

An Opposition in Search of Itself:
Modern French Cinema and the Algerian War

by

Matthew Croombs

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Matthew Croombs

Abstract

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This dissertation provides a sustained analysis of the politics of French cinema in the 1950s and 1960s from the socio-historical perspective of the Franco-Algerian War. By combining close visual analysis of the Left Bank Group's cinema, discourse analysis of contemporaneous film theoretical debates, and archival research of images from the popular press, I demonstrate how the Franco-Algerian War played a key role in shaping the cinematic representation of French modernization. Although it has been widely assumed that France's "police operation" in Algeria between 1954 and 1962 was absent from French screens due to severe censorship restrictions, I explore how filmmakers including Alain Resnais, Agnès Varda, and Chris Marker mobilize imagery and discourses unique to the war in order to critique the disciplinary nature of their own "modern society."

In its focus on colonialism, my dissertation challenges the dominant narrative of this influential period in film history as a monolithic New Wave movement reducible to the films of an inner-circle of auteurs and their writings in *Cahiers du cinéma*. I return to the journal *Positif*'s under-theorized criticism to illuminate how film culture in France functioned as a heterogeneous field of debate, in which political divisions were largely determined in relation to the question of colonialism's relationship to modernization. The 1950s mark the flourishing of Les Trente Glorieuses in France, a period of economic acceleration, which contemporary media

representation often cast in the ambience of science fiction. As the specificities of France's "dirty war" in Algeria permeated the mainland, however, the frontier dividing the two became increasingly precarious. By placing the *mise-en-scènes* of the modern world – its museums, its department stores, its cultures of objects – in a dialectical tension with images of policing, torture, and concentration camps, the Left Bank Group demonstrate how the horrors of the counter-insurgency in Algeria permeated everyday life in the metropole. The conclusion of the dissertation considers how the Left Bank Group's encounter with the Algerian War conditioned their militant film practice at the end of the 1960s (*Loin du Vietnam*, 1967), and defines René Vautier's "parallel cinema" as a necessary future direction for the study of anti-colonial cinema.

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Introduction

Modernity is, in fact, a European phenomenon but one constituted in a dialectical relation with a non-European alterity.

– Enrique Dussel¹

Framing Perspectives

I was drawn into the question of how France's colonial war with Algeria shaped the politics of French film and film culture by a feeling I had, and continue to have, concerning Michael Haneke's *Caché*. Haneke's film has emerged as one of the most generative texts of the early twenty-first century, largely because it seems so radically singular and hard to pin down aesthetically, politically, and historically. This dissertation is premised on the idea that *Caché* establishes a dynamic on these three fronts that is actually very familiar in the history of European art and militant cinema when it comes to the topic of Algeria. Since its release in 2005, Haneke's detective picture has triggered an astonishing volume of critical scholarship, and even inspired a full dossier of debate in *Screen*, film studies' leading international journal. The disposition of these debates, moreover, has been strongly polarized. For some cultural historians and theorists, such as Paul Gilroy and Nicolas Mirzoeff, *Caché*'s "whodunit" narrative structure and emphasis on *French* subjectivity combine to create a formally revisionist and embarrassingly Eurocentric picture of the colonial

¹ Enrique Dussel, quoted in Walter D. Mignolo, "DELINKING: The rhetoric of modernity, the logic of coloniality and the grammar of de-coloniality," *Cultural Studies* 21, nos. 2-3 (2007): 453.

past.² For others, including Martine Beugnet and Guy Austin, Haneke's investigative framework and (modernist) strategies of indirection work to illuminate the traces of a war whose history has been deferred by France's ongoing legacy of state sanctioned amnesia.³ Considered collectively, this accumulating body of scholarship reveals that Haneke's multi-layered aesthetic perspective on the years of decolonization has agitated a cultural nerve, perhaps because this perspective's political underpinnings remain largely mystifying and un-intelligible.

Significantly, Haneke is not the only contemporary filmmaker to confront the most policed zones of French-Algerian memory. *Caché*'s release was coincident with a proliferation of films concentrating on the war period of 1954 to 1962, including Philippe Faucon's *La Trahison* (2006), Laurent Herbier's *Mon colonel* (2006), and Alain Tasma's *Nuit noire, 17 octobre 1961* (2005). Yet, insofar as these films press the Franco-Algerian War's significant events into familiar, individualist-oriented narratives about reluctant heroes "caught between contradictory allegiances,"⁴ they do not describe the historically situated ways in which the war manifested itself to either French or Algerian experience. Haneke, whose filmography arguably extends the modernist cinematic impulses examined in this dissertation, is distinct in his treatment of the war as, precisely, an aesthetic problem to do with the frontier between presence and absence, visibility and invisibility. In fact, *Caché* resonates with Jacques Rancière's influential text on "The Cause of the Other," given that it is not concerned, for better or for worse, with "the exchange of gazes between France and Algeria," but

² Paul Gilroy, "Shooting crabs in a barrel," *Screen* 48, no. 2 (2007): 233-235; Nicholas Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

³ Martine Beugnet, "Blind spot," *Screen* 48, no. 2 (2007): 227-231; Guy Austin, "Drawing trauma: visual testimony in *Caché* and *J'ai huit ans*," *Screen* 48, no. 4 (2007): 529-536.

⁴ Beugnet, 227.

concentrates instead on “the reflexive gaze we turn back on ourselves when we consider an *other* whose presence or absence modifies the meaning of the adjective ‘French’ and distances the ‘French’ political subject from him or herself.”⁵

Caché does not aim this “reflexive gaze” at some normative French “we,” but toward a particular sector of French society: the reformed, left-wing intellectual. Both of the film’s protagonists, Georges and Anne Laurent, are knowledge workers or “cultural intermediaries”: he hosts and produces a literary roundtable program and she is the editor for a publisher of theoretical texts on postmodernism and postcolonialism. In the first act of the film, Haneke is almost heavy-handed in showing how these members of the contemporary French intelligentsia use their access to culture as a means of asserting class distinction. The Laurents’ posh, Parisian townhouse, whose interiors appear guarded by formidable walls of books, provides one of the film’s many graphic reminders of their joint cultural and economic seclusion. This sense of enclosure is disrupted by the mysterious videotapes which begin to arrive on their doorstep. At first, the images on the tapes appear innocuous, presenting surveillance footage of the exterior of the couple’s home, which is unanchored to any perspective in the diegesis and lacking in any semantic detail or “eventfulness.” Yet the third tape is accompanied by a disturbing drawing of a child spurting blood from its mouth, thereby establishing a narrative connection between the tapes and a lie that Georges told as a boy to his parents in order to have a young Algerian in their care, Majid, evicted from the home. This personal memory is subtly embedded within the broader social context of the Franco-Algerian War, since Majid was a refugee of the worst police massacre to take place against the Algerian

⁵ Jacques Rancière, “The Cause of the Other,” trans. David Macey. *Parallax* 4, no. 2 (1998): 25.

émigré community in Paris on October 17, 1961. Suspecting Majid as the culprit behind the tapes, Georges tracks him down to the *banlieues* on the periphery of the city, the spaces to which France's North African immigrant communities were exiled in the wake of deindustrialization and then stigmatized for their "lack of culture."⁶

Two aspects of the film are particularly relevant to the concepts developed in this dissertation. The first concerns the formal qualities of the images seen on the tapes. In their distanced, frontal composition, and in their symbolic associations with Georges' activity in the editing room (the video scanlines), these images are marked by the formal signatures of the protagonist's own look and its control over media discourse. The tapes turn Georges into an object, rather than subject of this look, whose right to see without being seen now manifests itself as a form of surveillance and policing; note also how the police are unable to help Georges in combating this ambiguous harassment. The second concerns the distinct, affective mood of horror generated by these images, which emerges as a paradoxical effect of their stillness. Unlike most commercially labeled "horror films," Haneke does not generate dread through a particular figure – "the monster" – or through shocking events that send bodies into flight – "terror." Rather, the horror of Haneke's film, in Levinasian terms, "is due just to the fact that nothing approaches, nothing comes, nothing threatens; this silence, this tranquility, this void of sensations constitutes a mute, absolutely indeterminate menace."⁷ By confounding the identity of the film's images and the

⁶ See Ginette Vincendeau, "Designs on the Banlieue: Mathieu Kassovitz's *La Haine* (1995)," in *French Film: Texts and Contexts, Second Edition*, eds. Susan Hayward and Ginette Vincendeau (New York: Routledge, 2000), 310-327.

⁷ Emmanuel Levinas, "There is: Existence without Existents," in *Time and the Other*, trans. Richard A. Cohen. (Pittsburgh PA: Duquesne University Press, 1987), 31.

tape's images throughout the narrative, Haneke also confers this sense of horror and temporal immobility over the body of the film as a whole.

I suggest that there is a profound connection between these motifs of policing and horror and the film's disavowed social context, represented by Georges' line, "October 17, 1961. Enough Said." October 17 is significant as an extreme example of how the techniques of the counter-insurgency in Algeria were displaced onto the conditions of everyday life in mainland France.⁸ On that night, the Algerian émigré community in Paris took to the streets against a racist curfew, which prohibited them from living any sort of public life outside of official 9-to-5 working hours.⁹ In response, the Paris police transformed the city into a militarized zone, enabling them to detain thousands of protesters in sporting stadiums, while another 121 of these protesters were gunned down in the streets, their bodies tossed into the Seine like rubbish. As Rancière argues, October 17 marked a turning point for many French in relation to the war, not only because of the criminal violence of the event and the erasure of a people manifesting themselves in public space. Rather, it was the erasure of the event itself, its complete blackout by the popular media working in conjunction with the police which produced a generalized climate of horror and led some French to refuse to continue identifying with the French state whose actions were conducted in the people's name.¹⁰ *Caché's* evocation and disavowal of this event thus provides an important insight into why the film stages the history of the Algerian War through the perspective of a look whose subjectivity is fractured by the specter of a hidden

⁸ Jim House and Neil MacMaster, *Paris 1961: Algerians, State Terror, and Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 113.

⁹ Kristen Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 19-64.

¹⁰ Rancière, 28.

crime. And yet, the aesthetic virtuosity of this gesture is also subtended by a dubious politics – what Mirzoeff, following Walter Mignolo, calls “The Eurocentric critique of Eurocentrism.”¹¹ Haneke transforms the suffering of the Algerians who were incarcerated, tortured, and “disappeared” throughout the war into an occasion to reflect on, and only on, *French* subjectivity, its impotence and shame in the face of such acts. Rather than enacting a dis-identification with this subjectivity in the form of an address to the Algerians, the film stages a conservative retreat back into the confines of identity, as when Georges retires to his bed at the narrative’s conclusion; in the protagonist’s dreams, we see Majid through the prism of the civilizing mission, as a subhuman threat to cultured society, but it is debatable whether he (or the film) ever really awakens to a historical consciousness of the Other.

This dissertation aims to show how the dynamic that *Caché* establishes between policing, horror, and a politically ambivalent dis-identification with the French state has a long history within the European cinematic representation of the Franco-Algerian War. This dynamic, for example, is what organizes former *Positif* critic Bertrand Tavernier’s four-hour documentary, *La guerre sans nom* (1992), in which the war’s veterans recount their participation in the worst acts of criminal violence, juxtaposed with an image-track that depicts serene and depopulated Algerian landscapes in the present. It is also at the core of the sequences in Harun Farocki’s *Images of the World and the Inscription of War* (1989) that reflect on Marc Garanger’s police photographs of Algerian women who were forced to unveil for the purposes of identity cards. The film’s reference to “the horror of being photographed

¹¹ Mirzoeff, 258; see also Walter D. Mignolo, “The Geopolitics of Knowledge and the Colonial Difference,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 101, no. 1 (2002): 57-96.

for the first time,” largely turns toward Garanger’s, and Farocki’s, subjectivities, as they confront the violence of their own look in the resistant gazes of the Algerian women. In fact, the dynamic between policing, horror, and political dis-identification can be traced back in film history to the years of the conflict itself, and is most forcefully embodied in the cinema of the Left Bank Group of Alain Resnais, Agnès Varda, and Chris Marker, whose encounter with the Algerian War constitutes the subject of this dissertation.

In the remainder of this introduction, I identify some of the fundamental social and cultural contexts that conditioned French cinema’s representation of Algerian decolonization through thematic and affective motifs of horror and policing. I describe why the Franco-Algerian War was unique within a post-World War II period of nationalist uprisings, largely on account of its proximity to everyday life in the metropole and its official definition as a “police operation.” I then turn to the policing of cinema specifically, the vicissitudes of which made it nearly impossible for filmmakers to determine what their films could and could not show in relation to colonialism. I also contextualize the censorship of cinema in France within a broader historical frame, pointing to the confrontation between the censors and Jean Vigo’s “social cinema” as an important precedent to the films of the Left Bank. Yet censorship and policing were not the only factors shaping French cinema’s often intellectually hesitant and indecisive approach toward the war. Accordingly, I define the ways in which the anti-colonial movement in Algeria involved the French left in a series of double binds concerning their allegiance with the Parti communiste français (PCF). In having established these broader framing perspectives, I focus on the Left

Bank Group, whose cinema was consistently isolated by the journal *Positif* for its subversive treatment of the Franco-Algerian War. Straddling diverse philosophical traditions, as well as commercial and militant film practices, the Left Bank Group's work is argued to present one of the period's most complex articulations of modernizing French society during the period of decolonization. The last section of the introduction situates this dissertation's analysis of the Left Bank Group's cinema in view of the increasing body of Anglophone film scholarship on modern French film and colonialism.

Policing, Horror, Politics

The post-World War II period to which this dissertation returns is one marked by the great decline of European colonial dominance over countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, a dominance that reached its apogee between 1900 and the end of World War I, when Europe controlled over 85 percent of the global population.¹² In the years between 1945 and 1962, Britain, France, and Italy confronted anti-colonial, nationalist movements in countries ranging from Madagascar, Vietnam, Cyprus, and the Congo. From 1954 to 1956, France alone lost its control over Indochina, Tunisia, and Morocco.¹³ Yet, as the Franco-Algerian War's contemporary critics and subsequent historians have both observed, France's troubles in Algeria were notably distinct from the "exogenous nature" of the colonial wars fought elsewhere, as they

¹² Robert Stam and Louise Spence, "Colonialism, Racism, and Representation: An Introduction," in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 237.

¹³ Mark Betz, *Beyond the Subtitle: Remapping European Art Cinema* (Minneapolis: Regents of the University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 97.

seeped their way into everyday life in France. Jim House and Neil MacMaster contend that part of this slippage can be attributed to geographical factors, since the Mediterranean sea facilitated regular circulation between both France's and Algeria's populations.¹⁴ An émigré community of 350,000 Algerian migrant workers arrived in the metropole after 1945 and became a second Front for the nationalist movement in Algeria. Over the course of the conflict, high-ranking French government officials and military personnel responded to military crises in the knife-edge present, travelling back and forth between Algiers and Paris on a regular basis, and often within the same day.

In addition to the blurred geographical boundaries between France and Algeria, however, there were also more deeply embedded, historical factors that made this conflict unique within a period characterized by nationalist uprisings. Under French rule since 1830, Algeria was one of France's oldest colonies, and considered, after 1845, to consist of three French *départements*: Algiers, Constantine, and Oran. Over the course of the twentieth century, it became a site for major mining and agricultural industries controlled by a settler, *pied noir* community of one million who, by the time of the Algerian War, exerted economic and legal dominance over the country's Arab population of nine million.¹⁵ This long history produced a sedimented cultural belief among many French that Algeria simply *was France*, and when the Front de libération nationale (FLN) deployed their first revolutionary attacks on November 1, 1954 (known as the Toussaint Rouge or "Red All Saints

¹⁴ House and MacMaster, 25.

¹⁵ Benjamin Stora, *Algeria, 1830-2000: A Short History*, trans. Jane Marie Todd (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 2004).

Day”), the metropole made the strategic maneuver of defining the conflict as an internal matter, or “police operation,” for “the maintenance of law and order.”¹⁶

The specious definition of a war that enrolled over two million French conscript soldiers as a “police operation” had the advantage of eliding the international laws established by the Geneva Convention and other human rights doctrines, which failed to specify protections for either civil or colonial conflicts. When this fact is understood in tandem with the Fourth Republic’s decision to institute a Special Powers Act on March 16, 1956, which placed the military in Algeria in charge of the nation’s civic responsibilities, the Algerians became, as the title of Francis Jeanson’s famous text indicates, literally “hors la loi.”¹⁷ By fighting under an extended state of exception, the French normalized methods of control and repression which ran directly counter to the nation’s self-identification with the Republican tradition of the Rights of Man: the “re-grouping” or containment of entire indigenous populations; seizures of papers, magazines, and journals; “ratonnades” and “mopping up” operations against whole villages; and the industrialized use of torture. Such practices, as Pierre Vidal-Naquet argued at the time, could not be localized to the military’s activity, since they implicated an entire “bureaucratic machinery,” which interpellated the highest levels of government and even the popular press.¹⁸ Both of these sources were well informed of the specificities of colonial violence in Algeria, but continued to reproduce the illusion that such violence only occurred in rare instances of excess.

¹⁶ Todd Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), 43.

¹⁷ Colette and Francis Jeanson, *L’Algérie hors la loi* (Paris: Seuil, 1955).

¹⁸ Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Torture: Cancer of Democracy* (London: Penguin, 1963), 27-28.

This (failed) disavowal leads to a final reason why the Algerian War was unique among Europe's colonial conflicts, in that both the counter-insurgency and its tacit state support managed to invade mainland France by the war's conclusion, as evidenced by the extreme measures that the Paris police force used to pacify the Algerian émigré population in the metropole. The transference of criminal violence to Paris is made particularly apparent in the positioning of Maurice Papon as the city's police prefect in 1958. A former Vichy collaborator who became the head of military operations in Constantine in the early 1950s, it was Papon who led the massacre against Paris's Algerian population on October 17, 1961. House and MacMaster note that October 17 thrust the French people into a situation of "state terror," but it is worth drawing attention to the particular language they use to describe this state as a "*climate* of insecurity and fear in the wider population" that "passed like a virus" and "slid dangerously" into the metropole, generating "a *feeling* of powerlessness, fatalism, and withdrawal."¹⁹ Time and again, in the popular press, in the writings of philosophers as diverse as Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Francois Lyotard, and even in film criticism, the effects of Algeria's police operation is described as "permeating the metropole" and producing an "atmosphere" of menace and dread. And the term that was consistently used to describe this porous, atmospheric invasion was not "terror" but almost always "horror." One of my key tasks in this dissertation is to explore how this climate of horror makes itself manifest in the period's cinema.

Yet, given that the Franco-Algerian War went undeclared by both state officials and the popular press even in name, visible traces of the horrors in Algeria were strictly forbidden. Censorship thus constitutes one of the fundamental contexts

¹⁹ House and MacMaster, 27-30, my emphasis.

for, but also theoretical obstacles toward, understanding the period's anti-colonial cinema. Significantly, state intervention into film aesthetics has had an enduring history in France, dating back to 1909, when, according to Steven Ungar, political officials began "to supplement efforts by police and local authorities to ensure that films did not threaten public tranquility and order."²⁰ This control became formalized during World War I with the formation of the Commission de censure in January 1916. Composed of members of the Ministry of the Interior and the police force, the commission issued distribution visas to films on condition that they preserved respect for France's key institutions, particularly the military, and posed no threat of inciting public disorder.²¹

From its inception, the commission did not follow an over-arching template, but evaluated films on a case-by case basis.²² While both the composition of these commissions underwent radical changes – from the first Commission de censure made up of government and police officials, to the post-Herriot decree Commission with an equal number of government and industry members, to the eventual Commission de contrôle comprised of government and military officials working through the Centre National de la Cinématographie (CNC) – and the governance of cinema shifted to different regulatory bodies over the course of the ensuing decades – the Ministry of the Interior in the 1930s, the Ministry of Information in the 1940s, and the Ministry of Cultural Affairs in the late 1950s – the policy of evaluating films on

²⁰ Steven Ungar, "Jean Vigo, *L'Atalante*, and the Promise of Social Cinema," *Historical Reflections* 35, no. 2 (2009): 76-77.

²¹ Lionel Trelis, *La censure cinématographique en France*, unpublished dissertation (Lyon: Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Lyon, 2001), sec. I.2.3.

²² See Bruce Kraft, "Tour du monde de la censure au cinéma – Partie 1: La France," *La Pellicule Brûle* (21 septembre 2001): "Sa composition est primordiale puisqu'elle va déterminer sa politique et ses prises de décisions."

an individual basis remains intact up to the present day.²³ This shifting institutional landscape made it particularly difficult for filmmakers to negotiate with the specificities of what could and could not be shown in their films, especially during times of civil unrest. Jean-Pierre Bertin-Maghit notes that almost forty films were forced to undergo cuts both during and after World War II for vaguely undermining either the prestige of the army or foreign powers considered to be “friends of France,” for demonstrating pro-communist sympathies, or for representing disaffected youth.²⁴

The prohibition of films that failed to conform with essentialist definitions of “Frenchness” also took place in the 1930s; however, as evidenced by the state’s policing of Jean Vigo’s work, this set a crucial precedent for the “social cinema” discussed in this dissertation. Vigo was a target of censorship not only because his father was a well known socialist revolutionary,²⁵ but because his polemics on documentary form were perceived as a direct affront to state control. The most famous of such polemics was delivered before a screening of *À propos de Nice* at the experimental Théâtre du Vieux Colombier in Paris on June 14, 1930. In what was later published as “Toward a Social Cinema,” Vigo proposed a model of counter-cinema, or what Nicole Brenez aptly calls “bio-political” cinema.²⁶ Social cinema departed from prevailing notions of *cinéma engagé*,²⁷ drawing instead on the

²³ See Trelis, sec. I; Laurent Garreau, *Archives secrètes du cinéma français 1945-1975* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2009); and Frédéric Hervé, *La censure du cinéma en France à la Libération* (Paris: Association pour le développement de l'histoire économique, 2001).

²⁴ Jean-Pierre Bertin-Maghit, *Le Cinéma français sous l'occupation* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1994), 14.

²⁵ Eugène-Bonaventure de Vigo was a socialist writer who died under suspicious circumstances in the Fresnes prison in 1917. See Ungar, “Jean Vigo,” 64.

²⁶ Nicole Brenez, “*À propos de Nice* and the Extremely Necessary, Permanent Invention of the Cinematic Pamphlet,” *Rouge* (2005): http://www.rouge.com.au/7/propos_de_nice.html.

²⁷ Steven Ungar, “Scenes in a Library: Alain Resnais and *Toute la mémoire du monde*,” *SubStance* 41, no. 2 (2012): 58-78.

surrealist impulses of Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí's *Un Chien andalou* (1928). Vigo argued that reportage – a mode of filmmaking proper to state newsreels – could be redirected to document the ways in which social injustice manifests itself in typically hidden gestures, objects, spaces, and sensations. His reverse-ethnographic documentary about the Mediterranean city of Nice, for example, dialectically integrates images of idle vacationers and beggars, grand hotels and gutters, leisure and labour into the same *affective* universe. In terms that strongly resonate with the language used to define the Left Bank Group's anti-colonial films, Vigo describes his short documentary's operations as follows:

In fact, no sooner is the atmosphere of Nice and the kind of life one leads there – and elsewhere, alas – sketched out, than the film moves to generalize the gross festivities situating them under the sign of the grotesque, of flesh and death, which are the last spasms of a society so little conscious of itself that it is enough to sicken you and to make you into an accomplice of a revolutionary situation.²⁸

During a period characterized by the rise of the Popular Front and growing left-wing politicization,²⁹ Vigo's desire to transform the spectator into an accomplice of revolutionary sentiment made him particularly threatening to right-wing policing. His 1933 short *Zéro de conduite* was denied a visa because to show adolescent boys rebelling against the disciplinary space of the boarding school was deemed an unforgivable “anti-French gesture.” Vigo's film was banned without chance of appeal.³⁰

²⁸ Jean Vigo quoted in Richard Abel, ed. *French Film Theory and Criticism, 1907-1939* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 63.

²⁹ See Christopher Faulkner, “Debates 1930-60: Critical Debate and the Construction of Society,” in *The French Cinema Book*, eds. Michael Temple and Michael Witt (London: British Film Institute, 2004), 172-180.

³⁰ Ungar, “Jean Vigo,” 66-67.

In its attentiveness to “the secret lives of things,” its blending of documentary reportage with surrealist methods of estrangement, and its emphasis on social critique, Vigo’s cinema largely anticipates the body of modernist films taken up in this dissertation. Indeed, three of the shorts analyzed in the chapters that follow, *Les statues meurent aussi* (1953), *Nuit et brouillard* (1954), and *La Jetée* (1962), were awarded the Jean Vigo Prize for their formal experimentation and willingness to confront historically forbidden subject matter. And, much like Vigo’s own work, the first two of these films were subjected to various mechanisms of censorship. *Les statues meurent aussi*, Alain Resnais and Chris Marker’s short essay film about the domestication of African art in the Musée de l’homme, was banned in the year of its production and did not obtain a visa for commercial distribution until 1968. Marker recounts his battles over the film with the CNC’s censors in his *Commentaries*, telling a story that echoes the experiences of other contemporaneous anti-colonial filmmakers, including René Vautier and Jacques Panijel.³¹ On July 31, 1953, he received a letter from Henry Segogne, head of the CNC’s censorship commission, informing him that the last ten minutes of the film, which attack the broader colonial ideology subtending the organization of the museum of man, prevented the CNC from sanctioning the film’s release. However, Segogne refused to provide Marker and Resnais with any specific instructions on how to re-edit the film, for fear of usurping their creative authority. This feigned concern with the directors’ artistic control led to over a decade of bureaucratic delay, in which the CNC responded to successive versions of the film with the incoherent demand to present a “more acceptable

³¹ Chris Marker, *Commentaires* (Paris: Seuil, 1961).

version.”³² By contrast, the commission responded to Resnais’s next documentary, *Nuit et brouillard*, with very precise censorship instructions. Resnais was coerced to black out the image of a French gendarme overseeing the detention camp at Pithiviers, where Jews were gathered by the Vichy regime before deportation to German camps. *Nuit et brouillard*’s case also demonstrates how censorship assumed variegated forms in the French political climate of the 1950s and 1960s.³³ In 1956, for example, the film was removed from competition in the short subject category at the Cannes Film Festival. The festival’s chief delegate, Robert Favre le Bret, feared that Resnais’s short would not only trigger protests from West Germany, but create a “field of passionate debate” that was supposedly counter to the spirit of the festivities.³⁴

Against this backdrop, films that explicitly evoked the Franco-Algerian War were subjected to an array of both state sanctioned and “bottom-up” forms of policing. Even when Gillo Pontecorvo’s *The Battle of Algiers* (1966) was finally authorized for commercial distribution in France in 1970, French war veterans put pressure on municipal governments and local theaters to halt its release. The film’s debut in the Latin Quarter was accompanied by large protests and violent clashes between the student left and the radical right, events that mirror the right-wing

³² Ungar, “Scenes from a Library,” 63.

³³ As Trelis says: “La censure est multiforme : elle émane du haut (ministres, commission) et/ou du bas (ligues de décence avec parfois leur cortège de bombes), elle mutile, coupe (des phrases ou des séquences), interdit (en fonction des âges, si ce n’est totalement), elle s’opère préalablement au tournage (lecture du scénario, refus de financement, de l’avance sur recettes), pendant (refus de donner des autorisations de tourner en des lieux), ou après (retirer de l’affiche, « iXer », saisir, brûler les négatifs). Elle se manifeste en surface, de manière voyante et très officielle, ou de manière plus insidieuse (par les groupes de pression, par le financement des chaînes de télévision induisant des scénarios peu audacieux et peu subtils)” (Introduction).

³⁴ Sylvie Lindeperg, “*Nuit et brouillard*”: un film dans l’histoire (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2007), 165.

response to Rachid Bouchareb's *Hors la loi* in 2010.³⁵ Administrative and repressive forms of intervention were thus to be expected against the cinematic representation of French-Algeria, leading a number of directors to "self-censor." Godard exercised both textual and extra-textual self-censorship in the case of *Le Petit Soldat* (1963), reversing the identities of the colonizer and the colonized within the film to dampen its inflammatory images of torture, while also making light of its narrative in interviews by casting it as an "adventure film" and "a Western with kidnappings and stuff like that."³⁶ Such strategies failed, and on September 12, 1960, Minister of Information Louis Terrenoire ratified the censorship commission's decision to ban the film because: it represented torture ("Les scènes de tortures appellent habituellement de la part de la commission les plus expresses réserves"); the hero is a deserter of the French army ("À un moment où toute la jeunesse française est appelée à servir et à combattre en Algérie, il paraît difficilement possible d'admettre que le comportement contraire soit exposé, illustré et finalement justifié"); and France's activity in Algeria is presented as lacking a justification ("les paroles prêtées à un protagoniste du film et par lesquelles l'action de la France en Algérie est présentée comme dépourvue de tout idéal").³⁷

In retrospect, there is some historical merit to the Minister's critique of Godard's film as "devoid of any ideal," even if this critique must be understood in terms wholly divorced from the Commission's agenda. Beyond the context of

³⁵ Benjamin Stora, "La Bataille d'Alger, Histoire des 'censures'," l'Université Paris 13 (2013): <http://www.univ-paris13.fr/benjaminstora/limage/199-la-qbataille-dalgerq-histoire-des-qcensuresq-par-benjamin-stora>.

³⁶ Jean-Luc Godard, quoted in Richard Brody, *Everything is Cinema: The Working Life of Jean-Luc Godard* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 100.

³⁷ Le Monde, "'Le Petit Soldat', de J.-L. Godard est interdit," *Le Monde*. 14 septembre 1960.

ensorship, the cinematic representation of the war was often characterized by a profound political ambivalence, if not incoherence, which further complicates a clear epistemological perspective through which to view Algeria's place within the period's film aesthetics. In *Le Petit Soldat*, for example, the left- and right-wing discourses associated with the war, whether they are quotations from Henri Alleg's *La Question* (1958) or radio broadcasts by the right-wing media, are presented in a completely skeptical and undifferentiated way. Benjamin Stora observes how the film weaves the history of decolonization into a "a first person narrative in which was witnessed commitment and disengagement, right-wing anarchism and leftist conscience, the waltzing hesitations of opinions, and – above all – the balancing of one camp against the other, from the OAS to the FLN."³⁸ *Le Petit Soldat* thus iterates, albeit it in anarchic fashion, the political confusion and self-doubt that the war triggered for many French intellectuals. Following Nikita Khrushchev's revelations in February 1956 of the Soviet Union's violent suppression of the Hungarian Uprising, for example, the French left were forced to determine how or if they could militate for Algerian independence without also supporting the Hungarians. Moreover, although the PCF opposed French military rule in Algeria, endorsing instead a policy of "associated territorial status," they failed to formalize this position within government. The Party's reticence was born out of a fear of alienating itself from Guy Mollet's socialist government, which was responsible for the Special Powers Act of March 1956.³⁹

³⁸ Benjamin Stora, quoted and translated in Tom McDonough, *The Beautiful Language of my Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), 74, my emphasis.

³⁹ Irwin M. Wall, "The French Communists and the Algerian War," *Journal of Contemporary History* 12, no. 3 (1977): 523.

If the cinematic representation of the Franco-Algerian War was blocked by censorship, and also obscured by ideological confusion and ambivalence, then how did the war both manifest itself through films and manifest itself as something political? In the chapters that follow, I aim to answer this question in relation to the contemporary cinema of the Left Bank Group, whose work was consistently identified by the anti-colonial film journal, *Positif*, as providing the most complex contemporary cinematic response to French colonialism in Algeria. The Left Bank Group's work is of particular interest within the political landscape of post-War European film and film culture because it forcefully embodies the tensions between militant and commercial film practice, as well as some of the period's dominant, yet competing artistic and philosophical impulses. Resnais and Marker, for example, became well versed in the history of French working class movements through their research for the popular culture organization *Travail et Culture*, yet also learned their craft through commissioned documentaries, making them attuned, like Vigo before them, to the ways in which oppositional positions could be adopted within a scene of political and industrial constraint. While Left Bank filmmakers Resnais, Marker, and Agnès Varda were all deeply influenced by the philosophical and artistic legacies of surrealism and existentialism,⁴⁰ their aesthetic strategies were also informed by the nascent intellectual currents of the time, including structuralism and the new novel. And, unlike their New Wave "counterparts," the Left Bank group lived through the years of World War II, Vichy, and the atomic bomb, providing them with a different perspective on the utopian discourses surrounding the resurrection of Gaullism and

⁴⁰ See Richard Roud, "The Left Bank," *Sight and Sound* 32, no. 1 (1962-1963): 24-27; Richard Roud, "The Left Bank Revisited," *Sight and Sound* 44, no. 3 (1977): 143-145; and Robert Benayoun, *Alain Resnais: Arpenteur de L'Imaginaire* (Paris: Éditions Stock, 1980).

the rise of American-inspired finance capitalism in the late 1950s. It is perhaps because of their radically heterogeneous backgrounds that they thus restrained from assimilating the Algerian War into a singular perspective, or grand meta-narrative of third-world revolution. Yet their films also refused both the a-politicism of Godard's *Le Petit Soldat* as well the withdrawal from sustained and impassioned anti-colonial critique characteristic of Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin's *Chronique d'un été* (1961). In what follows, I argue that the Left Bank Group's cinema, consistent with Haneke's *Caché* fifty years later, mobilizes colonialism as a prism or affective frame through which to mediate the increasingly disciplinary nature of *their own* modern society.

In this respect, my dissertation builds on a number of recent revisionist historiographies of French society in the post-World War II years, which critique the longstanding tendency to represent modernization and decolonization as two totally autonomous historical processes. The 1950s mark the flourishing of Les Trente Glorieuses in France, a period of economic growth and acceleration paralleled in its early years only by similar developments in Germany. It was a period marked by intense urban development and population shifts from the provinces to the metropole, by a nationalist embrace of American-style corporate capitalism and the emergence of a new, youthful, technocratic class of intermediaries, the "jeune cadre," and by a proliferation of consumer products, gadgets and durables that were propped up by a hyper-mediatized audiovisual culture of print advertising, radio, and cinema. The latter often cast "modern France" in the ambience of science fiction as a sanitized, functional, and futuristic world in which humans occupied an increasingly tactical and administrative, rather than transitive and productive, relationship to the things

around them. Kristen Ross's work provides one of the more rigorous reminders of how this idealized culture obtained its social intelligibility by asserting its difference from the "dirty war" being fought against the "savage bandits" overseas.

As the specificities of France's criminal regime in Algeria permeated the mainland, however, the frontier dividing the two became increasingly precarious. A range of Marxist critics began to draw parallels between colonialism and the "colonization of everyday life," perceiving the mainland as a site of policing, surveillance, and social stratification. Pre-dating Louis Althusser, the writings of the post-Trotskyist journal *Socialisme ou barbarie* consistently reminded its readers that the French regime in Algeria constituted a repressive *and* socio-administrative apparatus.⁴¹ Conscript soldiers "pacified" Algeria by exerting a numerical and anatomical control over its peasant populations, issuing identity cards to all of the villagers in a given region, who were then regrouped into standardized plots of land from which they could be "overseen."

⁴¹ "If therefore the military cadres as a whole harbor an ideology, it is neither fascist nor 'Francoist,' but 'administrative': the officer imagines his task as a task of putting all social activities back on track, and he knows that this is not possible without the participation of the peasant community, nor furthermore, without *his* participation in the peasant community." See Jean-François Lyotard, "The State of Politics in the France of 1960," in *Political Writings*, trans. Bill Readings with Kevin Paul Geiman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 266.



Figure 1. Still from Jacques Tati's *Playtime* (1967)

Indeed, even torture was conducted as a functional, “conveyor-belt” practice, requiring scientific training. Modern French cinema thus invoked discourses and imagery unique to the war in order to show how the colonial logic of the counter-insurgency – which transforms subjects into numerical objects, and freezes historical time into spatialized configurations – was displaced onto the technocratic governance of modern French society. This society, as structuralist theorists argued at the time, advertised itself as having achieved a post-historical relationship with the past, a mastery over the styles and signifiers of “pastness,” and an essentialist merger of class consciousness with national identity. Such *post-histoire* ideologies were in fact

grounded in the violence of state discipline, as shown in modern French cinematic representation. By placing the *mise-en-scènes* of the modern world – its museums, its department stores, its cultures of objects – in a dialectical tension with images of policing, of torture, and of concentration camps – the films of the Left Bank Group, in particular, tend to convert the “happiness” associated with modern a-historicism into the horror of what Albert Memmi called “the petrified ideology” of colonialism.⁴²

Conclusion: Decolonization, Cinema, and *Positif*

Before examining how the problems of representation noted above manifest themselves in particular bodies of films, it is necessary to frame my dissertation in the context of the marginal but growing Anglophone film scholarship that has taken up the relationship between French cinema and decolonization. The most sustained studies of this nature are Naomi Greene’s *Landscapes of Loss: The National Past in Postwar French Cinema* (1999) and Lynn Higgins’s *New Novel, New Wave, New Politics: Fiction and the Representation of History in Postwar France* (1998), both of which combine historical research with post-structural theory to determine how Algeria functions as a displaced historical referent in certain New Wave films. Greene’s book tends to identify New Wave politics with the films of Alain Resnais and, often using Gilles Deleuze’s philosophy, examines how films like *Nuit et brouillard* and *Muriel* condense the war in Algeria with the darkest zones of the Occupation, including collaboration, the deportation of foreign Jews from France, and

⁴² Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (London: Souvenir Press, 1974).

the climate of amnesia that followed the liberation.⁴³ Greene also establishes a compelling link between the disavowal of France's colonial history as represented in Resnais's films and the Islamophobia and structural racism against North African immigrants still ongoing in contemporary France. Similarly, Higgins's book argues that Resnais's cinema exemplifies the New Wave's politics, but situates his work within broader intellectual trends including structuralism and Robbe-Grillet's theories of the new novel. Drawing on the Althusser-Lacan-Barthes triad characteristic of film theory in the 1970s, she proposes that the New Wave and the New Novel are political in their "self-reflexive" work as meta-fictions, that is, in their use of "textual strategies that subvert the materiality of language."⁴⁴ Despite the (post)structural matrix of her argument, however, Higgins aspires to open the New Wave onto history, arguing that "the rigorous textual autonomy of a work can only be guaranteed by maintaining a separation between history *in* the film and the history *of* the film, and between its informative and performative dimensions."⁴⁵ Accordingly, Higgins brilliantly analyzes how the New Wave's textual operations are informed by contemporary political events, such as how the "rhetoric of rape" characteristic of Resnais's *Last Year at Marienbad* is cast in the shadow of the media's attention to the French military's rape of FLN activist Djamila Boupacha.⁴⁶

My dissertation is indebted to both Higgins's and Greene's account of post-war French cinema within broader artistic and intellectual trends and aspires to emulate their attentiveness to how film images and formal procedures are

⁴³ See Greene, 31-63.

⁴⁴ Higgins, 3.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 120.

overdetermined by historical discourses. However, my argument also departs from these influential texts in terms of its corpus of films, its methodology, and its understanding of the politics of the period's French cinema. Specifically, I aim to avoid a series of core tensions that arise in Higgins's book, particularly as a result of her application of theories derived from Christian Metz onto a blanket notion of the "New Wave." Although Higgins locates the New Wave's politics in its thwarting of a representational ontology, claiming that these films strictly concern the "how" rather than the "what" of history, she also tends to read Resnais's films as *allegories* for contemporary political events. Put differently, Higgins tends to *append* historical references to a structural framework, leaving the binary oppositions subtending this framework intact, for example, classicism : modernism and illusionism : materialism. By contrast, my dissertation explores how the tensions between structure and trace and between "immobile" and historical time are themselves symptomatic of the societal shifts rendered by bureaucratic modernization and decolonization. Furthermore, both Greene's and Higgins's books produce an ambiguity regarding whether the historical past is by nature "unrepresentable" – "always already" narrativized, mediated, trans-coded – or whether the unrepresentable is a metaphysical quality of particular kinds of events, like the horrors of the Holocaust and French colonialism. Yet neither book considers representation *as such*, that is, as a shifting regime for the distribution of knowledge, action, and affect, which would illuminate how proscriptions on representation are conditioned by the parameters of a historically embedded representational regime.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ It is worth challenging the conclusion that the horrors of the Franco-Algerian War are unrepresentable because the war manifests itself through text, speech, and radio broadcasts in *Cléo de*

Most significantly, the analytic opposition Higgins sets up between the “how” and “what” of history slips into another common binary opposition that divorces “culture” from “politics.” She argues that from its earliest iterations in the 1950s up until the “events” of May 1968, the New Wave’s politics cannot be identified with any explicit, emancipatory project, but with “a shared approach to certain problems of representation,” the most notable of such problems being the materiality of discourse or the gap between the signifier and the signified. There is a certain historical validity to this argument, but did all of the “New Wave” directors share a similar approach to representation? And isn’t Higgins’s position in danger of making this generalized account of New Wave aesthetics equivalent, to borrow D.N. Rodowick’s phrase, “to a form of theoretical inquiry proper to semiology itself”?⁴⁸ As I demonstrate in the following chapters, the films of directors like Resnais, Marker, and Varda are informed by diverse theoretical and artistic movements ranging from surrealism to Soviet montage; in Chapter 2, for example, I point to a Vertovian impulse in Resnais’s early work to trace the life of the commodity sign back to its roots in class exploitation. I also argue that we cannot separate the above directors from the cause of “lasting political and social revolution,” unless we discount their participation in third-worldist manifesto films, including the subject of Chapter 5, *Loin du Vietnam*

5 à 7 and *Chronique d’un été (Paris 1960)* (1961), or because the spectator only hears rather than views the rape and murder of *Muriel*’s title character. The Franco-Algerian War *is* being represented in all of these instances, through particular distributions of speech and vision, and through inter-medial exchanges between the cinema and other recording and communication technologies. For Rancière, the logic of the unrepresentable “transforms problems of the adjustment of representative distance into problems of the impossibility of representation. Proscription is then slipped into this impossibility, while being disclaimed, presented as a simple consequence of the properties of the object.” Jacques Rancière, *The Future of the Image* (London: Verso, 2007), 112. Adam Lowenstein also objects to the logic of the unrepresentable on ethical grounds, noting that “The move to safeguard the idiom of survivors by treating their experience as ‘unrepresentable’ evades the challenge of finding idioms for that experience – it locks away survivor trauma inside an authentic moment in the past, free from the perilous present of cultural negotiation demanded by representation” (5).

⁴⁸ Rodowick, 54.

(1967). Rather than superimposing a particular theoretical formation onto a homogenous notion of the New Wave, my dissertation identifies how filmmakers negotiated the properly historical tension between the state as an agent of modernization and the state as a violent disciplinary regime. This regime, as noted above, worked not only to deny the subjectivity of some of its members, by relegating their history to the past and then dis-counting their citizenship, but to erase its own operations from public perception. Accordingly, I explore the politics of the films discussed in this dissertation in terms of how they address both the state as a machinery for the disciplining of historical knowledge and public perception *and* the subjectivities either excluded or erased by this discipline.

