EXTREME STATES

Remixing Cinema, Visual Art and Music in Godard's *Puissance de la parole*

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1. A Flux of Sensation: *Puissance de la parole* and Video Mashup

Jean-Luc Godard's 25-minute video *Puissance de la parole* (1988), commissioned by the newly corporatised French telecommunications company France Télécom, wryly explores the power and powerlessness of the spoken word in the modern age. At the same time, and even more contrary to expectation, it experiments boldly with the creative, analytic and technical potential of the electronic medium of video itself, urging its spectators to explore and reflect on historical connections between images and sounds with its myriad of figured collisions between the body and technology.

Puissance de la parole stands as one of several autonomous video shorts made in the late 1980s when Godard was continuing to explore the altered state of cinema and spectatorship in the age of television, and in the emerging era of satellite and cable, in anticipation of the explosion of digital media in the following decade. *Puissance de la parole* and the video short *Le rapport Darty* (1989) followed the production of a two-part series of television advertisements entitled *Closed* (1987-88) and the video short *On s'est tous défilé* (1987), which were made for the fashion designers Marithé and François Girbaud. Crucially, *Puissance de la parole* was made at the same time as the early drafts of the first episodes of Godard's eight-part video series *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1988-98), an extraordinary multiform film that has been defined as both 'a videographic elegy to cinema' and 'a hymn

to the versatility and power of video itself' (Witt 2013: 51-2).

Histoire(s) du cinéma samples many of Godard's videos and feature-length films, including those contemporaneous with *Puissance de la parole*, which itself incorporates a sequence from the first episode of *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, bearing testimony to the important interrelationship between the two films. *Puissance de la parole* is a potent video mashup that has, nevertheless, received minimal critical attention. It fashions a dense intermedial space of clashing intertexts and explosive encounters between human and cosmic forces (Leutrat 2000: 182-3), operating as a microcosm of *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, and training its spectators to engage with the extreme montage states that Godard constructs so vividly in this latter work. Through techniques of fragmentation, decontextualization and through the recombination of pre-existing material, this compact video short pulsates with energy and marks an important shift in Godard's 1980s film work, a shift that sees video come into its own as a poetic and interdisciplinary artistic force.

As Nicholas Cook makes clear, mashup involves 'continuous collisions or negotiations among heterogeneous elements, giving rise to meanings that are emergent, unpredictable, and frequently ineffable' (2013: 57). Video mashup is a plural form that thwarts our customary listening and viewing strategies, compelling us to participate in a volatile, arbitrary and indeterminate sense-making process. J. Meryl Krieger understands remix and mashup as cultural processes of transformation and recreation, 'mechanisms of recycling or transforming materials from other media creators with the aim of producing new content' (2015: 374). She notes that mashups differ slightly from remixes in that they reuse older materials and 'retain the references that often provide cultural contexualization for the mashup audience', while remixes 'blend these materials to the point where original authorship or identifiers can be lost' (2015: 374). *Puissance de la parole* is a mashup that tips into the remix, as aural and visual fragments deriving from films, paintings, popular songs and other musical compositions are progressively (and aggressively) pulverised, almost beyond the point of recognition. This video forges connections between different art forms (film, poetry, visual art, music) and in doing so it exposes us to Godard's particular contribution to mashup culture, namely, his manner of harnessing and recasting the main formal characteristics of his source material.

Although *Puissance de la parole* is concerned with the lost traces of the cinematographic image and with the technical specificity of the electronic medium of video, it also lays emphasis on video's vital place in audiovisual history. Holly Rogers argues that video is not simply a visual genre but a 'highly *musical* genre', rooted in the interrelated histories of musical and visual culture (2013: 1, original emphasis). She notes that many early video artists were originally musicians and composers, and demonstrates that when video became available to the consumer in the mid-1960s it facilitated the blending together of music and visual art in unprecedented ways that led to a new type of active spectatorship. Rogers asserts: '[v]ideo, then, produced a unique moment in audiovisual history: able to create both image and sound concurrently, the new technology instigated the birth of the artist-composer and process-driven, interactive intermediality' (2013: 1-2). Rogers thus replaces the concept of the video artist with that of the video 'artist-composer' and she redefines the genre of video-art as 'video *art-music*' (2013: 2, original emphasis), a term deployed in recognition of video's basic audiovisuality and one that could well be applied to *Puissance de la parole*.[1] As Michael Witt has pointed out, for Godard, video is a flexible medium that 'allows the fluid, quasi-musical passage to and fro between different moments in time, in a manner that is more difficult and time consuming to achieve in 35mm' (2013: 54). My hope is that by understanding more fully the rich musicality of *Puissance de la parole*, spectators and commentators alike will find new ways into the more marginal, under-analysed video works in the Godardian corpus that, in turn, elucidate the distinctive musical logic that pervades *Histoire(s) du cinéma* and other Godard video shorts, short films and features.[2]

Puissance de la parole takes its name from Charles Baudelaire's translation of Edgar Allan Poe's short story *The Power of Words* (1845) in which Poe sets out his 'theory of vibrations', which he expands upon in his more extensive essay *Eureka* (1848) on science and cosmology. The video is structured around a fraught telephone conversation between ex-lovers Frank (Jean-Michel Iribarren) and Velma (Lydia Andréi) and Frank's gloomy utterance 'Allo' is played at different speeds, evoking the first word allegedly recorded by Edison's phonograph. The dialogue between Frank and Velma consists of a two-page excerpt from James M. Cain's novel *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1934), a classic text for the cinema, with Pierre Chenal's *Le Dernier tournant* (1939), Luchino Visconti's *Ossessione* (1943) and Tay Garnett's *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1945) all based on

the same novel. Encircling this stormy inner dialogue is an outer metaphysical circle composed of a lengthy cosmic dialogue between two angels, Mlle Oïnos (Laurence Côte) and M. Agathos (Jean Bouise), extracted from Poe's *The Power of Words* (Moullet 2005).

