera moves around the arena from the stands so as to follow Escamillo's triumphal parade in the ring while also surveying a sizeable chunk of the spectators. Many of the shots that delineate the ordinary social world of Seville work in the same way, especially those that present Carmen outdoors, i.e., in Acts I and III.

Fig. 1 *Bizet's Carmen:* Carmen between José and the community

maximum effect.[43] Carmen confidently treats the world as an audience, and the audience as confidently reacts, dances to her tunes, applauds her, sings the refrains of her songs and echoes her sentiments. The realistic ambience of the film is not compromised by her performances, because Carmen really is singing and dancing in the world of the movie, just as she is in the opera.[44]

Against this background of Carmen's involvement with her social surroundings, the support she receives from her base in community life, and the focus of attention she provides for others, the treatment of José's duet with Micaëla achieves its full effect. In contrast to Carmen, the pair are filmed with a relatively static camera, framed in formal pairings that make them look like figures on a china cup (see Fig. 2). Most striking and effective of all, the presentation continually calls attention to the lack of interaction between them and the surrounding world. José and Micaëla sing to and with one another at the top of their lungs; they pay no attention to their surroundings and nobody hears or notices them. The funniest sequence in the duet comes at its end, when the couple walk away from the unblinking camera deep into the field, singing of mother and the transfer of a kiss on a soundtrack in which

[43] This is another example of the technique described above, using the extended duration of scenic music as a way to get more information and additional narrative into the film.

[44] McClary notes the way Bizet revises the function of the traditional *opéra-comique* chorus to make this social point: 'Chameleon-like, *Carmen*'s choruses represent a variety of social groups . . . Carmen . . . always fits into and is supported by the community as represented by the various choruses', 46–7.

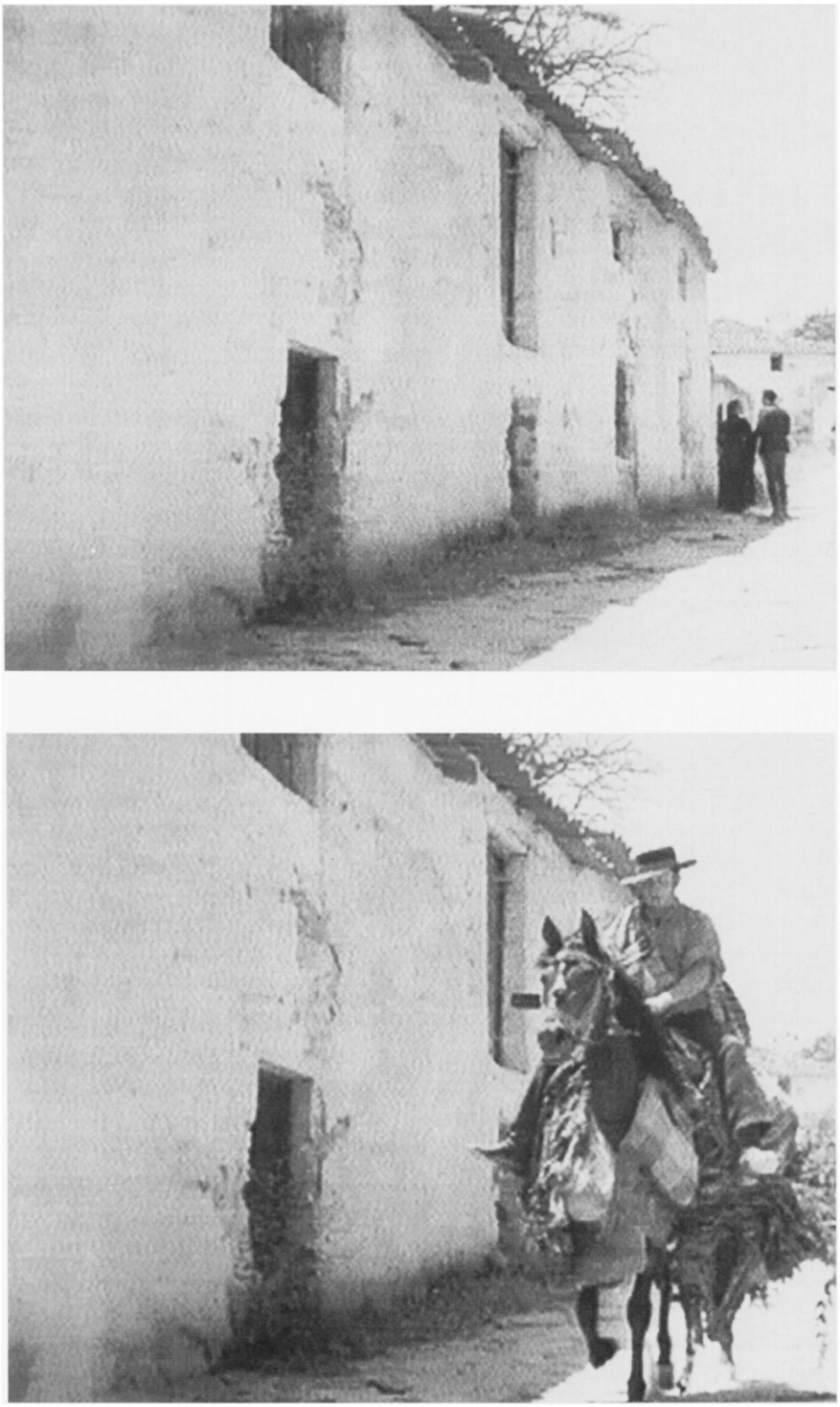
Fig. 2 *Bizet's Carmen:* José and Micaëla as figurines

