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**Re-Framing French Culture: Transformation  
and Renewal in the films of Jean-Luc Godard,  
Alain Resnais, Agnès Varda and Jacques Tati  
(1954 – 1968)**

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## Abstract

In this dissertation I focus on the cultural transformations and renewal apparent in the films of Godard, Resnais, Varda and Tati in the period 1954-1968. I contend that the Algerian Revolution (1954-1962) – also known as the Algerian War of Independence – contributed to eroding the myth of *Résistancialisme* and engendered, especially in the generation young enough to be drafted, an initially confused but nevertheless sincere quest for a cause or a Revolution to believe in. This is depicted in the films of Godard, Resnais and Vautier chosen for study here. I also maintain that the aforementioned quest and related cultural, societal and ideological transformations contributed to the events of May 1968. While May 68 is generally considered to have been unforeseen, it was, with hindsight, clearly foreshadowed in the films I have chosen to study. During this period it was not only Algerians but also women who were engaged in a struggle for equality and civil rights, not least of all the right to corporal freedom through fair and legal access to contraception and abortion. Momentous changes in laws governing women and their social status was achieved through sustained challenges to dominant power structures and ideology: therefore, I complement the aforementioned theses by deploying sexual-linguistics and Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva's challenges to Lacanian psychoanalysis in an analysis of Varda's films to portray these transformations and argue that women are not excluded from the Logos, but rather can be considered to be the very point of origin of the symbolic order and language itself. Moving towards May 68, I conclude by applying Bakhtin's theories on the role of laughter and Rabelaisian carnival to four of Jacques Tati's films of this era, which, I argue, offer representations of a growing collective folk movement and are redolent with the symbolism of historic renewal, therefore also pointing forward to the solidarity and rebellion that typified May 68. Finally, I conclude that the films included in my dissertation, when considered together, have the distinct advantage of portraying an insight into the many momentous cultural and societal transformations taking place in a chapter of modern French history more commonly described as 'quiet'.

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**Author's Declaration**

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Printed Name \_\_\_\_\_

## Introduction

This dissertation focuses primarily on the period 1954 – 1968 in French culture, beginning just prior to the outbreak of the Algerian War for Independence and drawing to a close at the dawn of May 68. I focus on films which represent what can be considered as three areas experiencing momentous transformation in this period, namely, the decline of the French empire and the colonial war in Algeria, the emancipation of women, and the increasing standardization of the French middle class, coupled with the threat posed to artisan and rural modes of production due to increased modernization and the Taylorization of industry. In each of these areas there is an underlying tension and power struggle, an oppressor and the oppressed, an ideal and its antithesis.

The common lines of connection between these three areas will also be made by demonstrating how to a greater or lesser extent these movements are complementary, each going some way, indirectly or directly, towards engendering the others, culminating in the general strike of 9 million people in the near-revolution that became known as May 68. This – sometimes violent – stand-off between workers, students and activists on the one hand, and the government and ‘establishment’ on the other, was ended only by the deployment of the French army on domestic soil against its own civilian population.

Generally held to have been unforeseen, the films studied indicate that May 68 was preceded by at least a decade of rising pre-revolutionary unrest, disillusionment and profound questioning of the social and political status quo.

However, as the title indicates, May 68 is not the focus of this dissertation; what I offer instead is a closer look at the supposedly ‘quiet decade’ that led up to it. This dissertation can be roughly divided into three parts (as mentioned above), and the theoretical and critical framework that I use in each differs according to its relevance to each section. I provide a predominantly (post)-colonial analysis in the first two chapters which focus on films that address the Algerian war. In the third chapter where I discuss some of Varda’s films I engage with currents of thought in feminism, sexual-linguistics and psychoanalysis to discuss the films, and in the final chapter I complement Tati’s mocking of the themes of alienation in the

dehumanized modern factory and society by enriching my critique of the films with Bakhtin's theories of Rabelaisian Carnival.

To introduce the first section, one of the principal theses underlying my dissertation is the awareness that Algeria has had a profound and enduring influence on French cinema and culture. Algeria and France's colonial wars are increasingly absent from the list of causes that scholars agree contributed to May 68<sup>1</sup>, and yet I argue that the colonial wars, and in particular the Algerian War, which directly involved at least 1,200,000 French conscripts, and indirectly their friends, lovers and families, created an abrupt and profound disillusionment with the French Republic and reigning power structures, undermined the national myths of *Résistancialisme* and a nation united heroically under de Gaulle, and served to open up space for the diverse questioning and quest for alternatives that led to and so characterized what we now call May 68 (but which of course was not just confined to one month).

Therefore one of the questions that motivates the first half of this dissertation is what tangible residue of this influence can be found in the films of the period, and especially, in what ways might the Algerian question – which is repeatedly and with such frequency described as 'forgotten' that one can only assume it is 'denied' – have shaped the cultural landscape of 1960s France? Furthermore, are the French films of this era really as silent as scholars such as Guy Austin maintain?<sup>2</sup>

It is the peculiarly re-occurring and seemingly chronic voluntary amnesia, often communicated through '*cette perpétuelle redécouverte de situations occultées*'<sup>3</sup> regarding colonization and the Algerian Revolution that has motivated me to focus, in the first two chapters of this dissertation, on the 'colonial' or 'Algerian' films – so often ignored – made during and just after the Algerian War by some of the most established and respected Left Bank and New Wave filmmakers. Chris Marker, Alain Resnais, Agnès Varda, Jacques Demy and Jean-Luc Godard as well as René Vautier and Jean Rouch, depict different aspects of this phenomenon in widely variant forms both abroad (the Ivory Coast, Bénin, Algeria, Cuba) and in France.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. for example Chris Reynolds article « May 68 : A Contested History » *Sens Public* (2007/10)

<sup>2</sup> Austin, Guy. (2007) « Representing the Algerian War in Algerian Cinema : *Le Vent des Aurès* » *French Studies* pp. 182-195

<sup>3</sup> Stora, Benjamin. (2004) *Imaginaires de guerre : les images dans les guerres d'Algérie et du Viêtnam* p. 25

While Kristin Ross (1996) writes that decolonization led to a reordering of French culture and rapid modernization of the metropolis, I lodge the caveat that despite prevailing myths, the perceived ‘end’ to colonization is of course in many instances not a reality, but at best an incomplete process, given that many of the economic, political and cultural structures of empire and colonization persist, both in France and worldwide. For what is colonization? Cultural historian Benjamin Stora defines it as:

[...] *la mise en place d'un système qui permet d'exploiter les ressources d'un pays ; cela veut dire construction de routes, de villes, d'hôpitaux..., plein de choses formidables, c'est entendu. Mais en vue de quoi ? De s'appropriier le territoire et ses richesses.*<sup>4</sup>

Concrete examples serve to illustrate the fact that the 1962 Algerian Independence does not also equate with a conveniently neat and chronologically precise end to economic colonization; for example, according to the Évian Accords, France retained favourable exploitation rights to Algerian petrol and mining, retained the right to test nuclear bombs in the Algerian Saharan desert, retained the strategic port of Mers El-Kébir (a major Mediterranean port in close proximity to Oran), and so on.<sup>5</sup>

As Noam Chomsky points out in *Year 501: the conquest continues* (1993) the Industrial nations of the North have historically sought and still endeavour to maintain the countries of the Southern hemispheres in a tertiary role, ‘The South is assigned a service role: to provide resources, cheap labour, markets, opportunities for investment and, lately, export of pollution.’<sup>6</sup> Nothing in France’s use of Algeria differed from this.

In a global state-sponsored capitalist era, this fact (that colonization continues) is not a minor detail, and in terms of this thesis and its focus not only on the battle against empire in Algeria, but also on modernization, standardization, and alienation in mainland France, it is useful to remember that the modernization process has been enabled, in its acutely non-egalitarian manner, by the fact that ‘colonization extended (...) to the societies of the conquerors as well, and continues to do so today.’ The form that this colonization of European/Western societies

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<sup>4</sup> Benjamin Stora : entretiens avec Thierry Leclère (2007) *La Guerre des mémoires : la France face à son passé colonial* p. 27

<sup>5</sup> Stora, Benjamin. (2005) *Les mots de la guerre d'Algérie* p. 8

<sup>6</sup> Chomsky, Noam (1993) *Year 501: the conquest continues* p. 33

takes is namely that ‘...the profits of empire were privatized, but the costs socialized.’<sup>7</sup> We have seen a startlingly acute example of this following the banking crisis of 2008, since when national governments worldwide have been pouring public money into the private sphere.

We can add to this idea of the domestic colonization of Western societies, the notion that the extent of the French colonisation of the Arab world is much more far-reaching than commonly acknowledged, and that it is not limited to the colonies but continues within the hexagon, was expressed by Godard, for instance in an interview in 1970 on the subject of *Ici et ailleurs* (filmed 1970, released 1976):

- *De quelle façon avez-vous conçu ce film ?*

- En tant que Français, comme un film sur les Arabes qui n’a jamais été réalisé pendant la guerre d’Algérie. Un film sur le monde Arabe longtemps colonisé par les Français et qui l’est toujours, puisqu’en France une grande partie de la main-d’œuvre est constituée par des Arabes et des Africains.<sup>8</sup>

As noted above, a significant part of the modernisation process relied and still relies on the labour of the ‘formerly’ colonized. Recent research (Gaignard [dir.] 2006: 7-144) and (Fassin [dir.] 2010: 543-562) confirms that racism still motivates the unequal division of labour, especially hard labour, work involving bodily risk, and the lowest paid ‘dirty jobs’. To add insult to injury, the far-Right and other political factions strive conscientiously to ignore that France’s economic success is due in no small part to the very people they would like (once their ‘usefulness’ has been exhausted) to exclude both from the country and from long-term legal protection.

My research into Algeria under French rule from 1832-1962 (which is not included in this dissertation) and into the war for independence (which is included) leads me to conclude that it is precisely our willingness to ignore these dark chapters of French colonial history that allow the racist ideology still persistent in France today to endure. Therefore in the first two chapters of this dissertation I anchor my analysis of the films chosen for study with solid cultural and historical research to place the films in context and draw out nuances in their significance which I feel have all too often been missed by critics. The documentary

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<sup>7</sup> Chomsky, Noam. (2010) *Hopes and Prospects* p. 15

<sup>8</sup> Godard, Jean-Luc. *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard* (1998) p. 340

filmmaker René Vautier's audacious 1950 short film *Afrique 50* and the writings of Albert Camus, Abdallah Laroui, Benjamin Stora and Edward Saïd, amongst others, inform my discussion in these chapters, whilst the principal focus is on Godard and Resnais.

The first chapter is divided into three parts, the first of which explores the difficult terrain that had to be negotiated by French filmmakers wishing to address *the* political subject of the mid 1950s to early 1960s: Algeria. An underground cinema emerged in order to avoid censorship bans, but ran the inevitable risk, due to the difficulties of distribution and limited audiences, of preaching to the converted. With censorship lenient in terms of moral issues but severely limiting as regards ideology, the topic of the Algerian War was not necessarily taboo, which resulted in pro-military films that promoted the official ideology concerning the war obtaining visas, whilst films with only a loose connection were banned (cf. Chris Marker's *Cuba Si*, 1961). While the New Wave was predominantly silent on Algeria, it was not only the Left Bank but also more established filmmakers of the classical period who most effectively circumnavigated the censors in denouncing colonialism.

Guy Hennebelle writes that '*la Nouvelle vague a toujours péché [...] par sa timidité sur le plan politique et elle a presque totalement ignoré la guerre d'Algérie, le grand problème de son temps*'.<sup>9</sup> And yet nevertheless in **Chapter One**, a close analysis of Godard's *Le Petit Soldat*, a film whose intrigue is centred on the Algerian War, reveals the destabilising effect of the war on a generation searching for an ideology and beginning to revolt against the authority and dominant power structures that sought to make them active participants in the colonial wars. The juxtaposition between the dominant mythologizing rhetoric of *résistencialisme* and the colonial ideology and military oppression indicated a fundamental and profound hypocrisy on behalf of the state, and also on behalf of the society willing to accept the lie. The impact of this ideological rift was to be particularly acute on the younger generations, as it occurred in tandem with the emergence of youth culture and the accompanying shift whereby young people began to form their identities based no longer on their immediate family but on society.

The end of the Second World War and the Liberation did not mean an end to military conflict for France. In some respects it can be argued that the moral paralysis of French society as

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<sup>9</sup> Hennebelle, Guy. (2002) « Flashback sur la Nouvelle Vague » *CinémAction* p. 10

regards the subsequent seventeen years of colonial wars in Indo-China and Algeria was reflected in the cinema of the post-Second World War era. While this took different forms, often time becomes fluid and non-chronological as the characters become un-willing witnesses to events that escape their control, in what Deleuze describes as the advent of the ‘*image-temps*’.<sup>10</sup>

The ‘*image-temps*’ can be contrasted with the ‘*image-mouvement*’, with the fundamental differences being that whereas in the ‘*image-mouvement*’ cinema of the pre-post-Second World War era: ‘frame follows frame causally, according to the necessities of action’<sup>11</sup> in the ‘*image-temps*’ cinema of the post-Second World War era, the logic governing the succession of frames is freed from the necessity of causality. Amongst other things this means that the cinema of the ‘*image-temps*’ is more suited to expressing subjective realities, reveries, and narratives in a non-linear structure, or even to tolerate the absence of classical narrative.

Meanwhile a common hallmark of the New Wave was the construction of ‘the point of view of a wounded masculine subjectivity’ (Sellier in Hayward 2000: 112) and in **Chapter Two** we will see that to a certain extent both of these premises (the cinema emerging in Europe post-Second World War as site of the ‘*image-temps*’ and of a prevalent place given to wounded masculinity) can be applied to Alain Resnais’s *Muriel, ou le temps d’un retour* (1963).

But Resnais’s film is about much more than wounded masculine subjectivity. Although the Algerian War and torture are at the heart of the film, and like Godard’s films it depicts the fratricide that was such a cruel element in this (essentially guerrilla) revolutionary war without a front, memories and psychological scars from the Second World War are never far, and time slips and falters for each of the main characters as past events resurface in the film. The internal states of being that shape the film distract the viewer from the outwardly linear progression of time in the film’s diegesis, so that the multiple layers so synonymous with the ‘time-image’ come to the fore. The main protagonists can be understood to be ‘living’ slightly different realities from each other, respectively trapped either in a post-traumatic state, in self-constructed inverted realities formed as a means of escape, or obsessions with the past and addictions to transient materiality.

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<sup>10</sup>Deleuze, Gilles (2006b) *Cinéma 2 : L’image-temps* Paris : Les Éditions de minuit

<sup>11</sup>Marks, Laura. (2000) p. 27

Together *Le Petit soldat* and *Muriel, ou le temps d'un retour* enrich our understanding of the forces colluding in this pre-revolutionary era and a generation's growing disillusionment with the myths generated after the Liberation. While the protagonists in the two films I have selected undergo transformation on a psychological and moral level, their nascent and initially confused searching for alternative ideologies would, I contend, mature into the widespread revolt that culminated in the near-Revolution of May 68.

Another factor that contributed to May 68 was the struggle for women's emancipation, with outdated sexual mores being cited (Morin 2008: 14; Reynolds 2007: 3 and MacCabe 2003: 191) as causes that created both discontent and a rift between generations. Writing in 1949, Simone de Beauvoir indicated the close lines of connection between liberation struggles of women and blacks (cf. for example 2008a: 216 and 2008b: 610) and the similarity in obstacles facing both minority groups. Having devoted the first two chapters to the Algerian War for Independence, I then concentrate on women's struggle for independence within the Hexagon. Given the transformation in women's roles during the World Wars and under the Occupation, and the lasting reverberations that ensued, it will come as no surprise that in **Chapter Three** questions of gender and feminism(s) in this period come into the foreground.

This theme and chapter needs less of an introduction as most readers will already be familiar with the major issues that the women's movements and feminism(s) were fighting for. In Varda's films at this time, as in France itself, there is a growing emphasis on individual freedom and women's increasing (though still largely clandestine) control of their fertility. Accordingly I examine the evolving representations of the female body and femininity in four of Agnès Varda's films. Sexual linguistics, and Kristeva and Irigaray's challenges to Lacanian psychoanalysis underpin much of my discussion in this chapter. As we see in this chapter, Varda employs a variety of strategies to overcome the prevailing monolithic and somewhat misogynistic discourses determining filmic representations of women, and in so doing she offers the spectator a multiplicity of alternative voices and images.

Bridging the gap between themes addressed in Varda's films and those that prevail in my analysis of Jacques Tati's films in **Chapter Four**, we can cite their shared interest in the twilight of rural France's artisan way of life. Whereas Varda portrays the villagers' of *La Pointe Courte* (1954) nascent struggle against capitalist interests intent on preventing them

from fishing the coastal pond upon which their livelihood has long been dependant, Tati foregrounds the tension between tradition and modernization in his first film, *Jour de fête* (1947) Although he seems slightly at odds with the other directors chosen here, I will defer to Deleuze in order to justify my inclusion of Tati at this juncture:

Si Tati appartient à la nouvelle vague en effet, c'est parce que, après deux films-ballade, il dégage pleinement ce que ceux-ci préparaient, un burlesque procédant par situations purement optiques et surtout sonores.<sup>12</sup>

I focus on the burlesque and comic aspects of Tati's wandering films by according so much prevalence to Bakhtin's theories of Rabelaisian Carnival, as mentioned earlier and below, and I also engage with Michel Chion's writings on sound<sup>13</sup> to incite reflection on the 'situations sonores' in Tati's films.

Tati's place in this dissertation arises also from the predominance he gives to the trope of the Taylorisation of industry and the accompanying dehumanisation arising from the diminishing value accorded to the worker's quality of life, addressed especially in *Mon Oncle* (1958). These were major contributors to discontent among the working classes and therefore influential as a force motivating so many of the strikes culminating in May 68.

Tati is described by Kristin Ross as: 'The greatest analyst of post-war French modernization [...]'.<sup>14</sup> In his films we are: '[...] offered a critique of official representations of a uniformly prosperous France, surging forward into American style patterns of consumption and mass culture.' (Ross 1996: 13) The demarcation of prosperity is duly noted in the opening sequence of *Mon Oncle*, where a horse-drawn cart and a pack of dogs travel from a traditional popular neighbourhood into a strikingly clean, stylised modern bourgeois residential neighbourhood, which even the proletarians' dogs are unable to enter. Furthermore, drawing the lines of argument in the previous chapters together, in this chapter I deploy Bakhtin's theories of Rabelaisian Carnival to Tati's films and conclude that his films 1953-1967 chart a progression towards increased collective social folk tradition of carnival and revolution... looking forward once again to May 68.

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<sup>12</sup> Deleuze, Gilles. (2006b) p. 18

<sup>13</sup> Chion, Michel. (1998) *Le Son Paris* : Nathan

<sup>14</sup> Ross, Kristin. (1996) *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies* p. 30

I conclude by contending that, with hindsight, the films I have chosen to study reveal that the wars of decolonisation gave the lie to a deeply corrupt and racist system (cf. Chapters Two and Three), and along with the very real injustices suffered by women in France at the time (cf. Chapter Four), and the increasingly dehumanising effects of industrialisation on the working classes (cf. Chapter Five) combined to lead to profound revolt – somewhat anticipated in these films – amongst diverse members of society (students, workers, the oppressed, intellectuals, artists, and so on), serving as the catalyst for change.

Before looking at the films and the period 1958 – 1968 in the following chapters, we will look briefly here at May 68, in the interests of later ascertaining whether it was indeed foreshadowed. Sociologists and historians have struggled to explain why May 68 happened, and even call it an accident: “*Que s’est-il donc passé en mai 1968 ? Un “accident” sociologique ... incroyable, bouleversant, qu’il s’agit de comprendre ...*”<sup>15</sup> Writing in 1968, Edgar Morin offers an analysis of the events as they unfold in *Mai 68 : La Brèche*. Morin distinguishes two phases of the uprising in May which he names as the Student Commune followed by the Faceless Revolution, and when providing key dates commonly writes of the period November 1967 – May 1968. More recently, Reynolds notes that recognition of the brutal repression in June ’68 is often ignored due to the emphasis now placed upon the more positive events of May, and therefore notes the interest of employing the term May-June 1968 when discussing the events. While recognising the validity of all of these terms, for the sake of brevity I will nevertheless mostly use May 68.

Chris Reynolds writes that, while “1968 is so immune to definition”<sup>16</sup> there is nevertheless general consensus that the following factors contributed to May 68: de Gaulle’s authoritarian style of leadership, which was perceived as out-dated; uneven distribution of wealth and concerns of unemployment, which created frustration; the gulf between values and priorities of the older and younger generations, which was reaching a point of rupture; and finally that students “looked abroad for inspirations at a time when romantic figures and causes were omnipresent”. (Reynolds 2007: 3)

I will assume that the ‘omnipresent romantic causes’ to which Reynolds here refers include the revolutions which were at that time taking place in the Third World, which mobilised and

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<sup>15</sup> Morin, Edgar. (2008) *Mai 68 : La Brèche* p. 89

<sup>16</sup> Reynolds, Chris. (2007) “May 68: A Contested History” *Sens Public* p. 12

channelled students' opposition to imperialism, capitalism, fascism and Stalinism as their struggle against what Morin describes as: "*l'hydre aux trois (impérialisme, capitalisme, fascisme), voire quatre (stalinisme) visages*". (Morin 2008: 18) This anti-imperialist and Dostoevskian expression of universal solidarity and collective responsibility<sup>17</sup> which students and workers increasingly expressed, was communicated by Godard too in 1967 via the inter-titles of *Weekend* (1967):

IL APPARTIENT AUX PEUPLES DU  
MONDE ENTIER DE METTRE FIN À  
L'AGRESSION ET À L'OPPRESSION  
DE L'IMPRÉRIALISME

Returning to Reynolds recent evaluation of May 68, while for students the concerns of imminent unemployment cited by Reynolds above were a factor, it must be added that scepticism about the *nature* of future employment on offer was also a factor, as students were dissatisfied with the types of careers that their degrees would ultimately lead them in to. Rather than a mere protest against unemployment, this belies a deeper rejection of what society was becoming, and also differentiates the sixties from the current era, because now, according to MacCabe: "the permanent threat of unemployment has produced docile student bodies desperate to equip themselves with the skills and diplomas which will help them face the insecurities of the job market" making it therefore "difficult to imagine a time when large numbers of students were willing to refuse the authority of their teachers and argue with them in public."<sup>18</sup>

Morin suggests that factors other than those cited by Reynolds were significant. While too numerous to list exhaustively here, he writes that according to some the causes for revolt lay in the students' desire to modernize the University, whereas according to other analysts, a major cause was not a desire to modernize but rather students' refusal of modern society. In the former case, demands would include discarding archaic teaching methods and outmoded segregation of the sexes in dorms, whilst renewing materials, the campus buildings and so on. In the latter, the revolt can be seen to have been driven:

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<sup>17</sup> Dostoevsky, Fyodor. « Chacun est responsable de tout devant tous. » in De Beauvoir (1945) *Le Sang des autres* p. 9, quoted from Dostoevsky (1880) *The Brothers Karamozov*, Chapter 25, Part II.

<sup>18</sup> MacCabe, Colin. Godard : *A Portrait of the Artist at Seventy* (2003) p. 189

...non sur la volonté des étudiants d'adapter l'Université à la vie moderne, mais sur leur refus de la vie bourgeoise considérée comme mesquine, médiocre, réprimée, oppressive ; non pas sur la recherche des carrières, mais sur le mépris des carrières de cadres-techniciens qui les attendent ; non pas sur leur volonté de s'intégrer le plus rapidement possible dans la société adulte, mais sur une contestation globale d'une société adultérée. (Morin 2008 : 14)

This 'société adultérée', which students and workers vividly refused to identify with during May 68 is depicted in Godard's *Weekend* (1967), in which the main protagonists are an adulterous bourgeois couple, on a microcosmic scale emblematic of this adulterated, mediocre, petty society. Much of the film is shot on highways, with the couple singularly unmoved by the extensive carnage they witness on the roads. They are plotting to kill the lady's parents in order to inherit the wealth of the defunct, manifesting a desire to eliminate the older generation. Yet this is not the revolutionary desire for renewal born of ideals and the quest for justice, but the symptom of the immoral or amoral bourgeoisie obsessed with money and wealth, and nothing else. Illustrative of this, when their car crashes, the woman's panic stricken distraught cries are for her handbag: "Aaaaaah ! Mon sac ! Mon sac Hermès !" Later, having to resort to hitchhiking they travel briefly with someone who claims to be omnipotent and can grant them anything they wish for. Displaying their profound lack of humanity and imagination, as well as to some extent the dominance of Anglo-Saxon culture, their desires could have been picked out of a glossy magazine: an Yves Saint Laurent dress, a Miami hotel, a weekend with James Bond. The couple is emblematic of the French middle class, travelling down a highway of carnage and flaming vehicles, where death by car accident prevails, and is as indiscriminate in rendering victims as a NATO bomb falling on Tripoli.

The film offers a portrayal of a sick society whose only preoccupation is with consuming. A slow tracking shot that lingers on the logo painted onto a petrol-carrying lorry incriminates the Dutch-British multinational Shell in the traffic deaths, while France's colonial past is evoked via the dialogue:

- On n'aura qu'à la torturer pour la faire changer d'avis. Quand j'étais Lieutenant en Algérie je m'en souviens, on nous a appris des trucs.

The other feature length film that Godard directed in 1967 was *La Chinoise*. *La Chinoise* anticipates the Student Commune and this moment where French society entered into a period of revolution. Godard's film gives centre stage to the division and in-fighting between different student revolutionary cells, the anti-imperialism provoked by American military intervention in Vietnam (and, though not officially, in Laos), and the revolutionary dilemma surrounding the question of resorting to violence.

Much of what Godard depicted in film was echoed by real events. For while the disillusionment with the French Republic engendered by the Algerian war was a contributory force behind the May 68 uprising (cf. Morin 2008: 22; Reynolds 2007: 12 and Ross 2003: 33-64), by 1968 other anti-colonial battles were taking place, and other revolutions had succeeded. Amongst the students engaged in the revolt, Trotskyists and Maoists focused on the revolutions taking place in Third World countries such as Cuba, Vietnam, and China, and also in Latin American countries, while the Maoists endeavoured in addition to offer their revolutionary services to the working masses in French factories. March 22<sup>nd</sup> 1968 saw the remarkable unification between the “*exigence existentielle libertaire*” of the anarchists and situationists, and the “*politisation planétaire*” (Morin 2008: 17) of the Trotskyists and Maoists as “*les groupuscules fondent une unité d'action dans laquelle s'intègre même le courant maoïste.*” (Morin 2008: 19) Coupled with the inconsistent and widely criticised reaction of the government and police, which oscillated between inertia and tardy and excessively brutal repression, the students' revolt rapidly gained support amongst even moderate teachers, professors and parents.

In *La Chinoise*, when two young women, students at Nanterre, discuss philosophy and politics while washing dishes, they conclude that: “*Alors la France en '67 c'est un peu comme les assiettes sales*”. We will see in the next chapter that this conversation and descriptive simile betrays young people's awareness of shame and moral filth staining the Gaullist regime, a residue born not least of all of the undeniable hypocrisy of the government led by the former hero of the resistance, leader of the Free French, who had participated actively in the continued occupation of Algeria and condoned the same methods<sup>19</sup> to suppress the Algerian liberation movement, as Nazi Germany had employed in France during the Occupation.

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<sup>19</sup> The methods employed that I refer to here include torture, summary executions, arbitrary detention, mass displacement camps not un-similar to concentration camps, censorship and propaganda.

## 1

## Filming a war the French refused to declare: the Algerian War for Independence in French Cinema 1954-1962

*Le Petit Soldat* is often disregarded, in the context of Godard's oeuvre, as more of a preliminary sketch than a completed work. To re-dress this appraisal, before considering the film itself, and in order to situate it in relation to other works addressing similar themes, this chapter includes an analysis of some of the films to have emerged in the underground cinema during the Algerian War for Independence, and also *Avoir 20 ans dans les Aurès* (1972) by militant filmmaker René Vautier. Vautier filmed for the FLN in Algeria during the war, and some of this footage is included in his 1972 feature. I then offer a brief summary of the socio-political and historical context in which *Le Petit soldat* was made, so that the film's controversial contribution to the political landscape of the early 1960s can be fully appreciated.

Finally, given that the film's interest lies not only in its contribution to the political debates of its time, this chapter will look at *Le Petit soldat* in some depth and also consider how *Le Petit soldat* reveals the ambiguities and innovations of a new cinema searching for a form. As Godard has said, “[la Nouvelle Vague] réfléchissait la forme plus qu'elle ne la donnait, mais on était encore en rapport avec l'essentiel.”<sup>20</sup> Despite Godard's modest assertion, I suggest that his second feature nevertheless offers an intricate example of the Deleuzian “*image-cristal*” in which “the present-that-passes and the past-preserved” cohabit.<sup>21</sup> In sum, an interplay of (post)-colonial and Deleuzian readings of Godard's 1960 film will be used to argue that *Le Petit soldat* can be interpreted as an accurate transposition of a generation's disillusionment with the myths generated after the Liberation and a subsequent – initially confused – searching for alternative ideologies. Consequently, I argue that the film holds an

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<sup>20</sup> Propos [de Godard] recueillis par Jean-Michel Frodon, Le Monde, 3 décembre 1996 in *Godard par Godard [Tome 2 1984-1998]* p. 393

<sup>21</sup> Marks, Laura. (2008) *The Skin of the Film* p. 65

original and pivotal place as a cultural artefact, representing the nascent shift from a post-war patriotic unified Gaullism towards the decline of this homogenous patriarchal society, with growing fragmentation, rebellion and desire for momentous transformation that would be so clearly crystallized in the months leading up to May 68.

### The Algerian War for Independence in French Underground Cinema

The Algerian War of Independence was called varyingly ‘*guerre de libération nationale*’ or ‘*révolution algérienne*’ by Algerians<sup>22</sup> (Muslim Arabs or Berbers in French-occupied Algeria) and officially ‘*événements*’ or ‘*pacification*’ by the French government, although the press referred to the ‘*guerre d’Algérie*’ as early as 1955.<sup>23</sup> It was not until 1999, after more than two decades of pressure from representatives of the one and a half million Frenchmen who had been drafted to Algeria and wanted their status of war veterans to be recognised – so that they could benefit from war veteran pensions – that the National Assembly passed a law which recognised the ‘events’ in Algeria as a war.

Almost from the moment that the Algerian national liberation movement(s) initiated the war for independence with the synchronised bombings of 1<sup>st</sup> November 1954, the war was, as much as possible, occulted by the French government. The government’s intention to mask the true nature of events unfolding in its colony across the Mediterranean was made explicit days after the November bombings through a statement made by François Mitterrand (who was *Ministre de l’Intérieur* at the time):

*Nous éviterons tout ce qui pourrait paraître comme une sorte d’état de guerre.*<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> I use Algerians to denominate the majority of the indigenous population of the occupied territory in what is now Algeria. This, somewhat artificially perhaps, does not include Algerian Jews, who were given preferential treatment in comparison with the Muslim Arabic and Berber population. The Jewish population was accorded French naturalisation via the Crémieux décret in 1870, while the non-French Mediterranean colonisers (the much more recent economic immigrants of Italian, Spanish, Sicilian, and Maltese origin) were granted French citizenship in 1889. (Stora 1997c: 56)

<sup>23</sup> Stora, Benjamin. *La Guerre des Mémoires : La France face à son passé coloniale*. (Editions de l’Aube, 2007) pp. 13-15, and in particular : « Le terme [guerre d’Algérie] a été utilisé dès 1955 par la presse, à partir du moment où le gouvernement a décidé d’envoyer les rappelés. » p. 13

<sup>24</sup> Mitterrand giving a press conference, extract reproduced in the documentary *Les Années algériennes* (Favre and Stora, 1991)

An ambivalent character, François Mitterrand, much like Guy Mollet, came to symbolise treachery for much of the anti-colonial left. He was opposed to Algerian Independence<sup>25</sup>, yet was instrumental in negotiations that led to Tunisian and Moroccan autonomy. Mitterrand was a signatory, along with others such as Albert Camus, to the France-Maghreb Manifesto demanding that the principles of human rights be applied without exception in North Africa, yet he was also the man responsible for denying those rights by defending the special powers bill. The bill gave the French army the infamous *pouvoirs spéciaux* (12 March 1956) “*qui supprime toutes les libertés individuelles en Algérie, et qui permet d’y envoyer massivement le contingent*”,<sup>26</sup> and which amounted to nothing less than a green light from the government for the army and police in Algeria to proceed, with impunity, with torture and summary executions.

Given the concerted effort on behalf of the French government to hide the unfolding events in Algeria, it comes as no surprise to find that representations of the war for Algerian Independence in French cinema have been subjected to rigorous efforts of occultation as well, in particular once de Gaulle returned to power in 1958 and then created the Fifth Republic. The essence of Mitterrand’s 1954 statement – and the glimpse into official ideology concerning the war from its outset – can be seen to have been generally applied as much to the censor’s guidelines (and therefore the general cinematic production) during the years of the war, as to the state and military propaganda of the period.

### The mechanisms of censorship

State censorship – which was enforced by the Minister of Information and a commission of 14 members representing the government and the cinematographic profession – was strong throughout the Algerian war, being at its peak in the period 1958-1962.<sup>27</sup> Originating in a skeletal form with a 1919 decree and then fleshed out by the Vichy regime (notably with Pierre Laval as minister of Information 1942-1944), the censorship committee had a variety of weapons at its disposal to counter undesirable projects. At the time of the Algerian conflict, these included but were not limited to: the total ban; age limitation (forbidden to the under-

<sup>25</sup> Mitterrand’s reaction to the November uprising was distilled in his speech to the government through the comment ‘*La seule négociation, c’est la guerre*’ 5th November 1954.

<sup>26</sup> Tisseyre, Karine. (1997) « Trois documentaires télévisées dans les années 90 ... » *CinémAction* n° 85 p. 116

<sup>27</sup> Gaston-Mathé, Catherine. (1997) « Le règne de la censure » *CinémAction* n° 85 p. 33-39

16s); and subject to cuts and/or modifications. However, there was also the ‘*précensure*’<sup>28</sup> hurdle to overcome, as well as the problem of attracting a producer, the threat of the finished film being consigned to the censor’s bottom drawer for an undefined period (possibly permanently) until the subject matter was less sensitive, and distribution difficulties. Although censorship for political reasons was officially suppressed in 1973 (thanks in some respects to Vautier’s hunger strike (cf. below p. 32) the economics of distribution and the concentration of production power in the hands of a small minority, primarily television channels (Canal +, TF1, etc) means that in many respects it endures in one form or another.

Yet despite the wide array of weapons at the disposal of the French Government to control the representation of the war in cinema, and to silence voices of opposition, more than forty full length French films were made in the period 1957-1995 in which the Algerian war is a significant narrative feature; this number rises to nearly seventy if ‘made for television’ films are included in this analysis. In addition to this, 42 documentaries and shorts were made during the same period up until 1995.

French films have, in general, remained extremely limited in their capacity to address the many dimensions of the Algerian National Liberation movement, for a variety of reasons as historians such as Benjamin Stora have emphasised (cf. Stora 1997a), although this is changing. Yet it is apparent that whilst the Algerian War may not be French cinema’s most common subject matter, neither is it truly French cinema’s forgotten war. Accordingly, Philip Dine’s assertions that the French-Indochina war is the real forgotten war of French cinema is an accurate appraisal:

[...] *la guerre d’Indochine, conflit colonial qu’on peut concevoir plus légitimement comme « guerre oubliée » que celle de l’Algérie.*<sup>29</sup>

Discarding then the idea that the Algerian War is French cinema’s forgotten war, let us consider the context in which cinema first addressed the anti-colonial conflict. As stated above censorship was a significant hurdle to overcome. At its apogee, what did censorship

<sup>28</sup> *La précensure est instaurée en 1948-1949 avec la création de la commission d’agrément qui décerne l’autorisation provisoire du tournage et avec l’aide à la production octroyée par le directeur du Centre national de la cinématographie.* (Pre-censorship has existed since 1948-9 when a commission was set up to give provisional authorisation for filming and also a production grant from the Director of the National Centre of Cinematography.) Gaston-Mathé, Cathérine. ‘Le règne de la censure’ *La guerre d’Algérie à l’écran* p. 34.

<sup>29</sup> Dine, Philip. (1997) « *L’Honneur d’un Capitaine* et la question de la torture ... » *CinémAction* n° 85 p. 121

target? In *Le règne de la censure* (op. cit.) Catherine Gaston-Mathé provides a detailed analysis of the role that censorship played in limiting and mutating French cinematographic production during and after the war in Algeria. Regarding this, she demonstrates the following:

*La censure veille à ce que rien ne menace les institutions et n'encourage de dissensions morales et politiques. Si elle est relativement libérale en matière morale, elle l'est beaucoup moins en matière politique ; elle défend le colonialisme et l'armée et utilise la panoplie des mesures à sa disposition pour occulter les réalités des guerres d'Indochine et d'Algérie.* (Gaston-Mathé 1997: 35)

Accordingly, while on the one hand films which were pro-military, supported official ideology and glorified the army and/or the infamous parachutists, were granted visas (eg: *Les distractions* (Jacques Dupont, 1960) other films which did not conform never made it past the starting post, such as Henri-Georges Clouzot's *Mort en fraude*, whilst still others were banned, such as Chris Marker's *Cuba Si* (1961). In fact, in the years 1952–1959, whilst the French empire was losing control of Indochina and subsequently of North Africa, 105 films were either entirely banned or submitted to '*une longue période de purgatoire*' when their directors refused to modify the films according to the commission's recommendations. (Gaston-Mathé 1997: 36)

#### How the German occupation liberated the French documentary

Despite the strong Vichy style censorship, the impact of the Vichy regime on French cinema was not exclusively negative: it was as a direct result of the 1940 Vichy law and Nazi Germany's preoccupation with propaganda that the short – usually a documentary – began to flourish. Ironically the fascist/Nazi preoccupation with state propaganda actually nurtured the short and later resulted in a situation arising whereby avant-garde and underground directors were later able to use the medium to counter official ideology throughout the Algerian War. As we will see, to a certain extent the German occupation liberated the French documentary.

To appreciate how this situation arose it is worth remembering that during the late fifties and early sixties television had not yet come to dominate news coverage, which was instead still assured by the ten minute slot before main features in cinemas. This arrangement, whereby

spectators were shown a short film followed by a full feature, originated with the Vichy regime in 1940.

Prior to that time, spectators had been shown two full-length features per séance, which meant that the French short film or documentary was in an unenviable situation; the short benefited from no state funding and faced extremely limited distribution possibilities, due to the full length feature double billing.

Il est difficile d’imaginer pire situation que celle du documentaire en France, avant 1940 : non seulement il ne bénéficie d’aucune aide de la part de l’Etat, mais il ne peut pratiquement pas être distribué en salle en raison du système du double programme (une séance se compose alors de deux longs métrages) [...] <sup>30</sup>

However, due to the Nazi dictatorship’s emphasis on propaganda, the Vichy regime passed a law (26 October 1940), which effectively terminated the double feature length séance and instead institutionalised the projection of one short feature before every full-length feature. While this was done primarily in order to favour the transmission of propaganda to the general public during the years of the Occupation, the practical consequence of the law for the short film or documentary as a medium was longer lasting than either the war or the occupation, and eventually enabled the short to diversify and move away from mere propaganda. This was because, in order to finance the making of the short features or documentaries, not only was distribution and projection all but guaranteed as a consequence of the new law, but the law also specified that a percentage of the ticket price be paid to the short film. The result of this in relation to the vitality of the French documentary was to ensure both the economic viability and distribution of the short in the years to come.

Two years after the Liberation the Vichy born COIC (*Comité d’Organisation des Industries Cinématographiques*) was replaced by the CNC (*Centre National de la Cinématographie*), and the following year (1948) the CNC took the decision to revise all of the regulations which had been put in place under Vichy. However, the law of 26 October 1940 was maintained, in the form of the 23 September 1948 ‘*Loi d’aide*’, so that whereas prior to the Occupation the

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<sup>30</sup> Odin, Roger. (1996) *L’Âge d’or du documentaire* p. 19

documentary in France was marginalized by the dominance of the full-length feature in cinemas, the situation was reversed, and as a result,

[...] la France sera, dans les années 50, l'un des leaders de la production de films documentaires en Europe, comme le prouvent ses résultats dans les palmarès des principaux festivals internationaux. (Odin 1996 : 28)

Examples of the above are numerous and include the following: *Paris 1900* (Nicole Vedres, with Alain Resnais as assistant director, 1946) won the 1947 Prix Louis Delluc; *Les Statues meurent aussi* (Chris Marker and Alain Resnais, 1953, 30 minutes) won the *Prix Jean Vigo* in 1954; *Le Monde du Silence* (Jacques-Yves Cousteau and Louis Malle, 1955) won the 1956 *Palme d'or* at the Cannes Film Festival, the 1956 *Prix Méliès*, and the 1956 Academy award for Best Documentary Feature; *Nuit et Brouillard* (Alain Resnais, 1956) won the *Prix Jean Vigo* in 1956; *Moi, un noir* (Jean Rouch, 1960) which won the 1958 Prix Louis Delluc.

In summary, the short film was rescued from the periphery by a fascist regime endeavouring to guarantee maximum control over image based news/propaganda, and then became the form favoured by the parallel, independent cinema of the late fifties and sixties as one of the only legitimate weapons to combat the French Republic's colonial ideology. Many of the great avant-garde film-makers also cut their teeth on it, and in some cases – as with Resnais and Marker, either working together or separately – their criticism was not limited to the Fifth Republic but went further back as they made committed works of quality denouncing the role of the French State and French Police under the Vichy regime in crimes against humanity such as the deportation of 76,000 Jews to concentration camps through the Rafle du Vel d'Hiv (in *Nuit et Brouillard*), or the crimes and denigration associated with colonialism in black Africa, particularly in Bénin (in *Les Statues meurent aussi*).

### The role of cinema in providing image based news

Officially however, the short film's primary function in the years of the Algerian War was to provide the newsreels of the 1950s and 1960s, and the government maintained the official line that French armed forces were sent to Algerian on a 'peacekeeping mission' or to 'maintain order.'

Evelyne Desbois' research into newsreels of the period has revealed that: « *Pour plus de sept ans de guerre, de 1954 à 1961, les actualités françaises n'ont donc présenté que 28 documents* »<sup>31</sup> about the Algerian War of Independence. Although she provides a more detailed breakdown the essential elements are as follows. Considering entries about Algeria under the news bulletin section "*Conflits et guerres*" there were a total of four filmed news documents in 1954, with titles such as: « Opérations dans les Aurès » and « Soumission des fellaghas »; only one document in 1955, entitled « Aurès »; nine in 1956: « Sécurité »; « Pacification »; « Distribution d'armes »; « Retour rappelés »; « Accrochages »; etc.; a quasi-silence over the course of the next three years, given the amplitude of the war, with three newsreels in 1957: « Pillage »; « Attentat Casbah » and « Casbah »; two in 1958 : « Retour prisonniers du FLN » and « De Gaulle et guerre d'Algérie » ; and only one in 1959 : « Opération Jumelles »; then six in 1960; « Emeute » ; « Evènements » ; « Calme à Alger » ; « Réponse FLN à de Gaulle » ; « Mission Boumendjel » ; « Evènements dramatiques » ; and one in 1961 : « Journées d'Alger ».

1962, with the end of the war approaching, witnessed thirty-one newsreels, fifteen of which were classed under "L'attente du cessez-le-feu", meaning that the total image based news coverage of eight years of war (in which the French military used napalm for the first time, and between one and two million Algerian lives were lost, along with 25,000 French) was reduced onscreen to 53 short newsreels (averaging 30 – 50 metres). (Desbois 1997: 23-24)

As far as the SCA (*Service cinématographique de l'armée*) was concerned, a change of tactic was employed for the Algerian war. Whereas during the Indochina war the SCA had endeavoured to sell the war to the French and international public by highlighting military successes, (Desbois 1997: 24) during the Algerian war the SCA was at pains to present an image of peace. Evelyne Desbois summarises the ambiance of the short films produced by the SCA 1957-1960:

Ces films ont l'apparence du documentaire classique sur une région, une culture, et leurs titres témoignent de cette volonté descriptive et pédagogique [...] Les armes

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<sup>31</sup> Desbois, Evelyne. (1997) « Les Actualités françaises pendant le conflit... » *CinémAction* n° 85 p. 24

aussi sont interdits au générique, sauf quand elles servent à dire que justement on ne s'en sert pas, comme dans « Au-delà des fusils ».

Sans escamoter totalement les soldats, le SCA ignore donc leur qualité de combattant et ne présente que deux aspects de leur rôle là-bas: la protection et la pacification.  
(Desbois 1997 : 24)

Mirroring the paternalistic language of school text-books considered earlier, the effort to mask the military aspect of the war was further reflected in phrases such as the following, unearthed by Desbois: « Que font nos cinq cent mille soldats? Ils aident à promouvoir l'Algérie nouvelle; ils protègent les populations. »<sup>32</sup>

It is obvious then that the general French public's perception of the Algerian war was radically different to that of, for instance, the American public's perception of the Vietnam War. Americans had watched the war live on their television screens, day by day, and one of the implications for French film makers was that, unlike their American counterparts, they were not free of the '*sainte mission*'<sup>33</sup> of portraying the truth of what actually went on 'over there'.

### Films targeted by the censorship committee

As noted above, in 1948 the CNC completely revised all of the regulations put in place by the Vichy regime, and yet left intact the censorship legislation. Furthermore, through the course of the Algerian war, Louis Terrenoire (as Minister of Information from February 1960-August 1961) took steps to expand upon the existing censorship mechanisms by encouraging a form of pre-censorship «*à l'exemple de certains pays comme l'Allemagne, de manière à ce que l'Etat n'ait pas à l'exercer* » Terrenoire specified that as a result of his pre-censorship project, directors would know:

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<sup>32</sup> Quote from : *Service cinématographique de l'armée* short film, *Au-delà des fusils* (1960, 36mn). Source Desbois op. cit. p. 24.

<sup>33</sup> Frodon, Jean-Michel. *Le Point* 17 April 1989. « *Ils [les cinéastes américains] sont débarrassés de la 'sainte mission' de révéler la Vérité qui devient rapidement un boulot aux pieds de leurs collègues français* ».

[...] que s'ils maintiennent tel ou tel thème, ils s'exposent à l'interdiction. Ils ne pourront donc plus se plaindre des pertes financières...<sup>34</sup>

To gain an inclination of the breadth, scope and diligence of censorship during the years of France's wars to maintain her colonies in Indochina and then Algeria, and in particular the careful erasing from the cultural heritage of allusion to movements and armed struggle for decolonisation, criticism of colonisation, and even positive portrayal of the colonized (outwith the accepted norms of the official ideology), it is worth considering the wide variety of works targeted for censorship. Marcel Pagnol's 1950 adaptation of an already twice adapted 1928 play, *Topaze*, saw dialogue referring to the relationship between politics, business and the colonies under the Third Republic cut, including:

Untel est à Madagascar, on lui a donné une chaîne de montagnes. Il est allé la vendre à ceux qui l'habitent.<sup>35</sup>

The same year that Pagnol's film was subjected to modifications, René Vautier's committed and ground-breaking anti-colonialist film *Afrique 50* was sent by the *Ligue des Enseignants* (who had commissioned it) to the police; the film was banned and Vautier charged with 13 offences. In the film, Vautier's voiceover denounces colonisation as: "*la règne des vautours*", citing the massive profits made by French companies exploiting Africa's natural resources (and men). He is clearly outraged at the situation in Africa, filming the carcasses of cattle rotting in the sun, bullet holes in blood soaked walls, the places where men, women and children were "*assassinés en notre nom à nous, gens de France !*" for the non-payment of taxes owed to the French administration. He warns that: "*Le peuple d'Afrique, s'appuyant sur la Constitution française, demande qu'on lui rende la terre qui lui a été volée par les compagnies coloniales.*"

Edward Saïd writes of a similar process in Algeria at the outset of colonisation there: "The inexorable process went on to make Algeria French. First the land was taken from the natives and their buildings were occupied; then French settlers gained control of the cork-oak forests

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<sup>34</sup> Quoted (without source) by Lefèvre, Raymond. 'Une censure à kepi étoilé' *La Guerre d'Algérie à l'écran* pp. 41-42

<sup>35</sup> in Gaston-Mathé, Catherine. (1997) p. 36

and mineral deposits.”<sup>36</sup> As in sub-Saharan Africa, the instauration of taxes and the demand that they be paid in cash impoverished entire communities, while sometimes the ‘debt’ was even back-dated, as in the case of Kabyle economic migrants to France, to include:

“*l’obligation singulière de payer les impôts arriérés de tous les compatriotes de l’émigrant qui porte le même nom que lui.*”<sup>37</sup>

As an investigative journalist for *Alger République* Albert Camus travelled extensively throughout Kabylie in 1939. In the face of the extreme poverty he witnessed there, he writes of the insufficiency of the average daily diet, and of the bitter irony that while the French empire were converting arable land to vineyards and exporting record amounts of wine and wheat to Europe, the indigenous population were being locked into an increasingly severe cycle of starvation and poverty. Writing of the colonial system and the bureaucracy preventing the rural population from being allowed to undertake paid employment for more than a few days a month (and they had to look for employment, as any prospect of self-sufficiency was unlikely now that their land and often homes too had been stolen), he concluded that:

Il n’y a pas de mot assez dur pour qualifier pareille cruauté. [...]

Si les chantiers de charité sont faits pour aider à vivre des gens qui meurent de faim, ils trouvent une justification, dérisoire sans doute, mais réelle. Mais s’ils ont pour effet de faire travailler en continuant à les laisser crever de faim des gens qui jusque-là crevaient de faim sans travailler, ils constituent une exploitation intolérable du malheur. (Camus 2003: 47)

The crippling effect of taxation and the cycle of debt in the colonies was evoked by Marguerite Duras too, but from the perspective of poor French colons. Her 1950 novel *Un barrage contre le Pacifique* (adapted to cinema in a well-intentioned but rather forgettable film of the same name in 2007, directed by Rithy Panh and starring Isabelle Hupert) features another French colonial setting: Indochina. In the novel, Marguerite Duras (who later worked in collaboration with Alain Resnais on *Hiroshima mon amour*) paints the poverty and enormity of the toil, predominantly and overwhelmingly futile, that a European family living and ostensibly farming on a salt-water flood plain faces. The family are the victims of an

<sup>36</sup> Saïd, Edward. (1994) *Culture and Imperialism* p. 207

<sup>37</sup> Camus, Albert. (2003) *Chroniques Algériennes 1939 – 1958* p. 35

eternally empty promise by the French colonial administration that improvements will be made to make the land arable. Based on a historical reality, through this process (the ‘gifting’ of poor quality land to encourage European settlement) members of the lower echelons of European communities were effectively locked generation after generation into relative poverty in the colonies, where their fate has been described, though with some degree of exaggeration, as little better than that of the colonised. Because the prime real estate was quickly reserved by government and army officials or the powerful colonial companies, European civilians were often distributed ‘free’ land of poor quality, often all but infertile, which could realistically hardly even support one family living from hand to mouth.

This procedure, which was also applied in Algeria, served at least three purposes for the Republic: firstly, by installing Europeans in the countryside a proportion of the rural (Algerian, Indo-Chinese, or other) native population were displaced and were then forced to seek unskilled labour in the cities (building French villas, fountains, streets, irrigation canals, schools, libraries, theatres, etc) while secondly, this displacement also contributed to the dismantling of the traditional infrastructure, thus lessening the ability of the people to organise revolt. A third advantage was derived from the fact that revenue on the poor land was created through taxation of the new European landowners (while the native population was also taxed, though elsewhere).

Alain Resnais and Chris Marker’s documentary *Les Statues meurent aussi* (1953), which revealed some of the damage done to African art and artefacts by colonialism was also completely banned, despite the authors’ acquiescence to the censor’s proposed modifications. Likewise, the censorship committee ‘requested’ that Resnais and Jean Cayrol suppress any allusion to struggle for decolonisation from their documentary about the Second World war and extermination camps, *Nuit et Brouillard* (1956) while also ordering that archive footage used in the documentary which clearly identified the active participation of French police (easily identifiable by their distinctive ‘képi’) in the Vel d’Hiv Rafle and in the running of the Drancy concentration camp be falsified in order to hide the French police’s responsibility in these crimes against humanity.

