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## THE BODY (RE)PUBLIC: WOMEN ON/AS THE LANDSCAPE OF MODERNITY, FROM ZOLA'S AU BONHEUR DES DAMES TO VARDA'S CLÉO DE 5 À 7

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MODERNITY, FROM ZOLA'S *AU BONHEUR DES DAMES* TO VARDA'S  
*CLÉO DE 5 À 7***

A Dissertation Presented

By

CHRISTINE GUTMAN

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment  
Of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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Comparative Literature

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*To my parents.*

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## ABSTRACT

### **THE BODY (RE)PUBLIC: WOMEN ON/AS THE LANDSCAPE OF MODERNITY, FROM ZOLA'S *AU BONHEUR DES DAMES* TO VARDA'S *CLÉO DE 5 À 7***

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This dissertation explores the ways in which questions of gender, space and mobility intersect in a selection of *fin-de-siècle* French novels and 1960s French New Wave films in an effort to discern how the representational interplay of these three elements gives allegorical form to the sociopolitical anxieties of the times in which the works were produced. Using the Paris Commune of 1871 and the protests of May '68 as anchoring points for the two periodizations underlying my inquiry, I examine how women in the novels of Emile Zola (*Au Bonheur des Dames*, *Nana*) and Villiers de L'Isle-Adam (*L'Ève future*) and the films of Jean-Luc Godard (*2 ou 3 choses que je sais d'elle*), Agnès Varda (*Cléo de 5 à 7*) and Alain Resnais (*Je t'aime, je t'aime*) are subject to a complex representational framework which alternately figures, transfigures and disfigures them to embody surrounding anxieties. We encounter female characters in the works of Zola and Villiers who inhabit the extremes of this continuum, conjuring the images of two antithetical women-myths central to the mythology of the burgeoning Third Republic: Marianne (the mother-nation) and the pétroleuse (the revolutionary force of its destruction). Yet others, particularly the female protagonists of the films I analyze,

elude such Manichean, ideologically charged representations, offering instead a more nuanced—indeed, ultimately indeterminate—and self-realized model of woman.

In addition to exploring how these female protagonists subversively navigate between public and domestic space, and how they delimit, transgress and even embody milieux, I identify a parallel trend of male protagonists retreating, retiring, looking back: a reactionary mode with classist resonances that is coded as a kind of revolt against the shocks of modernity, a solitary form of (in)activism that anticipates/recalls the alienated dreamers of modernism, from Proust to Kafka, and bespeaks a broader crisis of masculinity. I conclude by a consideration of how these tropes and representational strategies have continued to be deployed in French films well beyond the '68 era as elements of the tumultuous, alienating sociopolitical climate depicted by Zola, Godard et al have persisted to this day.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	v
ABSTRACT.....	vii
INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER	
1. BODIES IN MOTION: POLICED MOBILITY AND RESISTANCE IN ZOLA'S <i>AU BONHEUR DES DAMES</i> AND GODARD'S <i>2 OU 3 CHOSES QUE JE SAIS D'ELLE</i> .....	17
1.1 Chapter Overview .....	17
1.2 From Barricades to Brocades: The Violence of Female Consumption in Zola's <i>Au Bonheur des Dames</i> .....	20
1.2.1 Introduction.....	20
1.2.2 Defining Consumption.....	22
1.2.3 Consumption and Resistance, Consumption <i>as</i> Resistance.....	25
1.2.4 City and Body: The Battlegrounds of New Paris.....	29
1.2.5 <i>Coups d'étalage</i> : Orchestrated Commercial Violence and the Female Consumer .....	36
1.2.6 A New Model of Masculinity .....	42
1.2.7 The Indeterminate Woman .....	46
1.3 Sex, Language, Capitalism and the Unstable Ontology of Women in Godard's <i>2 ou 3 choses que je sais d'elle</i> .....	48
1.3.1 Introduction.....	48
1.3.2 From Street to Screen.....	52
1.3.3 The Spaces of Language .....	54
1.3.4 Gender and Language .....	58
1.3.5 <i>Le Capital/La Capitale</i> : Oppressive Consumption.....	61
1.3.6 Culture vs. Capital / Cultural Capital.....	64
1.3.7 Marianne and Johnny: American Imperialism and Death by Camera.....	70

2.	LOOKING BACK, MOVING FORWARD: WOMEN'S SPACE, SELF AND SEEING IN ZOLA'S <i>NANA</i> AND VARDA'S <i>CLÉO DE 5 À 7</i> .....	76
2.1	Chapter Overview .....	76
2.2	Expansion and Refraction: Milieu, Mobility and Mirroring in Zola's <i>Nana</i> ...	81
2.2.1	Introduction.....	81
2.2.2	A Carnavalesque Conquest.....	82
2.2.3	Nana as Crossroads .....	87
2.2.4	<i>La Courtisane de Paris</i> : Nana as Mobilizing Force .....	91
2.2.5	<i>Masculin/Féminin</i> : Reconciling Nana's Competing Identities .....	95
2.2.6	Disease and Decadence: Towards a Pathology of Male Hysteria.....	101
2.2.7	Signifying Symptoms: A Naturalist Death .....	106
2.3	Shattered Glass: The Subjectivating Power of Empathy, Hapticity and Mobility in Varda's <i>Cléo de 5 à 7</i> .....	109
2.3.1	Introduction.....	109
2.3.2	Time and Face: Cléo in the Mirror .....	112
2.3.3	The Feminine Masquerade.....	117
2.3.4	Situating Cléo.....	119
2.3.5	Hapticity as Complicity .....	121
2.3.6	Turning the Gaze Outward, Recovering Subjectivity .....	125
2.3.7	Cléo, the Flâneuse .....	129
2.3.8	Varda's <i>Cinéécriture</i> : The <i>Caméra-stylo</i> Meets <i>Écriture Féminine</i> .....	135
3.	THE PARADOXICAL WOMAN AND THE UNDOING OF THE MALE IMAGINARY IN VILLIERS' <i>L'ÈVE FUTURE</i> AND RESNAIS' <i>JE T'AIME, JE T'AIME</i> .....	138
3.1	Chapter Overview .....	138
3.2	"Cette Monstruosité Sublime": Artifice and Fragile Masculinities in Villiers' <i>L'Ève future</i> .....	142
3.2.1	Introduction.....	142
3.2.2	Positivism in the Service of Romanticism.....	147
3.2.3	The Semantics of Women's Bodies .....	149

3.2.4 Exhumation, Autopsy, Translation: Deconstructing the Female Body .....	154
3.2.5 The Specularity and Derivativity of Desire .....	158
3.2.6 Revolting Women .....	163
3.2.7 Reactionary Men .....	166
3.3 À <i>Rebours</i> , or Forward Regression in Resnais' <i>Je t'aime, je t'aime</i> .....	173
3.3.1 Introduction.....	173
3.3.2 Being (T)here: Body, Consciousness and the <i>Personnage Spectateur</i> .....	179
3.3.3 Ridder: From the Political to the Personal.....	184
3.3.4 Catrine: Decadence and Domination .....	190
3.3.5 From Double to Revenant: Ridder in Catrine's Grasp .....	195
3.3.6 1968-1969: The Year of Becoming Unstuck in Time .....	202
CONCLUSION.....	206
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	213

## INTRODUCTION

“The events surrounding the historian, and in which he himself takes part, will underlie his presentation in the form of a text written in invisible ink.”

—Walter Benjamin<sup>1</sup>

As I write these words on a sunny Parisian spring day I am as ever keenly aware of my position, both spatial and historical, on the Paris landscape and how that position has continually inspired, shaped and reshaped this dissertation. From where I sit along the Boulevard des Maréchaux—the inner beltway of the Périphérique, the boundary that separates Paris from non-Paris—I am a ten-minute stroll away from what lies beyond Paris: in this case, the suburb of Malakoff. Though now perhaps best known as the birthplace of television in France, the town that was formerly the eastern side of Vanves once had a very different legacy. Perched atop Malakoff’s imposing hill is the Fort de Vanves, a motley assemblage of moss-covered stone walls, barbed wire and a smattering of mid-twentieth-century brick office buildings. The architectural and temporal hybridity of the site, currently the headquarters of the French Army’s intelligence services, is of the sort that characterizes many repurposed historical structures in the greater Paris area. Built in 1846, the fort has since undergone a number of iterations. Initially serving as a prison, it was the site where workers involved in the insurrections of June 1848 were incarcerated; twenty-two years later it would be the strategic post of occupying Prussian troops who had arrived at the gates of Paris fresh off the French defeat at Sedan. The

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<sup>1</sup> *The Arcades Project*, N11, 3.

following March, the already badly damaged fort would be occupied by the Fédérés (Communards) and become a bloody battleground for Fédérés and Versaillais during the ensuing months of the Paris Commune. Largely in ruins following a long succession of bombings, the fort would be rebuilt and alternately expanded, partially demolished and otherwise incorporated into the changing urban landscape well into the twentieth century.

Since 1960, these remnants of '48, '70 and '71 sit in the shadow of a cluster of high-rises: the Stalingrad-Paul-Vaillant-Couturier public housing complexes, built to house the growing ranks of middle-class Parisian families and North African immigrants (the latter previously concentrated in shantytowns on the outskirts of the city and in the Goutte d'Or neighborhood of the eighteenth arrondissement, a historically marginal zone to which the working class were forcibly exiled during Haussmann's renovations of central Paris). The complex closest to the fort is known as *la Cité du Fort de Vanves* or, by metonymical abridgement, simply *le Fort de Vanves*. Through an instance of geographical metonymy, two vastly different structures built over one hundred years apart have merged under a common moniker to evoke the convergence of multiple eras in French history. For, if the old fort represents the cyclical tumult of what Eric Hobsbawm famously called "the long nineteenth century," the high-rise complex is the crystallization of a more condensed twentieth-century tumult, nonetheless stemming from many of the same root causes: the rapid onset of newly pervasive forms of consumer capitalism, the consequences of (de)colonization and a period of dramatic urban renewal.

It is this forced cohabitation of two eras and two symbols of those eras—a mid-nineteenth-century fort and a 1960s *habitation à loyer modéré* (one of the many dozens of "HLMs" that pock the landscape of peripheral Paris)—that, on some level, inspired

this dissertation. But above all, this dissertation stems from a will to understand what cannot be termed continuities so much as repetitions with a difference, echoes, or stutters in modern French history: inevitably the result of attempts to account for complex events by situating them along a historical continuum of revolution—to posit the one as the natural recurrence of the other, just as the Commune was regarded as the failed completion of '48,<sup>2</sup> and just as the *gilets jaunes* of 2018-2019 were smugly greeted by political commentators as a second '68 (*Cinquante ans plus tard !*) only to subsequently elicit nervous comparisons to the Commune as demonstrations grow increasingly violent (I use the present tense as the event is ongoing at the time of writing).

Allow me to be clear: while the Paris Commune and May '68 underlie the periodizations established in this dissertation, my aim is not to suggest any sort of equivalency between these discrete historical events with different origins, different claims and different outcomes. If those dates serve as anchoring points for my selection of texts and the scope of my comparative analysis, it is, rather, due to the presence of similar societal and political circumstances leading up to and immediately following them, and which percolated into the literature or films of each respective period—sometimes quite manifestly, other times more obliquely. Indeed, this dissertation undertakes to explore the latter form, to mine texts from both periods for their metaphoric of oppression, of revolt and of the transformations enacted by modernity.

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<sup>2</sup> Writing about Jules Vallès' *L'Insurgé*, Emilien Carassus summarizes this conflation of events and parallel collapsing of the political and the personal (my discussion of Resnais in Chapter 3 explores the latter phenomenon): "Vallès n'a cessé de vouloir écrire l'histoire des vaincus de juin 1848 ; il a finalement écrit celle des vaincus de 1871, et c'est, en fin de compte, la même histoire ; et c'est, en fin de compte, sa propre histoire" (47).

The literary “working through” of national traumas has taken many forms, from Jules Vallès’ autofictional *L’Insurgé* to the allegorical naturalism of Émile Zola’s *Rougon-Macquart* and, finally, the irony-laden idealism of Villiers de L’Isle-Adam’s *L’Ève future* and *Contes cruels*. Nearly a century later, Jean-Luc Godard’s voice weaves in and out of the fluid diegesis of *2 ou 3 choses que je sais d’elle*, intervening to provide explicit political commentary, while Agnès Varda’s subtle acknowledgments of such *actualité* remain exclusively, though pervasively, diegetic in *Cléo de 5 à 7*. Alain Resnais’ *Je t’aime, je t’aime*, in turn, is so hermetically sealed from historically situated experience—notably the volatile political reality surrounding its release—as to invoke it precisely by its deafening absence.

Despite formal and/or ideological differences, the six works I examine in this dissertation do share a common thread: the deployment of gender as a prism through which to explore and make sense of the anxieties and existential confusion of the ’71 and ’68 eras respectively. This representational approach most commonly consists in an exaggerated/allegorized portrayal of gender norms and stereotypes: woman as maternal figure (including *la métropole*/La Marianne) or whore (an identity synonymous with hysteria, disease and violence: the same qualities associated with the Commune’s mythical *pétroleuses*); and men as dominant, rational and enterprising (Zola’s Mouret and Villiers’ Edison), though nonetheless imperiled by the latter, dangerous class of women who threaten to render them weak and superfluous.

Yet, in other instances, we witness an unsettling blurring of these neatly delineated gender identities, as, for example, in Godard’s *2 ou 3 choses*, in which Juliette is both mother *and* whore (and neither excessively virtuous nor violent), and her husband

an insecure paradigm of the “modern man”<sup>3</sup> whose enviable bourgeois status is maintained by his wife’s earnings. Such subversion of established gender roles is not limited to twentieth-century works: we encounter similar examples in Zola’s *Nana*, whose protagonist, a literal cross-dresser at one point, is a resourceful and manipulative courtesan capable of reducing the most dignified, virile noblemen of Paris to weeping children. As a whole, Zola’s *Rougon-Macquart* offers a multiplicity of coded female “types”: at one end of the continuum, the destructive Nana, a stand-in for the decaying Second Empire; at the other, Denise Baudu of *Au Bonheur des Dames*, a woman capable of reconciling autonomy and rational thinking with a gentle maternal character and, accordingly, the reassuring embodiment of Zola’s utopic vision of capitalist democracy.<sup>4</sup>

But what of the men in all this? While scholars have exhaustively scrutinized the oft-objectifying depictions of women in literature, film and painting (Pollock, Nesci, Hayward, etc.) far less attention has been paid to the proto-modernist shift in representations of masculinity which, precisely in foregrounding the male gaze, proceeds to undermine it. In the French context, this oversight misses a not-insignificant collapsing of gender distinctions as a reaction to changes to the social, political and geographical landscape of Paris—and France more broadly—that culminated in a crisis of masculinity. Indeed, Walter Benjamin’s passing acknowledgment of the department store as “the

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<sup>3</sup> Drawing on Frantz Fanon’s conception of the decolonized *homme nouveau*, Kristin Ross contrasts the “virile asceticism” of the 1960s revolutionary cadre, a figure emblematic of the wars in Algeria and Vietnam, with the benign, apolitical passivity of the Parisian *jeune cadre* (*Fast Cars* 175).

<sup>4</sup> Peter Starr and Heidi Brevik-Zender question Denise’s transition from maternal figure and advocate of social justice to ally and wife of ruthless capitalist Octave Mouret (albeit while retaining her social justice mantle to make of the department store a kind of workers’ utopia). Brevik-Zender posits Denise and Mouret as the successful marriage of democracy and capitalism, a combination which Zola enthusiastically touted (120). Starr, however, sees Denise’s conversion—her Darwinian evolution from her *vieux commerce* roots towards savvy capitalism—as a movement inspired by terrorist logic according to which “one [can] only go forward over the bodies of the dead” (161).

flâneur's final coup" (*Charles Baudelaire* 54) signals, in actuality, a seismic shift in nineteenth-century Parisian life and, more specifically, in gender roles: the newly rationalized urban topography, designed in a manner that invited "respectable" women to emerge from the domestic interior, simultaneously left the newly superfluous arcade flâneur to retreat back into that very interior much in the manner of Proust, the ultimate post-flâneur, who wrote *À la recherche du temps perdu* from the safety of his cork-lined apartment, defiantly positioned on the Boulevard Haussman.<sup>5</sup>

In Villiers de L'Isle-Adam's *L'Ève future*—a novel frequently criticized for its flagrantly misogynist *propos*—a façade of grotesquely caricatured depictions of women and dizzying descriptions of an artificial woman's body parts dissimulates an underlying narrative of men in the throes of an existential crisis: a narrative that does more to unravel the myth of the virile, honorable nobleman (like Huysmans' Des Esseintes, Lord Ewald represents a doomed incursion of pre-'89 France into the post-'71 era) than to preach a misogynistic ideology with earnest conviction. For Ewald and Edison, creating a woman is a reactionary move: the construction of a safe-haven, an embodied variation of Edison's Menlo Park, Ewald's castle or Des Esseintes' book-bound bedroom, for those men left behind by modernity. The articulation in spatial terms of such temporal/ideological "escapism" instantiates a key thematic concern explored in this dissertation: the conflation of (generally urban) space and women's bodies, both frequently figured as irrational elements to be contained and mastered. For, what Marilyn Gaddis Rose has called "the need man feels to create woman" (123) reflects the parallel

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<sup>5</sup> This phenomenon is most famously explored in J.-K. Huysmans' *À Rebours* (1884), a novel that inaugurated the decadent movement in literature. While *À Rebours* is not explicitly treated in this dissertation, the specter of its protagonist, Des Esseintes, nonetheless looms over these pages as the prefiguration of a few of the male characters that I will examine—notably, of course, those of *L'Ève future*.

need, explored by Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson, to (re)construct, rationalize, name and claim ownership of an equally unmasterable public space (29).<sup>6</sup> This dual quest conflating woman and city provides some insight into the tension between the embodied, mobile city of women that we see in *Au Bonheur des Dames* and *2 ou 3 choses*, and the spatialization of women's bodies as stationary pivots,<sup>7</sup> as the gaping maw that we see in *Nana* (the “mangeuse d'hommes”) or the stagnant low tide that we see, nearly a century later, in *Je t'aime, je t'aime* (48).

In her seminal study *Paris as Revolution* (1994), Ferguson represents the various incarnations of post-revolutionary Paris (1789, 1830, 1848, 1871) as a shifting landscape requiring periodic interventions of “revolutionary” rationalization—not in the Haussmannian sense of topographical restructuring, but in an ideological, immaterial form of (re)ordering centered on the *naming* and *writing* of urban space. Her summation of this phenomenon proves quite germane to my own discussion of gender and mobility: “By shifting topography to toponomy, from the relatively fixed to the inherently mobile, revolutionary fervor converged on phenomena particularly susceptible to modification. Energies were not directed at things themselves so much as at the ways those things were conceived, perceived, and used” (12). This description of a decentered, mobile city also suggests its transformation into Zola's and Godard's (and Flaubert's, for Ferguson) embodied capital of reified, illusory social relations.

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<sup>6</sup> Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson discusses the cyclical process of renaming Paris streets and the intent behind it: “As nomenclature could reform topography, it could rewrite history. The entire city would be renamed and, hence, recreated” (27).

<sup>7</sup> Philippe Labro describes *Catrine* as a “personnage pivotant” and Resnais cites her ensaring “fixité” as the force which generates the film's non-chronological plot (*Avant-Scène* 10).

Who better, then, to navigate such a landscape than the objectified, illusory flâneuse?<sup>8</sup> We certainly see examples of this model of mobile women in the Bonheur des Dames department store, where a wave of disembodied female shoppers crashes into a sea of coveted commodities, an image that is complemented by a scene in which mannequins lining the store's display windows bear price tags on their necks in the place of heads. The line between female consumer and commodity is perpetually blurred. Nearly one hundred years later Godard gives us a similar image: at the request of their American client, prostitutes Juliette and Marianne parade about a hotel room half naked with TWA and Pan-Am flight bags over their heads. The scene, like the film more broadly, boldly deconstructs the cinematic tendency of objectifying women by self-consciously exposing it, exaggerating it, rendering it literal—and suggesting throughout that men are equally implicated in this schema of urban object relations.<sup>9</sup>

If France's public spaces and the ways in which they were navigated underwent a transformation the late nineteenth century and mid twentieth century, the same holds true for its domestic spaces in the latter period. Once again firmly reestablished as women's purview in the 1950s and 1960s via a barrage of advertisements selling appliances to the women whose lives they were supposed to facilitate, the *ménage* was the site where status symbols—proudly paid for by an up-and-coming *cadre's* salary—were displayed, and where respectable women proudly showcased their good housekeeping skills. In

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<sup>8</sup> Ferguson notes that the term first appeared in a dictionary in 1877, denoting a type of *chaise longue*: a commodity whose function would seem quite at odds with its name. In reality, however, the emergence of a “strolling chair” coincides with the male retreat to a solipsistic, stationary form of armchair flânerie, observable most notably in Huysmans' *À Rebours* (113).

<sup>9</sup> Godard's phenomenologically minded film directs a particularly perceptive gaze at the rapidly modernizing urban France of the 1960s in which, according to Kristin Ross, “[t]he commodity form does not merely symbolize the social relations of modernity, it is the central source of their origin” (90).

short, it was the settling for an idyllic (and newly hygienic, as Kristin Ross emphasizes in her sociological study of the period, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies*) family tableau. All the same, as the gendered public/domestic divide was further eroded by women now navigating public space *en masse* to work, to buy, or simply to exist—to boldly assert their subjectivity as we see in *Cléo*—two additional factors also contributed to a new blurring of public and private space more generally: the rise of the automobile, which offered a mobile extension of the private sphere (Ross 31), and the forced promiscuity of life in the densely populated HLM high-rises, in which privacy was delineated by a thin wall and one’s own toilet.<sup>10</sup>

These shifts, combined with technological advancements that allowed for filming in more confined spaces, may account for the centrality of domestic settings in all three films examined in this dissertation. *Cléo*’s hollow, white-walled apartment, furnished almost exclusively by a frilly bed and a couple of playful kittens, mirrors her own blank identity as a pop star and commercial “sex kitten” manufactured by producers and composers, yet waiting to be imprinted by a self-realized, authentic subjectivity. It is in this metonymous space that she comes to a sudden and devastating understanding of her own objectivity, which sets the process of transformation in motion, allowing her to reenter public space as a subjectivated, self-realized woman.

For Juliette of *2 ou 3 choses*, the line between public and domestic space is blurred to reflect her contradictory identity as respectable housewife and prostitute: shots from inside her apartment reveal walls adorned with movie posters and advertisements—

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<sup>10</sup> In 1968, only 54.8 percent of households disposed of an indoor/in-apartment toilet—up from 26.6 percent in 1954 (471). See: Jacquot, Alain. “Cinquante ans d’évolution des conditions de logement des ménages.” *Données sociales – La société française*, 2006, pp. 467-473.

items that, like the prostitute, are more associated with the street than with domestic space. The omnipresence of commodities and the fact that the couple's interactions are inevitably mediated by the content of women's magazines and trendy men's self-help books (the vade mecums of the 1960s neo-bourgeois couple) suggest a family that is firmly *de son temps*.

In *Je t'aime, je t'aime*, Claude Ridder's apartment serves as a refuge from a fast-paced modern life that does not adhere to his subjective temporality; yet it is precisely this recourse to domesticity that allows him to be absorbed by Catrine, whose spatialized influence is compared to a low tide and the reaching tentacles of an octopus. If domestic space is indeed woman's purview, in *Je t'aime, je t'aime*, it becomes a direct extension of the woman who inhabits it (we see an earlier instance of this, of course, in *Nana* wherein the courtesan's increasingly lavish apartments expand as a measure of her growing influence and power). Ridder's apartment, accordingly, becomes a mire—the reification of a stifling codependence—into which he sinks, much in the same way that he is slowly engulfed by the monotony of his work and, likewise, absorbed into the cushion of the Sphere during the experiment.

## Structure and Methodology

Having provided a broad thematic overview of this dissertation and the scope and angles of my inquiry, I will now break down the structure and methodological approach underpinning my analysis. This dissertation is divided into three chapters, each one pairing a nineteenth-century novel with a twentieth-century film in the aim of identifying

and accounting for specific thematic and representational continuities between the two works. The dual structure provides a unique opportunity, firstly, to consider each work in depth by way of close textual analysis, an historicizing approach and engagement with existing literary and sociological scholarship and, secondly, to place in dialogue the works of authors and filmmakers from two distant periods which have not yet, to my knowledge, been compared. The result is an analysis that is, like many of the texts discussed, at once retrospective and anticipative: a two-way variation on Benjamin's practice of "telescoping the past through the present" (*Arcades* N7a, 3) which acknowledges the tendency of authors writing after the Commune to write backwards—to the Commune (Vallès), to the Second Empire (Zola), to the Revolution (Hugo)—and that of the '68-era's New Wave filmmakers to turn their cameras towards an uncertain future (Godard's eschatological voiceover at the end of *2 ou 3 choses*, Cléo meeting the camera's gaze with an expression of anxious hope, Ridder's suicide as his emancipation from an inescapable past in *Je t'aime, je t'aime*).

A number of questions arising from the considerations elaborated in this introduction form the basis of my analysis and are explored variously in relation to each of the six works:

- How is space navigated and/or occupied by women?
- How are different spaces and milieux coded as masculine or feminine, or even allegorically embodied by women?
- How are feminine mobility and masculine stasis coded as acts of revolt?

To these I add one additional question, which runs parallel to the relationship between gender and space: How do porous spaces allow for the incursion of the political into the personal *or* figure the personal as the allegorization of the political?

These questions are placed against the backdrop of two respective modernities: a term I deploy in its broadest sense to encompass the experience, common to both periods, of sudden and profound social, political, economic and topographical transformations. Bearing these considerations in mind, the chapters are as follows:

The first chapter, entitled *Bodies in Motion: Policed Mobility and Resistance in Zola's Au Bonheur des Dames and Godard's 2 ou 3 choses que je sais d'elle*, begins by exploring the complicated fluidity of women's identity in the early days of consumer capitalism, notably presenting women as a fusion of consumer and commodity. If Haussmannization aimed to impede revolutionary movement in the streets of Paris, for Zola it has the secondary effect of enabling women to circulate more freely and subversively than before in the in-between space of the department store, a paradoxical domain that is equal parts destructive and empowering. Likewise, Godard's exploration of women navigating the changing twentieth-century Parisian landscape (and its by-now pervasive consumerism) depicts women as critically self-aware intermediaries, as embodied language making possible interaction, even the rawest affirmation of the self, in a world in which reified social relations impede all communication.

The second chapter, entitled *Looking Back, Moving Forward: Women's Space, Self and Seeing in Zola's Nana and Varda's Cléo de 5 à 7*, places in comparison the iconic nineteenth-century courtesan and the twentieth-century pop star, two women constructed by the male gaze. While the former slyly subverts that gaze and even usurps

it to render her male suitors superfluous, the latter must emerge from it, to assert her own (inter)subjectivity by learning to look back at the world. In *Nana* space/milieu function as an extension of Nana's dominating (because desired) corporeality, an indicator of her expanding influence and a sign of her ability to, unlike her streetwalking friends, statically mobilize the city around her. For Cléo, power comes precisely from a newly actuated mobile form of perception (a variation of Deleuze's *pur voyant*) and hapticity becomes a natural extension of this complicitous female gaze.

In the third and final chapter, entitled *The Paradoxical Woman and the Undoing of the Male Imaginary in Villiers' L'Ève future and Resnais' Je t'aime, je t'aime*, the more explicitly political works of the previous two chapters are complemented by two works that would *a priori* constitute a solipsistic rejection of the political—yet, that very rejection, in a deceptive realm of pure aestheticism, constitutes the crystallization of all the themes discussed in previous chapters: the crisis of masculinity, the paradoxical dual figuration of women as transfigured ideal and grotesque monstrosity, as well as a return to the social dimensions of *l'être* and *le paraître* already explored in *Nana*. In these two works, we see the convergence, within an individual consciousness (Ewald's and Ridder's respectively, buttressed by the empty signifiers of science fiction), of these era-defining anxieties.

#### *Plus ça change...: Continuities Across Works and Periods*

Positing the era of Balzac and the 1960s as bookends (the beginning and end of an empire, respectively, though the comparison does not end there), Ross attempts to

identify the mid twentieth century's answer to the author of *La Comédie humaine*. Though she reaches the conclusion that no single modern author has undertaken Balzac's sweeping and incisive social analysis, she does proffer the names of novelists, philosophers and filmmakers who each produced works that, when considered collectively, provide a comprehensive tableau of changing times (*Fast Cars* 13). One of the names to which she frequently returns is Jacques Tati. Indeed, his Monsieur Hulot films which place in opposition a simple world gone by (*la Vieille France*) and the modernized, over-mechanized urban France of the 1960s, seem an apt reflection of a period rapidly abandoning the old for the new. However, by the early 1970s Tati's combination of gentle nostalgia and biting parody of technological progress was displaced by the definitive triumph of the latter over the former: in the post-'68 period nostalgia turns to disgust, and the cinematic representation of *la Vieille France* goes from quaint and charming to grotesque. There is something menacing about the dilapidated façade of the Bouins' house in Pierre Granier-Deferre's *Le Chat* (1971) and the stifling, hostile domestic space that lies within it, the battleground for a couple played by Jean Gabin and Simone Signoret. The aging actors, like the last vestiges of pre-La Défense Courbevoie, get more than their close-up: the camera traps them in an unbearable *huis clos* punctuated by the fall of the wrecking ball. The Bouins' enclosed, stagnant and spitefully codependent existence suggests the couple that Ridder and Catrine might have grown into had they not died. More importantly, films like *Le Chat* and, as I will discuss at the end of this dissertation, Pierre Tchernia's *Les Gaspards* (1974) stand as evidence that space and milieu would continue to be linked to questions of gender and mobility in

post-'68 French films: indeed, it is precisely in the representation of discrete yet porously divided spaces that anxieties surrounding gender, politics and society are crystallized.

If the social and political context leading up to and immediately following '71 and '68 were obliquely, allegorically channeled into the novels and films of their times, the revolutions were themselves rooted in text: the former was fueled, and subsequently immortalized, by newspapers, tracts and journals; the latter by posters, slogans and graffiti. In relying strategically on text, both *Communard* and *soixante-huitard* indelibly inscribed revolution onto the Paris landscape in ways that continue to be visible to this day. Those traces, from the textual to the architectural, are, as I have established, what inspired the two periodizations structuring this dissertation. Yet, both events and their participants also left immaterial traces: both are implicated in a far-reaching genealogy of revolution that continues to make of Paris the epicenter of French social and political contestation, the underlying anxieties of which continue to be rooted in a fragilization of established gender roles, a renewed policing of mobility (answered by radically imposed stasis), and an increasingly porous divide between the personal and the political.<sup>11</sup> These

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<sup>11</sup> While an in-depth sociological study of political upheaval in present-day France is beyond the scope of this dissertation, I would be remiss not to address the recent reemergence of the themes I have undertaken to explore, all now crystallized in the image of the automobile. The ongoing *gilets jaunes* movement of 2018 and 2019 originated as a protest against a proposed gas tax which, opponents argued, penalized working-class populations living in non-urban areas not served by public transportation. The measure coincided with the national deployment of a highway radar monitoring system which automatically detected speeding vehicles and used license plate identification to fine drivers. Seen as an impediment to citizens' free (and self-determinedly rapid) mobility *and* buying power, both measures were greeted with growing unrest. By March 2019, 75 percent of France's highway radar devices were reported to have been vandalized (*La Libération*). During the same period, increasingly organized groups of *gilet jaunes* launched a dual strategy of barring major roundabouts to impede traffic circulation and blocking access to malls and shopping districts to impede the circulation of capital. The common refrain is that these protesters are disenfranchised citizens who do not vote, who have never been politically involved, who are simply confronted with "des fins de mois difficiles" (the phrase uttered time and again, most often in testimonies from defeated *pères de famille* unable to provide for their family) but who have, for the first time, found solidarity in a common struggle. The automobile has thus undergone a transformation from the status symbol and solipsistic island of private space amidst the traffic jams of the 1960s to a politically charged rallying symbol and tool in this revolt for the right to mobility and reduction of social inequalities.

latter, immaterial yet omnipresent traces are why, just over fifty years after May '68, the themes explored in this dissertation continue to resonate.

## CHAPTER 1

### **BODIES IN MOTION: POLICED MOBILITY AND RESISTANCE IN ZOLA'S *AU BONHEUR DES DAMES* AND GODARD'S *2 OU 3 CHOSES QUE JE SAIS D'ELLE***

#### 1.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter places in dialogue Émile Zola's *Au Bonheur des Dames* and Jean-Luc Godard's *2 ou 3 choses que je sais d'elle* to explore how competing allegorical figurations converge to present women as, on the one hand, the embodiment of social/economic turmoil and dangerous progress and, on the other, subversive agents capable of negotiating a hostile new landscape. In the case of Zola, a faceless—at times even headless—mass of female consumers in *Au Bonheur des Dames* represents the twinned forces of Haussmannian urban planning and capitalism that transformed the landscape of nineteenth-century Paris, whereas the prostitute Nana (as we shall see in Chapter 2) embodies the decadence and violent downfall of the Second Empire and of the emperor himself.

Drawing on a combination of contemporary scholarship and various nineteenth-century figurations of women, including those of Delacroix and Gabriel Tarde, I argue that the ideology behind Zola's works is in keeping with broader post-Commune-era suspicions of mobile women and a tendency to figure hysteria not only as a feminine condition but one that is personified (and thus capable of being contained) as female. Such suspicions arose as women emerged from the domestic sphere into public space, largely enabled by Haussmann's creation of a more easily traversable city dotted with department stores and cafés, a shift that coincided with the retroactively lamented retreat

of the flâneur: for if, as Benjamin stated, the department store was the flâneur's final coup, it was certainly the flâneuse's first (*Charles Baudelaire* 54). Yet the emerging flâneuse figure proves complex: at once agent and object, she defines her own trajectory yet does so under an ever-present male gaze, which vacillates between sanctifying and sexualizing her. Earlier associations of the female body with revolution had been positive: the heroics of the Revolution of 1830 were personified, in Delacroix's iconic painting, by *la Liberté*, breast bared, standing astride a barricade. But the violence wrought by and enacted upon women's bodies particularly in Zola's *Au Bonheur des Dames* signifies a shift towards a body that is paradoxically at once more sinister and more victimized.

A century and two world wars later, the *Trente Glorieuses* era arose as an echo of the Second Empire, marked by a similar embrace of and suspicion towards progress in film and popular culture,<sup>12</sup> extensive urban transformation (this time less to "embellish" the city and more to accommodate a growing and changing population) as well as the violent implosion of the colonial empire that Napoléon III had sought to consolidate. These shifts were palpable in popular culture of the period on both sides of the Atlantic: as the Hollywood Hays Code became obsolete, the release of the film *Bonnie and Clyde* ushered in a gritty new cultural zeitgeist. This championing, indeed glamorizing, of criminality was immediately exported to France by way of Brigitte Bardot's sultry Bonnie Parker, singing alongside Serge Gainsbourg's Clyde in the eponymous song. Bardot's sexualized, sympathetic depiction of female criminality evokes the point of

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<sup>12</sup> Jacques Tati's films (*Mon oncle*, *Playtime*) represent perhaps the most striking critique of progress, whereas New Wave filmmakers take a more ambivalent position, alternating between fetishizing and eschewing American commodities and pervasive consumer culture, both signifiers of the postmodern age.

rupture between Zola and Godard (and by extension postwar filmic and literary representations of women): in Godard's *2 ou 3 choses que je sais d'elle* and *Vivre sa vie* the very archetype of woman to be feared—the prostitute/flâneuse—displaces the maternal Marianne as a heroine in her own right. Moreover, whereas in Zola's work women's bodies figure simultaneously as allegories of the Nation (Marianne) and of the efforts to undermine the Nation (pétroleuse), Godard's films present women's bodies as the crucial blood-currency that flows through a now embodied city's veins, keeping it alive and warding off the dangers of late-capitalist solipsism. Their participation in the economy is at once equated with the dual violence of war and technology and posited as a utopian alternative—as all that remains after an apocalyptic purge, of the same nature as Zola's purification of Paris by fire in *La Débâcle*.

While the existence of an androgynous Baudelairean female dandy may indeed, as Janet Wolff has suggested, have been a myth (George Sand aside), a revolutionary female form of *flânerie* was and continues to be represented in several forms (38). By acknowledging the diverse and often subversive forms of mobility practiced by women in Zola's novel and Godard's film, as in post-Commune-era literature and '68-era cinema more broadly, I hope to enable a significant reevaluation of the ambiguous role played by female characters in light of these historical and sociological contexts, as well as a new definition of both flâneur and flâneuse—the latter a figure capable of subverting the regimes that attempt to police her body.

## 1.2 From Barricades to Brocades: The Violence of Female Consumption in Zola's *Au Bonheur des Dames*

### 1.2.1 Introduction

The Paris of Baudelaire, Zola and, retrospectively, Benjamin, may be remembered as the “capital of the nineteenth century” in terms of prolific artistic and literary production, industrial and architectural innovation, and colonial might, but it was also the epicenter of long-fomenting social and political unrest that culminated in a number of insurrections and revolutions, notably those of: 1830, ushering in the reign of Louis-Philippe, the *roi bourgeois*; 1848, yielding the short-lived Second Republic, which saw the abdication of Louis-Philippe; and 1871, which signaled a violent transition from a fallen empire and humiliated nation to a radical socialist commune amidst cannon fire, flames, and barricades. But the ostensible lull in violence during the Second Empire (1852-1870) is somewhat deceptive. Under the supervision of Prefect Georges-Eugène Haussmann the city underwent drastic transformations: entire neighborhoods were demolished, making way for a network of broad boulevards, imposing monuments, and luxurious new homes. Beyond his promise to aerate, sanitize and beautify the city, Haussmann undertook a dual strategy of pacification, which entailed first burying the city's history of revolt and violent suppression beneath smooth macadam and behind elegant building façades, and secondly, preventing future revolt by eliminating narrow, easily barricaded streets and thus enabling circulation around the city: the circulation of people, money, and if need be, troops.

It is in this context of elegantly repressed violence and restored national glory that Zola sets his 1883 novel *Au Bonheur des Dames*. The story of Octave Mouret's all-consuming commercial metropolis—variously described in terms of a machine, a temple to women and to the commodity, a gaping maw, and a seductive dreamworld—mirrors the real-life concurrent narrative of Haussmannization: entire neighborhoods of Old Paris are demolished to make way for the unbridled expansion of Mouret's department store, Le Bonheur des Dames, itself modeled on Paris's first department store, Le Bon Marché, whose grand opening in 1852 coincided with the birth of the Second Empire.

In Zola's rendering of Second Empire Paris, cutthroat capitalism and urban modernization are the channels through which violence is simultaneously sublimated and repressed. While Mouret's ostensible victims are the *vieux commerçants* whose shops stagnate across the street from the behemoth Bonheur des Dames, the victimization of women in the jaws of Mouret's "mécanique à manger les femmes" stands as a parallel narrative of destruction and cannot be entirely separated from the former; indeed, the sickly Geneviève Baudu figures as a not-so-subtle allegorical bridge between the two populations (129).

Repeatedly deploying metaphors of consumption, *Au Bonheur des Dames* establishes an equivalence between the landscape of Old Paris and women's bodies, both threatened by the emergent capitalism represented by Mouret's department store. There is, however, an important distinction: whereas the so-called *vieux commerce* is unwilling or unable to adapt to the new economic system in order to challenge Mouret, the women of his store—both employees and customers—practice resistance from within, though some with self-destructive results. My exploration of instances of female agency,

violence, and resistance in the novel will highlight how Mouret's strategy of consumer seduction ultimately dismantles the mechanisms of capitalism itself—a consequence of inciting the female consumer crowd, Gabriel Tarde's "female savage" (qtd. in Ramazani 131): at once violent and erotic, this collective body constitutes a dangerous intersection of mythical women past (*la Liberté*) and future (*la pétroleuse*), thereby rechanneling the civil violence—and indeed the sexuality—of the street into the commercial interior.

### 1.2.2 Defining Consumption

In her seminal study on consumption in nineteenth-century France, *Dreamworlds*, Rosalind Williams traces the etymology of the term *consumption* to two roots. The Latin *consumere* ("to take away with" or "to use up entirely") draws attention to the dual usage of *consumption* in English, insofar as it can be applied "not only to the use of commodities but also to the wasting away of the body . . . for in both cases the process involves the destruction of matter" (5). The second root, *consummare* ("to make the sum," "to sum up"), conveys the notion of carrying to completion, perfecting—expressed in English by the related term, *consummation* (6). The two definitions, seemingly at odds, combine to articulate "the ambiguity of consumption itself, its mingled nature as achievement and destruction, as submission to entropy and triumph over it" (7). It is indeed this mingled nature, the internal contradiction at the heart of capitalist consumption, that sows the seeds of the Zolian female consumer's self-destruction while simultaneously providing the tools of her resistance.

While enumerating the multiple, contradictory connotations of the English term, Williams omits a crucial consideration in the context of Zola's work, which further complicates the role of consumption in the novel: the French term *la consommation* encompasses the acts of economic and oral consumption as well as sexual consummation. This nuance has important implications for the novel, which depicts the act of consumption as an erotically charged moment, initiated by contact with the item—whether purely visual or tactile—and culminating in the moment of monetary exchange. The description of Bonheur patron (and shoplifter) Madame de Boves's perusal of merchandise is explicitly erotic, a scene of seduction and excess:

Le comptoir débordait, elle plongeait les mains dans ce flot montant de guipures, de malines, de valenciennes, de chantilly, les doigts tremblants de désir, le visage peu à peu chauffé d'une joie sensuelle ; tandis que [sa fille], près d'elle, travaillée de la même passion, était très pâle, la chair soufflée et molle. (167)

Mouret, boasting of having built an empire on his ability to intuit and appeal to feminine desires, has created the ultimate palace of sensuality: upon entering the store, shoppers are greeted with eye-popping, elaborate displays of items; they are encouraged to handle items with no obligation to purchase; they must walk past aromatic perfume vials and flower arrangements; they can pause for refreshment at a buffet restaurant, and all this amidst the “buzz” of the female crowd. Each of the senses is relentlessly indulged, leaving overstimulated women to “consummate,” or rather sublimate, their sexual passions in the physical act of buying. In characterizing nineteenth-century French women's approach to buying as marked by an increasing lack of distinction between the “real” and the shoddy imitation, historian and economist Georges d'Avenel has recourse

to Alfred de Musset's famous aphorism: "Qu'importe le flacon pourvu qu'on ait l'ivresse?" (qtd. in Williams 101). While his assertion about women's indiscriminate commodity fetishism is symptomatic of the period's misogynistic discourse, his invocation of the commodity as a source of intoxication is specifically aligned with Zola's metaphorical framework.

This *ivresse* even assumes a spiritual dimension. When a rival department store calls on a priest to bless its merchandise, Mouret aspires to having an archbishop bless Le Bonheur des Dames so that women shoppers will be assured of purchasing God, "tombé dans les pantalons de femme et dans les corsets"—an image which toes the line between blasphemous eroticism and the equally blasphemous apotheosis of the commodity (470). In order to "conquer" the woman consumer, materialism must then enter the metaphysical realm. This union of rational capitalism (seen as a masculine domain) and spirituality (aligned with the perceived feminine qualities of mysticism and idealism) serves to underpin Zola's syncretic enumeration of metaphors: Mouret profits from his philosophy that the machine and the cathedral can and in fact *must* be one and the same within an economy of women.<sup>13</sup> But his system is not failproof and pockets of female agency exist wherein women subvert the forces of capitalism in a way their allegorical counterparts—the aging male shopowners representing old commerce—cannot.

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<sup>13</sup> This phrase aptly articulates women's dual position as subject-possessors and object-constituents of the economy.

### 1.2.3 Consumption and Resistance, Consumption *as* Resistance

I begin my exploration of women's agency in the novel by turning to Rita Felski, whose writings on the role of women in modernity problematize the longstanding "production/consumption dichotomy which persistently devalues the latter as a passive and irrational activity" (63). If, as Felski asserts, consumption is not passive, then what kind of agency does the female consumer exercise? To answer this question, I will now turn to the dynamics of female consumption in *Le Bonheur des Dames* department store.