neither their singing nor its full orchestral accompaniment diminishes in volume with their distance. When they are far enough away to be two distant figures, clopping hoofbeats gradually get louder on the noise track until a man on a donkey ambles into the foreground and completely obliterates the still-singing pair (see Figs 3*a* and *b*).

Rosi's filming brings out with particular clarity the absorption of Micaëla and José in each other, and therefore tends once again to stress the sense of extra emotion, the quasi-sexual fascination and timid flirtation, especially on Micaëla's part, that lie behind and take advantage of the 'innocent' transmission of a mother's message and a mother's kiss.[45] In traditional nineteenth-century opera, a duet between a soprano and a tenor is a love-song whether the characters intend it or not; Rosi's manipulation of cinematic style makes the point that these people are doing more than just exchanging information – and so reads out in cinematic terms Bizet's use of duet conventions to get at the traces of hidden desire, coded as the tendency to burst into song that no one else can hear.

At the same time, however, because the dense actuality of the town (people washing, trading, talking) is so pointedly left in the scene, the presentation tends to stress the extent to which the couple cut themselves off from the surrounding world. At this level, Rosi's cinematic technique functions as an interpretation of Bizet's use of form. The opera proposes a contrast between popular dance-forms –their exotic

[45] Compare the account of Carmen's response to the flower song, given above.



Figs. 3*a* and 3*b Bizet's Carmen:* The actual world interrupts a romantic idyll

modes and rhythms redolent perhaps less of the oriental Other than of *café concerts* and similar vernacular public entertainments – and the more conventional operatic duet that José and Micaëla sing, one of only two such numbers in the opera, in which bourgeois pretensions to high style are characteristic of these would-be bourgeois figures.[46] The social implications of this contrast are stressed by Rosi's *mise-en-scène*, which presents the characters as people who comically assume their independence of the wider social world in a way Carmen never does. The difference between the noisetrack and soundtrack is used to signify something about character and class. Rosi converts 'realism' into a textual element, making use of the rich reference to actuality in a way Zeffirelli, the exemplar he emulates and parodies, never dreamed of. He exploits the oddness of people singing in what looks so much like real life to specify and reinforce the psycho-social implications of a difference in musical style.