The censorship laws were particularly fiercely opposed by those who had been active in the Resistance, such as René Vautier. Fully aware of the danger to civil liberties and freedom of information that the censorship laws represented – which in fact was reaffirmed in December

1972 through an unsuccessful application for a visa for *Octobre à Paris*<sup>38</sup> (Jacques Panigel, 1961, Comité Maurice Audin) – Vautier went on a hunger strike on the 1<sup>st</sup> January 1973:

Ce que je demandais ? La suppression de la possibilité, pour la commission de la censure cinématographique, de censurer des films sans donner des raisons ; et l'interdiction, pour cette commission, de demander coupes ou refus de visas pour des critères politiques.<sup>39</sup>

On January 17th 1973 the censorship committee, who had initially suggested a complete ban, granted *Octobre à Paris* a visa.

Vautier was not alone in opposing the principle of politically motivated censorship. According to Gaston-Mathé when Henri-Georges Clouzot was prevented from filming *Mort en fraude* by the censorship committee (it would later be filmed by Marcel Camus), while acknowledging that his vision of events in Africa and Asia was not “*strictement conforme à la doctrine officielle*” he denounced the fact that it was “*le principe même d'un tel film, que le gouvernement déclare inadmissible et censure par anticipation.*” (Gaston-Mathé 1997: 35) Clouzot was not alone; 121 intellectuals and artists signed the *Manifeste des 121* on the 5<sup>th</sup> September 1960, in which it was directly stated that they esteemed that refusing to take up arms against the Algerian people was justifiable, and also that they approved sending aid to Algerians oppressed in the name of the French people. The government retaliated: ‘*Ses signataires (dont François Truffaut et Alain Resnais) sont frappés d'un temps d'interdiction sur les écrans et les ondes ou rayés des films bénéficiant d'une aide d'Etat.*’ (Gaston-Mathé 1997: 37)

A minor correction is to be made here: Truffaut did not sign, cf. the Manifesto.<sup>40</sup> The manifesto, which also denounced torture, was published 6<sup>th</sup> September 1960 in the magazine

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<sup>38</sup>*Octobre à Paris* was produced with support from the Maurice Audin Committee. Maurice Audin had been arrested by parachutists in Algeria one day before Henri Alleg. Both men had been living underground (clandestinely) in Alger since the instatement of the pouvoirs spéciaux; Alleg was picked up while looking for Audin, who had suddenly disappeared. Both men were tortured by the French Army and police; Maurice was murdered and Henri Alleg was released the following day. Alleg wrote a detailed account of his experience in French detention, which was published in 1958 as *La Question* and which, as Stora has since pointed out, put an end to anyone being able to pretend they didn't know what was going on.

<sup>39</sup> Vautier, René. (1998) *Caméra citoyenne : mémoires* p. 5

<sup>40</sup> which can be found in html here : <http://www.algeria-watch.org/farticle/1954-62/manifeste121.htm>  
05/09/2010

*Verité-Liberté*. Amongst those who did sign were: Simone de Beauvoir, Marguerite Duras, Alain Resnais and Pierre Vidal-Naquet. The issue was seized and the editor charged with ‘*provocation de militaires à la désobéissance*’.

### The emergence of the Parallel Cinema

In an attempt to avoid censorship, a ‘parallel cinema’ emerged, of films shot and screened clandestinely, by the ‘*maquis de la liberté d’expression*’<sup>41</sup>. For obvious reasons, these were usually short features - although there were notable exceptions, such as *Octobre à Paris*.

The disadvantages of the parallel cinema in terms of its ability to represent and encourage reflection on major social and political events such as the Algerian war is that by its very nature – underground – it was and still is limited in its distribution and accessibility and therefore limited in its capacity to influence the few spectators able to watch the films, which, in most cases would only be viewed by those already politically active and in favour of Algerian independence. Wider distribution is necessary if a counter cinema hopes to reach out of the activist circle in which the films are made, in order to inform those not already ‘converted’ to the cause. The result, in the 1950s and 1960s, of the tight state censorship pushing the oppositional cinema underground, and the survival strategy chosen by certain politically engaged filmmakers, unions, and Communist Party committees, albeit generally with the best intentions, effectively “*sauvait la création indépendante pour l’enfermer dans un ghetto.*”<sup>42</sup>

However, some of the independent films of the parallel cinema were able to reach out of this ghetto, at least briefly, thanks to some of the French film festivals that were still in existence:

Les films indépendants trouvaient un refuge précaire dans des festivals malheureusement éphémères comme Evreux, Evian ou Paris [...] C’est ainsi que quelques films courageux purent franchir le mur de l’anonymat : *Le passager* de Louis Cros, sur l’aide interdite au FLN, *Gott Mit Uns* de Louis Chevallier, sur la longévité des infrastructures du fascisme [...] (Lefèvre 1997 : 43)

<sup>41</sup> Lefèvre, Raymond. (1997) « Une Censure à képi étoilé » *CinémAction* p. 43

<sup>42</sup> Cadé, Michel. (1997) « Les films des années 60... » *CinémAction* p. 49-50

Examples from the parallel cinema include: *58 2/B* (Guy Chalon, 1957-58); *Secteur Postal 89098* (Philippe Durand, 1959); *Le retour* (Daniel Goldenberg, 1961); *Parfois le dimanche* (Ado Kyrrou, 1961); *Demain l'amour* (Paul Carpita, 1962); *La quille* (Jean Herman, 1962); *Fille de la Route* (Louis Terme, 1962); and *27 mois après* (Jean-Claude Bourlat, 1963).

Recurring themes in these films include the following:

...le drame des appelés, la douleur du départ, les amours brisées et l'incertitude du retour. Ils expriment la révolte d'une génération envoyée au massacre et la difficile réadaptation des survivants. (Gaston-Mathé 1997 : 36)

As Raphaëlle Branche has argued (1997: 58), directors generally favoured the point of view of the draftee or the draftee's family. This would be most likely to resonate with the public given that nearly two million young men were drafted (or redrafted from 1956 onwards) in the years 1954 – 1962.

### Mainstream Cinema (Algeria mostly absent)

While films that were anti-colonial, pacifist or otherwise contradictory to official ideology were denied visas and distribution, the Algerian war was not altogether absent from cinema screens in the 1950s and early 1960s, providing that reference to the war was minimal and not perceived as a threat to the status quo. Examples of the above from mainstream cinema include *Les Suspects* (Jean Dréville, 1957) and *Le Sahara Brûle* (Michel Gast, 1960).<sup>43</sup> The former is a big-budget detailed and almost documentary-style examination of the attempts of a *Direction de la Surveillance du Territoire* (DST) unit to negotiate the liberation of Inspector Vignon, who has been captured and held hostage by the FLN. In the latter, the Algerian War is a less significant part of the narrative, which focuses primarily on the resistance of an old petrol prospector Wagner, ordered to cease his activities in the Sahara.

Later in this chapter and in Chapter 2, we will consider a number of films, including *Le Petit soldat*, that were made not in the underground but in the margins of commercial cinema either during or just after the Algerian War for Independence.

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<sup>43</sup> Examples of the above are given by Gaston-Mathé, op. cit. p.37

### A brief outline of the socio-political climate leading up to May 1958

*Le Petit soldat* is set specifically during the 13<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> May 1958. Godard's choice of dates is significant, given that the Fifth Republic was born of pro-colonial riots that culminated in the Putsch of Alger of 13<sup>th</sup> May 1958. The Generals that took control of the putsch immediately demanded de Gaulle's return to power, raising the question of whether De Gaulle's return to power in 1958 was in fact a thinly disguised coup d'état.

In the previous decade, it was de Gaulle who had signed the *Ordonnance* of 4<sup>th</sup> March 1944 which gave French citizenship and the right to vote to a tiny minority – 65,000 – of Algerians, a carefully filtered elite predominantly composed of war veterans or those from the former ruling classes with degrees: men only. This ruling, which was itself similar to the abandoned Blum-Violette project of December 1936 (Bränche and Thénault 2001: 2), also abolished the *code de l'Indigénat*.

Three years later in the wake of the Sétif and Guelma massacres of May 1945, and largely in the hope of, on the one hand, sedating the growing frustration and desire amongst Algerians for independence, yet on the other hand avoiding putting French sovereignty at risk, a law was adopted 20<sup>th</sup> September 1947, known as the *Statut de 1947*. Profoundly un-democratic, the law was based on recommendations by Professor Viard (Professor of Law, University of Alger and Director of *L'Echo d'Alger*). The *Statut de 1947* created an Algerian General Assembly of 120 members, divided into two electoral colleges. The 60 members of the first college were designated by male and female French citizens of European origin, as well as by Algerians who had attained French citizenship (Algerians made up a mere 11% of the electors of this college). The 60 members of the second college were to be elected by 1.5 million Algerian men over the age of 21 (Algerian women were entirely excluded from voting). Consequently one can conclude that the 60 elected members of the first college represented the 860,000 Europeans of Algeria, and that the second college represented 7,700,000 Algerians of non-European descent, or more concisely still, that one European vote was equal to 9 Algerian votes.

As Professor Viard explained in interview in *L'Ennemi intime* (Patrick Rotman, 2002) the law offered “*trop peu, trop tard*” from the Algerian point of view, and yet *colons* accused him of having proposed a law which they perceived as being far too radical. When the MTLD (as Messali Hadj’s party was then named) secured 33% and the FLN 18% of Algerian votes in the first round of the municipal elections of October 1947, hundreds of activists were arrested – and some tortured – before the second round. During the second round voting urns were stuffed, while voting took place under the ‘surveillance’ of the French military. Socialist Marcel-Edmond Naegelen (then governor-general of Algeria) resigned after he was powerless to prevent European colons and the police ensuring that similar fixing took place during the 1951 elections. As a consequence of the fixing of the 1948, 1951 and 1954 elections, although theoretically the Algerian Assembly was to have significant powers, in practice these were limited to examining the budget proposed by the administration (Brånche and Thénault 2001: 4-5).

While 1945 had seen the end of hostilities in Europe, just over one year later France engaged in the Indochina war, which lasted nearly a decade, until 21 July 1954. By then a new conflict was about to commence, as the seeds of revolt sown in Algeria had matured into the creation of the *Front de Libération nationale*<sup>44</sup> (FLN). In response to the first terrorist attacks launched by the FLN (8 deaths 1 November 1954) the traditional colonial rhetoric, as well as the level of retaliation, is impressive: François Mitterrand stated that “*l’Algerie, c’est la France*” and perhaps in order to ensure that “*le peuple algérien, partie intégrante du peuple français, se sente chez lui comme nous et parmi nous*” (Bezbakh 1997: 362-363) some 25,000 armed men were sent over in the following three months. It was not until Algeria gained its independence 3 July 1962 that France was finally not at war.

The Fourth Republic suffered from chronic instability, the rapidity with which power changed hands being symptomatic of this. Guy Mollet was the Fourth Republic’s longest serving Prime Minister, and by May 1958 France had already undergone two changes of government in less than a year, and twenty governments since the Liberation.

On the 8<sup>th</sup> February 1958 the French had bombed the Tunisian border village of Sakiet Sidi Yousseff – killing 69 civilians, including 21 children – thus bringing the conflict into the

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<sup>44</sup> Ben Bella’s *Comité révolutionnaire d’unité et d’action* formed the FLN in October 1954; a series of terrorist attacks took place 1 November 1954, causing 8 deaths.

limelight of international attention. In many respects the impact that this made on the international community and the UN made this a diplomatic turning point in the war, in favour of Algerian Independence (which is not to say that the French in any way diminished their war effort at this point). The American and British intervention in mediation following the Sakiet Sidi Yousseff bombing incited such hostility from partisans of French rule of Algeria that Félix Gaillard – who had conceded to the Anglo-Saxon intervention – was overthrown in the National Assembly on the 14<sup>th</sup> April 1958.

Adding tension to an already taut political climate, on 9<sup>th</sup> May 1958 the FLN had announced the decision to execute three French soldiers held prisoner, and it was in this particularly sensitive context that President René Coty designated Pierre Pfimlin to succeed Gaillard. Pfimlin was known to be favourable to negotiating with the FLN, and in protest against this decision and the deaths of the three soldiers riots broke out amongst the conservative European colon population living in Alger, culminating in the '*Putsch d'Alger*', 13<sup>th</sup> May 1958. The Generals Raoul Salan (who later became the president of the OAS) and Jacques Massu (the head of the 10<sup>th</sup> Division of Parachutists), along with Edmond Jouhaud and the Gaullist Jacques Chaban-Delmas, amongst others, rapidly seized control of the putsch, declared the '*Comité de salut public*' the next day, and demanded General de Gaulle's return to power. The manner in which de Gaulle returned to the Presidency understandably unsettled Republicans and the Left concerned that France may have been entering a dictatorship, and questioning with some legitimacy whether a coup d'état had just taken place (Bakhdatzé 2007: 59).

De Gaulle fought the FLN and movement for independence on both the military and diplomatic fronts. On the military front, the French Army had 'won' the *Bataille d'Alger* in 1957, before de Gaulle's return to power, forcing the FLN to take refuge outside of Algeria (Ferhat Abbas presided over the GPRA, formed in Tunisia 19<sup>th</sup> September 1958). The '*ligne Morice*', created in 1957 (a double barrier of electrified barbed wire re-enforced with mines and surveillance), effectively cut Algeria off from Tunisia and Morocco and therefore supplies of men, weapons and other provisions, while the '*Plan Challe*' – the widespread napalm bombing, described as a '*rouleau compresseur terrifiant*' – instigated under de Gaulle's presidency combined with the massive displacement of the rural population (two million Algerians) into internment camps, not dissimilar to Nazi concentration camps, where many died, further isolated the FLN from support and shelter.

With his return to power in June 1958 de Gaulle intensified pressure on the FLN by endeavouring to undermine the movement for independence by abolishing the two colleges (whereby one European vote was equal to eight Algerian votes). Perhaps hopeful that Algerians would vote for '*francisation*' or '*association*', he also instated universal suffrage in Algeria, which meant that the Referendum on the Constitution 28<sup>th</sup> September 1958 was the first time that all Algerians over the age of 21, including women were able to vote. A further tactic was to combat poverty, which was perceived as being one of the prime factors driving support for the FLN. The Constantine Plan instigated real socio-economic reform, including the re-distribution of 250,000 hectares of land, yet by January 1960 de Gaulle was entering into negotiations with the provisional government of Algeria. The Referendum of 8<sup>th</sup> January 1961 on Auto-determination offered Algerians the choice between: "*francisation*", "*association*" or "*sécession*" (Bakhdatzé 2007: 83). The first choice, *francisation* would imply cultural assimilation and supposedly 'keeping' Algeria French. In this case, Muslims would have to renounce *Sharia* and basically 'become' French by adopting the French language, culture, values, etc. *Association* on the other hand implies a sharing of power, or at least a relatively convincing façade of shared power, that would leave intact what was left of the cultural, linguistic and religious heart of the country, affording Algerian Muslims the luxury of 'ruling' Algeria in tandem with the French. Finally, *sécession* implied self-determination, or in other words, independence.

The erosion of *résistancialisme* in Godard's *Le Petit Soldat* (1960)

Two recent articles<sup>45</sup> have analysed cinematic representations of the Algerian War in non-French cinema, both articles favouring the perspective of films made on other shores of the Mediterranean, either Algerian or Algerian-Italian (co-)productions. Guy Austin's 2007 article focuses primarily on Mohamed Lakhdar Hamina's 1966 feature *Le Vent des Aurès*, while Emily Tomlinson's focus is on Gillo Pontecorvo's 'docudrama' *La Bataille d'Alger* (1965). French cinema has been all but dismissed as presenting the spectator with "the 'nothing' that there was to see in Algeria" (Austin 2007: 182). Austin's appraisal refers to Resnais's *Hiroshima mon amour*, a film which invites reflection on the limitations both of cinema to represent and of our ability to 'see' or comprehend the trauma of a war experienced directly by others, but indirectly by ourselves. The admonishment that French cinema portrayed "the 'nothing' that there was to see in Algeria" implies also that French cinema participated in the process of masking the events unfolding in Algeria and collaborated with the government's cover-up. While to some extent an accurate appraisal, I hope to have already shown in some detail the reasons for this, and also the many exceptions in the underground cinema and the largely ignored (albeit to varying extents thwarted by the censor's scissors) resistance to militarism and under-mining of dominant pro-colonial ideology expressed in some of the films made by directors of the classical period during this period (cf. for example Pagnol's *Topaze*). While examining representations of the Algerian War from across the Mediterranean is certainly worthwhile, I hope that this chapter will demonstrate that in our haste to dwell on the New Wave and Left Bank directors' more accessible or palatable themes and films, we might have all too quickly skimmed over what some of their 'Algerian' films can contribute to the ongoing debate and ways of thinking about the Algerian War for Independence and the reordering of French culture.

In this chapter I will seek to answer the question of whether Godard's provocative association of torture with the revolutionary liberation movement (in this context, the FLN) as opposed to the counterrevolutionary movement (here the OAS) is indicative of, as some have claimed, a "néofascist" tendency on behalf of the director, or of something else altogether. We will see that while the torture sequence in Rossellini's *Roma città aperta* (1945) sits comfortably within the schema of *résistancialisme*, that in Godard's film does not. While diverse

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<sup>45</sup> "Representing the Algerian War in Algerian Cinema: *Le Vent de Aurès*" *French Studies* LXI 200(x) 182-195 and "Rebirth in Sorrow: *La Bataille d'Alger*", *French Studies* LVIII (2004), 357-70.

interpretations are possible, I contend that Godard's choice belies a willingness to mirror back at society an image which, while it doesn't correspond to the official representation dominant at the time (the Gaullist myth of a nation of *Résistants*), may correlate much more closely with the sociological reality than many were prepared, in 1960 or 1963, to admit.

In making *Le Petit soldat* Godard sought to fend off criticism levied at the New Wave of being capable only of filming young people in bed. In a lengthy 1962 interview in *Les Cahiers du cinéma* Godard said:

Ma façon de m'engager a été de me dire : on reproche à la Nouvelle Vague de ne montrer que des gens dans des lits, je vais en montrer qui font de la politique et qui n'ont pas le temps de se coucher. Or, la politique, c'était l'Algérie. (*Godard par Godard*, Tome 1: 220)

Despite this, the film nonetheless fits, albeit perhaps chaotically, into the New Wave framework, with its characteristically early Godardian feat of being what Deleuze describes as an “*extraordinaire ballade*”:

Godard commence par d'extraordinaires ballades, d' « A bout de souffle » au « Pierrot le fou », et tend à en extraire tout un monde d'opignes et de consignes qui constituent déjà la nouvelle image ... (Deleuze 2006b: 18)

and also for its clear emphasis on the personal as opposed to the public. Godard voiced his intentions at the time: ‘*La vérité sur cette guerre sera personnelle, subjectiviste*’ (Godard in Stora 1997a: 136) which is not to suggest that the film would be an introverted artefact free of wider reaching polemic discourse. While ‘*les enjeux idéologiques de la guerre d'Algérie ne sont pas mentionnés*’ (Stora 1997a: 142) *Le Petit soldat* nevertheless anticipated the Algerian victory and can be interpreted as an incitement to desertion or insubordination, at a time when, as the Censorship committee emphasized in 1960 when taking the decision to ban the film: “*toute la jeunesse française [masculine] est appelée à combattre en Algérie*” (Lefèvre 1997: 41).

Esquenazi writes convincingly of the “*double échec*” of *Le Petit soldat*: failure both with critics and general audiences at the time of its release (2004: 93-112). For others a fatal

“discrepancy between subject and sensibility [...] makes *Le Petit soldat* [...] a fantastic piece of sophistry” (Dyer 1963: 196). Despite the remarkable international success of the director’s previous feature – *A Bout de Souffle* – and the press attention given to the forthcoming *Le Petit soldat*, the censorship committee voted overwhelmingly for a complete ban, consigning the film to the silent purgatory of the censor’s cabinet until 1963 (Lefèvre 1997: 41). At the time of the film’s release the left-wing press<sup>46</sup> denounced the film rather hypocritically for not clearly advocating in favour of Algerian independence; but even the Communist party did not advocate for Algerian independence, voting instead in favour of the infamous ‘*pouvoirs spéciaux*’ and avoiding specifically demanding or supporting Algerian independence throughout the war, opting instead for the prudent and politically uncommitted slogan of: “*La paix en Algérie*”.

*Le Petit soldat* charts three days – specifically 13<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> May 1958 – in the life of Bruno Forestier, a deserter from the Algerian war who has taken refuge from the French authorities in Switzerland. Markers that anchor the film to a specific historical moment include the integration of newspapers and news reports heard over the radio about events in Algeria, such as reports of the CRS using tear gas in Algiers, calling in support from the infamous parachutists, and totals of numbers killed and injured. The riots mentioned are those that culminated in the ‘*Putsch d’Alger*’. A significant moment in the history of modern France, the instability of the Fourth Republic, pro-colonial riots in Algeria and the aforementioned Putsch of Alger on 13<sup>th</sup> May 1958 favoured General de Gaulle’s return to power, with the right hopeful that de Gaulle, who for a long time remained quietly ambiguous on the subject, would maintain French rule of Algeria.

It is in this context that we encounter the deserter Bruno who, with little apparent conviction, works for an extreme right-wing terrorist organisation, clearly an analogy for the OAS.<sup>47</sup> He

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<sup>46</sup> Cf. for example, the following articles : Monjo, Armand « Un aventurier qui brouille les cartes » *L’Humanité* 30/01/1963 ; Benayoun, Robert « Godard ou le mythe de l’irresponsable » *France-Observateur* 31/01/1963 ; M.D. in the column entitled « Les films qu’on peut voir à la rigueur » *Le Canard Enchaîné* 30/01/1963.

<sup>47</sup> In an example of the Franco-French fratricide during the Algerian War, during the ‘*semaine des barricades*’ (beginning 10<sup>th</sup> December 1960) the *Front de l’Algérie Française* (FAF), which became the OAS one month later, demonstrated violently against de Gaulle’s policy of ‘abandon’ (Bakhdadzé 2007: 76). While the FAF was the last major body to operate within the law, when it became the OAS it mutated into an armed terrorist organisation. In the period 21 May – 8 June 1961 the OAS performed 150 ‘*plasticages*’ in Algeria, after which frequency increased. For instance, the OAS was responsible for 801 terrorist attacks in Algeria in the month of January 1962, killing 555 and injuring 990. French citizens living on the mainland were also targeted with significant frequency: for example, in the last two weeks of January 1962 (15-28 January) the OAS launched 73 attacks in mainland France (mostly in Paris). (Stora 2005a: 88)

falls in love with the Russian Veronica Dreyer (Anna Karina, in her first collaboration with Godard), who, it transpires, collaborates with the FLN. Bruno's colleagues suspect him of being a double agent, and he is assigned a mission of assassinating P., an openly anti-colonial radio presenter, in order to ascertain his fidelity. Bruno refuses, simply because he doesn't feel like it, leading to one of the film's most memorable statements given the context: '*Même un soldat on ne peut pas le forcer à tuer quelqu'un*'. This assertion (articulated by Godard in the film's voiceover) is rather ironically overthrown by the film's diegesis, as the rest of the film centres around Bruno being forced to kill P. Before doing so, he is captured and tortured by the FLN, who pick up on his lack of commitment to the OAS, and accordingly "*comme tout organisation révolutionnaire qui se respecte*" try to win him over to their cause.<sup>48</sup> Bruno's associates, who are most often referred to simply as "*les français*" set up a minor car accident which involves the Swiss police, subsequently forcing Bruno to comply with the assassination order or be deported to France (where he will be charged with desertion). Before completing the assassination mission, Bruno negotiates that fake passports for himself and Veronica will be given to them afterwards so that they can leave for Buenos Aires. Bruno kills the radio presenter, only to find out that while he was fulfilling his part of the deal, '*les français*' abducted Veronica to a villa for questioning, and ultimately tortured her to death. Leaving Bruno with time to reflect...

One aspect that I will look at in this chapter is the question-mark surrounding Godard's political affiliations and his provocative decision to choose to show the *Fédération de libération nationale* (FLN) – or more precisely, its armed wing, the *Armée de Libération Nationale* (ALN) – committing acts of torture on a French citizen, a member of the OAS. Some critics have chosen to deduce that Godard therefore condemned the FLN or at best was indifferent to the outcome of the war (cf. Monjo, Armand « Un aventurier qui brouille les cartes » in *L'Humanité* 30/01/1963). However, I think it would be a mistake to conclude that this choice of allocation of roles, showing torture perpetrated by the FLN and not by the OAS, indicates that Godard held to a conservative counter-revolutionary ideology. Given the manner in which the narrative progresses, and most notably, as described above and below, the fact that Bruno escapes from torture at the hands of the FLN relatively unscathed, whereas Véronica is assassinated by the French, I think that it is more likely that Godard decided to keep Véronica's torture off-screen while showing the torture of a French citizen by members

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<sup>48</sup> Voiceover, *Le Petit soldat*.

of the FLN/ALN at some length, in the hope that the film might then slip past the censorship committee. Further indication of Godard's support for the Algerian liberation movement comes through the character of Véronica; as we will see in more detail later, her revolutionary stance and actions are seen to be the result of considered reflection, whereas Bruno, symbolic of members of the OAS, is (before his meeting with Véronica) an apathetic, apolitical ideologically confused young man taking advantage of the war to make fast money, and is ultimately trapped, manipulated and betrayed by the organisation he joined.

Parallels can be found with Alain Cavalier's *Le Combat dans l'île* (1962), ostensibly made as a critical counter-point to Godard's film. Clément (Jean-Louis Trintignant) is the son of a wealthy patron and is married to a beautiful – and flirtatious – young woman Anne (Romy Schneider) in material luxury in the heart of Paris. He also collaborates with an extremist organisation, about which the spectator knows very little, except that they are combating communism. After a dispute with his father over the best way to handle their factory's striking workers (somewhat paradoxically, given his involvement with the anti-communist terrorist organisation, Clément advises that they give in to the workers' demands) Clément breaks all ties with his family, essentially instantly impoverishing himself. His wife leaves him, and as he drifts into depression he decides instead to agree to assassinate an influential politician. As in *Le Petit soldat*, the male protagonist's choice to act for an extremist organisation (perhaps the OAS once again, although reference to the Algerian War is absent from Cavalier's film) is due to circumstance more than conviction, as it is Anne's decision to leave him that acts as a catalyst in driving Clément to overcome his hesitation. After the presumed assassination, Anne and Clément re-unite, and seek shelter with an old 'blood brother' of Clément's, Paul. Whereas the city-dwelling Clément is an active member of a right-wing terrorist organisation, it would seem that Paul, who lives modestly in a house in the countryside and earns a living as a printer, is active to a greater or lesser extent in the left-wing battle of workers' unions against being exploited by people such as Clément. In order to firmly brandish the ideology of the filmmakers, Anne falls in love with Paul, and Clément perishes as a result of his own foolish insistence of fighting a dual with Paul over Anne.

*Le Combat dans l'île* was purportedly made in response, and as an anti-dote to, Godard's supposed support for the OAS and French-Algeria in *Le Petit soldat*. As a consequence, Cavalier's film, which was produced by Louis Malle, has been heralded as a welcome left-wing response to Godard's conservative pro-OAS film. However this view is problematic for

two reasons. Firstly, it is difficult to discern any distinguishable reference to the Algerian War for Independence in *Le Combat dans l'île*, whereas Godard places the war in the foreground and explicitly and repeatedly references it in *Le Petit soldat*, even being so bold as to include Algerian actors and torture sequences in the film. Secondly, as I argue throughout this chapter, in *Le Petit soldat* the OAS and French colonialism is negatively portrayed in the film, and examples of this abound, such as the OAS betrayal of Bruno, Veronica's statement that the French are condemned to lose the war because they are lacking an ideal, and Godard himself has a cameo role as a member of the FLN. While an especially motivated viewer might conclude that Paul's murder of Clément can be read as an allegory for the fratricidal nature of the war, *Le Combat dans l'île* is more of a dramatic love story than a criticism of violence, the OAS, and colonialism. The OAS and colonialism are never mentioned in the film, and it is an act of violence (murder) that frees the ostensibly pacifist couple (Anne and Paul) from Clément.

Another element that has led to Godard being labelled as conservative as regards the Algerian war is the clearly confused ideology expressed by the lead character, Bruno. Yet I suggest later in this chapter that Godard actually offers an accurate sociological representation of the internal turmoil and ideological confusion and quest for an ideal experienced by many members of the generation drafted into the Algerian War. The film's central character is, after all, not a conscientious objector, but a deserter of the French Army, which indicates that his sense of morality is less mature than that of a conscientious objector: he is a character in the act of becoming.

### The time-image and dual temporality

Bergala has written at length of the influence of *Sommaren med Monika* (Summer with Monika, Bergman 1953) on *Pierrot le fou* (1965) but it can be seen that in two areas in particular *Monika* initially served as a template for *Le Petit soldat*. A brief citation reveals one of the structures to have inspired Godard:

Bergman est le cinéaste de l'instant. Sa caméra cherche une seule chose : saisir la seconde présente dans ce qu'elle a de plus fugitif et l'approfondir pour lui donner

valeur d'éternité. D'où l'importance primordiale du « flash back » dans ces rêveries scandinaves de promeneuses solitaires. (Godard 1998a: 137)

While, doomed young love aside, the narrative content differs widely from that of Bergman's film, the form and treatment of temporality is modelled on that of *Monika*, as Bruno enters and exits the film as one of cinema's 'promeneurs solitaires' while the film (like *Monika*) is essentially constructed of one long flashback. However, by synchronising the main character's reflection on past events (via the voice-over on the soundtrack) with the image-track and soundtrack presentation of these (now past, but seen as present) events, Godard overlaps past and present in what I called earlier an intricate example of the Deleuzian "image-cristal" in which "the present-that-passes and the past-preserved" (Marks 2008: 65) cohabit.

Bergman's influence extends to other aspects, such as the 'caméra-regard' (whereby the actor looks directly at the camera, sometimes even addresses the camera), which Godard uses freely in *Le Petit soldat* (cf. Bruno looking directly at the camera during the torture scene, frame 5). The most obvious example of this is Bruno's long near-monologue directed at the camera/spectator whilst photographing Anna Karina, but secondary characters participate in this self-conscious negation of the impression of illusion, so that for instance Laszlo Szabo's citation from Mao is punctuated with a long stare at the camera. Adding further to this effect are the multiple photographers in the film, both extensions of Godard and self-conscious references to the art of photography and film, in Brechtian-style dissolution of the impression of illusion (cf. frames 2, 3, and 8).

The close-ups of Henri Alleg's *La Question*, an unidentifiable book or pamphlet by Lenin, and Mao's *Une étincelle peut mettre le feu à toute la plaine* (Mao Tse-Toung, 1930), coupled with lengthy citations from the books, such as Mohammed's citation from Mao during which he looks directly at the camera, or Bruno's reference to Alleg's experience in a DOP<sup>49</sup> in Algeria ('*Je sais qu'à d'autres on a fait bien pire. Mais les camarades martyrisés que l'on croise dans les couloirs, les hurlements à travers les murs, je n'ai pas connu ça*') as he is

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<sup>49</sup> The definition of a DOP provided by Stora in *Les mots de la guerre d'Algérie* (2005 : 46-47) is as follows : DOP - « Dispositif opérationnel de protection », équipe de recherche du renseignement par la torture, créée en 1957 par le CCI, Centre de Coordination Interarmées, organe centrale de recherche du renseignement de l'armée française en Algérie en 1956. Les équipes des DOP sont envoyées sur le terrain pour recueillir le plus rapidement possible des renseignements au prix d'interrogatoires « très poussés » (usage de la torture).

being tortured (while one of his FLN captors reads from the book) are pre-cursors of a more overtly dialectical style to emerge in Godard's films. Furthermore, the film contributes to our understanding of the ways in which the Algerian War moulded or changed the course of the evolution of French culture, for instance the lines of connection and mutual inspiration between the Algerian Revolution (War for Independence) and the simmering pre-revolutionary period leading up to 68.

The film begins with the 'end' of the film, Bruno driving alone through a border check, with the following narrated dialogue (as voice-over): « *Pour moi le temps de l'action est passé. J'ai vieilli. Le temps de la réflexion commence.* » At once both the literary overtones and the double temporality are introduced. This can also be interpreted as an example of the Deleuzian *image-cristal* in which there is the cohabitation between the '*passé du présent*' and the '*présent du présent*' (Dosse 2008: 104). Godard emphasized that there is no present in the film, while Esquenazi has pointed out that:

[Godard] adaptera dans *Le Petit soldat* le procédé littéraire du flux de conscience qui permet de suivre, plutôt que l'action, *les sentiments envers l'action* du personnage. (Esquenazi 2004: 95-96)

This also confirms Deleuze's appraisal of the action-image having been abandoned in post-Second World War cinema (beginning with Italian neo-realism and including the French New Wave) in favour of the time-image, and films peopled with characters who '*enrégistrent*' (record) more than they '*réagissent*' (react); signified quite literally in *Le Petit soldat* by Bruno's habit of photographing (for instance, a couple in the street early in the film, Anna Karina at length later). Although throughout the film on one level Bruno would appear to be reacting to diverse narrative situations, he is not, as these situations are already in the past and are unalterable; he merely annotates what has already happened. He is deprived of the possibility of taking action and therefore can only feel and reflect. This confirms Deleuze: '*le personnage est devenu une sorte de spectateur*' to the unfolding of events around him, in contrast with characters in the earlier cinema of the action-image who '*réagissaient aux situations*' (1985b/2006: 9), and this relative impotence is a point which is impressed upon the spectator with the film's penultimate words: '*C'est après avoir tué Palivoda que j'ai appris la mort de Véronica. Il ne me restait qu'une seule chose, apprendre à ne pas être amer.*' As though mirroring the moral sclerosis of French society in the face of the

Indochinese and Algerian Wars for Independence, the cinema of the post-Second World War era becomes '*un cinéma de voyant, non plus d'action*' (Deleuze 1985b/2006: 9); the characters become the powerless spectators of violence, in self-imposed exile or on the margins of a society they feel alienated from.

It may be asked whether, as a consequence of the above-mentioned sclerosis or paralysis in the post-War cinema, the '*image-mouvement*' of the classical Hollywood era is therefore 'moral' in comparison. I think not: the paralysis in the post-Second World War European films I refer to in this chapter portray characters entangled in or witness to events that they find morally shocking, and their inaction can be read as their only avenue of escape from engaging in or witnessing further atrocities. In other words, there is a moral core underlying these films (as will be seen in more detail in the following chapter). That the characters in the '*image-temps*' films of this era fill roles that are closer to that of voyeur than actor, witness rather than perpetrator, can be understood as a metaphor for the generation 'taken hostage' as it were by an older, influential, often more cynical and powerful elite with authority, either political and/or military in nature (de Gaulle, Massu, etc) or on a micro-sociological level patriarchal authority with-in the family, given that young men drafted during the Algerian War would often be seen to have a duty to follow in the footsteps of their fathers and grand-fathers who had defended the Republic by fighting in World Wars One and Two.

In Brechtian style without appealing to the emotions Godard nevertheless depicts torture and murder. Examples of the lack of pathos elicited by the film are to be found in the torture scene and the end of the film. Although a fairly comprehensive gamut of torture techniques are performed on Bruno, the textbook like explanations provided by the narration serve to distance the spectator. The scene is inter-cut with shots of the FLN members discussing the drawbacks of using knives '*non, c'est comme ça que les français ...*' so that the spectator is left to appreciate the political significance of torture in a specific socio-political context instead of being drawn into emotional identification with an individual on-screen character. Likewise the death of Karina's character and Bruno's reaction to her death are portrayed in a manner that prevents the spectator from empathising. The commentary too is peppered with irony and humour (more benchmarks of *Verfremdungseffekt*), '*Il n'y a aucun doute, la force est supérieure à l'intelligence*' says Bruno with his head submerged by his torturer in the bathtub.

## Godard, the Metropole's Rouch

BRUNO: Mais, c'est terrible aujourd'hui, si vous restez tranquille à ne rien faire, on vous engueule, justement parce que vous ne faites rien. Alors, on fait la guerre sans conviction et je trouve que c'est dommage de faire la guerre sans conviction. (Bruno, *Le Petit soldat*)

Esquenazi maintains that « *Le désintérêt pour les enjeux du conflit que manifeste le héros Bruno Forestier fait en effet écho aux sentiments d'une grande partie de la population.* » (2004: 103) Following this line of reasoning he argues that *Le Petit soldat* could therefore have been expected to have been welcomed by the same generation that identified with *A Bout de souffle*. *Le Petit soldat* « *aurait pu être l'expression du refus d'une génération après qu'A Bout de souffle ait été l'expression de (certains de) ses rêves. Mais le film fut un échec auprès du public qui avait fêté Belmondo et Seberg.* » Although Esquenazi offers several hypotheses as to why this might have been the case (discussed below), he neglects what might seem to be the most obvious: the film was banned for three years, so that when it was finally released the Algerian War was over, thus creating an irrevocable hiatus between the film's characters and spectators, radically modifying the spectator/film dynamic. A prediction that the French will lose the war (voiced by Karina's character) is no longer controversial after the fact, whereas in 1960 the FLN were certainly losing the war on the military front, and it was not yet clear they would win on the diplomatic front. By 1958 two of the FLN's most charismatic and creative leaders – Larbi Ben M'Hidi and Abane Ramdame – had been assassinated, and the surviving leaders of the FLN had had to flee Algeria.<sup>50</sup> As Stora surmises, « *C'est l'année où tout peut basculer, d'un côté comme de l'autre* » (2004: 136).

The film's tepid reception can be further understood by returning in more depth to the double failure that Esquenazi writes of: failure of the film with both critics and general audiences. The latter were apparently either unable or unwilling to identify with the film, which veered sharply away from the codes and references of Hollywood cinema favoured in *A Bout de souffle* to turn towards French literature, philosophy, and politics. This is embodied in the frequent citations from Malraux's *La Condition humaine* and Cocteau's *Thomas l'Imposteur*,

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<sup>50</sup> These men and their deaths are emblematic of the 'double' war: French against Algerian, but also Alger-Algerian fratricide, and Franco-français fratricide, while Abane, 'une sorte de Jean Moulin Algérien ... », was assassinated 27 December 1957 in Morocco by other FLN members...

Bruno's existential reflections, and explicit references to the war in Algeria, ranging from radio clips to the entire double-agent intrigue. Another obstacle to audience's identification is perceived to have been that the film offered a somewhat muted degree of agency to the female lead, just as young French women were aspiring to something more than 'head-shaking' 'gorgeous puppet' on-screen models. Meanwhile film critics faulted the film most notably for its surprising and eclectic "*juxtaposition de citations ou de références, avoués ou non, que le film charrie*" (Esquenazi 2004: 102), elsewhere described as an indication that Godard was "suffering from a sort of intellectual measles marked by sex-in-the-head [...] and a rash of cultural name-dropping." (Dyer 1963: 195) Although already a major component of *A Bout de souffle*, only later would this 'sampling' become both appreciated and synonymous with Godard, reaching its apogee in *Histoire[s] du cinéma* (1998). *Le Petit Soldat* illustrates the point however that Godard was able to film both young people in bed *and* questions of political significance (cf. Frames 9 and 10).

Bruno's '*désordre intellectuel*' is typified by what is ostensibly an unlikely mix of contradictory movements, icons and artists, such as his admiration of Spanish Republicans yet adherence to a fascist terrorist organisation. He admires Aragon (synonymous with resistance to German occupied France), yet supports *l'Algérie française* (French occupied Algeria), and so on. Many critics have made sense of the main protagonist's intellectual disarray by conflating Bruno Forestier with Godard, rather than searching for a wider implication within the narrative:

For one thing, we are being dared to share Bruno's (and, let's make no bones about it, Godard's) overriding sense of self-importance [...]  
[...] we are faced, in fact, with Bruno/Godard's disavowal of political, moral and social theory in favour of pure aestheticism; it is hardly surprising that Godard's future career should remain shrouded, for most of us, in uncertainty. (Dyer 1963: 195)

However, rather than assuming that Bruno 'is Godard', it is worth looking at some of Bruno's dialogue in detail. Bruno, in conversation with Veronica Dreyer, addresses the following controversial near monologue to the camera, in an example of (to borrow from Deleuze) "*une conversation quelconque infinie*" (1985b: 31):

C'est drôle, aujourd'hui, tout le monde déteste les français. Moi, je suis fier d'être Français, mais en même temps, je suis contre le nationalisme. On défend des idées, on ne défend pas des territoires. J'aime la France, parce que j'aime Joachim Du Bellay et Louis Aragon, et j'aime l'Allemagne parce que j'aime Beethoven. [...] Et je n'aime pas les Arabes, parce que je n'aime pas le désert, ni le colonel Lawrence, encore moins la Méditerranée ou Albert Camus. Non, j'aime la Bretagne et je déteste le Midi. En Bretagne, la lumière est toujours très douce, pas comme dans le Midi. Et puis, les Arabes sont paresseux, mais je n'ai rien contre eux ou contre les Chinois. Non, je voudrais les ignorer. [...]

If we compare Bruno's monologue with the following transcript from Stora's 1990 documentary *Les Années algériennes*, where a 'pied-noir' speaks of her youth and OAS membership in Algeria during the war, one can't help noting that rather than revealing Godard's intellectual disarray, it would seem that Godard presented the spectator with a strikingly accurate snapshot of OAS ideology:

L'OAS, c'était pour nous la Résistance. Et on rentrait dans cette OAS avec une âme de résistant. Je me rappelle que j'écoutais Léo Ferré chanter *L'Affiche Rouge*, je lisais les poèmes d'Aragon. Nous étions les héros, les patriotes. Nous allions défendre la France en danger qui perdait son Empire. Et on était là pour remettre la France sur le droit chemin.<sup>51</sup>

The irreconcilable perspectives offered by the amalgam of cultural references and ideologies evoked by Bruno has struck many critics as improbable, yet the Fifth Republic was infested with a similar lack of ideological coherence (not least regarding the status of Algerians). The Fourth and then Fifth Republics themselves shook on their foundations as the myths they were standing on began to crumble. In the colonized territories the Republic's stated ideals were shown to be little more than pleasing 'trompe-l'œil' when the indigenous populations of France's third world colonies demanded to benefit from the freedom and equality that the Republic ostensibly promised. It may be advantageous to an understanding of the evolution of

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<sup>51</sup> Michèle Barbier, former pied-noir, cited in *La Gangrène et l'oubli* (Stora, 1998 (first published '91) p. 112. Cf pp. 109-114 for discussion of the evolving perspectives of former resisters... See Chapter six for discussion of the trio of massacres committed by the French authorities during the last six months of the war: the victims of the first, Algerians with full French citizenship (Paris, 17 Oct '61); the second, pro-Algerian Independence demonstrators (Métro Charonne, 8 Feb '61); the third, pieds-noirs (Alger, 26 mars '62)...

French society in this period (early 1960s) if Bruno Forestier, *'le petit soldat'* is interpreted both as a symbolic embodiment of the Fifth Republic's contradictions, and as emblematic of a young generation coming of age in the era of decolonisation, trying to come to terms with the rapidly shifting parameters and ideological conception of 'France' and the (nearly total) demise of the French empire within decades.

The film charts the progress of a deserter who, having joined an extremist organisation, cannot escape it. Godard invites the spectator to reflect on the affinities that reconcile extremists at both ends of the sphere, and on the similarity of the ideas, concepts, and ideologies used to justify torture or assassination and to defend – interchangeably – either reactionary or revolutionary ideals and movements. To highlight this the OAS and the FLN participate in identical activities: when staking out Veronica's flat, the OAS (represented by Pierre and Jacques) play chess on a mini chess board, and later on when one of the FLN members is torturing Bruno in the bathroom, the other FLN member gets out a mini chess board identical to the one that the OAS members play on, and carefully sets it up. Thus Godard uses visual clues to parody the fact that extreme right and extreme left share the common ground of extremism, and sometimes (as during the Algerian War) also cultural references and idols.

For the avoidance of doubt, they also share the same language: before Bruno is tortured, Mohammed of the FLN (ALN) says to Bruno: « *Quelquefois, il faut avoir le courage de frayer son chemin avec un poignard* » Likewise, towards the end of the film, as Jacques gives Bruno the gun to assassinate the radio presenter Palivoda, he gives exactly the same advice, or 'encouragement' to Bruno: « *Quelquefois, il faut avoir le courage de frayer son chemin avec un poignard* ». Can we surmise that Godard intends the spectator to conclude that the OAS and FLN are equally ridiculous? I think not: Godard obviously favours the Algerians' cause: *'ils ont un idéal, il faut avoir un idéal'*, and Bruno escapes from torture relatively unscathed whereas Véronica is murdered by the double-crossing *'français'*...

A comparison can be drawn here between *Le Petit Soldat* and Godard's *Les Carabiniers* (1963). In *Les Carabineirs*, whose setting can best be described as abstract, intemporal and extra-geographical (no doubt to represent the universality of its narrative, but perhaps also to circumnavigate censorship), the two conscripts who are the film's main characters, Ulysse (Marino Masé) and Michel-Ange (Albert Juross) return home from war, having committed

every atrocity therewith permitted, and proudly show off their loot: a suitcase full of picture postcards of monuments in major cities. This scene serves two purposes; firstly, the men believe that the ownership of the pictorial representation of these cities and their treasures equates to ownership of the cities themselves, hence evoking the power of representation and inviting the viewer to reflect on the apparent paradox therein (cf. also René Magritte's '*ceci n'est pas une pomme*' or '*ceci n'est pas une pipe*' which evoke the limits of representation). Secondly, the self-repeating nature of human creation is depicted, where, in the postmodern era, nothing is unique, whether it is in architecture, the buildings of great cities, or destruction, and performing atrocities; everything has its carbon copy or mass-produced picture-perfect representation. As Godard described it:

Autrement dit, un peu comme s'il s'agissait d'illustrer les multiples – et pourtant toujours ennuyeusement pareils – visages de la guerre grâce à des plaques d'Épinal glissés dans la lanterne magique [...] (Godard 1998a : 238-9)

Predictably, given its release when France was just exiting seventeen uninterrupted years of war, and still clinging to notions of the heroic through the myth of *Résistencialisme* in order to mitigate the shame of nationally endorsed collaboration in the form of the Vichy Régime, *Les Carabiniers* received a hostile reception, meeting with criticism and derision. For in the film, the depiction of war is stripped of any accommodating notion of glory, honour, worth, value, or sense: in short, unadorned by any ideology or other attempt to render it palatable or meaningful, Godard shows war in its true senseless horror. Death in *Les Carabiniers* remains meaningless, whereas the spectator generally prefers to be able to invest the death of a character with meaning; to somehow give sense to a senseless act (such as war) or find meaning in a potentially absurd universe.

*Le Petit soldat* was similarly met with criticism upon its release. Neither communists nor conservatives knew quite how to handle this film, which as a result was often condemned. *Le Figaro* dismissed the film as "*le plus faible et le plus décevant de ce jeune cinéaste*"<sup>52</sup> Jean Rochereau writing in *La Croix* described the censorship committee's ban as justified and hoped that the film's release would finally allow those who still took Godard seriously to see that "*tout, dans ses films, est culture mal digérée, narcissisme déplaisant (...). C'est en*

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<sup>52</sup> P.M. *Le Figaro* 01/02/63

*dilatante fatigué qu'il daigne accorder un regard à ces pauvres types.*"<sup>53</sup> Rachid Boujedra denounced *Le Petit soldat* as 'un film de tendance néofasciste'.<sup>54</sup> The preferred line of attack amongst critics was to accuse Godard of intellectual dandyism and ideological confusion (cf. articles cited above in footnote 25 and also Jean Rochereau's article "*Le Petit soldat*" in *La Croix* 08/02/1963).

Deleuze meanwhile has attempted to elucidate why so many of the avant-garde films of the era should have been so misunderstood by critics and audiences alike. Reflecting on *Stromboli* (Rossellini, 1950), *Les Carabiniers* (1963) and Ozu's films in general, Deleuze analyses why the films and their characters', at odds with mainstream representations, were rejected:

Au Japon comme en Europe, la critique marxiste a dénoncé ces films et leurs personnages, trop passifs et négatifs, tantôt bourgeois, tantôt névrosés ou marginaux, et qui remplacent l'action modificatrice par une vision « confuse ». (Deleuze 1985: 30)

He concludes that the films were met with incomprehension as a result of the novelty of their form, content, and lack of clarity. Stora too has commented that '*Nous sommes loin, dans Le Petit soldat, de l'épopée de l'engagement clairement motivé.*' (1997c: 141) The 'vision confuse' evoked by Deleuze above must be one of the defining characteristics of *Le Petit soldat*, and so merits further consideration.

The expression of a generation's errant dreams that prevailed in Godard's previous film, *A Bout de souffle*, is met with an absence of the same and a pervasive sense of the male protagonist's disillusionment and confusion (Esquenazi 2004: 103). This is not surprising if we concur with Jean Michel Frodon's assertion that in French cinema of the 1960s the Algerian war was often evoked as an ensemble of events which rendered vulnerable illusions that had grown out of the post(-Second World)-war period.<sup>55</sup> Therefore, we can extrapolate

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<sup>53</sup> Rochereau, Jean « *Le Petit soldat* » *La Croix* 8 February 1963

<sup>54</sup> Rachid Boujedra, *Naissance du cinéma algérien*, (Paris : Maspero, 1971) p. 27 cited by Stora in *Imaginaires de Guerre* (Paris : La Découverte, 2004) and also by Jean-Pierre Esquenazi (2004 : 102).

<sup>55</sup> « Ce sont des films le plus souvent situés en métropole, qui réfractent la manière dont celle-ci a majoritairement perçu la "guerre sans nom" : pas comme une guerre, justement, mais comme un ensemble d'événements inquiétants, mettant en péril des personnes, des intérêts, un certain mode de vie, une éthique de l'action, des illusions issues de l'après-guerre. C'est cela qu'évoquera surtout le cinéma français d'alors. »

that the stagnation apparent in French cinema in the decade following the Second World War was part of a wider phenomenon that touched other parts of French culture and society, as a result of historical events. For just as French cinema stagnated in the ten-year period subsequent to the Second World War (Deleuze 1985: 284-5), oppressed by the weight of several wars (Second World War, Indo-Chinese, Algerian) and the patriotic myth-building which left little breath for innovation, French society and the political realm stagnated too until awoken by the largely unexpected wave of world-wide anti-colonial revolutions that multiplied in the wake of the Second World War, followed by the struggle for women's emancipation and workers' and students' revolt epitomised in May 68.

For is it inconsequential that both Godard's and Resnais's Algerian conscripts refer to others' revolutions? Bruno openly admires the Spanish Revolution<sup>56</sup>, and when he reads about the assassination of an art teacher by car-bombing (an assassination executed by the organization for which he works) the event seems to provoke a '*prise de conscience*'. This is reflected in his thoughts while he travels by train to the rendezvous assigned by the counter-revolutionary organization (symbolic of the OAS) he is employed by: '*Jusqu'à maintenant mon histoire a été simple. C'est celle d'un type sans idéal. Et demain ?*' In contrast, the general indifference of other passengers/society is signified through the man who denies (twice) having a light, despite the fact that a lit cigarette hangs from his lips. Similarly, in *Muriel*, Bernard writes in his diary of Algerians that: '*Ils ont leur révolution à eux, mais nous? Rentrer en France pour quoi faire?*' Both *Le Petit soldat* and *Muriel, ou le temps d'un retour* can be interpreted as transpositions of a generation's disillusionment with the myths generated after the Liberation and a subsequent – initially confused – searching for alternative ideologies.

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Frodon, « Le cinéma et la guerre » *Le Monde* 31 Oct. 2004.

<sup>56</sup> My choice to refer to the events of 1936-37 in Spain as the Spanish Revolution as opposed to the Spanish Civil War is informed by Noam Chomsky's research into the events (cf. *The Chomsky Reader* 1987 especially pp. 85-119). Chomsky writes that "we can learn a great deal from the peasants and workers of revolutionary Spain" (p. 26); "Jackson's account of the popular revolution that took place in Spain is misleading and in part quite unfair" (p. 85); "During the months following the Franco insurrection in July 1936, a social revolution of unprecedented scope took place throughout much of Spain. It had no "revolutionary vanguard" and appears to have been largely spontaneous, involving masses of urban and rural labourers in a radical transformation of social and economic conditions that persisted, with remarkable success, until it was crushed by force. This predominantly anarchist revolution and the massive social transformation to which it gave rise are treated as, in recent historical studies, as a kind of aberration, a nuisance that stood in the way of successful prosecution of the war to save the bourgeois regime from the Franco rebellion." (p. 86); The revolution was "apolitical", in the sense that its organs of power and administration remained separate from the central Republican government and (...) continued to function fairly independently until the revolution was finally crushed (...)" (p. 87); and so on.

## La Guerre des Mémoires

As mentioned above, recent attention has been given to cinematic representations of the Algerian War in non-French cinema (cf. Austin 2007; Tomlinson 2004; Frodon 2004). There is particular emphasis and ongoing debate around questions of collective memory and amnesia of the Algerian War within the French national consciousness (cf. Frodon 2004 and Austin 2007).

