The Dissonant Refrains of Jean-Luc Godard's
Prénom Carmen

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The familiarity of the Carmen story rests upon the circulation of song and narrative within popular culture. The immediate familiarity of the tune unleashes a web of associations extending beyond the realm of the performance or film. Jean-Luc Godard's 1983 film *Prénom Carmen* is, on the surface, one of the least faithful contemporary adaptations of the tale. Godard self-consciously creates a pastiche of elements borrowed from the history of *Carmen*, wound around a loose narrative in which the perennial seductress is transformed into a modern-day terrorist. Yet the exaggerated gestures of Godard's contemporary retelling appear heightened by his irreverence: the music from Bizet's opera surfaces only on the fleeting whistle of a passer-by, having been completely replaced by the strains of a string quartet rehearsing Beethoven. Drawing upon the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, the chapter will suggest that the complex circulations of music, narrative, and popular reference in *Prénom Carmen* function as 'refrains' that move within and across multiple texts. In addition to its co-optation of *Carmen*'s more concrete elements, the structure of the film, built upon the tension between music and image, becomes a refrain in itself. The result is a work that addresses not only the history of the Carmen story, but the very processes through which meaning is constituted.

Beethoven, Ludwig von
Bizet, Georges: *Carmen*
Deleuze, Gilles
Guattari, Félix
Godard, Jean-Luc: *Prénom Carmen*
Music and image

1.

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari introduce the notion of the refrain (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 310-350). Using an amalgam of musical, scientific, and philosophical terminology, they expand the definition of the refrain from its colloquial usage to encompass a highly complex phenomenon. On the most basic level, refrains are fragments of songs, colours, words, or other expressive elements that circulate and repeat through individual articulations. These circulations contain temporal facets, marking with each variation a certain duration; yet they also have an involved relationship to space. The refrain becomes a means of *territorialization*, an utterance that delineates a particular territory through its echoes: a bird's song, for example, is a refrain that marks its domain (312). Refrains can further constitute or create their territory through the act of singing; a child hums a familiar tune to

comfort herself when far from home; folk songs have ties to nations, but they can also create mobile territories of people bound by the refrain that they share (311, 347). Refrains may play more specialized functions, defining spaces, actions, and roles. A song shared between lovers affirms their bond. Songs sung by workers solidify their labour through a refrain of solidarity. A lullaby becomes a refrain that encloses mother and child in a shared space of safety and love; it inscribes the territory of 'the child's slumber' (327).

This theorization of the refrain suggests a provocative approach to the question of *Carmen* in film, an approach attuned to the circulations of melody, voice, narrative, and myth that have rendered the tale such a rich subject for continued reinterpretation (see Davies's Introduction to this volume). Tracing *Carmen*'s cinematic refrains becomes an arduous task in the context of this long tradition of reworking. While the strains of Bizet's opera might be the most prominent and identifiable reiterations, one might also point to the characters and plot of *Carmen* as refrains, as well as to the story's thematic echoes: the exoticism of the Spanish setting, the Gypsy as racialized Other, the undercurrents of class, labour and community, the sexual assertiveness of Carmen, and the seeming inevitability of her death.

These varied refrains of *Carmen* each reverberate in a fraught and contentious relationship to space. The 'exotic' Spanish landscape and the nomadic territory of the Gypsy to which Mérimée and Bizet refer are, as many critics have discussed, more accurately located within the space of the French nineteenth-century imaginary. Carmen's character herself functions as the space upon which fantasies of femininity are embodied and rewritten. As these refrains circulate, adapting and evolving to each new setting and retelling, the spaces that they carve out also begin to shift. It is this process of metamorphosis that makes the repetitions of *Carmen* so fascinating and tangled. How, specifically, do the meanings of *Carmen*'s refrains transform with each retelling? Might a radical restructuring of the story result in the marking out of new territories? Or does the core of the refrain persist, its symbolic and semiotic space remaining ever present within each strain?

