DARK YEARS, DARK FILMS, LONG SHADOWS: THE OCCUPATION, NOIR, AND NATIONAL IDENTITY IN FRENCH FILM AND CRITICISM

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Although the term arises in French film criticism, "noir" has long been associated with American cinema and a certain, recognizable type of visual and thematic style. Through a return to the French critics of the late 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s this dissertation defamiliarizes and redefines noir's value to film and French studies by demonstrating its negatively constitutive role in the negotiation of French national identity and the central place of the Occupation in any discussion of French noir. By locating noir within criticism and performing close readings of the critical archive, which includes figures as diverse as Georges Sadoul and André Bazin, Lucien Rebatet and François Truffaut, I argue that noir critical discourse is defined by a tension between the category's ever-changing value and the efforts of those who deploy it to fix the meaning of the nation before, during, and after the Occupation through careful omissions of the historical, collective memory. Because noir is central to debates on how the nation should and, more precisely, should not be represented, I also resist conventional, generic approaches to advance that individual films noirs are secondary to noir critical discourse. Particular films, such as those by Julien Duvivier, Jean-Pierre Melville, and also Henri Decoin's lesser-known *Non coupable* (*Not Guilty* [1947]) may thus only be viewed as "noir" insofar as they bring into frame aspects of recent French history and sociocultural identity left out of dominant narratives of the national imaginary. Ultimately, through a focus on the critical and filmic archives and the dynamic value of noir during an era marked by the Occupation, I wrest noir scholarship from the hegemony of

Hollywood and the rigidity of conventionally generic readings to restage it as the beginning of a new conversation. Film noir, that is to say, *French* film noir as I articulate it here brings together questions of not only national cinema, but of the larger obstacles facing any articulation of national identity related to the era that shares noir's name: the Occupation, the dark years, *les années noires*.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Zachary Gooch earned his Bachelor of Arts in French, with Honors and Distinction, and his Bachelor of Arts in English, with Honors, from The Ohio State University in 2005. He was admitted to the doctoral program in French in the Department of Romance Studies at Cornell University in 2006, where he earned his Master of Arts in Romance Studies in 2010.

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While working toward the degree, Dr. Gooch worked as a graduate teaching assistant at Cornell University in the Department of Romance Studies and the Department of Performing and Media Arts. He also spent one year working at the University of Paris VIII as a Lecteur de langue while performing research for this dissertation at the Bibliothèque nationale de France and the Bibliothèque du film at the Cinémathèque française in Paris.

Dr. Gooch's dissertation, *Dark Years, Dark Films, Long Shadows: The Occupation, Noir, and National Identity in French Film and Criticism*, was supervised by Dr. Timothy Murray, with Drs. Tracy McNulty and Amy Villarejo also on his dissertation committee.

To my family, friends, mentors, and of course to Yoon

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INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS FRENCH FILM NOIR? CRITICISM, OCCUPATION, NATIONAL CINEMA

At the beginning of the first monograph on noir cinema, *Panoramique du film noir américain* (*Panorama of American Film Noir* [1955]), Raymond Borde and Étienne Chaumeton contend that "Le film noir est noir *pour nous*, c'est-à-dire pour le public occidental et américain des années 50" 'Film noir is noir *for us*, that is to say, for the Western and American audience of the 1950s' (5).[1] Their opening statement should be accompanied by a couple qualifications. "Film noir" has been a category in French film criticism since at least the late 1930s and was unknown or unrecognized as such in the United States until the late 1960s. In other words, these films may have been "dark" for Western audiences on either side of the Atlantic, but just as the Occupation is only known as "les années noires," or the dark years, in France, film noir was first "noir" only for the French.

Taking this fact as its starting point, this study sets out to discover what film noir meant for a specific audience, in a specific space, and at specific times: spectators and critics in France immediately before, during, and after *les années noires*. It will show that noir is central to mid-twentieth century French national identity and collective memory because noir in film and criticism points to what the nation is by indicating what one does not want the nation to be. From the eve of war to the long shadow of the Occupation, film noir is negatively integral to how an entire nation represents itself to itself.

Breaking Away from the Cinematic "Readymade "

[1] All translations are my own unless otherwise documented.

The official story of noir, which can be read in the first pages of any book on the subject published since Borde and Chaumeton's *Panorama*, consists in a series of lists and goes something like this. Noir emerges in America in the early 1940s, influenced by American hard-boiled fiction (e.g. Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, Cornell Woolrich); American horror and gangster films of the 1930s; German film expressionism of the 1920s; and European directors and technicians working in Hollywood after having fled political strife and the war abroad (e.g. Fritz Lang and Billy Wilder, to name a few). Noir films feature high contrast lighting and off-center compositions; labyrinthine and unpredictable narratives that unfold in urban settings and are punctuated by sex and violence; tough guys (read: anti-heroes) and even tougher dames (read: femmes fatales), both with ambiguous morals, motivations, relationships to law, and psychological profiles; and finally themes of alienation, paranoia, desire, sadism, perversion, and revenge (Spicer 1-18).[2]

Although noir, the story continues, reflects the cumulative American experience of the Prohibition, Great Depression, and World War Two, the term was first coined and applied to Hollywood films in articles by French film critics. The three most frequently and often exclusively cited are Nino Frank's "Un nouveau genre 'policier'" 'A New "Detective" Genre,' Jean-Pierre Chartier's "Les Américains font aussi des films 'noirs'" 'Americans also make films "noirs,"' both published in 1946, with Borde and Chaumeton's text following a decade later in 1955. One avers that these diverse films coalesced for French critics due to the better perception

[2] Although I draw this description from the pages of a relatively recent history of noir, Andrew Spicer's text book *Film Noir*, similar descriptive lists can be found in the first pages of just about any other study. See those by Naremore, Telotte, Durgnat, Porfirio, Schrader, Damico, Place and Peterson, for example, but this list could go on for pages. Indeed, speaking of noir consists increasingly in making lists.

afforded by geographical distance and the tense sociopolitical atmosphere following the Occupation (Buss 7-9).

I would also add that family resemblances were made more probable in France because the first American films noirs hit Parisian screen *en masse* in the summer of 1946. At the Liberation and with the end of the Nazi ban against Allied culture, in May 1946 the Blum-Byrnes accords arranged to liquidate part of the French debt to the United States in exchange for opening its market to American products (Williams, *Republic of Images* 277-78).[3] Backlogged Hollywood films flooded theaters at the same time following the agreement, and so any similarities between individual works, no matter how tenuous, were put into relief. In other words, noir as an American phenomenon relied on historical contexts in postwar France to come into being. Indeed, "noir" films were not collectively known as such in the United States until the late 1960s and early 1970s when American critics, such as Charles Higham and Joel Greenberg, Raymond Durgnat, and Paul Schrader, adopted the French designation because it and the films' tone seemed to match disillusionment surrounding the Vietnam War (Spicer 3).

The fact of delay in American usage of the term has prompted the most valuable studies of noir to recognize that it constitutes an idea "projected onto the past" and that it participates in a sort of "mythology" insofar as the term remains the same but signifies different things to different people at different times (Naremore 11, 2). These studies' take a step back from the rambling, cumbersome lists of generic characteristics—often used to speak of an extremely

[3] The Blum-Byrnes accords, signed in May 1946 and anticipating the Marshall Plan, initially committed France to importing American films in quantities that would have been unsustainable for the French film industry. In exchange for erasing some of the debt owed to the United States after the war, France had effectively to sell out its cinema for Hollywood. Ironically, the agreement was supposed to be a protectionist measure, but the quotas agreed upon were more beneficial to the United States than to France. The first films noirs were released in French cinemas that summer. For an in-depth explanation of this crisis, see the first two chapters of Patricia Hubert-Lacombe's excellent *Le Cinéma français dans la guerre froide : 1946-1956*.

diverse set of films[4]—to view how noir *becomes* through the process of speaking about it. J.P. Telotte and James Naremore, for instance, focus on how noir is determined by the contexts, intertexts, and institutions in place that make it possible to say certain things about it while disallowing others. Inspired by Michel Foucault's notion of discourse, as elaborated in his *L'Archéologie du savoir* (*Archeology of Knowledge* [1969]), and by his notion of the author function (see "What is an Author?" [1969]), noir scholars now tend to speak of "discursive formations" or of a "genre function" (Telotte 11; Naremore 11). Even Andrew Spicer, who does not mention Foucault, employs the term "discursive critical construction" to describe noir (24). In short, most scholars now see it as having "less to do with a group of artifacts than a discourse," less a list of characteristics than "a history of ideas" (Naremore 11).[5]

If noir is to be a discourse, a history of things said about an amorphous thing rather than the thing itself, then research about noir must begin with the criticism where it first appears as a category. Consequently, I believe noir scholarship must change in three concrete ways: a renewed investment in the critical discourse about noir, in how its value changes through time, and in the French context where it initially emerges. Moreover, each of these imperatives, as will soon become evident, should additionally be carried out with special reference to the Occupation.

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[4] Noir's gigantic umbrella encompasses titles as different as forerunners *The Maltese Falcon* (John Huston 1941), *Laura* (Otto Preminger 1944), *Scarlet Street* (Fritz Lang 1945), *Double Indemnity* (Billy Wilder 1944), and *This Gun for Hire* (Frank Tuttle 1942), mid-cycle works *The Big Sleep* (Howard Hawks 1946), *Gilda* (Charles Vidor 1946), *The Naked City* (Jules Dassin 1948), *Kiss of Death* (Henry Hathaway 1947), and *Gun Crazy* (Joseph H. Lewis 1950) before ending with a bang in *Kiss me Deadly* (Robert Aldrich 1955), *Night of the Hunter* (Charles Laughton 1955), and finally *Touch of Evil* (Orson Wells 1958)—just to name a few of the most cited works belonging to what is often called the classical period.

[5] Naremore aptly compares the list-type studies with Jorge Luis Borges' fictional taxonomy of animals *The Celestial Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge* (10). The same allusion is made, although in different contexts, in the first pages of Foucault's *Les Mots et les choses* (*The Order of Things* [1966]) (7).

A renewed interest in what critical discourse on noir looks like can be glimpsed in Naremore's *More than Night* (1998), where he casts noir as a metaphor in re-readings of Frank, Chartier, and Borde and Chaumeton through the lens of the intellectual climate in postwar France. The lingering influence of surrealism, he argues, is evident in critics' preoccupation with film noir's antisocial, violent attack on bourgeois morality and taste for *l'amour fou* (mad love), not to mention the fact that the journal for which Borde and Chaumeton wrote, *Positif*, maintained strong connections to surrealist intellectuals (Naremore 18-22). Naremore also emphasizes that interest in surrealism was combined with the current trend for Sartrean existentialism, whose refusal of any privileged perspective and embrace of individual resistance leaves its traces in André Bazin's phenomenologically inspired concept of filmic realism (Naremore 24-26). While these specific explorations will not be repeated here, they finally allow and even demand that one venture beyond the familiar set of critical texts and intellectual contexts that noir scholarship has been citing for years. Particularly, one must seek out new critical resources from before, during, and after the war to read these and already well-known examples of noir criticism in light of the Occupation, which is surprisingly marginalized in Naremore.

The second imperative builds on the first by urging wider explorations into French criticism that are not limited to the postwar era. In this direction, Charles O'Brien's "Film Noir in France: Before the Liberation" (1996) goes back before World War Two to discover that noir was already a common marker for poetic realist films before they became better known by that name (7). He also demonstrates that noir had quite a different, polemical value in prewar France, when figures on far ends of the political spectrum used the term to condemn the negativity of films by Marcel Carné, Jean Renoir, Julien Duvivier, and Pierre Chenal (O'Brien 8). Unfortunately, however,

O'Brien's survey stops at the outbreak of war—this despite the promise in the article's title to investigate criticism up to 1945—again leaving the link between noir and the Occupation in the dark. But the text clearly suggests that an understanding of noir as a discourse would benefit from a wider perspective on criticism from the 1930s through the 1950s because the value of postwar criticism only becomes accessible through the prism of the prewar and Occupation.

Put another way, French film critics did not retire and hand off their pens to their successors when Paris fell to the Germans in 1940 or when Allied forces later liberated it. Georges Sadoul, for instance, whom O'Brien cites repeatedly and who will prove essential in my own analysis, wrote continuously from the mid 1930s through the mid 1960s. Due to the simple fact of critical memory, understood as both intertextuality and actual faculty of the writers in question, film criticism needs to be seen within its temporal dimension as a continuous practice forever in the process of reconfiguring itself.

A return to French criticism that does not limit itself to the postwar years has the potential to transform an understanding of noir's value. While O'Brien's contribution to a history of noir criticism is often acknowledged, scholars largely persist in perpetuating preconceived notions of noir, projecting them onto newly discovered texts, or worse still, neglecting lesser known texts altogether. If noir scholarship now seems stale—and one could be forgiven for thinking as much—this is because it resists the challenges presented by new, exciting evidence only to repeat, reaffirm old arguments. For instance, instead of asserting that Nino Frank was the first to use the term "film noir" in any context, this statement is unfortunately, and lazily, tweaked so that Frank becomes the first to apply it to Hollywood cinema (Spicer 2). Yet Georges Sadoul, a better known French critic who like Frank wrote in the 1930s and Occupation and railed against French

noir films, reuses "noir" in an 1946 article titled "Grande saison de noir" 'Big Season of Noir.' Here, weeks before his colleague, Sadoul already speaks about postwar American crime films as films noirs, but that Sadoul beat Frank to the punch is not in itself significant. What is, however, is that while Frank praises American noir's novelty, Sadoul greets it with a gaping yawn. He laments the return of a conformity for dark films in this review of *Double Indemnity* (Billy Wilder 1944), where he compares American noir to French poetic realism and even neoclassical drama (Sadoul, "Grande saison de noir" 8).

The rich history of discussing noir in French film criticism leads me to emphasize a third necessary change, which has already been gestured toward by my two previous commentaries: a focus on the significance of noir in a French context. Along with interest in, albeit isolated, selections of French criticism, there have been a few separate explorations into French noir cinema itself, which one usually compares to its American counterpart. Instead of Hammett or Chandler, one references Georges Simenon or the hardboiled translations of the *Série noire* (Vincendeau, "French Film Noir" 25, 35; Buss 12-15). Rather than going straight from German expressionism to American film noir, poetic realism becomes a "missing link," or detour, and one reminds the reader that émigrés like Fritz Lang and Billy Wilder very briefly worked in France before skipping across the pond to the United States, where they often made new versions of prewar French noir (Vincendeau, "Noir is also a French Word" 51-53; "French Film Noir" 27-28).[6] In contrast and from a thematic perspective, one often highlights that French noir differs from American noir in the former's penchant for social voyeurism and frequent omission of

[6] Examples of such remakes include but are not limited to: the two remakes of *Pépé le moko* (Marcel Carné 1937) in *Algiers* (John Cromwell 1938) and *Casbah* (John Berry 1948); Fritz Lang's *Scarlet Street*, which was based on Jean Renoir's *La Chienne*; and Anatol Litvak's *The Long Night* (1947), a plagiarized remake of Marcel Carné's *Le jour se lève*. Litvak made a handful of films in France, of which the most notable is *Mayerling* (1936), while Lang only made one, *Liliom* (1934).

women (Vincendeau, “French Film Noir” 25-26). Vincendeau also notes that the darker French noir get the less likely a film is to be about crime (“French Film Noir” 45).

Yet such points, while important, do not succeed in making French film noir any more than a supplement to American noir. By working through a point-by-point comparison, from literature, character types, and even its makers, French noir never becomes an object of study in its own right. Old categories are put pack into circulation and gain new, immovable weight. “Poetic-realist films were more noir than film noir,” one writes (Vincendeau, “French Film Noir” 27); but such formulations demonstrate that different types of noir are at issue, that noir has a significance and complexity proper to French cinema. Finally, while focusing on the fact that important filmmakers had layovers in France on their way to the United States and while passingly recognizing the Hollywood remakes of prewar French noir, one largely glosses over what happens in France from 1940 to 1945. Ultimately, the tendency to repeat is no more evident than when it comes to discussions of French film noir, where, moreover, French criticism is often completely ignored, precisely there where it is most necessary.

This is precisely what causes Marc Vernet to call noir a “cinephilic readymade” because “speaking about *film noir* consists, from the beginning, in being installed in repetition, in taking up the unanalyzed discourse of [one’s] predecessors” (2). Therefore, any intervention in noir scholarship, if it has any hope of arresting this repetition and corrupting the cinematic readymade, must begin in the filmic *and* critical archives, study not just a glimpse but a large swath of that discourse, and situate it within a French political, historical, and cultural context where the role of the Occupation is recognized as fundamental. I have undertaken this task, immersed myself in noir discourse in France from the late 1930s through the 1950s, and

discovered that the significance of noir for critics of that period differs tremendously from conventional accounts of French fascination with Hollywood film. No longer a loose network of characteristics, no longer having a special and primary relationship to American cinema, noir represents a long conversation about French national identity. Noir in film and especially criticism constitutes a privileged site where the French imaginary and collective memory are continually negotiated and where each reconfiguration of that identity leaves traces of what it omits. Consequently, any account of mid-century French film, and particularly cinema after the Occupation, that does not take account of noir proves hopelessly incomplete. Indeed, as I will continually emphasize throughout this work, to disregard the role of noir in French cinematic discourse is to perpetuate postwar biases.

Darkness Never Looked So Refreshing: Shades of Noir in French Film Criticism

Noir in French criticism always concerns debates about how France should be represented in film and specifically marks out what should not be included in that representation. This does not mean that what France should and should not be always refers to the same thing, nor that noir represents the same thing to all those who participate in conversations about it. Coloring an epoch of film and criticism from the 1930s up to the New Wave, it takes on different functions wherever it appears. Yet in sifting through thirty years of noir criticism, in bringing together voices and eras that scholarship has long kept separate, I have discovered that it always takes shape around questions of national identity related to the Occupation. This includes the years preceding it, those under its dark sun, and those in the long shadow of its memory. Any exploration of film noir within French cinema and criticism must have an eye trained on *les*

années noires because film noir functions as a medium through which their effect, anticipated, endured, or felt as aftershock can be registered. The following constitutes my own broad, introductory panorama of noir in mid-century French film criticism as it hinges on the Occupation. This account and the more detailed chapters that follow mark an immediate, radical, and unapologetic break with traditional accounts of film noir.