Arguments to have emerged in the ongoing '*guerre des mémoires*' include the following hypothesis by Jean-Michel Frodon that, if valid, essentially negates the concept of a psychological cover-up in favour of a more pessimistic appraisal: aside from those directly concerned people have simply been ignorant or entirely insouciant of the events:

Il est frappant que ceux qui, depuis près de cinquante ans maintenant, parlent d'amnésie et de refoulement soient pratiquement toujours des gens dont l'histoire *personnelle* est liée aux « événements » : rapatriés ou enfants de rapatriés, Algériens, militants de la cause anticolonialiste, quelques fois anciens appelés. [...]

While an interesting observation, is this more than a loosely calibrated shot at an apathetic majority for not being all that interested in history? Frodon continues to argue:

L'échec commercial de la quasi-totalité des films sur la guerre d'Algérie est un indice que cette histoire-là n'est pas désirable, parce que, pour la très grande majorité de nos concitoyens, elle ne leur dit rien. C'est à dire que, pour eux, *elle ne leur dit rien d'eux*. (Frodon 2004: 76)

As regards the quasi-total commercial failure indicating lack of interest in the subject matter, it may not indicate anything more than mainstream lack of interest in the type of films and directors that have chosen to reflect on the Algerian War. It is possible, as some critics have argued, that all that is needed to achieve a commercial success of an 'Algerian War' film is to replicate the Hollywood blockbuster action-film format with several A-list stars. Consider for instance the success of *Lost Command (Les centurions)* (Mark Robson, 1970) described by Raphaëlle Branche as a classic Hollywood war film using the Algerian war as an exotic location, combining FLN terrorists, French military haunted by the defeat at Diên-Biên-Phu

and torture to predictable effect. As she notes, the film stayed at the top of the Parisian box-office for three weeks running, until being usurped by another war film, *Paris brûle-t-il ?* (Branche 1997: 64) Would a proliferation of such commercially successful films, which arguably tell most of the audience nothing about themselves either (*'ne leur dit rien d'eux'*), necessarily be a desirable addition to what can perhaps best be described as the quality commercial failures (such as *L'insoumis*, *Muriel*, *Le Petit soldat*...)?

There has also been discussion of the 'nothing' there was to see in Algeria, according to French cinema'. While it is clear that French cinema has largely avoided *explicit* representation of the Algerian War (the exceptions being the militant cinema of Vautier, Clément, etc), several lines of arguments would seem to divide critics on this issue. On the one hand cinema's limitations if asked to serve as an historical arbiter must be acknowledged, as there is a risk of the cultural artefact distorting following generations' appreciation of history if film is presented as providing a sacrosanct version of the truth. Consider Tomlinson's appraisal of Gillo Pontecorvo's excellent film *La Bataille d'Alger*. She rightly concedes that the film has been accused of 'revolutionary hagiography', but stops short of specifics. Tomlinson specifically describes the film as:

Meticulously researched, the tiniest detail of its episodes is derived from 'interviews with former paratroopers and officers in Paris, [...] [from] Arab revolutionaries, [...] guerrilla dynamiters, [...] [and] newsreel footage.'<sup>57</sup>

Her article is peppered with vocabulary relating to realism and historical accuracy 'the one point [...] where Pontecorvo backs down from realism is in his use of the musical soundtrack [...]'<sup>58</sup> and Tomlinson goes on to quote J. Mellen emphasizing that the actors were:

'chosen on the basis of their physiognomies and physiques', on the basis of their resemblance to real-life activists who 'remained' in faded photographs alone.<sup>59</sup>  
(Mellen 1973: 41 in Tomlinson 2004: 362)

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<sup>57</sup> Emily Tomlinson "Rebirth in Sorrow..." pp. 365-6 also citing J. Michalczyk *The Italian Political Filmmakers*, p. 191

<sup>58</sup> Tomlinson quoting Rebecca Pauly "Rebirth in Sorrow..." p. 364

<sup>59</sup> J. Mellen, *Filmguide to the Battle of Algiers* (London, Indiana University Press, 1973) p. 41 (quoted by Tomlinson p. 362)

Yet North African historian and sociologist Mostefa Lacheraf, a specialist of the Algerian Revolution, sees a vast hiatus between some of the principal historical participants and their on-screen counterparts, providing an appraisal which undermines Tomlinson's:

Ainsi, un criminel de guerre se voit représenté sous les traits, le comportement et les manières d'un grand seigneur, d'un chevalier sans peur et sans reproche, alors qu'on prête à Larbi Ben M'Hidi, future et courageuse victime de ce colonel de parachutistes, le rôle d'un théoricien à lunettes, un peu guindé et timide, inexpressif, épisodique et marginal.<sup>60</sup>

Indeed, even for non-specialists in the field, it is difficult to identify a resemblance between 'faded photographs' of Ben M'Hidi and the actor chosen to play his part.<sup>61</sup>

*La Bataille d'Alger* is admittedly a film that does 'appeal' strongly to the senses in quite a different manner to *Muriel* or even *Le Petit soldat*. It also makes a valuable contribution to understanding the Algerian War for Independence. It may be worthwhile to note though that in its predominance and popularity there are inherent dangers both in privileging the angle provided by one film, and also in the difficulties particular to analysing a 'docudrama'. It is all too easy to confound the docu(mentary) with the drama, to lose sight of the context, and specifically an appreciation of the fact that the film's representation, and lasting perpetuation of images of the Algerian War drifts away from the actual historical events and people. As time passes, the problems inherent in classifying any 'one' audiovisual document as definitive become increasingly crystallized, until the fictive representation may successfully obscure the historical 'reality'.

Although not immediately apparent, the preceding discussion is relevant to this chapter for the following reason. Godard (and in the following chapter, it will be seen, Resnais) rather neatly sidestepped the above problem (notably hagiography and the holy mission of providing the 'truth') by acknowledging cinema's limitations when it comes to representing traumatic events, and key episodes in national history. In setting *Le Petit soldat* in Switzerland, thus tinting the events of the film with a detached and slightly unlikely hue, while also imposing

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<sup>60</sup> « Filmography algérienne » par Mouny Berrah *CinémAction* n° 85 p. 226 citing historian and sociologist Mostefa Lacheraf in « Cinémas du Maghreb » *CinémAction* n° 14, 1981.

<sup>61</sup> For more on Larbi Ben M'Hidi see Patrick Rotman's 2002 documentary *L'Ennemi intime* and for photographs see Bakhdatzé.

the dual temporality (discussed later) a critical distancing effect is achieved, an early indication of the more obviously Brechtian techniques that Godard would employ in subsequent films (such as in *Les Carabiniers*, 1963).

### Absent Algerians

Guy Austin writes that ‘Algeria [is] so often fantasized as empty of Algerians in French cinema and in colonialist thought...’ In fact, it is not only Algeria, but France too which French cinema has so often fantasized as empty of Algerians, despite significant migration of Berbers and Muslims to France’s industrialized cities for decades to work in factories, not least of all as part of the war effort during the First and Second World wars. Michel Marie writes that the Algerian was all but absent from French cinema in the 1950s and 1960s, with Christian-Jaque’s *Si tous les gars du monde* (1956) distinguishing itself as one exception, being a film « qui offre un portrait assez rarissime d’un Algérien sympathique » (Michel Marie 2005: 23); *Elise ou la vraie vie* (Michel Drach, 1970) based on Claire Etcherelli’s 1967 novel – which won the *Prix Fémina* – is another slightly later exception to the rule. Therefore it is worth recognizing that the inclusion of Algerians in *Le Petit soldat* also delineates some of the singularity of Godard’s 1960 film.

Opinions diverge on whether equal proportions of screen time divided between Algerian and French actors might reveal a more profound ideological fairness of the auteur. While some critics argue in favour of such a balance (cf. Austin 2007: 185), it is worth noting that others doubt that such equilibrium would have been desirable if it had been achieved (cf. Frodon 2004). Accepting the premise of the myth-creating quality of films ‘about’ these wars, Frodon writes explicitly that:

Les films [américains] ont encore affaire à un mythe ; un mythe qui ne concerne pas du tout le Vietnam comme pays réel, mais complètement l’Amérique comme pays imaginaire. [...] On ne voit pratiquement pas de Vietnamiens dans les films américains qui se passent au Vietnam, on voit des Américains, et une certaine idée de l’Amérique mise en scène et surtout mise à l’épreuve. Coppola, Cimino, Kubrick, Kaza, Altman, De Palma, ou même Pan Cosmatos et Joseph Zi n’ont rien à dire des Vietnamiens, ils n’en savent rien et c’est plutôt à leur honneur de ne pas tenter d’en faire malgré tout des personnages.

Austin on the other hand interprets the absence not as essentially indicative of navel-gazing performed by the (former)-coloniser but instead as a prolongation of the colonial dream: of a host nation without the hosts. Describing the absence of Algerians in French cinema generally, and with particular reference to Demy's *Les Parapluies de Cherbourg* (1964) and more specifically the photograph that Guy sends Geneviève from Algeria, Austin writes:

The result was [...] a depiction of Algeria from which Algerians themselves were absent [...] Algerians remain invisible, always off-screen. Such is the legacy of colonialism which, as Fanon wrote in *Les Damnés de la terre*, seeks the 'inexistence politique et économique de l'indigénat'. (Austin 2007: 185)

Austin's conclusion that Algerians are invisible and off-screen in *Les Parapluies* is based on the fact that in the photograph, Guy is framed standing dressed in uniform:

...next to an empty Moorish archway. Algeria and its population are out of sight, through the empty arch, while the photo itself is framed by Geneviève's letter written naturally enough in French: the war is framed by a French romance, and exists only insofar as it tells a tale about French lovers; Algerians remain invisible, always off-screen. (Austin 2007: 185)

That may be the case, but in Demy's film is it really the expression of a colonial desire to seek the inexistence of the indigenous population? Guy was not, after all, in Algeria as a tourist; if he had been, then perhaps we might expect to see some locals going about their business peacefully in the background. However, as an on-duty – and probably armed – soldier (he was obviously on-duty when the photograph was taken, given that he was wearing a uniform) it is unlikely that he would instil a sense of trust in the locals, and therefore one of the only plausible contexts one can think of in which he may have been photographed with Algerians would be in the sort of hideous trophy shot that American troops brought back from Iraq and Afghanistan: clearly neither the angle nor psychological hue that Demy was seeking in *Les Parapluies de Cherbourg*, which evokes neither torture, nor the horrors of war, but rather focuses primarily (and legitimately, in my opinion, in the interests of representing many different viewpoints) on the impact of the war on a young woman and the consequences of the draft on the couple.

Debate on this subject – which is to say, debate on choice of perspective and viewpoint – predates the release of *Le Petit soldat*. Godard explained in justifying the perspective chosen in *Le Petit soldat* that he could only relate the Algerian War from his own point of view (as a Parisian), not another's:

Moi, j'ai parlé des choses qui me concernaient, en tant que Parisien de 1960, non incorporé à un parti. Ce qui me concernait, c'était le problème de la guerre et ses répercussions morales. J'ai donc montré un type qui se pose plein de problèmes. Il ne sait pas les résoudre, mais les poser, même avec un esprit confus, c'est déjà tenter de les résoudre. Il vaut peut être mieux se poser d'abord des questions que refuser de se rien poser ou se croire capable de tout résoudre. (1998a: 220)

As we see in frame 8 and frame 11, Algerians are neither invisible nor off-screen in *Le Petit soldat*, and are sometimes playfully framed, in such a way as to highlight the economic interests of colonization (for example in frame eight, where Laszlo Szabo partakes in the volley of self-referencing photographers photographing in the film, and in frame eleven, where he is filmed laughing underneath the large gold lettering of the *Banque Commerciale Arabe*).

### Le Petit soldat censored

Austin cites two main obstacles to representing the Algerian War under de Gaulle's presidency as censorship and 'the powerful mythologizing known as *'résistancialisme'*, a national obsession with the Resistance.' (Austin 2007: 184) It is easy to underestimate the strength of French censorship; in stark contrast to images of the consequences of American military intervention in Vietnam (circa 1965-1975) or torture during the present-day Iraq War, even to this day, not one single image of torture by the French Army during the Algerian War of Independence has been seen by the public, so carefully guarded are the nation's public – and private – archives (Bakhdatzé 2007: 47).

As we have seen, critics express frustration at the perceived limited representations of the Algerian War offered by French cinema. With reference to Resnais's 1963 film *Muriel*, Austin writes, 'Muriel's torture and death is a metaphor for what happened in Algeria, but it

takes place off-screen.’ (Austin 2007: 182) It does, and so does Véronica Dreyer’s torture and death in *Le Petit soldat*, although Godard does ‘show’ torture to a striking extent (cf. frame 7 and frame 9), both as inflicted on Bruno and also in the photographs of Bruno’s ‘colleagues’ who have met their death. But as spectators do we need to see a graphic depiction in order to ‘know’ what happened? Can we better understand events as traumatic as torture by seeing them acted out on-screen? Or are these essentially ‘*inexprimable*’, as Jean-Louis Comolli has argued. Are torture and death (‘Muriel’) absent just because we don’t see them (‘her’)? And finally we might ask whether it is of credit or discredit to French cinema that it maintains such a close parallel between the off-screen torture and death of cinema’s fictional characters and the ‘off-limits’ and un-seen images of the war’s real victims? Resnais’s film shows us that ‘Muriel’ is not absent at all; even though unseen, torture and death haunt the returned conscript long after the war is over, with dramatic repercussions for many.

In contrast to the off-screen torture in *Muriel, ou le temps d’un retour*, there is a lengthy debut of a torture sequence in *Le Petit soldat*, that of Bruno in the hands of the FLN. According to Comolli, ‘*L’absence de torture en renforce la présence.*’ The torture sequence in *Le Petit soldat*, has been analysed by Comolli as follows:

Pour filmer la torture, il commence par filmer l’expérience de la torture [...] et au moment où la véritable torture commence (quand l’expérience devient souffrance), il filme l’absence de torture : de longs panoramiques sur des immeubles [...]. *Et loin que cette fuite ou cette pudeur devant la torture en atténue l’horreur, elle la renforce.* En ne montrant pas la torture, elle empêche qu’on ressente simplement un sentiment de pitié ou d’horreur, et nous mène ainsi au-delà de tout sentiment, à la torture dans sa véritable et universelle horreur, dans son abstraction et son absurdité tragique.  
(Comolli 1963: 56)

We might interrogate ourselves too on the significance of the long pan to the right across the many windowed façade of residential buildings. The contextualization of the torture is rendered everyday, the setting anywhere, the victim anyone, the perpetrators polite, sincere, committed, intelligent individuals. As in *Les Carabiniers* Godard de-mystifies banal yet atrocious acts of war, depicting them in the cold light of their absurdity, absent of Manichaeism. Are we also invited by the tracking shot of the camera as it travels the length of the building to consider the shared responsibility of the neighbouring citizens, so that the

other inhabitants' blissful unawareness and insouciance of the crimes against humanity being committed in their vicinity act as a parable for the widespread indifference amongst the French population to crimes committed by young French conscripts in Algeria (and colonial crimes in general)?

A somewhat lengthy quotation (divided into three parts) from the censorship committee's communication concerning their decision to vote for a complete ban of *Le Petit soldat* in 1960 allows us to gauge the amplitude of their opposition to the film:

1. ... Les scènes de torture appellent habituellement de la commission les plus extrêmes réserves. La très longue représentation de scènes de ce genre dans *Le Petit soldat* est de nature à entraîner une mesure restrictive, en dehors de toutes autres considérations. Que ces tortures soient appliquées par des agents du FLN ne saurait modifier le jugement qui doit être porté contre ces pratiques et leur représentation à l'écran. (Lefèvre 1997 : 41)

Obviously scenes of torture were not new to the screen. Rossellini filmed a member of the Italian Resistance (Manfredi) subjected to torture by Nazis in *Roma città aperta* (released in France in 1945), which is considered to be the first Italian neo-realist film. However, torture in *Roma città aperta* could be interpreted as comfortably co-existing with *résistancialisme*, whereas that in *Le Petit soldat* cannot, given that in Rossellini's film it is a member of the resistance who is tortured by Nazis, whereas Godard in his iconoclastic role places the revolutionary Algerians in the role of torturers, and the counter-revolutionary as a victim. Rossellini's film also features a disillusioned Nazi General who becomes rather inebriated in the military's private club. The General predicts the downfall of the Reich and the remaining legacy of death; he has clearly lost what faith he had in Nazism. However, the Italian soldiers who are to execute the priest (Don Pietro, another member of the Resistance) have not lost their 'Faith': every soldier in the firing squad 'misses' the priest. *Roma città aperta* in many ways acts as a pre-cursor to *Le Petit soldat*, as Godard playfully either adheres to or inverts some of the earlier film's themes and formal techniques. Veronica's assertion that France will lose the war mirrors the General's prediction, while a theme common to both films is betrayal. In film noir style in *Roma città aperta* it is a woman who betrays the man, while Godard makes a refreshing break from the film noir code (after Patricia's betrayal of Poiccard in *A Bout de souffle*) as Bruno is betrayed not by Veronica but by his own 'friends'.

2. L'action du film, située en Suisse en 1958, retrace certains épisodes de la vie d'un jeune déserteur. Son objet est d'analyser le comportement de ce jeune homme, les raisons profondes de son acte, ainsi que les attitudes qu'il est amené à prendre dans le conflit où il est impliqué. A un moment où toute la jeunesse française est appelée à combattre en Algérie, il paraît difficilement possible d'admettre que le comportement contraire soit exposé, illustré et finalement justifié. Le fait que ce personnage se soit paradoxalement engagé dans une action antiterroriste ne change rien au fond du problème. (Lefèvre 1997 : 41)

The main protagonist of *Le Petit soldat* is a deserter, and because resistance to the Algerian War among French conscripts has for a long-time been considered to have been extremely rare this has seemed to be an anomaly. However, new research by historian Tramor Quemeneur means that this interpretation is due a reappraisal.

Until recently it was thought that roughly 470 conscientious objectors were condemned during the period 1955-1962, while the French military saw numbers of deserters and soldiers committing insubordination ranging from three to four hundred, putting total resistance at less than one thousand. (Stora 1997b: 91) However, due to the recent research of Tramor Quemeneur in his doctoral thesis "*Une guerre sans "non"? Insoumissions, refus d'obéissance et desertions de soldats français pendant la guerre d'Algérie (1954-1962)*" (Quemeneur, 2007) it transpires that these figures, which were relatively low in comparison to American resistance to the Vietnamese War, and were interpreted as an indication of the general population's general acquiescence or indifference to the Algerian War, are substantially inaccurate. Quemeneur's extensive research (more than one thousand pages) reveals that in fact numbers of French conscientious objectors, insubordinates and deserters were more than ten times previous estimates – totalling nearly 15,000 – making them equal in numbers, proportionately, to that of the American equivalent during the Vietnam War.

3. En fin, les paroles prêtées à une protagoniste du film [Veronica Dreyer/Anna Karina] et par lesquelles l'action de la France en Algérie est présentée comme dépourvue de tout idéal, alors que la cause de la rébellion est défendue et exaltée, constituent, à elles seules, dans les circonstances actuelles, un motif d'interdiction. » (Lefèvre 1997: 41)

Before citing the dialogue in question, note that Esquenazi sees Anna Karina's character as being very weak with no agency, arguing that:

A aucun moment du film, Véronica Dreyer [...] n'a l'occasion d'exprimer une position ou un point de vue qui puisse rivaliser avec ceux manifestés par Bruno Forestier (Esquenazi 2004 : 105)

This is not altogether accurate, as Karina's character (cf. frame 4) explicitly contests Bruno's convictions: she openly and without complex contradicts the male protagonist and is the character who predicts that the French will lose the war. The opinions expressed by her character '*rivalise*' those of Bruno's to such an extent that the censorship committee cited her dialogue alone as reason to ban the film:

BRUNO FORESTIER : Pourquoi vous travaillez avec le FLN, par conviction politique ?

VÉRONICA DREYER : C'est difficile à dire. Petit à petit. Mais ça ne me gêne pas. De toutes les façons, je trouve que les Français ont tort. Les autres, ils ont un (sic) idéal, mais pas les Français. Il faut avoir un idéal, c'est très important. Contre les Allemands, les Français avaient un idéal. Contre les Algériens, ils n'en ont pas. Ils perdront la guerre.

BRUNO : Vous croyez ? Moi pas.

VÉRONICA : Mais si.

[...]

## Conclusion

No single film is likely to fill the void that Austin perceives. Yet perhaps the void is not quite as empty as suspected. There are undoubtedly un-represented participants of this dramatic period of French and Algerian history, but Godard's film does have the merit of representing

the under-represented: Algerians (as members of the FLN); French hostile to Algerian Independence (as members of the OAS); French actively engaged in the combat for Algerian Independence (as members of the FLN), deserters from the military, the shifting of fidelity from one cause to another, lost idealism and the quest for an ideology or a revolution to be believed in.

*Le Petit soldat* may be devoid of ideological coherence, but it reflects the intellectual disarray and the prevailing confusion that reigned in French society at the time. If ‘*décrire, c’est observer les mutations*’ (Godard in Deleuze 1985/2006b: 31) then Godard has excelled at describing a more profound mutation in French society during the course of the Algerian War than has been commonly appreciated. From this point of view this film can be interpreted as a filmic representation of crumbling *résistancialisme*.

Decline of *résistancialisme* is linked with the anticipatory vision of May 68 in that the myth of *résistancialisme* was nurtured by de Gaulle and adhered to by his faithful followers, whereas May 68 was a clearly defiant gesture against de Gaulle while simultaneously denying the image of a unified France that de Gaulle and *résistencialisme* sought to portray.

My thesis is that the Algerian War and the role of the French therein served as a catalyst for change and in some ways contributed to both the decline of *résistencialisme* and May 68. According to *résistencialisme*, France was supposedly made up of heroes of the resistance united against fascism and the inhumane methods of Nazi Germany; methods that included torture and death camps. The revelation, through the course of the Algerian War, that members of the French army, including ordinary conscripts, which is to say the sons, nephews or younger brothers of the supposed heroes of the resistance, had adopted Nazi methods and were systematically torturing and performing summary executions in Algeria, with the awareness and blessing of the French government (including François Mitterrand and de Gaulle) could only engender a profound re-assessment of the validity of the myth of the united heroic nation. No longer the victim of atrocities and war crimes, France became the perpetrator, and given the vast numbers of conscripts sent to Algeria, the malaise was widespread and guilt, responsibility and disgust felt by many. When one aspect of an ideology (perhaps hitherto accepted without even necessarily being noticed) comes into question, suddenly everything becomes questionable, and the once solid ground of the image of the nation (and of oneself, to the extent to which one identifies oneself as a member of a nation)

becomes unstable quicksand, as other former certainties crumble and slip away. Hence I argue that the awareness of the illusion engendered by the Algerian War brought about a more profound quest for something to believe in. Having failed to find a concrete ideal embodied in the nation, there were simultaneous movements – from workers’ strikes to women’s liberation via anti-colonialism (in the shape of the anti-Vietnam War movement, which was also a struggle against imperialism and capitalism) – to create something to believe in, to generate momentous changes in order to create a less corrupt, more egalitarian society. Although the causes of May 68 and even to some extent the significance of May 68 resist definition and consensus, these diverse movements certainly contributed to May 68.

## 2

## From crystal to mosaic: formalism and fragmentation in Alain Resnais's *Muriel, ou le temps d'un retour* (1963)

With three decades of experience and success in short films<sup>62</sup>, finding a producer for a first full-length feature – *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959) – was not easy for Resnais. In the fifties, the short and full length features were often considered to be two entirely different disciplines, and success at one meant supposed inaptitude at the other (Roob 1986: 132). Furthermore it was only after the commercial success of Chabrol's *Le beau Serge* (1959) that producers started to invest in the new wave with relative confidence.<sup>63</sup>

Resnais' first two features – *Hiroshima*, followed by *L'année dernière à Marienbad* (1961) – received widespread critical and commercial success. *Muriel, ou le temps d'un retour* won the Critics' Prize and Delphine Seyrig received the 'Volpi' cup for best actress at the Venice Film Festival in September 1963, and the film went on to gain distinction as Resnais's first complete commercial failure. Both despised and admired, a fine selection of divergent criticism has been gathered by Emma Wilson, including the memorable: 'Alexander Walker, in the *Evening Standard*, commended the film only to "morbid filmgoers who wish to see a talent seemingly in the last stages of decomposition.'" (Walker 1964: 123) James Monaco on the other hand is amongst those who praised the film's vitality, and cites it as the first where Resnais really masters his talent (1979: 89).

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<sup>62</sup> Resnais marked his debut in 1936 with (as an amateur) *Fantômas*, but only his films dating from 1946 are still available for viewing. Generally, the 1948 short *Van Gogh* is cited as his film debut (e.g.: Liandrat-Guigues and Leutrat, 2006; Wilson, 2006), although six court-métrages released in 1947 (*La Bague*, *Portrait de Henri Goetz*, *Christine Boomeester*, *Hans Hartung*, *Domela*, and *Felix Labisse*, along with the equally rare Lucien Coutaud (1949) have been conserved on video and were screened in France in 2008, as part of the first complete retrospective of Alain Resnais's films, which debuted at the Cinémathèque de Toulouse 4<sup>th</sup> January, and subsequently continued at the Centre Pompidou (Paris) and Premiers Plans festival (Angers).

<sup>63</sup> Roob, *Alain Resnais, qui êtes vous?* Roob's note to p. 132 reads as follows: « C'est en effet après la réussite commerciale du *Beau Serge* (1959) que les producteurs commencèrent à faire confiance à de nouveaux venus comme Truffaut, Godard, Resnais. Mais c'était peut être encore plus difficile pour le réalisateur de *Guernica*, *Nuit et Brouillard*, *Le Chant du Styryène* qui avait déjà un nom prestigieux dans le court-métrage, alors considérée comme fondamentalement différent du long métrage. »

The canniness with which Resnais captured the mental landscape of France in the early 1960s has been applauded by some: ‘*Muriel demeure le seul film qui ait vraiment su cerner les contours du paysage mental de la France de son temps, le seul qui nous soit aujourd’hui un témoignage quasi direct de cette France [...] du temps de la guerre d’Algérie*’<sup>64</sup>, whilst Emily Tomlinson cites Algerian novelist Rachid Boudjedra lamenting that the film ‘is not a film about Algeria but a film where Algeria is something everyone tries to forget.’ (Tomlinson 2002: 53) Serge Daney on the other hand did not hide his admiration:

Cet homme a signé trois films géniaux, trois témoins irrécusables de notre modernité, trois manuscrits rédigés en VO dans ce que Blanchot appelle « L’écriture du désastre »: *Nuit et Brouillard* (1955) *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959) et *Muriel* (1963). (Daney 1998: 163-165)

Resnais’s first two feature films – *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959) and *L’Année dernière à Marienbad* (1961) – were strong successes both with critics and commercially. Marguerite Duras wrote the scenario of *Hiroshima*, Alain Robbe-Grillet that of *Marienbad*, and Jean Cayrol the scenario and dialogue of *Muriel*; that he collaborated with novelists on all three of his first full length features led to a misconception that would endure for some time. In a 1986 interview Resnais lamented what he saw then as one of the longest standing/most abiding misunderstandings of his work, stressing that staying away from established screenwriters was also one means of renewing the metier:

Je crois que le malentendu le plus tenace concerne les influences littéraires que j’aurai subies et les choix des scénaristes en fonction, a-t-on dit, de leur qualité de romanciers. D’abord, on oublie une chose très simple : quand j’ai commencé à trouver enfin des producteurs, grâce à l’exemple de Chabrol, quels scénaristes y avaient-il ? [...] j’ai essayé de trouver des scénaristes qui n’avaient pas fait de cinéma. C’était une bonne façon de renouveler la chose. (Roob 1986 : 132-133)

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<sup>64</sup> Perez, Michel, 1977 (pour la réédition du film) cited by Michel Marie, *Muriel d’Alain Resnais*. p. 22

## Before *Muriel*

Before working together on *Muriel*, Resnais and the novelist Jean Cayrol collaborated on *Nuit et Brouillard* (1955), a documentary about the deportation of civilians to concentration camps during the Occupation. Whilst *Muriel* is certainly the most ‘Algerian’ of Resnais’s films, anti-colonialism and anti-militarism are themes that reoccur throughout Resnais’s oeuvre. *Les Statues meurent aussi* (Marker and Resnais, 1950-3) denounced not only the impact of colonialism on African art and culture, but also the colonisers’ system itself for engendering a situation in which once meaningful artefacts became devoid of significance, as colonisers seized control of production and quality was sacrificed in the race to keep up with the pace of ‘white’ demand for African statues and sculptures.<sup>65</sup> Amongst the most memorable commentaries in the film is the statement that although certain Kingdom(s) of Benin, with their fine palaces and exquisite statues are contemporaries of Jeanne d’Arc, we know as little about these civilisations as we do of Babylonia, so devastating has been the white man’s destruction of Africa. Needless to say, reaching completion at the dawn of decolonisation, the documentary fell foul of the censorship committee. Another idea expressed in this early documentary, that the colonisers’ (racist) ideologies are created to provide the Europeans with an alibi for exploitation, is echoed in Resnais’s later films, particularly in *Mon oncle d’Amérique* (1980).

*Nuit et Brouillard*, filmed during the early years of the Algerian war, focuses on one aspect of Nazi policy during the Second World War, the deportation of civilians to concentration camps and the use of human labour in the death camps to further industry. The film ends on a haunting and deliberately universal warning against continuing atrocities, which was – erroneously in my opinion – criticized. For discussion of criticism surrounding the lack of insistence in the film on the holocaust as a Jewish phenomenon, see Wilson (2006: 26-27) and Liandrat-Guigues and Leutrat (2006: 215-218). Due to the film’s wide distribution and screening since the 1950s it has made an important contribution to the construction of collective memory of the Second World War while also being, as Wilson surmises, ‘a film about France, France under the Occupation *and* France in its colonial wars. (2006: 33)

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<sup>65</sup> There are numerous examples of this in the documentary, amongst them the following relating to the former African Kingdom of Bénin: whereas prior to colonisation, a statue might be sculpted by an artist as a ‘prayer’ for fertility, after colonisation, with the coloniser willing to purchase African artefacts, the pressure mounted to mass produce objects devoid of symbolic meaning or indeed any purpose at all aside from profit. The documentary commentary also makes explicit that under colonisation the black African sells his labour for strictly dead-end purposes (to further white enterprise but with no hope of personal advancement in the colonial system).

The opening words of *Hiroshima mon amour*, spoken by Eiji Okada, “*tu n’as rien vu à Hiroshima*” refer the spectator immediately to the impossibility of seeing or ‘knowing’ a past event of the amplitude of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, while crucially *Muriel* too explores the ‘unseeable’ and ‘unshowable’ nature of trauma and violence when not experienced first-hand, so that both films explore the possibilities and limitations of cinema in making ‘history reveal what it was unable to say’ (Marks 2000: 29).

Liandrat-Guigues and Leutrat class *Muriel* as one of Resnais’s politically engaged films, the others being those mentioned above and *Guernica* (1950); *La guerre est finie* (1966); *Le mystère de l’Atelier quinze* (1957)<sup>66</sup>; and *Loin du Vietnam* (1967) (with the – debatable – omission of *Mon oncle d’Amérique*). These films offer an insight into some of the re-occurring socio-political themes in Resnais’s work, which can otherwise be termed « *des projets vertueux* » and include: « *des sujets qui portent sur les grands drames de notre époque, le chômage, les sujets sociaux, les sujets pacifistes, les films contre la torture...* » (Resnais in Daney and Dubroux 1983: 27)

It is Resnais’s concern with these subjects, which are arguably amongst the most pressing socio-political themes of modern times, that has contributed to Resnais and his work being described thus:

Au tournant des années soixante, Resnais a été mieux qu’un bon cinéaste : un sismographe. Il lui est arrivé cette chose terrible de capter l’événement fondateur de la modernité : qu’au cinéma comme ailleurs, il faudra compter avec un personnage de plus : *l’espèce humaine*. Or ce personnage venait d’être nié (les camps de concentration), atomisé (la bombe), diminué (la torture), et le cinéma traditionnel était bien incapable de « rendre » cela. Il fallait trouver une forme. Ce fut Resnais. (Daney 1998: 164)

### ***L’Année dernière à Marienbad* – an apolitical interlude?**

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<sup>66</sup> « une espèce de cauchemar où l’usine devenait une jungle » (Liandrat-Guigues and Leutrat 2006 : 285)

Amongst Resnais's un-realised film projects to date remain two 'Algerian' films in 1960: he bought the rights to *La Permission* to be based on the novel of the same name by Daniel Antelme, and also endeavoured to find a producer to enable him to make *A suivre à n'en plus finir*, to be filmed from an original scenario by Anne-Marie de Vilaine, focusing on the impact of the Algerian war on a couple when the husband is 'rappelé' (redrafted after having already been drafted and served military service; nearly 200,000 young Frenchmen suffered this fate through the course of the Algerian war). Benayoun writes that these two projects were abandoned in favour of Cayrol's *Muriel*, (Benayoun 1980: 293) whilst Michel Marie's account differs slightly in that he notes that when both the 1960 projects fell foul of the censorship commission, Resnais changed tack and sought to collaborate with Alain Robbe-Grillet, asking him to write the scenario for *L'Année dernière à Marienbad* 'dont le moins que l'on puisse dire est qu'il développe une fiction très loin de l'actualité politique de la France de l'année 1961.' (Marie 2005: 19)

Still according to Marie, it was only after *Marienbad* won the Venice Golden Lion in 1961 that Resnais returned to the Algerian scripts, but he was unable to find a producer willing to take a risk on either project, due to the threat of censorship. Consequently, having first discussed the possibility of an 'Algerian' film with Cayrol in 1959, Resnais turned to him again in 1961. Shooting began just months after the signing of the Evian accords in 1962, and the film was first screened in Paris 24<sup>th</sup> July 1963.

### ***Muriel, ou le temps d'un retour: assembling the pieces of the mosaic***

*Muriel* marked a return to « des projets vertueux ». <sup>67</sup> The film is situated in the two-week period from 30<sup>th</sup> September – 14<sup>th</sup> October 1962, meaning that the film is set in the autumn following the Evian Accords (19<sup>th</sup> March 1962). This is also roughly one month after the

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<sup>67</sup> A. Resnais. J'ai eu sûrement des projets que j'appelle des projets vertueux, avec des grands idées nobles, et au bout de quarante ou cinquante pages, on arrivait à des choses consternantes de naïveté et qui ne faisait pas maître des personnages. Les personnages disaient des choses imprononçables pour des comédiens, on se décourageait et ça s'arrêtait comme ça. On est jamais sûr quand on commence un scénario de le finir. C'est comme une plante, vous la mettez en terre et puis elle pousse mal, elle flétrit et elle finit par mourir.

Cahiers. Qu'entendez-vous par sujet vertueux ?

A. Resnais. Eh bien, des sujets qui portent sur les grands drames de notre époque, le chômage, les sujets sociaux, les sujets pacifistes, les films contre la torture... Mais j'ai l'impression que, quand on entre dans le domaine de la fiction, tout de suite, des personnages apparaissent ou non, mais c'est quand ils commencent à dire des choses qui nous déplaisent qu'ils commencent à exister. (Cahiers, n° 347 mai 1983, p. 27)

OAS organised assassination attempt of de Gaulle (22<sup>nd</sup> August '62), and just prior to de Gaulle's controversial decision – taking advantage of the assassination attempt – to instate presidential election by universal suffrage (referendum of 28<sup>th</sup> October).

In Act One Héléne, a widow who lives with her stepson, meets – by prior arrangement – Alphonse, a past love whom she has not seen since before the Second World War. He arrives with his young girlfriend, Françoise, who is introduced as his niece. Alphonse, 'now a failed restaurant proprietor and, one assumes, failed everything else' (Houston 1963/4: 34) hides his past, just as Bernard, Héléne's stepson, hides his. Whereas Alphonse enthuses about the former colony (Algeria), claiming to have spent more than a decade in Alger '*quinze ans d'Afrique du Nord. Les plus belles années... J'ai donné le meilleur de moi même*' Bernard is more reticent, '*Moi, vingt-deux mois seulement...*' (Cayrol 1963: 54) Bernard was a conscript in the Algerian War, and returned from military service eight months ago. He has completely failed to readapt to life in Boulogne-sur-mer, and carries the memory of a certain traumatic event in the war with him, much like the town, '*une ville martyre*' is a constant reminder of another war (the Second World War). Bernard has a girlfriend, Marie-Do, who 'serves as an anchor in the film outside of memory [...] and she is the only one to make real plans for the future' (Monaco). She is one of the only characters not rooted in a past event, and as such she is both Bernard's antithesis, and possible his only antidote, with whom he finds temporary respite. Both Bernard and Marie-Do feel threatened by Robert, a (former) friend of Bernard's, who served with Bernard in Algeria and is possibly now a member of the OAS. Finally, Héléne's more regular companion, Roland de Smoke, is nicknamed '*Monsieur de la démolition*' by Alphonse (Cayrol 1963: 77). He is an opportunist who has benefited from the war, and is the character who is most prosperous and at ease in post-war Boulogne. De Smoke is strongly identified with the Second World War and moral ambiguity from the moment he is introduced:

HÉLÈNE: Je vous présente ...Roland de Smoke, qui a eu la charge d'achever la démolition de la ville en '45.

ROLAND: En tant qu'entrepreneur.

It is clear that de Smoke has profited in whatever way possible from the Occupation (Cayrol 1963: 30) and he continues to reap financial gain from the war and its associated destruction long after it has ended.

The original musical score to the film was composed by Hans Werner Henze, with Cayrol's lyrics sung by Rita Streich, and a popular song 'Déjà' sung by Ernest towards the end of the film. Both the lyrics sung by Streich and those in 'Déjà', highlight the themes of nostalgia, growing older, memory and the passage of time.

Y a bien du bonheur ici-bas,  
 Mais comme on ne s'en aperçoit pas,  
 On préfère craindre l'avenir  
 Regretter le passé et dire  
 Déjà, déjà, déjà...

As is readily apparent, intertwining the biographies of the characters are numerous themes, only some of which will be analysed here. While these include the Second World War and the Algerian War, references to the Indochinese War, although much more elliptical, are also present. Fairly typical of French cinematic representation of the Algerian War, the film focuses on the effect of the war on a returning conscript, although it does so in an inhabitual manner. The uneven process of modernization is also explored in the film, often using architecture as a means of communicating the rapid evolution of modern French society. Finally, the film's dynamic hinges on the opposition and interplay between the characters' experience of two very different dramatic situations, love (Hélène) and war (Bernard).

### Mutation of post-war cinema

*Muriel* also reflects the changing form of European cinema in the post-war period, when, according to Deleuze, national cinemas experienced "*la grande crise de l'image-action*". Beginning in Italy circa 1948, manifest in France from approximately 1958, and then in Germany from around 1968, (Deleuze 1985:2006a 284) cinema became less reliant on the action-image and instead moved into the era of the time-image. To explain why the great crisis of the action-image was experienced later in France than in Italy, Deleuze offers a plausible explanation, which is that in the years immediately following the Liberation, as part of de Gaulle's concerted effort to propagate the image of a France wholly united with the victorious, of the French people as a whole as having contributed to victory, and of the

Resistance as: “*une armée régulière parfaitement organisée*”.<sup>68</sup> This myth building left very little room for any doubt or ambiguity, and was therefore not favourable to cinematographic renewal.

It is precisely this presence of doubt and ambiguity that distinguish *Muriel* (and Resnais’s cinema in general). Long before Malle’s *Lacombe, Lucien* (1974), Resnais swept away Manichean representations with the acknowledgement that: ‘*la violence n’est pas forcément comme on la montre souvent au cinéma quelque chose qui s’accompagne d’une musique tonitruante, de héros exemplaires ou de traîtres très noirs*’.

According to Deleuze then, in contrast with the forward moving and action motivated editing of the preceding era, post-war Europe, literally devastated and reduced to ruins, cradled a new form of cinema, suited to this ‘arguably post-traumatic’ era. Writing of the films that emerged in the post-War period, Wilson describes them in general as ‘less teleological and transparent, where different layers of past events, subjective and virtual layerings of reality take precedence’. (2006: 6) Similarly, writing of Fellini’s *Amarcord* François Dosse describes the “*image-cristal*” as the means of evoking the telescoping of two temporalities, so that the “*passé du présent et le présent du présent*” coexist (Dosse 2008: 104).

In some respects *Muriel*’s proper subject matter is the internal state of being of the characters, and it is here that the virtual layerings of reality and the different layers of past events that exemplify the ‘*image-cristal*’ and of which Wilson writes of are to be found. For the narrative is ostensibly, or outwardly, linear, and yet *Muriel* is a film in which each of the main protagonists ‘lives’ a slightly different reality from each other, and ‘moves’ through different past events, caught up either in their memories (Hélène), in a post-traumatic state (Bernard), or in an invented reality which is more palatable than their actual existence (Alphonse). There is juxtaposition between the narrative that proceeds in a linear progression through the present, and the characters’ imagined existence, variably obsessed with traumatic memories from the past.

Trauma, obsession and addiction seem to anchor Hélène – and in a different register, Bernard – to their daily reveries and existence. Past memories surface in almost every conversation

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<sup>68</sup> Deleuze, Gilles. (1989) *Cinéma I L’image-mouvement* p. 285

that H el ene engages in, and when not submerged by her memories, she is likely to either pursue or evoke in some other way (such as verbally by asking to borrow money) her addiction to gambling. Bernard is no less a prisoner to his past; the guilt that lays on his conscience, coupled with the official amnesty granted by the Evian accords, is exasperated by the unwillingness of most of those around him (and by inference French society in general) to open a channel of communication for him to confess to the torture and assassination of ‘Muriel’. This stifling repression compounds his malaise and accentuates his obsession with the death, which ultimately results in Robert’s murder, as Bernard fulfils Cayrol’s prophecy of being “ a retardement comme une bombe” (Cayrol 1963: 21).

Wilson, writing of the use of flashback in *Hiroshima, mon amour*, notes that whereas in film criticism the flashback is usually recognised as a technique used in narrative cinema to fulfil an ‘explanatory function [...] offering us some key pre-history’, Resnais’s cinematic flashback, rather than being invested with an explanatory function, is used to communicate the sense it holds in psychoanalytic discourse, where flashback signifies ‘an unwilling returning hallucination or memory which takes possession of the victim of trauma.’ (Wilson 2006: 52)

In *Muriel*, as in *Hiroshima*, Resnais once again focuses on main protagonists who have suffered trauma, but in this film he explores other ways of revealing this to the spectator, entirely avoiding the use of the *visual* flashback (of either sort: he uses neither that of explanatory function nor of unwilling hallucination). However, both H el ene and Bernard seem to experience the unwilling flashback. This is the first feature length film in which Resnais also abandoned the use of narrative voice-over, instead relying on dialogue, montage, and the sound track (including the often disconcerting musical compositions of Hans Werner Henze and the equally disconcerting frequent overlapping of sound from one scene onto the next) to communicate malaise. It could be argued that by avoiding the use of the visual flashback (which would have been fairly straightforward and in many respects ‘easier’ both for the spectator to comprehend, and for director and photographer to film) Resnais inaugurates a more authentic mode of expression, relying, amongst other things, on Cayrol’s dialogue and on the actors’ ability – in particular that of Delphine Seyrig (H el ene) and Jean-Paul Thierr e (Bernard) – to subtly communicate through tone of voice, facial expression, a glance, something that otherwise could have been made explicit, or ‘recounted’ explicitly to the spectator, in a classic explanatory visual flashback. I argue that Resnais’ technique here is

‘more authentic’, and even more realistic than use of the flashback because of course in everyday life we do not ‘see’ other people’s memories or flashbacks, and so Resnais does not show them to us, but instead seeks other ways by which to communicate to the viewer that a character may be experiencing them.

However, arguing that *Muriel* adheres in some respects to the realism mode of expression, as I have done above, is itself problematic. While the absence of the visual flashback is in keeping with notions of realism, the rapid disjointed montage with insertion of (near) stills into tense sequences – flitting from day to night and a variety of locations at will – is not. The camera angles and its relative immobility (predominantly eye-level, fixed and/or panning with an absence of tracking shots until the final sequence) may conform with Bazinian notions of realism, as does the careful attention to diegetic sound, and yet the very idea of realism has progressed beyond that initially defined by Bazin.

At this juncture it may be useful to consider Rossellini and Italian Neo-realism; indeed Deleuze writes that the French New Wave can only be understood in relation to Neo-Realism: “*La nouvelle vague française ne peut se définir si l’on n’essaie pas de voir comment elle a refait pour son compte le chemin du néo-réalisme italien, quitte à aller aussi dans d’autres directions.*” (Deleuze 1985/2006b: 18)

Deleuze writes of « *la grande tétralogie de Rossellini [Germania anno zero (1948); Stromboli terra di Dio (1950); Europa ‘51 (1952) and Viaggio in Italia (1954)] qui, loin de marquer un abandon du néo-réalisme, le porte au contraire à son perfection.* » (1985/2006b: 8) He then charts his interpretation of the main protagonists’ progress in each of the four films, concluding that: « *c’est un cinéma de voyant, non plus d’action.* » (1985/2006b: 9)

He goes on to argue that whereas « dans l’ancien réalisme » the characters reacted to situations, with the spectator participating through identification, this process of identification has been reversed:

Mais c’est maintenant que l’identification se renverse effectivement : le personnage est devenu une sorte de spectateur. Il a beau bouger, courir, s’agiter, la situation dans laquelle il est débordé de toutes parts ses capacités motrices, et lui fait voir et entendre ce qui n’est plus justiciable en droit d’une réponse ou d’une action. Il enregistre plus

qu'il ne réagit. Il est livré à une vision, poursuivi par elle ou la poursuivant, plutôt qu'engagé dans une action. (1985/2006b: 9)

Deleuze's analysis of Rossellini's tetralogy resonates to some extent with *Muriel*. Like *Le Petit soldat*'s Bruno in the preceding chapter, Bernard is trapped by circumstances out with his control, and up to a point '*enregistre plus qu'il ne réagit*' (as though to underline the point both Bruno and Bernard are literally equipped with recording equipment). Similarly, both Hélène, Bernard, and to some extent Alphonse, are '*livré[s] à une vision, poursuivi par elle ou la poursuivant, plutôt qu'engagé dans une action*'.

### Mutation of post-war France

As mentioned above, the fragmentation of modern society, the rupture between the past and the present, the destruction of pre-war France and the equally abrupt re-construction of post-war France are often conveyed to the spectator through architecture. The town's past is related through images of buildings that are scarred by bullets or damaged by bombs, street names that bear homage to members of the resistance, while on the other hand, the abrupt reconstruction which leaves the new town with few discernable landmarks and a disorientating impact is exemplified in the indiscernible town centre, the suddenly shifting train station, or the emphasis on impersonal architecture on anything but a human scale, such as the avenue Gambetta apartment blocks (Pierre Vivian, architect, 1951-56)<sup>69</sup>, or the testament to the importance of money (the newly built majestic casino).

The town's role in carrying the themes of loss of memory and ruin is made explicit early in the film when Hélène, Françoise and Alphonse reach Hélène's apartment block. Filmed in the street, where it has just begun to rain and it is some time after nightfall:

FRANCOISE : Ca a l'air tout reconstruit. C'est à cause de la guerre ?

ALPHONSE : Une ville martyre.

HÉLÈNE : Oui, il y a eu beaucoup de morts, de fusillés... Je ne me souviens plus de nombre... Deux cents, trois mille ... vraiment, je ne me souviens plus...

ALPHONSE : Vous l'avez échappé belle, comme moi.

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<sup>69</sup> Liandrat-Guigues and Leutrat 2006: 98-99

The gulf between the figures she offers – two hundred, three thousand – highlights the fragility of her memory, but also of human memory. The subsequent visual bracket syntagma<sup>70</sup> (in which the predominantly dark background of the city seen at night which has dominated the screen since H  l  ne’s arrival at the train station is suddenly juxtaposed with stills of disparate locations in the city in daylight, of bomb-struck buildings, streets bearing names that pay homage to heroes of the resistance, and other physical and visual reminders of the war) inserted by Resnais emphasizes this, and as Michel Marie has written: ‘*Cet   change dialogu   est important car il lance le th  me de la ville d  truite et celui de la perte de m  moire des survivants.*’ (Marie 2005: 54) H  l  ne’s memory is vague despite the fact that she lives in a town where the formal ‘remembrance’ of the war is prolific. Linking her further with the themes of memory and loss, her occupation as an antique dealer means that she deals in and her home is full of objects which are themselves ‘memories’ of the past. She is the prime vector of the theme of loss of memory, from the banal, ‘*O   sont mes cl  s? J’ai encore perdu mes cl  s*’ to the more profound, for instance when she says to Robert in the Alsace caf   (where the subtext is that his parents are dead):

H  L  NE : Vous habitez toujours chez vos parents?

ROBERT : Mais non, comment ...

H  L  NE : Excusez moi, je n’ai aucune m  moire, j’oublie tout.

In the wider context of the film, this inevitably raises the question: if survivors of the Second World War remember it so vaguely, living in the very towns that were devastated, what hope is there of preserving a meaningful, cautionary public or private memory of the Algerian War, fought (predominantly) across the Mediterranean, and of which there was for so long a complete absence of official and formal ‘remembering’ (street names, formal admission of it having been a war, and so on)?

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<sup>70</sup> I borrow this term from Christian Metz; James Monaco provides an explanation of Metz’s theories of montage in *How to Read a Film* (1981: 186-191). Briefly, the rapid montage scene that follows H  l  ne’s confessed confusion as to the numbers of dead, is clearly not an autonomous shot, i.e. it is not entirely independent of what precedes or follows it, because it is inspired by H  l  ne’s dialogue. Therefore, according to Metz’s theories, it can be described as a syntagma, i.e. a unit which is meaningfully related to other units within the film. This analysis of the daylight frames can be refined further as a ‘bracket syntagma’, a term invented by Metz, and defined by him as ‘a series of very brief scenes representing occurrences that the film gives as typical examples of a same order or reality, without in any way chronologically locating them in relation to each other’ (Metz, 1974: 126), while Monaco adds that ‘this is rather like a system of allusions.’ (Monaco 1981: 187)

The internal impact of modernization is seen as an equally incomplete process, exemplified in Hélène, an antique dealer who literally trades in relics of the past whilst attempting to find emotional refuge in a love affair that pre-dates the war, meanwhile maintaining a simultaneous relationship with the entrepreneur responsible for demolishing much of the old town.

### « Un simple bombardement »

As already established, aside from Bernard and Hélène, another of the principal characters of the film is Boulogne-sur-mer itself. The sea in question has a tendency to be unseen and absent when one would most expect it to be present, such as when Françoise and Bernard walk down to the beach in Act One:

FRANÇOISE : *Où est la mer? Elle a disparu.*

BERNARD : *Pourtant, c'est marée haute.*

The town too has a tendency to efface itself ‘*Où est le centre?*’ ‘*Mais vous y êtes!*’ as though to confirm the centrifugal nature of the film’s structure. The location of spaces once presumed immobile becomes questionable; de Smoke is convinced that following “*un simple bombardement*” Hélène’s apartment is in the place of his former attic. Even the characters themselves are no less subject to slipping away or suddenly reshaping their past or present. In comparing Resnais and Welles, Deleuze seized upon the absence of centre or fixed point in Resnais’s cinema :

Or, la première nouveauté de Resnais, c’est la disparition du centre ou du point fixe. [...] Dans « Muriel », la nouvelle Boulogne n’a pas de centre, pas plus que l’appartement aux meubles transitoires : aucune des personnes n’a de présent, sauf peut être la dernière qui ne trouve que du vide. (Deleuze 2006b : 152)

Cayrol recommended “*la nouvelle Boulogne*” as the location due to the visible traces of the severe damage the town suffered during heavy bombardment (more than 500 air raids) during the Second World War, when the working class neighbourhoods surrounding the port were almost completely destroyed. The town has been astutely described by an architect as ‘*un cas d’école pour la cohabitation des contraires dans la France d’après-guerre: ville centre sédimentée, constituée en oppidum ; ville neuve, basse pour l’essentiel, dont la silhouette se*

*distingue néanmoins par la fugue monumentale d'une série de quatre hauts blocs installés en coulisse le long du bassin de l'avant port.*<sup>71</sup> It is certainly for this quality, '*la cohabitation des contraires dans la France d'après-guerre*' that the town is so apt for the film. Liandrat-Guigues and Leutrat note that in Resnais's films towns can be employed as a symbol of the characters' situations (Liandrat-Guigues and Leutrat 2006: 94), and this is evidently the case in *Muriel*, as the characters oscillate between images of themselves, memories of the past and the present. The characters are for the most part as undecided and uncommitted, as full of contradiction as the town, which also oscillates between medieval and modern; between being a '*ville martyre*' bearing the memory of the liberation, or a town of '*divertissement*' with its casino and fashion boutiques; neither Paris nor province: '*Un port, ce n'est pas tout à fait la province.*' (Cayrol 1963: 66)

Motifs for modernity linked to the town include '*l'immeuble qui glisse*', the delocalised train station, the '*paquebot échoué tout illuminé*', an indistinguishable centre. Images of these are layered into the discordant, choppy montage to convey the sense of fragmentation that Resnais felt was so omnipresent in French society at the time. From the opening frames, beginning with a conversation already begun, jarring close-ups of objects, surprising framing, every aspect of the film is touched by the theme of fragmentation, from the soundtrack (dialogue running over from one scene to the next, snippets of unfinished conversations), via the characters' states of being and relationships to each other, to the film's structure.