In this respect, my dissertation is closely aligned with a series of recent essays on individual French films from the late 1950s and early 1960s that situate the period's politics relative to the dynamic between modernization and decolonization. For example, Jill Forbes's essay "Gender and Space in *Cléo de 5 à 7*" returns to *Cléo*'s historical reception in order to complicate Sandy Flitterman-Lewis's now canonical feminist-moralist reading of the film, in which Cléo transforms from object to subject of the gaze midway through the narrative, and from a state of alienation to community at the conclusion when her fate merges with the young French soldier headed for Algeria.⁴⁹ By contrast, Forbes observes that contemporary critics were struck by the film's documentary qualities and, specifically, by how Cléo's itinerary presents a "reverse ethnography" of modernizing Paris. Varda's description of Paris through methods associated with the colonies is not incidental, given the

⁴⁹ Jill Forbes, "Gender and Space in *Cléo de 5 à 7*," *Studies in French Cinema* 2, no. 2 (2002): 83-89; Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, *To Desire Differently: Feminism and the French Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

displacements of colonial discipline characteristic of the period, and Forbes describes how Algeria de-centers and symbolically limits Cléo's itinerary and freedom of mobility.⁵⁰ Likewise, Mark Betz's chapter "Wandering Women: Decolonization, Modernity, Recolonization" in *Beyond the Subtitle* explores *Cléo* and other New Wave films, including Godard's *Vivre sa vie* (1962), in view of Ross's claim that the female body functioned as "a highly charged site of national recolonization" during the 1950s and 1960s.⁵¹ Similar to the themes of abjection I discuss in Chapter 3, Betz studies how Cléo's cancerous body is allegorized with the war in Algeria, arguing that her "progress toward personal and visual liberation as a modern French woman is linked to a certain flight or regress from the (de)colonized and racialized Other, an Other she is figured variously as and as not."⁵²

Some of the questions I address in Chapter 5, concerning the Algerian War's troubled place within French intellectual life, have been taken up by recent politically-oriented interpretations of the period's two most famous "reverse ethnographies": *Chronique d'un été* and *Le Joli mai*. In an excellent essay on the former, Ivone Margulies breaks with the usual discussions of Rouch and Morin's film as the first iteration of *cinéma vérité* – an interventionist mode of documentary premised on staged conflict and the use of synch sound to let subjects "vouchsafe"

⁵⁰ Forbes, 89: "Yet this mobility is denied by the extreme formalism of the film, the sense that even when Cléo escapes to the exterior, her itinerary is dictated by determinants that are far from leaving her free; the sense that neither she nor Dorothee can escape the *mise en scène* to which women are subjected. This might be confirmed by the other, contemporaneous meaning of *la dérive*, which was a term used to refer to the Algerian war, a conflict in which new technologies, far from offering evidence of unambiguous modernization, were, as Kristen Ross has demonstrated, used to prevent mobility and change."

⁵¹ Betz, 96.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 137. Also see Rodney Hill, "The New Wave Meets the Tradition of Quality: Jacques Demy's *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg*," *Cinema Journal* 48, no. 1 (Fall 2008): 27-50; Nancy Virtue, "Jacques Demy's *Les Parapluies de Cherbourg*: A National Allegory of the French-Algerian War," *Studies in French Cinema* 13, no. 2 (2013): 127-140.

their own words – in order to examine how the peculiar parameters the film sets on what its subjects can and cannot say betray Morin’s traumatic departure from the Communist Party. Specifically, despite the film’s socio-scientific claims to represent a “sample population” of Paris in 1960, its subjects are composed entirely of radical left-wing activists and intellectuals. Margulies reads the film’s reticence to allow discussion of party or “grand” politics in combination with its insistence on a micro-politics of the everyday as indicative of Morin’s own retreat from the meta-narratives of communism.⁵³ This retreat was triggered by the party’s impotence in the face of the Stalinist purges in Hungary, and also informed the sociologist’s often ambivalent and indecisive stance toward the Algerian war – i.e., his refusal to understand the FLN’s struggle within a grand narrative of History. Ultimately, Margulies is critical of the film, as she argues that Rouch and Morin’s focus on the everyday fails to open onto a systemic analysis of historical power relations, and that the directors recuperate the final word on the film’s meaning despite their desire for a “shared anthropology” based on synch sound – their closed discussion with each other at the film’s conclusion serving as a privileged example.⁵⁴ Steve Ungar, by contrast, argues that Rouch and Morin both privilege interaction above their own paternalistic authority and demonstrate how the war affected French experience precisely because of their film’s rootedness in the everyday:

Chronique relocates the encounter with decolonization in Paris as a personal matter lived on a daily basis rather than as something one merely reads about it newspapers. In this sense, it shows the extent to which the meaning of the

⁵³ Margulies, 174: “In its reticence to spell out its political allegiances, and in its posited interest in the private sphere of everyday life, the film enacts a transition from party politics to an alternate micro-politics. I further suggest that this move is motivated by Morin’s parallel trajectory as a left thinker and critic.”

⁵⁴ Margulies, 183-184.

Algerian war for Parisians in 1960s entails a decolonization of their own rather than simply that of natives and others living in occupied territories.⁵⁵

A number of scholars have also contrasted *Chronique*'s emphasis on "shared anthropology" against Marker's dialectical and potentially didactic juxtaposition of everyday life, state power, and colonialism in *Le Joli mai*.⁵⁶ In an essay that coincides with the arguments I make concerning Resnais's short documentaries, Cynthia Marker explains how *Le Joli mai* captures the contradictory atmosphere of modern Paris by juxtaposing an idealized version of the "city of light" viewed from the Eiffel Tower with a horror world of cemeteries, prisons, and colonial repression aligned with the surrealist anti-hero, Fantômas.⁵⁷

Adam Lowenstein's chapter on the films of Georges Franju in *Shocking Representation: Historical Trauma, National Cinema, and the Modern Horror Film* offers the most sustained account of how the period's cinema mobilized discourses of horror to confront the nation's repressed political contradictions. Undermining film studies' false binary opposition between (high brow and international) art cinema and (B-grade and domestic) horror genre cinema, Lowenstein persuasively demonstrates how Franju's horror imagery in *Les Yeux sans visage* – grisly operations, burnt flesh, electrical shock, and drowning – condense or allegorize, in Benjamin's sense, the histories of the Holocaust and the Algerian War.⁵⁸ Lowenstein also places Franju's film in conversation with disparate artistic and theoretical movements including

⁵⁵ Ungar, 18.

⁵⁶ Cynthia Marker, "Self-Censorship and Chris Marker's *Le Joli Mai*," *French Cultural Studies* 12, no. 34 (2001): 23-41.

⁵⁷ Marker, 28: "Here, the fictitious Fantômas is used to disclose France's repression of the Algerian War. The eponymous 'phantom' conveys the idea of a shameful past and a refusal to testify to France's crimes in Algeria, with Fantômas's 'return' clearly signaling France's memory of the war. The incarnation of the bogeyman responsible for all evil in the world, Fantômas is the perfect metaphorical scapegoat for a nation seeking to deny historical responsibility."

⁵⁸ Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragedy* (London: Verso, 2009).

Surrealism – noting the director’s attention to the outmoded and the secret lives of things – and existentialism – usefully comparing the heroine’s recognition of both herself and the dead in the mirror with Sartre’s concomitant claims regarding the French as both victims and perpetrators of violence.⁵⁹ The following chapters of this dissertation continue Lowenstein’s inquiry into how the period’s French cinema opened “visceral political affect to public history”;⁶⁰ although, as will become apparent, I understand the “horror” of modern French cinema in terms distinct from Lowenstein’s emphasis on shock.

More importantly, my dissertation is aligned with Lowenstein’s challenge to the very theoretical foundations that prop up film study’s understanding of modern French cinema. Specifically, Lowenstein seeks to trouble the “New Wave” narrative of French film that I critically analyze in Chapter 1, which parallels the evolution of a particular national cinematic movement – the “New Wave” – with the evolution of national history itself – modernization. He asks, “how can we redefine national cinema as a contested *process* of debate and dialogue, rather than as a set of ‘given’ abstractions and ‘self-evident’ classifications?”⁶¹ In order to destabilize such classifications, film study must also demythologize the noted history of *Cahiers* and New Wave praise that “has hindered a critical examination of their political role within French culture in the 1950s and early 1960s.”⁶² Lowenstein’s examination is unique among the texts discussed in this section because, while all of these texts stress the need to re-examine the politics of the period’s French cinema through the

⁵⁹ Lowenstein, 43.

⁶⁰ Lowenstein, 49.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 32.

question of colonialism, Lowenstein's book is among the few to address *Positif's* side of the debate, the side that established the war in Algeria among its chief concerns. Drawing on key texts by Gérard Gozlan and Robert Benayoun, Lowenstein is able to elucidate how Truffaut's watershed "A Certain Tendency" essay, in its desire for purity and a unified, new national cinema, failed to question the idea of nation itself, but produced another, reactionary ideal of nation synonymous with modernity.⁶³ He also supports *Positif's* claim that *Cahiers* subsumed the directors of the New Wave and the Left Bank under this homogenized, a-historical version of the modern, by reading the films of the latter in romantic and transcendental terms. For example, the journal described the atomic bomb in *Hiroshima mon amour* as a figurative gesture, divorced from military imperialism. The stakes of this slippage are clear: "When the Left Bank is subsumed under the New Wave in this manner, it is the very distinction between political and apolitical that threatens to vanish from sight."⁶⁴ Significantly, when Lowenstein clarifies the distinction between the Left Bank and the New Wave, he contrasts *Les Yeux sans visage's* critique of scientific reason and technological progress with *Les Quatre cent coups's* fervour for mobility and, in contrast with Dudley Andrew's interpretation of the film as discussed in Chapter 1, its "embrace of a privatized, de-politicized, and 'timeless' version of modernization."⁶⁵

In light of a recent tendency toward the (re)mythologization of the New Wave that I address throughout this dissertation, the time has come to interrogate the French cinema of the late 1950s and early 1960s in its sociopolitical contexts, and to restore colonialism to its role as a fundamental stake in the period's debates

⁶³ Ibid., 31, 38.

⁶⁴ Lowenstein, 34.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 39.

concerning the political responsibilities of film. The journal *Positif* is crucial in this respect, because its (discarded) writings enable us to challenge the readymade narrative of a coherent “rejuvenation” of French film aesthetics in the late 1950s, as they also anticipate a number of the claims being made by current scholarly investigations into the relationship between French film politics, and colonialism.⁶⁶ Generally speaking, *Positif* rejected the New Wave’s self-definition as a rebellious, young cinema that broke with the conservatism of the “cinéma du papa” in its use of documentary techniques to capture “real history” and life in Paris “as it is.” Consistent with the arguments made throughout the following chapter, Marcel Oms, for example, insisted that “youth” and “rejuvenation” were *the* motifs deployed by De Gaulle’s government to mystify the conditions of history. He perceived in proto-New Wave films like Jacques Becker’s *Rendez-vous de juillet* (1948), in New Wave films like *Les Quatre cent coups* and *À bout de souffle*, and in related work like Louis Malle’s *L’Ascenseur pour l’échafaud* (1958), a vision of youthful rebellion commensurate with the expression of personal will and might rather than a systematic

⁶⁶ Consider, for example, how precisely Raymond Borde’s critique of *Chronique d’un été* resonates with Margulies’s recent interpretation of the film’s dubious politics: “Ce sont des scientifiques et, plus précisément encore, des néo-positivistes. Ils ont pu avoir jusque-là des faiblesses humaines, être – que sais-je ? – marxistes ou gros mangeurs. Maintenant ils se retranchent derrière la mécanique. Ils ont la carapace des appareils enregistreurs qui proclament la pureté de leurs intentions. Ils sont des servants silencieux, des emmurés de la connaissance, d’humbles manieurs de boutons. Ce départ à zéro reflète une lassitude idéologique et un dégoût des systèmes que l’écroulement du stalinisme explique sans les justifier. Je reconnais qu’il n’est pas facile en 1962 de définir les normes d’un cinéma social digne de ce nom. La caméra Brault et le magnétophone invisible résolvent magiquement le problème de la mise en scène et des décisions morales qu’elle implique. On appuie sur le déclencheur, on filme ce qui vient et les instruments de métal et de verre se substituent au roseau pensant. C’est le grand transfert des responsabilités à une machinerie qui n’aura jamais tort [...] Et la chronique du bonheur prit la forme d’une chronique de Morin qui nous apprend beaucoup moins de choses sur les Parisiens de l’été 60 que sur un sociologue en mal de plateforme, enfant perdu du stalinisme, bon vivant, légèrement puritain, qui est tous comptes faits “presque heureux.” Raymond Borde, “Problèmes du cinéma-vérité,” *Positif*, no. 49 (décembre 1962): 1-2, 4.

engagement with societal contradictions.⁶⁷ In this respect, the films of the New Wave leaned toward a right-wing anarchism rather than a formulated left-wing politics, and thus *continued* the tradition of depoliticization of which De Gaulle's return to power was only symptomatic.⁶⁸

A number of the authors at *Positif* argued that both *Cahiers's* and the New Wave's success was made possible by the crisis of left politics noted above,⁶⁹ which was prompted by the discovery of the Soviet atrocities in Hungary and by the PCF's failure to take a militant stance with regard to both Stalinism and colonialism. According to Michèle Firk, what substituted for "left critique" was a certain political "pirandellisme" – the cultivation of a wide liberal center whose various factions associated their vague, moderate politics with "the left" while casting revolutionaries to the margins.⁷⁰ While *Positif's* perhaps nostalgic commitment to Trotskyism and Surrealism is not above reproach, it is difficult to deny their critique of *Cahiers's* often equivocal politics at this time as little more than "hot air."⁷¹ For example, when challenged on his political stance in *Le Petit Soldat*, Godard's response is at once typically provocative and empty: "As I am sentimental, I suppose I am left-wing. Especially compared with my best friends – they are distinctly right-wing ... To me, an artist cannot help being left-wing. Even Drieu La Rochelle was left wing."⁷²

⁶⁷ Oms, "Le Grand Mensonge," 11.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Gozlan, 125: "There is clearly no longer any need to be a Marxist, let alone a materialist, in order to become a left-wing critic. You just need to be honest, to be quite simply a human being, to exist. The notions of revolt, analysis and effectiveness are lost in the darkness of time. And probably because the French public is on the whole less receptive today to a Marxist approach and method of analysis, Marxism is left, with its accomplice, materialism, in the cloakroom ... the Left is losing ground every day without realizing it."

⁷⁰ Michèle Firk, "Cinéma et Politique (II)," *Positif*, no. 34 (mai 1960): 37.

⁷¹ Benayoun, "The Emperor Has No Clothes," 166.

⁷² Godard quoted in Benayoun, "The Emperor Has No Clothes," 180.

Likewise, while *Positif* demonstrated a sustained attentiveness to the intersection between bureaucratic modernization and the hypertrophy of the state characteristic of the period's political landscape, Truffaut, on the other hand, removed himself from this equation: "There are communist directors in France, and it is they who should be asked to make films about the workers ... I refuse to put love at an opposite pole to the bourgeoisie or the police. Policemen fall in love too."⁷³ Indeed, Gérard Gozlan equated *Cahiers*'s consistent disavowal of societal power relations, and its transcendental readings of the social cinema of Jean Renoir and Roberto Rossellini, with the same state rhetoric that worked to efface the realities of colonialism:

These totally fatuous remarks are strongly reminiscent of the speeches of the princes that govern us. For only someone who assumes that colonial wars are the unhealthy external appearance of French good health will say that "Ray's films end where Rossellini's begin: with the intuition of a harmony that is to be found beyond the sphere of conflicts and clashes of opinion."⁷⁴

This effacement, moreover, extended into the New Wave's films, as they transformed techniques that the neo-realists created out of the exigencies of their political realities into the *signifiers* of contingency, into formal clichés that perfectly suited the new culture of conspicuous consumption:

It became almost obligatory to include in every Nouvelle Vague film one or more long promenades on foot or in a taxi, so that Paris could be discovered "for the first time." The new cinema was indubitably fond of *flânerie*, and had one quality in common with the tourists one sees in travelogues: the ability to *see* everything without *looking* at anything.⁷⁵

Significantly, *Positif* often contrasted the New Wave's "cinema of furnishings" with the films of the Left Bank. These films demonstrated how historical experience was precisely that which was endangered by the acceleration, mechanization, and

⁷³ Truffaut quoted in Benayoun, "The Emperor Has No Clothes," 179.

⁷⁴ Gozlan, 101.

⁷⁵ Benayoun, "The Emperor Has No Clothes," 166.

immobilization of time characteristic of bureaucratic modernization. Whereas Roger Tailleur saw only a haphazard approach to form in Godard's *À bout de souffle*, for example, he discerned a series of surreptitious, albeit rigorous, attempts to open the spectator onto historical meaning in Varda's *Cléo de 5 à 7*: the subtle juxtaposition of the iron bars in the Luxembourg gardens against the chant of "Free the Bretons!" on the radio, or the commoditization of African statuary with the war in Algeria.⁷⁶ And, in what reads like a response to Kristen Ross *avant la lettre*,⁷⁷ Benayoun argued that Resnais acted as the Balzac of his time, as the artist who most accurately diagnosed the political contradictions of modernizing France.⁷⁸

Yet, like those of *Cahiers*, *Positif*'s writings did not constitute a totally coherent discourse or position. Consider that the two seminal critiques of the New Wave by Benayoun and Gozlan, which are reprinted in Peter Graham and Vincendeau's edited collection, originally appeared in a special issue of *Positif* devoted to the Franco-Algerian war. In that issue, Raymond Borde and the filmmakers of *J'ai huit ans* (1961) depart from Benayoun's and Gozlan's identification of the Left Bank's allegorical cinema with the radical politics of the day.⁷⁹ Rather, they argued that the most forceful interventions against state discipline were created by a "parallel cinema" of collectively authored militant films that

⁷⁶ Roger Tailleur, "Cléo d'ici à l'éternité," *Positif*, no. 44 (mars 1962): 26.

⁷⁷ Ross, *Fast Cars*, 12: "Perhaps the point is that no single writer could occupy the position of Balzac in a moment that was also characterized by the introduction of market research into book publishing, by the mass-marketing of paperback books, by the dawning of image culture, and by a profound crisis in the traditional novel that itself reflected the new fragmentation of social life."

⁷⁸ Benayoun, "The Emperor Has No Clothes," 122: "There is however a tremendous ambition: to portray individual dramas and set them against the background of collective dramas – to be the Honoré de Balzac of our time. The Balzac or the Resnais? The place has already been filled, well and truly filled."

⁷⁹ Raymond Borde, "Le cinéma marginal et la guerre d'Algérie," *Positif*, no. 46 (juin 1962): 15-17; Filmmakers of *J'ai Huit Ans*, "Manifeste pour un cinéma parallèle," *Positif*, no. 46 (juin 1962): 18.

circulated outside of the channels controlled by the CNC and the Ministry of Information: “ciné-clubs, sections de comités d’entreprises, amicales, sections de syndicats, comités de défense, groupes, groupuscules et chapelles.”⁸⁰ A film like *J’ai huit ans*, which represents the drawings of young Algerian children evacuated by the FLN to a Tunisian refugee camp, truly exposed the horrors of French colonialism, they argued, by demonstrating how this horror shaped the psychological realities of its victims.⁸¹

The remainder of this dissertation, therefore, takes up the lines of militancy identified by this key issue of *Positif*. How did the filmmakers of the Left Bank Group, so often identified with an impenetrable formalism, actually illuminate the displacements between modernization and colonialism? Chapter 1 confronts this question by mapping out the predominantly formalist terms in which modern French cinema has been framed and understood. I aim to de-center these terms by placing French film and film culture in dialogue with a range of extra-cinematic discourses that re-establish the primacy of colonialism as one of the period’s dominant political concerns. The following three chapters then bring this historically informed discussion to bear on the motifs of policing and horror in films by Resnais, Varda, and Marker. Over the course of these chapters, however, the dissertation also begins to emphasize the political limits of the Left Bank Group’s strategies of indirection,

⁸⁰ Filmmakers of *J’ai Huit Ans*, 18.

⁸¹ Also see: Marc Kravetz, “Entretien avec René Vautier,” *Positif*, no. 50 (mars 1963): 43-50. When questioned about the efficacy of “parallel cinema” in relation to his *Afrique 50*, Vautier responds: “Je crois que le film a eu son utilité dans la lutte anti-colonialiste en France, qu’il a contribué à montrer aux cinéastes français qu’il était possible de se battre en se foutant de la censure, qu’il a créé ou illustre une certaine solidarité de lutte entre les Africains et nous, qu’il a surtout – pour moi – provoqué cette phrase d’un ami allemand: ‘Je ne sais pas jusqu’où le colonialisme va entraîner la France, jusqu’à quel degré de fascisme vous arriverez; en tout cas votre cinéma aura fait *Afrique 50*, le nôtre, en 33, n’avait rien de tel.’ Enfin, les bagarres provoquées par la diffusion d’*Afrique 50* ont contribué à réveiller, à mon sens, les milieux de jeunes qui en organisent la projection.”

noting cases in which their treatment of the war veers toward a narcissistic retreat into the confines of French identity. My conclusion thus turns to the cinema of René Vautier, which exemplifies a radically alternative approach to negotiating the precarious distance between the colonizer and the colonized, enabling the latter to articulate an experience that was decidedly not that of the French.

1

An Opposition in Search of Itself: Modernization, Decolonization, Cinema

The speed with which French society was transformed after the war from a rural, empire-oriented, Catholic country into a fully industrialized, decolonized, and urban one meant that the things modernization needed – educated middle managers, for instance, or affordable automobiles and other ‘mature’ consumer durables, or a set of social sciences that followed scientific functionalist models, or a work force of ex-colonial laborers – burst onto a society that still cherished prewar outlooks with all the force, excitement, disruption, and horror of the genuinely new.

– Kristin Ross¹

The “New Wave” Narrative of Modern French Cinema

There is a broad consensus across both Anglophone and Francophone film scholarship that the year 1958 marks a rupture in the history of French cinema. The “New Wave”² was affecting all areas of the film production process: films were starting to be made cheaply, with independent or government subsidized funds; films were marketed to a young, intellectual, bourgeois demographic; films were shot on the streets and outside of the studio, amalgamating techniques from Italian neo-realism, the ethnographic cinema of Jean Rouch, Hollywood film-noir, and wartime newsreels; and films took on new subject matter, rejecting the psychological realism of the costume dramas associated with the “tradition of quality” in favour of personal narratives that confronted the accelerated rhythms and shifting sexual mores of

¹ Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), 4.

² The term “New Wave” was developed in the journal *L’Express* in the fall of 1957 through both a series of articles by Françoise Giroud and social scientific surveys that sought to designate a new brand of young consumers, between the ages of 18 to 25. See Richard Neupert, *A History of the French New Wave Cinema, Expanded Second Edition* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2007), 14.

modernization. The transformation of French cinema was conditioned by the exigencies of a broader mutation felt to be taking place in the realm of culture, as well as by a political crisis concerning the fate of French democracy and its empire.

Jill Forbes, Tony Jones, and Michael Kelly trace the New Wave's economic foundations to a series of five-year plans (under the *Commissariat Général du Plan*) initiated by De Gaulle's provisional Fourth Republic government. Conceived of by Minister of the Economy Pierre Mendès-France and presided over by former business man Jean Monnet, the plan set targets and government incentives for heavy industry – electricity, house-building and reconstruction, transport – and was crystallized by the American funds made available by the Marshall Plan agreements of 1947.³ By 1951, the country's Gross National Product exceeded the output of 1929, setting the path for what would come to be known as *les Trente Glorieuses*. Although industrial production increased by over 40% throughout the course of the decade, the nation's prosperity was late to reach the working population, and a number of French were profoundly uprooted by state-led modernization.⁴ Rural populations and small shopkeepers found their forms of life endangered, and members of the emergent urban, industrial proletariat were increasingly subjected to the controls of machine labour and alienated from the products of their work. For a number of contemporary sociologists, the most revealing shift in the nature of modern work was the ascendance of a whole new intermediary class – the *jeune cadre* – of financiers, administrative functionaries, and speculators who were called upon for their technical

³ Michael Kelly, Tony Jones, and Jill Forbes, "Modernization and Avant-gardes," in *French Cultural Studies: An Introduction*, eds. Jill Forbes and Michael Kelly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 142.

⁴ Williams, 329.

knowledge and creativity.⁵ White collar specialists, or “technocrats” in the critical vocabulary of the time, the *jeune cadre* reflected France’s adoption of American managerial attitudes and a widening of the bureaucratic gulf between employers and employees, the latter of which, according to one contemporary Marxist critic, were becoming reduced to a “moment in the circulation of capital” and to a “simple appendix of a management that is itself ever more invisible.”⁶

The connection between youth and modern managerial attitudes that exemplified the *jeune cadre* dynamic is particularly significant because it extended beyond the work sphere toward the new modes of consumption that came to define the everyday.⁷ In the wake of mass production, widespread population shifts from the country to urban centres, and the rise of dormitory-like suburbs, a proliferation of new materials – Formica, plastic, stainless steel – and mass-produced electronic appliances – washing machines, refrigerators, and televisions – entered into the domestic environment. Early materialist-semiotic texts by Roland Barthes and Jean Baudrillard described how this proliferation of consumer durables, loaded with cultural values determined by an increasingly technical society, transformed the nature of everyday life: “Indeed, a genuine revolution has taken place on the everyday plane. *Objects have now become more complex than human behaviour relative to them.* Objects are more and more highly differentiated – our gestures less and less

⁵ Alain Touraine, *The Post-Industrial Society: Tomorrow’s Social History: Classes, Conflicts and Culture in the Programmed Society*, trans. Leonard F.X. Mayhew (New York: Random House, 1971), 5.

⁶ Jean-François Lyotard, “The State and Politics in France of 1960,” in *Political Writings*, trans. Bill Readings with Kevin Paul Geiman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 270.

⁷ “The production process imposes a life-style that matches its objectives and its power system ... The conditions for growth are not limited to the realm of production; influence over needs and attitudes must also be controlled.” Touraine, 7.

so.”⁸ As represented by *The System of Objects*, but also works of fiction like Simone de Beauvoir’s *Les Belles Images*, the new “press button universe” of the domestic interior, with its gleaming stove-top surfaces and aggressive plastics, no longer personified human relationships or the continuity of a religious-moral order, but interpellated subjects to treat objects as signs within a spatialized, total environment or “structure of atmosphere.”⁹ Objects functioned as signifiers of dominant cultural discourses and desires, and perhaps the dominant desire of the modernizing period was the desire to be clean: “Decay is being expelled (from the teeth, the skin, the blood, the breath): France is having a great yen [*fringale*] for cleanliness.”¹⁰ The term “newness,” far from being restricted to the period’s artistic movements like the cinematic “New Wave,” the “new novel,” and the “new theatre,” was, therefore, emphasized in the marketing of products ranging from soap, laundry detergent, refrigerators, and perfume, products that promised rejuvenation and resistance against the ravages of time (Figure 2).

⁸ Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*, trans. James Benedict (London: Verso, 1996), 56.

⁹ Baudrillard, 47: “Of course, culture has always played the ideological role of pacifier, sublimating tensions associated with functional imperatives and answering the need for being to take on recognizable form beyond material reality and conflicts of the word. [...] It is just that, like the reality it simultaneously reflects and disavows, this form is now being systematized. Systematic technicity calls forth systematic cultural connotation. And *this systematic cultural connotation at the level of objects is what I am calling ATMOSPHERE.*” Also see: Ross, *Fast Cars*, 98.

¹⁰ Roland Barthes, quoted in Ross, *Fast Cars*, 73.



Figure 2. Advertisement in *L'Express*, August 30, 1957.

As these latter examples suggest, the new consumer age was propped up by an entire audio-visual culture. This culture included not only magazine advertisements, but store windows, yearly expositions like the *Salon des arts ménagers* and the *Salon de l'automobile*, radio broadcasts, and, not least of all, the cinema. As Vanessa R. Schwartz argues in her analysis of Brigitte Bardot films in the 1950s, including *Et Dieu créa la femme* (1956), *Cette sacrée gamine* (1956) and *Une parisienne* (1957), “These films not only familiarized audiences with Bardot via the screen but also served as occasions for magazine articles depicting her life.”¹¹ Schwartz notes that “all the films were, like the canonical New Wave films, concerned with contemporary society; they relentlessly featured such things as television sets, jukeboxes, and modern apartments with newfangled décor.”¹² Indeed, throughout the 1950s, the French state attempted, with limited success, to make the cinema a vehicle of modernization in its project of reestablishing French culture internationally. It was not until the emergence of the Fifth Republic, however, that film would become a state

¹¹ Vanessa Schwartz, “Who Killed Brigitte Bardot? Perspectives on the New Wave at Fifty,” *Cinema Journal* 49, no. 4 (Summer 2010): 150.

¹² *Ibid.*

concern equal to that of other “culture industries.” In 1958, following the military’s assumption of power in Algeria through the installation of the “Committees of Public Safety,” De Gaulle was reinstated as the nation’s leader with the expectation that he would preserve the sovereignty of French-Algeria.¹³ Having obtained the strong presidential role for which he campaigned during the liberation, De Gaulle instated himself as a symbolic figurehead of cultural renewal, making culture an official ministry of the government led by novelist, filmmaker, and anthropologist, André Malraux. Malraux, in turn, transformed the *Centre national de la cinématographie* (CNC) into an official branch of the Ministry of Culture, and openly called for a rejuvenation of the French film industry. In 1959, the CNC amended the Film Aid program away from guaranteed subsidies to completed films based on box office returns, and instead provided low interest loans, or “advances on receipts,” which were to be repaid before producers could earn profits.¹⁴ This new economic infrastructure had the effect of shifting the international perception of the French film industry, as the Fifth Republic would become associated with the promotion of a daring new cinema. A 1959 article in *Time* remarked:

Along with most of the arts in France, the cinema spent a long postwar period in the doldrums. But when De Gaulle came to power, his government announced that it did not intend to send good screen subsidies after some old bad ideas ... Suddenly the New Wave was rolling, and on the crest of it dozens of ambitious *cinéastes* went surfboarding to success.¹⁵

¹³ He would betray his promises to the radical right in favour of the more insipid, economic control over Algeria’s oil achieved through the Evian accords. Herman Lebovics, *Mona Lisa’s Escort: André Malraux and the Reinvention of French Culture* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 82-86.

¹⁴ Neupert, *A History*, 38.

¹⁵ Quoted in Richard Neupert, “The New Wave’s American Reception.” *Cinema Journal* 49, no. 4 (Summer 2010): 139.

Film itself was transformed into one of the many commodity-fetishes of French modernization. In reflecting on the origins of the New Wave as a film movement, Claude Chabrol notes that he and “the Young Turks” at *Cahiers du cinéma* were “promoted like a brand of new soap. We were ‘the nouvelle vague.’ ... But if the popular press spoke so much of us it was because they wanted to impose a formula: De Gaulle equals renewal, in the cinema like everywhere else. The general arrives, the Republic changes, France is reborn!”¹⁶ The birth of both a modern, “radical” French cinema and film culture was thus deeply overdetermined by the long history of, and intersections between, a series of economic, cultural, and political factors.

A particular narrative of film culture proper during these years has been so richly rehearsed that I will only point to its broad contours here. In the aftermath of the liberation, French theatres witnessed the release of formerly banned films, including Jean Renoir’s *La Règle du jeu* (1939) and Jean Vigo’s *Zéro de conduite* (1933), the revival and re-release of certain American classics, like Orson Welles’s *Citizen Kane* (1941) and, following the Blum-Byrnes agreement, a profound increase in the exhibition of contemporary American cinema (from 38 titles in 1946 to 338 in 1947). This altered film landscape contributed greatly to the climate of cinephilia that characterized Paris in the 1950s, a cinephilia made evident by an expansive proliferation of cine-clubs and film journals.¹⁷ Although a number of film journals

¹⁶ Neupert, *A History*, 3.

¹⁷ Notable among the former were *Objectif 49*, started in 1948 under the auspices of filmmakers like Jean Cocteau and Robert Bresson, and critics André Bazin and Alexander Astruc, as well as Eric Rohmer’s Cine-Club du Quartier Latin. Along with the Cinémathèque française, these cine-clubs are often cast as pedagogical sites for a new generation of critics and filmmakers, since they facilitated post-screening debates on the artistic merit of industrially produced American cinema and cinematic specificity. The same debates were articulated in more sustained form in print: for example, in the exchanges between Jean-Paul Sartre and Bazin over *Citizen Kane* in the pages of *L’Ecran français* and *Les Temps Modernes*, and in the polemics characteristic of the revived *Revue du Cinéma* and Rohmer’s

emerged during the early 1950s, including *Positif* in 1952, and *Cinéma 55* in 1954, film study has tended to condense the period's intellectual film culture into a narrative focused on *Cahiers* and Bazin's phenomenological theories of film realism. The latter famously privileged a select lineage of *auteurs* who intensified the cinema's realist vocation through the use of non-interventionist film techniques – for example, the long take and depth of field in Flaherty, Renoir, and Welles – and identified recurrent formal and thematic patterns in the work of particular filmmakers and genres. These theoretical protocols set the stage for *Cahiers*' preoccupation with cinematic specificity as tied to the analysis of *mise-en-scène*.

Film historians tend to support Doniol-Valcroze's claim that Truffaut's article, "A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema" (1954) marked a watershed moment in *Cahiers*'s intellectual trajectory by solidifying Bazin's measured investment in authorship and *mise-en-scène* analysis into the journal's official "line" or doctrine.¹⁸ Admittedly, *Cahiers*' understanding of this doctrine did not always assume a homogenous form, as evidenced most strongly in the growing gulf between Rohmer's Catholicism versus Godard's and Rivette's embrace of film modernism. Moreover, the literary nature of Truffaut's own films, especially *Jules et Jim* (1962), reveal that he was a reformer rather than an unambiguous opponent of the tradition of quality.¹⁹

short lived *Gazette du cinéma*, which would anticipate *Cahiers du cinéma*'s obsessions with American cinema and film realism. Jim Hillier, "Introduction," *Cahiers du Cinéma: Volume 1: The 1950s: Neo-realism, Hollywood, New Wave*, ed. Jim Hillier (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 3-5. Following the death of the *Revue du Cinéma*'s editor Jean-George Auriol in 1950, the writers of these two journals merged – Bazin, Astruc, Kast, and Doniol-Valcroze with Rohmer, Chabrol, Truffaut, and Godard – to form *Cahiers du cinéma* in 1951.

¹⁸ François Truffaut, "A Certain Tendency in French Cinema," *The French New Wave: Critical Landmarks*, eds. Peter Graham, Ginette Vincendeau (London: British Film Institute, 2009), 39-64. Hillier, "Introduction," 5; Dudley Andrew, *What Cinema Is!* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 117-122.

¹⁹ Williams, 349.

Nonetheless, the principles of authorship and *mise-en-scène* analysis functioned as fundamental anchoring points for the journal until its turn toward new modes of thought like structuralism, anthropology, and Brechtian dramaturgy in the early and late 1960s. Jim Hillier notes how these anchoring points prompted a lasting revolution in film criticism because they elevated the film *maudit* – B-grade modes and genres like film noir and the Western, and the pulpy films of Samuel Fuller and Nicholas Ray²⁰ – and because they demonstrated that film meaning had to be interpreted according to critical protocols and methods.²¹ More recently, Dudley Andrew has called for film study to reevaluate its familiar assumptions about the “*Cahiers* line,” by arguing that the spiritual reality that Bazin and Truffaut believed could be disclosed by the camera did not designate a transparent relation between filmed world and spectator but pointed to that which is absent from the image, to a deferred ontology that the camera could asymptotically approach yet never capture.²²

Yet Andrew’s recent return to postwar French film culture, a culture “over which André Bazin exercised his generous rule,” is characterized by a symptomatic orientation toward Bazin and *Cahiers* worship rather than critical analysis, and thus fails to interrogate how the *Cahiers* line’s fetishistic attention to film form and socio-cultural transcendence was only possible against the backdrop of the journal’s reactionary, right-wing politics. *Cahiers*’s critical ascendancy was concomitant with an ongoing intellectual confusion and disenchantment with the grand meta-narratives of communism and with the growing depoliticization of the French masses. As John

²⁰ Ibid., 7.

²¹ Jim Hillier, “Introduction: *Cahiers du Cinéma* in the 1960s,” *Cahiers du Cinéma: Volume II: The 1960-1968: New Wave, New Cinema, Reevaluating Hollywood*, ed. Jim Hillier (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 7.

²² Andrew, 8-11.

Hess argued in a two-part, 1974 article in *Jump Cut*,²³ which remains one of the most astute critiques of *Cahiers* during these years, “les politiques des auteurs was, in fact, a justification, couched in aesthetic terms, of a culturally conservative, politically reactionary attempt to remove film from the realm of social and political concern, in which the progressive forces of the Resistance had placed all the arts in the years immediately after the war.”²⁴ Prior to Hess, the authors at *Positif* had rigorously demonstrated that while Truffaut and Godard were (in line with Andrew) concerned with how the cinema could evoke what is beyond external appearances, this “beyond” pointed to a “domain of pure beauty, pure spirit and aesthetic transcendency,” and not to dominant political realities, like the clandestine torture cells and concentration camps that the modern French state was operating in Algeria.²⁵ For the *politique des auteurs* was not solely a theory concerning how the director as romantic artist transmits his personal worldview, but the celebration of a particular worldview, of a Christian humanist belief in the capacity of the individual to “transcend the isolation imposed on one by a corrupt world.”²⁶ *Cahiers* was clearly predisposed to the elaboration of this worldview in the “mise-en-scène of domination” that characterized popular American cinema.²⁷ As a number of film historians have observed, during a period when the French nation was profoundly uprooted by urban industrialization, the genre pictures of Anthony Mann and Howard Hawks provided new models for

²³ John Hess, “La politique des auteurs (Part One): World View as Aesthetic,” *Jump Cut*, no. 1 (May-June 1974): 19-22; and “La politique des auteurs (Part Two): Truffaut’s Manifesto,” *Jump Cut*, no. 2 (July-August 1974): 20-22.

²⁴ Hess, “La politique des auteurs (Part One),” 19.

²⁵ Gérard Gozlan, “The Delights of Ambiguity – In Praise of André Bazin,” in *The French New Wave: Critical Landmarks*, eds Peter Graham and Ginette Vincendeau (London: British Film Institute, 2009), 65-90. Original: “Les délices de l’ambiguïté (Eloge d’André Bazin),” *Positif*, no. 46 (juin 1962): 39-69.

²⁶ Hess, “La politique des auteurs (Part Two),” 20.

²⁷ Kelly et al., 173.

living, by advocating personalized, rather than political, responses to social problems and by promoting a modern set of values – in Raymond Durgnat’s terms, “decision, action, efficacy, simplicity” – that could function as correctives to an outmoded and unwanted sense of French identity associated with laziness and snobbery.²⁸

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the French and American press also devoted some attention to a body of filmmakers whose films were perceived as thematically and aesthetically parallel to and yet distinct from those of the New Wave. In 1961, Truffaut used the term “Branche Delluc” – after the filmmaker, novelist, and critic who believed that film could articulate thoughts and ideas – and, one year later, the American critic Richard Roud came up with the term “Left Bank” to designate the cinema of Alain Resnais, Chris Marker, and Agnès Varda.²⁹ Unlike the Young Turks at *Cahiers*, the Left Bank cultivated their aesthetic within the tradition of quality,

²⁸ Thomas Elsaesser, “Two Decades in Another Country: Hollywood and the Cinéphiles,” in *Superculture*, ed. C.W.E. Bigsby (London: Elek, 1975), 206-210; Raymond Durgnat, *Films and Feelings* (London: Faber, 1967), 82. As Philippe Mary and Nataša * urovi)ová observe, this binary opposition between the old and the modern has been framed as *the* organizing principle that guided the “Young Turks’” transition from criticism to filmmaking in the late 1950s. In contrast to both the tradition of quality’s conventional shot grammar and the meticulous set design of the brothers Douy, Godard showed us the café culture of Saint-Germain-des-Prés and took his camera off the tracks, improvising the use of a mailman’s cart to capture the movements of everyday passersby on the Champs-Élysées (*À bout de souffle*, 1960). Whereas Jean Aurenche and Pierre Bost bastardized the literary classics of Gide, Bernanos, and Colette, transforming the director into a technician or *metteur-en-scène* in the process, Truffaut employed Astruc’s “caméra-stylo,” adapting his own intensely autobiographical screenplay about an adolescent boy’s rebellion against familial and institutionalized discipline (*Les quatre cent coups*, 1959). And while the old cinema that garnered prestige at festivals and awards shows was committed to an outmoded academicism, Chabrol and Rivette confronted the frank and often cruel sexuality of a new youth culture (*Les bonnes femmes*, 1960, and *Paris nous appartient*, 1960). The image of a coherent and youthful French cinematic movement, freed of outmoded values and stylistic conventions, was propped up by a powerful media culture: through articles like Pierre Billard’s “Forty under Forty” in *Cinéma 58*; at the Cannes film festival, where Truffaut won the best director award in 1959, and where UniFrance Film congregated a group of young filmmakers who were poised as representing a fresh, unified film vision; and by the American press, whose privileged attention to the *auteurs* from *Cahiers* greatly contributed to film study’s long-lasting, telescoped view of the period’s films and film culture. See Philippe Mary and Nataša * urovi)ová, “Cinematic Microcosm and Cultural Cosmologies: Elements of a Sociology of the New Wave,” *Cinema Journal* 49, no. 4 (Summer 2010): 160.

²⁹ Nora M. Alter, *Chris Marker* (Champaign IL: University of Illinois, 2006), 13-14.

through government subsidized and institutionally sponsored short documentaries. Representing subjects ranging from the production of plastic (*Le chant du Styrière*, Resnais, 1958) to the practices of Paris's abattoirs (*Le Sang des bêtes*, Franju, 1949), the Left Bank's documentaries often contain a surrealist merger of clinical exegesis with subversively lyrical commentary and pictorial framing. In subsequent feature films like *Hiroshima mon amour* (Resnais, 1959) and *Cléo de 5 à 7* (Varda, 1962), the Left Bank would demonstrate a profound attunement with parallel tendencies and concepts developing in the arts and criticism, including the de-psychologized landscapes of the new novel and a renewed interest in the estrangement techniques devised by Bertold Brecht. Ten years older than their New Wave "counterparts," the Left Bank were in their twenties during the Second World War, and demonstrated a concerted engagement with prevailing political topics, including nuclear warfare, torture, and police repression.³⁰

Yet, despite these differences, the films of the Left Bank were and continue to be framed as an appendage of the overall New Wave "movement." Note the tendency among most textbooks on the period's cinema to marginalize the importance of the Left Bank to a tokenistic afterthought.³¹ As a movement, the films of the New Wave and the Left Bank iterate varying points of view on the same project. That is, whether the discussion turns to the way Godard's camera rolls in tandem with the protagonist's mind in *À bout de souffle*, or the various scenes of flânerie in Varda's *Cléo de 5 à 7*, "the New Wave" produced fresh forms with which to negotiate the

³⁰ Williams, 367.

³¹ Ginette Vincendeau, "Introduction: Fifty Years of the French New Wave: From Hysteria to Nostalgia," in *The French New Wave: Critical Landmarks*, eds. Peter Graham and Ginette Vincendeau (London: British Film Institute, 2009), 23.

“modern world.”³² By subsuming all of the period’s vanguard film aesthetics under a banner metonymically linked to the Young Turks at *Cahiers*, however, this modern world begins to take on a homogenous form. Andrew, for instance, singles out Truffaut’s *Les Quatre cent coups* as representative of modern French cinema’s general attitude towards aesthetics and history:

The exuberance of the New Wave shows off the growth spurt the medium had experienced in its self-conception after World War II. For the camera began to stray outside familiar territory and to confront an often shocking world; it strayed, as adolescents do, from entrenched norms, from the *cinéma du papa* that shielded French youth from real sex, real death, real history.³³

But what, exactly, was “real history” in the era of modernization *and* decolonization? What kinds of aesthetic differences and critical debates emerged over the political configurations that constituted the stakes of history at this given time? And how has film study in its revised attentions to French film and film culture of the 1950s and 1960s enabled us, and failed to enable us, to see these stakes anew?

Subsequent Representations: Modern French Cinema and Currents in Film Theory

Throughout film studies’ intellectual genealogy, modern French cinema has functioned as an anchoring point. Whether its corpus has been framed as an object of bourgeois complacency, philosophical inquiry, or nostalgia, its identity as “modern” has been reassessed and redefined to suit the discipline’s dominant shifts. My goal here is not to provide a comprehensive account of these shifts, but to question how *Cahiers*’s understanding of the period’s cinema has provided the basis for its

³² Bickerton, 37.