This concern with the social meaning of desire also extends to the question of its social construction. Like Godard, Rosi accepts the idea that much modern experience is structured, especially in representations that offer themselves for the expression of *jouissance*, by an imaginary drawn from movies, and he often creates complex ironic effects by alluding to other movies and movie clichés. Unlike Godard, however, he uses this technique not as a way of replacing but of interpreting Bizet. José poised on the stairs, sword in hand to duel with Zuniga at the end of Act II, for instance, comes from swashbuckling costume-drama films, and specifically – I am certain – from Errol Flynn's duel on the castle stairs with Basil Rathbone at the end of Michael Curtiz's *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (Warner, 1938). Most of the latter portion of Act III, the duel between José and Escamillo, is treated as a western-movie faceoff, of the exaggerated, cranked-up – dare I say operatic? – spaghetti-western sort, including the low-angle travelling shots that make the characters appear to be monumental in size and covering acres with every stride, the tight alternating close-ups on confronting faces out of films like *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*, and Escamillo's hilarious, Gene Autry singing-cowboy farewell gesture with his hat before riding off into the sunset (see Fig. 4). These references are cinematic analogues of the way operatic arias represent fantasy, because they show us not what the characters are actually doing, but their images of what they suppose or wish they were doing. In both cases the genre-references are patches of conventional visual style that the characters momentarily inhabit without appearing to notice it; they communicate a shared vision of the encounter. Rosi's use of the western tags the peculiarly ritual violence of José and Escamillo's encounter, its concentration on male competition and self-affirmation. It points out how little this has to do with Carmen and how much with who these men agree they want to be. The faceoff is, in other words, Rosi's interpretation of why the two characters can sing a duet while they fight. In Bizet, as in middle and late Verdi, the singing of a duet often indicates shared desire, that the characters involved have reached a point where they can persuade themselves, at least for the moment, that they agree, not

[46] See McClary, 15–16 and 44–7, for a brief, pointed account of the class associations of this musical style.

Fig. 4 *Bizet's Carmen:* Escamillo as Gene Autry

about what they have but about what they want.[47] This duet between Escamillo and José can plausibly be read as Bizet's way of indicating the shared vision of male competition, the odd friendliness, of the duel.

Something similar is going on in Micaëla's soliloquy, 'Je dis que rien ne m'épouvante', also in Act III. As I pointed out earlier, the final strain of the aria moves from Micaëla to the soundtrack – the voice continues over images of her making a silent path through the mountains. I take this to be a way of dramatising her subjective state, showing how the confidence and emotional exaltation generated by whatever she is doing in the earlier verses – thinking discursively? talking to herself? actually singing? – appear to her literally to fill the landscape, providing a fantasy of power and protection that keeps her going: song turns into magic, or that is what it looks and feels like to her.[48] Once again Rosi identifies a

[47] *Un ballo in maschera*, with its interest in shifting alliances, is full of this effect, as is, for similar reasons, *Don Carlos*.

[48] A fuller reading would need to take into account the way Rosi and Bizet position this aria as a contrast to Carmen's style of reflection on her situation in the card song, which almost immediately precedes this scene. In both Bizet and Rosi, we are invited to notice the same difference between an essay at self-definition – Carmen's – conducted in the presence of an audience, and one like Micaëla's, whose surface humility serves as a pretext for expanding the self to appropriate an empty landscape. Once again the fact of singing in a 'realistic' *mise-en-scène* tags an attitude towards the world, and in this case the likelihood that this amount of noise would be sure to attract attention questions the song's message of secret fear and identifies the underlying aggressivity typical of Micaëla, who never shrinks from asserting herself when she can blame it on a mother or God.

specific moment when *jouissance* infuses a character's discourse – plausibly enough, on the repeat. However, he also identifies the participation of this fantasy in a larger structure of socially patterned desire by making the scene a specific echo of another film, one that opens with a woman bursting into song in the middle of an empty, spectacular landscape (see Figs. 5–6).