For prewar critics, "noir" is deployed to speak about and largely condemn a set of films that would later become more widely known as "poetic realist." Although "poetic realism" was first used to describe Marcel Aymé's 1929 novel *La Rue sans nom* (*The Street Without a Name*) and then again in reviews of Pierre Chenal's 1933 adaptation, it did not become widely used until much later (Andrew 11). As an article by André Bazin on the aesthetic and thematic transition from prewar to postwar cinema testifies, permutations of "film noir" such as "réalisme noir" 'noir realism' were more widespread; "noir" even broke up the now dominant poetic realist label in formulations such as "réalisme noir et poétique" 'poetic noir realism' (Bazin, "Quinze ans du cinéma français" 25-29). For many, such French noir works as *Pépé le Moko* (Julien Duvivier 1937), *La Bête humaine* ([*The Humain Beast*] Jean Renoir 1938), *Le Quai des brumes* (*Port of Shadows* [Marcel Carné 1938]), *L'Hôtel du nord* (Marcel Carné 1938), *Le Dernier tournant* (*The Last Turn* [Pierre Chenal 1939]), and *Le jour se lève* (*Daybreak* [Carné 1939]) represent France as a nation of defeatists and degenerates. They elevate the hopeless and downtrodden to the level of heroes who, rather than rise up courageously against oppression, violently capitulate to some dark form of inner destiny (Sadoul, "*Le jour se lève*" 30). A few critics, including Lucien Rebatet, blame these films and particularly director-screenwriter team, Marcel Carné and Jacques Prévert, for the defeat to the Germans in May and June of 1940 because they were powerful,

leftist, and even Semitic enough to demoralize an entire nation (Rebatet, *Les Tribus du cinéma et du théâtre* 86-88).[7] While Rebatet thus laments the negative influence of these films and their supposed Jewish and Marxist worldviews on the French imaginary, others, such as Georges Sadoul, Émile Vuillermoz, and even Jean Renoir, conversely assert that film noir drives one to fascism. This is because such pessimism forces both domestic and foreign spectators to view France as so decadent that only a fascist dictatorship would be capable of setting it right (Sadoul, "Récent progrès du cinéma français" 462-64; Vuillermoz, "Un cas de conscience" 48; Jeancolas 236). Despite these figures' diverse political affiliations, for each of them noir designates what one excludes from French identity in the politically charged climate of the late 1930s. Even Georges Altman, one of the only critics to use the term non-pejoratively, recognizes in it a threat or attack on convention, seeing in noir a "puissance subversive d'un rêve ou d'un bombe" 'the subversive power of a dream or a bomb' ("*Le jour se lève* : une œuvre noire et pure" 5).

During the Occupation, noir becomes an epithet hurled at Frenchmen working under Nazi supervision at the German-run, French film production company, Continental films. The darkness or *noirceur* of such works as *Les Inconnus dans la maison* (*Strangers in the House* [Henri Decoin 1942]), *La Vie de plaisir* (*Life of Pleasure* [Albert Valentin 1944]), and especially *Le Corbeau* (*The Raven* [Henri-Georges Clouzot 1943]) and their representations of contemporary French society were viewed as indictments of the entire nation. They were consequently labeled anti-France at a time when such self-critique was unthinkable. Whether this meant France as envisioned by Vichy, controlled by the occupiers, or fought for by the Resistance, these films were noir insofar as they were not consistent with diverse spectators'

[7] The ridiculousness of Rebatet's antisemitism is emphasized by the fact that Carné and Prévert were not Jewish.

ideas of what France ought to be. As in Georges Adam and Pierre Blanchar's diatribe against *Le Corbeau* in the resistant *L'Écran français*, an accusation of *noirceur* signals a refusal to accept what they saw as the films proposition: "Voilà l'image de nous-mêmes" 'Here is an image of ourselves' (qtd. in Barrot 14). What makes *Le Corbeau* all the more inexcusable for Adam and Blanchar is that this image was made by a Frenchman for a German firm, in effect becoming a French voice for perceived Nazi ideology (in Barrot 15). In short, noir proves intimately linked to collaboration, which by definition confuses national identities, straddles a boundary that must be maintained for the sake of and to create a French national imaginary. Together noir and collaboration became major factors after the Liberation for banning these films and barring their directors as well as actors from the profession if not, in some cases, briefly imprisoning them, which was the case with Pierre Fresnay and Ginette Leclerc of *Le Corbeau* (Billard 434; Berin-Maghit 202).

Noir's pejorative value changes significantly after the war, when it becomes gradually less associated with prewar French noir and Occupation cinema and applied, often with praise, to new American crime films. This is where the conventional story of the relationship between film noir and France begins and ends, omitting the prewar and Occupation and neglecting their lasting influence. But if one does not detach this moment of French criticism from the history of its larger discourse, it becomes obvious that those writing about American film have just as much to say about the state of postwar French identity, and particularly the roles of the prewar and Occupation in its constitution.

Criticism of American noir carries the weight of a haunting, unrecognized collective memory about the Occupation and prewar. Film critics, including Frank, Chartier, and Borde and

Chaumeton all recognize, explicitly or implicitly, that French cinema has a history of producing "noir" films, yet they resist any resemblance between prewar French noir and postwar American noir (Frank 8; Chartier 70; Borde and Chaumeton 27-28).[8] Similarities between the two cinemas may be debatable, but the rhetoric used to speak about noir during both periods is undeniably similar. Jean Kanapa, a leading figure in the communist left, echoes Sadoul when he warns in 1955 that brutal realism and "décadence" 'decadence' in popular culture invite war and dictatorship, and critics Claude Roy and Borde and Chaumeton locate sublimated Nazi sympathies in America's passion for dark films (Kanapa 89; Borde and Chaumeton 26; Roy 14). All these instances represent a trend in the late 1940s and 1950s to renew the link between noir, nation, and fascism that fueled the debates of 1938 and 1939.

Each of these texts, however, conspicuously omits any mention of prewar or Occupation France. Instead, Kanapa and Roy reference Germany before Hitler's rise to power and, on rare occasions and only indirectly, Borde and Chaumeton recognize the Occupation as a subject to be passed over in silence (Kanapa 89; Roy 14; Borde and Chaumeton 26). The determinative absence of the prewar and Occupation in postwar criticism on noir becomes so glaring that in one case, Henri-François Rey employs the Vichy motto, "travaille, famille, patrie" 'work, family, nation,' to condemn noir as representative of American capitalism's presence in France without making any reference to the Occupation (Rey 13). If postwar criticism is fascinated by the image of the United States on film, this is because it provides an opportunity to reflect on, from a safe

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[8] Chartier and Borde and Chaumeton are direct in their comparisons, while Frank is more suggestive. He speaks of a replacement of the vast decor of the Western by that of the "fantastique social" (Frank 8). The "social fantastic" was another term occasionally used to speak of poetic realism/film noir through its connection to the literary works by Pierre Mac Orlan from which these films were often adapted: for example, *Le Quai des brumes* (Mac Orlan 1927; Carné 1938), *La Bandera* (*The Flag* [Mac Orlan 1931]; *Escape from Yesterday* [Duvivier 1935]).

distance and through a proxy, the recent, traumatic reconfigurations of the French national imaginary.

The effort to escape the past while labeling it noir persists in those few instances where one associates it with French film. Although the New Wave's reimagining of critical and cinematic practice often takes place in analyzing the type of authorship made possible by Hollywood's studio system and exhibited in American film noir, François Truffaut, in contrast to his contemporaries, locates "noir" in postwar French cinema. In the same breath as he famously laments the role of adaptation, Truffaut decries a national cinema that gives its public "sa dose habituelle de noirceur" 'its regular dose of darkness' ("Une certaine tendance du cinéma français" 21-22). Yet just like the above critics of American noir, much of his rhetoric is borrowed from prewar discourse on film without, however, acknowledging that provenance. Paradoxically, then, when mourning the absence of Jacques Prévert in postwar film, prewar French film noir becomes an object of loss (Truffaut, "Une certaine tendance" 23). As such, the legacy of prewar noir in the postwar becomes at once a point of reference, but also of resistance in the New Wave's efforts to redefine French national cinema.

From the late 1930s through the 1950s, from poetic realism to the New Wave, noir is ever-present, but rarely does it mean the same thing at any two moments and for any two critics. It persists as a metaphor in the sense that it serves as substitute for something else, carries the load of something unsaid, left, as it were, in the dark. Noir is not continuous in discourse as something that would affirm or protect a type of unified historical consciousness. Its significance lies in its constant state of transformation, of discontinuity. Yet while the value of *noirceur* changes over time, noir bears the weight of those transformations, the memory of its past use. In

other words, noir may be discontinuous with itself, but the discourse of noir is continuous. This is because wherever it appears, noir's specificity inheres in its function: to relegate to obscurity that which one does not want to admit as part of one's version of the French national imaginary or collective memory. But crucially, and especially in the years following the Occupation, noir therefore simultaneously draws attention to this exclusion as constitutive of that identity.

Noir, National Cinema, and Genre

Because the present study conceptualizes noir as a discourse elaborated through time and in which critics debate how a nation should or should not view itself on screen, it also participates in conversations about national cinema and genre. In Andrew Higson's seminal article, "The Concept of National Cinema," he argues that while traditional approaches to national cinema emphasize the site of production, who makes films and what the films represent, equally if not more important are the sites of consumption (36). A national cinema largely inheres in "the activity of national audiences and the conditions under which they make sense of and use the films they watch," which involves from the start considerations about "what *ought* to be the national cinema" (Higson 36, 37). This means that rather than having a fixed meaning, national cinema arises out of a "mythologizing process" marked by "conflict, […] resistance and negotiation" and is thus produced by the interplay between the need to fix the definition of the nation in cinema as myth and the never-ending process of doing so through the conversations about it (Higson 37).[9]

[9] The same point has more recently been made by Alan Williams and Adam Lowenstein (Williams, "Introduction" 4-5; Lowenstein 11)

In other words, national cinema exists, like noir, not in the films themselves but through the discourse about them, through the ways cinema's relationship to the nation is spoken, and through the tension between the many motivations for articulating that relationship. While this definition of national cinema obviously echoes with my understanding of noir in France from the 1930s through the 1950s, the importance of noir to French national cinema goes beyond conceptual similarities. Indeed, if the two resemble each other on a theoretical level this is because noir is inseparable from the continuing effort to fix a French national cinematic identity. If I may adapt Williams' soberingly direct definition of French national cinema, noir "is whatever you need it to be to make a point in the ongoing struggle to conceptualize France" a struggle that is "*dynamic*" and "perpetually *unfinished*" ("Introduction" 5). This struggle to define France reaches an extreme degree of intensity during the period that hinges on Occupation, precisely when noir dominates film criticism.

As for the study of noir as a genre, I repeat that I do not believe noir has a fixed set of formal or thematic characteristics. They certainly do not exist in the films themselves, but neither can they be found in the criticism, which is where noir originates as an filmic idea. Noir more correctly constitutes a way of negatively articulating how the nation should and should not be represented in film. This is not to say, however, that genre has nothing to do with the current study's enterprise. For as much as noir and national cinema are born of discourses of conflict, so is genre. In his work on film genres, Rick Altman speculates that they "operate like nations," to the extent that they are "multiple things serving multiple purposes for multiple groups [and] regulatory schemes facilitating the integration of diverse factions into a single unified social fabric" (195). Just as noir demonstrates that national cinema exists through a discourse in which

the value of noir and the nation, the nation through noir, never cease to change, if noir is to partake in genre, it is again through a process leaning toward an ever-receding horizon (Rick Altman 199). Noir, national cinema, and genre are thus all examples of discourse in the sense that each is in a constant, pre-discursive state that is always already discursive (Foucault, *L'Archéologie du savoir* 106). If the link Rick Altman studies between theories of genre and the nation[10] remain for him on the level of "the tentative and suggestive rather than the confident and definitive," then, my exploration of noir in French film criticism provides a complex yet concrete example of that relationship (205).

What I have said so far about noir, national cinema, and genre may give the impression that the films themselves matter little. This is far from the case, for while I locate noir within criticism and not in the films, individual films are capable of responding in their own turn to the criticism. Like national cinema and genre, noir's role within criticism is marked by a tension between the processes and the permanence of myth (Higson 37; Rick Altman 19-20, 195-205). On the one hand, its value is in state of constant flux due to evolving historical pressures and the changing motivations of those who use it. On the other, critics deploy noir in singular instances to reject certain elements in representations of the nation in order fix national identity according to ideological biases. In short, noir is a process of defining the nation through discourse, but its function in individual instances of its use is to arrest that process in the service of myth. By emphasizing how noir transforms within film criticism spanning over two decades, my research into its diachronic dimensions resists any effort to make the nation conform to one representation to the exclusion of all others. Films themselves serve as similar, potential sites of resistance. This

[10] Rick Altman references Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* and Jürgen Habermas' *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (196-99)

is because if noir is deployed in criticism to fix the definition of the nation at a specific time and for a specific purpose by excluding something from it, then the formal processes and absences within particular films are occasions to unfix the nation and address particular omissions. As a result, French films noirs may thus properly be described as works that resist the hegemonic efforts of film criticism to crystallize a myth of French national identity. Films noirs are those works that further the study of noir criticism by challenging it conventions.

This relationship between noir criticism and films noirs informs the organization of the chapters that follow. The first two may be taken as a pair since they bring together for the first time in scholarship a vast body of criticism stretching from the mid 1930s to the beginning of the New Wave without separating that corpus, a priori, into distinct moments. Both chapters focus on the use of "noir" as a category and the related constellation of ideas, conventions, and debates as they appear, though with notable differences, throughout the period. The most significant issues of the era, namely the definition of the nation, its representation in film and for specific groups of spectators, and the role of the Occupation in both, are all articulated in conversations about noir. That noir is such a privileged site for these discussions proves its essential role in any account of pre- to postwar French cinema.

More specifically, the first chapter explores the possibility of continuity between prewar, Occupation, and postwar film criticism on noir through these periods' interest in representations of France and the issues of spectatorship born out of them. Drawing on critics as diverse as Émile Vuillermoz, Lucien Rebatet, Georges Sadoul, André Bazin, and Raymond Borde and Étienne Chaumeton, I demonstrate that while each may examine particular historical representations of the nation and conceptions of spectatorship, these all take shape around

specific dualities for critics about what is and is not French. Within the contexts of prewar political anxieties, Occupation-era Manichaeism, postwar reflection on prewar film, and American cultural imperialism, I argue that noir criticism simultaneously exemplifies and puts the unity of French cinematic identity into question since it can only be conceived through a series of changing historical oppositions.

The second chapter focuses on a particular paradox of postwar noir criticism. That is, even as postwar critics of American noir such as Jean-Pierre Chartier and Borde and Chaumeton resurrect debates and categories from prewar criticism on noir, most resist any relationship between the two eras. Instead of agreeing with that resistance or seeking to correct it, however, I emphasize the importance and productivity of maintaining the paradox, of viewing noir criticism as simultaneously continuous and discontinuous with itself. For while it remains about the nation, the issue of the representation of France is often screened out by various proxies, including the United States but also the auteurist polemics of the nascent New Wave. Not only does this approach provide a glimpse into the essential role of the Occupation and French cultural memory in postwar criticism about American film, but also into how postwar criticism as a whole redeploys aspects of the prewar discourse to different ends. In the case of the mid-to-late fifties and the New Wave this involves the use of a prewar social rhetoric to reconceptualize national cinema through the creative vision of the director while marginalizing problematic social issues. By outlining the shift of interest in noir criticism from representations of the nation to cinematic national identity and the auteur, radical reevaluations of François Truffaut's critical work and its debt to noir criticism and of Julien Duvivier's neglected but integral position in postwar French film history are made possible.

The second half of my dissertation explores how diverse formal aspects of specific films are capable of problematizing dominant postwar national myths. The third chapter analyzes Jean-Pierre Melville's "cinema of process,"[11] understood as the continuous representation of detailed, repetitive, planned action through discontinuous cinematic time. Through formal readings of *Le Doulos* (1962), *Le Deuxième souffle* (1966), and *Le Samouraï* (1967), I advance that the cinema of process uses repetition and rehearsal, or *répétition*, and *mise-en-scène* to engage with meta-cinematic myths and that this fascination is equally haunted by, yet paradoxically detached from, memories of the war and Resistance. Indeed, process proves most compellingly at work in his films about the Occupation. In *Le Silence de la mer* (1949) and *L'Armée des ombres* (1969), the cinema of process falters or reaches unsustainable intensities at the same time that the Resistance myth undergirding postwar national identity also begins to collapse. The cinema of process' emphasis on *répétition* and *mise-en-scène* reveals that both meta-cinematic and national-historical myths rely on a combination of fixity and unceasing change that threatens the very constitution of those myths.

The fourth and final chapter examines the structures of spectatorship in Henri Decoin's *Non coupable* (1947). Through an extended analysis, I explore the film's combination of individually unambiguous formal and narrative cues to recount a story in which the main character is simultaneously guilty and not guilty of a series of murders committed offscreen, and I emphasize that this offscreen overlaps with that of real events in postwar France. Thus elaborating what I call the film's troubled "formal imaginary," the play of absence in *Non coupable*'s narrative structure challenges the spectator constantly to interrogate the gap between the film's diegesis

[11] I appropriate the term from Colin McArthur, who uses it in "Mise-en-scène degree zero: Jean-Pierre Melville's *Le Samouraï*."

and its representation and ultimately to question the main character's level of guilt. By drawing attention to the offscreen and what is troublingly absent, *Non coupable* raises questions about other intertexts that are equally conspicuous through both their absence in the film and their being made absent in reconstructions of postwar French identity: the trial of Occupation-era serial killer Marcel Petiot and Decoin's *épuration* (purge) hearings. In short, I argue that the fictional world created *Non coupable*'s formal imaginary gives expression to anxieties otherwise expelled from the "real" world configurations of national imaginary following the Occupation.

Certainly, noir has a whole set of manifestations beyond the film and criticism surrounding Occupation France. Taking on a whole new life in American cinema and belonging to another sort of existence in works of multiple national literatures, noir means many things for different groups of spectators, readers, and critics. What I hope to accomplish through these explorations into French film noir and criticism is not to disparage these other avenues in relation to it as some exclusive ground. Nor do I have any pretensions of conclusively rounding off the discussion of noir. However, by for the first time opening the rich French critical archives on noir, by exploring how its value for a specific audience in a specific space changes over a roughly thirty year time period, and by allowing films then to fold back onto the criticism and highlight its basic assumptions, this study gives noir more breadth, depth, and nuance than its conventional, narrow definition as a genre exclusive to American postwar cinema. Noir in French film and criticism is the dark, obscure other side against which, and therefore through which, France sees, remembers, and redefines itself from the late 1930s up to the 1960s.

CHAPTER 1

NOIR AND THE NATION

One of the most striking continuities in noir criticism from the immediate prewar era through the mid-1950s is its enduring interest in the nation. Susan Hayward points out that in the 1930s this assumed various forms within general meta-cinematic activities: the "mythologizing" of France's role in cinematic history; the "totemization" of Louis Delluc in accounts of the 1920s avant-garde and impressionist school and in the establishment of the *Prix Louis Delluc*; the birth of the *Cinémathèque française* at the hands of Henri Langois, Georges Franju, and Jean Mitry; the establishment of the *Grand Prix nationaux*; and the polemical debates on national identity in film (Hayward 136-37). As for film production, Dudley Andrew argues that the issue of the nation gains in intensity during the same period through the concern for a national French cinema of "quality" as opposed to the dominant Hollywood cinema of "quantity" (Andrew 6-11). The concern for quality even persists as a nationalist conviction in the cinematic institutions set up by Vichy during the Occupation (Nord 239-41). Then following the Liberation, the nation is still a concern with a variety of foci. Critics deliberate on the merits and faults of Occupation-era film as well as the new French cinema emerging from it.[12] Discussions of French national cinema appear regularly in *L'Écran français*. In the opening pages of its very first non-clandestine issue in July 1945, an anonymous, untitled mission statement calls the publication a "journal de combat" 'militant magazine' for the promotion of "l'esprit et la culture française […] non seulement à travers la France mais aussi dans le monde entier" 'French spirit and culture […] not only throughout France but also in the entire world' (*L'Écran français*, 4 July 1945, 1).

[12] Much of André Bazin's work is devoted to this new cinema and the directors who began making films during the Occupation. See his "Quinze ans du cinéma français" collected in *Le Cinéma de l'occupation et de la résistance* and in *Le Cinéma français de la libération à la Nouvelle Vague: 1945-1958*.