Jean-Luc Godard's 1983 film *Prénom Carmen* is, on the surface, one of the least faithful contemporary adaptations of the tale. Godard quite self-consciously creates a pastiche of elements borrowed from Mérimée, Bizet, and the history of *Carmen*'s various interpretations. The setting for the film is decidedly modern and

designed to invite a direct critique of the gender politics of *Carmen*'s originary versions. The title character is a radical leftist terrorist, a politically driven woman whose goals presumably transcend her personal interests. The characterizations in the film as a whole are stylized and two-dimensional. Drawn with deliberate exaggeration, the collisions and interactions between the key players become, at times, outright farce. While exaggeration and theatricality are central to the operatic form, *Prénom Carmen* seems to focus its attention upon the surface of these representational practices rather than utilizing them to create a new, emotionally convincing account of the Carmen story. The structure of *Prénom Carmen*, as is to be expected in a Godard film, becomes a central component in establishing the meaning and subject of the work. Narrative action is continually interrupted by long, extra-diegetic shots of the ocean and sequences in which a string quartet rehearses Beethoven. These musical interludes can perhaps be seen as Godard's most irreverent move: Beethoven's quartets, along with a pop song by Tom Waits, come to replace Bizet's music altogether, reducing the latter to an occasional whistle heard on the lips of a passer-by.

These factors make *Prénom Carmen* a peculiar subject for a study of the construction of meaning in the larger history of *Carmen* on film. How can questions regarding *Carmen*'s refrains be addressed by a film that intentionally ignores *Carmen*'s primary musical text, its most familiar and predominant chorus? My reasons for taking this approach are three-fold. Firstly, Godard's conscious manipulation of the elements of the *Carmen* oeuvre indicates his awareness of their refrain-like function: meaning circulates through snatches of melody, stereotypical characterizations, and operatic dramatizations.[1] The excessive proliferation of these elements in the film makes their significance all the more apparent. Secondly, the intrusiveness of the structure of *Prénom Carmen* highlights the significance of form, both as a meaning-constituting element and as a refrain that is in itself central to the Carmen story. Finally, Godard's curious use of music works to foreground the larger function of music within the history of *Carmen*. Music lies at the heart of one of the key 'Carmenic' refrains reverberating throughout *Prénom Carmen*: namely the complex, often ambiguous representational framework the story relies upon, and its relationship to the question of difference. Despite Godard's unusual scoring techniques in this film, music and sound provide the very basis for this framework.

The self-conscious intertextuality of *Prénom Carmen*'s larger structure is echoed in the film's narrative. Like many relatively contemporary interpretations of *Carmen* (especially the film versions by Saura, Rosi, and Brook also released in 1983 and 1984), Godard's engages in a critical reappraisal of both Mérimée's novella and Bizet's opera. Transposed to modern-day France, Carmen is now 'Carmen X', part of a group of leftist terrorists. Her uncle, Jeannot Godard, played by Godard himself, is a senile and, in Carmen's words, 'washed up' filmmaker. She convinces her uncle to help her friends shoot a documentary film, although, as she later reveals, the film is merely a ruse (capitalizing on the latest 'video craze') for her gang to kidnap a wealthy businessman.

First, however, the gang holds up a bank: it is unclear whether the robbery is undertaken in order to fund the film project or the group's larger political goals, goals that are never even vaguely intimated during the course of the film. Joseph is the rather naïve and over-enthusiastic guard at the bank who, after a cartoonish shoot out scene, ends up rolling about on the floor of the bank with Carmen in a passionate embrace. Their affair flourishes when they escape to Uncle Jeannot's beach house. Yet the relationship begins to unravel when they rejoin the gang in Paris, particularly when the well-educated and somewhat elitist leader, Jacques, refuses to allow Joseph to participate. Joseph's anger and alienation build as Carmen herself begins to reject him. His desperation culminates in a confrontation with Carmen during the filming/kidnapping attempt in a hotel lobby. It is unclear, in the end, whether or not Joseph shoots Carmen, if she shoots herself, or in fact, if she has been shot at all. She is alive, slumped on the floor in the last frames of the film, which closes on an almost redemptive note: 'What is it called', Carmen asks, 'when everything's been lost, but it's daybreak and yet we're still breathing?' A bellboy, attempting to aid her, answers, 'it is called sunrise…'.