In this article I explore Godard's video mashup as a disruptive and violent intermedial space where past and future meet. I devote particular attention to the structural relation between the extracts of music, especially Maurice Ravel's *La Valse* (1919-20), and two key paintings by Francis Bacon. Indeed, Godard's manner of 'composing with' the musical extracts in this video loads them with an immediacy and a special affective power, bringing to life what James S. Williams aptly identifies as 'a creative *act* in the present tense' (2004: 300, original emphasis). Furthermore, Godard's handling of recorded sound and music, in conjunction with his treatment of Bacon's *Study from the Human Body* (1949) and *Figure in Movement* (1979), is hugely significant because together the mix of music and painting powerfully expresses the ambivalent convergence between movement and stillness that constitutes what Laura Mulvey terms cinema's 'central paradox' (2006: 12). Godard transposes Ravel's *La Valse*, a 'choreographic poem' for the stage, into a videographic poem for the screen, which indulges and deranges the spectators' ears and eyes as the enthralling vestiges of cinema's past are recovered, re-examined and configured anew. By charting tendencies of dissolution, distortion and reconstruction, I reveal how a sense of nostalgia for the cinematographic image, mixed with the distant traces of a waltz, gives life to a disorderly spectacle that shatters boundaries between media, engendering unfamiliar experiences of familiar works and producing new musical visions in the process.

2. Ravel, the Grotesque and the Spirit of Excess

Ravel composed *La Valse* for the Ballets Russes and subtitled his score a 'choreographic poem', implying that it was conceived for the stage. The striking use of repetition, circular motion and the music's tendency toward dysfunction and self-destruction grant the work its place in what Deborah Mawer has termed Ravel's 'dance-machine' trajectory (2000a: 65-6).[3] *La Valse* was first performed as an orchestral work in 1920 and later premiered at the Opéra in 1929, commissioned by Ida Rubinstein and choreographed by Bronislava

Nijinska with sets by Alexandre Benois. *La Valse* is a lavish and devastating composition in which the music seems directed towards its own dissolution. In her study of the waltz, Sevin Yaraman states that by the turn of the 20th century '[t]he original era of the Viennese waltz, like the society that gave rise to it, was coming to an end' (2002: 91). She defines *La Valse* as a piece 'about' the 19th-century Viennese waltz and as a thoroughly Ravelian 'portrait' of a Straussian waltz (2002: 98).[4] Similarly, in her description of the composition, Mawer refers to the gradual creation of a 'rich, romantic sonic image of the mid-nineteenth-century waltz' (2006: 153). *La Valse* has also been interpreted as a metaphor for the Franco-German unrest of 1848, the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, the fall of the Habsburg Empire, and the destruction of the First World War, along with the demise of high European culture (Mawer 2000a: 52; 2006: 155).

In *La Valse*, Mawer states that the music's 'moving in and out of focus' could be construed as quasi-Symbolist *correspondences* between present and imagined past, reality and a fantastical dream-world' (2000b: 151). Mawer has connected Ravel's fascination with symbolism to the synaesthetic dimension of *La Valse* and she identifies a resemblance between Ravel's hallucinatory choreographic poem and Baudelaire's disorienting waltz in his poem *Harmonie du soir* (1857) (2006: 156). She also stresses the crucial influence of Poe's work on the composer, exposing a possible link between Ravel's conception of *La Valse* as the image of a 'fantastic and fatal whirling' and Poe's short story *Masque of the Red Death* (1842) (2006: 156). As we shall see, Ravel's 'sonic image' of the pre-cinematic Viennese waltz, that slides from a conventional, contained waltz cliché to something resembling a post-cinematic electronic smear, is appropriated by Godard and reflected videographically.

In her study of music and the grotesque, Julie Brown examines the figure of the grotesque in Béla Bartók's oeuvre and emphasises its crucial relationship to bodily meanings. She underscores grotesque art's ability to exhibit 'sheer excess' (2007: 54) and states that in the visual arts, the grotesque body is often a hybrid form that mixes unrelated categories, or things usually kept apart (such as the human and the animal, the human and the vegetable, the human and the machine, and life and death):

> [I]n the early twentieth-century the grotesque served an artistic and literary revolt marked not only by formal play, hybridity and dissonance, but by consistent focus on human subjects *in extremis*. Early twentieth-century crises of subjectivity seem to have found a perfect figurative manifestation in the grotesque body with its emphasis on distortion and abnormality, and conflations of the comic and the terrifying. (2007: 46)

Brown invokes Esti Sheinberg's writing on the grotesque in Dmitri Shostakovich's music, giving emphasis to Sheinberg's assertion that dance, namely the *danse macabre*, is the 'quintessential moment' of the musical grotesque owing to its blend of hyperbole and bodily movement and, ultimately, of life and death (2007: 54-5, 137). Elsewhere, Ravel is cited as one of a number of 20th-century composers who have composed works called grotesques, or works that include grotesque subject matter or metaphors of the grotesque, and Brown alludes specifically to the exaggerated and 'overblown, overdone topoi of the waltz' in Ravel's *La Valse* (2007: 129).

In his study of music and decadence in European modernism, Stephen Downes states that decadence as an idea and style is frequently associated with themes of deviance, decay, despair and death and with processes of fragmentation, dissolution and deformation.[5] Its artistic styles are typically described as excessive, epicurean, artificial, darkly comic or esoteric and its main aim 'was a pessimistic critique of the bourgeois affirmation of subjective, psychological, physical and social progress and unity through the denigration of wholeness and wholesomeness and the celebration of the toxic and taboo' (2010: 1). Making reference to Brown's study of the grotesque, Downes draws parallels between the concerns of decadence and the grotesque body. He writes of Ravel's *La Valse*: '[t]he manic contrasts between apparently organic generative process and grotesque distortion and mechanical breakdown in Ravel's grotesque apotheosis mark the degenerative, hysterical demise and final "death rattle" of a decadent Viennese tradition' (2010: 124-25). Godard's use of *La Valse* in *Puissance de la parole*, and the ephemeral glimmers of Bacon's paintings, create vivid and meaningful intersections between music and visual art through which Godard reflects on the aesthetic power, disintegration and dilapidation of cinema as an art form, while signalling the possibility of renewal.

Volker Helbing, in his analysis of *La Valse*, labels the first part of the composition the 'exposition', formed from an introduction and a waltz suite composed of nine individual waltzes, modelled on the stylistic clichés that Ravel associated with the genre. For example, Ravel draws on tendencies in waltzes by Johann Strauss, exaggerating particular figures and patterns. These waltzes return in the second part of the composition in various fragmented forms (Helbing refers to these returns as 'waltz quotations'). Helbing describes the second part as 'the spiral construction', which denotes a process of acceleration and intensification (2011: 180-3). If we conceive of *La Valse* as a sort of delirious architectural form (a macrostructure composed of a series of miniature waltzes), then metaphors of the grotesque can be traced in what Helbing calls the 'multilevel liquidation' and the 'sonic and choreographic over-kill' that occurs dramatically as the piece comes to a close (2011: 200, 207). In the same vein, Mawer mentions the 'truncated, distorted and endlessly repeated' melodic patterns that play out in the final moments of *La Valse*, which she compares to a needle stuck in the groove of a gramophone record, reminding us of Frank's Edisonesque 'Allo' in *Puissance de la parole*. She also captures the 'grotesque touches' of the 'bestial "snorting" of the brass' that precede the death rattle of the penultimate bar (2000b: 155).