Subsequent issues even feature debates on the relationship between nationalism and the ethics of dubbing (Becker "Film doublé = film trahi: 'Doubler,' en argot, signifie : 'trahir,'"; Sadoul "La Querelle du doublage"). Conversations surrounding the state of French cinema again proliferate in the summer of 1946 following the Blum-Byrnes accords, seen by many as a threat to the very existence of the French film industry.[13] Lastly—although any end to this list would be premature and arbitrary—the filmic representation of the nation regularly appears as a special point of interest. This is the case with French cinema, naturally, but also American films released after the Liberation.

While the above compendium demonstrates the importance of the nation within cultural, industrial, and political contexts, it also illustrates the difficulty of defining what "the nation" means in each context and across them collectively. Furthermore, one cannot ignore that the nation in its many forms has always been a concern in a country where the national cinema is in a perpetual state of crisis, due either to its own internal industrial issues, its struggle against American filmic hegemony, or its unflagging nostalgia for its pre-World War I international dominance. The initial obstacle in speaking of the nation in French film is that of conceptual and historical specificity.

It is here that criticism on film noir from the 1930s through the 1950s proves indispensable to a history of French cinema. This criticism allows one to explore and define the contours of the nation in French film with such specificity because the latter takes its most vivid shape in discussions about *noirceur*. What exactly sets these conversations apart from those appearing

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[13] Georges Sadoul's postwar criticism is particularly representative of the reaction to the accords. See "La Bataille des écrans français" (originally published in installments in *L'Humanité* from December 1951 to January 1952, reprinted in *Écrits 1*). For a more in-depth investigation of contemporary political tensions surrounding and sparked by the agreement see Patricia Hubert-Lacombe's excellent *Le Cinéma français dans la guerre froide*.

before and after them? How and under what conditions do noir and the nation intersect, and in what does the nation's specific continuity within noir criticism consist? To respond briefly and provisionally to these questions, noir criticism's interest in the nation is unique in that centers on how and for whom it is represented in film and sets noir as the negative of what the nation ought to be.

In what follows, I will not restrict myself to mere thematics of conversations on the nation and its representation, nor even to the nation exclusively understood as France. Although noir criticism makes up a discourse, the various voices that participate in it and what the nation means for them does not constitute one unified utterance. What proves significant is not only how the nation is spoken and constituted in each text but also the conditions of dispersion and difference between texts. What are the various debates, categories, and relationships used to conceive of the nation in noir criticism? How is it deployed and to what end? For whom do those discussions exist? By taking into account the dissimilar ways in which noir criticism argues how the nation ought to be represented as well as the spectatorial positions born out of these polemics, I will pay close attention to how the nation and spectator transform through time. In this way, the very concepts of a French nation and spectator, indeed of French cinematic identity, will ultimately prove conceivable only according to a series of national and international tensions. These include: political divisions and prewar anxieties in criticism of the late 1930s; collaboration in Occupation-era filmmaking; postwar reflections on the prewar era; and manifestations of the French nation and spectator in accounts of postwar American cinema.

Prewar French Noir and (Inter)National Anxieties: Projected Positions of Spectatorship

Criticism from the late thirties is riddled by debates on how the nation should and should not be represented in film. These discussions often take shape around anxieties about the effect of the image of the nation on particular audiences and thus raise questions of spectator positioning. Positioning of course also marks a strain of post-1968 film criticism where it appears in ideological, psychoanalytical, and Marxist-oriented work, but its conjugation with issues of the nation puts it into a different context from the late 1930s to the 1950s. This does not mean, however, that questions of the nation during this period exclude ideological concerns—far from it. Nor does it mean that spectatorial positions are imagined as a sort of unity, as being specifically and exclusively about French spectatorship. Indeed, spectatorship in this period of criticism emerges through and as a tension, a double relationship to the nation in as much as the spectator is simultaneously self and other. As Richard Abel points out, "most writers assumed that the French cinema constituted a crucial representation of the French people as a nation, to themselves and to others" (Abel 145). Following Abel, Christopher Faulkner adds, invoking Louis Althusser, that at stake in the critical writings on both the political left and the right in the late 1930s is "the very survival and definition," "the acceptable and (unacceptable) ideological representations of the nation," and the signs by which new political identities are formed (Faulkner 137-38).

This doubleness must therefore be articulated within its historical context. In the late thirties, film critics pay special attention to how the nation ought to be represented to spectators not only due to the polarized and "shrill nationalistic" political climate but also in anxious anticipation of the war (Abel 149). Debates on the nation in film do not exist in a vacuum, then, but attest to larger, unavoidable political and international contexts. This awareness is evidenced by the

overtly political character of the journals where many critics of the period worked. As such, they express anxieties not only about polarized politics within the hexagon but also within Europe. For all the concern about the demoralizing effects of film noir on French viewers there is equal worry for how France would and ought to be represented in foreign countries. Representative of this dual anxiety is a directive from the *Service du cinéma* from October 13, 1939, that bans certain films, and noir films in particular, due to their pessimism, supposed immorality, and negative representation of France to international audiences:

> Concerning censorship of films for export, especially to those countries where we have many friends, we must particularly avoid […] representing our country, our traditions and our race through a lens that is distorted, lying or deformed by the prism of an artistic individuality which may be original, but is not always healthy. (qtd. in Ehrlich 2-3)

Concerns for the nation's image and its effect on the audience thus hinge in part on positions of spectatorship run through and rendered double by a literally and figuratively foreign other. It is literal in the sense of non-French spectators but figurative in the sense that it assumes a domestic spectator whose attitudes towards representations of France changes according to the anxieties of an-other, equally postulated spectator.

To open up a brief parenthesis and specify what I mean by a doubleness and otherness of spectatorship outlined in prewar criticism, I want to distinguish this from the aforementioned theories of positioning that begin to appear in the late 1960s. Spectatorial positions are always double, defined as they are by the sometimes conflictual amalgam of an actual viewer and the spectating subject posited by cinema's material conditions, techniques, viewing conventions, and

consequent ideologies.[14] But the doubleness within criticism from the late 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s is different. It concerns the positioning of French and foreign spectating subjects through their connection to particular representations of the nation, which in prewar criticism is predominantly France, and through their dialectic relationship to one another. The positing and thus positioning of spectator-subjects in this case is not due to the cinematic apparatus, but is simply the result of discussing large, generalized groups of viewers. At issue in the following analyses is a doubleness of spectatorship understood not as the product of those abstract psychic or ideological structures later discussed by apparatus criticism but rather produced by critical discourse itself.

The details of how supposedly unhealthy and distorted visions of France have a negative effect on domestic and foreign viewers are outlined by some of the most visible critics and sometimes filmmakers of the period, including Georges Sadoul, Lucien Rebatet, Jean Renoir, and Emile Vuillermoz.[15] Beginning with Sadoul and Rebatet, who are on opposite ends of the political spectrum as communist and fascist, respectively, both express anxieties about how representations of the nation in noir threaten French spectatorial identity. Yet the contours of that identity are also simultaneously defined by the foreign nature of what endangers it.

Writing as François Vinneuil in weeklies of the extreme right*, Je suis partout* and *L'Action française*, Rebatet exhibits typical vitriol in denouncing what he pejoratively calls a "noir" cinema perpetrated by leftist Jews. He particularly regrets its characters' submission to "la

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[14] See for example: Jean-Louis Comolli and Jean Narboni's "Cinema/Ideology/Criticism," Comolli's "Machines of the Visible," and Jean-Louis Baudry's *L'Effet cinéma*.

[15] Many of the passages I have chosen from these critics are mentioned in Charles O'Brien's article, "Film Noir in France: Before the Liberation" as well as in Abel's anthology of criticism. I owe a large debt to both of them for venturing into the archive and laying a provisional path of material for the analyses that follow.

fatalité" 'fate,' the absence of a "combat intérieur" 'inner struggle,' and the effect these may have on the viewing public (Vinneuil, "Le jour se lève" 9). Such claims about the dangers of noir appear most directly in his reviews of Marcel Carné's *Le jour se lève* (*Daybreak* [1939]) and Pierre Chenal's *Le Dernier tournant* (*The Last Turn* [1939]),[16] they but are elaborated at length and in greater detail in his *Les Tribus du cinéma et du théâtre* (*The Tribes of Cinema and Literature*). In this 1941 diatribe, Rebatet accuses dark French cinema of leading to the defeat while elaborating an antisemitic conspiracy theory: "[C]et esthétisme marxiste […] ces produits spécifiques du judaïsme ont joué un rôle de dissolvant social" 'This Marxist aestheticism […] these specific products of Judaism were agents of social discord' (Rebatet 86-87).[17]

While once positive toward noir's social realism, at the end of the 1930s film critic and historian, Sadoul outright accuses Julien Duvivier and Carné of perpetrating a brutal, counterproductive form of realism:

> Ce n'est plus une peinture de la société, mais une rafle de police. [. . .] Il ne faut pourtant pas oublier que c'est dans de telles catégories sociales que se recrutent non les vrais héros du peuple, mais les hommes de main d'un Doriot, d'un Carbone, d'un Sabiani, les tueurs du C.S.A.R., les trafiquants d'armes, les troupes de la drogue et ces hommes de Tercio que l'auteur du roman *Quai des brumes* [*Port of Shadows* (Pierre Mac Orlan 1927)]

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[16] Chenal's film is the first adaptation of James M. Cain's *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1934). The others are *Ossessione* (*Obsession* [Luchino Visconti 1943]) and Tay Garnett and Bob Rafelson's adaptations (1946 and 1981, respectively), which retain the original title.

[17] Rebatet does, however, find some comfort in what he sees as the public's preference for more lighthearted entertainment (Vinneuil "Le Dernier tournant" 4).

On Rebatet's explanation of how prewar noir led to the defeat, see *Les Tribus du cinéma et du théâtre* (86-94). His first seven chapters constitute a veritable and expansive whodunit narrative about how Jewish businessmen ruined the French film industry.

> magnifia dans un autre de ses livres, *La Bandera* [*The Flag* (1931)], dédié au général Franco. (Sadoul, "Récents progrès" 463-64)[18]
>
> This is no longer a portrait of society but a police roundup. […] It must not be forgotten that it is in such social groups that one recruits not the true heroes of the people, but the henchmen of a Doriot, a Carbone, a Sabiani, the killers of the C.S.A.R, arms traffickers, drug gangs, and those men of the Tercio whom the author of *Quai des brumes* [*Port of Shadows* (Pierre Mac Orlan 1927)] idealized in another of his books, *La Bandera* [*The Flag* (1931)], dedicated to General Franco.

The dissimilarities between Rebatet and Sadoul are striking, and they are, of course, not to be overlooked. Each espouses opposing political worldviews and locates perceived threats to the domestic spectator in different forms of alterity. For Rebatet, an extreme right wing critic for fascist and monarchist weeklies, the dangerous and demoralizing effects of the films find their source in a plot concocted by the recently immigrated political and Jewish other. Sadoul, on the other hand, objects to the representation of characters and social situations that might drive the domestic viewer to what he takes as a leftist critic publishing in *Cahiers du bolchevisme* to be the politically foreign, that is, fascists resembling those in Spain, Italy, and Germany. Their unspoken and implicit positionings of the domestic, French spectator differ from one another according to their politics. Despite the different results, however, the conditions of possibility for

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[18] Jacques Doriot was a former-communist political figure who became fascist in the thirties and led the *Parti populaire français* (French Popular Party) with Simon Sabiani as its vice-president (Soucy 204-12, 221). Paul Carbone was a figure of the prewar Marseille underworld who then, with the help of Sabiani, collaborated with the Germans during the Occupation (Pierrat 213-16). The C.S.A.R., *Comité secret d'action révolutionnaire* (Secret Committee for Revolutionary Action), or *La Cagoule* (*The Hood* or *The Balaclava*), is a far right organization suspected of having helped Benito Mussolini assassinate anti-fascists, Carlo and Nello Rosselli (Bourdrel 156-61). Tercio, or the Spanish Third, is a military formation of Spanish origin dating back to the sixteenth and sventeenth centuries, no doubt referenced by Sadoul to fit in one more reference to fascism, one more jab at Duvivier's film (Lynch 117).

thinking a French spectator are the same in both cases. The perceived threat of an alterity allows them to suggest and glimpse the possibility of a French spectator who is simultaneously given and constructed insofar as there must first exist something to be threatened, and yet that the threat of the foreign other also gives shape to what it threatens. The identity of a French spectator for Sadoul and Rebatet proves only conceivable according to this dialectic.

Threats to the French spectator and nation are also located in noir cinema's foreign reception. The most memorable instance of this anxiety is Renoir's accusation—reported by Henri Jeanson, former friend, colleague, as well as screenwriter for Carné and Duvivier—that *Le Quai des brumes* "est un film de propagande fasciste parce que les étrangers qui le verront auront le droit de penser qu'un pays qui produit des types de l'espèce de Gabin ou de Pierre Brasseur est un pays mûr pour la dictature" 'is a fascist propaganda film because foreigners who see it will have the right to think that a country that produces the likes of Gabin or Pierre Brasseur is a country ripe for dictatorship' (qtd. in Jeancolas 236). Renoir's attack on Carné's film, while similar to Sadoul's, is not articulated from the position of a French spectator, but from that of an imagined foreign spectator who, Renoir suggests, will receive the film and its images of France differently. In other words, Carné's film is propaganda only insofar as it is considered a French film seen by Germans or Italians who will then use it against the French. But why should this condemnation come from the perspective of a foreign spectator, whereas it could very well have been expressed from a French position, as in Sadoul?

A response can be found in music and film critic, Émile Vuillermoz's more evenhanded criticism, where Renoir's own films play a role. Vuillermoz frames his objections less provocatively so that they touch only on the exportation of noir films, which he otherwise greatly

appreciates. In a 1939 article from *Le Temps* devoted to *La Bête humaine* (*The Human Beast* [Renoir 1938]) and *L'Hôtel du nord* (Carné 1938), Vuillermoz compares Renoir to naturalist novelist Émile Zola, whom he describes as a cinematic writer with the realism of a cameraman, and says that Carné's portrayal of fate recalls classical tragedy. Yet the same qualities he praises in this new trend of cinema "poussé au noir" 'driven to darkness' (Vuillermoz, "*La Bête humaine*" 5) make him particularly anxious when he imagines that they might be seen by foreign audiences:

> c'est ce qui donne à ces mélodrames de carrefour une dangereuse noblesse. Je crois devoir, en effet, insister une fois de plus sur le tort considérable que nous fait en Europe l'exportation imprudente des films de cette valeur, qui accréditent avec autorité la légende de la pourriture définitive et irrémédiable de notre pays. (Vuillermoz, "La Bête humaine" 5)
>
> this is what gives these crossroads melodramas a dangerous dignity. I believe I must, indeed, stress one more time the considerable harm throughout Europe that carelessly exporting these types of films causes us, films that authoritatively validate the myths of our country's definitive and irreparable moral decay.

This passage vividly relays Vuillermoz's ambivalent attitude toward noir. The commercial triviality of "mélodrames de carrefour" forms a paradoxical pair with "dangereuse noblesse," which itself approaches oxymoron. Each half of the expression represents one side of the critic's position or, rather, the plurality of his positions on French noir. On the one hand, he speaks as a French spectator who appreciates the films for their aesthetic merits and heritage; on the other, he speaks as a Frenchman attempting to view the films through the perspective of a foreigner

already equipped with an anti-French bias. Indeed, at the end of the passage, Vuillermoz ventriloquizes and is ventriloquized by the foreign viewer he imagines. He throws his voice toward an anti-French spectator whose presence is assumed, in the sense of presupposed and yet taken on, the better to reinforce the notion of a French position that needs to be protected.

The above mention of "une fois de plus" 'one more time' references an article published five months earlier, from August 1938, entitled "Un cas de conscience" 'A Case of Conscience' in which Vuillermoz outlines at greater length his ambivalent position on noir and his misgivings about its exportation. The context for the editorial is the Venice Biennale, then under the control of the Italian fascist government. Vuillermoz announces at the outset that the essay's subject is the representation of the nation in both an aesthetic and diplomatic sense: "Aux quels films doit-on accorder la redoutable investiture officielle d'ambassadeurs de l'esprit français ?" 'Which films should be given the formidable investiture of official ambassadors of the French spirit?' (Vuillermoz, "Un cas de conscience" 47). The task is formidable, he says, largely because of a particular French mindset:

> Chacun sait que, dans *notre* pays, *nous* avons des habitudes bien établies de franc-parleur. *Nous* tenons beaucoup à cette indépendance de pensée et de langage. *Nous nous* disons volontiers *nos* quatre vérités et l'auto-critique *nous* procure des joies sans cesse renouvelées. Alors que d'autres peuples se gardent bien de laver leur linge sale autrement qu'en famille, *nous* faisons volontiers *notre* lessive sur la place publique. Il *nous* plaît d'analyser complaisamment *nos* travers et *nos* ridicules. *Notre* malice naturelle y trouve son compte. *Nous nous* flattons ainsi de donner la preuve de *notre* impartialité, de *notre*

clairvoyance et de *notre* indépendance de jugement. (emphasis added; Vuillermoz, "Un cas de conscience" 47)

Everyone knows that in *our* country we have the well established habit of speaking frankly. *We*'re very fond of this independence of thought and language. *We* gladly give each other a piece of our mind, and self-criticism provides us with endless joy. Whereas other peoples are careful to wash their dirty laundry in private, *we* do *our* washing in the public square. *We* take pleasure in indulging *ourselves* in analyzing *our* faults and *our* absurdities. *Our* natural malevolence gets something out of it. *We* thus pride *ourselves* in proving *our* impartiality, *our* clear-sightedness, and *our* independence of judgement.

Vuillermoz's liberal use of various forms of the first person plural produces a performative rhythm. The repetition rhetorically rehearses and thus realizes an overflowing sense of French collectivity marked by an affable, self-deprecating *bonhomie* (affability), and it firmly casts the speaker within a stereotype as one of the group.

Yet as the instances of the jovial *nous* soon dwindle, his voice becomes neutral and assumes an air of caution:

C'est un état d'esprit qui n'est certes pas antipathique mais qui, dans certaines circonstances, comporte quelques fâcheux inconvénients. Dans une compétition internationale, en particulier, cette franchise excessive nous est fatale. Et lorsqu'il s'agit de cinéma nous payons cher cette manie de la confession publique.

La plupart d'autres peuples, en effet, calculent immédiatement les incidences que peut créer un scénario dans le domaine de la propagande. Un film va partout. C'est d'ordre moral et intellectuel, un placard de publicité. (Vuillermoz, "Un cas de conscience" 47-48)

> It is a state of mind that is admittedly not unpleasant but that, in certain circumstances, entails some unfortunate disadvantages. In an international competition, in particular, this excessive frankness is disastrous for us. And when it is a question of cinema, we pay greatly for this quirk of public confessions.
>
> Most other peoples, in fact, immediately calculate the repercussions a screenplay can have in terms of propaganda. A film goes everywhere. It is, morally and intellectually, a publicity poster.