The store creates the ideal conditions for bilaterally destructive consumption. On the one hand, its impersonality encourages passivity among customers: the traditional pre-capitalist system of negotiating a price has been replaced by a price tag on every item. One either accepts the given price or chooses not to buy the item which, as we see in the novel, is rarely the case. But by the same token the impersonal nature of such a large store eliminates the social pressure, even obligation, to make a purchase, which was inevitably true of the small shop where customers developed a personal relationship with the seller. In the novel, women react in different ways to their liberation from the imperative to buy. Madame Marty, Zola's paradigmatic seduced female consumer, falls victim to the labyrinthine organization of the store, which encourages impulsive purchasing throughout, and finally succumbs to a sale: "Madame Marty, sous le prétexte de se montrer économe, acheta une robe dont elle n'avait pas besoin" (259). Ironically then the sale offers her the opportunity to perform the role of the frugal bourgeois wife, making intelligent purchases and thus pleasing her husband. But the reality is that her attempt to appear a savvy consumer only contributes to her growing debt. Marty and her husband are eventually ruined by her superfluous purchases and her recourse to sale

items as a means of “righting” herself only further entrenches her in the store’s bottomless stomach. No matter which role she tries to perform, it inevitably becomes that of the consumer-victim.

Marty’s shopping companion, the countess Madame de Boves is overwhelmed by a similar “rage de désir inassouvi” at the sight of tables piled high with lace, but she devises a plan to distract a naïve salesman as she pockets fourteen thousand francs worth of merchandise (334). Boves is caught and escorted off to plead her case before the management. While she refuses to confess to Mouret’s men, the narrator reveals that Boves has in fact been shoplifting for a year, “ravagée d’un besoin furieux, irrésistible” to the point that doing so has become “une volupté nécessaire à son existence” in spite of the risk of public humiliation and *déclassement*, a particularly grave prospect given her noble status (502).

But there is also a calculating dimension to Boves’s shoplifting: her husband, perhaps to compensate for carrying on an affair with Boves’s friend, Madame Guibal, passively allows his wife to empty his drawers (“vider ses tiroirs”) of money, which she does, fully aware of her husband’s infidelity (502). Boves’s practice of stealing for the sake of stealing (“vol[er] pour voler”), gives new meaning to the similar act of stuffing her pockets with her husband’s money: by taking but not using his money, she is rejecting the tacit agreement that legitimizes his affair and relegates her to the role of mistress to the objects she covets (502). In bypassing the capitalist mechanism of exchange, Boves is able to claim her pleasure (“jouissance”) independently of her husband, just as he claims his independently of her (502). At a time when middle-class women were forced into marriage and thereafter dependent on their husbands’ income,

Boves is at once succumbing to and subverting the oppressive masculine framework of capitalism, and refusing to be bought into complacency by her husband (Felski 19). Her downfall lies in her inability to distinguish her calculated subversion from her persistent, indeed sexual, desire for object-induced “jouissance” that ultimately impels her to commit an illicit act. Boves’s subversion of the rules of capitalism—in an environment that deceptively invites such subversion—tarnishes both her and her husband’s reputation, much in the same way that Marty’s excessive adherence to bourgeois mores leads to her family’s financial ruin.

Madame Guibal, the mistress of Boves’s husband, offers a strikingly different model of woman shopper. If Mouret and the managing apparatus of the store deploy destructive strategies to seduce female consumers, Guibal responds with her own set of subversive tactics (to use Certeau’s terms).<sup>14</sup> During the same visit to the store that leaves Marty “chauffé[e] d’une joie sensuelle,” Guibal “marchait dans le magasin, d’un pas de promenade, donnant à ses yeux la joie des richesses entassées, sans acheter seulement un mètre de calicot” (167; 163). Unlike Marty and Boves, who abandon themselves to “le besoin sensuel d’enfoncer les mains dans les tissus” that ultimately leads them to buy and steal respectively, Guibal is content to observe, to stroll the store at a leisurely pace and not make a purchase (499). Later, when the store institutes a liberal return policy, Guibal takes full advantage of it, buying up items, perhaps making use of them, only to return them a few weeks later. She advises Marty, as the latter contemplates buying a sewing table, to do the same: “On la met dans son salon,” she says, “On la regarde ; puis, quand

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<sup>14</sup> Certeau describes strategies as the rationalizing, defensive practices of a dominant framework and tactics as the practices of those individuals (consumers in a store, inhabitants of a city, soldiers at war, etc.) operating within this imposed framework: “La tactique n’a pour lieu que celui de l’autre. Aussi doit-elle jouer avec le terrain qui lui est imposé tel que l’organise la loi d’une force étrangère” (60).

elle vous ennuie, on la rend” (331). Whereas Marty craves physical contact with the items, Guibal finds use-value and satisfaction in the transient, unconsummated act of looking. In this regard, Guibal is subverting the traditional buying practices that the other women unconsciously enact; realizing that frivolous purchases have no real use-value except as just that—*purchases* destined to embellish the owner’s identity by temporarily adorning her closet, parlor or body—she is liberated to buy and return according to her whims, or simply to revel in the visual pleasure of beholding the store’s displays. Her ocular consumption paints Guibal as the paradigm of the flâneuse in its most literal sense: the female counterpart of the non-interventional male urban stroller. If the flâneur is he who “embodies the gaze of modernity which is both covetous and erotic” (Pollock 67), then Guibal reinscribes the term to show that the department store is *not* in fact “the flâneur’s final coup,” but rather the drastic reinvention of *flânerie*, the inception of the feminine form of a once strictly male identity (*Charles Baudelaire* 54). Guibal’s eye sweeping the store merchandise acts in a similar fashion as the “covetous and erotic” eye of Baudelaire’s narrator wandering over the body of a passing woman in “À une passante,” the poem which succinctly summarizes the human condition in modernity by constructing a narrative of would-be passion out of a shared glance: momentary fantasy becomes more satisfying than the reality of possessing an item one will soon tire of and replace as part of an unending chain of purchases (or, in this case, romantic conquests). Perhaps with this in mind, Guibal relegates the store to little more than a spectacle and a public space allowing her to exchange letters with her lover in anonymous discretion. The act of exchange, which within the context of capitalism Guibal has already subverted by rendering it temporary, is here again repurposed to suit her needs: instead of catering to

Guibal with tempting commodities, the store functions merely as a site of illicit communication. The anonymous public space enables the transference of the illicit encounters of the street into an interior and explicitly commercial realm. In doing so, however, it also encourages, as I will explore shortly, a fluidity in social roles enabling a refiguration of the bourgeois woman as streetwalker within the quasi-domesticated public space of the department store.

As I have shown, subversion of the capitalist machine through the redefinition of the act of buying and the repurposing of the store's space constitutes a tactic of consumption-driven female resistance, even as it takes place against a broader pattern of unbridled commodity fetishism, as exemplified by Madame Marty. Having explored the complex position of Zola's female consumer, perpetually embattled by an atmosphere that mirrors the violence of demolition and construction taking place in the streets outside of the store, I turn now to the character whose body becomes the locus of that war.

#### 1.2.4 City and Body: The Battlegrounds of New Paris

Geneviève Baudu, the sickly daughter of a failing draper, serves to bridge the various connotations of *consumption* in the novel: as a woman she is consumed by the store not through her purchases, but by losing her fiancé to one of the store's seductive salesgirls; as the daughter of a failing *vieux commerçant*, enclosed within the dark, musty walls of an ancient boutique, she is a casualty of the encroaching capitalist behemoth across the street. Geneviève's literally consumptive body, "ses maigres bras, brûlés de la fièvre ardente des phtisiques," becomes the point of conjunction between woman and

city, the corporeal battlefield upon which the war between old city and new city, old commerce and new commerce is played out (440). As she lies dying in a room above her father's shop, her parents take turns keeping vigil over her upstairs and over the failing shop downstairs, carrying out a kind of double wake. After her death, in a symbolic image, the city's remaining *vieux commerçants* march the streets of Paris behind her coffin, recognizing in her death a metaphor of their own plight. The umbrella merchant Bourras concedes that in burying Geneviève, "c'est le quartier qu'on enterre" (448). The funeral procession winds its way inevitably around Le Bonheur des Dames, the coffin bearing "la première victime tombée sous les balles, en temps de révolution" passing directly in front of the store windows as a handful of mildly interested employees look out (445). Described in terms of a soldier's burial, the procession corresponds to an earlier scene in which, in the midst of the department store's expansion project, employees trying to get inside must form a line bisecting the Place Gaillon, causing passersby to stop "pour les regarder, comme on regarde défilier un régiment" (285). The narrator later refers to Bonheur employees as Mouret's "rouages des services et l'armée de son personnel," depicting them as both soldiers on the march and cogs of a machine *en marche*—a fitting mixed metaphor for the rationalized capitalism which Mouret espouses—and their "victory march" offers an ironic counterpoint to the Baudus' funeral march (410).

Here again, Mouret's militaristic machine becomes a microcosm of Haussmannizing Paris: constantly expanding, it demolishes the relics of the old city that stand in its path in the goal of quite literally slicing through "l'ombre humide du vieux quartier Saint-Roch" with its blinding "trouée de lumière" (466). As protagonist Denise

Baudu first enters the store, she is overwhelmed by its vast interior (“doré de lumière, pareil à une ville, avec ses monuments, ses places, ses rues, où il lui semblait impossible qu’elle trouvât jamais sa route”), a topography she must navigate in the same confused way she initially navigates the streets of Paris (98). Indeed the metropolis-store’s lateral encroachment upon the rest of the city mirrors a concurrent development: the railroad, a parallel that Mouret himself draws (450). Much like that of a moving train, the constant motion both inside and outside the store stands in stark opposition to the stagnancy of the old shops it overtakes. Bourras claims proudly in the face of the demolition crew that he will not move, that (in a moment recalling Mouret’s wife’s death and burial beneath the foundation of his store) “la maison peut crouler, on me trouvera sous les pierres”; his downfall stems then from his failure to accept that, in the new economy, movement is essential to survival (272). While descriptions of Bourras’ and Baudu’s shops evoke enclosure, claustrophobia and stagnation, *Le Bonheur des Dames* extends its reach beyond its walls: surrounding streets are lined with a “défilé triomphal” of delivery carriages and balloons bearing the store’s name are distributed to customers’ children so that they will be released all over the city, “portant au ciel le nom du Bonheur des Dames” (298; 336). When Denise, after a brief period working for the department store, is fired, largely for refusing the advances of the store inspector (one of two male allegorical figures to which I will return shortly) she rents a room in Bourras’ building and finds that even within the walls of Old Paris, she cannot escape the grip of the department store. Her domestic life revolves around watching employees walk to and from work; she constantly encounters Bonheur acquaintances in the street outside her building; Geneviève’s fiancé stalks Denise in the hope that, as a former employee of the

store, she will lead him to a salesgirl of whom he has become enamored from afar. To Denise's chagrin, the department store exists beyond its walls as a haunting specter, spreading its name to the far reaches of the city—and indeed upwards to the heavens—through mass employment, mass advertising and the resultant mass consumption it generates.

Metaphysical presence aside, however, the store literally consumes surrounding sidewalks. Since it spans several streets, sales limited to specific departments must be indicated according to which street they take place on—the street name, of course, serving as a metonym for a given side of the building, but also as a reminder of the store's geographical usurpation of the neighborhood it has assimilated (473). If the old shops are a holdover from a time when shopping involved walking the pavement from store to store or strolling the arcades, Mouret's department store blurs the line between interior and exterior, bringing the practice of the sidewalk stroll indoors, in a similar way to the arcades, yet limiting it to the confines of a single store. Inside, where the boutique customer would encounter a homogenous display of goods for sale, the department store customer is assailed by a hodgepodge of items, a disorienting but spectacular intermingling of heterogeneous commodities under one roof.

While the heterogeneity of the merchandise mirrors the diversity of customers, who range from members of the *petite bourgeoisie* to wealthy marquises, it also reproduces the syncretism of Haussmann's Paris: in a city that is never fully modernized (traces of medieval Paris share sidewalks with opulent cafés and imposing new *hôtels particuliers*) Bourras' shop is “étranglée” between the department store on one side and

the soon-to-be demolished Hôtel Duvillard on the other—sandwiched squarely between Old and New Paris (244).

There is thus no clear line of demarcation separating the new city from the old city. As the new consumes and buries the old, the past is appropriated and pastiched in the present. Le Bonheur des Dames is itself an architectural contradiction: columns, engravings, high ceilings and a hall of paintings are juxtaposed against iron staircases, railings, and suspended walkways. “C’était comme une nef de gare” we are told of the grand gallery, reinforcing the correspondence between store and train,<sup>15</sup> the icon of industrialization and fast movement, “le fer régnait partout” (318).<sup>16</sup> In marrying elements of classical architecture with modern industry, Mouret is at once banalizing conventional notions of art and elevating industrial materials to the status of art, perhaps an expression of his position—and that of Paris as a whole—caught between two times and, like Haussmann, between two imperatives: *le beau* and *l’utile*.

But ideological factors are also at play. Under Haussmann, Paris was transformed into a “monumental gallery,” a vast landscape upon which a series of imposing monuments were arranged (Douglas 36). The layout of the monuments and urban landmarks was highly strategic and not based purely on aesthetic choices. Douglas points out that the Rue de Rivoli, which cut through the Faubourg Saint-Antoine—a hotbed of

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<sup>15</sup> The use of the word “nave” (*nef*), of course, also brings to mind the structural similarities between the train station and the cathedral, further emphasizing the sacralization of commodities inside. The cathedral metaphor is perhaps most famously deployed in Zola’s now-iconic description of the store as “la cathédrale du commerce moderne” (300).

<sup>16</sup> It bears noting that the Gare d’Orsay, an impressive train station built for the Exhibition of 1900, was later converted into an art museum specializing in mid- to late-nineteenth-century French painting, offering a fascinating real-life example of the aesthetic hybridity of modernity: the marriage of iron, glass, and pastels. The location also reflects impressionist painting’s initial status as marginal, inferior art, not worthy of inclusion among the canonical masters at the Louvre.

political dissent—was extended to form a line of sight from the Courbevoie barracks on one end to the Place de la Bastille (site of the former prison) at the other (38). Other historical landmarks, such as the Pantheon, had to be drastically altered in order to maintain Haussmann's network of symmetrical lines. In this way, the city itself became a museum (one could walk the streets with the "gaze of the gallery patron") and its monumental attractions, from the Arc de Triomphe to the newly constructed Opéra Garnier, dwarfed the masterpieces inside the Louvre—a phenomenon which coincided with the rise of the department store and blurred the distinction between art and commodity (Douglas 36).

This process of commodifying art/aestheticizing commodities was initiated, first, by the World Exhibition of 1855, the first such event to put price tags on all display items (Williams 59). That same year, however, another development crystallized this collapsing of "dreams and commerce" (Williams 65): the opening of the Grands Magasins du Louvre. At a time when "Le Louvre" could refer both to a department store and a museum, art and history were displaced, reified by commodities, even as the two sites remained bound by their common element of spectacle. As a result, a dual trivialization of the Louvre took place: first by the "museumification" of the city itself, which rendered the artwork of the Louvre insignificant and redundant, and subsequently by the creation of a commercial space which mocked the apotheosis of art by instead fostering the apotheosis of the commodity. Ironically then, in the New Paris of mass production and consumption, the optimism expressed by Walter Benjamin in his iconic essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" that the mechanically reproducible work of art would be liberated from ritual proves to be partly misplaced: commodity fetishism

has created a new kind of art—what Vaheed Ramazani calls “the modern artifact”—imbued with its own ritual value (135).

Mouret, of course, capitalizes on this new definition of art by erecting elaborate displays, beside which a hall of “*médiocres tableaux, très richement encadrés*” pales in comparison, thus cleverly elevating his spectacular window displays to artistic masterpieces (313). More importantly, the immensity of the store itself overshadows Paris’s museum landscape, to the point that the city outside is “*rapetissé, mangé par le monstre . . . [et] les monuments semblaient fondre, à gauche deux traits pour Notre-Dame, à droite un accent circonflexe pour les Invalides, au fond le Panthéon, honteux et perdu, moins gros qu’une lentille*” (468). The punctuation analogies depict a textual city that has been read (consumed), assimilated, and embellished by the department store—cannibalized in the confusion of temporally and stylistically opposed architectural styles, from train station to cathedral to museum.

The dark and filthy old boutiques of Old Paris stand in stark contrast to Mouret’s illuminated palace, victims of oppressive groundedness and close proximity to the street. White sheets hung in the Baudus’ shop window on the day of Geneviève’s burial are splattered with the mud of passing carriages, and ever since Mouret has acquired the buildings surrounding the Baudus’ shop, the dust of stagnation has settled all over, “*envahissa[n]t les comptoirs et les casiers*” (274). At the same time, the dust gathering on unmoved goods intermingles with the “*poussière implacable*” of the plaster from Mouret’s massive demolition project, which seeps through the woodwork, dirtying Baudu’s fabrics and slowly “poisoning” the family, implying a direct causal connection between the construction of the department store and Geneviève’s failing lungs (283).

A similar dust invades *Le Bonheur des Dames*, but in this case, it is a result of constant movement and disturbance; it is at once the mystical, erotically charged trace left by the women who pass through the doors (“l’encens de ce temple élevé au culte de son corps”) (323) and the “poussière humaine” to which the crowd of female consumers has been reduced (319). Sensual, spiritual awe and destructive capitalism merge in a dialectic which posits woman as equal parts goddess to be revered and, as I argue in the following section, military opponent to be destroyed, a dual identity not dissimilar from the aims of Haussmannization: to design a city that marries monumental grandeur and streamlined policing. With this dual image in mind, I now turn to the subject of the female crowd and its capacity for agency in the belly of the “mécanique à manger les femmes” constituting both a reification of the capitalist drive and a behemoth “temple” to women’s bodies that threatens to consume the very object of its idolatry (127).

#### 1.2.5 *Coups d’étalage*: Orchestrated Commercial Violence and the Female Consumer

If the female body and the city streets are the battlegrounds on which the various conflicts of modernity play out in the novel, then *Le Bonheur des Dames* is the site where the figurative violence of capitalism is made literal. However, since the crowd of female consumers functions as both unified agent and object of violence, the nature of violence at play becomes unclear and, as Ramazani points out, reflective of the larger social phobias and reified nationalisms of the post-Commune era in which the novel was written (131). For, if Delacroix’s *La Liberté guidant le peuple* personified the heroics of the Revolution of 1830 as woman, breast bared and standing astride a barricade (Could this be the archetype of the eroticized female soldier who populates the ranks of Mouret’s

shopgirls?), then the mythology surrounding 1871's pétroleuses reinscribes the woman revolutionary as something to be feared and suppressed. Indeed, less than ten years after the publication of *Au Bonheur des Dames*, Gabriel Tarde spoke in terms eerily similar to Zola's about the nature of the urban crowd, most strikingly referring to the crowd as a "female savage" and further insisting that "the crowd is woman, even when it is composed, as is almost always the case, of masculine elements" (qtd. in Ramazani 131). If, as Tarde suggests, the crowd is typically composed of men who, as a unified whole, become feminized, then the crowd of *Le Bonheur des Dames* represents a threatening reversal: a revolutionary masculinization of women and a not-so-subtle reminder of the events of the Commune anachronistically placed within the novel's pre-Commune temporality.<sup>17</sup> Mouret, as operator of the store-machine, works to simultaneously perpetuate the images of both Delacroix's apotheosized Liberté and the vilipended pétroleuses of the Commune with destructive results.

In one of Mouret's first appearances in the novel, the revered "étalagiste révolutionnaire" pushes his head display designer out of the way so that he himself can demonstrate the proper technique for constructing a commercial display (97): "Il voulait," we are told, "des *écroulements*, comme tombés au hasard des casiers *éventrés*, et il les voulait *flambants* des couleurs les plus ardentes, s'avivant l'un par l'autre. En sortant du magasin, disait-il, les clients devaient avoir mal aux yeux" (97, emphasis added). The passage evokes colors so "flaming" that they actually hurt the eyes and we are subsequently told of a "blaze of fabrics" which burns like a funeral pyre or, to use a metaphor better suited to a so-called "revolutionary" display artist, a street barricade.

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<sup>17</sup> Sophie Guermès situates the action of the novel between 1864 and 1869 (22).

Mouret would seem to be appealing to the image of the hysterical modern woman harboring an almost sexual attraction to violence (and, more specifically, to fire à *la pétroleuse*), a myth that has resonances in Tarde's conception of the crowd. This interpretation holds to an extent. Denise, during her disorienting first walk through the store, bumps into the display and, "malgré son effarement, la femme se réveillant en elle, les joues subitement rouges, elle s'oubliait à regarder flamber l'incendie des soies" (98). There is a certain specularity to Denise's gaze that is common to most of the novel's female characters: the women rapt by Mouret's spectacles of commodified violence are in fact beholding a mirror of the violence done to their own bodies (and pockets) amidst the press of the crowd and the stress of overstimulation.<sup>18</sup>

But Mouret's imposing "blaze of silks" is also described in terms of collapsed structures (*écroulements*) and racks that have been *éventrés*, a word with connotations both architectural and homicidal: a clear allusion to the destruction/construction taking place beyond the store's walls. Here the spectacle of destruction which mirrors the collapse of buildings in the streets serves once again to align women with the old city and, more importantly, to allow them to read their plight in the pile/pyre of fabric whose *écroulement* is ensured by their removal, by purchase, of its individual components.<sup>19</sup>

Mouret's revolutionary/suppressive strategies do not end there. On the day of the store's big seasonal sale, the layout of the store is altered in order to impede circulation:

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<sup>18</sup> The only other object of contemplation to arouse such emotion in Denise is the sight of her uncle's crumbling shop, which she views from the department store windows (147). The store's windows then serve, on the one hand, to reveal the opulent splendors born of mass production to those on the outside looking in and, on the other, to provide a prime view of the decay of old commerce—a museum's archeological panorama of sorts—to those on the inside looking out.

<sup>19</sup> The image of collapse returns when sacks containing the day's earnings are placed on Mouret's desk, overflowing "comme l'écroulement d'une fortune, ramassée en dix heures" (339).

baskets of items at drastically reduced prices (“à vil prix”) are placed in the entryway of the store, not to encourage impulsive purchases but rather to cause women to crowd the door to the point that “la rue était barrée, ainsi qu’en temps d’émeute” (306). The commodities themselves are accordingly repurposed as barricades which paradoxically seduce those outside by forbidding them entry and trap those on the inside amidst the stifling crush of patrons and sales displays.

By deploying the revolutionary tactic of street barricading so that, ironically, money may circulate all the more freely, Mouret is simultaneously channeling Haussmann<sup>20</sup> and Marianne—two seemingly diametrically opposed symbols of French modernity: the latter an emblem of revolution, the former an architect of suppression.<sup>21</sup> References to the crowd gathering outside as an *émeute*, a term associated with street riots, instead of the more neutral *foule*, emphasize the violence Mouret aims to foster, a violence which he hopes will be sublimated/consummated by women’s unrestrained purchasing. The term *émeute* also imparts something of the rampant hysteria of the female consumers whose “fever” of commodity fetishism Mouret intends to “exploit” (300). Indeed, as she contemplates the unruly crowd in the street, Madame Marty is filled with the “désir d’entrer où entre le monde” (an indication that Mouret’s calculations are

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<sup>20</sup> Mouret, “les lèvres pincées par une moue d’artiste” as he arranges his garish displays, recalls Haussmann as a self-styled “artist-demolitionist” (98; Benjamin, *Arcades* E3a, 1).

<sup>21</sup> Douglas, understanding Haussmannization in light of Benjamin’s “A Critique of Violence,” argues that the two types of violence (revolution and suppression) are, in fact, two sides of the same coin: “If *Haussmannization* and the barricades are both recognized as material and spatial transformations of the city, then they must both be appreciated not only for their violence, but as conflicting impositions of law” (34). Indeed, for Benjamin, the violence of demolition/construction is inseparable from the violence of barricading insofar as the “[l]awmaking [that suppression entails] is power making, and, to that extent, an immediate manifestation of violence” (295).

correct) and, after a moment's hesitation, abandons herself to "l'attrait irresistible de l'écrasement" (308).

It is important to note that Madame Marty's "fever" suggests a pathologization of female consumption which equates the "symptoms" of commodity fetishism with those of Geneviève's tubercular consumption. Geneviève's burning arms flail in a "perpétuel mouvement de recherche" an uncontrollable motion reproduced by Bonheur customer Madame de Boves, who instinctively reaches out to touch—and eventually *steal*—every item that pleases her until she is detained and humiliated by Mouret himself and left as an example of the consumer consumed: a victim of Mouret's practice of simultaneously facilitating and covertly policing women's illicit consumption (440, 449).

Mouret's barricades and visually arresting spectacles, designed as an allusive condensation of divergent types of historical and present violence, form the backdrop upon which women enact *physically* violent consumption, and *reenact* the violence for which the store's layout recreates the conditions. Upon entering the store, customers are subject to the collective fever of the crowd as the desire of each individual to acquire, fueled by the "blaze" of commodities on display, presses the "wave" of bodies relentlessly along, while a few men, "noyés sous les corsages débordants, jetaient des regards inquiets autour d'eux" (308-9). Numerous descriptions of the female crowd depict a unified entity composed of fragmented women's bodies: amidst the undulating "flot des clientes," individual women are "tenues debout par des épaules et des ventres" (308). In one of a series of images of women's disembodied heads, "[u]ne houle compacte de têtes roulait sous les galeries" (164)—a disturbing allusion to the Revolution

of 1789, and perhaps more specifically to the punishment suffered by Marie Antoinette, the archetype of female commodity fetishism, for her insatiable desire for opulence.

Equally violent are references to mirrors in the store: “partout les glaces reculaient les magasins, reflétaient des étalages avec des coins de public, des visages renversés, des moitiés d’épaules et de bras” (319). The mirror does not distinguish between consumer and commodity; rather, in its reflection, seemingly dismembered parts of women’s bodies merge with the objects on display, blurring the line between consumer and commodity. An explicitly specular relationship between woman and commodity is established as the piles of objects themselves *become* mirrors, which women contemplate “comme pour se voir” (159, emphasis added). If Siegfried Kracauer locates the cult of distraction at the Berlin Kinopalast of the 1920s, echoes of his words hover over Zola’s department store, where the overstimulating, fragmented spectacle of displays provides a mirror in which the masses quite literally encounter themselves (126).

The women also find their uncanny mirror image in the display mannequins whose “tête absente était remplacée par une grande étiquette . . . tandis que les glaces aux deux côtés de la vitrine, par un jeu calculé, les reflétaient et les multipliaient sans fin, peuplaient la rue de ces belles femmes à vendre, et qui portaient des prix en gros chiffres, à la place des têtes” (48). The headless automatons are multiplied infinitely by mirrors and projected onto the street, where their mirror images on the opposite side of the window become their streetwalking counterparts (indeed, what better way to illustrate Benjamin’s description of the prostitute as “saleswoman and wares in one” than by the placement of lifeless models wearing price tags on the street?) (“Baudelaire” 157). This is also, however, the same street where the female “riot” will later gather outside the store.

Once again, consumer and display merge into one: the disembodied heads of female shoppers correspond to the headless bodies of the mannequins and, more importantly, the image of the violent female riot is overlaid by the image of commodified female sexuality. The resultant erotically charged hysteria, a manifestation of the dangerous union of *La Liberté* and *la pétroleuse* which Tarde so feared, threatens to undermine the very masculine capitalist system that has begotten it.

#### 1.2.6 A New Model of Masculinity

In the wake of the female crowd, salesmen “campaient” along a “champ de bataille encore chaud du massacre des tissus” (174). Employees attempting to clean up debris are trapped behind an impassible “barricade de cartons” and piles of furs are strewn everywhere as though “un peuple de femmes . . . se serait déshabillé là, dans le désordre d’un coup de désir” (174). The department store is portrayed as the site where pétroleuse and prostitute, rioter and automaton, intersect within the female consumer—and leave formerly aggressive salesmen defeated and exhausted in their newly conquered land (“comme en pays conquis”) (335).

In a jarring reversal towards the end of the novel, Mouret looks on from his panoptic vantage point, reasserting his tenuous domination over the store as customers walk off with their spoils, “dépouillée, violée, . . . à moitié défaite” (507). He proceeds to “abandon himself” to the crowd, immersing his body—not unlike Baudelaire’s *homme de la foule*—in the violent wave that he has fostered, a movement that signals his

assimilation (in both integrative and digestive terms) by Tarde's female savage—thus assuring that the violation will be reciprocal (508).

Yet, above all, the act of abandoning himself to the female crowd signifies Mouret's final metamorphosis into at once an anachronistic romantic and a savvy *homme moderne* (two figures seemingly at odds but that, as we shall see in Chapter 3, are in fact compatible) who is willing to relinquish some of his masculine dominance for the success that a partnership with Denise will bring. By the end of the novel, he has proposed to Denise and entrusted her with authority over both him and his store. In ceding much of the store's governance to the empathic, humane Denise, Mouret forgoes some of his ruthless capitalist practices without sacrificing their lucrative results. The abrupt change of tone by which the former battlefield is refigured into a workers' utopia—the literal and figurative marriage of democratic ideals and thriving capitalism—may appear uncharacteristically hopeful when considered alongside the other, less optimistic works of the Rougon-Macquart cycle, but it serves two key purposes: firstly, placing Denise in a position of power at the store neutralizes the menacing image of the female consumer by confirming the reassuring triumph of the republican Marianne, rather than the pétroleuse, as women's allegorical figurehead: women, the novel's conclusion implies, may ascend to a position of power, but only insofar as they remain safely benevolent, maternal figures. Secondly, as Heidi Brevik-Zender has suggested, the literal and ideological marriage with which the novel concludes conveys Zola's own pro-capitalist, pro-democracy agenda (120).

Regardless of Zola's motivations, the conclusion provides a scenario in which women are at once transfigured and contained, impressively dominant yet relegated to an

allegorical status. This paradoxical cohabitation of power and submission is aptly conveyed in the closing line of the novel: when Denise accepts Mouret's proposal, he arranges for her to go home to her family away from Paris so that "il irait ensuite l'y chercher lui-même, *pour l'en ramener à son bras, toute-puissante*" (513, emphasis added).

Mouret's evolving role, characterized by a similar tension between dominance and submission, can better be understood in light of two other male characters in the novel who demonstrate similar modes of adaptation to the shifting landscape of modernity, the first being the retired military officer Inspector Jouve who patrols for shoplifters at the department store. Though Jouve plays the role of department store gendarme with zeal equal to that of a loyal soldier (at one point in the novel he is stationed by the entryway as a greeter, brandishing his military decorations "comme une enseigne de vieille probité") his new job figures him as an emblem of the changing times (140): with the end of fighting in Crimea, Algeria now firmly under French control and the restoration of tenuous social and political stability following the Revolution of 1848, military might—or at least ceremony—is moved from the realm of the streets to the commercial interior and is redeployed within a women's department store where customers constitute stealthy opponents. In his new role, the former captain is subordinate to Mouret, who rehires Denise after Jouve dismisses her for refusing his advances, thus rendering the aging officer powerless and ineffectual: his military might is shown to be superfluous and is ultimately only validated by the arrest of Madame de Boves. Yet the ease and enthusiasm with which he reinvents himself as a watchman of goods and of the women who buy and sell them (he lures female employees to him with

gifts and money, reproducing the prostitution of the street within the confines of the store to further blur the line between interior and exterior) bespeaks a man well adapted to modernity.

An enlightening comparison could be drawn between Jouve and his colleague, Le Bonheur's ironically-named head cashier, Lhomme, who offers a different model of modern masculinity. The only other older male employee of the store, Lhomme is subordinate and thoroughly submissive to his wife, also a store employee, who earns more than twice her husband's salary. Lhomme, unlike Jouve, is not a war veteran, but he does have a battle scar: his missing right arm, lost to a passing omnibus in the chaotic Paris streets, the symbolic castration of a man who fails to live up to his name (64). As a near casualty of the streets of Paris, Lhomme is the archetype of the New Paris "survivor": emasculated, privileging capitalist greed over military valor, the head—in title only—of a peripatetic family ("des gens sans intérieur, toujours dehors," Baudu tells Denise), Lhomme is wounded not in Crimea, but amidst the violence of urban modernization (69). His survival, like Jouve's, lies in his ability to accept and easily adapt to the imperatives of modernity: after losing his arm he devises a method for carrying the overflowing sacks of money containing the day's receipts to the vault in one arm. If Baudu and Bourras stubbornly refuse to move—both *bouger* and *déménager*—Lhomme, himself a holdover of Old Paris, embraces mobility by encouraging the rapid circulation of money and customers within the store (exemplified by his cashiers' dreaded slogan "Passez à la caisse!" which is directed at customers and dismissed employees, reduced to a "rouage inutile" as they collect their final wages) and by his

nightly vagabondage between theaters and cafés, with no stable household to speak of (214).

Lhomme's accident is the inspiration for former store employee, now failed merchant, Robineau's suicide attempt. After witnessing the destructive potential of the street, Robineau throws himself in front of an oncoming omnibus in an attempt to render literal his metaphorical "écrasement" by the encroaching department store (457). His mimetic self-mutilation could be seen as an attempt to emulate—indeed become—Lhomme (and by extension *l'homme moderne*), one of the few holdovers of old commerce who successfully transitioned to, and comes to embody, new commerce. In Jouve and Lhomme we thus see the convergence of mobility, strategic adaptability and (in the latter's case) a passive, submissive form of masculinity which Mouret also comes to embody by the end of the novel—and which proves key to male survival in the modern capitalist city.<sup>22</sup> In short: in order for these men to confront modernity, they must at once adopt the practices of the novel's subversive women *and* submit to those women.

### 1.2.7 The Indeterminate Woman

Despite a dubiously moralizing conclusion and an ambivalent treatment of female characters, Zola's *Au Bonheur des Dames* presents the reader with a diverse group of women wielding threatening power through their tactics of movement, buying and selling. For, if the blasé flâneur was he who made unconventional use of the streets and

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<sup>22</sup> Male characters exhibiting similar qualities will be examined throughout this dissertation, from La Faloise the dandy in *Nana* (see Chapter 2) to Robert the *cadre* in *2 ou 3 choses que je sais d'elle*, whom I discuss in this chapter.

arcades of Old Paris, Zola's mobile woman, the flâneur's logical successor, is born of the commercial interior, meeting barricades of cobblestone with barricades of calico, existing perpetually as allegory, reenacting the past as *la Liberté*, anticipating the future as pétroleuse, her body at once agent and object of violence. For Zola, modernity is inscribed both on the urban landscape and on women's bodies—indeed he sees an almost mystical correspondence between the two. Yet, while the old shopkeeper is destroyed by his failure to move, the female consumer is capable of merging the mobile, individual voyeurism of *flânerie* with the collective blockade-spectacle of the riot, navigating and ultimately reconciling the “great marketplace of consumption” with the “rendezvous of pleasures”—various terms by which Haussmann described Second Empire Paris and which echo from within the walls of Le Bonheur des Dames (Benjamin, *Arcades* E3a, 1).

### 1.3 Sex, Language, Capitalism and the Unstable Ontology of Women in Godard's *2 ou 3 choses que je sais d'elle*

#### 1.3.1 Introduction

Some one hundred years after Haussmann gutted the center of Paris, the city would once again undergo a period of destruction and renewal. Against a backdrop of war, decolonization, mass migration and the onset of late capitalism, the Paris of Haussmann was not equipped to meet the needs of the twentieth-century Parisian population. Legislation was passed in 1957 authorizing the construction of vast new urban housing developments, Les Quatre Mille being among the first and most iconic. The aim was to accommodate a growing and increasingly diverse population struggling to afford housing in the postwar economy.

In 1966, in a climate of modernization and expansion, as the borders of Paris spilled over into neighboring suburbs, Paul Delouvrier was appointed Prefect of Paris. Under Delouvrier's aegis, the city would undergo sweeping urban modernization projects and infrastructure development that were Haussmannian in scope, if not in aesthetic. Indeed, in the transition of Paris from city of the "man of houses" to that of the "man of the worker" we witness a semantically fitting shift from Haussmann's aesthetically obscured strategies of suppression to an ostensibly transparent functionalism: Haussmann's imposing boulevards were now dwarfed by brutalist high-rises and surrounded by serpentine concrete overpasses and vast, windswept expanses of asphalt. I shall return to these images shortly to discuss the ideological continuities—and

suppressive strategies—linking two distinct approaches to urban planning that would otherwise appear to be at odds.

The inhabitants of the so-called *grands ensembles* were a mix of middle-class French families and immigrants, largely from the Maghreb (families reuniting with fathers/husbands, many of whom had fought for France in the Second World War and had subsequently been hired for factory jobs in the *métropole*). Such large-scale cohabitation in this liminal urban space, located symbolically just beyond the periphery boulevard separating Paris from non-Paris, brought about what came to be described as the “mal des grands ensembles” (De Baecque). This pathology is precisely what Godard set out to explore in his 1967 film, *2 ou 3 choses que je sais d'elle*, inspired by an exposé about the housewives of Les Quatre Mille moonlighting as prostitutes.<sup>23</sup> The piece confirmed Godard’s belief that Gaullist economic reforms had only served to generate greater inequality and, far from protecting French society against the hazards of untethered capitalism, was complicit in submitting France to a destructive and “immoral” capitalist framework.<sup>24</sup>

Susan Hayward has noted that the postwar period marked a critical shift for Paris from site of production to site of consumption—the one productive outlier, she contends, being the expanding film industry (28). The Parisian landscape was thus fertile ground for Godard’s socially observant filmmaking, enabling an exploration of consumer culture

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<sup>23</sup> Viminet, Catherine. “Les étoiles filantes.” *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 23 March 1966; and “Prostitution dans les grands ensembles?” *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 4 May 1966.

<sup>24</sup> This sentiment is made explicit early in the film in one of Godard’s voiceovers: “J’en déduis que le pouvoir gaulliste prend le masque d’un réformateur et d’un modernisateur, alors qu’il ne veut qu’enregistrer et régulariser les tendances naturelles du grand capitalisme. J’en déduis aussi qu’en systématisant le dirigisme et la centralisation, ce même pouvoir accentue les distorsions de l’économie nationale et plus encore celles de la morale quotidienne qui la fonde.”

through the prism of women, who function as the embodiment/reification of Godard's own musings on object relations thanks to the ontological fine line they walk between consumer and commodity. The impulse to allegorize women—and, more broadly, to conflate and confuse urban space with the female bodies that navigate it—has of course, as we have just seen in my discussion of *Au Bonheur des Dames*, been thoroughly exploited by Zola. This new era of commodity fetishism is then symptomatic of a cyclical return to prosperity—the sign of a society regaining its footing after years of economic hardship brought on by war, not unlike the tenuously stable Paris of the Second Empire.

Malini Guha contends that postwar urban planning reconfigured Paris in a way that facilitated women's mobility—so effectively, in fact, that the prominent trope of the wandering woman in European modernist cinema would become a key metaphor for the modern city in flux (47-48). This is due in a large part to the collapsing of public and private space (both real and imagined) cinematically and socially, generating sexual and conversational promiscuity. Thus when Godard presents *2 ou 3 choses* as an investigation of life in the *grands ensembles*, he has recourse to a familiar, if newly provocative, feminization of the city: “Quand on soulève les jupes de la ville, on en voit le sexe” (6).<sup>25</sup> Godard's assertion figures the city as a woman being violated, and sexual voyeurism as the only channel through which a man can penetrate a woman's inner thoughts: the blurring of interior/exterior also applies, then, to women's bodies. Yet at the same time,

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<sup>25</sup> This quote perfectly illustrates Godard's unique conception of the *ville-femme*: the city is embodied by the totality of its female inhabitants whose collective skirts (“les jupes”) may be lifted by the filmmaker-journalist's omniscient eye to reveal a single, unified genitalia (“le sexe”). This privileged access to the private/taboo implies a profane, readable figuration of women quite unlike the female characters present in Zola's works, wherein both sacred and dangerous iterations of women ultimately remain a fascinating-but-dangerous cipher (the saintly-yet-inscrutable Denise for Mouret, the manipulative Nana for the many men she seduces).

the film presents us with female characters who, while existentially frustrated, exercise a degree of self-awareness and agency (in strategically wielding their sexuality) not present in emasculated male characters.<sup>26</sup>

What remains to be seen is how this constant conflation of woman and city functions in the service of the film's other political and ideological aims—notably, its critique of America's interventions in Vietnam and of the less violent but more pervasive development of U.S. economic and cultural imperialism, both of which were central rallying forces during May '68. In addition, the specter of Algeria and of the many reunited North African immigrant families inhabiting *Les Quatre Mille* hovers over the film, inescapably present but largely unaddressed. Even though the women depicted in the film identify with the subaltern—and with the plight of the Vietnamese, specifically, anticipating the broader show of empathic solidarity among protesters just over a year after the film's release—Godard rather surprisingly fails to evoke France's own implication in these phenomena, leaving the film's allegorical figuration of women to become increasingly convoluted, their subjectivities as fragmented and overladen with competing meanings as the subaltern subjectivities with which they identify.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> This is not the first time that Godard has addressed prostitution/voyeurism in his films: his earlier treatment of these subjects (*Une femme est une femme* [1961], *Vivre sa vie* [1962]) similarly uses the practices of prostitution and stripping to shed light on the economic plight of the modern woman. The subject of prostitution would later be revisited by Chantal Akerman (*Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles*, 1975), liberated from Godard's dominating camera eye/I.

<sup>27</sup> Kristin Ross discusses at length the implicit equivalency established between the bourgeois housewife and the colonial subaltern in the political economy of the 1950s and 1960s. Ross argues that, in the administrative void left by decolonization, the duty of keeping a geographically distant native population "in order" was transmuted into an obsession with keeping a clean, orderly household, the pristine *ménage* serving as a microcosm of the *métropole*: "The transfer of a colonial political economy to a domestic one involved a new emphasis on controlling *domesticity*, a new concentration on the political economy of the household . . . [t]he housewife—manager or administrator and victim, occupying a status roughly equivalent to the *évolué* or educated native in the colonial situation—efficiently caring for the children and workers" (*Fast Cars* 77-78). In a climate in which women play a subordinate yet vital role in perpetuating a

### 1.3.2 From Street to Screen

Godard and his New Wave peers, like Zola and Baudelaire before them, have a keen ability and purposeful inclination to mine the connection between temporal transience and spatial instability, a symptom of postwar capitalism as it was of early industrial capitalism a century earlier. Their films—shot with lighter, mobile equipment in actual urban locations rather than on sets—portray what Hayward calls the “now/now-gone of the ‘then’ city” (29). In Godard’s films the tension between presence and absence reveals an alienation that transcends the film’s diegesis and its production—spanning Godard’s own disdain for the conventions of his medium and humanity’s inability to connect with one another—and blurs the line between the two.

In addition to the presence/absence dialectic at play across Godard’s work, there is a similar tension in *2 ou 3 choses* between interior and exterior, which Guha describes as the “tension between ‘inside and outside,’ between the city and the world” (40). Indeed, between the claustrophobic domestic space of apartment buildings and the gaping construction sites outside their windows, there is at once hostility and continuity: images of Juliette and her client preparing for sex abruptly cut to phallicized images of cranes poised over the remains of a former neighborhood: symbols of both destruction and regeneration. These jarring continuities between inside and outside, present and absent, reinforce the notion that, for the women practicing prostitution in the *grands ensembles*, the domestic sphere necessarily becomes yet another of the film’s “work sites” and an incursion of the public street(walker) into private space. This incursion is further

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new myth of nation, it is not hard to see why Godard’s female characters would repeatedly identify with the Vietnamese.

highlighted by the choice of artwork in the various apartments shown in the film, as I will discuss shortly.

These poles of tension, as with all dualities in the film, are explicitly introduced via Godard's whispered voiceovers, his soft lisp presenting a stark juxtaposition with the images of urban demolition and war on the screen and the overpowering diegetic noise of jackhammers and bombs. His voice also serves to silence the film's (mostly female) characters by usurping their words, addressing them directly from behind the camera eye and in so doing objectifying them, as we see in one of the earliest scenes of the film where Godard introduces the actress Marina Vlady, describing her appearance and movement as though she is a specimen under examination. The ideologically charged incursion of the author/auteur's voice into his film in order to equate a seemingly eschatological commodification of the city (and by extension the women that navigate and embody it) with war and colonization has the effect of converting Zola's emplotted ideology into extradiegetic commentary—to make the spectator uncertain where the frame ends and to eliminate any uncertainty as to the film's political commitment.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> For example, one abrupt transition takes us from images of construction workers noisily demolishing old buildings to make room for a new overpass to silent images of workers loading a crane, over which Godard whispers: "Je scrute la vie des gens de la cité et les liens qui les unissent avec autant d'intensité que le biologiste scrute les rapports de l'individu et de la race en évolution. C'est seulement ainsi que je pourrai m'attaquer aux problèmes de pathologie sociale, en formant l'espoir d'une vraie cité nouvelle." These would seem to be the words of a committed journalist and naturalist, and as such they recall Zola's methodological discourse. However, unlike Zola, who looked to the science of naturalism merely to accurately represent and account for social determinism ("Je ne veux pas comme Balzac avoir une décision sur les affaires des hommes, être politique, philosophe, moraliste," he writes. "Je me contenterai d'être savant, de dire ce qui est en cherchant les raisons intimes. Point de conclusion d'ailleurs. Un simple exposé des faits d'une famille, en montrant le mécanisme intérieur qui la fait agir" [*Œuvres* 14]), Godard is not satisfied to "account for" and instead seeks to intervene in order to cure the "pathology" of life in the *grands ensembles*.