Elizabeth Grosz introduces the concept of 'the spirit of excess' in relation to the work of Georges Bataille, for whom the uncontained elements that 'exceed the proper' like dirt, disorder, contagion, the bodily, the bestial and bodily waste, produce an excess that 'defies the laws of system' (2001: 153). She alludes to Bataille's writing on architecture to suggest that the spirit of excess is best represented not in production but in 'the *destruction* of monumental architecture' (2001: 154, original emphasis). She concludes: '[f]or Bataille, what is "more" or "excessive" is that which has no function, purpose, or other use than the expenditure of resources and energy, is that which undermines, transgresses, and countermands the logic of functionality' (2001: 155). Amy Herzog invokes Grosz's theorization of excess in her analysis of the excesses of the musical spectacle in film. She considers the relationship between the extreme bodily states of pain, dissolution and death, and the potential for pleasure and transformation through musical performance. To do so, she draws on Eleanor Kaufman's work on Pierre Klossowski's study of Nietzsche and physical suffering.[6] Through reference to Nietzsche's writing on his own ill health, Klossowki interprets the sick body as a 'positive enabler', with physical excess (in the form

of illness) functioning as a creative 'reactive force' that allows the mind to unleash a joyous form of 'thought-energy' , emerging when bodily sensation transforms into 'thought-sensation infused with corporeal energy' (Kaufman 1999: 153-4). Extreme bodily states are capable of producing 'a materiality of thought' and a mental exuberance and lucidity that Klossowski describes beguilingly as 'voluptuous lucidity' (1999: 154). The body re-energises thought with its materiality, leading to shifts in perception, new perspectives and creates 'altered states of being' (1999: 152). Most exciting about Herzog's use of Kaufman's text is the connection she goes on to make between extreme states and what she terms the 'musical body' in film:

> I would like to suggest that the musical body, the body engaged in the ornamental excesses of performance, enters into another type of extreme state. While this state is obviously quite distinct from that of sex or illness, the body-in-music posits another type of becoming, one that explores the limitations of corporeality, dissolves distinctions between interior and exterior, and forges new alliances between the bodies of living beings, objects, and environments. (2010: 274)

In my own analysis, I show how Godard composes strange multimedia stalagmites out of the sudden flash shots, the sonic distortions, the superimpositions and the musical fragments that together function as larger-than-life *bodies-in-music*, wrenching us from our usual viewing and listening habits, which are transfigured in the process.

3. The Power of Video: Thinking in Images and Sounds

Video enables Godard to think and write directly '*with* and *in* images' (Dubois 1992: 178). From 1974 to 1979, Godard and Anne-Marie Miéville (his foremost collaborator from this period onwards) experimented with video as an instrument of thought and a critical tool of 'decomposition', deployed to break down, and slow down, the editing process, thus allowing them to compare, deconstruct and analyse sounds, images, mechanisms and ideologies (Dubois 1992: 173, see also Witt 2013: 51-4). Dubois suggests that Godard and Miéville's use of video slow motion moved into new territory in their radical 12-part television series

France tour détour deux enfants (1979). Here they turned away from a type of intellectual and analytical decomposition and toward something more organic and bodily (1992: 177).The slow-motion episodes in *France tour détour deux enfants* inject a measure of spontaneity, unpredictability and emotion into the body of the image, generating what Dubois terms a 'painting effect', as well as an effect of 'the gaze being renewed' (1992: 177). He suggests that Godard's experimentation with video slow-motion effects permitted him 'to (re)turn to a cinematographic image that is still possible, that can still be looked at as new, and therefore to be made' (1992: 177).[7] Indeed, *Puissance de la parole*, contemporary with the first episodes of *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, is a work that engages Godard's long-running discourse on the death of the cinematograph as well as his concept of projection. In the early episodes of *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, Godard's ideas on the prophetic power, artistic potential, and the failures of the cinematograph are expressed in a multitude of ways. As Witt makes clear, Godard's thinking on the demise of the cinematograph encompasses several different subject matters: the early industrialization and commercial exploitation of cinema, the male domination of filmmaking, the coming of sound, the Second World War and the colonization of cinema by television (2013: 119).[8]

On s'est tous défilé and *Puissance de la parole* in particular instigate an intensified use of speed alteration in the form of acceleration and rapid flash shots. Rather than focusing solely on slow-motion, we find in *Puissance de la parole* what Raymond Bellour refers to as images in search of a new speed. In a succinct analysis of the video, Bellour writes:

> Pictures in slow motion, frozen, shattered; or reconstructed, transformed, represented anew thanks to the swiftness of montage and the potency of the special effects. In short, images in search of a new speed, which Godard has been looking for since *France Tour Détour Deux Enfants*, but this time really capable of changing speed, for instance, of going from a "photographic" representation to (more or less emphatic) sketches of distortion. (1996: 197)

In *Puissance de la parole*, the metamorphic potential of fast-paced movement injects into the video an aesthetic force while at the same time operating as a tool of resistance, serving to cut through and reconfigure the rapid circulation of clichéd images, sounds and sanctioned

ideas that are powered by mass media.

4. Freezing Time: Sound, Painting and Photography

The flash shots, superimpositions, speed changes, and the unpitched electronic pulsations in *Puissance de la parole* give rise to a rhythmic swarm of colour and sound, constituting what Dubois proclaims as 'a *video-vibration*, like a cardiac pulsing that carries into and echoes throughout the whole universe the infinite marks of thought and speech' (1992: 182, original emphasis). Human thought and emotion migrate from the body, expanding into the visual textures and acoustic environments, and speech is stretched and smeared across the evolving soundscape. Images of racing clouds, freeze-frames of rushing water, full-screen liquid surfaces, steam pouring from barren rocks, volcanic explosions and billowing purple, pink and red vapours, are set against tight grid-like figures and an array of framing structures. The electronic imagery, awash with speed changes and brimming with quiet but menacing stirrings, is also flooded with the colour schemes and consistencies of certain salient paintings that include Bacon's static *Study from the Human Body* and his dynamic *Figure in Movement*, as well as Max Ernst's portrait *Euclid* (1945) and his luxuriant bird goddesses from *Attirement of the Bride* (1940), flushing the visuals with a variety of dream-like, effervescent forms. Godard's montage strategy teases us through an array of playful surface associations that blur the lines between different genres, often through the use of echoes and word-play (for example, Frank/César Franck, Ravel's *La Valse*/Leonard Cohen's 'Take this Waltz'). Just as the painters' tableaux are made to break beyond their frame, the audio arrangement is knocked into an irregularly shaped object by the dissolving temporalities, the sheer pressure and raw dynamism of the layered extracts of music, sporadically blown through and distorted by gusts of electronic noise.