³³ Andrew, xxiii-xxiv.

subsequent representations. This basis has obscured colonialism as a crucial concern for certain lines of French film and film culture in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

Consider, for example, *Cahiers's* internal shift toward structural-semiotic analysis after 1961. The move toward structuralism was prompted not only by the linguistic turn conditioning developments in the humanities and by the expansion of (visual) consumer culture, but by the “modernism” of filmmakers like Resnais.

L'Année dernière à Marienbad (1961) marked a “Copernican revolution” for the journal,³⁴ because its gaps and open, labyrinthine structure evaded any governing sense of tense, objectivity, or authorial voice. In a contemporary essay in *Cahiers*, André S. Labarthe noted how the film troubled the premises of realism and authorship:

Marienbad ... presents itself to the spectator as a two-dimensional object whose parts are all situated on the same level of realism. There is no *objective* difference between a shot of the past and a shot of the present. It is the spectator who structures the film and establishes the differences of reality which give the object (the film) its perspective ... The true successor of the traditional film-maker is not Resnais or Robbe-Grillet, but the spectator of *Marienbad*.³⁵

Yet in transforming *Marienbad* into a work of pure surface, one that expels historical time in favour of its own filmic time, Labarthe also establishes a separation, in Lynn Higgins's terms, “between history *in* the film and the *history* of the film, and between its informative and performative dimensions.”³⁶ The film's historically overdetermined setting (*Marienbad*) and its dominant motif of rape, are thus rendered unintelligible by Labarthe's immanent semiotic reading (see section 3 below). Even

³⁴ Bickerton, 42.

³⁵ André S. Labarthe, “*Marienbad* Year Zero,” in *Cahiers du Cinema: Volume II: The 1960-1968: New Wave, New Cinema, Reevaluating Hollywood*, ed. Jim Hillier (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 55-58.

³⁶ Higgins, 54.

when *Cahiers* organized a roundtable discussion concerning Resnais's *Muriel*, the authors never anchor their discussion of the undecidable relation between the universal and the particular to the film's explicit contexts of modernization and colonialism.³⁷

As Betz astutely notes, when *Cahiers*'s structuralism was assimilated into the broader Marxist framing discourses of the later 1960s, film modernism was re-periodized into pre- and post-1962 strains.³⁸ The first strain was identified with the work of directors like Truffaut *and* Resnais, and was said to demonstrate an apolitical fascination with the alienated bourgeois individual's relationship to society. The latter strain, by contrast, was linked to the work of the militant Godard, Straub-Huillet, and Oshima, and associated with both the collective militancy that animated the social scene in the late 1960s and a series of "deconstructive" tactics against the normative codes that perpetuate the social formation.³⁹ It is revealing that both *Cahiers* and Godard would adopt a radical anti-colonial position in the *late* 1960s, directing their militancy toward America's invasion of Vietnam, although France's colonial war with Algeria perhaps functioned as a structuring absence in the articulation of this militancy, as evidenced by subtle clues, like the conspicuously placed poster of Alain Resnais's *Muriel* in a discussion concerning Vietnam in Godard's *2 ou 3 choses que je sais d'elle* (1967) (Figure 3).

³⁷ Jean-Louis Comolli, Jean Domarchi, Jean-André Fieschi, Pierre Kaste, André S. Labarthe, Claude Ollier, Jacques Rivette, and François Weyergans, "The Misfortunes of *Muriel*," in *Cahiers du Cinema: Volume II: The 1960-1968: New Wave, New Cinema, Reevaluating Hollywood*, ed. Jim Hillier (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 68-81.

³⁸ Betz, 18-25.

³⁹ David N. Rodowick, *The Crisis of Political Modernism: Criticism and Ideology in Contemporary Film Theory* (Urbana IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 19.



Figure 3. Still from *2 ou 3 choses que je sais d'elle* (1967)

Given that European film theory in the late 1960s largely defined the agenda of film studies for the next two decades, making questions of ideology, subject-positioning, and anti-illusionist textual politics the discipline's avowed concerns, French modernist film and film culture tended to fall outside the critical map. Vincendeau, for example, notes the radical decline in theoretical books and articles about the New Wave in the years between 1968 to 1990.⁴⁰ Accordingly, a major rupture with what were then orthodox understandings of Bazin as a naïve idealist lured by external appearances and of the New Wave as a formalist cinema that turned its back on politics was catalyzed by Gilles Deleuze's massive two-part ontology of the cinema.⁴¹ Deleuze not only revived critical interest in Bazin, *Cahiers*, and the

⁴⁰ Vincendeau, 14.

⁴¹ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986); Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

New Wave, but created a new philosophical and periodizing framework within which to consider their theories and practices.

Influenced by Bazin's essays on both film language and Italian neo-realism, and by the Young Turks' accounts of their own cinema, Deleuze argued that the history of the Second World War precipitated a mutation from classical to modern cinema or, in his terms, from the movement-image to the time-image. By contrast with classical cinema (Hawks, Hitchcock), which coordinated perception with the trajectories of bodies across continuous space (the sensory-motor-schema), the modern cinema of the neo-realists and then the New Wave opened onto the destruction and chaos of the modern world, giving rise to episodes of dead time, elliptical wanderings, and the recognition of intensities liberated from bodily states. Unlike Bazin, however, Deleuze argued that what preoccupied modern cinema was not the recalcitrance of the real, but the creation of new forms of thought, "mental images" whose paradoxical play of presence and absence disrupted the instrumental logic of representation. On these grounds, Deleuze also rejected the Marxist critiques of the New Wave's apoliticism in the 1970s – "it is not the cinema that turns away from politics, it becomes completely political, but in another way" – by arguing that despite their bourgeois inactivity, the characters in these films demonstrated a liberated perception capable of revealing the power structures that give order to seemingly discrete institutions; for example, the factory as prison, or, in my example from Chapter 2, the national library as concentration camp.⁴²

Many of Deleuze's core observations regarding modern French cinema inform my arguments in the following two chapters. Unlike previous and even current

⁴² Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 19.

accounts of the New Wave, Deleuze seems to claim that the period's key historical tensions are embodied in the films of the Left Bank. He also identifies these tensions in a non-contemporaneous experience of time that directors like Resnais and Marker articulated through blending modes such as documentary and fantasy. Consistent with his predecessors in the 1960s and the 1970s, however, Deleuze tends to reduce all of French film production in the 1950s and 1960s to a blanket understanding of the "New Wave," which he then subsumes within a broader meta-narrative concerning the aesthetics of modern cinema following the Second World War. The specificities of modernization and colonialism, as the essential mediating contexts for the articulation of French history during this period, are thus largely obscured by Deleuze's historiography. A generalized narrative concerning the breakdown of the sensory-motor schema is insufficient, for example, to address why an African mask becomes an object of horror in *Cléo de 5 à 7*, or the juxtaposition of images of torture with images of consumer objects in *La Jetée* (1962). In the chapters that follow, I explore the non-synchronous experience of time that Deleuze identifies with Left Bank cinema in view of a specific political constellation involving colonialism, capitalist modernization, and the experience of the state as a machinery for the distribution of sense. I also depart from the tacit ventriloquism operating in Deleuze's cinema books, in which the films of Resnais and Godard are transformed into the cinematic articulation of a Nietzschean brand of anti-humanist philosophy. Rather than mapping a particular theoretical formation onto the period's film production *tout court*, I demonstrate how the contemporary French cinema often assimilates conflicting theoretical and aesthetic tendencies, and it is precisely in the tension

between these tendencies – for example, between the meta-narratives of anti-colonialism and the social scientific claims of structuralism – that the period’s politics are revealed in their complexity.

It is precisely the question of politics that has been sidelined by what Vincendeau identifies as the latest current of scholarship on modern French cinema, which nostalgically associates the “New Wave” with discourses of cinephilia and medium specificity. That is, when the nature of film appeared endangered by digital cameras and the proliferation of new exhibition formats in the 1990s, texts by Serge Daney, Michel Marie, and Richard Neupert celebrated the New Wave cinema’s embrace of spontaneity and intimate engagement with film history proper: “Against a background of the ‘contamination’ of cinema from advertising, television, video and computer-generated images, the New Wave cinema, in its heady celebration of ‘pure’ cinephile pleasure, seemed like the perfect antidote.”⁴³ To their credit, these critics and scholars certainly broadened the disciplinary purview within which the New Wave has been understood and historicized. Marie developed the definition of the New Wave as an “artistic school” with a coherent body of artists, manifestos, and set of marketing strategies.⁴⁴ And Neupert’s *A History of the New Wave*, to which my own discussion of the New Wave thus far is largely indebted, rigorously reconstructs modern French cinema’s economic, technological, and generational conditions of possibility. Yet despite their cultural-historical approach, both Marie’s and Neupert’s books delicately revise the existing idea of the “New Wave” by studying narratological patterns across films, questions of periodization – whether the New

⁴³ Vincendeau, 16.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 12; Michel Marie, *The French New Wave: An Artistic School*, trans. Richard Neupert (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002).

Wave's history exceeds the 1958 to 1962 timeline – and canonization – whether directors like Louis Malle and Jean-Pierre Mocky should be included as part of the movement. Studies that seek only to refine the New Wave canon are less likely to disrupt our familiar understandings of modern French cinema, however, than studies that confront historical problems of representation. As Vanessa Schwartz argues, “if the new reigning paradigm does not disturb such easy notions as ‘the New Wave’ itself and only becomes another means to consecrate Truffaut and Godard and *Cahiers du cinéma* at the expense of a more complete albeit more complex history, perhaps it is not revisionist enough.”⁴⁵ Along these same lines, Vincendeau observes that those texts which have considered modern French cinema relative to problems of political representation, thereby challenging the metonymic link between modern French cinema and the premises of the “New Wave,” have tended to come from literary studies, “as if *Cahiers*’ ‘inner circle’ remained somehow the preserve of *film* studies.”⁴⁶

Given this context, I return to Andrew's recent book *What Cinema Is!*, not only because it further reduces the period's film culture to the work of the usual suspects at *Cahiers du cinéma*, but because the terms under which Andrew advocates for these directors is deeply symptomatic of broader disciplinary anxieties concerning the nature and functions of cinematic representation. Consistent with what has been a decade-long disciplinary obsession with cinema's lost “indexicality” – a term misappropriated from its expansive meaning in Peircian semiology to designate the existential bond between camera and pro-filmic event – Andrew upholds New Wave

⁴⁵ Schwartz, 148.

⁴⁶ Vincendeau, 17.

cinema as the embodiment of film's capacity to register the contingency of the real in excess of human intervention; for example, the happenstance of a fly accidentally entering the frame during a love scene in Truffaut's *Jules et Jim*. To support this association between New Wave aesthetics and film's rapport with the real, Andrew sets up a straw-man argument, contrasting Jean-Pierre Jeunet's fantasy film *Le Fabuleux destin d'Amélie Poulain* (2001) against the work of Truffaut, Godard, and even Eric Rohmer. Whereas the former is condemned for digitally tidying up the image, ethnically white-washing Paris in the process, the latter are mythologized for seeking "friction at every stage of production."⁴⁷ When Andrew seeks a counter-example to Jeunet's racially homogenized Paris from the corpus of modern French cinema, he does not turn to Chris Marker's documentation of the State's exploitation of the ex-colonial labour force in *Le Joli mai* (1963), but to the comparatively tame scene from Truffaut's *Les Quatre cent coups* in which the director's screen surrogate, Antoine Doinel, wanders the streets of Paris for an evening: "Antoine Doinel would enter into Paris' dark body, his true mother, as when he shoves the empty milk bottle he had filched into a sewer and listens to it shatter underneath the streets in the city's bowels or womb."⁴⁸ That Andrew can plausibly isolate *Les Quatre cent coups* as the best example of modern French cinema's encounter with "Paris' dark body" in all of its abject racial friction, gives us an indication of how deeply *Cahiers*'s hegemony over the narrative of French film history has erased both colonialism as a dominant subtext of French political life and the militancy of filmmakers and critics who worked to give this subtext visibility. Although Andrew undertakes an exploration of

⁴⁷ Andrew, 19.

⁴⁸ Andrew, 23.

the relationship between cinema and “real history” that is focused through the lens of post-War French film culture – “the noisiest forum for debate of competing ideas of cinema”⁴⁹ – his book liquidates any sense of the period’s debates over the representation of history by refusing to engage, let alone name, *Cahiers*’s main theoretical interlocutor, *Positif*. No doubt, this is because *Positif* critiqued the films of Truffaut, Godard, and Rohmer on the very same grounds that Andrew attacks *Amélie*: for their complicity with the surface culture of advertising and consumption, and for deliberately white-washing the historical experience of a young generation “conditioned by the Algerian War” and its “political and social realities.”⁵⁰ This dissertation takes up the challenge issued by *Positif*’s now occluded side of the debate, which is to explore the “friction” of modern French cinema in the context of the societal contradictions between technocratic modernization and a dying colonialism.

There is a longstanding blanket assumption across Anglophone film scholarship, however, that French cinema between the years 1954 and 1962 completely evaded the subject of colonialism. In his influential study of the period, for instance, Roy Armes argues that “Key contemporary themes – the war in Algeria, the need for social change in metropolitan France – are as absent from French cinema after 1958 as they were before.”⁵¹ Likewise, Dina Shirzer notes, “There is a strange silence of French cinema on the subject of decolonization and colonial wars, because viewers preferred to close their eyes; they wanted the past behind them as France was

⁴⁹ Ibid., xxiv.

⁵⁰ Robert Benayoun, “The Emperor Has No Clothes,” in *The French New Wave: Critical Landmarks*, eds. Peter Graham and Ginette Vincendeau (London: British Film Institute, 2009), 163-186. Original: “Le roi est nu,” *Positif*, no. 46 (juin 1962): 1-14.

⁵¹ Roy Armes, *French Cinema* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 169-170.

busy entering consumer society and enjoying an economic boom.”⁵² While I discuss the issue of State censorship in the following section, here it is sufficient to note that this assumption is rooted in the fact that the French Ministry of Information heavily monitored the film industry during these years, banning or refusing to grant a visa to any film containing oppositional views toward the war. Mark Betz has recently challenged the foundations of this assumption, by asking “Is the granting of a visa – an industrial, economic, statist seal of approval – a prerequisite for historical consideration? And what exactly *is* a ‘film on the Algerian question?’”⁵³ If French film during these years, to use Antoine de Baecque’s terms, “provided a snapshot of the country as it was experiencing the first phase of its economic boom” and “stylized in the present, in the immediacy of its history, the world of its contemporaries,” then how is it possible that the nation’s savage war with Algeria did not form any part of this picture?⁵⁴ Rather than capitulating to a “repressive hypothesis,” in which colonialism is understood as wholly absent from French film screens because it was not given explicit representation, film study ought to turn to the extra-textual discourses that enable us to determine how the war was mobilized in the production of social life.

In fact, the Franco-Algerian War was usually the main item of the Gaumont news actualities that preceded films and was consistently featured on the cover of *L’Express*, the magazine that invented the term “New Wave.” As a result of conscription – with the number of soldiers doubling from 200,000 to 400,000

⁵² Dina Shirzer, “Introduction,” in *Cinema, Colonialism, Postcolonialism: Perspectives from the French and Francophone Worlds* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), 6.

⁵³ Betz, 103.

⁵⁴ Antoine De Bacque, *La Nouvelle Vague: portrait d’une jeunesse* (Paris: Flammarion, 1998), 16.

between the months of January to June 1956 alone – the war forcefully intervened into the lives of the nation’s young generation, the very “object” of the New Wave. The war was at the kernel of the transition from the Fourth to the Fifth Republic, the latter of which, as noted above, was often held responsible for shaping the nation’s “culture industries,” especially the cinema. It was also a conflict that polarized the French political scene, triggering leading intellectuals like Edgar Morin to part with the French communist party while also causing rifts among former philosophical allies like Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus. Finally, by coercing the public into a quiet complicity with the State’s systematic use of torture (both overseas and in the metropole), the Franco-Algerian War conferred an atmosphere of haunting and horror over the nation. The manifestations achieved by hundreds of thousands of protesters near the war’s conclusion remind us that this horror also triggered the militancy of many French who dis-identified with the State that they felt directly betrayed the political legacy of the Great Revolution, the Commune, and the Resistance.⁵⁵ It is only possible to claim that French film registered none of this horror or militancy if we believe, to use Maurice Blanchot’s terms, that some of the social transformations effected by the Fifth Republic – “the pressure of technocratic demands” – can be isolated from the others – “a movement of colonial affirmation . . . the transformation of the army into a political force.”⁵⁶ Yet in an essay shortly following the inauguration of the Fifth Republic, Blanchot insisted that it was necessary to recognize that these social transformations “constitute a whole, which has reality and

⁵⁵ Martin Evans, “The Memory and Significance of Anti-Nazi Resistance,” in *Memory of Resistance: French Opposition to the Algerian War, 1954-1962* (Oxford: Berg, 1997), 31-72.

⁵⁶ Maurice Blanchot, “The Essential Perversion,” in *Maurice Blanchot: Political Writings, 1953-1993*, trans. Zakir Paul (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 12.

meaning only as a whole.”⁵⁷ It is toward an investigation of how the social transformations brought by modernization and decolonization were experienced as a “single phenomenon,” in Blanchot’s terms, that I now turn in the following section.

Modernization, Decolonization and their “Non-contemporaneity”

As a counterbalance to Andrew’s account of modern French film, which isolates Truffaut’s work for capturing the “friction” of its contemporary history through an embrace of happenstance, one might consider two alternative examples of the period’s cinema from Varda’s *Cléo de 5 à 7* and Marker’s *Le Joli mai*. These films also involve instances of friction, but their friction is produced out of the displacements, the traffic, and the relays between the societal shifts observed by Blanchot above. My first example is from the famous hat shop scene in Varda’s film; this scene, not incidentally, directly precedes the cab ride in which *Cléo* has a mysteriously traumatic encounter with an African mask and then overhears news on the radio of the difficulties with the OAS in Algeria. The shop offers *Cléo* a respite both from the discovery of her cancer and from the intrusive looks of the men she encounters on the street. As she gazes into one of the shop’s many mirrors, *Cléo* temporarily reestablishes a sense of herself in this “intoxicating” commercial setting: “everything suits me.” Yet Varda films the shop’s countless reflective surfaces like a hall of mirrors, thus creating a visual indiscernibility between this highly feminized place of consumption and the police’s paternalistic control over the streets outside. At one moment during a complex tracking shot, Varda, in a single (dialectical) image, captures *Cléo* staring into one side of a two-way mirror in profile as the Republican

⁵⁷ Ibid.

Guard enter the frame from the opposite side. The image seems to suggest that Cléo's self-identification with the scene of consumption also involves an unwitting *assimilation* of discipline (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Still from *Cléo de 5 à 7* (1962)

The second example concerns the friction produced between the two halves of Marker's ethnography of Paris, entitled, "Prière sur la Tour Eiffel" and "Le Retour de Fantômas," respectively. The former concludes with an interview with a young couple on the border of the Seine. Both the man and the woman say that their only dreams are to have "the pleasure of setting up house," to own a car, and to have children. Even though the man is dressed in military uniform and heading to Algeria, when asked about how current political events might affect the future of his children, he nervously insists that he refuses to think about political issues, and that, if left alone, such issues will be forgotten. The latter half of Marker's documentary begins

by depicting Paris as the scene of a murder mystery, cast in “the shadow” of horror. Following a brief montage of graffiti-tagged walls with headings like “Jeanson,” Marker cuts to the massive demonstration at the Charonne metro station in Paris that took place on February 8, 1962. As a response against an Organisation de l'armée secrète (OAS) bombing in Algeria, the manifestation in Paris was, as the film shows, violently repressed by police, leaving nine dead. Significantly, Marker will tacitly evoke the couple's dreams in a later sequence in the film, introducing a montage of scenes of consumption at the *Salon des arts ménagers* with the heading: “the dream is being consumed ready-made.”

In order to contextualize the above examples in view of what were dominant social and political contradictions, it is necessary to return to the question of state-led modernization's drive toward a historical equilibrium, or, in Touraine's terms, toward “a politico-moral order” based on “rigidity, resistance to change, and the formation of bureaucracy.”⁵⁸ Contemporary Left critique consistently argued that despite its promises of mobility and freedom to the masses, modernization's chief project was to naturalize, or “immobilize” its ideals of hygiene, privatization, and functionality into a timeless, coherent discourse. As noted above, this project could be identified in the firm and the factory, where methods and procedures derived from the social sciences were achieving standardization, and in the home, where a new culture of surfaces, gadgets, and objects rejected tradition and duration in the name of a “modern order based on externality, spatiality and objective relationships.”⁵⁹ Yet for Barthes, modernization derived its ideological force from the fact that it could not be localized

⁵⁸ Touraine, 24.

⁵⁹ Baudrillard, 24-25.

and instead operated seamlessly as part of the national culture: “The whole of France is seeped in this anonymous ideology: our press, our films, our theater, our pulp literature, our rituals [...] everything, in everyday life, is dependent on the representation which the bourgeoisie *has and makes us have* of the relations between man and world.”⁶⁰ The telos of modernization’s project, therefore, was to make this unseen and unnamed economic ideal coterminous with French citizenship, to invest the nation’s political identity with the illusion of a social class devoid of negotiation or struggle: “today, the bourgeois merges into the nation, even if it has, in order to do so, to exclude the elements which it decides are allogeous (the Communists).”⁶¹

Through considering what has become perhaps the most discussed example from *Mythologies*, we know how Barthes understood the role played by colonialism in the staging of this illusion. In his analysis of the cover of *Paris-Match*, featuring a young African boy dressed in military uniform saluting the tricolour, Barthes argues that bourgeois ideology works to *arrest* the lived experience of the colonized subject by pressing the historicity of this experience into the service of a functional concept, namely, colonialism as an essential fact of French History, immune to “present difficulties.”⁶² Here, myth exploits the analogical quality of the signifier, transforming the boy’s documentary presence (“*look at this good Negro who salutes like one of our own boys*”) into an exemplary and immobile image of the colonized subject’s devotion to his alleged oppressors: “the Negro suddenly hails me in the name of French imperialism; but at the same moment the Negro’s salute thickens,

⁶⁰ Roland Barthes, “Myth Today,” in *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), 140, emphasis in original.

⁶¹ Barthes, 138.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 119.

becomes vitrified, freezes into an eternal reference meant to *establish* French imperialism.”⁶³ Armed with Barthes’s own theoretical hindsight, we are also in a better position today to recognize the limitations of the mythologist’s account of how colonialism was registered as a historical phenomenon during the years of decolonization. Much like the application of linguistic theory to film study in the 1960s and 1970s, Barthes takes for granted that the text’s operations are symmetrical with the spectator’s activity, thus undermining the cultural specificities of reception along with questions of excess and the trace. Additionally, while Barthes isolates the image of the African boy saluting the tricolour because it demonstrates how myth establishes colonialism as a timeless fact of French history, he does not engage with how the colonizer and the colonized occupied asymmetrical positions on the plane of history, in which the latter was made intelligible to the former through signifiers of pastness.⁶⁴

⁶³ Ibid., 125.

⁶⁴ In his major study of the relationship between colonial Algeria and French intellectual life, James Le Sueur argues that “the most important aspect of the French colonial idea was the French insistence that they were indeed the bearers of a new category of time for the indigenous populations ... bringing progress, technology, education, and order to an otherwise chaotic world.” See James D. Le Sueur, *Uncivil War: Intellectuals and Identity Politics During the Decolonization of Algeria* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 25. Le Sueur traces how the major doctrines of French colonial theory either denied the historical specificities of Algeria’s indigenous cultures altogether (assimilation) or situated these cultures within an evolutionary trajectory that lagged behind civilized, European time (associationism and integrationism). Also see: Tzvetan Todorov, *On Human Diversity: Nationalism, Racism, and Exoticism in French Thought* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 2-31. In 1865, for example, Emperor Napoleon’s *senatus consulte* granted full French citizenship to those “evolved” or “naturalized” Algerian Muslims who consented to reject their civil status under Islamic law. The political ideal of assimilating the “natives” into French civilization, as synonymous with universal reason and humankind, peaked during the early Third Republic, until a growing current of racialist discourse began to impact debates over European identity at the turn of the century. Intellectuals, legislators, and scientists, including Joseph-Arthur de Gobineau, Ernest Renan, and Gustave Le Bon, insisted that colonial “populations” could not evolve with European ideals of technology and progress, because of their anatomical inferiority, which was demonstrable by “science.” Le Bon, for example, argued that “each people possesses a constitution as fixed as its anatomical characteristics”, and he constructed a typology of races ranging from “primitive” to “superior.” See Le Sueur, 23; Todd Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), 33-34. Following the outbreak of

The image of the Algerian Muslim as a regressive religious zealot, unclean and anti-modern, was deeply reinforced for well over a century by a series of interlocking bureaucratic, medical, and cultural discourses. This image was given cinematic expression in classic French films like *Pépé le Moko* (1937), which depicts the Casbah as an overpopulated, maze-like den of iniquity where the hero goes to escape the laws and codes of civilized culture. Accordingly, it is crucial to remember that when French Algeria became the dominant political issue in the press during the mid-1950s to the early 1960s, at precisely the same time that modernization's project of making culture synonymous with consumption was taking effect, these two images of the nation – new and old, clean and filthy – existed side-by-side in their “noncontemporaneity.” In returning to the earlier example from *Le Joli mai*, it becomes apparent that, far from a playful exercise in Eisensteinian montage, Marker's juxtaposition of the young couple's disavowal of Algeria's political realities with the hypnotic scene of consumption at the *Salon des arts ménager* taps into one of the period's *dominant* social contradictions. Indeed, Gaumont's newsreel from February 1960 features a speech by President De Gaulle who stresses the need to circumvent the rebel forces that are ruining French-Algeria, while the image track presents disturbing sights of slaughtered animals and destroyed Algerian villages. The March newsreel from the same year is devoted to the *Salon des arts ménagers*, and confers a gleeful and quasi-futuristic atmosphere around the demonstration of

the War, Algeria's Governor General, Jacques Soustelle, would rely on a tacitly racist ideology to make his case for “integrationism,” which proposed to acknowledge Algerian Muslims' French citizenship while granting them the right to be governed by local legal regimes. See Shepard, 48. Yet note the terms under which Soustelle framed this policy: “Integration takes Algeria as it is, the Algerians as they are – as history made them – in order to bring this province into equal footing with the rest of the French Republic.” Soustelle quoted in Le Sueur, 26.

consumer durables – vacuum cleaners, washing machines, and refrigerators – by a demographic of fresh-faced young women. And consider the following, rather typical page from a 1960 issue of *L'Express*, in which a preview of an upcoming story by ethnologist Germaine Tillion entitled “L’Algérie, malade de l’injustice” is placed directly above advertisements for both a perfume bottle with the bolded word “Nouveau” and a car cleaner brandished by an exemplary member of the *jeune cadre* (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Advertisement in *L'Express*, September 13, 1957.

As argued most persuasively by Ross, there were political determinations specific to the French nation’s widespread obsession with newness and cleanliness in the 1950s

and 1960s. These cultural ideals functioned as ideological stakes in the nation's redefinition of its identity and concomitant disavowal of the "dirty war" with unmodern Algeria.⁶⁵

Although Algeria was tacitly mobilized, by way of contrast, to promote the image of a new consumer culture and then foreclosed from definitions of French-ness when independence appeared inevitable, the Franco-Algerian War was nonetheless recognized internationally as a political failure. How did the war affect French experience in ways that exceeded its dominant representations by the media? And how did the colonial trace survive the war's end? In attempting to answer these questions, it is useful to recall Jacques Rancière's claim that the Franco-Algerian War was largely defined in public discourse as a "police operation" and that reactions for or against independence were thus largely mediated by the "police aspect" of the

⁶⁵ Ross, *Fast Cars*, 114. At the War's conclusion, this disavowal was instituted into the *legal* definition of who was and who was not counted as French. Significantly, Todd Shepard observes that French legal doctrine avoided explicit racial codification from 1830 until the early 1960s, demonstrating a "colour-blindness" that was distinct from German, British, and American hegemonic traditions. See Shepard, 13-14. As noted above, integrationist policies during the war proposed to give Algerian Muslims – a legal rather than religious designation – full French citizenship while respecting their attachment to customary law. See Shepard, 48. Such acts of concession would cease toward the war's conclusion, however, when it became apparent through events like the failed peace talks between the French government and the FLN at the Melun conference that an integrated French-Algeria was no longer a political reality. In making the transition to independence, the Fifth Republic appropriated anti-colonial theory's claim that the emancipation of colonized nations was an inevitable outcome of the "tide of History." Yet this tide of History was established as an effect of *French activity*, as an extension of the same values – liberty, equality, fraternity, and the Rights of Man – that were formerly used to justify its "civilizing mission." See Shepard, 6. According to a narrative of progress, France's modernity was responsible for the nation's break with its colonized peoples, and modernization's project of making bourgeois identity synonymous with national identity thus meant not only the exclusion of class difference but also of racial difference. See Ross, *Fast Cars*, 12: "Class conflict, after all, implies some degree of negotiability; once modernization has run its course, then one is, quite simply, either French or not, modern or not: exclusion becomes racial or national in nature. If the ideology of modernization says convergence – all societies will look the same – what it in fact sustains and freezes into place is the very unevenness or inequality that it was supposed to overcome: they will never be like us, they will never catch up." On the dawn of independence in 1962, the French government replaced the term "Algerian Muslims" with "Algerians" or "North Africans" as distinguished from the French. As Shepard writes, "With no public debate, the French government made common-sense understandings of ethnic difference the basis of laws that denied most people from Algeria the right to remain French." See Shepard, 12.

conflict.⁶⁶ In fact, from its beginning, when what was then a relatively unknown organization – the Front de Liberation National (FLN) – set off a series of bombs in Algeria on November 1, 1954, to its official conclusion with the Evian agreements on March 18, 1962, France’s battle with Algeria would be given several definitions – “insurrection,” “transference of power,” “police action” – but was never called a “war” as such. This was largely due to Algeria’s longstanding role in the constitution of France’s identity as a colonial empire. Algeria was colonized in 1830, and in 1845 France denied the cultural existence of the country’s colonized peoples altogether by transforming the nation into three *French départements*: Oran, Algiers, and Constantine.⁶⁷ Throughout the twentieth century, Algeria developed into a major source of mining and agricultural production, controlled by the European *colons* or *piets-noir* who, in turn, constituted a market for French industrial goods.⁶⁸ Given Algeria’s important role in the functioning of the French economy, and its place as home to a French settler base of over 1 million, the French government’s blunt reaction to the FLN’s intransigence was to state Algeria’s French identity as simple matter of fact; after the FLN’s first attack in November 1954, Prime Minister Pierre Mendès-France proclaimed before the National Assembly, “Algeria is France, not a foreign country. And France will recognize no other authority in Algeria other than her own.”⁶⁹ To have declared France at war with Algeria, therefore, would have been tantamount to declaring France in a state of civil war. The government chose to avoid

⁶⁶ Jacques Rancière, “The Cause of the Other,” *Parallax* 4 (1998): 29.

⁶⁷ Etienne Balibar, “Algeria, France: One Nation or Two?” in *Giving Ground: the Politics of Propinquity*, eds. Joan Copjec and Michael Sorkin (London: Verso, 1999), 166.

⁶⁸ Benjamin Stora, *Algeria, 1830-2000: A Short History* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 2004).

⁶⁹ Le Sueur, 32; Shepard, 6.

an international public relations nightmare, by treating the conflict as an internal affair against a small minority of radicals to be “pacified” by the police.

Yet the war was not defined as a “police operation” solely in popular discourse. As a number of contemporary and revisionist histories have remarked, this definition shaped the “confused” or “disordered” state that the nation’s young conscripts confronted in practice through their roles in a simultaneously administrative and repressive apparatus.⁷⁰ Pierre Vidal-Naquet’s 1963 book, *Torture: Cancer of Democracy*, for example, rigorously describes the paradoxical demands placed on French military youth in Algeria as part of their peace-keeping operation.⁷¹ Representatives of “French generosity” who were enlisted to protect the indigenous populations from the “terrorists,” French soldiers instead found themselves surrounding villages with barbed wire, disciplining the running of schools and hospitals (Sections Administratives Spécialisées), and either torturing or executing helpless prisoners.⁷² If torture devolved into a not so clandestine institution in Algeria, then it is because the conflict was “an Intelligence war in the military sense of the term.”⁷³ That is, although most popular representations of the FLN during these years focus on the activities of its armed unit – the Armée de Libération Nationale (ALN) – the organization’s survival rested with the Organisation Politico-administrative or OPA, the diffuse network responsible for contact with the population, collecting funds, and the distribution of information. Since it would be

⁷⁰ For example, see: Jean-François Lyotard, “The ‘Counterrevolutionary’ War, Colonial Society, and De Gaulle,” in *Political Writings*, trans. Bill Readings with Kevin Paul Geiman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 216-217.

⁷¹ Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Torture: Cancer of Democracy* (London: Penguin, 1963).

⁷² Vidal-Naquet, 136.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 41.

impossible to reach the FLN's supplies or hideouts without containing this unit, "the war in Algeria was therefore, in essence, a struggle against the OPA."⁷⁴ According to the memoranda left behind by Colonel Argoud, the Chief-of-Staff of the Algiers Army Corps, the army's chief techniques for conducting the war against the OPA's intelligence combined a triad of "protection-commitment-supervision."⁷⁵ Under the policy of "protection," nomadic and mountain tribes were "regrouped" in concentrated barbed wire compounds "without water, without sewage or sanitation of any kind, without land to cultivate and for the most part without work."⁷⁶ A select proportion of the sequestered population was then coerced to commit to the French military by means of both bribery and torture, while the rest of the population were issued with identity cards, their daily gestures and attitudes subjected to constant surveillance.

Although there is ample evidence concerning the corruption of the court system in Algeria prior to the FLN's insurrection in 1954, the granting of successive "special powers" legislation from 1955 onward amounted to a complete disregard for the codes of common law. Suspected terrorists could be held in "sorting centers" across the country for indefinite periods of time before being released to an Examining Magistrate. When General Massu's Tenth Parachute Division was granted full police powers by the super-prefect of Algeria during the battle of Algiers, "the civil power in Algiers had literally vanished."⁷⁷ Algiers itself became transformed

⁷⁴ Ibid., 42.

⁷⁵ Also see: Alex J. Bellamy, "No pain, no gain? Torture and Ethics in the War on Terror," *International Affairs* 82, no. 1 (2006): 121-148.

⁷⁶ Alistair Horne, *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria 1954-1962* (New York: NYRB Classics, 2006), 338.

⁷⁷ Vidal-Naquet, 57.

into eight “sorting centres” where torture shifted from an artisanal practice to an industrial science. It is in this respect that Ross can speak of the military regime operating in Algeria as a pathological or monstrous double of the functional order being instituted in Paris. The sorting centres in Philippeville and Constantine were “conveyor-belt establishments” whose employees went to training schools to learn scientific torture procedures. These procedures, moreover, employed the same electrical and bathroom appliances that constituted the “system of objects” in the modern French home, and were often accompanied by a code language of cleanliness: “cleaning up the Casbah,” “floor polishing,” and “erasing traces.”⁷⁸ Algeria was an iteration of modern functionalism “gone mad.” As Frantz Fanon argued in *The Wretched of the Earth*, “Apart from the pathology of torture, the pathology of the tortured and that of the perpetrator, there is a pathology of the entire atmosphere in Algeria.”⁷⁹ To what extent, however, did this generalized pathology permeate the “structure of atmosphere” in Paris?

Evidence of police and military barbarism in Algeria reached mainland France at an early stage in the war. In the same week of January 1955, Claude Bordet’s “Your Gestapo in Algeria” and Francois Mauriac’s “The Question,” published in *France-Observateur* and *L’Express* respectively, reported that suspected FLN members were being both tortured by police prior to their release to an Examining Magistrate and prevented from communicating with their lawyers.⁸⁰ As further reports of unlawful military violence trickled into France through the testimony of returned conscripts, left progressive weeklies like *France-Observateur*, *L’Express*,

⁷⁸ Ross, *Fast Cars*, 121, 122.

⁷⁹ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove, 2004), 216.

⁸⁰ Shepard, 66.

and *Témoignage chrétien* adopted a measured anti-torture campaign. Their critique was situated within a “Dreyfusard” lineage of French Republicanism, and focused on how the war was debasing French values without taking up an explicit stance on Algerian independence.⁸¹ By contrast, Jean Paul-Sartre, and his followers at *Les Temps Modernes*, released a series of polemical essays, which argued that torture was endemic to the French colonial system, and rallied the French public to accelerate this system’s inevitable historical demise. The most detailed accounts of torture, however, were generated by independent left-wing activists and intellectuals working outside the confines of the mainstream press. The “Maurice Audin Committee,” a collection of academics investigating the “disappearance” of the Algerian communist doctoral student who was drowned in police custody, and independent publications including *Témoignage et documents* and *Vérité-Liberté* worked to re-circulate articles suppressed by the government and to publish anti-torture propaganda.

Despite a report submitted on March 1955 to the office of the Governor-General by a civil Inspector-General, Roger Wullaume, which described the military’s systematic use of electrical and water torture, the French government’s official line throughout the various regime changes that took place during the war was that torture only occurred in limited cases of excess. In enforcing this line, government circles solicited high ranking officials to deny the use of torture at inquiries, threatened to cut off subsidies to institutions like the Catholic Church if

⁸¹ Shepard, 67: “This moniker captures the new left’s self-fashioned descent from the fin-de-siècle defenders of Alfred Dreyfus, such as Emile Zola, who had protested against the treason conviction of the officer of the French army’s general staff, which was a result of anti-Semitism, traditionalism, and bigoted patriotism rather than evidence.” On Jacques Derrida’s relationship to the Dreyfusard position, see: Edward Baring, “Liberalism and the Algerian War: the Case of Jacques Derrida,” *Critical Inquiry* 36 (2010): 239-261.

they reported military abuse, and even accused the press of fabricating stories. As Vidal-Naquet wrote in 1963, “A whole machinery of deception has been built up, which reaches from the police officer who uses torture, via the judge who accepts the results of the interrogation as valid evidence, to the Prime Minister who either issues a denial or says nothing.”⁸² The French public encountered this machinery via the state’s radical censorship of the media. The state’s Ministry of Information controlled the content of film newsreels and Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française, deleted scenes from or banned outright films that alluded to Algeria, such as Resnais’s *Nuit et brouillard* (1955) and Godard’s *Le Petit Soldat* (1963) and, as I discuss in further detail in the next chapter, seized over 265 left-leaning papers throughout the duration of the war. Yet it is crucial to challenge the common conclusion that State censorship somehow foreclosed the horrors occurring in Algeria from French *experience*. As Martin Harrison argues, “Readers could invariably glean the gist of what the government was trying to suppress ... the author is skeptical whether a single significant fact was suppressed for more than a day or so. Rather, seizure alerted an informed public to the facts they were intended to conceal.”⁸³ In a 1957 essay for *Les Temps Modernes*, Sartre puts things more forcefully, “We are not naïve, we are dirty ... *Everybody* has heard about the torture, in spite of everything, something has filtered through ... but we do not seek this evidence because, *in spite of ourselves, we know*.”⁸⁴

⁸² Vidal-Naquet, 135.

⁸³ Martin Harrison, “Government and Press in France During the Algerian War,” *The American Political Science Review* 58 (1964): 281; and Martin Evans, “A Story of Censorship and Forgetting: French Cinema and the Algerian War,” *Modern and Contemporary France* 39 (1989): 46-49.

⁸⁴ Jean-Paul Sartre, “You Are Wonderful,” in *Colonialism and Neocolonialism*, trans. Azzedine Haddour, Steve Brewer, and Terry McWilliams (New York: Routledge, 2006), 66, emphasis in original.

Sartre's writings for *Les Temps Modernes* remind us that, rather than simply repressing the facts, the French state's acts of deception produced a national climate of self-surveillance and asphyxiation. Knowing that the state was operating a Gestapo-like regime in Algeria, but without the documentary evidence to believe in the soundness of this knowledge, the French public were maintained in a carefully administered "false ignorance" that was, in fact, a kind of complicity. In his famous speech at the Salle Wagram for the *Comité d'Action des Intellectuels contre la Poursuite de la Guerre en Afrique du Nord* (Action Committee of Intellectuals against the Continuation of the War in North Africa), which would be translated into "Colonialism is a System" for the March-April 1956 issue of *Les Temps Modernes*, Sartre argued that since the colonial system could only maintain the near starvation rates of its Arab labour force through permanent military violence, its destruction was an historical inevitability. But he added that, meanwhile, for the people of mainland France, colonialism "still fouls the atmosphere. It is our shame; it mocks our laws and caricatures them."⁸⁵ A year later, he would define the experiential quality of this atmosphere more precisely: "We already feel prey to a vague malaise. It is not yet horror but a feeling that horror exists, very close by, all the more threatening because we cannot and will not look it in the face."⁸⁶

This link between the public's implicit (and complicit) knowledge of the state's war crimes in Algeria and a national atmosphere of horror was not peculiar to Sartre's writings, however, and recurs as a theme across diverse iterations of the period's left criticism. In his writings for the post-Trotskyist journal *Socialisme ou*

⁸⁵ Jean-Paul Sartre, "Colonialism is a System," in *Colonialism and Neocolonialism*, trans. Azzedine Haddour, Steve Brewer, and Terry McWilliams (New York: Routledge, 2006), 54.

⁸⁶ Sartre, "You are Wonderful," 68.

Barbarie, Jean-François Lyotard returned obsessively to the question of how Algeria permeated “the permanent atmosphere” of depoliticization created by De Gaulle’s regime.⁸⁷ Following the state’s botched attempt to cover up its bombing of the Tunisian village of Sakiet Sidi Youssef in February 1958 – a reprisal against FLN escapees that wound up killing 69 civilians – he wrote: “But France is saturated by Algeria through every pore... the entire world knew, and Washington knew, that [premier Félix] Gaillard had covered up for a military and political operation that he had not chosen and no doubt considered inopportune.”⁸⁸ Likewise, two key texts that defined national sentiment in the immediate aftermath of the war, Jacques Juillard’s “La morale en question” (1962) and Vidal-Naquet’s book on torture, both argued that officials could no longer be troubled to contest the facts that were in dispute only months beforehand – “all of that is past – and over with”⁸⁹ – and what remained was a trace over France that “would never disappear.”⁹⁰ This haunting was the manifestation of a breach between the public and the state, between a *political* lineage (the Rights of Man, the Great Revolution) and a *legal* regime whose states of exception meant the degeneration of that lineage. For Vidal-Naquet, because the state granted legal amnesty in the war’s aftermath to a police apparatus that already worked to hide its own operations, any chance of the nation’s public reaching the truth had been “sealed,” and the breach between legislation and politics would haunt the nation’s relationship to its own history.⁹¹

⁸⁷ Jean-François Lyotard, “The State and Politics in France of 1960,” 255.

⁸⁸ Jean-François Lyotard, “Algerian Contradictions Exposed,” in *Political Writings*, trans. Bill Readings with Kevin Paul Geiman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 202.

⁸⁹ Jacques Juillard quoted in *Le Sueur*, 288.

⁹⁰ Jacques Juillard quoted in *Le Sueur*, 288.

⁹¹ Vidal-Naquet, 164.

Notice how these arguments concerning the French public's experience of colonial-state discipline provide an almost uncanny rejoinder to the accounts of the state as an engine of modernization. The latter discourse describes the sanitized and dehumanized *mise-en-scènes* of consumer culture, and the drive to establish a functional equilibrium between production and "lifestyle," between class identity and national consciousness. The former discourse describes the polluted, porous climate of a police state whose erasure of its own operations triggered a haunted, non-synchronous relationship between political and national definitions of citizenship. Following Blanchot, one of the aims of my dissertation is to re-interrogate how these two seemingly contradictory areas of experience – modernization and discipline, modernization *as* discipline – constituted a single phenomenon, the one refracting into the space and history of the other, as when the paternalistic force of the Republican Guard appears scattered across the hat-shop's hall of mirrors during the famous shopping sequence from *Cléo de 5 à 7*.