If we dwell briefly on the sense of fragmentation that surfaces in the characters relationships, we see that all of the relationships are fragmented, incomplete. Hélène & Alphonse's relationship ended suddenly in the past; Bernard says to Marie-Do if she goes to Argentina she'll never see him again; Françoise is going to leave Alphonse when she returns to Paris; although Hélène & Bernard express real platonic/filial love for each other, their relationship too is fragmented, incomplete: his infancy was without her as she is not his mother; his relationship with his father is fragmented as it was abruptly broken by his death, Alphonse has left his wife, Robert has been orphaned, and so on.

To consider just two of the aforementioned symbols of modernization, the ocean liner is at once both a metaphor for modernity and for the end of the Age of Empire. For while the

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<sup>71</sup> Emmanuel Doutriaux, architect dplg, whose text figures in *Alain Resnais Liaisons secrètes, accords vagabonds* p. 98

ocean liner may be a cliché of modernity, it was also the most common form of transport of passengers and freight between the European empires and their colonies, making the ocean liner which has run aground a fitting metaphor for the demise of the French empire.<sup>72</sup>

Whereas for Algerian Nationalists, the Liberation was the result of many decades of anti-colonial struggle, for colons and the French, the end of the French Empire was experienced as a sudden rupture, the suddenness of which is mirrored by the abruptness with which the ocean liner has run aground, with its lights still on:

FRANÇOISE : tout près de la plage, [...] un paquebot échoué tout illuminé. C'est fantastique. On dirait une grande fête, et il est échoué. Quel spectacle.

Wilson has written of the meaning of the delocalised train station, reading an even wider significance into the sequence:

With a dizzying sense of the escalation of time we see that this has changed in the mere two weeks of the film's diegesis. Hélène attempts to return to the same place, only to find it missing. This reflects on her failed attempt to re-find Alphonse and the failure of return in the film altogether. (2006: 104)

### Formalism and fragmentation in the film

Resnais, for whom the logic of contradiction is a constant theme<sup>73</sup>, admits to having enjoyed the challenge of making a film that would have the inverted structure of his previous film. Whereas *Marienbad*'s structure is *centripète*, according to Michel Caen, *Muriel*: "*chassait peu à peu tous les protagonistes d'un mouvement centrifuge*".<sup>74</sup> The centre away from which the film revolves is precisely Bernard's monologue relating the torture of 'Muriel', which, despite diverse assertions to the contrary, Wilson rightly locates as being at the centre of the film. The monologue is recited over amateur footage filmed by a soldier (presumably Bernard) in Algeria; the footage is quietly banal, revealing one of the film's central themes,

<sup>72</sup> The liner running aground also heralds another age; the age of the jet airliner. The first scheduled route was flown in 1952; by 1958 the Boeing 707 began the trans-Atlantic voyage, making 1958 the first year that more trans-Atlantic passengers travelled by airplane than ship.

<sup>73</sup> '*Nuit et Brouillard* et les trois premiers longs métrages commandent le déroulement de l'œuvre tout entière au sens où se met en marche avec eux un processus et une logique de la contradiction qui ne s'arrêtera pas.' (Liandrat-Guigues and Leutrat, p. 71)

<sup>74</sup> Caen, Michel. « Les temps changent » *Le Cahiers du Cinéma* n° 179 juin 1966 p. 75

that horror can easily be hidden, that something banal can mask something atrocious. This is not without evoking the opening commentary of *Nuit et Brouillard*, written by Jean Cayrol, himself a holocaust survivor:

Même un paysage tranquille, même une prairie avec des vols de corbeaux, des moissons et des feux d’herbe, même une route où passent des voitures, des paysans, des couples, même un village pour vacances, avec une foire et un clocher, peuvent conduire tout simplement a un camp de concentration. (Cayrol 1955)

and in many ways *Muriel* can be interpreted along with *Nuit et Brouillard* as a sustained warning against complacency in the face of violence and war, and an appeal to the French to take responsibility for atrocities committed in their name or by those around them.

In *Muriel* ‘fundamentally [Resnais] and Cayrol are not concerned with mystery-making but with elucidation.’ (Houston 1963/4: 36) This has not always been obvious to spectators or critics. *Muriel* can be challenging for the spectator, as each act is punctuated by short sequences in which the passage of time is communicated through the condensed sequences which cut rapidly between various characters in a number of locations, or locations only, at different times of day or night. The main characters become synonymous with particular places: Hélène with the Casino and her modern apartment; Alphonse with the town’s small businesses and cafés; Bernard with the medieval door into the city, the old atelier, the cliff tops above the town. In this way Resnais used a condensed shorthand style to convey the evolving, accelerating rhythm of modern life:

Un film classique ne peut pas traduire le rythme réel de la vie moderne. [...] La vie moderne est faite de ruptures, cela est ressenti par tout le monde. [...] Pourquoi le cinéma ne témoignerait-il pas également, au lieu de s’en tenir à la construction linéaire traditionnelle.<sup>75</sup>

Returning to situating the film in context with Resnais’s earlier films, it is not only the structure but also the style of the film which is inverted: *Marienbad*, with its labyrinthine narrative, strong undercurrent of the fantastic, claustrophobic nightmarish atmosphere, and actors’ eerie theatrical articulation, is the antithesis of the – perhaps not immediately apparent

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<sup>75</sup> Resnais, Alain (propos recueillis par Sylvain Roumette, *Clarté*, n° 33, février 1961, in *Premier Plan*, n° 18, pp. 45-46 and quoted by Leperchey (2000 : 9)

– realism of *Muriel*, with the camera at eye-level, the absence of superfluous camera movements, and natural acting. That Resnais's work should oscillate between the real and the imaginary is perfectly logical according to Leutrat and Liandrat-Guigues, and can be ascribed in a long history of ebb and flow between the two modes of expression: 'L'opposition et la complémentarité de l'imaginaire et du réel est conforme à la tradition occidentale du XIXe et du XXe siècles (romantisme, symbolisme, surréalisme même).' (2006: 78)

In his quest for innovation or renewal, this 'realism' was taken to its most literal limits. An example of this is that the film was shot at precisely the same time and same day as in the script, but one week later. Accordingly, for instance, if Cayrol's script read: noon, Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> October, it would be filmed at noon, Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> October: 'on tourne avec une semaine de retard sur le scénario, [...] à l'heure dite – avec huit jours de retard'. Furthermore, *Muriel* was filmed in colour, with the added decision that, 'on ne fait rien pour que cela fasse plus joli. A la rigueur, on s'autorise à enlever un bouquet de fleurs s'il tient trop de place dans le cadre' (Resnais in interview, Leutrat and Liandrat-Guigues 2006 : 225). Yet the essence of contradiction prevails within *Muriel* as the spectator is simultaneously aware of aspects of natural authenticity (in the acting, the sets, the dialogue), while the film is at the same time highly stylised and experimental, partially due to the overlapping sound and the meticulously layered montage, which can perhaps best be described as mosaic: '*Muriel s'ouvre sur une mosaïque énigmatique de gros plans d'objets avant que la fiction ne prenne possession d'un temps et d'un espace.*' (Thomas 1994: 33)

The first element to strike the spectator is the alarmingly rapid and apparently disjointed montage, which is unarguably evocative of Eisenstein and yet altogether modern when combined with Resnais's "liberation of the soundtrack from the 'tyranny' of the image track". Monaco writes that several years after *Muriel* Godard called for the said liberation of the soundtrack from the image track, but that "Resnais foreshadowed him" with this film. However, examples of this so-called 'liberation' can already be found in Godard's 1960 *A Bout de souffle*, while both directors were outrun in the use of this technique by Jacques Tati, who (as we will see in more detail in Chapter Five) employed bleeding of sound between scenes in *Mon Oncle* (1958). After just a few years this technique would be widespread (used not only in films but in television commercials, etc) and accepted by the viewer (Monaco 1979: 93). Monaco describes Resnais's experimentation with sound here as 'overlap cuts in which the sound of the previous image continues for a moment into the succeeding image,'

(Monaco 1979: 93) but we more commonly call it ‘bleeding’ of sound onto one sequence to the next, in order to orientate the viewer, and ‘weld’ the two cuts together. It is worth stressing though that the technique is disconcerting and disorienting in *Muriel*, and also that Godard had further begun to deconstruct sound, if not completely liberate it, in *Le Petit Soldat*, where often all of the sound one would normally expect to hear in a sequence (based on the action that can be seen to be unfolding) has been removed, and only one or two sounds remain, such as footsteps, a horn blowing, or the strike of a match to light a cigarette (recalling the heavily stylised sound of *Mon Oncle*, but to subtly different effect, cf. Chapter Five for more on this).

Returning to *Muriel, ou le temps d’un retour*, the film commences with no establishing shot, and yet it is not only an establishing shot which is ‘missing’; neither the dialogue nor script provide an alternative to the establishing shot, the consequence being that the spectator is invited to piece together the context, setting, and the characters’ relationships to each other from the fragments of conversation and actions, rather as though the spectator were themselves a character suddenly, and for a limited time only, entering the diegesis of the film.

Although Resnais’s concept of the location filming schedule was meticulously chronological, as mentioned above, due primarily to the montage the first impression the spectator has is one of accentuated discordance between the images and narrative, and indeed the impression that the narrative is much less linear than it is:

Compared with *Muriel*, even *Hiroshima* and *Marienbad* had relatively linear plot structures. *Muriel* gives us a constantly challenging confrontation with memories and present events – a melange that closely approximates the structure of everyday experience in which memories, meaningful or not, constantly interpose themselves among events, meaningful or not. It is a brilliant structure [...]. (Monaco 1979: 85)

Although not entirely linear, with many of the sequences comprised of parallel montage, the film’s narrative is scrupulously chronological, and the film contains no flashback or oneiric sequences. I would suggest that François Thomas seems to have resolved this debate:

La linéarité [...] rompue par les plans de Boulogne-sur-mer en plein jour qui entrecouperont une scène de nuit, de *Muriel ou le temps d’un retour* ne sauraient ainsi se

confondre avec une continuité, elles sont constamment niées par un découpage fragmenté, elliptique, particulièrement dans *Muriel* [...]. (Thomas 1994: 95)

And yet Monaco's impression captures Resnais's concept :

Je crois que, dans la vie, nous ne pensons pas chronologiquement, que jamais nos décisions ne correspondent à une logique ordonnée. Nous avons tous des images, des choses qui nous déterminent et qui ne sont pas une succession logique d'actes qui s'enchaînent parfaitement.<sup>76</sup>

The structure of the film in Cayrol's published scenario is as follows: the film is structured into a five act script, with all action taking place in the fortnight between Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> September 1962 – Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> October of the same year. Acts 1 and 5 are of equal length: one day; Acts 2 and 4 are both one week; while Act 3 is 2 days precisely in the middle. Furthermore, three meals provide focal points at beginning, middle and end. 'In short, *Muriel* has an elegant plan, yet none of this is at all noticeable on screen since the structure does not force the cinematic material, it underlines it.' (Monaco 1979: 76)

As regards the montage, which is initially so disconcerting, Resnais has said: '*Je tenais à ce que les raccords n'interviennent pas dans le mouvement, à souligner l'effet du choc entre les plans.*'<sup>77</sup> Leutrat and Liandrat-Guigues interpret the influence of graphic literature here; Alain Resnais is well known for his fondness of quality comic books, and confesses wholeheartedly to their influence on his concept of montage. The resulting jarring ellipses and non-sequential découpage communicate the sense of fragmentation and malaise, which are some of the film's fundamental themes. As a consequence, 'the image is a major 'actor' in the film. It replaces the narrator of *Marienbad* and therefore frees the characters. They are no longer prisoners of the narrator's persona.' (Monaco 1979: 92)

As mentioned above, in *Muriel ou le temps d'un retour* Resnais completely broke with narrative voiceover: '*la bande sonore de Muriel, du point de vue verbal, ne comprend rien que des dialogues*'. (Marie 2005: 76) Both *Hiroshima, mon amour* and *L'année dernière à Marienbad* had relied heavily on the narrative voiceover to provide an essential part of the

<sup>76</sup> Resnais in interview in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, September 1961 (quoted in *Cahiers*, 2006).

<sup>77</sup> Alain Resnais in *CinémAction* p. 241 (cited by Liandrat-Guigues and Leutrat op. cit. p.38)

narrative structure to communicate sense (or increased bewilderment) on the part of the spectator. The spoken is also contrasted with the unspoken. The irony is that in a film whose ‘text’ is comprised of dialogue, and where the past is evoked not through flashbacks but verbally, with conversation almost incessant – ‘un film bavard’ (Marie 2005: 65) – the main protagonist is suffocating under the weight of the ‘non-dit’.

### Overcoming Censorship

As mentioned previously, *Muriel* was conceived by Cayrol and Resnais while the Algerian war was ongoing. Neither had any delusions about the stringency of the censorship commission, and their prior experience manifests itself here in the skill with which they subtly managed to integrate an abundant scattering of both oblique and explicit references to the Algerian war, to colonisation in general, to the OAS, to the question of torture, and more generally, to a pervasive unease with a society emerging from not one but three recent wars (the Second World War, the Indochina War and the Algerian War). Some examples of the above are detailed in the following paragraphs.

The early colonial wars, most likely the invasion and conquest of Algeria, are introduced through dialogue when referred to early in the film, when Françoise tells Bernard that she acted in a period piece recently: ‘*J’ai tourné dans un film sur la guerre. De la figuration. Ça se passait en 1830... on en sort crevée.*’ References, again using language, to Indo-China are equally understated, and begin simply with Françoise suddenly exclaiming: ‘*On est au bout du monde!*’ at the dinner table (Act One), a slightly odd declaration which takes on significance when later in the act she is filmed standing in front of the poster for the film ‘*Femmes du bout du monde*’ (*Le Orientali*, Romolo Marcellini, 1959). There is a modulation in tone as the Indo-Chinese war is evoked when Alphonse, during the pivotal second dinner (at the restaurant), relates a newspaper revelation – which he ridicules as preposterous – about a French prisoner of war released by the Vietnamese Revolutionary Army in Indo-China after five years in captivity.

Moving to the visual mode of representation, architectural details that echo Islamic architecture are used to refer the spectator to the recently occupied Algeria and the colonial

war. Liandrat-Guigues and Leutrat identify a *remplage* in Hélène's apartment (seen behind Alphonse when he and Françoise first enter Hélène's apartment):

Il s'agit d'un *remplage* en béton typique du style de l'atelier de l'architecte Auguste Perret qui a reconstruit le centre ville du Havre. (2006 : 111)

and insist that it evokes the North African *moucharabieh*, with the effect that we move '*d'un univers à un autre tandis que resurgit sur un mode allusive l'Algérie.*' (2006: 111-112)

The *remplage* is a decorative architectural detail designed as much to be seen as to allow light to pass through a building and so allow the inhabitants to see. As Liandrat-Guigues and LEutrat write: '*Il constitue un panneau mural fait d'un assemblage de petites formes triangulaires en béton.*' (2006 : 111)

Evoking the themes of destruction and reconstruction, the *remplage* in question has been identified by Frederic Borde as typical of the architect Auguste Perret (Liandrat-Guigues and Leutrat 2006: 269); the example in question would appear to be an exact replica of an architectural detail of the 'remplissage des baies' of the Collège Raoul Dufy gymnasium in le Havre. This is significant to *Muriel ou le temps d'un retour* because Brussels born Perret is synonymous with the reconstruction of Le Havre following the city's near complete destruction during the Second World War.

While *remplage* originated as a component of gothic architecture whose function was (and is) to provide decoration while *allowing* light to enter the building, the Islamic architectural *moucharabieh* which it evokes is the geometrically complex wooden screen and/or balcony found throughout Islamic countries whose original purpose was to *prevent* light from entering, while allowing air to circulate between the interior and exterior spaces. Initially the *moucharabieh* was to provide shade, in the form of a screen, to cool drinking water. Both the form and function of the *moucharabieh* evolved to include that of window, curtain, and device for cooling the interior space, until entire balconies comprised of the *moucharabieh* became widespread, crucially allowing women in particular to watch people in the streets or courtyard below, without being seen themselves.

To avoid the wooden structure warping and splitting in the heat of summer, the *moucharabiehs* were comprised of as many as two thousand small individual pieces of wood dovetailed together (without nails or glue) in such a way as to allow the wood to expand or shrink, whilst retaining the overall form and intricate geometrical design, or mosaic.

When Françoise and Alphonse first enter Hélène's apartment, the camera films from a fixed point which frames Alphonse standing in front of the *remplage* for about a minute, as Hélène moves about crossing from one side of the room to the other, while the camera pans to follow her movements, repeatedly panning back to Alphonse and the *remplage*, while finally Hélène and Françoise join him again at the door with the *remplage* behind the three of them. That this framing of the *remplage* seems to be quite deliberate, and is otherwise unnecessary to the scene lends weight to Liandrat-Guigues and Leutrat's argument. Although first viewed from the living room, later in the film the *remplage* is often seen from Bernard's bedroom, through his open door which leads onto the same hallway (of which one of the walls is in fact the *remplage*). This further strengthens the identification between Bernard and the *remplage* – *moucharabieh*.

This inclusion, in the very centre of Hélène's home, and often framed with Bernard, of the European *remplage*, which like the *moucharabieh* is made up of many separate interlocking pieces, leads one to think of the *remplage* as symbolic of the many diverse factions of French society, government, and the military, bound together in collusion to hide torture, preventing light being shed on the dark secrets of the war. On the more intimate scale of the film, each of the characters can be construed to be part of or a piece of the *remplage* hiding uncomfortable aspects of the war: Bernard, emblematic of the two million young French men drafted into the war where they committed atrocities, wishes to speak out but can't, Françoise and Hélène who remain voluntarily unaware of what could be troubling Bernard, Alphonse who fabricates a blissful memory of Algeria '*les meilleures années de ma vie*', Robert who forbids Bernard to confess, and so on.

While the *moucharabieh*, with its connotations of exoticism and secrecy, and its function whereby it provides camouflage for someone to watch without being seen, obviously resonates to some degree with questions of voyeurism and so also the role of being a spectator in cinema, while also recalling the layers of secrecy or 'non-dits' in the film. Finally, the *remplage*, but also the more elaborate *moucharabieh* which it evokes, is itself another

metaphor, like the kaleidoscope and the crystal, for Resnais's films: in this case a mosaic of puzzle pieces methodically arranged to form a fragmented entity of plural significance. Taking Penelope Houston slightly out of context, her analysis can be used to support mine '...out of these fragments we contrive to construct a whole, as Resnais and Cayrol find a unity in the fragile details on which they have built this solid and beautiful structure.' Pushing the metaphor further, the film itself is akin to a *moucharabieh* behind which the torture of 'Muriel' is hidden, her torture and death remaining definitively unseen.

Therefore, to conclude this section, I come back to the *moucharabieh* as synonymous with French culture of this period when state censorship was so acute. It can be argued that the impact of censorship went further than simply hiding the individual facts of torture from the public. Most dangerously for the Republic and democracy, state censorship extended beyond the domain of the visual image and written record, reaching into the legal arena as well. The screen which the government tried to draw across the French Army's practise of torture stretched into a multitude of amnesty laws in the years and decades following the end of the Algerian War, which means that the men responsible for perpetrating crimes against humanity still have not been judged, but are instead protected, and indeed in some cases honoured, under French law.<sup>78</sup> This injustice itself, coupled with what is perceived as the inherent racism that accompanies such law-making, contributes to frustration and resentment amongst members of French society, in particular 'children of colonisation', with parts of entire communities living as 'une bombe à retardement' in current French society as this frustration is occasionally proven to be all too explosive.

Critics have disagreed on the significance of the final pattern that emerges when contemplating the film. While I give substantial attention to a (post)colonial reading, for others the film is more valuable when its sense is limited to a more intimate sphere:

Muriel has been read by some people as an allegory of contemporary France, haunted by her Algerian memories, her war memories, and so on. This seems to me the sort of wild hunt for 'significance' that can only be damaging to one's actual experience of the film. It is enough to see a few people, rather than a country, trapped with the past;

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<sup>78</sup> Many went on to receive some of France's highest honours. Resnais and Cayrol could not have known just how far the French government would go to ensure that the generals Bigeard, Massu, Salon, etc and the politicians under whose watch these crimes were committed – de Gaulle, Mitterrand, Le Pen, etc. – should be protected from condemnation for their part in the deaths of so many.

and it is with the evanescence of men and things, the way a house falls over a cliff and a memory becomes a lie, that *Muriel* is concerned. (Houston 1963/4: 36)

### 'Amnisties et Amnésies'<sup>79</sup>

Robert is defined by Cayrol as the: “*mauvais génie*” de Bernard en Algérie: *il l'a poussé à commettre des actes répréhensibles, cruels;*” (Cayrol 1963: 23). The pressure that Robert exerts on Bernard does not stop there: he is determined that Bernard keep silent about their shared history in Algeria.

ROBERT : C'est fini, la vie du bled, les coups de gueule, les voitures à haut-parleurs, les discours sur les places du village, les tracts. On est en France. Le principal, tu sais, c'est que chaque Français se sente seul et crève de peur. Il mettra de lui-même des barbelés autour de sa petite personne. Il ne veut pas d'histoires, alors tenons-le en haleine, à bout portant, sans tirer.

BERNARD : Ca te plaît ce qui se passe ?

ROBERT: Bien sûr, ça me plaît. Toi, tu en es encore à Muriel. C'est ça qui t'inquiète ? Et l'amnistie ? C'est aux autres de se cacher, pas à nous. [...] (Cayrol 1963: 115)

Robert evokes 'Muriel' and amnesty (the clause of the Evian Accords granting amnesty for crimes committed during the Algerian war). For Kreidl, *Muriel* is 'an overtly anti-OAS film'<sup>80</sup>, for Benayoun, Robert and his friends have joined the OAS and Bernard will be 'plastiqué' off-screen after shooting Robert:

Bernard vit encore en contact étroit avec ses anciens compagnons de combat, devenus membres d'OAS. [...] En fin de compte il sera le seul protagoniste de l'action qui

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<sup>79</sup> The proliferation of Amnesty laws passed in the decades following the end of the Algerian War has provoked significant and ongoing debate, since the 1990s, concerning the relationship between amnesty and amnesia, as regards the history of the Algerian War. In particular, it is the risk of amnesty laws inhibiting historians' work of establishing truthful and accurate records of events that is most commonly at the forefront of voiced concerns. (cf. for example Stora 2005a for further discussion of this, or Rajfus 1995 for comparison with legal restrictions shrouding or unveiling other nations' sensitive archives).

<sup>80</sup> cited by Emma Wilson, *Alain Resnais* p. 89

puisse surmonter son passé par un autre acte irrémédiable: il abat son mauvais génie, Robert, principal tortionnaire de Muriel, et sera plastiqué (*in absentia*) par ses anciens complices. (Benayoun 1963/2002: 134-5)

While Benayoun's prediction is purely conjecture, terrorist activities are probably alluded to in conversations between Bernard and Robert, where plans they made in Marseille are repeatedly evoked. In the sequence quoted above, Robert's dialogue '*Le principal [...] c'est que chaque Français se sente seul et crève de peur...*' refers to the terror-bombings employed by the right-wing terrorist group, the OAS's revolt against de Gaulle's decision to concede to Algerian nationalist demands for independence. This demonstrates how finely attuned to the political climate of the early 1960s the film was. With the character of Robert Resnais/Cayrol would seem to have transposed the political will for silence and amnesia that motivated the proliferation of amnesty laws over the course of the next two decades. The first of a subsequent series of amnesty laws was later passed on 17 December 1964 – fourteen months after the release of *Muriel* – whilst the second in this series, passed just days later on 21 December, granted presidential grace/pardon to 173 former members of the OAS, confirming that "*c'est aux autres de se cacher, pas à nous*" (Robert's dialogue). Subsequently, following the general strikes of May 1968, all former members of the OAS were pardoned, with the consequence that within days these (former) terrorists were released from prison (e.g. Raoul Salan) or returned from exile (e.g. Georges Bidault). A law passed on 24 July 1968 then suppressed the '*peine pénale*' relating to the '*événements*' in Algeria. A further law passed 16 July 1974 reversed all convictions passed during and after the Algerian War. Eventually, under François Mitterrand's government the law of 24 November 1982 went further than any right wing government ever had and reinstated the '*cadres*', officers and generals who took part in the putsch. (Stora 2005: 13)

A chain of events, including conversations with Robert and the destruction of the tape recording, lead Bernard to realise the futility of gathering proof (– for what?) with the forthcoming amnesty. There will be no retribution, no justice. The scenario highlights the profound hypocrisy of French legislation and politicians, and the impossibility of accepting this amnesty for those grappling with their conscience. The moral dilemma posed by the film is further complicated when Bernard takes the law into his own hands, as it were, and commits what can be interpreted as an act of retributive justice. Yet there will be no amnesty for Bernard's act.

‘*L’Armée, la torture, et la République*’<sup>81</sup>

HÉLÈNE : M. Noyard; il revient d’Algérie.

ROLAND : D’Algérie ? J’aimerais avoir une conversation avec vous. C’est vrai, nous connaissons très, très mal la Question.

ALPHONSE : Ô, il me faudra du temps, beaucoup de temps pour que je puisse parler à cœur ouvert sur ce sujet. Qu’on me laisse tranquille pour le moment.

Hélène’s introduction of Alphonse as having been in Algeria throughout the war invites de Smoke’s enquiry concerning ‘*la question*’ (torture). Alphonse is evasive and avoids giving an answer; in fact, he doesn’t answer because he has no more personal knowledge of ‘*la question*’ than Roland, since, as the spectator will learn later in the film, he has never been to Algeria at all. In this way historical and political references about taboo subject matter are manoeuvred past the censorship committee. Likewise ‘Muriel’ of the title is a synonym for torture.

The absent ‘Muriel’ is the character and the event at the centre of the film which ultimately drives the characters apart. For spectators in the early 1960s, Muriel, the young Algerian ‘résistante’ of Resnais’s film would have immediately evoked Djamilia Boupacha, whose torture and rape at the hands of the French army was publicised in 1960 by Gisèle Halimi and Simone de Beauvoir (although *Le Monde* refused to print the word ‘*vagin*’, so that it was replaced by ‘*ventre*’ at Halimi’s suggestion (cf. Serge Moati’s 2007 documentary, *Gisèle Halimi, l’Insoumise*). Or in other words: “*Ce qu’est Muriel, finalement, c’est la torture. Bernard a assisté, et même participé, aux atroces sévices exercés par des soldats français sur une jeune résistante algérienne.*” (Benayoun 1963/2002: 134-135)

Cayrol/Resnais overcame what Benjamin Stora (1997a) has identified as one of the primary obstacles to making a film about the Algerian War: ‘*Comment alors filmer [...] des guerres sans front?*’ This was achieved by focusing on the *aftermath* of violence, in this case, the aftermath of an ‘*interrogatoire poussée*’ and its traumatic trace.

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<sup>81</sup> Branche, Raphaëlle. (2002) *L’Armée, la torture et la République* (conference given by Branche 07/03/2002)

Prior to hearing Bernard's monologue, the spectator is presented with extracts of Bernard's journal. Michel Marie describes the film as '*un film bavard*' (2005: 65), noting that the film begins in the middle of a conversation between H el ene and a customer, and that in the rapid montage conversations are overlaid, questions are unanswered, and that whenever there is not dialogue, there is music. And yet, silence dominates throughout one sequence in the film, and one sequence only, drawing the spectators' attention to the hand-written words of the diary entries that Alphonse comes across in Bernard's room:

On peut lire avec lui [Alphonse] onze textes manuscrits successifs, voir des photos souvenirs en noir et blanc. Parmi ces textes tr s lisible:

-« J'ai d roul  la b che et – je ne sais pas pourquoi les yeux de Muriel n' taient pas ferm s. »

« On est en guerre m'a dit enfin le petit rouge, quand tu seras civil, tu pourras penser ce que tu voudras....» [...]

« Mais c'est avec Muriel que tout a commenc  vraiment – que j'ai compris – c'est depuis Muriel que je ne vis plus vraiment. » (Marie 2005: 65)

Bernard's monologue at the centre of the film is recounted over the Super 8 footage he has brought back from Algeria. As Marie argues, Bernard's monologue, in many instances using precisely the same words as those written in his journal '*permet d'interpr ter a posteriori le sens du t moignage que d couvre Alphonse*'. For the avoidance of doubt, not only does the central monologue permit the spectator to interpret the diary entries, but the diary entries also confirm the monologue. Unlike in *Marienbad*, this film is about elucidation (as Houston argues, cited earlier).

The juxtaposition between the images projected on the screen and Bernard's monologue highlight the widespread discordance between the images of the war that soldiers brought home, and the reality of their experience of that same war. This also reflects the strong state censorship discussed in the previous chapter and the extraordinary discrepancy between what was happening in Algeria and what newsreels and newspapers were permitted to report. French cinematic production released during the war was as inept at 'showing' the public what went on in Algeria as Bernard's footage is. And yet the film also invites reflection not

only on censorship but on the real impossibility for a non-participant or non-witness (be it a character or the spectator) to see or know an event at which they were not present.<sup>82</sup>

To the somewhat banal images of Bernard's archive footage are juxtaposed his shocking account of the woman's torture. There is some synchronicity between Bernard's monologue and the images: for instance, Bernard's words '*comme si elle avait séjourné longtemps dans l'eau*' are seconded by footage of conscripts jumping gleefully into a swimming pool, which makes the impact of the scene all the more grotesque.

It is significant that Bernard recounts the torture episode to Vieux Jean, who lives on the margins of society, rather than to any other character in the film. Each of the other characters (with the possible exception of the man in search of a mate for his goat) is integrated in one way or another to modern society. Whilst never erring into the overly didactic, the message is still clear: French society in general does not want to and quite simply will not hear about torture practised by the French Army; Bernard is tolerated at best and urged to find employment and behave normally.

Therefore, what the characters do not hear (with the exception of Vieux Jean) is mirrored by what the spectator does not see: Bernard's filmed souvenirs are as aphonic as he is about 'Muriel': we see Bernard's physical souvenir of Algeria, but we don't see his actual memory, or what he really remembers, of Algeria (the torture and assassination of 'Muriel'). One set of images hide others, just as the other characters' incessant dialogue seeks to maintain a silence on subjects about which they do not wish to speak.

Wilson asks: "Is the torture of Muriel the single hideous scenario Bernard has witnessed in twenty-two months in Algeria?" (2006: 97) It quite possibly is, as he obviously had (perhaps exclusively) secretarial duties; in his monologue Bertrand relates that he covered his typewriter before going to the room where the woman was being tortured:

Personne n'avait connu cette femme avant. J'ai traversé le bureau où je travaillais, recouvert la machine à écrire.

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<sup>82</sup> It is also possible that it was as a result of the criticism – which I find unjustifiable – that Rensais and Cayrol showed too much in *Nuit et Brouillard* that they chose to show nothing in *Muriel et le temps d'un retour*.

This goes some way in answering Wilson's question: it seems that Bernard was not in a combat platoon, but worked in a military office, probably writing up reports, and didn't see much 'action'. 'Muriel' may well be the single incident he has witnessed in Algeria, as a conscript, not career soldier (or paratrooper), in a war without a front. Oddly, Bernard's fictional experience is echoed forty years later by the real experience of the typist interviewed by Rotman in *L'Ennemi Intime* (2001), while also echoing the on-screen representation of the secretary in *Le Petit Soldat* (cf. frame 6).

However, Wilson's question is somewhat odd, for the character of Bernard is emblematic of a generation of young conscripts, just as 'Muriel' symbolizes 'nine out of ten' young Algerian women who would be tortured and raped following arrest by the French Army.<sup>83</sup> That the spectator comprehend that 'Bernard' witnessed 'Muriel' is sufficient; whether Bernard witnessed many 'Muriels' is irrelevant.

Branche offers a different interpretation:

Le décalage entre ces images et son récit provoque un sentiment de malaise terrible: il dit le déchirement de Bernard, pour qui la vie s'est arrêtée en Algérie, mais il indique aussi la faillite des images devant cet immontable: non pas la torture mais le sentiment qu'éprouve celui qui torture, celui qui se déshumanise en niant à l'autre sa valeur d'être humaine.

As Branche indicates, what cannot be shown in the monologue sequence of *Muriel ou le temps d'un retour* is the de-humanising effect of torture on the torturer. She goes on to write:

Alain Resnais [...] invite le spectateur à se tourner, non pas vers la réalité de la guerre d'Algérie, qui appartient au passé, mais vers les hommes qui l'ont faite et qui en sont rentrés [...]. (Branche 1997: 66)

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<sup>83</sup> For this statistic, cf. Beaugé (2001) in *Le Monde* 11/10/2001.

Bernard : ‘*un témoin que nul ne veut plus entendre*’

Bernard is emblematic of a generation of young men returning from Algeria. As argued (above and below), not only did the French not want to talk about Algeria and Algerians, they did not want to hear about what went on in Algeria, and this was very astutely captured by Cayrol and Resnais in 1962 when making *Muriel*:

Il se sent comme un témoin que nul ne veut plus entendre. Ses vingt-deux mois passés en Algérie l’ont défiguré. Ce qu’il a pu voir, ce qu’il a dû faire l’a tellement blessé, qu’il reste comme halluciné, mais il se retient, fait silence, gardant tout en lui [...] ça éclatera peut-être un jour, mais pour le moment, il est à retardement comme une bombe, on ne sait quand l’explosion arrivera.’ (Cayrol 1963: 21)

Whereas Wilson sees a ‘failure of return in the film altogether’, I would argue that there is not an overall failure of return in the film; rather, « le temps d’un retour » of the title can be interpreted as a potential moment of catharsis, when the conscript does ‘return’ to the drama, as Cayrol made explicit speaking about the character of Bernard in 1963:

C’est un personnage [Bernard] qui n’a pas parlé sur ce drame qu’il a vécu et qui pour la première fois [lors du monologue] arrive à parler ; il ne peut vivre sans avoir parlé de son drame ; [...] or, comment pouvoir parler sinon à travers cette espèce d’anonymat qu’est justement ce film d’amateurs et en même je pense qu’à ce moment-là il est conscient par sa parole, par son langage, de ce qu’il a vécu et à ce moment-là, il pourra rentrer totalement dans le drame et le vivre jusqu’au bout.<sup>84</sup>

It is not improbable that Resnais and Cayrol hoped that the film might serve to instigate a cathartic reaction in its viewers, which makes its commercial failure in France all the more regrettable. The fact that *Muriel* incited such a low box office turnout supports a point of view expressed by Gérard Mordillat, author of *Cher Frangin* (1988), that the ultimate censor was not the censorship commission, but the spectator. (Stora 1997a: 141)

The character of Bernard has been met with mixed reception. Benayoun states that Resnais transposed all of his intellectual sympathies onto him: ‘*Resnais a nettement reporté sur*

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<sup>84</sup> Cayrol, Jean. Press Conference, Venice, 1963.

*Bernard toute sa sympathie intellectuelle. Bernard, comme lui, veut raconter Muriel [...] sans en passer par une forme orthodoxe de récit.* (1963: 135) It is likely that he is a sort of alter-ego for the *ancien déporté* Cayrol too: ‘*Tous les objets qu’il peut avoir en main, [...] doivent en quelque sorte le préserver de ce dont il a le plus peur, c’est à dire brusquement la révélation qu’il est blessé à mort.*’ (Cayrol 1963: 21). For Cayrol may also seek refuge (from memories of deportation) in literature, in film...

Wilson is critical of the character, writing that ‘Bernard’s character at first seems to conjure sympathy’ (2006: 96) but ultimately seeing narcissism in the manner in which he is consumed by what he experiences as a personal trauma. I would argue that on the one hand it is experienced as personal trauma because of a tacit agreement amongst members of society to keep the secret hidden, to not know or pretend to not know (in *Hiroshima* Resnais has already shown society hiding its shameful secrets in the form of the young French woman ‘hidden’ by her father in the family cellar following her affair with the German soldier). On the other hand, what Bernard learns from his time in Algeria he applies to a much wider analysis of his society, communicated to the spectator through, for example, his diary entry: ‘*c’est avec Muriel que tout a commencé vraiment – que j’ai compris*’.

The official pardon to be provided by the imminent amnesty, together with the forbearing general silence, holds Bernard prisoner rather than liberating him. He struggles against this oppressive guilt by collecting proof, but proof against whom? Against himself as well as Robert? Because of the amnesty, which was to be just the first amongst many other amnesty laws (as detailed above), collecting evidence, even meaningful evidence, was futile. There would be no tribunal for the ‘Bernards’ of the 1960s to testify in, no-one and nothing for them to confess to; nothing to assuage their guilt, and when the immensity of the atrocities have resurfaced when Françoise accidentally plays the tape, Bernard seems to comprehend the terrible futility and seizes upon the grotesque solution of killing Robert, ‘*son mauvais génie*’. I think this act is to be understood as a gesture of absolute impuissance: to do *something* to rectify the wrong. Which of course it doesn’t, making it all the more tragic. Initially incomprehensible, Bernard’s action offers the opportunity for the spectator to reflect on how the absence of natural justice becomes intolerable for those who have committed crimes against humanity and cannot forgive themselves, or, at best, can only partially resolve their guilt by displacing their responsibility onto others. Seen in the light of this film, the amnesty laws were clearly not designed to help the young men who had participated in these crimes

against humanity to move on with their lives, but rather to silence these men in order to avoid damaging disclosures in court rooms and the press that would have implicated senior officials and revealed the systemic nature of the crimes. So in effect with the amnesties de Gaulle (and later Mitterrand) further burdened a generation who had *already* paid with their youth and innocence, in order to protect those in power. Resnais would later return to an exploration of these questions of powerlessness, anxiety and aggression (amongst others), in *Mon Oncle d'Amérique*, where the relationships between powerlessness, futility, anxiety, illness, struggle, and violence (towards others or oneself) as a form of self-defence are explored in this film based on the theories of biologist Dr Henri Laborit.

In any case, the following extract of dialogue communicates the incomprehension with which Bernard's situation is met. It takes place in his room after the first dinner:

FRANÇOISE : Vous n'avez pas l'air de beaucoup vous amuser. Qu'est-ce que vous faites ?

BERNARD : Je vous l'ai déjà dit : je reviens d'Algérie.

FRANÇOISE : Qu'est-ce que vous avez fait là-bas ?

BERNARD(off) : comme tout le monde.

FRANÇOISE : C'est tout ? Et maintenant ?

BERNARD : Je rentre.

From this point of view, Bernard's state of being, "je reviens d'Algérie", can be understood, if not translated, as the present continuous ('I'm returning from Algeria'); Bernard is effectively in the process of *trying* to return from Algeria. Yet the haunting power that his memory of the torture and killing of 'Muriel' holds over him, or most crucially, the hold that his part, both inactive (as spectator) and active (as participant) in her death retains on his *conscience*, prevents him from being able to complete his return, or to completely return. His final words to Hélène are: '*Je ne pense pas que je pourrai revenir*'.

Tomlinson is critical of the film, arguing that history becomes "traumatized" but not "worked through" (Tomlinson 2002: 55) and perceiving a fixation on the part of Resnais on a 'breakdown of language which precludes informed exchange with either the past or the racial "other"' (Tomlinson 2002: 67). Wilson is also, but to a lesser extent, critical of the film, stating that:

The film is doubtful about memory and representation of the past: any literal trace of the torture scene is destroyed; Bernard's investment as witness to Muriel's torture may be erotic or painfully narcissistic. (2006: 105)

I find Branche's analysis more trenchant in its recognition of the film's capacity to depict '*le déchirement de Bernard, [et] le sentiment qu'éprouve celui qui torture, celui qui se déshumanise en niant à l'autre sa valeur d'être humaine.*' The psychologist Marie-Odile Godard wrote a doctoral thesis on the '*traumatismes psychiques de guerre*' experienced by soldiers involved in torture during the Algerian War, noting that '*...c'est souvent à l'occasion de telles scènes d'extrême violence que leur équilibre psychique a basculé...*'

For Wilson, *Muriel* is ultimately 'a vertiginous film, allowing us no grasp, pulling back from any definitive statement'. But according to Michel Marie:

[...] *Muriel* est un film ancré dans l'actualité historico-politique de son époque : les allusions à la guerre d'Algérie, au traumatisme qu'elle représente pour toute une génération, font de *Muriel* un film de témoignage qui restitue le climat de la France gaullienne d'alors et jette sur la société française un regard d'une grande lucidité.<sup>85</sup>

Leperchey analyses the scene in the café in which both Robert and Alphonse meet Bernard (not by prior arrangement) and in which Alphonse has agreed to meet Ernest. There is use of tight parallel montage, cutting between the two conversations, transmitting fragments of each. Leperchey identifies in this scene a growing threat in each of the two conversations, creating two camps: 'the aggressor' and 'the aggressed':

Cette menace [...] crée en effet, dans chacune des histoires, deux camps, celui des « agresseurs » et celui des « agressés », Ernest semblant traquer Alphonse, et Robert voulant faire taire Bernard, l'empêcher de « raconter Muriel ».

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<sup>85</sup> Marie, Michel. *Muriel* d'Alain Resnais. (Neuilly : Atlande, 2005)

She writes that the threat provokes : ‘l’écèlement final de ce petit monde (Bernard tuera Robert, et Ernest séparera Alphonse et Hélène). Most interestingly, and relevant to the point above, is that according to Leperchey, Bernard’s action (killing Robert) redefines him:

Il était un tortionnaire parmi les autres; mais, parce qu’il se dresse contre Robert, on peut désormais dire qu’il était le tortionnaire qui allait se révolter contre la torture. (2000: 78-79)

Unlike the erosion of sentiments that Hélène experiences, and unlike the fluctuating past that Alphonse creates for himself, Bernard’s ‘memory’ of Muriel remains fixed, because it is less memory than conscience. The acoustic recording of the torture séance is a symbol of its intransient nature, and when Françoise accidentally plays the tape back, this serves as the ‘trigger’ or the element which acts as a catalyst resulting in Robert’s murder. Once again, critics have differed on their interpretation of Bernard’s action. According to Monaco, Bernard lacks the courage of his convictions:

But the action he takes, so unusual for a Resnais film, turns out to be based on bad faith. It isn’t at all clear that Robert was uniquely responsible for the death of ‘Muriel.’ Suicide may have been a better course of action for Bernard. (1979: 88)

Liandrat-Guigues and Leutrat recognise characteristics of the ‘bernard-l’ermite’ in Alphonse, an animal which Resnais cites as a metaphor for certain characters in *On connaît la chanson*, and an animal which he defines as ‘*l’animal le plus angoissé du monde.*’ Half shelled, half naked, and always growing, the hermit-crab is in a constant quest, initially for a host shell, and then as it grows, for a bigger, more intact and more suitable shell, and intensely vulnerable with every move (from old shell to new). Liandrat-Guigues and Leutrat note that these characteristics are apparent in Alphonse:

Une sorte de bernard-l’ermite, se faisant héberger, allant de maison en maison et hésitant devant diverses images possibles de lui-même. (2006: 13)

Personally, I find more of the hermit-crab in Bernard. Aside from the fact that Bernard and the ‘*bernard l’ermite*’ share a name, and that Bernard is often hidden away in his atelier, there are verbal indications of his hermitical habits, for instance through Robert’s dialogue. He is

also often either the first to retreat from a social gathering, or the last to arrive (for example, he's the last to arrive for dinner at Hélène's twice, and the first to leave the evening meal in the restaurant). But furthermore, what makes Bernard so vulnerable in the film is that morally he has outgrown his past self. The fact that he is the torturer who revolts against torture (cf. Lepercqy 2000: 78-79, cited above on p. 107) renders him vulnerable, in his move from one state of being to another, yet unable to easily break free from the characters who his past ties him to (such as Robert). His is '*le plus angoissé*' of the characters in the film, precisely because of his awakened conscience. Compare '*Les yeux de Muriel n'étaient pas fermés. Ça ne me faisait presque rien, peut-être même que cela ne me faisait rien du tout.*' with his journal entry 20 April: '*je me dégoute, pourquoi n'ai je rien dit ?*'. Finally, he almost literally moves from shell to shell, moving out of Hélène's to his atelier, and then on from there to an unknown destination.

More support for this argument can be found in a conversation which takes place during the second dinner, that which takes place in the restaurant (and is further analysed below). In this conversation, fragments of an earlier conversation between Françoise and Bernard are invested with another sense altogether. In Act One, Bernard took a scorpion out of a cigarette packet in his pocket:

FRANÇOISE : C'est mon signe, le scorpion. Et vous ?

BERNARD : Je ne sais pas... peut-être le homard.

(*Rires de Françoise.*)

It is later in the film, in the restaurant scene in question, after Bernard and Alphonse's argument, which has clearly demarcated Bernard from the rest of the group, that Bernard's earlier seemingly insignificant joke takes on significance:

FRANÇOISE: Il y a un très bon restaurant [...] à Paris, du côté de la gare St Lazare. Il jette le homard vivant dans l'eau bouillante devant nous; on s'y habitue.

Bernard '*le homard*', becomes the symbol of yet another generation of young men sacrificed (to war), whilst the characters, symbolic of society, demonstrate that like the customers, they remain indifferent to the young men's distress, '*on s'y habitue*'.

The conversation which precedes the above makes this clear:

BERNARD: Pourquoi n'êtes-vous pas resté là-bas ? Mais votre café n'aime pas les burnous.

ALPHONSE : Je respecte toutes les races, même si je ne peux pas sentir les Arabes.

BERNARD : Finissez sans moi. (*Il se lève*)

[...]

HELENE: [...] Tu as raison, il vaut mieux que tu t'en ailles. On t'a changé, et je sais qui c'est.

BERNARD : Tandis que toi... tu ne changes pas. (*Il sort*)

This moment in the film unambiguously demonstrates Bernard's criticism of French society (*Tandis que toi.... Tu ne changes pas*); he is becoming Lepercq's 'tortionnaire qui se révolte contre la torture' and revolting against the whole society that sent him to fight "une sale guerre". Hélène is ignorant of what Muriel signifies, but all the same she is right, and her remark "On t'a changé, et je sais qui s'est [Muriel]" resonates with Bernard's "c'est avec Muriel [...] que j'ai compris." He has understood the violence, oppression and hypocrisy upon which his society is built. If we accept Frodon's description of Resnais as the 'militant discret', Bernard can be understood as emblematic of a defiant generation whose youth and innocence was sacrificed by corrupt leaders to further their own interests.

It could be argued that one of the germs of May 68 lay in the colonial wars and the disillusionment with the national myth that they engendered. Furthermore it has been written that for many of the men who were drafted to Algeria the era of the war only ended in 1968 with the departure of De Gaulle from power:

1968 est un tournant dans l'histoire de la mémoire de la guerre : « *La guerre d'Algérie s'est terminée en 1968, parce que le général de Gaulle a vidé les prisons des derniers chefs du putsch et de l'OAS (...) mais aussi parce que, six ans après la fin du conflit, les hommes qui y avaient participé conservaient à l'égard de la société qui les avaient entraînés dans cette « malaventure » une défiance, un désintérêt, une rancune... »*

(Eveno and Planchais 1989 in Branche 1997: 59)

That the dialogue exchanged between Bernard and H el ene above is followed by the story of “*la maison qui glisse*” (a metaphor for instability, fragile foundations of post-war Europe) further underlines the second dinner’s pivotal function within the film. While seemingly nothing more than a series of superficial comments exchanged between friends, the entire restaurant scene is comprised of heavily symbolic dialogue.

Alphonse, and the others, demonstrate a remarkable insouciance as regards recent French history and the colonial war in Indo-China:

ALPHONSE : On ne sait plus quoi inventer dans les journaux. Ce matin, c’ tait le retour d’un prisonnier. Depuis plus de cinq ans on l’avait laiss  croupir en Indochine.

FRAN OISE : Alphonse a une adoration pour tout ce qui est bizarre.

Fran oise’s comment relegates the prisoner’s fate to the status of trivia, while H el ene then sums up the group’s self-interested attitude: ‘*Le cuisinier d’ici a  t  d port . S’il  tait mort, on aurait perdu sa recette.*’

## Conclusion

In keeping with an expression of the crisis in the action-image, the film may invite doubt in the spectator, and holds a place for ambiguity. It is doubtful about memory and representation of the past, recognising both the fragility of personal memory and how even the most atrocious acts are vulnerable to manipulation: facts can be hidden, evidence can be destroyed. Which is of course exactly what happened in contemporaneous French society: the first of the Amnesty laws was passed just one year after *Muriel, ou le temps d’un retour* was released. The film echoes the severe censorship laws that continue to conceal images of torture during the Algerian war; the banal tourist-like super-eight footage of palm trees and smiling young Frenchmen that Bernard has brought home with him, while ostensibly preserving memories of Bernard’s time in Algeria, serve to hide the torture and assassination of a young woman.

Resnais and Cayrol question this superficial apparent reality and demonstrate that the visual representation of a conscript’s two years spent in Algeria can be very different from the actual events and memories of those same two years. The visual image masks the verbal

recollection, just as the newsreels and censored cinematic output to some extent masked the true violence of the Algerian war. The character of Bernard and his amateur film, the paradox or dichotomy between what the spectator is shown, and what they are told, serve then as a wider metaphor for the post-war society, in which the men who had tortured, and the responsibility of politicians and military officials for the ‘special measures’ and also for the military putsch of 22 April 1961 (and even the responsibility of the terrorist OAS) were protected, ‘hidden’ or erased by a series of laws. As Stora has written:

Dans les années 1954-1962, les informations à propos d’exactions parvenaient en France (métropole) dans un temps bref et étaient rendus publiques par le truchement de certains journaux et l’édition d’ouvrages. Ces informations connues par les plus hautes autorités, les stratégies de dénégation se mettaient en œuvre pour enterrer une information déjà divulguée. Après l’indépendance, toutes ces informations si graves ont été mises au secret, aucun responsable n’a été inquiété ou jugé par l’Etat. La société, de son côté, ne voulait plus savoir, ni assumer. C’est dans l’après-coup de la guerre que l’Algérie n’a plus figuré dans la conscience française. (Stora 2005: 18)

I return to Rachid Boudjedra’s criticism of the film, stating that *Muriel* ‘is not a film about Algeria but a film where Algeria is something everyone tries to forget’. Boudjedra’s appraisal is predominantly inaccurate: most of the characters are *not* trying to forget Algeria; much more worryingly, they have already forgotten Algeria. Rather than being a fault with the film though, this anchors it to the socio-historical climate of its time. For, according to the historian Stora, the socio-political climate of 1961 – and therefore of the context of the film – as seen through the general motivation behind public support for the signing of the Evian accords, was as below:

Déjà, en 1961, quand la France a voté massivement « oui » (à 75%), en faveur de l’autodétermination de l’Algérie, elle ne l’a pas fait pour satisfaire les revendications des colonisés ; elle n’a pas reconnu s’être trompée dans l’aventure coloniale. Mon analyse du référendum est toute autre : les Français du métropole ont voulu se débarrasser du Sud pour ne plus avoir à en parler. (Stora 2007: 24)

Typical of the attention to visual and formal symmetry in the screenplay, Bernard and Hélène’s relationship begins and ends with a roof caving in and ashes in the air. Bernard and

Hélène were united by the aftermath of an act of violence: the traumatic consequence of a bombing in the Second World War when Bernard was just a child; and they are separated by the aftermath of another act of violence in a subsequent war. The many pieces of the mosaic interconnect, as the aftermath of the violence enacted against ‘Muriel’ manifests itself through another murder, Robert’s. The frustrated desperation driving Bernard to murder is in turn an interlocking consequence of the amnesty laws favouring the OAS criminals, while also being engendered by Bernard’s inability to forgive himself for the atrocities he has witnessed and committed, as an involuntary participant in a colonial war in which he cannot believe.