Along with the voices of the protagonists, *Puissance de la parole* features the husky, gritty vocals of Cohen and Bob Dylan, mixed with intrusive electronic sirens, beeps and screeches. As Trond Lundemo stresses, in this video, it is the materiality of the spoken word that is foregrounded, particularly during the ex-lovers' exhausted telephone dialogue, which is at times emptied of signification as the words become 'grains of sound' (2004: 116-17), as if to

echo the words of the *musique concrète* pioneer, Pierre Schaeffer, when he proposed: '[l]et's record a spoken phrase, listen to it, distort it as much as necessary so that all that is left is the melody, the rhythm, and all verbal content is lost. Haven't we got an excellent schema for the composer?' (2012: 172). At the start of the video, we are immediately placed in contact with the pure mechanism of cinema and the unbinding of sound. We see a reel of 35mm film being sped up and slowed down as it crosses the editing table, accompanied by a portion of soundtrack from Jean Renoir's *Boudu sauvé des eaux* (1932).[9] As the strip of film moves we hear a bewildering mesh of animalistic growls, grunts and shrieks, foreseeing the grotesque tinges and bestial snorts of Ravel's fateful waltz. At the same time, we hear the words: '[w]ithin the entrails of the dead planet, a tired, antique mechanism quivers. Tubes radiating a pale, vibrant glow awoke. Slowly, as though reluctantly, a switch in neutral changed position', read from Alfred Van Vogt's science-fiction story *Defence* (1947) (quoted in Bellour 1996: 196, see also Bellour 2006: 335-36). Indeed, the tired old mechanism of the filmstrip in *Puissance de la parole* is set alongside the signs of high-speed computerised editing, including wipes, flash shots, stop-start motion and episodes of acceleration.

As the video commences, we hear the somber opening from the first movement (I. *Lento; Allegro ma non troppo*) of Franck's *Symphony in D minor* (1888), which is briefly cut into by an electrifying flash shot and the first of John Cage's *Sonatas and Interludes* (1946-48) for prepared piano, a work that also featured in Stan Brakhage's *In Between* (1955).[10] The prepared piano involves objects such as screws, bolts, fabrics and wood being placed on the strings, thereby altering the pitch by dampening the tones. The piano, as James Pritchett notes, when prepared in this way, becomes a 'miniature percussion orchestra' able to produce highly intimate, precise and lyrical sounds (1993: 23-4). In Godard's disfiguring of this extract, the percussive sound of electronic pulsations, loud gushing water, birds chirping and crow-like squawks constitute the filmmaker's own additions to Cage's preparations. The interruption of Franck's ill-fated *Lento* with this Cagean burst of musical sound, and the entirely different form of musical organization that Cage's composition embodies, portends the beginning of a new order of time.

In his article on electronic music, Drew Hemment draws on Paul DeMarinis's motif of the

'Edison effect', which conveys what many regarded as the negative impact of the objectification of music and sound that occurred when recording became commonplace (2004: 79-80). In the eyes of many this new technology destroyed the spontaneity, transiency and uniqueness of musical performance. Hemment replaces this concept with that of 'the Edison *defect*', which in contrast celebrates the zone of indeterminacy established through the play of slippage and recontextualization facilitated by recording technology (2004: 80). Hemment perceives the sonic imperfections that result from 'the *rupture of recording*' as fertile matter, capable of producing 'a new kind of music and another sonic realm' (2004: 80). He notes that the '*musical potential*' of sonic disturbance was appropriated by electronic music artists during the 20th century, whose work moved away from 'the *telos* of representational technologies', evolving instead from 'accident, manipulation and reuse' (2004: 80, original emphasis). For example, Cage's experiments with turntables, the *musique concrète* compositions of Schaeffer and Pierre Henry, and Steve Reich's early phasing pieces resulted from the invention of recording technology. The 'audio documents' captured and preserved thanks to the phonograph, inadvertently led to a new '*plastic art*' that involved the reworking and remixing of sonic textures to produce new species of sound and new mixtures of time (2004: 79-80, original emphasis).[11] Hemment comments on the types of editing techniques that subsequently developed and freed sound up from the restrictions imposed by sequential past-present-future trajectories:

> Sound cut up, looped, reversed. But also, and most interestingly, in wresting the audio image out of time, the recording process freezes and isolates a fragment of time, making possible the capture – and reworking – of a plurality of temporalities encoded in individual sounds or passages of music. In morphing a movement in sound the perception of the very passing of time can be toyed with or subverted; time brought into view by being taken out of focus in a twist of the lens. (2004: 90)

In *Puissance de la parole*, the expression of time is articulated incessantly through references to cinema, photography, recorded sound and through the distortions of musical time. In the second half of the video we experience the clusters of music and sound almost as cones and spirals of soft clay. As Steven Connor suggests, if sound adds time to the image 'the plastic manipulability of sound also expresses the possibility of time being congealed

into spatial form' (2013: 117). When the video begins, the bright sound and distinctive timbre of a note from Cage's first Sonata is embellished with the sound of gushing water, deepened via electronic pulsations and extended via bird chirps to form a dense audio image. These sonorous particles overshadow Franck's symphonic statement and hit our ears all at once. Then, the echoes of the film voices that rise up from the editing table, mixed with the raspy vocals of Dylan, followed by a male/female voiceover reading and accompanied by the snarls of the film mechanism, immediately form another dense audio image, this time through a staggered vocal cluster.