Yet these narrative scenes are in fact only one of several major threads that comprise *Prénom Carmen*, each weaving in and out of the other with a slow, deliberate rhythm. Long shots of the ocean and the sounds of crashing waves and seagulls punctuate the film, accompanying each other at times, or appearing separately, paired with other images or sounds. The narrative action frequently and abruptly cuts to scenes of the string quartet. The musicians pause to argue about technique, and rehearse troublesome passages over and over. These interjections have a shifting relationship to the plot. They initially, and primarily, appear to be extra-diegetic, yet they emerge as

intertwined with the various layers of the narrative as the film progresses. The sea becomes a reference point for Joseph and Carmen's love after their stay at the beach house. The viola player in the quartet, Claire, appears in later scenes as Joseph's previous love interest, a somewhat removed reworking of Bizet's Micaela character. The string quartet itself is even hired by the filmmaker/terrorists, and provides diegetic accompaniment for the film's climax.

It is critical to note that while these various threads do in fact prove to be interrelated, the end result is not one of synthesis or integration. Just as soon as one element joins another in a moment of harmonious collaboration, they are interrupted, separating into free-floating sonic and visual elements. Image and sound are continually 'mismatched': the sounds of the sea in certain scenes overlap shots of characters speaking, at times replacing the audio of their dialogue entirely. The music played by the quartet, too, accompanies many scenes non-diegetically, serving in some instances to support the action, in others halting abruptly mid-scene, leaving in its place extended stretches of pure silence.

Structurally, this eccentric combination of image and sound foregrounds the conventions, and the arbitrary nature, of their coupling. The characters frequently refer to sound. Uncle Jeannot tells Carmen, 'we should close our eyes, not open them', as he shows her his new 'camera', a portable stereo that he holds to his ear. Joseph, at one point later in the film, refuses to accept Carmen's rejection, protesting, 'that's not you speaking: the sound of the sea was missing'.

It might thus seem as though the core refrains of *Carmen* have been thoroughly dissipated by Godard's radical dismantling of the story and opera and his utilization of both as fodder for a more generalised meditation on the nature of sound and image in film. *Prénom Carmen*'s unconventional format, however, despite its deviations from Mérimée and Bizet, may in fact engage with *Carmen*'s refrain-like mechanisms more directly than more 'accurate' cinematic versions. The concept of the refrain is not limited to the echoes of concrete sounds and images. Beyond the more ephemeral repetitions of narratives, characterizations, and themes, refrains might be more deeply embedded within particular representational strategies. Indeed the absence of *Carmen*'s most familiar and central elements serves to highlight their dynamic and shifting role in *Carmen*'s various manifestations. As Phil Powrie notes, *Prénom Carmen*'s 'significant intertexts […] conjure up a distant, indeed absent, narrative, so that *Prénom: Carmen* comes into being only as a

palimpsestic gesture which structures the original Carmen narrative as loss' (Powrie 1995: 65). The Carmen narrative, as well as Bizet's music, become a missing refrain that haunts *Prénom Carmen*, a refrain that nevertheless works to define the space of the film through absence. Moreover, the fragmentary and stuttering quality of the film's multiple registers and references results in a work whose meaning is created through the mobile collisions and recombinations of its various disparate refrains. Though *Prénom Carmen* thus distinguishes itself from more unified renditions of the narrative, it draws attention to the operations of these circulating elements within the *Carmen* oeuvre as a whole.