Shifting the context to international competition, the frankness of how the French represent themselves to themselves takes on a different value once it becomes a question of representing themselves to others. According to Vuillermoz such situations are problematic because spectators, including the French, find pleasure in glimpsing "la psychologie secrète" 'secret psychology' of another country through its films. "Un film est toujours un aveu" 'A film is always a confession,' he writes, "[l]es peuples s'y présentent peints par eux-mêmes, ce qui donne à ce document une valeur instructive" '[p]opulations present themselves of their own accord, which gives an instructive value to this document' (Vuillermoz, "Un cas de conscience" 48). Consequently, by exhibiting films to an international audience just as one would normally do back home, he continues, cooly reverting to the sympathetic and ubiquitous *nous*, "Nous allons au devant des critiques si souvent injustes qu'on nous adresse et nous donnons à nos ennemis des verges pour nous battre" 'We go before the often biased judges one assigns us, and we give our enemies switches with which to beat us' (Vuillermoz, "Un cas de conscience" 48).

The acrobatics of Vuillermoz's voice are stunning. Having gone from the position of a sympathetic Frenchman who speaks for the collective to the detached critic and then returning to

the first position to infuse it with the second's voice of caution, he soon finds himself ventriloquizing multiple positions at once:

> Mais voulez-vous songer un instant à l'exploitation sournoise que l'on peut faire contre nous de ces deux réalisations [*Pépé le Moko* (Julien Duvivier 1937) et *Le Quai des brumes*] de premier ordre ? Ne voyez-vous pas d'ici la brillante campagne d'opinion que l'on peut amorcer dans certains milieux anti-français contre notre politique coloniale en faisant observer que de notre propre aveu nous sommes incapables d'organiser l'Algérie, puisque sa capitale est un repaire inexpugnable de bandits et de hors-la-loi ? […] Ce tableau d'Alger [*Pépé le Moko*] peint par des Français est plus éloquent que n'importe quel article de polémique. La France s'avoue elle-même indigne de posséder et incapable d'administrer un empire colonial.
>
> De même, le *Quai des brumes* nous montre à quel degré de dégénérescence et d'abjection est tombée notre population provinciale. […] Ce ne sont pas des étrangers haineux, ce sont des Français qui nous avouent que dans cette ville il n'existe pas un seul personnage propre [mais] un ramassis d'épaves sociales lamentable qui grouille dans un climat d'immoralité vraiment stupéfiant. [Nous montrons] à tout l'univers que nous sommes un peuple fini, rongé par la gangrène du vice et que, lorsqu'un des nos compatriotes veut donner une image fidèle de son pays, il est obligé de charger sa palette des plus sombres couleurs (Vuillermoz, "Un cas de conscience" 48)
>
> But will you not take a second to think about the insidious way one can exploit these two first-rate films [*Pépé le Moko* (Julien Duvivier 1937) and *Le Quai des brumes*] against us? Don't you see from here the brilliant campaign that can be started in certain anti-

> French groups against our colonial policy by showing that, of our own admission, we are incapable of keeping order in Algeria, since its capital is an impregnable den of thieves and outlaws? […] This picture of Algiers [*Pépé le Moko*] painted by the French is more eloquent than any editorial or polemic. France herself admits that she is unworthy of possessing and incapable of administrating a colonial empire.
>
> Similarly, *Le Quai des brumes* shows us the degree of decline and abjection to which our provincial population has fallen. […] These aren't foreigners full of hatred—these are Frenchmen who confess to us that in this city there is not one decent character [but] a bunch of pathetic social derelicts who swarm about in a truly stunning climate of immorality. [We are showing] to the whole universe that we are finished as a people, eaten away by the gangrene of vice and that, when one of our compatriots wants to offer a truthful image of his country, he must load his palette with the darkest colors

"Can you all not see what they would say of us: 'Look at the French colonies! Look at the French.' Look at what we are saying about ourselves to them," he seems to argue, weaving dizzyingly in and out of positions. Such slipperiness renders the indirect nous in "nous montre" 'shows us' and "nous avouent" 'confesses to us' impossible to anchor in either a French spectator or an anti-French spectator, a task made no easier by the opening preamble's invitation to imagine what they would say while he, Vuillermoz, goes ahead and says it.

Within the oscillations of his voice are ultimately two main positions, each one as fictional as the other. Vuillermoz postulates both a French spectator and an anti-French spectator. Similar to Renoir, he argues for the reconsideration of filmic images of France from the perspective of an imagined foreign viewer who then influences the French public's relationship to representations

of their own nation. In other words, as far as this foreign spectatorial function is concerned, what is at play in "Un cas de conscience" is a mode of projection. The French spectator is split or alienated from himself in a superegoic fashion through the projection of his apprehensions about filmic images of France onto a postulated foreign other who in turn mediates the former's relationship to that image.

Unlike Renoir, however, Vuillermoz repeatedly interjects moments of praise between his objections. On the surface, these seem to come from a position of French spectatorship unmediated by the imagined foreign spectator because his admiration and disapproval are explicitly separated: "J'en ai choisi deux [exemples] au hasard, parmi les films dont la qualité ne saurait être discutée […] et qui font le plus grand honneur à notre production nationale. Je l'ai dit, je l'ai écrit et je le répète volontiers" 'I've chosen two [examples] at random, among films whose quality is beyond question […] and that do the greatest honor to our national production. I have said it, I have written it, and I willingly repeat it' (Vuillermoz, "Un cas de conscience" 48). Or again, in a case where the order of criticism and praise is reversed: "Encore une fois, j'avoue que *Le Quai des brumes* et *Pépé le Moko* sont deux films excellents, d'un accent énergique et juste. Tout cela existe, tous cela est vrai. Mais, dans un concours, tout cela est détestable" 'Once more, I admit that *Le Quai des brumes* and *Pépé le Moko* are two excellent films with an energetic and fair accent. All that is so, all that is true. But in a competition, all that is detestable' (Vuillermoz, "Un cas de conscience" 48).

Yet one should hesitate to distinguish between the two positions of admiration and disapproval because they are set in relation to one another by the hinge of Vuillermoz's critical voice. Each preliminary statement lays the ground for what follows, and by swinging one way he

leaves room for himself to move in the opposite direction. In the first case, projected criticism—examples of films as bad publicity—clears the way for praise. In the second, praise makes possible a following criticism, where that criticism is again valid only by imagining foreign spectators during an international competition. By contextualizing his condemnation through a posited foreign other, Vuillermoz frees himself to cry the films' merits, even going so far as underlining the honor they do French national cinema. Inversely, by praising the films *again* and *energetically*, he exonerates himself from the following position where in a competition with foreign spectators the films become detestable. This exoneration is all the more remarkable in that the confession, the *aveu,* appears as an introduction to his praise. The positions cannot be separated from one another because each makes the other possible. Each spectator only maintains its unity by its being predicated on and determined by an antithetic and equally fictional spectatorial totality. They are paradoxically both exclusive from and codependent on one another.

Vuillermoz's misplaced and unnecessary admissions further alert the reader to the interconnectedness of positions. He confesses his praise of Carné and Duvivier's films: "Je l'ai dit, je l'ai écrit et je le répète volontiers" 'I have said it, I have written it, and I willingly repeat it.' But the repetition here of equivalent independent clauses combined with the self-awareness of that repetition and the redundant use of *volontiers* suggests a defensive mechanism that can only be described as a reverse form of denegation. Why should he go to great lengths to defend through admission the merits of these films? "Encore une fois j'avoue […] d'un accent énergique et juste" 'Once more I admit […] with an energetic and fair accent' he then states. But why confess things that do not need confessing, unless that confession is misplaced? The confession

appears uncomfortable and unnecessary in laudatory propositions because it would seem more appropriate and be more expected of Vuillermoz to state that *Pépé le Moko* and *Le Quai des brumes* are good films but then confess his doubts about specific contexts of reception.

One should be wary of such an assumption, however, for this potential formulation would only be more appropriate if one were to assume that Vuillermoz speaks consistently from the position of a French spectator. By deeming the confession to be misplaced, then, I am not implying that it appears in the wrong location but rather, by outlining the nature of its actual formulation, emphasizing the interconnectedness of the positions he ostensibly seeks to separate. The confessions are misplaced, on the one hand, only if one assumes these moments of praise to be articulated from a position that is not hostile to the films, from a position marked by the voice of Vuillermoz's indulgent, self-deprecating French spectator. Yet on the other hand, if one takes them to be voiced equally and simultaneously from the position of the foreign spectator postulated and ventriloquized throughout the article, then the confessions are wholly appropriate in their apparent unnecessariness and semantic confusion. Not only is there evidence of a structure according to which a position of harsh criticism enables and is enabled by a position of praise, but through Vuillermoz's self-exculpation and apparently misplaced confessions, his voices prove inextricable from one another. Each voice gives voice, so to speak, to the other. This problematic recalls and puts into question another *aveu* Vuillermoz mentions earlier, namely, that a film is not only "un placard de publicité" 'a publicity poster' but also "toujours un aveu" 'always a confession.' Given the entanglements of his own confessions one must ask: from whom, in which of the essay's voices of reception are these films taken as confessions?

The great pains Vuillermoz takes to disentangle his voices constitute evidence of a positional ambivalence from which he struggles to escape but ends up reinforcing. The dichotomy he sets up between a French spectator and a foreign other may be aimed at elaborating and protecting the unity of the former, yet he ironically demonstrates both positions to be inseparable. This element of his article reminds me of a scene in *Pépé le Moko* where Pépé (Jean Gabin) and Gaby (Mireille Balin) meet in the Casbah in Algiers, dream together about Paris, and fall in love. They evoke the neighborhoods they know well, starting on opposite sides of the city, until they finally meet at Place Blanche. Yet because of their different backgrounds, the two would never actually meet in Paris, could really only ever unknowingly pass each other on the street, him emerging from the metro, her climbing into her car. The connection between hood and socialite as both dream about some sort of metropolitan Frenchness is only possible in a fantasy of Paris concocted from the position of exile. French identity gets lost in its own expression, can only be dreamt from the position of the other. For Pépé, as for Vuillermoz, Frenchness is always already alienated.

The spectatorial doubleness elaborated by Sadoul, Rebatet, Renoir, and Vuillermoz in their anxieties about representations of the nation and for whom they exist initiates a significant strain of film criticism on noir that continues during and after the war. Yet while this doubleness and the challenges it poses to thinking cinematic Frenchness present some sense of continuity in criticism of the period, the specificity of the nation, spectator, and the effects born out of the relationship between them change significantly according to evolving historical conditions.

A Franco-German Cinema: The Scandal of Le Corbeau

The controversy surrounding Henri-Georges Clouzot's *Le Corbeau* (*The Raven* [1943]) is perhaps the most well-known example of debates on the representation of France in cinema. Both Vichy and the Resistance press hated the film's negative representation of a small French village, and almost everyone involved in its production faced some sort of punishment after the Liberation as a result. The polemics against it were so heated that after the war some lamented what they saw as rhetorical hyperbole. Roger Régent, for instance, decries the ridiculousness of how Occupation critics were offended in simply assuming "Voici l'image de la France" 'This is the image of France' (199). Some explicitly warned the *épuration* committees, the purging hearings after the Liberation, of the dangers of such a reading, including screenwriter Henri Jeanson:

> prétendre que les personnages sont le reflet de tout un pays est une absurdité ou alors il faut dire que *Pension mimosas* [Jacques Feyder 1935] c'est la bourgeoisie française, *Pépé le Moko*, l'empire français, *Le Grand jeu* [*The Big Game* (Jacques Feyder 1934)], l'armée coloniale française, *La Bête humaine*, les chemins de fer français, *Quai des brumes*, la vie de nos ports, *Goupi mains rouges* [*It Happened at the Inn* (Jacques Becker 1943)], notre paysannerie… Condamner *Le Corbeau* selon ce point de vue serait un précédent mortel pour notre cinéma. (qtd. in Bertin-Maghit 225)[19]
>
> to claim that characters are the reflection of an entire country is absurd or else one must conclude that that *Pension mimosas* [Jacques Feyder 1935] is the French bourgeoisie, *Pépé le Moko* the French empire, *Le Grand jeu* [*The Big Game* (Jacques Feyder 1934)] the French colonial army, *La Bête humaine* the French railroads, *Le Quai des brumes* life

[19] Unfortunately, as I have just demonstrated, this dangerous precedent truly does date to some of the films Jeanson mentions.

> in our ports, *Goupi mains rouges* [*It Happened at the Inn* (Jacques Becker 1943)] our peasants… To condemn *Le Corbeau* according to this perspective would be a deadly precedent for our cinema.

Without the benefit of hindsight, however, one can easily see how *Le Corbeau* was perhaps destined, like many films of the era—from *Les Inconnus dans la maison* (*Strangers in the House* [Henri Decoin 1942]) to *La Main du diable* (*Carnival of Sinners* [Maurice Tourneur 1943]) and *Les Visiteurs du soir* (*The Devil's Envoys* [Carné 1942])—to be interpreted as an allegory. Not only was the film's story of anonymous letter writing reflected in everyday Occupation France, but the exceptional situation of the Occupation predisposes one to look for historical metaphor in popular media, whether or not they exist or are intended by the author (Williams 267).

Published in the first clandestine issue of *L'Écran français*, actor, Pierre Blanchar, and critic, Georges Adam's "*Le Corbeau* est déplumé" '*The Raven* is plucked' denounces the film in precisely the terms later decried by Régent and Jeanson:

> l'opinion traditionnelle des nazis sur notre peuple est un article de foi pour ces Messieurs [Clouzot et scénariste Louis Chavance] : les habitants de nos petites villes ne sont plus que des dégénérés, mûrs pour l'esclavage, et nos qualités ancestrales, souvenirs historiques tout juste bons pour les manuels d'un âge défunt. *Voilà l'image de nous-mêmes* qu'il importe de montrer au plus vite afin de nous convaincre de notre indignité et de l'urgence qu'il y a à nous plier au bon plaisir et aux règles morales du vertueux nazi. (emphasis added; qtd. in Barrot 14)[20]

[20] The full text of "*Le Corbeau* est déplumé" is reprinted in Olivier Barrot's work in *L'Écran français*. It was originally published in first clandestine issue of *L'Écran français* contained within the pages of *Les Lettres françaises.* 10 March 1944.

> the traditional opinion of the Nazis on our people is an article of faith for these gentlemen [Clouzot and screenwriter Chavance]: the residents of our small towns are no more than degenerates, ripe for slavery, and our ancestral qualities mere historic memories only fit for textbooks on a dead era. *Here is the image of ourselves* that needs to be shown as quickly as possible to convince us of our indignity and of the urgency to submit to the will and moral rules of the virtuous Nazi.

Blanchar and Adam's rhetoric and accusations of fascist sympathies strongly recall the anxieties induced by prewar noir cinema, specifically those expressed by Renoir, Vuillermoz, and Sadoul. For all of them, dark images of France show viewers, domestic and foreign, that the French are ready for, in need of, or in a situation conducive to the rise of fascist dictatorship. The multifaceted resemblance between *Le Corbeau* and noir of the mid to late thirties did not go unnoticed by critics who had worked in both periods (Régent 196-97; Sadoul, *Cinéma français* 99-100). Yet Adam and Blanchar go one step further in accusing Clouzot of having "consommé sa trahison, de complicité avec M. Chavance […] sous les ordres de son chef nazi, M. [Alfred] Greven" 'perpetrated his treason, with the help of M. Chavance […] under the orders of his Nazi boss, M. [Alfred] Greven' because he worked for the later's German production company, Continental Films, which exclusively produced French works (qtd. in Barrot 14). Elsewhere, Sadoul even goes so far as to claim, wrongly, that *Le Corbeau* was exported and exploited by the Nazis as anti-French propaganda ("Les Inconnus" 7). Adam and Blanchar reinforce their interpretation of *Le Corbeau* as a treasonous vision of France by opposing it to Jean Grémillon's *Le Ciel est à vous* (*The Woman Who Dared* [1944]). Unlike Clouzot and Chavance, who supposedly promote Nazi ideology, in Grémillon's work "les vrai Français […] reconnaissent

leur sang, leur vérité et applaudissent avec des larmes. *Voilà l'image de nous-mêmes*, et non celle grimaçante et caricaturale du *Corbeau*" 'the true French […] recognize their heritage, their truth, and applaud with tears. *Here is the image of ourselves*, and not the twisted and grotesque image of *Le Corbeau*' (emphasis added; qtd. in Barrot 15).

For others not involved in the resistant left or its press, the film was equally reprehensible for its representation of France, but for different reasons. The German authorities objected to the negative portrayal of anonymous letter writing because it was something they encouraged. Not only did they prevent a publicity campaign that would have emphasized this aspect of the film, but they also fired Clouzot from his position as head of screenwriting at Continental (Régent 199; Ehrlich 184). As for Vichy, the regime deplored the work as an attack on its own ideology, particularly its investments in authority figures, religion, provincial life, women, and children, which were meant to repare the decadent culture left by the Third Republic (Ehrlich 179-82).

Lucien Rebatet, on the other hand, again publishing as François Vinneuil, proves an exception. While figures on the extreme ends of the political spectrum went into attack mode, this homegrown fascist unexpectedly considers the film a solid outing, reflecting the opinion of a majority of contemporary viewers. His few complaints are small, but revealing. He finds many of the characters psychologically flat, "aussi anonymes—à leur tour !—que des pièces d'échec" 'just as anonymous—in their own turn—as chess pieces' (Vinneuil "Lettres anonymes" 7). Most notably, and in contrast to all other accounts, Rebatet wishes that Clouzot had penetrated more deeply into the issue of poison pen letter writing because he finds the film somewhat boring as is (Vinneuil, "Lettres anonymes" 7)!

> les délations, les injures et menaces de mort épistolaires, jamais signées, comptent parmi les occupations quotidiennes et essentielles de notre gracieux pays, de Calais jusqu'à Port-Vendres. Un journaliste est particulièrement blasé sur ce genre littéraire et […] la première réaction de ce journaliste est de se dire : « Bah ! il n'y a pas de quoi faire un plat. » (Vinneuil, "Lettres anonymes" 7)
>
> the epistolary informing, insults, and death threats, never signed, are among the everyday and essential activities of our gracious country, from Calais to Port-Vendres. A journalist is particularly indifferent to this literary genre, and […] the first reaction of this journalist is to say to himself: "Bah! It's no big deal."

Such a jaded reaction underscores the perceived banal referentiality of the film as an image of Occupation-era France. Yet Rebatet's yawning is also significant because it constitutes a double exception: first within the context of his usually vicious, partisan style, and second within the larger critical reception of *Le Corbeau*. This abnormally restrained Rebatet accentuates the extremes elsewhere in the film's reception.

Returning to the radical reactions thus put into relief, one can better glimpse the conflict between the Resistance's accusations of Nazi propaganda and the reaction of the occupying forces.[21] When taken separately these two cases against *Le Corbeau* are perfectly understandable: the film does offer a negative image of France and is decidedly against anonymous letter writing. Yet when read collectively, as contemporary to one another, the Resistance press' charge makes little sense. The Germans' objections to the film and their subsequent actions, firing Clouzot and banning the film, present strong reasons for the

[21] The Resistance's negativity toward *Le Corbeau*, it is important to remember, was not unanimous—nor were all members of the left—but it was by far the most visible reaction in the Resistance press (Bertin-Maghit 177).