Indeed, French cinema in the late 1950s and early 1960s provides some of the period's most profound manifestations of the atmosphere of horror discussed in contemporary political discourse. This atmosphere is palpable, for example, in the ominous shift in tone that characterizes the protagonists' departure for Algeria at the conclusion of Jacques Rozier's *Adieu Philippine* (1963), in the coded and uncomfortable appearance of the OAS in Louis Malle's *Le Feu follet* (1963), in Muriel's spectral presence/absence in the film of the same name,⁹² and in what *Positif*

⁹² Robert Benayoun, "Les Naufragés du Hasard," *Positif*, no. 56 (novembre 1963): "Le personnage de Muriel, qui était sans doute au départ un tant soit peu fantômatique, est devenu le spectre d'une situation précise, d'un drame localisé dans l'actualité ... Ce qu'est Muriel, finalement, c'est la torture" (3).

critic Marcel Oms described as Georges Franju's confrontation in *Les Yeux sans visage* (1960) with "un Paris gris, inquiétant, un Paris qui est un terrain vague et que hantent des gens que Franju refuse, un monde que Franju n'aime pas."⁹³ As this latter example suggests, the problem of a national atmosphere of horror was recognized *as such* by the voices at *Positif*, voices, which like the history of French-Algeria itself, have been sidelined by film study's dominant trajectories. In a July 1962 critique of the New Wave, "Le Grand Mensonge," Oms argued that the war had created a climate of menace so "thick" in the metropole that even a passing reference to Algeria was perceived as a revolutionary act:

A peine quelques mots du dialogue pouvaient-ils suggérer, comme dans *Les Tricheurs* ou dans *Cléo de 5 à 7*, la menace qu'elle laissait planer sur la jeunesse. L'atmosphère était, il est vrai, si lourde que la moindre allusion verbale, le moindre personnage secondaire prenaient figures de défi révolutionnaire.⁹⁴

I argue that the films of Left Bank filmmakers like Varda, Marker, and Resnais present a strong audio-visual case for what leftist critics identified as the displacement of colonial discipline and violence to mainland France. Recall that one of the early fears among opponents of the war was that in transferring police personnel from Paris to Algeria and vice-versa, the French state was not "metropolitanizing" the Algerian police, but "Algerianizing" the French police.⁹⁵ Such fears proved prophetic, since the dominant image of police barricades in Algeria that the French experienced through the popular press at the beginning of the war would turn out to be something that they would confront at home and in the flesh by the war's conclusion (Figure 6, Figure 7).

⁹³ Marcel Oms, "Les Yeux sans visage," *Positif*, no. 34 (mai 1960): 55-57.

⁹⁴ Marcel Oms, "Le Grand Mensonge," *Positif*, no. 47 (juillet 1962): 7.

⁹⁵ Vidal-Naquet, 33.



Figure 6. *L'Express*, 3 October 1957. Figure 7. *L'Express*, 21 February 1962.

As I demonstrate in the following chapters, by dialectically juxtaposing the war in Algeria with the hypertrophy of the state *in France*, the contemporaneous films of the Left Bank Group give cinematic expression to Cornelius Castoriadis's claim that Algeria was the fundamental condition of possibility for a growing number of French dissidents to become "conscious of what they opposed in *their own society* ... Algeria was the occasion, the catalyst for an opposition in search of itself, becoming more and more conscious of itself."⁹⁶ The next three chapters, devoted to the questions of the state's regulation of national history and of torture, are organized around the three key pivots I have established thus far: the slippage between the state as an agent of capitalist modernization and the state as a machinery for disciplining public perception; the atmosphere and sensations of horror that the latter conferred on the former; and the relationship between horror and the emergence of a political subjectivity based on a dis-identification with state definitions of citizenship. They often engage with films that are familiar to film studies – for example, *Nuit et brouillard*, *La Jetée*, and *Cléo*

⁹⁶ Cornelius Castoriadis, *Political and Social Writings: Volume 3: 1961-1979: Recommencing the Revolution: From Socialism to the Autonomous Society* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 73.

de 5 à 7 – but, by casting these films in a wider field of film theoretical debate and the socio-political context of decolonization, I aim to make them intelligible in a new light. In Chapter 5 and the conclusion, the dissertation shifts directions by considering the Left Bank Group’s coalitional response to the Vietnam War and a militant tradition of anti-colonial French film largely unfamiliar to Anglophone film study, and forcefully embodied in the work of René Vautier. Vautier’s work is unique among the directors considered here because, unlike the work of the New Wave, the Left Bank, and even ethnographic filmmakers like Jean Rouch, it “crosses over to the other side,” to use Etienne Balibar’s apt phrase, daring to interrogate “the relation of Algeria to its own interior alterity, and of its necessary ‘dis-identification.’”⁹⁷ Chapter 5 and the conclusion therefore consider future directions for the study of French anti-colonial film.

⁹⁷ Balibar, 162, 172, 163.

2

French Algeria and the Police: Horror as Political Affect in Three Short Documentaries by Alain Resnais

It is not yet horror but a feeling that horror exists, very close by, all the more threatening because we cannot and will not look it in the face.

– Jean-Paul Sartre¹

This chapter provides a sustained analysis of how the sociopolitical contexts of French colonialism and the Franco-Algerian War shape the themes and motifs of Alain Resnais's early, commissioned short documentaries. My initial point of inquiry is opened by the Left Bank director's own consistent yet cryptic claim that his filmography between the mid 1950s and the early 1960s fundamentally concerns Algeria.² Film history writing has traditionally gravitated toward the latter half of this timeline, as a growing body of scholarship continues to unpack how Algeria functions as a scarcely submerged historical referent in Resnais's features, including *L'Année dernière à Marienbad* (1961) and *Muriel, ou le temps d'un retour* (1963).³ It remains less evident how the French experience of Algeria operates as a fundamental aspect of his early documentaries, given that *Les statues meurent aussi* (1953) was made one

¹ Jean-Paul Sartre, "You Are Wonderful," in *Colonialism and Neocolonialism*, trans. Azzedine Haddour, Steve Brewer, and Terry McWilliams (New York: Routledge, 2006), 68.

² "Je crois ... qu'on ne peut pas faire de film, en France, sans parler de la guerre d'Algérie." Quoted in Gaston Bounoure, *Alain Resnais: Cinéma d'aujourd'hui no. 5* (Paris: Seghers, 1967), 52; also see Charles Krantz, "Teaching *Night and Fog*: History and Historiography," *Film History*, vol. 15, no. 1 (February 1985), 2-15.

³ Lynn Higgins, *New Novel, New Wave, New Politics: Fiction and the Representation of History in Postwar France* (Omaha: University of Nebraska Press, 1996); Naomi Greene, *Landscapes of Loss: The National Past in Postwar French Cinema* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); Mark Betz, *Beyond the Subtitle: Remapping European Art Cinema* (Minneapolis: Regents of the University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

year before the outbreak of the war, and that *Nuit et brouillard* (1954) and *Toute la mémoire du monde* (1956) never refer to colonialism or Algeria as such. Ostensibly, all three of these documentaries share a similar preoccupation, which is not with colonialism *per se*, but with how divergent objects and institutions are ordered by more generalizable forms of discipline. The particular institutions that they feature – the national library, the museum of man, and the camp (as museum) – concern the epistemology of history, and the ways that the national past is made to cohere within totalizing, representational spaces. A straightforward exposition of the films’ subject matter, however, betrays the unique and situated quality of horror that Resnais confers on both these institutions and their arbitration of French identity, a horror that extends, curiously, even to his representation of the Bibliothèque nationale. I argue that the relation Resnais’s documentaries establish between horror and the disciplining of history takes on a new intelligibility when considered against the political backdrop of France’s eight-year “police operation” in Algeria.

By drawing on Chapter 1’s definition of horror as a climate of dread that cast itself over the French population, I analyze how Resnais’s three short documentaries evoke figures of total history during the precise period when, as a result of the nation’s colonial activity, French history was placed under erasure. The unique quality of horror generated by these shorts, I argue, is a function of how the state is shown to remove history from public perception in ways that resonate with the at once administrative and violent nature of France’s police operation: surveillance, seizures, *matraquage*, and concentration camps. Furthermore, Resnais represents these institutions for the immobilization of history as synecdoches for modern French

society itself, whose embrace of technocratic efficiency, as Kristen Ross has demonstrated, not only diminished the historical quality of everyday life in France, but could be linked to the demolition of the legacy of the Rights of Man in Algeria.⁴ It is for this reason that I begin with *Toute la mémoire du monde*, a film that, according to Jacques Rivette's contemporary assessment, demonstrated Resnais's ability to "see the modern world as it is." For Rivette, Resnais's short on the Bibliothèque nationale exemplified the logic of a modernizing French society composed of a "civilization of specialists" and in which "science-fiction has become reality."⁵ And yet, if Resnais tapped into the identity of the *modern* through his representation of the national library, which achieves an epistemological mastery over knowledge by quantifying its objects within spatialized networks, then how are we to account for the explicit parallels between *Toute la mémoire du monde* and Resnais's previous two shorts on the realities of colonialism? The remainder of this chapter explores this blurred frontier between modern French technocratic society and the concentrationary logic of the colonial.

Resnais on French Colonialism and the Police

Totalitarian bureaucratic society lives in a perpetual present in which everything that has happened earlier exists for it solely as a space accessible to its police.

– Guy Debord⁶

⁴ Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995).

⁵ Jacques Rivette, quoted in Jean Domarchi, Jacques Doniol-Valcroze, Jean-Luc Godard, Pierre Kast, Jacques Rivette, Eric Rohmer, "Hiroshima, notre amour" (discussion on Alain Resnais's *Hiroshima mon amour*, July 1959), in *Cahiers du Cinéma: Volume 1: The 1950s: Neo-realism, Hollywood, New Wave*, ed. Jim Hillier (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1985): 58, 67.

⁶ Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone, 1994), 76.

According to Raymond Bellour, Resnais and writer Rémo Forlani had difficulty finding an adequate ending to *Toute la mémoire du monde*, their commissioned short on the Bibliothèque nationale, then located in the rue de Richelieu in Paris.⁷ The conclusion that we see today was the result of a fortuitous encounter that the director and writer had with Jean Cayrol and Chris Marker, who together penned the final lines of the film. Against a horizontally scrolling, extreme long-shot that spans the length of the library's reading room, these concluding lines of narration describe a world in which the histories of discrete disciplines – “astrophysics, physiology, theology” – are classified by the same techniques and “a future in which all mysteries are resolved.” Nothing is missing from this representational universe, and the grand, frontal composition of the image echoes this sense of completion. Yet when the off-screen voice continues to propose a time of unlimited mnemonic access, of “a time when we are handed the keys to this and other universes,” there is a marked shift in formal strategy, as an obliquely angled travelling shot motions toward an opening between two book shelves located off in one of the library's corners to reveal an officer standing in the shadows. An abrupt jump cut to the guard's partially disclosed face transforms the opening into both a point of entrapment and surveillance. In returning to the reading room and its readers in the subsequent shot, Resnais employs an ominous, “panoptic,” bird's-eye view, accompanied by Cayrol and Marker's last line of narration: “And this will come about because these readers, each working on his slice of universal memory, will lay the fragments of a single secret end to end, a secret with a beautiful name, a secret called ‘*happiness*’.” With this last phrase,

⁷ Raymond Bellour, “Un cinéma réel,” *Artsept*, vol. 1 (1963), 5-27; see also, Robert Benayoun, “Six préfaces à l'oeuvre future,” in *Alain Resnais: Arpenteur de L'Imaginaire* (Paris: Éditions Stock, 1980), 41-60.

Cayrol and Marker assist Resnais in situating his short film discretely in the context of modernization and consumer society.



Figure 8.



Figure 9.



Figure 10.

In 1950s and 1960s Paris, “happiness” was *the* buzzword of advertisers peddling the ideology of privatization and its push toward a “move within” the confines of the domestic interior, the car, the married couple, and the hexagon.⁸ Happiness becomes a term that cultural theorists like Roland Barthes begin to associate with “domestic enclosure” and a “slippered introversion” excused from broader social responsibility.⁹ It is also the term that catalyzes the two great ethnographic studies of Paris in the early 1960s, Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin’s *Chronique d’un été* (1961), and Marker’s own *Le Joli mai* (1963). The latter, not incidentally, begins with a montage of interviews with a cross-section of Parisian citizens about their happiness and concludes with the image of the hexagon as one great prison. Thus, in its final scene, as in others, a short film that was commissioned by a cultural division of the French foreign ministry as a tribute to the preservation of historical lineages dating back to the monarchy, instead becomes a prescient demonstration of the relationship between modernity and imprisonment that later French films would associate with everyday French life itself.

Indeed, a number of film scholars have identified *Toute la mémoire* as a film with a split identity. In the latest iteration of this position, Dudley Andrew argues that Resnais’s short contains two temporal orders: the accumulated weight of the past (the facts) and the human activity that fashions this past according to need (desire).¹⁰ Unlike Andrew’s Bazinian reading of the film, my questions are differently formed and concern how Resnais’s visual and acoustic rhetoric creates varying points of view

⁸ Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies*, 54.

⁹ Roland Barthes, “Conjugations,” in *The Eiffel Tower and Other Mythologies*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 24-25.

¹⁰ Dudley Andrew, *What Cinema Is!* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 46.

on the same disciplinary organization of time. That is, *Toute la mémoire* describes a world of totalizing presence, an order where all things are profiled and rendered legible, absent of void or supplement. But the film also estranges the naturalness of the disciplinary foundations governing the library's order, giving rise to the inverse experience of a "place where the bottom has dropped out of everything, an atmospheric density, a plentitude of the void."¹¹ It is this oscillation that makes Resnais's documentary both a pedagogical film and a horror film.

As a state-commissioned pedagogical documentary, *Toute la mémoire* gives spectators a considerable education on the library's contents and archival practices. We learn of its stores of original materials, like the first works published by Rimbaud, the systems of communication between library employees, the processes of monitoring periodicals, how the atmosphere is corrected to preserve antiques and maps, and we even follow the full trajectory of a single book from its first appearance in the library to its placement in the labyrinthine stacks. Yet Resnais films this "silent citadel," its architectonics and its practices, as though it were an extension of the same Borgesian universe that he disclosed a year earlier with *Nuit et brouillard*, as though the same tracking shots that filmed the camp ruins here drifted to the library's underground burrows and its piles of books. *Toute la mémoire* shares *Nuit et brouillard*'s quietly menacing and impersonal tone, presenting a Cartesian universe where human agency is overseen and uncomfortably subordinated to structures, networks, and grids. Thus, in the late scene describing how library materials are transferred between workers, Resnais never anchors his camera work to a human

¹¹ Emmanuel Levinas, "Existing without Existents," in *Time and the Other*, trans. Richard A. Cohen. (Pittsburgh PA: Duquesne University Press, 1987), 44-51.

consciousness, instead filming the movements of bodies from canted high and low angles, through iron grillwork, and around partially obstructed corners. Workers appear like a phase in the process of circulation or, in one philosopher's terms, like "neuronic messengers" in an institutionalized brain.¹² By contrast, the film's objects appear to take on a strange vitality, as though Resnais, following Benjamin's description of the surrealists' ethnographic experiments, brings out "the immense forces of 'atmosphere' concealed in these things to the point of explosion."¹³ This auratic charge is perhaps a function of the object's condemnation to a different, disciplinary "structure of atmosphere" that implies the death of its singularity.¹⁴ In the sequence describing the arrival of a fake book whose cover shows the face of Italian actress Lucia Bosé, and whose interior includes a reference to André Breton's *Le point du jour*,¹⁵ the voiceover narration describes a process in which the book is first stamped and issued with an "identity card," "after which, a prisoner, it awaits the day of classification." Once sorted from its fellow prisoners, the book is indexed and catalogued, never "to escape any search." The voiceover is accompanied by a montage of images, capturing the book in shadowy vaults, behind cages, and eventually issued by a cap wearing worker to its place in the stacks.

¹² Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 121.

¹³ Walter Benjamin, "Surrealism: the Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia," trans. Edmond Jephcott, *New Left Review* 108 (March-April 1978): 50.

¹⁴ Concerning modernization's transformation of objects into components within signifying systems, Jean Baudrillard writes, "Of course, culture has always played the ideological role of pacifier, sublimating tensions associated with functional imperatives and answering the need for being to take on recognizable form beyond material reality and conflicts of the word. [...] It is just that, like the reality it simultaneously reflects and disavows, this form is now being systematized. Systematic technicity calls forth systematic cultural connotation. And *this systematic cultural connotation at the level of objects is what I am calling ATMOSPHERE.*" Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*, trans. James Benedict (London: Verso, 1996), 47.

¹⁵ Steven Ungar, "Scenes in a Library: Alain Resnais and *Toute la mémoire du monde*," *SubStance* 41, no. 2 (2012): 67.

Peter Harcourt has commented on the film's analogy between books and prisoners, noting that unlike human prisoners, the national library's objects are arrested so as "to guarantee their continued life."¹⁶ Yet does Resnais's description of the process through which the library's objects become components within a grand system of classification leave spectators with the impression of their continued life, whether we take "life" to mean their materiality or their unique, substantive duration? In her rejoinder to Harcourt, Naomi Greene says, "One shivers for the fate of these volumes guarded so carefully behind iron gates... Designed as a 'place of memory' to keep the past alive, the funeral library seems, instead, to have assumed the form of its tomb. Is it too much to imagine that it is a tomb enclosing some of the darkest, and most carefully guarded, secrets of the national past?"¹⁷ Resnais's short documentary is as much about "all the memory in the world" as it is about forgetting, or rather the abuses of forgetting. This "forgetting" involves not only the metaphysical destruction inherent to all archivization, what Jacques Derrida calls the archiviolithic effacement of the archive as a site of origin and order.¹⁸ *Toute la mémoire*'s images of officers profiling papers with conspicuous Arabic text, of books interned behind bars, of newspaper stacks housed in locked basements take on a set of meanings peculiar to what historians have called the "draconian" atmosphere of Fourth Republic France.¹⁹

That is, the French state could promote its activities in Algeria as a "police action" against a few terrorists, who could be slaughtered like animals rather than

¹⁶ Peter Harcourt, "Alain Resnais: Memory is Kept Alive with Dreams" *Film Comment*, vol. 6 (1973), 50.

¹⁷ Greene, *Landscapes of Loss*, 42.

¹⁸ Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

¹⁹ Martin Evans, *Memory of Resistance: French Opposition to the Algerian War, 1954-1962* (Oxford: Berg, 1997), 141.

politically negotiated with, by virtue of its fascistic control over both public dissidence and the mass communications industries.²⁰ The same Ministry of Information that was responsible for censoring Resnais's previous two films also stringently limited any public meetings concerning Algeria, took command over the coverage of newsreels, and monitored Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française according to strict political policies. But the most *publicized* weapon against the news media, Martin Harrison argues, was the incessant seizures of books and newspapers, a process that began in 1954: "The technique is simple. Papers must deposit signed copies of each edition at the local prefecture. There, and in several ministries, they are rapidly scanned for objectionable material, whether an article, cartoon, headline or caption, even a few isolated sentences."²¹



Figure 11.

²⁰ See Higgins, 42; Martin Harrison, "Government and Press in France During the Algerian War," *The American Political Science Review*, vol. 58 (1964), 273-285; and Martin Evans, "A Story of Censorship and Forgetting: French Cinema and the Algerian War," *Modern and Contemporary France*, vol. 39 (1989): 46-49.

²¹ Harrison, 274.



Figure 12.

In addition in key texts like Henri Alleg's *La Question*, 265 papers were seized throughout the course of the war, and moderate to left-wing journals like *L'Humanité*, *France Observateur*, and *L'Express* were targeted with excessive frequency (200 of the 265 seizures were of left or left-leaning papers). The situation was graver in Algeria, since the same "special powers" acts that normalized torture also sanctioned a complete ban on all nationalist papers and all French papers of progressive and Communist origin – nearly 600 seizures took place in Algiers alone throughout the course of the war.²² Papers were seized not only for reporting on the French state's political crimes – including torture and summary executions – but for their "tone," meaning their militant or revolutionary rhetoric. In this respect, historians tend to

²² Harrison, 277.

echo Sartre by noting that the seizures were not effective in repressing the realities of war in Algeria, but only in creating a climate of internalized surveillance, of horror without a discernable face.



Figure 13. Cover of *L'Express*, September 15, 1960.

Against this historical backdrop, *Toute la mémoire*'s claim that "In Paris, words are imprisoned in the Bibliothèque nationale" appears less like a playful analogy and more like a literal description of the fate of and climate surrounding words under the jurisdiction of the *police judiciaire*.

In its surrealistic destabilization of the relation between humans and things, *Toute la mémoire* raises another problem that was brought to the fore by the political

philosophy surrounding the Algerian war, and which was given sustained reflection in the contemporaneous work of filmmakers like Resnais and Marker. I am referring here, after Bill Brown, to the phenomenological, social, and institutional infrastructures on which apprehensions of alterity are built.²³ What can be learned about a society by the way it stabilizes culture through “things”? What confiscations of democracy can be legitimated when such apprehensions of “thingness” are displaced onto humans? These are the questions posed explicitly by the two Resnais documentaries made immediately before *Toute la mémoire*, *Les statues meurent aussi* and *Nuit et brouillard*.

As concerns the former, Resnais noted in an interview with René Vautier that his film with Chris Marker was guided by a single research question: “Présence Africaine asked us for a film on black African art. Chris Marker and I have started our reflection with the following question: *why black African art is located in the Musée de l’homme whereas the Greek or Egyptian is in the Louvre?*”²⁴ In pursuing their line of inquiry, Resnais and Marker clash with what was a growing collective fascination in 1940s and 1950s France with so-called primitive cultures and art. Jean Rouch, for instance, describes how an expanding demographic of French youth frequented the Musée de l’homme during this period in the hopes of disassociating themselves from the legacy of the Occupation through an escape into the experience of exotic African cultures mediated by the display of artifacts.²⁵ This escapist desire

²³ Bill Brown, “Objects, Others, and Us (The Refabrication of Things),” *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 36 (2010), 186.

²⁴ René Vautier and Nicole Le Garrec, “Les statues meurent aussi et les ciseaux d’Anastasia,” *TÉLÉCINÉ*, vol. 175 (1972), 32-36, emphasis in original.

²⁵ Jean Rouch, *Ciné-ethnography*, ed. and trans. Steven Feld (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 54.

was best elaborated in the cinema by Jacques Becker's *Rendez-vous de juillet* (1949), a proto-New-Wave film shot on location in Paris, in which promiscuous, jazz-obsessed teenagers eventually leave the metropole for sub-Saharan Africa to go on an ethnographic study of "pygmy" art. The same period also saw the development of a particular ideology of the collection, institutionalization, and display of ethnic artifacts, what André Malraux called in *Les voix du silence* (1951), "the imaginary museum" or "museum without walls," a utopian setting where the specificities of culture are subordinated to a transcendent set of correspondences between artworks from around the world.²⁶

Resnais and Marker's documentary is clearly indebted to a different lineage of artistic expression and anti-colonial struggle, a lineage exemplified by the surrealists' 1931 anti-Exposition, which was designed as an aesthetic retaliation against the Colonial Exhibition, a grand public event organized in the Bois de Vincennes. Divided into three rooms, the anti-Exhibition dialectically juxtaposed African artifacts against photographs of the exploitative construction of the Brazzaville Ocean Railroad, and also against a display of "European Fetishes" that featured plaster Jesus and Mary statues.²⁷ As Christopher Faulkner argues, this set of juxtapositions exposed "the relationship in contemporary artistic and religious practices between private obsession, public ritual, and commodity capitalism."²⁸ But whereas the anti-Exposition was widely critiqued as a makeshift, amateurish event, Resnais and

²⁶ Herman Lebovics, *Mona Lisa's Escort: André Malraux and the Reinvention of French Culture* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 79-80

²⁷ Herman Lebovics, *True France: The Wars over Cultural Identity, 1900-1945* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), 105-110.

²⁸ Christopher Faulkner, "Affective Identities: French National Cinema and the 1930s," *Canadian Journal of Film Studies*, vol. 3 (1994), 11.

Marker deploy the methods of cinema, and, specifically, dialectical montage, toward a rigorous and sustained exploration and critique of how the cultural imperialism of the Musée de l'homme is subtended by the broader imaginaries and infrastructures organizing colonial society at large.

By contrast with what V.Y. Mudimbe has identified as the traditional ethnographic museum's will to domesticate time, which makes conquest and alterity "signs of a theological, biological and anthropological destiny, and assigns to things and beings both their natural slots and social mission," *Les statues* stages what might be called a "natural historical" encounter with objects designated as belonging to the past or as "outmoded."²⁹ This idiosyncratic concept, which Benjamin associated with both surrealism and the Germanic tragedy, has a dual connotation: "Natural history is born out of the dual possibilities that life can persist beyond the death of the symbolic forms that gave it meaning and that *symbolic forms* can persist beyond the death of the form of life that gave them human vitality."³⁰ In anticipation of Marker's *La Jetée* (1961), *Les statues meurent aussi*'s first scene depicts a series of fragmented Western art objects in ruins – statue heads or busts re-appropriated by insects and moss. Detached from their historical forms of life, these objects appear present-at-hand in their brute materiality, like phenomena in nature. Yet the subsequent scene representing the fate of African art objects in the Musée de l'homme discloses Resnais and Marker's equal concern with the second sense of natural history, with objects that, reterritorialized by Western institutional space, have lost something of

²⁹ V.Y. Mudimbe quoted in Matthias De Groof, "Statues Also Die – But Their Death is not the Final Word," *Image & Narrative*, vol. 11 (2010), 30

³⁰ Eric Santner, *On Creaturely Life: Rilke, Benjamin, Sebald* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 17.

their “second nature” and become *denaturalized*.³¹ Here, Resnais and Marker, in an allusion to Man Ray’s “Black and White,” position the spectator in the impossible point of view of an enslaved mask behind a shield of glass, as a series of white observers gaze with contemplative expressions at the camera. The film’s voiceover narration describes the exotic object’s unique place within the functional system of objects constituting commodity capitalism, which is to make a manufactured sense of time, authenticity, and origins a dimension of a structure of atmosphere that is, in actuality, defined by its obliteration of cultural origins: “Black art, we look at it as though it had its reason for being in the pleasure it gives us. The intention of the black who created it, the emotions of the black who looks at it, all of that escapes us.” The mask’s manufactured authenticity within a system “*whose basic principle is by no means authenticity but, rather, the calculation of relationships and the abstractness of signs,*”³² is then emphasized in the film’s construction of an exchange of gazes between the mask and a black spectator. By failing to evoke cultural identification, this exchange triggers a sense of a “lost unity where art was the guarantee of an agreement between man and world” and an encounter with a repressed symbolic history: “It is the sign of this gravity that delivers her beyond the *métissage* and the slave ships to that ancient land of the ancestors.” What follows is an extended montage, in which the “great empires” of these ancestors are represented as “dead kingdoms to history.”

Similar to the opening sequence of *Toute la mémoire*, in which piles of books are filmed as though imprisoned within an underground cell, a series of floating

³¹ Santner, *On Creaturely Life*, 17.

³² Jean Baudrillard, “The Non-Functional System, or Subjective Discourse,” in *The System of Objects*, trans. James Benedict (London: Verso, 1996), 74, emphasis in original.

travelling shots capture African artifacts submerged in a black, negative space. The objects shown range in geographical origin from North to sub-Saharan Africa, and include masks, animal statuary, and utensils stripped of their use. Resnais and Marker begin to contract their shot-scale on the details of these objects – the bulging eyes of one statue juxtaposed against the sunken eyes of another – alluding to a set of correspondences that threaten to elude the Western aesthetic gaze: “An object dies when the living glance trained upon it *disappears*... Classified, labeled, conserved in the ice of showcases and collections, they enter into the history of art.” Resnais and Marker leave the spatialized organization of the museum, however, and engage what Edward Dimendberg has identified as a hermeneutic, Vertovian impulse in their work to travel backward from product to process, from effects to causes.³³ Indeed, the project announced by *Le Chant du styrène*, “Let’s go back from the object to its distant ancestors, this story must unfurl backwards,” could equally apply to *Les statues*. Although, Resnais and Marker reveal that it is not a single story, but a multiplicity of histories that are congealed in these objects.

On the one hand, *Les statues* narrates what is undoubtedly a romanticized version of the origins of African art. Uncorrupted by the liquidating forces of the money economy, the production of objects in indigenous African cultures is presented as an extension of the earth’s creation, as a process in “which man is never separated from the world” or alienated in his labour. A stunning, but highly aestheticized series of dissolves makes the differences between the textures of African sculpture indistinguishable from the grains of nature. On the other hand, and consistent with the

³³ Edward Dimendberg, “‘These are not exercises in Style’: *Le Chant du Styrene*,” *October*, vol. 112 (2005), 74.

dual sense of “natural history,” this blending of nature and objects is dialectically opposed in the final act of the film to the cultural mutilation and de-naturalization of African art by the ideological and coercive techniques of Western colonialism. Resnais and Marker’s critique dilates from an interrogation of the Western labour practices imposed on African artists to a broader, societal critique of colonialism as a system combining capitalist accumulation and state violence.

In what unfolds as a single argument, the directors shift from representations of white industrialists administering the production of a new “African art,” made for French consumer society, with Western technologies, and according to aesthetic protocols of resemblance, to images of the African agricultural proletariat, enslaved in their gestures by techniques transplanted from the factory. This trajectory, and the film itself, conclude with a radical clash between a nascent aesthetic of resistance and the state’s control over the visible world. By an aesthetic of resistance, I mean not only the film’s representations of a “transitional” African art, which gives witness to the oppressions of colonial labour, but also its documentation of public dissidence by African workers who joined the labour struggle. In anticipation of the images of “matraquage” that would define the response to French militancy in the cases of both the Algerian war and May ’68, the spectator sees how anti-colonial dissidence is met with “a climate of predetermined menace” by police who violently clear the public space with guns and batons. And here Resnais and Marker juxtapose images of Africans clubbed to the ground with the Western media’s containment and expropriation of black resistance in the form of spectacle and sport.



Figure 14.



Figure 15.

From the place of the museum to the space of the streets, from the death of cultural histories to the disappearance of dissenting bodies, and from the alienation of history as myth to the commoditization of dissent as spectacle, Resnais and Marker question how colonial power is assumed by vast state apparatuses, institutions, and “objects.” It is a project that the former director will continue in his next film, *Nuit et brouillard*, here again focusing on a particular colonial institution, the camp, in order to facilitate a broader societal critique. In this case, however, his interrogation is aimed at the colonial war with Algeria.

Students are often surprised to learn of Resnais’s claim that “the whole point” of his short documentary on what is now called the Shoah was Algeria.³⁴ Yet the “multi-directional” memory between anti-Nazi resistance and the anti-Colonial struggle was one of the first and most powerful motivations among a nascent but growing number of Left militants to dis-identify with the Parti communiste français’s support of empire in favour of Algerian independence. Throughout the mid 1950s to the early 1960s, left-oriented papers and journals, including *Les temps modernes*, *L’Express*, and *France Observateur*, and a series of key texts ranging from Henri Alleg’s *La question* to Maurice Maschino’s *L’engagement: le dossier des réfractaires* (1961) all registered France’s war crimes in Algeria through the lens of Vichy, the Occupation, and Nazi barbarism. Anti-colonial intellectuals working within the language of existential humanism produced the first and most impassioned critiques of the hypocrisy of a French regime that claimed to resist the Germans only to violently oppress the colonies who fought for liberation. As Robert J.C. Young argues, this hypocrisy was underlined only days after Victory in Europe Day when

³⁴ Krantz, 2-5.

the French air force responded to a protest march in the Muslim town of Setif by murdering an estimated 40,000 Algerians.³⁵ Writing in the early 1950s, Aimé Césaire argued that French bourgeois complacency toward such violence was akin to the complacency that gave rise to Nazi Germany, suggesting that the only difference was that the Nazis “applied to Europe colonialist procedures which until then had been reserved exclusively for the Arabs of Algeria, the coolies of India, and the blacks of Africa.”³⁶ This position would gain mounting conviction throughout the 1950s in essays like Claude Bourdet’s “Votre Gestapo d’Algérie” and François Mauriac’s “La Question” published in *France Observateur* and *L’Express*, respectively, in the same week of January 1955. By 1961, the analogy between the French military’s police operation in Algeria and Nazi Germany functioned as a central argument for the media text that defined public debates over decolonization and set up the Algerian revolution as a central stake in the broader “third worldist” struggle between the colonizer and the colonized: the “Manifesto of the 121” or the *Déclaration sur le droit à l’insoumission dans la guerre d’Algérie* (Declaration of the Right of Insubordination in the Algerian War). A petition signed by a coterie of intellectuals ranging from Robert Benayoun, Maurice Blanchot, and Alain Robbe-Grillet, the declaration founds its case for the refusal of French youth to participate in the illegality of the Franco-Algerian War as a “sacred duty” rather than as treason by way of the link to Nazi barbarism: “Is it necessary to recall that fifteen years after the destruction of the Hitlerian order, French militarism, as a result of the exigencies of

³⁵ Robert J.C. Young, “Sartre: the ‘African Philosopher’” in Jean-Paul Sartre, *Colonialism and Neocolonialism*, trans. Azzedine Haddour, Steve Brewer, and Terry McWilliams (London: Routledge, 2006), xiii.

³⁶ Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), 14.

this war, has managed to reinstate torture and to make it an institution in Europe once again.”³⁷ Resnais’s film with Cayrol must be considered among the key media texts that enabled a small but receptive audience to imagine the connections between Nazism and colonialism. For example, for certain members of the Jeanson network, the famous “suitcase carriers” who transported funds to the FLN through Swiss bank accounts, the impact of seeing camp victims castrated, burned, and surgically butchered in *Nuit et brouillard* framed their understanding of how similar acts were being committed in Algeria in *their name*. Joining the anti-colonial struggle was thus perceived as an act of fidelity to French nationhood, to the legacy of the Great Revolution, the Commune, and the Resistance.³⁸

Indeed, *Nuit et brouillard* is intelligible historically only in its oscillation between a certain time of the statement – Nazi Germany from 1933 until the aftermath of Liberation – and a certain time of the enunciation – the emergence of the Franco-Algerian war and its media censorship, although the historical distance separating these times is precisely what the film places in question. Like *Les statues meurent aussi*, Resnais’s movement through the time of the statement studies the relationship between systematized state violence and industrial rationalism. The film not only renders the camps as spatially coherent systems, but relentlessly traces the stages of the “Nazi machine” from the industrial bids on crematoriums, to the rounding up of Jews like cattle in the Vel’ d’Hiv’, to the socio-economic classifications of prisoners’ productivity, to the transmutation of these same

³⁷ Maurice Blanchot, “Declaration of the Right to Insubordination in the Algerian War [Manifesto of the 121],” in *Political Writings, 1953-1993*, trans. Zakir Paul (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 16.

³⁸ Martin Evans, “The Memory and Significance of Anti-Nazi Resistance,” in *Memory of Resistance: French Opposition to the Algerian War, 1954-1962* (Oxford: Berg, 1997), 31-72.

prisoners' bodies into commodities like soap and fertilizer. The film's punctuated returns to the mute and tranquil waste grounds of the camps, to the time of the enunciation, question, in the same way as *Toute la mémoire du monde* and *Les statues meurent aussi*, the relationship between ideology and memory. Which narratives confer a sense of finality over the historical past, and engender belief that "we are cured once and for all of the scourge of the camps"? It is the affective texture of these sequences, again those famous "de-psychologized" tracking shots that undermine any such epistemological certainty of closure. Resnais's camera movements are "de-psychologized" insofar as they are not narratively aligned with a fictive subject in the diegesis, but, more importantly, because they do not intend an *object of* consciousness. These sequences are, rather, immediately "seeped" in an anonymous, impersonal being – the virtual presence of the "nine million dead that haunt this countryside" and the "never-ending cry" of a subject left conspicuously unnamed. As Emmanuel Levinas writes in an essay published in the immediate aftermath of the camps:

The disappearance of all things and of the I leaves what cannot disappear, the sheer fact of being in which *one* participates, whether one wants to or not, whether having taken the initiative anonymously. Being remains, like a field of forces, like a heavy atmosphere belonging to no one, universal, returning in the midst of the negation which put it aside, and in all powers to which that negation may be multiplied.³⁹

By constantly referring the "industrial butchery" of the camps back to this invisible but inescapable atmosphere of horror in the present, an atmosphere in which everything appears to have "disappeared" but "somewhere in our midst, lucky Kapos still survive" and "we turn a blind eye to what surrounds us," Resnais's short

³⁹ Levinas, "There is: Existence without Existents," 34, emphasis in original.

documentary takes on a suggestive political significance. This is not only because, as noted above, the film represents state crimes similar to those happening in Algeria – torture, starvation, and extermination – but because *Nuit et brouillard* taps into the “mental functions” governing the camps, into the logic whereby quantification becomes an expression of personal property and humans are calculated and instrumentalized in the same way that capital organizes “things.”⁴⁰ In 1955, such “mental functions” or mental disorders, rather, had led to the generalized sub-humanization of the Arab Algerian population at the hands of French colonial governance.

There is no doubt that the French regime operating in Algeria *was a camp in its essence*, if the camp is embodied by any situation in which “the normal rule of law is suspended and in which the fact that atrocities may or may not be committed does not depend on the law but rather on the civility and ethical sense of *the police that act temporarily as sovereign*.”⁴¹ Contemporary anti-colonial intellectuals ceaselessly explained that the non-sustainability of France’s “special powers” in Algeria was attributable to the police’s paradoxical, Gestapo-esque role as both repressive *and* socio-administrative apparatus. Beyond pacifying, torturing, and exterminating the rebels, the military was enlisted to regulate schools, hospitals, and markets, as well as, more importantly, to maintain the industries fueled by a sub-proletariat labour force who, stripped of their agricultural and mining means of production, were forced to work for a fraction of French wage-earners’ pay or die of starvation: “You do not create 70 percent profit margins innocently, you extract those profits from millions of

⁴⁰ Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 121.

⁴¹ Giorgio Agamben, “What is a Camp?” in *Means without End*, trans. Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 42, emphasis added.

dispossessed workers in the shape of sweat and death... This is not administration, it is treating a population like cattle.”⁴² For Maurice Maschino, an anti-colonial journalist who fled to Tunisia during conscription, colonial governance in Algeria confiscated the Algerians’ humanness just like commoditization strips things of their being: it was “the pure instrumentalization of men and the physical riches of Algeria; the Algerians had become just another material source to be exploited along with the minerals and the cows.”⁴³ Likewise, for Sartre and Frantz Fanon, what was at stake in the Algerians’ struggle for independence was nothing less than a war over who was and was not counted as a member of the human species. The military and the *piéd noirs* could only pledge their faith to the French ideals of the Rights of Man and universalism, while simultaneously sanctioning the non-criminal putting to death of their own people, by making the Algerian less than man: “One of the functions of racism is to compensate the latent universalism of bourgeois liberalism: since all human beings have the same rights, the Algerian will be made a subhuman.”⁴⁴

Given the period’s ubiquitous discourse on the French military’s criminal dehumanization of the Arab Algerian population, *Nuit et brouillard*’s encounter with what Serge Daney calls “the limits of a denatured humanity” was particularly menacing to French historical audiences of the 1950s and 1960s. Daney’s moving essay about how he was affected as a teenager by Resnais’s and Gillo Pontecorvo’s incompatibly distanced and spectacular cinematic approaches to the Holocaust, itself tacitly framed by the question of how the Franco-Algerian War undermined the

⁴² Jean-François Lyotard, “The Social Content of the Algerian Struggle,” in *Political Writings*, trans. Bill Readings with Kevin Paul Geiman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 228.

⁴³ Maurice Machino, quoted in Le Sueur, *Uncivil War*, 241.

⁴⁴ Sartre, “Colonialism is a System,” p. 51.

cinema's epistemological integrity to represent the historical past, provides an important insight into the experience of this menace.⁴⁵ I am referring here to his claim that the film's photographs of camp prisoners starved to the point of bare life and of dead bodies frozen with open eyes are "'things' that have watched me more than I have seen them."⁴⁶ No doubt, Daney's essay describes, in general terms, modern cinema's power to leave the spectator exposed to a certain experience of history, to the feeling of being helplessly absented from the horror of a scene that "continues without me." But, there is something profoundly contextual about the fact that Daney recollects viewing *Nuit et brouillard*'s images as a French seventeen-year-old in 1961 not in terms of an empathic identification with the camps' victims, nor even as a revelation of the Shoah's happening, but as a horror of the *self*. The film's conclusion says, "Nine million dead haunt this countryside," and asks, "Who among us keeps watch from this storage watchtower to warn of the arrival of our new executioners? Are their faces really different from our own?" Nazi violence may have once seemed incomprehensible to the French, and this incomprehensibility was a source of pride. As the news of torture in Algeria trickled into the metropole, Sartre would write of a different French apprehension of Nazi history:

Now we know there is nothing to understand: everything occurred unnoticed, by imperceptible abdications; and then, when we looked up we saw in the mirror an unfamiliar, hateful face: our own... we are both the 'the wound and the knife.' The horror of being the latter and the fear of becoming the former govern and reinforce one another.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ "The War in Algeria was ending, and because it hadn't been filmed, it had brought suspicion upon any representation of history." Serge Daney, "The Tracking Shot in *Kapo*," trans. Laurent Kretzschmar, *Senses of Cinema*, vol. 30 (2004), http://www.sensesofcinema.com/2004/feature-articles/kapo_daney/

⁴⁶ Daney, *op. cit.*

⁴⁷ Jean-Paul Sartre, "A Victory," in *Colonialism and Neocolonialism*, trans. Azzedine Haddour, Steve Brewer, and Terry McWilliams (New York: Routledge, 2006), 76.

It is toward the goal of understanding this horror as a political affect that I now turn in my conclusion.

Conclusion: Horror as Political Affect

By returning Resnais's work in the mid-1950s to its social contexts, this chapter has argued that the French experience of colonialism fundamentally informs the themes and motifs of his commissioned short documentaries. Echoing the period's critical discourses, Resnais's documentaries articulate this experience as a relation between horror and the police. I have meant horror here in a sense distinct from the affective associations and figures that film studies traditionally attributes to the term: for example, physical shock from a situated scene of violence ("terror"), or fear or the "monster." In fact, these films rely less on strategies of terror and de-monstration, since their horror, to use Levinas's terms, "is due just to the fact that nothing approaches, nothing comes, nothing threatens; this silence, this tranquility, this void of sensations constitutes a mute, absolutely indeterminate menace."⁴⁸ Levinas calls the atmospheric remainder of what is placed under erasure simply the "*there is*": "The *there is*, inasmuch as it resists a personal form, is 'being in general' [...]. The rustling of the *there is*... is horror." Departing from a strictly metaphysical deployment of the term, however, this article has situated the horror of Resnais's documentaries in view of the state's policing of its colonial activity. "The police" also take on a specific sense in this context, understood as the socio-political agency that assigns to history its places and functions, or, more bluntly, as a concrete certitude regarding "the

⁴⁸ Levinas, "There is: Existence without Existents," 31.

obviousness of *what there is, or rather what there is not*, and its slogan is: ‘Move along! There’s nothing to see here!’.”⁴⁹ The horror of Resnais’s documentaries is rooted both in the spectral presence of the police and the absence of what the police have removed from history. In reflecting this horror back at *European* subjectivity (“Are their faces really different from our own?”), these documentaries also give cinematic expression to how French militancy against the war tended to take form.