The intercutting of the string quartet's rehearsals is consistent with Godard's larger body of work, in which he repeatedly highlights film's materiality and means of production. The bank robbery sequence is exemplary in this regard. The scene opens with Joseph pacing before the bank's entryway, his rifle slung over his shoulder. Beethoven's opus 74 accompanies the scene non-diegetically, until the image abruptly cuts to the Prat Quartet rehearsing the piece.[2] The players break off as one of them remarks that the tone must be 'more mysterious', 'it develops and then it becomes more tragic'. The camera remains trained on the quartet for well over a minute as they begin the passage again before cutting back to Joseph comically and aggressively hustling pedestrians away from the bank. As the terrorists burst through the door, tackling Joseph, the music periodically pauses and resumes in varying intervals. Joseph chases the gang in a hail of bullets while several of the customers huddle in fear on the floor and others go about their business, oblivious to the chaos. The scene then cuts back to the quartet, with one player insisting, 'it must be more violent'. They repeat several bars twice, with increasing 'violence', and again the scene stays with the players for several minutes until they once again break off. 'Act, don't ask', Claire intones, and the image returns to Joseph, stumbling over furniture and fallen customers as he searches for the gang within the hallways of the bank. The music has stopped, yet Claire's monologue continues over the image, which cuts back to her several times as she discusses the concept of destiny. Throughout the remainder of the scene, the strains of the music momentarily resume and halt in varying relationships of contrast and empathy with the image. Joseph engages in an exchange of gunfire with the gang before encountering Carmen X on a staircase. Realizing that both are out of ammunition, they wrestle on the floor for several seconds before fervently groping one another. 'Let's get out of here',

Carmen says as a female custodian calmly mops up a puddle of blood behind them.

The disruptive cutting in this scene, the multiple references to outside texts, and the comedic theatricality are typical of the film as a whole, as well as of Godard's directorial style. Yet these practices, while similar to the strategies invoked in Godard's other films, are deployed in a new context here. More than Brechtian methods of distantiation, the self-referential elements in *Prénom Carmen* echo the larger structural refrains of the Carmen story. Delving into *Carmen*'s history, one might locate certain representational frameworks linking its multiple permutations. Mérimée's novella is narrated by a French archaeologist who recounts and critiques the story told to him by don José, adding a lengthy commentary on the Gypsy language and culture. Though Bizet's opera does away with the novella's double narration, his musical interpretation of the story adds what we might similarly call a self-reflexive meta-commentary. Bizet's initial version of *Carmen* was an *opéra-comique*, a 'lighter' genre that integrated both spoken and sung dialogue. Much like the mediation of the narrator, the distancing effect of the collision between speaking and singing draws attention to the work's formal constructs. *Prénom Carmen* repeatedly searches for 'the moment that comes before naming', a stage prior to language and the symbolic order.[3] Yet it pursues this moment through an overwhelming collage of musical and textual references. This self-conscious interrogation of the processes of symbolization and representation echoes those framing strategies in Mérimée and Bizet at the same time that it pushes the project to a new threshold. As Evlyn Gould argues:

> Though Godard's film does not use Bizet's score, its unique counterposing of dramatic dialogue and quartets complements the diegetic splicing of shots of ocean waves into the action of the narrative and can only be explained by its renewal, for the modern spectator, of the formal effects of Bizet's original comic-opera form. But this form is itself a renewal of Mérimée's fundamentally formal antagonisms cast in what Wayne Koestenbaum has called opera's 'queer marriage' of music and words (Gould 1996: 13-14).

For Gould, the thread between the three works lies in the active role these frameworks force the reader/listener/viewer to engage in, 'an oscillating position between identification and resistance' (113). The overt structure of *Prénom Carmen*, while seemingly an utter departure from *Carmen*'s foundational texts, in fact reflects the formal core of those works at the same time that it asks its audience to reflect upon that tangled web of associations.

While *Prénom Carmen* does reproduce several of *Carmen*'s key frameworks, however, these repetitions must be understood in the context of the film's thematic project, one which does significantly deviate from both Mérimée and Bizet. Godard and screenplay writer Anne-Marie Miéville's adaptation concentrates almost exclusively upon issues of gender and sexuality.[4] This shift in focus has serious implications in the context of *Carmen*'s narrative. Both Carmen X and Joseph are French Caucasians, a move that displaces the racial tensions central to the opera and novella. Though the orientalism of the Spanish setting and the conflicts between the Gypsy workers, the Spanish officers, and the French narrators are removed from *Prénom Carmen*, some corollary signifiers of 'otherness' persist, if in somewhat veiled forms. Maruschka Detmers, the Dutch actress who plays Carmen, has dark features that have been deemed 'exotic' enough to land her roles as diverse as a Hungarian-Jewish freedom fighter in *Hanna's War* (Menahem Golan, 1988) and a Cuban-American in *The Mambo Kings* (Arne Glimcher, 1992). In *Prénom Carmen* Detmers is not racially coded in this way, yet her character does stand in stark visual contrast to the fairer Claire, whose conservative clothing and closed body language further differentiate her from the assertive, frequently unclothed Carmen X. Rather than exploring Carmen's troubling racial politics, this move could be read as leaving those prejudices intact and projecting them onto an equally troubling portrayal of female sexuality. One might conversely, however, question whether relocating *Carmen* to a French setting has a productive potential. While, in this instance, it obscures the issues of race key to the original story, it does return *Carmen* to the French culture that spawned it, the culture that the story and music, in fact, had far more to do with than the phantom of Spain that they imagine. David Wills makes a compelling argument in this vein, regarding the proliferation of Carmen films in 1983-1984 and crises of economics and nationality within the European Community (Wills 1986).