### 1.3.3 The Spaces of Language

“Oui, la ville est une construction dans l’espace. Les éléments mobiles de la cité? Je sais pas. Les habitants? Oui, les éléments mobiles sont aussi importants que les éléments fixes.”

—Marianne (Anny Duperey) in *2 ou 3 choses que je sais d’elle*

Language is a central theme in *2 ou 3 choses*: a metaphor for physical mobility and economic exchange as well as an aphasia-inducing source of frustration as it is constantly pushed up against its own limits, revealing itself to be inevitably indeterminate, tenuous. Nowhere is the ambiguity of language more evident than in the title of the film. Green et al have invoked the broad indeterminacy of the *elle* of the film’s title: does it refer to Juliette? to Paris? If the latter, are the *choses* in question women? Morrey points to a more targeted plurality of *elles*—Juliette and her performer, Marina Vlady, both of whom are introduced in turn in the opening scenes of the film—before turning to the *je*, most ostensibly Godard, but also potentially the spectator who shares the director-narrator’s gaze (64). Regardless of how we interpret the title, its referential ambiguity performs a similar conflation of woman and city as that which we encounter in Zola: the title *Au Bonheur des Dames* references at once a store, a city (the store is a metonym for rapidly expanding Paris) and a vague, unlocatable site of women’s pleasure. In the case of Godard, if we, like Green et al, are to believe that the knowledgeable *je* of whom *elle* is the object is masculine—Godard himself—we might be tempted to subscribe to their view that this male voice/gaze represents the director’s collusion in,

rather than subversion of, the filmic exploitation of women's bodies.<sup>29</sup> Yet the very duplicity of language in the film—extending to the film's paratext, from its title and intertitles to its posters and trailers—combined with its figuration of women as language, offers female characters if not total liberation at least empathy, self-awareness and freedom of mobility, inside and out: abilities otherwise reserved for the director-narrator himself.<sup>30</sup>

As in many Godard films, language is a critical means by which female characters perceive and (fail to) relate to the urban phenomenal world. As she compares skirts in a clothing shop where several women are shown working silently side by side, Juliette remarks, "Ensemble c'est un mot que j'aime bien... Un ensemble ce sont des milliers de gens. Une ville peut-être... Personne aujourd'hui ne peut savoir quelle sera la ville de demain. Une partie de la richesse sémantique qui fut sienne dans le passé—elle va la perdre... certainement... peut-être..." Her alternation between articulating the city in linguistic terms and language in spatial terms (earlier in the film she declares that "le langage, c'est la maison dans laquelle l'homme habite") foregrounds the centrality of exchange and communication to urban life. If language (*langue*) is, as Freud would have it, a masculine construct, then the film presents female mobility and participation in the

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<sup>29</sup> Here, Laura Rascaroli calls for a more nuanced understanding of the essay film director-narrator. Arguing that director and narrator should not be conflated, she refers to the role of the director-narrator as that of an "enunciator subject . . . embodied in a narrator, who (although never un-problematically or unreflexively) is close to the real, extra-textual author" (184).

<sup>30</sup> Chris Dumas reminds us that Godard's style of filmmaking, in which signification and intentions are explicated at length (generally by the director himself), "is different from the way in which Hitchcock becomes *le sujet supposé savoir*: Godard is the ultimate authority on his own films, is possessed of an impossible transparent self-knowledge, while Hitchcock is the ultimate authority about the film going on inside the spectator's head" (103). Godard's overly-extimate films send his characters on an unending quest for cathexis (i.e. Juliette's identification with the Vietnamese people, Robert's conversation with the young woman in the café, the girl who finds that the spoken word inhibits her ability to communicate with her author idol) that is systematically thwarted by forces of alienation.

economy as *parole*: the artful manipulation of language and the coding of the mobile body as signifier.<sup>31</sup> This equivalency is possible in particular due to women's dual role in an economy of communication that figures them simultaneously as consumer (shopping for clothes and wielding brand-name household products) and commodity (engaging in prostitution).<sup>32</sup> Godard's voiceover confirms this contradictory status as he presents the spectator with an image of froth on a cup of coffee dissolving and then, shown backwards, reforming out of the separated bubbles: following his recognition of the interplay between his own oppressive objectivity and alienating subjectivity (a remark that, Timothy Corrigan argues, clearly suggests the self-reflexive, interpellative strategies proper to the essay film narrator), the director-narrator muses, "D'abord, qu'est-ce que c'est qu'un objet? Peut-être qu'un objet est ce qui permet de relier, de passer d'un sujet à l'autre, donc de vivre en société, d'être ensemble" (201).

Indeed, Juliette and the other self-aware female protagonists move about the city doing just this, with a blasé assurance as though claiming ownership of a collective space that—given the tautology present in the phrase *grands ensembles collectifs* and the contrasting reality presented in images of desolate urban landscapes—while belonging to

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<sup>31</sup> In a 2019 interview, Godard explicitly politicizes the distinction between *langue* and *parole*, criticizing sociologically-minded filmmakers who set out to document *la France profonde* armed with preconceived notions that suppress the individual voices they seek to hear ("Ils ont vu ce qu'ils voulaient voir parce qu'ils l'ont défini avant par des mots, par un texte."). Drawing on Claude Lefort's assertion that the compartmentalization of the political brought about by modern democracy lays the groundwork for totalitarianism, he states, "Eh bien voilà, on est dans une phase de l'humanité relativement totalitaire à cause de la langue qui n'est pas le langage" (*France Culture*, emphasis added). It is then the disconnect between the two domains that is at once the source of oppression and resistance.

<sup>32</sup> Adding yet another layer to women's identity, Engels speaks of women's role in the context of bourgeois marriage as that of "a mere instrument of production" (or, more specifically, reproduction) (*Origins of the Family*). More germane to this discussion is his contention—also evoked by Green et al—that "[i]n both cases this marriage of convenience turns often enough into the crassest prostitution—sometimes of both partners, but far more commonly of the woman, who only differs from the ordinary courtesan in that she does not let out her body on piece-work as a wage-worker, but sells it once and for all into slavery."

everyone, belongs to no one. And it is precisely the anomie of these vast new public spaces that enables women's bodies to circulate freely, merging public and private, in the same manner as the auteur filmmakers of the period, abandoning sets to film in city streets and hotel rooms: a shift which, while imposing new technical constraints, paradoxically allowed directors greater control over the process.<sup>33</sup>

Parsing the etymology of the word *metropolis*, Hayward speaks of the city as a (female) body-politic: a kind of corporealized shared space. Yet, how are we to reconcile this anthropomorphic mother-city with the reality of a codified realm in which women were historically (expected to be) invisible, symbolically absent? Here, Hayward proffers, "if according to the body-politic, you are invisible and cannot therefore perform the city so (paradoxically) any performance is possible" (33). And this Certeauian recognition of mobility as a form of resistance—of the parts at once constituting and subverting the whole—is clearly in alignment with the postmodern embodied city that Godard presents to us.<sup>34</sup>

If the architecture of postwar Paris afforded women greater mobility and the opportunity to engage in subversive spatial practices, it also opened up the city to new, more direct modes of filmic representation. The mobile conditions of New Wave film production present moviegoers with a radically altered way of experiencing urban space—a kind of representational renewal not unlike Haussmann's urban renewal measures. Even the terms used to describe this shift seem to evoke the rupture between

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<sup>33</sup> Director Claude Ventura aptly summarizes this revolutionary strategy of New Wave filmmakers: "La Nouvelle Vague c'est ça: tourner dans la rue au milieu des gens" (qtd. in Mary 167).

<sup>34</sup> Marianne's above-cited comment suggests an embodied city ("Les éléments mobiles de la cité? Je sais pas. Les habitants? Les éléments mobiles sont aussi importants que les éléments fixes.") as does Godard's own observation about the singular/collective female anatomy of the city.

Old and New Paris: “On est bien passé d’un état du champ à un autre état. L’espace a changé de structure” (Mary 16). Eschewing the technical and spatial conventions of the so-called “Tradition of Quality” brings about a transformation that constitutes at once an enlargement of public space/shrinking of private space and a cinematographic alchemy that collapses the boundaries between the two. The genre itself comes to serve as a *mise en abyme* of the historical city’s ongoing transformations.

But perhaps above all, the Paris of New Wave film is an *articulated city*: a *ville-texte*, not unlike the mythological Paris of Hugo, that Godard, Truffaut et al would later reclaim and “overwrite,” stamping it with their own subjectivity and banality, what Philippe Mary refers to as a *réalisme de soi* (167). They would not be the first to evoke a malleable textual city: such a Paris—almost an extension of one’s consciousness—had already been depicted in surrealist works like *Nadja* and *Le Paysan de Paris*, and even though the spatial and linguistic practices Aragon and Breton deemed necessary to navigate the city would, likewise, be taken up again in the New Wave films and *nouveau romans* of the 1950s and 60s, these phenomena would only be formally reflected on in a framework of power and resistance some ten years later by Certeau.<sup>35</sup>

#### 1.3.4 Gender and Language

It is with questions of power in mind that I return to Engels’ conception of bourgeois marriage (see Footnote 32). In *2 ou 3 choses* we see this very structure at once

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<sup>35</sup> Again, Certeau’s poststructural conception of strategies and tactics, referenced in my discussion of *Au Bonheur des Dames*, corresponds to the ludic, subversive interaction between subject and world, *parole* and *langue*, common to both surrealist and New Wave works.

produced and subverted: Juliette does engage in prostitution so that her family can afford to display the signifiers of their bourgeois status (a British car, brand-name household products, trendy clothing, etc.), yet doing so places her in a position of dominance vis-à-vis her husband. The traditional role of male breadwinner is replaced by that of female status-maintainer as symbols of wealth supplant sustenance. When asked by a male friend how he could afford to buy his red Austin Mini, Juliette's husband Robert replies obliquely, "C'est Juliette qui l'a trouvée. Elle est formidable. Elle trouve toujours des occasions." The "occasions" in question are not only second-hand objects, but also a euphemism for the economic opportunities afforded by Juliette's prostitution work, which funds the family's status-symbol purchases.<sup>36</sup> This inversion of traditional spousal roles and centrality of status in the context of the 1960s neo-bourgeois French household is, following Ross's logic, an accurate reflection of the period's drastic socio-economical shifts: "The importance of status and self-definition through consumption for the *cadre* derives from his intermediate position: *cadres* 'control' or manage the workers but are themselves subject to wage contracts as well. Status helps them define their autonomy" (*Fast Cars* 171).<sup>37</sup> Robert's attire (at home he is shown wearing a dress shirt while a necktie and suit jacket are draped over the chair next to him), trendy car, fixation on communication and, as I will discuss shortly, his bedside reading, are all signifiers of the young Parisian *cadre*. Moreover, Robert is emasculated by Juliette's dominance, both economically and domestically, according to women's socially prescribed role, as she is

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<sup>36</sup> Morrey adapts Engels' assertions to a mid-twentieth-century context, stating that "the main inspiration for the film is the assertion [by the exposé in *Le Nouvel Observateur*] . . . that young housewives in these 'grands ensembles' are turning to prostitution, not out of necessity, but precisely in order to pay for consumer items which, only a few years previously, would have been considered as luxuries" (62).

<sup>37</sup> It bears noting that the intermediate, subjugated/subjugator role of the *cadre* echoes Ross's subjugated/managerial conception of the housewife.

“manager” of the household. Indeed, far from the ideal of an autotelic male subject, the *cadre* (and Robert as he is depicted in the film) is a contingent, intermediary subject with limited agency. In this regard, Ross sees in him the emasculated double of the virile revolutionary *cadre* that had recently secured independence in Algeria (*Fast Cars* 175).

While Juliette spends the film eyeing/buying objects, selling her body and pondering object relations and the inadequacy of language as a form of communication, Robert, in search of a kind of pure social interaction, reduces his conversation with an unknown woman in a café to crude, atavistic sexual terms, rendered so simplistic and nominal as to be banal. Accordingly, while for Juliette sex is reified as language and commodity, the exact opposite is true for Robert. Since it is sex and not language that upholds his status as bourgeois husband, he assigns it to a phatic and, one could argue, similarly status-charged realm. And since for Juliette and other female characters in the film sex is commodified as a form of exchange, phatic conversation becomes its most obvious parallel: the latter systematically entails a symbolic exchange of objects, a stand in for the sexual act. For example, in the café scene Juliette asks the bartender, “Vous avez des Winstons?” as another woman remarks to a passing man, “Tiens, vous avez des nouvelles chaussures!” In this capitalist space, all speech exchange hinges on commodities—with the particularity that these commodities are charged with ethical and political significance. Like Juliette’s Winstons, the man’s shoes turn out to be American-made, a revelation that causes the woman to exclaim, “C’est avec ça qu’ils marchent sur les pieds des Vietnamiens.” Their conversation is cut short when the man, a former client of Juliette’s, recognizes her and offers to serve as her pimp, ostensibly to protect her from the violence to which prostitutes are exposed (even this discussion is framed in terms of

moral duty). The exchange draws an implicit parallel between Parisian women and the Vietnamese. “D’abord, la guerre est finie et puis je fais ça provisoirement, j’espère que ça va pas durer,” Juliette replies cryptically and ends both the conversation and any residual anti-American sentiment by ordering a Coca Cola.<sup>38</sup> Yet, if the war in question is over, she cannot be referring to the still-ongoing Vietnam War (Godard’s voiceover informs us that the film/filming takes place in August 1966). More logically, this may be an oblique reference to the Algerian War, from which widespread residual anger at the French government’s violent repression of resistance and a sense of solidarity with the Algerians were subsequently redirected towards the conflict in Vietnam.

Over the course of the scene we are thus whisked from the realm of object relations (the women’s enunciations) to the realm of sexual relations (the incursion of the prospective pimp into women’s discursive space) and back again. More importantly, we are privy to the ideological and ontological ambivalences of the film’s female characters, caught as they are in a state of perpetual vacillation between subject and object, consumer and commodity, bourgeoisie and subaltern, and accordingly constituting one of the film’s several dimensions of representational ambivalence.

### 1.3.5 *Le Capital/La Capitale*: Oppressive Consumption

The Paris Commune was, on some level, the culmination of years of ambitious imperialism with disastrous consequences both at home and abroad (Mexico, Algeria,

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<sup>38</sup> Kristin Ross states that “throughout the 1960s in France, themes of anticapitalism and internationalism were spontaneously combined; the discourses of anticapitalism and anti-imperialism were woven together in an intricate mesh” (*May ’68*, 11). The indignation of students and workers would coalesce around these merged concerns during May ’68.

Crimea). The France of *2 ou 3 choses* is situated, if not in the same historical context, at least in the same overarching narrative, with a difference: by now Lyndon Johnson has assumed the role of overzealous emperor as the United States engages in a combination of economic imperialism and military interventions destined to obliterate the remaining vestiges of France as a colonial power. Indeed, as I have suggested, the French imperialism of the not-so-distant past is equally “obliterated” from the film—an omission that negates over a century of continuous French/European imperialism in order to posit the U.S. as a sole and spontaneous force of both power and destruction in the world. That the film’s characters systematically, indeed fatalistically, consume metonymically functioning American products while simultaneously criticizing the U.S. bespeaks a broader ambivalence between submission and resistance that is, again, tied to characters’ unstable positionality—particularly female characters for whom upholding a bourgeois identity (by possessing the signifiers of modern trendiness) is contingent on purchasing American products and thereby buying into the very forces of oppression they condemn.

As in 1870-71 and 1848 before it, the internal conflict marked by simmering social unrest in 1960s Paris is thus revealed to have external roots and consequences. Seeing in American-dominated Parisian consumer culture an allegorical parallel to the more explicitly violent American presence in Vietnam, Godard, like Zola, turns to a figuration of capitalism as war. This allegorical mode of representation points to a postwar shift in both consumer culture and object relations. Whereas in the early twentieth century commodities were temporarily transfigured as signifiers of nostalgia and emotionally charged objects (a phenomenon reflected in the works of the surrealists and Walter Benjamin), *2 ou 3 choses* signals a shift towards two more concrete and

determinate functions: instantiator of presence (notably colonial presence) and reification of intersubjectivity (more specifically, as we see in the film's café scene, the reduction of interaction of all kinds, from social to sexual, to a realm of pure object relations). Thus, while the commodity retains its allegorical status, it is desanctified and stripped of any emotional/fetishistic attachment, much like the intersubjective relations depicted in the film. The result is a kind of social breakdown manifested both through language, via constant reminders of its inadequacies, and through the visual fragmentation of women's bodies.

Indeed, recalling the recurring motif of fragmented women's bodies in *Au Bonheur des Dames*, the official poster for *2 ou 3 choses* features a collage of women's body parts—a face and crotch in the center and legs on either side, interspersed with advertisements for dish detergent, a high-rise building, a Vietnamese soldier, and a vertically positioned airplane propping up the face of a man who appears to be Johnny, Juliette's American client, but who equally resembles Godard himself. *Le/la capital(e), la guerre, la prostitution, l'actrice* and *l'auteur* are merged into a single, fragmentary—and quite literally dismembered—entity.

Guha speaks of the corresponding fragmentation and objectification of the postmodern filmic city—a representational strategy that “foregrounds the process of how a city can be drained of any semblance of a ‘sense of place’” (42). In *2 ou 3 choses* this fragmentation and objectification extends to the women navigating/embodying the city, who strive to recover their agency and in so doing relinquish their discrete, unified subjectivity. In one of many monologues addressing the camera/Godard/the spectator, Juliette reflects on “le sentiment de mes liens avec le monde. [She pauses as the camera

pans around the high-rise complex looming over her.] Tout à coup j’ai eu l’impression que j’étais le monde et que le monde était moi.” As the city is deprived of its spatial and temporal unity—indeed, of its meaning—women’s mobile bodies are charged with the duty of restoring that meaning. The body public (Paris) and the newly-public body (women) are thus merged and folded into the indeterminate *elle* of the film’s title.<sup>39</sup>

The women/city equivalence is indeed one of three key instances of doubling/duality present in *2 ou 3 choses*. These pairings are presented sometimes in the form of oppositions, sometimes as conflation, but always as the manifestation of unresolved ambivalence—Godard’s as much as his characters’. I now turn to an exploration of the film’s most pervasive dialectic, one that exposes Godard’s perpetually conflicted relationship with Americanophilic capitalism and dominant culture.

### 1.3.6 Culture vs. Capital / Cultural Capital

There is a tension in *2 ou 3 choses*—one that is endemic to Godard’s oeuvre—between “legitimate”/high and dominant/mass culture (the latter often American and personified here by Johnny the war photographer; the former “à la fois objet de désir et objet de dégradation”) (Mary 238). This opposition could also be framed in terms of the increasingly blurred distinction between art and commodity, a phenomenon similarly

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<sup>39</sup> In his discussion of Anna Karina’s Nana, the prostitute protagonist of Godard’s *Vivre sa vie* (1962), Jean Douchet could just as well be addressing the fragmentation of women’s bodies/beings in *2 ou 3 choses* considering “[c]omment Nana s’aliène, se refusant comme sujet pour mieux se vendre comme objet. Une progression en douze étapes enclenche le mécanisme d’une scission d’un être, son clivage qui sépare l’apparence de l’âme” (113). Indeed, in Husserlian terms, the Godardian woman willfully relinquishes her subjectivity (Leib) in order to more effectively deploy her object-body (Körper), creating an opposition between interior and exterior that is mirrored by claustrophobic interior scenes (cramped apartments, tiny hotel rooms, crowded cafés).

present in *Au Bonheur des Dames*. From movie posters hanging on apartment walls to women's fashion magazines being touted as "culture," there is a pervasive intermingling and interchanging of the two elements in *2 ou 3 choses* that result in the elevation of the commodity—and of mass culture more broadly—to the status of art. This is likely a manifestation of Godard's own status as a New Wave filmmaker caught at the intersection of two conflicting ambitions: the creation of an autonomous work and the creation of an alienating politically engaged work with, at its core, the same sociological inquiry and journalistic methodology as Zola's *romans expérimentaux*. (After all, *2 ou 3 choses* was largely inspired by Catherine Viminet's exposé about prostitution in the *grands ensembles*, published in the *Nouvel Observateur* in 1966.) Indeed, Mary considers Godard to be a bourgeois "héritier en rupture" and that renounced heritage encompasses as much his inescapable bourgeois identity as his espousal of documentary-styled realism using non-professional actors: a mode of filmmaking that certainly aligns itself with the ethnographic "in-the-streets" realism of Zola's canonical works while eschewing its narrative conventions (218).

Perhaps the greatest contradiction of all is that, in making a film that aims to denounce the destructive nature of capitalism, Godard remains beholden to the very capitalist interests that his film and his movement eschew. To more closely examine how these overarching conflicts function within the film, I will examine an incongruous scene in which we witness a collision of ideological concerns and diverse, at times contradictory, representational strategies that serves to belie the "refus de l'historicité" (Mary 56) to which Godard and his New Wave peers had initially aspired.

As Robert and his friend sit at the kitchen table, using a large radio transmitter to intercept reports on Vietnam, Juliette enters the room to talk about some pantyhose she has found in a fashion magazine. Children's voices can also be heard in the background. The scene forms a bizarre domestic vignette: the kitchen table, the traditional center of the family household, is surrounded by artwork and plants, signaling a tasteful bourgeois residence, and yet here it seems to have been repurposed as a kind of "war room." Hanging on the wall just above the transmitter is a poster for Alain Resnais' 1963 film *Muriel, ou le temps d'un retour*. The poster depicts a woman's face, partially obscured by a piece of paper torn in two: the top half bearing the name Muriel over the woman's eyes, and the bottom half bearing small text that covers the rest of the photo, leaving visible only the woman's open mouth, which seems to be speaking. It is a strange choice of domestic artwork: *Muriel, ou le temps d'un retour* is a film about the breakdown of a household, the trauma of war and the domestic consequences of colonialism. The image stands as one of the film's only acknowledgments of the recent war in Algeria and thus of France's broader colonial past.

The movie poster is itself yet another example of the incursion of the street (the usual site of movie posters and other advertisements) into the domestic sphere—and it is far from the only one we see in the film.<sup>40</sup> Walls in Juliette's home and Monsieur Girard's daycare/brothel are adorned with movie posters and advertisements in the place of traditional artwork, blurring the line between art and commodity in the same way that Mouret installs an art gallery amidst racks of clothing in his department store.

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<sup>40</sup> It is also perhaps no coincidence that the poster for *2 ou 3 choses* bears strong resemblance to the poster for *Muriel*.

Over the course of the kitchen table scene we are presented with several of Juliette's identities: mother, consumer and prostitute (the latter hinted at obliquely through Robert's remark about her aptitude for procuring status symbols). After her departure, the two men turn their attention away from the radio to discuss Robert's new car. Their conversation and the radio chatter are drowned out by the sound of a bomb exploding. By the end of the scene, bourgeois capitalism and war have merged into a single, violent entity—not unlike that of the Bonheur des Dames department store. This bizarre condensation of commodified femininity (the pantyhose, the Austin, the children) and military violence also points to the fragile, uncertain masculinity depicted in the film. From Robert to Juliette's client to Godard himself, men are portrayed as existentially uncertain and dependent—or worse, existentially contingent—on women. We can hear an echo of Gainsbourg's "Je t'aime... moi non plus" (the original version of which was recorded in 1967, the year of the film's release) in this vacillating construction of masculinity.

Invoking the archetypal fragile/misogynist New Wave male protagonist, Geneviève Sellier argues:

Cette figure du jeune garçon vulnérable . . . se construit un rapport paranoïde au monde et surtout aux femmes, créatures incompréhensibles parce que radicalement autres, et dangereuses parce que désirables. La vulnérabilité du héros est en quelque sorte une figure inversée de la volonté de puissance (créatrice) de son auteur. (83-84)

Sellier's contention may hold true in a film like *À Bout de souffle* or *Pierrot le fou*, but the formula is subverted by *2 ou 3 choses*, in which the protagonist and the characters

with the most dialogue (Robert and Johnny being the two exceptions) are female and the “first person” of the film is not the protagonist at all but rather the director-narrator himself (quite literally, as the implied “je” of the film’s title), thereby subverting Sellier’s dialectical conflation of protagonist and auteur.

Nonetheless, this fraught male identity is explored in one of the final scenes of the film, set in Robert and Juliette’s marital bed as Robert undresses and Juliette reads what appears to be a men’s self-help guide. Husband and wife seem utterly indifferent to one another. That this bedroom scene is among the least sexualized interactions of the film reinforces the notion that in this society, sexual relations are relegated to an economic, pragmatic domain:

Juliette: “L’homme d’avenir a confiance en lui, mais sans agressivité... C’est toi qui a souligné ça?”

Robert: “Oui.”

Juliette: “L’homme d’avenir est prêt à admettre ses problèmes et reconnaître ses fautes. Un tel homme ne craint pas de dire ‘Je ne sais pas.’ On a le sentiment que seules les personnes sûres d’elles peuvent admettre un échec.”

The man of the future is thus confident in his uncertainty<sup>41</sup>: a trait that already holds true for the female characters of the film. Few statements made by Juliette are pronounced without a confident marker of doubt (“...peut-être...” “Qui sait...?”)—as though, indeed, doubt is the only thing about which one can be certain. This certainty

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<sup>41</sup> Ross states that “If we are to believe [the depictions of novelist] Christiane Rochefort, the qualities required of the new middle-class businessman [the *cadre*—a certain amorphous adaptability bordering on passivity, serviceability, a pleasant nature, and being on the whole devoid of singularity—amounted to a distinct loss in virility” (175).

about the uncertain underscores the aptness and irony of the grammatically feminine “personnes sûres d’elles” used in a context of masculine insecurities. Robert’s submission to Juliette is symbolically played out as he strips down next to her while she remains clothed and in control of the conversation. As for the notion of the “man of the future,” this paradigm to which Robert aspires, it is important to note that both Robert and Godard himself as director-narrator are fixated on the future—Robert more idealistically, Godard more eschatologically.

Yet, one female character punctuates this overarching forward gaze with a contrasting perspective. We meet the young Colette at the hair salon where Juliette’s friend and fellow prostitute Marianne works. Like the other female characters, she addresses the camera directly: “Je ne crois pas à l’avenir. Je me promène. Je n’aime pas être enfermée. Quand je peux, je fais de la lecture. Oui, et j’aime beaucoup étudier le caractère des gens . . . Plus tard quand je serai mariée avec François qu’est-ce que je fais d’autre ?<sup>42</sup> Un tas de choses banales.”

Colette presents herself as a classic literary flâneur. Entirely focused on the present, wandering, reading books and faces, she is a more rational heir to the narrator of Poe’s “The Man of the Crowd.” And yet her inevitable marriage promises “un tas de choses banales,” among them perhaps prostitution (if, as Robert has indicated, sex is an extension of phatic discourse, then it would certainly fit the description). Accordingly, it is through marriage—the ultimate bowing to social conventions—that women transition from a solitary, intellectual and traditionally masculine form of *flânerie* to an even more

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<sup>42</sup> Note that she speaks of hypothetical future events in the present. The only projected certainty is marriage.

subversive feminine form, working within capitalist structures and upending marital conventions paradoxically in order to maintain their marriage and social status. A scene following Colette's monologue explicitly demonstrates the implications of these practices and the multiple layers of complicity that they engender.

### 1.3.7 Marianne and Johnny: American Imperialism and Death by Camera

Halfway through the film we are introduced to Johnny, a client of Juliette and her friend, the aptly-named Marianne. Johnny is an American war photographer (with an inexplicable thick French accent) who has left Saigon, preferring to photograph his sexual conquests rather than the victims of war. Yet the figurative violence of the camera shutter—the photograph signifying absence by objectifying and freezing its subject in decontextualized/recontextualized time and space—carries over to this new context. When Johnny snaps a photo of Marianne, she exclaims, “J’existais. C’est tout ce que je savais. Vous pouvez pas dire autre chose.” In this Cartesian moment, she refers to herself in the past tense, as though slain by the camera, reducing consciousness and any attempt at self-definition to a bare recognition of her existence. The rest of her identity is retrospectively imposed by the camera eye, representing the objectifying gaze of the Other (or indeed the auteur). The photo is an assertion of dominance, a violation: the scope of U.S. visual domination, first carefully curating the media coverage of the Vietnam War, now come to create images in/of France (*La Marianne*). One of Godard's later voiceovers suggests that this photography-as-violence metaphor is quite intentional and politically charged: “Il n’y a pas besoin d’événement fortuit pour photographier et tuer le monde.” Indeed, in Eddie Adam's iconic 1968 photograph of a Viet Cong prisoner

at the second of his execution by gunshot, one of the most grimly emblematic images of the Vietnam War that would at once galvanize and come to define the '68 era, the camera eye merges with the gun as both objects are triggered simultaneously. “Photographeur et tueur,” then, does not imply causality but, rather, concurrence.<sup>43</sup>

Instead of engaging in a sexual act, Johnny has the women parade around the hotel room naked with TWA and Pan-Am flight bags over their heads. Directly behind them hangs a painting appearing to depict the landing of an imperial power on a virgin shore. The bizarre ritual, seemingly set against a backdrop of traditional European military might, combines signifiers of American consumerism (the airline bags), war (the scene is intercut with distressing images of a besieged Vietnamese population) and “headless” commodified female bodies (an image we can compare to that of the mannequins in the Bonheur des Dames store window, bearing price tags in the place of their heads).

The “ménage à trois” between Johnny, Marianne and Juliette serves then as a *mise en abyme* of the film as a whole, superimposing over oblique references to France’s colonial past an analogy equating American economic imperialism with the violence in

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<sup>43</sup> This scene recalls Bergman’s *Persona*, released a year before *2 ou 3 choses*, in 1966. When one of the two female protagonists of *Persona*, professional actress Elisabet Vogler (Liv Ullman), suddenly rejects speech and movement, presumably as inauthentic means of self-construction, and destroys material signifiers of her familial identity (a letter from her husband, a photo of her son), she begins to absorb the subjectivity of the garrulous nurse caring for her, and even silently internalizes television footage of a Buddhist monk setting himself on fire and an iconic photograph of the Warsaw Ghetto (both images representing a Godardian incursion of historically situated atrocities into the otherwise timeless/placeless realm of Bergman’s film). Elisabet’s refusal to speak/move and her destruction of signifiers of her marriage and motherhood is seen as a symbolic suicide—the effacement of socially prescribed roles that are, in reality, performances of a different order—for, in remaining silent and still, she cannot “appear” (*paraître*) and therefore ceases to be (*être*). Her doctor draws an explicit connection between a failure to perform oneself and death: “Commit suicide? No, too nasty . . . But you can refuse to move or talk. Then at least you’re not lying.” For Bergman, speech, mobility and identification are bound up in questions of authenticity; for Godard, they are imperfect markers of intersubjectivity, relational identifiers that fall short of enabling pure, unmediated communication.

Vietnam. When Marianne mocks the American's patriotic tee-shirt, he replies, "Yes, but it's they who invented the jeep and the napalm," implying a connection between military might and general superiority. Within this exchange, and Juliette's subsequent monologue about Vietnam (that establishes an empathic link between French women and the Vietnamese people), France—personified by Marianne—is strangely absent. The omission signals at once a strategic forgetting and the possibility that the metaphors of capitalism/colonialism have become so thoroughly enmeshed at this point that direct, non-allegorical reference to either is no longer possible. This "forgetting" seems to suggest that the apocalyptic *départ de zéro* referenced at the end of the film is actually no less than the fall—or rather the replacement—of the French Empire.

The failure to explicitly acknowledge the ways in which French imperialism laid the groundwork for the present conflict in Indochina *and* the ways in which the city's spatial, aesthetic, demographic changes also stem from an imperial legacy (Delouvrier, like Haussmann before him, sought to keep poor and working-class populations—in this case predominantly North African immigrant families—on the outskirts of the city) creates a gaping lacuna (*Jalons*). Here, the thematic/historical narrative linking Zola to Godard is broken off; instead, we see a will on Godard's part to dispense with history entirely, perhaps reflecting his burgeoning Maoist sentiment, in order to instead look to the future. For indeed, unlike Zola's Paris, the Paris that Godard presents to us is a place that has been uprooted from history: here, there is no nostalgia for a specific *vieux Paris*,<sup>44</sup> no visual opposition between new and old; there is only a construction site, a

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<sup>44</sup> Take, once again, Juliette's musing: "Personne aujourd'hui ne peut savoir quelle sera la ville de demain. Une partie de la richesse sémantique qui fut sienne dans le passé...elle va la perdre certainement... Peut-être..." The fixation is not on the past but rather on speculating as to what the future might be.

Paris in progress. We have crossed at once the temporal boundary into postmodern Paris and the spatial boundary of the Périphérique, the line of demarcation that separates Paris from non-Paris and those who inhabit it: the residents of the *grands ensembles*.

The film's ambiguous position vis-à-vis France's colonial legacy takes us into ideologically ambivalent and, as Guha would have it, contradictory territory (84), confirming neither (a) approval that France is no longer (directly, at least) complicit in colonial atrocities nor (b) bitterness that America has displaced Europe as the center of world dominance. It ends on a note echoing the conclusion of Zola's *La Débâcle* (and by extension the Rougon-Macquart cycle as a whole, of which *La Débâcle* is the penultimate novel) in which we see the farmer Jean Macquart rise from the ashes of the Commune to return to the countryside, "marchant à l'avenir, à la grande et rude besogne de toute une France à refaire" (582)—the underlying ideology being that a "sick" past must be purged in order to lay the groundwork for a healthy future (a belief that, admittedly, has Maoist resonances in Godard's case).

Amidst rupture, continuity has been restored between Zola's and Godard's conceptions of time and history; though unlike Zola, who writes the past through the lens of the present, Godard is writing the future through the lens of an uncertain present and can only guess at and allegorize the impending forces of social and political destruction/renewal in the form of cranes, jackhammers and half-finished overpasses (the specter of May '68 nonetheless looming large, crystallizing the revolutionary anticapitalist sentiment to be mined with greater absurdity in *La Chinoise*, *Week-end* and 1972's *Tout va bien*, a recognition of the failures of '68).

All of this brings us to the most ideologically-fraught duality present in the film: “purity” vs. derivativity (the former an ideological notion underpinning the naturalist morality of the Rougon-Macquart, the latter a concept coming into focus during the ’68-era transition from structuralism to poststructuralism). This particular opposition plays out in the film’s conclusion in a scene that, as I have suggested, recalls the Zolian purge: in the case of *Au Bonheur des Dames*, the violent plundering of the department store during a sale; in the case of *Nana*, the decline and death of the morally diseased protagonist mirroring the physical decline of the emperor, the French defeat at Sedan and the Prussian siege of Paris that formally marked the end of the Second Empire.

Here, however, there is no such civilization-rattling catastrophe: instead, the final image of *2 ou 3 choses* is that of a green lawn upon which a collection of household products has been arranged in the form of a city—or, more specifically, a high-rise development. Godard’s voiceover has just detailed the amnesia-inducing effects of radio advertisements.<sup>45</sup> Among the things mass consumption has enabled him to forget are: the atrocities of war, the minimum wage and the housing crisis. “J’ai tout oublié,” he whispers, “sauf que, puisqu’on me ramène à zéro, c’est de là qu’il faudra repartir.” Godard, who had long been operating within the borrowed, derivative language of the

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<sup>45</sup> Godard’s violent critique of media saturation and aggressive advertising campaigns that relentlessly assault the spectator with garish images and loud noises points to his early understanding of a phenomenon that would soon come to be known as media *matraquage* (a word bearing resonances of the Algerian Massacre of 1961 but which, Ross asserts, would only be deployed in its new metaphorical sense following May ’68). Ross states that “[a]fter ’68, the word [*matraquage*] is most often used in the context of certain kinds of media or advertising ‘saturation’ campaigns, when advertisement slogans descend like cluster bombing, creating the bland monotony of received ideas or doxa, the whole reiterative logic of ‘the society of consumption.’ . . . But during the year 1968 the word *matraquage* was suspended between its future connotations and its colonial past . . . In 1968 the same word contained both the future announced by its figurative sense, which was just appearing, and the materiality of past colonial violence” (*May ’68*, 31). By interspersing images of war with advertisements, Godard captures the indeterminacy of both the word and the uneasy present that hovered between Algerian independence (1962) and May ’68, deploying this tension to re-infuse the mundane with the political.

film industry and the New Wave movement (vacillating between apotheosis and critique of Americanophilic consumer culture), has finally relinquished—strategically forgotten—these stylistic and ideological constraints in order to move towards an ever-more-explicitly politically engaged mode of filmmaking. His next feature-length film, the Maoist *La Chinoise* (1967), picks up where *2 ou 3 choses* leaves off: in the destabilized Paris of the months leading up to the May '68 student uprisings. Godard's efforts to view the future through the lens of the present in *2 ou 3 choses* have thus proven eerily prescient and effective. His *départ de zero* is then that of a filmmaker attempting to disavow his cinematic heritage and bourgeois roots. It is precisely this rejection of the past that enables Godard to anticipate cataclysmic events and then to engage incisively with them as they unfold, in all their maddening immediacy.

## CHAPTER 2

### LOOKING BACK, MOVING FORWARD: WOMEN'S SPACE, SELF AND SEEING IN ZOLA'S *NANA* AND VARDA'S *CLÉO DE 5 À 7*

#### 2.1 Chapter Overview

“On est laid quand on est mort.” – Nana

“Être laide, c'est ça la mort.” – Cléo

In this chapter, I turn once again to Zola, though this time for a different model of mobile, public woman. *Nana's* eponymous protagonist is a calculating object of desire with a hereditary penchant for disrupting social order. Unlike the hysterical masses that invade *Le Bonheur des Dames* and unlike her male suitors, Nana is neither hysterical nor “in heat” (Zola's words) and instead wields her sexuality to strategic aims. Nonetheless, *Nana* further displays the ambivalent ontology of women we encounter in *Au Bonheur des Dames*, once again blurring the line between consumer and commodity. The novel evokes a “mangeuse d'hommes” whose body can, in turn, be consumed for a price. Yet Nana's ability to adopt a masculine perspective—one that satisfyingly mirrors back to her the male desire that her body is capable of activating—suggests a woman more aligned with Octave Mouret (himself a man who adopts a woman's perspective to better understand how to exploit female consumers) than with the female patrons of his store. Yet, whereas *Au Bonheur des Dames* concludes on a surprisingly utopic note, the marriage of Mouret and Denise symbolizing the union of cutthroat “masculine” capitalism and more humane democratic principles (the latter figured as maternal and thus feminine), *Nana* offers only the absurd reality of an empire in decline, a degenerate

nobility clinging to its last thread of relevance—from the senile *vieille noblesse* to the posturing Napoleonic nobles and their courtesans—and, of course, the looming specter of Napoléon III’s humiliating capitulation to Bismarck at Sedan and the ensuing year of chaos and violence. Indeed, if *Nana* ultimately embodies the dissolution of the Empire, the narrative of *Nana* bringing down the French nobility equally foreshadows Bismarck’s triumph over the emperor himself (the novel concludes two months before the Battle of Sedan): she is thus an indeterminate symbol, alternately the battleground and the invading force, as a result of the perpetual tension between spatializing representations of stasis and a threateningly subjectivating mobility.

Alongside *Nana*, I consider Agnès Varda’s film *Cléo de 5 à 7*, released on April 11, 1962, two months after a violent police intervention resulted in the death of nine protesters at the infamous Charonne demonstrations and less than three months before De Gaulle declared Algeria an independent nation, a humiliating concession following years of similarly violent—and unpopular—French interventions on Algerian soil. In a tenuous age when France could suddenly no longer count on its proud and long-held certainties, *L’Algérie française* among them, Cléo the pop star is a symptom of France’s abrupt transition from a nation rooted in certain sacred yet increasingly antiquated signifiers of cultural identity and national grandeur (as attested in its refusal to relinquish its hold on Algeria, even in the wake of Dien Bien Phu) to a superficial, youthful and present-oriented submission to Anglo-Saxon popular culture and commodities.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> One has only to consider the hundreds of covers of American hit songs, translated and adapted for a French audience, that dominated the French airwaves in the 1960s, giving birth to a generation of cover-happy French pop icons, from Eddy Mitchell and Johnny Hallyday to Sylvie Vartan and Claude François.

Zola's novel chronicles the decadence of the waning Second Empire. Varda's film chooses the growing pains of the rapidly-opening Fifth Republic France and its simultaneously shrinking empire as the backdrop against which two anxious, alienated characters find complicity. Both works are set at the crossroads of Tradition and Modernity, *Cléo* depicting a nation desperately clinging to its colonial holdings and a society holding fast to superstitions (channeled by Cléo's assistant and mother figure, Angèle) while it is simultaneously, willfully invaded by the shampoo, Coca-Cola, pop songs and automobiles constitutive of American economic imperialism. More to the point, the image of the 1960s French pop star—the embodiment of the assimilation of this dominant foreign popular culture—has something in common with the image of the classic courtesan. Cléo's soldier companion Antoine subtly acknowledges the connection when, in performing a taxonomy of Cléo's name, he mentions the iconic Belle Époque dancer Cléo de Mérode, a rumored courtesan (though Mérode vehemently denied the accusation): "Pas tant une chanteuse qu'une demi-mondaine," he explains, misstating her occupation in an apparent Freudian slip that aligns the scandalous historical figure even more closely with Cléo. She was, he tells Cléo, "[u]ne de ces cocottes de luxe qui ont affolé nos grand-pères." There is, of course, continuity between the courtesan and the pop star: both reify male desire and offer the female body up as spectacle (the latter reaching an even broader, newly virtual audience thanks to television and radio) and both are performers of an impossible, false identity: Nana as a noblewoman, like Irma d'Anglars before her; Cléo as the pop star "poupée" manufactured by male image-makers. Further emphasizing the fragility of their façade, both women are afflicted with disease: Cléo's invisible illness is the driving force of the film, a reminder of the transience of both

beauty and life; whereas Nana, the descendant of a tainted bloodline, dies a hideous death by smallpox in a moralizing conclusion that reinforces the metonymic link between the courtesan and the Empire.

To understand how each woman plays/subverts her respective role(s) in society, I will explore Cléo's and Nana's "reach": their relationship to space. Their narratives offer striking metaphorical parallels, notably the metonymic relationship between self and milieu and the figuration of each woman's bed as the center of her universe. For Nana and Cléo, the bed is the site of both social relations (it is from their bed that both women receive visitors) and work (it is the site where they conduct their "business": Nana sleeps with her male suitors in order to build her fortune; Cléo receives her composer and lyricist, come to discuss new material with her, in bed). In contrast to Nana's extravagantly furnished and decorated homes, Cléo's apartment is stark white, the walls adorned only with her jewelry, almost an extension of her body. The sprawling, sparsely furnished space, of course, makes of the sumptuous, centrally positioned bed the focal point of her world. Cléo's apartment, like Nana's in turn, is an extension of herself. That this blank space is furnished only with a bed suggests the reified sexuality and limited identity that are symptoms of her status as a pop star, as well as of a kind of languid lack of self-determination that seems almost a behavioral echo of her physical illness.

But Cléo, more so than Nana, complicates the space metonym—and indeed Varda's typical mode of person/place-driven filmmaking, more specifically—by considering not only Cléo's movement through space but, more crucially, through *time*. Whereas for Nana time is fatalistically teleological—she is doomed to embody the pathological decay of Second Empire society as a festering mass of flesh on her

deathbed—we watch Cléo take ownership of her identity and overcome her own fatalism in real time (“On a si peu de temps ; on a tout le temps !” she tells Antoine in a mid-sentence epiphany), culminating in her doctor’s admission that, with treatment, she will recover from her cancer. Whether courtesan or pop star, doomed by naturalism or empowered by empathy, Nana and Cléo offer a rich and complex depiction of women simultaneously navigating and embodying uncertain times, thereby enabling us to understand how women’s bodies and subjectivities are deployed in fiction to account for, embody or simply—yet most powerfully—perceive those uncertainties in a common gaze with the reader/spectator.

## 2.2 Expansion and Refraction: Milieu, Mobility and Mirroring in Zola's *Nana*

### 2.2.1 Introduction

In 1877 Eduard Manet submitted an oil painting entitled *Nana* to the Paris Salon. Like his scandalous *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* (1863) before it, the painting, which depicts a partially undressed courtesan confidently meeting the spectator's gaze, was refused. Despite failing to garner acclaim at the time, Manet's painting nonetheless has value for nineteenth-century scholars thanks to its keen distillation of the gender politics of its time. Even more importantly, both title and subject anticipate what would come to be one of the most iconic French novels of the nineteenth century and certainly one of the most thorough allegorical treatments of the decline of the Second Empire: Émile Zola's homonymous *Nana*, which would be published three years later. Zola and Manet were close friends and while it is unclear whether the identical titles and subject matter were a case of coincidence or mutual inspiration, the painting constitutes an important visual complement to a text in which looking—and particularly the subversion of the male gaze—figures centrally (Rey 6).