Jacques Rancière is correct in his observation that anti-colonial dissidence against the Franco-Algerian War was not inspired by an abstract belief in the dialectical inevitability of third-world revolution, or through an identification with the Algerian community, but in a fundamental refusal of the state that acted in the French public’s name while hiding its operations from their view.⁵⁰ “I clearly recall what I said,” recalls Micheline Pouteau, a former member of the Jeanson network, on her participation in the Algerian struggle, “What’s going on there is being done in your name. It’s you who are responsible, just as the Germans were responsible for the concentration camps... I see no reason to say that whatever she does France is always right’.”⁵¹ When the communist filmmaker René Vautier described in 1975 what led him to make a series of anti-colonial documentaries in the 1950s and 1960s, he said, “I was not doing it *for* the Africans, *for* the Tunisians, *for* the Algerians. I was doing it *against* the colonial system built in my name.”⁵² Likewise, Henri Alleg concludes his searing autobiographical account of the military’s torture practices in Algeria with

⁴⁹ Jacques Rancière, “Ten Theses on Politics,” in *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, ed. and trans. Steven Corcoran (New York: Continuum, 2010), 37.

⁵⁰ Jacques Rancière, “The Cause of the Other,” *Parallax*, vol. 4 (1998), 29.

⁵¹ Micheline Pouteau, interviewed in Evans, *Memory of Resistance*, 62.

⁵² René Vautier, “The Word Brother and the Word Comrade,” in *Algerian Cinema*, eds. Hala Salmane, Simon Hartog, and David Wilson (London: British Film Institute, 1976), 18, emphasis in original.

the insistence that the French must “know that the Algerians do not confuse their torturers with the great people of France, from whom they have learnt so much and whose friendship is so dear to them. But they must know what is done IN THEIR NAME.”⁵³ Through the optic of colonial Algeria, many French came to dis-identify with the structures and stratifications constitutive of their own “modern” French society.

During the final stages of decolonization, this society witnessed a fundamental *displacement* of colonial discipline. As noted in Chapter 1, the early press images of police barricades in Algeria foreshadowed the disciplinary response to social dissidence within France by the war’s conclusion. At a more insipid level, the expanding, state-sponsored bureaucratization captured implicitly by Resnais’s cinema transformed employees in the factory and the firm into colonized subjects whose forms of participation were alienated from any economic decision-making authority and predetermined by the frameworks and objectives of the employers. Militancy against the “colonization of everyday life” in the 1950s would thus set the stage for the later rejections of social identity characteristic of the anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist, and anti-Gaullist protest movements of the late 1960s. Indeed, the chief political slogan that Rancière identifies with the events of May ’68, “We are all German Jews” – a slogan whose impossible “we” invokes all political subjectivities falling outside of the law – was foreshadowed by the concluding line of Jacques

⁵³ Henri Alleg, *The Question*, trans. John Calder (Omaha: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 96.

Panijel's *Octobre à Paris* (1962), "We are all *bicots* [a racist term for North Africans]." ⁵⁴

It is crucial to historicize how the French experienced, articulated, and contested the police nature of the Franco-Algerian War, because the problem of policing continues both to haunt the war's subsequent representations and to bear upon the political demands of the (neo)colonial present. By recognizing Resnais's short documentaries as early iterations of the European cinematic history of the Franco-Algerian War, film history writing is better equipped to understand why a later body of films – for example, Harun Farocki's *Bilder der Welt und Inschrift des Krieges* (1989), Bertrand Tavernier's *La guerre sans nom* (1992), and Michael Haneke's *Caché* (2005) – have interiorized the memory of the war through themes of historical imprisonment and affective motifs of horror-absence. The aesthetic questions posed by this cinema regarding Algeria's removal from both French public perception and memory are, in turn, inseparable from broader political questions of representation. Recall that the platform of the political right in France since 2007 has been premised not only on an embrace of neoliberal economics and increased state authority, but on a museological re-conquest of the nation's identity. Nicolas Sarkozy, in addressing the nation's alleged trend toward apologies, promised to create a national history museum that would work as a corrective to the "deconstructionist" and post-colonial sensitivities characteristic of contemporary memory work.

Harkening back to the horror of those final images of *Toute la mémoire*, he proposed

⁵⁴ Sally Shafto, "October in Paris: A Review of the 2011 'Maghreb des Films, Recontres Cinématographiques' (Paris and Elsewhere in France)," *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, <http://www.frameworkonline.com/festivals/4th-maghreb-des-films.html>; also see Kristin Ross, "The Police Conception of History," in *May '68 and its Afterlives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 19-64.

to freeze the nation's history in a conservative and nostalgic image of white male achievement that would once again erase Algeria's role in the constitution of French subjectivity.⁵⁵ France's recent transition toward the political left thus symptomatizes a broadening dis-identification with exclusionary and mythologized state definitions of citizenship, potentially reopening history to its political function as a catalyst for debate and reflection.

⁵⁵ See Nicolas Bancel and Herman Lebovics, "Building the History Museum to Stop History: Nicolas Sarkozy's New Presidential Museum of French History," *French Cultural Studies*, vol. 22, no. 4 (2011), 271-288.

3

***La Jetée* in Historical Time: Colonialism, Consumerism, Displacement**

For the most crucial fact about pain is its presentness and the most crucial fact about torture is that it is happening.

– Elaine Scarry¹

Introduction

This chapter is guided by two objectives. First, I aim to resituate Chris Marker's *La Jetée* (1962), one of the chief texts of European cinematic modernism, within the overlapping sociopolitical contexts of French modernization and decolonization. Second, through an interdisciplinary analysis of Marker's short *ciné-roman*, my goal is to provide a much broader consideration of how dominant trends in French cinema, theory, and literature represented the experience of the nation's emergent commodity culture, and to explore the subtle ways in which the colonial situation in Algeria informed the representation of this experience.

Significantly, *La Jetée* has inspired an astonishing breadth of film scholarship, informing both historical claims about the transition from cinematic classicism to cinematic modernism and theoretical claims about the filmed image's relation to cinematic time. Yet film studies' predominantly formal emphasis on Marker's play with movement, stasis, and temporality has tended to come at the expense of

¹ Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 9.

investigations of the film's radically political content. As such, *La Jetée* stands out as a curious anomaly in Marker's oeuvre, which has otherwise been widely understood to examine the dialectic between late capitalism and third-world revolutionary struggle (e.g., *¡Cuba Sí!* (1961), *Loin du Vietnam* (1967), *A Grin without a Cat* (1977), *Sans Soleil* (1983)).² In this chapter, I argue that *La Jetée* is consistent with this larger project by demonstrating how the shifting relation between the film's two dominant settings, the concentration camp and a not-so-distant-past Paris, generates a series of uneasy displacements between France's colonial and consumer contexts. What initiates my analysis of this displacement is the film's central, yet profoundly under-theorized, theme of torture. More than a "spectral" allusion to topical events, I argue that Marker's representation of torture is conditioned by the text that was largely responsible for introducing the problem of torture in Algeria to a wide French audience: Henri Alleg's *La Question* (1958).

The first section of the chapter contextualizes Alleg's book, describing its contents and immensely controversial reception. I suggest that while *La Question* was taken up as an explicit subject of French art, including painting and cinema, its aesthetics of horror had a vast cultural influence and informed the ways in which filmmakers like Marker rendered state violence through the image. In turning to *La Jetée* in the subsequent section, I point to the ways that Marker's film not only invokes the narrative details of Alleg's book, but also its affective qualities of nightmare, pain, and horror. These affective qualities carry over into Marker's representation of France's commodity culture, which I discuss in the third section.

² See: Nora M. Alter, *Chris Marker* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2006); and Catherine Lupton, *Chris Marker: Memories of the Future* (London: Reaktion Books, 2005).

Here, it is necessary to reiterate Chapter 1's core concern with how dominant French discourses tended to define the new consumer culture developing in the metropole as diametrically opposed to the state's repressive rule in Algeria, which failed to flow with "the tide of history." Recall that even figures on the French intellectual left began to discuss the political situation "elsewhere" in Algeria as lagging behind the new forms of power emerging "here" in the metropole. Edgar Morin, for example, argued that the union between the European *colons* and the military government in Algeria had devolved into a "semi-fascist, semi-military society. The Algerian war has literally given birth, from a de facto situation, to a totalitarian system." The metropole, by contrast, modeled social life after advanced, Western consumer society and the "techno-bureaucratic systems," which "have the advantage of integrating wage-earners into the welcoming institutions of an American-style civilization rather than subjugating them through political dictatorship."³ Understood along these lines, torture in Algeria was symptomatic of the backward and soon-to-be-defunct totalitarianism of French rule in the colonies. Its practice could only be seen as geographically and historically remote from the nascent mechanisms of soft power that were organizing social life in modernizing France. This "soft power" was most strongly associated with the nation's emergent commodity culture, the glossy world of plastics, electric appliances, and magazine advertising that made "present difficulties" easy to forget. Benjamin Stora notes the commonplace historical assertion that, "Within the euphoria of 'progress,' everyone gave in to the pressure of the immediate, caught up in the avalanche of novelties and

³ Edgar Morin, quoted in Tom McDonough, *The Beautiful Language of My Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), 82-83.

consumption [...]. The nascent modernity concealed the issues born of the ‘Algerian years’.”⁴

The third section of this chapter explores the parallels between the imaginary world of the past in *La Jetée*, and France’s then-current commodity culture. By placing Marker’s short in an interdisciplinary dialogue with contemporaneous French science-fiction films, structuralist theory, and literary criticism, I map out the various ways in which theory and artistic practice identified consumer society with the representational ideal of *visuality*, understood as the transformation of historical meaning into frozen image-signs.⁵ This emphasis on visuality was accompanied by a concomitant anxiety concerning the relationship between the subject and “things,” the former now placed in the tactical, *disembodied* position of “measuring, locating, limiting, defining,” to use Alain Robbe-Grillet’s terms.⁶ The “spectator of objects” identified by the period’s critical discourses is literalized by the position of the hero in *La Jetée*, whose entry into the film’s commodity world takes place in the absence of his physical body.

In the fourth and final section, I consider how Marker binds France’s consumer and colonial contexts together. Marker places the man’s disembodied gaze within the framing perspective of the camp police. By analyzing this gesture alongside Jacques Leenhardt’s deconstruction of Robbe-Grillet’s *La jalousie* (1957), I consider how modernization’s depersonalized obsession with objects and spatialized

⁴ Benjamin Stora, Jane Marie Todd, and William B. Quandt, *Algeria, 1830-2000: A Short History*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 93.

⁵ See: Nicholas Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look: A Counterhistory of Visuality*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 2011).

⁶ Alain Robbe-Grillet, *For a New Novel: Essays on Fiction*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Grove Press, 1966), 24.

arrangements had its grotesque equivalent in France's counter-insurgency operations in Algeria.⁷ Marker, perhaps more consciously than Robbe-Grillet, asks the spectator to see the modern through the lens of the colonial, and thus associates modern visuality with mechanisms of surveillance and policing. In its destabilization of the boundary between the modern and the colonial, the film also questions torture's proximity to the metropole. Consistent with my arguments in Chapters 1 and 2, I consider how torture manifests itself as a generalized atmosphere of horror affect, which permeates the texture of the film as a whole.

La Question

With The Question, everything changes.

– Jean-Paul Sartre⁸

On June 12, 1957, activist and journalist Henri Alleg was arrested by the military dictatorship in Algeria run by General Massu's Tenth Parachute Division. Alleg was the former editor of *Alger républicain*, a daily newspaper that was banned in 1955 by French authorities for presenting a diverse and democratic picture of Algerian national opinion. As a suspected accomplice of the FLN's underground networks, he had been in hiding since 1956, but was captured during a visit to the home of Maurice Audin, the French-Algerian mathematician whose "disappearance" prompted the formation of the Comité Audin, the largest independent anti-torture organization in

⁷ Fredric Jameson, "Modernism and its repressed: Robbe-Grillet as anti-colonialist," *Diacritics* 6, no. 2 (1976): 11.

⁸ Jean-Paul Sartre, "A Victory," in *Colonialism and Neocolonialism*, trans. Azzedine Haddour, Steve Brewer, and Terry McWilliams (New York: Routledge, 2006), 78.

Paris.⁹ Upon capture, Alleg was detained at the El-Biar “sorting centre” in the suburbs of Algiers. This was the hub of media scandal where Audin was drowned to death only weeks later and where Djamila Boupacha, the falsely accused FLN activist and symbol of Algerian resistance, was given what French army men termed “the bottle treatment” and forced to witness the near-fatal assault of her immediate family in 1960.¹⁰ Alleg was held at El-Biar for an entire month before being transferred to another prison, Lodi, where he drafted a detailed account of his torture which was smuggled to Paris through his lawyers, and eventually published under the title *La Question* in 1958.¹¹

Unlike Pierre Vidal-Naquet’s *Torture: Cancer of Democracy*, which analyzes how torture was normalized by an infrastructural machinery that assimilated the French police, the judicial system, and the popular press, Alleg’s book provides a phenomenological account of how torture in Algeria was experienced by its victims in practice. *La Question* follows Alleg through the anatomy of the El-Biar prison, describing environments ranging from an underground dungeon “where daylight never entered,” to a laboratory/infirmarium “overflowing with medical supplies in complete disorder,” to quasi-domestic *mise-en-scènes* like a living room and the kitchen of a future apartment with “a sink and an earthenware cooking stove, surmounted by a shelf on which the tiles had not yet been laid and only the metal frame was in place.”¹² Alleg recalls his encounters with French police and army

⁹ Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Torture: Cancer of Democracy* (London: Penguin, 1963), 78.

¹⁰ Simone de Beauvoir and Gisèle Halim, *Djamila Boupacha: The Story of the Torture of a Young Algerian Girl which Shocked Liberal French Opinion*, trans. Peter Green (New York: Macmillan, 1962).

¹¹ John Calder, “Foreword to the English Edition,” *The Question*, by Henri Alleg, trans. John Calder (London: John Calder, 1958), 7-9.

¹² Henri Alleg, *The Question*, trans. John Calder (London: John Calder, 1958), 48.

men who self-identified with the Gestapo and who vowed, prophetically, that “what we are doing here, we will do in France.”¹³ Over the course of the month designated by the book, he is repeatedly beaten to unconsciousness, subjected to various methods of electrical and water torture, and injected with “truth drugs” like penthanol. As such, *La Question* exposes the reader to a whole repertoire of horror imagery and sensation: “Suddenly, I felt as if a savage beast had torn the flesh from my body.”¹⁴ Alleg writes of the spasmodic and constrictive forms of pain that he experienced from the electric shocks administered through a repurposed military phone, of being blinded by the electrodes placed over his eyes, and of tightening his jaw on a rag to muffle the sounds of his screams. He also describes hallucinatory states and episodes, such as losing all sense of time and experiencing interior bodily sensations as living forms from without. The strangest of such episodes occurs when Alleg is drugged with penthanol, and, during the middle of an interrogation, finds himself displaced from the infirmary to a series of sites across Paris – “I was in the street, in an apartment, in a square” – sites that appear to him like disconnected “pictures.”¹⁵

Published by *Editions de minuit* on February 15, 1958, *La Question* sold 60,000 copies upon its first two weeks of release.¹⁶ Although it was banned by French authorities shortly thereafter for breaching national security, the book would go on to sell hundreds of thousands of copies throughout the year on the black market, making it an unofficial best-seller. It offered a visceral, first-person exposé of the systematic, industrialized nature of torture in Algeria, inspiring debates that, as Benjamin Stora

¹³ Alleg, 58.

¹⁴ Alleg, 55.

¹⁵ Alleg, 96.

¹⁶ Calder, 7.

argues, “deeply divided public opinion, the Church, the families, and the parties.”¹⁷ In addition, Alleg’s text, often considered in conjunction with the discourse surrounding Djamila Boupacha’s torture, was the subject of numerous aesthetic representations, such as the surrealist painter Matta’s award winning *La Question Djamila* (1962) and Robert Lapoujade’s *Triptyque sur la torture: en hommage à Djamila Boupacha et Henri Alleg* (1961).¹⁸ Direct passages of the book are read by the FLN characters in Godard’s politically ambivalent *Le Petit Soldat* (1963), whose bathroom torture sequences play out like dramatizations of Alleg’s torture, only with the Algerians as the perpetrators. Yet, as I will demonstrate in the remainder of this chapter and in Chapter 4, the discourse and imagery surrounding Alleg’s and Boupacha’s cases had “aesthetic consequences” far beyond works of art that cite these cases by name. Consider, for example, the profound correspondences between Alleg’s text and a film that may seem remote from the politics of anti-colonialism given its dominant framing by the discipline of film studies: Chris Marker’s *La Jetée*.

Colonialism

Marker’s science fiction *ciné-roman* occupies a crucial place within the historiography of European cinema. Long-established film scholars like Raymond Bellour, Roger Odin, Peter Wollen, and D.N. Rodowick have each singled out this short film, about a man who is thrust backward and forward in time to rescue the historical present from a nuclear holocaust, as *the* chief example of “cinematic

¹⁷ Stora, et al., 52.

¹⁸ McDonough, 229.

modernism.”¹⁹ For all of the above theorists, this modernism designates post-War European cinema’s shift away from the formal decorum and character-driven storytelling epitomized by Hollywood illusionism, toward a film grammar governed by principles of discontinuity, ambiguity, and reflexivity. Understood accordingly, Marker’s film stands in for a very broad revolution in film language, and that revolution’s attendant challenges to the history of Western metaphysics. Rodowick’s Deleuzian analysis of the film exemplifies this reading:

1962. The modern European cinema as well as the new American cinema, has displaced the Newtonian conception of space that characterizes the classical period. Chris Marker’s *La Jetée* depicts a not-so-distant future where a prisoner of war is subjected to a series of painful experiments that enable him to “travel” in time. Whether this passage is actual or physical, or mental or spiritual, is ambiguous. [...] This is another theory of mind and another logic of sense, defined by a decisive break with the earlier model.²⁰

Yet while the narrative of cinematic modernism has accorded *La Jetée* a central place within the debates over cinematic time, it has severely effaced the film’s engagement with the political and social history of France during the 1950s and early 1960s. More than an example for modernist reflexivity, *La Jetée* also concerns the relays between the carnal horrors of torture in Algeria and the idealized, commodity-fetish culture seizing hold of everyday life in the metropole.

Consider the scenes that take place within the film’s dominant setting – the network of underground concentration camps that provide the material backdrop to the hero’s mental displacements in time. Featuring Gestapo-like police agents who

¹⁹ Raymond Bellour, “The film stilled,” *Camera Obscura* 24 (1990): 98-123; Peter Wollen, “Fire and Ice,” in *The Photography Reader*, ed. Liz Wells (London: Routledge, 2003), 76-80; Roger Odin, “Le film de fiction menacé par la photographie et sauvé par la bande-son (à propos de *La Jetée* de Chris Marker),” *Cinéma de la modernité, Films, Théories*, eds. Dominique Chateau, André Gardies, and François Jost (Paris: editions Klincksieck, 1981), 147-172; David Norman Rodowick, *Gilles Deleuze’s Time Machine* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997).

²⁰ Rodowick, 4-5.

tyrannize the camp population with mind control experiments, the action in these scenes has often been thought to evoke vaguely both the societal traumas of and the contemporaneous anxieties around World War II and the Cold War, respectively. Certainly, the film does evoke these contexts, especially the latter in its topical emphasis on modern warfare as a problem of control over mental “spheres of influence” (or “brainwashing”) rather than territorial sovereignty. Yet, when returned to the political context of decolonization, the subject of the film Marker released in the following year, *Le Joli mai* (1963), it becomes apparent how explicitly these scenes, set in a dungeon “where daylight never enters,” resonate with the peculiar discourse and imagery surrounding torture in Algeria.

Like Alleg, the protagonist is blinded by the electrodes placed over his eyes, and tightens his teeth on the side of his bed to cope with the onslaught of torture (Figure 16). He also loses all sense of time and experiences interior mental states as “living forms, half seen, all mixed up together” with actual forms from without. Even the film’s dominant narrative device, the injections that send the unnamed man scattered across Paris, a Paris which appears as a series of disconnected photographs, echoes with the near-identical episode noted above in Alleg’s text (Figure 17).

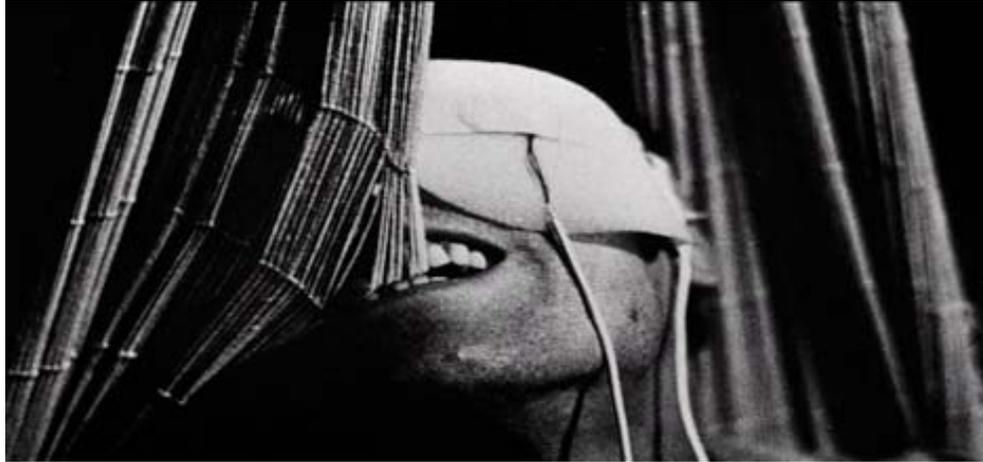


Figure 16.



Figure 17.

Beyond a set of narrative details, *La Jetée* also evokes the horror imagery and sensations described by Alleg's book. Marker recreates El-Biar's lack of daylight, Alleg's "impression of unreality, of nightmare," and the more generalized atmosphere of madness. He makes the spectator imagine screams that cannot be heard, and the pain of the man's stretched and contorted muscles. The stasis of the photographic image only amplifies the agony associated with the body's prolonged binding in

time.²¹ This is not to say, of course, that *La Question* is “the subject” of Marker’s film in the form of a coded reenactment. Rather, both Alleg’s text and the contemporaneous onslaught of media horror stories concerning torture in Algeria are the conditions of possibility for the specific forms through which the film represents state violence. Marker’s explicit evocation of these stories betrays an attempt to use science fiction as a medium to confront contemporary audiences with the period’s displaced social realities. It is toward his science fictional representation of the modern that I now turn.

Modernization

Marker’s film is, in fact, consistent with a body of French cinema in the 1950s and 1960s that deployed science fiction as a privileged mode through which to represent processes of modernization, such as the shift to mass consumption, the re-planning of urban space, and the increasing bureaucratization of everyday experience. The aspiration toward a depersonalized “functionalism” that united these processes was consistently cast in the dystopian terms of objectification, policing, and mind control. In Jacques Tati’s *Mon Oncle* (1958), for example, the artisanal world of small shops and community life linked to the figure of Mr. Hulot is juxtaposed against the centralized, technocratic “Plastac” factory and its domestic reflection in the Arpel family’s hypermodern home. Kristen Ross astutely observes how the latter, a sterile, showroom-like space of gleaming stainless steel surfaces and brightly coloured plastic furniture, demonstrates the period’s interior design ideal that “everything

²¹ Alleg, 59: “Instead of the sharp and rapid spasms that seemed to tear my body in two, a greater pain now stretched all my muscles and racked them a longer time.”

communicate.” In this functional space, human gesture is reduced to an after-thought of the pre-programmed correspondences between electric gadgets and appliances.²² By the politicized, late-1960s context of *Playtime* (1967), Tati demonstrates how the metropolis as a whole has become a petrified, geometric space, rendered transparent and uniform by glass towers and their cubicle interiors. Paris is reduced to its visual display, and the film’s American tourists gaze at the Eiffel tower not directly but through its glass reflection. Similarly, Godard’s *Alphaville* (1965) and Truffaut’s *Fahrenheit 451* (1966) mobilize images of an authoritarian future to reflect back at their contemporary “programmed society” and its draconian policing of discourse. The former’s “Alpha 60” computer and the latter’s “firemen” both purge the cultural imaginary of any poetic or historical artifacts that might threaten what Godard, in *2 ou 3 choses que je sais d’elle* (1967), called “the gestapo of the structures” (Figure 18).²³

²² Kristin Ross, *Fast cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 105.

²³ Allen Thiher, “Postmodern Dilemmas: Godard’s *Alphaville* and *Two or Three Things That I Know about Her*,” *boundary 2* 4, no. 3 (1976): 957.



Figure 18. Still from *Fahrenheit 451* (1966)

And in his time travel film, *Je t'aime, je t'aime* (1968), Resnais displaces *Les statues meurent aussi*'s (1953) analogy between mice in tanks and the African agricultural proletariat onto the new intermediary class of knowledge workers, as embodied in the figure of the protagonist, Ridder, the manager of a marketing firm. In a series of graphic matches, Resnais compares Ridder's attempt to map the effectiveness of his circulars through market research with the scientists' similar attempt to map the interior of Ridder's own psyche through their time travel experiments.

Yet it is Marker's time travel film that most literalizes Fredric Jameson's claim that the aim of science fiction is "not to give us 'images' of the future [...] but rather to defamiliarize and restructure our experience of our *present* [...], transforming our own present into the past of something yet to come."²⁴ Although a number of scholars have explored the metaphysical qualities of the past world

²⁴ Fredric Jameson, "Progress versus Utopia; Or, Can We Imagine the Future? (Progrès contre Utopie, ou: Pouvons-nous imaginer l'avenir?)," *Science Fiction Studies* (1982): 151-152.

induced by the experiments, less has been said about the almost aggressive manner in which the hero's memory engenders the simulated atmosphere of the film's *contemporary* post-War consumer society. In the words of the narrator, this is a "dateless world" that stuns the man "by its splendor" and surrounds him with "only fabulous materials: glass, plastics, terrycloth." Put differently, this past world is composed of those same materials that were currently introducing modularity and mobility into the schemes of interior design,²⁵ that were the show items of magazine advertising and major exhibitions like the *Salon des arts ménagers*, and that were the objects of critical scrutiny in Tati's cinema and Roland Barthes's early materialist semiotics.²⁶ Consistent with the increasingly *visual* economy of this commodity culture, Marker keeps the man at an optical distance in the dream world, filming him against the reflective surfaces of department store mirrors and window displays, while avoiding the fleshy close-ups of the camp scenes.²⁷ The dream world of the man's memory is thus associated with modernization not only by its objects and settings, but by the man's relation to those objects and settings. In the absence of his physical body, he is positioned as a *spectator of objects*, whose transcendental gaze is often directed toward a depopulated collection of images.

Here it should be noted that there was a recurrent tendency throughout the French art and militant cinemas of the 1950s and 1960s to represent the world of commodities in the absence of any human actors. In the prologue to Resnais and

²⁵ Edward Dimendberg, "'These are not exercises in style': *Le Chant du Styrene*," *October* 112, no. 1 (2005): 71.

²⁶ Roland Barthes, "Plastic," in *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), 97-99.

²⁷ On the relationship between the close-up and "the flesh," see Marker's essay on *La passion de Jeanne d'Arc* (1928): Chris Marker, "Un film d'auteur: La passion de Jeanne d'Arc," in *Regards neufs sur le cinéma*, ed. Jacques Chevallier (Paris: Seuil, 1953), 249-255.

Raymond Queneau's commissioned short, *Le Chant du Styrène* (1959), for example, a succession of vibrantly glowing plastic products – ladles shaped like ferns, bowls, a tennis racket – are presented in close-up, without material origins in the world, but simply “there” in a timeless, black void (“O plastic, where do you come from? Who are you?”). In his analysis of the film, Edward Dimendberg notes the apparent autonomy of the film's objects:

Confronting the viewer with objects that have no users, the film implies the autonomy of the former, as if to problematize the status of people within this domain. [...] *The Song of Styrene* outlines a set of structural relations (of manufacturing techniques and tangible forms) that compose a *langue* of plastic objects, uninflected by the distinctive *parole* of its users.²⁸

Another contemporary short documentary, Guy Debord's *Critique de la séparation* (1961), advances a more aggressive and explicit attack on the divide between

France's reified object-culture and the historical world of human mediation.

Intercutting (not so) subliminal images of pinball machines, comic books, and pin-up girls with documentary footage of atomic warfare and colonial violence, the film is a precursor to Godard's sustained critique of consumer society in *2 ou 3 choses que je sais d'elle* (1967).²⁹ At the conclusion of the latter film, a depopulated *mise-en-scène* of Pax and Tide detergent products are shown to be the “jumbo-sized brainwashing” agents that enable the masses to sleep through the historical struggles posed by the housing problem and the Vietnam War.³⁰

Modern cinema's representation of “spectators of objects” echoed contemporaneous critical discourses surrounding mass society, which asserted that

²⁸ Dimendberg, 72.

²⁹ See: Tom McDonough, “Calling from the Inside: Filmic Topologies of the Everyday,” *Grey Room* 26 (2007): 6-29.

³⁰ I discuss Godard's representation of the objects of consumer culture in Chapters 4 and 5.

objects no longer functioned to fulfill visceral needs, but that needs were directed to suit the exigencies of mass production. Objects were increasingly valued for their cultural, semiotic connotations, and the subject's transitive relationship to things was transformed into a tactical role of administering signs, or of "engineering atmosphere." In *The System of Objects*, for example, Jean Baudrillard rightly pointed to the ubiquitous tendency within the period's advertising, as illustrated by this furniture ad in *L'Express* (Figure 19), as well as a number of the "peace time" images in *La Jetée* (Figure 20), to remove the subject from the image altogether, since "his" role is coterminous with the order he puts into things, an order he experiences from without.³¹



Figure 19. Advertisement in *L'Express*, 1960.

³¹ Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*, trans. James Benedict (London: Verso, 1996), 26.



Figure 20.

The association between mass consumption, spectatorship, and a disavowal of the body was also at the kernel of Debord's notion of the spectacle as "capital accumulated to the point where it becomes an image":

Since the spectacle's job is to cause a world that is no longer directly perceptible to be *seen* via specialized mediations, it is inevitable that it should elevate the human sense of sight to the special place once occupied by touch; the most abstract of the senses, and the most easily deceived, sight is naturally the most readily adaptable to present-day society's generalized abstraction.³²

By contrast, the motif of the spectator of objects, or "the voyeur," was cast in almost utopian terms by Robbe-Grillet's concomitant theory and practice of the new novel (also called the "école du regard"). In the essays that make up *For a New Novel* (originally published as *Pour un Nouveau Roman* in 1963), Robbe-Grillet consistently targets the inadequacy of literary realism, typified by the works of Honoré de Balzac, to mediate the era of mass culture, large structures, and "administrative numbers." While Balzac's realism reduced things to props for the unfolding of causal, character-driven narrative, the new novel would displace "man" from his role as center of the universe, and accord objects an autonomous presence in

³² Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone, 1994), 17.

the order of things. Rendering objects exterior to human passion, however, also meant renouncing the visceral language still embedded in an intellectual climate largely defined by existentialism. In his polemics against Sartre, Robbe-Grillet privileges sight as the best weapon to keep things at an analytical distance:

From day to day, we witness the growing repugnance felt by people of greater awareness for words of a visceral, analogical, or incantatory character. On the other hand, the visual or descriptive adjective, the word that contents itself with measuring, locating, limiting, defining, indicates a difficult but most likely direction for a new art of the new novel.³³

For all of the intellectual movements above, modernization is chiefly associated with themes of “visuality,” understood, in this first instance, as the transformation of history into image-signs.³⁴

Whether the visualization of history was framed as an emancipation from anthropomorphic, “great man” conceptions of progress,³⁵ or, by contrast, as an effacement of the social history of objects and events,³⁶ all of the intellectual movements above relate modern visuality to the motif of the “freezing of time.”³⁷ Not surprisingly, this same relation is what defines the world of the past in *La Jetée*,

³³ Robbe-Grillet, 24.

³⁴ Also see, Martin Jay, “The Camera as Memento Mori: Barthes, Metz, and *Cahiers du Cinéma*,” in *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century Thought* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994), 435-492.

³⁵ In liberating objects and gestures from the conventions of realist representation, Robbe-Grillet claimed that modern narrative—in both literature and cinema—ultimately broke with an outmoded, humanist conception of time. No longer the measurement of man’s actions, time in the new novel was synonymous with the work’s description of its own object, or, put differently, with its own formal processes: “It is no longer here a question of time passing, since gestures paradoxically are shown on the contrary frozen in the moment [...] The entire interest of the descriptive pages ... [is] in the very movement of the description” (Robbe-Grillet, 155). Echoing the critical vocabularies of the period, he describes the disconnected episodes that make up *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961) as occurring in a closed “perpetual present,” in which the “last year” of the film’s title takes place before the spectator’s eyes in the here-and-now—“an elsewhere is no more possible than a formerly” (Robbe-Grillet, 153).

³⁶ Debord, 114: “The spectacle, being the reigning social organization of a paralyzed history, of a paralyzed memory, of an abandonment of history founded in historical time, is in effect a *false consciousness of time*” (emphasis in original).

³⁷ See the section entitled “Immobile Time” in Ross, 176-196.

where images of classical statuary, ruins, department store interiors, the jetty at Orly, and simulacra of Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958) all "merge" indistinguishably in the "imaginary museum" of the hero's memory. Recalling Marker's conclusion to *Toute la mémoire du monde* (1956), discussed in Chapter 2, the disappearance of the historicity of distinct cultural forms into a homogenous collection of images is equated with a numbed kind of happiness. As the voiceover suggests, the man and the woman "are without memory, without plans. Time builds itself painlessly around them. Their only landmarks are the flavor of the moment they are living, and the markings on the walls." This perpetual present is reproduced in the man's libidinal investment in the woman, which, consistent with the ideology of advertising, is sustained as a "fort-da" game of thwarted fulfillment.

Displacement

What kind of relationship does *La Jetée* establish between these two historically suggestive contexts – one associated with the violent repression of the counter-insurgency operation in Algeria, and the other with the idealized soft power of consumer society in France? An inroad to this question comes from Marker's early writings as a critic for the journal *L'Esprit*, which demonstrate a sustained concern with the cinema's capacity to trouble the distinction between physical and imaginary realities. His thoughts on *Orphée* (1950) are particularly instructive in this regard, insofar as Jean Cocteau's film, in its similar themes of time travel and parallel worlds, is one of *La Jetée*'s key inter-texts. In his 1950 review, Marker argues that the

atmosphere of fear *Orphée* creates through the tension between its mental and material worlds is a product of Cocteau's role as a "reverse illusionist":

Dès lors, s'il dévoile son jeu, sic et illusionniste à rebours découvre ses appareils, ouvre ses armoires, révèle que sa magie blanche est magie noire, ses pigeons vivants, ses femmes réellement coupées en morceaux, et marche vraiment sur la mort, son public le lâche.³⁸

Cocteau engenders the immaterial reality of dreams and "internal adventures" with the visceral trace of flesh and blood by transforming the former into a scene of actual violence, thus destabilizing the boundary between myth and everyday social reality – what Marker calls the film's "incarnated metaphysics." He also emphasizes that, rather than "using" the contemporary setting as a means to make myth intelligible, Cocteau's aim is to present the film's French audiences with the horror of their own (post-Occupation) society in its state of fleshy decomposition ("la mythologie d'une société en décomposition"):

[...] la réalité la plus proche de nous, celle de la guerre, des messages de radio, des ruines, des tribunaux d'épuration. Ce qui ne revient pas à dire que Cocteau "utilise" les éléments de l'époque pour nous rendre le mythe sensible (et il faut toute la légèreté d'un critique de *Combat* nouvelle manière pour s'y tromper). Car s'il y a utilisation, c'est l'époque qui a commencé.³⁹

Likewise, I suggest that there is a profoundly social content to the series of displacements of world that constitute the narrative in *La Jetée*.

Marker's film asks the spectator to see modernity from the perspective of colonialism by situating the man's disembodied look within the framing context of the camp and its police. Though associated with totalitarian repression ("the victors who preside over a kingdom of rats"), these figures, with their gratuitous telescopic glasses, are ultimately cast as agents of surveillance "who spy even on dreams." In

³⁸ Chris Marker, "Orphée," *L'Esprit* 18, no. 11 (November 1950): 694-695.

³⁹ Marker, "Orphée," 696.

the rare instances when the man explicitly senses their look, the happiness associated with commodity culture and its phony timelessness is transformed into feelings of dread and imprisonment. One of these instances occurs when the man, staring at the woman as she lies against a barred fence, becomes aware of the division between his mind and body in time, revealing the world of his perceptual present as a world of the past. By corollary, the woman begins to take on uncanny qualities of petrification: “In order to be sent back to her, she is dead.” In a later scene, the voiceover narration reiterates the couple’s happiness as they go “on countless walks in which an unspoken trust, an unadulterated trust will grow between them, without memories or plans.” This security is interrupted, however, at “the moment where he feels, ahead of them, a barrier” and is suddenly placed under the look of his torturers in the camps. What follows from the man’s psychic displacements between the camps and the metropole is thus a concomitant displacement of visibility, now redefined in the colonial terms of the authoritative *policing* of the visible world.⁴⁰

As made evident by the analysis of Resnais’s short documentaries in Chapter 2, *La Jetée*’s gesture of framing modernization within the context of colonial visibility links to a broader tendency within the period’s modernist film and literary practice.⁴¹

Recall that this same gesture concludes *Toute la mémoire du monde*, in which the

⁴⁰ Mirzoeff, 3-5, and Chapter 5, “Antifascist Neorealisms: North-South and the Permanent Battle of Algiers,” 196-231.

⁴¹ As Robert Stam and Louise Spence argue, the link between optical instruments, transcendental vision, and European colonial ideology has a long history, dating back to the voyages of discovery in the Renaissance period. Indeed, this dynamic was exemplified by the telescope, which offers the illusion of intimacy, while keeping its subjects at a controllable distance: “Conventional literary and filmic narratives about “discovery,” from Columbus’ Diaries through Robinson Crusoe to the quincentennial productions about Columbus, assume the point of view of the discoverers. Most discovery narratives place the reader on a European ship, the land is sighted (usually through an anachronistic telescope), and the “Indians” are glimpsed on the beach or behind the trees.” Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism* (London: Routledge, 1994), 71.

disembodied and calculating look that presides over the Bibliothèque nationale is subliminally associated with the menacing and watchful eye of the police. A more explicit example of this displacement occurs in the 1957 novel, *La Jalousie*, in which Robbe-Grillet's "voyeur," the pure look that "contents itself with measuring, locating, limiting, defining," manifests itself in the historically loaded figure of the plantation "overseer."⁴² In this case, the visual distance that the author championed in his theoretical writings for maintaining "things in their respective place" is transformed into a pathological form of visual inspection, liquidating the distinction between the plantation's banana trees, its fields, and its slave workers. Jacques Leenhardt argues persuasively in his simultaneous deconstruction and critique of the novel, that colonialism thus functions as the trans-historical situation in which Robbe-Grillet's zeal for the visual confronts its limits. By returning to the writings of anti-colonial philosophy, so haphazardly dismissed by the new novelist, he reminds us that the transcendental ideal of a look that sees without being seen – "privilège de voir sans qu'on le voie"⁴³ – is precisely what defines the ontological inequality between the colonizer and the colonized, who is deprived of the right to look. But Leenhardt also detects a situated social content in the novel's motifs of surveillance and hyper-geometrical arrangements ("géométrisme hyperbolique" or even "géométrisme morbide"): the relocation of Algeria's indigenous populations to the concentration

⁴² As Nicholas Mirzoeff has recently shown, "visuality's first domains were the slave plantation, monitored by the surveillance of the overseer, operating as a surrogate for the sovereign. This sovereign surveillance was reinforced by violent punishment but sustained a modern division of labor. [...] Sovereign authority was thus delegated to the plantation, where it was managed in a system of visualized surveillance" (2, 10).

⁴³ Jacques Leenhardt, *Lecture Politique du Roman: La Jalousie d'Alain Robbe-Grillet* (Paris: Les éditions de minuit, 1973). Here, Leenhardt cites Sartre's preface to *Orphée noir* (1949): "[...] le blanc a joui trois mille ans du privilège de voir sans qu'on le voie; il était regard pur, la lumière de ses yeux tirait toute chose l'ombre natale, la blancheur de sa peau c'était un regard encore, de la lumière condensée" (51).

camps and sorting centers where torture was performed (“regroupement des populations paysannes pendant la guerre d’Algerie”).⁴⁴ What haunts this novel about a virtual overseer who compulsively delimits his “property” from an elevated distance is the spectre of a dying colonial situation. The pathological character of this situation came into full relief during the war’s counter-insurgency operations, in which the French attempted to pacify the chaos of the rebellion by segregating the Algerians within exposed, grid-like spaces:

Dans l’ambiance du colonialism finissant, la géométrie morbide prend donc une signification idéologique très nette. Il est signe de l’affolement du pouvoir cartésien face à une réalité qui ne se laisse plus saisir, qui se rebelle. L’effort pour l’y contraindre outrepassa alors le cadre “raisonnable” de la géométrie et s’emballe en un délire schizomorphe.⁴⁵

Marker’s films about Paris in the early 1960s suggest that the metropole itself has become the site where this “rational” but ultimately “schizophrenic” colonial vision reclaimed its segregating authority.

Consider the representation of the “new world” in *La Jetée*, or what the voiceover narration aptly calls Paris’s “pacified future.” What initially appear to be images under a microscope are described by the voiceover narration as the bird’s eye views of a city, which is reduced to a suffocating grid of overlapping lines (or “géométrisme morbide”). The final images of the past leading into this dystopian future are, not incidentally, of the natural history museum, that heterotopia which maps space into concentrations of “species.” One might speculate on how these images of Paris resonate with the film Marker made during the same period, *Le Joli mai*, which documents both the inflation of the state’s presence into urban space and

⁴⁴ Leenhardt, 54-55.

⁴⁵ Leenhardt, 55. The reference is to the final part of Descartes’s *Discourse on the Method* (1637).

the development of the massive housing complexes on the city's borders. During a sequence showing an Arab man at work in the construction of this racially segregated space, the narration reminds us that: "In the month of May 1962, during the euphoria of the Evian Agreement, we tend a bit to forget that the poorest worker in the colonizing country always has a poorer worker in the colonized country and that this aspect of reality *survives colonization and its end.*"

If Marker suggests that colonialism was not only policed from France's emergent consumer society, but that this society was itself complicit in the propagation of a kind of colonial visuality, then how does the horror of torture in *Algeria manifest itself* in the film's consumer setting? It would be imprecise to argue that the world of nightmare and agony conditioned by Alleg's text constitutes something like the film's "repressed content," emerging through scattered and localizable symptoms. Rather, Marker expresses the question of torture in a manner consistent with how the period's intellectuals and activists discussed the crisis of French-Algeria at the time: as "everywhere and nowhere" or "the *there is*" (see Chapter 2); as between I and the Other; and as an invisible presence that nonetheless *permeated* France at the level of its pores. *La Jetée* superimposes the context of torture in Algeria over consumer society, creating an affective, abject frontier between the two. As with his reading of Cocteau's *Orphée*, Marker invests the immaterial reality of dreams and "internal adventures" with the visceral qualities of flesh and blood. By overlaying the space of the camps with the space of the museum, or faint images of the man's writhing body over the hypnotic scene of the department

store (Figure 21), Marker presents “culture” as the site where France went to purify itself from the crimes of the dirty war.



Figure 21.

Marker’s film transforms the modern settings and institutions that are supposed to further the citizen’s world – for example, domestic shelter and science/medicine – into sources of pain and the “unmaking” of subjectivity.⁴⁶ And through the temporal manipulations afforded by science fiction, he reverses the state sponsored discourse that relegated torture to a thing of the past while posing modernization as the one and only present. To watch *La Jetée* is to be reminded of the simple fact that torture *is happening*.