Nevertheless, while issues of race and ethnicity are not explicitly addressed in the film, Godard and Miéville's interrogation of gender is substantial.[5] Carmen X is a mesmerizing and complex character who rarely falls into the role of the fickle-hearted seductress. Though Carmen X's fate in the film is ambiguous, her dialogue and narration throughout provide a direct commentary upon the dichotomy of fate/freedom central to the Carmen story as a whole.[6] The virgin/vamp duality established in Bizet's opera is further displaced, for despite the visual contrast initially established between the two

characters, Carmen X and Claire are almost never presented as rivals. Unlike Carmen and Micaela, they take the form of parallel voices existing on primarily distinct narrative registers. Both speak at length, in monologues, about the tension between fate and improvisation, one of the key conflicts that drives the film. In articulating this shared quandary, Claire has more in common with the historian's role in Mérimée's novella than she does with Micaela; she provides a narrator's interpretation of the action that is unfolding. Masculinity, too, is destabilized; Powrie (1995), for example, points to the ways in which Joseph's character operates in a position of ambiguous gender identification, in effect recasting the myth of the *femme fatale* into one of male desire and masochism.

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Rather than exploring these representations in further detail, however, I would put these observations aside to locate the problem of gender difference addressed by the film within the larger economy of difference it interrogates. Within *Prénom Carmen* the emphasis on difference and the other is realized most clearly in the conflict established between music and image. Sound, that which film traditionally renders subservient to the image, is brought to the forefront in a direct challenge of this hierarchy. Music is not a metaphor for femininity, nor vice versa. But each does function as a repeating *refrain* of difference, the unfixed domain of the Other. I would argue that this is in fact the refrain most central to the Carmen myth: that of difference in the realm of representation.

The question of repetition and difference lies at the heart of Deleuze and Guattari's interest in the refrain, and their examination of the concept centres on the degree to which individual refrains either minimize difference, or allow it to flourish unresolved. Looking in this way at the specific function that a repetition performs, they isolate several distinct ways in which the refrain can relate to space. It can, as in the examples of the birdsong and folk music, act to territorialize, inscribe, or fix. Carmen's 'Habanera', for example, as McClary has demonstrated, constitutes an incredibly complex ground, one that includes Cuban-style cabaret, bourgeois nineteenth-century notions of the 'exotic', 'feminized', hip-swaggering 'chromatic excesses' (McClary 1991: 57-58), and the ambiguous space between communal performance and personal expression (McClary 1992: 74-77). With each rearticulation of this refrain, in various venues and mediums, this same ground, more often than not, is re-embodied.

Yet there is a certain creative potential, according to Deleuze and Guattari, which can take hold of the refrain and make it a *deterritorializing* force. A refrain may be highly determined and 'grounded', but it will also 'bring "play" to what it composes', opening up into new configurations as it transects the space of which it sings (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 336). Many versions of *Carmen* thus utilize the 'Habanera' to critically renegotiate questions of community, nationality, gender, and race. Sound and music especially, for Deleuze and Guattari, have a capability to move between divergent spaces and to elicit affective responses. On the one hand, this accounts for music's tendency toward emotional manipulation (348). On the other, sonorous elements have a potential to free themselves from repressive frameworks, to carry us elsewhere. Carried along by the expressive power of the refrain, music can break pre-existing configurations open and create, out of that raw material, new ways of seeing, hearing, and thinking.