More than the object of the male gaze, *Nana* is a force capable of transcending boundaries of class and gender, thus upsetting the social order in a way that anticipates the events of 1870-71 which, in the novel, are only alluded to as an unanticipated menace on the horizon. Embodying at once the decadence of the Second Empire and the violence that brings about its downfall, *Nana* is an elusive signifier and her constant slippage is precisely what enables her to move about so freely and widely. This section provides an

exploration of the meaning(s) of Nana and her deployment as an allegorical figure through an analysis of gender, space, milieu and the dictates of naturalist literature that govern the novel. I hope to provide a nuanced depiction, informed by historical context and intertextual correspondences, of a character who is easily and often conflated with the hysterical female crowd of *Au Bonheur des Dames*, but who, in fact, represents a much more rational—though nonetheless destructive—female agent: one who reflects Zola’s own ambivalence towards the Commune and his wariness of female revolutionaries. For, rather than meet the gaze of the spectator like Manet’s Nana, Zola’s Nana refuses to acknowledge him and instead directs her gaze at the mirror, the act of looking serving to negate (the gaze of) the Other, the act of self-contemplation affirming her own subjectivity. And it is this unconscious yet subversive deployment of the gaze that enables her to operate at all levels of society as a prefiguration of violence—of negation—to come.

### 2.2.2 A Carnavalesque Conquest

The opening chapter of the novel, set at the Théâtre des Variétés on the evening of Nana’s stage debut, sets the tone for the narrative to follow. The air charged with lustful anticipation, the theater director’s comments about his “bordel” (24) and the phantasmagoric experience of the male spectators—“ce monde singulièrement mêlé, fait de tous les génies, gâté par tous les vices, où la même fatigue et la même fièvre passaient sur les visages” (31)—suggest at the very least a debauched and heterogeneous comingling of men, interspersed with an equally motley collection of courtesans and women of higher standing. Like the female crowd of *Le Bonheur des Dames*, a sea of

disembodied heads and fragmented body parts spilling forth into the jaws of a “mécanique à manger les femmes” (*ABDD* 127), the male spectators of the Théâtre des Variétés are dissolved into “une confusion, un fouillis de têtes et de bras qui s’agitaient” (32) overcome by a “détraiement nerveux” (49) as they wait to be consumed by a “mangeuse d’hommes” (48).<sup>47</sup> These descriptions are consistent with those of the oft-referenced shocks of urban life (Baudelaire, Simmel, Benjamin, Kracauer, Nordau, etc.). And yet the urban experience presented here is less structured by the chaotic instability of urban space than by a single, fixed object of desire. Nonetheless, an equivalency is established between actress and city—both harbingers of an uncertain modernity—in which the latter is embodied and the former dispersed across/into urban space itself.

Whether in the overtly carnivalesque space of the theater, on a pastoral interlude at her country estate, at the races at Longchamp or at a lesbian nightclub, Nana’s diffuse presence perpetually threatens to expose the porousness of class and gender divisions. It is accordingly not surprising that the novel abounds in carnivalesque imagery. The farcical play offers up its shrill-voiced Venus as a perversion of Catholicism (a central theme of the novel) and a suggestion of the decadent decline of the Empire: “on piétinait sur la légende, on cassait les antiques images” (41). In a later chapter, when the Prince of Wales visits Nana’s dressing room, the incursion of royalty into the realm of popular

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<sup>47</sup> The descriptions of crowds in both novels closely echo Zola’s personal account of encountering the discarded bodies of executed Communards (“Les têtes et les membres sont mêlés dans d’horribles dislocations.”), suggesting two complementary narratives that, when combined, foreshadow the Commune: the male crowd representing the crumbling Empire and the female crowd representing the Communards— and more specifically, the pétroleuses (Trousson 463). Moreover, the location of each crowd in spectacular spaces (a theater and the grand staircase of a department store which, like the famed staircase of the Opéra Garnier, is a spot from which to see and be seen) evokes the theatricality of the barricades themselves as spaces that are staged and performed (Brevik-Zender 59-60). Indeed, the motley crowd manning the barricades (Communards were a diverse assortment of revolutionaries from all milieux) and their common ambition to overturn the existing social order also suggest that the barricades were a carnivalesque space.

theater yields yet another carnivalesque collapse—this time one of class distinctions and of reality and fantasy: “[c]e monde du théâtre prolongeait le monde réel, dans une farce grave, sous la buée ardente du gaz” (158).

In addition to the mixing of classes, Nana’s presence in a given space/milieu entails gender fluidity: when the infatuated young Georges runs through the rain to visit Nana at her country estate, she removes his wet clothes and dresses him in her own robe (“Oh! le mignon, qu’il est gentil en petite femme!”) before sleeping with him (189), foreshadowing her lesbian relationship with Satin and demonstrating her contradictory maternal and virile impulses (a duality to which I will return in my discussion of Nana’s competing conceptions of sexuality). Nana similarly rubs shoulders with female cross-dressers at a lesbian establishment frequented by women of all milieux, from the bourgeoisie Madame Robert to Satin and other common prostitutes (265). Nana’s burgeoning misandry is validated by these women, leading her to openly flaunt her disdain for men while publicly carrying on her affair with Satin.

More than a simple violation of social conventions or farcical *travestissement*, the gender fluidity that exists in Nana’s social and spatial milieux serves to violently upend traditional power dynamics. Catherine Bordeau suggests that, in harnessing male desire and consequently weakening men’s power, Nana enables not just herself but *other* women to consolidate their own: as Nana saps the last of Muffat’s finances, the count’s wife, Sabine, carries on an increasingly blatant affair of her own and spends his remaining money on lavish redecorations to the couple’s formerly cold, ascetic home. Her “ascent” can be measured in direct correlation to her husband’s fall.

Sabine's sexual liberation and her creation of a gaudy, excessive domestic milieu in which she can finally feel "chez elle" (102) offer a striking parallel to Nana's own trajectory.<sup>48</sup> Indeed, bearing an identical mole, the two women would seem to be one another's doppelgängers.<sup>49</sup> The resemblance is even the topic of male conversation in one disjointed scene that reveals as much about the willful myopia of the male gaze as it does the more politically attuned prescience of the novel's female characters. As Fauchery and Vandevres observe the women in attendance one evening at the Muffats', the subject of Nana arises, a symbolic incursion of Nana into noble space that will later be actualized. Comparing Sabine's body to Nana's, Fauchery states that, despite the countess's cold demeanor, "[t]out de même on coucherait avec" (101). The use of the impersonal "on" signals a unified yet disembodied male voice that has dissolved into nothing more than a focalizing gaze, similar to that of the ecstatic audience beholding Nana's Blonde Venus.

Meanwhile, a parallel discussion is taking place among the women in the room, with the distinction that the object of evaluation is not women's bodies, but Otto von Bismarck's character. Madame Du Joncqoy concedes with ironic dismissiveness that he is "peut-être un homme d'esprit" (102). The men, too giddy at the prospect of seeing

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<sup>48</sup> During a sumptuous party at the Muffat's newly-redecorated residence, Nana's theme—"la valse canaille de la *Blonde Vénus*"—fills the air, again implying her omnipresence, the scope of her influence, even in absentia: "la valse sonnait le glas de la vieille race ; pendant que Nana, invisible, épandue au-dessus du bal avec ses membres souples, décomposait ce monde, le pénétrait du ferment de son odeur flottant dans l'air chaud": thus is the end of the aristocracy not so subtly signaled (416). Whether by her odor or the music associated with her, Nana's presence transcends her physical body.

<sup>49</sup> Recognizing Sabine's mole as "absolument le signe de Nana" (101), Fauchery's conflation of the two women relies on a semantic ambiguity that literally marks the scope of Nana's power and anticipates her ability to disseminate that power among other women and across heterogeneous spaces and milieux. The mole-sign, then, demonstrates the concept of Bourdeau's all-encompassing feminine milieu. The class-transcending connection between Nana and Sabine is even more strongly evoked in Muffat's fantasy: the two women are incestuously conflated, made equals "dans une parenté d'impudeur, sous un même souffle de désir" by male desire (236).

Nana to care, absent themselves both literally and figuratively from the more topical conversation: “Comment ! encore M. de Bismarck !” exclaims Fauchery. “Cette fois je me sauve pour tout de bon” (102). The conversation figures as a harbinger of Bismarck’s arrival at the gates of Paris and both the competing conversations, divided by gender, and Fauchery’s reaction of disgust and retreat at Bismarck’s name foreshadow the men’s collective reaction to Nana’s death, for which only the women are present.

The chapter that follows reproduces the evening at the Muffats’ with the distinction that Nana’s gaudy home stands in for the Muffats’ residence and Nana replaces Sabine as lady of the house. Here, again, the same men’s eyes and conversation are fixed on the women in the room, whereas this time a different group of decidedly less respectable women speak of Bismarck. The narrator explicitly invokes the comparison: “Et, comme chez la comtesse Sabine, on s’occupa longuement du comte de Bismarck . . . Un instant, on fut de nouveau dans le salon des Muffat ; seules, les dames étaient changées” (120). Bored with the repetitive conversation, the young Georges, like Fauchery before him, tries to change the subject to Nana, but is thwarted as, yet again, “la conversation revint fatalement au comte de Bismarck” (121). The oppressive inevitability (“fatalement”) of Bismarck’s incursion, much like Nana’s own, into conversations in domestic spaces across social milieux serves to metaphorically link the Prussian statesman and the courtesan and to underscore the ironic obliviousness of those very men most closely tied to the emperor and his interests. Yet paradoxically, that women across classes and around the city speak of Bismarck suggests a Greek chorus anticipating with ironic humor both the death of Nana—an event around which they will be unified and at which they alone will be present—and the fall of the Empire at Bismarck’s hands.

### 2.2.3 Nana as Crossroads

I have already alluded to the dispersion of Nana's influence across urban space and social milieux. Now, I wish to more closely explore the three forms of mobility—spatial, social and temporal—that Nana practices with particular attention to the ways in which these three domains intersect and overlap. I situate my analysis alongside a wealth of existing critical works on the subject of space and gender, among them Bordeaux's writing on the feminine milieu and Griselda Pollock's exploration of the interplay between space, gender and representation in modernity.

In her groundbreaking book, *Vision and Difference*, Pollock seeks to understand “why the territory of modernism so often is a way of dealing with masculine sexuality and its sign, the bodies of women” and why it is that, in the art world of nineteenth-century Paris, “paintings of women's bodies [are] the territory across which men artists claim their modernity” (54). This ideological territorialization of women's bodies is seen as a violation. Yet *Nana* presents us with quite the contrary: the spatial expansion of women's subjectivity that encroaches on masculine space and subverts the dominance of the male gaze.

Part of this phenomenon is the spatialization of social milieu at play in *Nana*, which Bordeaux has also acknowledged and attributes to popular naturalist theories of the period which ascribed a powerful “environmental influence” to women (96). Citing examples from the novel and other texts, Bordeaux demonstrates the ways in which woman's milieu is both demarcated and expanded by certain intangible forces attributed to her, namely the power of scent and the power of her metonymic connection to domestic objects. For example, two key scenes depicting Muffat's sensual conquest by

Nana transpire in her loge and bedroom, the two sites where Nana's power over men is consolidated, via "un bouquet de tubéreuses qui s'était fané dans sa [Nana's] chambre," "une débandade de flacons et de boîtes de cristal, pour les huiles, les essences et les poudres" (155) and later "[une] débandade des pots et des cuvettes, au milieu de cette odeur si forte et si douce" (161). Muffat is thus intoxicated by an abundance of competing and converging odors and objects, some signaling feminine sexuality, others harbingers of death.<sup>50</sup> It is perhaps exclusively in the intermingling of these odors and objects that the contradictions of Nana as a signifier are metonymically reconciled: she is indeed at once seductive, destructive and doomed to decay.

Likewise, Nana's living environment is represented as a metonymic extension of herself to the point that woman and space become indistinguishable: her sumptuous apartment, we are told, "était un élargissement brusque d'elle-même, de ses besoins de domination et de jouissance, de son envie de tout avoir pour tout détruire. Jamais elle n'avait senti si profondément la force de son sexe" (351). Her feverish rate of consumption is similarly spatialized, sometimes as a lateral devouring ("A chaque bouchée, Nana dévorait un arpent..." we are told as Nana claims all of La Faloise's properties); sometimes as an annihilation ("Nana passait, pareille à une invasion, à une de ces nuées de sauterelles dont le vol de flamme rase une province.") (447). Her consumption practices, accordingly, also constitute spatial practices, suggesting that the

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<sup>50</sup> David Galand reads the symbolic function of odors in the novel as the association of Eros and Thanatos. As Muffat remembers the tuberoses in Nana's bedroom, the narrator reminds us that "[q]uand les tubéreuses se décomposent, elles ont une odeur humaine" (155). Even the decaying flowers mimic bodily scent, serving to link symbols of femininity (flowers) and sensuality (body/perfume) with death. The comingling of Eros and Thanatos likewise evokes the Freudian (and traditionally masculine) death drive underpinning both Muffat's desire for Nana as well as Nana's own ambitions.

circulation of goods entails a physicality that can supplant/extend physical mobility in Nana's model of movement.

Perhaps most frequently, though, Nana's accumulation of goods is described in terms of conquest. As Muffat strives to overcome his lust for Nana, "[t]out son être se révoltait, la lente possession dont Nana l'envahissait depuis quelque temps l'effrayait . . . [mais il] saurait se défendre" (161-2). This bellicose language (*possession; envahissait; se défendre*) posits Nana and Muffat, an acolyte of Napoléon III, as proxies enacting the impending Prussian siege of Paris. Nana, it should be noted, is also depicted here as a savage demonic presence, echoing Labordette's sensational description of Bismarck (intended to put an end to the women's speculation on the subject) as a monster who feasts on raw meat,<sup>51</sup> kidnaps and rapes any woman who approaches his "lair" ("repaire") and thus manages to "spawn" at an astounding rate (121): a rumor of promiscuity, excessive virility and sexual deviation that, while serving as a metaphor for—and simultaneously a very real consequence of—military conquest, also echoes Nana's sexual conquests and correlating rate of accumulation/(auto-)expansion, which similarly suggest masculine virility rather than fertility.

But such parallels between Nana and Bismarck are complicated by the convoluted symbolism of the novel, discernible in the symmetrical structure of the narrative in which a common refrain is repeated, each time with a difference. In the first chapter, the growing mob of male theater patrons chants, "Nana, ohé ! Nana !" (29). That moment finds its echo in a later scene at the races, when, in an instance of ironic slippage, the

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<sup>51</sup> In his article *La Mouche d'Or*, Fauchery describes an unnamed Nana as "une mouche qui prenait la mort sur les charognes tolérées le long des chemins" (227). The hunger for raw meat corresponds to Labordette's version of Bismarck.

crowd celebrates the victory of Nana's eponymous horse by chanting, "Vive Nana ! Vive la France !" (385) leaving ambiguous "si c'était la bête ou la femme qui emplissait les cœurs" (387). Nana, horse and nation are thus collapsed in an absurd apotheosis of the cocotte and abasement of the Empire. Finally, the novel ends on a note of grim irony as Parisians take to the streets with shouts of "À Berlin !" which punctuate and distract from the women's vigil at Nana's deathbed (469-482). Nana's death and decomposition thus signal a further, definitive shift in her signification, nodding towards the as-yet unanticipated defeat of the emperor and his troops by Bismarck, and the fall of the Empire.

This shift from Nana-as-woman to Nana-as-force-of-destruction (the decadence of the Empire, Bismarck) to destruction itself (the fallen Empire) emphasizes Nana's temporal and ontological fluidity, her figuration as the intersection of past and future—her self-destruction signifying the rupture between the two. Indeed, Nana is inspired to become a high-end courtesan after encountering a revered elderly woman named Irma d'Anglars who once successfully ascended the social ranks to become a powerful courtesan under Napoleon (214). Nana's aspiration to the same social mobility—in this case a carnivalesque reproduction of the *vieille noblesse* in a Napoleonic context—is what drives her to sleep with Muffat, an act that she justifies as a calculated, practical decision ("elle rentrait dans le bon chemin") (214). It also prompts her to put a temporary end to her romantic interlude with Georges, which would not serve her ambitions of social mobility.

But in keeping with the dualities and narrative symmetries that structure the novel, Irma d'Anglars, like Nana, has a double: a rag lady known as La Reine Pomaré,<sup>52</sup> herself a former courtesan whose life took a decidedly different turn and who now wanders the streets of Paris. As Nana beholds the woman's grotesquely deformed face through the window (doubly functioning as a mirror reflecting Nana's own fate), the "face bleue couturée" of the rag lady conjures its antithesis: the regal features of Irma d'Anglars (351). The two courtesans are conflated in Nana's mind according to the same process by which Nana and Sabine are conflated in Muffat's mind, with the distinction that Nana's self-reflexive window/mirror gaze implicates her in this dialectic of two seemingly opposed milieux as their synthesis. Effectively, rather than restoring the feminine glory of a past era, Nana annihilates the signifiers of that past entirely, hastening at once "la mort de la vieille race" (416)—symbolically enacted in Count Vandevres' suicide, himself "ce fils, si appauvri et si fin, d'une antique race" (373)—and that of the counterfeit nobility represented by Irma d'Anglars and La Reine Pomaré.

#### 2.2.4 *La Courtisane de Paris*: Nana as Mobilizing Force

In addition to this tripartite structure of movement, Nana also functions as a stationary monument of sorts: her "chair de marbre"—a reference to both her virile indestructibility and statuesque beauty—is capable of mobilizing the city around her and influencing spatial practices external to herself (49). This phenomenon is perhaps best

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<sup>52</sup> Marie Élisabeth Sergent, a young dancer who went by the same name, was popular during the July Monarchy, but died of tuberculosis in 1847. The name also brings to mind Madame de la Pommeraye from Diderot's *Jacques le fataliste*. Seeking vengeance for her lover's infidelities, the noblewoman enlists a prostitute to pose as a woman of standing and seduce him.

illustrated by Muffat's two feverish walks through the city which frame Chapter 7. At the beginning of the chapter, we see Muffat scouring the Passage des Panoramas for Nana. His desire renders him nearly hysterical, akin to the obsessed narrator of Poe's "The Man of the Crowd," as window displays reflect his thoughts about Nana back to him: he is surrounded by an endless row of "vitres blanchies de *reflets*," containing a chaotic, violent arrangement of items set ablaze ("flamb[ant]") by garish lighting "derrière la pureté des *glaces*, dans le coup de lumière crue des *réflecteurs*" (215, emphasis added). The recurrent, inescapable motif of reflection—of mirroring and of critical self-reflection—offers an unsettling reminder of the power of Nana's autoerotic gaze and the state of emasculated superfluity to which it reduces her lovers. Indeed, when Muffat catches a glimpse of himself in a mirror, "en s'apercevant . . . il éprouv[e] une honte mêlée de peur": the realization of what unbridled desire has done to him (218). As he navigates his way in and out of arcades and galleries, Muffat is systematically driven back into the belly of the network of passages—the Théâtre des Variétés—as though trapped in a labyrinth. Comparing the spatial, topographically reified scope of Nana's influence to the maddening labyrinths of Borges and other twentieth-century modernist and postmodernist writers, Étienne Barnett concludes that "Nana must be seen as the construct of only a center, an unending circle forever turning on itself, void of any axis but its own, dizzyingly auto-reiterating *ad infinitum*" (446). Barnett's description aptly acknowledges Nana's dual effect: the Other-negating force of her sexual solipsism as well as her "auto-reiterating" parthenogenesis—another threat to the virility/utility of Nana's male lovers which, of course, is articulated in terms of a proliferating disease

rather than any salutary and socially acceptable forms of (pro)creation or (re)production, motifs to which I will return in the next section.

Muffat's trajectory through the Passage des Panoramas also provides a compelling exploration of the correspondences between time, space and textuality that Nana—both as a character and as a polysemous signifier—enables. The scene represents a textual and temporal crossroads of sorts, initially glancing back to Poe (1840) and then finding its intertextual echo years later in Louis Aragon's *Le Paysan de Paris* (1926), by which time the space of the arcades has been transformed into a liminal dreamworld frozen in time, charged with a mystical nostalgia that causes Aragon's narrator to experience hallucinations, among them the cobweb-covered specter of Nana herself who tells him: "Tout ce qui vit de reflets, tout ce qui scintille, tout ce qui p rit,   mes pas s'attache. Je suis Nana, l'id e de temps" (78). Aragon's figuration of Nana as the walking embodiment of the passage of time ("  mes pas s'attache") and of the *passages* themselves again reaffirms her powers of dispersion and disembodiment and her frustrating slippage as a signifier.<sup>53</sup> The notion that "everything" latches onto Nana's mobile feet implies that, rather than proliferating disease, as Barnett suggests, or exhibiting parasitic behavior, Nana effectively becomes the desired *host* of a parasitic horde (composed not only of her male lovers, but also of women who, as Bordeau has suggested, look to her to derive their self-determination and their relationship to space and milieu) by fostering their pathological dependencies—which could be more accurately termed existential contingencies. Indeed, as she "voraciously subsumes any

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<sup>53</sup> The "reflets" of the shop windows correspond to Nana's own reflection in the mirror; the "shimmering" goods recall her metonymic relationship to commodities and money; "tout ce qui p rit" calls to mind Nana's dual role as embodiment of the dying Second Empire and also as the catalyst that brings about its downfall.

significance exterior to the being she inhabits,” she negates the meaning, the subjectivity, of those around her precisely by denying them her subject-Leib (her gaze, her own embodied subjectivity) and strategically offering her object-Körper, the all-consuming yet ever-shifting signifier, until her physicality extends to encompass Paris itself (Barnett 446).

After an emasculating encounter with Nana and her reflection during which, fittingly, Nana reveals that Sabine is having an affair, Muffat takes to the street once again—this time on a frenzied quest for his wife even though, in his fantasy, she is merely the derivative trace conjured by the memory of Nana’s body (“Nana nue, brusquement, évoqua Sabine nue.”) (236). As Zolian New Paris—here represented by the construction site of the future Opéra Garnier<sup>54</sup>—rises up around him, “il se réfugi[e] contre les palisades, parmi les échafaudages”: the fences and scaffolding that form a barrier separating Muffat from modern Paris constitute signifiers of a city *en devenir*, of the glory of the Empire (and, paradoxically, of its foreboding incompleteness), but also of the horizontal thrust of modernity annihilating and assimilating everything in its path much like Nana’s “auto-reiterating” body (241). In contrast to his rising, expanding surroundings, Muffat repeatedly exclaims, “C’est fini . . . il n’y a plus rien . . .” (236-237). Though the object of his lament is unclear—whether his marriage to Sabine, his

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<sup>54</sup> Brevik-Zender notes that “a number of links were forged between fashion and urban spatiality” in mid-to late-nineteenth-century Paris. On the one hand, women were encouraged to choose clothing in hues that matched the dust and pavement in order to hide the appearance of filth; on the other hand, the urban landscape created by Haussmann and embellished with steel and wrought iron frameworks, was seen as “crinoline architecture” (9-10). In both instances, there is a conflation of urban space and the women’s bodies navigating it that corresponds to Muffat’s overwhelming walk through the city during which he is haunted by Nana/Sabine everywhere he looks.

relationship to Nana or the old city—Muffat’s inevitable impulse is to return to the Passage des Panoramas signaling a dual desire to recover at once Nana and Paris past, the arcades, as we have seen, constituting an emblem of both.

### 2.2.5 *Masculin/Féminin*: Reconciling Nana’s Competing Identities

I have already explored the ways in which Nana moves about both physically and figuratively across space and milieu, as well as how she influences the spatial practices of others. I now turn my focus to a key determining factor of her movement: work. Much like Godard’s Juliette, Nana’s implication in the economy is complex in that she figures alternately as producer, consumer and commodity. Her position is perpetually shifting and her ontological hybridity as she hovers between subject and object is precisely what enables her to move between milieux. Yet, unlike Benjamin’s prostitute who is “both saleswoman and wares in one” (“Baudelaire” 157), Nana’s cocotte represents something less neatly definable that affords greater agency, for in selling her body she is expanding her corporeality, her presence, both through the accumulation of goods (her metonymic appendages) and of influence (metaphorically represented by the odors associated with her) that she receives in return. The implicit, open-ended transaction of the cocotte, then, instills her with power that goes spatially and durationally beyond the transient offering of a commodified body.

It is the rational bourgeois Mignon whose perception of Nana provides the most lucid depiction of her function in a society whose downfall she is bringing about.<sup>55</sup> Upon

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<sup>55</sup> Mignon and his actress wife, Rose, are a liberated couple—he and Rose’s lover even share a certain amiable complicity—and Rose, like Madame Lhomme in *Au Bonheur des Dames* and Juliette in *2 ou 3*

visiting Nana's sumptuous residence on the Avenue de Villiers, Mignon marvels at a chaotic heap of objects—lavish tokens of her lovers' financial ruin—which converge to form a “monument magistral . . . débordant par-dessus les ruines” (459). It is not hard to read in the description, which wavers between images of majestic construction and demolition, a metaphor of Second Empire Paris. Yet, rather than succumbing to the intoxication of this all-encompassing extension of Nana's body, Mignon is filled with the respect of a peer at the sight of her “travail” (459). By (a) acknowledging the capitalist framework underpinning Nana's conquests and (b) conflating the fruits of her labor (or alternately of her purchases, for in her transactions, the roles of buyer and seller remain ambiguous and interchangeable)<sup>56</sup> with the labor itself, Mignon's observation effaces both the act of exchange and the male buyer, leaving Nana, once again, as an autonomous, all-generating, all-negating parthenogenetic force. His musings continue: as he beholds her body through the desexualizing gaze of a fellow entrepreneur, he remarks “Quel outil!”—an observation that reifies her sexuality as labor and figures her body as the means of production (460).

Mignon's extended assessment of Nana's economic prowess provides three key connections that are central to the figuration of Nana, the structure of the narrative and Zola's naturalist objectives: “Elle, c'était avec autre chose, une petite bêtise dont on riait,

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*choses*, is clearly the dominant partner in the relationship: we learn that Mignon's vocation is as Rose's manager and accountant, overseeing her earnings “au théâtre et ailleurs” (“ailleurs” suggesting less savory endeavors) to ensure their children's fortune and thus the perpetuation of the family's bourgeois status and prosperity (116).

<sup>56</sup> The cocotte economy in which Nana and her lovers are implicated complicates the traditional relations of buyer, seller and goods. In this case, Nana offers up her body to her consumer-lovers as a good/service on the one hand; yet simultaneously finds herself in the position of consumer, deploying her body as the currency with which to pay for the goods and reputation that can only be conferred by her relationship with wealthy, distinguished men.

un peu de sa nudité délicate . . . dont la force soulevait le monde, que toute seule, sans ouvriers, sans machines inventées par des ingénieurs, elle venait d'ébranler Paris et de bâtir cette fortune où dormait des cadavres" (460). In addition to the obvious comparison to Haussmann (wherein Nana's capacity to rattle Paris "sans machines" renders her the superior of the two builder-demolishers), the phrase "cette fortune où dormait des cadavres" anticipates Octave Mouret's similarly described department store, the foundations of which are his wife's tomb (a connection to which I will return shortly), while also nodding towards Nana's own impending death.

But more explicitly this "fortune où dormait des cadavres" evokes Nana's bed, the focal point of her home and of the narrative space of the novel. Its impossibly lavish construction and unending process of embellishment, which ultimately drives the last of Nana's lovers to financial ruin, make of it a key plot point late in the novel as well as a *mise en abyme* for the novel as a whole. And with good reason: as the site where Nana's multiple identities intersect, it is imbued with metaphorical significance. Growing in opulence in direct proportion to the decay of the surrounding society and the waning authority of the emperor, it signals an unambiguous shift in the locus of power: "Nana rêvait un lit comme il n'en existait pas, un trône, un autel, où Paris viendrait adorer sa nudité souveraine" (422).

Yet, more than a throne or an altar, Nana's bed is a multifunctional crossroads of sorts, both geographically and subjectively: it is the site from which she mobilizes the city around her ("où Paris viendrait"); it is there that she receives her lovers (male and female) and thus ensures her continued prosperity and dominance; and it is also there that her maternal identity is enacted, both *vis-à-vis* her son Louis and the young Georges who

alternately fills the roles of son and lover. This convergence of contradictory identities proves destructive, exposing as it does an unnatural synthesis of the masculine (her dominant virility, her perception of sex as labor<sup>57</sup>) and the maternal (Louis, Georges, her miscarriage). For example, early in the novel we see her dismiss a lover from her bed and replace him with her son (“elle le prenait dans son lit”) (115), who is in turn replaced by another lover; later, the innocent Georges comes to fill the role of both lover and son: “Je ne veux pas,” she tells him before giving in to his advances. “Ce serait très vilain, à ton âge... Écoute, je resterai ta maman” (191). Nana’s attempts to emphasize her maternal identity only serve to mark her actions as deterministically perverse, imbuing them with an incestuous quality in the service of Zola’s naturalist ideology.

From her position in the bed as a dual site—one that is both productive and reproductive—Nana thus unites a traditionally masculine imperative of labor (*travail*) with a second, feminine practice of labor (*accouchement*). But the two dimensions of labor ultimately remain irreconcilable and their product is destined to destruction: Nana’s son is, in keeping with naturalist norms, the sickly progeny of a doomed bloodline and another pregnancy ends in miscarriage. Indeed, the two types of labor in question collide when she learns of her second pregnancy: “elle avait une continuelle surprise, comme dérangée dans son sexe ; ça faisait donc des enfants, même lorsqu’on ne voulait plus et

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<sup>57</sup> Nana values the mobility and autonomy afforded by work and has an aversion to idleness. When she tells Fontan “Je travaillerai” (by which she means work as a prostitute) to support them both, the word “travail” is, seen through her eyes, “un mot sublime”; the imperative of work seems to justify her remaining in a precarious and abusive situation, paradoxically, for the financial autonomy and self-reliance it entails (272). Later, as a kept woman, the inverse is true: “[c]ette certitude qu’on la nourrirait, la laissait allongée la journée entière, sans un effort, endormie au fond de cette oisiveté et de cette soumission de couvent, comme enfermée dans son métier de fille. Ne sortant qu’en voiture, elle perdait l’usage de ses jambes” (332). Nana thus conceives of idleness as an undesirable feminine pursuit (qualified as a “métier de fille”) which is both spatially confining and morally oppressive. This sentiment is consistent with her insatiable desire to expand her interior space, making of it an extension of the expansions happening outside on the street, where she and her prostitute friends feel “chez elles” (278).

qu'on employait ça à d'autres affaires ?" (396). Her body-tool has betrayed her by not carrying out its intended (economic) purpose: production has turned to reproduction. The marriage of the maternal and the masculine thus proves impossible, compelling Nana to shed the constraints imposed by her gender (see Footnote 57) by cross-dressing and engaging in homosexual—and thus non-reproductive—sexual practices. At one point Nana even imitates the practices of her male suitors in order to woo Satin: “elle comb[er] Satin de tendresses et de cadeaux” (336) and accompanies her to debauched parties “sous un déguisement d'homme” (444).

Yet even while plying her body-tool in her role as cocotte, Nana asserts her autonomy. Obsessed, much like her male suitors, with the image of her own body, she frequently undresses in front of the mirror, and the narrator specifies that “ce n'était pas pour les autres, c'était pour elle” (226). Upon finding Nana lost in this autoerotic reverie, Muffat is frightened and emasculated by his own superfluity, by the realization that, while money can buy access to her body, Nana retains ownership of her sexuality. Admiring her body in the mirror before Muffat, Nana speaks dismissively of “les femmes . . . toutes noceuses,” employing the derogatory words of a cuckolded husband and thus purposefully aligning herself with a masculine perspective, Muffat's in particular—a figurative gaze that is literalized by her scopophilic/narcissistic gaze in the mirror (235).

The novel abounds in instances of Nana catching pleasing glimpses of her body in the reflections of mirrors, windows and even flames, but the specular gaze takes on a suddenly foreboding tone when Nana observes the reflection of her pregnant body shortly before her miscarriage. She remarks cryptically, “On est laid, quand on est mort,” suggesting that her maternal identity—in this case, physical reproduction as opposed to

abstract spatial expansion—is unnatural, a deadly disease that has already condemned her to death (394). It is at this point in the novel that Nana’s destructive impulses become more violent, more visible as, for example, when she shatters the many gifts she has received from her suitors.

The growing sense of doom extends to the use of naming, starting with Nana’s own name: while it would later, thanks to the novel’s popularity, come to broadly encompass any and every woman (*une nana*) or more narrowly a prostitute, it simultaneously denies any signification whatsoever by negating its referent (*Na, na !*). That her son is called Louis, a name heavy with historical and ideological significance, serves to extend this referential indeterminacy, to make of it a genetic trait. Whether harkening back to the Ancien Régime or glorifying the present emperor, the name Louis in 1880, the year of the novel’s publication, signifies a violent fall from opulent grandeur to decay and sweeping social change. But not only that: young Louis, who is constantly being circulated from arm to arm—rarely ending up in his mother’s arms—also calls to mind another namesake: the *louis* coin. At the races, Louis is tossed aside by Nana, who passes him on to members of her entourage so that she can go collect sufficient *louis* to bet on her eponymous horse. The ensuing narrative *découpage* that splices between Nana’s quest to get the money (*louis*) to place her bet, the race of her eponymous horse, and the ailing Louis’ neglect highlights yet another instance of doubling, this time to farcical effect. By the end of the chapter, Nana, her eponymous horse who, we are told, “luisait à la lumière comme un louis neuf,” her son and his eponymous coin are collapsed into a single, muddled referential device: the first step towards Nana’s semiotic disintegration (380).

## 2.2.6 Disease and Decadence: Towards a Pathology of Male Hysteria

“Le sujet de *Nana* est celui-ci : Toute une société se ruant sur le cul. Une meute derrière une chienne, qui n’est pas en chaleur et qui se moque des chiens qui la suivent. Le poème des désirs du mâle, le grand levier qui remue le monde.”

— Émile Zola, “Ébauches: *Nana*”

Contrary to the prevailing representational strategies of its time (and contrary to facile readings of the novel that portray its protagonist, the “mangeuse d’hommes,” as little more than a pathological impetus of male destruction), *Nana* is a text that undermines the male gaze as it exposes it: a feat accomplished first and foremost by systematically foregrounding the ironic disconnect between the male gaze and the objectively relayed actions and dialogue of *Nana*. The former portrays her as a goddess; the latter as a deeply flawed, vulgar woman—hardly the Venus into which Muffat’s perception transfigures her.

Given its structure that alternates between (male) fantasy, deterministic naturalist commentary and *Nana*’s own dialogue, *Nana* does not fit neatly into the sociologically- or novelistically elaborated metanarrative of the hysterical woman that pervaded the nineteenth-century collective consciousness.<sup>58</sup> Instead, the character of *Nana* serves as a foil, holding a mirror to an increasingly depraved class of men and hastening their downfall, the aftermath of which would later be treated by Huysmans, Villiers, etc.

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<sup>58</sup> From Tarde’s mob-like “female” crowd to the patrons of Zola’s *Bonheur des Dames* to the myth of the pétroleuse.

Indeed, Zola's novel finds its place alongside a number of nineteenth-century narratives of male desire and infatuation, many arising out of the latter days of romanticism and the ashes of 1830 and 1848. From Julien Sorel and Frédéric Moreau to Count Muffat, we can trace a common lineage of disillusioned, emasculated and irrational male protagonists, caught in the same dialectic of romanticism and capitalist modernity that led to the self-destruction of Emma Bovary. *Nana* thus suggests a simmering late-century masculine ennui that stems from the same root causes as its forebear, the feminine affliction *le bovarysme*, and provides a thematic bridge connecting realism and naturalism to decadence and symbolism (this phenomenon is addressed in Chapter 3).

In the case of the devoutly Catholic Muffat, this male hysteria manifests as an extension of his faith. As Nana's beauty and dominance expand to take on godlike proportions, Muffat trembles before "la toute-puissance du sexe" of this "dieu de colère" (451). Whereas Muffat's id and superego (the latter represented by the Church and the nobility) were once safely compartmentalized<sup>59</sup>, his infatuation yields an improbable reconciliation between carnal desire and ascetic piety: Nana constitutes at once his transgression and his atonement. As she becomes increasingly sadistic, his pleasure is rationalized as its own ascetic punishment: he finds in his total submission to Nana "exactement ses sensations de croyant . . . avec le vague souvenir des saints dévorés de poux et qui mangeaient leurs excréments" (451-2). Likewise, the church becomes an extension of Nana's body, and prayer "un prolongement religieux des voluptés de Nana" during which, "les genoux glacés par les dalles, il retrouvait ses jouissances d'autrefois"

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<sup>59</sup> This dramatic oscillation between unfettered desire and its ascetic sublimation through prayer is a common romantic trope generally reserved for female characters, Madame de Renal in Stendhal's *Le rouge et le noir* providing just one example. And, similarly to Muffat's "prolongement religieux des voluptés de Nana," Emma Bovary recovers a sensual, if brief, "volupté perdue" during her last rites (470).

(457).<sup>60</sup> Yet, transitioning away from Muffat's focalization, the narration describes a degrading "soif de bestialité" that leads Muffat to role-play an obedient dog and subsequently be kicked and stepped on in his chambellan's uniform, in what is perhaps the novel's most absurd—and yet potently symbolic—carnavalesque image (453).<sup>61</sup>

The infatuation of other suitors (Steiner, Vandevres, Labordette, Philippe, etc.) is measured by the money they spend on Nana even as their motives for pursuing her become increasingly unclear (in return for their ruinous contributions towards Nana's throne-bed, they receive nothing but humiliation). Interestingly, only one of Nana's male suitors is able to emerge psychologically, if not financially, unscathed from the inevitability of ruin: La Faloise, a foppish slave to fashion who "postulait depuis longtemps l'honneur d'être ruiné par elle, afin d'être parfaitement chic" (446). Indeed, this construction of fragile-yet-blasé masculinity seems to conform to Baudelaire's masculine ideal of a new and revolutionary aristocracy—the dandy—"qui apparaît surtout aux époques transitoires où la démocratie n'est pas encore toute-puissante, où l'aristocratie n'est que partiellement chancelante et avilie" (56). That the young provincial La Faloise embodies an ideal of modern nobility more rooted in strategic performance than noble birth, suggests an adaptability to—and even fatalistic embrace of—the shocks and vagaries of modernity that Nana's other gentlemen suitors lack. Indeed, in performing nobility, La Faloise highlights the absurdity of any and all

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<sup>60</sup> We have already seen the scope of Nana's domination as her influence spreads across space and class. It is then only fitting that she be subject to the same metaphor as *Le Bonheur des Dames* which, in its awe-inspiring grandeur, is likened to a cathedral: "la cathédrale du commerce moderne . . . faite pour un peuple de clientes" (300).

<sup>61</sup> Indeed, Muffat submitting to Nana's abuse while in full chambellan's regalia conjures the image of Napoléon III's surrender and capture at Sedan. Nana's pet name for Muffat, César, also suggests an abasement of the emperor (453).

pretension to authentic nobility in the latter days of the Second Empire: the *vieille noblesse* (represented by Vandeuves and the grotesque, elderly Marquis de Chouard) has long been superfluous and the Napoleonic nobility represented by Muffat is its equally doomed and even less legitimate reproduction. It should be noted that La Faloise's strategic performance, his privileging of *le paraître* over *l'être*, is similar to Nana's own as she strives to emulate the behavior of a successful courtesan and thereby become one.

If Nana's mastery over space and movement enables her at once to subvert norms of gender and class and to maintain dominance over her suitors, the sustainability of her power is ultimately rooted in a careful policing of the male gaze. Indeed, Steven Wilson's description of the heavily policed space of *Le Bonheur des Dames* as "designed according to a logic of circulation, organization and wealth generation, which depends on carefully managed disorder" also applies to Nana's dwelling spaces (99). Like Mouret, Nana constructs and manipulates space to facilitate circulation—of money and of her own body—while at the same time preventing the free circulation of her lovers (lest they cross paths) and eluding them by taking the service staircase or hiding in the kitchen, spaces typically reserved for servants. These tactics, again, highlight the transgressive dimension of Nana's spatial practices and the symbolic collapsing of spatial and social milieu that they engender.

Accordingly, where Wilson initially posits Nana, the "unruly prostitute," as a symbolic prefiguration of Mouret's deceased wife buried beneath the foundations of his store, I am more inclined to support his subsequent comparison between Nana and Mouret himself (101). Indeed, I would suggest that no single character in *Au Bonheur des Dames* has more in common with Nana than Mouret: she anticipates his calculated

designs, his stealthy mobility, the comparisons to Haussmann that he elicits. He, in turn, inverts her spatial schema in order to police the female gaze and women's bodies. And in that way, Mouret is also a *reaction* to Nana, a kind of corrective measure: the oppressive restoration of male dominance to a world gone momentarily askew after allowing the boundary-blurring emergence of women into public space. However, Mouret's corrective measure proves largely ineffectual as the store is ultimately dominated by women: the destructive crowd of female consumers, powerful female employees like Madame Lhomme, and of course Denise, who transcends the obstacles of class and gender to assume a dominant position to which even Mouret, now a doting husband, is subjugated. Even as Denise remains a safely maternal figure, her ability to modify the store's space and the rules governing it in order create a more humane workplace suggests her usurpation of masculine space/milieu.

Taking a more deconstructivist approach to the novel, Barnett speaks of the all-engendering/all-effacing nature of both Nana and the text that (de)constructs her/is (de)constructed by her, stating that the novel presents "no image of other, others or otherness, only the deferral of metonymy" (447). Indeed, as I have already suggested, the narration is so fixated on the physicality of Nana that other (mostly male) characters exist purely as a gaze, a decorporealized reflection of Nana as what Barnett calls an "auto-reflexive cipher of none but the barrenness of self" (442).<sup>62</sup> Consistently scopophilic descriptions of Nana are then merely echoes of her own autoerotic self-perception which, when wielded in the presence of men, usurps/denies the gaze of the Other (Muffat, the

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<sup>62</sup> The treatment of gazing men in *Nana* as "auto-reflexive cipher[s]" and decentered subjects nods towards symbolism and decadence. Huysmans' *À rebours* will later recount the failed rehabilitation of a superfluous (because noble), disembodied male subject.

reader), rendering them superfluous. When the gazed-upon object sees itself and thereby acknowledges its own subjectivity, it challenges the gaze of the Other and, in the framework of the novel, refracts men's irrational desire back at them in an unsettling way. Nana is thus not to be read as a pathological nymphomaniac: as Zola himself mentions in his preparatory notes for the novel, she may be calculating and manipulative, but she is not "in heat" and is, quite on the contrary, indifferent to the men who doggedly pursue her.

### 2.2.7 Signifying Symptoms: A Naturalist Death

The death of Nana implies a return to equilibrium that is ironic because the reader knows it to be temporary and which, as prescribed by Zola's naturalist code, can only be achieved by the necessary purging of a societal aberration.<sup>63</sup> Indeed, in a reversal of roles it is the women who now gather around Nana's deathbed, driven not by a *desire* to see, but "un *besoin de voir*" (474, emphasis added) a kind of feminine solidarity, while the men congregate on the street below, none daring to look upon Nana's disease-stricken body. The traditional gender milieux have thus been safely reestablished, literally containing the pathogen: women return to the interior to keep vigil over Nana, men loiter outside and no intermixing occurs. The once-porous boundary between the two milieux and genders is rendered impermeable by Nana's death and Nana's body is annihilated

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<sup>63</sup> It is surely no coincidence that Nana shares the fate of the Marquise de Merteuil of Laclos' *Liaisons Dangereuses*, who is branded with the scars of smallpox as the price for her libertinage. Also not accidental is Nana's death from *la petite vérole* (smallpox) which is one word away from *la grande vérole* (syphilis), thus at once allowing Zola to reference her sexual transgressions and punish them with a deforming disease.

in/by the absence of the male gaze; the vulgarity which her previously focalizing male suitors had refused to acknowledge is now, in their absence, reified as a monstrosity.