Resnais’s film, with its mosaic structure, offers a multitude of fragmented images of itself, ultimately offering and inspiring in the spectator a challenging criticism of some of the most crucial processes at force in shaping modern French society. Through manipulation of cinematic codes, and the innovation of a variety of techniques, ‘*ce film laisse un sentiment de malaise fort: c’est un film éveilleur tel que le voulait Resnais, c’est surtout un film dérangeant, un film magnifique.*’ (Branche 1997: 66)

This era in French cinema was matched by a growing disillusionment with the myths generated in the post-war period. Resnais’s film reflects the tacit veils of secrecy that members of society voluntarily shroud themselves in, but also the widening gap between generations in the violent era of global decolonisation and modernisation that would eventually culminate in May 68 and an accompanying radical renewal of French culture and society – for a time.

## 3

## Re-framing the female body:

### Agnès Varda's films and feminism(s) 1954-1964

Varda too was implicitly involved in the renewal and transformation of French culture at this time. Varda and Resnais were both loosely affiliated as 'members' of the Left Bank, having met when someone suggested to her that he was just the person to edit her first film, *La Pointe-Courte* (1954). Although he initially refused, ten days later he was working on the film, and continued to do so for months (and without pay). Varda writes of the knowledge that Resnais imparted to her during these months raising her from '*cinéaste brute à cinéaste débutante*' (Varda 1994: 47); indeed it was a fortuitous meeting both for Varda and for French cinema.

In this chapter I will examine the ways in which Varda has re-framed both the body and concept of woman. Varda's films in the period 1954 – 1964 can be interpreted as diametrically opposed to feminist doctrines that were dominant at the time – namely those expressed by Simone de Beauvoir – and yet they indicated philosophical and theoretical directions the movement would later embrace. The films can also be seen to counter elements of Lacanian psychoanalytic discourse, although indirectly given that the films pre-date the writings and lectures I refer to here. Of particular interest is Jacques Lacan's assertion that as a concept, woman cannot come into existence: "*cet Autre en tant que pourrait l'être, si elle existait, la femme [...]*" (Lacan 1975: 77). Lacan considers that woman is fated to remain eternally outside the imagination of dominant phallic discourse, and furthermore that women are alienated by the symbolic order and language itself. This determinism fatalistically considers that women are excluded by language '*exclue[s] par la nature des choses qui est la nature des mots*' (Lacan 1975: 68). This is an interesting idea and one that we will return to, with reference to the Kristevan chora and Irigaray, later. As we will see, this concept can be

seen to be refuted both by Varda's *cinécriture*<sup>86</sup> – she effectively ‘writes’ in the language of cinema – and on a theoretical and sexual-linguistic level by others.

More generally though, this determinism is contested by feminists and those concerned with re-thinking the representation of woman. Although not specifically directed at Lacanian psychoanalysis, from an existential perspective Simone de Beauvoir describes determinism as psycho-analysis's fatal flaw: ‘*C'est là le postulat commun à tous les psychanalystes : l'histoire humaine s'explique selon eux par un jeu d'éléments déterminés. Tous assigne à la femme le même destin* (Beauvoir 2008a: 87).

As we will see in this chapter, Varda offers a vision of women that frees us from archetypal myths, accepts our alterity, biological and otherwise – for instance in *L'Opéra-Mouffe* – and admits – for instance in *Cléo de 5 à 7* – considerable scope for defending a position that maintains that women are not destined to remain ‘unknowable even to themselves’ but rather that we can be the active agents of our own existence. Taking this into consideration, Luce Irigaray's challenge to Lacanian psychoanalytic discourse will be deployed to analyse *Cléo de 5 à 7* in particular.

By extending the Italian neo-realist introduction of the (male) child framing of the gaze, such as that in Vittorio de Sica's *Shoeshine* (*Sciuscià*, 1946) or in Roberto Rossellini's *Germany Year Zero* (*Germania anno zero*, 1948) to include a wider spectrum of possible gazes and a multiplicity of actors, Varda translated the feminist search for alterity and plurality – as alternatives to the dominant masculine modes of thought and patterns of representation – to the screen. Examples of this can be found throughout her corpus, from her debut feature *La Pointe-Courte* (1954) where the Parisian woman's intimate perspective is juxtaposed to the more ambitious (in its plurality) collective perspective of the village.

*L'Opéra-Mouffe* (1958) can be described as a *caméra-stylo* short in which Varda examined her own relationship to her pregnancy and body. *Caméra-stylo* (a concept which here complements, rather than contradicts, that of *cinécriture*) is a term coined by the novelist, film

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<sup>86</sup> Varda uses the term ‘*cinécriture*’ to encompass the entire creative process of engendering a film, and the manner in which it is filmed; therefore the process of ‘*cinécriture*’ includes not only the filming, the choice of actors, but also ‘*les lieux [...] le découpage, les mouvements, les points de vue, le rythme de tournage et du montage [...]*’ (Varda 1994: 14).

critic and director Alexandre Astruc, writing in 1948<sup>87</sup>, to describe and encourage directors' use of the camera in the same way that authors employ the pen, which is to say, to retain and transmit a degree of immediacy and intimacy that would otherwise often be absent or muted in major productions. Astruc urged that the cinema should and indeed would increasingly diversify into plural 'cinemas' and would be a means by which *auteurs* could transmit thoughts – however abstract – relay obsessions, and convey all manner of philosophical, psychological, mathematical, historical and scientific thought. Although Astruc's term can obviously be applied to many different genres and types of film-making, I find the term useful in relation to Varda's *L'Opéra Mouffe* in the sense that we see in the film that Varda liberates cinema from the constraints of the then-dominant forms of cinema (such as social realism inspired by the 19<sup>th</sup> Century novel), and we find in the film the expression of Varda's abstract reflections on love and pregnancy, age and infirmity, and so on, communicated in a dream-like form with the absence of a classical narrative.

Disaccord with feminist trends can be found in the film; at a time when Simone de Beauvoir's denial of an intrinsically biological origin of 'woman' was internationally praised, Varda dedicated this film to the exploration of her body's biological mutation, thus situating it in seemingly diametrical opposition to then prevalent feminist theory. However, given the (much) later feminist embrace of motherhood, in some cases with leanings towards matriarchy, the film was somewhat prescient in nature as to directions later adopted by feminists.

Subsequently, *Cléo de 5 à 7* (1961) provides the raw material for a classic feminist study of the dismantling of the Hollywood cinematic codes of montage and viewpoint, as Varda assigned alternative roles to mechanisms such as the typically voyeuristic camera. Lacanian psychoanalytic discourse and Luce Irigaray's contestation thereof can be deployed to further analyse the film. Finally *Le Bonheur* (1964) opens a Pandora's box of still-troubling questions about the extent to which individuals can retain unique identity in the nuclear family structure. The film offers an ironic interplay between the narrative and gendered visual iconography to suggest that the consumer society and marital structures 'drown' women in domesticity.

To conclude, the thematic unity of the four films will be analysed, which has the advantage of demonstrating that Varda's filmic production in this ten-year period was in synchronicity with

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<sup>87</sup> Naissance d'une nouvelle avant-garde : la caméra-stylo *L'Écran français* n°144 (30 March 1948)

the wider-reaching demographic and societal mutations of the era. Considered together, the films lend themselves to an analysis of a decade in French history marked not only by the changing conceptual framework of gender relations, representation of women, and plurality of modes of thought which challenged the dominant monolithic male discourse, but by a more general exodus from the rural areas which signified a twilight of the artisan way of life and the increase in city and suburbia-dwelling appliance-rich disquiet of the early 60s.

### A Quiet Decade?

As regards recent French history, until recently the period between the end of the Second World War and May 68 has been viewed as uneventful, a ‘period during which it is commonly said that ‘nothing happened’ (Duchen 1994: 3). These years are often regarded as a quiet period book-ended by the Liberation and end of the Second World War on one side, and the general strikes, social upheaval and near-revolution of May 68 on the other. This view, unproblematic for many scholars a decade ago, ignores the wave of decolonisation that swept across many European-held colonies in the wake of the Second World War.

Parallel to the national liberation movements being fought in France’s colonies and overseas territories in this period, (1950s – 1960s) there were many women’s groups campaigning on the mainland for reform and equality for women. The great point of rupture between the struggle for women’s rights pre and post ’68 was precisely the focus on reform (within current political structures) pre-May 68, which was in contrast with the radical desire to re-think the whole political system and effectuate change from outside existing party systems and political organizations post-May 68.

In this chapter I will examine four of Varda’s films and their relevance to feminist theories in this period, notably those expressed in Simone de Beauvoir’s *Le Deuxième Sexe*, which was published in 1949 and would be met with worldwide acclaim in the following years. In interview with DeRoo (2006) Varda cites *Le Deuxième sexe* as influential on *Le Bonheur* (DeRoo 2008: 191). While much of de Beauvoir’s book sustains a passionate argument for women to be accorded the right to control their own fertility, de Beauvoir also lucidly demolishes the philosophical myth of woman, reveals the limitations inherent in Freudian psychoanalysis, investigates the biological qualities of the female sex and charts woman’s condition, situation and status throughout much of history. Given the broad scope of this work

and its impact on women in the years after its publication, coupled with Varda's acknowledgement of *Le Deuxième sexe*'s influence, it is clearly an indispensable text for any analysis of feminism(s) in France between the years 1954 – 1964.

### Gender construction and re-framing the concept of woman

Like Irigaray, in her films Varda clearly refutes the fatalism inherent in the psychoanalytic and essentialist definitions of women/femaleness, for example in *Cléo de 5 à 7* as we will see in more detail later in this chapter. However, before considering the theme of gender construction as explored in the films, it may be useful at this point to deploy Irigaray's theories on this subject. Irigaray has been critical of Freud's error in interpreting women's suffering and pathologies without situating them in social and cultural contexts, thereby more or less ignoring or neglecting the causes of the symptoms and women's dissatisfaction:

[...] Freud décrit un état de fait. [...] Il rend compte, en « homme de science ». Le problème, c'est qu'il n'interroge pas les déterminations historiques des données qu'il traite. [...] il accepte comme *norme* la sexualité féminine telle qu'elle se présente à lui. Qu'il interprète les souffrances, les symptômes, les insatisfactions, des femmes en fonction de leur histoire individuelle, sans questionner le rapport de leur « pathologie » à un certain état de la société, de la culture. Ce qui aboutit, le plus généralement, à resoumettre les femmes au discours dominant du père, à sa loi, en faisant taire leurs revendications (Irigaray 1977: 68 – 69).

This is to some extent in contrast with other feminist readings, such as those by Mitchell and Rose, who argue that 'psychoanalysis is indispensable to feminism, on the basis that it provides a theory of sexual identity as culturally enjoined and constantly resisted', while Mitchell suggests that psychoanalysis 'explains how we acquire sexual identity by repressing desires which are culturally unacceptable; it does not require us to believe that sexual identity is synonymous with anatomy' (Belsey and Moore 1992: 6)

In response to Lacan's ruminations on women's fate, such as that we are excluded '*par la nature des choses*' (1975 : 68), ignorant of our own '*jouissance*': '*il n'y en a pas d'autre que la jouissance phallique – sauf celle sur laquelle la femme ne souffle mot, peut-être parce qu'elle ne la connaît pas*' (1975 : 56) and to his apparently all too phallogocentric insistence

that '*rien ne peut se dire de la femme*' (1977: 75) she draws attention to the limitations inherent in the fact that for centuries male pedagogues have presumed to define women, but (necessarily) from the outside, as it were:

On vous a appris que vous étiez propriété privée ou public, d'un homme ou de tous. [...] Que tel était votre plaisir [...] que, sans soumission aux désirs – d'un homme ou de tous - , vous ne connaissiez pas de jouissance. Que celle-ci était pour vous, toujours liée à la douleur, mais que telle était votre nature. *Mais votre nature était, curieusement, toujours définie par les seuls hommes, vos éternels pédagogues : en sciences sociales, religieuses, ou sexuelles.* (Irigaray 1977: 201)

Aside from quite clearly constituting a rebuttal of Lacan's attempts to define women she follows this line of argument by inciting women to embrace personal freedom and agency:

Faites ce qui vous vient, ce qui vous plaît : sans « raison », sans « cause valable », sans « justification ». [...] Ne vous obligez pas à la répétition, ne figez pas vos rêves ou désirs en représentations uniques et définitives. Vous avez tant de continents à explorer que vous donner des frontières reviendrait à ne pas « jouir » de toute votre « nature ». (Irigaray 1977: 202)

However, of greatest interest here with reference to re-framing the concept of woman, is Lacan's assertion that:

Il n'y a de femme qu'exclue *par la nature des choses* qui est la nature des mots, et il faut bien dire que s'il y a quelque chose dont elles-mêmes se plaignent assez pour l'instant, c'est bien de ça – simplement, elles ne savent pas ce qu'elles disent, c'est toute la différence entre elles et moi (Lacan 1975: 68).

Lacan considers that women are excluded, and condemned to a peripheral relationship to Logos and the symbolic order. Others have supported this thesis that women are ontologically alienated from language. It would seem that Kristeva concurs somewhat with Lacan on the issue of sexual difference impacting on infant boys' and girls' relation to the symbolic order when she hypothesises that sexual differences result in different relationships to the symbolic contract. This is evident below, where she dismisses generative linguistics and argues that the

symbolic is a social product of our relations with each other, differing depending on a variety of biological factors:

On sait qu'un courant de la linguistique générative revendique le principe de l'innéisme des universaux du langage. Comme il apparaîtra dans ce qui suit, le *symbolique* et par conséquent la syntaxe et toute la catégorialité linguistique, est un produit social du rapport à l'autre, à travers les contraintes objectives constituées par les différences biologiques, entre autres sexuelles, et par les structures familiales concrètement et historiquement données. (Kristeva 1985: 29)

This line of argument presumes that given the ways in which these relationships differ, it would follow that girls are excluded from and boys integrated into language, Logos and the symbolic realms. However, this conflates the development of the symbolic order with the so-called signing of the 'social contract', clearly expressed in Kristeva's 1979 paper '*Le temps des femmes*' where she writes 'the symbolic contract which *is* the social contract' (Kristeva, ed. Moi<sup>88</sup>, 1986: 196), and theorizes that due to sexual differences women are excluded from the symbolic order and condemned to a peripheral existence as regards 'power, language and meaning'.

It would appear that Kristeva and Lacan are not alone in conflating the symbolic and social orders: 'We can see [...] that the social order and the symbolic order are assimilated; structurally they are seen as equivalent' (Whitford 1991: 170). Seeing the entry into the symbolic and social orders as simultaneous – or forgetting that they are not – results in the conclusion that woman is ontologically excluded from language and the symbolic order. This hypothesis is explicated by Kristeva: '*vous avez la femme qui n'a pas la parole mais apparaît comme le désir pur de le prendre*' (Kristeva 2001: 38) and again specifically in relation to monotheism: '*L'économie de ce dispositif exige que les femmes soient à l'écart aussi bien du principe unique, seul vrai et légiférant, de la Parole, que de la face (toujours paternelle) selon laquelle la procréation obtient une valeur sociale : à l'écart du savoir et du pouvoir*' (Kristeva 2001: 40). Irigaray too concedes that women have an unequal relationship to language: '*L'infériorité sociale des femmes se renforce et se complique du fait que la femme n'as pas accès au langage, sinon par le recours à des systèmes des représentations*

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<sup>88</sup> I was unable to gain access to *Le Temps des femmes / Women's Time* in French, hence the citation in English.

« masculins » qui la désapproprient de son rapport à elle même, et aux autres femmes' (Irigaray 1977: 81), though she is careful to make explicit that this is a result of social and cultural factors (cf. Irigaray 1977: 68-69).

As a result of this hypothesis, Kristeva can argue that women are alienated from the symbolic order. This is pivotal in leading Kristeva and Irigaray to argue, not dissimilarly to Lacan, that woman is condemned to the periphery, not being party to the symbolic order or social contract, alienated from '*la Parole*', though not, I think, by the *chora*; one could hypothesize that these conclusions may have led Kristeva to conceptualize the *chora*, as a domain pertaining to communication from which women are not alienated (cf. below for further discussion of this).

Generally though, on this subject Lacanian and Kristevan psychoanalytic discourse would seem to participate in what Gilbert and Gubar have identified as a broad cultural project of constructing women as excluded from language (1986: 95-98).

Somewhat surprisingly, even committed feminists participate in this cultural project, cf. for instance Margaret Whitford's explanation of how best to understand Lacan's statement that 'woman does not exist':

We should now interpret 'woman does not exist' as: 'women are not parties to the social/symbolic contract'; in Irigarayan terms, they are outside the symbolic order, which they can enter only 'as men'; in Rousseauistic terms, they remain in the pre-contractual state of nature. (This is not the primordial state of nature, but that intermediate stage, prior to the social contract, in which the strong and powerful have taken advantage of the weak to foist upon them a contract which only empowers the powerful even more.) (Whitford 1991: 177)

However, Gilbert and Gubar have asked (1986: 97) whether this idea, 'the idea that language is in its essence or nature patriarchal' is perhaps in fact a 'reaction-formation against the linguistic (as well as biological) primacy of the mother?'

To support their argument they write of 'the extraordinary swerve Jacques Lacan has to perform as part of his attempt to make the moment of the child's accession to language

coincide with the moment of the Oedipus complex, so that women can be defined ‘as excluded by the nature of things which is the nature of words’ (1986: 96).

Irigaray for her part challenges several Freudian theories as internally inconsistent, in particular relating to the Oedipal complex and Freud’s (*anatamo-physiologique*) anatomical-physiological justification for what he perceived as inherent qualities: male aggression and female passivity (Irigaray, 1977: 69). Extending Irigaray’s challenge to Freudian theories, Gilbert and Gubar address inconsistencies in Lacan’s theories, to convincingly argue that the symbolic order and social ‘contract’ are separate, and given that the symbolic contract is signed *before* the social contract (language is acquired before gender construction occurs) there is no need to postulate that language acquisition and the relationship to the symbolic order is different for girl and boy infants, but rather, that it is experienced equally.

In support of this they point out that ‘it is in most cultures the mother who feeds the child words even as she furnishes her or him with food’ and ‘as Freud himself observed, the birth into language delivers the child from helplessness at the goings and the comings of the mother’ and consequently ‘it is not only the presence of the mother’s words that teaches the child words, but also the absence of the mother’s flesh’ (Gilbert and Gubar 1986: 96).<sup>89</sup>

This leads Gilbert and Gubar ask whether the couple mother/child rather than man/woman is the primordial couple from which we learn the ‘couplings, doublings, splittings of ‘hierarchy’.’ This leads them to hypothesise then that language acquisition is linked not so much to the ‘Law of the Father’ but the ‘lure and the lore of the mother’ (1986: 97-98). The implications of this are not only that mothers cross-culturally ‘feed’ children words, but also that women are not ontologically alienated from language.

Irigaray’s alternative interpretation of Rousseau’s ‘golden age’ further substantiates Gilbert and Gubar’s theory of the mother/child couple as the primordial couple, in its depiction of the blissful, peaceful and harmonious relationship in a world/garden/age where the mother/daughter couple formed a natural and social model:

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<sup>89</sup>Amongst the many other points of interest in this article is the fact that they call attention to the (oft ignored) writings of Erich Neumann (circa 1950), for whom ‘the positive femininity of the womb appears as a mouth... and on the basis of this positive symbolic equation the mouth, as “upper womb”, is the birthplace of the breath and of the word, the Logos.’ (Neumann in Gilbert and Gubar 1986: 97)

There was a time when a mother and daughter were the figure of a natural and social model. This couple was the guardian of the fertility of nature in general and of the relations to the divine. At this time, food consisted of the fruits of the earth. The mother-daughter couple ensured the safeguard of human nourishment and the site of the oracular word. This couple protected the memory of the past: at that time the daughter respected her mother and her genealogy. It also concerned itself with the present: food was produced from the earth in calm and peace. Foresight for the future existed thanks to the relation of women to the divine, to the oracular word.

Were men harmed by this organisation? No. In this respect for life, for love, for nature, neither of the two sexes was destroyed by the other. The two sexes loved each other, without needing the institution of marriage, without being required to have children – which has never suppressed reproduction – without taboos on sex or the body.

This is probably what monotheistic religions narrate to us as the myth of earthly paradise. This myth corresponds to centuries of history known today as prehistory, primitive eras, etc. Those who lived in these so-called archaic times were perhaps more cultivated than we are. (SP: 206) (Whitford 177)

Therefore rather than give continued credence to the Logos as the Law of the father, Gilbert and Gubar conclude that it is the mother who has both biological *and linguistic* primacy, hence women are not excluded by language at all, which effectively undermines Lacan's assertion that, '*Il n'y a de femme qu'exclue par la nature des choses qui est la nature des mots*' (1975: 68).

Borrowing from Gilbert and Gubar's persuasive demonstration that the 'very existence of a long-neglected tradition of female writing' would tend to undermine the 'assumption that 'the feminine' is what cannot be inscribed in common language', it can be argued that Varda's cinematic oeuvre and her self-named *cinécriture* further substantiates the above argument that women are not alienated by language, but are rather, as Lévi-Strauss indicated, not only signs but also generators of signs:

Mais la femme ne pouvait jamais devenir signe et rien de cela, puisque, dans un monde d'hommes, elle est tout de même une personne, et que, dans la mesure où on la

défini comme signe, on s'oblige à reconnaître en elle un producteur de signes. (Lévi-Strauss 1967: 569)

To relate this more concretely to cinema and film studies, whilst Gilbert and Gubar posit that the primary couple is mother/child, Laura U. Marks, in her writings on the cinematic phenomenon of haptic visuality, describes haptic visuality as blurring inter-subjective boundaries. She places haptic visuality, in psychoanalytic terms, as being drawn 'on an erotic relation that is organised less by a phallic economy than by the relationship between mother and infant' (2000: 188). We can therefore deduce its interest to women filmmakers as a feminist strategy.

### Re-framing the [female] body

Varda demonstrates a typically feminist concern for re-thinking gender relations and the representation of women, and offers alternative structures of desire and fluidity of the gaze, encouraging a concept and representation of woman that can be appreciated by deploying feminist theoretician Luce Irigaray's contestation of Lacanian theories:

Dans cette logique [dominant phallic discourse], la prévalence du regard et de la discrimination de la forme, de l'individualisme de la forme, est particulièrement étrangère à l'érotisme féminin. La femme jouit plus du toucher que du regard, et son entrée dans une économie scopique dominante signifie, encore, une assignation pour elle à la passivité : elle sera le bel objet à regarder. [...] son corps se trouve ainsi érotisé, et sollicité à un double mouvement d'exhibition et de retrait pudique pour exciter les pulsions du « sujet ». (Irigaray 1977: 25)

To give an example, although the films analysed here pre-empt Irigaray's theories, we will see that this notion that « *la femme jouit plus du toucher que du regard* » can be seen to be explored and played out through the visual and haptic re-framing of the body in the films discussed in this chapter, particularly in *Le Bonheur* and *L'Opéra-Mouffe*.

Filmmakers have sought alternative strategies to avoid the aforementioned passivity. If women desire differently, how can women filmmakers enter into the scopic economy of

cinema without relinquishing the expression of other ways of desiring? Some women filmmakers, such as Catherine Breillat with *Romance X* (1999), for example, simply inverse the roles, choosing to render their male actors the somewhat passive objects of desire of their female protagonists. In other cases this has been achieved through negating or diminishing the medium's (and Western society's) ocular-centrism in favour of opening up avenues of exploring the potential for a haptic visuality.

According to Laura Marks, 'in haptic visuality, the eyes themselves function like organs of touch' (2000: 162). A haptic image, one that is not immediately discernable, and on which the camera may linger, can be used to express the notion that women rely on the sense of touch more than the sense of sight in attaining sexual climax, as the haptic image invites the eyes to 'feel' the image that they cannot 'see'. Haptic visuality can be contrasted with optical visuality, and through its tendency to circumnavigate visual perception, or lead our optical perception into an impasse, where it falters, the haptic image can be adept at awakening other senses, and therefore is especially provocative in representing desire, but also in representing emotions and memories which may be triggered by the other senses.

*Le Bonheur*, *L'Opéra-Mouffe*, and to a lesser extent *La Pointe Courte* share similar images; the celluloid sculpture formed by the framing of Silvia Monfort and Philippe Noiret's faces, one facing the camera, the other in profile –almost to form one face – in *La Pointe Courte* is echoed in the more sexual yet still highly stylised compositions of the faces and body parts of the couple named only 'les amoureux' in *L'Opéra-Mouffe*. Whilst maintaining similar framing of the couple in *Le Bonheur*, Varda generally abandons the theatrical style of her earlier films and recreates a more carnal, sensual, haptic mood, where physical desire, scent, taste, indeed all five senses are evoked in the scenes between the adulterous couple.

Often relying on still close ups which feature parts of both people filmed, for instance part of one character's face with another's body part, Varda frames the bodies and their contact with each other. This framing evokes the way that the lovers in *Hiroshima, mon amour* are framed, fragmented body parts entwined, but with an eerie undertone due to the context and the ash covered embrace of the opening scene.

Her approach to filming love scenes is unusual in that she films the impression of the physical act from many surprising angles without filming the bodies in movement. We can contrast

this with Roger Vadim's legendary recording of Brigitte Bardot dancing to the African djambés in *Et Dieu créa la femme*, an example which, as well as being an example of filming the female body in movement, also serves to illustrate male cinematographers' tendency to focus on women's erogenous zones (such as thighs and breasts).

Typical of her generation of filmmakers, for reasons of censorship, which was severe in de Gaulle's France, Varda chooses to avoid the explicit filming of sex; she alludes to it through framing body parts of the couple in semi close-up. The pairing of unusual elements (elbow to mouth, for example) invites the spectator to reflect on the senses (of touch, taste, smell, sight and sound) that are implicated in arousal and physical desire; hence the framing of ear to eye, elbow to mouth, etc. (cf. Frame 15). In fact, almost paradoxically the choice of close-up serves to map the bodies without objectifying them, even though on one hand they seem to be reduced to parts. As indicated above this is done to acknowledge the haptic experience of the sexual encounter while refusing to resort to voyeurism in filming the physical experience. Alternative techniques have been used by other women-filmmakers, often as a result of a quest to film women without exploiting the actor's body. These range from the use of a visually elliptic technique which relies on a near literary process whereby the spectator's imagination is incited to visualize (or not) the physical experience by combining a sexually detailed and explicit narration of sexual encounters which are simultaneously almost – but not quite – shown to the audience (cf. for instance Carine Adler's *Under the Skin* 1997) to the visually explicit approach blurring the boundaries between pornographic and mainstream film (cf. Virginie Despentes and Coralie Trinh Thi's *Baise-moi*, 2000).

Breillat, Despentes and Trinh were pre-empted by a quarter of a century as the male body and penis had already been extensively filmed by Japanese filmmaker Nagisa Oshima in another socio-political and cultural context altogether. Oshima filmed sexual relations – including penetration and the penis both erect and non-erect – from almost any imaginable angle in his beautiful yet disturbing tale of desire, betrayal, love, possession and self-sacrifice in *Ai no corrida* (*In The Realm of the Senses*, 1976). Oshima's approach to filming the couple differs from the Western approach in that he places the male nude almost on a par with the female nude, according them similar amounts of time and attention.

Similarly, when filming physical love or desire, Varda, like Oshima, gives equal attention to filming the contours of the male body. This approach differentiates her from other male

directors, such as Vadim or even Godard. Consider for example that Brigitte Bardot is filmed entirely naked in *Le Mepris*, whereas her partner played by Michel Piccoli is never undressed; near the beginning of *Weekend* Corinne is interrogated by her partner about a three-way sexual encounter she had; as she relates her story, she is dressed only in bra and panties, while her partner is wearing a suit and tie. In the “*vocation théâtrale*” interlude near the end of *La Chinoise*, the two women knocking on glass have been stripped of clothing each time the camera returns to frame them. Finally the young woman has lost even her bikini top, so that she is last shown naked, whereas the older woman is not shown without her swimsuit, and Jean-Pierre Léaud’s character remains entirely dressed. We may wonder why, and conclude that for Godard nudity is acceptable when the body is young, female and beautiful, but that older flesh and larger body shapes remain taboo, unlike for Varda in *L’Opéra Mouffe*.

The camera’s point of view in Varda’s films does not coalesce with either the male or female character’s point of view, and therefore it can be argued that Varda’s films free the female spectator from the need to ‘*se travestir en homme*’ (Burch and Sellier 1996: 305). In *L’Opéra-Mouffe* and *Le Bonheur* the object of desire cannot be said to be uniquely feminine, just as the subject who desires is not only male, but rather the object and subject alternate, in a blurring of inter-subjective boundaries.

An example of this alternation between object and subject can be found in the series of near stills that communicate the adulterous couple’s sexual liaison in *Le Bonheur*: when the camera traces the curve of Émilie’s buttocks and back she is the desired object, and when she clutches his neck and smiles we can suppose that she becomes the subject, possessing both pleasure and François.

Varda differs from other women filmmakers such as Catherine Breillat in this respect, as Breillat unashamedly relegates the male object of desire to just that, an object, essentially reversing the gaze, and positioning the woman so that she assumes the role of voyeur (and instigator of sexual encounters). Breillat’s 1999 *Romance X* serves as an example of this approach. While pre-empting (by one year) the explicit un-simulated sex brought to the screen in Despentès and Thrinh-Thi’s *Baise-moi*, *Romance X* in its portrayal of the sexual act with close-up filming of the erection and penetration blurs the boundaries between pornographic and mainstream cinema, and it is notable that Breillat ‘re-framed’ the *male* body, by filming the erection, and finally reinstating the male nude as a whole integral body, rather than an

elliptic figure filmed from the thigh down or lower abdomen up, always without a groin. Throughout the history of cinema the male sex has been voluntarily occulted, and therefore filming the integral male nude (as Breillat does) constitutes an act of rupture with prevalent dominant cinematic codes. This is not only due to censorship regulations, which in most cases stipulate that unless there is no sexual ‘use’ of the penis, a film will be classed as pornographic if an erect penis is filmed, but is also due to the (im)practicalities involved in filming a (sustained) erection. Varda too has participated in this rupture; her 1980 film *Documenteur* features a man lying down alone naked with one hand and his penis (not erect) lying on his stomach ‘*comme deux oiseaux*’.<sup>90</sup> He represents the lost object of desire: he is thought of, ‘pictured’ and cannot be touched.

This raises another characteristic of Varda’s re-framing of the body; the nude, whether female or male, in her films is often solitary. Both *L’Opéra –Mouffe* and *Documenteur* feature a scene in which a woman lies naked on a bed and looks at herself in a mirror. This is perhaps to be understood as a re-appropriation of the female nude, an assertion that the female body can exist naked without serving male desire, but as part of a process of self-reflection. Varda films the female body in a context which sets it apart from most other contexts of female nudity in cinema: the body is naked without having been undressed by a male character, and a male character is not about to make use of the body. Most recently in *Les Plages d’Agnès* Varda seems to revisit another sequence in *L’Opéra-Mouffe* as she films a couple outside completely naked standing together in a courtyard. And yet she surprises the spectator with a new take on the old scene: the camera pulls away from a close up of the couple to reveal their whole bodies and the man’s bouncing erection.

Jeanne Labrune offers the following hypothesis regarding the occultation of the male sex and the prevalence of phallic substitutes:

Couper un corps, pour moi c’est de le retirer son intégralité et donc son intégrité. Parce qu’un corps dit quelque chose dans son entièreté. A partir du moment où on l’occulte ça donne furieusement envie de fantasmer. On imagine qu’il y en a beaucoup plus (ou beaucoup moins) qu’il y en a... Et surtout, *il me semble* qu’il y a une corrélation entre ce non-filmage de cette partie du corps des hommes dans la tradition

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<sup>90</sup> Varda’s description, in interview in *Filmer le désir* (Mandy, 2001).

cinématographique et, par ailleurs, la démesure d'objets qui seraient des substitues de sexes masculins. C'est à dire moins le cinéma masculin a filmé le sexe des hommes, je dirais tout le cinéma de genre, le polars, les films de guerre... tous ce cinéma de genre qui encore plus qu'un autre a refoulé le sexe des hommes, on voit bien que par ailleurs il le manifeste à travers des revolvers, des pistolets des armes, des couteaux, des obus, toute chose qui représente la puissance masculine offensive, et qui évidemment ne débände jamais. » (Jeanne Labrune in Mandy 2001).

To conclude then we can note that although Varda flirts with representing the female/male body as passively objectified by filming it fragmented, this is illusory as the camera focuses not (or rarely) on erogenous zones but on areas of the body that evoke the senses, in the hope of communicating the wider range of physical and emotional perceptions and involvement of the whole body and mind that is, or may be, awakened or engaged in the act of love-making represented in the '*scène d'amour*'. Furthermore, despite the use of close-up (which would normally create emotional proximity and identification between audience and character), the still quality of these frames diminishes the likelihood of the spectator identifying with the actors and also perhaps serves to divert the scopoc drive of the image. The result is that curiously in these love scenes there is a relative frigidity and coldness acquired (in the spectator) by the very stillness of the bodies and the disconnecting montage (almost as though a series of stills were projected), which call upon the active viewer to remain somewhat analytical.

I do not wish to suggest that the body in Varda's films is filmed uniquely in relation to sex: Varda uses the same technique, which is to say the focus on a gesture that evokes an emotion, such as hesitation, reverie, or solitude, in other contexts. An example of this can be found in *Documenteur* in the gesture of a woman absently caressing/massaging her neck as she waits in a Laundromat in L.A. This short sequence of an unknown woman was filmed from the street, behind the woman; it is a moment caught on celluloid that Varda is fond of precisely because it captures the essence of an emotion unknowingly communicated. (source: Varda speaking at the *Cinémathèque de Toulouse* during a conference in 2002).

For Marks (2000: 184) 'the haptic viewer relates simultaneously to an illusionistic image and a material object, and thus implicitly refuses to be seduced by the cinematic illusion.' Yet paradoxically she also defines the haptic viewer as one who 'is quite willing to pull the wool

over her eyes' (Marks 2000: 184) thus giving in wholeheartedly to the image. Like Marks's shifting definitions, these images in *Le Bonheur* inhabit a middle ground, oscillating between their status as optical and haptic images. Some frames rely on a viewer who 'isolates and comprehends the image', while others invite the viewer 'to lose herself in the image, lose her sense of proportion'.

***La Pointe-Courte*: Re-defining through absence (absence of the female body eroticised)**

By extending the Italian neo-realist introduction of the (male) child framing of the gaze, such as that in Vittorio de Sica's *Shoeshine* (*Sciuscià*, 1946) or in Roberto Rossellini's *Germany Year Zero* (*Germania anno zero*, 1948) to include a wider spectrum of possible gazes and a multiplicity of actors, Varda translated the feminist search for alterity and plurality (as alternatives to the dominant masculine modes of thought and patterns of representation) to the screen. Examples of this can be found throughout her corpus, such as in *La Pointe-Courte* (1954) where the Parisian woman's intimate perspective is juxtaposed to the perhaps most ambitious (in its plurality) collective perspective of the village.

An interwoven double narrative structures Varda's first film, *La Pointe-Courte*, and although the action takes place in a single location, the characters from each strand hardly interact. Varda was inspired by the dual narrative of William Faulkner's *The Wild Palms* and integrated this concept into her film, while Godard used this same double narrative technique a decade later in *Pierrot le fou* (1965). Its construction is based on the alternating juxtaposition between two central themes: the evolution and near dissolution of the relationship between 'elle' from Paris, and 'lui' from Sète, on the one hand, and on the other the village community's collective struggle to overcome a threat to their livelihood in the form of their conflict with capitalist interests intent on preventing them from harvesting shellfish.

Relatively novel in French cinema at the time was Varda's choice of including non-professional actors, complete with heavy regional accents and use of the vernacular. The confrontation between Jésus and the Inspectors in this first encounter is a good example of this, with his "*Foutez-moi le camp!*", brusque gestures, and protruding partially clad belly. This is a far cry from the generally somewhat theatrical on-camera presence of other actors of the era. Filming outside of studios was also rare at the time, and although present to some extent in the 1930s – notably in the seminal *Toni* (Jean Renoir, 1934) – there remained a comparative paucity of location filming in French cinema until the 1950s.

Another striking aspect of this first film, which sets it apart somewhat from Italian neo-realism, is the juxtaposition of styles within the film, and the additional juxtaposition between the seemingly 'objective world of things and the ambiguous world of thoughts' (Flitterman-

Lewis 1996: 220). Varda employs a seemingly natural documentary style when filming the location and the villagers, who play themselves; again parallels can be drawn with Italian neo-realism and more specifically the Sicilian fishing community filmed in *La terra trema* (Luchino Visconti, 1948) or the islanders of *Stromboli* (Rossellini, 1949). In contrast, the sequences involving the couple are marked by a heavily stylised theatrical direction of two professional actors. This was Philippe Noiret's screen début, and Varda later pointed out that he was at times exasperated by her inexperience at directing actors. Both narratives share predominantly naturally lit exterior settings (which makes for rather difficult viewing of the final sequence as it was filmed in the evening). The film is made up of seven sequences; the first six, each roughly ten minutes long, are consecrated to either the villagers or the couple, and the seventh, nearly twice as long as the previous sequences, features both.

Echoes are to be found between *La Pointe Courte* and Luchino Visconti's *La Terra trema* (1948) which is also set in a fishing village, that of the small community of Aci Trezza on the eastern coast of the island of Sicily in Italy. Visconti draws the spectator into the daily lives of the villagers, highlighting not only the peril the men face at sea, but also the strong sense of community, solidarity and tradition that unite family members. The sense of solidarity is communicated visually as when the men share the load of carrying the net down the narrow winding alleyways between houses to the water, while the sense of tradition is made evident by the repeated deference to elders in decision-making, and the discreet and chaste courtship between lovers. The drama, and the family's fall from grace arises from a decision on behalf of the younger men to ignore the elders and break with tradition. For like *La Pointe Courte*, the film has a social message to convey, as the struggle between Antonio and the wholesalers comes to the forefront. The cycle of labour that is recompensed only with subsistence-level earnings, but never enough to bring the family (or other villagers) out of poverty, is communicated through the voiceover that accompanies the women's preparation of food that the men will bring with them out on the boats: "Wine, bread and sardines, to provide enough energy for the men to fish to have more wine, bread and sardines...."

Antonio will be the catalyst for change, urging the other fisherman to work with and pool their resources to be able to salt and cure the fish they catch in order to entirely by-pass the corrupt wholesalers who refuse to give the fishermen a fair price. When the rest of the community refuses to join him, Antonio convinces his family to mortgage their home in order

to start salting and curing the fish, and all goes well until the men are caught out in a storm and their fishing boat is all-but destroyed.

While the ending, with Antonio going back to work on someone else's boat and selling at a low price to the wholesalers, is for some critics indicative of his realisation of the importance of solidarity and acceptance of his place, and the place of his class, in society, I interpret the outcome quite differently. For it can also be argued that the pessimistic ending confirms that Antonio (emblematic of the peasant population and working class) cannot overcome the corrupt system which exploits him if he has to fight it alone, and that it is only if the community joins together in solidarity that they can overcome the wholesalers and capitalism.

In *Stromboli* on the other hand, it is a foreigner, Ingrid Bergman, who dominates the film's narrative, and with her sophisticated manners and desire for material wealth provides a source of contrast with the humble fishing community and modest way of life. When compared with these two films, *La Pointe Courte* can be said to combine the principal theme from each one, weaving them together in a single film.

Varda departs from the representation of women commonly brought to the screen by male filmmakers at the time. To appreciate the rupture with codified images, or the extent to which the image Varda offers is an alternative we can briefly compare the representation of women in the film with that in Roger Vadim's *Et Dieu créa la femme* which was released one year after *La Pointe Courte*. Vadim's film catapulted Brigitte Bardot to stardom; that it should have done so (that such a representation of women should have captured the imagination) reveals something of the dominant patterns of social gender construction of the 50s. While Vadim's portrayal of women on screen was new, it was welcomed as authentic and in synchronicity with the younger generation, as expressing their (male) desires and amorality. François Truffaut makes this point explicitly in his enraptured article published in *Arts* at the film's release in 1956, where he describes the film as:

[...] un film sensible et intelligent dans lequel on ne décèle pas une vulgarité ; c'est un film typique de notre génération, car il est amoral (refusant la morale courante et n'en

proposant aucune autre) et puritain (conscient de cette amoralité et s'en inquiétant) [...] lucide et d'une grande franchise.<sup>91</sup>

Vadim's camera positions the male spectator as voyeur of Bardot's character Juliette, whose initial attempts to exercise agency are progressively thwarted by the male characters, while she is trapped in the male gaze which wants her to exist as a sexual object of desire, and yet denies her agency of that desire, resulting in frustration, rebellion and then submission to the male order. Her sexuality is encouraged and yet exploited: it must be limited and controlled by the male characters. Irigaray's analysis can be deployed to examine Brigitte Bardot's character, which is firmly posited as '*le bel objet à regarder [...] son corps se trouve ... érotisé, et sollicité à un double mouvement d'exhibition*' – as in the frenzied dance sequence downstairs in the jazz club – '*et de retrait pudique*' (Irigaray 1977: 25) – her sexuality ultimately bridled, subdued and directed by the male characters. For Susan Hayward, the film clearly communicates the message that “women who ‘try’ to agence their desire (subjectivity, sexuality) will be punished for their transgressions” (Hayward 1993: 178).

*La Pointe Courte* begins with a close-up showing the titles. The camera then pans back and a travelling panoramic to the left reveals that the background to the titles is an outdoor carved wooden bench in the village street. This first shot concludes with a forward travelling movement taking the viewer down La Pointe-Courte's central alley, essentially delineating for the viewer the habitable area of the village.

The core of the village thus established, the second shot of the film sees the camera pan to the right to disclose a man standing under the fig tree. He is a key protagonist and what narrative there is in the village series essentially hangs on the fact of his (and other inspectors') being there. The camera then tracks a local who enters the background of this shot, evidently notices the stranger, and enters a house to the right of the screen, which calls for another travelling pan to the right so that an open window is neatly framed and the spectator can 'hear' the conversation within.

Continuing this movement to the right is the third shot of the film, where with a tracking pan to the right the camera again frames an entrance to a house, this time a door, and then begins a

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<sup>91</sup> Truffaut, François. *Et Dieu créa la femme* « *Sincère, amoral, intelligent et puritain* » in *Arts* (5/12/56)

smooth meandering movement through the house and out the backdoor. As with the previous two shots, the aim of this third shot is that of laying the ground of the narrative: not only does this tracking shot bring the spectator into the intimacy of the local inhabitants' home, where the woman is at work in the house accompanied by several children, but we are also shown the ill child who will die during the film.

Demonstrating Varda's talent for concise filmic organisation, the essential threads of the villagers' series are thus neatly laid out for the spectator. The camera work is mobile and dexterous, with the majority of shots at eye-level. These stylistic traits characterize the village sequences. The rest of the sequence sees a general fleshing out of these issues, with fluid camera work interspersed with shots, which are practically still photographs, their composition often heavily symbolic. Of these images, primarily of objects or animals, many accrue meaning when related to other similar images occurring later in the film. There are numerous examples of this in the first village sequence, for instance the image of a white cat curled up sleeping in a cradle of fishing nets.

The above is obviously a peaceful image and reflects the calm of the community at this early stage of the narrative, a calm which is about to be interrupted. As the film progresses, so the tension mounts, and accordingly more uneasy images such as the procession towards captivity (and death) of eels, crabs, and other eerie sea creatures are chosen as a sort of filmic, celluloid transcription or visual summary of the characters' emotional landscapes.

To return to the wide spectrum of framing gazes then, which translates the feminist (or feminine) quest for plurality, Varda introduces a plural diegetic gaze: the spectator can occupy several positions, of both genders and all ages. Initially the gaze is collective in its range, that of the inhabitants of the tiny village of La Pointe-Courte. No particular character's or family's point of view is favoured in the villagers' sequences as the camera wanders between locations and incidents directed only by the course of events: a child falling ill, the arrest of a local, the repairing of nets or a political discussion amongst fishermen.

Before the spectator encounters the couple and the shift in diegetic gaze that this implies, Varda uses women's glances and gestures to introduce 'lui' (Philippe Noiret), to the spectator. As the camera frames him, it is from behind that he is followed, walking through the village to the train station, hoping that his wife may be arriving from Paris. Once united, for some

time the couple too is seen only from behind, often walking into the frame and then out of it again, making full use of the hors-champ. This gives the impression that the characters might be superfluous to the narrative; perhaps neither the couple nor the villagers but the geographical location is the film's central character, as the title might suggest, so the camera offers an alternative authorial viewpoint.

With reference to Varda's re-framing of the concept of woman, then, and specifically the role of the gaze in *La Pointe-Courte*, obviously, the pro-filmic event is from the point of view of a woman: Varda. The diegetic gaze in the film is slightly more complex, because it is here that Varda introduces plural gazes through the shifting point of view between the couple and villagers. Furthermore she introduces gender fluidity as far as the implied spectator is concerned, and a genuine alternative to dominant on-screen representations of women.

To conclude, in her directorial debut Varda offers a concept of woman which modestly challenges on-screen representations of women and female sexuality at the time, while also portraying society's changing mores. The childless Parisian woman ('elle') is primarily concerned with her own emotional well-being, whereas the local women discuss younger members of the community and are occupied with their children and daily chores. 'She' travels alone, unsupervised by the men of her family or her partner, something which is probably not done by the women of *La Pointe Courte*, and that we can suppose is unimaginable for the women of Rossellini and de Sica's Sicilian villagers, without bringing their name to shame. Complementing the energy the women of *La Pointe-Courte* put into the repeated but necessary tasks of washing, cooking, cleaning, or hanging out laundry in the invigorating (predominantly cool, cold and dry) wind of the *mistral*, 'she' tirelessly analyses her relationship, which quite clearly no one else has chosen for her. 'She' would seem to have been freed somewhat from the patriarchal traditions that the local women respect, such as awaiting the permission of the fathers in the community to pursue (sexual, but not extra-marital) relationships. However, even in this rural and in some ways archaic community, the men are not the absolute decision makers, as the women participate in key discussions about the fate of the young lovers and chide the men along the path of tolerating, accepting and most importantly perhaps, for the community, of condoning (while also remembering the passion of) young love.

Not only dialogue but visual clues too indicate that the local women are a fundamental part of the community, performing the essential, though un-paid and often thankless tasks of laundry, cooking, cleaning and raising children. Aside from during the village party, both the local men and women are filmed predominantly at work; in the case of the women, either in their own homes or just outside, while the men are to be found repairing nets in beach houses or out fishing on the water. 'She' on the other hand is free to wander at will, neither her location nor her activities directed by work. The village women, while filmed engaged in typically and traditionally 'feminine' lines of work, are not ideologically portrayed as faultlessly nurturing mothers: in fact, one of them is down-right negligent, and yet the consequences are filmed in a non-dramatic manner. And almost paradoxically, the local women are neither objectified nor passive; they assert their opinions in argument with the men and there is nothing in the film to suggest that their way of living is fundamentally less fulfilling than the Parisian's.

### States of exception in *L'Opéra-Mouffe* (1958)

Varda's challenge to cinematic representations of women and female sexuality would continue, moving onto another much more intimate plane with her camera-stylo short film, *L'Opéra-Mouffe*. While de Beauvoir asserted "*on ne naît pas femme, on le devient*" Varda contests that position and asserts instead that the fact of being in a woman's body is what makes us fundamentally women: « *être femme, c'est être née dans le corps d'une femme* » (Mandy, 2001). *L'Opéra-Mouffe* is a film whose raison d'être is inextricably linked to this fact, and the entire film is shaped by this perspective.

*L'Opéra Mouffe* positions the gaze as feminine, and even more specifically as that of a pregnant woman, asserted in the film's subtitle: '*carnet de notes filmées rue Mouffetard à Paris par une femme enceinte en 1958*' which gives an indication of the caméra-stylo concept behind the film. By choosing the perspective of a pregnant woman (herself) Varda integrated into French cinematic production of the 1950s a perspective that would not generally be perceived as lacking in cinema until some time later. For it would take feminist theorists several decades of theorizing to arrive at the conclusion that what was lacking in dominant cinema was not only 'woman', but a multiplicity of women, that is to say, a wide array of femininities; a void that Varda had already recognised and started to fill here. In *L'Opéra-Mouffe* she goes some way towards opening a cinematic dialogue on representing 'the most taboo image' of woman: giving birth. (King 1992: 180)

The film is divided into nine chapters of unequal length, and most of the sequences were filmed in the market on Rue Mouffetard, which in 1958 was predominantly frequented by the poor and homeless. The process of re-framing the female body begins with re-claiming the female body, partly through de-mystifying women and the body: both masculine and feminine.

The first image of the film is a naked seated middle-aged man viewed from behind; it is an unflattering image where the generous folds of flesh of the buttocks are accentuated in a slightly grotesque allure. This is part of the demystifying of the male physique, and, as we have seen, other techniques in this category would include filming of the (integral) male nude.

The second image of the film is the pregnant nude, viewed from breasts to belly, without a face, indicating that the film is not as subjective as the sub-title suggests. This absence of a specific identity lends objectivity to the short film and invites women in general (and men) to engage with the film's narrative. The pregnant nude in *L'Opéra-Mouffe*, while still rare in cinema, is not specifically challenging to prevailing codes in that it is a pregnant nude devoid of eroticism. De Beauvoir describes pregnancy as a moment at which the woman's body finally belongs to herself, in society's eyes – although not necessarily in her own – precisely because it is inhabited by another:

Son corps est enfin à elle puisqu'il est à l'enfant qui lui appartient. La société lui en reconnaît la possession et le revêt, en outre, d'un caractère sacré. Le sein qui était naguère un objet érotique, elle peut l'exhiber, c'est une source de vie : au point que des tableaux pieux nous montrent la Vierge Mère découvrant sa poitrine en suppliant son Fils d'épargner l'humanité (2008b: 346).

This quiet right of exhibition is demonstrated by Varda in this sequence, where her body and breasts are filmed to accentuate the female body as a source of life, harbouring new life. This is emphasized by the very stillness of the body framed, a stillness which accentuates the only movement which is that of the woman breathing, as the pregnant mass rises and falls with each breath, while the form of the baby can be sensed within. Varda placed this sequence of the pregnant nude at the beginning of the film, still and against a dark background, disconnected and isolated from the other sequences. It is accordingly situated outside of the film's 'narrative', thus using the body to provide the context; the pregnant nude frames the subsequent daydream, and is the physical metamorphosis which lends significance to the following sequences.

Feminist critics are divided in their reception of the film: Flitterman-Lewis has recognized that the 'film offers a powerful contrast to traditionally codified images of maternity' but faults the film due to the fact that 'the film's project is the treatment of pregnancy from a woman's point of view' (1996: 216-217) which, according to her, results in the film's support of a biological definition of women and essentialist ideology. It is difficult to subscribe to this line of argument because, problematically, it seems to indicate that it be preferable for women to abdicate any recognition of our biological differences, in order to avoid being labelled as adhering to or propagating essentialist ideology. Flitterman's criticism in some respects

indicates the impasse that haunts feminist theory. It excludes the possibility of a concept of ‘femininity’ which admits biological differences without condoning the inequality engendered in dominant social constructions of gender. Varda’s position is much more ambivalent; she invites a concept of “women” which is not entrenched in the prevalent restrictive and repressive binary opposition between genders, but instead admits physical and biological characteristics, tendencies and experiences without the intention of propagating the status quo or reaffirming old boundaries.

As regards the social and material conditions of being a mother, the prevalent opinion among feminists in the 50s can be gauged by considering that expressed by de Beauvoir in *Le Deuxième Sexe*. In 1949 she consistently described women’s condition throughout much of history as being akin to that of slaves: ‘*Elle est donc esclave du domaine, et du maître de ce domaine à travers la “protection” d’un mari qu’on lui a imposé [...]*’ (2008a: 163), and likened the living conditions of the wives of farmers with children, in 1940s France, to that of beasts of burden: “[...] *la plupart du temps le travail rural réduit la femme à la condition de bête de somme.*” (2008a: 231) Varda to some extent engages with this concept of motherhood, but only to a limited degree: the emphasis on toil and burden is apparent in the penultimate chapter of *L’Opéra-Mouffe* in the sequence where the pregnant woman is quite literally ‘burdened’ as she walks wearily uphill (cf. frame 12). In addition to her in utero extra load, she is carrying several kilos of potatoes in one hand and a basket that is (surprisingly) filled with cement blocks in the other. The composition of the sequence is interesting to note, for Varda also alludes to the political oppression of other social groups in this sequence, via a slogan painted on the wall that the woman is walking past. This subjective representation of pregnancy combines the visual statement of the woman oppressed or worn out by her physical condition, with the political slogan for “*Paix en Algérie*” which, it can be seen, is actually an OAS slogan “*Algérie Française*” which has been transformed by a subsequent painter into a – moderate – claim for “Peace in Algeria” (again, cf. frame 12).