I would not argue that *Prénom Carmen* achieves that level of deterritorialization, a highly specific, nearly impossible movement as it is established in *A Thousand Plateaus*. But I would suggest that this idea of a 'creative play' that utilizes the repetitive power of the refrain to open up new layers of space and expression reveals much about the way *Prénom Carmen* figures itself in relation to the larger Carmen myth. The multiple registers in the film, its poly-vocality and abundant intertextual references, confront the audience with the raw elements of the Carmen narrative dissected and laid bare. More than a deconstruction, however, the systematic unhinging of refrains within *Prénom Carmen* marks a struggle toward the creation of something new. The final moments of the film emphasize less a return to the beginning than the birth of a new dawn. Powrie performs a different reading of this scene, finding within it a return to Carmen's origin and the mythical status the film otherwise worked to undo (Powrie 1995: 72). I would agree that the scene is highly ambivalent, working at once to rehearse and pull apart *Carmen*'s mythology. Yet the 'double theatricalisation' Powrie aptly uncovers here, found in the dialogue's direct quotation from Giraudoux's *Électra* and the stage-like *mise en scène*, might also be read as an attempt to rewrite these myths through a self-conscious staging that subverts their combined meanings. Just as Carmen X's ambiguous fate in the last frames leaves open a window of hope, perhaps the intense dialogue between refrains found here might open onto new territories, improvised variations that serve to 'clear the air' by destabilizing the link between quotation and

source. As Verena Andermatt Conley writes, the film's 'many quotations undermine the unfolding of the Carmen story. They introduce different tonalities, vibrations and temporalities allowing, paradoxically, voices to lead toward each other, in a movement necessary for an affirmation of life and breathing' (Conley 1990: 73).

The thrust toward the creation of new spaces through the repetition of refrains in *Prénom Carmen*, as I have suggested, reinscribes the film's interrogation of gender difference into a larger formal sphere. Individual characterizations might indeed remain problematically grounded, yet the film takes its greatest creative leaps in a sonic register. The Carmen story is founded upon a self-conscious interest in representation and difference, from Mérimée's complex narrative framing strategy to Bizet's dramatic collision of musical styles and spoken dialogue. I would identify the strains of this kind of framework within *Prénom Carmen* as structural refrains. The territory these refrains circumscribe is that of representation itself, the representation of difference. Wills makes this argument when he writes that the music in *Prénom Carmen* becomes

> that through which the economy of representation is both articulated and
> disrupted, inasmuch as it provides a difference against which the visual can
> define itself while at the same time participating with the visual in the same
> field of possible representations. (Wills 1986: 42)

Sound and music, which are used in formally similar ways in the film, become a refrain for not only the kind of representational frameworks found in Bizet and Mérimée, but also a refrain for that which is continually elided, dominated, and contained through the process of representation (40).

This, I would argue, is the primary motivation for Godard's use of Beethoven's quartets as opposed to Bizet's opera. Unlike the dramatic form of the opera, which utilizes highly coded signifiers for gender and race, the quartets cannot be definitively linked to a particular characters or traits.[7] This is not to say, of course, that Beethoven's music, in its non-narrative and non-theatrical form, is thus free from political implications. It is to say, however, that the music used in *Prénom Carmen* functions entirely differently from that of Bizet's opera. It does not signify directly, but points instead to the very *weight* of signification music is forced to bear in film.

What becomes provocative about the repetition of refrains in this instance is the manner in which each element has become dislocated from any direct representational relationship. Unlike

simpler refrain-functions, such as the birdsong that clearly corresponds to the set territory it marks, here the refrain functions as a floating element that frees itself (to varying degrees) from its traditional, fixed associations, and begins to form new meanings and associations as it adheres to and interacts with other elements and refrains. The distinction to be made here is that the refrain is not bound in the one-to-one relationship of a signifier and a signified. Instead it becomes part of a process of endless circulation and transformation. Again, this is not to say that these elements become dehistoricized or depoliticized, utterly removed from their original contexts. Their emotive impact arises, in fact, from the reverberations of those rich historical associations. Yet rather than conceiving of these meanings as fixed, the repetition of each refrain becomes a process of rending these traditional associations apart, associations that are often deeply coloured by binaristic Western conceptions of race, gender, and class. These originary meanings do not disappear, but through the variations of each recurrence, they become open to interrogation and heighten the potential for new associations, combinations, and meanings.