As a character-symbol bound by a seemingly endless chain of significations, Nana's grotesque transformation aligns her with another symbol: the *pétroleuse*, a mythical woman portrayed as grotesque and thus ostensibly containable because incapable of harnessing men's desire—though ultimately containable because she is mythical. Like the *pétroleuse*, Nana can only be mastered as a grotesque, diseased figure, physically removed from the male gaze and from her own, which refracts it. Without it, “Vénus se décompos[e]” (481): Nana is de-apotheosized and emptied of signification as she is moved from her throne-bed to her deathbed. Contending that in death, Nana as an all-consuming narrative device is “de-troped” (447) Barnett goes on to suggest that, in emptying Nana's signifier-body of signification by “decomposing” it, “the novel stands . . . as a challenge to metaphoricity, to ‘by-extention-ness,’ the battle against, and triumph over, figurativity, a kind of anti-symbolist script cast in a symbolist frame” (449). The dialectic that Nana embodies, signifying at once everything (every woman) and nothing (refusing, negating), thus obliterates her body and expunges her voice from the narrative. As a foreshadowing of this corporeal/textual obliteration, we learn that her last role at the theater before her mysterious disappearance was a silent walk-on part: “Elle ne disait pas un mot, même les auteurs lui avaient coupé une réplique, parce que ça gênait” (471). Here we can hear the voice of the *auteur* himself, denying his protagonist any final words before definitively committing her to silence so that the narrative's closing chants of “À

Berlin !”—signaling the arrival of the new and turbulent era prefigured by her death—  
may be heard all the more clearly.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Zola once described female Communards as “brutes,” which Nana certainly is not. Yet he also felt that women who used their intellect and powers of persuasion to incite men to battle (“raisonneuses”) represented a far greater menace, branding them as “d’autres dont le genre de folie est plus grave” (Trousson 454). It is accordingly worth noting that, while Nana does often exhibit the behavior of a warrior (“Elle se donna le régal d’un massacre,” [424] we are told as she destroys her suitors’ gifts), instances of her narrative focalization reveal a much more measured and calculating behavior: “Ah ! comme elle aurait lâché tout ce monde, si elle ne s’était répété vingt fois par jour des maximes de bonne conduite ! Il fallait être *raisonnable* . . .” (222, emphasis added). In her discussion of female subjectivities in film, Kate Ince evokes the dialectic of violence/pragmatism that Nana enacts in a filmic context. Drawing on Irigaray’s conception of a masculine economy of desire, Ince contends that “[b]y behaving badly at least in part because they are driven to by circumstances, [actively desiring female protagonists] might be said to inhabit a zone in which the symbolic and social reorganization of sexuate desire is taking place, and a modification of the economy of masculine subjectivity going on,” which is apparent in “the challenge [such characters] present to conventional civilized morality as well as in the extreme and violent behavior they exhibit” (134). Ince further argues that the “tenacity and violence” of female characters such as the protagonist of Claire Denis’ *White Material* “correspond to the driven, brutally pragmatic kind of female desire Irigaray suggests may reorganize economies of sexual subjectivity in favour of women” (147). In such scenarios we observe the transposition of Freud’s traditionally masculine death drive into a feminine realm.

## 2.3 Shattered Glass: The Subjectivating Power of Empathy, Hapticity and Mobility in Varda's *Cléo de 5 à 7*

### 2.3.1 Introduction

Much as Zola's *Nana* has her pictorial double in Manet's *Nana*, Varda's *Cléo* similarly finds hers (and her inspiration, according to Varda) in a painting: Hans Baldung Grien's *Death and the Maiden* (1509-1511). While Baldung Grien painted several works based on the popular Renaissance motif, one in particular stands out: a beautiful young woman with blond hair and fair skin is depicted smiling at her reflection in a hand mirror while Death, lurking just behind her, holds an hourglass over her head. The skeletal figure also holds one end of a sheer sash that covers the woman's privates, while a cherub—the figuration of youth and love, the beautiful Eros contrasting with a gruesome Thanatos—is enmeshed in the other end. Both the hourglass and the sash signify the passage of time—the latter visualizing Bergson's famous dual spools of duration, though in this case there is only a single spool which unravels towards death.

Susan Hayward has cited *Cléo* as a rare example<sup>65</sup> of a modernist cinematic flâneuse—a female protagonist who resists the tendency of female characters to be allegorized and thus necessarily objectified by the camera's frequent conflation of

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<sup>65</sup> Rare, but not exclusive. Giuliana Bruno has, for example, examined the women “streetwalkers” of early Italian filmmaker Elvira Notari whose documentary-style films, like Varda's, implicate their director and her camera in the process (see: Bruno, G. *Streetwalking on a Ruined Map: Cultural Theory and the City Films of Elvira Notari*. Princeton University Press, 1993.). In more recent years, Kate Ince has cited the protagonists of films by Claire Denis, Catherine Breillat, Sally Potter and Sophie Calle as examples of subversively mobile, embodied female subjectivities. Likewise, the wide release and popular acclaim of Lauren Elkin's book *Flâneuse: Women Walk the City in Paris, New York, Tokyo, Venice and London* in 2017 suggests a growing awareness of and fascination with the phenomenon beyond academic circles.

woman and city—on the grounds that it is her “subjective experience of the city that we [the spectator] are privy to” (27). Hayward’s statement implies that a cinematic feminine *flânerie* is contingent on, firstly, the presence of a female subjectivity that demonstrates agency and, secondly, the alignment of the camera eye/I with the female subject’s perspective. While Cléo does fulfill both of these criteria in the second half of the film, she also, quite simply, demonstrates the behavior of the aimless, gazing stroller. Her *flânerie* signals a kind of spiritual awakening—a new awareness of her active gaze and the critical role it plays in situating her in an intersubjective world—even as the restless uncertainty driving it suggests the movement of a sick body, symbolically occurring as it does in the liminal time-space between life and death (or, put less dramatically, in the time leading up to the doctor’s prognosis).<sup>66</sup>

The very title of the film foregrounds the transgressive, illicit liminality of the time-space in question: the French expression *cinq à sept* refers to the window of time at the end of the workday when a (presumed male) lover meets his mistress for a brief tryst before heading home to his wife; the phrase can also, by extension, refer to the mistress. Yet, even more transgressive than its casual suggestion of infidelity, the *cinq à sept* implies a rupture in *another* temporal expression that, six years after the release of *Cléo*, would become an anticapitalist rallying cry: *Métro-boulot-dodo*,<sup>67</sup> the neatly rationalized routine that would come to define the rapidly modernizing bourgeois society of the *Trente Glorieuses*. That an interval suggesting at best idleness and at worst adultery could

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<sup>66</sup> In his discussion of the function of time in Antonioni’s *Story of a Love Affair* (*Chronique d’un amour* in French), Deleuze states that “il n’y a pas d’autre maladie que chronique, Chronos est la maladie même” (36).

<sup>67</sup> The catchphrase is an abridgment of a stanza first published in Pierre Béarn’s *Couleurs d’usine* (1951): “Métro, boulot, bistrot, mégots, dodo, zéro.”

interrupt the productive cyclical continuity of labor and family—two pillars of the Republic—implies an aberration, a threat to the dearly-held traditional values that, Ross argues, ambitious young *néobourgeois* still sought to uphold, albeit via a more lucrative, streamlined system (*Fast Cars* 167-8). In Cléo’s case, the imagined tryst is with death itself—the *cinq à sept* waiting period enacting a kind of condensed mise en abyme of her life—and encounter death she does, in the form of tarot cards, an emotional ballad, a slapstick film, a café window shattered by a bullet, the façade of a funeral parlor and an encounter with a soldier on leave from Algeria. In the hours leading up to her encounter with the doctor, the passage of time itself is pathologized, only to be remedied by Cléo’s ultimate acceptance of duration (“Il me semble que je n’ai plus peur. Il me semble que je suis heureuse.”).

It is at once fitting and slightly unusual that the film’s title revolves around its main character’s relationship to time. Indeed, the titles of Varda’s films tend to fall into one of two categories: (a) the relationship of their protagonist(s)—and occasionally the director herself—to one another (*Salut les Cubains*; *L’Une chante, l’autre pas*; *Jane B. par Agnès V*; *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse*) or (b) characters’ relationship to a given place (*Daguerréotypes*; *Jacquot de Nantes*; *Les Plages d’Agnès*; *Visages Villages*). People and place are thus frequently bound by bilateral metonymy in Varda’s work.<sup>68</sup> Cléo, however, embodies the space-time of the *cinq à sept*: she is at once the mistress (her lover does pay her a brief visit), the “tryst” (potentially with death itself), and the diseased

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<sup>68</sup> Varda makes this phenomenon explicit in *Les Plages d’Agnès* when she muses: “Si on ouvrait les gens, on trouverait des paysages. Et moi, si on m’ouvrait, on trouverait des plages.”

personification of the moral aberration that the expression suggests. In that regard, it is not hard to draw a connection to Nana.<sup>69</sup>

Because both Nana and Cléo inhabit narcissistic, reflective—and eventually self-reflexive—worlds, I will return in my analysis of *Cléo* to the trope of mirroring and the auto-subjectivating power of the female gaze which I will extend to include what I call the haptic gaze, drawing on the writings of Laura Marks. And of course, no discussion of Varda would be complete without a consideration of the auteure's unique imprint on her medium and on feminist discourse, both textual and visual: her *cinécriture*.

### 2.3.2 Time and Face: Cléo in the Mirror

*Cléo* is a film whose rhythm is punctuated by clocks and mirrors (the “clocks” in question taking the form of various temporal markers, from a radio announcer giving the time to the chapter titles that structure the film). The dual thematic of observing and experiencing the passage of time is established in the opening minutes of the film as Cléo walks out of a foreboding session with a tarot reader. Pausing in the hallway to gaze at herself in the mirror, she remarks via internal monologue, “Minute, beau papillon... Être laide, c'est ça la mort. Tant que je suis belle, je suis vivante et dix fois plus que les autres.”

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<sup>69</sup> Cléo's title, then, deceives. Rather than portraying, as one might expect, the sexual escapades of the modern woman (the kind we see in Godard's *Une femme mariée* or the more libertine *Masculin/Féminin*, to name only two contemporary films on the subject), the title does not make good on its promise. The closest we get to romance is the empathic complicity that unites Cléo and Antoine, two unlikely would-be lovers bound by a common threat of death (Cléo from cancer, Antoine from war). Varda would subsequently treat the *cinq à sept* and its destructive consequences in *Le Bonheur* (1965).

The word *minute*—at once a command to pause and a temporal marker—sets the stage for a number of temporal enunciations to follow, each of which serves to merge objective time with Cléo’s subjective perception of time. Indeed, the very title of the film commits just such a conflation: the ninety-minute film should logically conclude at 6:30 if, as the chapter titles lead us to believe, objective “real time” is to be transposed onto a focalized diegetic duration anchored in Cléo’s consciousness. The title, then, deceives twice over, promising an illicit romance and an established span of time that both stop short of being delivered.

Yet, more than highlighting Cléo’s fixation on the passage of time, the utterance “Minute, beau papillon...,” a variation on the French phrase for “Hold your horses!,” is an indication of her narcissism (the word “beau” is Cléo’s addition to the set phrase). Paired with the image of Cléo deriving obvious visual pleasure from the sight of her reflection in the mirror, Cléo’s “beau papillon” comment suggests an alignment with the male gaze—a strangely flirtatious self-interpellation. While Nana similarly harnesses a masculine perspective, both visually and at times discursively, Cléo’s identification with the lustful gaze of the Other is not a calculating performance like Nana’s; it becomes apparent that Cléo has internalized that gaze. As the mirrors around her multiply her image infinitely (providing a fitting visual representation of the lyrics to a song she will later sing: “Il y a mille femmes en moi !”), this moment of introspection offers a troubling indication that even her introspection is externally derived. The ironic opposition between Cléo’s discourse—her acknowledgement that her continued existence hinges on others’ visual perception of her—and the solipsistic image of her engaging

with her countless mirror iterations foreshadows her eventual transformation from a contingent, *seen* woman into an autonomous, *seeing* woman.

The mirror's multiplying effect recalls Deleuze's conception of the crystal-image which breaks down the subject into its actual (present) self and its virtual (past) double, a process that visibly reifies time, in the case of *Cléo*, as a reflection of the self: "Le temps consiste dans cette scission, et c'est elle, c'est lui qu'on voit dans le cristal" (108-9). If the mirror/crystal indeed confronts Cléo with the passage of time, beauty and youth, her "Minute!" seems an apt reaction. The scission in question is further implied in the scene leading up to her gaze into the mirror: Cléo is shown walking down a set of stairs, the forward movement of her body repeatedly stalled and a close-up of her face replayed from an earlier point as though to suggest a fragmentation between Cléo past and future. The editing is jarring as it is the only point in the film where the illusion of real time is explicitly broken. Also jarring is the sudden intrusion of a musical score (prior to this point in the film, there is no musical overlay): the tempo of Michel Legrand's appropriately spiraling score is marked by Cléo's footsteps with the regularity of a metronome or a ticking clock. Even during the "rewinding" effect, which is also synchronized with the tempo of the music, the steady beat of Cléo's footsteps continues to mark the forward march of time.

In the scenes that follow, in which Cléo walks to a café to meet Angèle and the two women go to a hat shop, mirrors both literal and figurative abound. In the street, she is interpellated by multiple men—some hawking their merchandise, others catcalling her and yet others simply turning to look at her, thereby reestablishing an external male gaze—but she does not acknowledge any of them. However, upon joining her

assistant/motherly companion Angèle at the café, she once again turns to examine her face in the mirror. “Les cartes le disent : je suis malade . . . Elle l’a vu dans le jeu, mais est-ce que ça peut se voir sur ma figure ?” This time, the seam of the mirror cuts directly down the middle of her face, fragmenting and distorting her image and forcing her to adjust her position to restore her beauty and unity. Gone is the self-satisfied smile reflected in the previous mirror; from here on out mirrors are no longer a source of reassurance for Cléo but, rather, a reminder of her fragmented, ill self and of the impossible present in which she exists.

The subsequent scene in the hat shop presents us with a clever progression of mirror play that incorporates the camera itself. The camera is initially positioned inside the shop, filming Cléo looking in from the sidewalk, her face partially obscured by the reflection of the hats in the window through which she is filmed. As she enters the shop, several mirrors alternately reflect and multiply her moving body from every angle; as she looks in the mirror, the camera films her from behind, capturing at once the silhouette of the “real” Cléo from behind and the face of her mirror double. A perspectival dance between the camera and Cléo takes place: the camera’s perspective merges with her own as she gazes into a mirror with measured satisfaction, recovering the illusion of her subjectivity as the spectator is given a brief “window” into her self-perception (for now the fusion of the camera/spectator eye and Cléo’s eye remains partial, still relegated to the mirror gaze). Then, suddenly, the original positions of Cléo and the camera are reestablished but inverted, the camera now positioned on the sidewalk filming Cléo from the other side of the shop window. The shot, once again mediated by this second lens, now superposes a reflection of the city outside onto Cléo: as she stands surrounded by a

sea of eye-catching, trendy (certainly ephemeral given the comically garish style of the hats she tries on) feminine apparel items to which she is metonymically bound, Cléo is momentarily walled in by a window-turned-screen that projects upon her body the very source of its objectification: the city, the public, *her* public. Further complicating the interplay of spectator/spectacle, the interposed screen/window has the effect of physically encasing Cléo in glass among the hats (no longer just their phantasmagoric reflections) and again leaving her partially obscured by them, reinforcing the metonymic equivalence.

As though testing her admission that, decidedly, “tout me va,” Cléo settles on a gaudy fur hat, an incongruous choice for the first day of summer (the film, we learn, is set on June 21, 1961—fittingly, the longest day of the year), again pointing to a disconnect between objective time and Cléo’s fatalistically accelerated clock. Further indications of Cléo’s conception of time emerge back at the apartment when her lover José pays her a visit. “Je n’ai qu’un moment,” he tells her. She replies, “Tu es l’amant *du moment*,” collapsing both the fleeting nature of their relationship and of popular trends (*être du moment*)—from the hats she tries on to her own pop stardom—under a single temporal signifier.<sup>70</sup> Similarly, when José asks if she has missed him, Cléo replies, “Comme on manque le train.” Yet again, Cléo’s language merges the affective, subjective realm with the unstoppable forward thrust of objective time, represented by a missed train. Her fixation on the ephemerality of things cannot be expressed directly. Indeed her recourse to metaphorical language when talking about objective time suggests a discourse and—as

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<sup>70</sup> She performs a similar conflation when Bob’s lyricist tells her that her performance of “Sans toi” will “révolutionner le monde de la chanson”: “Mais qu’est-ce que c’est qu’une chanson ?” she replies warily. “Combien de temps dure-t-elle ?” Again, an awareness of the ephemerality of the popular culture that she embodies is superposed over the running time of a song, and duration becomes an ontological concern.

I will argue in my discussion of Cléo's awakening—an identity shaped by the figurative, euphemistic lyrics of pop songs much like the ones her composers write for her.

### 2.3.3 The Feminine Masquerade

While an obvious takeaway from the hat shop scene is that Cléo finds solace in commodity fetishism, Janice Mouton argues that there is another, gendered dimension to her buying behavior. Citing a practice of feminine masquerade rooted not in Mary Ann Doane's subversive, empowering appropriation of the gaze but rather in a kind of exaggerated performance of femininity, Mouton acknowledges the natural progression from commodity fetishism to objectification: "The objects Cléo desires also adorn her body, transforming *her* into a fetishized object. Here fetishism and feminine masquerade converge" (6). Considered in all its complexity, of course, Cléo's position is not simply that of a fetishized object: her practice of masquerading involves feeding off a gaze that mirrors her autoerotic desire back to her, allowing her to embody both spectator and spectacle and therefore merging Doane's and Mouton's respective empowered and objectified conceptions of masquerade. Yet insofar as Cléo's desire is, at this point in the film, defined and directed entirely by external forces, the rules of her visual pleasure are imposed upon her in the absence of any intrinsic volition—a lack that suggests Doane's conception of a "non-identity" concealed by feminine performance (Doane qtd. in Mouton 5).

Mouton evokes the latter, objectifying definition of the feminine masquerade in her analysis of a key scene signaling the onset of Cléo's transformation. As a female taxi

driver (her gender is a detail worth mentioning for reasons that I will explain shortly) drives Cléo and Angèle home, she switches on the radio, which happens to be playing Cléo's hit single. Cléo is flustered, commanding the taxi driver to turn the radio off before finally announcing, with false modesty, that she is the singer. (The driver's reply—"J'aime bien cette chanson; on l'entend pas souvent !" —suggests that Cléo is in reality much less of a star than she imagines.) Cléo then leans out the open window just as the taxi stops in front of a window display of African tribal masks. As the taxi continues on, the first window display gives way to another in which similar masks are graced with thick, elaborate heads of hair—one piled high like Cléo's own wig, while another billows down like the frilly hat she had tried on earlier. Something about the sight of the masks upsets Cléo and she complains of feeling ill; Angèle's reply ("C'est pourtant tout ouvert !") draws attention to the car's open windows—the lack of mediating screen/lens/mirror separating Cléo from the world around her—as a potential source of her consternation. The open windows also point to a transformation in Cléo's perception. Her eyes have metaphorically opened as well: she appears to be actively *looking* and seeing something external to herself—something that nonetheless reflects back an unsettling truth about her. For the masks are indeed reflections, totemic doubles of Cléo: Mouton asserts that "these striking masks are also fetishes. Once, in their original context, they represented elements in a belief system; now, like Cléo, they are simply objects on display—beautiful but devoid of a life or meaning on their own" (6). In short, they are a reification of the feminine masquerade and the non-identity that it seeks to conceal.

#### 2.3.4 Situating Cléo

If the taxi ride signals the onset of Cléo's transformation, it is also, fittingly, the point in the film at which Cléo's thoroughly mirrored subjectivity is confronted with the very force it rejects: objective temporality. As the taxi drives on and the radio blares, Cléo's song gives way to a news report. Top stories include the latest developments in the Algerian War, a farmers' uprising in Brittany, Edith Piaf's battle with illness, and the latest Cold War developments between Washington and Moscow, headed off by an advertisement for American shampoo. The seemingly unrelated stories and the ad are woven together to form a startlingly cohesive and comprehensive narrative of French society in the early 1960s while also providing a subtle *mise en abyme* of the film: the slow decline of a cancer-stricken French songstress and the perils awaiting soldiers in colonial Algeria collide in a single news update, mirroring Cléo's encounter with Antoine, a French soldier preparing to ship off to Algeria for another tour of duty.

On a broader level, we can see in this sociological tapestry the seeds of '68: a cultural shift initiated by France's youth (the death of Piaf, the paragon of the *chanson française*, coincides with the rise of the Americanized *yé-yé* generation, embodied by Cléo<sup>71</sup>, and an influx of American and British pop idols); growing discontent among laborers on farms and in factories; the Algerian War sowing the seeds of popular resentment towards the French government for its violent suppression of resistance (a resentment that will be sublimated in protests against the Vietnam War, a cornerstone of

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<sup>71</sup> The titles Bob composes for Cléo—from “La joueuse” and “La menteuse” to “La belle putain”—deftly capture the coy superficiality of the genre and its equally superficial construction of women: misogyny tucked under lushly orchestrated pop melodies. France Gall's *yé-yé*-era hits offer some real-life parallels: “Poupée de cire, poupée de son,” “Les sucettes” and “Laisse tomber les filles.”

the '68 agenda); and, of course, a reminder of American cultural and economic imperialism at a time when American commodities were something to be coveted.<sup>72</sup>

Varda is known for making films that are *situated*, indelibly marked by—and often reciprocally marking—the time and place of their production. Roy Jay Nelson points to her decision to incorporate an authentic radio broadcast from June 21, 1961 in *Cléo* as one such example of this situating imperative (737). Likewise, by immersing fictional characters<sup>73</sup> in real, named space (Rue Huyghens, Le Dôme, the Parc Montsouris, the Hôpital de la Salpêtrière, etc.), anchoring those characters and their surroundings in an illusion of real time and filming from a subjective viewpoint (for example, the seemingly unoccupied passenger's seat of Cléo's taxi), Varda constructs the film—like many others—as extensions of the spectator's situation.<sup>74</sup> Moreover, although the implication of real/lived space and time in *Cléo* would seem to indicate Aristotelian unity, Nelson argues that the film's ultimately misleading title provides at best simultaneity, a convergence of diegetic and real time as both are subjectively and similarly experienced, given that the spectator is aligned with Cléo's focalized experience of time (742).

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<sup>72</sup> Ross' seminal study *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies* (1995) details the growing French middle class's obsession with the new cars and spic-and-span cleanliness promised by American advertising.

<sup>73</sup> Michel Legrand, Godard and Anna Karina toe the line between real and fictional by playing fictionalized versions of themselves (Legrand as the pop composer Bob; Godard and Karina as lovers, the former hiding behind his trademark sunglasses). Indeed, even Varda's documentary films foreground the necessarily artificial *mise en scène* of all filmmaking.

<sup>74</sup> Summarizing Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty's shifting conception of the subject, Sonia Kruks states: "The subject is no longer the possessor of private, individual consciousness, but is an 'impure' subject. [This] situated subject is an opening, through the body and perceptual experience, on to a common being and is always an intersubjectivity" (17). This definition encompasses at once the fundamentally intersubjective female subject of *2 ou 3 choses* and the empathically situated subjects—and by extension spectators—of Varda's films. Cléo's medical pathology—which the tarot reader refers to as "une transformation profonde de tout votre être"—then corresponds to her transformative movement towards an "impure" situated subjectivity.

As much as Cléo tries to defy the passage of time, to live and die by her own rules, she cannot escape her own situatedness, her being in the world and in shared time. The fragmented duality that she embodies—caught between a repressed authentic self (Florence)<sup>75</sup> and a capitalist construction forged by image-makers and hit composers (Cléo)—is referenced via celebrity appearances in the film (see Footnote 73), all friends and colleagues of Varda, and of course also nods to the added extra-diegetic layer of Cléo/Florence's identity: Corinne Marchand as the actress/singer portraying both. As we shall see, in Varda's films the world of the diegesis is highly permeable to that which exists just beyond it: the conditions of production, set, actors and crew (the latter often represented by Varda's intrusion into her films, whether physically, vocally or paratextually) are at once deeply imbricated in the narrative of the film and external to it. Having established this duality, I will now explore a similar interplay between film world and subjective lifeworld in *Cléo* and the haptic gaze that fuels it.

### 2.3.5 Hapticity as Complicity

My discussion of hapticity is indebted to Laura Marks' exploration of haptic visuality, a mode of filming/seeing that "tends to move over the surface of its object rather than to plunge into illusionistic depth, not to distinguish form so much as to discern texture" (162). Varda's films consistently weave together two modes of haptic

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<sup>75</sup> Upon learning Cléo's given name, Antoine weighs the significance of both Cléo and Florence: "Florence, c'est l'Italie, la Renaissance, Botticelli, une rose... Cléopâtre, c'est l'Égypte, le sphinx et l'aspic, une tigresse. Non, moi je préfère Florence. Je préfère la flore à la faune." Of course, the floral resonances of Florence suggest a natural, authentic identity, implying that Antoine's presence can encourage Cléo's total unmasking, but his equal insistence on the name's connection to Renaissance art points to an artificial dimension—while, of course, also subtly evoking the film's unspoken motif: Death and the Maiden.

representation: the hapticity of physical contact—a hand touching an object, a hand touching another hand—and an embodied camera eye that similarly sweeps slowly over body parts (often, in her later work, Varda’s own). In *Cléo*, this dual tactile-optical hapticity has two primary functions: to demonstrate complicity between/among women and to highlight the individual agency, the embodied subjectivity, of each woman.<sup>76</sup> In this way, the role of haptic exchange in *Cléo* is not dissimilar to that of language in *2 ou 3 choses*.<sup>77</sup> Both of these functions are established in the opening images of the film, which playfully superpose/interpose the credits over/amidst a volatile landscape of moving hands (Cléo’s and the tarot reader’s), shooting glances (Cléo’s, the tarot reader’s and the camera/spectator’s) and flipped cards. The visual and tactile interaction that takes place between the characters embedded in the diegesis and the names of external figures involved in the film’s production (the actors playing those characters, Varda, etc.) is an example of the aforementioned permeability in Varda’s work between the two aspects of filmmaking which, appropriately, can typically be divided into the visible (diegesis) and the invisible (production). In this case, Varda ensures that both are visible and thus must compete for the spectator’s attention.

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<sup>76</sup> Ince cites *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse* (2000) in her discussion of Merleau-Ponty’s subject-object, which exists dually through the subjectivating, animating function of hapticity by which the object touched is also a second subject touching (66). Unlike the unilateral, objectifying gaze, the bilateral experience of touch has the effect of subjectivating both the one/thing touching and the one/thing being touched via their shared experience of contact and sensation. Varda’s own deployment of haptic visuality is indeed subjectivating but also, in many cases, self-reflexive. When she exclaims in *Les Glaneurs*, “C’est ça mon projet : filmer d’une main mon autre main,” she is affirming her own empowered-yet-fragmented position as both filmmaker and filmed body.

<sup>77</sup> Godard’s scrutinizing objectivism entails a *mise à nu* of the object: “le côté extérieur des choses” he claims, should be rendered so as to reveal “le sentiment du dedans” (qtd. in Deleuze 21). Varda, on the other hand, is content to explore the surface, rejecting the possibility of the object’s “illusionistic depth” (Marks 162).

It is not insignificant that we see Cléo's hands before we see her face, her hands being the key to intersubjective exchange prior to her transformation: initially they engage in a dance with those of the tarot reader, tapping, flipping and turning cards; subsequently, a close-up shows her handing the tarot reader money and shaking her hand, a gesture that she will reproduce with a female clerk at the hat shop and then yet again, by proxy, when Angèle pays the female taxi driver. An economy of women is thus established, to use Kruks' terms, "through the body and perceptual experience" (17). At this point in the film, the former is activated, while the latter is only beginning to awaken in Cléo.

This economy of women, unlike Godard's or Zola's, is rooted more in haptic empathy than monetary exchange. For example, when Cléo bursts into tears at the café, Angèle's reflex is to reach over and remove Cléo's belt. It is an odd instinct, perhaps one that only a woman, herself familiar with the discomfort caused by constraining women's clothing, would find natural. In seeking to soothe Cléo by removing a piece of clothing from her body, Angèle seems to be unconsciously liberating Cléo from her feminine masquerade. After holding a tissue to Cléo's nose (yet another gesture that serves to undermine Cléo's performance of a desirable feminine ideal), Angèle just as naturally reattaches Cléo's belt so that the pop star can resume her public role. There is then a haptic complicity between the two women, a tactile connection that can temporarily negate the male gaze. Indeed, this empathic hapticity stands in contrast with the aggressively interpellative hapticity practiced by male characters in the film. Over the course of the taxi ride, for example, both Cléo and the taxi driver are catcalled by men. When the men's words get no reaction, they reach out and touch the women's hands.

Both women recoil at this incursion of male hands into a complicit space of feminine intersubjectivity (the taxi driver proceeds to talk about her experience of being assaulted on the job) and, despite the gender differentiation that Angèle establishes between the feminine ideal that Cléo represents and the perceived masculinity of the taxi driver (“Quelle typesse, cette femme !” she says of the latter), Cléo and the taxi driver are bound together, collapsed by the male gaze, which safely neutralizes the social transgression of the independently mobile woman.<sup>78</sup> In reality, of course, the taxi driver prefigures Cléo’s transformation into an equally mobile woman capable of defining herself outside of the male gaze.

Cléo’s sole positive haptic exchange with a man—that is, one rooted in empathy and complicity similar to her haptic experiences with other women—takes place during her encounter with Antoine in the park. Sitting on the bench beside him, listening to him speak of the fighting in Algeria and of lost love, she drapes his army jacket over her shoulder, giving the illusion that she is wearing it (over one half of her body) and caressing the pocket. In donning Antoine’s clothing—in particular his soldier’s uniform, the symbol of his own imposed identity and mortality—Cléo seems to be acknowledging an intimacy, even an equivalency, between herself and Antoine. He reciprocates by touching the ring on her hand. “C’est une perle et un crapaud,” she tells him, to which he responds simply, “Vous et moi.” An almost wordless, primarily haptic interaction thus

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<sup>78</sup> Ross states that in 1961, the year of *Cléo*’s release, “only one in eight French people (as opposed to one in three Americans) owned a car” (27). Compounding Dorothée’s exceptional position as a (female) driver is the automobile’s perceived status as “l’ami de l’homme” in parallel to the household appliances that were seen to be “les amis de la femme” (Ross 24).

plays out metonymically via a piece of clothing and a piece of jewelry to demonstrate the empathic bond that has developed between the pop star and the soldier.

### 2.3.6 Turning the Gaze Outward, Recovering Subjectivity

In Cléo's apartment, however, the male gaze is present in force, in the form of her lover and her two songwriters: the men responsible for constructing her public image. Bob the pianist (played, as I have mentioned, by the film's actual composer, Michel Legrand) and his lyricist compose songs about frivolous, dishonest or inscrutable women who lie, cheat, seduce and, perhaps most dangerous of all, elude definition. As Bob unveils one of his newest songs ("Il y a une femme, il y a dix femmes..." he croons), Cléo intuitively finishes his sentence: "...il y a mille femmes en moi !" Sung by Bob, the song is a parody of the inscrutable woman. Sung by Cléo, the song has darker resonances: it is the recognition of a woman's body as the site of "the conflict between the individual woman and the generic image of Desirable Woman, made to be looked at, into which society has transformed Cléo while requiring her to suppress her individuality" (Smith 106). Cléo has exchanged her discrete subjectivity for a role as the generic ideal of woman: in effacing her self to embody something broader, she, like Nana, exists simultaneously as "every woman" and no one. The tension between a conception of women as unique, opaque, transfigured, and as the safely objectified, even commodified construction of male fantasies is apparent, even more so when considered in light of Varda's other filmic attempts to address women's impossibly metonymic

status.<sup>79</sup> When Cléo sings, “Il y a mille femmes en moi !” she unwittingly acknowledges this contradictory feminine identity, which she comes to embody as a kind of infinitely-multiplying crystal-image—the virtual woman reflected *ad infinitum* in the mirror at the beginning of the film—that reflects the position of all women.

But it is another song, an uncharacteristically grim ballad, that signals Cléo’s *prise de conscience*. “Sans toi” is a narrative of lost love that also suggests the consequences of liberation from the male gaze, a falling-away of the feminine masquerade that exposes the void (Doane’s “non-identity”) beneath it. A grieving woman bemoans that, without her beloved, she is “une maison vide,” a decomposing corpse on exhibition (“rongée par le cafard, morte au cercueil de verre”) and worse yet than death, she sings: “Je me couvre de rides sans toi . . . seule, laide et livide.” Cléo’s three greatest fears—death, aging and ugliness—converge in a pop song, a mode of performance that normally serves to safely reinforce her idealized identity. Now, that identity is stripped away by the words she sings and the doomed character she inhabits.

As she sings “Sans toi” a gradual transformation takes place. Mirroring the falling-away of the feminine masquerade, the vivid white backdrop of Cléo’s apartment falls out from behind her and is replaced by blackness. It becomes clear that the

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<sup>79</sup> This phenomenon is addressed in Varda’s 1975 *Réponse de femmes*, a *cinétract* (an activist genre born of ’68) that assembles a group of women of all ages, some clothed, others naked, who take turns addressing the camera (Smith 104): “Être femme,” says one, “c’est être l’unique, la désirée, la présente, la mystérieuse...” To which another replies, “Je suis unique, OK, mais je suis toutes les femmes.” Far from essentialism, this conflation indicates, again, a kind of solidarity, an empathic complicity among women whose individual subjectivities are erased by an essentializing male gaze. The film concludes with a chorus in which each woman plays a part: “A chaque fois qu’on déshabille une femme pour vendre un produit...” “C’est moi que l’on déshabille.” “C’est moi que l’on étale.” “C’est moi que l’on méprise.” “C’est moi que l’on désire.” “C’est moi que l’on critique.” “C’est moi que l’on achète.” “C’est moi que l’on commande par téléphone.” “C’est moi que l’on paie par chèque ou en espèces.” “C’est moi que l’on offre en peinture au désir des hommes.”

performance we are seeing is filtered through Cléo's fantasy and is no longer for Bob: simultaneously staring into the camera and focalizing the camera's gaze so that it projects her fantasy, Cléo is engaging in a confrontation between the actual and virtual. The song's apt, foreboding lyrics intrude into the comfortable realm of performance to lead her to a moment of self-awareness. It is thus only through the collision of her theatrical masquerade with the actual concerns that it attempts to conceal that Cléo is enabled to actively and subjectively *see* for the first time—not only other people, but also the mask that has been constructed for and imposed upon her by other people. “C'est *vous* qui faites de moi une capricieuse,” she tells Bob and his lyricist, later adding, “Vous m'exploitez !”

Following her outburst, Cléo removes her wig and disappears behind a dark curtain, again creating a dramatic contrast with the white wall along which it hangs. Her reemergence moments later in a simple black dress, her short blond hair combed down naturally around her face, signals the entry of a new Cléo and the onset of a new performance, this time rooted in *unmasking*, authenticity and mobility. Mouton acknowledges the particularity of Cléo's transformation and subsequent spatial practices: “George Sand *assumed* the disguise of a man to become a flâneur, Cléo *removes* the disguise of a spectacle woman to become a woman walker. In both cases, the purpose is the same: to look without being looked at” (8). This is a critical distinction in that it suggests the possibility of a mobile, public woman capable of existing as such outside of the economy (unlike Godard's Juliette, Zola's Nana or the female crowd of *Au Bonheur des Dames*) and without the traditional *masculine* masquerade that such feminine *flânerie* was once believed to require. Ironically, it is in symbolically baring herself to/in the

world that Cléo protects herself against objectification. As she leaves behind her apartment to walk the streets of Paris, Cléo becomes a dreamlike condensation of the women she encounters there over the course of her five-to-seven journey: the taxi driver in her fearless navigation of the streets by car and Dorothee, also a woman driver, who makes a living posing nude for art students and who sees no correlation between her corporeality and self. Cléo's own ability to separate her identity from her corporeality, up to now inextricably bound together, will prove to be the key to her shift from object to subject.

The self-body dialectic is alluded to early on, in a moment of foreshadowing. In the opening scene of the film, the tarot reader draws what appears to be the Death card. She reassures a distressed Cléo, "Cette carte n'est pas forcément la Mort. Les pieds et les mains sont couverts de chair. C'est une transformation profonde de tout votre être." It is telling that healthy, "flesh-covered" feet and hands are the indicators of survival for Cléo and her tarot avatar: feet and hands are also the primary instruments of hapticity and mobility, and thus the two driving forces of Cléo's transformation and liberation. Her newly imperfect public body and, more importantly, the self-acceptance that accompanies its exposure form the distinction between death and transformation ("pas forcément la Mort"). I have already discussed the role of women's hands in the film as at once haptic conveyors of empathy and self-subjectivating tools, extensions of the gaze. I now turn to the self-subjectivating, transformative role of feet.

### 2.3.7 Cléo, the Flâneuse

“Depuis toujours je pense que tout le monde me regarde et moi je ne regarde personne que moi, c’est lassant.” – Cléo

In his *L’Image-temps*, Deleuze defines the modern film as one in which:

[d]es personnages, pris dans des situations optiques et sonores pures, se trouvent condamnés à l’errance ou à la balade. Ce sont de purs voyants, qui n’existent plus que dans l’intervalle de mouvement . . . Ce n’est plus le temps qui dépend du mouvement, c’est le mouvement aberrant qui dépend du temps. (58)

These criteria certainly hold true in *Cléo*. If, prior to Cléo’s performance of “Sans toi,” her recognition of the Other is limited to the observation of her own desirability mirrored back to her, the transformed Cléo engages in total empathic identification—with others and, more importantly, with the camera eye/I—in the place of self-mirroring narcissism. In “unmasking” and symbolically baring herself, she becomes invisible, decorporealized—Deleuze’s perpetually mobile “pure voyante.”<sup>80</sup> The “aberrant” mobility that Cléo practices as she moves through space and time constitutes a kind of feminine *flânerie*—aimless yet teleological (she is walking/living inevitably towards her fateful encounter with the doctor), subjective and unsexualized.

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<sup>80</sup> I have already discussed the presence of a disembodied “pure gaze” in *Nana*, notably apparent in passages where the collective male gaze focalizes (the theater, the loge). Yet, whereas the male gaze of *Nana* is aggressively egocentric and voyeuristic (driving the men to hysteria precisely because they can see but *cannot* touch), Cléo’s newly haptic gaze is, on the contrary, empathic and non-interventional.

One of the first people she encounters on her walk is a male street performer whose act consists in swallowing live frogs. His performance is unsettlingly grotesque and the film spectator's disgust is reflected and amplified in Cléo's grimace. Yet the man is, like Cléo, a performer plying his trade before a gawking crowd. Cléo, now reduced to a role as spectator, is horrified by what she beholds and, more importantly, by her identification with her fellow man-spectacle. Shortly thereafter Cléo encounters a second street performer: this time, a man impaling his bicep with a large needle. Both figures, filmed partially from a subjective viewpoint in the crowd, appear as Cléo's ghastly doubles and grotesque metaphors of her ailing body, invaded by disease and a scrutinizing external gaze: the frog swallower consumes frogs with the same avidity that Cléo consumes the accessories constituting her masquerade; his subsequent regurgitation suggests an unwelcome visual manifestation of Cléo's stomach cancer (shortly after encountering the two performers she tells Dorothée of her relief that her cancer is located in a place where it cannot be seen: "J'aime mieux là qu'ailleurs. Au moins ça ne se voit pas"). The self-mutilator in turn suggests the self-destructive (or in Cléo's case, *reconstructive*) nature of embodying spectacle. Whereas he publicly defaces his own body for the entertainment of others, Cléo allows others to construct and control the public body/persona that she inhabits.

We know that these spectacles affect Cléo, for it is following her encounter with the frog swallower that the camera (and spectator's) eye first merges with Cléo's perspective. The point-of-view shot occurs as Cléo walks purposefully into Le Dôme café and selects her song on the jukebox. It is one last incursion of Cléo the pop star into a complex web of actuality/*actualité*. As the music blares and Cléo/the camera make their

way around the café unnoticed, the joint perspective of Cléo and the spectator is privy to fragments of conversations on the absurdity French policy in Algeria, a conference on surrealism, family reunions, Miro and Picasso, the decadence of poetry, and so on. We are once again made aware of time, but here less via clocks and chapter titles than by a sampling of the ambient zeitgeist (more specifically, the artistic-intellectual current particular to Montparnasse) and current events.<sup>81</sup>

In overpowering these conversations with the sound of her voice to generate two competing actualities/*actualités*, Cléo forcibly inserts herself into this intersubjective space all while maintaining her anonymity (she puts on sunglasses to render herself unrecognizable)<sup>82</sup> and thereby separating herself from the woman singing on the jukebox.

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<sup>81</sup> Varda revisits this scene in *Sans toit ni loi* (1985). The film's protagonist, a young vagrant named Mona with no backstory, enters a café which, like *Le Dôme*, has a mirror. Mona passes behind it to take a seat at the bar and stares purposefully at a male patron until he orders her a sandwich. She then crosses the café once again to put a song on the jukebox (the apt "À Contre Courant" by Valérie Lagrange), examining the patrons, like Cléo, as she walks back and forth, and then pauses beside the mirror, instead directing her gaze vaguely, indifferently towards the camera/spectator. The only time in the film that she confronts a mirror is when squatting in a partially-abandoned estate. Upon finding a dust-covered mirror, she traces her name on the glass, only for it to be immediately erased by her boyfriend who scolds her: "Pas de traces. Ni vu, ni connu." Indeed, as Varda's narrator informs us after Mona's death, Mona adhered strictly to this credo: "Cette morte de mort naturelle ne laissait pas de trace." Unlike Cléo, Mona is entirely self-determined. Various people she encounters intervene in her life, but no one successfully wields influence over her. Instead, she transiently inscribes her presence—on the mirror, on the landscape she wanders across and in the lives of the strangers she encounters—without allowing herself to be inscribed in turn, and thus to be fixed in time and space. "Moi, poser ? Moi, *poser* ?" she asks incredulously when a male vagrant talks of getting her a modeling job. Her reaction captures at once her revulsion at the prospect of being a woman-spectacle and her inability to *se poser*: to stop moving, settle down. If Cléo the pop star cannot bear the idea of living "sans toi," Mona the vagabond requires an existence that is not only "sans toi" (void of the defining gaze of the Other) but also, as the film's title homophonically suggests, "sans toit"—mobile, liberated. We see the beginnings of such a self-determination as Cléo strolls the streets of Paris, but Mona embodies its most extreme realization. Her evasion of mirrors and seemingly erased past—she claims to have lost her only form of identification, her birth certificate—suggest a totally actualized (and *actuel*) subject, existing entirely in the present.

<sup>82</sup> The sunglasses, of course, will be referenced shortly thereafter in the short film *Cléo watches*. Godard's character can only see doom and gloom from behind his "black" sunglasses. Indeed, Varda has criticized Godard's habit of hiding behind sunglasses as a way of creating a barrier to human connection, a topic she explores in *Visages Villages*.

Indeed, as if to confirm the scission between Cléo the spectacle and Cléo the flâneuse, Cléo leaves the café rather than sit and observe the public's reaction to this aural intrusion. It is as she leaves and strolls down the boulevard that we see the symbolic correspondence between hands (correlating to the haptic gaze) and feet (the movement of which enables that gaze). As her eyes once again merge with the camera eye, this time yielding a more durable tracking shot, Cléo becomes one with the instruments of filmmaking<sup>83</sup>; she becomes *une femme-travelling*, a wandering camera-woman, her feet serving as extensions and enablers of her gaze. In fact, this dual act of looking while walking perfectly instantiates Marks' conception of the haptic gaze as a kind of visual grazing.

Yet, the spectator's focalized perception of Cléo's walk is not simply haptic; it is also a product of Cléo's mind's eye which mixes past and present, virtual and actual: memories of people, frozen in time and space—Angèle, Bob, the tarot reader, the frog swallower, a random man in the street—compete with images of Cléo's present surroundings and a ticking clock, a reminder that even the unending chain of successive presents are quickly subsumed into the past. In keeping with Varda's conception of hapticity as a necessarily bilateral and subjectivating experience, fleetingly returned gazes from the past and present are intercut into a montage of looking subjects.

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<sup>83</sup> Lauren Elkin acknowledges the liberating agency that is implied by Cléo's perspectival fusion with the camera and argues that this freedom transcends the diegesis to encompass the filmmaker as well: "It is Varda we imagine behind the camera, even if she is not the camera operator, Varda who determines where the camera will go, and when, and what it will capture. It is powerful to see the evolution of a flâneuse in front of the camera, but every step Cléo takes reminds us of the one *behind* the camera" (220). I have already suggested such a fluidity between diegesis and production in Varda's films, particularly her documentaries; in *Cléo* the acknowledgment of Varda's own hand in the film is largely implied—often, appropriately, by the movement of other women's hands.