Resistance instead to embrace it, not as an image of France, but of France under German rule. In this light, the stubborn idea that *Le Corbeau* is or was effectively used as anti-French propaganda is completely absurd.[22]

The conflict between the Resistance's reception of the film, the perceived motives of the Germans, and the Germans' actual reaction indicates a simple underlying issue. For the Resistance, there are reasons both to reject and to embrace *Le Corbeau*. Why, then, should the left's reaction be so uncomplicated, so unidimensional, and why it should seek to oppose its reaction to an imagined German position in such a clearly defined yet problematic fashion? How are these modes of reception, their related positions, and the opposition between them formed? The controversy bears similarities toVuillermoz's article and its opposition of a French position of spectatorship to that of a posited foreign other, but the specificity of *Le Corbeau*'s historical context calls for a different explanation.

One may approach these questions by taking the moral ambiguity of the film's narrative, noticed by later critics and emphasized in recent scholarship, as a point of departure. That is to say, the issue of whether the film is anti-French presents a false choice. As I have just demonstrated, it is neither one nor the other but both simultaneously. The question of pro- or anti-France is clearly symptomatic of another issue. Following Ehrlich, one may advance that, "it was not simply Clouzot's and Chavance's attacks on French hypocrisy which so angered the

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[22] Régent lampoons this exact position:

> Cette affirmation paraît dérisoire. Si les nazis avaient ainsi exploité ce film, ce n'eût été qu'une très grossière falsification et l'on doit alors admettre que *M. Smith au Sénat* [Frank Capra 1939] et cinquante autres productions de Hollywood dont, à notre connaissance, la projection ne fut pas interdite pendent la guerre aux Etats-Unis et ailleurs sont des films anti-américains. (Régent 199)
> This assertion seems ridiculous. If the Nazis had so exploited this film, it would only have been a very gross falsification, and it must then be admitted that *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* [Frank Capra 1939] and fifty other Hollywood productions that, as far as we know, were not banned during the war in the United States and elsewhere are anti-American films.

Left. Rather, the underlying problem was their world view, their refusal to acknowledge that moral positions were clear-cut," whereas what viewers required was "clear-cut villains and heroes, […] a sharp distinction between 'us' and 'them'" (Ehrlich 185, 187). The clearly defined oppositions elaborated in Resistance criticism may be read as an effort to negate or protect oneself from the film's ambiguities about morality and national identity.

Yet in attempting to erect their own clear divisions, the critics' arguments wind up reflecting the ambiguities they reject in *Le Corbeau*. Indeed, Jacques Becker, one of the few voices of reason during the *épuration* hearings, spoke of a "psychose Clouzot" 'Clouzot psychosis,' the source of which are the falsehoods and Manichaeism of Adam and Blanchar's article (Bertin-Maghit 227-28, 177):

> aux estropiés, aux amoraux, aux corrompus qui déshonorent, dans *Le Corbeau*, une de nos villes de province, *Le Ciel est à vous* oppose des personnages pleins de sève française, de courage authentique, de santé morale, où nous retrouvons une vérité nationale qui ne veut pas et ne peut pas mourir. (qtd. in Barrot 14-15)
>
> to the crippled, the amoral, the corrupt who dishonor, in *Le Corbeau,* one of our provincial towns, *Le Ciel est à vous* opposes characters who are full of French vigor, genuine courage, moral health, where we rediscover a national truth that will not and cannot die.

This is an itemized, point-counterpoint comparison wherein the first term comes to define negatively the second and ultimately the nature of what is seen as national identity. There is either amorality or morality, corruption or authenticity, and physical disability is opposed to nationalist fervor, raising unsettling questions about how one defines national "(in)validity." Far

from finished, however, the writers continue to fashion a dichotomy: "Au pied-bot et à la putasserie de l'héroïne, il [*Le Ciel est à vous*] réplique par une jeune mère de France, modeste et forte […] Au médecin hypocrite et criminel, il oppose Gauthier-Vanel, solide et bon comme un vrai poilu de 1914" 'To the club-footed and whoring of the heroine, it responds with a young mother of France, modest and strong […] To the hypocrite and criminal doctor, it opposes Gautier-Vanel, solid and good like a true veteran of 1914' (qtd. in Barrot 15).[23] They pair a whore/mother dichotomy with that of physical and national health and add issues of class to those of authenticity, morality, and nationalism. In this series of oppositions, the *il* originally referring to Grémillon's film gradually functions as a pronoun for an ideal that replaces it. In the end, this ideal allows Blanchar and Adam to respond triumphantly to Clouzot's image of France, as they imagine Grémillon's film does, or more truly the ideal they have made of it: "Non! Vous êtes des faux. Les vrais petits Français, c'est moi qui vous les montre" 'No, you are fakes. The true, humble French—it is I who show them to you' (qtd. in Barrot 15).

Try as they might to erect positions between which there is no place for ambiguity, it manages to reappear elsewhere in different forms. First, scholarship has pointed out that the article's hyper-nationalist rhetoric based on notions of health, morality, the "real" France, and the "real" French strongly resembles that of Nazi Germany as well as Vichy—*Le Ciel est à vous* premiered for and was enjoyed by Pétain, by the way—and that it also resembles discourses of the extreme Right in France both before and after the war, despite *L'Écran français*' grounding in the resistant left (Ehrlich 123; Williams, *Republic of Images* 262). Second, while praising Grémillon's portrayal of family life, the article forgets that the goals of the parents in the film are

[23] "Gaultier-Vanel" refers to the character Gaultier, played by Charles Vanel.

only reached through the sacrifice of their children's dreams. This omission not only accentuates the craftsmanship of Adam and Blanchar's powerful oppositions, but such sleight of hand further aligns them with Vichy ideology (Mayne, *Le Corbeau* 76).[24] Third, they argue that *Le Ciel est à vous* was a commercial success to prove that audiences preferred this film's image of France over Clouzot's (in Barrot 14-15). In truth, however, Grémillon's work was a commercial failure and marked the beginning of his decline, whereas *Le Corbeau* was a success (Williams, *Republic of Images* 262). This discrepancy again signals the fashioning of *Le Ciel est à vous* into a sort of ideal. Finally, one should remember that *L'Écran français* was published by the communist-led *Comité de libération du cinéma français* (French Cinema Liberation Committee), and that one of its main functions was to denounce supposed collaborators, which until the Liberation and due to obvious factors was done anonymously (Ehrlich 170-71). The negative portrayal of anonymous letter writing in *Le Corbeau*, then, may have been particularly objectionable to critics from *L'Écran français*—like it was to German authorities.

These paradoxes, omissions, and falsehoods are less significant as inconsistencies than they are as indicators of a greater need: to detail clear battle lines between oneself and the enemy. The power of this motive for clear divisions without regard for clarity or consistency of argument is also displayed, and more brazenly, by Georges Sadoul's "Faut-il autoriser le 'Corbeau'?" 'Should the screening of *Le Corbeau* be authorized?' and "Les Inconnus et le Corbeau," from December 1945 and May 1946 respectively.

[24] In her own discussion of the article from *L'Écran français*, Judith Mayne also addresses the ambiguities ignored by Adam and Blanchar in their comparison of Clouzot's film to Grémillon's (*Le Corbeau* 74-77).

Despite being the source of false rumors that *Le Corbeau* was exported as propaganda, Sadoul takes great effort to define carefully his objections to the film (Bertin-Maghit 224).[25] At first echoing Rebatet, he states that there is nothing new in *Le Corbeau*, that it owes much to the pessimism and daring of its noir predecessors. But then he goes on to attack it in the same terms as Adam and Blanchar: "*Le Corbeau*, comme *Les Inconnus dans la maison*, fut un film qui consentit à représenter la France comme une nation pourrie, dégénérée, petite bourgeoise vicieuse et décadente, en concordance avec les assertions de *Mein Kampf*" '*Le Corbeau*, like *Les Inconnus dans la maison*, was a film that consented to representing France as a rotten, degenerate, vicious petty bourgeois and decadent nation, in accordance with the assertions of *Mein Kampf*' (Sadoul, "Faut-il?" 7). Unlike Adam and Blanchar, however, Sadoul is wary of viewing Clouzot and Chavance as intentional participants in a Nazi propaganda campaign. Rather, what underlies his attack are the film's timing and production company:

> Il se peut que les auteurs du film n'aient pas eu, au fond de leur cœur, cette intention […] Mais il est certain que ce film, terminé durant l'occupation, pour le compte d'une société ennemie, peint une petite ville française dont tous les habitants sont tous également tarés, menteurs ou criminels.
>
> On peut répondre que d'autres œuvres, et plus grandes, sont aussi « noires ». Mais Stroheim n'a pas tourné sa *Marche nuptiale* [*The Wedding March* (1928)] pour le compte du gauleiter de Vienne, et Zola ou Renoir n'ont pas, dans *La Bête humaine*, exécuté une commande passée par des services placés sous l'autorité du général Stulpnagel. (Sadoul, "Faut-il?" 7)

[25] For some, including Jean-Paul Le Chanois/Dreyfus, Sadoul was responsible for the whole campaign against Clouzot (Bertin-Maghit 224).

> It is possible that the film's authors, in the depths of their hearts, did not have this intention […] But it is certain that this film, finished during the Occupation, commissioned by a company of the enemy, depicts a small French town of which all the residents are equally sick, lying, or criminal.
>
> One could respond that other and greater works are just as 'noir.' But Stroheim did not make his *The Wedding March* [1928] with for the Gauleiter of Vienna, and Zola or Renoir did not, in *La Bête humaine*, execute an order of departments under the authority of general Stulpnagel.

Sadoul does not take issue with Clouzot's film on the central grounds of its *noirceur*. He believes noir can be just as drably conformist as a more rosy style, a point he makes in both articles.[26] Instead, the *noirceur* of *Le Corbeau*'s representation of France is objectionable because it appears on screens during the Occupation and, most problematic of all, because it is produced by French artists working for a German-run company: Continental Films.

That noir only plays a part insofar as tied to the context of the Occupation is clearly demonstrated in Sadoul's later article, where he draws an analogy between Clouzot's film and an antisemitic late-nineteenth century work by caricaturist and self-proclaimed "antisemitic" candidate for the Paris legislative elections, Adolphe Willette:

> En 1943, la Propagandastaffel couvrait les murs de France d'une affiche antisémitique dessinée par Willette en 1898. Si ce caricaturiste vivait encore, nul ne songerait à demander des sanctions contre l'affichage de 1898. Mais il n'en eût pas été de même si Willette—je prie ses amis d'excuser cette supposition aussi injurieuse qu'absurde—avait

[26] "Le conformisme de la bibliothèque noire, on m'excusera de le répéter, est aussi fade que celui de la bibliothèque rose" 'The conformism of dark works, one will excuse my repeating it, is just as dull as that of more rosy works' (Sadoul, "Les Inconnus" 7)

> autorisé l'affichage de 1943 moyennant 100.000 francs versés par la Propagandastaffel ou par la société Continental, pour la publicité du *Juif Süss* [*Jew Suss* (Veit Harlan 1940)]. (Sadoul, "Les Inconnus" 7)[27]
>
> In 1943, the Propagandastaffel covered the walls of France with an antisemitic poster drawn by Willette in 1898. If this caricaturist were still living, nobody would dream of demanding sanctions against the 1898 campaign. But it would not have been the same had Willette—I ask his friends to excuse this absurd and insulting speculation—authorized the poster campaign in 1943, averaging 100,000 francs and paid for by the Propagandastaffel or by Continental, for the advertising of *Juif Süss* [*Jew Suss* (Veit Harlan 1940)].

The extremity of this hypothetical and its reference to antisemitic propaganda betrays the larger issue at hand by negating the question of antisemitism altogether. The problem in this scenario is not the content of the act, but its context: working with Nazis during the Occupation. In short, the problem with *Le Corbeau* and hypothetically with Willette is neither a vision of France nor

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[27] Willette's campaign was actually in 1899, as indicated in the entry at the Bibliothèque nationale de France for the poster in question. The poster reads:

> Les Juifs ne sont grands que parce que nous sommes à genoux !…
> LEVONS-NOUS !
> Ils sont cinquante mille à bénéficier seuls du travail acharné et sans espérance de trente millions de Français devenus leurs esclaves tremblants.
> Il n'est pas question de religion, le Juif est d'une race différente et ennemie de la nôtre.
> Le JUDAISME, voilà l'ennemi !
> En me présentant, je vous donne l'occasion de protester avec moi contre la tyrannie Juive, faites-le donc quand ça ne serait que pour l'honneur ! (Adolphe Léon Willette).
>
> Jews are only great because we are at our knees!...
> LET'S STAND UP!
> They only account for fifty-thousand who benefit from the relentless and hopeless work of thirty-million Frenchmen who have become their trembling slaves.
> This is not a question of religion. The Jew is of a different, enemy race.
> JUDAISM, that is the enemy.
> In standing for election, I am giving you the chance to protest with me against Jewish tyranny. Do it now when it is only in the name of honor!

The image can be accessed through the Bibliothèque nationale de France's online catalogue.

antisemitism, but rather that these works should be made by artists who cross or would cross battle lines at a time when such boundaries must be maintained. The issue is collaboration with the enemy. In his careful attempt to outline why Clouzot and Chavance should be condemned, Sadoul demonstrates that the film is anti-France not only because of the darkness of its vision but because it does not recognize the essential, contemporary opposition between French and German. As Jacques Siclier writes: "Qu'a-t-on retenu contre Clouzot et Chavance, en dehors du fait que leur film avait été produit par la Continental ? […] Une vision non-manichéenne. Nous voilà au cœur du débat" 'What did one have against Clouzot and Chavance apart from the fact that their film had been produced by Continental? […] A vision that was not Manichean. Here we are at the core of the debate' (66).

There is, of course, nothing exceptional in the need for such an opposition at this historical moment, and the controversy surrounding collaboration is not surprising. The point is rather that as much as Adam and Blanchar and Sadoul's texts react negatively to the crossing of this imperative boundary, their reactions to *Le Corbeau* also work to institute and define the opposition between French and German. The vague us-versus-them dichotomy is not a function of difference between ideologies or visions of France but is self-motivated, self-determining, and self-perpetuating. Because the lines of battle are in reality not clear, critics set up the duality as a way to deny this very fact, as a protective barrier against its ambiguity.

Although I agree with Ehrlich that the problematics of such divisions lie at the heart of *Le Corbeau*'s critical reception, the difficulty of distinguishing between a reaction to boundary-crossing and that boundary's establishment make it necessary to disagree with her on one vital point. She writes, "The difficulties presented by Continental Films are not limited to determining

whether the films it produced were French or German. Far more troubling are the political and moral issues arising from the very existence of a German-owned company in occupied France" (Ehrlich 55). Yet Ehrlich differentiates here between the issues of cinematic nationality and the Continental question a little more easily than she should. For it is exactly the ambiguity between French and German in Continental films that makes the company problematic. The firm raises various political and moral questions precisely because these are about collaboration, about crossing the line between French and German. The oversight is all the more apparent when Ehrlich concludes her discussion of Continental in one brief sentence: "The ultimate paradox of Continental Films is that, by establishing their own presence within the French film industry, the Germans helped assure the survival of the French cinema" (55). This is true: without Continental, filmmaking in France would have had a grim future. But the paradox only exists as such if French and German are taken as constant, given totalities. That is, if one does not instead view Continental as a strange but not necessarily paradoxical overlap of tangled interests, and if one does not see the French films of Continental as differing from or in competition with those of other French-owned and operated studios of the Occupation. By concluding in this way and settling with the notion of a paradoxical relationship between French and German interest in Continental, Ehrlich simply perpetuates the problematic national boundaries elaborated in Sadoul, Adam and Blanchar. Instead, the Occupation is precisely marked by their co-presence, co-determination, and sometimes in the worst of cases their collusion and collaboration. Talk of a French cinema or polemics on treasonous representations of France are centrally motivated during the Occupation by the difficulty of defining what is cinematically French.

Divided Against Itself: Postwar Perspectives on Prewar Cinema

Critical work on noir, images of the nation, and related spectator positions again takes on a historically singular value after the war. This is the case not only in the reception of American films, which I will discuss in a moment, but also in reassessments of French prewar cinema. These reflections demonstrate that French cinematic identity and investment in representations of the nation, after and through the lens of the Occupation, are subtended by temporal dichotomies. Georges Altman and André Bazin, in particular, illustrate that contemporary notions of the French nation and spectator emerge through the rejection or impossibility of recapturing those of the previous era.

Georges Altman's negative 1946 re-review of Renoir's *La Grande illusion* (1937) contrasts strongly with the film's original reception nine years earlier because he can only speak of the film after having lived through the Occupation: "[ce] n'est pas un spectacle à offrir à un peuple qui n'a plus connu l'Allemagne que par la Gestapo, les SS, les fusillades d'otages, les supplices, les déportations et les fours crématoires" '[this] is not a spectacle to offer to a people who no longer experienced Germany but through the Gestapo, the SS, the shooting of hostages, torture, deportations, and cremation furnaces' ("La Grande illusion de 1937" 5). In his lengthy diatribe, Altman makes at once general and personal allusions to the impossibility of ever seeing Renoir's film the same way as before the Occupation. In *La Grande illusion,* when Erich von Stroheim welcomes Pierre Fresnay, Altman argues, the French can now only think of the way the Germans welcomed the Resistance. When von Stroheim and Fresnay dine together, the French spectator can only think of the SS torturing their compatriots. When the Germans in the prison camp console Gabin, the French only remember the beatings they received by German and

collaborationist forces. When he watches Elsa (Dita Parlo) take care of Maréchal (Gabin) and Rosenthal (Marcel Dalio), Altman recalls his brother who escaped a prison camp only to be turned in by German civilians. When he thinks of Elsa's little girl and her *blaue Augen* (blue eyes), he can only recall the Jewish children who were deported to concentration camps. Finally, when he listens to the pleasant conversations between von Rauffenstein (Erich von Stroheim) and de Boëldieu (Pierre Fresnay), what comes to mind are the French and German upper classes whose only concerns were "leur caste et l'Europe hitlérienne" 'their class and Hitlerian Europe' (Georges Altman, "La Grande illusion" 5).

Through the memories the film now summons, Altman's emotional article constitutes a powerful example of the ambivalent positions created by the passing of time, and it demonstrates that positions from different eras do not replace but coexist and codetermine one another. Although writing in a personal mode, Altman speaks for the larger collective of French spectators, stating that even in 1937 one should not have tolerated the film because one supposedly already knew what was happening in Germany but ignored it ("La Grande illusion" 5). As this judgment indicates, Altman's rereading gains its force from the temporal difference between two positions determined by the events that separate them and by each other, where one is postulated and retro-projected as contemporary with the film and the other with the article. In other words, the war and the later position color the supposedly previous position through what is retroactively seen as willful ignorance. The prewar position is in effect created by the retrospection or, rather, retro-projection of what one has since come to know and experience—a (re)creation that is perhaps all the more evident in that Altman did not write on the film upon its release. Inversely, although this "previous" position is determined by the later one, the

reconstructed prior position must also inflect that later position in its own turn insofar as the former becomes a reference point for the later's subsequent objection to it. The change of attitude points emphatically to two types of transformation: first, *La Grande illusion*'s significance in the postwar era as a representation, if not exactly of France, then of a changed Europe; and second, by the synecdoche of Altman's own position, a French audience who has become other than or other to what it previous was. Yet one must remember that this previous identity, of the film and its spectator, is posited retrospectively by the present moment and informs in its own turn that present position. Both remain alongside one another, and the actual previous position, like Altman's missing 1937 review of *La Grande illusion*, disappears in the process of remembering. The central issue is thus not the film itself nor the reality of spectator positions, but that this positional opposition should be effected through a temporal difference that is immediately erased. In short, French spectatorial identity is defined with and against itself.[28]

Now, to be sure, the extent to which *La Grande illusion* was and could be considered noir is debatable. There are no reviews treating it at such, and the initial reception of Renoir's classic, as previously mentioned, is positive. Additionally, the shift in tone evident in Altman's article is also relatively expected, even if it is extreme, especially since Altman was active in the Resistance (Watts 224n21).