My emphasis on horror accords with the film’s two most famous scenes: the first, of the woman’s gaze at the camera, and the second, of the man’s death. The former has traditionally been understood in terms of *jouissance*, an ephemeral

⁴⁶ Scarry.

moment of relief and expenditure in which the man, and by corollary, the spectator, are able to *enjoy* the woman.⁴⁷ Yet, as Julia Kristeva makes clear, “*jouissance* alone causes the abject to exist as such.”⁴⁸ Throughout the film, the man’s deferred attraction to the woman is founded on a particular kind of subject position, “the right to look without being looked at.” In this moment of exchange, reciprocity, and collectivity, the voyeuristic distance that preserves the boundaries of individualism is thus placed under duress. The man is here exposed as an object of the gaze, and it is thus not incidental that the woman’s animism immediately returns him, frozen, to the repulsive and obscene enjoyment of his torturers, calling the politics of looking into question. This question will be further discussed at length in Chapter 4, in which I explore how the sadism of torture, a sadism that “*enjoys* the possession of the Other’s flesh,” but that also “enjoys its own non-incarnation,”⁴⁹ was understood by anti-colonial philosophy as co-extensive with the structure of the colonial look itself.⁵⁰

Yet it is the narration’s conclusion, in which the man is gunned down by the camp police at the site of his privileged memory, that most resonates with my consideration of the film as a meditation on the displacements, or the abject frontier, between France’s consumer society and its colonial discipline. Here it is productive to draw upon Joan Copjec’s reading of Marker’s short as a film that is ultimately not

⁴⁷ Joan Copjec, “Vampires, breast-feeding, and anxiety,” *October* 58 (1991): 37.

⁴⁸ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, ed. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 9.

⁴⁹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1984), 518.

⁵⁰ Consider, for example, Frantz Fanon’s description of how the colonial look is interiorized by the colonized subject in *Black Skin, White Masks*: “I am being dissected under white eyes, the only real eyes. I am *fixed*. Having adjusted their microtomes, they objectively cut away slices of my reality. I am laid bare. I feel, I see in those white faces that it is not a new man who has come in, but a new kind of man, a new genus. Why, it’s a negro.” Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 116.

about the need to remember but about the necessity of forgetting. For Copjec, what the fascist world of the camps (and of torture) cannot “survive is the hero’s refusal to reject this memory. It is he who has condemned this world to destruction; the world is in danger as long as the memory endures.”⁵¹ It is crucial to append to this reading the fact that the film’s closing scene (Figure 22) incorporates Robert Capa’s famous Spanish civil war photograph of the fallen Republican soldier as its explicit inter-text (Figure 23).



Figure 22.

⁵¹ Copjec, 37.



Figure 23.

In these final images of state violence, Marker evokes that entire *zeitgeist* of 1930s photo-journalism, of the “picture stories” in weekly magazines like *Vu*, *Life*, and *Picture Post* that visually documented the struggle against the spread of global fascism.⁵² For the torture camps to survive, then, the *political*, counter-visual memory of war, the documentation of state crime and resistance, must be forgotten and scratched from the record. As I have demonstrated throughout this dissertation, it was precisely this kind of photographic representation that was erased by the state’s Ministry of Information in the case of France’s own fascist violence against the Algerians, an erasure that profoundly contributed to the French discourse around the Algerian war as something which was felt, rather than seen.⁵³ By displacing the figure

⁵² Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Picador, 2003), 32-35.

⁵³ “As soon as we try to get hold of the documentary evidence, our open society turns into a tropical rain forest: we vaguely hear, a long way off, the sound of a tom-tom, but we go round in circles when we try to get closer to it.” Jean-Paul Sartre, “You Are Wonderful,” in *Colonialism and Neocolonialism*, trans. Azzedine Haddour, Steve Brewer, and Terry McWilliams (New York: Routledge, 2006), 66.

of the camp police into the film's Parisian setting, Marker also reminds us of the metropole's failure to quarantine itself from the violence of colonial governance, which will become a key topic of Chapter 4.

In this chapter, I have argued that the colonial situation in Algeria constitutes more than a "spectral" referent of Marker's influential science-fiction film. *La Jetée's* representation of state violence is explicitly conditioned by the material discourses that introduced the question of torture to a broad French audience. These discourses also inform the perspective through which the film looks back at the metropole, revealing the nation's nascent commodity culture as a site of displaced colonial discipline. Now having introduced the topics of torture in Algeria, the disembodied ideals of everyday consumer society in mainland France, and their abject relation, I will provide a more sustained analysis of this dynamic in Chapter 4. Chapter 4 considers the violence of colonial Algeria in a more systematic and sustained fashion, by analyzing its institutional practice, its ties to the machinery of the French state, its supporting ideologies, and its installation in Paris. I then consider how this violence permeated modern French cinema's representation of everyday life in the metropole through an exploration of a number of films, including *Cléo de 5 à 7* (1962), *Les yeux sans visage* (1960), and *Muriel, ou le temps d'un retour* (1963).

4

Colonial Abjection: The Question of Torture in Modern French Cinema

Algeria is irreducibly present in France as is France in Algeria. On either side, the 'foreign body' is all the more impossible to eliminate as it is not due solely to physical presences, but also to memory and the constitution of identity; each being affected by an interior difference, an essential noncontemporaneity to itself.

– Etienne Balibar¹

Although it often has to do with death or, if you like, with the killing of helpless victims, horrorism is characterized by a particular form of violence that exceeds death itself. This is starkly evidenced in the infinite scene of torture, a word whose etymological root lies in the Latin verb 'torquere' (supplying English with verbs 'to torque' and 'to distort' and the nouns 'torture,' 'torment,' 'torque', 'torch,' and 'tort' but normally translated as 'to twist'): to torture is to twist and distort the body, to make it 'a body broken to pieces by tormentum.' ... The crime discloses its profundity, going to the very roots of the human condition, which suffers offense at the ontological level.

– Adriana Cavarero²

Introduction

This chapter advances an analysis of the question of torture in colonial Algeria, and explains how the spread of torture permeated the French cinema of the early 1960s. Through my discussion of *La Jetée* in the previous chapter, I showed how Chris Marker mobilized cultural discourses associated with France's use of torture so as to trouble certain ideals of French modernization, particularly, the aspiration toward a disembodied, visual control over the world of things. Seen from the perspective of the

¹ Étienne Balibar, "Algeria, France: One nation or two," in *Giving Ground: The Politics of Proximity*, eds. Joan Copjec and Michael Sorkin (London: Verso, 1999): 167-168.

² Adriana Cavarero, *Horrorism: Naming Contemporary Violence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 32.

concentration camps, this very ideal of “the transcendental look” takes on the pathological associations of the colonial counter-insurgency. Here, I aim to demonstrate that Marker’s gesture of displacing France’s consumer and colonial contexts is resonant with the contemporary films of the Left Bank generally, while also placing the question of torture within a larger social context.

The first half of the chapter considers France’s use of torture in Algeria from diverse historical perspectives, questioning how it mutated over time, the ways in which it interpellated the French government within a broader machinery of deception, and the ideological justifications that supported its continuation. How did a nation that prides itself as the author of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and as a proponent of international human rights treaties justify the most grotesque of all human rights violations on such an industrial scale? After discussing France’s historically short-sighted arguments in favour of torture (for example, “ticking time bomb” scenarios), I consider how torture found a deeper justification in the ideology of the civilizing mission, and its division between the colonizer and the colonized in terms of separate species. It was the latent, yet historically embedded, perception of the colonized as “not yet man” that framed the Algerian insurgents, if not the entire population, as outside the law. At the conclusion of this section, I make it clear that the violence of colonial Algeria, in relation to both terrorism and torture, had fully invaded “civilized” mainland France by the early 1960s.

In the latter half of the chapter, I analyze how torture manifests itself, explicitly or implicitly, in a number of the period’s French films, including *Cléo de 5 à 7* (1962), and *Muriel, ou le temps d’un retour* (1963). In considering these films

collectively, I argue that French cinema tended to present torture through themes and formal motifs of *abjection*. I choose “abjection” for a number of reasons and against the concepts, including “trauma” and the “uncanny,” which have conventionally been deployed to articulate Algeria’s supposedly “submerged” relation to the period’s cinema.³ First, while films like *Cléo* and *Muriel* have been subject to scrupulous structural and narratological analyses, a different set of concerns emerges when one returns to their immediate critical reception, which stresses their affective qualities and, specifically, their affective qualities of horror. This horror was framed as neither repressed nor submerged, but identified with *physical* sensations of nausea, disgust, and repulsion. Indeed, a common trope of the period’s Left Bank cinema is to pair the theme of colonial Algeria with images that either present the body in pain or that distort its figural unity. Moreover, these images of disgust are frequently mediated through the impressions of women, the subjects of France’s internal civilizing mission. Fetishized and dismembered by the society of the spectacle, women were never accorded the privilege of occupying modernization’s idealized subject positions, to become “spectators of objects.” Women, as Kristen Ross reminds us, “are the everyday: its managers, its *embodiment*.”⁴

Second, I use the term abjection because it illuminates the boundary problems of the frontier and of radical, spatial dislocation.⁵ Throughout this dissertation, I have argued that colonialism in Algeria, generally, and the practice of torture, specifically,

³ Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism* (London: Routledge, 1994), 211, 245; Guy Austin, “Trauma, cinema and the Algerian war,” *New Readings* 10 (2011): 18-25.

⁴ Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 77, first emphasis in original, second emphasis added.

⁵ “[...] there is nothing either objective or objectal to the abject. It is simply a frontier.” Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, ed. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 9.

were organized around strategies of containment. These strategies took both repressive and ideological forms, as in the attempts to relocate Algeria's indigenous populations into controlled sorting centers, and in the imperative to quarantine France's identity and international reputation from the realities of the dirty war – an imperative crucial to the discourses of modernization.⁶ Yet, as Diana Taylor argues, torture is precisely that which cannot be placed in a geographical or historical vacuum. Torture “crosses the limit” and “undermines all boundaries and conventions set up by societies to contain and rationalize violence – to ‘limit the evil.’”⁷ In the case of the Franco-Algerian War, conscript soldiers, like the character of Bernard in *Muriel*, carried the trace of torture back to the mainland. The penetration of colonial violence into the most intimate spheres of everyday life obscured the dividing line between civilized and uncivilized France, and the films discussed in this chapter present characters who are lost in their surroundings, outcasts and wanderers on a drift.⁸ And this indiscernibility concerning the boundaries of civilized culture takes my inquiry from the question of the body to the body politic, to the failed separation between French and Algerian national identities. For Etienne Balibar, the imperial trace remains so embedded within both France's and Algeria's national histories that, even into the present, their relation constitutes a “non-whole frontier,” which does

⁶ See Jean-François Lyotard, “The ‘Counterrevolutionary’ War, Colonial Society, and de Gaulle,” in *Political Writings*, trans. Bill Readings with Kevin Paul Geiman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 215-224.

⁷ “It crosses the limit, threatening to corrode Enlightenment distinctions between the human and inhuman and eviscerating international agreements differentiating between the legitimate and illegitimate use of force; just and dirty wars, invasions, and occupations; and lawful and unlawful combatants.” Diana Taylor, “Double-blind: The torture case,” *Critical Inquiry* 33, no. 4 (2007): 711.

⁸ “The one by whom the abject exists is thus a deject,” Kristeva argues, “always asking ‘Where am I?’ instead of ‘Who am I?’ For the space that engrosses the deject, the excluded, is never *one*, nor *homogenous* nor *totalizable*, but essentially divisible, foldable, and catastrophic. [...] A tireless builder, the deject is in short a stray.” Kristeva, 8.

“not make two, but something like *one and a half*, as if their addition always already contributed a part of the other.”⁹ Films like *Cléo* and *Muriel* not only give expression to colonialism as the “interior-alterity” that France “carries within itself, and, for the most part denies”¹⁰ – Cléo’s cancer, the figure of “Muriel” herself – but foreshadow the nation’s colonial identity as a problem that will plague the future.

The final reason why I identify the films discussed in this chapter with the problem of abjection is because they describe a fundamentally “narcissistic crisis” of national identity.¹¹ Until now, I have explored how the French cinema of the 1950s and 1960s and, specifically, of the Left Bank, mobilizes horror as “political affect.” Horror in the films discussed thus far triggered a reflexive gaze upon national identity (“are their faces really different from our own?”), and a rejection of the state criminality that was operating in the French public’s name. In the films discussed in this chapter, however, horror is met with a conservative response, a retreat back into the shelter of identity and the ideology of “happiness.” Rather than fostering the image of a relational subjectivity between the shared cause of the French and the Algerians, these films diagnose, and are perhaps even complicit with, what Simone de Beauvoir called a cultural “tetanus of the imagination.”¹² Chapter 5, however, considers how the capacity to imagine such a relational subjectivity between the causes of anti-capitalism and anti-imperialism re-emerged in the French cinema of the late 1960s, particularly around the issue of the Vietnam War.

⁹ Balibar, 164, emphasis in original.

¹⁰ Balibar, 162.

¹¹ Kristeva, 14.

¹² Simone de Beauvoir, *Hard Times: Force of Circumstance, vol. II: 1952–1962* (Originally published as *La force des choses* [1992]), trans. Richard Howard (New York: Paragon House, 1994), 88.

Torture in Algeria: Practice and Ideology

Can a great nation, liberal by tradition, allow its institutions, its army, and its systems of justice to degenerate over the span of a few years as a result of the use of torture, and by its concealment and deception of such a vital issue call the whole Western concept of human dignity and the rights of the individual into question?

– Pierre Vidal-Naquet¹³

In Chapter 1, I described how torture in Algeria was largely motivated by the structural exigencies of the war; specifically, the need to extract intelligence from the O.P.A. unit responsible for coordinating the revolutionary leaders in the villages, and for collecting funds and provisions. Although torture was practiced by local police prefects even before the FLN insurgency, with the voting of the special powers on March 12, 1956, and the installation of Massu's "paras" on January 7, 1957, torture became a dominant and all-pervasive strategy against the country's indigenous people. I also explained that the French military could not be held exclusively accountable for the spread of torture, since its practice was known, and thus tacitly condoned, by the French judicial system, government, and press. The official inquiries conducted by Inspector-General Roger Wullaume ("the Wullaume report"), along with the "permanent commission to safeguard individual rights and liberties," revealed the specific details and scope of torture practices across Algeria's sorting centers, but failed to affect French state intervention even in the highest

¹³ Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Torture: Cancer of Democracy: France and Algeria 1954-62* (London: Penguin, 1963), 15.

profile cases.¹⁴ Throughout the 1950s in mainland France, a generalized imperative toward self-censorship was issued by sources ranging from the editors of newspapers (Jean-Marie Domenach at *l'Esprit*, for example) to the highest levels of government; De Gaulle famously evaded the word “torture” and claimed that it had died with the Fourth Republic.¹⁵

As suggested by Vidal-Naquet above, the ubiquity of torture in Algeria threatened to completely degrade the legacy of French Republicanism initiated by *La Declaration des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen* (1789). In addition to the ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity, the declaration ascribed natural rights to the citizen, such as the “security” of the body, which were inalienable by law.¹⁶ Following the atrocities of World War II, the principles subtending the declaration had a major effect on the construction of international human rights charters – the *Charter of Human Rights* (1945), and the United Nations General Assembly’s *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948) – of which France was an early and eager proponent.¹⁷ How did a nation that prides itself as an international leader of human rights legislation possibly justify the implementation of torture on such an industrial scale?

Its official justifications were, in fact, couched in the same terms that strongly informed the Bush administration’s spin on human rights violations in Iraq during our own time. France was fighting a “new kind of war” against a savage and invisible

¹⁴ The full Wuillaume report is reprinted in the appendix of Vidal-Naquet, 169-179.

¹⁵ Rita Maran, *Torture: The Role of Ideology in the French-Algerian War* (New York: Praeger, 1989), 24.

¹⁶ “Any man is presumed to be innocent until he has been found guilty; in the event therefore of his arrest being considered essential, any act of violence other than that necessary to assure his detention must be severely punished by law.” *La Declaration des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen*, quoted in Vidal-Naquet, 19.

¹⁷ Maran, 7-10.

army of terrorists who could only be brought to justice through the confessions obtained from torture.¹⁸ In anticipation of the pro-torture arguments that pervaded the mainstream American media in the early 2000s (for example, Alan Dershowitz's case for "torture warrants" on *60 Minutes*, or the typical situations played out on the television program *24*),¹⁹ the war's strategists (Colonel Roger Trinquer) and apologists (Father Delarue) took recourse in "ticking time bomb" scenarios.²⁰ The war was framed as a battle against time, in which French military officials were caught between the options of awaiting an impending terrorist attack, or torturing the low level "bandits" whose information could lead to FLN higher-ups and thus save hundreds of lives. One thinks here of Colonel Mathieu's famous "organigramme" in *The Battle of Algiers* (1966). Such hypothetical arguments not only placed the practice of torture in an ethical and historical vacuum, but hardly reflected the realities of a war in which Algeria's entire Arab population was the possible subject of routinized and arbitrary persecution.²¹

The indiscriminate nature of persecution in Algeria leads to what was a second pervasive justification for the practice of torture, which perhaps troubles

¹⁸ As one of the war's key historians, Neil McMaster, argues, "The French army believed that it was confronted with a totally new form of Maoist-inspired guerrilla warfare, known as *la guerre révolutionnaire*, in which Algerian nationalists were prepared to use systematic terror, including bomb attacks on both indigenous and French civilians. Military exponents of revolutionary warfare, not unlike the present Bush administration, held an apocalyptic vision of a global threat from the forces of evil, communism and its proxy, Islamic fanaticism, to destroy western Christian civilisation." Neil McMaster, "Torture: From Algiers to Abu Ghraib," *Race & Class* 46, no. 2 (2004): 4.

¹⁹ See, J. Jeremy Wisniewski, *Understanding Torture* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010); Susan Sontag, "Regarding the torture of others," *New York Times* 23, no. 05 (2004): 04; Naomi Klein, "Torture's Part of the Territory," *Los Angeles Times* (2005, June 7): 25; James D. Le Sueur, *Uncivil War: Intellectuals and Identity Politics during the Decolonization of Algeria* (Omaha: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 295-300; J. Jeremy Wisniewski, "Hearing a Still-Ticking Bomb Argument: A Reply to Bufacchi and Arrigo," *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 26, no. 2 (2009): 205-209.

²⁰ Vidal-Naquet, 51.

²¹ Jean-Paul Sartre, "A Victory," in *Colonialism and Neocolonialism*, trans. Azzedine Haddour, Steve Brewer, and Terry McWilliams (New York: Routledge, 2006), 83.

Vidal-Naquet's thesis that the war reflected a fundamental "degeneration" of French Republican values. As Rita Maran argues in her rigorous study of the discourse surrounding French violence in Algeria, the normalization of torture reflected "the structurally ambiguous status of the colonized in relation to 'citizenship' and 'the rights of man.' Object of the 'civilizing mission,' the colonized was never yet a subject with full rights; structurally, the colonized was never fully 'man.'"²² The Enlightenment ideals of the Declaration of the Rights of Man were consistent with the Third Republic philosophical context that promoted the ideology of the "civilizing mission" and France's destiny to assimilate the "racially inferior" populations of the colonies to the historical world of "progress, technology, and education."²³ Raymond Betts echoes Maran in noting that "The vocabulary relating to the doctrine of assimilation and that relating to these republican ideals were the same."²⁴ The doctrine of assimilation made it clear that the colonized was *not yet* the subject of the rights of man. Thus, as the natural rights of individuals were being denied in Algeria, statespersons, military officials, and even certain media outlets returned to the rhetoric of the civilizing mission to justify torture as a *defense* of the rights of man.²⁵ French soldiers and generals could maintain a certain ideological distance from their criminal dehumanization of Algeria's "bandits," since they were "crusading for the defense of Western values against the barbarians from the East" and preventing the "decline of Christian civilization."²⁶

²² Maran, 5.

²³ Le Sueur, 23.

²⁴ Raymond Betts, *Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Theory: 1890-1914* (Omaha: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 30-31.

²⁵ Maran, 20.

²⁶ Maran, 16.

According to military discourse, then, torture was not a barbarous excess, but a “civilizing practice.” As such, it required an organized form. Here it is useful to consider Pierre Bourdieu and Abdelmalek Sayad’s ethnographic account of the typical first stage in the disciplinary process leading to torture, the rounding up of tribal populations into “centres de regroupement”:

After the style of Roman colonisers, the officers in charge of organising the new communities begin by disciplining space, as if hoping that this will allow them to discipline people, too. Everything is subjected to uniformity and aligned neatly in a row: the standardised houses on allotted plots of land stand straight as a die along wide roads based on the ground plan of a Roman castrum or colonial settlement.²⁷

If we recall the discussion of Jacques Tati’s films and Alain Robbe-Grillet’s novels in Chapter 3, the pacification of Algeria’s indigenous communities was, in fact, facilitated by spaces whose architectural uniformity and heightened visibility mirrored the ideals of modernization in the metropole. The interiors of Algeria’s sorting centers also simulated modern society’s “civilized institutions,” insofar as they assumed the appearance of laboratories and factories, and were run “like real conveyor-belt establishments where torture was applied with scientific precision. There were even training schools for this ‘science.’”²⁸ However, it was Henri Alleg’s book that most brought home the parallels between modern France and colonial Algeria, through its descriptions of torture rooms that resembled domestic *mise-en-scènes*; for example, rooms where everyday objects and settings – telephones and bathtubs – were pressed into the service of electrocuting and drowning suspected “terrorists.” Most of the victims of torture were not terrorists, of course, and their

²⁷ Pierre Bourdieu and Abdelmalek Sayad, *La déracinement. La crise de l'agriculture traditionnelle* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1964): 26, my translation.

²⁸ Vidal-Naquet, 56.

suffering had little to do with matters of military intelligence. In a war in which the activities of the ALN could not persist without the clandestine support of the people, torture was ultimately a measure of breaking the people's will and of reducing the Algerians to their brute species being. It was a continuation of the sadism that anti-colonial philosophy identified with the colonial look, in which the body is objectified as flesh and made to signify the power of the agency that inscribes its subordination.²⁹

It is crucial to note that by the early 1960s, the perverse and sadistic character of colonial power in Algeria was well known in mainland France. At this stage of the war, the atmospheric horror represented by Alain Resnais's early short documentaries could no longer be felt as something exterior to everyday life. Writing in 1961, de Beauvoir explained that "During the last few months even our most circumspect papers have been full of horror-stories: murders, lynchings, ratonnades and man-hunts through the streets of Oran."³⁰

²⁹ Elaine Scarry, "The Structure of Torture," in *The Body in Pain*, 27-59.

³⁰ Simone de Beauvoir and Gisèle Halim, *Djamila Boupacha: The Story of the Torture of a Young Algerian Girl which Shocked Liberal French Opinion*, trans. Peter Green (New York: Macmillan, 1962): 9.

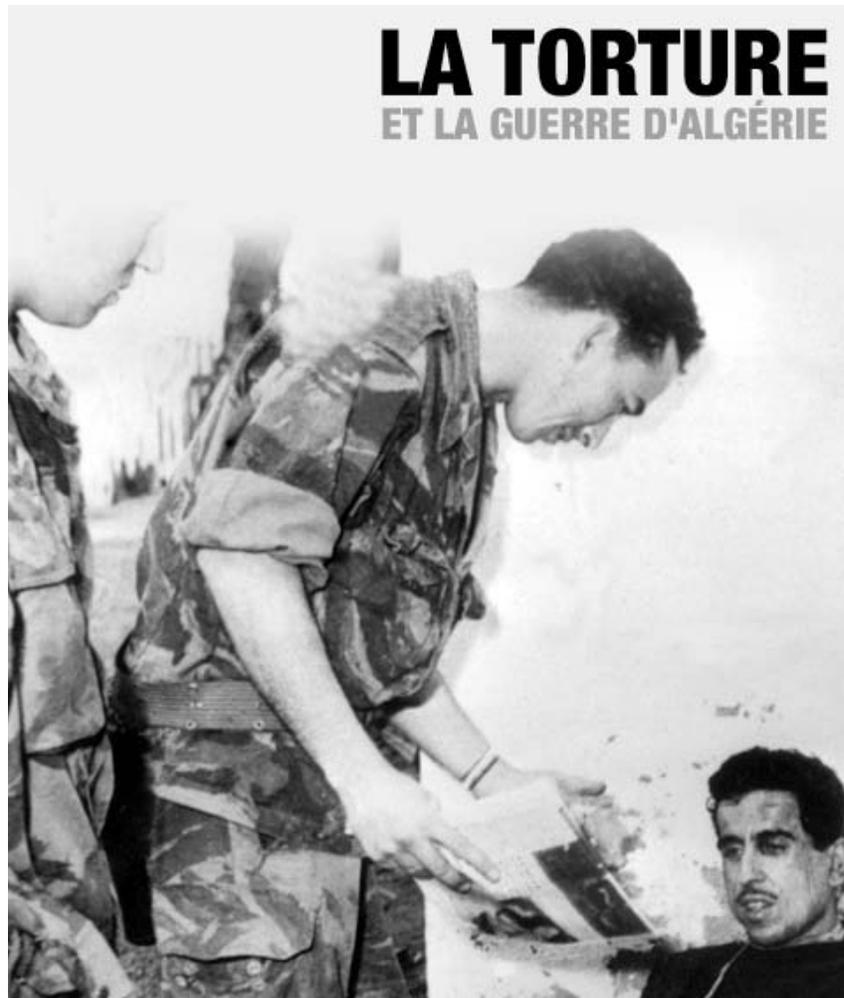


Figure 24. From the archives of *Le Monde*³¹

De Beauvoir added to such horror stories the escalating colonial violence that was happening *at home*, like “the dozens of corpses strung up from trees in the Bois de Boulogne, beside the Seine, in the very heart of Paris; endless cases involving maimed limbs or broken skulls.”³² This was the period of uncontrollable OAS violence in the metropole, with a total of 107 plastic explosive attacks taking place in

³¹ See “La torture et la guerre d’Algérie,” *Le Monde* (2012): http://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/visuel/2012/03/17/la-torture-et-la-guerre-d-algerie_1671229_3212.html

³² de Beauvoir, 9.

and around the Paris region between January 15 and February 11, 1961, alone.³³ It was also the moment when the *state* criminality common to Algeria's military rule was installed in Paris under Maurice Papon. A former prefect of the Constantine sorting center turned prefect of the Paris police, Papon was largely responsible for "Algerianizing" the mainland's law enforcement, having overseen both the massacre against the anti-OAS protesters at the Charonne metro station on February 8, 1961, and the racial extermination of over 120 French-Algerians on October 17, 1961.³⁴ Papon was also the architect of a special "*harki*" division of the Paris police force, which was sanctioned both to conduct sweeping arrests in France's Arab neighbourhoods and to use torture to find French connections to the FLN.³⁵

As much as France tried to quarantine its identity from the impurity of the "dirty war" and to project itself in the science-fictional image of a modern technocracy, it remained "saturated by Algeria through every pore."³⁶ The period's climate of censorship and the attendant ban on analogical representations of colonial violence, however, forced French filmmakers wishing to invoke the horrors of French-Algeria to work by surreptitious means. In an aesthetic strategy most exemplified by the films of the Left Bank group, the theme of colonial Algeria is frequently coupled with images that either invoke the body in pain or that distort the integrity of the human figure, thus threatening to arouse feelings of repugnance and abjection. The contemporary critical reception of films like *Cléo de 5 à 7*, and *Muriel*,

³³ Benjamin Stora, Jane Marie Todd and William B. Quandt, *Algeria, 1830-2000: A Short History*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 82-96; Alexander Harrison, *Challenging De Gaulle: The O.A.S. and the Counter-Revolution in Algeria, 1954-1962* (New York: Praeger, 1989).

³⁴ See Jim House and Neil MacMaster, *Paris 1961: Algerians, State Terror, and Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

³⁵ Kristen Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 53.

³⁶ Jean-François Lyotard, "Algerian Contradictions Exposed," in *Political Writings*, trans. Bill Readings with Kevin Paul Geiman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 202.

ou Le temps d'un retour, for example, emphasized that these images demanded not so much to be *seen* by the spectator as experienced at the level of her *flesh*. Accordingly, it is necessary to challenge the common assumption that colonialism was invoked only as a peripheral subject of the Left Bank group's cinema. In the context of a growing consumer culture that framed everyday life as a disincarnated "visual display," the appearance of the colonial in these films affects a "global modification of consciousness." As Sartre argues in *Being in Nothingness*, if the body is "lived as flesh, then it is as reference to my flesh that I apprehend the objects in the world [...] I am sensitive not so much to the form of the object and to its instrumentality, as to its matter (gritty, smooth, tepid, greasy, rough, etc.) [...] I discover something like a *flesh of objects*."³⁷

Modern French Cinema and the Flesh of Objects

What we get is the realism of saturation – a world we are saturated with and don't see anymore, given to us not in the way we might be capable of seeing it, but in the way we absorb it.

– Jean-Louis Comolli³⁸

Consider Agnès Varda's film about a narcissistic pop singer who pursues a situationist-like drift from the Right Bank to the Left Bank after being diagnosed with what is potentially stomach cancer. In the first half of the film, especially, Cléo is formally associated with the a-material, surface culture of commodity capitalism: her

³⁷ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1984), 509.

³⁸ Jean-Louis Comolli, in Comolli, Jean Domarchi, Jean-André Fieschi, Pierre Kast, André S. Labarthe, Claude Ollier, Jacques Rivette, and François Weyergans, "The Misfortunes of *Muriel*," in *Cahiers du cinéma: Volume II: The 1960-1968: New Wave, New Cinema, Reevaluating Hollywood*, ed. Jim Hillier (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 74, emphasis in original.

look is interpellated by the objects of window displays and rendered oblivious to the ubiquitous and patriarchal presence of the police; her body is framed against two-dimensional reflective surfaces as opposed to the depth attributed to the crowd; and, when the Tarot card reader predicts her imminent death, she takes comfort in the mirror, noting that her skin is still intact: “As long as I’m beautiful, I’m alive.”

According to one dominant reading of the film, initiated by Sandy Flitterman-Lewis’s *To Desire Differently*, and re-enforced by Jim Morrissey’s recent award winning essay “*Cléo de 5 à 7* and *Le Fabuleux destin d'Amélie Poulain*,” Cléo overcomes this alienation in the latter half of the narrative, since she “ceases to be an object, constructed by the looks of men, and assumes the power of *vision*, a subjective vision of *her own*.”³⁹ While this reading is comforting, insofar as it gives the film formal balance and allows the spectator to partake in Cléo’s alleged self-possession, it also undermines the destabilizing, socio-political context of horror that pervades the film, a horror that, as Mark Betz notes, is linked to the heroine’s “flight or regress from the (de)colonized and racialized Other, an Other she is figured variously as and as not.”⁴⁰

Cléo’s entire trajectory is organized by a series of visceral encounters with the colonial object: starting from the taxi ride in which she is frozen by the commercial display of an African mask,⁴¹ followed by the overheard news of Algerian civil unrest

³⁹ Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, *To Desire Differently: Feminism and the French Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 269, emphasis in original; also see Jim Morrissey, “Paris and voyages of self-discovery in *Cléo de 5 à 7* and *Le Fabuleux destin d'Amélie Poulain*,” *Studies in French Cinema* 8, no. 2 (2008): 99-110.

⁴⁰ Mark Betz, *Beyond the Subtitle: Remapping European Art Cinema* (Minneapolis: Regents of the University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 137.

⁴¹ This scene, as Roger Taillieur notes, is an explicit reference to Resnais and Marker’s *Les statues meurent aussi*: “La mort est partout sur la route suivie par Cléo cet après-midi là: [...] ce sont des masques nègres dans les vitrines d’antiquaires de la rue Guénégaud, qui nous rappellent que ‘les statues meurent aussi’ et que la censure se charge de l’enterrement, c’est un enterrement, justement

on the radio; to the scene in the Café le Dôme, where two patrons discuss the war, the same scene that is book-ended by two grotesque events involving, first, the street performer who swallows and then vomits up frogs and, second, the “acupuncturist” who pierces his bicep with a steel rod; to the film-within-the-film that represents a “white world” of care mirrored by an invisible “black world” of death; to the mysterious bullet hole in a café window (an act of OAS violence?); and, finally, to the meeting with conscript soldier, Antoine, in the park, where Cléo’s cancer is explicitly linked to the war in Algeria, leading her to respond, “quelle horreur.”

Significantly, in *Positif*’s contemporaneous review of the film, Roger Tailleur emphasizes that Cléo’s encounters with “the chill of horror,”⁴² far from investing her with the distancing powers of vision, work instead to carve into her flesh, turning her identity “inside out”:

Loin de rester un leit-motif abstrait la pensée s’enfonce comme une écharde dans la chair de Cléo, que la moindre scène un peu anormale, pourvu qu’elle suggère douleur physique ou acrobatie viscérale, révulse et laisse au bord de la nausée. Un avaleur de grenouilles, un acupuncteur de trottoir, le trou fait dans la glace d’un café par la balle d’un mystérieux règlement de comptes, la font défaillir presque: ‘Je suis toute retournée.’⁴³

Indeed, Cléo’s cancer makes her particularly sensitive to objects and signs that imply death or pose a threat to her physical well-being. Such threats, as a number of commentators have noted, are often displaced onto images of non-whiteness.⁴⁴ While Cléo finds herself “intoxicated” by the items on window display at the hat-shop, she is thrust into a bout of illness when confronted with another window display of

rencontré à Montparnasse, c’est l’ironie d’une enseigne: ‘A la bonne santé.’” Roger Tailleur, “Cléo d’ici à l’éternité,” *Positif*, no. 44 (mars 1962): 16.

⁴² Tailleur, 17.

⁴³ Tailleur, 17.

⁴⁴ Betz; Steven Ungar, *Cléo de 5 à 7* (London: British Film Institute, 2008); Jill Forbes, “Gender and Space in *Cléo de 5 à 7*,” *Studies in French Cinema* 2, no. 2 (2002): 83-89.

African masks during her cab ride: “J’ai mal au coeur.” This sense of dis-ease is heightened when the black art student in the Left Bank mock-frightens her by surrounding the cab; in Steve Ungar’s terms, “It is as though one of the masks she had just seen suddenly came to life.”⁴⁵ The film’s two most carnivalesque moments involving the frog-swallower and the “acupuncturist,” are also symbolically overdetermined by the war in Algeria; French conscript soldier, Antoine, identifies himself as a frog at the end of the film, and the latter scene of staged mutilation is immediately preceded by a conversation Cléo overhears at Le Dôme in which a man notes, “These crazy Algerian events ... their damned politics ... you don’t know where you stand.”

Yet it is also unclear whether Cléo consciously registers the ubiquity of the messages surrounding Algeria, making the war’s presence at once everywhere and nowhere.⁴⁶ Cléo appears indifferent to the radio news broadcast that describes the rioting in East Algeria and then reports the trial of Commander Georges Robin, one of the insubordinate officers involved in the failed putsch attempt against the Fifth Republic on April 1961. She also drowns out the aforementioned discussion between the two men in the café concerning Algeria and art by narcissistically playing one of her own songs on the juke box. Indeed, it is not until Cléo meets Antoine at the Parc Montsouris at the end of the narrative that her personal fears become wedded to the nation’s broader societal traumas. During their unexpected courtship, Cléo tells Antoine of her fears, chief among which is the likelihood that she has cancer. He

⁴⁵ Ungar, 34.

⁴⁶ Ungar notes how a similar indiscernibility is apparent at the end of Varda’s *L’Opéra Mouffe* in which a woman unwittingly passes by a graffiti marked stone wall that reads, “Paix avec l’Algérie française,” with the word “française” crossed out and replaced with “libre” (107).

responds that she would be in a constant state of fear were she sent to war in Algeria, where he is headed the following morning. In one of the film's strongest graphic cues to the spectator that the cancer eating's Cléo's flesh is linked to the "cancer of democracy" eating French society, Cléo drapes her body with Antoine's military coat nearing the conclusion of this exchange.⁴⁷ When the couple arrive at the Hôpital de la Salpêtrière at the end of the film, we are given another foreboding reminder of the potential danger to come, which affects a shift from the "empty to homogenous" clock-time organizing the narrative toward a supernatural, astrological time. Antoine tells Cléo that the date is June 21, the summer solstice when the sun leaves Gemini and enters the sign of Cancer. Yet if the cancer that threatens both Cléo and French society functions to "flesh out" the idealized world of consumer society, it is also something which occupies a politically ambivalent role within the film. At the conclusion, Cléo affirms that she and Antoine still have "plenty of time" at the precise moment when their metaphorically paired fates have left them both out of time. Her closing declaration of "happiness," with all of that term's contextual baggage, generally, and in the work of the Left Bank Group, specifically, is thus ambivalent, and might imply a narcissistic retreat from a historical future in which she is scheduled for radiation and Antoine is bound for "Algérie en flammes."

This political ambivalence, bordering on narcissism, was common to a number of French films that dared to evoke the war. In Louis Malle's melancholic, *Le feu follet* (1963), for example, the protagonist, Alain, returns from his service in Algeria as an impotent and "hapto-phobic" alcoholic ("I can no longer touch things"), who is haunted in his every encounter by the imperial trace – his breakfast with the

⁴⁷ Thanks to Christopher Faulkner for cueing me toward this detail.

pretentious “Egyptologist” is shortly followed by coffee with members of the OAS. Rather than converting his generalized disgust for his surroundings into any form of political reflection, Alain spends the film’s near two-hour duration languishing over his lost identity before committing to a pre-planned suicide. Georges Franju’s *Les yeux sans visage* presents a decidedly less maudlin, but equally Franco-centric treatment of the war. Adam Lowenstein has demonstrated how this grizzly horror film, about a surgeon who attempts to mask his daughter’s scarred face with the flesh of murdered young women, works to condense the historical traumas of Vichy and colonial Algeria.⁴⁸ Christiane’s grotesque face becomes a figural embodiment of a nation that, in Sartre’s terms, is both occupied and occupier, “the wound and the knife.”⁴⁹ But the film that most forcefully embodies French cinema’s simultaneous recognition of and retreat from colonial Algeria, in all of its threatening implications for both the Vichy past and the consumer present, is *Muriel* – Resnais’s severe diagnosis of “le malaise d’une civilisation dite du bonheur.”⁵⁰

Like a number of the films discussed thus far, *Muriel* has been consistently singled out within the theorization of modern cinema because of its elliptical and a-psychological dislocations of narrative time and space.⁵¹ Given film studies’ paradigmatic shift toward semiology throughout the 1960s and 1970s, it is not surprising that the film recurred as a site of “textual analysis” and inspired what remains perhaps the most formidable structural reading of a single film, Claude

⁴⁸ Adam Lowenstein, “History Without a Face: Surrealism, Modernity, and the Holocaust in the Cinema of Georges Franju,” in *Shocking Representation: Historical Trauma, National Cinema, and the Modern Horror Film* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 17-54.

⁴⁹ Jean-Paul Sartre, “A Victory,” 76.

⁵⁰ Robert Benayoun, “Les Naufragés du Hasard,” *Positif*, no. 56 (novembre 1963): 3.

⁵¹ See especially, Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, trans. High Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

Balibé, Michel Marie, and Marie Claire Ropars-Wuilleumier's *Muriel: histoire d'une recherche*.⁵² Here again, however, when the film is returned to the historically raw context of its immediate reception, it becomes apparent how what was then only a budding interest in *Muriel*'s relation to film language was outweighed by a different set of concerns with the film's affective qualities. This is particularly evident in the fascinating round-table discussion organized by *Cahiers du cinéma* in November 1963, which featured a prominent list of the period's novelists, film critics, and filmmakers (for example, Jean-Louis Comolli, Claude Ollier, and Jacques Rivette). Jean-André Fieschi's contribution to the discussion emphasizes the film's "muted sense of terror," and how its accumulation of everyday details "becomes almost physically unbearable – you almost long for some catastrophe to set you free."⁵³ For Comolli, the film's reality is of a fleshy rather visual order, presenting the modern world "not in the way we might perhaps be capable of seeing it, but in the way we absorb it."⁵⁴ And Pierre Kast notes that if one were to provide a plain description of the film's story, in which the reunion between former lovers Hélène and Alphonse is complicated by the generational clash between Alphonse and Hélène's stepson, Bernard, each standing in for World War II and the Franco-Algerian War, respectively, "you would come up with an outline very similar to a story in *Elle* or *Marie-Claire*." But he adds, "that's precisely what's being challenged. In other words the film forces people to face up to their own experience with the same horror that can suddenly grab them in relation to the world outside – the monstrous reality in

⁵² Claude Bailblé, Michel Marie and Marie Claire Ropars-Wuilleumier, *Muriel: histoire d'une recherche* (Paris: Editions Galilee, 1975).

⁵³ Fieschi, in Comolli et al., 73.

⁵⁴ Comolli, in Comolli et al., 74.

which they live and usually take for granted.”⁵⁵ Consistent with the contemporaneous reception of *Cléo de 5 à 7* and *Les yeux sans visage*, the panel seizes on “the horror of the everyday” as a guiding concept to discuss the film’s meditation on modernizing France.

Resnais’s strategic choice of setting, the working-class, coastal town of Boulogne-sur-mer, contributes significantly to the horror atmosphere that the film confers over “modern France.” Ravaged by bombs during World War II, the Boulogne of 1963 was only half-modernized, an imperfect realization of the demand for historical equilibrium characteristic of the period’s discourses of nation building.⁵⁶ In Resnais’s film, Boulogne is a place where faceless grand ensembles, casinos, and modern shops with fashionable window displays clash against waste-grounds and commemorative *lieux-de-mémoire* devoted to promoting the town’s “grandeur.” This unevenness, or sense of non-contemporaneity, is reproduced in Hélène’s ultra-modern apartment, which doubles as an auction room for a hodge-podge of antique furniture; as Bernard says, “On ne sait jamais si on se réveillera dans du second Empire ou dans rustique normand.” The objects in Hélène’s flat function not to preserve the historical imprint of human relationships, but to signify “historicalness” or the ambiance of historical being to a town in the ideological process of reconstructing the relationship between past and present. Their overt character *as commodities* prevents these objects from seamlessly integrating into a signifying discourse, thus betraying the fragmented, de-structured space, which, for Baudrillard, was the faulty foundation of

⁵⁵ Kast, in Comolli et al., 68.

⁵⁶ Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), 176-196.

all modern interiors.⁵⁷ Thus, in the film's creepy opening sequence, Resnais's repetitive, cubist editing isolates the random objects in and around H el ene's kitchen – the modern coffee pot, the grandfather clock, and the vintage chandelier – disintegrating any subject position that might establish their symbolic coherence. In the process, both H el ene's and her client's bodies are also de-structured, but the abrupt rhythm of Resnais's "hacked montage" seems to attenuate scopic enjoyment with the "physics of horror," understood as instinctive disgust for a violence that seeks to undo the uniqueness of the human body.⁵⁸ In the ensuing moments, Bernard returns home and announces that he is off to see "Muriel," which the spectator soon learns is a code name for the Arab woman whom he and his fellow soldiers tortured to death in Algeria.

As a synecdoche for the practice of torture, "Muriel" invades the entirety of Resnais's film, but the specificities of the torture of the real, unnamed Algerian woman are revealed in two scenes. The first occurs when Alphonse rummages through Bernard's drawers, discovering both war-time diaries that make reference to Muriel's "open eyes" during her torture, and a photograph that shows Bernard with his head cut out standing beside an Arab woman.

⁵⁷ Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*, trans. James Benedict (London: Verso, 1996), 18.

⁵⁸ Cavarero, 8, 12.



Figure 25.