Cléo reemerges in front of the camera as she meets Dorothee, who is posing nude for an art class. When Cléo expresses wonderment over her friend's career choice (in Cléo's "Mais vraiment, ça te gêne pas de poser ?" we hear an echo of her earlier remark to the taxi driver: "Et la nuit, vous n'avez pas peur la nuit ?"), Dorothee replies, "Quand ils me regardent je sais bien qu'ils cherchent autre chose que moi : une forme, une idée, je ne sais pas. Alors c'est comme si je m'absentais, comme si je dormais." It is then precisely in exhibiting—literally baring—her body that Dorothee is liberated from the externally imposed signification of her corporeality, much in the same way that Cléo's "unmasked" walking liberates her from the oppression of a publicly scrutinized body, making of her a "pure voyante." More crucially, Dorothee's self-awareness allows her to separate the aesthetic or sexual ideal her body represents to others—a vessel of meanings subject to the personal hermeneutics of each individual who beholds it—from her subjectivity. Antoine later echoes Dorothee's division of body and self. Acknowledging women's hesitation to "give" of themselves emotionally, he states that "leur corps, c'est comme un joujou, ce n'est pas leur vie."

After accompanying Dorothee to the cinema to watch a short film—the scene and the short film itself serving as a dual *mise en abyme* of her transformation, reaffirming her new role as spectator both directly and through the proxy of Jean-Luc Godard's protagonist who is blinded by his sunglasses<sup>84</sup>—she once again passes by Le Dôme to discover that one of the café's windows has been shattered by a bullet, the trace of a

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<sup>84</sup> Nelson points out that the short film is "shot at sixteen frames per second and projected at twenty-four. The apparently rapid gestures of the actors remind us that time speed is a matter of perception" (737). Nelson's observation, of course, brings to mind the famous quote from Godard's *Le Petit Soldat* (1963): "La photographie c'est la vérité. Et le cinéma c'est vingt-quatre fois la vérité par seconde." For Varda, of course, that truth is subjective.

violent act. Then, moments later, Dorothée drops her pocket mirror and it, too, shatters. The camera zooms in on the image of Cléo's eye reflected in a shard of glass. The recurring image of shattered mirrors and the fragmented pieces of Cléo that they reflect suggest the destruction of Cléo's virtual double (Cléo-past) and the consequent spatial, temporal and ontological liberation of Cléo-present. Indeed, Deleuze evokes as much in his analysis of the funhouse mirror scene from *The Lady from Shanghai*. The confrontation between Elsa (Rita Hayworth) and her husband (Everett Sloane) represents "l'image-cristal parfait où les miroirs multipliés ont pris l'actualité des deux personnages qui ne pourront la reconquérir qu'en les brisant tous, se retrouvant côte à côte et se tuant l'un l'autre" (95).

Cléo's liberation is not, in fact, violent, nor is she subject to the same predetermined destruction as Nana; on the contrary, Cléo's prognosis is one of hope and healing. While Nana, as an allegorically charged character, must surrender her mastery over her corporeality to the ravages of a symbolic disease, Cléo reclaims ownership of both her body and her identity (supported in the latter by Antoine, who insists on calling her by her birthname, Florence) thanks to the prospect of human connection that her encounter with Antoine has opened. Yet, the film's conclusion cannot be said to be entirely positive: if Cléo will ultimately heal, Antoine must still deploy to Algeria where a less certain and more violent fate awaits him. When the pair exchanges glances in the closing shot of the film, Cléo smiles and says, "Il me semble que je n'ai plus peur. Il me semble que je suis heureuse." Antoine, however, remains silent and appears uncertain: a reminder that the characters' Deleuzian *actualité* is, for better or for worse, also bound up in the *actualité* (current events) surrounding them.

### 2.3.8 Varda's *Cinécriture*: the *Caméra-stylo* Meets *Écriture féminine*

Over ten years prior to the release of *Cléo de 5 à 7*, director and film critic Alexandre Astruc published two essays that anticipated the practices of the French New Wave and, more specifically, Varda's own. The first, published in 1947, speaks of the possibility of a "camera-I": the perspectival fusion of character and camera which, first used for gag effect in *Lady in the Lake* (1946), seemed Brechtian in its jarring and limited point of view (Astruc bemoans the fact that "les auteurs ont eu sans doute dans l'idée de faire monter le spectateur sur l'écran. Ils n'ont réussi qu'à faire descendre l'acteur dans la salle."), yet Astruc remained optimistic that the technique could be used to convey introspection in adaptations of modernist novels (316). Varda, we have seen, later appropriated the technique, using it as a means of focalization and imbuing the camera's gaze with hapticity and empathy that engage the spectator rather than alienate him or her.

The following year, Astruc once again took up innovations in filmmaking, this time invoking the "caméra-stylo," an early acknowledgement of the director as auteur that predates Truffaut's iconic 1954 manifesto on the subject, "Une certaine tendance du cinéma français." Yet Astruc's criteria for a director's author-ity are decidedly more textual—and more haptic—than Truffaut's: "Toute pensée, comme tout sentiment, est un rapport entre un être humain et un autre être humain ou certains objets qui font partie de son univers. C'est en expliquant ces rapports, en en dessinant la trace tangible, que le cinéma peut se faire véritablement le lieu d'expression d'une pensée" (327). It is then in practicing a form of filmmaking that renders the intangible ties of intersubjectivity *tangible* (visible) and externalizes consciousness (intersubjectivity and consciousness being, for Astruc, inextricably bound) that "[l]'auteur écrit avec sa caméra comme un

écrivain écrit avec un stylo” (327). Astruc’s call for the tangible/visible reification of the invisible and the implicit equivalence he draws between the tangible and the visual, which suggests haptic visuality, closely echo Alison Smith’s more contemporary analysis of the surrealist *objet trouvé* in Varda’s films: close-ups of objects that metonymically “become images of the characters’ sensations” and, moreover, serve as “a powerful catalyst which crystallizes the unconscious or semi-unconscious preoccupations of the finder” (27-28). The sudden static, decontextualized rupture they represent in an otherwise mobile, situated narrative brings about an awakening: Cléo’s taxi ride is interrupted by the sight of the tribal masks; her stroll is interrupted by the shattered window and the shattered pocket mirror; her bus ride to the hospital is interrupted by the contradictory sights of a funeral parlor and a premature baby—all of which serve as revelatory *objets trouvés*, moving Cléo towards self-realization.

More importantly, Astruc’s attempt to elaborate a definition of the auteur anticipates Varda’s own directorial manifesto on what she calls, in an echo of the *caméra-stylo, la cinécriture*: “Un film bien écrit est également bien tourné, les acteurs sont bien choisis, les lieux aussi . . . En écriture c’est le style. Au cinéma, le style c’est la cinécriture” (14). Yet, as we have seen, Varda’s *cinécriture* has a gendered dimension that is absent from Astruc’s (or Truffaut’s) conceptions of auteur-ship. In the context of Varda’s work and its keen attention to female subjectivities—notably the interplay between empathically writing women’s bodies on film and filming women’s bodies as they write themselves through their haptic and spatial practices—Astruc’s conceptions of a first-person camera and a *caméra-stylo* are folded into Cixous’ *écriture féminine*: Varda the auteure is a woman writing herself—and other women—into/onto film (37). And

*Cléo* is one of Varda's earliest and most iconic examples of this practice. I conclude by returning to Elkin's image of the double flâneuse in *Cléo* wherein the act of watching Cléo's evolution before the camera elicits a parallel awareness of the authorial flâneuse behind the camera: two writing/written bodies are separated by a camera-pen until they merge—with each other and with the spectator—to tell the dual narratives of a woman learning to look and another to film.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Indeed, Varda is a photographer by training who came to filmmaking somewhat fortuitously, undergoing a largely autodidactic initiation (nonetheless bolstered by her Left Bank affiliation, which saw Alain Resnais' involvement in the production of her first film, *La Pointe Courte*). Over the course of her career, she experimented with various modes of filming including, famously, a digital camera (*Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse*), which allowed her to assume the role of camerawoman and thus film from her own perspective with freer and more spontaneous mobility.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE PARADOXICAL WOMAN AND THE UNDOING OF THE MALE IMAGINARY IN VILLIERS' *L'ÈVE FUTURE* AND RESNAIS' *JE T'AIME, JE T'AIME*

#### 3.1 Chapter Overview

At the beginning of Villiers de L'Isle-Adam's *conte cruel* "Le Désir d'être un homme" (1883), a renowned actor contemplates his aging body in the mirror of a building façade as the chaos of the Paris Commune's midnight curfew roundup unfolds around him. The scene depicts an incongruous moment of solitary stillness against the bustling external temporality of the Commune; it also forms an unlikely correspondence with the scene of *Cléo de 5 à 7* in which Cléo pauses to examine herself in the mirror, clinging to her youth and beauty in the face of illness and passing time (see Chapter 2). The similarities do not end there. While looking into the mirror, Villiers' idealist actor, appropriately named Esprit Chaudval, comes to the realization that, having spent his life embodying others, he has never actually *felt* emotions himself; he has merely performed them. Resolved to remedy this deficiency which, he feels, has made of him "une ombre" (96) and hindered his ability "d'être un homme" (98) (one can read in *homme* at once humanity and masculinity), he decides to set fire to a building in a crowded, poor neighborhood in order to experience the feeling of remorse: "C'est dit.—Et maintenant—acheva le grand artiste en ramassant un pavé après avoir regardé autour de lui pour s'assurer de la solitude environnante—et maintenant, toi, tu ne refléteras plus personne" (98). The act of shattering the mirror in order to liberate an actualized (in Chaudval's case non-ideational) subjectivity, of course, functions quite similarly to the trope of shattered

glass in *Cléo*, though Chaudval's moment of clarity finds its most immediate echo in Cléo's epiphanous rendition of "Sans toi." That Chaudval commits this act with a stray cobblestone—which, given the timing and setting of the story, one can infer, would have been the remnant of a barricade—serves to merge an actualized subjectivity with the surrounding political *actualité*, thereby inscribing the solipsist, not without irony, into a broader historical narrative, much in the same way that Cléo navigates a Paris marked by reminders of the Algerian War and rampant modern consumer culture.

However, unlike Cléo, whose shattered crystal-image makes of her an empathic, social and self-aware being, Chaudval's destruction of his own "cristal cruel et sombre" (92) leaves him even more solipsistically isolated than before. The crime he goes on to commit fails to produce any emotion in him: "Peines perdues ! Attentats stériles ! Vains efforts ! Il n'éprouvait *rien*" (102). God having denied him his wish to feel emotion, Chaudval retreats to an abandoned lighthouse where he lurks as an impotent specter for the rest of his days. And it is precisely here, in this deterministic realm where idealism—even of the most violent nature—is brandished futilely as a weapon against a mundane and inauthentic world, that Villiers sets his most famous novel, *L'Ève future* (1886): the story of two men, an inventor and an aristocrat, using artifice to replace artifice and revolting against bourgeois positivism with an impossibly idealist form of positivism. Though the novel bears the tropes of science fiction—an inventor, an experiment, an android—and is accordingly often classified as such, it owes less to Jules Verne than to Hegel and the German Romantics. Indeed, a backdrop of advanced technology is merely a canvas, described in symbolist terms, onto which the idealism of a fragile male imaginary is projected. It is a paradoxical attempt to manufacture a more "natural"

woman; and a reactionary effort to harness the technology of the future as a means of recovering an outdated and misogynistic form of romanticism.

Just over eighty years later, Alain Resnais' film *Je t'aime, je t'aime* (1968) took spectators to a similarly hybrid universe furnished with the signifiers of science, yet ultimately dominated by the consciousness of its protagonist, a suicidal man who is whisked to and from various moments from his past. For the blasé Claude Ridder, however, there are no stakes in the experiment: there is no past to recover, save the rectification of his failed suicide attempt.

Both the novel and the film engage obliquely with chaotic times, for the stakes in each are not so much political as personal: the crisis of men who have become superfluous and the women who have ostensibly made them so,<sup>86</sup> from Lord Ewald, a noble in an era of Republicanism, to Ridder, an unambitious office worker and, eventually, aphasic writer in the era of the dynamic *homme d'avenir* and *jeune cadre* (see Chapter 1). It is, then, appropriate that Claude Ridder is whisked back to his past in order to realize (or rather, to negate) his future by “correcting” his failed suicide. Like Ewald, Ridder, as played by Claude Rich, is a man out of place in his time, carrying himself with the incongruous “flegme britannique” of a dandy (Leutrat and Liandrat-Guigues 83). Both narratives feature men in the throes of a crisis of masculinity, haunted by women—though mostly by their ideation of those women, via projection or memory.

At first glance, the catlike, atavistic Catrine and the idealized android Hadaly seem at antipodes. Yet, through the intermediary of the mystical entity Sowana, Hadaly

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<sup>86</sup> Of course, the underlying reasons for this seismic shift in gender roles are ultimately rooted in a broader sociopolitical reality.

comes to evoke the spectral and perceptive “somnambule” that Catrine embodies in Ridder’s memories. While the former is an unsettling simulacrum which annihilates its original (as it turns out, Ewald himself as the will who has created her), the latter is threatening simply because she is stripped of all artifice, representing a pure, originary and destructive force of nature.

Resnais’ film, true to Jacques Sternberg’s screenplay, reconciles the banal and the fantastical, and transposes the simmering anguish from the epic historical tragedies of his earlier films onto a stifling domestic interior and a single tortured consciousness. Villiers’ novel, though superficial and idealist in its scope and intent, shatters numerous dualities underpinning the metanarrative of nineteenth-century French society: masculinity/femininity, realism/idealism, solipsism/love, objectivity/subjectivity, bourgeoisie/nobility. If in both works all is fatalistic illusion, Ridder’s consciousness supersedes reality in order to actualize that illusion; in Ewald’s case, God alone is in control.

### 3.2 “Cette Monstruosité Sublime”: Artifice and Fragile Masculinities in Villier’s

#### *L’Ève future*

##### 3.2.1 Introduction

If Zola was the faithful and fiercely positivist scribe of his era, Villiers de L’Isle-Adam was quite the opposite. The proud descendent of a noble bloodline (though the legitimacy of his claim to the L’Isle-Adam name is dubious), Villiers eschewed the bourgeois ideology underpinning realism and naturalism in favor of a complex form of idealism rooted in a number of contradictory philosophies: Hegelianism, Catholicism and his own doctrine of illusionism. Rather than narrativize the material reality of bourgeois society, Villiers rejected that reality and that mode of representation entirely: a disavowal with classist and countercultural resonances that assumed a political dimension during the Commune.<sup>87</sup> Thus would he come to be viewed as a founding member of the French symbolist movement, in spite of his resistance to aesthetic affiliation. Though initially publishing sparingly and falling into penniless obscurity over the course of the 1870s, Villiers experienced a revival of sorts in 1884 when J.-K. Huysmans cited him in *À Rebours* as a favorite author of the novel’s decadent protagonist Des Esseintes. Around that time, Villiers resumed writing prolifically and his published works met with some

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<sup>87</sup> Though Villiers, a royalist, believed that French history came to a halt in 1789 (Raitt 15), he did recognize that the Revolution, while sowing the seeds of a bourgeois society, also paved the way for the People to revolt against its excesses. In his description of a concert organized at the Tuileries garden during the Commune, he muses, “Et c’était plein de grandeur de voir, enfin, des femmes à toilettes modestes et des hommes aux yeux francs passer sous ces mêmes voûtes où l’adultère, l’hypocrisie, le meurtre, l’exaction et la torture s’étaient promenés depuis tant de siècles, le diadème au front et le respect de l’univers au pied” (*Tableau 56*).

success—perhaps above all, as Alan Raitt has suggested, an indication that *fin-de-siècle* French readers were looking for an escape from the formulaic banality of the period’s ubiquitous realist and naturalist novels (*Villiers* 31).

Indeed, by the time the final version of *L’Ève future* was published in 1886<sup>88</sup> Villiers had consolidated his place in French literature as a bridge between early-nineteenth-century Romantics like Chateaubriand and Parnassian Symbolists like Rimbaud and Verlaine (Raitt *Villiers* 147). Yet, for all of Villiers’ supposed aesthetic affinities, *L’Ève future* remains a novel that transcends both traditions, instead deploying a kind of mystical positivism in the service of an impossibly antiquated form of romanticism, incompatible with the banalized notion of Progress that dominated the discourse of the period and even less with the increasingly empowered position of women in society, which I have acknowledged in my discussions of *Au Bonheur des Dames* and *Nana*.

Much like Huysmans’ *À Rebours*, the title of Villiers’ novel signals a backwards movement, using the biblical creation story (and, we later learn, the fall) as a frame of reference for a grim present in which science and spiritualism—and noble men and bourgeois women—remain ultimately irreconcilable. Indeed, while the experiment to create an idealized android double of a “mediocre” woman proves disastrous, it is as a consequence of a somber *deus ex machina* rather than any failure of the science or idealism which animate the creation. And indeed, in light of Villiers’ suspicion of

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<sup>88</sup> Various incarnations of the story exist dating as far back as 1877.

progress and his increasingly Catholic turn, one can expect the titular “future Eve” and her creators to succumb to just such a divine retribution.

That said, the android-woman Hadaly embodies more than the dangers of playing God, as the novel’s conclusion and its numerous references to *Faust* would have one believe; she is, in part, a response to what Jacques Marx qualified as “l’âge d’or du péril vénérien,” a means of containing/replacing those women, particularly of the theatrical milieu as is the case of Evelyn Habal and Alicia Clary, who were perceived as seductive carriers of disease and destruction (qtd. in Borloz 76). We have, of course, encountered a similarly pathologizing vision of actresses in Zola’s *Nana*, published six years prior to *L’Ève future*, an indication of how prevalent this perception was in 1880s France.

Yet the android and her male creators also embody a broader shift in how gender was perceived and constructed in Villiers’ time, filtered, of course, through the prism of Villiers’ personal biases (which stem as much from his romantic failures as from his social status) and surprising contestation of certain gender norms. Looking across Villiers’ body of work, Pierre Zoberman sees gender identities “which both adhere to the heteronormative binaries (male/female) and undermine them, because of social and historical determinations: the *fin-de-siècle* aesthetic and the elite dandyism which characterized it” (47). Indeed, Villiers’ oeuvre is replete with effete male protagonists<sup>89</sup> cloistered safely in castles far from the bourgeois city, and for whom renewed contact with “common” society constitutes a threat to their fragile noble sensibility, a constitutive

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<sup>89</sup> Ewald both conforms to and departs from this model. As I shall discuss later in this section, Villiers goes to great lengths to emphasize Ewald’s “beauté virile” and muscular physique, which seem at odds with his dandy attire and pince-nez, and are particularly incongruous with his fragile emotional state and awed submission to Hadaly (68).

element of their masculinity.<sup>90</sup> Ewald is one example, and his name, containing the German word for forest (*Wald*), alludes as much to his aristocratic/romantic rejection of urban life as to the novel's German Romantic influence, palpable in the vaguely Faustian plotline and frequent invocation of Goethe.

Villiers was, as I have established, a writer drawn towards multiple competing, and often contradictory, ideological poles. In the case of *L'Ève future*, the existence of Hadaly depends upon a dialectic composed of Edison's technology and ingenuity (Science) and Ewald's will to believe in her (the Ideal). Even when the occult, in the form of the disembodied entity Sowana, intervenes to sublimate this dialectic, we learn that Sowana's control of Hadaly also hinges on Ewald *choosing* her—believing in her—over Hadaly's pre-programmed identity: “[C]es autres semblances féminines qui dorment en moi,—ne les éveille pas . . . Tu t'étonnerais encore—et je suis encore si peu qu'un étonnement efface mon être et le voile !” (317). All is then contingent on the brand of transcendental idealism that Villiers practices: illusionism. The all-engendering gaze that such a philosophy entails is critical to the power dynamics at play in the novel: if the senses—seeing in particular—are evoked in exhaustive detail in *L'Ève future*, a clear line is drawn between those who see, smell, hear and feel (men) and those whose autopsied bodies and scrutinized subjectivities are literally reduced to a pair of eyes, vials of perfume, vocal recordings and shreds of fabric (women): for it is Edison who usurps the

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<sup>90</sup> Zoberman cites several stories from Villiers' *Contes cruels* and *Nouveaux contes cruels* (notably “L'Inconnue,” “L'Incomprise” and “Sylvabel”) as examples of Villiers' “elaborate case for alternative, even effete masculinities” and argues that “[t]he underlying motif of a link between threatening women (women as a threat) and the Capital . . . may take on its full significance in view of one trait common to [“Sylvabel” and “L'Incomprise”]. In both cases, the male character who exemplifies an alternative masculinity escapes being undone while away from Paris, outside the confines of the idle, moneyed circles of the Parisian viveurs—a milieu that may, on the one hand, allow for conventional gender definition, and, on the other hand, be inseparable from the anxiety of destruction/castration” (66).

novel's narration and dominates the women he narrates with his soliloquys, performing a gruesome post-mortem exegesis of Evelyn Habal, a scientific ekphrasis (to borrow Sirois-Trahan's evocative term) of his android masterpiece, and finally delivering a parallel monologue deconstructing the behavioral traits of the living Alicia Clary (135).

In this section I will explore how the unlikely fusion of science and idealism, coupled with Edison's practice of narrating women's bodies and subjectivities so as to define/contain them and thereby gain mastery over them (his is a male gaze for which women's bodies have been too thoroughly demystified to elicit desire)<sup>91</sup> constitute at once a reflection of the times and of Villiers' own complicated masculinity.<sup>92</sup> Both are, however, ironically undermined by a conclusion which strips the garrulous Papa of the Phonograph of his narrational power, leaving him speechless as he is confronted, for the first time, with his own ignorance.

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<sup>91</sup> What distinguishes this novel from *Nana* is that—Ewald's infatuation with Alicia Clary's body aside—seductive female characters in *L'Ève future* are *not* desirable. It is Edward Anderson's inexplicable aversion to Evelyn Habal's body that, ironically, compels him to sleep with her: he is stimulated by the extra "effort" he must exert to possess her: "de trouver—(malgré son initiale aversion pour les lignes, en general, de Miss Evelyn)—un plaisir possible à l'idée de la posséder, à cause de cette aversion même" (179).

<sup>92</sup> The two are fittingly merged in the 2009 joint publication of his *Tableau de Paris sous la Commune* and *Le Désir d'être un homme*.

### 3.2.2 Positivism in the Service of Romanticism

“C’est une chose prodigieuse d’ingéniosité et d’idéal, mais toute naturelle, ainsi réalisée.”

—Sowana, *L’Ève future*

For a man of science, the Thomas Edison depicted in *L’Ève future* is an oddly romantic figure: called “un Beethoven de la Science” (40), “un magicien” (55) and depicted, in one Baudelairean vignette, as “se laiss[ant] insensiblement séduire par les attirances de la rêverie et du crépuscule” (41), he represents something far more mystical and baroque than the “bourgeois-positivist villain” (Butler 68) present in early drafts of the novel. The lovelorn British dandy Lord Ewald, who travels from his secluded castle to the equally stately and mysterious Menlo Park, is accordingly much less Edison’s opposite—the intrusion, one might imagine, of romanticism into the domain of science—than his double. Descriptions of the inventor’s fantastical creations and secretive existence reinforce the rather paradoxical<sup>93</sup> equivalence established between an American entrepreneur and a dying European aristocracy, the latter embodied by Ewald: “Oui, vous êtes de ces derniers grands attristés qui ne daignent pas survivre à ce genre d’épreuve,” Edison says reverently of Ewald’s resolve to commit suicide rather than live with the contradiction of a lover whose transcendent physical beauty is belied by her *terre-à-terre* bourgeois mannerisms (135). It is precisely this discrepancy between *l’être* and *le*

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<sup>93</sup> In reality, Edison’s estate and inventions were, of course, the signifiers of wealth accumulated through the “self-made man” ethos of burgeoning American industrial entrepreneurship. The pragmatic capitalist drive underpinning the real Edison’s work is deemphasized in the novel, which instead depicts him as a kind of alchemist and dreamer who even dabbles in the occult.

*paraître* that drives the novel's economical plot: an attempt to restore the sacred correspondence of signifier and signified, broken by the "positivisme inepte" of a bourgeois society in which *le paraître* supplants *l'être* (92). As such, *L'Ève future* reads almost as a perverse continuation of Flaubert's *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, though here, the once futile experiments are brought to successful—and frightening—completion at the will of a male character whose *romanesque* motivations align him more with Emma Bovary (herself, ironically, a misguided *bourgeoise*) than with the bumbling bourgeois copyists.

Yet, more than that, *L'Ève future* is a manifesto on representation, putting forward the assertion that realism is not an adequate mode of representation for modern life, as Edison makes clear: "Je viens offrir aux humains de ces temps évolués et nouveaux—à mes semblables en Actualisme, enfin !—de préférer désormais à la mensongère, médiocre et toujours changeante Réalité, une positive, prestigieuse et toujours fidèle Illusion" (267).<sup>94</sup> The solution entails, on the one hand, a masculine recuperation of control over a threatening narrative (as we see in the case of Edison and Ewald) and, on the other, a means of escaping that reality entirely—both virtually via an artificially constructed ideal lover and geographically, in Ewald's case a return to his sufficiently romantic castle-lair, far from the city and untouched by time: "Là, seulement, dans ce brumeux domaine, entouré de forêts de pins, de lacs déserts et de vastes rochers, là, vous pourrez, en toute sécurité, ouvrir la prison de Hadaly" (145).

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<sup>94</sup> Of course, in the end, all modes of representation are proven inadequate and all dualities, from gender (masculine/feminine) to genre (realism/idealism), are dismantled. Sirois-Trahan references the irony implicit in Edison's longwinded scientific explanations which are so hyperbolic, so overwhelmingly technical as to be utterly incomprehensible, their only function being to leave the reader with an impression, "la fonction référentielle [étant] comme débordée par la fonction poétique" (135).

### 3.2.3 The Semantics of Women's Bodies

In the original preface to *L'Ève future*, which was drastically truncated in the final publication, Villiers expresses (perhaps disingenuous) concern that the novel's overly scientific descriptions and misogynistic premise would alienate female readers:

Pour le surplus, si, pour me lire, il devenait indispensable d'avoir, sur sa table, les neuf in-folio d'Hoëne-Wronski, accompagnés des dictionnaires de mathématiques et d'électricité, je risquais, singulièrement, de manquer de lectrices—surtout ayant fait choix, déjà, d'un sujet si peu sympathique à tant de femmes. Cette dernière considération m'a tellement effrayé que j'ai dû me résigner à prendre un moyen terme,—sortable, sans doute, mais un moyen terme. (“Manuscripts” 388)

Villiers' words reveal a clear ambivalence between his acknowledgment of his female readership and his intellectual dismissiveness of that readership.<sup>95</sup> A similar tension between acknowledging women's subjectivity—to the point of transfiguring them based purely on physical (Alicia Clary) or metaphysical (Any Anderson/Sowana) characteristics—and simultaneously contesting that subjectivity is at play in the novel, generating a confused figuration of women as bearers of multiple conflicting meanings, at once harmless “toys,” deadly predators driven by pure animal instinct and, against all odds, the lingering promise that some as-yet unknown (or not yet manufactured) ideal woman exists, combining beauty with intelligent grace.

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<sup>95</sup> Of course, contrary to his statement, the novel that emerged from Villiers' “compromise” for female readers (“sortable . . . mais un moyen terme”) remains saturated with lengthy, opaque descriptions of the technology animating Hadaly, obscure references and a disturbingly invasive scrutiny (which, for Sophie Borloz, constitutes a thrice-over autopsy) of the women who incited Edison to create the android (82).

A consideration of the novel's ideal-woman in question, Hadaly, gives us a more precise indication of the desired feminine characteristics and, likewise, a point of departure for understanding Edison and Ewald's obsessional misogyny. If Hadaly as a companion is, first and foremost, a product of Ewald's will and a projection of his desire, she is, as an invention—or, more specifically, what Jean-Louis Cabarès calls “un être incorruptible animé par l'électricité et la volonté masculine” (qtd. in Borloz 77)—the crystallization of a much broader *fin-de-siècle* male imaginary, fed by paranoia about sexually transmitted diseases, adulterous wives and dangerous *femmes fatales*. These are the very things about which Edison cautions Ewald when he speaks, in Darwinian terms, of “ces ‘femmes’ . . . pour qui celui qu'elles passionnent est simplement une proie vouée à tous les asservissements. Elles obéissent, fatalement, à l'aveugle, à l'obscur assouvissement de leur essence maligne” (190); and again when he presents Ewald with vials once belonging to the deceased dancer Evelyn Habal, from which the labels have been scratched off—proof, he asserts, that they are remedies for whatever shameful “bouquets de *Ne m'oubliez pas* [qu'elle] pouvait offrir à ses préférés” (206). It is fitting then that scent, itself a key contributing factor to the polysemy and reproducibility of women's bodies in the novel, is so central to the creation of a lifelike android-woman, carrying with it as it did in the late nineteenth century connotations of “atavisme, fuite du temps, mort, artificialité, paradis artificiels, . . . [et] féminité” that echo the various and contradictory traits Edison sees women as embodying (Borloz 7).

This complex figuration of women demands closer consideration. On the one hand, Edison mocks what he sees as the modern woman's heightened positional awareness—a consciousness of her place in society vis-à-vis other women—and claims

that “être aimée n’est (malgré toutes ses protestations) presque toujours que secondaire pour elle. Ce n’est qu’être *préférée* qu’elle désire” (159). As Edison would have it, a woman’s romantic pursuits are bound up in questions of vanity and a broader relational identity rooted in class and age among other markers of identity. Such pragmatic, Darwinian courting is in keeping with a late-nineteenth-century bourgeois collective consciousness that, as depicted in stereotyped bourgeois characters such as Villiers’ own Tribulat Bonhomet, privileged *le sens commun* and the pragmatic *terre-à-terre* over the romantic.<sup>96</sup> Edison subsequently adds that such women represent “l’intruse consciente, désirant d’une façon secrète et natale,—pour ainsi dire *malgré elle*, enfin,—la simple régression vers les plus sordides sphères de l’Instinct et l’obscurcissement d’âme définitif de celui... qu’elle ne tentait qu’afin de pouvoir en contempler . . . la déchéance, les tristesses et la mort” (191); and ultimately concludes, “*c’est que leur action fatale et morbide sur LEUR victime est en raison directe de la quantité d’artificiel, au moral et au physique, dont elles font valoir—dont elles repoussent, plutôt,—le peu de séductions naturelles qu’elles paraissent posséder*” (196).

There is, running throughout this extended qualification of the female mind, a tension between willful manipulation exercised by an artificially augmented social being and the unconscious death drive of an irrational predatory animal. Hadaly, an android whom Edison has equipped with several hours of pre-programmed speech, but whose mechanical mind—unbeknownst to Edison—is usurped by the disembodied female entity Sowana, represents not simply the ironic sublation of this contradiction but the total

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<sup>96</sup> Alan Raitt provides a thorough analysis of Villiers’ satirical treatment of bourgeois mores, notably where these two imperatives are concerned. (See: *Villiers de l’Isle-Adam et le mouvement symboliste*. José Corti, 1965.)

subversion of Edison's attempt to use his discourse *or* his invention to assert male dominance: even the mechanisms of the android created for that purpose have been secretly undermined, and made truly sentient, by a woman. And that is not the extent of Sowana's role in undermining Edison's efforts. Reading the novel in light of the real-life technological innovations that inspired it, Kristine Butler asserts that the invention of the phonograph brought about an abrupt change in the function of voice:

No longer proclaiming simply the pure presence of the self, [the voice] also figures the echo of the social within the self. Voice thus has the paradoxical function of harking both to the nostalgia of pre-linguistic self-identity, and to the post-linguistic subsumation by the social body. (66)

It is then in the *voice* that this contradictory primitive-socialized identity is at once reconciled and crucially subverted by Sowana, who exists as an occult double of Edison's phonograph: a "pure," disembodied voice that collapses presence and absence. We see a similar phenomenon in the two "films" Edison shows Ewald of Evelyn Habal dancing and singing. While her appearance changes drastically from one to the other (in the second she is shown in her grotesque "natural" state), the only constant is her unpleasant singing voice—the unbreakable link between body and subjectivity, nature and artifice (201).

Edison's paradoxical depiction of women as strategically artificial (implying some level of socialization) and unconsciously regressive (implying a primitive atavism) is, however, not the only such contradiction in the novel. Perfume, presented as a key

determinant of a woman's identity and a weapon in her arsenal of seduction,<sup>97</sup> offers a second, darker paradox: if a woman wears perfume to seduce men, men's sensory (ap)perception of the scent determines their perception of the woman—and that perception (that “preference” as Edison would have it) is then projected back onto the woman. Accordingly, much as Hadaly's existence is said to be dependent on Ewald's will to project his ideal onto her (“Mon être, ici-bas,” she tells him, “*pour toi du moins, ne depend que de ta libre volonté.*”) (316), the novel establishes a broader division of contingencies in which it is men who *sense* and in so doing *define* what they perceive. Sensory perception—inevitably apperception, informed as it is by previous experience—is thus presented as an ontological, rather than epistemological, phenomenon. Women, in turn, *are sensed*, yet remain themselves anesthetized. Alicia Clary, for example, is shown to be incapable of appreciating artistic masterpieces such as Wagner's operas and the Venus de Milo, in which she bemusedly sees a deformed version of herself: “Tiens, MOI !” (99). Her lack of refined aesthetic judgment is posited as a manifestation of unrefined sensory perception. Ewald, on the contrary, is shown to possess highly cultivated aesthetic appreciation *and* heightened sensory perception. Butler contends that “his senses allow him to perceive a commonness unnoticed by society. This man of heightened faculties<sup>98</sup> is at once privileged and plagued by his artistic sensibilities, which are meant to shield him from the common, but finally make him suicidal” (67).

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<sup>97</sup> Indeed, Edison conceives of perfume as a deceptive tool that allows women to conceal or alter their natural odor and thus, by extension, their identity: “des fioles de ces huiles puissantes, élaborées par la pharmaceutique pour combattre les regrettables émanations de la nature” (206). As such, perfume is a central component of the *quantité d'artificiel* to which he refers.

<sup>98</sup> The designation originated in Baudelaire's characterization of Poe's narrators as *l'homme aux facultés suraiguës*.

### 3.2.4 Exhumation, Autopsy, Translation: Deconstructing the Female Body

Early in the novel, a telling chapter title—*LE SONGEUR TOUCHE UN OBJET DE SONGE*—establishes this gendered divide between sensor and sensed. The chapter recounts an encounter between Edison and a disembodied woman’s arm lying on a table in his salon. That the reader is not given any immediate explanation as to the origins of the arm (it is, we later learn, a prototype for Hadaly’s arms) reinforces the troubling banality of “autopsied” women in Edison’s world. Even more startling, this relic of some “amputation désespérée,” adorned with a viper bracelet, is described in mystical language that merges sensuality with menace: “Le pâle rayon caressa la main inanimée, erra sur le bras, fit jeter un éclair aux yeux de la vipère d’or, la bague d’or brilla... Puis tout redevint nocturne” (56).<sup>99</sup>

Of course, the disembodied arm is merely a foreshadowing of the fragmented, metonymic figuration of female characters in the novel, anticipating in particular the post-mortem “exhumation” (as the chapter is titled) of Evelyn Habal during which Edison takes Ewald to Hadaly’s subterranean lair to show him the belongings of a “femme artificielle,” from her wig and false teeth to her clothing, makeup, perfumes and even contraception. Edison’s taxonomy of Evelyn Habal’s belongings (generalized as the tools of any woman since “*toutes sont, ou seront demain, . . . plus ou moins de sa famille*”) (206) stands as an ironic reversal of Octave Mouret’s calculating use of commodities to

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<sup>99</sup> Assia Djebar’s *L’Amour, la fantasia* (1985) offers a striking reversal of this scene, recounting an incident in which the French painter Eugène Fromentin, on a visit to colonial Algeria, discovers a real dismembered woman’s hand lying on the ground. With a mysticism equal to Villiers’, the female narrator states, “Plus tard, je me saisis de cette main vivante, main de la mutilation et du souvenir et je tente de lui faire porter le qalam [Arabic for pen]” (255). The passage is an attempt, as part of the novel’s broader aim, to enable colonized women to reinscribe themselves into a history from which their voices were long absent. A similar suppression of women’s voices is present in *L’Ève future*, via a male-dominated narration, the only exception being the disembodied Sowana.

seduce and dominate female consumers in *Au Bonheur des Dames*. The one constant across both novels is the process by which those women enter into a metonymic relation with the objects they buy/wear (see Chapter 1).

Indeed, if *L'Ève future* abounds in attempts to fragment women's bodies and metonymically reify their subjectivities, Edison's deconstruction of Evelyn Habal most clearly demonstrates the novel's macabre equivalency between woman and the material signifiers of her sexuality. Having thoroughly condemned the dancer's artifice, Edison points to her former possessions, remarking to Ewald, "Pourtant ne sont-ce pas là ses vrais ossements?" and marveling at the fact that men have been driven to suicide by "*le contenu de ce tiroir*" (207). Thus, while Alicia Clary is discursively deconstructed and the android Hadaly physically deconstructed, Evelyn Habal is, in death, *decorporealized*: her body, which Edison sees as nothing more than a mount for her artificial embellishments, is eliminated entirely, save the phantasmagorical projection of her spectral dance. However, unlike the hypnotic trance that causes Sowana to mystically emerge from Any Anderson, suggesting the latter's symbolic liberation, Evelyn Habal's decorporealization is a means of containing a promiscuous body.

The chapter *EXHUMATION* is then one of several instances where the two men are shown suppressing women's voices and exercising creative control over women's identities. We have seen how Edison appropriates Evelyn Habal's likeness, voice and personal items in order to fashion a misogynistic parable out of them in her absence (death). Alicia Clary is similarly narrated by Ewald in her absence: everything we learn about her comes from what Ewald refers to as "ma traduction" (80). However, when he realizes, in a chapter entitled *COMME LE FOND CHANGE AVEC LA FORME*, the

inaccuracy of his “version” of Alicia, he tells Edison, “il me faut vous avouer le *texte même*,” and continues on with his character study in a comic imitation of Alicia’s style of speech (81-2). The chapter in question bears the telling epigraph “*Les absents ont toujours tort*”: an ironic acknowledgment of the place these women occupy in their own narrative (80).

Ewald’s use of the word *translation* (*traduction*) deserves closer consideration in light of this absence. The recurring notion of translation, and the associated equivalency between women’s bodies and text/speech are central to the novel’s discursive and metaphysical developments: in parallel to the men’s overarching discursive “translations” of these women, Edison describes the alchemic translation of Alicia into Hadaly (240) and the electrical processes which effect the further “translation” (*la translation*) (338) of the android from an assemblage of metal and wires into the illusion of a woman. Indeed, conjuring the ethical concern in certain contexts of textual translation, that a translation, if improperly undertaken, threatens to replace/eliminate the original,<sup>100</sup> the corporeal/subjectival translation that Edison and Ewald undertake appears contingent on Alicia Clary’s permanent absence—a metaphorical death, rendered literal in the final chapter. “JE VAIS LUI RAVIR SA PROPRE PRÉSENCE,” Edison boasts to Ewald before informing him of his plan to create Alicia’s idealized double, implying that the woman and the android cannot exist simultaneously (124). In Ewald’s supplication, “Ah ! qui m’ôtera cette âme de ce corps ?” we see a similar euphemistically worded necessity

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<sup>100</sup> For an exploration of such translational practices see: Gutman, “Smuggled Words: Textual Migration and Subversive Assimilation in the Translations of Isaac Bashevis Singer.” Ed. Siri Nergaard. *translation*. 2 (Spring 2013): 105-131.

for Alicia to *rendre l'âme*—or at the very least surrender her subjectivity—if Ewald is to forgo his planned suicide (98).

More than simply a translator, Edison is figured as Hadaly's father and progenitor. However, in evoking Hadaly's "*venue au jour*" (147) and describing her as having "*pris l'attitude de l'enfant qui va naître*" (211), Edison speaks in maternal terms that carry over to the maternal role he assigns to Ewald, whom he instructs at length in how to feed and "educate" the as-yet-unborn Hadaly: "*C'est une enfant, en ce qui est de la terre ; elle ne sait pas. Il faut lui apprendre*" (153). The double irony of Edison's statements is, of course, that the android-woman which he delivers to Ewald is not entirely of his own making, nor does she require Ewald to educate her: secretly animated by Sowana, Hadaly is shown to possess far more acute faculties of perception and expression than Ewald.

Edison's paternity/maternity vis-à-vis his creation is thus usurped and his expansive monologues detailing the technical capabilities of the android are proven not only superfluous but, once thoroughly demystified, quite banal—the very definition of positivist science—in the face of Sowana's supernatural intervention. Coded as a kind of cuckolding of the inventor, this latter development must be kept quiet much like Edward Anderson's affair with Evelyn Habal: "*Ne lui parle pas de ce que je t'ai dit tout à l'heure ; c'est pour toi seul,*" Hadaly tells Ewald after confessing to him the unscientific mechanisms behind her intelligence (328).

Perhaps most striking of all as far as Edison's paternal claims are concerned is his declaration that "*cette ÈVE FUTURE, . . . aidée de la GÉNÉRATION ARTIFICIELLE (déjà tout à fait en vogue depuis ces derniers temps), me paraît devoir combler les vœux*

secrets de notre espèce...” (175). Edison draws an explicit comparison between the process of creating Hadaly and the then-nascent practice of artificial insemination (Raitt 419). By referring to his creation as the product of “la génération artificielle,” an intervention to assist a biological process, he not only naturalizes his android creation; he ironically situates it squarely within the realm of *fin-de-siècle* positivist medicine.

### 3.2.5 The Specularity and Derivativeness of Desire

The paternal/authorial claim Edison exerts over Hadaly and the other women he narrates merits closer consideration. In the midst of Edison’s detailed explanation of how each of Alicia Clary’s body parts will be replicated on the android, Ewald bemoans having to consider “les choses de l’Amour” in such a cold, scientific light; to which Edison responds, “Non point les choses de l’Amour . . . mais celles des ‘amoureux’ . . . Est-ce qu’un médecin se trouble devant une table de dissection, pendant un cours d’anatomie ?” (263). Edison’s response, an attempt to move superficial romanticism into the realm of science, also insinuates that the “things” in question are the property of (male) lovers. Indeed, Edison and Ewald do appropriate the signifiers of women’s identities and corporeality through a combination of perception—what Edison appropriately calls a “vision objectivée”—and narration in these women’s absence (131). Yet, as becomes clear, Ewald’s appropriation of Alicia Clary’s likeness is also coded as a projection of his own ideal (as subjective perceiver/narrator) which turns out to be a double not of Alicia but, rather, of *himself*. “[L]es choses,” he tells Edison, “ne sont, en réalité, que ce que nous pouvons admirer en elles, c’est-à-dire y *reconnaître* de nous” (287).

Edison also evokes the specular nature of desire, which results in the effacement of its object, telling Ewald, “Enfin, c’est cette vision objectivée de votre esprit, que vous appelez, que vous voyez, que vous CRÉEZ en votre vivante, *et qui n’est que votre âme dédoublée en elle*. Oui, voilà votre amour.—Il n’est, vous le voyez, qu’un perpétuel et toujours stérile essai de rédemption” (131). Once again, perception is not merely creation; it is self-duplication, a kind of autoeroticism that Edison fittingly qualifies as a “stérile essai de rédemption.” This external projection of the self is, indeed, anything but salutary. Edison also acknowledges the existential torments inherent in illusionism, providing a more self-destructive and slightly less solipsistic explanation of desire:

Donc, n’oubliez plus que nous ne voyons des choses que ce que leur *suggèrent* nos seuls yeux ; nous ne les concevons que d’après ce qu’elles nous laissent entrevoir de leurs entités mystérieuses ; nous n’en possédons que ce que nous en pouvons éprouver, chacun selon sa nature ! Et, grave écureuil, l’Homme s’agite en vain dans la geôle mouvante de son MOI, sans pouvoir s’évader de l’Illusion où le captivent ses sens dérisoires. (129)

Edison’s words give new urgency to Ewald’s plea for someone to “ô[t]er cette âme de ce corps,” implying that it is none other than Ewald’s *own* soul that is imprisoned in the wrong vessel. For although perception is possession, the subjective intuition of a not-I (what Edison/Villiers calls *l’Illusion*) is nonetheless a prison of the self: a reminder of each individual’s solitary, self-circumscribed lifeworld in which nothing external can be objectively known.

This brand of transcendental idealism—a philosophy that informs Villiers’ own doctrine of illusionism—stands in contrast with Edison’s thoughts on derivativity and

performativity: for example, when Ewald protests about the constraints imposed on him by Hadaly's pre-programmed speech (to which he must learn the appropriate responses), Edison replies, "[V]ous croyez donc que l'on improvise quoi que ce soit ? qu'on ne *récite* pas toujours ? . . . En vérité, toute parole n'est et ne peut être qu'une redite" (226).