However, the relationship between this article and those he wrote before the war about films noirs, such as reviews of *La Bête humaine* and especially *Le jour se lève*, make the tone of his postwar review of *La Grande illusion* more relevant. Of Renoir's adaptation of Zola, he states that, "Ce qu'il y a de noir […] dans le style du metteur en scène de *La Chienne* [*The Bitch*

[28] Marc Ferro, in his *Cinéma et histoire*, also writes about the changing meanings of *La Grande illusion*. For him, what is significant is the shift from the reception before the war, when the film was seen as pacifist and about class, to a perspective that takes Renoir's work as proto-Vichyist (71-77).

(1931)] pouvait s'harmoniser avec cette sorte de génie noire, puissante et courte de Zola dans *La Bête humaine*" 'What is noir […] in the style of the director of *La Chienne* [*The Bitch* (1931)] would match with this sort of Zola-esque noir genius, powerful and short in *La Bête humaine*' (Georges Altman, "*La Bête humaine*" 5). Furthermore, he defends *Le jour se lève* against accusations of pessimism and amorality by taking the pejorative "noir" and turning it into something positive that still represents a sort of negativity. Altman lauds the film for having "une violence déchirante, noire, mais d'une parfaite pureté" 'a heartrending noir violence, but of a perfect purity' and for exhibiting the "puissance subversive d'un rêve ou d'un bombe" 'the subversive power of a dream or of a bomb' in depicting "le noir d'une vie sans espoir" 'the darkness of a life without hope' (George Altman, "*Le jour se lève*: une œuvre noire et pure" 5). That Altman should embrace and defend *noirceur* before the outbreak of war and then rail against Renoir's decidedly more hopeful 1930s work afterward vividly demonstrates the changing positions of spectatorship regarding images of the nation. Moreover, it also illustrates the usefulness of noir criticism in putting other areas of critical discourse into historical perspective.

Altman is not the only critic to reflect on prewar noir after the Liberation. André Bazin also discusses the contradictions within postwar spectatorship, particularly when it comes to the work of Marcel Carné, the memory of his prewar films, and the lackluster reception of his postwar output. In a 1951 essay entitled "Carné et la désincarnation," Bazin's describes what he labels the "Carné problematic":

> le problème Carné se ramène d'abord à une série de contradictions. Sa réussite d'avant-guerre était liée à un accord [du style de Carné, de ses thèmes, et de la sensibilité du

> public de l'époque], mais les temps ont changé et les mythes ne sont plus les mêmes. En bonne logique pour rester égal à lui-même, Carné devrait d'abord discerner ceux de 1950, ensuite leur trouver une expression aussi parfaite et aussi efficace. Mais, plus ou moins consciemment, ce que nous demandons à Carné, ce n'est pas de créer une nouvelle mythologie, c'est de rendre vie aux vieux mythes, de nous restituer leur romantisme périmé. Il ne peut donc nous satisfaire, car il ne dépend pas plus de Carné de refaire *Le jour se lève* qu'il n'était possible à Voltaire de refaire Racine. ("Carné et la désincarnation" 109)[29]
>
> the Carné problematic comes down, first of all, to a series of contradictions. His prewar success was linked to a match [between Carné's style, themes, and the sensibility of the era's public], but the times have changed and the myths are no longer the same. Logically, to match his former success in the present, Carné should first discern the myths of 1950 and then find a way to express them that is just as perfect and effective. But, more or less consciously, what we demand of Carné is not to create a new mythology—it is to bring the old myths back to life, to reproduce for us their dated romanticism. He is thus incapable of satisfying us because it is no more up to Carné to remake *Le jour se lève* than it was possible for Voltaire to remake Racine.

Because the public wants what he cannot give them and because that same public is moreover no longer sensible to it, Carné is at once incapable of recapturing what is lost and even of forming something new. Bazin thus draws the conclusion that spectators do not want Carné as he *is* but as

[29] Originally published in *Esprit*. September 1951.

he is *remembered to have been*, that is, a prewar Carné who has become inaccessible, a memory or a myth of himself ("Carné et la désincarnation" 110).

I would like to dwell further on Bazin's assertion that, "the times have changed and the myths are no longer the same." These two propositions should not be taken as equal to one another but rather as forming a logical progression. While times have indeed changed, one should take a cue from the fashioning of Carné as myth to argue that the myths only exist due to that change and due to myths no longer being the same. Indeed, for Bazin, becoming inaccessible to the present is the condition for becoming myth: the times have changed *thus* the myths are no longer the same ... *and so there are myths* qua *myths*. These are therefore not the myths-as-stars or stars-as-myths theorized by André Malraux in his contemporaneous *Esquisse d'une psychologie du cinéma* (*Sketch of a Psychology of Cinema* [1946]) (Malraux 43-48), nor is it the ontological horizon for total cinema Bazin himself expounds elsewhere ("Le Mythe du cinéma total"). Instead these correspond to the secondary semiological system fleshed out by Roland Barthes in that the Carné problematic involves a *décalage*, shift or gap, in the way the image signifies itself as such over time, shifting from the basic relation between signifier and signified to the cultural mythological unit of its fixed connotation (Barthes, *Mythologies* 114). Myths belong by definition to a position that has yet to construct its own mythology, and so by the logic of myth making, they are produced retrospectively. The myths proper to any position are then paradoxically the very ones it has attached to the positions before it.

The ascendency of Carné-Prévert's films to the level of myth forms the center of their last work together, *Les Portes de la nuit* (*Gates of the Night* [1946]), which is about the settling of accounts after the Occupation. Not content to reproduce the theme of fate, the film embodies it in

a character named "Le Destin," or Destiny, who rides the metro and asks or perhaps tells the main character, "Vous descendez à la prochaine (?)" 'You are getting off/going down at the next stop (?)' Yet while Le Destin may be a manifestation of cinematic myth on screen, the awkward directness of his presence suggests that things are not the same. Likewise, instead of Gabin, who was supposed to play the lead role, a young Yves Montand spouts a "poor simulacrum" of "Gabin-speak," performing the memory of a prewar Gabin by failing to live up to the figure who was originally supposed to play the role (Hayward 201-202). But at the same time, poetic realist form is used to tell the most contemporary of stories: Pierre Brasseur plays a bourgeois who profited from the black market during the Occupation and Serge Reggiani an unrepentant collaborator who finally gets what he has coming. The use of bald prewar noir myths to explore postwar France are what arguably made *Les Portes de la nuit* such a commercial failure: "How […] could the public, after four years of living the opposite, believe in the certainty of circumstance, in Destiny forecasting future events or fate playing a role in the narrative?" (Hayward 166). Yet without the incongruence between the film and its time, the myth of poetic realism would never emerge so clearly. The film thus proves at once the most perfect and the most flawed example from the classical period of French cinema.

Carné and his prewar work are not alone in becoming myth, however. The harmony Bazin speaks of between style, theme, and public, exists through the relationship between Carné's style and the sensibility of the viewing public at a specific time. Thus along with Carné and his films, the idea of prewar spectatorship also partakes of myth-making and belongs to the present since it, too, is retro-projected as a mere memory. Similar to Altman's personal reaction to *La Grande illusion*, Bazin suggests a spectatorial double logic within his Carné problematic. A prewar

position of spectatorship persists and truly only exists alongside a postwar position that effects and yet is effected by it. For both critics, postwar spectatorship is defined by an internal other, is given meaning by that which has lost its meaning, is what it can no longer be.

Images of Postwar France through American Cinema: The Reception of American Noir

In Marc Vernet's evaluation of postwar noir criticism, he points to a similar form of French spectatorship, but focuses on the reception of American films noirs released in France following the Liberation. For him, those who condemn American cultural imperialism and capitalism in the wake of the Blum-Byrnes accords—which gave the U.S. greater access to the French market, where it intended to wage a cultural war against communism—and thus embrace noir as a critique of that system are caught in the contradiction that American noir is nevertheless produced by such an industry.[30] Vernet concludes that American noir is a fetishistic object, a "critical object: invested by French criticism, it allows one to love the United States while criticizing it, or more exactly to criticize it in order to be able to love it" (5-6). Within the context of my own discussion, the paradoxical positions outlined by Vernet are yet another manifestation of postwar spectatorial doubleness in addition to those located in Altman and Bazin. They also resemble permutations of the enabling contradictions analyzed in Vuillermoz. In Vernet's article, however, the nation at issue is the United States, not France.

Yet, just as the dualities concerning a French versus a foreign mode of spectatorship or a prewar versus a postwar position teach one to be suspicious of any unity of spectatorial identity,

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[30] Vernet mentions that the opposite situation is also true, whereby one embraces capitalism and rejects noir as a critique of it, thus rejecting a product of capitalist industry. Yet he says this situation is much less frequent (5-6). Unfortunately, I have not been able to find any examples of French film critics condemning American noir in support of capitalism, let alone any examples of critics embracing American capitalism.

they also suggest that the solidity of a construct like the nation, whether France or the United States, is equally suspect. While the historical context of the Marshal plan and Blum-Byrnes accords enables Vernet to complicate the positions of French film critics regarding American noir, they also complicate the status of the nation in reaction to which critical discourse exhibits those contradictions. Insofar as critics react to images of the United States, they more correctly react to the presence of the United States *in* France, a presence constituted by these very films. As screenwriter Pierre Laroche expresses his own hostilities to the accords, "Ce serait la fin du cinéma français… Hollywood vous dévorerait en moins de temps qu'il n'en faut pour projeter *Le Corbeau* ou *Les Inconnus dans la maison*" 'It would be the end of French cinema… Hollywood would devour you quicker than it would take to show *Le Corbeau* or *Les Inconnus dans la maison*' (qtd. in Hubert-Lacombe 93).

The logical next step is thus to view critical reactions to American noir as equally articulated in relation to contemporary visions of postwar France, that is, the re-envisioning of what France ought to look like and what should be left out. Such an understanding of both the nation and spectator positioning, wherein neither is a fixed point around which the other pivots, is essential in the present exploration of postwar French film criticism. For while explicit interest may be in filmic images of the United States and the American spectator, this strain of criticism has just as much to say, and in the same breath, about their French counterparts.

The opening of Raymond Borde and Étienne Chaumeton's 1955 monograph, *Panorama du film noir américain* (*Panorama of American Film Noir*), is such a double-voiced testimony: "Le film noir est noir *pour nous*, c'est-à-dire pour le public occidental et américain des années 50. Il répond à un certain type de résonance émotive aussi singulier dans le temps que dans l'espace"

'Film noir is noir *for us*, that is to say, for the Western and American public of the 1950s. It responds to a certain type of emotional resonance as singular in time as in space' (5). While the rest of the work centers on the representation of the United States in film and the investment of American spectators in those images, the way that focus is elaborated raises particular questions about postwar France and the investment of French spectators in American noir—especially since the French element of "pour nous" disappears from the rest of the book. What is the nature of the French critics' investment in American spectatorship and in "un ensemble de films nationaux" 'a set of national films' deemed *noir* at this point only by French critics, and what does this say about French spectatorship and visions of postwar France (Borde and Chaumeton 2)? Furthermore, what similarities does *Panorama* share with previous criticism on foreign spectators, such as the work of Vuillermoz?

One of Borde and Chaumeton's most fascinating lines of inquiry is why American spectators are invested in films about violence and murder. The question is less interesting for its content than for the response it elicits. They initially hazard that the war sparked new interest in cinematic realism on a national scale in that noir represents current levels of crime in the United States. But then they offer what they see as the most plausible explanation:

> les événements [de la guerre] habituaient aussi à la violence et préparaient la voie à un cinéma cruel. Le récit des atrocités allemandes et japonaises, largement diffusé après la victoire, fit le reste. Ajoutons que le public américain n'a pas connu, aussi directement que le public européen, certaines horreurs de la guerre. Les tortures de la Gestapo se déroulaient de l'autre côté de l'Océan, et gardaient un aspect exotique, irréel. On tolérerait difficilement, dans un film français ou italien, qu'un gangster indigène se

conduise comme un homme de main de la Gestapo. Il y a là, croyons-nous, une sorte de tabou. En Amérique c'étaient plus facile, et le film noir a pu y opérer la synthèse du réalisme et la cruauté.

D'ailleurs, il polarisait sans doute tous les désirs troubles du spectateur moyen. Les violences exercées sur les enfants (*Une incroyable histoire* [Ted Tetzlaff 1949]), sur les infirmes et les malades (*Panique dans la rue* [Elia Kazan 1950], *Le carrefour de la mort* [Henry Hathaway 1947]), sur les Juifs ou les nègres, n'étaient-elles pas un moyen d'assouvir à bon compte sur un plan imaginaire des envies secrètes, conscientes ou non ? (Borde and Chaumeton 26)

the events [of the war] also accustomed spectators to violence and prepared the path toward a cinema of cruelty. The account of German and Japanese atrocities, widely circulated after the victory, did the rest. Let us add that the American public did not experience, as directly as European audiences, certain horrors of the war. The Gestapo's tortures took place on the other side of the ocean and maintained an exotic, unreal quality. In a French or Italian film, one would hardly tolerate that a native gangster should behave like a henchman of the Gestapo. Believe us, such a thing would be taboo. In America, it was easier, and there, film noir was able to combine realism and cruelty.

What is more, it undoubtedly concentrated all the vague desires of the average spectator. Violence against children (*The Window* [Ted Tetzlaff 1949]), against the disabled and the sick (*Panic in the Streets* [Elia Kazan 1950], *Kiss of Death* [Henry Hathaway 1947]), against Jews and Negroes—was this not a means of cheaply satisfying, on an imaginary level, secret desires, conscious or not?

This is the only instance in the entire text where the question of French spectatorship appears. Yet while noir may respond to the specific situation of French and American spectators within time and space, in this passage the critics effectively divide that space. The distance and proximity that respectively contrasts American and European viewers' relationships to the violence of the Second World War renders the former more tolerant of images of cruelty reminiscent of the Gestapo. The idea that American spectators would manifest less resistance to representations of violence and Nazi-like characters is extremely audacious, but it should not distract from a more subtle maneuver. Differences in geographical space allow the critics to create strategically separate spaces within their argument, to bracket the question of a French spectator and focus on American spectators. With the casualness of "D'ailleurs" 'What is more' and the verb *polariser*, meaning both "to concentrate," as it is used here, but also "to polarize," Borde and Chaumeton quarantine the issue of American spectators' investment in film noir into its own paragraph, where noir represents the persecution of minorities and the handicapped. Film noir is thus not only a reflection of a United States drowning in crime but indirectly a national repository of repressed Nazi sympathies that ultimately casts American spectators' investment in noir cinema a sublimation of such "envies secrètes" 'secret desires.'[31]

As for the issue of a French spectator, Borde and Chaumeton's assumption that French audiences would not tolerate a film in which a French gangster behaves like a member of the Gestapo is certainly less shocking. Yet there are good reasons to nuance this claim. Lending historical support is the fact that French gangsters not only behaved like but collaborated with

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[31] Borde and Chaumeton aren't the only ones to make such a claim. See also Claude Roy's "'Faites-moi mal au cœur' réclament les spectateurs américains. Et ils sont servis !" which appeared as early as the fall of 1946 in *L'Écran français*.

the Gestapo. Members of the infamous *Gang des Tractions Avant*,[32] including Pierre Loutrel (a.k.a. Pierrot le fou) and Abel Danos, were originally part of the *Carlingue*, also referred to as the French Gestapo, many of whose members joined the Resistance once it became clear that Germany would lose the war (Auda 215-218).[33] And yet, Loutrel and Danos do feature in postwar films. While Loutrel only contributes his moniker to Jean-Luc Godard's *Pierrot le fou* (1965), Abel Danos becomes the main character of Claude Sautet's *Classe tous risques* (*The Big Risk* [1960]), where he is transformed into Abel Davos (Lino Ventura), a wanted man on the run. His efforts to escape justice lead to his wife's death and force him to give up his children. Yet these are not seen as consequences of his Occupation-era activities because there is no mention of Davos' past crimes, let alone the war. The spectator is even made to feel pity for him as former friends refuse to provide shelter and actually betray Davos to the police. The omissions of Sautet's film effectively function as a collective absolution, an erasure of cultural memory not unlike the one subtly at work in *Panorama*.

Collaboration with the Gestapo appears more directly in other important postwar films, particularly through characters played by Serge Reggiani. In *Les Portes de la nuit*, ex-resistant Diego (Yves Montand) discovers that Guy (Reggiani) is the man who denounced his friend, Lécuyer (Raymond Bussière), to the Germans. Not only does Diego give Guy a good trashing as pay back, but Guy ultimately meets his fate underneath a train that just happens to be conducted by Lécuyer. Reggiani again plays a rat in Duvivier's *Marie-Octobre* (1959), but this time within a reunited Resistance group who lost one of its members in a carefully planned Nazi ambush

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[32] "Traction Avant" refers to a car model made by Citroën at the time.

[33] Similarities were also drawn in the press between Gestapo violence and French tactics during the Algerian war. Claude Bourdet wrote an article whose title is quite direct on the issue in 1955, the same year *Panorama* was published: "Votre Gestapo d'Algérie."

fifteen years earlier. By the end, the film reveals that his motives for betrayal were more amorous than political: he was in love with the deceased member's girl, played by Danielle Darrieux. Nevertheless, Marie-Hélène (Darrieux) shoots him dead just to be sure. More explicit than *Classe tous risques*, Reggiani is executed in both *Les Portes de la nuit* and *Marie-Octobre* for the stain he represents on postwar national consciousness.

At the same time that these films support the idea that representations of French collaboration with the Gestapo would be received coldly by the domestic viewing public, they equally suggest that such aversion is motivated by the conservation of particular versions of recent history. Reggiani's death in *Marie-Octobre*, for example, is also meant to maintain the network's dignity and integrity. To this end, it is remarkable that Borde and Chaumeton should be able to tolerate Americans who behave like Gestapo henchman. More than that, they obviously like American film noir. This inconsistency leads one to ask why such representations in American films should be received by French critics any differently than they would be in French films, and why associations in noir between violence and Nazis should be categorized as specifically American?

In analyzing the conditions behind Borde and Chaumeton's argument, I am wary of engaging in the same sort of mass psychology and of assuming the givenness of what is French as opposed to what is American. This anxiousness happily puts into relief the resemblance between their assertions and Vuillermoz's "Un cas de conscience," particularly the relationship in that article between French and foreign spectators and the operations of projection. To recap, in Vuillermoz projection appears as a means to level simultaneous criticism and praise at prewar French noir and to distance the writer from possible accusations of complicity with either that criticism or the negative images of late 1930s France. The articulation of Vuillermoz's argument suggests that

both spectator positions exist within a dialectical logic according to which the French and the foreign are determined by and get lost in one another.