The second scene bears an eerie resemblance to Bertrand Tavernier's film, *La guerre sans nom* (1992), insofar as it juxtaposes Bernard's innocuous war-time film footage with his voiceover account of what actually happened in Algeria.⁵⁹ Images of French

⁵⁹ The former *Positif* critic's four-hour documentary is organized as a sort of detective picture, meant to illuminate one of the "deepest fault-lines in French society." See Naomi Greene, "Bertrand Tavernier: History in the Present Tense," in *Landscapes of Loss: The National Past in Postwar French Cinema* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 98-129. The film is organized around a tripartite structure, with each part devoted to its own kind of trace. The majority of *La guerre sans nom* consists of the remembrances of individual soldiers and the reminiscences of groups of soldiers, both sympathetic with and opposed to the cause of the war. These exercises of memory generate a broad range of discussion topics and affective associations, including the soldiers' estrangement from the French population upon returning from the war, their participation in or witnessing of acts of torture, and, in some cases, their psychical anguish in the form of night terrors and flashbacks. Sequences devoted to these phenomenological traces of corporeal memory are punctuated by the soldiers' own war-time souvenirs, which, similar to Bernard's case, include photographs that often depict moments of play and fraternity rather than the horrors being described. Finally, a series of establishing and re-establishing shots (compulsively) return to the locations, or psycho-geographical traces specified by the soldiers' narration. Although *La guerre sans nom* has been compared to Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* (1985), Resnais's "Marienbadism" is the explicit inter-text of these languid travelling shots that capture de-populated landscapes of the Algerian desert. Through a kind of Freudian *Nachträglichkeit* or "deferred action," these tranquil landscapes begin to take on the hallucinatory aura of past horrors encrusted in the present through their repetition and intersection with the soldiers' testimonies. If Marcel Oms was correct when he stated in 1992 that *La guerre sans nom* was "the film on the Algerian

soldiers laughing, playing guitars, and blending in peacefully with the indigenous population form the backdrop to the grotesque retelling of Muriel's murder, in which she is not only stripped naked and presumably raped, but subjected to kicks to the body and cigarette burns to the breasts. It becomes apparent in this scene that if "Muriel" haunts the Boulogne of the film, then the social context of Djamilia Boupacha's torture is what haunts the film itself:

Djamila was lashed down in the chair, completely naked while her captors exchanged obscene jokes and drank beer ... they all kicked her and punched her, and several times knocked her to the ground ... All the time one of the inspectors was smoking nonchalantly, and dabbing the red-hot tip of his cigarette on to her chest and shoulders.⁶⁰

The question of Muriel's, and, by corollary, Boupacha's torture is then explicitly linked to the politics of visibility and the reciprocity of the gaze. Bernard recounts his horror at being locked into Muriel's eyes while her body was reduced to "a sack of potatoes ripped open."

As discussed above, the problem of the colonial look and of torture, or the colonial look *as* torture, was a recurring point of interrogation for the anti-colonial philosophy of the 1950s. In particular, Fanon's famous polemic "Algeria Unveiled" tended to define the colonial will to both expose the Algerian woman's skin and demystify her anonymity through recourse to images of disfigurement: "French colonialism has settled itself in the very center of the Algerian individual and has

War and the indelible imprint it left on the lives of those who fought in it," then what conclusions should be drawn from the fact that the film's closest encounter with the Algerians manifests itself, not unlike in 1956, through the atmosphere generated by their absence? Marcel Oms, "La France Contemporaine," in *L'histoire de France au cinéma*, eds. Pierre Guibbert and Marcel Oms (Paris: CinémaAction, 1993), 242. For Benjamin Stora, Tavernier's fidelity to the French experience of the war rests precisely in its representation of Algeria *without* Algerians (Austin, 185).

⁶⁰ Simone de Beauvoir and Gisèle Halim, *Djamila Boupacha: The Story of the Torture of a Young Algerian Girl Which Shocked Liberal French Opinion*, trans. Peter Green (New York: Macmillan, 1962).

undertaken a sustained work of cleanup, of expulsion of self, of rationally pursued mutilation.”⁶¹ In an observation that seems particularly relevant to *Muriel*, Fanon perceives the repressive forms of unveiling that followed the Battle of Algiers – for example, the violent rounding up of groups of women for the purpose of military identity cards – as functioning on a continuum with the sociological, *softly coercive* methods deployed by the state to objectify Arab women.⁶² Throughout the 1930s to the 1950s, the sociologists and ethnologists of the Arab Bureaus conducted a kind of

⁶¹ Frantz Fanon, “Algeria Unveiled,” in *A Dying Colonialism* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 65.

⁶² This specific dynamic between colonial vision in Algeria, the return of the gaze, and horror has a lengthy cinematic afterlife. Consider those sequences from Harun Farocki’s *Images of the World and the Inscription of War* (1989) that meditate on conscript soldier Marc Garanger’s photographs of Algerian women in the early 1960s, who were rounded up and forced to remove the veil for the purpose of making identity cards. The film’s voiceover frames its images of these police photographs relative to “the horror of being photographed for the first time.” In Farocki’s film, the “horror” of this spectacle bears upon the question of how the representational logic of the police photograph inscribes the capacity of subjects to partake in the historical past: “The year 1960 in Algeria, women are photographed for the first time. They are to be issued with identity cards. Faces, which, up until then, had worn the veil. Only those close have looked on these faces without the veil: family and household members. When one looks into the face of an intimate, one also brings something of the shared past. The photograph captures the moment, and thus crops away past and future.” Farocki associates the police photograph with the symbolic extermination of its subject’s past, and, by extension, undermines the spectator’s capacity to experience a sensible continuum with this past. As a measure of biometric surveillance like the thumbprint, the police photograph captures the referent’s past-presence as a bodily presence, evacuated of cultural history and constituted through disciplinary classifications. However, a number of scholars have noted how these women creatively negotiate with Garanger’s presence through their resistant gazes and gestures. Garanger’s case is also unique since he was simultaneously complicit with and staunchly opposed to the colonial gaze: “My spirit’s revolt was proportionate to the horrors that I witnessed.” Garanger, quoted in Karina Eileraas, “Reframing the Colonial Gaze: Photography, Ownership, and Feminist Resistance,” *MLN* 118, no. 4 (2003): 814, 829. In 1961, Garanger re-circulated his identity card photographs in a number of Paris exhibitions and would later publish an anti-colonial photo-essay—*Femmes algériennes 1960*—to at once trigger militancy against and document the criminality of France’s civilizing mission. “Given his ambivalent position *vis-à-vis la mission civilatrice*,” Karina Eileraas argues, “Garanger opens up a space for dis-identification with the racial and sexual politics embedded in colonial imagery.” Eileraas, 814. Yet it is also crucial to address how dis-identification as a political strategy produces specific relations of visibility and invisibility with the wronged community to whom it is addressed. Farocki’s film points to the political ambivalence of Garanger’s art on these terms. The redistribution of his police photographs within the sense parameters of the art world denaturalizes their disciplinary functionality and confers visibility on the violence of the colonial gaze. Yet, by refashioning his subjects’ bodies and faces as (frozen) aesthetic spectacles, Garanger perhaps abstracts them a second time by subordinating their life-world and its cultural contexts of looking to the mediated and contemplative exchanges of the gallery and the photo-essay. To re-invoke the voiceover narration from *Les Statues meurent aussi*, “An object dies when the living glance trained upon it disappears [...] Classified, labeled, conserved in the ice of showcases and collections, they enter into the history of art.” Also see Malek Alloula, *The Colonial Harem* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

market research, taxonomizing Algeria's indigenous female population in order to identify the "weak" women who could be converted to European fashion by school nuns, shopkeepers, and other representatives of Western civilization. Echoing the discourses of modernization in mainland France, Fanon describes how, once converted, "These test-women, with bare faces and free bodies, henceforth circulated like sound currency in the European society of Algeria. These women were surrounded by an atmosphere of newness."⁶³ According to his own psychological studies of the unveiled woman, however, this atmosphere of newness was experienced as a de-structuration of the self: "Without the veil she has an impression of her body being cut up into bits, put adrift; the limbs seem to lengthen indefinitely."⁶⁴

Through a series of displacements and condensations, *Muriel* establishes a similar indiscernibility between the body's visual objectification and the violence of its mutilation. In an early scene, the film juxtaposes Françoise's (Alphonse's mistress) remark that she works "dans la figuration" with Hélène's confession to Alphonse that "J'avais tellement peur que vous soyez défiguré par la guerre."⁶⁵ Later on, Resnais immediately follows Hélène's plea to Alphonse to "stop torturing" her with an abrupt, kaleidoscopic image of Bernard fragmented into pieces. Ultimately, however, it is Hélène who both embodies everyday life in Boulogne, and who is consistently "cut up into bits" by the film. In the representation of her domestic life, especially, she is either reduced to her extremities by close-ups or scattered across her modularly-styled apartment by ellipses; note the "Marienbadism" of her first night

⁶³ Fanon, 42.

⁶⁴ Fanon, 59.

⁶⁵ Celia Britton, "Broken images in Resnais's *Muriel*," *French Cultural Studies* 1, no. 1 (1990): 42.

with Alphonse, in which she is displaced across three different rooms during a single linear conversation. Her image is most forcefully overdetermined by the objects in the apartment, as when Bernard finally recognizes “her” in the crystal glasses used for their first dinner. Following the discovery that the entire dinner set and most of the antiques in the apartment have already been sold, it becomes apparent that Helene’s body circulates indistinguishably within the film’s visual economy of objects and monetary signs.⁶⁶

If one accepts Celia Britton’s argument that “what is happening in the film to H el ene’s image echoes what is happening in the Algerian war to Muriel’s body,” if the spectre of “Muriel” re-imbues H el ene’s body with fleshy materiality, then it must be stressed that these two forms of violence are by no means equivalent.⁶⁷ Rather, the anxiety that surrounds Resnais’s film stems from the fact that “Muriel” cannot be wholly *excluded* from everyday consumer life in Boulogne, making it impossible to determine where “soft” power begins and where repressive power ends. Muriel is precisely the “foreign body” that is “all the more impossible to eliminate as it is not solely due to physical presences, but also to memory and the constitution of identity.”⁶⁸ Thus, in making a documentary about Muriel’s torture, Bernard films life in Boulogne, as if the traces of that event could be detected in everyday consumer objects, like the telephone, and attitudes, like those of his best friend, an active member of the OAS. This indiscernibility concerning the “where” of Muriel’s story makes the abjection of Resnais’s film impossible to reduce to any particular scene or

⁶⁶ See Matthew Croombs, “Algeria Deferred: The Logic of Trauma in *Muriel* and *Cach e*,” *Scope: An Online Journal of Film and Television Studies* 16 (2010):

<http://www.scope.nottingham.ac.uk/article.php?issue=16&id=1169>.

⁶⁷ Britton, 41.

⁶⁸ Balibar, 167-168.

event. Claude Ollier suggests as much in his compelling interpretation of the film, noting that *Muriel* exhibits the same spatial imaginary, or desire to delimit, characteristic of both Robbe-Grillet's fiction and his collaboration with Resnais on *L'année dernière à Marienbad* (1961). He adds that in the case of *Muriel*, however, this spatial imaginary is suddenly plunged into historical time and unable to contain its subject matter:

[...] you have *Muriel* with the apartment and the town as constants, two spaces separated by wide glass windows and unfinished doors, a whole shaky, temporary unstable world from which the characters are abruptly ejected, and at great speed towards the end. That's why I had the same feeling of disorientation, and dislocation – stronger even than in *Marienbad* [...] in *Muriel* you have Boulogne-sur-Mer, the France of lower middle-class Europe in all the colours of today's world, and it's the same nightmare.⁶⁹

Abjection and dislocation, as Ollier suggests, shape the film's "deep movement" or centrifugal structure.

Yet *Muriel* not only structurally embodies its characters' conservative retreat from colonialism and the colonization of everyday life. It also *reproduces* their narcissism in its decided failure to imagine forms of expression capable of bringing the Algerians' suffering into the realm of shared social experience. Even the film-within-the-film made by Resnais's screen surrogate, Bernard, expresses a will to contain and displace French guilt, rather than to articulate "Muriel's" story. Perhaps the same could be said of Boupacha's case, insofar as it enabled a liberal French public to be reassured by their indignation and to re-inscribe the civilizing, patriarchal discourse that cast the colonial oppressor in the role of rescuing the oppressed

⁶⁹ Claude Ollier, in Comolli et al., 70.

colonized woman.⁷⁰ Indeed, when Robert Benayoun diagnoses *Muriel*'s nostalgia for Surrealism, one might question whether the film not only longs for a programmatic revolutionary discourse, but also carries some of that movement's misogynistic ideological baggage, especially in its latent libidinal fascination with H el ene as [a] "corps morcel e."⁷¹ Unlike the assured militancy of *Nuit et brouillard* (1955) and *Les statues meurent aussi*, *Muriel* seems to be at a loss with how to proceed politically in the vertiginous spot between the aftermath of the Algerian War and the ineluctable future of consumer society. What the film articulates, as most of its contemporary commentators pointed out, is precisely this crisis of representation. Yet *Muriel* was not, of course, the last film of the 1960s to pose the question of the relation between colonialism and the colonization of everyday life. In the following chapter, I thus move toward a consideration of how this relationship was re-established in the belated context of the Vietnam War by a series of films, one of which, Godard's *2 ou 3 choses que je sais d'elle* (1967), positions itself as a "response" to *Muriel*. I also historicize how the Left Bank's militant cinematic response to the Vietnam War was largely prefigured by R ene Vautier's anti-colonial documentaries in Algeria.

⁷⁰ Suzanne Gauch, "Muriel, or the Disappearing Text of the Algerian War." *L'Esprit Cr ateur* 41, no. 4 (2001): 55.

⁷¹ Benayoun, 1.

5

Loin du Vietnam: Solidarity, Representation, and the Proximity of the French Colonial Past

Introduction: *L'imagination au pouvoir*¹

Analyzed collectively, the films discussed in the previous two chapters share a common obsession with the theme of photography. Bernard's past in *Muriel* is reconstructed through the clash between his photographic diaries of the war and his verbal testimony. At the conclusion of *Cléo de 5 à 7*, Antoine and Cléo discuss how the former is a "photo-maniac" who will use the latter's photograph to invent stories for his fellow soldiers in Algeria. The decomposition of Christiane's face in *Les yeux sans visage* is articulated through an extended photo-montage. And *La Jetée* is composed (almost) entirely of still photographs, establishing its narrative through the rhythmic interaction between voice-over narration and editing. Yet, if all these films are also conditioned in both theme and form by the surrounding historical context of industrialized torture in Algeria, not one of them provides a single, analogical representation of this violence. To recall Serge Daney's remark from Chapter 2, "The war in Algeria was ending, and because it hadn't been filmed, it had brought suspicion upon any representation of history."² Released around the conclusion of a

¹ Jean-Paul Sartre, "France: Masses, Spontaneity, Party," in *Between Existentialism and Marxism*, trans. John Matthews (New York: Verso, 2008), 125.

² Serge Daney, "The Tracking Shot in *Kapo*," trans. Laurent Kretzschmar, *Senses*

war in which the press had become “a lie factory,” selling the public an image of Algeria without sorting centers or mass graves, these films question the supposed veracity of photographic representation and its claims to visible evidence.³

If modern French cinema either failed or refused explicitly to document the realities of the war in Algeria, then should it be concluded, as is often done in passing, that these films provoke the spectator to “imagine” the violence of torture? The answer to this question is more complex than might seem initially apparent, especially if one considers the recollections of intellectuals, who, unlike much of the general French public, were vehemently against the war. In her memoirs, for example, Simone de Beauvoir recalls that “in 1957, the broken bones, the torn-out nails, the impalements, the cries of pain, the convulsions, they reached me all right.”⁴ But in a depressing qualification, she confesses: “Today, in this grim December of 1961, like most of my fellow creatures I suppose, I am suffering from a sort of tetanus of the imagination. [...] That, perhaps, is the final stage of demoralization for a nation: one gets used to it.”⁵ Certainly, the violence of torture in Algeria invades the cinema of the Left Bank group, and confers an atmosphere of horror onto its objects and settings. It is less clear, however, that these films transform the unwanted invasion of the Algerians’ suffering into a political object through the powers of the imagination. To imagine the other’s pain, as Elaine Scarry argues, is to challenge one’s own skepticism and myopic entrenchment in the world in order to create forms that both express and diminish the other’s suffering, thus bringing pain into the realm

of Cinema, vol. 30 (2004), http://www.sensesofcinema.com/2004/feature-articles/kapo_daney/

³ Simone de Beauvoir, *Hard Times: Force of Circumstance*, vol. II: 1952–1962 (originally published as *La force des choses* [1992]), trans. Richard Howard (New York: Paragon House, 1994), 86.

⁴ De Beauvoir, 88.

⁵ De Beauvoir, 88–89.

of “shared objectification.”⁶ I am inclined to argue that modern French cinema’s representation of colonial violence in the early 1960s expresses something closer to De Beauvoir’s tetanus of the imagination, a paralyzing and narcissistic inability to move beyond the ways in which the nation’s use of torture deformed its own identity – a narcissism that so frequently appears in the cliché image of the “broken mirror.”

The theme of the deformation of French national identity received its most symptomatic treatment in *Le petit soldat* (1963), the story of a man who, here again, “feels that his reflection in the mirror does not correspond with his own image of himself.”⁷ As a number of scholars have observed, Godard’s thriller about the ill-fated love affair between a pro-French military assassin, Bruno, and a Russian spy working for the FLN, Veronica, attempts to achieve an ideological “consensus through the image”⁸ by liquidating the distinctions between the war’s pro- and counter-insurgency discourses; as Bruno says, “both the OAS and the FLN quote Lenin.” At the time, Godard claimed that this ideological ambiguity was in fact a faithful expression of the period’s political climate. In interviews with *L’Express* and *Cahiers du cinéma*, he defended the film for demonstrating the nation’s generalized confusion and for asking questions before espousing ready-made solutions. But such questions were posed as though they issued from an impossible position of political impartiality: “Politics are talked about in it, but it has no political bias. [...] I spoke of

⁶ Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 10.

⁷ Jean-Luc Godard. “Le Petit Soldat” in *Godard on Godard: Critical Writings*, trans. Tom Milne (New York: Da Capo Press, 1986), 89.

⁸ Tom McDonough, *The Beautiful Language of my Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), 74; Benjamin Stora. *La gangrène et l’oubli* (Paris: La Découverte, 1991), 249.

what concerned me, a Parisian in 1960, belonging to no party.”⁹ Given its total lack of political anchorage, what the film actually articulates is a reactionary dilettantism bordering on a deliberate attempt to perpetuate the period’s political chaos; consider the embarrassing monologue in which Bruno claims to love France because of the legacy of figures like Louis Aragon and the fascist Drieu La Rochelle, and to hate Arabs because they are lazy and live in the desert. For Benayoun, the film’s dilettantism culminates in the scenes devoted to torture, which, in a provocative stunt, reverse the identities of colonizer and colonized: “Monsieur Godard a déclaré que son film demeure impartial, puisque chaque camp a pratiqué la torture. Mais ce sont les Algériens qu’il a choisi de montrer... torturer son héros grâce à des méthodes dont la paternité a été prouvée: électricité, baignoire, etc.”¹⁰ Woven in between the hero’s meditations on the art of Paul Klee and Diego Velázquez, torture is aestheticized by the film and presented with a decided lack of seriousness. This nonchalance, as recent debates over the film *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012) make clear, would be unthinkable in the case of other forms of violence, such as rape.¹¹ By attaching the pain and suffering experienced by the Algerians to a French referent, the film disingenuously transforms torture into an object of *French* sympathy (so much for film as “truth 24x a second”).

Given his reactionary posture toward the questions of torture and Algerian independence, Godard’s political transformation throughout the 1960s is especially

⁹ Jean-Luc Godard, “Interview with Jean-Luc Godard,” in *Godard on Godard: Critical Writings*, trans. Tom Milne (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 1986), 178; originally published as “Entretien: Jean-Luc Godard,” *Cahiers du cinéma*, no. 138 (December 1992), 24.

¹⁰ Robert Benayoun, “Cinéma: Godard: Godard ou le mythe de l’irresponsable,” *France-Observateur* (January 31, 1963), 22.

¹¹ Slavoj Žižek, “*Zero Dark Thirty*: Hollywood’s Gift to American Power,” *The Guardian* (January 25, 2013), <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2013/jan/25/zero-dark-thirty-normalises-torture-unjustifiable>.

remarkable insofar as it develops, in conjunction with the Left Bank, an express concern with the intersections between anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist critique. The gradual politicization of his cinema also indicates a broader attunement with the societal currents of French militancy leading up to the events of May '68. Recall from Chapters 1 and 2 that the “events of May” designate a series of displacements of social identity, rather than a counter-cultural rebellion among students. Students, workers, anti-colonialists, and farmers transgressed their fixed and functional roles in order to partake in a more generalized revolt against the state and consumer society.¹² If the Algerian years were largely defined by a retreat into the American dream of washing machines and setting up house, and by a willed incapacity to imagine the cause of the colonial militant, a set of reversals seems to take place by the end of the decade. For what contributed to the relational subjectivity that enabled the student to perceive the worker’s struggles in his or her own struggles? According to Sartre, the sense of collective possibility that surrounded May was facilitated by an image of Vietnam: “The element which unified the struggle was something, which, in my opinion, came from afar; it was an idea which came to us from Vietnam and which the students expressed in the formula: ‘L’imagination au pouvoir.’”¹³ Unlike the cause of its own interior Other, the cause of an Other perceived as “afar” illuminated how the commodity culture cherished earlier in the decade was predicated on the destruction of other countries and, eventually, of France itself.¹⁴ As Resnais said before a screening of *Loin du Vietnam* (1967): “On commence avec le Vietnam, afin

¹² Kristen Ross. *May '68 and its Afterlives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 1-18.

¹³ Jean-Paul Sartre, “France: Masses, Spontaneity, Party,” in *Between Existentialism and Marxism*, trans. John Matthews (New York: Verso, 2008), 125.

¹⁴ Ross, 88.

d'en arriver à quelque chose qui soit presque entièrement français... pour montrer, en fin de parcours, que c'est clairement le capitalisme qui est en cause.”¹⁵

The remainder of this chapter examines Godard's and the Left Bank's coalitional documentary against the Vietnam War from the perspective of their treatment of Algeria earlier in the decade. By situating *Loin du Vietnam* within its unique production and exhibition contexts, I consider how SLON's (Société pour le lancement des oeuvres nouvelles) first feature film marks a departure from the art cinema discussed in the previous chapter with its emphasis on colonialism as a source of existential malaise for the alienated bourgeois individual. *Loin du Vietnam*, I argue, cultivates a pluralist aesthetic, which aims to make the North Vietnamese struggle directly intelligible within the currents of intellectual and industrial contestation taking place across France. After a close analysis of the film, however, I also identify strong points of continuity between the representations of Algeria and Vietnam, illuminating how the history of the former explicitly conditions the political consciousness that Godard and the Left Bank bring to their understanding of the first war ever broadcast on television. It is often with direct reference to Algeria that the film both considers the question of how to speak with, rather than for, the other and evaluates the mediated quality of all visual representation. At the conclusion of the chapter, I analyze how Algeria recurs as nodal point of memory within French cinema's late 1960s engagements with the “third world” by isolating Godard's cinema of the period as a chief example.

Loin du Vietnam

¹⁵ Alain Resnais, quoted in *Cinéma 68*, no. 122, 41-42.

Released in 1967, *Loin du Vietnam* was the first documentary feature of Chris Marker's SLON, a production and distribution organization that, in the director's terms, sought "to give the power of speech to the people who don't have it, and, when it's possible, to help them find their own means of expression."¹⁶ Collectively authored by key Left Bank figures, including Resnais and Varda, and filmmakers both new and old to political documentary, such as Godard and Joris Ivens, the film provides one of the decade's most tangible expressions of the intersection between the social upheavals leading to May '68 and the aesthetics of cinema. Significantly, 1967 marked a key pivot point for both the workers' and intellectuals' struggle in France and the broader international resistance against American imperialism in North Vietnam. In February of that year, for example, approximately three thousand workers occupied the Rhodéciata textile factory in the town of Besançon for over a month. The strike triggered further militancy throughout Lyon and anticipated the experiments in *autogestion*, or worker's self-management, that took place over the next five years and culminated in the occupation of the LIP factory in 1973.¹⁷ It was also in 1967 that the global mobilization against the World War II-style carpet bombing of North Vietnam began fully to materialize, as evidenced by the march on the Pentagon by a hundred thousand protesters, and Fidel Castro's proclamation that

¹⁶ Chris Marker, quoted in Trevor Stark, "'Cinema in the Hands of the People': Chris Marker, the Medvedkin Group, and the Potential of Militant Film*," *October* 139 (Winter 2012): 119.

¹⁷ Stark, 118.

the third world stands with “heroic Vietnam.”¹⁸ *Loin du Vietnam*’s genesis as a film was explicitly shaped by these overlapping currents of dissent.

Following the mass bombardment of Hanoi that began in 1965, Marker was approached by diverse sectors of French society to make a film about Vietnam. In 1966, Robert Bonzi of the “A Billion for Vietnam” operation, which brought together communists, socialists, and progressives, turned to the director to make a film that would help the coalition’s efforts to raise funds for the North Vietnamese Red Cross. Later that year, students at the University of Nanterre also asked Marker to document the situation in Vietnam in order to contribute to the debates among the university’s diverse pro-North Vietnamese groups.¹⁹ While overseeing the filming of the project in Vietnam, however, the director received an urgent correspondence from René Berchoud, a long-time friend and co-organizer of Besançon’s local cultural center, the CCPPO (*Centre culturel populaire de Palente-les-Orchamps*), appealing to him to capture the unique character of the strikes taking place in and around Rhodiaceta: “If you aren’t in China or elsewhere, come to Rhodia – important things are happening here.”²⁰ The strikes at Rhodiaceta were “unique” in that the strikers’ protests went far beyond issues of wages and work hours toward a broader societal critique of how the factory’s debilitating conditions alienated its workers from the spheres of culture, art, and communication. As Trevor Stark argues: “... in recognizing themselves as the constitutive exclusion of the cultural sphere, the strikers called into question the

¹⁸ See David L. Schalk, Benjamin Stora, and George C. Herring, *War and the Ivory Tower: Algeria and Vietnam* (Omaha: University of Nebraska Press, 2005); Norman Mailer, *The Armies of the Night: History as a Novel, the Novel as History* (New York: New American Library, 1968).

¹⁹ François Lecoïnte, “The Elephants at the End of the World: Chris Marker and Third Cinema,” *Third Text* 25, no. 1 (2011): 94-5.

²⁰ Berchoud, quoted in the Medvedkin Group DVD collection booklet, *Les Groupes Medvedkine: Le cinéma est une arme* (Paris: Éditions Montparnasse, 2006), 5.

conception of culture as a separate category within bourgeois society, supposedly divorced from the means-end rationality of productive existence.”²¹ This demand for access to culture, Stark points out, was largely conditioned by the CCPPO, which had been working since the early 1960s to enrich Besançon’s cultural life, by organizing plays by Brecht and scholarly lectures on Picasso, and by screening the films of directors including Vautier, Godard, and Ivens. Upon receiving Berchoud’s letter, Marker is reported to have taken a hiatus from editing SLON’s first documentary in order to travel to Rhodiacesta to make a collaborative film with the strikers entitled *À bientôt j’espère* (1967-1968). Segments of the latter were then incorporated into the finalized version of *Loin du Vietnam*, which, in turn, would receive its premiere screening for the workers in the town of Besançon. *Loin du Vietnam*’s production, distribution, and exhibition were thus guided by the imperative to generate the kind of relational or pluralist discourse constitutive of the broader manifestation of dissent that culminated in and around May ’68.

Indeed, the Left Bank’s, and particularly Marker’s, work during this period resonates with the critical objectives outlined by the Student-Writer Action Committee, a coalition of activists and intellectuals who, with the assistance of Maurice Blanchot, produced a series of ephemeral “tracts,” posters, and collages.²² These texts were intended to articulate the new forms of mass organization that occurred around the May movement. In the first issue, the Committee outlines its goals as follows: to make anonymous texts, not in order to free the writer from

²¹ Stark, 120.

²² In 1968, Godard, Resnais, and Marker collaborated on an un-credited project called ciné-tracts, which put together forty-one documentaries, usually lasting from two to four minutes in length, that dealt with the workers’ strikes and police repression. See Wheeler Winston Dixon, *The Films of Jean-Luc Godard* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 103.

accountability, “but to constitute collective or plural speech: a communism of writing”; to maintain the fragmentary character of these texts, so that processes of speech “find their meaning not in themselves but in their conjunction-disjunction, their being placed together and in common [*mise en commun*], their relations of difference”; to abandon the privilege accorded to “originality” in favour of citation and the new meanings created through the relations between fragments of discourse; and to open channels for the non-experts and those without speech to “have a place in which to express themselves or to find themselves expressed, whether directly or indirectly.” The Committee concludes by stressing the need to perpetually “decenter centers,” the chief of such centers being “the work space (worker-student relations)” and “the international exigency (relations with foreigners).”²³ SLON’s first documentary clearly shows a similar injunction toward both aesthetic and political de-centering.

In contrast to the auteurist emphasis of French film and film culture in the early 1960s, *Loin du Vietnam* presents a collage of perspectives, which are marked either by a kind of authorial restraint, as in Ivens’s observational documentary footage, or by meditations on and critiques of directorial authority itself, as in Godard’s and Resnais’s segments. The film also borrows from what François Lecoq calls the period’s “plastic production” in its blending of diverse media – photography, animation, graffiti, video material – and modes – observational documentary, news footage from both American and Vietnamese television,

²³ Student-Writer Action Committee, “Comité: The First Issue (October 1968),” reprinted in Maurice Blanchot, *Political Writings, 1953-1993*, trans. Zakir Paul (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 85-86.

testimonials, and talking head segments.²⁴ Such modernist strategies of reflexivity and discontinuity always remain directed, however, by the political aim of de-centering Western capitalist society's false sense of seclusion from the realities of imperialist violence. As Godard's voiceover narration says: "... the best thing I can do is to let Vietnam invade us and make us realize the place that it occupies in our daily lives, everywhere." His section of the film, as I will note below, produces a series of conjunctions and disjunctions, as when images of the workers' strikes at Rhodiaceta are blended with images of North Vietnamese liberation fighters, or when Western cosmetic advertisements collide against footage of napalmed bodies. Such strategies of "placing in common," to use the Committee's terms, also pervade *Loin du Vietnam* as a whole. Celia Britton observes how the film's ominous opening scenes, which cross-cut between footage of American bombers being loaded and then actually deployed, and footage of women forging bomb shelters in Hanoi, work to make the North Vietnamese plight not only narratively intelligible to Western audiences, but phenomenologically perceptible at an immediate and affective level. Aligning the film's perspective with the glances of the North Vietnamese women at work, the camera encourages the spectator to "look *with* them at parts of their bodies. [...] The commentary reinforces the identification by reading an extract from a letter from Ivens saying: 'Just by being with the Vietnamese, one becomes calm *like* them.'" ²⁵

Both Godard's and the Left Bank's intervention in the Vietnam War would thus appear as an aesthetic and political reversal of their timid confrontation with the

²⁴ François Lecoq, 96.

²⁵ Celia Britton, "The Representation of Vietnam in French Films Before and After 1968" in *May '68: Coming of Age*, eds. D.L. Hanley and A.P. Kerr (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989), 169.

Franco-Algerian War earlier in the decade, particularly in the cases of *Muriel* and *Le Petit soldat*. The earlier films are characterized by a dearth of visual representation and a near total exclusion of the Algerians who were tortured and disappeared in the name of the French people. This (structuring) absence is also symptomatized as a crisis of French identity and its narcissistic self-misrecognition. In *Loin du Vietnam*, however, we are given an excess, or as the fictionalized hero of Resnais's segment puts it, an "obscurity," of representation, reflective of the ways in which the Vietnam war entered into "the West's living room." The film also incites the spectator to look the "Vietnamese's challenge in the face," and to recognize this challenge "as all around us, within us." In this sense, *Loin du Vietnam* and its surrounding critical discourses partake in one of the period's prevailing, vaguely Maoist, convictions that all revolutionary movements – industrial, intellectual, anti-colonialist – participate in the same struggle against an increasingly globalized capitalism.²⁶ Michel Ciment's review of the film in *Positif* emphasizes this need to see the Vietnamese's freedom as a problem for the French: "Sa force est de s'élargir progressivement, de donner au Vietnam sa dimension mondiale, d'en faire le reflet de notre monde."²⁷ The utopianism of such claims, however, was often attenuated by a countervailing anxiety surrounding the French intellectual's desire to speak with rather than for the Vietnamese.²⁸

²⁶ Britton, 166.

²⁷ Michel Ciment, "Loin du Vietnam," *Positif* 89 (November 1967), 11-13.

²⁸ The anxiety is exemplified by the Left Bank's letter to the Vietnamese, which supplemented the film: "Words of friendship and solidarity, however sincere they may be, are only words... Silence in the face of the war in Vietnam is impossible. But saying 'solidarity' from afar and without risk, may also be a convenient way of easing one's conscience. Our solidarity occurs in towns that no one bombs, in lives that no one menaces. What does this mean? We know that this war is your war, that the peace, when it becomes possible, will be your peace, and that no one has the right, even with the best of intentions, to put themselves in your place, to speak on your behalf. Where is our place? To answer

In this respect, Britton reminds us that despite the French left's various iterations of solidarity with the Vietnamese, France's relationship with its former colony remained a highly vexed one, fraught with ideological complications. Such complications included the humiliating defeat at Dien Bien Phu and France's partial responsibility for America's subsequent military presence in Vietnam, as well as both nations' conflicting global political allegiances. For example, the Vietnamese were heavily supported by the Soviets, who had become a target of scorn among the radical French intellectual left since the invasion of Hungary in 1956. Ho Chi Minh also promoted a militant nationalistic stance against the Chinese cultural revolution for both practical and ideological reasons, thus problematizing the French absorption of the war into a Maoist discourse.²⁹ The intellectual filmmakers who produced *Loin du Vietnam* were acutely aware of such contradictions, and their film is marked, in addition to the claims for solidarity, by numerous instances of caution about the technologically mediated and politically situated character of all representation. In anticipation of the dominant trends within the film theory of the 1970s, the question of "subject positioning" thus pervades the overall texture of the film – the constant shifting of both location and film formats, the attentiveness to the material qualities of the image – and is made the focus of Godard's and Resnais's particular sections.

Godard's section, entitled "Camera Eye," literally turns on the director himself and his contradictory place as a Western intellectual embroiled in the

these questions, we have undertaken to make a film. It is a response that is neither praiseworthy nor heroic, but which has the sole motive of being tangible, within our means and within our limitations. It is with our work, it is within the context of our profession, that we want to bring a little life to this word 'solidarity.'" Quoted in Thomas Waugh, "*Loin du Vietnam* (1967), Jorin Ivens and Left Bank Documentary," *Jump Cut*, no. 53 (Summer 2011), <http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc53.2011/WaughVietnam/index.html>.

²⁹ Britton, 163-165; also see Schalk, "Background to Historical Engagement: Historical Comparisons," in *Ivory Tower*, 14-37.

Vietnam War. Facing the screen, while simultaneously positioned behind his clunky American Mitchell camera, he reflects on the irony of representing the Vietnamese struggle to the profit of the Americans, whose cinematic technology determines how the war will be represented to the Global West. As Stephen Heath notes: “This camera – American Mitchell – this film – American Eastman Colour – have a great deal to say, something to tell us about Vietnam, about the reality of the struggle and about the reality it produces and the positions of the subject they hold (representation is exactly a fixing of positions.)”³⁰ Rather than an emancipation from the political narcissism of *Le Petit soldat*, *Loin du Vietnam* thus stages a confrontation with the limitations of the European intellectual filmmaker’s subject position, a position whose iterative role in the construction of discourse is, in some senses, always already obscured by the “realism” of cinematic vision. As Godard would say in an interview with *Cahiers du cinéma*: “we are all narcissists, at least when it comes to Vietnam; so we might just as well admit it.”³¹ This admission entails a corollary understanding of the “coupures” between intellectuals, workers, and anti-colonialists. The intellectual lacks the brute phenomenological knowledge to “speak of bombs when they don’t fall on your head,” as the voiceover says, just as the worker (supposedly) lacks the “cultural knowledge” to diagnose his or her oppression at a structural level.³² The ideological fissure between Godard and Marker on these issues

³⁰ Stephen Heath, “Lessons from Brecht,” *Screen* 15, no. 2 (1974): 104.

³¹ Jacques Bontemps, Jean-Louis Comolli, Michel Delahaye, Jean Narboni, and Jean-Luc Godard, “Struggle on Two Fronts: A Conversation with Jean-Luc Godard,” *Film Quarterly* 22, no. 2 (1968): 23; originally published in *Cahiers du cinéma*, no. 194 (October 1967), 13-26.

³² Consider the following exchange in his 1967 interview with *Cahiers du cinéma*: “Godard ... A movie on the strikes at Rhodiacteta would have led to a quite different kind of realisation ... Yes, it would. But if it were made by a movie-maker, it wouldn't be the movie that should have been made. And if it were made by the workers themselves-who, from the technical point of view, could very well make it, if somebody gave them a camera and a guy to help them out a bit-it still wouldn't give as

will be discussed further at the conclusion of this chapter. For now, it is sufficient to note that Godard's section responds both to the apparent excess of representation and the discourse of solidarity that accompanies the film's intervention into the Vietnam War with a deep suspicion about the apparent obviousness of images, and a demand to understand the form of epistemological critique unique to different sectors of the anti-capitalist struggle.

Likewise, Resnais's section of the film stages a monologue by a fictional intellectual, Claude Ridder, who demonstrates an outright "bad faith" toward Vietnam's privileged place within broader third world narratives. Ridder, named after the time traveller in *Je t'aime, je t'aime* (1968), undermines the ability of the French to identify with the North Vietnamese while also dis-identifying with the Americans. In his protracted rant to a silent and expressionless female listener, he suggests that the Vietnamese have become "fashionable victims," whose heightened media representation has worked to obscure the equally significant situations of the Sudanese and the Kurds. He also points to the irony of disdaining the Americans as imperialists, when it is they who liberated the French during the Occupation. "The French," he reminds us, "didn't realize their anti-colonialism in Algeria." Significantly, what precedes this statement is a meditation on the use of torture in Vietnam. Ridder places the woman in one of those "ticking time bomb" scenarios discussed in Chapter 4, asking her if she would not condone the use of torture in the hypothetical event that it could save her own life. It becomes apparent in this scene

accurate a picture of them, from the cultural point of view, as the one they give when they're on the picket-lines. That's where the gap lies" (ibid., 22).

how explicitly the experience of the Algerian War has conditioned the perspective or subject position from which the film understands Vietnam.

Algeria irrevocably changed the way many French confronted these precise questions of solidarity and representation, which arose with greater force toward the conclusion of the decade. Intellectuals who thrust themselves behind the cause of independence soon learnt of their naïveté in the most basic areas of Algerian politics; for example, the key differences between the FLN and the MNA.³³ Their claims for solidarity with the colonized produced a series of double-binds. Could one, as Edgar Morin asked, support the FLN and remain loyal to the French Communist Party, given its complacency after the Soviet invasion of Hungary? The conflicting responses to such questions lead to the dissolution of political groups such as the *Comité d'Action des Intellectuels contre la poursuite de la Guerre en Afrique du Nord*.³⁴ Furthermore, as noted in Chapter 1, the collusion between state and media that warped and erased the realities of the war cast theoretical doubt upon the analogical qualities of the image, as in Barthes' famous example of the African boy soldier on the cover of *Paris-Match*, or *Cahiers du cinéma*'s gravitation toward questions of cinematic signification. Recall that the fissure between the MacMahonists and Jacques Rivette was largely played out around the latter's review of Panijel's *Octobre à Paris*.³⁵

³³ Martin Evans, "Motivation for Anti-Colonial Resistance," in *Memory of Resistance: French Opposition to the Algerian War, 1954-1962* (Oxford: Berg, 1997), 31-172.

³⁴ James LeSueur, "Visions of Reconciliation, Visions of Rupture: Violence, Propaganda, and Representations of Difference," in *Uncivil War* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 165-213.

³⁵ Emilie Bickerton, *A Short History of Cahiers du cinéma* (London: Verso, 2009), 34.

If Algeria posed both a political and representational crisis for the directors of the Left Bank, then does their treatment of the Vietnam War reflect an answer to or overcoming of this crisis? Or, does Algeria largely frame the perspective through which *Loin du Vietnam* casts its gaze on the struggle between American imperialism and third-world militancy in the late 1960s? In fact, the Franco-Algerian War is perhaps best understood in this context as a nodal point of multi-directional memory, a subject of “negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing,” in Michael Rothberg’s terms, with “the potential to create new forms of solidarity and new visions of justice.”³⁶ As described in Chapter 2, the war was drawn into such processes of cross-referencing from its outset, when many French recognized the trace of Vichy and Nazi violence in the policing and “pacification strategies” taking place in the colonies. In *Loin du Vietnam*, the Left Bank constitutes the Vietnam War as another node in the history of racial extermination that they encountered previously through Vichy and colonial Algeria. This chain of correspondences is made explicit by the film’s uncanny re-purposing of the Hans Eisler soundtrack to *Night and Fog*. The (displaced) presence of Eisler’s score invokes the horror of Resnais’s short documentary about the Holocaust and the Franco-Algerian War, and casts the film’s images of American violence against the North Vietnamese within the history of twentieth-century genocide.³⁷ It also counters the footage of American politicians and military personnel (for example, General Westmoreland), who justify the West’s imperialism in the name of democracy’s fight against “terror.” Such counter-

³⁶ Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 3-5.

³⁷ Jean-Paul Sartre, “Vietnam: Imperialism and Genocide,” in *Between Existentialism and Marxism*, trans. John Matthews (New York: Verso, 2008), 67-83.

informational strategies unfold in a manner that reflects directly back upon European and French subjectivity. Consider the key sequence in which Eisler's score returns during Agnès Varda's meditation on the systematic industrialized bombing that began against Hanoi in February of 1965. In a speech profoundly resonant with Sartre and de Beauvoir's anti-colonial writings earlier in the decade, Varda explains that the "bombardments, whose images you've seen, are not operations of war, they are exactly sessions of torture. The aim is to pacify the people, to break their resistance." She further draws upon the rhetoric of anti-colonialism in noting that the Vietnamese's impending victory is not a question of conquest, but "the recognition of a right" by a wronged community whose claims have gone unrecognized. In its dominant themes of torture and ethical caution toward representing the cause of the colonized other, and its formal evocations of the Left Bank's own prior entanglements with the Algerian War, the film indicates how "the events" earlier in the decade function as the prism or referential precondition through which the directors understand the Vietnam War and render it intelligible. The Vietnamese's far-off struggle, in return, triggers the spectre of what has yet to be remembered adequately at home.

The reference to Algeria's role within what Kristen Ross has called the "long history of May '68" was not unique to *Loin du Vietnam* and recurs across a number of French films in the late 1960s. In fact, of all of the contributors to SLON's first film, it was Godard, the director responsible for one of the most politically reactionary films at the time of the war, who made Algeria a consistent focus of his militant period. In 1967, Godard released three films, *Weekend*, *La Chinoise*, and *2 ou 3*

choses que je sais d'elle, which all depend on some allusion to France's eight-year police operation. In some cases, these allusions are made in passing, as when the male half of the decadent bourgeois couple in *Weekend* reveals that he mastered torture in North Africa. The memory of resistance in Algeria is crucial, however, to the way that *La Chinoise* thinks about the specificity of revolutionary movements. Jacques Rancière frames the latter as an exemplary "film from the red epoch, the epoch of straightforward colors and simple ideas. Not simplistic ideas, but the idea of trying to see what simple ideas look like."³⁸ Godard also described the film as an inversion of his political attitudes during the filming of *Le Petit soldat*, when he believed that it was impossible to make a political film, since one would need an "extragalactic" point of view to include the infinity of political perspectives: "I've changed. I think you're right to favor the correct view at the expense of the wrong ones."³⁹ This altered point of view is reflected in *La Chinoise* by Godard's consistent tendency to hold his characters – who enact Maoist doctrine from the insulated comfort of their bourgeois apartment – accountable to the exigencies of the exterior world. Like *Le Petit soldat*'s Bruno, *La Chinoise*'s protagonists confront the spectator with didactic and often mis-informed polemics, as when the theatre actor, Guillaume, defines the Vietnam War as a peripheral stake in the struggle between a non-dangerous Soviet Communism and a dangerous Chinese communism, erroneously aligning Vietnam with the Chinese. Yet here Godard incites the spectator to be critical of such "pseudo-revolutionary formulations," by, for example, undercutting Guillaume's descriptions

³⁸ Jacques Rancière, "The Red of *La Chinoise*: Godard's Politics," in *Film Fables*, trans. Emiliano Battista (London: Berg Press, 2006), 149.