Invoking a range of speech acts, from prayer to phatic discourse, Edison claims that all communication is ultimately derivative and that the notion of original, spontaneous discourse is an illusion (227). This hypothesis, of course, presents a contradiction. Is one, as Edison had previously suggested, a prisoner of one's own consciousness ("la geôle mouvante de son MOI"), or is one a socially contingent being, bound more by externally imposed discourse than by the intuitions of an all-determining, if deceptive, consciousness?

Edison's fantasy of employing the phonograph to immortalize the ephemeral utterance and despatialize/decorporealize the situated/embodied utterance and Ewald's parallel quest to transpose his Ideal (Self) onto an Other (Alicia/Hadaly) suggest the creation of a pantemporal/panspatial, hybrid "présence-mixte," to use the term by which Edison refers to Hadaly (132). (The term is, of course, laden with irony as Edison is, somewhat unknowingly, also evoking the literal cohabitation—Edison's technology/Ewald's suggestive will/Sowana's metaphysical possession—animating the android.) This notion of blurring the limits between past and present, Self and Other, original and copy is likewise present in Edison's contention that the modern simulacrum, unlike its jerky automaton forebearers, can equate and even surpass its human model. Ameliorative derivativity is thus to be preferred over a flawed original. The important distinction, for Villiers, is that the creation of a superior copy is enabled less by recent

scientific progress than by the subjective creativity of idealism. Edison thus has only to build “le squelette d’une ombre” upon which some individual’s consciousness “suggests” an impression, an identity (121). This Platonic ideational mediation of an external reality not only underscores the problems with categorizing *L’Ève future* as early science fiction, a genre to which the novel is often rather facilely relegated alongside the works of Jules Verne; it combines elements of science, phenomenology and an overarching Christianity<sup>101</sup> that is awkwardly reconciled with the novel’s idealist philosophy.<sup>102</sup>

Perhaps the subtlest, yet most lugubriously telling, suggestion of the idealist-illusionist conception of Other-as-Self can be found in Edison’s explanation of how Hadaly is to be transported back to Ewald’s castle. Hadaly, Edison informs Ewald, must be kept secluded from other passengers and travel in a coffin “à la manière des mortes” (144). The wording brings to mind a similar phrase appearing some twenty years earlier in Baudelaire’s 1863 essay *Le Peintre de la vie moderne*, a manifesto on aesthetics and modernity. A chapter is devoted to the figure of the dandy—unambiguously represented in *L’Ève future* by the noble Ewald, “vêtu avec une si profonde élégance” (68)—who,

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<sup>101</sup> Raitt argues that the centrality of scientific and technological innovations in the narrative, as exemplified by Edison’s lengthy monologue on the mystical potential of the phonograph, indicates, rather than a celebration of progress, Villiers’ belief that “seule une démonstration scientifique pourra convaincre le bourgeois de l’existence du surnaturel. C’est donc avec les moyens de la science positiviste qu’il veut prouver l’idéal” (178). Take, for example, Edison’s musing that if God “daignait nous laisser prendre la moindre, la plus humble photographie de Lui, voire me permettre, à moi, Thomas Alva Edison, ingénieur américain, sa créature, de cliquer une simple épreuve phonographique de Sa vraie Voix (car le tonnerre a bien mué, depuis Franklin), dès le lendemain il n’y aurait plus un seul athée sur la Terre !” (66).

<sup>102</sup> After fantasizing about using the phonograph to record the voice of God, Edison abruptly concedes that it would be impossible since God “comme toute pensée, n’est dans l’Homme que selon l’individu” (66). Edison then abruptly modifies his position, positing God as a guiding force of this nearly solipsistic subjective framework: “Or, Dieu étant la plus sublime conception possible et toute conception n’ayant sa réalité que selon le vouloir et les yeux *intellectuels* particuliers à chaque vivant, il s’ensuit qu’écarter de ses pensées l’idée d’un Dieu ne signifie pas autre chose que se décapiter gratuitement l’esprit” (67). See Raitt (1965) for a more comprehensive examination of Villiers’ attempts to reconcile Hegelian idealism with Christian doctrine.

Baudelaire affirms, must maintain a cold, impassive appearance<sup>103</sup> in keeping with the ascetic Christian motto “*Perinde ac cadaver*” (literally: “in the manner of a corpse”) (55). The dandy Ewald and his android-corpse lover, then, share a fatal resemblance that foreshadows the novel’s tragic conclusion, further reinforced by Edison’s word of caution to Ewald: “Votre devoir sera, donc, de la détruire à l’heure de votre mort” (253); in other words, Hadaly must die with the will that has created her. Of course, what actually happens is the opposite: it is Hadaly who is destroyed in a fire on the ship transporting her and Ewald back to England. Ewald, however, survives and, as is implied in the novel’s conclusion, resolves to follow through with his originally planned suicide in the absence of his ideal lover.<sup>104</sup> Indeed, Ewald’s death naturally follows, as the death of his idealized female “double” implies his own death (such is the case in Poe’s “William Wilson,” a story that Villiers, a great admirer of Poe, would no doubt have read via Baudelaire’s translations).<sup>105</sup> Yet, the narrative of male destruction into which Ewald’s suicide is inscribed alongside Edward Anderson is foreshadowed long before the novel’s conclusion in a description of Hadaly’s bellicose metal body. I now turn to an exploration of women’s power and transgressive will in the novel.

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<sup>103</sup> The chapter recounting Ewald’s arrival at Menlo Park repeatedly vacillates in its description between his noble elegance and phlegmatic severity: “Tout d’abord on eût dit un don Juan d’une froideur insoucieuse” (68).

<sup>104</sup> For Foucault, “[s]e suicider, c’est la manière ultime d’imaginer”: a means of recovering an originary, unified self (113). For Ewald it is also a way of recovering the lost ideal, which is ultimately a projection of himself. I will return to Foucault’s notion of suicide in my discussion of *Je t’aime, je t’aime*.

<sup>105</sup> Zoberman suggests that Villiers uses names to imply doubling or female domination, citing as an example the short story “Antonie” from *Les Nouveaux contes cruels*. The name of the eponymous female protagonist evokes a feminization of Antony, implying a fusion of the manipulative Cleopatra and her lover or, rather, the former’s assimilation of the latter (50).

### 3.2.6 Revolting Women

If women's chronic absence is what enables a narrative that conspires against them to unfold, the men in charge of constructing that narrative take little action, remaining immobile throughout, their efforts ultimately thwarted by external forces. Nearly all plot action is discursive/descriptive in nature and, save Ewald's ill-fated final voyage, is confined to the stifling interiors of Menlo Park. Mirroring the alienating surroundings, the men's conversation, less a dialogue than a series of monologues, advances at a lethargic pace and turns in repetitive circles, generating a *huis clos* with few characters and plot events. As Raitt has pointed out, "Le mouvement est très irrégulier, les événements marquants sont rares, et par moments . . . le roman semble presque menacé de stagnation" (28). Raitt's description of the novel's narrative structure, and by extension the (in)action of the two male protagonists, could just as well be that of the slow and jerky automatons that Edison derides in words foreshadowing the novel's conclusion: "Ces ouvrages, sycophantes informes, au lieu de donner à l'homme le sentiment de sa puissance, ne peuvent que l'induire à baisser la tête devant le dieu Chaos. Rappelez-vous cet ensemble de mouvements saccadés et baroques, pareils à ceux des poupées de Nuremberg !" (120).

Within this world which superficially vaunts technological progress while ultimately serving as a refuge for reactionary men against the shocks of modernity, female characters represent the inevitable incursion of that dreaded modernity into masculine space, from the projection of Evelyn Habal's spectral dance to Alicia and Sowana's voices, the astonishing spectacle of Hadaly's body and Hadaly-Sowana's autonomous intelligence. Though discursively dominated, these women's presence is

nonetheless destabilizing, threatening as it does an artificially imposed social order. Acknowledging this threat, Marilyn Gaddis Rose looks across Villiers' body of work and identifies "a wide range of female types, ethereal, sordid, staunch, insipid, but always powerful, even when apparently weak" (118). Indeed, we have seen how a surface of male-dominated power dynamics belies a reality of fragile masculinities and deep existential insecurities that are fatally exploited first by Evelyn Habal and later by Hadaly-Sowana.<sup>106</sup> It becomes clear that the primitive animals, vain mimics or pre-programmed androids described by Edison and Ewald are elaborations of the men's own consciousnesses and justifications for their misogyny, a fact that reveals more about male anxieties than about the surprisingly powerful women they narrate.

In some instances this feminine threat is expressed in explicitly violent terms. Hadaly, for example, is described as being covered in a layer of armor (Ewald sees in her "l'illusion d'une vivante incluse dans une armure") and is explicitly figured as both a weapon and a warrior (212). She is thus at once weaponized by Edison, her creator, as a tool to eliminate men's dependence on women (thereby rendering women safely "absent," superfluous), and instrumentalized by the narrative itself in which descriptions of her resistant armored body and shimmering electric lifeblood foreshadow the novel's

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<sup>106</sup> In one particularly telling instance of irony, Evelyn Habal's tools of artifice (notably her false teeth) are the same tools employed by Villiers himself as part of a carefully orchestrated attempt to seduce an Englishwoman of standing. The attempt was not successful, though Villiers was allowed to keep the rented teeth (Raitt 18). The incident illustrates Villiers' infatuation with marrying into wealth, likely reflective of his own complicated masculinity as an impoverished noble beset by financial and health woes. The romantic rejections he endured despite great effort and expense contributed to the kind of vitriolic misogyny that saw him transpose his own failed methods of seduction onto disreputable female characters. Indeed, in what may well be a moment of self-reflexivity for the author following some particularly egregious statements about women, Ewald chides Edison: "Si attristé par une femme que je puisse être, je trouve que vous parlez de la Femme avec bien de la sévérité" (159).

fatal condemnation of challenging Nature. Her destructive power initially appears to remain firmly in the hands of the men who control her: when Ewald expresses reservations about accepting the android, Edison reassures him matter-of-factly that he can suspend the experiment at any point if need be, “même après l’œuvre accomplie, puisque vous pourrez toujours la détruire, la noyer, si bon vous semble, *sans déranger pour cela le Déluge*” (134). His reply once again foreshadows Hadaly’s actual “death” by burning and drowning, brought about not by Ewald but by seemingly divine forces.

All the same, Edison himself expresses reservations about his invention. Recounting an allegory of blacksmiths who must forge tools and weapons for some unknown purpose, Edison alludes to the ethical implications of his authorship: “Nul ne peut estimer, au juste, la véritable nature de ce qu’il forge, par la raison que tout couteau peut devenir poignard, et *que l’usage que l’on fait d’une chose la rebaptise et la transfigure*. L’incertitude seule nous rend irresponsables” (122). Once the creation escapes the grasp of its creator, so too, then, does the authority to define its purpose. Not only is this an allusion to the subjective will and intuition (Ewald’s) upon which the invention’s success depends; it is also precisely what happens under Edison’s nose as Sowana secretly assumes control of Hadaly, thwarting Hadaly’s intended function.

Yet the allegory is also the ironic counterpoint to a revelation that follows shortly thereafter: no sooner does Edison speak of the dangers of a knife that could be used as a dagger than we learn that Hadaly is equipped with an explosive dagger, which she is programmed to automatically draw and detonate in the event a man other than Ewald makes an advance on her (155). The powerful explosive is made from a formula “perdue

sous l'empereur Néron” and promises to leave the unsuspecting man “la face noircie, les jambes brises, souffleté par un silencieux coup de tonnerre” (156).

From the bellicose appearance of her skinless limbs (armor aglint with electrical currents) to the actual excessive violence—a double weapon merging *être* (a bomb) and *paraître* (a dagger) to enact a gruesome murder—which Hadaly is programmed to commit, the android stands in stark contrast to the passive observation and banter of the two men, whose most violent act is a figurative autopsy. The trappings of Hadaly’s identity in fact show that Edison has unwittingly created a violent woman—“une enfant un peu sombre, qui, insoucieuse de la mort, la donne facilement” (155)—whose unique form of autonomy upsets traditional gender roles in a way that poses a physical threat to men in addition to a psychological one, rendering the figure of the male protector utterly superfluous.

### 3.2.7 Reactionary Men

In a lengthy physical description that echoes the erotic imagery used to describe Alicia or her android double’s body, Ewald is introduced to the reader as a stylish young aristocrat possessing “une rare beauté virile,” as evidenced by impressive muscles suggestive of both physical strength and scholarly excellence (“des muscles d’une exceptionnelle solidité, tels que les exercices et les régates de Cambridge ou d’Oxford savent les rendre”) (68). His “grands yeux noblement calmes” and chiseled features, likewise, betray “une énergie de décision souveraine” (68). This stoic, virile gentleman—on the brink of suicide to preserve his honor—is transformed over the course of the

novel. From his absurd impersonation of Alicia to his horror upon discovering Evelyn Habal's "crypt" and his final, fateful encounter with Hadaly-Sowana, he is rendered weak and uncertain each time the innerworkings of the illusions maintaining his desire are exposed. As Edison touches Hadaly's ring, causing the armor shell of her body to open up, "Lord Ewald tressaillit et devint fort pâle" at the sight of her mechanical entrails (212). Upon learning that the woman he believed to be a newly refined Alicia Clary is actually Hadaly, he is totally destabilized: "Hors d'état de se ressaisir, il ferma les yeux : puis, de la paume de sa main fiévreuse, essuya quelques gouttes de sueur froide sur ses tempes" (307).

Likewise, Ewald is depicted systematically adjusting his pince-nez when faced with the unknown. "Pourquoi mets-tu ce morceau de verre dans ton œil, en me regardant ?" Hadaly asks the baffled Ewald. "Tu n'y vois donc pas bien *non plus* ?" (318). Indeed, Ewald's pince-nez serves to emphasize the limits of his perceptive capacities: he is betrayed by his own idealistic creation and his inability to grasp anything beyond the immanent and the material. Performing a mechanical gesture as if to restore his poise and mastery over a situation beyond his knowledge or control, he is depicted on multiple occasions compulsively adjusting his pince-nez (103, 162, 307, 319), the signifier of a fashionable English gentleman, but also of a vain, myopic one.

If, as we have seen, Edison and Ewald derive their position of power from their sensory mastery over the women they observe/touch/smell/hear, Hadaly-Sowana challenges that mastery. At the moment that Hadaly, whom Ewald initially believes to be Alicia Clary, confesses her true identity to him, she does so "[en] appuyant sur les épaules du jeune homme ses pâles mains" (306)—an act as destabilizing as the shocking

revelation that accompanies it, for it is Hadaly who touches, and thereby exerts sensory mastery over, Ewald.<sup>107</sup> Shortly thereafter, as she continues to explain the circumstances surrounding her creation, Hadaly first addresses him “[en] se croisant les mains sur l’épaule du jeune homme” and later, “l’Andréide prit les deux mains de Lord Ewald, dont la stupeur, le recueillement sombre et l’admiration atteignaient un paroxysme intraduisible” (316). Her repeated initiation of physical contact suggests, contrary to what Edison tells Ewald about her, a subjectified agent capable of dominating a conversation (monologic conversation, as I have discussed, being a form of power and control) and acting free of external projection. Indeed, as Sowana speaks through Hadaly, it becomes clear that, despite her idealist entreaties to Ewald (“Attribue-moi l’être, affirme-toi que je suis ! renforce-moi de toi-même.”), Hadaly already has a fully realized subjectivity (316). She informs Ewald, “Je m’appelais en la pensée de qui me créait, de sorte qu’en croyant seulement agir de lui-même il m’obéissait aussi obscurément. Ainsi, me suggérant, par son entremise, dans le monde sensible, je me suis saisie de tous les objets qui m’ont semblé le mieux appropriés au dessein de te ravir” (315). And her final ultimatum further suggests that it is Hadaly-Sowana who manipulates and subjugates both Ewald *and* Edison—not the contrary: “Admets mon mystère tel qu’il t’apparaît,” she tells Ewald. “Ne préfères-tu pas *que je sois* ?—Alors, ne raisonne point mon être : subis-le délicieusement” (317).

It is perhaps, then, not surprising that Ewald is frequently flustered in Hadaly’s presence<sup>108</sup>: she threatens to “neutralize” him much in the same way he and Edison seek

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<sup>107</sup> Far from the bilaterally subjectivating, empathic touch that we see in *Cléo de 5 à 7*, the initiation of touch in *L’Ève future* is, like all forms of perception, a unilateral act of domination.

<sup>108</sup> See, for example, his reaction upon learning that the newly-refined Alicia Clary who had been speaking to him is actually Hadaly: “Le sang reflua dans ses artères. Il vit les choses comme sous un jour rouge

to neutralize threatening women. Her presence renders him passive and utterly superfluous by denying him not only his socially prescribed masculine duties and qualities (notably the role of protector), but also the pleasure of possessing and defining her.<sup>109</sup> Indeed, Hadaly annihilates/assimilates Ewald by assuming the traditionally masculine role in the relationship: it is she, as we have seen, who is the more eloquent speaker and gallant (if excessively violent) guarantor of fidelity.

In the aptly titled chapter *RÉVOLTE*, Ewald rails against the fantastical, the incomprehensible and the derivative embodied by Hadaly—a hypocritical reaction to which the narrator is quick to call attention: “Ainsi, à la question [asked by Ewald]: ‘*Depuis quand Dieu permet-il aux machines de prendre la parole ?*’ si un passant lui eût répondu: ‘Depuis qu’il a vu le triste usage que vous en faites !’ la réponse eût été assez gênante” (320). In the end, his “revolt” is more an acknowledgment of a crisis of masculinity and new insecurities aroused by a female companion who surpasses him in eloquence (a fact that weakens the authority of his narrative-controlling voice). In perhaps the greatest of ironies, just as Edison and Ewald’s “revolt” against bourgeois mediocrity is a reactionary one—a paradoxical recourse to modern technology in order to

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sombre. Son existence de vingt-sept années lui apparut en une seconde. Ses prunelles, dilatées par la complexe horreur du fait, se fixaient sur l’Andréide. Son cœur, serré par une amertume affreuse, lui brûlait la poitrine comme brûle un morceau de glace . . . Hors d’état de se ressaisir, il ferma les yeux : puis, de la paume de sa main fiévreuse, essuya quelques gouttes de sueur froide sur ses tempes” (307).

<sup>109</sup> Caught between an unfulfilling life with a mediocre bourgeois companion, incompatible with his romantic fantasies, and the dangerous specter of positivism, Ewald is figured as a masculine heir to Emma Bovary, while Alicia Clary, the compendium of bourgeois stereotypes, is a *terre-à-terre* female answer to Charles Bovary. And while it would be convenient to complete the analogy by reading Edison as a positivist Homais figure, the comparison does not hold since, as Sirois-Trahan states, despite Edison’s appropriation of positivism, he retains a mystical dimension that makes of him “un magnétiseur, héritier de l’alchimie médiévale” (134). Butler points out that in the earliest iterations of the story, Edison is figured as a typical Villiersian “bourgeois-positivist villain” but evolves in later versions “into a confidant, father figure, and double to the young lord . . . someone who embodies the fantastic-idealist possibilities of the future” (68).

recover a nobler time and the signifiers of a romanticism gone by—so too does Ewald now, in the face of the Unknown, revert back to the very bourgeois *sens commun* he condemns. Likewise, upon learning that his creation has been destroyed by a divine restoration of the natural order, the voluble genius Edison is at last reduced to humbled silence: faced with “l’inconcevable mystère des cieux, il frissonna,—de froid, sans doute—en silence” (349). The novel concludes with these words, for a narrative dominated by Edison’s voice—spouting theories and godlike ambitions, built up over dozens of chapters only to come crashing down in a few pages—cannot go on in his silence.

Yet, if the creator-narrator is silenced by a recognition of his blasphemous human folly and Ewald has resolved to commit suicide after losing Hadaly, one voice lingers: Sowana’s. As the disembodied force that first manipulates Edison into creating Hadaly and subsequently imbues the android with her own intelligence, Sowana subverts all the physical and linguistic contingencies and subjugations of the female characters we have encountered in this dissertation. Most crucially, as a decorporealized entity, Sowana is neither present nor absent (indeed, this indeterminacy is a source of consternation to Edison, who shudders when her voice calls out to him) (46). Existing as pure voice,<sup>110</sup> Sowana is, as I have suggested, the occult counterpart to Edison’s phonograph, which also decorporealizes/displaces voice: the similarities between the spirit and the invention

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<sup>110</sup> The idea of a female character existing as “pure voice” presents an interesting counterpoint to Deleuze’s “pur voyant” and an alternative means of recovering agency and subjectivity. In my discussion of *Cléo de 5 à 7*, I saw in Cléo’s move from embodied pop star to disembodied spectator (signaled by point-of-view shots) a transition from object to self-realized subject.

serve to ironically underscore the disparity between Edison's hopelessly positivist technology and a more powerful, irrational creative force.

As if to consolidate her superiority over two men for whom perception is power, the entranced Any Anderson, from whose hypnotized mind Sowana has sprung, exhibits clairvoyant powers and a keen insightfulness that enable her to make of Hadaly a "superior" double of Alicia Clary. Edison marvels in revealing terms at her perceptiveness: "ses yeux sont constamment fermés, au point que la couleur en demeure inconnue. Cependant elle y voit clair !" (330). It is telling that his emphasis is not on her clairvoyance, but on the fact that *he cannot know* the color of her eyes.<sup>111</sup> In a novel rooted entirely in the power dynamics of perception and narration, Sowana subverts the superficial phenomenology of the male gazers. That she does not need to *look* to see (or narrate) suggests that she is a more powerful being than Edison.

Though we are not told what becomes of Sowana at the end of the novel, Butler sees in Hadaly's destruction and Any Anderson's death Sowana's symbolic emancipation, her triumph over Edison: "Eluding visual and aural representation, she is an intelligence unmoored, unrepresentable, not connected to even partial mastery by gaze or hearing" (74)—and, of course, the only voice capable of interrupting the male discourse. Though Villiers, as I have stated, rejected the label of his symbolist *confrères*, the detachment of signified from signifier that Sowana represents (or, according to the

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<sup>111</sup> Any Anderson's mysterious gaze is the antithesis of Hadaly's gaze as Edison intends to design it insofar as, like Sowana, Anderson's eyes see but refuse to be seen. An entire chapter of the novel (*LES YEUX PHYSIQUES*) is devoted to Edison's quest to produce in Hadaly a feminine gaze that combines beauty with intelligence (261). Edison even proceeds to deconstruct the mechanics behind the female gaze from a purely physiological standpoint: an absurd attempt to demystify something that, as Any Anderson proves, is shielded from scrutiny.

terms of Villiers' unique conception of correspondences, of the transcendent from the imminent, the sacred from the profane) certainly suggests a liberation of meaning: the movement into an unnarratable, unmasterable space. Yet Sowana, in her elusiveness, is not the only female character to represent a threatening dichotomy. The women of *L'Ève future* may be symbolically dominated through discourse, and their tools of artifice may deceive, but none more so than Edison's own creation, an artificial substitute for these absent women and the fruit of a blasphemous marriage between positivism and idealism, a monstrosity that is punished in a spectacular moment of divine retribution.

Champfleury famously lamented, "Cette querelle des réalistes et des idéalistes est fatigante et sans fin. Il y a de grands esprits et petits esprits, il y a des esprits masculins et des esprits féminins" (257).<sup>112</sup> *L'Ève future* maintains this gendered dualism—indeed depends on it—though reverses the terms to suit a social landscape in which women, alternately pragmatic and mystical, assert their place while a destructively nostalgic, superfluous class of men withdraw into their dreamworld: a space which, for Villiers, who longed to play the role of Hamlet, is equated with death. Like Esprit Chaudval retiring to his abandoned lighthouse, Ewald commits suicide having observed the dangers of *le paraître* and the elusiveness of *l'être*.

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<sup>112</sup> According to Rémy de Gourmont, Villiers had established his own dualism: "Il était violemment romantique. Et disait :—il y a les romantiques et les imbéciles" (qtd. in *Avant-propos* 28).

### 3.3 À Rebours, or Forward Regression in Resnais' *Je t'aime, je t'aime*

#### 3.3.1 Introduction

The circumstances surrounding the doomed release of Alain Resnais' *Je t'aime, je t'aime* provide a fitting echo of the film itself: just as the scientists' experiment to send Claude Ridder back in time to a particular moment in his life ultimately fails—their malfunctioning machine-brain is unable to deliver him to the precise minute of the past to which he was intended to go—Resnais' film never received its premier screening at the ill-fated 1968 edition of Cannes. Opening at the height of the May '68 protests, the festival was abruptly canceled. Although *Je t'aime je t'aime* did subsequently receive a less high-profile release and lukewarm critical reception,<sup>113</sup> it remains overshadowed by the director's earlier, career-defining and, more importantly, politically engaged films. For *Je t'aime, je t'aime* has neither the deep historical consciousness of *Nuit et brouillard* and *Hiroshima mon amour* nor the spellbinding oneirism of *L'Année dernière à Marienbad*, and the release, in May '68, of a film centered entirely on the tormented consciousness of a disaffected man—possessing agency but lacking the will to act—was decidedly out of touch with the collective, activist spirit of the period.

By the mid-1960s Resnais had already begun to move away from the more radical, politically engaged work of his earlier career and towards a jaded, apolitical sensibility (*La guerre est finie*, *Je t'aime, je t'aime*) that solidified the director's intellectual turn (Leutrat and Liandrat-Guigues 17). His collaboration with Jacques

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<sup>113</sup> A resurgence in screenings in recent years has helped to rehabilitate *Je t'aime, je t'aime*, as has Michel Gondry's *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004), which pays homage to the former with similar premises of memory travel and lost love as well as a charmingly low-tech visual aesthetic (Rosenbaum).

Sternberg, at the urging of Chris Marker and very clearly indebted to the latter's own time-travel classic, *La Jetée*, is more a showcase of Sternberg's postmodern screenplay—the product of hundreds of pages of non-chronological automatic writing which Resnais then reordered and whittled down to two hundred and fifty—than the kind of artistic power struggle between director and screenwriter that characterized Resnais' collaboration with Alain Robbe-Grillet, for example (Sternberg 10).

Yet, as Resnais ostensibly traded the political for the personal, the hallucinatory for the banal, *Je t'aime, je t'aime*—like the 1967 short film that would inspire its protagonist's name, *Claude Ridder*—inevitably mines the zeitgeist even in its most solipsistic moments. Although the reasons for Ridder's disaffected comportment are never explicitly named, we gather that he is likely dealing with unresolved trauma stemming from his time as a soldier in the Second World War as well as disenchantment with the new streamlined working world and its industrious *jeunes cadres*, among which he—an increasingly unproductive novelist lacking in ambition—is an outlier. Indeed, both the war and the rapidly evolving postwar professional landscape depicted in the film shaped the socio-economic circumstances that generated May '68. And while I am not suggesting that *Je t'aime, je t'aime* has a political agenda or that it in any way (consciously) anticipates May '68 or responds to Algeria, Vietnam or other mobilizing concerns of the day, its fragmentation and uniquely filmed subjective perspective are evocative of the complexities of memory that plagued the analytical posterity of '68, generating an ontological crisis: the “obscure event” (Sylvain Lazarus qtd. in Ross *May '68* 3) which collective memory had conveniently transformed from an historico-political conflict into a socio-generational one, proved difficult to situate in relation to the

revolutions that preceded it (Ross 6). In parallel, Ridder's marginal position as an immobile, inactive man in a hyper-mobile and politically agitated postwar society—one in which there is no clear place (or, more specifically, *use*) for him—provides implicit social commentary by way of its very negation of what he should, logically and ethically, be.<sup>114</sup>

Much like Varda's, Resnais' film titles often reference characters' relationships to space-time. *Je t'aime, je t'aime*, perhaps Resnais's most explicit study of time, seems at first glance to diverge from this formula: the title, like Godard's *2 ou 3 choses que je sais d'elle*, consists of an enunciating subject and an object—the *je* presumably being Ridder and the *tu* his dead lover, Catrine—and even repeats itself emphatically, suggestive of the snag in the experiment which forces Ridder to relive the same moments of his life over and over. Despite this apparent divergence, as I will argue in my discussion of Catrine, the title actually remains consistent with the common Resnaisian formula as Catrine—the *tu* in question—is frequently spatialized throughout the film: she is referenced as a decorporealized presence and a hostile, yet nonetheless inhabited, terrain. Most memorably, she is compared to a low tide (“une marée basse”) in which Ridder is drowning. Ridder, Sternberg notes in his screenplay, “vit avec elle, en elle, pour elle” (49) and the *en elle* takes on particular significance as he flounders about amidst her all-

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<sup>114</sup> The harnessing of a solipsistic negation of '68-era political concerns and social expectations as a means of socio-political commentary is more explicitly deployed in Robert Benayoun's time-travel film *Paris n'existe pas* (1969), a fitting companion to *Je t'aime, je t'aime*. On the literary front, Ross points out that “[t]he quasi-totality of novelistic representations of '68 after the fact have marched in lockstep with dominant media representations, choosing for example, to dramatize the events through the perspective of the sometimes caricatured consciousness of an individual living out an anguished existential crisis against a backdrop of barricades...” (*May '68* 14-15). In my discussion of Resnais' collapsing of the personal and the political, I consider the effect of just such a displacement which, contrary to Ross's broader critique, is capable in Resnais' work, as in Zola's before it, of powerfully brandishing a political dimension by acknowledging the sometimes porous boundary between society and self.

encompassing, all-consuming presence, evoked by the first and most frequently repeated memory-image we see of him snorkeling in the Mediterranean. To fully convey this feeling of entrapment, Resnais systematically places Ridder at the center of the frame and uses deep focus to create a spatial depth that visualizes the emotional depth lingering below the surface of the actors' languid performances.

The trailer, which pieces together a seemingly traditional linear narrative out of non-sequential fragments of Ridder's past, initially presents the film as a classic romance of sorts: a man traveling back in time in order to spend one more minute with his dead beloved. "Il le fera pour cette femme . . . pour lui dire encore une fois, 'Je t'aime, je t'aime,'" the narrator intones. And there are indeed elements of gothic romance in the film, from Krzysztof Penderecki's haunting choral score (the musical sublimation of the protagonists' unexpressed emotion) to Ridder's all-consuming infatuation with Catrine and the couple's Shakespearean self-destruction, and even extending to the fantastical prospect of time travel. Yet, that tone is quickly undermined by scenes depicting a fraught (and worse: dull) relationship. The romanticism is obscured beneath the blasé performances of characters who move about and interact like sleepwalkers. Ridder in fact does not express any enthusiasm about the prospect of traveling back in time nor any will to see Catrine again. He undergoes the experiment indifferently, seemingly with an even greater passivity than the mouse that accompanies him.

*Je t'aime, je t'aime*, quite like *L'Ève future* before it, is a kind of *sui generis* work, bearing on the one hand recognizable signifiers of the science-fiction genre (a lab experiment, scientists, time travel) while that dimension is ultimately supplanted by Resnais' poetic imaginary. Indeed, the scientific experiment that propels Ridder into this

non-chronological drama is, for Resnais, peripheral: “Le héros revit son passé, mais quand il le revit nous sommes avec lui, le film se déroule à mon avis toujours au présent. Il n’y a absolument pas de flash back...” He adds, “Je crois que la science intervient dans la notion du rêve, enfin dans la notion de l’imaginaire et du côté ‘il était une fois’ . . . Ça ne me paraît pas avoir une rigueur scientifique quelconque, mais une rigueur poétique, j’espère” (10).<sup>115</sup> Of course, the driving mechanism of the plot, and the lens through which we view the film, remains Ridder’s own consciousness. Deleuze, who cites the film as a prime demonstration of his *image-temps*, places it alongside examples of an all-powerful organizing/orchestrating *monde-cerveau* in the films of Lang and Kubrick (267). However, in the case of Resnais’ film, Ridder’s consciousness overtakes the *monde-cerveau* (the lab and the almost brain-shaped time machine) to create a subjective, internally rooted experience not unlike Edison and Ewald’s subjectively driven experiment. Indeed, contrary to most time-travel films, hardly any technology is depicted in *Je t’aime, je t’aime*. Ridder is given high doses of a sedative drug in preparation for the experiment and then enters the Sphere, the chamber in which he must lie immobile during the experiment, and which more closely resembles organic or biological matter than something one would expect to find in a research lab: its appearance is at once

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<sup>115</sup> This privileging of the poetic over the rational mirrors Villiers’ work, particularly the relegation of science to an oneiric, idealist realm. When we first encounter Edison in *L’Ève future*, he is described as a “songeur . . . se laiss[ant] insensiblement séduire par les attirances de la rêverie et du crépuscule” (41). Likewise, Hadaly (animated by Sowana, herself a product of Any Anderson’s hypnotic trance state) introduces herself to Ewald as “Un être de rêve, qui s’éveille à demi en tes pensées” (315). The same could be said about the somnolent Catrine who appears in Ridder’s memories.

vegetal (a gourd, a tomato) and vaguely human (a woman's breasts, a womb, a brain), but remains decidedly unsuggestive of a machine.<sup>116</sup>

Perhaps precisely because of the film's resistance to categorization or, more crucially, interpretation, *Je t'aime, je t'aime* has attracted little scholarly attention over the years. While this section is certainly not intended to remedy that in any comprehensive way, I do seek to join the conversation started by Benayoun and expanded by Boillat (2014) and Arnaud (2017) in more recent years in order to shed light on questions of temporal and spatial mobility, and embodied subjectivity and agency in the film with specific attention to the ways in which formal innovation and characterization intersect to create an ostensibly apolitical, "unsituated" film that is in fact both a product and reflection of the forces that shaped May '68. Deleuze has compared Resnais' films to Godard's, stating that Godard's is a "cinéma du corps" and Resnais' a "cinéma du cerveau," but that "l'un n'est pas plus abstrait ni plus concret que l'autre" (265). The happily emasculated and aspiring *homme d'avenir*, Robert of *2 ou 3 choses*, shares common ground with the equally emasculated and alienated Claude Ridder who, unlike Robert, has a devastating awareness of his own superfluity, his existential dependence on his female lover and the futility of his labor. Just as Godard's film ends on an eschatological note, there is something wryly eschatological in Ridder's failed suicide attempt and its successful reenactment. As the memories we watch are focalized by Ridder's consciousness, his mind in turn becomes our own *monde-cerveau*. With his death, the divergent temporalities of the film converge and come to a standstill—and with

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<sup>116</sup> Citing Resnais' comments on the cinematic potential of Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Benayoun dismisses the "parascientific" dimension of *Je t'aime, je t'aime*, instead positing the film as a fairy tale and the Sphere as Ridder's pumpkin-carriage (147).

that the film, like the experiment, must end. To better understand this fragmented, ambiguous representation of time, I now turn to an exploration of the film's structure, which conforms to what Deleuze has referred to as the shifting topology of the time-image in Resnais' films (156-159).

### 3.3.2 Being (T)here: Body, Consciousness and the *Personnage Spectateur*

I have already, in my discussion of *Cléo de 5 à 7*, referenced Deleuze's notion of the mobile, disembodied "pur voyant" in Italian neorealist film. Deleuze goes on to characterize the films of the French New Wave as a "film-balade" in which "un cinéma de voyant remplace l'action" (18). We can certainly see evidence of that in the case of *Cléo*, in which we witness the passage of real time and the navigation of lived space through Cléo's eyes. Yet, while Cléo's is a teleological, embodied stroll in situated space and linear time (her steps falling in time with the ticking musical score), Claude Ridder's is a scattered, disembodied skip *through* time and mental space. The *balade* aspect is certainly present, but here it is stationary stroll—he is ensconced in a spongy chair inside a dark chamber—through his own consciousness, through subjective, immeasurable time and remembered places. In this way, Ridder is, as Diane Arnaud terms him, a "personnage spectateur": passive, immobilized and under the effect of a mind-altering drug, Ridder becomes an extension of the film spectator (26). As we sit watching in an equally darkened room, intoxicated in our own way by the film-viewing experience, our

diegetic double and the film's focalizing eye travels through his memories with us in exactly the same conditions to create a trans-filmically shared experience.<sup>117</sup>

That the chamber in which Ridder sits is called "La Sphère" gives us another indication as to the role of time and space in the film as, quite simply, the amorphous structure is hardly sphere-shaped. "Sphere" thus more logically refers to an abstract site: the mental realm not bound by physical space and clock time by and through which Ridder travels. It is initially engaged via the experiment but subsequently appears to be hijacked/disrupted by Ridder's own consciousness, which transports him through a hiccupping, discontinuous montage of memories (what Arnaud calls a "bégaiement temporal"), displaying even the content of his dreams as lived experience: the interaction between mind and *monde-cerveau* (36). If the experiment aims to control how Ridder exists in space and time, the machine-brain fails to carry out its intended purpose: to take him back in time exactly one year for exactly one minute. It does, nonetheless, appear to physically displace him. With each temporal stutter, Ridder's body is shown disappearing from the Sphere, its imprint in the chair the only trace of his presence/absence. Through the processes of memory, he exists simultaneously in both times/places and in neither: it is, as Arnaud states, "être là sans y être, être une version autre, déplacée, de soi" (26). According to Arnaud's figuration of Ridder as a passive "personnage spectateur" with whom we are to identify, Ridder-present cannot be assimilated into (his visions of) Ridder-past. He is then decorporealized, absorbed into his mental "sphere," an abstract

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<sup>117</sup> Discussing the contradiction operating at the heart of *Je t'aime, je t'aime*, Boillat argues that the experiment "aboli[t] la dichotomie entre distanciation et immersion, au profit d'une identification avec un personnage *en transit* d'un monde à l'autre, et souvent *transi* dans la posture du spectateur immobile : le monde vient à lui, le convie à s'absorber en lui" (142).

phenomenon that is actualized when, at the end of the film, the chair in which he has been sitting gradually absorbs his body, assimilating it completely into the surrounding, seemingly organic matter of the Sphere.<sup>118</sup>

In their discussion of clausturation in Resnais' films—an affliction which, they argue, can only be overcome by dreaming or suicide—Jean-Louis Leutrat and Suzanne Liandrat-Guigues turn to Foucault's assertion that

les formes majeures de l'imagination s'apparentent au suicide. Ou plutôt le suicide se présente comme l'absolu des conduites imaginaires : tout désir de suicide est rempli de ce monde où je ne serais plus présent ici ou là, mais présent partout, donc chaque secteur me serait transparents, et désignerait son appartenance à ma présence absolue. Le suicide n'est pas une manière de supprimer le monde ou moi, ou les deux ensemble ; mais de retrouver le moment originaire où je me fais monde, où rien encore n'est chose dans le monde, où l'espace n'est encore que direction de l'existence, et le temps mouvement de son histoire. Se suicider, c'est la manière ultime d'imaginer. (113)

Suicide, for Foucault, is the ultimate presence/absence, the solipsistic recognition of the originary self as world. Given this simplified, liberating conception of presence, space

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<sup>118</sup> I have already demonstrated over the previous two chapters how mobility is equated with agency, empowerment and embodied subjectivity. Ridder's subjectivity is shown to be fragmented, decorporealized—a wandering gaze, not unlike the focalizing male gaze from *Nana*, associated with an immobile body. He is a voyeur of his own past and Deleuze's "pur voyant," neither absent nor present as he exists simultaneously on multiple temporal planes (58). In fact, as I will discuss at the end of this chapter, it is only through the repetition of his failed suicide attempt—and thus in death—that he is able to regain corporeality. The movement from passivity to a decisive action on/of the body restores the unity of body and subjectivity.

and time, it is appropriate that Ridder ultimately does turn to suicide—initially as he is “drowned” by Catrine’s overbearing, spectral presence, subsequently as he is literally absorbed by the Sphere, in which he appears to be sinking as into quicksand—and that it is precisely through suicide that he is liberated from these oppressive elements and that body and mind are reunified. Suicide as rebirth is also implied in Ridder’s initial and most recurrent memory-image (a scene to which I will return in my discussion of Catrine): we see him emerge from the ocean in a scuba mask and flippers like a maladroit parody of Venus or a primitive species taking its first steps on dry land. It is an atavistic rebirth—a reference to Catrine’s own atavistic nature—after a suicide that will have retroactively been made successful.

It is notable that in his mental/temporal wanderings, Ridder is frequently taken back to a dull, seemingly insignificant moment of his life, for it is precisely these vignettes of *temps mort*—menial office tasks, banal conversations and the like—that allow us to piece together his identity and provide clues as to the origins of his depression, most notably thanks to a collage of oppositions which whisks Ridder between two competing temporalities: “Une course de temps,” he calls it. “Le temps du bureau contre le temps dehors.” From an endless wait for a tram he has already missed to rote repetitive work that requires efficiency and not thought, Ridder is thoroughly enmeshed in the mind-numbing *Métro-boulot-dodo* schema (see page 120).

In one office scene, a fellow employee comments that his watch appears to be broken since the time it displays is incorrect. “Absolument pas,” Ridder replies. “Elle marche au ralenti. Elle divise le temps en deux très exactement . . . Comme ça, j’ai mon temps personnel, strictement personnel.” The exchange hints once again at the dual

temporality governing Ridder's life—the tension between internal and external time—even prior to the experiment, while also evoking the dual temporality of his time-travel experience, which shuttles him about within his own “temps personnel” to the point that he loses all awareness of external time and muses that perhaps, since entering the Sphere, he has “à peine vieilli de quelques minutes et des siècles ont passé pour le monde.”

Addressing Ridder's perpetual idleness at work, one of Sternberg's notes in the script could well be Ridder's motto: “On fait des choses, on va en faire, mais on en fait rarement” (47). And yet the passage of time seems contingent on Ridder's own action: “Le temps passe pour les autres,” he says. “Mais pour moi seul, enfermé dans cette pièce, il passe plus . . . Il est trois heures à tout jamais.” As he goes on, the scope of his observation expands: “Je pense que pendant cent millions d'années la terre a subi le règne des algues et des mollusques, qu'ensuite elle a été dominée par les grands reptiles et qu'enfin quelqu'un a eu l'idée de créer la firme dans laquelle je suis employé.” Ridder moves from a recognition of his own alienation and the solipsistic universe that he has created for himself to an all-encompassing walk from prehistory to modernity wherein he finds his (meaningless) place. The reference to seaweed and mollusks, of course, echoes his comparison of Catrine to “la marée basse, la noyade, la pieuvre,” raising her sinister specter in her absence. Here, as elsewhere, she figures as a relic of pre-civilization, representing a far more ancient, more natural and more primitive realm. Yet, paradoxically, Ridder's office—operating on the modern corporate principles of productivity and efficiency—comes to be equated with Catrine's stifling, all-consuming death force in an admission that forces of oppression are to be found in all milieux and temporalities. Whether nature or artifice, woman or work, Ridder's life is defined by

external forces, as he is seemingly incapable of or unwilling to assert his agency. Even his implication in Catrine's death remains unconfirmed (he is exonerated by the police) and passive at best. If we are to believe his assertion that he murdered her, the act is nonetheless one of *failing* to act: his refusal to intervene and turn off the gas that kills her in her sleep.

### 3.3.3 Ridder: From the Political to the Personal

In Resnais' contribution to the 1967 short-film anthology *Loin du Vietnam*, the titular character, Claude Ridder (played by Bernard Fresson), is asked to write an analysis of Herman Kahn's tract *On Escalation* for an unnamed filmmaker.<sup>119</sup> Rather than write, Ridder launches into an impassioned diatribe exposing and connecting the contradictions of war, colonialism and capitalism before concluding on a note of impotent defeat and uncertainty: "J'sais plus. Je sais rien. Je n'écrirai rien." As a frightened woman looks on, Ridder's tone shifts from rage to downtrodden, alienated disaffection. The film is, for Robert Benayoun, "une séquence d'exorcisme de l'inaction inacceptée, indéfendable et cependant constatée" and as such constitutes "une maquette potentielle . . . du film à suivre [*Je t'aime, je t'aime*]" (142). Claude Rich's Claude Ridder, then, seems the natural continuation of his eponymous predecessor (all the more so given the continuity created by Fresson's presence in *Je t'aime, je t'aime* as Ridder's best friend). Most obviously, Ridder 1's inability to write in the face of war anticipates Ridder 2's writer's block in the

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<sup>119</sup> The reference is surely a nod to Kubrick, whose character Dr. Strangelove is believed to be partially inspired by Kahn (Menand). Indeed, *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* draws heavily from Kahn's treatise *On Thermonuclear War*.

wake of Catrine's death ("Je n'écrirai plus beaucoup maintenant."). Yet, more importantly, Fresson's *Ridder* speaks of the connection between the personal and the political, suggesting that all war is ultimately a sum total of personal vendettas—avenging a fallen brother's death, and so on. This theme is taken up implicitly in *Je t'aime, je t'aime* in the perpetual conflict between *Ridder*'s personal world and a broader, external world on the margins of which he exists.<sup>120</sup> Leutrat and Liandrat-Guigues state that in this transitional period of Resnais' career, particularly marked by *La guerre est finie* (1967),

la leçon de l'après-guerre est exposée : les modalités du combat politique doivent changer, les postures héroïques ou lyriques sont devenues irréelles. L'homme ordinaire est comme un 'revenant' au sein de l'Histoire, ainsi qu'en témoigne la vie de l'employé Claude Ridder dans *Je t'aime, je t'aime*. Le cinéma, lieu de l'ordinaire, est à même de faire prendre conscience des instants quelconques qui font autant les existences banales que les moments historiques délestés de tout discours volontariste ou prophétique. (18-19)

The Claude Ridder of *Je t'aime, je t'aime* is indeed a revenant: a man "reborn"<sup>121</sup> after a failed suicide attempt and, on a metadiegetic level, the homonymic residue of a previous film. From Resnais' grandiose earlier films to the stifling domesticity of *Muriel, ou le temps d'un retour* and *Je t'aime, je t'aime*, we witness the return with a difference

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<sup>120</sup> Resnais frames the characterization of Claude Ridder in terms of his marginalization: "Je crois aussi qu'un des sujets du film, à propos de Claude Ridder, c'est de poser la question : peut-on vivre autant en marge qu'il le fait ? Peut-on passer toute sa vie, ainsi entièrement à côté ?" (*Avant-Scène* 11).