A similar type of distancing mechanism and codetermination occurs in the passage from *Panorama*, but with important changes. The most significant of these is that the pertinent positions are not equally explicit, as in Vuillermoz. What might be considered a French position is implied indirectly through its very absence. This gap exists initially within Borde and Chaumeton's interest in social representations of the United States, spectators' investment, and then the lack of protest at what they deem Nazi-like cruelty and violence in noir realism. Indeed, this absence betrays the structure of projection proper to *Panorama*. Through screening via the cinematic product of another nation what one claims to resist in the image of one's own, that representation becomes neutral—if not sometimes even positive, given the critics' glimmers of enthusiasm for American noir. Other scholars have maintained that this distancing results from a need to separate "noir" from its use in the 1930s and from certain tainted contexts such as the prewar years and the Occupation (Vincendeau, "French Film Noir" 31-32). What I aim to outline, however, at least in this chapter, are the discursive qualities particular to Borde and Chaumeton's argument.

By viewing this form of projection as discursive and not just symptomatic, one is able to locate a specific continuity between it and other instances of criticism on noir instead of isolating that projection as historically discontinuous with them. This part of Borde and Chaumeton's work thus emerges as a riff of what happens in Vuillermoz, but with two exceptions. First, the object projected is not only a position of spectatorship *but also* a representation of the nation, and second, the mediating screen on which that projection occurs is that of an imagined foreign

spectator *and* a foreign national cinema. Consequently, the notion of a French spectator is pushed out of the equation since it is not only alienated from a position of spectatorship but also from an image of France. This goes some way toward explaining why the issue of French noir spectatorship is rarely addressed directly by Borde and Chaumeton even while it serves a function in their anchoring definition of noir as "noir pour nous" 'noir for us.' Put differently: a domestic relationship between spectator and representation of the nation is mediated by a foreign cinematic product and a corresponding spectatorial position onto which the former relationship is projected as on a screen. Moreover, this operation ultimately omits and, more correctly, engineers the absence of a French spectator while implicitly referring to and creating this position as the point of departure.

However, the relationship between the American position posited by Borde and Chaumeton's argument and the French position suggested by its structure is marked by a reflexivity similar to the spectator-nation relations in Vuillermoz, but also found in Altman, Bazin, and the controversy surrounding *Le Corbeau*. In a reformulation of those texts' logic, each position and representation of the nation effects and is effected by another. Insofar as the absence of a French spectator and representation of France determine Borde and Chaumeton's account of an imagined American spectator and its relationship to a representation of America, it is also through that account's gaps and allusions that the possibility of a French version of this relationship emerges. It is equally determined by the very account that omits it. Borde and Chaumeton's concern in the 1950s with the American spectator and its relationship to a representation of the nation is then a reformulation of the anxieties in Vuillermoz, of the boundaries of identity in the articles on *Le Corbeau*, and of the cinematic memories found in

Altman and Bazin. To be sure, the other critics' arguments do not reappear in *Panorama*. Rather structural similarities are present as discursive echoes of earlier noir criticism.

From the anxieties leading up to World War Two, through the Occupation, postwar cultural memory, and American cultural hegemony, critics from Sadoul to Borde and Chaumeton all represent specific obstacles to imagining the nation within noir cinema. Indeed French cinematic identity in each case is only possible through opposition to historical forms of the other, the literally foreign, and past conceptions of France in film. In each instance, the nation and the French spectator born out of its representation lose themselves in the dualities' elaboration, following the shift from one dialectic to another. Within the layers of history, culture, and criticism, the possibility for any definition of the nation in noir criticism seems frustratingly distant. It recedes into the horizon as the critical voices and polemics accumulate.

Nevertheless, I hesitate giving into the tempting simplifications of discontinuity, where film history consists of isolated moments that break off at the advent of war, Occupation, Liberation, and renewal. The critical corpus, which this study has explored in unprecedented depth but still merely glimpsed, represents a discourse. Those who wrote about film noir before and during the Occupation do not relay their pens to ignorant successors in 1939 and 1945. They continue to write alongside those who follow them and with a sense of critical memory. By placing each critical text within that discourse, change from one set of historical conditions to the next can be conceived not as a break nor as a progression, but as a continuity that takes account of difference. Essential here is the notion that discourse exists and persists in its becoming, that the prediscursive is already discursive, that it consists in "une épaisseur immense de systématicités, un ensemble serré de relations" 'an immense thickness of systematicities, a tight set of

relationships' (Foucault 106). By conceiving cinematic identity in the diachronic and synchronic plural determined via the mutable repetition of certain conditions for difference, the French nation in film and its spectator correlate, reflect, and inhere in that change. It is through the morphing structure of the obstacles facing the conception of the nation in noir cinema and criticism that the nation emerges, continuously and interminably.

I would like to conclude by calling upon a film and face that each exemplify this stratification of French historical-cinematic identity: Henri Decoin's classic Gabin vehicle, *Razzia sur la chnouf* (*Drug Raid* [1955]), based on the novel by Auguste Le Breton (1954). From the outset, the film positions itself as not only about contemporary France and American cultural influence, but also about memories of the Occupation and prewar filmic myth. Its first few minutes install it within a rich intertextual network, beginning with the prologue:

> Ce film fait apparaître à la lumière crue de la vérité, un milieu violent, implacable, et jusqu'ici inconnu. Les auteurs estimeraient leur but atteint si les images qui vont suivre devaient mettre en garde ceux qui par faiblesse ou ignorance, risqueraient d'être un jour les victimes de ce redoutable fléau : "LA DROGUE."
>
> This film reveals under the raw light of truth a violent and remorseless underworld, unknown until now. The authors would judge their goal achieved if the following images were to have warned those who, by weakness or ignorance, would risk one day being the victims of this terrible scourge: "DRUGS."

Razzia adopts generic modes imported from the United States, like the documentary feel of socially oriented noirs such as Jules Dassin's *Naked City* (1948)[34] and the detailed action of John

[34] Dassin directed an adaptation of another novel of Le Breton's the same year as Decoin's adaptation of *Razzia*: *Du rififi chez les hommes* (1955).

Huston's *Asphalt Jungle* (1950). Decoin obsessively films the ins and outs of drug selling from grunt to *caïd*, or big shot, with an attention to detail unparalleled until Jean-Pierre Melville's later work. As the forebears of the film's genre are American, so too are the sources of its criminal underworld. Henri Le Nantais (Gabin) arrives in France after having learned the drug trade in the United States and is hired as a type of consultant to reorganize Paul Lisky's (Marcel Dalio) network.[35] France is victim to the drug trade but only insofar as influenced by and represented through the generic screen of the United States.

The structure of Lisky's organization and its policies, however, are markedly French. The network maintains a strict policy of *cloisonnement*, or compartmentalization, the importance of which is mentioned throughout *Razzia*. Compartmentalization may evoke for current viewers popular stories of organized crime, but for French audiences of the 1950s it would more readily have recalled the hierarchies of clandestine networks and black markets organized by the Resistance and Nazis. The film thus bears traces of a historical memory that, as in Borde and Chaumeton, can be expressed only through a foreign intermediary.

The opening sequence reveals and adds to these layers of signification through the entrance of its star, Jean Gabin. Following the prologue, an international aircraft swings into position, with "AIR FRANCE" and its trademark *la crevette* ("the shrimp") in clear view. Such is the grand entrance of Gabin/Henri, finally returning from the United States and the last to disembark. Despite his meta-cinematic aura, the police who secretly wait for him have to compare this man with a mugshot. For this is not the Gabin of *Le jour se lève*, *Le Quai des brumes*, *La Grande illusion*, *La Bête humaine*, or *Pépé le Moko*. Nor for that matter is the mugshot. The face in both

[35] It is worth remembering that both Dalio and Gabin were not only important actors during the late 1930s, but that they also worked in Hollywood during World War Two.

images is distorted by a topography of wrinkles and a shocking pallor. His eyes no longer give out warmth but are stony and surrounded by drooping bags of flesh. The mugshot is thus not a means of comparing this heavyset man in a double-breasted camel overcoat and flashy tie to the memory of a rugged proletarian of the prewar era. Instead, the photo proves a way of recognizing a lost acquaintance, comparing what he is to what he has reportedly become. After a long stay in the United States—in the film and real life—Gabin/Henri returns wholly other to his past persona and public. He is a myth only in the sense that his time has passed—as in Bazin, a deteriorating souvenir, outdated and grotesque. Even in *Razzia*'s diegesis, he is more or perhaps less than that since the conclusion reveals that Henri is merely a stand-in, an undercover agent for the French police, identical to but other than the real Le Nantais, who is his twin brother. The symbol of prewar cinema becomes someone else entirely, a member of the institutions he once resisted, an impostor. Yet it is because of this difference, the disappointment of a Gabin twenty years past his prime that the memory of François, Jean, Maréchal, Lantier, and Pépé persists, like the Carné problematic, as a collective semiological image, a myth of himself. Between those wrinkles and in his steely, unflinching gaze, one cannot help but see a certain Gabin, if only because one wants to and so is hopelessly drawn into the nostalgic spirals of film memory. In that face are layers of history, from the fall of the Popular Front through the Occupation, the Liberation, and postwar American cultural hegemony—a series of intersecting wrinkles that mark a whole intertextual discourse on France and between which one can spy a series of others against which French cinematic identity puts itself into relief.

CHAPTER 2

A CERTAIN PARADOX OF POSTWAR FRENCH NOIR CRITICISM

It is by now common knowledge that "noir" was used by postwar French critics to denote a group of American films released in France after the Liberation. Relatively recent scholarship, however, has emphasized that the category had been previously deployed during the prewar and then the Occupation to describe and often condemn a particular vein of French cinema characterized by its negative representations of the nation. These bleak and despairing films are some of the most well-known of the period: *Le Quai des brumes* (*Port of Shadows* [Marcel Carné 1938]), *Le jour se lève* (*Daybreak* [Carné 1939]), *La Bête Humaine* (*The Human Beast* [Jean Renoir 1938]), *Pépé le Moko* (Julien Duvivier 1937), *Le Dernier tournant* (*The Last Turn* [Pierre Chenal 1939]), and *Le Corbeau* (*The Raven* [Henri-Georges Clouzot 1943]). Yet postwar critics, while aware of this earlier cinema, resist any connection between prewar and Occupation French noir and later American noir.

This discrepancy raises a few questions: what do these two cinematic and critical moments have in common; how do they differ from one another; and why should prewar and Occupation noir be distanced from postwar noir? Some have responded to this last question by arguing that noir needed to be detached from the negative national contexts of the late 1930s and the Occupation to "*celebrate* the American films" (emphasis in the original; Vincendeau, "French Film Noir" 31-32). While a potentially powerful argument, I find it problematic and open to improvement for two reasons. First, it applies a uniform reading to large swaths of critical discourse, itself seen as unified—not all critics celebrated American noir—and thus closes down analyses of specific texts where they beckon to be opened up. Second, it ignores that the rhetoric

in which postwar French critics couched their reception of American noir cinema, in addition to recycling "noir" as a label, strongly recalls that previously used to speak of prewar and Occupation French noir. In short, while valid on a superficial level, this explanation glosses over a specific tension: that the distinction was necessary for the sake of the French national imaginary yet effected to the detriment of collective memory.

The resistances in postwar criticism thus constitute not a contradiction to be resolved by sweeping generalities, but rather a paradox to be explored. I will therefore neither affirm nor deny that resistance. To do either would discount the very real tensions between pre- and postwar film criticism and would ignore history and critical discourse as such. Moreover, whether French noir anticipates American noir is not central to this paradox. As should be apparent by now, I believe noir to be a function primarily of criticism. Moreover, such a genealogy of stylistic traits would fail to consider the way "noir"'s value in criticism historically changes, as I demonstrated in the previous chapter's study of debates about filmic representations of the nation and related notions of spectatorship.

Essential here is an examination of the criticism about the films and the way the possibility of a connection between prewar and postwar noir is both raised and then quickly dismissed. This task requires an expansive and profound awareness of mid-century French film criticism. Luckily, the first chapter has put us in a privileged position to entertain and explore this paradox of postwar criticism. Rather than resolving historical tensions and bypassing critical problematics through retroactive, ahistorical solutions, I will instead perform close readings of a handful of significant postwar critical texts to ask a more proper set of questions. What are the conditions of possibility for this paradox, for the incommensurable continuities and discontinuities between

pre- and postwar critical discourse? And how, by focusing on postwar criticism's complicated relationship to earlier contexts and on the paradox's specific manifestations, can more text-specific and productive readings about the relationship between noir and the nation in the postwar era be made possible? In its aim to exploit instead of reducing complexity, to maintain and engage with the paradox, this chapter will also pose a third, larger question: how does the paradox of postwar writing on noir enable one to rethink other areas of criticism traditionally unrelated to noir, and thus to re-imagine postwar French national cinema as taking shape around noir? How can conceiving noir on the level of critical discourse not only lead to new readings of texts seemingly removed from it but also enrich the larger study of postwar French cinema?

These questions on the nature of the paradox and its greater import determine the trajectory of the present chapter: first, to demonstrate the irreducible paradox of postwar noir criticism's resistance through the close examination of canonical texts, including those by Jean-Pierre Chartier and Raymond Borde and Étienne Chaumeton; and second, to articulate the paradox's relevance to other areas of postwar film and criticism, such as the New Wave and Julien Duvivier's postwar career. Criticism on American noir may rarely address French noir and certainly resists any connection to it, but rhetorical similarities between postwar and prewar criticism and traces of recent history suggest that those writing on American noir have just as much to say about what constitutes, through their very absence, French national identity and collective memory after the Occupation. Critical work on a foreign cinema therefore comes to function as a major locus for reflection on France and its own cinema.

The legacy of prewar noir criticism also enables a reevaluation of François Truffaut's seminal essay, "Une certaine tendance du cinéma français" 'A Certain Tendency of French Cinema' and,

through Truffaut, of Julien Duvivier's reception among French critics from the 1930s to the 1960s. In the case of Truffaut, I argue that his emphasis on an aesthetic view of French cinema centered on the auteur borrows a social rhetoric from the very eras of film and criticism he wants to leave behind. As in the prewar, noir is used to rail against what one does not accept as part of French national cinema, but national cinema for Truffaut has less to do with the social state of that nation than with the creative vision of the film auteur. I will subsequently cast the reception of Julien Duvivier's films as a vital illustration of how this shift from the social in national cinema to the aesthetic is not only illustrated in Truffaut's article but characteristic across postwar criticism. For while his films grow even more ingrained in dark and sensitive parts of recent French history, addressing for example issues of antisemitism in *Panique* (*Panic* [1946]), sexual power and violence in *Voici le temps des assassins* (*Deadlier than the Male* [1956]), and even myths of the Resistance in *Marie-Octobre* (1959), critics increasingly ignore their social significance to discuss and often disparage them on formal grounds. This negative correlation between Duvivier's films and their reception ironically make him a monument to an era of film during which he is largely neglected. Both Truffaut and Duvivier will thus ultimately emphasize the fundamental place and extensive reach of noir in rethinking postwar French national cinema and criticism.

Resistances of Postwar Criticism

Charles O'Brien's study of prewar noir criticism implicitly demonstrates that noir, while not always referred to as such, inheres within a discursive field on how a nation assumes that films are and reacts to them as representations of itself (7-8). Without its associated ideas and

polemics, the second degree significations preceding and developing out of it, the term itself is empty. Just as noir should not be limited to its name, nor should analysis be limited to explicit manifestations of postwar criticism's resistance to prewar noir. To define the contours of this paradox in noir criticism, then, it is necessary to analyze in their specificity and intertextuality a collection of works that contribute to that discursive field. Criticism on noir by writers like Henri-François Rey and Jean Kanapa, where resistance is implicit, and Jean-Pierre Chartier and Raymond Borde and Étienne Chaumeton, where it is explicit, all have in common an argumentative structure where issues of postwar France are noticeably absent yet discussed through reactions to American noir.

Rey's 1948 article for *L'Écran français*, "Hollywood fabrique des mythes comme Ford des voitures" 'Hollywood Makes Myths Like Ford Makes Cars,' sets out to counter the assumption that American noir is subversive. He contends that many noir films' conclusions, where the criminal protagonist fails or dies, prove that the works participate in a dominant capitalist ideology, which he defines through the Vichyite trilogy of "travaille, famille, patrie" 'work, family, nation' (Rey 13). Yet despite this direct reference to the Occupation-era regime, nowhere does Rey mention France or the war, let alone what importance the Occupation might have for American noir or even what the films' conclusions have to do with capitalism.

While the contention that American noir may support some type of dominant ideology is arguable, Rey's perhaps involuntary allusion to Vichy elicits other questions. Why should an objection to capitalism be expressed through a rejection of an Occupation-era French political regime? And why should Vichy be associated with a set of American films whose moniker recalls an earlier French cinema to which Vichy itself objected (for instance banning *Le*

Corbeau)? The first question concerns parapraxis, misplacement and substitution. For Rey, Vichy is associated with an American and capitalist ideology in the sense that both represent or are associated with invasions by a foreign body. These may be political in the case of the Occupation and industrial and economic in the case of American noir, yet both cases represent threats on the integrity of national identity. The second question, on the other hand, suggests that Vichy's relationship to prewar cinema has been simultaneously omitted from and corrupted in critical memory. What comes to the fore, then, is a historical souvenir that haunts and determines Rey's reception of contemporary cinema yet also a collusion between remembering and forgetting. Prewar cinema is forgotten only to reappear indirectly in a historically bastardized form. The paradox of resistance thus manifests itself in Rey's text as a relationship between pre- and postwar noir that is at once beyond linear historical articulation and riddled with lacunae.

Kanapa's "Feu sur la décadence !" 'Fire on Decadence!' also maintains indirect yet strong echoes with the recent past. Writing in 1953 for *Nouvelle critique*, he reacts hostilely to recent films' penchant for brutal realism and, as a leading figure of the communist left, to its demoralizing influence on the struggle of the working class. He even suggests that such a harsh depiction of social conditions could drive spectators to defeatism and potentially to fascism:

> Paralysés par des songes morbides, ligotés par un sentiment d'impuissance, le jour venu nous serions d'un seul coup extraits du marécage pour être jetés sur les champs de la guerre. Ainsi les fumées déliquescentes qui obscurcirent la conscience de tant d'Allemands après la guerre de 14-18 créèrent-elles les conditions propices au recrutement des Casques d'Acier. C'est le même itinéraire qu'on voudrait nous faire prendre. (Kanapa, "Feu sur la décadence !" 89)

> Paralyzed by morbid dreams, bound by a feeling of impotence, when the day comes we will be taken in own move from the swamp and thrown onto the fields of war. In just this way, the degenerate smoke that obscured the conscience of so many Germans after World War One created conditions favorable to the recruitment of *Stahlhelms*. This is the same route one would have us take.[36]

In his fear that cinema may drive spectators to fascism, Kanapa alludes to interwar Germany and not to the more immediate late 1930s France or Occupation. The lack of reference to recent French history becomes all the more remarkable once Kanapa is read alongside prewar criticism's own interest in representations of the nation and the connections often outlined between noir and fascism. As seen in the previous chapter, prolific film historian, critic, and active leftist Georges Sadoul already says much the same thing about prewar French noir when writing in 1938 for *Cahiers du bolchevisme*:

> Ce n'est plus une peinture de la société, mais une rafle de police. [. . .] Il ne faut pourtant pas oublier que c'est dans de telles catégories sociales que se recrutent non les vrais héros du peuple, mais les hommes de main d'un Doriot, d'un Carbone, d'un Sabiani, les tueurs du C.S.A.R., les trafiquants d'armes, les troupes de la drogue et ces hommes de Tercio que l'auteur du roman *Quai des brumes* [*Port of Shadows* (Pierre Mac Orlan 1927)] magnifia dans un autre de ses livres, *La Bandera* [*The Flag* (1931)], dédié au général Franco. (Sadoul, "Récents progrès" 463-64)
>
> This is no longer a portrait of society but a police roundup. […] It must not be forgotten that it is in such social groups that one recruits not the true heroes of the people, but the

[36] It should be noted that while Kanapa here addresses film and popular culture more generally, he is not a film critic by profession but instead primarily a political figure of the communist left.