This initial burst of explosive action is full of abrupt scuffles, splutters and slight de-synchronizations. A spilling-over of thought and feeling is immediately conveyed through a reproduction of Bacon's *Study from the Human Body*, which is mixed via flash shots with fast-moving white clouds. Frank's repeated 'Allo' is elongated and made to stammer, as we are propelled hazardously beyond the earth's atmosphere. The camera zooms in and the images begin to flash erratically as Frank tries to make contact with Velma over the telephone. High-pitched electronic tones are mixed with another flashing grayscale image of a satellite in space, all the while muddied by the *Symphony in D minor*. The strident fortissimo descent of the *Allegro non troppo* then begins, hurrying us back to earth and into Velma's Degar-esque abode, re-rooting us in an enclosed domestic space [see Figure 1]. The galactic ringing noise, the electronic screeches, the disturbing buzzing sound, as well as the fierce staccato string chords, harmonise at the end of this frenetic, colourful and brilliantly rhythmic opening section that culminates in a frenzied array of flash shots. The camera zooms in fitfully, dramatically and threateningly on a clump of vegetation with which Velma's body is confused, producing an incongruous fusion of human and plant forms that pertains to the grotesque. Indeed, a crude shot of her squatting posture is crossed through, owing to the fast visual flickering motion of the green foliage, producing a strange electronic frottage effect. This sequence, along with others in the video, seems haunted by Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's novel *L'Eve future* (1885) about the android Hadaly, a creation of the inventor Edison (a fictionalised Thomas Edison). Hadaly's soul is electric, her lungs are made from the golden cylinders of a phonograph and she resides in an underground vault, recalling Velma's fantastical boudoir.[12]

Figure 1: Velma

In the middle part of the video, the quick three-time beat of Cohen's pop song 'Take this Waltz' is superseded prophetically by a short passage from the 1st movement of Beethoven's *Piano Sonata No. 26 in E-flat major*, Op. 81a (the *Lebewohl* Sonata). Indeed, the three movements of the *Lebewohl* are suitably titled 'Farewell' [*Das Lebewohl*], 'Absence' [*Abwesenheit*] and 'Reunion' [*Das Wiedersehen*]. Beethoven composed this work at the time of the French occupation of Vienna in 1809, when many of his friends were forced to leave the city, including his patron to whom the sonata is dedicated (Kinderman 2000: 119).

Adorno has written fondly of the 'crude' design of Op. 81a, commenting on its 'impulse for extreme humanization and subjectification' (1998: 174). He detects in the opening movement the 'sound of disappearance', conveyed by a three-bar phrase that suggests the clatter of horses' hooves and evokes the 'moving away of the coach' (1998: 174-5 and 243, n. 295. See also 1997: 453). This motif of disappearance becomes for Adorno a poignant, simple and deeply expressive image of hope: the hope of return. An image of Velma fades to show a backdrop of a hazy grey path in a brightly-lit forest, accompanied by the faint notes of the piano sonata. The ghostly white shape of her body, as displayed in Figure 2, soon reappears, ephemerally streaked by lines and shadows. This image evokes an earlier image of Velma in her apartment, brushing her hair in a white towel and positioned in front of some shutters, mixed with a blue-tinted image of rippling water to create a similar streaky effect [see Figure 2]. Near the end of the video, just before the explosive finale commences, we see the return of an image that flashed up at the start: Bacon's *Study from the Human Body*. This painting is faded in over a shot of Oïnos and Agathos, accompanied by the same excerpt from Beethoven's *Lebewohl* and joined by the return of the electronic pulsations.

Figures 2a and 2b: Reconstructing Study from the Human Body

Study from the Human Body constitutes Bacon's first significant adaptation from the serial photography of Eadweard Muybridge, in particular, his photographs of male wrestlers (Hammer 2005: 47). As Martin Hammer notes, Bacon's work from this period (1949-50) marks a radical break with formal conventions and launches a new type of engagement with the photographic medium, including experimentation with montage techniques, superimposition, as well as with texture and paint application (2005: 46-8).[13] Bacon's use of pre-existing photographic sources, including x-rays, medical textbook drawings and newspaper photographs to inspire details in his paintings, such as the tiny safety-pin in *Study from the Human Body* and the grainy photographic quality produced by the grisaille technique, resonate with Godard's own mix of documentary-style images in *Puissance de la parole* (we see satellite graphics, scientific utensils, a computer keyboard and the stamen of a flower). The human figure merges with its surroundings in this haunting painting, generating an evocative and uncertain image of a naked body that fuses a sense of primitive desire with feelings of detachment, all the while preserving a sense of singularity within this expanse of grey [see Figure 3].

Figure 3: Bacon's Study from the Human Body *in* Puissance de la parole

Bacon was equally fascinated by Edgar Degas's pastels, especially his use of parallel lines in the series *After the Bath*, *Woman drying herself* (c. 1890-5), composed of photographs of women in contorted positions, as well as monotypes, drawings, paintings and pastels. The various pained, isolated postures performed by Velma throughout *Puissance de la parole* function as the redundant leftovers of the painter's tableaux. She is often filmed at the sink, drying herself with a white towel, brushing her hair or dressing, surrounded by yellow and greenish shades and these images tease the spectator through such literal references to

Degas's studies of female ritual, ciphered through the scan lines of the electronic medium. Bacon noted how the striation of form in Degas's pastels works to intensify and diversify the image's reality: 'I always think that the interesting thing about Degas is the way he made lines through the body, you could say that he shuttered the body, in a way, shuttered the image and then he put an enormous amount of colour through these lines. And having shuttered the form, he created intensity by putting this colour through the flesh' (Sylvester 1987: 176). The shallow space, photographic quality and the atmospheric smudgy effect in Bacon's *Study from the Human Body* creates a suggestive, mysterious image juxtaposed with the crudeness of flesh, inspired in this case by Degas's crafting of the spine.[14] Godard's fleeting electronic imitations of Bacon's use of striation might remind us of a theatre curtain or, more aptly, a cinema screen and thus of the revelatory power of the projected image, conjuring similar feelings of melancholy, absence and desire as expressed in the original painting.