The selection of Beethoven's music, rather than that of any other composer, is particularly significant in this regard.[8] The reception and categorization of Beethoven has been the subject of fierce debate, and has undergone dramatic historical shifts. Beethoven's late string quartets, Godard's primary source in this film, were regarded by many of his contemporaries as dissonant and fragmentary deviations from his earlier work, and Beethoven received a great deal of criticism for abandoning the classical tenets of unity and reason. He was later embraced as the creative progenitor of the Romantic movement, his late string quartets being viewed as intensely private works that experimented with form and expression in radical new ways. Musicologists of the early twentieth century, however, went to great lengths to disavow Beethoven's Romanticism, rooting his work in the eighteenth-century tradition by pointing to the influences of Haydn and Mozart, and to the persistence of classical forms such as the sonata (Solomon 1994). More recently, theorists have addressed both tendencies within Beethoven from a variety of interdisciplinary perspectives. Feminist musicologists have elaborated on the violent movements of his compositions and associations they have accrued in their cultural recyclings (McClary 1991). The late string quartets have also been read through the lenses of semiotics and postmodernism (McClary 2000).

The circulations of both Beethoven's music and the commentary it has generated are salient here in two key ways. First, within Beethoven's later compositions themselves, there is a formal tension between fragmentary, deconstructing references and a movement toward reunification. Responses to these works, through their interrogation of Beethoven's influences and his dissonant, expressive tendencies, throw into question conceptions of originality and creativity in the artistic process. Secondly, criticism of Beethoven, as a perpetual site of contention and re-evaluation, further probes the roles of interpretation, criticism and 'reading' in the experience of works of art. In essence, these debates engage with what we might call the refrain, the resurfacing of themes and influences, the modes of reception they demand from their audiences, their deviations and flights into new territories, or conversely, their synthesis and ultimate return to the same ground.

The history of the reception and recycling of Beethoven might thus be read as partially analogous to that of *Carmen*. A particularly rich point of correlation might be drawn between the complex relationship between dramatic, literary, and musical texts found within both Beethoven and *Carmen*. Leon Botstein argues that shifts in the reception of music in nineteenth-century Vienna led audiences to become increasingly reliant upon secondary texts and guidebooks in their listening practices. The former 'impenetrability' of Beethoven's late quartets gave way to their rediscovery, when they 'assumed special stature as secret, opaque, and visionary objects requiring special extramusical commentary' (Botstein 1994: 93). He further locates the late quartets within nineteenth-century dramatic traditions, hypothesizing that they may 'have been impelled explicitly by so-called extramusical narrative impulses' (100). Christopher Reynolds similarly discusses the nineteenth-century practice of providing textual accompaniment to a musical work, verbal visualizations that were provided either by the composer or an outside interpreter. While textual annotations of music had fallen out of favour by the twentieth century, contemporary filmic interpretations of Beethoven have reinvigorated, for Reynolds, 'a metaphorical way of hearing related to that which flourished in the nineteenth century':

> Indeed film, with its opera-like dependence on music to convey, create, or comment on aspects of the drama, is the most active heir to a metaphorical mode of expression and hearing that once linked composition and criticism […]. Whether for Berlioz and Wagner or Kubrick and Godard, artistic reuse

of canonical works takes part in defining the reception of those works, no less
than more obvious forms of criticism (Reynolds 2000: 163).

The tensions between text and music, composition and criticism that
Botstein and Reynolds locate within the late quartets resonates equally
with Mérimée's novella, Bizet's *opéra-comique*, and Godard's film.
Each of these tensions I would identify as having a refrain-like
function. Most significantly, I would point to the tension within the
refrain between the mobile expression unleashed by each articulation,
and the grounded cultural spaces to which each chorus refers. Echoing
Reynolds, I would further argue that the recycling of refrains works
not only to transform that space, but also, potentially, to critically
interrogate it. While each of the works discussed here might engage
with this collage of contradiction differently, with different degrees of
resolution, it is difficult to deny that each demands a new mode of
seeing and listening.