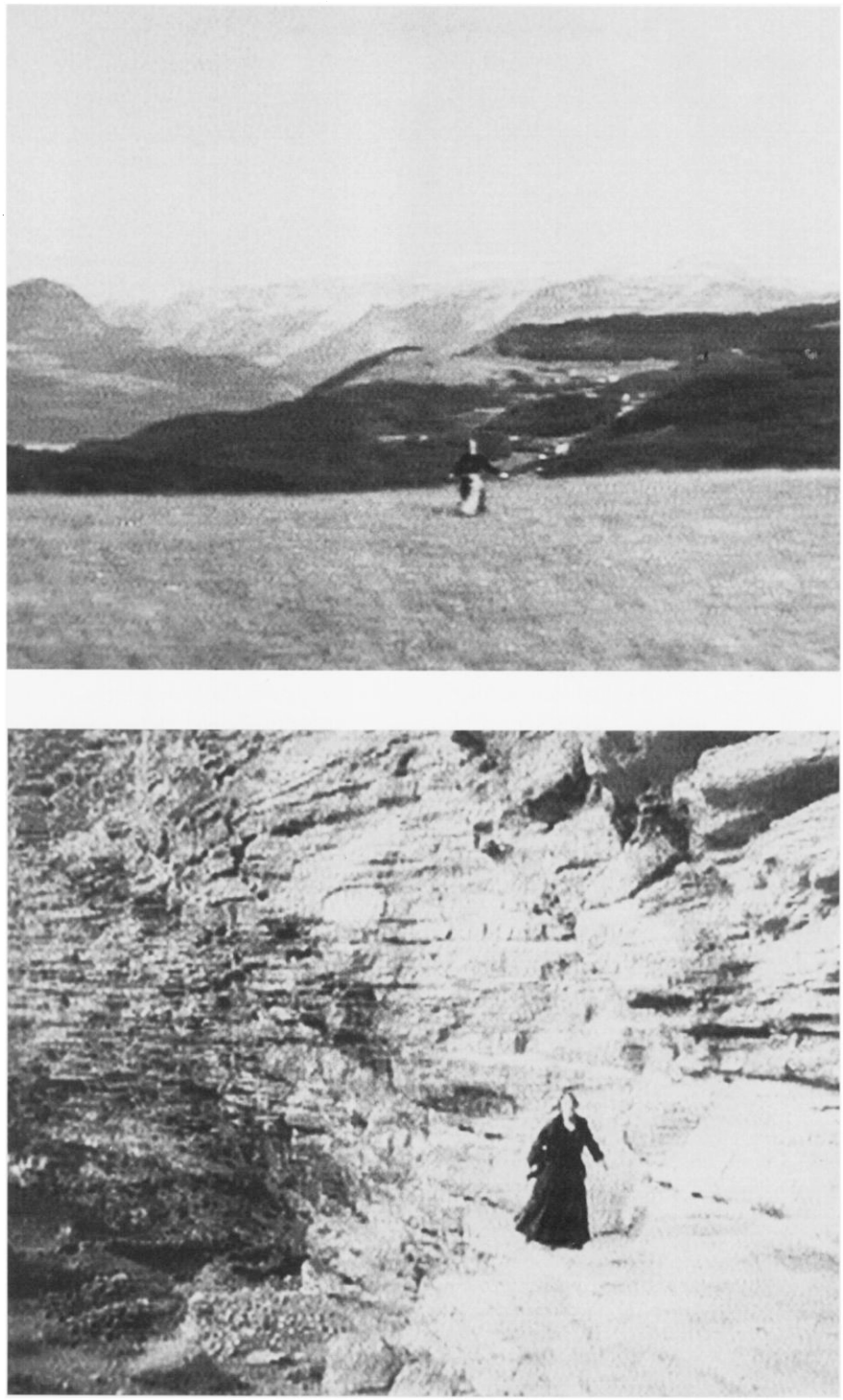
Robert Wise's *The Sound of Music* (Fox, 1965) is one of the most cinematically distinguished bad movies ever made,[49] and Rosi learned a lot from it; but his *hommage* here makes it in effect the social success-story Micaëla has in her head as she searches for José: 'If I am a very good and courageous girl, and especially if I never admit to myself for a moment that I have any designs in that direction, I will all innocently, through my selfless attention to his welfare, win the heart of my aristocrat, Don José Lizzara-Bengoa'. This appeal to a culturally shared fantasy of the possibilities open to virtuous women reads out the fantasy behind the behaviour of Bizet's Micaëla (the way, for instance, she does not play her trump-card, the information about José's mother's actual illness, until she has given him the chance, complete with echoes of the Act I duet, to respond as he previously did to her own shy virtue), by framing it in contemporary terms: Maria in *The Sound of Music* is a way of suggesting for us now who Micaëla wanted to be – somebody like La Dame Blanche perhaps.[50] The presentation delineates not only Micaëla's symbolic investment in the landscape as an emblem of her self-sacrifice, her active construction of the mountains as a great deal more than crassly physical obstacles, but also identifies the ideological character of that investment, its participation in a larger, socially shared story about female virtue, marriage and class.