Hammer writes of *Study from the Human Body*: '[i]t can indeed be seen to capture, or trap, an image of a human being passing through – passing through a curtain, but also, we might feel, passing through life, or moving in and out of one's own life' (2005: 231). The unique associations forged in *Puissance de la parole* between notions of disappearance, expressed aurally in Beethoven's music and evoked visually in Bacon's painting, communicate something precise and articulate on the transiency and fragility of the cinematograph and of life itself, while fusing feelings of loss with a sense of new hope and possibility in the regenerative potential of electronic imagery. It would be a mistake, therefore, to pass over these audiovisual montages as blithe reproductions of famous works, rendered impotent in their new videographic outfit, since Godard is devoted to the task of fearlessly re-instilling past forms of the image into new technological contexts, while embracing the instantaneousness of the medium's present tense. The *déchets* of past sensation come to recover their aesthetic force in this musical video-vibration, as the rush of audiovisual fragments pummels us from new angles.
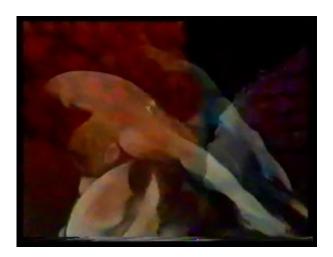
5. A Study of a Study of the Waltz

Halfway through *Puissance de la parole* and in the concluding moments, Ravel's *La Valse*
sweeps in to disrupt the flow of things. Like the effect of slow motion in a film, the formation
of a small inner circle, performed by waltzers, who trace a larger circle as they move around
the ballroom, creates an illusion of stasis. *La Valse* can be construed as a self-reflexive study
of the waltz itself, that makes reference to the Viennese waltz without succumbing to its
conventions (Yaraman 2002: 92). Peter Kaminsky points out that *La Valse* showcases Ravel's
creative treatment and refashioning of a particular musical and historical model, namely the
waltzes of Johann Strauss (2011: 5). It involves what Helbing terms a 'distancing
appropriation', which he defines as 'the ever-alienating incorporation of pre-found musical
material into one's own musical language', along with the 'formal conception of the "spiral"'
that drives the composition to its fatal end (2011:180). As Mawer states, music and
choreography are closely related through movement and a desire to animate space and
time. She writes: '[b]allet offered Ravel a multi-dimensional projection of dance; visual
spectacle of exquisite elegance and beauty; a vehicle for fantasy and opportunity for
distancing and detachment' (2000b: 140). The physical power of the piece, its strong spatial
dimension, along with the music's spiraling out of control, are qualities that render the
composition a particularly attractive musical model for Godard to re-envision and transform
on his own terms.

Figures 4a and 4b: Poe's angels and Bacon's Figure in Movement *mixed with Ernst's* Attirement of the Bride

The composer and conductor George Benjamin presents the opening of *La Valse* as a mysterious void. The piece begins, he writes, with a deep unpulsed tremolo and then 'a heartbeat evolves, intimating perhaps that the origins of the waltz are atavistic and physiological, not merely cultural' (1994: 432). Benjamin describes the 'skeleton of the music' as liquid in its early stages. He alludes to the 'cinematically edited glimpses of future themes' and he later likens Ravel's use of chromaticism to a virus that gradually seeps into the texture of the music (1994: 432, 434). The aesthetic of deformation that pervades *La Valse* certainly infiltrates *Puissance de la parole*, as notions of traditional perspective and realistic representation are conjured and swiftly destroyed. Furthermore, from the start, gestures, rhythms and regular musical tempos are offset through techniques of simultaneity and syncopation. We witness Frank's limp as he shuffles across the garage floor and later we see Oïnos stumble while swaying balletically through a cluster of trees. This latter visual sequence of Poe's angels imitates the romantic but 'cartoon-like style' of Benois's set design for the 1931 ballet production of *La Valse* [see Figure 4].[15] Mawer reveals that Benois's design involved 'sumptuous framing drapes', high symmetrical arches at the back of the stage, as well as a scrim or gauze veil though which the silhouettes of dancers could be glimpsed in the distance, to achieve the initial lack of visual definition as stipulated in

Ravel's written scenario for the piece (2006: 163-4).[16] Mawer declares that finally, in this later production, '*La Valse* was properly realized as a three-dimensional moving image' according to the composer's original vision (2006: 162), making it the perfect basis for Godard's prismatic video-vibration.

In the lead-up to Oïnos's stumble, the electronic siren becomes unbearably shrill, masking the rich strains of Richard Strauss's tone poem *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Op. 30 (1896). This tone poem is melded lyrically and almost plastically with *La Valse,* as slow-motion images of rushing water fill the screen. The cartoon-like vision of Oïnos and Agathos wandering among the trees is, like Strauss's tone poem and the celestial dialogue, muffled by the erasing electronic sound and by the unstoppable white vapour that floods the screen, as their silhouettes appear and disappear within this chaotic surface of noise. Their voices could be compared to those captured and preserved by Edison's early recordings, where, as Hemment remarks, words and voices, masked by sonic interference, morph into 'recognisable shapes' that 'flicker like shadows' over a surface of static (2004: 80). Yet Hemment writes that dwelling within this surface of noise were the nascent traces of a new form of music that would later see composers and artists forging novel editing techniques and developing new methods of working with recorded sound and its byproducts as compositional materials.

Oïnos's off-beat movement in this middle section of the video triggers a flash shot of Bacon's falling *Figure in Movement*, which is mixed via high-speed visual fluttering with Ernst's *Attirement of the Bride.* The angels' words are superimposed over each other as the signals become confused, producing a spasmodic instance of simultaneity. Bacon's desire to get to the real, raw energy of something by capturing a sense of immediacy and intensity is seized by Godard in *Puissance de la parole.* David Sylvester has associated *Figure in Movement* with Bacon's drive to strip something down to its essence. It was, Bacon concurs, 'an attempt to make a figure in movement as concentrated as I could do it' (1987: 168). Similarly, Godard extracts the primitive rumblings and catastrophic high-point of Ravel's composition and integrates them into the video, creating energetic surges that rush in and out of the second half, returning ferociously at the video's close. The destructive impulse that flows through the video parallels a tendency that Cook has identified in Godard's short

Armide (1987), of Godard 'doing violence' to the music. Cook argues that Godard 'does not just select and recombine his music; he fragments it, fading it in and out or interpolating silences into it, and sometimes he even superimposes one number on another' (1998: 219).[17] In *Puissance de la parole*, Godard's manner of disfiguring the music is even more radical, free-flowing and joyful. An act of violence and destruction transmutes into one of positive, jubilant construction. In the concluding moments the boundaries between media explode entirely and Godard's dramatic mashup triggers a complete metamorphosis that moulds the musical and visual fragments into a dazzling new form.