This particular parallel between slavery and motherhood had been drawn by de Beauvoir in 1949 and resurfaced again virulently amongst members of the *Mouvement de Libération des Femmes* (the MLF, used here in its broadest sense) in the heady days of coming into being post May 68, as indicated by the explicit titles of publications such as *Maternité esclave* (1975) (cited in Duchén 1994: 55). The choice of vocabulary and sense of oppression in the decade following May 68 was largely a consequence of the politically imposed absence of

choice concerning parenthood; with the pill and other forms of contraception technically and materially in existence but largely inaccessible in France until 1972 (cf. below for more detail), maternity in these decades was in many cases forced upon women: pregnancy was in many cases potentially both the price to pay for physical love and/or the consequence of marital relations.

With Gisèle Halimi backing him, Mitterrand had included the issue of legalizing contraception in his 1965 Presidential campaign. Although the *Loi Neuwirth* legalised contraception (subject to conditions) in December 1967, it was not reimbursed by the *Sécurité sociale* and therefore in practical terms was least accessible to women of the very economic class that could least afford a relatively safe abortion abroad or to have more children.<sup>92</sup> It was not until 1974 that the *Sécurité sociale* began to reimburse contraception, finally making it widely accessible. Abortion was illegal until the *Loi Veil* was passed in 1975, which meant that up until that time, for working class women in particular it was either inaccessible or dangerous, potentially resulting in sterility, infection, or even death. So once again (as with contraception) the ability of women to control their own fertility highlighted the inequality between classes: even while contraception and abortion were illegal the bourgeoisie had access to contraception – through the economic ability to travel to countries where family planning was legal – and could afford to travel to foreign clinics for safe abortions. This class inequity is what Halimi chose to focus on in the landmark Bobigny case.<sup>93</sup>

The representation of the experience of pregnancy is not as peaceful or harmonious as the opening image suggests. The violence and sheer physical rudeness of gestation and birth is represented through association with the reproductive processes of other life-forms, vegetable and animal: the slicing open of a voluptuous pumpkin, which is then gutted of its seeds, and later the smashing of a light-bulb out of which a chick hatches (cf. frames 17-20). In fact, as well as indicating the influence of Gaston Bachelard and in particular his theory of “*l’imagination des matières*” (Flitterman-Lewis 1996: 221) which linked traits of human character with concrete elements in the material world, these images provide an example of vivid cinematic support for Simone de Beauvoir’s assertion regarding a woman’s experience of pregnancy:

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<sup>92</sup> « Les décrets d’application de la loi Neuwirth (assez restrictive par ailleurs) de décembre 1967 sur la contraception ne sont promulgués que tardivement, la rendant ainsi non opératoire de 1968 à 1972. » (Guban, Jacques et al. 2004 : 211)

<sup>93</sup> Cf. *Avortement: une loi en procès, l’affaire de Bobigny* Paris : Gallimard, 1973 for more detail.

Mais la grossesse est surtout un drame qui se joue chez la femme entre soi et soi ; elle la ressent à la fois comme un enrichissement et comme une mutilation ; le fœtus est une partie de son corps, et c'est un parasite qui l'exploite [...] (2008b : 345)

*L'Opéra-Mouffe* offers the spectator a work which communicates the contradictory emotions experienced in pregnancy: simultaneously trapped, hopeful, tired, exploited, ecstatic, weary, sensual, repulsed and so on. This vision of pregnancy (which can also be applied to aspects of motherhood) which differs so markedly from traditional representations of these states, would seem to support Catherine Breillat's conclusion – whether accurate or not – that women accept and live with ambiguity and contradiction more easily than men:

Le déni existe beaucoup plus chez les hommes que chez les femmes. Les femmes sont capables d'ambiguïté. Accepter une chose et son contraire. Le cinéma, par excellence, c'est la dualité et la fiction (in Clouzot 2004 : 163).

Varda explores the seemingly contradictory heightened awareness of one's own mortality that birth and gestation inspire, as well as the distinctive heightened sensibility and empathy for others that is triggered by the state of pregnancy and facing the creation of an unknown new life within oneself. As a consequence, although it may at first seem to be an apparent digression from the short's self-proclaimed subject matter, much of the film focuses not on the woman's pregnancy itself but on the elderly inhabitants of the neighbourhood: '*ils étaient des nouveaux nés*'. In so doing she gives centre stage to people whom filmmakers usually consign to the background or leave off stage entirely (pregnant women, the elderly, the ugly, the disfigured, and children). This echoes the cross-Atlantic trajectory of Diane Arbus (1923-1971) and can be interpreted as an example of Varda's ability to widen the range of possible cinematic gazes.

In this chapter (*Ils étaient des nouveaux nés*) we see Varda's framing of the disfigured and the disabled, as the music limps in synchronicity to the uneven gait we watch on-screen. The images alone provoke an emotional reaction that is not necessarily mirrored by the music: shame, humility, relief, pathos, disgust even. We are challenged to confront, and at length, images of people that we normally ignore or turn away from in the street, and the images echo in primarily unfathomable or rarely chartered emotional depths that mainstream cinema and

much of the New Wave cinema ignores. By filming people, faces, bodies, movements, activities that we normally choose to look away from or exclude from narratives, Varda admits a vast multiplicity of beings into the film's diegesis, and potential future narrative structures. Challenging our socially constructed intolerance: « *Infirme, laide, vieille, la femme fait horreur* » (Beauvoir 2008a: 269). Varda accepts the diversity of humanity as it is, and invites the spectator to share this visual embrace of multiplicity. She challenges the spectator to reappraise our deepest held preconceptions of acceptable visual representations of femininity. This technique was praised by Bonner who noted Varda's ability to: '*in an adept feminist move, revalue the physical signs of age that society chooses to malign.*' (Bonner cited in DeRoo 2008: 218)

To focus briefly on the sexual encounters of mutual *jouissance*, which punctuate the film, these sequences have none of the documentary quality of the street footage of the elderly inhabitants of rue Mouffetard. Instead they are stylised and aesthetically contrived; the spectator encounters the couple, obviously actors, often alone and naked, in unexpected and unusual locations. While the man's face and experience of physical love is overtly joyous, the woman's experience seems to be a more solitary and self-reflective one, leading to one of the film's memorable images, that of the woman filmed from behind lying naked on a wrought iron bed which surprisingly is in an abandoned open courtyard or edge of a field (cf. frame 13). She holds a mirror in her hand – self-reflection again – and moves her thighs against each other ever so slightly to accentuate the curve of her spine. The man is almost exclusively filmed naked and his only role is that of lover; sex for him is associated with freedom, represented by the choice of backdrop for his delighted face: the sky, his arms outstretched, Eros filmed by Varda.

He is otherwise absent from the film, and although the woman's pleasure in these scenes is evident, his jubilation when making love is presented in juxtaposition with the consequences for the woman, consequences whose impact is further explored in the later chapters as her pregnancy progresses: anxiety, fatigue, repulsion and craving. As detailed above, when this was filmed (in 1958) not only was abortion illegal, but contraception and informing women about the existence of contraception and methods of avoiding pregnancy were illegal. Single parenthood and having a child out of wedlock were stigmatised in a widely conservative Catholic country. It might be of further interest to note here that Varda – who finished filming this short just weeks before giving birth – had been left by her lover when she announced she

was pregnant; this may explain the solitary experience of pregnancy that the film communicates, as well as the absence of the man in any role except that of lover.

Mary Jacobus noted by the late seventies that feminist criticism was ‘more likely to stress pleasure than suffering – the freeing of repressed female desire; *jouissance*’ and ‘*la mère qui jouit*’ (no longer barred from sexual pleasure) as against the burden of womanhood’ ([1979], 1986: 51). It may be interesting to note that in this 1958 caméra-stylo short, in an unusual shot Varda frames the female lover holding her lover’s foot (cf. frame 16). While evocative of Buñuel’s foot fetishism, this caress has none of the uneasy undertones of uncomfortably intimate ties between religion and the individual that is communicated through the Priest’s washing and embracing of the choir boys’ feet in Buñuel’s *Él* (1953). Familiarity with Varda’s fondness for wordplay and both visual and linguistic puns inevitably leads the viewer to think of the French expression ‘*prendre son pied*’, which can be translated as to have an orgasm, or literally, to get your share (in this case, of pleasure) and it seems clear that while mainstream feminism at the time may have been emphasising women’s suffering, Varda was pre-empting their later shift towards celebrating pleasure.<sup>94</sup>

This brings us to the end of the film: the woman satisfying her physical cravings by eating rose petals. In this last sequence the woman languorously strolls the streets, pausing to pluck a flower from a florist’s bucket, and to devour it gladly, in a clear sign of freedom from ‘repressed female desire’.

We can conclude that Varda’s experience and representation of motherhood is ambiguous. Elements in the film support de Beauvoir’s analysis while others are clearly contradictory to it. It can be construed that Varda acknowledges the physical, material and practical ‘chains’ associated with pregnancy in the 1950s, due in part to the social and political status of women and the absence of contraception (and therefore the resultant imposition of pregnancy) and the physical sensation of imprisonment within one’s own body as the foetus develops and grows inside. Therefore, without necessarily propagating essentialist ideology, her representation of motherhood is anchored in the raw physical experience.

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<sup>94</sup> In a quirky coincidence relevant to the last two chapters and (post)-colonialism, the etymology of the expression ‘*prendre son pied*’ can be traced back to the dawn of the age of empire, when sailors who had returned home on ships laden with booty acquired (stolen or otherwise) from the colonies and/or distant lands would pile the riches high on the harbour decks adjacent to where the ship was moored and each would literally ‘prendre son pied’ (take one’s share, which at the time would have been measured out in feet).

However, Varda also somewhat atypically (for the era) communicates freedom from repressed female desire, as discussed above, and explores the intimate and emotional landscape, as is communicated in the courtyard and bedroom sequences of the couple (either together or alone) and the masked children. A further example can be found in the dream sequence of the woman running through the desolate courtyards and half-crumbled buildings of Parisian neighbourhoods, post-Second World War yet pre-reconstruction, a sequence which bridges the gap between the personal and social themes.

To conclude, typically Vardian traits of the juxtaposition of styles and themes, and the pseudo-documentary (or ‘*documenteur*’) approach are apparent in this short film. As in so many of her other films, such as *Documenteur* (1981), *Les Glaneurs et La Glaneuse* (2000) and *Les Plages d’Agnès* (2008) and Varda makes free use of her own autobiography while referring to the broader social context mainly represented by the street and market sequences, so that what is ostensibly an intimate journal betrays a social and anthropological curiosity which enriches the film’s diegesis.

### **Appropriating the gaze in *Cléo de 5 à 7***

*Cléo de 5 à 7* was Varda’s second feature length film, and was amongst the handful of films produced by Georges de Beauregard in 1961, along with *Le Petit Soldat* (Godard) and *Lola* (Demy). De Beauregard is of course well known for having produced *A Bout de Souffle* and many of Godard’s other successful films, and along with Braunberger and Anatole Dauman is one of the three producers enduringly associated with the French New Wave. In *Les Plages d’Agnès* (2008) Varda recalls that the only constraints she had to adhere to in making the film were that it be inexpensively filmed in black and white and return a profit.

*Cléo de 5 à 7* was made at a time when France was engaged ‘in military operations on such a massive scale that a conscription period of three years was enforced’. MacCabe states that ‘every young man faced three years of military service which brought not only the danger of death, but also the horror of torture.’ (2003: 83 and 132) In fact, not only was conscription enforced, but the highly controversial re-conscription was put into place, whereby men who had already served their time as ‘*appelés*’ (often in Indo-China) were returned home only to

be sent on to Algeria as *'rappelés'*. Although Varda states explicitly (Varda 1994: 48) that the film's genesis lies in her perception of Paris at the time and the widespread fear of cancer, an unacknowledged inspiration for the film must undoubtedly have been the escalating war and violence in Algeria, which spread to the mainland in the form of the above mentioned draft as well as OAS bombings and fratricide between opposing factions of the revolutionary and counter-revolutionary armies, the shockwaves of which were widely felt, even if unspoken.

Filmed in the summer of 1961, the 90-minute film traces two hours in 'real time' in the life of Cléo, as she confronts the existential crisis triggered by awaiting the results of a medical analysis for cancer. The spectator follows Cléo not only in 'real time' but also on a 'real journey' through Paris, while the film also features the originality of having been filmed in chronological order. *Cléo* is divided into thirteen chapters, the seventh chapter containing the pivotal moment of her breakdown, with six chapters on either side providing neat symmetry permitting equal time to be devoted to the unravelling of the themes and depiction of Cléo's narcissism, anxiety and transformation. The chapters also indicate the time and character most relevant to each one. The film's rhythm is punctuated by many tracking shots and one of the hallmarks of the cinema of *l'image-temps* – four grand Deleuzian New Wave 'ballades'<sup>95</sup> across Paris – the first three by taxi and car and the fourth by bus. This literal journey (temporal and physical) is paralleled by the existential crisis and subsequent transformation that Cléo experiences that afternoon, whilst awaiting the results of her medical exam.

Unlike the rest of the film, the tarot cards in the opening sequence were filmed in colour, in order to set the fortune-telling sequence apart as a 'fiction within a fiction'. Although the evolution of Cléo's character will introduce a refreshing alternative representation of 'woman' into 1960s French cinema, Varda begins by offering the spectator an age-old archetype in the form of the fortune-teller (who was an actual *tireuse de cartes* and wrote her own lines). If we consider the archetype of the superstitious medium that Varda offers in *Cléo (la tireuse de cartes)*, it is interesting to note that de Beauvoir has written of the wider implication of assigning this role to women:

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<sup>95</sup> « La nouvelle vague [...] reprend la voie précédant : du relâchement des liens sensori-moteurs (la promenade ou l'errance, la ballade, les événements non-concernants, etc.) à la montée des situations optiques et sonores. [...] Godard commence par d'extraordinaires ballades, d'*A bout de souffle* à *Pierrot le fou* [...] » (Deleuze 2006b: 18)

[...] elle permet à la société qui s'est séparé du cosmos et des dieux de demeurer en communication avec eux. [...] dans la Grèce antique, elle entend les voix souterraines ; elle capte le langage du vent et des arbres : elle est Pythie, Sibylle, prophétesse ; les morts et les dieux parlent par sa bouche. Elle a conservé aujourd'hui ces pouvoirs de divination : elle est médium, chiromancienne, tireuse de cartes, voyante, inspirée [...] (2008a: 257).

With very different, and potentially much more positive and liberating implications for feminine identity and gender construction, Kristeva too conceptualizes a 'subterranean' feminine domain, the semiotic *chora*.<sup>96</sup> According to Kristeva, although not exclusively feminine, the semiotic *chora* differs from the symbolic order in several respects, one of which is that it is a domain in which femininity is not repressed. Because it is anterior to the symbolic and social orders or 'contracts', and thus anterior to gender construction, this would mean that as young infants both sexes experience the *chora* as equals. The *chora*'s role is to govern non-linguistic communication such as gestures and laughter, and to articulate a continuum of energy drives within the body (cf. Kristeva 1985: 24-25). It is also bound up with the mother's body, and it is here that Kristeva would seem to verge on corroborating the linguistic primacy of the mother postulated by Gilbert and Gubar. Interestingly though, Kristeva does not fully develop her hypothesis in that direction. I am tempted to ask whether we must necessarily conceive of the *chora* and the symbolic order as separate, as opposed to merging together, or on a sliding scale? Why wouldn't they be inter-communicable, parallel, or even parts of the same internal infrastructures governing language acquisition and expression? And finally, if the semiotic *chora* originates as a feminine domain that pre-exists – and yet also represents a necessary step towards – entering the symbolic order, then there would be no reason to conclude that women are destined to exclusion from the symbolic order.

Returning to *Cléo*, that women are invested with innate intuitive skills and in turn invest objects with otherworldly mystical meaning is not a liberating experience for the women involved, but constructs them as inherently irrational creatures and constantly distracts their attention towards the trivial. This will be further emphasised through the character of Angèle,

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<sup>96</sup> According to Lechte, the *chora* develops prior to the symbolic, and as the person engages with and enters into the symbolic order the semiotic *chora* becomes more sophisticated, eventually governing musical creation, the writing of poetry, and other non-verbal forms of communication, including laughter (1990: 129).

whose deeply superstitious attitude creates boundaries and limitations that restrict the simplest of actions that Cléo wishes to pursue, such as the truly inane prohibition that she mustn't wear anything new on a Tuesday.

The fortune-teller's 'confirmation' that Cléo will die serves as the catalyst behind Cléo's ensuing self-realization. Profoundly shaken by the fortune-teller's prediction, Cléo seeks comfort in her reflection in the entry hall mirrors as she leaves the fortune-teller's apartment. Like Estelle in Sartre's *Huis clos* (1944) and Emma in Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1856) it is the confirmation of her own existence in her reflection that she seeks. And indeed she appears to find it; her reflection is reflected infinitely in the mirrors (cf. frame 21).

Reassured by her beauty, she looks at herself and thinks: "*être laide, c'est ça la mort*". As this indicates, throughout the first part of the film Cléo is a woman who lives in the eyes of others, focused narcissistically on (her own) superficial beauty and material luxury. Her dependence on material wealth echoes de Beauvoir's line of argument as regards the need to alter the condition of women, as their situation in the 1940s and 1950s (and later) denied women real fulfilment through creative employment, economic and sexual independence, and instead forced them to find fulfilment elsewhere, for instance in possessions. Even the ostensibly more independent '*courtisane*' or un-married woman who chooses her sexual partner and lives to live either with or separately from him, is dependant on masculine support:

*[...] même la star, privée d'appui masculin, voit pâlir son prestige: quittée par Orson Welles, c'est avec un air souffreteux d'orpheline que Rita Hayworth a erré à travers l'Europe avant d'avoir rencontré Ali Kahn. La plus belle n'est jamais sûre du lendemain, car ses armes sont magiques et la magie est capricieuse ; elle est rivée à son protecteur – mari ou amant – presque aussi étroitement qu'une épouse « honnête » à son époux. Elle lui doit non seulement le service du lit mais il lui fait subir sa présence, sa conversation, ses amis et surtout les exigences de sa vanité. (...) Les dons dont elle est accablée sont des chaînes. Et ces toilettes, ces bijoux qu'elle porte, sont-ils vraiment à elle ? L'homme parfois en réclame la restitution après la rupture, comme fit naguère avec élégance Sacha Guitry. (...) On sait dans quel esclavage tombent les vedettes de Hollywood. Leur corps n'est plus à elles ; le producteur décide de la couleur de leurs cheveux, de leur poids, leur ligne, leur type ;*

*pour modifier la courbe d'une joue on leur arrachera des dents.*' (de Beauvoir 2006b : 444-445)

At this point in the film, as she leaves the fortune-teller's and walks down rue Rivoli, Cléo is clearly unseeing but seen. As in classic narrative cinema, Cléo is passively objectified through the gaze, that of the spectator and the male characters. But as her name suggests, the character of Cléo evokes Cléopâtre, raising the intellectual profile of this new cinema by clearly referencing high culture, as Godard had referenced high art in *A Bout de souffle*, where Jean Seberg's profile 'is juxtaposed with a Renoir painting'.<sup>97</sup> Cléo's name also refers the spectator to representations of another archetypal woman, the idolized woman: « *À la fois prêtresse et idole, la narcissiste plane nimbée de gloire au cœur de l'éternité [...]* ». <sup>98</sup> Again, the experience of viewing *Cléo* can be enriched by applying de Beauvoir's revelations regarding the danger in the illusory power or agency that women in Cléo's situation may assume they have: '*Chaque femme noyée dans son reflet règne sur l'espace et le temps, seule, souveraine, elle a tous les droits sur les hommes, sur la fortune, la gloire, la volupté.*' <sup>99</sup>

Yet the glory is illusory, her 'self' is lost as she subordinates her personal freedom in the quest to merge with her chosen external standard (in this case, fame and glory). For Cléo's glory is wholly dependant on her being worshipped as 'un bel objet', thus sacrificing her freedom and agency, and so remaining objectified and condemned to passivity. Again we could refer to later feminist theoreticians who advocate for agency (cf. Irigaray 1977: 202) and stress that the systems of male representation which impose constructed values and roles on women prevent women from knowing themselves:

La valeur de la femme lui viendrait de son rôle maternel, et, par ailleurs, de sa « féminité ». Mais, en fait, cette « féminité » est un rôle, une image, une valeur, imposés aux femmes par les systèmes de représentation des hommes. Dans cette masquerade de la féminité, la femme se perd.<sup>100</sup>

<sup>97</sup> Hayward, Susan. (2000) p. 116

<sup>98</sup> De Beauvoir, Simone. (1949/2008b) p. 523

<sup>99</sup> De Beauvoir, Simone. (1949/2008b) p. 522

<sup>100</sup> Irigaray, Luce. (1977) p. 80

Furthermore, Cléo's stage name confirms her status as idolized being: Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt, while Antoine, the soldier on leave from the Algerian War for Independence whom Cléo meets in the Parc Montsouris, evokes Marc Antony, Roman General and Cleopatra's doomed lover. Cléo's stage name is emblematic of her state of being and will be juxtaposed to the character's real name, Florence, revealed in discussion with Antoine. Florence, with its connotations of flora, flowering and spring,<sup>101</sup> symbolizes Cléo's potential blossoming, her new beginning, while both names are associated with high culture – ancient Egypt and the capital of the Italian Renaissance. This insistence on linking the female lead with high culture also stresses the evolving social and cultural representations of women in art and through history and thus also the ever evolving construction of gender. The sequence in the artists' atelier towards the end of Chapter VIII and beginning of Chapter IX further reinforces this as we will see in the brief analysis immediately below.

The sequence in the sculptors' atelier indicates Varda clearly inviting the spectator to consider the concept of gender as social construction. Cléo's friend Dorothée poses nude as the model for a group of sculptors (predominantly men but also women) who sculpt, shape and construct representations of the female body/the image of a woman (cf. Frame 22). Cléo enters the artists' studio after her distressing walk/anxiety attack and it is here that Cléo and the spectator are offered the symbolic representation that women and the concept of women are social and cultural constructions. For the narrative the implications are that Cléo can reconstruct herself, and more generally that the ideological representations of women can be deconstructed, demolished, and recreated, by women and men. As Dorothée says to Cléo when they leave the studio together : « *Quand ils me regardent, tu sais, ils cherchent autre chose que moi. Une forme, une idée...* » or in other words, « *... si elle n'existait pas, les hommes l'auraient inventée. Ils l'ont inventée*<sup>102</sup>. *Mais elle existe aussi sans leur invention* ».<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Floréal was the eighth month in the French revolutionary calendar, the month of flowers (approximately 20 April – 20<sup>th</sup> May) and Varda had hoped to film in the Spring, but for various reasons the filming was postponed until the summer (cf. *Varda par Agnès* p. 53).

<sup>102</sup> Simone de Beauvoir's note : « L'homme a créé la femme, avec quoi donc ? Avec une côte de son dieu, de son idéal. » (Nietzsche, *Le Crépuscule des idoles*).

<sup>103</sup> De Beauvoir, Simone. (2008a) p. 305

### The role of mirrors in *Cléo de 5 à 7*

As though in confirmation of de Beauvoir's analysis, Cléo loves to be adored and admired, and could be construed as trapped in a Lacanian moment, too close to the image of herself, trapped in an illusion:

La jeune fille qui a vu au fond du miroir la beauté, le désir, l'amour, le bonheur, revêtus de ses propres traits – animés, croit-elle, par sa conscience – essaiera [...] d'épuiser les promesses de cette éblouissante révélation. « C'est toi que j'aime » [elle] confie [...] à son propre reflet (de Beauvoir 2008b : 523).

Flitterman-Lewis has written of the 'contrasting functions of mirrors in the first and second halves of the film' (1996: 272). According to Flitterman-Lewis, while in the first half mirrors are used to confirm Cléo's 'identity as image', in the second half she is no longer able to find comfort in her reflection, as she has begun to 'see' the flaws in her clichéd existence. In the pivotal seventh chapter, Cléo looks at herself in the mirror of a Chinese restaurant and her interior dialogue verbalizes her self-criticism. In the next six chapters Cléo's face is reflected in only two mirrors, both of which are broken. For Flitterman-Lewis the last mirror in the film (1996: 273) is the mirror that Dorothee accidentally drops from her purse, causing it to smash on the street. The camera captures a fragmented reflection of part of Cléo's face in the shard of mirror, as Cléo says '*c'est horrible*', adding that the broken mirror signifies that someone will die. However, this is not the last mirror in the film, as this sequence is followed immediately with another sequence in which a mirror is a focal point; Dorothee and Cléo approach the Dôme to find a crowd gathered around a mirrored window, which has also been fragmented, by a bullet. The camera frames the crowd in mid-shot reflected in this mirror; for the first time in the film in a mirrored reflection Cléo is not alone but surrounded by other people: a miscellaneous group of passers-by commenting on the murder. She is however, unlike them, reflected in the fragmented portion of the mirror, which again serves the purpose of underlining the dissolution of Cléo as purely an image, the dissolution of society's projected ideal of a fetishized woman. The shattering of the mirrors in this chapter indicates that the importance of Cléo's own image is being eroded as she becomes increasingly aware of the vacuity of her idolized status. The lack of mirrors in the film henceforth can be interpreted as indicative of Cléo's liberation from the state of femme-cliché.

Lacan's theories on the mirror stage can be deployed here. He suggests that the mirror stage be interpreted thus: *'Il y suffit de comprendre le stade du miroir comme une identification au sens plein du terme : à savoir la transformation produite chez le sujet, quand il assume une image'* (Lacan 1966: 94). He elaborates by describing the *'stade du miroir'* as a drama which: *'pour le sujet, pris au leurre de l'identification spatiale, machine les fantasmes qui se succèdent d'une image morcelée du corps à une forme que nous appellerons orthopédique de sa totalité, - et à l'armure enfin assumée d'une identité aliénante [...]'* (Lacan 1966: 97).

It is useful to focus not on the mirror stage's relevance to infants, as first conceived of by Lacan, but rather on his later suggestion that the mirror stage typifies the adult subject's libidinal relationship with the body-image: *'La fonction du stade du miroir s'avère pour nous dès lors comme un cas particulier de la fonction de l'imago, qui est d'établir une relation de l'organisme à sa réalité – ou, comme on dit, de l'Innenwelt à l'Umwelt'* (Lacan 1966: 96).<sup>1</sup> I understand this to mean that the mirror stage is an ongoing cyclical process, the manifestation of a continuing loop of communication between the *Innenwelt* and *Umwelt* whereby the subject assumes different identities in a lifelong process of self-realization.

Always *'étrangers à nous mêmes'* (Kristeva: 1988) to varying degrees, the image(s) we adopt are predicated on false identification, so that cracks start to appear in the identity we have assumed, as we sense that the adopted image is insufficient. In Lacanian psychoanalytical theory, *'the acquisition of language during the mirror stage [...] marks the intervention of the symbolic (Name-of-the-Father) into the child's universe, and his/her separation from the idyllic state of continuity and harmony, which, psychically, is the mother. A resultant experience of loss is constitutive of language and desire.'* (Lechte 1990: 158)

If one wanted to indulge this theory further and concede that the mirror stage is not only intricately bound up with language acquisition, as the recognition of separateness from one's mother (loss) motivates the infant to make progress linguistically, but that the mirror stage is also a constant libidinal drive in the adult's body-image dynamic, then one could hypothesize that Cléo here experiences this relatively sudden realization (in the space of two hours) that the comfort she has sought in the beauty of her image is unstable and illusory. In such a reading it could be argued that through the course of the film she is separated from the idyllic state of (self)-adoration, the still waters in which she perceived her reflection are rippled or muddied, as it were, and she is confronted with the loss of the illusion.

Several elements in the film support this interpretation (as detailed elsewhere, including her rising anxiety confronted with the disapproving or belittling gaze of her entourage), and the shattering of the mirrors can then be interpreted as communicating Cléo's 'acquisition' as it were, of language and desire. Which is to say, her newfound ability to *communicate* with others and her desire to 'see' instead of being content with 'being seen'.

With reference to Cléo's emotional/existential trajectory, '*le stade du miroir est un drame dont la poussée interne se précipite de l'insuffisance à l'anticipation*' (Lacan 1966: 97); or in other words, in *Cléo de 5 à 7* we are witness to Cléo's trajectory as her awareness of the inadequacy of the image she had assumed drives her to abandon the armour provided by this false image. This false image literally shatters around her (her image refracted in the broken mirrors) and the film closes on Cléo (and Antoine) framed walking forwards, facing the future filled with anticipation, seeking a truer closer approximation of her 'self.'

### Cléopatra's descent from the throne

*Cléo de 5 à 7* provides the raw material for a study of the dismantling of the Hollywood cinematic codes of montage and viewpoint, as Varda assigned alternative roles to mechanisms such as the typically voyeuristic camera. While early in the film the camera assumes the standard role of voyeur as Cléo basks in her own image and the spectator in her beauty, this does not remain constant. The camera's point of view merges with Cléo's in pivotal scenes such as the second café scene (Chapter VIII) and in the sequences in the street which follow. Cléo leaves the café and forward and backward tracking shots film her from behind and in front as she walks down the street. The tracking shots are interspersed with pans to the left or right as the camera follows her gaze to look at people she passes in the street, who look back at her. She grows increasingly uncomfortable under this unsympathetic scrutiny until several shots in mid close-up of the faces of people who are not in the street but whom she has seen previously, and of objects that are redolent with symbolism (her wig, her clocks, her dressing table and mirror) are intercut with the footage of Cléo walking. Bob, Angèle and her lover are positioned sitting on her bed or armchair looking directly at the camera with almost critical or accusatory expressions. She becomes increasingly anguished and eventually breaks into a run and seeks shelter by dropping in on her friend Dorothée who is modelling in an artists' studio.

These scenes, where Cléo's and the camera's perspectives overlap, share common ground; when Cléo is intensely shaken, in the midst of what may be an existential crisis or at least emotional shock and acute anxiety, the perspectives slip and the montage tends towards the unreal, hinged on subjective representation, usually communicated through a sudden non-chronological fluidity of time. As we will see below these scenes are not the first moments in the film where this occurs.

Much earlier in the film at the end of the introductory tarot sequence, Cléo bursts into tears before leaving the fortune-teller and is still visibly shaken as Chapter One commences and she crosses the waiting room. This sequence integrates a similar overlapping between objective and subjective point of view and time as Cléo descends the staircase, and a merging between Cléo's and the camera's perspectives occurs. The circular winding descent down the staircase is mirrored later by the circular isolating movement of the camera around Cléo in her apartment singing the song that triggers her existential crisis (*Un cri d'amour*); furthermore, geographically speaking Cléo's journey through Paris is itself circular. One could stretch the analogy so far as to say that Cléo's awakening as she becomes less pre-occupied with her self and more inclined to observe and engage with the world around her can be construed to be another centrifugal trajectory (turning outwards) in the film; the shifting of her focus from the *Innenwelt* to the *Umwelt* is thus depicted.

It could be construed that this centrifugal structure is itself an intertextual reference to an earlier New Wave cinematic 'ballade extraordinaire' (cf. below), as the above circular structure in *Cléo* is not without reminding the spectator of the reoccurring centrifugal structure of Truffaut's *Les quatre cents coups*. The opening sequence, as Keith Reader has pointed out, begins with 'the camera track[ing] around the Eiffel tower, in a series of circling movements that evoke the fairground sequence in which Antoine and his friend René will be spun round and round in the 'Rotor' machine (1993: 412). Thus the spectator is taken on a journey that will 'spin away from the touristic Paris which the Eiffel Tower embodies towards less well-heeled areas' revealing that Antoine, not Paris is the film's central character. Reader reminds critics that 'representations [of Paris in the cinema] can be most usefully considered intertextually [...] rather than referentially' (1993: 412). Accordingly some, but by no means all, of the other intertextual references in the film will be analysed below.

To return to the overlapping of subjective and objective perspectives, this is communicated through disjointed cuts and non-chronological time, and in Chapter One the same moment is relived several times as we see an identical shot of Cléo's face framed in semi close-up descending the stairs (and screen) three times in rapid succession. Similarly, this sequence entails a rapid oscillation between objective and subjective point of view: Cléo, framed by a fixed camera walking down the stairs is inter-cut with hand-held point of view shots that tremble in step with her gait as she descends the staircase. This is probably the film in which Varda has come closest to transposing a Resnais-like sense of '*l'imaginaire*' and the short flashback sequence in Chapter VIII pre-dates the striking montage of scenes in *Muriel* (1963) in which images of the city as imprinted on a character's imagination are inter-cut with images of the city as seen by the characters walking through the city at night. As we will see later in this chapter, this sequence can be construed as indicative of the crucial journey that Cléo takes as she 'descends' from the throne and gradually discards her idolized status, in order to embrace a more socially conscious awareness of herself and others.

### Several grand Deleuzian 'ballades'

Balzac wrote that « *La femme [...] est une esclave qu'il faut savoir mettre sur un trône.* » (in Beauvoir, 1949/2008a : 193). It is crucial from the feminist perspective that Cléo step down from the throne, and that she evolve from object seen to subject seeing. Varda depicts this process in numerous ways, including ones that we will look at here briefly: several grand Deleuzian *ballades* across Paris.<sup>104</sup>

Four journeys by automobile are interspersed with Cleo walking (accompanied or alone). In fact the characters are rarely static in this film; through the majority of the film the characters are moving, or being moved, naturally favouring the use of long tracking shots. The first of these journeys occurs in Chapter III when Cléo and Angèle take a taxi from the rue de Rivoli

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<sup>104</sup> Deleuze, writing of the continuity between Italian neo-realism and the New Wave, wrote that, 'La nouvelle vague [...] reprend la voie précédant : du relâchement des liens sensori-moteurs (la promenade ou l'errance, la ballade, les événements non-concernants, etc.) à la montée des situations optiques et sonores. [...] Godard commence par d'extraordinaires ballades, d'*A bout de souffle* à *Pierrot le fou* [...]' (Deleuze, 1985/2006b: 18) As regards Paris: Keith Reader urges critics to 'go beyond discrete evaluation of this or that film as *témoignage* to a more conceptually substantial approach:' "How Paris is represented in the cinema, in other words, is to some degree at least independent of whether what we see is 'genuine Parisian footage' or not, which reinforces the view that its representations can be most usefully considered intertextually, in their relations to one another, rather than referentially, in relation to the 'real' city of Paris.

to Cléo's apartment on rue Vavin. At one point the taxi drives slowly, briefly stopping in front of windows in which African masks are exhibited. Cléo and the taxi driver (a young woman) exchange the following dialogue: Cléo : "Et la nuit, vous n'avez pas peur la nuit?" Driver : "Mais non, peur de quoi?" The African masks and sculptures are framed by the taxi's open window with Cléo's face in profile in the foreground, followed by close-ups of the masks. This is an intertextual reference to Chris Marker and Alain Resnais's 1953 short film *Les Statues meurent aussi*, and serves gently to ridicule both Cléo for her navel-gazing insecurities and the censorship board which had refused the film a distribution visa, afraid of the impact that Resnais and Marker's film – which denounced colonialism – might have on colonial France. Cléo is afraid of the uncontrollable invisible threat that her suspected cancer poses, but the analogy may easily be drawn between Cléo, white colons and general French public afraid of 'l'homme du sud', consistently a similarly invisible, unknowable threat in the popular Western imagination.

Said has written that 'Psychologically, Orientalism is a form of paranoia, knowledge of another kind, say, from ordinary historical knowledge.' (2003: 72) Despite the fact that no culture has engaged in expansionism like the European nations and their 'progeny' (the USA), Michelet's warning that 'the Orient advances, invincible, fatal to the gods of light by the charm of its dreams, by the magic of *chiaroscuro*,' resonates with swathes of Westerners as an accurate and ominous appraisal, finding its echo even now in widespread xenophobia against Muslims, in providing supposed 'justification' for occupying foreign lands (Michelet in Said 1978/2003: 73). In fact, the Algerian 'problem' is often referred to, in supposedly neutral literature, as a cancer that threatened France until the country was, '*enfin débarrassé du cancer algérien*' (Bezbakh 1997: 391) (sic).<sup>105</sup> The taxi journeys also serve as a mechanism for introducing the ongoing Algerian War via the radio news broadcasts.

Cléo's friend Dorothee gives Cléo a lift to visit Raoul who shows Cléo and Dorothee *Les Fiancés du Pont Mac Donald* from the projection room. Dorothee is unpretentious and speaks frankly to Cléo, who seems to benefit from the meeting. The women leave Raoul and in the taxi that will take Cléo to the Parc Montsouris she discards more outward signs of fixation on

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<sup>105</sup> Given the 132 year occupation and the high number of casualties suffered in the battle for Independence, coupled with France's pillage of Algeria's natural resources, and other historical details, their respective roles might be more accurately described as virus and host – France as the virus and Algeria the (unwilling) host.

material and superficial beauty, by giving Dorothee the brand-new hat which she seemed to find so indispensable earlier in the day.

It is when she meets Antoine in the Parc Montsouris that she drops the mask and returns the gaze and as a consequence is finally released from her anxiety. Varda has said in interview that:

Le première geste féministe c'est de dire bon ok on me regarde mais *moi je regarde*.  
L'acte de décider de regarder et [comprendre que] le monde n'est pas défini par  
comment on me regarde [...] mais comment *je* regarde (Varda in Mandy, 2001).

Antoine offers to accompany Cléo to the hospital, and to her suggestion that they hail a taxi: “*On prend un taxi ?*” he responds: “*L'autobus est plus gai.*” As previously discussed, viewed collectively Cléo's journeys by taxi, car and bus can be seen to depict her gradual abandonment of social elitism in favour of a more outward-looking humanism, enabling her to regard others instead of only herself (cf. Frame 23).

### Changing perspectives

The short silent film within the film – “*Les Fiancés du Pont Mac Donald*” starring Anna Karina and Jean-Luc Godard – illustrates the importance of the theme of tainted perspectives: “*Ah! je voyais tout en noir à cause de mes lunettes ! [...] Maudites lunettes noires !*” The parallel to be drawn is between Godard's character and Cléo as they both experience a shift in perspective which radically alters their vision of events: Godard by literally removing his dark glasses, and Cléo through removing the inner psychological or spiritual equivalent. While critics have focused on the subjective/objective time dialectic and the feminist themes within the film, the theme of perspective and the shifting between objective and subjective realities has been less often explored. For while both the fortune teller and Cléo interpret the tarot cards as spelling out her imminent death, the fortune teller offers an alternative meaning:

*Le pendu, c'est le changement [...] il y a un bouleversement, c'est votre maladie que vous prenez trop à cœur [...] cette carte n'est pas forcément la mort [...] c'est une transformation profonde de tout votre être.*

Critics have overwhelmingly ignored this less dramatic interpretation – the possibility that Cléo will survive treatment for cancer, not die – and in some cases in order to confirm that Cléo faces certain death some have even interpreted her flashback as being indicative of future events:

*De même, durant la sortie solitaire de la jeune chanteuse, les très courts plans (de l'avaleur de grenouilles, de l'homme du café, de la cartomancienne, de Bob, [...] de José, d'Angèle [...] tendent à mélanger les temps puisqu'ils sont à la fois réminiscences, visions présentes mais également futures (tous participeront-ils pas, dans l'avenir, à son cortège mortuaire ?) [...] (Bloch 1991: 123)*

It is not a glimpse of future events; many of the people evoked are strangers to Cléo and would not attend her funeral. The flashback in question is an indication that the viewer is privileged with Cléo's subjective viewpoint. It is composed of a fairly rapid montage sequence featuring the images of different people – all looking at Cléo – or incidents and objects the spectator has already seen, and as discussed earlier the flashback is triggered involuntarily as a result of the anxiety Cléo experiences in contemplating her solitude, mortality and existence. This sequence also recalls Sartre's '*l'enfer, c'est les autres*'<sup>106</sup> from *Huis clos* where Sartre developed the concept that the other's gaze reifies me, so that true damnation is to be found in the ways that others judge us, or that there is no escape from our sins or faults in the company of others, because the presence of another forces us to judge ourselves 'through their eyes'.

Ultimately in the film Cléo does return the gaze, which initially is a destabilizing experience (cf. the flashback), for she is forced to see herself as others see her, rather than bask in the comfortable self-adoration that admiring herself in mirrors provides. But gradually she completes the existential crisis to become fully aware of her existence, and thus be able to turn outwards to embrace a social existence and responsibility. In the final stages of her 'journey' she encounters Antoine, the young man who is home briefly on leave of absence from the Algerian War. He is open, engaging, sincere and poetic (everything her lover is not) and it is through dialogue with him, and through the course of the last physical journey, a

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<sup>106</sup> Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Huis Clos*, scène 5.

journey which they undertake together that Cléo faces her mortality and others without fear. She and Antoine both face the doctor and are united as each '*encaisse le coup*'.

Significantly, the film's final sequence is the tracking shot of Cléo and Antoine in close-up walking side by side, looking not at each other but together into the future (cf. frame 24), reminiscent of Antoine de Saint Exupéry's words in *Terre des hommes* (1996: 169-170): '*l'expérience nous montre qu'aimer ce n'est point nous regarder l'un l'autre mais regarder ensemble dans la même direction.*' Unlike their historical counterparts or Shakespeare's tragic heroes Varda grants Cléo and Antoine a hopeful future. In the context of the film Cléo is not limited to being 'other' but becomes subject, autonomous, free.

We have therefore seen that in *Cléo de 5 à 7* one kind of psychoanalytic discourse is undermined by the fact that Cléo exerts choice instead of enacting and being limited to a series of pre-determined psychoanalytical stages. By voluntarily abandoning her narcissism she rejects the role of '*enfant gâtée*' and '*femme-cliché*' and becomes a woman who realises that to live in the eyes of others as a beautiful icon is superficial and unsatisfying, whereas appropriating the gaze herself allows her to be freed from anxiety (temporarily at least). We might refer to Kristeva's theories in '*Etrangères à nous-mêmes*' here to consolidate this. As John Lechte has so eloquently summarized, 'The foreigner becomes rootless, a wanderer in exile, living different guises, taking on different personas in a life of the mask. Identity has become tenuous, and although this has its potentially creative side, it is also the source of anxiety.' (Lechte p. 81)

Throughout this decade (and later) Varda progressively enriches her unique '*cinécriture*'. As far as *Cléo* is concerned, it can be seen that Varda successfully constructs images and a cinematic narrative which mirrors elements in de Beauvoir's *Le Deuxième Sexe* and asserts independently that woman is not destined to be naturally excluded from discourse, disdainfully confined to the perimeter at best, or objectified and passive at worst. Instead, Varda renews the medium to articulate that women can achieve agency, assume the gaze and exert choice instead of being reduced to fulfilling a destiny mapped out by centuries old myths and ideological constructions.

### Escaping domesticity in *Le Bonheur* (1964)

Winner in 1965 of the Silver Bear at the Berlin Film Festival and of the Prix Louis Delluc, and of the David Selznick Award in 1966, the most problematic of Varda's films of this period remains *Le Bonheur*. Strikingly beautiful in its composition and choice of colour, the aesthetic qualities and characters' surface tranquillity are in stark contrast with the narrative and serve as an ironic counterpoint to accentuate the bitterness of the underlying commentary. The interplay between the gendered visual iconography and the narrative, underpinned by the film's sophisticated critique of the complicity of visual knowledge with patriarchal discourse will be analysed.

The scenario was written in three days as a consequence of that for *Les Créatures* being rejected by the *Commission d'avance sur recettes* at the CNC four days before the submission deadline. The simple narrative was inspired by Varda's desire to scratch the surface of the ubiquitous holiday snapshot of a happy family (Varda 1994: 238-9). In *Cahiers du Cinéma* (n° 165, avril 1965) Varda spoke of her desire to portray what is behind the picture-perfect family cliché, noting that the happiness born in the smile of every family member must conceal hidden dramas : *'en regardant mieux, vous êtes saisi par un trouble: [...] il y a quinze personnes sur la photo, des vieux, des femmes, des enfants, ce n'est pas possible qu'ils aient tous été heureux en même temps... Ou alors qu'est-ce que le bonheur [...] ?'*

In her article 'Unhappily ever after: visual irony and feminist strategy in Agnès Varda's *Le Bonheur*' (2008: 189-209) Rebecca DeRoo highlights the fact that critics' attention has for the most part been focused on the film's storyline, which has resulted in the visual or properly cinematic qualities of the film being largely ignored. This has led to the film often mistakenly being interpreted as anti-feminist and sickeningly sentimental. Exceptions include Flitterman-Lewis's analysis of this 'subversion of melodrama' (1996: 219). To set the record straight DeRoo has undertaken a detailed examination of the film's imagery in order to reveal the 'underlying critique of popular representations of womanhood' (2008: 191) present in the film.

## Colour in the film

At the very outset of the generic, just before the opening titles, the screen is saturated with red which fades as the image of a sunflower comes into focus. Chapters of varying length throughout the film are demarcated by the flooding of the screen with a colour whose mood (and colour) will dominate the chapter. Marks (2000: 177) posits that (commercial) films that open on a haptic image are commonly those that ‘are predicated on the audience’s uncertain or false knowledge’; the viewers are misled by what they see and rendered uncertain as to their relationship to the image. I would suggest that *Le Bonheur* to some extent, if the frequently colour-saturated screen is interpreted as haptic, can be usefully understood as a film which similarly is predicated on false knowledge and demands an active viewer to discern the cracks which undermine the film’s apparent tranquillity.

In keeping with the colour-logic integral to the film, François begins his affair in the ‘gold chapter’, as the luxurious metal finds its echo within the chapter in the prowling lion and lioness, the gold statues, and Thérèse herself with her golden hair, likened by François to a free-roaming animal:

FRANÇOIS (speaking to Émilie) : « *Thérèse est comme une plante vivace, toi, tu es comme un animal en liberté, et moi, j’aime la nature* ».

The camera pans back to frame a generous bouquet of daisies in the foreground, highlighting François’ infidelity by placing ‘Thérèse’ (the wild flowers) in the scene with the two lovers. Throughout the film Thérèse will be associated with floral vegetation, and the simplicity of the shot here is maintained through the palette of three colours: white, yellow and green.

The opening credits mentioned briefly above end as the screen is again flooded with colour, this time not red but its opposite: green. In this chapter François wears green, but his wife and children do not. It is father’s day and the family blissfully strolls through a riot of lush exuberant springtime foliage, where the colour green dominates in everything from the leaves, grass, moss, to the green bridge and the slick of green slime that covers the water. Rich flora in outdoor locations or generous bouquets of wild flowers are featured throughout the film adding to the film’s multi-sensorial appeal, described in *L’Humanité* as ‘une débauche d’odeurs et de couleurs,’ offering, ‘des joies olfactives’ (Lachize 1965).

This is where Thérèse will subsequently drown, and therefore it is both the first and last place that the viewer sees the family together, one of the cyclical patterns in the film. Throughout the film the palette of blues and greens frequently dominates, almost cloying to Thérèse and her home as though Thérèse cannot escape her forthcoming death. That François dresses in the same colours even in this opening sequence, thus placing him out of synchronicity with his wife and children, highlights his inevitable link to her drowning, so it is tempting to conclude that the palette of floral and aquatic colours foreshadows her forthcoming death.

#### Undermining the film's dominant narrative

Building on research by Kristin Ross into representations of women in popular culture DeRoo concludes that: 'Varda's innovative visual rhetoric silently challenges the dominant narrative and constructs the film's ironies [...]' (2008: 191). The images in question (both in magazines and in *Le Bonheur*) are those of what DeRoo dubs the 'serving hand', and more generally of domestic chores tirelessly repeated, coupled with docile devotion to family life and a complete absence of intellectual activities.

Popular representations of women, such as the serving hand in advertisements, provide an example of the ways in which women were targeted – as consumers – by women's magazines. There is an explicit reference to the women's magazine *Elle* in the film, as one of Thérèse's customers, dissatisfied with the prêt-à-porter wedding dresses she has seen in town, says: '*Moi, je voudrais une robe comme j'ai vu sur Elle.*' Betty Friedan wrote of the epiphany she experienced when she 'realised the significance of the boast that women wield seventy-five per cent of the purchasing power in America. I suddenly saw American women as *victims* of that ghastly gift, that power at the point of purchase.' (1963: 199)

That this significant purchasing power was in the hands of women would seem not to have gone un-noticed in France, as can be deduced by the following article unearthed by Duchon (1994: 73). In 1956 *Elle* published an article entitled '*Êtes-vous une femme moderne ?*' which essentially sought to impress upon the reader that there was a direct correlation between consuming and 'being modern' and that she (the reader) could answer confidently in the affirmative only if she possessed a wide range of disposable goods and electrical appliances.

Marks writes of the power of mimesis citing Erich Auerbach's research which indicates that each time a listener/reader hears a story, the story is 'sensuously remade in the body of the listener' (2000: 138). She extrapolates the additional mimetic power that cinema must exert on the spectator. For Marks, 'mimetic representation lies at the other pole from symbolic representation' (2000: 139), and she asserts that capitalism relies heavily on symbolic representation, which she sees as being a particular characteristic of contemporary urban and post-industrial society. However, sophisticated advertising is a particular characteristic of capitalism, and, I would argue, relies heavily on mimetic representation: encouraging the viewer to identify with the image, sensuously remaking it within their body, and yearning, subconsciously and otherwise, to close the gap between their material wealth/personal relationships/social status, in order to bring it ever closer to the 'ideal' represented in advertisements (I use advertisements in its broadest sense, to include all cultural exports that advertise the idea of a commodity rich lifestyle, including standard publicity but also Hollywood movies and American soaps, magazines, and so on).

The destructive power of advertising and chasing the consumer society dream had been explored by Elsa Triolet in *Roses à crédit* (1959), with which it is safe to presume that Varda was familiar, given her fondness of Elsa Triolet as expressed in her short *Elsa la rose* (1965) and in *Varda par Agnès* (1994: 84). Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* was published in 1963 and translated into French the following year, an event which Duchén credits with considerable importance for French feminist theorists, and DeRoo cites *The Feminine Mystique* – questionably – as an influence on Varda's *Le Bonheur*. Questionably, firstly because the English edition of the book was not released in France in 1963, and secondly because the French translation of the book did not appear until the 30<sup>th</sup> September 1964, which is to say *after* filming of *Le Bonheur* had commenced, given that *Le Bonheur* was filmed between 14<sup>th</sup> July and 5 November 1964 (cf. Varda 1994: 238). And finally, even if Varda had had access to the book in English in 1963, while De Roo points out that Varda is (now) proficient in English, in 1963 when filming *Le Bonheur*, Varda had neither lived in America nor made her 'American' films yet (*Oncle Yanco* (1967) *Black Panthers* (1968) *Lions Love* (1969) and later *Mur Murs* (1980) and *Documenteur* (1980-81)), and therefore it is probable that at that point she was substantially less proficient in English.

Certainly though the book would have influenced French feminist thought towards the very end of the period studied here and therefore deserves brief attention. Friedan was critical of Freudian psychoanalysis due to its limitations regarding women, which she perceived as further emphasizing that women's destiny was restricted to the domestic and infantile spheres. However she differed from existentialists in that she appears to have resorted to a notion of a pre-existing individual self, a core self which may either be nurtured to follow its true course or would fall victim to being stunted, warped and corrupted by lack of choice or following the wrong image (the wrong image being most often that of the happy housewife offered by advertisers and the media) (Bowlby 1987: 68). French feminists post-'68 borrowed heavily from Friedan's analysis, while *Le Bonheur*'s narrative, if Thérèse's death is interpreted as suicide, mirrors Friedan's cross-Atlantic account of desperate suburban housewives committing suicide, although it could be argued that Thérèse's desperation arises not from a disjunction created by consumer desires predicated on false premises, but rather on the realisation of the ease with which she can be supplanted or seamlessly replaced by another. Thérèse's drowning will be looked at in more detail later (cf. p. 162).

Although Thérèse works, she works in a typically feminine domain: dress-making. Furthermore, because she works from home she is obliged to multi-task, simultaneously attending to the children, her sewing, the housework, laundry and cooking. Thus here Varda foregrounds a theme that retains relevance fifty years later, that of the hidden double shift, as the expectation that women will bear responsibility for the vast majority of housework and childcare, as well as paid employment, continues even today. It is both the most widespread and frustrating form of oppression encountered by women, especially mothers, on a daily basis and a key obstacle to excelling professionally, given the fact that generally speaking people that excel in their field are people who devote most time to their field (and these people are rarely women with young children given the persistent uneven repartition of domestic tasks).