<sup>121</sup> Deleuze has spoken of the "personnage lazarien" and the "héros frileux" and "fantomatiques" of Resnais films, whether in Auschwitz, Hiroshima, or framed by the appropriately expressionist Brussels backdrop of *Je t'aime, je t'aime*, a location selected to convey marginalization and alterity, via an unfamiliar language and bleak urban landscape (270-1).

(explicitly referenced in the title of *Muriel*) that Ridder comes to embody: “[Resnais] se déplaça des grandes batailles du monde vers les guerres domestiques, des catastrophes de l’humanité aux désastres sentimentaux, des explosions nucléaires aux *aftershocks* conjugaux” (Serge Kaganski qtd. in Leutrat and Liandrat-Guigues 20).

Zola, as we have seen, had effected the symbolic transposition of the political onto the personal long before Resnais, demonstrating that the representation of either need not be mutually exclusive and that both are often intertwined, that characters exist within their immediate, affective worlds but also within a broader socio-historically situated context. In *Je t’aime, je t’aime*, the personal subsumes and internalizes those broader, external hostilities, as we see in Ridder’s dream sequences, which comingle with waking lived experience in his memories. Many ostensible dream sequences (often only identifiable as such thanks to Sternberg’s indications in the screenplay) are set in the workplace and showcase the all-consuming yet unfulfilling nature of Ridder’s career, from his first job as a packager to a managerial position and finally that of a published, yet increasingly aphasic, author. This “travail pénible, ingrat et intensif . . . une sorte de spirale monocorde et sans fin” (Sternberg 40) extends to the very structure of the film which perpetually whisks Ridder and the spectator back and forth from domestic life with Catrine (or, in her absence, Ridder’s female confidant Wiana) to increasingly surreal workplace scenes where he appears to be in the midst of an existential crisis.

What is perhaps most striking about his condition is that, in spite of his apparent indifference, he exhibits a kind of hostile energy that he is either unwilling or unable to channel towards any personally meaningful or professionally productive activity. Sternberg describes the young Ridder in his first job accordingly: “Il y a en lui quelque

chose de naturellement agressif—ou d'exacerbé par la guerre à peine terminée—mais rien de revendicateur, pas tellement de tendance à la révolte juvénile” (21). He is entirely focused on repeating mechanical gestures, counting, verifying, and remains oblivious to his surroundings. The scene of young Ridder sorting magazines, like the other workplace scenes in the film, is a lonely postmodern echo of the assembly line in *Modern Times*, though unlike the Little Tramp, who is unknowingly swept up in anticapitalist resistance, Ridder is consciously and smugly content to remain in his subordinate role,<sup>122</sup> to carry out rote tasks with a full awareness of his own wasted potential. When his boss suggests that he deploy his “energy” in a more authoritative capacity (“...diriger un service..., avoir des responsabilités...”), Ridder responds, “Je déteste les responsabilités”—adding, when prompted, that he comes from a family with money. Years later, as a successful author, he is shown mechanically dedicating copies of his book, scrawling the same generic note in each one. There is, then, no distinction between one mindless task and another: all labor is reduced to efficiency and an attempt to pass time: to escape the eternal three o'clock of the office.

In line with Ridder's seemingly contradictory submission to both nature and artifice, work and domesticity, his writerly identity is folded into the kind of mechanical rationalism that characterized the rapid onset of capitalism in postwar France, particularly in the form of factory jobs (most famously those at Renault) which emblemized assembly-line efficiency and whose striking workers would become a key catalyst of the

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<sup>122</sup> In one scene, Ridder and Catrine are in a train passing by a village that his regiment had liberated during the war. He sets the scene of their march into a shower of bullets. “Ça donne envie de foutre le camp,” he tells Catrine. “Mais fuir c'est encore plus dangereux. C'est pour cela que tout le monde avance.” Here, unlike Fresson's Ridder, there is no individual vendetta, only a fear of autonomy, of reclaiming one's individual agency in the face of danger, uncertainty and the possibility of punishment.

May '68 movement.<sup>123</sup> Yet, ironically, Ridder's attire, office setting and position of power (he has the authority to hire Catrine) suggest that he is instead intended to play the role of the *cadre*, himself also a figurehead of modernizing France, yet one in the difficult position of representing at once social mobility, if not progress, and a complex hierarchical station as neither *patron* nor *ouvrier* (Ross 171, see Chapter 1).

Catrine, who, as we have seen, rejects both capitalism and mobility—two key pillars of 1960s French society<sup>124</sup>—expresses disbelief at Ridder's willing implication in this oppressive structure:

Catrine : Parfois je me demande comment tu t'y prends pour accepter.

Ridder : Pour accepter quoi.

Catrine : Tout. De te lever tôt.<sup>125</sup> De travailler pour toi, pour moi. Je ne comprends pas. Moi je ne pourrais pas.

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<sup>123</sup> Indeed, the strikes at the Renault plant in Boulogne-Billancourt in mid-May 1968 contributed to the decision to cancel the Cannes Film Festival prior to the scheduled screening of *Je t'aime, je t'aime*.

<sup>124</sup> Despite the fact that the film is set in Brussels—a decision attributable to the Belgian Sternberg—it presents the more universal condition of the young European *néobourgeois*, particularly apparent in Paris as we have seen in my discussion of *2 ou 3 choses*, released a year before *Je t'aime, je t'aime*. Robert Benayoun summarizes the indeterminacy of place and subjectivity in another one of Resnais' films as follows: “Tous les hôtels, tous les jardins se ressemblent, toutes les villes, toutes les femmes' dira Marienbad” (68). And indeed, this formula extends to encompass a number of Resnais' films, including *Je t'aime, je t'aime*: as with Zola and Godard, an equivalency is established between woman and city, between (female) body and space. Both are presented as charged signifiers, referencing everything/everywhere and thus nothing/nowhere. Brussels might just as well be Paris with its trams, traffic jams and scurrying people, but it ultimately remains unidentifiable due to the film's *huis clos* focus on generic cafés and office spaces, and cramped, cluttered interiors. Catrine, in turn, like Delphine Seyrig's A in *Marienbad*, is potentially at once every woman and no one: a cipher with no identity, constructed by a man until she intervenes and participates in the construction of her narrative.

<sup>125</sup> Catrine is particularly disturbed by the thought of getting up early, which signifies not only labor but more specifically the working class (Nicolas Sarkozy highlighted this correlation in 2007, evoking the hardships of “la France qui se lève tôt”). In one scene from the couple's ill-fated vacation in Glasgow, she remarks during an early-morning thunderstorm: “Ils se lèvent tellement tôt tous ces gens . . . Dieu... les ouvriers...” There is then something unnatural, even sinister (coexisting with the lightning bolts associated with a God of wrath), about labor and those who must perform it to survive that momentarily rattles her idle, aristocratic existence.

Ridder : Moi non plus, je ne comprends pas toujours. Mais, parfois tout me paraît très simple au contraire. Ni plus absurde, ni moins absurde qu'autre chose. En fin de compte, il n'y a aucune différence réelle entre composer une symphonie dantesque et trier des fiches de comptabilité ou des petits pois.

Once again, Ridder collapses all types of labor, whether artistic or purely economic, as the negation of idleness and the passage of time. As such, labor should be the negation of the forces of stagnation and immobility that Catrine embodies and projects onto Ridder, and that Ridder has visibly internalized in the wake of his suicide attempt, having become totally lethargic and indifferent. In reality, however, the opposite is true: labor appears to be a continuation of this domestic stagnation, and the will to work—whether to write a novel or go to the office—seems overpowered by Catrine's will to idleness. Indeed, Ridder quits his job the day he meets Catrine and later, as a writer, admits that he can/will no longer write.

In his memories, Ridder and those around him behave like somnambulists, moving about lethargically or simply remaining prostrate, as he and Catrine are often shown, lying fully clothed on the beach or in bed. Whether the oneiric quality of his memories is an effect of the drug he has been given to keep him immobile during the experiment<sup>126</sup> or simply Ridder's past as he recalls it, the disaffected, somnolent mental

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<sup>126</sup> Specifically, the scientists want him to undergo the experiment as a "dormeur éveillé." The notion of the "dormeur éveillé," of course, brings to mind the mystical sleeping/waking duality of Any Anderson/Sowana, again emphasizing the metaphysical, rather than scientific, nature of the experiment Ridder undergoes, as well as his own role in subjectively, if unconsciously, shaping the experience. These words also echo Edison's suggestion that Hadaly, once delivered to the secluded grounds of Ewald's castle, will behave as a "mystérieuse somnambule," wandering about in an external projection of Ewald's consciousness (146). In "Le Désir d'être un homme," Chaudval is also described as moving about with a "démarche somnambulesque"; for Villiers, an air of somnambulism seems to signify mystical idealism (90).

and social space he is shown to inhabit is decidedly out of step with the turbulent, activist climate surrounding—and ultimately preventing—the film’s release. Indeed, far from the kind of fatalistic alienation we see in *Ridder and Catrine*, May ’68 was marked by a collective will to action and, more importantly, the convergence of distinct and self-defined social groups that fostered solidarity: between students and workers and even between protesters and filmmakers (among them several of Resnais’ New Wave peers, including Godard). With this in mind, I now turn to a closer consideration of *Catrine*’s role as impetus of (in)action which, in its rejection of society, solidarity and the established socio-economic frameworks within which May ’68 protesters operated, constitutes a revolt of a different order: the kind more at home in the symbolist novel of the late nineteenth century.

#### 3.3.4 *Catrine*: Decadence and Domination

In his reflection on *Catrine* as a character, Resnais initially speaks in terms that also evoke Zola’s *Nana*:

Et puis j’ai peut-être été trop subtil en raisonnant comme suit : le personnage de *Catrine* est destructeur malgré elle ; c’est une fille qui mènera son compagnon jusqu’à sa perte, elle secrète la mort. Il faut éviter le cliché d’une comédienne dramatique, il faut prendre quelqu’un qui ait l’air en bonne santé, dont on ne se méfie pas . . . L’idée était qu’il ne faut pas qu’on sente qu’elle est une incarnation de la mort. Il ne faut pas qu’elle fasse héroïne russe ravagée dès le début. Cela a gêné sûrement la compréhension du film. Avoir un héros qui se refuse à toute

entreprise et que le film sorte en mai 68, ce n'était pas le moment. (qtd. in Leutrat and Liandrat-Guigues 228)

What is perhaps most striking about his observations is that, more than any lack of political engagement with the immediate concerns of its time, he attributes the film's ultimate failure to the overly subtle figuration of Catrine as a force of destruction. This is, of course, quite the opposite of Nana, who is from the start—thanks largely to the omniscient narrator—established as a force of destruction and social decay. In *Je t'aime, je t'aime*, the absence of any overarching moral judgment and the Resnaisian eschewal of any kind of unified subjectivity or truth hinder attempts to make sense of Catrine as a character, much less determine her narrative function in the non-linear diegesis (even as it eventually becomes clear that she is the impetus for Claude's self-destruction and thus the reason he ends up at the Centre Crespel, taking part in the experiment that generates the film).

When asked following the film's release whether he perceives Catrine as a “personnage pivotant,” Resnais replied, “C'est, en effet, sa fixité qui déclenche par moments ce qu'on pourrait appeler un drame” (Labro 10), underscoring the contradiction by which it is precisely Catrine's failure to move that generates the (erratic) movement of the plot: Ridder endures a series of unfulfilling, monotonous jobs until he meets Catrine and becomes infatuated with her; her companionship exacerbates his existential malaise; he ends up possibly killing her and subsequently attempting to kill himself; he takes part in the time travel experiment and *does* kill himself. In her dreamlike fixity, Catrine seems to exert a gravitational pull on Ridder that recalls Nana's ability to mobilize Parisian men around her bed-altar. It is symbolic that Ridder, in his first and most recurrent memory

(and the spectator's first glimpse of Catrine), reports the findings of his snorkeling expedition as follows: "Deux serpents de mer, quelques requins, des méduses géantes." All three sea creatures are menacing, though the *méduses* (jellyfish) suggest the added threat of their homonymic woman-monster for whom Catrine's unconscious ability to transfer her immobility to another offers a striking parallel.

The scene is the first of many to reference the ocean, inevitably as a metaphor for the all-encompassing pull Catrine exerts on Ridder, particularly apparent in the oft-repeated shot of Ridder coming up for air, each time with greater difficulty. The last time we see the shot, the sound of his fatal gunshot overlays the sound of his gasp as he struggles to keep his head above water; his Venusian "rebirth" via the experiment is shown to be, in fact, a second and final suicide, this time carried to completion. Indeed, in the repeated sequence of Ridder emerging fully from the water to join Catrine on the beach, the continuity between the ocean and Catrine becomes clear: she is shown sprawled catatonically—her pose somewhere between that of a siren and flotsam—against a ledge of seaweed that the low tide has left exposed. The image anticipates Ridder's comment, in another beach scene, that Catrine smells of "la marée basse, la noyade, la pieuvre. D'ailleurs cette plage..." He pauses and Catrine finishes his sentence: "Oui, cette plage, c'est moi..."

This time it is Ridder's discourse, and no longer visual cues, that equates Catrine and the ocean as an all-engulfing, destructive force.<sup>127</sup> Yet Catrine is also an assimilative

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<sup>127</sup> Leutrat and Liandrat-Guigues discuss the centrality (if symbolic indeterminacy) of the *Inconnue de la Seine* mythos to Resnais' body of work. They suggest that the famed death mask—believed to be that of a drowned Parisian girl bearing an enigmatic *Mona Lisa* smile ("La Joconde du suicide" according to Breton)—fits into a broader mythology of mysterious "women of the waters," some monstrous (*les méduses*), some dangerously alluring (sirens—a key figure in Aragon's *Paysan de Paris*, itself a formative

force: not simply one that engulfs, but one that metempsychotically invades/absorbs (like the matter of the brain-machine), influences and haunts. For even in Catrine's absence, Ridder both inhabits and is inhabited (*habité*) by her. While away on a business trip, for example, he is shown talking to her on the phone. She instructs him to close his eyes and allow her to describe his surroundings (in reality, a hotel room overlooking the ocean): "Tout est bleu, il fait tout bleu. Le ciel est bleu, la mer, le papier peint, le sable, la ville..." Her words suffice to immerse—and, increasingly, subsume him—in her ocean-world, to the point that he tells his girlfriend Wiana after Catrine's death that he had begun to feel as though "peu à peu, elle m'oxydait," like a weathered hull rusted by ocean water. The implied erosion of the industrial (iron) by the natural (water) in Ridder's comment encapsulates the dichotomy that he, the rationalist office worker, forms with Catrine, the errant, unsocialized woman whose soliloquy about the merits of living like a cat draws clear parallels to her own way of life and, moreover, describes the master-slave dynamic that is implicitly established between her and Ridder: "Ainsi aux chats Dieu aurait donné l'indolence et la lucidité et à l'homme la nevrose, la passion de construire et de posséder les choses . . . Ainsi l'homme n'aurait été créé que pour prendre en charge l'existence du chat." She concludes, "Toute la civilisation que l'homme a édifiée n'aurait qu'un but : offrir aux chats le confort, le manger et le gîte." The dialectic that plays out between the lovers is then as much one of nature and machine (Ridder is, for example,

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work for Resnais), others anonymous drowning victims (116-131). Catrine, herself a cipher about whom we know very little, fits into this mythology on the one hand as the unlikely composite of the seductive siren and the drowned woman (shown "washed up" on the beach in more than one scene), but also as the ocean itself that swallows up those who navigate it. Like so many of the female characters that I have examined in previous chapters, Catrine becomes impossibly overdetermined, laden with multiple irreconcilable meanings: her body is alternately spatialized, reified, sexualized and mostroicized.

often shown “malfunctioning” while completing rote tasks, from humorously miscounting envelopes to dictating a form letter in gibberish) as it is the domination of a fragile ego by an animalistic id. Indeed, the distribution of roles both conforms to and subverts the gender norms in 1960s France that I have already discussed (see Chapter 1): men were to aspire to progress, efficiency and economic prosperity—the *jeune cadre* representing a kind of engineer(ed) *Adam futur*—while expectations of women were largely unchanged from the previous century; their purview remained the domestic sphere, though they were now assisted in their household labor by technology.

From jellyfish and octopuses to mud, the discourse surrounding—and produced by—Catrine figures her as the antithesis of Ridder: not so much a degeneration as a willful atavistic return to a pre-socialized, pre-rationalized world, underpinned by a seemingly paradoxical imperative of *confort* and idleness (signified by domestic cats): two decidedly more modern concepts evoking an aristocratic, civilized lifestyle. Catrine’s fusion of atavism and decadent excess calls to mind existentially troubled male protagonists from Huysmans’ *Des Esseintes (À Rebours)* to Gide’s Michel (*L’Immoraliste*) and indeed Ewald and his early predecessor, Hoffmann’s Nathanael (*Der Sandmann*), thereby figuring Catrine and Ridder as an inversion of the nineteenth-century formula: here, the decadent dandy woman meets and, unlike Ewald, *masters* the automaton.

The proximity to Catrine that Ridder initially desires is actualized as an almost spiritual possession, one that Catrine seems to foresee and even warn Ridder about. When he confesses his need for her on the day they meet, she replies, “Je suis invivable.” Ridder’s response in turn suggests his own unconscious prescience: “Je n’ai pas

l'intention de vous vivre," he says. "Je veux être près de toi."<sup>128</sup> His comment recalls Sternberg's note: "Il n'y a que Catrine qu'il prend au sérieux. Il vit avec elle, en elle, pour elle" (49). Here again, the themes of proximity, assimilation and something between substitution and existential fulfillment emerge. For, in various moments of their relationship, Ridder is shown to assume Catrine's morbid discourse, her somnolent physicality (see the scene in which the couple is sprawled fully clothed on the beach as Ridder's mouse time-travel companion scurries past), and even her non-identity. As the narrative unfolds in temporal leaps and stutters, and as Catrine becomes coded as the decadent dandy of yore (a traditionally male identity), Ridder is coded as another popular nineteenth-century literary figure: the double.

### 3.3.5 From Double to Revenant: Ridder in Catrine's Grasp

It is precisely Catrine's lack of energy and ambition that draws Ridder to her before he even meets her. His interest is piqued when he learns that a prospective employee is painstakingly slow at addressing envelopes and he later reminisces about his *coup de foudre* with the kind of warped romanticism that pervades the film and defines the characters' relationship: "Et je n'avais surtout jamais vu personne faire des enveloppes, à moitié couchée sur une table, la tête posée sur le bureau." Ridder's remark simultaneously evokes Catrine's lethargy—at least as she appears in his memories, as though all memory of her has been marked by the posterior knowledge of her death—and foreshadows her death itself, a defining moment in Ridder's life and indeed the event that

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<sup>128</sup> Ridder's constant vacillation between "vous" and "tu" during this first encounter also foreshadows Catrine's doubled identity.

comes to define his own identity as a man whose very action is characterized by inaction, evidenced in his ambiguous role in Catrine's death.

Catrine recalls the same work experience in different terms: "Aucun travail ne me convient mieux. Les bureaux me rendent malade." Again and again, her pathological aversion to work figures her as an anachronism: a decadent figure with a backstory as nebulous as it is Dickensian (she claims to be the orphan of a financially-ruined father), as old as time and yet strangely naïve about the mechanisms of capitalism that drive modern society. At one point, Ridder's friend asks him,

"Qu'est-ce qu'elle faisait quand tu l'as rencontrée ?"

"Rien."

"Et maintenant ?"

"Toujours rien."

Like the cats she idolizes, Catrine seems to have subsisted exclusively on the labor of others—including Ridder's—though repeatedly expresses incomprehension at Ridder's willingness and capacity to work, notably given the contractual engagement, which for her seems to suggest slavery, that his salary entails. Likewise, she rejects the signifiers of modern consumer culture and by extension the image of the 1960s bourgeois housewife—both of which are associated with household objects and appliances—on the grounds that buying generates further labor and contingencies: "Il y a trop de choses justement. Puis il faut les nettoyer, les astiquer, les réparer. L'esclavage..." For Catrine, labor and its fruits are folded into a single force of oppression. Indeed, she rejects all superfluity and claims to be content with what few possessions she has ("Je n'ai besoin de rien pour l'instant."), a satisfaction that contrasts with Ridder's unhealthy dependence

on her: “J’ai besoin de toi, je crois,” he tells her within hours of meeting her. As the relationship unravels, the normally reserved Ridder lashes out, faced with the realization that he himself has been reduced to the role of a disposable commodity, a status both superfluous and undesirable for Catrine: “Tu n’as même pas besoin de moi!” he yells. “Tu as simplement besoin que je sois là.”<sup>129</sup>

Proximity to Catrine thus becomes stifling, overwhelming. “Même quand je fais l’amour avec d’autres filles, je me sens happé par toi,” Ridder complains in characteristic frankness about his infidelities, suggesting that sleeping with other women is an attempt to liberate himself from Catrine’s grasp. In reality, his other relationships are inevitably haunted by the specter of Catrine as though every other woman in his life is a stand-in for her. Accordingly, while Resnais acknowledges that his supposedly unintentional choice to cast actresses who resemble Olga Georges-Picot’s Catrine in secondary roles (notably Anouk Ferjac’s Wiana, who serves as a kind of external substitute for Catrine) may have created unnecessary confusion, the decision in fact proves to be an ingenious way of focalizing Ridder’s perception of the world as being indelibly marked by Catrine (Leutrat and Liandrat-Guigues 227).

Ridder’s association of Catrine with “d’autres filles” also points to her diffuse identity: she is at once every woman and no woman. When asked if she has left behind any family, Ridder replies, “Plus un seul. Plus un seul, pas même un cousin. Elle n’avait

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<sup>129</sup> The full quote continues: “L’idéal, ce serait de me faire empailler, de me mettre dans un coin. Mais je suis vivant... Je vais, je viens, je bouge, je vois d’autres gens. Si je ne voyais que toi... mais je serais capable de me trancher la gorge...” Rather than Catrine becoming Engel’s objectified bourgeois housewife, property of her husband, it is Ridder who feels objectified and subjugated by Catrine in his existential superfluity.

pas d'amis, pas d'attaches. Pas non plus de patron. Elle ne travaillait pas. Elle n'avait pas affaire aux contributions." In death as in life, Catrine leaves no tangible trace: she has no family, has not worked, has not paid taxes. Ridder even admits that she obtained her first identity papers for their trip to Glasgow. She exists anonymously on the margins of society in the same manner as Mona in Varda's *Sans toit ni loi*, though unlike Mona, who lives in deplorable conditions, Catrine lives comfortably—a testament to the feline lifestyle she espouses.<sup>130</sup>

Yet, despite her alleged lack of family, Catrine makes numerous curious references to her sister(s). She provides, for example, a cryptic explanation of her lack of attachment to possessions:

Catrine: Quand mon père est mort, il était déjà ruiné depuis longtemps. Les deux orphelines, c'est moi.

Ridder: Toutes les deux ?

Catrine: Parfaitement.

When Ridder expresses remorse over having met Catrine, she replies:

“Ça n'aurait rien changé. Un peu plus tôt, un peu plus tard, tu aurais rencontré une de mes sœurs.” While there is, in her words, a simple suggestion of feminine solidarity, there is also a somber insinuation that any other relationship Ridder were to enter into

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<sup>130</sup> Ridder even confides in Wiana: “La plupart des gens que je connaissais [he speaks in the past tense as though in killing Catrine he has killed himself] n'avaient jamais vu Catrine. Ou bien, ils l'avaient à peine entrevue. Je suppose même que, depuis des années, ils ne savaient même plus si, oui ou non, je vivais encore avec elle.” Wiana replies, “C'est vrai que tu l'as toujours cachée.” Given this information, Benayoun raises the possibility that Catrine is a figment of Ridder's imagination (146), an illusion or idealistic projection as Hadaly is intended to be for Ewald. Likewise, Ridder's “haunting” by Catrine (or “of” Catrine, if we follow Benayoun's reasoning) recalls Edison's conception of desire as the double of one's own soul projected onto an external object (131).

would come to the same destructive conclusion. The tension between solidarity—a quality which does not seem consistent with Catrine’s solipsistic nature—and a kind of omnipresent self-replication against which Ridder is fatalistically powerless, recalls my previous discussion of Nana and her influence over Muffat.

One of the film’s most memorable scenes (seemingly the memory of a dream, though Sternberg does not specify) evokes this doubling even in Catrine’s absence. Ridder arrives at Wiana’s apartment only to discover that she is not home. Another woman’s voice calls to him from the bathroom: “Nous sommes deux filles dans la salle de bain. Laquelle choisirez-vous : celle de gauche ou celle de droite ?” When he enters, he is framed by, to one side, a woman in a bathrobe and to the other, her mirror reflection. The scene suggests numerous layers of substitutions: the absent Wiana is a substitution for Catrine, the stranger in the bathroom is a substitution for Wiana, and even she is substituted by her reflection, surrounding Ridder on both sides and propositioning him with disarming assurance. Ridder responds to her question by unknowingly selecting her mirror image, the most mediated substitution possible.

If Catrine is a cipher, Ridder is also gradually revealed to have a non-identity. In one memory, he approaches a government official he recognizes and explains that he is Claude Rabois, the young man to whom the official gave false identity papers during the war. The official fails to recognize him. Much later, when he accepts to undergo the time-travel experiment, he informs the researchers, in words that echo his description of Catrine, “Vous en seriez pour vos frais ; je n’ai pas de famille.” When Ridder confides in Wiana that he has murdered Catrine, the incredulous Wiana replies, “J’en arrive à me demander qui tu es exactement.” His response channels his preferred metaphors of the

couple's relationship and evokes his existential dependence on Catrine: "Quelque chose d'assez flou. De plus en plus flou. Je rétrécis et je déteins aux lavage." Like a piece of fabric tossed about in a washing machine (yet another image suggesting Catrine's swirling tide of influence and destruction), Ridder remains under Catrine's hold, yet her absence has altered his identity: "Je n'écrirai plus beaucoup maintenant," he admits, suggesting that his ability to perform his job was tied to the necessity of providing for Catrine as much as to any muse-like inspiration she may have provided in return.

After Catrine's death, Ridder becomes her living trace. Just as he is both present and absent, himself and Other, during his time travel, he becomes "une version autre, déplacée" (Arnaud 26) of Catrine in the same way that her ambiguous "sister(s)" are extensions of herself. I have already referred to the "revenant" nature of Resnais' protagonists. If Ridder is haunted by Catrine during her life, then after her death he becomes her specter: she lives on in his lethargic, disaffected and socially alienating behavior. Ridder's failed suicide attempt *actively* reenacts his passive murder of Catrine, propelling him into the experiment which enables him to confront his past and complete the unfinished act: only by reliving his suicide attempt with him do we understand that his identity as a time traveler and "version autre" of himself transcends the role—*our* role—of passive spectator. Ridder-present is equally embodied by Ridder-past. After completing the unfinished suicide and thereby, ironically, recovering a sense of agency and potency (he missed his heart in his first suicide attempt and confesses that he barely knew how to fire his gun during the war), Ridder's body is shown materializing and dematerializing in various locations on the Crespel Center grounds, no longer bound by Catrine's oppressive fixity, by the Sphere (whose temporal stammering recalls the

malfunctioning of Ridder's own machine-brain), nor by the unified time and space from which the experiment has liberated him.

In the moments leading up to Ridder's suicide, Penderecki's ethereal choral score is replaced by the diegetic strains of Thelonius Monk's instrumental "Misterioso," a work as enigmatic, genre-bending and defiant of formal conventions as Resnais' film. Ridder abruptly stops the record before shooting himself in the chest, as if to make explicit the role of music in the film as an externalization of his inner emotional state, an extension of his existence—and as such no longer necessary. Whereas the "rebirth" through illness of Varda's Cléo presents an opportunity for her to learn, heal and live as a liberated and empathic modern woman, Ridder's second chance is marked by the grim determinism of a society in which there is no place for a man who, forced to look back rather than forward, conforms neither to the elusive ideal of the *homme d'avenir* nor that of the courageous *homme engagé*. Like the twenty-one-day pact<sup>131</sup> in *L'Ève future* which prohibits Ewald from committing suicide in the space of time during which Edison perfects his invention, the diegesis of *Je t'aime, je t'aime* unfolds in the liminal space-time between two suicides.

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<sup>131</sup> It is not insignificant that the phrasing surrounding the terms of the pact ("Accordé: mais pas un de plus !" Ewald tells Edison, 139) reappears almost verbatim in Villiers' short story "Le Droit du passé" in which Bismarck replies to Favre's question as to how many days the Prussian ceasefire will last: "Vingt et un ; pas un de plus" (8).

### 3.3.6 1968-1969: The Year of Becoming Unstuck in Time

One year after the ill-fated release of *Je t'aime, je t'aime*, a similar film was screened at Cannes to a lukewarm reception: Robert Benayoun's *Paris n'existe pas*. Benayoun, a film critic who would go on to publish *Alain Resnais : arpenteur de l'imaginaire* (1980), wrote and directed a time-travel film that in many ways resembles Resnais': like Ridder the writer, Simon, the artist protagonist of *Paris n'existe pas*, is fraught with a splenetic, apolitical inertia, until he is liberated by a hallucinatory drug that jolts him back and forth in time between 1968 Paris and 1920s Paris (though he spends much of the film time-traveling within the confines of his apartment). Unlike Resnais' film, which is largely devoid of obvious temporal indicators and—filmed as it is in Brussels—familiar Parisian landmarks, Benayoun's film is quite intentionally dated and situated, with references to yé-yé culture, mod fashion and, perhaps most telling of all, '68-era pop icon Serge Gainsbourg in the role of the protagonist's friend and confidant. It is Gainsbourg's character who serves, not without irony, as a sort of radical moralist, admonishing Simon for using his time-travel capabilities to flee his present-day responsibilities and insisting on the importance of presence, of *actualité* (“C'est une régression. Tu fuis le réel. Tu te laves les mains de ce qui se passe sous ton nez. C'est une attitude réactionnaire.”).<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Gainsbourg's character's comment about the treasonous reactionism of looking back rather than taking action in the present could well apply to *Je t'aime, je t'aime*, which privileges the “modestes imaginaires privés” of individual memory over engagement with immediate social concerns (Leutrat and Liandrat-Guigues 82). Leutrat and Liandrat-Guigues attribute Resnais' increasing eschewal of political subjects to a timeless mode of filmmaking, less theoretically driven than that of his New Wave peers: “A la différence de Godard [or Benayoun], Resnais n'a pas l'expérience d'un critique ni la réputation d'un théoricien. Son œuvre ne se retrouve pas dans les courants de pensée artistiques *up to date*. Il ne fait pas non plus du cinéma le lieu d'enjeux essentiels car pour lui il n'est qu'un moyen d'expression parmi d'autres,

Where Resnais' film treads softly in the zeitgeist, Benayoun's film explicitly raises the question of the relationship between art(ist) and politics, more specifically: is there an ethical imperative for art to be political, for the artistic to be an activist? Indeed, the images from comics that flash on the screen recall the colorful artwork that underpinned the May '68 movement. Yet, that it is Gainsbourg who delivers this message—denouncing artists as “idôles yé-yé” and branding Simon as a reactionary for focusing on the past rather than the present—creates a level of ironic confusion.

Simon bemoans that he can have only one commitment, and eventually comes to justify his time-travel pursuits as a kind of political engagement in themselves. When his concerned activist friends pay him a visit, he reassures them that activism still matters to him in so far as, ironically, things do not change: “Tu sais, le jour venu, je descendrais dans la rue comme les autres. Seulement, *votre refonte des structures...*” (emphasis added). He later laments to his girlfriend about the dangers of forgetting: “Ils oublient tout. Regarde Algérie : dix ans après c'est comme si ç'avait jamais eu lieu. Les barricades, trois mois après. Même nous. C'est comme si on se connaissait depuis un siècle.” Like Bernard Fresson's Claude Ridder from *Loin du Vietnam*, Simon moves from the political to the personal as though the one is the natural extension of the other. Likewise, in his perception of the use of history—and thus of time travel as a means of accessing it—he moves from the general to the specific, the event to the anecdote:

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aucunement privilégié du fait qu'il est devenu le sien, ou au nom de pouvoirs exorbitants. Il est donc l'anti-Godard (ou l'inverse, Godard est l'anti-Resnais)...” (17).

Si on développait de tels dons [time travel] on pourrait réétudier l'histoire, du moins l'histoire récente, par les menus faits du quotidien. Par exemple, revoir toute la Commune par le biais d'un crottin de pain, ou d'un coin de palissade. J'ai pensé, tu sais, procéder à des regroupements précis, résoudre des petits mystères, ressusciter toute une époque.

This rather structuralist vision of history, one largely inscribed on objects, becomes a prescient indicator of what Benayoun's film will represent to the "time-traveling" spectator of the future who is invited into a collage of 1960s fashion, music, art, discourse, and for whom even Gainsbourg is an artifact.

It is perhaps no coincidence that the film's release on the heels of *Je t'aime, je t'aime* coincided with the publication of Kurt Vonnegut's novel *Slaughterhouse Five*. Becoming "unstuck in time" and acknowledging the subjective dimension of historical events was to become an important narrative device for depicting uncertain times and unresolved traumas, and not just for French writers and filmmakers. While Benayoun's intentionally dated film fell into obscurity not long after its release, it is a fascinating, if flawed, culmination of works past. Resnais laid the groundwork for filming memory with *Nuit et Brouillard*, *Hiroshima mon amour* and *Marienbad*; Chris Marker's formally innovative *La Jetée* paved the way for narrative and technical innovations to convey time and memory with an unsettling mix of immediacy and distance; Godard faithfully chronicled the Parisian culture of his time with increasingly dystopic political overtones. Benayoun incorporates elements from all of these auteurs and uses the trope of time travel as a means of elucidating a complex present. If time travel proves destructive to Claude Ridder, it instructs and inspires Simon with the promise of a useful "regression"

in the service of the present and, above all, a safe haven against the ills of a society in turmoil.

## CONCLUSION

This dissertation has explored the ways in which questions of gender, space and mobility intersect in a selection of *fin-de-siècle* French novels and 1960s French New Wave films in an effort to understand how the interplay of these elements channels the sociopolitical anxieties of the times in which the works were produced. From Zola's *Au Bonheur des Dames* to Resnais' *Je t'aime, je t'aime*, we have seen an array of women who are figured, transfigured and disfigured to reflect surrounding anxieties. We have also seen a parallel trend of men retreating, retiring, looking back: a reactionary mode with classist resonances that is coded as a kind of revolt against the shocks of modernity, a solitary (in)activism that anticipates/recalls the alienated dreamers of modernism, from Proust to Kafka.

In light of Zola, Godard and Varda, I have discussed women's subversive mobility, enabled first by the changing urban landscape and later by a blurring of public and private space and corresponding porousness between the personal and political spheres. These authors/auteurs, along with Villiers, present a troublingly indeterminate model of woman, hovering between agent and object, consumer and commodity, and then show her consciously assume this fluid identity to serve as a powerful intermediary (Denise, Nana, Juliette, Cléo, Sowana) in a world of objects and reified social relations. In contrast, we have also seen the dangerously stationary, even disembodied woman of Zola (*Nana*) and Resnais: one whose milieu is an extension of herself and whose reach, like the tentacles of an octopus, as Ridder describes Catrine, is endless and all-consuming.

In my introduction, I state that “above all, this dissertation stems from a will to understand what cannot be termed continuities so much as repetitions with a difference, echoes, stutters in modern French history.” Perhaps no work that I have explored better conveys this kind of eternal return than the ostensibly apolitical, dislocated *Je t’aime, je t’aime*: a film whose temporal stutters cause its protagonist to relive the same moment over and over, each time with a slight variation (sometimes the camera angle, sometimes the dialogue), signaling at once the subjective, unreliable nature of memory and the multiplicity of perspectives that shape the posterity of any event. While Resnais could not have foreseen the event that hindered the release of his film nor the complex legacy of that event, *Je t’aime, je t’aime*, in all its stifling eschewal of the political and its rejection of an objective past, could not have been more timely.

### A Murky Legacy

*Paris change ! mais rien dans ma mélancolie  
N’a bougé ! palais neufs, échafaudages, blocs,  
Vieux faubourgs, tout pour moi devient allégorie  
Et mes chers souvenirs sont plus lourds que des rocs.*

— Charles Baudelaire, “Le Cygne”

Exactly one hundred years after the Commune, the pétroleuse returned (nominally at least) in the form of Brigitte Bardot and Claudia Cardinale, two hypersexualized

women outlaws in Christian-Jacque's spaghetti western *Les Pétroleuses* (1971). A once grotesque, menacing figure, while still menacing, was now also playfully eroticized, perhaps because there continues to be something subversive and threatening about women openly brandishing their sexuality; or perhaps because submitting women's bodies to a decidedly male camera eye enables them to be safely contained and objectified.

*Les Pétroleuses* was not the only film released that year to implicitly straddle two periods of French history: Pierre Granier-Deferre's *Le Chat* merges Zola's dusty, crumbling *vieux Paris* with the stifling domesticity of Ridder and Catrine. The violence of the interior mirrors the violence of the wrecking ball outside, conjuring with it, of course, Haussmannization, but also evoking the political violence that would rock Courbevoie in the first battle of the Paris Commune. It seems that the digestion of '68 necessarily entailed the assimilation of '71: the former could only be understood—that is to say, comfortably integrated into the cyclical teleology of French history—in terms of the latter, even as the latter itself was transformed and reinterpreted in the process.

Pierre Tchernia's *Les Gaspards* (1974), a brilliant yet largely overlooked parody of Paris' twin histories of urban renewal and revolt, gives credence to this theory as the culmination of such attempts to telescope the two periods into a single narrative. The film depicts an ambitious city prefect carrying out a new round of urban renewal projects that threaten to destroy the remnants of Old Paris (which by now includes those areas already modified by Haussmann). A utopian cult of hippies led by a foppish aesthete (Philippe Noiret) retreats to the Catacombs to undermine and feed off of the ensuing demolitions. In this subterranean brave new world, construction cranes file triumphantly down the

broad avenues of Paris' underground quarries, baskets poised like guns, and helmeted construction workers march alongside the helmeted CRS agents come to liberate the cult's hostages. Tchernia's film, a ludic recognition of the failures of '68, exposes and collapses the many strata, both geological and historical, of the city. It also gives us, in the form of Philippe Noiret's aptly named antihero, Gaspard de Montfermeil (one hears, of course, *m'enfermer*), the twentieth-century incarnation of the anachronistic (in)activist male protagonist, in the tradition of Huysmans' *Des Esseintes*: a superfluous nobleman for whom retreat is revolt and the literal act of "going underground" a refuge against the intrusion of rationalized modernity into a private and subjective temporality.

While such cinematic incursions of the past into the present may have become more subtle over time in French cinema, they continue to manifest in unexpected ways. Mathieu Kassovitz's *La Haine* (1995) depicts a day in the life of three disaffected young men—one Jewish, one black and one *beur* (the son of North African Muslim immigrants)—living in the Cité de la Noé housing projects of Chanteloup-les-Vignes (the HLMs by then being the strongest signifier of the marginalization of poverty and otherness in urban and peri-urban France). The gritty film is notable for its depiction of police violence and the fatalistically bleak existence of *banlieue* youth (almost exclusively male in Kassovitz's vision<sup>133</sup>). In the final scene, one of the friends is shot by a policeman and an armed confrontation ensues against the backdrop of a giant Baudelaire mural spanning the façade of a high-rise. At first glance, the mural serves as an ironic reminder of the French Republic's practice of nominally imposing Frenchness

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<sup>133</sup> In more recent years, Faïza Guène's novel *Kiff kiff demain* (2004) and films such as *Tout ce qui brille* (Géraldine Nakache and Hervé Mimran, 2009), *Bande de filles* (Céline Sciamma, 2014) and *Divines* (Houda Benyamina, 2016) have provided a long-lacking feminine perspective of contemporary life in the Parisian *banlieues*.

on its citizens, all while marginalizing those who do not conform to the white, Catholic model of the oft-cited, if elusive, *Français de souche*. Yet Baudelaire was himself a radical, marginalized figure who stood at the barricades in '48, whose poem "Le Cygne" was a plaintive cry bemoaning Haussmann's expulsion of the lower class from the center of Paris to the periphery (an act establishing demographic patterns that persist to this day), and who was similarly rejected in his time only to later be rehabilitated as—and the mural makes this clear—the face of the French poetic canon. The mural then becomes the bridge between the idealized myth of a unified nation and an alienating, fragmented reality that resonates across spaces and times.

The Commune and May '68 remain ambiguous events and are, as such, frequently appropriated and assigned meaning by competing ideologies, contributing to their complicated posterity. While it is beyond the scope and aim of this dissertation to interpret these events themselves (besides, Kristen Ross' comprehensive analysis of both events and their social, political and aesthetic roots and repercussions has left little room for me to enter the conversation), I do hope that my analysis of the novels or films of each respective period has shed light on the anxieties that generated each event and those that emerged in its wake; on the ways in which those anxieties were given (so often female) form and how the resulting allegorized/spatialized model of literary/cinematic woman eludes definition to subvert her imposed identities; on the inevitable incursion of the political into resolutely personal and aesthetic realms; and perhaps most of all, on the ways in which these texts, in their engagement—however problematic—with their immediate context, continue to exert their anticipatory relevance as French history unfolds in leaps and revolutionary stutters.

Visages, Ville, Âges

Several months ago, around the time that I was writing about *Cléo de 5 à 7*, I happened down the Rue Daguerre, as I so often do when passing through Montparnasse. It was early evening. As I strolled past number 86, I noticed a light on in the kitchen. Peering furtively in the window, I saw a diminutive elderly woman bent over a tea kettle. She looked up for a moment, revealing an immediately recognizable two-toned helmet of hair. It was Agnès Varda, *la daguerréotypesse* herself, spotted in her natural habitat! I raced home and wrote feverishly that night.

While writing the last paragraphs of this dissertation, I learned of Varda's passing: devastating news for the international film community as she had remained an active and influential filmmaker through her final days (her last film, *Varda par Agnès*, screened at the Berlin International Film Festival weeks before her death). But it was also sad news for me personally: not only had Varda been the sole woman auteure examined in this dissertation and, with Godard, one of its only living subjects (as such, I felt, she imbued it with a necessary immediacy); she was also my neighbor.

I never lose sight of the rare privilege I have enjoyed writing this dissertation from my position on the Boulevard des Maréchaux: a ten-minute walk to the periphery that separates me from the crumbling fort and homonymous HLMs of Malakoff; a five-minute walk to 70 Rue des Plantes, the unassuming apartment building from which an imaginative young Breton named Alain Resnais launched an international film career; a fifteen-minute walk to the Rue Daguerre, where Varda and Jacques Demy were longtime residents, and to the neighboring Montparnasse Cemetery, where the couple now rest

together, just feet away from Resnais. Unlike other illustrious graves, the latter's stone lies bare, save an occasional rose and a loving note scrawled in a child's handwriting: a poignant reminder that the process of memorialization surrounding even a cinematic titan of Resnais' stature can be as pluralistic as the competing processes of memory at work both in his films and beyond them, in the subjective realm where historical events are continually recast and reimagined. And it is precisely in this palimpsest of the legend and the man, of the public and the personal, of representation and subjective reality, that divergent posterities collide and converge.

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