Schubert's criticism of Beethoven in a diary entry could easily
be read as a contemporary response to Godard; he derides the
'eccentricity which joins and confuses the tragic with the comic, the
agreeable with the repulsive, heroism with howlings and the holiest
with harlequinades, without distinction'.[9] Each permutation of
Carmen might likewise evoke such dissonant collisions. Yet *Prénom
Carmen* seems particularly attuned to the implications of these
juxtapositions, and utilizes them in ways that draw attention to their
representational strategies. Its jarring structure might not free itself
entirely from the ground that Carmen sings. Yet its active engagement
with the viewer throughout these various 'oscillations' carries each
refrain beyond the realm of mere repetition, toward unrealized
territories. 'To improvise is to join with the World, or meld with it'
(Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 311).

This reading of *Prénom Carmen* is by no means exhaustive. In
particular, it has neglected the emotive contribution of music to the
Carmen legacy, and the effects of the relative absence of this
component in *Prénom Carmen*. As that aspect of music that has been
consistently denigrated as subjective and 'feminine', a tendency
central to the history and reception of versions and adaptations of
Carmen, a study of the politics of difference and sexuality in the
music of *Prénom Carmen* must certainly take this into consideration. I
raise this point in conclusion not to question the integrity of Godard
and Miéville's adaptation, but instead to suggest that *no* version of
Carmen could ever address the full range of questions, the cacophony
of refrains, provoked by the story. There is something to be learned

from Godard's approach, yet there are certain elisions in the film as well: most notably the absence of the creative power of the female voice. We gain more when we view *Prénom Carmen* alongside other artistic co-options of the refrain (Geraldine Farrar's inspired vocal and silent adaptations are a particularly poignant example). Individual *Carmen*s cannot be read in isolation; their discursive strategies must be placed in the context of the hundreds of diverse strategies that comprise the Carmen myth as a whole. The power of *Carmen* lies in its function precisely as a refrain, a series of articulations that are always shifting, moving, and incomplete. We can best understand it not by analyzing the positive or negative aspects of each occurrence, but by mapping the implications of its movements as it circulates *between* texts. Often its strains may serve to territorialize and contain, but it always bears at the same time the potential to break free, to move on the notes of that song toward a new creative plane.

Notes
1. Craven (1988) similarly points to 'Godard's refrain technique', though her theorization of the refrain is drawn from literary theory and genre criticism.
2. For an elaboration of the various Beethoven quartets referenced in *Prénom Carmen*, see Sheer (2001: 173, 181-187).
3. See discussions of this aspect of the film by Powrie (1995: 68) and Conley (1990: 69).
4. McClary (1992: 125) notes that most contemporary 'revisionist readings of *Carmen*' similarly devote the majority of their attention to questions of gender.
5. As McClary discusses in '*Carmen* as Perennial Fusion' (in this volume), class is the other primary conflict that Godard examines through his reworking of the Carmen narrative.
6. In this regard, Carmen X might be read alongside Sally Potter's *Thriller* (1979), in which the heroine interrogates and deconstructs her own position as the Mimi character in Puccini's *La Bohème*.
7. See McClary (1992) for a discussion of the representational function of music in opera, especially Chapter 4. Interestingly, McClary also notes that Bizet cites Beethoven as his greatest idol (48). McClary's '*Carmen* as Perennial Fusion' in this volume specifically addresses Bizet's 'German' leanings and their implications in *Prénom Carmen*.
8. Godard has drawn heavily from Beethoven's string quartets throughout his career, especially those from the composer's late period (Opp. 131, 132, 133 and 135), featuring them in several of his films, including *Le Nouveau monde* (1962), *Une Femme mariée* (1964), *Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle* (1966) (Sheer 2001).
9. Franz Schubert, diary entry of 16 June 1816 from O. E. Deutsch (ed.), *Schubert: A Documentary Biography* (London, 1946), as quoted by Soloman (1994: 69).

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