Employing a maid is not economically viable for Thérèse and François (the working class), and yet paradoxically it is only by employing/oppressing another woman (often immigrant women) that women of higher social classes can free themselves from the hidden double shift. The fact that the housework and/or childcare is usually part-time, with irregular hours and often paid on the black results in further oppressing this social stratum. The short film in *Paris je t'aime* (2006) entitled "Loin du 16e" (written and directed by Daniela Thomas and

Walter Salles) highlights the persistence of this problem. An immigrant woman (possibly of Latin American origin) is shown awakening before the crack of dawn to dress herself and feed and clothe her baby, who she sings a nursery song or *berçouse* to, before dropping her baby off in a state-run crèche. After a long commute on the train and metro into a wealthy Parisian neighbourhood/borough (the 16<sup>th</sup>) she arrives at the home in which she works as a nanny. Before leaving, her employer, the lady of the house/mother of the infant casually and without any concern or respect for her employee's needs informs her that she will return later at night than scheduled. The film closes on a semi-close up of the young immigrant mother soothing the upper-middle class (bourgeoisie)'s crying infant with the same nursery song that she sang to her own baby, highlighting the cruel socio-political reality that deprives her of the (economic) ability to be with and care for her own child, and obliges her to care for another's. Aside from the material inequality between the respective mothers and babies, an effective inequality is also depicted. The inequality extends also to the quality of care that each child receives: individual (one on one) for the rich infant, and collective care at a ratio of care-giver to infant much lower than that recommended in Britain for the poor infant.

Unlike François, who relaxes in the evening away from work, Thérèse works much longer hours, continuing to work (either sewing or attending to her family) right up until retiring for the night. As DeRoo has pointed out (2008: 205) her life and work are more solitary than her husband's; his working day is punctuated with convivial moments and chat, lunching with his colleagues, sharing a bottle of rosé with them, and so on. While it is tempting to conclude that Varda wished to portray Thérèse's situation as emblematic of the solitude and isolation inherent in most housewives' routines, the situation the spectator views is more ambiguous, for Thérèse too has visitors, in the form of women who arrive for dress-fitting sessions, and a friendly neighbour spoils her son next door with bonbons. Thérèse is never shown to be tired or lonely, is neither exasperated nor worn out by her daily routine.

The blissful state of being 'Thérèse' (Thérèse being symbolic of housewives, mothers and devoted wives in general) as portrayed in the film is therefore doubly undermined both by the visual irony and also by the film's pessimistic narrative as far as the character of Thérèse is concerned.

One aspect of the visual irony is disclosed by looking more closely at the film's montage: scenes of François measuring and sawing materials in the atelier are inter-cut with Thérèse

busy with domestic work. This invests the domestic work with equal value, placing Thérèse's labour on a par with François's, thus emphasising the inequality in pay and the implicit lack of social recognition for raising children. This is partly due to the values of a meritocracy, whereby the degree that work is valued by a society is in direct relation to the amount of money one is paid for doing it.

Thérèse is typical of working - class women in France in the 1950s and 1960s in that she works from home and also endures the hidden double shift of un-paid housework and childcare. The double shift is still performed overwhelmingly exclusively, or almost exclusively, by women. While modern appliances have reduced the number of hours that women spend on tedious chores, in the 1950s studies show that women had to spend between 72 – 75 hours on housework each week. Frustratingly for women, the idea that a woman's vocation was that of wife and housewife, and later mother, was refuted neither by the dominant ideology nor by philosophical or psychoanalytical currents of thought. There was little to differentiate prevailing attitudes to women in France in the 1960s from that in the 1860s : *'Les femmes appartiennent à la famille et non à la société politique, et la nature les a faites pour les soins domestiques et non pour les fonctions publiques'* (Bonald, in Beauvoir, 1949/2008a: 192). Similarly, women were said to exist in a state akin to perpetual childhood : *'Cette infantilité biologique se traduit par une faiblesse intellectuelle ; le rôle de cet être purement affectif, c'est celui d'épouse et de ménagère'* (Comte in de Beauvoir 1949/2008a: 192).

The very real problems posed by families' expectations and social conventions meant that in 1962 almost 60% of women in the general population were 'totally without qualification' (Guelaud-Leridon 1967: 75). It is easy to see that depriving women of education and shepherding them towards their 'destiny' would result in a situation whereby women's intellectual inferiority and lack of aptitude for anything other than childrearing and housework was apparently confirmed.

The above statistic underlines the relative impotence of the 1946 decree on equal pay for equal work. Although by no means negative, the decree did nothing to rectify the imbalance in employment prospects. Women were offered neither the same educational opportunities, nor subsequently professional opportunities on a par with those on offer to their male counterparts, be they brothers, friends, cousins, future husbands or others.

The framing of the characters suggests a profound loss of identity for the woman who works at home, be it Thérèse or Emilie. This can be appreciated by returning to DeRoo's analysis of the visual irony at work in the film, and specifically the serving hand. A close analysis of the sequences that follow Emilie and François's decision that she take Thérèse's place in the family reveals a gradual effacement of Emilie's identity. At first Emilie is filmed in long shots as an integral body, and therefore integral person, such as collecting the children from school. In the home medium close shots are used, so that we're still aware of her identity as she takes Thérèse's place, though more passionately, in the marital bed. Gradually though the camera moves closer and the focus shifts from Emilie's body to that of objects. Shots of François at work meanwhile confirm that he retains his identity, while eventually back at home only the little pearl ring that Emilie wears on her finger enables the spectator to identify her. In contrast to this gradual and complete effacement of Emilie/Thérèse's identity, François retains his full identity throughout. This also confirms de Beauvoir's line of argument that as a housewife, '*Elle s'occupe, mais elle ne fait rien ; à travers ses fonctions d'épouse, mère, ménagère, elle n'est pas reconnue dans sa singularité*' (De Beauvoir 2008b : 519). François's work as a carpenter, in contrast to the domestic work of either of the women as wife and mother results in the fabrication of physical concrete objects, for which he earns a salary, thus seeming to render his labour all the more 'real'. Thérèse's work as a dress-maker also resulted in a tangible physical outcome for which she was paid, but the un-paid domestic work that both Thérèse and later Émilie engage in – nurturing the children, cleaning the house, washing laundry, etc. – are activities and effort which can't easily be measured or quantified, and the exact value of which it is difficult to ascertain.

As regards the pessimism of the narrative, whether Thérèse drowns accidentally or commits suicide, either out of despair or to punish her husband for his adultery, is almost incidental. What is significant is that she is seamlessly replaced within the family unit shortly after her summertime death (Emilie takes her place in the autumn). She has in fact become much like the efficient but ultimately disposable home appliance: replaced by a newer model whenever desired. The seamless integration of the 'newer model' is accentuated by the choice of colour: the final chapter is a dusky purple, and features the family driving to the forest. Whereas the film opens with the family of four (with Thérèse as the mother) walking across a field towards the camera, it closes with the family of four (Emilie as mother) walking through the woods away from the camera. The characters are all dressed in blue, which is in contrast to the

opening shot in which François was out of synch with the rest of the family, wearing green while his wife and children were dressed in red. And so the new family unit walks into the forest, the picture-perfect family.

Claire Duchen concluded that women's magazines actively propagated the dissimulation of the following role model for women in the late forties and early fifties to emulate in their private spheres:

For him [the husband], home was a place to relax, not to work, and when he was there, he was the focus of his wife's attention. She had to make sure that he was able to get the rest he needed by keeping the children quiet, listening to him but not worrying him with her domestic problems, feeding him [...] (1994: 79).

Both of the women in *Le Bonheur* conform to society's expectations; the opening sequence of *Le Bonheur* depicts a scene which is striking in its similarity to the description above: Thérèse is filmed tidying up the picnic blankets while her family sleeps, and when the children stir, she urges them to be quiet because daddy's sleeping, "*Chut, fais dodo, papa dort*". When he starts to awaken she immediately sits at his side, and the camera frames them sitting under the shade of a tree as they speak and embrace. The fact that the scene takes place in an idyllic countryside setting only serves to demonstrate that a wife's duties know no boundaries; whether in the home or outside of it, she must always put her husband's needs first.

Shortly thereafter, the family returns the borrowed van to the children's uncle. Their aunt is watching a scene played out on her television which mirrors the earlier sequence between Thérèse and François and rapidly indicates to the viewer the irony of the latter. It is seen to be a pastiche of this televised sketch which is set in a summertime field not dissimilar to that of *Le Bonheur's* opening sequence. In identical framing to the opening sequence, the young lady on television skips across the frame to bring the man a drink and settle down beside him in the shade of a tree. The boss's wife knits before the television, enraptured by the images and dialogue:

« Monsieur, vous ne voulez pas me dire quelque chose ? »

« Te dire quoi ? »

« N'importe pas ! Pourvu que vous parliez [...] Hier vous aviez commencé à parler de la *révolution* des espèces ! » she enthuses.

« *L'évolution* des espèces » he corrects.

As may be presumed by the dialogue, the man assumes the role of savant while the coquettish girl flips her hair and flutters her eyelashes.

Thérèse's situation may conform to the picture perfect wife and mother at home, dedicated to house and home, but without the visual irony there is nothing, aside from François's adultery, to suggest that her life is anything less than idyllic. And there-in lies the disturbing quality and strength of the film. Rather alarmingly, everyone does appear to be happy. After a brief moment's sadness at François's revelation that he has a lover, Thérèse cheers up and even declares that she now loves him more than before, "*plus, encore plus, parce que tu es si content !*" Up to this point the film seems to confirm François's idea that '*le bonheur, ça s'additionne.*'

François is 'comblé' by a picture perfect woman, seemingly any picture perfect woman. There is an anonymity in being, a lack of any singular point of definition in the characters, as Emilie resembles both Thérèse and the pinup behind François at work. And yet, unsettlingly, how much truth is in François's statement to Emilie: '*Tu sais, ma femme, je l'ai connue quand je faisais mon service [militaire]. On s'est aimé tout de suite, et puis je l'ai épousée à la fin de mon service. Si je t'avais connue la première, je l'aurais fait avec toi.*' In this way *Le Bonheur* also calls into question the romantic notion of the one true destined soul-mate, by admitting the incidental or coincidental element in love, and also exploring the boundaries of 'free love', not yet widespread in France but gaining in popularity in America and which would be a major theme of Varda's 1969 *Lion's Love*. The film invites us to ask to what degree we can stretch the boundaries of our marital structures of possessive coupling, without reaching the point of rupture?

#### Haptic moments and the memory of sound

Marital structures in the film are stretched and threatened by the blossoming affair between Emilie and François. There are several love scenes between the adulterous couple in the film,

and here Varda goes some way towards communicating embodied experience. Laura Marks's theories of haptic visuality can usefully be deployed to engage with these scenes. Marks seems to distinguish between two types of haptic image: those that entice the eyes to 'feel' the image, or touch the skin of the film, and those that resolve into figuration only gradually, if at all' (Marks 2000: 162).

In the gold chapter where the adulterous couple begin their affair, there is an example of a haptic image of the type where the embodied viewer responds to the image of his beard's stubble on the small of her back, as the image appeals to our ability to anticipate the sensation. It strikes me as the only sensuous moment of the couple together, the sensuality originating with the movement, texture, and bodily mimetic response.

Marks is almost completely silent (writing less than one page) on what she suggests we might term 'haptic hearing'. This is an area worthy of and receiving more research recently (cf. for example *Studies in French Film* 9.3), and here I offer only the briefest of contributions to this. The last moments of the character of Thérèse alive offer an example of haptic sound; so subtle it is easily missed. A cough in the audience or a movement in a squeaky chair would be enough to obscure the extra-diegetic sound of a splash of water heard while a contemplative Thérèse is awakening next to her sleeping husband, who prior to their love-making and subsequent siesta told her he is in love with another woman. This is partially an instance of sound bleeding backwards as it were from a forthcoming sequence onto a preceding one: the sound of Thérèse drowning can be heard before she drowns. Yet, contrary to standard practice, the sound bleeding here is not from the immediately following sequence, nor is it used in order to orient the viewer and facilitate the rapid gaining of bearings as regards the following images, which are not of Thérèse drowning but firstly of wild flowers – purple and gold, Thérèse's colours – and then of her children waking up. Instead there is no immediate relevance and as such the sound is temporarily incomprehensible and misleading. This is why I interpret it as an example of haptic sound.

Though 'we cannot literally touch sound with our ears' the soundtrack leads us to tune in to a way of bodily listening as the extra-diegetic music finishes when Thérèse awakens. The soundtrack becomes diegetic as Thérèse shifts and leans up slightly on the bed of dry summer grasses and flowers. We hear the crisp rustle of the foliage underneath the couple's bare skin and mimetically appreciate the feel of it on naked skin: as an embodied viewer we might add

to this our own personal memories that may be triggered, associating the sound with the unpleasant feel of dusty dirt on already dry skin, the scratch of brittle long grasses or the tickle of a small insect on the skin, hence inviting the sensation that ‘the aural boundaries between body and world may feel indistinct’ (Marks 2000: 183). Add to this the chirping of bird song and the sound of water, which we may imagine given the dry heat of the scene we view, to be in contrast cool, clear and refreshing. The sound seems to be of water rippling against something or someone and it is likely that the viewer initially makes an erroneous positive association with the sound of water in this sequence.

Odd when heard, only retrospectively can it be understood. Borrowing somewhat from Deleuze’s definition of the *image-temps*, I would suggest that here the disjunction between the visible and the audible (as opposed to between the visible and verbal) lead the viewer to the meaning. There follows an increasingly worried search on foot for Thérèse, as the children and François call out for her. Moments later, when François discovers his wife’s body which has been pulled from the water by on-lookers, the narrative slips again from Deleuzian *image-mouvement* to *image-temps* here as the frames of François lifting her body to his and grasping her to him are replayed over and over, but without sound, as though the intensity on the emotional plane surpasses and blocks out the other senses.

When he puts his head to her heart, we ‘see’ her drown, in two momentary elliptic flashbacks, almost as though Thérèse’s own body has spoken to him. The flashback is silent, as though the sound and the image have been separated, one has seeped forward and the other back; the sound that bled forward onto an otherwise idyllic moment was stolen from this ‘memory’.

References to women drowning themselves for unrequited love and desire abound in Western culture. American author Kate Chopin wrote *The Awakening* in 1898; it was fiercely slated in its time and Chopin never published another novel, but her novel has since been recognised as a landmark feminist work, in which the main protagonist Edna Pontellier is a Southern women, mother of two and married to a respectable and successful businessman. She gradually gives in to and is overcome by her desire for a younger man and freedom from social expectations and limitations, but ultimately the contradictory forces of social pressure dooms their love and she drowns herself by swimming far out into the Gulf of Mexico. A parallel in audacity of style can be found with Varda’s early work, as Chopin’s novel was a precursor of modernism much like *La Pointe Courte* was a precursor of the French New

Wave. In a strange cycle Chopin's style influenced William Faulkner and as such can be construed to be an indirect influence on Varda's first film, given the influence of the twin narrative of *Wild Palms* on *La Pointe Courte* (as previously mentioned).

Despite this indirect influence, it is likely that just as the paintings of death and beauty by Baldung Grien served as a source of inspiration for *Cléo de 5 à 7* (Varda 1994: 48), Shakespeare's widely referenced Ophelia and representation of her in Pre-Raphaelite painting by Sir John Everett Millais no doubt served as inspiration for Thérèse's character, manner of death, and the frequent choice of location shooting in abundant flora. The elements that unite the two women are numerous: both women have cause to be lovesick, like Ophelia, Thérèse is gathering wild flowers when she drowns, and ambiguity surrounds both their deaths. Queen Gertrude's account of Ophelia drowning describes her falling from a willow tree:

There is a willow grows askant a brook,  
 [...]
   
 There, on the pendent boughs her coronet weeds  
 Clambering to hang, an envious sliver broke  
 When down her weedy trophies and herself  
 Fell in the weeping brook. Her clothes spread wide  
 And, mermaid-like, awhile they bore her up;  
 Which time she chanted snatches of old tunes,  
 As one incapable of her own distress,  
 [...] but long it could not be  
 Till that her garments, heavy with their drink,  
 Pull'd the poor wretch from her melodious lay  
 To muddy death. (Hamlet, Act IV, Scene VII)

Although tempered by the description of Ophelia as 'incapable of her own distress', there is a strong suggestion of suicide given that she lay chanting 'snatches of old tunes' in the water before being pulled under. Recalling this verse in *Hamlet*, in *Le Bonheur* Thérèse is depicted, while François holds her dead body, snatching at the branches of a willow tree as the stream bears her body underwater. This grasping for branches which slip through her fingers doesn't remove the possibility of a desire to commit suicide as having been the cause of her death, as

it remains ambiguous as to whether this is her husband's imagined scenario or an instance of time in the diegesis slipping into non-chronological fluidity.

Thérèse escapes the cyclical pattern of repetitive domestic duties of motherhood and being a wife only through death. Problematically for feminists, Varda does not seem to be unequivocally critical of Thérèse/Emilie's situation. Consistently favouring a subtle approach, as opposed to radical film-making which would have consigned her work to the margins, Varda nonetheless constructs an ultimate irony in the film: Emilie, who enters the narrative as a sexually confident woman living alone and economically independent (*'t'inquiète pas, je suis libre, heureuse, et tu n'es pas le premier'* she says to François just before they start their liaison) and who has been cast as the modern woman, is then reduced by the narrative to the traditional housewife.

## Conclusion

A good woman was a good mother, a good mother was a good wife and housewife; and, for at least fifteen years after the war, no vision of fulfilled femininity involving anything other than domesticity and motherhood was readily available to women.

(Claire Duchen 1994: 64)

Considered together, the films studied in this chapter can be seen to have provided insight into some of the more wide-reaching and monumental changes in French history in the 1950s and 1960s, where the balance of power in gender relations began to shift considerably, the representation of women was regenerated, and dominant monolithic male discourse met with serious legitimate challenge from many angles. Apparent in two of the films (*La Pointe-Courte* and *Le Bonheur*) is the more general evolution in French society away from the small independent artisan,<sup>107</sup> such as the community of fishermen in *La Pointe Courte*, Thérèse's work as an independent dress-maker and François's work as a carpenter in *Le Bonheur*, and towards a homogenous and industrialized future. This shift towards homogeneity and the Taylorisation of industry will be foreshadowed more clearly in Tati's films, as we will see in the following chapter.

It is hoped that the present study of the four films selected for analysis has demonstrated that in this first decade of her career Varda offered the spectator multiple gazes and a vision of fulfilled femininity in diverse roles. As such she can be seen to have pioneered representations of women and the concept of woman on-screen in this period of French history leading up to May 68. These cultural products were not born of acquiescence with the status quo, and therefore I believe support my thesis that the filmic production of the New Wave, Left Bank and Underground directors in the pre-revolutionary decade leading up to May 1968 bear testimony to the cracks in the nation's image and ideological veneer that finally disintegrated in 1968.

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<sup>107</sup> The artisan and independent shopkeeper are central to one of Varda's later docu-films, in which she captures a snapshot, or as Varda says, "un album de quartier"<sup>107</sup> of some of her neighbours on rue Daguerre, themselves artisans or independent merchants, in *Daguerréotypes* (1974-1975).

Varda's very first film offers the spectator a wide choice of gazes, from the collective as embodied in the inhabitants of the tiny village of la Pointe-Courte to the modern Parisian woman and her Sétois partner, emblematic of the shift in the demographic situation in France. The difficulties encountered by the fishing community of La Pointe-Courte echo the artisanal way of life in general falling into decline as France became increasingly modernised, with industrialisation threatening small independent entrepreneurs and ever increasing numbers of young people, like Philippe Noiret's character, migrating to the urban centres in order to find employment. In a strange irony, the decline of the artisanal way of life across France was in direct contrast to the rise of the artisanal cinematic movement which this film was a precursor of: the French New Wave.

Varda then explores her own pregnancy in *L'Opéra-Mouffe*, communicating her anxiety about the birth and the mystery of the unknown child through rich symbolism, carefully staged unusual sets and of course the lyrics and music. *L'Opéra-Mouffe* is a film that can be seen to be inscribed in humanism, with its far-reaching regard for unglamorous and down-trodden marginal members of society.

We have seen that in *Cléo de 5 à 7* one kind of psychoanalytic discourse is undermined by the fact that Cléo exerts choice instead of conforming to 'destiny'. By voluntarily abandoning her narcissism she rejects her role of '*enfant gâtée*' and becomes a woman who realises that to live in the eyes of others as a beautiful icon is superficial and unsatisfying, whereas appropriating the gaze herself is a humanly enriching and rewarding experience.

The most problematic of Varda's films of this period remains *Le Bonheur*. It is strikingly beautiful in its composition and choice of colour, aesthetic qualities which are in stark contrast with the narrative and serve to accentuate the bitterness of the underlying commentary.

As Simone de Beauvoir wrote: '*Le besoin biologique – désir sexuel et désir d'une postérité – qui met le mâle sous la dépendance de la femelle n'a pas affranchi socialement la femme*' (1949/2008a: 22). Women's social liberation could not be attained without gaining the right to control their own fertility. While the *Loi Neuwirth* legalised contraception – subject to conditions – in December 1967 (Mitterrand had included the issue of legalizing contraception in his 1965 Presidential campaign) it was not until 1972 that it came into effect. Abortion was

still illegal until as recently as 1975, which meant that for working class women in particular in most cases it was inaccessible or unsafe, unhygienic and potentially fatal, prompting Simone de Beauvoir to label it ‘*un crime de classe*’ (1949/2008b: 330). Without contraception, sexual relations resulted in women being tied to maternity after maternity, and in consequence the home, the private sphere, domesticity, and dependence. Unfortunately, although it may not have been evident when de Beauvoir wrote *Le Deuxième Sexe*, even with contraception and increased educational and professional opportunities, the sexual division of domestic un-paid labour persists, and it is in this respect that the film retains a surprising relevance to issues of gender equality, to which Gisèle Halimi bears testimony in her recent contribution to *Ripostes* (7<sup>th</sup> March 2009, France 5).<sup>108</sup> By bringing domestic un-paid labour to the foreground, *Le Bonheur* makes a contribution to on-going feminist debate and can also be seen to reflect women’s concrete situation in 1964 France. Furthermore, as DeRoo argues (2008: 208), the film cannot be understood by a passive viewing, but relies on the spectator to actively engage with it on the visual and narrative level. These gender specific themes are ones that Varda would pursue in later films, such as in her representation of the Women’s Liberation Movement in *L’Une chante, l’autre pas* (1976).

It is apparent from this study that Varda did not adhere to the prevalent codes in 1950s cinema, codes which had female sexuality pinned down as the site of perversity and/or madness, such as the descent into folie and religious piety – sparked by the mere thought of infidelity, rather than recourse to the act itself – of Madame de... in Max Ophüls’ 1953 film of the same name. The opening sequence of *Madame de...* recalls certain moments in *Cléo de 5 à 7*, notably where Cléo adorns herself prior to her ‘fall’. However, the spiritual or psychological progression of the films’ respective heroines varies significantly, marking another point of transformation in female representations offered by Varda. The films in this chapter reveal Varda’s earliest challenges to monologic discourse and classic narrative cinema, and the diverse representations of women she offered on-screen. The films’ resistance to categorization into any one style, theory or ideology reflects the diversity and plurality that characterized feminism(s) in the period studied. Notoriously diverse and divided as a movement, once the unifying battles for contraception and abortion had been won (1967 and 1975 respectively), the movement became increasingly fragmented. Most significantly

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<sup>108</sup> cf. Gisèle Halimi’s contribution as guest speaker on “Ripostes” 7<sup>th</sup> March 2009 (France 5) where she highlighted the persistent inequality faced by women for whom it is not enough to be successful in their careers alone; they must simultaneously surmount the double-shift of housework and childcare which still falls primarily to women. Recent studies confirm this, cf. chapter 2.4 of the Helsinki report.

perhaps, Varda offers the spectator an image of women which is not entrenched in the prevalent restrictive and repressive binary opposition between genders.

## 4

## Rabelaisian Carnival and masquerade

### in Tati's *Playtime* (1967) and other films

Jacques Tati is inextricably associated with the seemingly ubiquitous heavily stylized silhouette of Monsieur Hulot, a man without a first name or known occupation. These qualities are to some extent emblematic of the growing alienation and increasing lack of intimacy amongst French citizens as the rural exodus resulted in cities and suburbs growing and taking on new forms. One of these new forms, as charted in Tati's films, is that created by civil engineers and modern architects such as Le Corbusier, buildings and cityscapes in which increasingly 'everything communicates'<sup>109</sup>, except for the inhabitants themselves, in these films that masquerade as not silent, but speechless.

In this chapter I deploy Bakhtin's theories of Rabelaisian carnival and the role of laughter in the analysis of three of Tati's films, *Les Vacances de Monsieur Hulot* (1953), *Mon Oncle* (1958) and *Playtime* (1967). Tati's comedies can be seen to fulfil the comic function identified by Bakhtin, which is 'all that is frightening in ordinary life is turned into ludicrous or amusing monstrosities' (Bakhtin 1984: 47). For instance, otherwise innocuous iconography in *Playtime*, such as the travel agents' posters of the identical skyscraper in every city, make light of a serious concern, that of cultural homogeneity and loss of national identities, while the grey labyrinthine offices and carbon-copy businessmen collude to deride and render ludicrous the de-humanizing aspects of industrialisation.

Similarly, in order to diminish 'anxiety in the face of corporate and social disembodiment' (Beugnet and Ezra 2010: 21), somewhat paradoxically, extended use of the long shot effaces the subjectivity that would otherwise dispel the comic effect, for '*le rire n'a pas plus grand*

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<sup>109</sup> 'Tout communiquent' Mme Arpel proudly announces with reference to the living spaces of her ostensibly modern home (in fact a pastiche of modernist architecture) in *Mon Oncle*.

*ennemi que l'émotion.*' (Bergson 1900: 11). The result is that the human figure in the form of the modern bourgeoisie, progress, mechanization and the landscape of the modern city, workplace and home become a source of mirth, thus transforming 'all that is frightening in everyday life' into laughable aberrations.

The festive marketplace, feasts, and the spirit of carnival reoccur throughout Tati's opus. Bakhtin identifies a form of comedy that emerged from Medieval folk culture and spread into literature towards the end of the Middle Ages and beginning of the Renaissance, flourishing – almost simultaneously – across Europe, for instance in the literary works of Rabelais, Cervantes, and Shakespeare. Bakhtin stresses that the reason behind the emergence of this universal comedy was these writers' use of their respective vulgar tongues instead of Latin, these languages serving as a gateway enabling rich components of popular culture to spread un-diluted into literary forms (Bakhtin 1965: 72). Aspects of this festive folk laughter live on in modern times, through grotesque realism, and in certain forms of comedy that play on Rabelaisian Carnival, including, I contend, Tati's comedies.

According to Bakhtin, in the Rabelaisian sense of the term, carnival signifies the symbolic, and temporary, destruction of official culture, power structures, and authority, while the ensuing laughter's regenerative effects and creative power herald transformation and renewal, bringing in the future (Bakhtin 1984: 71). Therefore, towards the end of this chapter I contend that the future announced in the closing sequence of *Playtime* can be read as a symbolic destruction of official culture and power structures, thus pre-figuring the 'revolution' of May 1968. This interpretation can be further nuanced by the fact that May 68 has itself often been seen to be an exemplar of carnival (cf. Reader 1993).

Beugnet and Ezra find an insistence on organization in 'the bright, shiny films of Tati in the 1960s, where bodies are 'filed' in office cubicles or sequestered in cars lined up in perfect formation in parking lots or on the motorway. [...] In the middle of the century, [...] there is nowhere to hide; everything is brightly lit, and if something is to be hidden it must be removed from the scene, exiled far away.' (2010: 15, 14) Indeed, the trauma of the war years and colonisation are off screen, and in conclusion, I also argue that the films' appeal to the French public emanates partially from their disjunctive relationship to real time and everyday life, in effect offering post-war and (post-)colonial spectators a timeless sanctuary to retreat into in a period of social uncertainty and political turmoil.

## Tati : making films in the vernacular ?

A substantial part of my argument in this chapter relies on interpreting Tati's films as a continuation of festive folk laughter, and that they depict a resurgence of carnival from its origins in popular culture. Tati's gestures and comic choreography from his debuts as a mime originated in the tradition of French music hall, where his stage career began, and as such his films are marked by this endemic element of popular French culture. However, the Tatiesque carnival may appear to be in anything but the vernacular, due to a perceived lack of speech and perceived lack of 'French-ness'. From the linguistic point of view, critics may argue that the films can hardly be in the vernacular given that they are largely mute. But contrary to the initial impression the films may leave, upon closer inspection, they reveal themselves to be surprisingly talkative, even polyphonic, and the false impression that the audience may retain of having watched a speechless film results less from a lack of dialogue than from the post-production work on the soundtrack that treats speech as a sound like any other (cf. Chion 1982: 226). For Tati's films, from the perspective of the *mise-en-scène*, are *verbo-décentrés*. This aspect will be discussed in detail later.

Returning to a perceived lack of French-ness, *Playtime* in particular appears to be un-French in the traditional sense, precisely because of the extent to which mass-culture's poly-culturalism is depicted in the film. This however makes the film an even more astute reflection of the cultural evolution in postmodern France. As Edgar Morin wrote in 1962:

*La culture de masse à la fois intègre et s'intègre dans une réalité polyculturelle, [...] elle tend à corroder, désagréger, les autres cultures. [...] Née aux Etats-Unis, elle s'est déjà acclimatée en Europe occidentale. Certains de ces éléments se répandent sur tout le globe. Elle est cosmopolite par vocation et planétaire par extension. Elle nous pose les problèmes de la première culture universelle de l'histoire de l'humanité.*  
(Morin 1962 : 13-14)

### Cinematic context: comedy in mechanization

In earlier chapters we have already seen some of the themes mentioned above and their treatment by other directors. The changing demographic realities of rural France combined with the pressure that agents of industrialization began to exert on artisans in the 1950s motivates the narrative of *La Pointe Courte*, while the juxtaposition between surviving pre-war homes and the necessarily new architectural reconstruction following heavy bombing (particularly in the North of France) during the Second World War provide a framework in *Muriel, ou le temps d'un retour* with its Boulogne-sur-mer setting and mosaic ensemble of war-time memories and traumas.

Bearing testimony to the importance of the aforementioned themes in post-Second World War France, they reoccur in Tati's oeuvre, while other themes that preoccupied sociologists and intellectuals at the time are also introduced. For instance, the films articulate the dehumanising effects of factory work, brought to France through the importation of Taylorism's scientific management theories applied to the assembly-line production, for instance – but not only – in Renault's factories. These factories were subsequently notoriously fertile sites of revolt leading up to and after May 68, and the rebellion and dissatisfaction engendered by the factory conditions have preoccupied filmmakers across genres, such as that of activist docudrama in *Coup pour coup* (Karmitz 1972). Not an all together novel theme in French culture, aspects of Taylorism and the dehumanizing effects of work in Ford's Detroit factories during the early industrial age had been vividly depicted in French literature by Louis-Ferdinand Céline in *Voyage au bout de la nuit* (1932), while Tati's treatment of this issue in the genre of comedy inevitably echoes René Clair's *À Nous la liberté* (1931) and Chaplin's *Modern Times* (1936).

In Clair's film, the gramophone, an early example of a mass-produced commodity of the fledgling consumer society, takes centre stage in the narrative. As in *Mon Oncle*, one of the principal locations is the factory, and in similarity with Tati's *Monsieur Hulot*, the main characters of *À Nous la liberté* are unemployed. In Clair's film life as a factory worker is seen to be just another form of imprisonment, while real freedom is punishable by prison. Twenty years later, in *Europe 51* (1951) Rossellini's heroine expresses a similar sense of desolation while watching workers enter a factory, declaring: « *J'ai cru voir des condamnés.* » With this

statement: “Elle fait le lien, et pas seulement métaphorique entre l’univers carcéral et l’entreprise capitaliste.” (Deleuze in Dosse 2008 : 104)

The threat of imprisonment for the unemployed is real in Clair’s film, as the film shows a happy ex-convict daydreaming in a field when two policemen spot him. The characters deliver an ominous fragmented warning, the dialogue of which is shared by two distinct characters. One of the policemen begins: ‘*Tu ne travailles pas ? Tu ne sais donc pas que...*’ whereupon an extra-diegetic inserted sequence allows a school teacher indoctrinating a classroom of young boys to finish the thought, ‘*...le travail est obligatoire, car le travail, c’est la liberté.*’ With astonishing prescience this admonition, followed by rows of men marching into factories where they are obligated to perform repetitive assembly-line work under surveillance, eerily foreshadows the motto of the Nazi death camps, *Arbeit macht frei*, and thus imbues the film with a sinister undertone while further emphasizing the dehumanizing rigidity of modern industrialization, where progress, organization and profit are valued more than humanity itself. However, comradeship ultimately prevails, and when the escaped crook turned boss donates his company and profits to the workers, returning to a life on the road with his best friend, the ‘impending political clashes between collectivist ideologies and democratic freedoms’ are, temporarily, resolved. (Temple and Witt 2004/2007: 95)

In Tati’s films too comradeship ultimately prevails. The prevalence given to the trope of change wrought by modernization in Tati’s oeuvre, along with the focus on the factory in *Mon Oncle* in particular, along with the foregrounding of social satire aligns his films with Clair’s musical *A nous la liberté* and Chaplin’s *Modern Times* (1936). These films constitute early examples of finding farce in the factory-line and mocking mechanization and modernization, whose effects on employment levels were devastating. Tati’s films were made in a different economic climate, the period known as *les trentes glorieuses*, when production and economic growth, regardless of the waste generated, was a priority. Record levels of employment were attained, and France’s GDP was on the rise, yet the actual working conditions and standard of life for workers left much to be desired.

Having established that Tati’s films can be situated in the French comic tradition, we will see that they borrow too from Anglo-Saxon silent comic film (which incidentally was in turn inspired by the French comic actor Max Linder, as professed for example by Chaplin). The

most immediately noticeable line of connection between the films from *Les Vacances de Monsieur Hulot* to *Playtime* is the character of Monsieur Hulot, played by Tati. From a visual perspective, Hulot can be seen to be a negative of one of his comic predecessors in particular: Charlie Chaplin.<sup>110</sup> Both characters share a vague classlessness, neither bourgeois nor entirely working-class (not least of all because neither works), interlopers on the outskirts of – but brushing shoulders with – respectable society. This contact with – but not adherence to – the bourgeois class and social mores is essential in order for the films to fulfill their function of satirizing the middle classes.

Moving on from the early decades of French classical cinema, when France ‘was about to be hit by the full force of the global economic crash’ to the end of this remarkable period, having survived the Occupation and US hegemony, French cinema then had to meet the challenges of adapting to colour, sound, and competing with television (Temple and Witt 2004/2007: 93).

The importance of the role accorded to mass-produced modern commodities already apparent in Clair’s films resurfaces in Tati’s films. One of the technical objects which is so often at the centre of his films is the car, treated initially in *Mon Oncle* ‘as a fantastic and singular visitation’. However, the critical angle is never far and moments later the car becomes just one of many in a queue of traffic. Kristin Ross, for whom Tati is the ‘greatest analyst of post-war French modernization’ (1995/1996: 30), underlines the role of cinema in creating myth and influencing both desire and patterns of consumption. She notes that just as the car was becoming commonplace (between 1960 and 1975 the number of automobiles on the road in France rose from 5 to 15 million; in 1966 more than half of French households owned one (Borne 1988/1992 41)), films helped to ‘produce a myth or ideology of the car’s auratic singularity’ (Ross 1995/1996: 33).

The car was just one of several material technical objects and appliances that symbolized modernity and can be read as indicators of the advance of modernization in post-second-world war France, the others being the refrigerator, television and washing machine, whilst rising comfort associated with modern housing meant that whereas in 1954 only 17.5% of housing had a bath or shower room, by 1975 this had risen to 70% (Borne 1988/1992: 41) By

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<sup>110</sup> Where Chaplin’s trousers are too long, Hulot’s are too short, where Chaplin’s bowler hat is round and rigid, Hulot’s is flatter and flaccid, and whilst Chaplin leans askew or backwards, Hulot tips forwards (Bellos 1999: 169-170). They also share similar stick-like props: where Chaplin carries a cane, Hulot is equipped with a pipe or umbrella, and even Hulot’s name refers back to *Charlot*.

the late 1950s and early 1960s studies into the society of consumption and youth culture abounded (Baecque 1998: 51-56), and the relatively new phenomenon of mass culture was also the subject of research and analysis. Edgar Morin is amongst the more enduringly lucid of these analysts, and conveniently also the most closely associated with the films analysed in this dissertation, having collaborated with Jean Rouch to make the cinéma-vérité *Chronique d'un été* (1962). Morin's observations will therefore inform and complement some of the discussion in this chapter.

### The mechanics of comedy and the democracy of the gag

While comedies rarely win accolades in international film festivals, often being considered less serious competitors in relation to contenders from other genres, Bakhtin emphasizes the crucial role and meaning of laughter during the Renaissance, which he describes thus:

Laughter has a deep philosophical meaning, it is one of the essential forms of the truth concerning the world as a whole, concerning history and man; it is a peculiar point of view relative to the world; the world is seen anew, no less (and perhaps more) profoundly than when seen from the serious standpoint. (Bakhtin 1984: 66)

Not only may there be a deep philosophical meaning to laughter, but in order to laugh (that is be sensitive or aware of the comical aspect) we must necessarily be in a detached and therefore somewhat critical state, '*Signalons maintenant, [...] l'insensibilité qui accompagne d'ordinaire le rire.*' (Bergson 1900: 10) There is a long culture of comic tradition in French literature and culture, which dates since Rabelais, and this tradition continued to manifest itself in very early cinema.<sup>111</sup> Finally, the 'peculiar point of view' offered by laughter and comedy may reveal a society's preoccupations and fears, while comedy often provides a mitigating channel through which to treat themes that are otherwise overwhelmingly grave,

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<sup>111</sup> Roughly 40 percent of French films during the 1910s were comedies. While not always the French public's preferred genre – partly due to the cinema's tendency to both reflect and affect the public mood, so that for instance in times of war, during the rise and demise of the *Front Populaire*, or under the Occupation, other genres would be more prominent – comedy is overall 'the most popular genre in French cinema' (Austin 2008: 199).

such as that of the Occupation, depicted by Autant-Lara in a dark but humorous vein in *La Traversée de Paris* (1956).<sup>112</sup>

In the 1950s Tati and Fernandel were France's comic leading men, to be surpassed – in terms of popularity with the French public – by Louis de Funès in the 1960s. Although somewhat despised by critics, Funès nevertheless became, according to Susan Hayward, 'the most popular star at the post-war French box-office (Hayward 2000: 136). Fernandel gained credit with critics by having acted in a 'serious' film: *Angèle* (Pagnol 1934), while Tati worked almost exclusively, whether acting, directing or producing, in the genre of comedy. Before directing, Tati acted in a handful of short films prior to the war, including a starring role in René Clément's *Soigne ta gauche* (1936). In 1943 he was considered – but not chosen – for the role of Debureau, 'the legendary father of French mime' in Marcel Carné's exquisite *Les Enfants du paradis* (1945), before securing "four months' work as a silent reflection" (Bellos 1999: 91 and 93) as the phantom in *Sylvie et le fantôme* (Autant-Lara 1945). Part of Tati's singularity in relation to other comic leading men in the 50s and 60s comes from his having been both an actor, director and producer; in short, an *auteur*. In this manner, he is closer to earlier stars of the burlesque, namely Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton, and Mack Sennett.

Loping through the landscapes of Tati's films, there is an accidental quality to Hulot's strengths and weaknesses, whether beating every opponent at tennis in *Les Vacances* (accidental, as he's merely repeating the gesture the woman made when she gave him the tennis racket) or introducing chaos into the factory in *Mon Oncle* (he's fallen asleep due to a leaking pipe). Furthermore Monsieur Hulot is often blissfully unaware of the inconvenience and 'gêne' that he causes, thus adding to his comic appeal given that: '*un personnage comique est généralement comique dans l'exacte mesure où il s'ignore lui-même*' (Bergson 1900: 15). When he is aware, he is so profusely apologetic that he rarely offends. His lack of specific geographical origin – although he seems to appeal most of all to Anglo-Saxon characters in the films, perhaps echoing de Gaulle and Churchill's uneasy collaboration during the Occupation – and ambiguous class combine with his modesty and willingness to please to create a non-threatening and widely appropriable character.

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<sup>112</sup> The film's narrative is driven by the slaughter of a pig and subsequent delivery of the meat across Paris, to be sold on the black market. Jean Gabin's character Grandgil is a painter while Luis de Funès has a small part as Jambier the shopkeeper.

Critics sometimes doubt whether Tati's films have retained their comic value half a century after their release. However, even when first shown this question was asked: *'Il est significatif que beaucoup de spectateurs de « Hulot » et a fortiori, de « Playtime » [...] se plaignent de ce que les gags ne sont [sic] souvent pas drôles.'* (Burch 1968: 27) Much of the uncertainty surrounding the comic aspect in Tati's films arises from his innovative use of a new form of comic construction which relies on extensive use of the long shot and depth of field, so that the spectator is often presented with a relatively densely populated 'tableau' where a series of gags take place simultaneously, leaving the audience free to choose what to look at, or indeed, to miss some of the action.

Multiple terms exist for describing the forms of gag prevalent in Tati's films. Noël Burch favours the description of a modern development of the "*mathématique du gag*" (1968: 27), while according to Michel Chion, Tati's tendency to share the source of mirth amongst many members of the cast communicates "*sa démocratie comique, en fait son anarchisme*" (1987: 19). Chion also analyses the mechanism behind the frequent sound gags involving the '*prise de parole*' by objects, whereby objects are made to 'speak', even sometimes to converse (one such example can be found in the waiting-room in *Playtime* where the businessman's and Tati's air-leaking seats 'speak' to each other). This also serves to further illustrate the point made below: *'C'est en relation avec cette 'prise de parole' des sons [des objets] que la voix humaine est ramenée, elle, au niveau d'un bruit.'* (Chion 1982: 72). David Bellos enters into detailed descriptions of switch-image and switch-movement cinema sight gags, followed by an analysis of the use of sympathetic irony and multiple other forms of gag to be found in Tati's opus (Bellos 1999: 173-180), while for Kristin Ross, Tati 'specialized in depicting a kind of burlesque malleability in the face of change' (1995/1996: 30).

For our interests here I will focus primarily on one type of gag in the films and use the term 'democracy of the gag' by which I mean that multiple members of the cast become the comic characters for the duration of a gag, before passing the comic role on to others. With this technique and through extensive use of the long shot, Tati works to overcome the hierarchy inherent in the traditionally voyeuristic relationship between the spectator and the image. The spectator's impression of superiority over characters is reduced by the multiplicity of simultaneous gags being acted out, some of which escape the spectator, while the director's authority over the spectator's focus of attention is likewise diminished. Tati described his

concept in the following way: '*je voulais faire participer un peu plus les gens [les spectateurs], les laisser changer de vitesse eux-mêmes*' (Fieschi and Narboni 1968: 15).

### A note on deconstructing sound

Although Tati was stubbornly anti-intellectual, he too, like Resnais, Godard, and Varda, explored the use of non-naturalistic editing and sound in his films. For instance in his films voices form silhouettes rather than opaque audible presences (Chion 1982: 71).

Before moving on to an analysis of the films separately, it is worth following up on Tati's aforementioned inclination for employing techniques in post-production that transform voices into silhouettes rather than opaque on-screen presences. As described in detail by Michel Chion, unusually, the human voice in Tati's films is treated much like any other sound, and mixed to be heard as a background rather than foreground sound.

In the majority of films, voices are recorded and mixed in order to be heard in the audio 'foreground', thus making the voice, according to Chion, '*plus grosse que les corps*' (1982: 71), and the consistent preference – which manifests itself through relatively high-volume – given to voices, regardless of their characters' situation or placement on-screen, leads to the actors appearing (audibly, at least) to be larger, closer and more prominent, than they are, or in any case more important than the decor in which they are situated (Chion 1982: 71). As spectators, we are accustomed to this, so much so that when a director strays from this principle/habit we are surprised or even disconcerted by the relative inaudibility of the dialogue. Tati's attention to the mixing of the human voice in his films has led Chion to place Tati with Ophuls, Fellini and Godard in terms of these directors' shared desire to let the audience's perception of dialogue be '*rumeur, bavardage, bruit*' (Chion 1982: 71).

Indeed Tati often relegates the human voice to a place in the audio 'background', which, although more true to reality, may strike the spectator as less 'realistic' and has also played some part in the impression the spectator may have of Tati's films being speechless, despite their polyphony. His films are however '*verbo-décentrés*', which is to say that speech is not designated as crucial, but rather treated as a sound amongst others (Chion 1998: 226).<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> In this, according to Chion, Tati's films share common ground with Fellini, whilst Godard's films, although liable to contain inaudible speech, are nonetheless '*verbo-centrés*' ([1998] 2004 : 226).

### ***Jour de fête* (1947) and the Ritualized Derision of Emperors**

Before moving on to a more detailed analysis of *Les Vacances de Monsieur Hulot*, *Mon Oncle*, and *Playtime*, it is worth briefly mentioning *Jour de fête* (1947) here, due to its delicate parody of Charles De Gaulle. According to David Bellos, Tati's films depict the 'imperfect state of modern communications' (1999: 312). Indeed, prior to 1968 it was sometimes necessary to wait for as long as two years for a telephone in rural areas. In line with Gaullist doctrine, and using the U.S. postal service as a role model, François the postman endeavours to improve his efficiency, for instance by sorting his mail on the tailgate of a truck as it drives down the street, thereby continuing on his delivery route at the same time and maximizing his productivity.

Further ridicule of Gaullist doctrine is located by Bellos in the raising of the Maypole; Bellos finds parallels between François's role in managing the raising of the maypole the official Gaullist line:

Like de Gaulle, François takes on responsibility for raising the flag: the maypole is the means by which the tricolour can float over the village fair. His words of instruction [are] nonsense, of course, but [they are] also Gaullist doctrine – a national movement claiming [...] to represent both Left and Right: "Those on the left, pull left! Those on the right, pull right!" (1999: 140).

Although only one recorded performance of Tati giving an explicit and 'startlingly life-like impersonation of [de Gaulle]' on stage exists (Bellos 1999: 140), in *Jour de fête* it is not difficult to see the visual resemblance between François (Tati) and de Gaulle. The source of mirth in the above sequence surrounding the raising of the Maypole can be situated in a long line of comic tradition dating back to classical antiquity.<sup>114</sup> For example, the Romans practised a 'traditional deriding of emperors and generals' (Bakhtin 1984: 70) which later resurfaced in Rabelais's time, only to be suppressed once again, as by the seventeenth century it was no longer considered appropriate for generals, kings or heroes 'to be shown in a comic aspect' (Bakhtin 1984: 67). Bellos writes of the necessary caution surrounding Tati's

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<sup>114</sup> Cf. Ovid's *Tristia*, or Martial, 'who in his epigrams justifies his license by recalling the traditional deriding of emperors and generals during the triumphal marches' (Bakhtin 1984: note 18 to page 70).

impersonations of de Gaulle ‘in the intensely polarized French political context of 1947’ (1999: 140), and I suggest that the rebellious audacity and courage inherent in such comic irreverence and (the spectators’) ensuing laughter situate this humoristic impersonation in a history of comedy, incorporating Rabelaisian carnival, which itself borrowed from the comic tradition of antiquity. Here laughter is seen to play the role that Bakhtin attributes to it:

Laughter liberates not only from external censorship but first of all from the great interior censor; it liberates from the fear that developed in man during thousands of years: fear of the sacred, of prohibitions, of the past, of power. (Bakhtin 1965: 94)

Many of the French spectators who first watched *Jour de fête* had lived through the *drôle de guerre*, the Occupation, and the Liberation, each period with its own myths, codes, propaganda, official state-regulated censorship, and also informal (but no less stringent and necessary for survival) forms of censorship. It seems fitting then that comedy would resurface in popularity, in the new popular medium, cinema.

In many respects De Gaulle embodied the contradictions of the time. Born in 1890 during the Belle Époque, he was France’s President (1959-1969, though he also led (part of) the country for an additional six years if the period during and immediately after the Second World war is taken into account, see below) during a period of hitherto un-paralleled modernization. He favoured industrialization and economic development, which appealed to the new middle classes, yet even while knowing that extended ‘progress’ and the homogenisation that came with it would be the demise of rural France, he managed also to maintain a traditionalist discourse, vaunting the value of a unified and eternal France, that appealed to rural inhabitants, artisans, and also to the bourgeoisie through extended use of patriotic symbolism (Borne 1992: 35-40). In earlier chapters we have already seen examples of his ‘universal’ yet unfeasibly contradictory appeal, such as in the global support he received from opposing factions during the Algerian war, where his chameleonic and ambiguous discourse resulted in both colons and those that wanted an end to the war, regardless of whether that meant Algeria remained ‘French’ or not, believing that De Gaulle had their concerns foremost in his plans. The ensuing perceived treachery led to hatred and assassination attempts on de Gaulle by supporters of French-Algeria, such as that by Jean Bastien-Thiry, whose father had known de Gaulle, whose family had long been Gaullist, and whose subsequent execution (following de

Gaulle's refusal to pardon the 35 year old) also poignantly highlights the Franco-French fratricidal nature of the Algerian War.

De Gaulle's political reign (initially as leader of the Free French forces 1940-1944, then prime minister of the provisional French government mid-1944 until early-1946, and finally as President of the newly founded Fifth Republic 1959-1969), roughly coincides with these films, and it is significant that de Gaulle is explicitly satirized in both the first and last film that Tati made in the 20 year period following the Liberation: in *Jour de fête* (1947) and in *Playtime* (1967), where he is mocked through an allusion to his alleged Bonapartism when an American tourist disguises a waiter as Napoleon. During this time frame, French culture and society began to turn away from the certitudes associated with modernism, and also from the authority and a certain myth associated with the figure of de Gaulle, who had become emblematic not only of the Free French and the ideals of the French Republic, but also tainted by the colonial wars and fratricide which subsequently divided the country. The cause of liberating France from the Occupiers and Nazi Germany's puppet regime in the form of the Vichy government under Pétain had been an ideological battle encompassing concrete acts of resistance which united across generations and political boundaries, motivating even the colonised to fight for France's liberation (and then their own). However, seventeen years of colonial conflict immediately post-Liberation during which the nation's young men had been drafted and sometimes *re-drafted* served to alienate the younger generations, who, whether anti-imperialist or not, felt that they were being sent to fight in the ruling classes' and older generations' wars; wars in which they did not necessarily believe.

Henceforth a rejection both of de Gaulle and more generally of the unambiguous authority and convictions inherent in the myth of the unity of the nation and *résistencialisme* grew as unrest and rebellion amongst youth, students, workers, women and immigrants (in particular from the former colonies) engendered a quest for renewal and alternatives, leading towards the less certain, pluralistic multiplicity and collective spirit (that some might call post-modern) of May 68.

I use the term post-modern with caution, given the ambiguities surrounding use and understanding of the term, which designates an intellectual movement rather than a theory. Post-modern works may be referentially void of depth, as the: 'Postmodernist image is

regarded as entirely cut off from any original'.<sup>115</sup> And yet postmodernism can also be said to exercise a 'recall of history [which] is intended to cancel the antihistoricism of Modernism and its rage for the New.' (Brann 1992: 6)

Complicity or a certain synchronicity between post-modernism and the *revendications* of May 68 can be found in the Greek and Latin etymology of the word and its prefix: modern is derived from the Latin '*modo*' meaning 'just now, this moment' and as such is "a term of temporal self-location" describing "a sense of having left something behind and of being on the cutting edge of time" (Brann 1992: 5) while post designates "the Greek preposition '*ana*', which as a prefix can mean "back again", as in *anamnesis*, recollection." (Brann 1992: 5)

Therefore, post-modern can designate a return to the immediate, an awareness of turning a historical page, wiping clean the slate, leaving the past behind and reappropriating the present. As such, it can be construed to resonate with the spirit of May 68 and the political claims for radical change.

One final point to make regarding *Jour de fête* relates to colour. Tati's first feature was meant also to have been France's first colour film.<sup>116</sup> Tati highlights the fact that his use of colour in the film was intended to attribute heightened value to the transient fun of the fair, clearly opposing the fair to the dullness of everyday life in a slow village. Whereas Bellos describes Tati's theory of colour as 'dramatic', he nevertheless faults it for being 'naïve, and somewhat sentimental' (1999: 110). It is however, I would argue, perfectly in keeping with an accentuation of the Rabelaisian carnival that runs through Tati's films, with its symbolic, transitory destruction of official culture. While the colours Tati intended to bring to the screen in *Jour de fête* were rarely seen, Tati's theory of colour seems to have remained consistent, so that in his later films colour is not used to create the impression of a faithful representation of reality, but rather it is used in a highly symbolic fashion.<sup>117</sup> Accordingly the essentially tri-

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<sup>115</sup> Eva T. H. Brann "What is Postmodernism?" *The Harvard Review of Philosophy* (Vol. 2 N° 1 1992) pp. 4-7 Retrieved 26 July 2011 at <http://www.hcs.harvard.edu/~hrp/issues/1992/Brann.pdf>

<sup>116</sup> Three versions of *Jour de fête* exist: black and white filmed in 1947, but not released until 1949 due to a lack of distributor; the version that was coloured-in that was released in 1964; and the 'colour' version which was filmed but could not be developed due to the technological failure of Thomsoncolour, but which nevertheless was 'restored' by François Ede and Sophie Tatischeff in 1994 (Goudet and Makeieff 2009:174). For a detailed account of Tati's debacle with Thomsoncolour, cf. Bellos 1999: 105-111

<sup>117</sup> Cf. one print of *Jour de fête*, which features a French flag in colour while everything else is in black and white.

colour palette of *Mon Oncle* and *Playtime* is comprised almost uniquely of predominantly neutral tones offset with splashes of blue/green or red/orange.