The musical montage flattens out harmonically as the earth-shattering conclusion begins. Ravel's *La Valse* (in D major) is twisted together dissonantly with the dark chords of Franck's *Symphony in D minor*, like a distorted mirror image. Bacon's *Figure in Movement* returns for a brief moment to disrupt the closing credits, where it is mixed with a flashing graphic of volcanic lava. In the original painting, we see a falling figure positioned in front of a black panel or mirror, with a purple stain on the floor. Ernst van Alphen writes of this painting: '[t]he figure is not reflected in the mirror; our gaze at the figure is repeated, not mirrored, in the mirror. Looking itself, not the object in front of the mirror, is reflected' (1992: 63). Van Alphen demonstrates how in Bacon's oeuvre the eye does not reveal but it dissolves, destroys and unmakes the object of looking. Notions of mirroring, traditional perspective and realistic representation are frequently undermined. Van Alphen emphasises that in Bacon's paintings, looking-relationships between subjects are often avoided, with figures pushed to the margins, psychologically isolated or imprisoned in confined structures. The visual regime, according to a Western model of representation, is blocked and challenged. Bacon scrutinises the ways in which images are constructed and viewed, transforming established representations of bodies in the process. Van Alphen states: '[w]hile the position of the figures in their space obstructs their self experience, the ambiguous identity of the space itself prevents it from providing a clear and comfortable frame. This lack of capacity to frame means that Bacon's spaces do not bestow shape' (1992: 143). Confusion between background and foreground, inside and outside, along with the flattening of perspective play an important role in the two paintings by Bacon displayed in Godard's video, where the dissolution of stable reference points generates a similar sense of fragmentation, distortion and liquidity, achieved in part through the sonic techniques

of amplification, mixing and sound masking.

Figures 5a and 5b: Stop-start images of flowing water and colourful climactic explosions

The textured effect of the attendant's lavish headdress in Ernst's painting, through which Bacon's figure's arms glimmer in the middle section of the video, returns in its new electronic guise during the video's final moments through the thick explosions of coloured smoke that enact *La Valse*'s demise [see Figure 5]. Mawer sums up: '[t]his is a road of no return. Civilized control becomes lost in a hallucinatory, disorientated whirling which

approaches the barbaric, and the orchestral waltz is robbed of its very identity: in the penultimate bar, its triple metre mutates into four, heavily accented beats' (2006: 154). Like the patterns of contrary motion and inner tension, generated by the freeze-frames and lush flash shots of gushing water in *Puissance de la parole*, the dramatic culminating images, and the extraordinary musical montage, enact the inner violations that Ravel's waltz undergoes. The orgiastic rhythms and lethal vortex of *La Valse* bubble up to the surface to hasten the video's end. Godard's finale evokes something of Ravel's original piano manuscript for his choreographic poem. The manuscript, as Mawer reveals, contained swirling ink doodles drawn onto the score by the composer himself, thus underscoring the important visual and physical dimension of the music. She affirms: '[c]ertainly, up to a point *La Valse* does explore the sheer physicality of dance through the aural domain of music' (2006: 152). Mawer identifies a similar pictorial effect in an anonymous painting named '*La Valse* de Ravel', printed in 1932 in *Le Courrier musical*. In this painting, a vortex effect is fashioned from thick dark lines and marks, as if the artist has attempted to revive for the eye Ravel's original vision.[18] At times in *Puissance de la parole* the images of rushing water freeze for a second and we are confronted with a compelling instance of stasis like an object to possess. Similarly, by pausing the video image manually, the spectator can also attempt to capture after Ravel and the anonymous artist, visual traces of the intoxicating, palpable force that is heard and felt in the music.

6. Conclusion

Puissance de la parole refashions our ways of hearing and seeing, blurring the boundaries between film, poetry, visual art, sonic art and music. It is a rich, stand-alone video that challenges the sense-making process and casts light on themes, processes and structural features that pervade many of Godard's other videos and films. It is also a work that typifies what Cook terms 'multimedia mentality' (2013: 57). He proposes that '[a]utonomy mentality holds that meaning and hence originality are inscribed in musical texts that are both ownable and assignable. By contrast, multimedia mentality holds that meaning and originality are performative, emerging out of contexts of use and reuse' (2013: 71). Meaning is not merely dumped in a work by its author to be uncovered and decoded but it is

negotiated and shaped in the act of reception, that is, in the twists, turns and thrills of the audiovisual experience, which can be interpreted in a multitude of unforeseen ways. It is this mentality that lies at the heart of *Puissance de la parole*, an incredibly intense piece of video art that beckons to a musical ear. In their new mixed state, although compressed and distorted, the ready-made sources that Godard exploits are endowed with a new coherence. Moreover, Godard's video mashup encourages us to look and listen beyond the borders of the video itself. Indeed, his manner of recycling and transforming material from other art works intrudes on and changes how we see and hear these art works in other contexts. Godard's experiments with extreme montage states in *Puissance de la parole* completely transfigure our ensuing experiences of sounds and images that we thought we knew so well.

The composer Steve Reich reminds us that remixing is not a recent phenomenon. The process of using pre-existing music to create new compositions is a timeworn tradition in all music, Western and non-Western, practised by composers including Josquin des Prez, Palestrina, Brahms, Stravinsky, and Reich himself (Reich 2013). He defines remixing in broad terms as simply 'a contemporary take on variation – somebody taking somebody else's music and doing something to it using the tools that we have around us now' (2010: 08:11). In terms of sound, Godard's early playful take on theme and variation form in *Vivre sa vie* (1962), and his use of music in *Sauve qui peut (la vie)* (1979), reveal his penchant for working with small units of sound that can be repeated, modified, spatialized, and transformed. The complex reworking of found material in *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, and Godard's borrowings from the ECM Records catalogue from 1990 on, as well as his derision of copyright laws in *Film socialisme* (2010), are further examples of his prolific use of mashup and remix tendencies. They are demonstrated stunningly in *Puissance de la parole*, dissolving monolithic structures, encouraging the free circulation of ideas, inciting us to be active spectators, and imbuing his films with a definite musical charge.

Ravel's reworking of the waltz genre is doubled in *Puissance de la parole* by Godard's own reinvention of Ravel's variation. *La Valse* acts as a special musical mechanism or an enticing refrain that provides the 'microstructure' within the 'macro-musical structure' of the whole, as Royal S. Brown wrote of Godard's incorporation of the nondiegetic musical fragment in *Vivre sa vie* (1994: 189-92). Although the extracts from *La Valse* occur only in short,

infrequent bursts in the video, Ravel's composition serves as a crucial metaphor for the shift that sees the fixed unit of the frame in cinema (evoked via Bacon's allusion to the photographic domain) mutate into the fluid, flexible forms of electronic imagery. The grotesque sonic distortions, including the uncomfortable electronic shrieks and moans, signal a body at the point of death. The sick, depleted body of cinema releases a deluge of 'thought-energy', which, enlivened by the exuberant acrobatics of video, gives rise to Klossowksi's concept of 'voluptuous lucidity' to which I alluded at the start and that opens up new vistas, generates shifts in perception and engenders altered states of being. The extreme dissonance, unstable tonalities and the chromaticism that permeate Ravel's composition as it progresses, could be compared to what Dubois calls the 'virus' of video, a figure of style marked by 'vibratory and infectious acceleration' (1992: 182, see also Dubois 2011: 238). The video-vibration gleefully smudges boundaries, dissolves hierarchies, unravels and destabilises unified identities, and absorbs all kinds of images, voices, sounds and bodies that mutate and vibrate together as one.