Rosi's overall reading of *Carmen* centres on class, and the narrative fulcrum of this is Escamillo,[51] the decision to open the film with a bullfight over the first-act prelude (music that belongs to Escamillo in Act IV) allowing Rosi to bring the toreador forward as the first character we see. The most powerful effects, however, stem from the appropriation of the prelude to Act II. As this music plays in the background, the camera settles on a daytime court scene where two dancers in stylised Andalusian costume perform a ballet to the prelude music, now revealed as diegetic, for a group of seated aristocrats in an enclosed courtyard. Escamillo sits comfortably among the onlookers, and glances flirtatiously at an attractive girl while he takes a cigar from a servant and lights it. The

[49] This is shorthand for something that could be elaborated in terms of Rosi's own themes and polemic, that is, an analysis of a movie that enlists powerful (and spectacularly naturalistic) images in support of what he would surely regard as lies about the possibilities for women to transcend class boundaries. In this context the film is politically 'bad' from Rosi's point of view, whatever else it may be.

[50] The suggestion is not entirely facetious. Given Bizet's announced fix on Boieldieu's opera as the enemy *Carmen* was intended to slay, a serious investigation is needed into the verbal and musical intertextualities of the two works, starting with such things as the continual use in *Carmen* of forms of the expression *prendre garde*, the signature of Boieldieu's heroine: 'Prenez garde, prenez garde, / La Dame Blanche vous regarde. / Prenez garde, prenez garde, / La Dame Blanche vous entend!'

[51] See Wills, 34.



Figs. 5 and 6 The hills are alive: Maria (*The Sound of Music*) and Micaëla (*Bizet's Carmen*)

scene establishes his connection with the upper class at a moment when the members of that class are amusing themselves with an *españolada*, a refined allusion to 'Spanish dance' very different from the authentic-looking group of flamenco dances spontaneously performed by the cigarette girls and their admirers in the previous act.[52] The presentation suggests that Escamillo's own profession and function are similar to those of the dancers, that he too supplies a version of Spanish life the rich are comfortable with.

Act II proper opens to the orchestral strains of Carmen's song of the Zingarella. The scene is a gypsy camp at night outside Lilas Pastia's tavern, and the camera does its characteristic travelling pan over a rich field of tents and campfires, cooking and child-tending, flirting, drinking and dancing, before moving inside to watch Carmen perform her own stylised representation of Spanishness as part of a tight-packed throng in which performers and audience continually exchange roles. The contrast between the effete, protected world of the upper classes and the vibrant collective energy of the people could not be more pointed – if anything, the popular world is pastoralised, depicted a little sentimentally. Thus, when Escamillo comes on the scene with the aristocrats in a train of carriages and alights briefly to perform the 'toreador song' for his admirers before riding off again in the same high-toned company, the point is clinched: as a performer, Escamillo is an alienator of popular culture; he sells it back in commodified form for his own advantage to those who first produced it as well as to those who only consume it.[53] Carmen is a performer too, but one who is the focus of her community and class, representing its own vitality, erotic energy and potential rebelliousness back to it.

This contrast allows Rosi to generate a critical interpretation of Carmen's affair with Escamillo as the story of her alienation from her roots, a co-optation more dangerous than the open struggle with José over 'la liberté', because it masquerades as something familiar and benign in order to tame her as José cannot. This interpretation is brought home by the visual detail of Carmen's entrance as Escamillo's lover in Act IV. She comes to the bullfight riding with Mercedes and Frasquita in the same sort of open carriage Escamillo shared with the aristos in Act II, and the implication that in becoming his mistress she has also become his dependent is made explicit by her costume – the same as that worn by the female ballet dancer in the Act II prelude. This chain of images supplies the frame for Rosi's reading of her duet with Escamillo, 'Ah! je t'aime'. The conventionality of the duet, in unison and parallel sixths, and the contrast its conventional sweetness makes with the complex, passionate resistance to singing a duet that characterises Carmen's relations with José throughout the opera, has been controversial: does it mark Carmen's achievement of a more satisfactory love-relationship or not, and if

[52] The choreography for the film was done by the same Antonio Gades who stars in Saura's *Carmen*.