### ***Les Vacances de Monsieur Hulot* (1953) and Laughing in the Kingdom of the Dead**

Hulot's arrival at the seaside village-resort in his dilapidated, spluttering car is noisy and draws disapproving attention from the staff and adult guests before they even see him. Children on the other hand swarm upon the odd little vehicle Hulot drives; their positive welcome is an early indication of the line of connection between Hulot and youth, a connection that is maintained throughout the films, being most evident in *Mon Oncle*. The children in Tati's films, like the youth in Rabelais and 'the "playing boy" of Heraclitus' (Bakhtin 1984: 147) are emblematic neither of immaturity nor of incompleteness, but like Mannekin-Pis,<sup>118</sup> symbolise innocence, humanity, and the collective gaiety of the people, drawing attention to the absurdity of the adult – serious and official – world.

For Bellos, Tati's films express the 'greater pleasures of taking a break' (1999: 312). The title itself of *Les Vacances de Monsieur Hulot* can be interpreted as a political comment, given the importance and relative novelty of paid holidays, instigated in 1936 just weeks after the Popular Front came to power. In the film the persistence of class inequality is apparent through the fact that the holiday-makers depicted in the film are predominantly bourgeois; the absence of the proletariat from the seaside resort indicates the hiatus between the theoretical possibility of 'taking a break', and the practical affordability of actually doing so.

The indoor ping-pong episode illustrates Hulot's tendency to accidentally introduce chaos into a previously orderly situation. This can be construed to be the spirit of revolution, freedom, and carnival played in a minor chord. In the process of recovering a lost ping-pong ball from underneath a chair in the lobby, Hulot accidentally causes a gentleman playing cards to cheat by spinning his chair 90° to the right as he is laying his cards down, so that they

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<sup>118</sup> Manneken-Pis was the little boy from Brussels whose bronze statue has been displayed in Brussels since the beginning of the seventeenth century, while prior to that time, a series of stone statues were on display. There are many different legends surrounding the boy, one of which is that re-counted by Vladimir Radunsky: the little boy became separated from his parents in a war, and he desperately needed to pee. Finally he couldn't hold it in any longer, and he peed from high up overlooking the town square, onto the fighting below. This ended the war, as the adults being peed upon started to laugh at the absurdity of it all. (Radunsky 2003) Manneken-Pis is also briefly mentioned by Bakhtin (1985: 151), although he writes only: '[...] *Mannekin-Pis* of the Brussels fountain. This is an ancient figure of a boy urinating with complete openness. The people of Brussels consider him their mascot.'

fall on another group's card table. Each of these players consequently thinks that his opponent has cheated. Meanwhile Hulot has spun the gentleman's chair back to its original position, where the gentleman proudly gathers in the stakes. The players at his card table are speechless. Consequently several intense arguments break out, but not until *after* Monsieur Hulot and the young lady have bid each other goodnight and retired blissfully unaware of the disorder about to erupt. This sequence can also be interpreted as a manifestation via the characters (the hotel guests) of what Bergson termed a certain '*raideur de mécanique*':

*Une certaine inélasticité native des sens et de l'intelligence, qui fasse que l'on continue de voir ce qui n'est plus, d'entendre ce qui ne résonne plus, de dire ce qui ne convient plus, enfin de s'adapter à une situation passée et imaginaire quand on devrait se modeler sur la réalité présente. (1900: 13)*

### ***Mon Oncle* (1958), the festive marketplace and brother-hood of fellow drinkers**

Tati's *Mon Oncle* 'depends on spatial devices to stage its conflict: the juxtaposition of two, non-integrated universes.' (Ross [1995] 1996: 51) We could extend Ross's line of argument to include not only the use of spatial devices to indicate the juxtaposition between two universes in the film, but the characters themselves. On one hand M and Mme Arpel, in their new house, with its countless gadgets and stunning brand new garishly coloured Chevrolet, live in a neighbourhood of similarly isolated residences (whose mal-functioning gates and walls will be ridiculed), and along with their pretentious acquaintances represent the new era of increased productivity and supposedly superior design. On the other hand Hulot – whose archaic automobile in *Les Vacances* has presumably '*rendu son âme*' – is now carless, but still unfashionably and somewhat shabbily attired in what may very well be the same clothes he wore in the *Les Vacances*, and in contrast to the Arpels, Hulot rather nostalgically represents an earlier era, an era prior to the unceasing relentless quest for novelty associated with modernism, and prior too to the invasion of technology into seemingly every corner of daily existence. Audio devices too will be used to signify the juxtaposition of two mutually exclusive universes, as discussed below.

There are in fact two pairs of "two, non-integrated universes" present in *Mon Oncle*: the first is the juxtaposition between the Arpel's functional yet sterile house and Tati's illogical yet

vibrant home; the second is the welcoming village bar where Hulot becomes waylaid and the off-putting factory from which he is expelled.

In all three Hulot films a restaurant or café serve as a unifying device, both spatially as a place that the characters and narrative return to, but also spiritually reconciling and bringing the characters together, fulfilling the function of depicting the ‘brotherhood of fellow-drinkers and all men, the triumph of affluence, and the victory of reason’ (Bakhtin 1965: 90). In *Mon Oncle* and *Playtime* the setting is a café or restaurant, whereas in *Les Vacances* the hotel restaurant and the hill-walkers’ refuge share this role.

The role of the factory is different; Tati chooses to use the factory both as exemplar of modern society and as a source of humour, much as Clair and Chaplin before him in *A nous la liberté* and *Modern Times* respectively (cf. pp 164-5). From a sociologist’s perspective Morin details how assembly line work comprises:

la tendance à l’hyper-spécialisation qui au contraire a quelque chose d’aliénant pour les individus: la pluralité des tâches se réduit, on tend à aller vers des tâches uniques, obsessionnelles, c’est l’image montrée par Charlie Chaplin dans *Les Temps Modernes*. (2000: 219-220)

Hulot’s first day at the factory has ended in hilarious disaster, partly as a consequence of the aforementioned ‘*hyper-spécialisation*’ that leaves Hulot unable to effectively substitute a colleague even for moments. The plastic-tubing machine malfunctions under his surveillance and as he is unable to regulate it, the machine churns out hundreds of metres of deformed piping. Hulot and his friends are left trying to dispose of these plastic ‘sausages’, which eventually they decide to throw into a river under cover of darkness. However, a pair of lovers is embracing on the riverbanks and mistakes the bundle of sausages for a suicide; the man heroically dives in to save the victim, but then feels humiliated when the true identity of the object is revealed.

This results in an angry pursuit, and just as full-blown fisticuffs are about to ensue on the terrace of the village bar, Hulot inadvertently lands a punch squarely on a bystander’s nose. The source of drama is diverted as all unite to usher the unfortunate victim inside for a drink.

Sometime later the participants exit the bar, evidently inebriated and thoroughly reconciled, and they share a jovial ride home in the back of the horse-drawn cart.

This sequence of events reveals several characteristics common to Tati's films. Firstly, the source of drama involving the romantic couple arises from the comic technique of dramatic irony, whereby Tati uses what Noel Carroll refers to as the "switch image" which has been usefully summarised by Bellos as: "X (or somebody) takes Y (or something) for Z (or something else) (2001: 173). Although there are several examples to choose from here, the two most central in terms of the unfolding gag are the couple mistaking the plastic piping for a suicide victim, and the origin of the whole debacle earlier in the factory having been due to a co-worker mistaking Tati's head 'nodding off' for a nod of affirmation.

Secondly, this episode highlights Hulot's inability to fit in or comply with expectations. Typically, despite efforts to the contrary, he fails to conform to the situation, which in this instance is the smoothly regulated running of the factory, again recalling the impact of Taylorisation in France, as mentioned above. Indeed not only does Hulot fail to integrate his gestures and behaviour into the rhythmic and regulated management of the factory, he introduces chaos into it, yet his rebellion and complete inaptitude are shown to be accidental – caused by a leaking pipe – and unavoidable – it sends him to sleep – rather than deliberate. This I would argue is Hulot's revolutionary aspect: he is intrinsically incapable of conforming to the regulated structure of the factory, and enduringly so due to his incorrigibility.

We could borrow from Bergson's theories on laughter in *Le Rire* (1900) as they lend themselves to an analysis of Hulot's comic aspect here, in particular as regards the involuntary element of Hulot's actions and the part that they play in constructing and articulating the comic element in the sequences described above:

*Un homme, qui courait dans la rue, trébuche et tombe : les passants rient. On ne rirait pas de lui, je pense, si l'on pouvait supposer que la fantaisie lui est venue tout à coup de s'asseoir par terre. On rit de ce qu'il s'est assis involontairement. (1900: 12)*

Hulot's incompatibility with the regulated factory milieu, the juxtaposition between Hulot and the rigid management can also be interpreted as an example of what Bergson refers to as '*Le diable à ressort*'. In this case, the image of the jack-in-the-box is transposed to the moral

sphere, whereby the spectator is faced with ‘...*un ressort plutôt moral, une idée qui s’exprime, qu’on réprime, et qui s’exprime encore...*’ (1900: 35-36). The tension between Hulot and the efforts of management and bourgeois order and bureaucracy, as embodied especially through his brother-in-law, can be understood in this way, as his brother-in-law and sister’s continually repeated efforts to fit Hulot into the ‘box’ of middle class respectability, be it in the office or at home (where it is hoped that he might settle down with the ‘right’ woman, their dreadful neighbour), are met each time by Hulot ‘popping’ out of the ‘box’.

Thirdly, the evening’s events are intercut with Hulot’s sister and brother-in-law’s night out to celebrate their wedding anniversary. Through the juxtaposition of the respective parties’ nights out, highlighted by the montage, the film explicitly invites us to consider the contrast between the unifying folk culture – represented by Hulot, his nephew, some workers from the factory, and other proletariat they meet – with the serious official culture of the upper stratum represented by the modern bourgeois couple’s excessively boring evening. Official culture and the bourgeoisie are mocked for their insincerity (the violinist wears a ridiculous mincing expression) and the materialist objective is underlined when the musician accepts payment from the husband for playing. This is juxtaposed with the sincere generosity of the common folk in the next sequence when the old man driving the horse-drawn cart refuses Hulot’s attempt to pay him something for bringing his nephew and himself home.

The above sequence usefully illustrates the close parallel between the role attributed to laughter by Tati and the role of medieval and Rabelaisian laughter:

Medieval laughter is directed at the same object as medieval seriousness. Not only does laughter make no exception for the upper stratum, but indeed it is usually directed toward it. ... not at one part only, but at the whole. (Bakhtin 1984: 88).

And indeed Tati directs our laughter at the modern bourgeoisie’s home, housewife, husband, appliances, domestic interior, ludicrous landscape gardening, automated gadgets, cars, mannerisms communicating with others, workplace, attitude at work, and so on... only the upper stratum’s children (symbolised by Hulot’s nephew) are exempt from ridicule.

In *Mon Oncle* the supposed sense of fulfilment that women in the 1950s, as the new ‘technicians of the home’ were to be revelling in, is clearly undermined through the character

of Hulot's sister and the multiplication of gadgets, buttons and quirky appliances she manipulates through-out the day. Raising the question of whether increased automation and adoption of a modern lifestyle necessarily equate with increased freedom for the individual, a significant proportion of her gestures are dictated by the appliances: a multitude of buttons and knobs to push and twist to flip a steak, a ridiculous flutter of the hand to open the kitchen door, the fountain to be switched on and off when the door-bell rings... In this way the film can be seen to render 'palpable a daily life that increasingly appeared to unfold in a space where objects tended to dictate to people their gestures and movements' (Ross 1995/1996: 5) With the growing popularity of the car, even the garage is not spared electrical devices, and the inversion of roles – master and mastered – is made complete and the gadget's mastery over people finally asserted when the automatic garage door, triggered by the dachshund, locks the couple inside the garage.

The sterile machine-operated residential neighbourhood of Hulot's sister, where any vestige or threat of the intrusion of an un-manageable or un-predictable Nature (such as a fallen leaf) must be removed immediately, "*Ô, une feuille !*" is counter-poised to the rambling, somewhat over-grown and dishevelled neighbourhood in which Hulot lives. In clear contrast with his sister's home, the lack of efficiency in the architecture of Hulot's boarding house is highlighted by the fact that to go downstairs, Tati must initially go up a flight of stairs, and Tati shows us that here, everything really does communicate, as Hulot politely turns the other way to allow a woman fresh from the bath to pass him by.

In *Mon Oncle*, sounds are used as environmental clues, indicators of ideology and social status contrasting the traditional folk neighbourhood with the serious, modern and middleclass neighbourhood and territories. Children's voices, hawkers' cries, and other noises associated with what Chion would term a '*chiaroscuro verbal*' (1998: 192) (sounds of a crowd, collective speech, noises in a café, and so on) along with birdsong and the theme song populate the audible landscape of Hulot's festive folk neighbourhood, while the cold click-clack of footsteps and the noise of machinery fill that of the bourgeoisie's home and workplace.

Chion asserts that in contrast with our ability to distinguish visually stylised effects, the spectator does not experience sound as stylised: 'Il n'y a donc pas de son stylisé' (1998: 123). I disagree, and reference to the footsteps heard during the garden party at Monsieur and

Madame Arpel's house serves to illustrate my argument and furnish an example of sound that can be distinguished as stylised. This line of argument can be developed by considering the following passage from Chion's *Le Son*:

Le son le plus stylisé s'intègre parfaitement bien dans un univers complètement réaliste, sans créer de distance, ni frapper l'univers du film de fausseté.

Ce n'est pas que l'écoute d'un bruit de pas soit « approximative » ; c'est que les spécifications formelles, qui définissent, dans la réalité, un bruit de pas, sont changeantes. Les gens que nous voyons marcher dans la rue s'ils sont habillés de manière très variable et ont des types physiques différents, obéissent cependant à une charte descriptive commune très précise : un visage avec trois yeux ou sans nez, ou même un corps avec des proportions éloignées de la moyenne (un buste deux fois plus long que les jambes) nous frapperait tout de suite comme irréel ou monstrueux.<sup>119</sup>

(Chion 1998: 124)

Here Chion compares our real-life perception with our impression when watching a film. However, the two experiences engage the senses somewhat differently. As he argues, when walking down a crowded and noisy street our perception of sound is mitigated by the situation and we hardly listen to the footsteps of the people passing us by. However, all of our senses are keenly alert and we imbibe a wide array of multi-sensorial impressions when walking down a city street, listening to traffic, snippets of conversation, visually appraising the people we pass, smelling them (whether subconsciously and involuntarily or not), exchanging glances with them, being seen by them, feeling (in relation to) them, and also struggling against the barrage of advertising soliciting us, inhaling traffic fumes, dodging dog excrement, pacing our speed to catch a pedestrian light, avoiding a cyclist, and so on. On the other hand, when watching characters on screen in a film we engage in an entirely different manner, homing in on what we see and hear, favouring primarily only two of our senses, sight and sound, and (usually, although there are exceptions, cf. Marks's work on the haptic in *The Skin of the Film*) leaving the other senses significantly more dormant, unless the image and/or soundtrack invite us to involve them. Therefore, I would argue, because of the prominence given to sight *and* sound when viewing a film, we do experience sound as stylised, and can be

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<sup>119</sup> Even our ability to recognize a heavily 'stylized' face in the street may be somewhat mitigated, for instance in the case of plastic surgery, which can dramatically alter a person's physique and yet is not so easily recognized.

struck by its disparity with realist sound. An example of this can be found in *Mon Oncle*, during the garden party. Firstly though, Chion elaborates thus:

Or, les bruits que les gens émettent sont eux beaucoup moins précis et beaucoup plus fluctuants dans leur spécification, et leur « cahier de charges » n'est pas stable. Un bruit de pas, selon non seulement la chaussure et le sol mais aussi la démarche, l'allure du personnage, etc., se modifie à tout instant du tout au tout. (Chion 1998: 124)

Personally, I think that it is precisely because a footstep or hand-pat is more vague, less precise, as Chion argues, that we are struck by the clarity, precision, and *invariability* of the footsteps and frequently re-occurring hand wiping sounds in *Mon Oncle*. This is apparent in particular during the garden party sequences, where the soundtrack emits the sound of the women's high heels click-clacking on the tiles, *even when* her steps miss the tile and her heels sink into the grass. I contend therefore that there is in fact 'stylized sound', and that the spectator recognizes the sound of specific gestures and movements in *Mon Oncle* as such.

Following Hulot's brother-in-law's hysterical outburst: "*Ça suffit ! ...il ira en province, ma décision est prise !*" Hulot is driven to the airport. This journey twice takes the nephew and father past construction workers noisily drilling and demolishing old buildings on the edges of Hulot's neighbourhood, and when read in tandem with the now deserted formerly festive marketplace and Hulot's departure, Tati is clearly signifying the destruction of the old folk culture, making way for the modern. Other films of the period evoke this abrupt remodelling of Paris and the ensuing sociological evolution explicitly and politically, such as Godard's voice over in *2 ou 3 choses que je sais d'elle* (1967):

Il est sûr que l'aménagement de la région parisienne va permettre au gouvernement de poursuivre plus facilement sa politique de classe, et aux grands monopoles d'en organiser et d'en orienter l'économie sans tenir compte des besoins de l'aspiration à une vie meilleure de ses 8 millions d'habitants.<sup>120</sup>

The contemporary remodelling of Paris was economically and politically driven, during *les trentes glorieuses* (glorious only for some, as mentioned earlier), with the objectives of

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<sup>120</sup> The narrator (J-L Godard) in *Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle*, by Jean-Luc Godard

relocating those displaced by urban renewal projects and the clearances of the *bidonvilles* (the long-awaited relocation was filmed by Marker in *Le Joli Mai*) as well as to isolate from the wealthy inner cities the immigrant populations that were actively sought and brought to France in order to build and modernise the country through hard labour. Ross writes of the ‘great cordoning off of the immigrants, their removal to the suburbs in a massive reworking of the social boundaries of Paris and the other large French cities.’ (Ross 1995/1966: 11), while sociologists have long warned against the dangers of concentrating the poor in high density housing in isolated monolithic structures. When Godard shot *2 ou 3 choses que je sais d’elle*, the high-rises that feature in it were monstrously alienating, but new and relatively functional. In comparison, seven short years later, by the time that Romain Gary wrote Goncourt Prize winning *La vie devant soi* (1975) the buildings most often represented a sort of penitentiary or living hell for their inhabitants. Although there are many negative aspects associated with living in the buildings, one problem associated with the modern structures is that lack of investment in electrical and engineering maintenance results in broken elevators, so that the sheer scale of the buildings renders them difficult, if not in some cases nearly impossible, for meaningful and practical navigation by people of all ages. Gary offers the reader the following image:

Il faut dire qu’on était dans une sale situation. Madame Rosa allait bientôt être atteinte par la limite d’âge et elle le savait elle même. L’escalier avec ses six étages était devenu pour elle l’ennemi public numéro un. Un jour, il allait la tuer, elle en était sûre. (Gary 1975: 79)

Madame Rosa lives on the sixth floor, but the reality in many of these buildings – in fact the definition of a high-rise building – is that they comprise 12 floors or more.<sup>121</sup>

The allusion to this modern phenomenon notwithstanding, *Mon Oncle*’s ending is on anything but a pessimistic note. To the same raucously cheerful jazz piece that was associated with Monsieur Hulot in *Les Vacances*, Uncle Hulot disappears into the crowd of holidaymakers entering the airport. No sooner has he exited the narrative than his nephew’s father

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<sup>121</sup> Another lasting legacy of the government’s ‘*aménagement de la région parisienne*’ (and of the other major French cities’ regions) was vibrantly felt during the riots of November 2005. One positive consequence of the riots was the attention they focused on the persistence of housing which is pathogenic for its residents, and also of the continued failure and refusal of the French ruling classes (and large swathes of the French population) to integrate the (formerly) immigrant communities (of colour) into the economy and French culture (cf. *Les Nouvelles frontières de la société française* ed. Didier Fassin 2010).

inadvertently steps into his shoes, accidentally instigating a comic sketch, as his calls and whistles to the departing Hulot (who is just out of earshot) cause another traveller to walk into a lamppost. This is the third time we have seen this gag in the film: the first time the nephew and his friends lay bets on the ‘victims’ and Hulot was suspected of being involved, the second time the nephew played alone through his garden fence, targeting one of his parents’ arriving guests.

This third enactment of the same gag serves to unite the father and son at the point of Hulot’s departure, as they laugh together for the first time and the boy reaches for his father’s hand just as he had reached for his uncle’s in earlier scenes. Furthermore, this short gag perpetuates the presence of the gag into the community beyond Hulot, illustrating the growing emphasis on community, which is so intrinsic to the tradition of carnival. This is a theme that Tati will develop further in his next film.

### ***Playtime* (1967) and Laughter and Social Consciousness in the Carnival Crowd**

In *Les Vacances de Monsieur Hulot* it is Hulot who is the initiator of minor catastrophe and the gag, but as previously discussed this is a role which begins to be distributed amongst the other members of the cast in *Mon Oncle*. By the time *Playtime* is constructed, Tati’s vision of the comic technique in the film can be interpreted as so synchronistic with that of Rabelaisian carnival that he declares that it is not Monsieur Hulot, but *Playtime* who is the star of the film (Tati in Fieschi and Narboni 1968: 8). We will see below that the whole cast participates in a delicate choreography of laughter and disguise, as though the film itself has become a great masked ball.

Although Hulot is the most noticeable line of connection between the three films analysed in this chapter, he is not the only reoccurring motif, and inter-textual references between the films abound. These include the inter-locking umbrella gag which the spectator will remember from *Les Vacances* and which is used, with a modern twist (Velcro) to introduce Hulot in *Playtime*. Another ‘*clin d’œil*’ shared between films is the visual humour through which growing global homogeneity is accentuated: tourists’ identical brown satchels in the final sequence at the airport in *Mon Oncle* are mirrored in *Playtime* by the identical white shoulder bags worn by tourists descending en masse from buses whom Hulot watches from

the glass waiting room of the labyrinthine offices. As detailed above there are audio echoes too resounding between the films, for instance the jazz piece from *Les Vacances* resurfaces at the point of Hulot's departure in *Mon Oncle*, and the typically Tatiesque pan-European multilingualism (often mumbled through a pipe or cigarette butt) is common to his films.

Applying Bakhtin's theory that 'All that was frightening in ordinary life is turned into amusing or ludicrous monstrosities' (1984: 47) we see that the travel agents' posters of the identical skyscraper in every city, like the matching shoulder bags discussed above, depict mass culture as '*cosmopolite par vocation et planétaire par extension*' (Morin 1962: 13-14) while simultaneously transforming this momentous cultural evolution into a humorously non-threatening object of ridicule. Just as mass culture's tendency to corrode national cultures and other cultures (humanist, religious, etc.) becomes a source of laughter in *Playtime*, the impersonal labyrinthine offices, in which hysterical managers and mechanical business-men are ineffectual or puppet-like, invite the spectator to consider bourgeois order and bureaucracy with irreverence.

Returning to the observations regarding architecture and city-scapes made in the introduction, architectural forms to be found in classical modernism which were used to make an avant-garde statement post-First World War, were subsequently reproduced during the post-Second World War building boom by young architects working for the fashion conscious petit bourgeois (Bellos 1999: 207). This 'transformation in the meaning of forms of classical modernism from avant-garde statement to petit-bourgeois fashion item' is epitomised in *Mon Oncle's* Maison Arpel (Neumann 1996: 136). This theme of increasing cultural homogeneity and blurring of national identities is further developed in *Playtime*:

[...] à la fin de *Mon Oncle*, Monsieur Hulot disparaît dans un aéroport vers une destination inconnue. Quand il en ressort, 10 ans après, le monde entier est un aéroport. Il n'est pas d'échappatoire possible, pas d'hypothétique retour vers un pays natal. La résistance des corps doit s'opérer ici et maintenant. (Blouin 2002: 46)

Allusions to mass culture are never far from the wings in Tati's films, waiting to come on stage. For example, the radio in the hotel lobby of *Les Vacances de Monsieur Hulot* emits 'a constant barrage of business news and advertisements for such products as "The briefcase that spells success"' (Ross 1995/1996: 171) whilst *Mon Oncle* is particularly rich in superfluous

gadgets and noisy household appliances, indicative both of growing consumerism in the hexagon and the ensuing lack of singularity amongst the new French middle class. Although an object of (mocked) wonder in *Mon Oncle*, by *Playtime* and Tati's later films, the car comes to be viewed as a 'fatal element in a ballet of seriality and repetition' (Ross 1995/1996: 30). Furthermore, in *Playtime* the implicit criticism is extended outside of France to encompass growing global homogeneity, while foregrounding a criticism of modern advertising. Aside from the ridiculousness of the objects being promoted in the showrooms through which Hulot and the American tourists wander, later that day in Barbara's hotel room a voice comes over the radio advertising *Quick Cleaner*: '*Mesdames, utilisez Quick Cleaner, parce que Quick Cleaner ...*' Unambiguously communicating disdain, Barbara (whom Chion refers to as Hulotte) switches the radio off mid-sentence.

Focusing now on the latter half of the film, I will briefly highlight two gags that apply the democracy of the gag. Subsequently, I will focus on a handful of sequences that depict the tempo, revelry and carnival spirit beginning slowly in the restaurant, gradually building in tempo and intensity, until spilling out into the street with the dawn of the new morning, heralded by the crow of a rooster, and culminating in the final carnival sequence in which the entire city, workers and tourists alike, participate.

Commencing with the evening in the Royal Garden, we can see that the democracy of the gag is used to its full potential, as a gag that begins with one character is gradually distributed amongst others. Indeed in many respects 'by the time of *Playtime* Hulot as a central character has devolved completely, replaced by a series of realistically observed vignettes that he merely passes through.' (Ross [1995] 1996: 174) Many examples illustrate this point; for instance, just minutes after opening the restaurant to guests, a floor tile sticks to the bottom of the Maître D's foot, causing him thereafter carefully to high-step over that part of the floor. As the evening progresses, he is shadowed by an apprentice waiter, and the youngster in all good faith mimics the Maître D's high-step over the potentially loose tile as though it were a required gesture when serving. The comic mechanism Tati employs here recalls Bergson's analysis that when characters: '*vont, viennent, dansent, se démènent ensemble, prenant en même temps les mêmes attitudes, gesticulent de la même manière*' they strike us as all the more amusing (Bergson 1900: 22).

Another example of this extension or democratisation of the gag can be found in the case of the waiter who tears his trousers on the chair-back. He is subsequently destined to wait out the night on the balcony, gradually shedding the un-damaged parts of his uniform as he accumulates and adorns other waiters' torn or tarnished garments, first a torn jacket, then a damaged shoe, and finally, verging on the grotesque, a slippery bow-tie covered in sauce which the spectator hopes he will not wear.

The gradual effacement of Hulot as the comic star of the film receives the following interpretation by Ross:

The 'progressive "levelling" of Hulot goes hand in hand with the levelling of the sharp oppositions in the earlier films between "traditional" and "modern" Paris; the increasing "incorporation" of the character of Hulot into the film *Playtime* is a narrative reflection on the increased standardization of daily life in France. (Ross [1995] 1996: 174)

I would disagree, as I align Hulot's effacement with the folk element of carnival, in which an entire community participates. Therefore, turning now to carnival, while the key trope of masquerade was announced explicitly in *Les Vacances* with a lingering close-up on the poster of the forthcoming *Bal Masqué*, the only participants were Monsieur Hulot, dressed as a pirate, and the young lady, elegantly masked. This stands in sharp contrast with the increasingly social, collective participation of the entire cast of *Playtime*'s mise-en-scene of carnival spirit, which I suggest mirrors the societal evolution towards increasing mutualisation and solidarity that mushroomed into the near-revolution of May 68.

Medieval laughter [...] is the social consciousness of all the people. Man experiences this flow of time in the festive marketplace, in the carnival crowd, as he comes into contact with other bodies of varying age and social caste. [...] festive folk laughter presents an element of victory [...] over [...] all that oppresses and restricts. (Bakhtin 1965: 92)

Even the building participates in the masquerade, 'dressing' the characters for the masked ball, such as when the outspoken American suggests that the serving-window resembles Napoleon's hat, framing a member of kitchen staff who, he declares, is 'going to be

Napoleon'. Once again, as in *Jour de fête*, Tati discreetly satirizes de Gaulle and his alleged 'Bonapartism', a particularly thorny issue in the newly (post-)colonial era. Later the building dresses-up itself, as the marble pillar masquerades as a map for the drunken gentleman who asks Hulot for directions.

In *Playtime* the feast and carnival crowd, with their accompanying revelling and (tempered) debauchery can be discussed in terms of their capacity to signify the symbolic destruction of official culture. In this manner the film aligns itself with the function of Rabelaisian carnival and its regenerative effect. The analysis of the final 'merry-go-round' sequence from the film will illustrate this point.

The film explicitly invites the spectator to regard the city at this point as incarnating carnival, so that this sequence can be discussed in terms of its capacity to articulate Bakhtin's theories, such as that: '...the spirit of carnival, liberates the world from all that is dark and terrifying; it takes away all fears and is therefore completely gay and bright.' (Bakhtin 1985: 47)

Barbara tells Hulot that her bus is leaving and she rushes off. He has bought her a gift, and needs to pass before the cashier to pay for it before giving it to her. The cashier's turnstile, clearly marked 'SORTIE: WAY OUT' is an exit, but it also doubles as an entrance, an entrance through which Monsieur Hulot must pass in order to enter the 'fair'. Trapped in the queue, his gift arrives out in the street before he does, and when her bus departs, the young man who carried Hulot's gift to Barbara turns to squarely face a workman holding a hand-held 'carousel' made of household tools. They linger for a moment in the frame, and moments later Barbara and her friend are framed in medium close looking out of the bus window at 'those planes over there', the rotating Travel Agents' sign, essentially another 'carousel', of planes circumnavigating the globe. The next shot is of a workman gaily dancing his deliveries into the street, followed by a high angle extreme long shot of *the* carousel, comprised of traffic circulating around a roundabout. These visual symbols reinforce the festive motif of the folk celebration and also, through their cyclical motion, announce the ongoing, regenerating effect of laughter and carnival.

The surroundings participate in this comic world and the all-encompassing gay, bright mood, further accentuated by '*la musique de foire*' (Chion 1987: 19), as another medium close frames Barbara and friend watching red and blue cars rise and fall on hydraulic car lifts to the

music's tempo. This was preceded by two long shots from the street of the traffic on the round-about; a girl dressed in yellow on the back of a motorbike rides in and out of the frame, she too rising and falling to the merry-go-round rhythm. In case the spectator had failed to pick up on the fairground theme, the (coin-operated) carousel comes to a sudden halt, only re-starting when a businessman walks into a high angle long shot and deposits coins into a parking meter, one of the multiple objects participating in the fête/masquerade.

What is Tati telling the audience with this closing scene? Lest it seem trivial or merely playful, the carnival reading of the film reveals the choreography and iconography of *Playtime*'s final sequence to be more portentous than at first glance it seems. As the film draws to a close, the theme of the carousel is further visually expanded on, and then the camera cuts to Barbara, now seen from outside the bus, holding a bouquet of *muguet* (lily of the valley). While up to this point the film was season-neutral, spring, the season of carnival is now highlighted by the introduction of this flower, indelibly associated with *la fête du travail* (1<sup>st</sup> May).<sup>122</sup>

The emphasis on spring and historic renewal is re-enforced 'following' Barbara's gaze, as she turns her gaze from the '*brin de muguet*' in her hands, to look out of the window and up at the street lights, whose form echoes that of the *muguet*, and upon which the camera rests so that they are framed in the final images of the film, as the sky darkens and they twinkle in the night. The significance of this emphasis on the lily of the valley (whether through the bouquet or through the form of the bouquet echoed in the street lights) in terms of Rabelaisian carnival is that spring announces historical renewal and, I would argue, retrospectively can be interpreted as foreshadowing the historically regenerative impact of May 68. At the very least, the closing sequence can be seen to announce a new era, as French culture and society moved away from the authority, certainty and unity associated with modernism, to the more uncertain, pluralistic, multiplicity of post-modernism's similarity-in-difference.

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<sup>122</sup> Quintessentially Tatiesque, not only is the title of the film *Playtime* but the dawn breaks on the workers' holiday. Furthermore 1st May has been a national holiday since 1947, which is also the year of Tati's *Jour de Fête*, with its aforementioned raising of the Maypole, meaning that he comes full circle in two decades of film-making, beginning and ending on the same day, the 1st of May.

## Conclusion

Carnival signifies the symbolic destruction of official culture and power structures. The popularity of Tati's films and their articulation of Bakhtin's theories reveal the French public's desire in the 1950s and 1960s to both symbolically destroy official culture and purge themselves of the past. Through the release of laughter carnival also bestows regenerative qualities, not only destroying repressive structures, but also heralding historical renewal.

To elaborate briefly on the purging of the past in the films, both *Les Vacances de Monsieur Hulot* and *Playtime* are haunted by a war, made ridiculous in the fireworks explosion episode in *Les Vacances*, and transformed into a harmless sort of private men's club re-uniting long-lost pals in *Playtime*: 'Tu te souviens de moi, Hulot? L'Armée !' While it is vaguely plausible that Tati is alluding to the Indo-Chinese and Algerian wars (he was, after all, a close friend of Marguerite Duras) it is more likely that the references are to be taken at face value and concern only the Second World War, in which he served with apparent prowess as a member of the cavalry. For the most part his films neither depict nor even hint at the violence of France's bitter colonial wars during this period, and the absent 'others' are consistently off screen in Tati's films until *Playtime*, in which a 'black Hulot' addressed in the street reappears in the green drugstore drinking a pink milkshake, before walking down the street to be initially turned away from the Garden Party on the grounds of his colour, until the tuxedo he carries swung over his back is noticed and he is identified as one of the jazz musicians. Rarely one to stray from his self-imposed tri-colour palette of reds, blues and occasional yellows with neutral tones, the surprising appearance of green and pink are also the colours of the finned Chevrolet in *Mon Oncle*; that they reappear here in this context seems to indicate the non-integrated foreignness of the Chevrolet and the black jazz musician in Tati's universe, or middle class France: present, but at one remove.

The period immediately post-World War Two saw massive housing shortages and the country struggling to re-find its feet after the Occupation. General conscription to fight the colonial wars in Indo-China and then Algeria tore families apart and scarred yet another young generation with war, with France nevertheless 'losing' most of her empire. Added to this were the exodus of workers to the cities, the demise of rural and artisanal ways of life, and the de-humanising impact of massive industrialisation and general modernisation.

In the face of this, accompanied also by the growth of consumerism and pressure to modernize, to some extent Tati's films offer the public a chance to escape into a familiar nostalgic landscape of family holidays, children's pranks, drunken festivities, in heavily stylised (unreal and therefore safe), settings. The future is represented in the films through gadgets and 'improved' interior design. The viewer contemplates the slightly ridiculous, sometimes ingenious, but most often humorously failed attempts to improve upon (what is presented as) an already adequate present. As Serge Daney concludes : '*Rien ne rate vraiment dans Playtime, bien que rien ne marche.*' (1979: 7) Thus the future is rendered unthreatening, something which is gently mocked, and when we can laugh at something we are not afraid of it.

Furthermore, when the three films are viewed chronologically, the gradually increased democracy of the gag and the celebration of community which is an inherent characteristic of the tradition of carnival mirrors the wider social phenomenon of a movement towards the dissolution of hierarchy and increased solidarity, as expressed most noticeably in the year following *Playtime*'s release, through the collective movement of May 68.

Hulot's disjunctive relationship with ordinary time and everyday life is highlighted in André Bazin's analysis "*M Hulot et le Temps*" where Bazin imagines that in contrast with the other characters, to whom we can attribute full-time occupations, M Hulot most likely disappears for ten months of the year only to reappear on the 1<sup>st</sup> July when office time comes to a standstill (1953/2002: 44). Hulot thus comes to represent a timeless sanctuary, synonymous with holidays and leisure time, a time of forgetting and un-winding, leaving behind the political and economic realities of day-to-day life. The importance of time out-with the working calendar is underlined by the full circle formed by the timeline in the four feature films studied in this chapter. While *Jour de fête* is set in May of 1947, *Les Vacances* stretches over the length of the summer holidays. *Mon Oncle* seems to take place in early to late autumn, and the trajectory comes full circle ending with *Playtime* set precisely on the worker's holiday, the 1<sup>st</sup> of May.

The most common month in Tati's films up to 1967 is the month of May, and as discussed, in terms of Rabelaisian carnival Spring announces historic renewal. Highlighting the cultural significance of the month of May and of Spring more generally, and providing support for the argument that Spring announces historic renewal, we can also refer to some of the other films

discussed in this dissertation: Varda's film *Cléo de 5 à 7* encourages the spectator to re-think gender construction, and is set on the first day of Spring, while Godard's *Le Petit soldat*, which places two revolutionary organisations (the FLN and the counter-revolutionary OAS) at the heart of its narrative, takes place between the 13<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> May. Another 'revolutionary' film set in May is of course Chris Marker's *Le Joli mai* (1962).

This reoccurrence of the season of carnival, combined with a gift emblematic of Spring from the aging Hulot to the young woman clearly signifies historical renewal. Unremarkable in isolation, when considered in relation to the previous films, the distribution of the comic role amongst the members of the cast in *Playtime* and the collective participation in the carnivalesque *Playtime* serves to further highlight the rising prominence of the social aspect, notably solidarity and mass movements in the pre-revolutionary era.

Just as 'the [forms that the] medieval culture of humour [took] were precisely related to time, to the future,' Rabelaisian carnival in Tati's films is likewise connected to the future, so that the culture of humour in the films can be seen to play the role of symbolically 'uncrown[ing] and renew[ing] the established power and official truth.' Through their resolutely optimistic endings: 'They celebrate [...] the return of happier times, abundance, and justice for all people.' (Bakhtin 1965: 99) The three films indicate a movement towards the dissolution of serious culture, gradually, if only temporarily, replaced by a growing collective folk celebration.

For despite their apparently tranquil surfaces, the films are largely in tandem with the simmering pre-revolutionary period in which they were made. Like the disenfranchised workers, youth, colonized, and conscripted, who joined forces to overthrow de Gaulle in 1968, Hulot resists or is impervious to authority, with a natural affinity for youth. Yet the films are not the un-ambiguous militant tracts of the counter-cinema, but instead imbued with ambivalence and plurality. Hulot, the vaguely middle class white French man, is gradually effaced through the course of the films, retiring to the background, even to the point of being left behind (literally, by the narrative of *Playtime*), and replaced by his feminine alter-ego, Hulotte/Barbara, a young trans-Atlantic woman. In this transformation, and the increasingly collective nature of the gag, we see a plurality of consciousnesses, a multiplicity of voices and nationalities, much as in the polyphonic novel, in keeping with the duplicity of post-modernism.

This aligns Tati neatly with Bakhtin, as Bakhtin too 'aimed at nothing less than the replacement of a monologic approach to culture with a truly polyphonic approach, one requiring a plurality of irreducible consciousnesses' (Morson and Emerson 1990: 251).

Furthermore the shift in gender-predominance mirrors the evolution in French society of women's roles and status throughout this period. Barbara also embodies a non-threatening, non-hostile and somewhat innocent image of America, itself somewhat rare for the time due to fears of cultural hegemony and the growing intensity of anti-Vietnam War protests.

Consequently the films' appeal can be seen to emanate from their unusual capacity to articulate both the burgeoning spirit of revolution and transformation through Rabelaisian carnival and also from their ability to depict a nostalgic, harmonised, non-threatening representation of post-War France, two somewhat contradictory cultural images much sought by post-war and (post)colonial spectators in a period of social uncertainty and political turmoil. In these films we find the transmission of a dialogic sense of truth, tending, much like de Gaulle at the pinnacle of his success, not to alienate but rather to reconcile opposing factions. This is epitomised visually through Tati's tri-colour palette: shades of red for the left, blues for the right, and neutral for everything else in-between.

## Conclusion

The Republican regime created a dystopia in Algeria for the native population, where the very concepts of equality and nationality were emptied of their meaning, in the process of exploiting the natural and human resources of Algeria, with massive profits, essentially privatised (Untel, Unilever, etc) and crippling costs, primarily socialized, which in this context is to say borne in particular by the Muslim and Berber populations. One can conclude that the French colonisation of Algeria created a grave social and economic crisis for the indigenous population, condemning the vast majority of the population to a life in extreme poverty with an intensely vulnerable and precarious legal and social status. The repeated failure of the Republican government to uphold basic and fundamental concepts of the French Constitution, coupled with consistently widespread violent oppression, and the rising influence of grassroots organisations inspired by *L'Étoile Nord-Africain* (in Paris) and continued by Messali Hadj and Ferhat Abbas, amongst others, led to the emergence of a growing movement of revolt.

This revolt, '*qui fut patiemment semé depuis l'entre-deux-guerres*' (Branche 2009: 8), would culminate, as we have seen in **Chapter One**, in the Algerian War of Independence. The revolutionary war was declared on the 1<sup>st</sup> November 1954 by the FLN, a young offshoot of the earlier nationalist independence movements, and would continue until July 1962. While censorship of the media and cinema, already fairly developed thanks to vestiges left over from the Nazi Occupation and Vichy Regime, was severe, extending even to pre-censorship, the Algerian War of Independence has nevertheless been depicted in French cinema, and Godard's *Le Petit Soldat* (1961) is a remarkable testimony to this.

I hope to have illustrated with some accuracy, due to a primarily (post)colonial reading, that in this single film Godard represents many of the actors in this socially and politically dramatic moment in French history that so many other directors chose to ignore: Algerian revolutionaries, French supporters of Algerian Independence, deserters from the French military, victims of torture, French working for the paramilitary anti-revolutionaries, and so on. Perhaps even more significantly, just three years after De Gaulle's return to power, and at the height of the mythologizing of the resistance, which was intended to weld French citizens

together, Godard's film depicts the fratricide dividing French nationals as a direct result of the Algerian War of Independence. Other elements depicted are moral and ideological confusion, the shifting of fidelities from one cause to another, the quest for a cause in which to believe, and the more general intellectual disarray that prevailed in France at the time.

In the **Second Chapter**, again from a primarily (post)colonial perspective, we have seen that *Muriel, ou le temps d'un retour* depicts the difficult process of re-adaptation to civilian life for returning conscripts, a process made even more difficult by the systematic torture of civilians taking place in Algeria during the war. The general apathy in French society concerning the colonial wars is also reflected in this film, where traumatic events are relegated to bite-size conversation pieces, and the members of society appear as willing to ignore crimes committed in their names as the government was to conceal them. The fragility of memory is evoked, as is the terrible destruction of much of France during the Second World War and the material and psychological difficulties encountered in reconstruction. The character of Bernard with his banal Super-8 footage of Algeria also serves as a metaphor for post-war France, hesitating before possible images of herself, in which state-propaganda diffused the military's 'peace-making' efforts, while the perpetrators of torture and crimes against humanity were voluntarily protected with a series of amnesty laws. These laws, which proliferated in the following years, served to 'erase' their crimes, much as Bernard's tape-recording, the only evidence he has, is destroyed.

With the multiple fragmented images of itself, Resnais's mosaic film offers the spectator a challenging and lucid criticism of some of the most crucial forces to have shaped modern France. While depicting the tacit veils of secrecy that members of society voluntarily shroud themselves in, of particular relevance to my thesis is the fact that the film also reveals the widening gap between generations in the violent era of global de-colonization and modernization. I argue that, despite being widely un-anticipated, the events of May 68 and the accompanying temporary radical renewal of French culture and society were foreshadowed in films such as those I analyze, as depicted in this deepening generational divide and increasing alienation from a corrupt system and archaic power structures.

It was not only young male draftees who felt alienated; profound dissatisfaction with archaic patriarchal power structures is reflected in Varda's films during the first decade of her filmmaking, as seen in **Chapter Three**. I have demonstrated the ways in which Varda's films

offer evolving concepts of femininity, and a shift away from archaic myths and representations of women. By deploying feminist psycho-linguistics and Kristeva's and Irigaray's challenges to Lacanian psychoanalysis, we have seen that as gender relations continued to evolve in the post-war era, Varda clearly pioneered not only the New Wave but also new visions of fulfilled femininity, in the four films chosen for study here. The author of the gaze becomes more fluid in her films, with the female spectator no longer obliged to 'cross-dress' her gaze, at it were.

Not only concerned with questions of gender, Varda is not afraid to give cinematic space to the people who inhabit the margins of society, as we have seen in *L'Opéra-Mouffe*. She also provides cinematic representations of the unglamorous theme of domestic labour in *Le Bonheur*, a theme that Chantal Akerman would revisit in the 1970s with *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai de la Commerce, 1080, Bruxelles* (1976), and that is still one of the most widespread inequalities facing working women, especially working class working mothers. The shifting demographic landscape of rural France is also depicted in her films, especially in *La Pointe-Courte* and again in *Le Bonheur*, as is, in the former film, the economic battle between artisanal and industrial modes of production.

Industrial modes of production and the dehumanizing effects of the Taylorization of the modern workplace are satirized in Tati's films, as we have seen in **Chapter Four**. Tati's films offer the spectator astute reflections on the cultural evolution of French society, and I deploy Bakhtin's theories of Rabelaisian Carnival and the role of laughter to analyze the ways the films make light of serious concerns, such as the angst associated with increased mechanisation, relegated in the films to a source of laughter by the multiplication of ridiculous gadgets for the home or workplace.

Due to the ability of mass culture to both integrate into and integrate poly-cultural characteristics, the world has entered into an era of the first universal culture in the history of humanity. The threat of loss of national identities and cultural homogeneity that this entails are another source of anxiety which Tati targets in the films, relieving this theme of its ominous portent by transposing it onto the screen via amusingly mechanical clones and aesthetically pleasing – though exceptionally homogenous – interiors that participate in the unfolding democratisation of the gag.

Finally the collective folk celebration, with its politically subversive and revolutionary aspect that is integral to carnival, grows through the films and I argue is made explicit in *Playtime*, so that the films foreshadow the spirit of collective carnival synonymous with May 68.

We have seen the transformation and evolution of French society reflected in the films analyzed in this dissertation. Interestingly one season reoccurs in the majority of the films studied here: spring, which in terms of Rabelaisian carnival is synonymous with historic renewal. We meet Bruno in *Le Petit Soldat* in the spring (13<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> May 1958) (cf. Chapter One); Cléo meets Antoine in a blossoming Parisian park where he speaks of the last day of Spring and the first day of summer (cf. Chapter Three), while finally the month of May and the 1<sup>st</sup> May returns with the symbolism of carnival in many of Tati's films. If the month of renewal itself is absent or not explicitly present, the main protagonists nevertheless face momentous change or experience cathartic moments that engender absolute transformation in their characters. The latter applies to Bernard in *Muriel, ou le temps d'un retour* (cf. Chapter Two) whose cathartic transformation engenders his evolution into becoming '*le tortionnaire qui allait se révolter contre le torture*' (Leperchey 2000: 78-79).

Taken together, I hope to have shown the lines of connection in these films between the dystopic reality of Algeria under French Rule, and the utopian vision motivating the May 1968 revolt. Throughout this thesis the cyclical spheres of influence that affect nations and host nations, an ebb and flow of ideas and ideals crossing and traversing the Mediterranean between occupied and occupier, oppressor and oppressed, emerge, and are communicated in the films of Chapters One and Two (by Vautier, Godard, and Resnais respectively). Many of the ideals and values that the enlightenment offered humanity (those noble notions of equality, fraternity, solidarity, justice, one vote per man), were not containable nor infinitely selectively applicable, but once set free in the minds of oppressed men and women, were seized upon in different contexts and fought for in order to gain rights, justice and equality by diverse peoples as seen specifically in Chapters One, Two and Three (i.e. by Muslim and Berber Algerians and women). And finally, this is reflected to varying extents in all of the films studied here, including those of Chapter Four, with their particular emphasis on symbolically overthrowing dominant power structures. Even while offering a glimpse of the legal and socio-political history, and the evolution in cultural representations of a society undergoing massive renewal and transformation in the period 1954-1968, my contribution is limited and limiting, and only a few notes in a much greater symphony.

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## Filmography

*2 ou 3 choses que je sais d'elle* (1967) Jean-Luc Godard, colour, 90 minutes

*Afrique 50* (1950) René Vautier, black & white, 17 minutes.

*Ai no corrida* (1976) Nagisa Oshima, colour, 109 minutes.

*L'Année dernière à Marienbad* (1961) Alain Resnais, black & white, 94 minutes.

*Les Années algériennes* (1991) Bernard Favre and Benjamin Stora, colour, 191 minutes.

*L'Armée, la torture et la République* (2002) Raphaëlle Branche, colour, 60 minutes.

*A nous la liberté* (1931) René Clair, black & white, 104 minutes.

*Avoir Vingt ans dans les Aurès* (1972) René Vautier, colour, 100 minutes.

*La Bataille d'Alger* (1966) Gillo Pontecorvo, black & white, 121 minutes.

*Le Bonheur* (1964) Agnès Varda, colour, 82 minutes.

*Les Carabiniers* (1963) Jean-Luc Godard, black & white, 80 minutes.

*Cléo de 5 à 7* (1961) Agnès Varda black & white and colour, 90 minutes.

*La Chinoise* (1967) Jean-Luc Godard, colour, 96 minutes.

*L'Ennemi intime : violences dans la guerre d'Algérie* (2002) Patrick Rotman, colour and black & white, 3 hours and 24 minutes.

*L'Ennemi intime* (2007) Florent Emilio Siri, colour, 111 minutes.

*Et Dieu crée la femme* (1955) Roger Vadim, colour, 90 minutes.

*Filming Desire : Voyage à travers le cinéma des femmes* (2001) Marie Mandy black & white and colour, 60 minutes.

*Germania anno zero* (1948) Roberto Rossellini, black & white, 78 minutes.

*La Guerre d'Algérie* (1971) Yves Courrière, black & white, 155 minutes.

*La Guerre sans nom* (1992) Bertrand Tavernier, colour, 240 minutes.

*Hiroshima, mon amour* (1959) Alain Resnais, black & white, 91 minutes.

*Le Joli mai* (1963) Chris Marker, black and white, 156 minutes.

*Madame de ...* (1953) Max Ophüls, black & white, 105 minutes.

*Modern Times* (1936) Charlie Chaplin, black & white, 87 minutes.

*Mon Oncle* (1958) Jacques Tati, black & white, 117 minutes.

*Muriel, ou le temps d'un retour* (1963) Alain Resnais, colour, 117 minutes.

*Nuit et Brouillard* (1955) Alain Resnais, 30 min.

*L'Opéra-mouffe* (1958) Agnès Varda, black & white, 17 minutes

*Les Parapluies de Cherbourg* (1964) Jacques Demy, colour, 87 minutes.

*Le Petit soldat* (1960) Jean-Luc Godard, black & white, 88 minutes.

*Playtime* (1967) Jacques Tati, colour, 124 minutes.

*La Pointe Courte* (1954) Agnès Varda, black & white, 89 minutes.

*Romance X* (1999) Catherine Breillat, colour, 84 minutes.

*Sciuscià* (1946) Vittoria de Sica, black & white, 93 minutes.

*Summer with Monika* (1953) Ingmar Bergman, black & white, 96 minutes.

*Les Statues meurent aussi* (1953) Chris Marker and Alain Resnais, black & white, 29 min.

*Stromboli* 1949 Roberto Rossellini, black & white, 107 minutes.

*La Terra trema* (1948) Luchino Visconti, black & white, 160 minutes.

*Topaze* (1950) Marcel Pagnol, black & white, 136 minutes.

*La Traversée de Paris* (1956) Claude Autant-Lara, black & white, 80 minutes.

*Les Vacances de Monsieur Hulot* (1953) Jacques Tati, black & white, 114 minutes

*Weekend* (1967) Jean-Luc Godard, colour, 105 minutes.

Frame 1



Frame 2



Frame 3



Frame 4



Frame 5



Frame 6



Frame 7



Frame 8



Frame 9



Frame 10



Frame 11



Frame 12



Frame 13



Frame 14



Frame 15



Frame 16



Frame 17



Frame 18



Frame 19



Frame 20



Frame 21



Frame 22



Frame 23



Frame 24