The glut of extreme states in the video, reflecting Ravel's apocalyptic vision of the waltz, is experienced aurally, visually and somatically through the spectacular, untamed video effects of stop-start motion and rapid flash shots, and through the layers and clusters of sounds, speech and music. The excessive, expansive and ecstatic musical body, analysed by Herzog, which forges new associations between living beings, objects and environments, comes to form a powerful metaphor for the videographic form of montage that is showcased spectacularly in Godard's mashup. *Puissance de la parole* presents itself to us as a strong foreshock of coming change. Apart from the temporal unfolding of the video itself, linear and unified structures are demolished and within this apparent crisis of representation in the new media age, a fresh form of communication stirs. At the end of the video, the visuals flash uncontrollably as the sounds and images merge into one giant conglomerate mass, reminding us for the last time of the raw material (the unformed electronic noise) of the medium itself. We are plunged into a sizzling acoustic space of abandon that like an awesome clash of cymbals in the finale of a symphony, overwhelms and refreshes our sensory experience. New dimensions of thought and feeling open up before us and, ultimately, a poetic audiovisual form comes into being, fuelled by the power of imagination. Borrowing from Mawer and her conception of *La Valse*, Godard's video art-music can be

said to explore the physicality of time through the audiovisuality of video, as the physical matter of cinema is remixed, remoulded and experienced anew. *Puissance de la parole* reconnects us with the past through the distant memory of a waltz, confronting us with the short-lived glimmers of cinema's history through reuse, speed alteration and distortion, while shuttling or 'shuttering' us into the future through the fractured patterning of the electronic medium of video.

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NOTES
[1] In her study of video as a medium, Yvonne Spielmann reiterates that the raw material of video consists of electronic noise, which can be generated aurally and visually. She states that the 'fundamental audiovisuality' of the medium denotes 'the real-world circumstances under which the electronic signal can be emitted and processed both aurally and visually' (2008: 7-8).

[2] For example, it would be interesting to compare Godard's treatment of the music in *Puissance de la parole* with the arrangement of music, the manipulation of time, and the sound-image relationship in Godard's and Anne-Marie Miéville's video *Dans le noir du temps* (2002). Readers should consult Jürg Stenzl's (2014) fascinating analysis of the role of Arvo Pärt's *Spiegel im Spiegel* ('Mirror in the Mirror') in this short.

[3] Mawer applies this term primarily to 'Feria' from *Rapsodie espagnole* and to three works in Ravel's ballet repertory (*Daphnis et Chloé*, *La Valse* and *Boléro*) that involve 'the creation, exploration and destruction of mechanised (often high-speed) dance' (2000a: 57).

[4] See also Mawer (2006: 149-50). Mawer notes that as early as 1906, Ravel was planning

to compose a grand waltz called *Vienne* (*Vienna*) as a tribute to the memory of Johann Strauss, and the idea subsequently evolved to become *La Valse*.

[5] Downes's study focuses on music's role in Central and Eastern European decadence from the mid-19th century to the aftermath of the First World War.

[6] Kaufman focuses firstly on Klossowski's trilogy *Les Lois de l'hospitalité* (*The Laws of Hospitality*, 1965) and secondly on the relationship between Nietzsche's philosophy and his ill health, as explored by Klossowski in *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle* (1969).

[7] Dubois is here referring to Godard and Miéville's return to commercial cinema, in 1979, with the release of their feature film *Sauve qui peut (la vie)* / *Every Man for Himself* / *Slow Motion* (1979/1980) that contains eighteen instances of speed variation.

[8] See Witt (2013: 117-30) for an in-depth account of Godard's discourse on the death of the cinematograph.

[9] This sequence is an extract from episode 1A of *Histoire(s) du cinéma*.

[10] Readers should note that this opening section of the video (the first 17 seconds) is missing from the version uploaded to YouTube, which has been referenced in this article: https://youtu.be/FGvrbF-qpoI.

[11] Hemment borrows the term 'audio documents' from Michael Chanan's study (1995).

[12] Laura Mulvey identifies Hadaly as a 'figure of transition, which will mutate into the beautiful woman typically featured in the magic shows of Georges Méliès, living but subject to the mechanical tricks of the cinema' (2006: 49). Mulvey cites Annette Michelson's analysis of Hadaly, whom Michelson defines as 'the phantasmatical ground of the cinema itself' (2006: 49). Like Hadaly, Velma's body is deployed throughout *Puissance de la parole* as a 'figure of transition', functioning as a site for the production of meaning and as a site of negotiation between the fluid forms of electronic imagery and the single unit of the

cinematographic image.

[13] In this section of the book, Hammer emphasises Bacon's interest in cinema, notably, his use of film stills of the nanny from the Odessa steps sequence in Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin*.

[14] Bacon also remarks that in Degas's famous pastel *After the Bath* (1903) the spine almost appears almost to come out of the skin, which points up the vulnerability of the rest of the body (Sylvester 1987: 46-7).

[15] A photograph of Benois's set design for the 1931 production of *La Valse* has been reproduced and included in Mawer (2006: 163).

[16] Ravel's scenario served as a preface to the orchestral score. It reads: 'Through breaks in the swirling clouds, waltzing couples may be glimpsed. Little by little they disperse: an immense hall filled with a whirling crowd can be made out (A [Fig. 9]). / The stage is illuminated gradually. The light of the chandeliers peaks at the *fortissimo* (B [Fig. 17]). / An Imperial Court, about 1855' (quoted in Mawer 2006: 155-6).

[17] In his analysis of Godard's use of music in *Armide*, Cook exposes the radical contest between media and suggests that Godard not only does violence to the music but that the music does violence to the film (1998: 254).

[18] A reproduced image of this painting can be found in Mawer (2006: 150).