[53] Rosi thus projects an estimate of the 'toreador song' close to Bizet's own, who 'seems to have regarded [it] as a sop for the Opéra-Comique audience: he is reported to have said concerning this number, "so they want trash [de l'ordure]? All right; I'll give them trash"'; McClary, 46.

it does, is it some sort of aesthetic failure on Bizet's part?[54] For Rosi the aesthetic question and the problem of characterisation are connected: for Carmen to sing with Escamillo like a good girl in an opera, like Micaëla with José for instance, is a 'failure of taste' on *her* part that marks an inadequacy in the relationship. It is an emblem of Carmen's capture by bourgeis conventionality, her reduction to a secondary version of Escamillo and a puppet of the establishment.

What is most original about Rosi's interpretation, and most firmly rooted in Bizet's text, is that he presents the final confrontation between Carmen and José as the fruit of Carmen's own desire for the *reste*, the something more, that she does not find in her relation to Escamillo. The sense of something left over that Escamillo does not satisfy emerges in such things as the odd excess of Carmen's expression of love in the midst of that sweet duet: 'et que je meure/Si j'ai jamais aimé quelqu'un autant que toi' (may I die, if I've ever loved anyone more than you) – suppose that were a prophecy, an explanation of her death? It emerges as well in the leftover ring, 'cette bague, autrefois, tu me l'avais donnée' (this ring that you once gave me), which she throws at José, the last straw that goads him to stab her.

One of the most striking things about *Bizet's Carmen* is the way Rosi stresses the passion of Carmen's and José's fights, in part through techniques like the use of those crickets on the noise track in Act II, in part through his direction of Julia Migenes in the title role. Carl Dahlhaus points out that there are no conventional duets between Carmen and José, that whenever they sing together, as in the Act II duet, they are at cross purposes.[55] But in Rosi's film it is just as accurate to say that when José and Carmen fight they often find themselves singing a duet. His practice with them, as with Micaëla and José in Act I, brings out how the conventions of the male–female duet in nineteenth-century opera carry a structural *reste* of erotic attraction[56] – if you really want people to fight, you should not let them sing.

Rosi's reading of Carmen's relationship with Escamillo – as a loss of her personal and social authenticity – allows her, however, the counter-intimation that if she is not happy fighting without also being in love, she is not satisfied to sing a love-duet without fighting either. This desire is linked not to some mysterious personal quirk of her sexuality but to the social conditions in which her rebelliousness registers the inadequacy of fulfilments offered women and workers in her position. Rosi's social analysis justifies Carmen's resistance to the ways men construct her as well as her search for a valid form of intimacy (whose model is perhaps the compelling but fragile and illusory pastoral of her relation to the community in Act I and the opening of Act II). Her final encounter with José suggests that her *jouissance* is and must be inextricably bound up in the tension between fighting and loving: she is most alive in the continual shuttle

[54] See Carl Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, trans. J. Bradford Robinson (Berkeley, 1989), 290–2, and McClary, 107.

[55] Dahlhaus, 280–2.

[56] As I tried to suggest above, something of the sort can cling to male–male duets as well, as in Escamillo's and José's duet in Act III.

between the two, as Rosi's extraordinarily detailed reading of the encounter with José in Act II dramatises.[57] It is not the fault of her desire but the conditions under which she must exercise it that her pursuit of that vitality leads logically to her death. With Escamillo she is the conventional gypsy girl in the red dress: an *españolada* is all that is left of Carmen when she is not fighting and loving José; but when she is with José she is driving – indeed goading – a man to kill her who cannot abide the passionate intensity with which she enacts and embodies the contradictions of their society. For Rosi, *Carmen* is the story of Carmen herself – of her situation and subjectivity – in a way it is not for the performance tradition or for Godard, Saura and Brook, all of whom seem better at treating the story as a representation of male oppression and male fantasy (as an opera about José) than as a representation of her point of view or agency.[58] For Rosi, uniquely in my experience, it is Carmen herself who is faced with the dilemma of loving something of which she does not approve.