³⁹ Godard, quoted in Bontemps et al., 22.

of the political “facts” with sardonic dramatisations and comic book imagery.⁴⁰ The most significant of such critical challenges occurs when Véronique, the would-be terrorist, shares her revolutionary beliefs with none other than Francis Jeanson, the former FLN liaison and leader of the Jeanson network. Godard is clear about the fact that he cast Jeanson because he “was relying on the allusion to Algeria.”⁴¹

Earlier in the film, Véronique explains that it was only after meeting the Algerian immigrants who live in the slums surrounding the University of Nanterre that she learned of the basic inequalities of Gaullist capitalism, such as the divisions between intellectual and manual work, and between life in the center and on the periphery; significantly, the film, in a tendency that recurs in *2 ou 3 choses*, uses Marienbad-like panoramic shots to render the slums as de-populated waste grounds. When speaking with Jeanson on their train ride through the suburbs, Véronique proposes to overcome the alienation between the cultured and non-cultured sectors of French society by bombing the universities, invoking Djamilia Bouhired’s attacks on the Milk Bar during the battle of Algiers as a means of bringing the Cultural Revolution to the West. Jeanson, the film’s synecdoche for French militancy in Algeria, is framed against the rural backdrop in the passing window, “grassy and punctuated by homes, so utterly foreign to the discourse of the aspiring terrorist,”⁴² and positioned as the voice of rationality in this exchange. He reminds Véronique that the Algerians were not only compelled to use violence against a repressive, totalitarian regime, but bolstered by the support of an entire people. To equate the rather abstract dissatisfaction felt by a small minority of petit-bourgeois youth with

⁴⁰ Britton, 176.

⁴¹ Godard, quoted in Bontemps et al., 20.

⁴² Rancière, 149.

the enforced starvation of an entire peasant population is thus to betray one of the chief maxims of Marxist-Leninist thought, namely, that a given revolutionary circumstance must be known according to its concrete, historical determinations. The very real disappointment which would have accompanied Jeanson's experience of Algeria's post-War transformation into a one-party state also lends a kind of wisdom to his questions to Véronique concerning what forms of governance she proposes to support after short-term acts of terror, questions to which she has no answers. Godard challenges the utopian terms through which the Chinese Cultural Revolution figured in the West, therefore, by placing the students' embrace of Maoist doctrine in tension with "the lessons" learned by the French Left in Algeria.

Among the four features he released in 1967, however, Godard's film about a lower middle-class housewife and prostitute, Juliette, and her relationship to a city in which everyone "is forced to prostitute oneself in one way or another,"⁴³ represents the director's sustained meditation on the question of solidarity, or "togetherness," in an increasingly alienated French society. *2 ou 3 choses que je sais d'elle* follows from the reverse ethnographic impulse that flourished in the context of decolonization, and was embodied both in documentaries, including *Chronique d'un été* and *Le Joli mai*, and in fictional features, such as *Cléo de 5 à 7* and *Muriel*. Here Godard covers similar territory to the latter film in his obsession with the re-planning of the urban landscape and the new culture of commodities. Yet *2 ou 3 choses que je sais d'elle* departs from *Muriel's* icy and opaque approach to these issues, openly presenting the changes to the nation's built environment as a product of the collusion between

⁴³ Jean-Luc Godard, "One Should Put Everything into a Film," in *Godard on Godard: Critical Writings*, trans. Tom Milne (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 1986), 239.

market finance and state policy. Shots of red, white, and blue dump trucks, and of cranes caught demolishing the region punctuate the narrative, as the voiceover condemns De Gaulle for instituting class and racial discrimination into the architecture of the city. Similarly, the emerging commodity culture presented in the films noted above had reached a hyper-mediatized phase by 1967, with the sale of television sets reaching two million compared to only three thousand in 1960, and with the ongoing expansion of print advertising and public billboards.⁴⁴ In *2 ou 3 choses*, Godard's thick description of the objects of mass culture, for example, the brazenly coloured graphic ads in *L'Express* and the billboards for Pax washing detergent, are integrated alongside his portrait of Juliette into a generalized "complex of feeling." By echoing the contemporary critical theory of the Frankfurt School, the film suggests that objects play an even greater role than subjects in the constitution of dominant discourses, their slogans and catch-phrases threatening to undermine the capacities of the human imagination; during the scene at the mechanic's garage, for example, Godard describes how the saturation of commodity-signs within everyday life has made it impossible to distinguish the real from the imaginary, thus negating the "irrealizing function" of the latter.⁴⁵ Godard's strategies of resistance to such

⁴⁴ Michael Kelly, Tony Jones, and Jill Forbes, "Modernization and Avant-gardes," in *French Cultural Studies: An Introduction*, eds. Jill Forbes and Michael Kelly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 146.

⁴⁵ The conflict between the market and the imagination was, for example, at the core of Herbert Marcuse's critique of "the one dimensional society": "The aesthetic dimension can serve as a sort of gauge for a free society. A universe of human relationships no longer mediated by the market, no longer based on competitive exploitation or terror, demands a sensitivity freed from the repressive satisfactions of unfree societies; a sensitivity receptive to forms and modes of reality which thus far have been projected only by the aesthetic imagination." Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 27. Similarly, Cornelius Castoriadis notes how the critique of "the established order" by the social movements of the late 1960s were organized around "the great appeals to the imagination." See Cornelius Castoriadis, "The Movements of the Sixties," in *World in Fragments: Writings on Politics, Society, Psychoanalysis, and the Imagination* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 42. In his notes on *2 ou 3 choses*, Godard describes how consumer

saturation should be understood not only in terms of a counter-mythological “denaturalization” of discourse, but as an attempt to imagine new representational forms capable of producing new forms of life (hence his allusion to Wittgenstein’s maxim that “the limits of my language are the limits of my world”).⁴⁶ The tension between the film’s desire to both dismantle and reconstruct discourse is particularly acute in the moments dealing with Vietnam.

Consider the key scene in which Juliette breaks away from her john, a chauvinistic American journalist, and enters into a monologue about her feelings of alienation. “It’s strange,” she says, “that a person in Europe on August 17th, 1966 can be thinking of a person in Asia.” Cued by Juliette’s imperative to “imagine him,” what follows is an image of a Vietnamese man whose face has been disfigured by napalm (Figure 26).

society has replaced human autonomy with “structures” or “complexes” whose functioning requires a simultaneously “objective” and “subjective” description of both people and things. Jean-Luc Godard, “My Approach in Four Movements,” in *Godard on Godard: Critical Writings*, trans. Tom Milne (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 1986), 239.

⁴⁶ See Allen Thiher, “Postmodern Dilemmas: Godard’s *Alphaville* and *Two or Three Things That I Know about Her*,” *boundary 2* 4, no. 3 (1976): 947-964.



Figure 26.

The representational status of this “imagined image,” however, remains somewhat ambiguous within the logic of the scene. On the one hand, the man’s appearance may serve as a cinematic equivalent to Sartre’s “l’imagination au pouvoir,” an instant where Juliette confronts her own domestication under Gaullist, American-inspired capitalism through a shocking image of this system’s global paternalism overseas. On the other hand, the film does not use any formal markers to suggest that this image is *Juliette*’s mental image. There are no fades or dissolves, for example, which transition into a subjective shot. The image, to use an old-fashioned term, appears as non-diegetic, a still photograph from *Life* magazine inserted abruptly into the film to the accompanying sound of gunfire. In Godard’s universe, the lower middle-class

housewife probably does not read *Life*. Like Charlotte in *Une femme mariée*, who studies her body proportions according to *Marie Claire*'s specifications but has never heard of Auschwitz, Juliette interrupts Bouvard and Pécuchet's taxonomy of the Vietnam War earlier in the film to quote *L'Express*'s praise of tights that resemble knee-high socks. Rather than establishing a psychological link between Juliette and the situation in Vietnam, the photograph announces itself as mediated, alien to her world, and perhaps alienated from its own historicity through its circulation within a commercial economy of signs. The command to "imagine" thus issues from Godard, who, with his growing interest in Vertov, attempts to edit together the existential material of everyday life – De Gaulle's policies, the dresses in *Vogue* magazine, the Vietnam War – into a refocused and reintegrated picture of the economic, domestic, and political dimensions of French society. And, as in *La Chinoise*, it is a (non-) image of Algeria that primes the spectator for this meditation on the alienated quality of everyday appearances. In the scene directly preceding Juliette's consideration of Vietnam, the film travels to the Parisian *banlieues*, but does not show us the Algerian immigrants heard off-frame, instead it reveals a multi-layered set of barriers to our perception: a glass wall in the foreground, a fence in the middle-ground, and a faceless *grande ensemble* in the background. The strategic positioning of this scene and the deliberate invisibility of the Algerians perhaps calls into question the French left's ability to see itself in the press images of Vietnam when it fails to see its own interior forms of colonization. Yet, as Jean-Patrick Lebel argues in his docu-fiction film, *Notes for Debussy, An Open Letter to Jean-Luc Godard* (1994), the Algerian immigrants of the housing estates never figure as more than a framing perspective or

an allusion in Godard's film, their agency and historicity reduced to an abstract lesson on the politics of visibility.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Lebel, who plays Bouvard in Godard's film, returned to the same building, the Debussy in La Courneuve, in order to give its residents the chance to narrate their own experiences of the banlieues since the 1960s. See Verena Andermatt Conley, "Literature, Space, and the French Nation-State after the 1950s," in *French Global: A New Approach to Literary History*, eds. Christie McDonald and Susan Suleiman (New York: Columbia University, Press), 154-155.

Conclusion

One shivers for the fate of these volumes guarded so carefully behind iron gates... Designed as a 'place of memory' to keep the past alive, the funeral library seems, instead, to have assumed the form of its tomb. Is it too much to imagine that it is a tomb enclosing some of the darkest, and most carefully guarded, secrets of the national past?

– Naomi Greene⁴⁸

*The point here is certainly not to align political tendency with the overall quality of a given work. Of course one would rather watch Godard's *Petit Soldat* than, say, René Vautier's *Algérie en flammes* (1959), however much one might admire the latter's support for Algerian independence.*

– Tom McDonough⁴⁹

In this dissertation, I have argued that modern French cinema, echoing the broader discourses of the French intellectual left, articulated the intersection between modernization and decolonization through motifs of displacement and abjection. The horror of colonialism functioned as an affective cinematic frame onto the modern world, and gave rise to different kinds of subject positions. In some films, such as *Nuit et brouillard* and *Le Joli mai*, horror is mobilized as “political affect,” a catalyst for both a dis-identification with the state and an implied declaration of solidarity with the colonized. In other films, including *Muriel* and *Le Petit soldat*, horror is associated with a conservative retreat back into the shelter of national identity. Both

⁴⁸ Naomi Greene, *Landscapes of Loss: The National Past in Postwar French Cinema* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 42.

⁴⁹ Tom McDonough, *The Beautiful Language of My Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), 77.

responses demonstrate that Algeria represented a crisis for French intellectuals, activists, and artists concerning how to place themselves in relation to a revolutionary situation that could not be absorbed into a pre-established Eurocentric worldview or Marxist discourse. The first section of the conclusion considers how this problem of the French filmmaker's political positionality vis-à-vis revolutionary struggle plays itself out in the post '68 era. I focus on Godard's and Marker's attempts at collective cinema as exemplifying two radically distinct approaches to this problem, and situate their divergences as a productive platform to consider the cinema of René Vautier in the final section.

Following the events of May '68, Godard and Marker developed a tacit rivalry around the question of how to represent subaltern people's struggles without reinscribing relations of class inequality. 1968 marked the year that Godard founded the Dziga Vertov Group with Jean-Pierre Gorin, one of the editors of the journal *Cahiers Marxistes-Léninistes*, in order to depart from the avant-gardist auto-critique of cinema, which he identified with his previous films, toward a cinematic critique of societal class consciousness.⁵⁰ Over the next four years, the group would produce a number of films – for example, *British Sounds/See you at Mao* (1969), *Pravda* (1969), *Vladimir et Rosa* (1971), *Tout va bien* (1972), and *Letter to Jane* (1972) – which, each in its own way, continues the investigation initiated by Godard's "Camera Eye" segment in *Loin du Vietnam* of the epistemological gap or "coupures" between different sectors of the class struggle. As James Roy MacBean argues, what differentiates the Dziga Vertov Group's output from Marker's work at this time is the

⁵⁰ Stark, 139.

former's insistence on the types of knowledge specific to intellectuals and workers.⁵¹ The workers who have been silenced by the factory, Godard argues, cannot suddenly be expected to articulate their struggle with the very tools that have been monopolized by those in economic control.⁵² Likewise, the intellectual, who lacks the phenomenological experience of the factory, cannot speak on behalf of the workers, but can only frame his or her experience within the broader contradictions of class society. In *Pravda*, the Vertov Group narrates a hypothetical letter from Lenin, the symbol of scientific Marxism, to Rosa Luxemburg, the symbol of grassroots resistance, which explicitly attacks Marker as a naïve empiricist, guilty of a credulous belief in the capacity of the oppressed to articulate an unmediated account of their situation:

Like Delacroix in Algiers or Chris Marker in the strike-torn factories of Rhodiaceta. The *New York Times* and *Le Monde* call it news. And I agree with you, Rosa, that it isn't enough. Why? Because it's only the knowledge perceived by our senses. Now one has to make the effort to rise above this perceptual knowledge. One needs to struggle to transform it into rational knowledge.⁵³

The Vertov Group thus perceived its mission as one of transforming perceptual knowledge into scientific knowledge, a mission which culminated in their analysis of another *Life* magazine photograph from the Vietnam War in *Letter to Jane*. In that

⁵¹ James Roy MacBean, "Godard and the Dziga-Vertov Group: Film and Dialectics," *Film Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (Autumn 1972), 33-34: "Coming from the petit bourgeois milieu, they acknowledge that they do not have the kind of working-class experience of oppression that would enable them to deal with the day-to-day experience of the worker, particularly the worker who has not developed a class-conscious analysis of his own oppression and alienation [...] for Godard and Gorin have repeatedly emphasized that unlike other militant film groups such as Newsreel or Chris Marker's SLON or the French CGT labor union film group or Paul Serban, the Dziga Vertov Group rejects the 'reflection of reality' notion of the cinema and therefore refuses the 'go out and get footage' approach (*la chasse aux images*) which invariably emphasizes the 'you were there' immediacy quality of events at the expense of a thorough analysis of causes, effects, relations and contradictions of events."

⁵² Godard makes this remark about Marin Karmitz's *Coup pour Coup* (1972) in an interview featured in extra features of the *Criterion* edition of *Tout va bien*.

⁵³ MacBean, 35-36.

film, Godard and Gorin never engage with the North Vietnamese, but analyze, following Althusser, how the representation of the war functions within a network of historical relations. By theorizing the inequality of camera focus between what the narration calls Jane Fonda's simulated "expression of an expression" of pity in the foreground and the anonymous Vietnamese man's authentic expression of his own concrete historical reality in the background, the group conclude that the North Vietnamese's decision to release this image to the Western press actually promotes the kind of individualist American ideology – the star system – that their collective struggle is defined against. This critique of bourgeois humanism, however, can only be identified by the film's authors, the pedagogues with the theoretical knowledge to apply scientific reason to the chaotic world of appearances.

In contrast with the Dziga Vertov Group's mission to liberate the spectator's consciousness through a distanced, scientific analysis of the class struggle in its different iterations, Marker moved toward a more instigative and interactive model of cinema in the post-'68 years, modelled after the legacy of Alexander Medvedkin, the subject of *The Last Bolshevik* (1993), and his unique practice of Soviet factography. During the civil war years in the Soviet Union (1917-1922), and again in the late 1920s, Medvedkin travelled across the provinces in a cine-train composed of three carriages which doubled as a production studio in order both to bring agit-prop to the masses and to aid a largely illiterate peasantry in producing their own films, which were then brought back to the center. Marker was particularly inspired by Medvedkin's view of cinema as a weapon to intervene in, rather than to reflect, social injustice, and attempted to stage a similar intervention into the workers' lives at

Besançon following their dissatisfaction with *À bientôt j'espère*.⁵⁴ Importing editing tables, 16-mm cameras and tape recorders from Paris, SLON transformed the CCPPO into a makeshift film studio where the collective would make films with the workers. In their second film, *Classe de lutte* (1968), which focuses on the daily life of Suzanne Zedet, a mother and employee at the Yema watch factory who became a key figure within the community's militant culture, SLON attempts to radically de-center the boundaries between the "subject" and "object" of documentary film practice. Not only does the film crew participate in the day-to-day labour of the workers' strikes and demonstrations, but they also integrate Zedet into the construction of the film by recording her reception of her own image and by implementing her suggestions into the final editing process. As Stark argues in his analysis of the film, Zedet's closing revelations concerning how the working class must fight to be exposed to culture with the same conviction that they fight for changes to their labour conditions should lead us to reject Godard's contemporaneous assessment of SLON's project as striving toward a kind of vulgar realism.⁵⁵ Rather, Marker's work at this time was premised on the principles of de-classification and de-specialization that Rancière identifies with the May movement in its broader contours, a desire to un-discipline the enclosures of knowledge that privilege any particular group identity – the PCF, the intellectuals, the students – as the arbiter of politics. The politics of May were forged around a "we" that was constituted by a rejection of any pre-fabricated community.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Stark, 126-33. In addition to Stark's key piece on the relationship between Marker and Medvedkin, see Nora M. Alter, *Chris Marker* (Champaign IL: University of Illinois, 2006), 45-53; and Paul Douglas Grant, "Just Some of the Ways to Shoot a Strike: Militant Filmmaking in France from Arc to the Groupe Medvedkine," *Situations: Project of the Radical Imagination* 4, no. 1 (2011).

⁵⁵ Stark, 148.

⁵⁶ Jacques Rancière, "The Cause of the Other," *Parallax* 4 (1998): 30.

Yet the cinematic expression of such a politics of dis-identification in Marker's work did not begin with May '68. Seen from the longer historical view outlined by this dissertation, we can identify how this politics of dis-identification began to emerge in the Left Bank Group's response to the Algerian War, which, despite its ambivalence at times, manifested the political as an opposition to the self. In the case of their representation of the Algerian War and the Algerian people, however, even the Left Bank group were ultimately not able to "give the power of speech to the people who don't have it," or to "help them find their own means of expression."⁵⁷

As I turn toward a conclusion that proposes future directions for the study of the French representation of the Algerian War, I will consider one French director, René Vautier, who took up this representational task with the militants of the FLN. Vautier's filmography is largely beyond the scope of this dissertation and its concern with how Algeria functions as a crisis of representation which modified the cinematic perception of *French* society in the process of modernization. His work illustrates a process of French cinema transforming itself into a legitimately Algerian cinema concerned with the revolutionary and the post-revolutionary aftermath of Algerian society. This transformation began in the late 1940s, when, as a student at IDHEC (Institut des Hautes Études Cinématographiques) he was commissioned to make a pedagogical film about what was then called French West Africa for French secondary school students. Outraged by what he saw as the parallels between the situation in Niger and the Nazi violence he witnessed as a fighter for the Resistance, Vautier made what some historians call the first ever anti-colonial documentary, *Afrique 50* (1950), leading to his one-year imprisonment for violating a 1934 decree

⁵⁷ Marker, quoted in Stark, 119.

instituted by Vichy collaborator, Pierre Laval.⁵⁸ In contrast to what he identifies in his memoirs, *Caméra citoyenne*, as Jean Rouch's capitulation to the State's policed representation of the colonies, Vautier developed an undercover identity in the ensuing period and travelled to Algeria to become a filmmaker and educator.⁵⁹ There he helped the FLN establish its film unit in 1957 and trained future Algerian filmmakers, including Chérif Zennati and Abd el Hamid Mokdad.⁶⁰ In that same year, he made one of the first ever anti-colonial combat documentaries, *L'Algérie en flammes*, during which his camera was gunned down by the counter-insurgency, leaving a small fragment of the camera embedded in his skull to this day. Over the remaining course of the war of independence, he collaborated with a reluctant Frantz Fanon on a short documentary, *J'ai huit ans* (1961), which combines ethnography with radical psychiatry to re-present the drawings of Algerian children who fled to a Tunisian refugee camp after their parents were both tortured and killed by French troops.⁶¹ On the dawn of independence in 1962, he helped develop the Centre-Audio-visuel, which, in the style of Medvedkin, began a "ciné-pops" program that used two projection vans to facilitate agit-prop screenings across 220 locations in Algeria for a largely illiterate peasantry.⁶² In addition to key Soviet texts like Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (1925), the project screened Vautier's own *Peuple en marche* (1963), the first documentary to demonstrate the exigencies of life in post-independence Algeria.

⁵⁸ Steven Ungar, "Making Waves: René Vautier's *Afrique 50* and the Emergence of Anti-Colonial Cinema," *L'Esprit Créateur* 51, no. 3 (2011): 34-46.

⁵⁹ René Vautier, *Caméra citoyenne: Mémoires* (Paris: Editions Apogée, 1998), 29-49.

⁶⁰ Nicholas Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look: A Counterhistory of Visuality* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 246.

⁶¹ Guy Austin, "Drawing trauma: visual testimony in *Caché* and *J'ai huit ans*," *Screen* 48, no. 4 (2007): 529-536.

⁶² Mirzoeff, 252.

Vautier, Manifestations, Future Directions

When considering this dissertation's broad themes of policing and horror, I am compelled to return in these final pages to the disciplinary space first explored in Chapter 2: the Bibliothèque nationale de France. For France's national library was not only the subject of Resnais's 1956 documentary on the disciplining of historical knowledge, it was also the site where Vautier compiled the materials for his first anti-colonial ciné-pamphlet in the name of Algerian independence. Wanted by French authorities for *Afrique 50*, Vautier was unable to secure a visa to travel to Algeria after the FLN staged their first acts of resistance on All Saints' Day 1954, and so decided to make a research film, composed of all the written sources he could gather from the Bibliothèque on France's relation to the Maghreb. After months of research, Vautier excavated testimonials from French generals dating back to the mid-nineteenth century, which provided rather strong evidence that France's history of barbarism in Algeria included the use of gas chambers. With the assistance of his colleagues at the IDHEC, Jean Lods and Sylvie Blanc, he made a short documentary entitled *Une nation, l'Algérie* (1955), whose voiceover narration incorporated direct passages from Vautier's research findings:

Tous les textes que je citais dans le film figuraient à la Bibliothèque nationale à Paris, et avaient été rédigés par ceux qui avaient pratiqué ces méthodes, et qui s'en glorifiaient dans une certaine mesure. L'Assemblée nationale avait

approuvé ces méthodes de guerre. Allait-on envoyer les jeunes là-bas, faire la guerre sans les avertir?⁶³

This short film, although it was produced with the state's reference materials, had no chance of securing a state visa, and Vautier did not even bother to apply for one. He organized clandestine screenings across Paris and was eventually able to place one of the two copies of the film in the hands of Frantz Fanon during a secret meeting in Tunisia in 1956; the latter wanted to present Vautier's work to an FLN delegation in South Africa. The first copy was destroyed by the anti-FLN Mouvement national algérien at a screening in the Latin Quarter, and the other was apparently stolen from Fanon.⁶⁴

What Vautier describes in a 2001 interview with Nicole Brenez as a paradoxical sense of the archive as a site that exposes history while it simultaneously constitutes its repression is perhaps resonant with the fate of his own cinema, now stored in libraries across France, including the Bibliothèque nationale.⁶⁵ I experienced a similar kind of vertigo when I first screened a number of his films, including *Peuple en marche* (1963), and *J'ai huit ans* (1961) in the library's audio-visual archive. This encounter with Vautier's cinema was admittedly primed by my own subject-position at the time, as I had arrived in Paris in the midst of the mass demonstrations and strikes by millions of protesters in October 2010 against the federal government's pension reform plan.⁶⁶ On my first night in the city, I watched as paramilitary riot

⁶³ Nicole Brenez and Bernard Benoliel, "Un entretien avec René Vautier," *Cahiers du cinéma* no. 561 (October 2001): 14.

⁶⁴ Marc Kravetz, "Entretien avec René Vautier," *Positif* no. 50-51-52 (March 1963): 47.

⁶⁵ Brenez, 47.

⁶⁶ The total number of protesters on October 12, 2010, has been estimated at between 1.2 and 3.5 million in Paris alone. See Christian Fraser, "French police frustrated by new strike blockades," *BBC News*, 20 October 2010: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-11580492>.

police “cleared” the manifestations surrounding the Bastille, putting the principle of “nothing to see here” into practice. The imprint of the event asserted its relevance in the ensuing days, when I started my research at the national library.

Most archival research demands that the researcher proceed through a series of (softly coercive) disciplinary checks and mechanisms: proof of citizenship, a letter attesting to his or her “expertise” in the field, and even physical searches. Nonetheless, the particular topic at hand, the French cinematic representation of the Algerian War, seemed to provoke a prolonged pause at each checkpoint, accompanied by some form of reminder that this was a “loaded” or “curious” topic, especially for a Canadian student to be studying. For years, I had read about Algeria as the “specter” or “structuring absence” of the French cinema of the 1950s and 1960s. Now, after a succession of long escalator rides, security checkpoints, and clearances through metal detectors, I was in a modest room in the library’s basement, watching films by a French director in which millions of Algerians, in their expansive cultural diversity, could be seen manifesting themselves across the country’s streets.

Vautier’s films could not be assimilated into the opaque cinema studied in this dissertation, with all of its strategies of allusion and indirection. Instead of Auschwitz and Dachau as allegories or “screen memories” for Algeria’s concentration camps, Vautier’s *Peuple en marche* confers visibility on the real Djelfa and Bossuet in all of their architectural and criminal specificity. It also contains the only footage of the massacre at Saqiet sidi Yussuf, what the director refers to as Algeria’s Guernica. However, it was not only the images of dead bodies or the testimonies of torture that made the experience of watching the film chilling, but rather the collision between the

disciplinary setting and the film's images of the post-revolutionary masses. In the vein of Eisenstein and Vertov, *Peuple en marche* shows the hardships of post-war reconstruction: the shared efforts among the peasantry and the military to harvest the land still embedded with explosives; the rebuilding of schools and hospitals; and the political demonstrations that involved all classes of society in the cause of socialism. Above all, Vautier's agit-prop film, as its title suggests, shows masses of bodies in the process of taking and giving form, and is perhaps too utopian in its promotion of the unified Algerian society to come (Figure 27).

J'ai huit ans contains a similar combination of trauma and celebration. In forcing the spectator to confront the faces of the five boys whose stories constitute the voiceover, and in narrativizing their drawings of scenes depicting French troops torturing and murdering their parents, the film asks us to imagine how France's presence and now-absence modifies Algerian subjectivity, and constitutes its "interior-alterity," to use Balibar's term.⁶⁷ And, like *Peuple en marche*, this short documentary concludes with visualizations of the people reunited to the uncanny soundtrack of a chant for Algerian independence (Figure 28).

⁶⁷ Étienne Balibar, "Algeria, France: One nation or two," in *Giving Ground: The Politics of Proximity*, eds. Joan Copjec and Michael Sorkin (London: Verso, 1999), 167.



Figure 27.



Figure 28.

Encountering these sounds and images, it was difficult not to be reminded of the conclusion of Pontecorvo's *The Battle of Algiers* (1966), in which a French radio broadcaster defines the undulating sounds emanating from the city's streets as something entirely alien to his European ears, even monstrous. Were Vautier's films, now left to languish in the Bibliothèque nationale, also potentially monstrous to the French society of control beyond the library's walls?

A source of insight into this question arrived during the days before I left Paris, when the magazine *le Nouvel Observateur* released a special issue devoted to the question of "Notre guerre d'Algérie," accompanied by a limited-edition DVD of Bertrand Tavernier's *La guerre sans nom* (1992). In responding to the arguments made by that film, since expanded by philosophers and historians, including Balibar and Herman Lebovics,⁶⁸ the articles in the issue describe how "the Algerian" functions as a synecdoche for the figure of "the immigrant" or non-European other in contemporary France, a generalized target of right-wing bigotry and scapegoating.⁶⁹ This slippage, the authors rightly point out, is the product of over fifty years of state sanctioned amnesia, which began with the amnesty agreements secured by the Evian accords in 1962 against the re-interrogation of French war crimes in Algeria, and continues into the knife-edge present; for example, in the 2005 legislation which forces educators solely to emphasize the "positive role" played by France in the

⁶⁸ Etienne Balibar, *We, the People of Europe?: Reflections on Transnational Citizenship* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009); Herman Lebovics, *Bringing the Empire Back Home: France in the Global Age* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).

⁶⁹ Sylvain Courage and Nicole Pénicaud, "Notre Guerre d'Algérie," *le Nouvel Observateur* no. 2398, 21-27 October 2010: 22-34; Slimane Zeghidour, "Un demi-siècle plus tard... Les Algériens enterrent la guerre," *le Nouvel Observateur* no. 2398, 21-27 October 2010: 36-38.

former colonies.⁷⁰ The state's prolonged refusal to identify historical links between the war, the wave of Algerian immigration to France during the period of modernization-decolonization, and the economic and geographical concentration of Arabs around the *banlieues* in the wake of de-industrialization, has spawned "la gangrène et l'oubli" from which current xenophobic anxieties have been allowed to spread.⁷¹ These anxieties are masked in the name of a pious devotion to French cultural sovereignty, and the far right's "defense" against the invasion of "Arab-ness" into public space and of Arab slang into the everyday French vernacular.⁷²

Yet such observations concerning the consequences of a national inability to count the French-Algerian past *as* French have been made, in albeit more diffuse form, elsewhere. What made this special issue of *le Nouvel Observateur* of particular interest was that it was in part triggered by the cultural response to Rachid Bouchareb's film *Hors la loi* (2010).⁷³ A quasi-Western, *Hors la loi* tells the story of three brothers who survive the French military's and *pied noirs*' massacre of the Muslim population of Sétif, and become involved, in distinct ways, with the cause of the FLN in Paris in the 1950s and 1960s. Prior to debuting at Cannes on May 21, 2010, it became the target of pre-emptive attacks by the radical right to halt its distribution. Lionel Luca, a deputy of the National Assembly belonging to Nicolas Sarkozy's Union pour un Mouvement Populaire party, condemned the film as "anti-French" before even seeing it, and commissioned the Service historique de la défense

⁷⁰ John Milfull, "Decolonising Europe? The Colonial Boomerang," *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 54, no. 3 (September 2008): 468.

⁷¹ Benjamin Stora, *La gangrène et l'oubli* (Paris: La Découverte, 1991).

⁷² Nathalie Funès and Agathe Logeart, "Comment Sarkozy drague les rapatriés," *le Nouvel Observateur* no. 2398, 21-27 October 2010: 47.

⁷³ Funès and Logeart, 46-50.

(SHD) – an arm of the Ministry of Defense – to evaluate the film’s historical accuracy. In a continuation of the legacy of disinformation that typically characterized the state’s official response to the war, the SHD undermined the film, noting: “The director wants to suggest that on May 8, 1945, Muslims in Sétif were blindly massacred by Europeans, whereas it’s the contrary that transpired... all historians agree on that... Europeans lashed out against Muslims in response to Muslims massacring Europeans.”⁷⁴ The film premiered at Cannes to the scene of thousands of protesters belonging to the far-right National Front, whose presence led police to frisk all attendees out of fear they might be carrying explosives. The mayor of Cannes responded to the protests by organizing a pro-French rally for all of the European soldiers lost to or injured by the war.⁷⁵

If the far-right’s response to Bouchareb’s film is any indication, then those counter-informational images stored in the Bibliothèque remain a threat to the state and its ongoing instrumentalization of history. In fact, the simultaneously bureaucratic and repressive character of the intervention against *Hors la loi* looks

⁷⁴ France 24, “Bouchareb film slammed for 'falsifying' history of French-Algerian massacre,” France 24, 1 May 2010: <http://www.france24.com/en/20100429-bouchareb-film-slammed-falsifying-history-french-algerian-massacre-cannes>. In fact, historians Alastair Horne, Benjamin Stora, Martin Evans, and Jim House and Neil MacMaster all agree that the conflict was initiated by the French police’s violent confiscation of anti-colonial signs held by Algerians on Victory in Europe Day, May 8, 1945. As House and MacMaster describe, “On 1 May 1945 police fired on unarmed nationalist demonstrations in Algiers and Oran, killing 12 people, and on 8 May shot and killed untold numbers of unarmed demonstrators in Sétif, Guelma, and Bône. In a riposte to a peasant insurrection during which 103 Europeans were killed, the colonial regime exacted revenge and reasserted its authority by a massive and disproportionate violence: over a period of several months the police, armed forces, and civilian vigilantes killed between 15,000 and 45,000 Algerians in the North Constantine region.” See also Martin Evans, *Algeria: France’s Undeclared War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 82-91; and Benjamin Stora, *Algeria, 1830-2000: A Short History* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 249; Alastair Horne, *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria 1954-1962* (New York: NYRB Classics, 2006), 23-96; Boucif Mekhaled, *Chroniques d’un massacre 8 mai 1945: Sétif, Guelma, Kherrata* (Paris: Syros, 1995), 117-118.

⁷⁵ Mark Brown, “Hundreds protests as ‘anti-French’ *Outside the Law* is screened,” *The Guardian*, 21 May 2010: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2010/may/21/rachid-bouchareb-outside-the-law-protests>

unfortunately familiar when seen against the backdrop of Vautier's career. All of Vautier's anti-colonial films were denied a visa until the 1970s, often for reasons that were never even specified to the director: "nous étions sans cesse censurés et la Commission de censure française n'était pas tenue du tout de dire pourquoi elle le faisait."⁷⁶ But "soft" tactics of censorship against his work were also accompanied by incarcerations, lawsuits, assaults, and acts of state terror. This history of violence culminated in the 1980s when Vautier directed a film, *À propos de l'autre détail* (1985), which synthesizes the testimonies of the Algerian prisoners of war tortured by Lieutenant and former presidential candidate Jean-Marie Le Pen. Having violated the (1968) law that gave blanket amnesty to all acts committed during the war, Vautier was sued by Le Pen and lost.⁷⁷ When he returned home to Brittany following the court case, he discovered his entire audio-visual library torched by a commando who remains unidentified into the present. In characteristic fighting style, Vautier would then make a film about the destruction of his own films entitled *Destruction des archives* (1988). Nicole Brenez notes how this short documentary, which provides a kind of inverse image of the "pure presence" satirized by *Toute la mémoire du monde*, "sums up the fate of political cinema today: dispersed, destroyed, shredded in the memories of those younger generations for whom it sought to build a better future."⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Brenez, 18. Also see René Vautier, *Caméra citoyenne: Mémoires* (Paris: Editions Apogée, 1998), 25-26.

⁷⁷ Marie Chominot, "René Vautier l'indépendant: l'Algérie au coeur," *Histoire(s) d'images* no. 32 (March 2012): 4.

⁷⁸ Nicole Brenez, "Forms 1960-2004," *The French Cinema Book*, eds. Michael Temple and Michael Witt (London: British Film Institute, 2004), 232.

Indeed, Vautier's entire cinematic and extra-cinematic career can be perceived as a life-long struggle against the erasure of history. It is crucial to remember that the reason films can no longer be censored for their political content in France today is because he went on a 31-day hunger strike in 1973 for the cause of another director's documentary: Jacques Panijel's *Octobre à Paris* (1961).⁷⁹ Yet Vautier's victories in the name of a cinema of counter-information and social intervention raise another set of questions about the invisibility of his work. Legally speaking, his films *could* be made widely available to a new generation of activists, cinéphiles, and students. Is the eclipse of his filmography solely the consequence and the aftermath of a protracted history of censorship and state terror? Or is there perhaps a more implicit, *cultural* form of discipline that has contributed to the destruction of his archives? In the years following my initial screening of *Peuple en marche* and *J'ai huit ans*, I have become attentive to how Vautier is discussed within broader scholarly accounts of the history of French cinema. Across a series of significant film history texts, including those by Susan Hayward, Mark Betz, and Alan Williams, there is a consistent tendency in English-language scholarship to acknowledge Vautier and the militant, parallel cinema which he represents, but only to defer this acknowledgement onto a footnote listing a few scarce sources in French.⁸⁰

Why, exactly, has Vautier been relegated to a footnote or half-sentence in the official narratives of French film history? Late in my research, I came across another such afterthought on Vautier's cinema in a text by Tom McDonough that confirmed

⁷⁹ Rosemarie Scullion, "Inscribing the historical: film texts in context," in *The Routledge Companion to Film History*, ed. William Guynn (New York: Routledge, 2011), 130.

⁸⁰ Mark Betz, *Beyond the Subtitle: Remapping European Art Cinema* (Minneapolis: Regents of the University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 103; and Susan Hayward, *French National Cinema* (New York: Psychology Press, 2005), 159.

my suspicions: “The point here is certainly not to align political tendency with the overall quality of a given work. Of course one would rather watch Godard’s *Petit Soldat* than, say, René Vautier’s *Algérie en flammes* (1959), however much one might admire the latter’s support for Algerian independence.”⁸¹ “One” admires and perhaps even sympathizes with Vautier’s politics, while regretting his cinema’s lack of artistic form. Written with the smug flippancy so characteristic of (white male) academic discourse, the above statement is slipped into McDonough’s observations on French aesthetics during the years of decolonization, quietly deriding the reader who would have the *poor taste* to question its self-evidence. Yet, as with any slip-of-the-tongue, McDonough’s argument betrays the work of a political unconscious that demands interrogation. First, who is this hypothetical “one”? And why would s/he rather watch *Le Petit soldat*, a film that Robert Benayoun identified as plodding, pretentious, and politically reactionary,⁸² over *Algérie en flammes*, one of the only films in history to take the spectator directly into the daily realities of the FLN in combat? It is unlikely that this “one” would be found among the Algerian youth who participated in the screening and lecture session on Vautier’s early work, as depicted in the recent documentary by Leïla Morouche and Oriane Brun-Moschetti, *Algérie tours détours* (2007). At first cynical about the idea that a Frenchman might give them a lesson in Algerian history, the majority of the group is both moved and stunned by the time of the event’s conclusion at their own alienation from the national past. Second, what is the apparent obviousness implied by the “of course” of McDonough’s dismissal? Presumably, the point is that Godard makes “art cinema,” thematically ambiguous

⁸¹ McDonough, 77.

⁸² Robert Benayoun, “Cinéma: Godard ou le mythe de l’irresponsable,” *France-Observateur* (31 January 1963): 22.

and formally rich, whereas Vautier's commitment to documenting history consigns him to a less evolved, pre-structuralist faith in the veracity of the image. Yet this kind of thinking betrays what Brenez calls one of film studies' most "convenient misconceptions," namely, that "politically committed cinema, because it is caught up in the practical necessities of history, remains indifferent to questions of form."⁸³ In fact, Brenez has gone to painstaking lengths to demonstrate the formal diversity of Vautier's cinema through its experimentation with modes, including "documented fiction" (*Avoir 20 ans dans les Aurès* and *La Folle de Toujane* (1974)), "the documentary poem" (*J'ai huit ans*), and the "didactic fable" (*Les Trois cousins* (1970)).⁸⁴ Vautier's key imperatives, an emphasis on polyphonic forms of authorship, the pedagogy of the oppressed, and the citation and recombination of previous work, can be seen to anticipate the radical collective filmmaking projects of the late 1960s, and particularly Chris Marker's work with SLON and the Medvedkine Group. I became personally convinced of the artistry of Vautier's cinema when Oriane Brun-Moschetti was gracious enough to provide me with an extremely rare copy of *La Folle de Toujane*, a feature-length fiction film that weaves together footage from all of Vautier's previous documentaries on Algerian independence into a formally complex narrative about the lives of a separated Breton couple.

Vautier's occlusion from the canon of film history thus cannot be reduced to his cinema's supposed lack of artistic quality. This absence is rather a question of the political commitments that subtend our received epistemological approaches to knowing the historical past. Consistent with the fetishistic isolation of form

⁸³ Brenez, "Forms 1960-2004," 231.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

perpetuated by *Cahiers* throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the historicization of modern French cinema has often been content to divide questions of aesthetics from politics, and theoretical innovation from praxis. McDonough's disavowal of the artistry of Vautier's cinema is only one expression of this tendency. The hefty collection of essays that make up the recent edited volume, *Opening Bazin: Postwar Film Theory and Its Afterlife* (2010) for example, combine to form an image of post-War French film culture in which *Positif* and its commitment to the cinema as an instrument of decolonization and revolution are completely excluded from the critical frame. By foreclosing *Positif*'s writings as a source of dialogue and debate, the volume presents a singular version of the past, in which Truffaut emerges as modern cinema's great arbiter of "real history" and *Cahiers* is confirmed as the period's only voice of lasting philosophical wisdom. Similarly, as I have noted throughout this dissertation, various texts by historians such as Richard Neupert and Michel Marie tend to define the Right Bank and Left Bank as one homogenous movement or "artistic school," without considering how modern cinema's artistic strategies often embodied radically opposed political perspectives. In each of these cases, film historiography functions less as a critical space for the promotion and distribution of dialogic narratives and more as another avatar of the "police conception of history" and its erasure of the memory of resistance.

Yet film studies is also a profoundly disorganized, internationally dispersed, and contradictory discipline. Its radically conservative accounts of the post-War European cinematic past are counter-balanced by equally contestatory, politicized, and insubordinate currents of historiographical scholarship. Such currents are most

forcefully embodied in the growing number of special journal issues devoted wholly to the question of militant cinema and the militant image. Recent editions of *Third Text*, *L'Esprit Créateur*, and *Framework*, for example, have all incited the discipline to re-interrogate the diverse cinematic traditions that were “dedicated to the liberation struggles and revolutions of the late twentieth century.”⁸⁵ The militancy of late 1960s film culture has re-emerged as a central hub of this critical discourse and is being discussed not only as it was exemplified by particular films, but in both its situated production, distribution, and exhibition contexts as well as its broader historical genealogies.

In its own way, this dissertation has aimed to elucidate the genealogy of the French militant cinema of the '68 period by tracing its conditions of possibility back to earlier cinematic oppositions to the Algerian War. I have returned to a canonical body of cinema in order to question the schemas of perception and classification which established this cinema's canonicity and aesthetic value. By demonstrating how the socio-political context of decolonization informs the very themes and formal motifs of chief modern cinematic texts, I have insisted that our received epistemologies for knowing these texts – for example, “the *Cahiers* line,” the “time image,” and “art cinema” – have debased the social significance of colonialism. I have shown how a film like *La Jetée* functions not only as a meditation on the ontology of cinematic time, but also as a critique of the society of the spectacle and its complicity with colonial violence. In its engagement with the largely forgotten

⁸⁵ Kodwo Eshun and Ros Gray, “The Militant Image: A Ciné-Geography: Editors’ Introduction,” *Third Text* 25, no. 1 (2011); See also Lynn A. Higgins, Steven Ungar and Dalton Krauss, “Introduction: The Powers of Cinema,” *L'Esprit Créateur* 51, no. 3 (Fall 2011): 1-2; and Elena Gorfinkel, “Dossier: The Work of the Image: Cinema, Labour, Aesthetics,” *Framework* 53, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 43-46.

writings of *Positif*, this dissertation has also aimed to re-open a historical perspective that viewed Algeria as a fundamental and palpable dimension of modern French film aesthetics. Finally, in situating these aesthetics within the broader memory of anti-colonial resistance, I have shown the ways in which modern cinema enacted a refusal of French identity as defined by the state and an “impossible identification” with the cause of Algerian solidarity, thus setting the stage for the later “relational subjectivities” that emerged around the time of the late 1960s. Having reached this dissertation’s end, however, I also recognize the urgent need for scholarship concerning the intersection between the cinema and social struggle to venture beyond the confines of the canon. In the case of the Franco-Algerian War in particular, the time has come for film studies to decolonize its own archive and make visible the anti-colonial cinematic traditions that fought to make film an instrument of both perceptual and political emancipation.

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