6

In my reading of Rosi's film I have tried to make it clear that, whatever its differences from the other three films considered, it is not a 'truer' interpretation of the opera any more than it is my own reading of the opera, which will have to wait for another occasion. In representing 'the discourse-*Carmen*', these films insist – counter to the institutionalised assumptions of the performance tradition – that *Carmen* is not an essence but a set of potential choices, which continually have to be renewed, rechosen with each new version, in the present. In fact, by working so much closer to the canonical operatic text, Rosi's *Carmen* makes it clearer than the other films that the canonical text is itself such a shifting collocation of retrospective choices from an indeterminate field of possibilities. What then is the distinctive difference between this movie and the others?

Insofar as they are all 'versions of *Carmen*', these films are texts that in some way represent another text as part of what they are doing themselves. They are part of

[57] This oscillation, insofar as it represents a refusal to be contained by a single structure or metaphor of relationship, may explain the unresolved debate in the literature on the meaning of the bullfight in *Bizet's Carmen*. The critics are agreed that the bullfight is proposed as a master-image by the opening of the film, and note that its end is structured (as is the opera, musically) by an insistent parallel cross-cutting between Escamillo's bullfight and the final confrontation between José and Carmen. The problem arises in trying to work out the parallel in relation to the characters – who is the matador, who the bull, and where is the third person in the triangle to be located in the bullfight? Even Wills's dazzling suggestion that Carmen is the cape (borne out, as David Rosen pointed out to me, by Rosi's continual play with the movements of Carmen's dress), does not solve all the difficulties. I think the reason for the problem is that by the end of the film Carmen and her relationships have come to evade or refuse such master-images so that they are no longer capable of containing and dismissing her. Instead, *she* reads *them*: Carmen will tell you more about the bullfight (about Escamillo, for whom Carmen might well seem to be the cape, something he manipulates in order to beat José) than the bullfight will tell you about Carmen. See Wills, 36–7, Tambling, 35–7, McClary, 142.

[58] See Nelly Furman, 'The Languages of Love in *Carmen*', in *Reading Opera*, 168–83.

the discourse-*Carmen* because they choose at least some elements that – to follow Godard – are *prénom Carmen*, signifying where they were before they got into the present arrangement. That is what it means to participate in a discourse. In Godard, Saura and Brook, however, 'Bizet's *Carmen*' is represented as an ancestor to be disavowed, it is *present as refused*, and the major symptom of this refusal is that the films do not engage Bizet's text *textually*. For their purposes, the films treat the meaning of *Carmen* as settled (even though it may be different for each), and attend to the place and disposition of that meaning in their larger projects. The approach is most thoroughgoing in Godard, because *Prénom Carmen*, like all his films, is committed to the project of film itself as text, and uses narrative primarily as a frame on which to hang the investigation of signifying possibilities. His rejection of Bizet is thus manifested straightforwardly as a refusal to include more than a sparse handful of signifiers from the opera. The movie is about 'Carmen', but not about *Carmen*. The most perverse refusal is probably Brook's, since it manages to reproduce a large part of the opera, yet treat it as an object of attack from beginning to end, while Saura, somewhere in between, disposes fragments of *Carmen* through his film as fixed elements to be reframed, affirmed or rejected in the new context of the modern story he tells.

Rosi begins at the other end of the spectrum from Godard, by miming a hyper-developed version of the performance tradition (which I think of as an apocryphal 'Zeffirelli *Carmen*') and subjecting it to a cinematic, textualising critique, which involves not only the repetition but the investigation of Bizet. Rosi's film – like Brook's – is a representation, not a reproduction, of Bizet's text, but one whose choices (the filming itself) actively sustain the order and detail of that text. To be sure, he brings his own themes and concerns (as a filmmaker, as a political radical) to the opera, but he does so in such a way as to allow Bizet's text to respeak them – even to resist them – in its own fashion. Rosi enacts his continued dependence on and involvement with Bizet, putting the text before himself and before us, reading the text in front of him and not some other thing. Like his heroine, he fights and loves the object of his desire at the same time; most of all, he lets it make a difference.

All four of these films seem agreed that a basic issue the discourse-*Carmen* raises is the 'operatic' question of *jouissance* and the object of desire, in the form I have referred to as the dilemma of loving something you do not approve of. All of them represent and concentrate on *arioso* moments of ecstatic self-forgetfulness, exploring the investments that replace opera itself in the pursuit of that experience under the conditions of modern life. They want to know and show what can activate the soundtrack, what makes the music come. What is unique about Rosi's film is that it allows the possibility that Bizet's *Carmen* is not just an example of the problem of inappropriate attachments, but is itself a representation and enactment of it. For Rosi this difficulty of desire is the experience of the title character and the theme of the opera, the thing *Carmen* too wants to know and show. What seems crucial to me is not the theme itself, but Rosi's willingness to ascribe its representation as a possibility of the text, because that is what I want to urge as the project of reading opera.

This is not the place to read *Carmen*, though no doubt my own interpretation has tacitly guided much of what I have done here. But I will end by pointing to a moment in the text as an emblem of the possibility I think we should explore. Godard, Saura and Brook share common themes *vis-à-vis Carmen* besides the one I have just cited, among them the difficulty of sustaining a distinction between representation and reality, the authentic and the constructed. They do so, however, from a point of view that assumes this theme is not part of the opera, and can best be evoked cinematically – typically by a derangement of the relation of soundtrack to image track that questions the connection between them and calls attention to its constructed 'unnatural' quality, so that, for example, noise can function as music and vice versa. In Bizet's *Carmen* there is a moment during Carmen's castanet dance for José at Lilas Pastia's in Act II, when the sound of castanets with which she is accompanying herself is augmented by a ruffle of horns from the orchestra, in time with her dance. After a few bars, José stops her and re-marks the music:

JOSÉ: Attends un peu, Carmen, rien qu'un moment, arrête.
CARMEN: Et pourquoi, s'il te plait?
JOSÉ: Il me semble, là bas . . .
Oui, ce sont nos clairons qui sonnent la retraite . . .
Ne les entends tu pas?

[JOSÉ: Wait a little, Carmen, only a moment, stop. CARMEN: And why, please? JOSÉ: It seems to me, down there . . . Yes, those are our bugles sounding the recall . . . Don't you hear them?]

In this extraordinary moment our experience of the music changes suddenly from, in film terms, music over to music off, from something that supplements what the characters in the world of the opera are doing without their agency or knowledge to something being made *in* that world, and appropriated by the characters to use and (in a moment) to argue about; it moves from the music track to the noise track. In doing so, it raises – potentially – all the questions the filmmakers do, and raises them in the overt discourse of the text. Although the traces and implications of this moment can be read far and wide in the opera, I cannot do so here. I will only point out that the kind of attention to opera I would urge is not a content but an attitude, not this or that determinate meaning but a way of reading. Once one allows that the questions this moment might raise are possible ones in the opera, many of the moves the moviemakers make become potentially recuperable for reading Bizet, and I think we ought to try.

A discussion of *Carmen* ought to end with a tease, and here is mine: another common concern of these movies is the depiction of a world that is so permeated by discourse and the traces of human making and use, so densely constructed, that the people in them are driven to seek out occasions for transcendence – moments of intensity, violence, passion – in order to affirm their own and others' reality. Now that opera and the pure emotions it depicts as natural no longer work convincingly, the films say, we must look for other sources – our innocence is gone. The importance of *jouissance* in this context is that it comes, and not at anyone's bidding, reaffirming the existence of a world we did not make. Suppose the world of *Carmen*

were already like this, and suppose the text of the opera can be made to show it? What would happen if we initiated a reading of the opera on the assumption that it is about the drive to find authenticity in such a world? What if we took a phrase from the libretto (it is in Mérimée too) and moved it from the margins of reading to the centre of the text, taking it as an image of the world of the opera and a driving force behind the pursuit of music in it? What if everything starts in *Carmen* from the fact that human beings are always 'faisant un tapage à ne pas entendre Dieu tonner' (making such a racket that you can't hear God thunder)?