> henchmen of a Doriot, a Carbone, a Sabiani, the killers of the C.S.A.R, arms traffickers, drug gangs, and those men of the Tercio whom the author of *Quai des brumes* [*Port of Shadows* (Pierre Mac Orlan 1927)] idealized in another of his books, *La Bandera* [*The Flag* (1931)], dedicated to General Franco.

Like Rey, Kanapa does not reference prewar French noir. Nevertheless, that he should express his objections to postwar noir through anxieties about fascism suggests a connection with prewar criticism, Sadoul, and even Renoir's infamous characterization of Carné's *Le Quai des brumes* as fascist propaganda (Jeancolas 236). The possibility of a relationship between French and American noir becomes powerful precisely because Kanapa alludes to interwar Germany and not the more obvious prewar or Occupation-era France. His reception of American cinema is conditioned by an amnesia concerning recent French history. The implicit relationship that Kanapa is incapable of voicing emerges through its glaring substitution and is further accentuated by the article's unmistakable intertextuality.

There are three things that should be taken from Rey and Kanapa. First, both execute particular parapraxes whereby significant historical moments are associated with or substituted for others: Vichy with American capitalist imperialism in Rey, and interwar Germany for prewar France in Kanapa. Second, in each case one must abstain from arguing that Rey and Kanapa actually discuss Vichy or prewar France because they more precisely speak simultaneously *to* them and yet *of* something else. This parallel doublespeak makes their unspoken resistance to envisioning a relationship between American and French noir emerge, but only insofar as it constitutes an irreducible paradox. Lastly, having established the mechanisms of this paradox where it is implicit, one is in a better position to understand the structural and discursive

complexities of critics such as Chartier and Borde and Chaumeton whose resistance to this relationship is explicit.

Writing for *Cahiers du cinéma* predecessor, *La Revue du cinéma*, Chartier's much anthologized "Les Américains font aussi des films 'noirs'" 'American's also make films "noirs,"' from 1946, suggests the possibility of a relationship between French and American noir in its very title. But he only returns to the proposition to reject it in his essay's final paragraph:

> On a parlé d'une école française des films noirs […] mais *Le Quai des brumes* ou *L'Hôtel du nord* [Carné 1938] avaient au moins des accents de révolte, l'amour y passait comme le mirage d'un monde meilleur, une revendication sociale et implicite ouvrait la porte à l'espoir et, si les personnages y étaient désespérés ils suscitaient notre pitié ou notre sympathie. Rien de tel ici : ce sont des monstres, des criminels ou des malades que rien n'excuse et qui agissent comme ils le font par la seule fatalité du mal qui est en eux. (Chartier 70)
>
> A French school of film noir has been discussed […] but *Le Quai des brumes* or *L'Hôtel du nord* [Carné 1938] at least had overtones of revolt. In them, love appeared as the mirage of a better world; an implicit, social statement opened the door to hope; and if characters were helpless, they elicited our pity or our sympathy. Nothing of the like here: these are monsters, criminals, or sick people whom nothing excuses and who act the way they do only because of the fatality of an inner evil.

Chartier's portrait of American noir and its differentiation from French noir on the grounds of revolt, hope, and the predominance of fate has much more in common with discussions of French noir before the war than he admits or remembers. Writing under the pseudonym of

François Vinneuil, fascist film critic Lucien Rebatet denounces prewar noir due to an absence of moral struggle in characters who lack not only pity but a soul, rendering them monstrous (Vinneuil, "Sur l'écran" 9). He also laments that, "livrées à leurs instincts [ils] n'ont même pas une sorte de puissance sauvage, pataugeant stupidement dans le sang" 'given over to their instincts [they] do not even have a primitive type of strength, wallowing stupidly in blood' (Vinneuil, "*Le Dernier tournant*" 4). Sadoul, for his part, first praises this vein of French cinema in 1936 because of its social realism, one defined precisely by hope and revolt: "Le réalisme implique la connaissance du monde qui est le nôtre, […] la révolte contre la société qui a créé ce monde inhumain, l'espoir dans le Peuple qui veut délivrer l'homme" 'Realism implies a knowledge of the world that is ours, […] revolt against the society that created this inhuman world, hope in the People who want to liberate man' (Sadoul, "A propos de quelques films récents" 376). Yet as detailed above, Sadoul objects a few years later to what he sees as social realism gone awry. In an article on *Le jour se lève*, he decries an absence of hope and argues that revolt has transformed into violent capitulation and surrender to forces larger than oneself: "La morale de cette histoire semble bien être […] que le seul héros est celui qui, dégoûté du monde, se munit de revolvers, et se retranche, bien résolu, avant de crever, à faire payer en cadavres à la société le mal qu'elle lui a fait" 'The moral of this story clearly seems to be […] that the only hero is the one who, disgusted with the world, arms himself with guns and entrenches himself, determined to make society pay back in corpses the wrong it has done to him before he dies' (Sadoul, "*Le jour se lève*" 30).

Despite Chartier's rejection of the relationship between French and American noir, its possibility is intertextually reintroduced through the very argument against it, through critical

memory. He is forced to participate in critical discourse on noir to elaborate his text's difference from it. Consequently, the recycling of categories like revolt, hope, and fate, while intending to outline difference, have the paradoxical result of situating Chartier's argument firmly within an earlier discourse. Moreover, the connotations of revolt, hope, fate, and the relationships existing between them take shape through the evocation of that critical memory. Chartier therefore not only installs himself in but expands a noir discourse despite and because of his aim to redefine it or even disengage from it for the description of a new object. In short, he suggests, then denies, but ultimately performs and projects a relationship between pre- and postwar noir, wherein American cinema turns into a proxy for what he refuses to see as part of prewar French film history.

Instead of calling upon established critical constellations in their own rejection of an affinity between French and American noir, in my last example, *Panorama du film noir américain*, Borde and Chaumeton advance their own set of terms:

> *Pépé le moko*, *Quai des brumes*, *La Bête humaine*, n'annonçaient-ils pas le film noir américain ? Nous ne le pensons pas. D'abord l'onirisme et l'insolite font également défaut dans ces films des années 36-38. Dès le début, l'action est située dans un milieu bien défini. Pas de trace non plus de violence gratuite, si ce n'est parfois dans les dialogues de Jacques Prévert qui, ne l'oublions pas, participait au mouvement surréaliste jusqu'en 1930 (Borde and Chaumeton, *Panorama* 27)
>
> *Pépé le Moko*, *Quai des brumes*, *La Bête humaine*—did they not herald American film noir? We do not think so. First, the dreamlike and bizarre are each lacking in these films from 1936-38. From the beginning, the action is situated in a well-defined social milieu.

> Nor is there any trace of gratuitous violence, if not sometimes in the dialogues of Jacques Prévert, who, let us not forget, was part of the surrealist movement until 1930

The legacy of surrealism in the French reception of American film noir, emphasized through references to the dreamlike and bizarre, has already gained sufficient attention in James Naremore's *More than Night* (18-22). Since his treatment of it has already been summarized in the introduction, I will not dwell on it here. I would, however, briefly like to draw attention to the mention of Jacques Prévert and the admission of his connection to the movement. Prévert's surrealist tendencies and their connection to violence may constitute an exception in the relationship between prewar French noir and postwar American noir that Borde and Chaumeton otherwise resist, but elsewhere they surprisingly limit surrealism's influence to the literal dream, the dream sequence (*Panorama* 29). Putting violence aside for the moment, surrealism would seem central to noir given their insistence on the dreamlike and bizarre in describing everything from noir's atmosphere, narrative structure, and character psychology.[37] The possibility for a connection between French and American noir via Prévert and surrealism has to be cut off before it comes to fruition. Yet the contradiction in deemphasizing surrealism while underlining the dreamlike and bizarre is more glaring than the one potentially introduced by the exception of Prévert. This will not be the last time Prévert occupies a position of exception in postwar criticism, as will be shortly shown in an analysis of Truffaut. Trying to mend a tear, Borde and

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[37] For example:

"Il y a, dans cette incohérente brutalité quelque chose qui tient du rêve, et c'est pourtant l'atmosphère commune à la plupart des films noirs" 'There is in this incoherent brutality something that takes after dreams, and this is the atmosphere shared by most films noirs' (Borde and Chaumeton, *Panorama* 12).

"C'est l'accumulation de ces plans réalistes sur un thème bizarre qui crée une atmosphère de cauchemar" 'The accumulation of realist images on a bizarre theme creates a nightmarish atmosphere' (Borde and Chaumeton, *Panorama* 13).

"Dans le vrai film noir, l'insolite est inséparable de ce qu'on pourrait appeler l'incertitude des mobiles" 'In true film noir, the bizarre is inseparable from what could be called the uncertainty of motives" (Borde and Chaumeton, *Panorama* 13).

Chaumeton make a gaping hole or time warp through which the relationship between French and American noir becomes all the more urgent to define due to one's refusal to entertain its possibility. As in Chartier, the closing down of possibilities tends to suggest more than it hides or obfuscates.

To feel out the contours of that relationship, one must return to the above passage and specifically to the roles of social realism and violence. The former, despite its implied opposition to the dreamlike and bizarre, constitutes a significant but overlooked portion of Borde and Chaumeton's account of American noir. Indeed, social realism is a focal point in *Panorama* in the pages immediately preceding the above judgment, where it appears as *national* realism and vividly recalls the polemics of noir criticism before and during the Occupation:

> Le film noir est lié à un contexte social […] et la description du milieu criminel est puisée dans la réalité quotidienne des U.S.A. […] D'ailleurs, il est rare, dans la production de différents pays, que les films consacrés au crime et situés dans le cadre national aient une base fictive. Ici le réalisme est presque obligatoire. (Borde and Chaumeton, *Panorama* 24-25)
>
> 'Film noir is linked to a social context […] and the description of the criminal milieu is drawn from the everyday reality of the U.S.A. […] Besides, it is rare, in various countries' output, that films devoted to crime and situated in a national setting should have a fictional source. Here realism is almost obligatory.

Borde and Chaumeton's assumptions echo directly the debates from the late 1930s and Occupation on the cinematic representation of the nation and most exemplified in the controversy surrounding *Le Corbeau* as well as Émile Vuillermoz's warning about exporting

French noir. *Panorama* continues the trend of taking any type of bleak, violent, realist narrative as a declaration that "Voici l'image de la France" 'This is the image of France' or as Georges Adam and Pierre Blanchar put it, "Voilà l'image de nous-mêmes" 'Here is the image of ourselves' (Régent 199; qtd. in Barrot). The difference of course, is that noir here concerns the United States and not France. To this extent, then, Borde and Chaumeton perform insofar as they take as truth Vuillermoz's argument that "Un film est toujours un aveu" 'A film is always a confession,' for foreign spectators because, "[l]es peuples s'y présentent peints par eux-mêmes" '[p]opulations present themselves of their own accord' (Vuillermoz, "Un cas de conscience" 48). As in these earlier critics, Borde and Chaumeton conjugate violence with social realism and see both as representative of the nation producing such films.[38]

For them, violence in American noir has a special value determined by its historical context, the images' content, and an audience's national specificity. As detailed in the previous chapter, this is precisely what allows Borde and Chaumeton to cast American noir as a manifestation of sublimated Nazi sympathies when they ask whether violence reminiscent of the Gestapo in American noir represents "un moyen d'assouvir à bon compte sur un plan imaginaire des envies secrètes, conscientes ou non ?" 'a means of cheaply satisfying, on an imaginary level, secret

[38] Raymond Borde makes a similar argument in his article "Deux époques du film social aux États-Unis" 'Two Periods of the Social Film in the United States' (1954).

desires, conscious or not?' (Borde and Chaumeton 26).[39] In the build up to this question they assert that a French spectator would not tolerate images evocative of Nazi-violence. Yet in doing so they betray a form of projection and substitution according to which of this French spectator proves alienated from a national history that would include memories of collaboration. By screening through another nation's cinema what one claims to resist in the identity of one's own nation, that screened representation of the nation becomes neutralized. Gestapo-like violence becomes tolerable precisely because it appears in American films and not French cinema. Yet because a foreign cinematic product and spectatorial position mediate the relationship between a French spectator and recent French history, the former become a means of expressing a paradox endemic to much of postwar noir criticism. American noir is at once a site where one exiles what is undesirable in the national imaginary but also where one stages postwar national identity as defined by self-alienation. As in Rey and Kanapa's historiographic parapraxes, projection in

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[39] "[L]es événements [de la guerre] habituaient aussi à la violence et préparaient la voie à un cinéma cruel. Le récit des atrocités allemandes et japonaises, largement diffusé après la victoire, fit le reste. Ajoutons que le public américain n'a pas connu, aussi directement que le public européen, certaines horreurs de la guerre. Les tortures de la Gestapo se déroulaient de l'autre côté de l'Océan, et gardaient un aspect exotique, irréel. On tolérerait difficilement, dans un film français ou italien, qu'un gangster indigène se conduise comme un homme de main de la Gestapo. Il y a là, croyons-nous, une sorte de tabou. En Amérique c'étaient plus facile, et le film noir a pu y opérer la synthèse du réalisme et la cruauté.

"D'ailleurs, il polarisait sans doute tous les désirs troubles du spectateur moyen. Les violences exercées sur les enfants (*Une incroyable histoire* [Ted Tetzlaff 1949]), sur les infirmes et les malades (*Panique dans la rue* [Elia Kazan 1950], *Le Carrefour de la mort* [Henry Hathaway 1947]), sur les Juifs ou les nègres, n'étaient-elles pas un moyen d'assouvir à bon compte sur un plan imaginaire des envies secrètes, conscientes ou non ? (Borde and Chaumeton, *Panorama* 26)"

'[T]he events [of the war] also accustomed spectators to violence and prepared the path toward a cinema of cruelty. The account of German and Japanese atrocities, widely circulated after the victory, did the rest. Let us add that the American public did not experience, as directly as European audiences, certain horrors of the war. The Gestapo's tortures took place on the other side of the ocean and maintained an exotic, unreal quality. In a French or Italian film, one would hardly tolerate that a native gangster should behaves like a henchman of the Gestapo. Believe us, such a thing would be taboo. In America, it was easier, and there, film noir was able to combine realism and cruelty.

'What is more, it undoubtedly concentrated all the vague desires of the average spectator. Violence against children (*The Window* [Ted Tetzlaff 1949]), against the disabled and the sick (*Panic in the Streets* [Elia Kazan 1950], *Kiss of Death* [Henry Hathaway 1947]), against Jews and Negroes—was this not a means of cheaply satisfying, on an imaginary level, secret desires, conscious or not?'

Borde and Chaumeton fulfills the function of simultaneous articulation and non-articulation of uneasy memories of war.

A Certain Paradox of "Une certaine tendance du cinéma français"

By reading these texts in their specificity yet also collectively, as distinct parts of an always potential whole, it becomes apparent that due to the particular distancing mechanisms manifest in each, they constitute together a specific mode of postwar critical discourse. Each text evokes the prewar and Occupation through contexts that are political, historical, and critical—but only insofar as it is simultaneously removed from them. The paradox then inheres in postwar critics who inscribe themselves within political, historical, and critical discourses of the prewar and Occupation, but subtract themselves from these contexts to wield the discourses for a new object: American film noir. The idea that postwar critics needed to detach noir from tainted contexts proves true only if one acknowledges that they nevertheless reappropriate and repurpose for American noir conversations surrounding French noir. The various mechanisms rendering France absent and substituting the United States for it, whether explicit or merely suggested, therefore demand that the critics' resistance to a relationship between French and American noir be neither affirmed nor denied. The issue is rather a paradoxical doublespeak that operates within criticism at two distinct levels, discursive and contextual, according to which prewar French noir respectively is and is not closely related to American noir.

This doublespeak is postwar noir criticism's defining trait. Noir consequently inheres not in the films it sometimes describes—circular arguments about which films are noir are doomed from the start—nor even entirely in its name or the specific content of critical arguments. After

the war, it comes to exist instead in the structure of the arguments themselves, in their critical, intertextual performance of polemics about the state of the nation. As a type of discursive formation, then, noir lends itself to analysis by making possible what may be called "noir analyses" of other texts not immediately or traditionally related to it. It is with this reconceptualization of noir as a mode of postwar criticism that I now turn to François Truffaut's "Une certaine tendance du cinéma français."

Truffaut's seminal article initially seems to have little to do with noir. As this section aims to prove, however, beyond the essay's polemic against the so-called "Tradition of Quality" and its reconsideration of the filmmaking process as a form of writing, another reading of the text as rhetorically conservative surfaces once it is analyzed and refracted through noir. Rather than rehearsing Truffaut's rethinking of artistic vision and the autonomy of cinema, I would instead like to emphasize the significance of social commentary and worldview, but also the role of critical memory in his attack on the Tradition of Quality and larger effort to re-imagine French national cinema.

My approach thus takes its cues from two basic readings of "Une certain tendance" in order to define a third, I think, more productive and evenhanded perspective. The traditional approach to Truffaut's article accentuates its call for a move away from a cinema dominated by stilted, tired adaptations of classic French literature and toward a conception of cinema as its own unique form of writing, with a style or vision distinctive of the director as its sole creator, its *auteur*. Dudley Andrew asserts, furthermore, that Truffaut's belief that only a "specifically cinematic *écriture* [writing style]" could reinvigorate French national cinema follows in the footsteps of critic, filmmaker, and general harbinger to the New Wave, Alexandre Astruc's notion of the

"caméra-stylo" 'camera-pen,' a symbol representing film directing's kinship to literary writing (Andrew 994-995; Astruc 5). For an approach such as this, Truffaut's text reconfigured cinema as an art with its own set of possibilities, launched the New Wave, and thus lent new energy to a weary French cinema. Counter-readings, rather, tend to stress Truffaut's conservatism in his attack not just on adaptations of literature but on the negative and pointedly leftist worldviews of the screenwriters he singled out, Jacques Aurenche and Pierre Bost. Janet Staiger, for instance, argues that Truffaut and the rest of the *Cahiers* critics tended to ignore issues of history, class, and general social conflict, while John Hess locates their intellectual origins in the Christian, right-leaning ideas of Personalism (Staiger 12; Hess, "*La Politique des auteurs*, I").[40] He forcefully argues that, "the cultural and political conservatism of his writings (and of the writings of [Jacques] Rivette, [Eric] Rohmer, and [Jean-Luc] Godard) should warn us about the fraudulent claims of many that the New Wave represented a radical break in the continuity of the French and the European cinema" (Hess, "*La Politique des auteurs*, II").

I believe both of these claims are equally valid. Truffaut's article does reconceptualize filmmaking as a practice with a potential all its own and does revitalize French national cinema, but his criticism is also deeply couched in postwar French conservatism. What differentiates my analysis, however, is its examination of the article's relationship to earlier film-critical contexts that it seemingly rejects, namely the late 1930s and issues of noir and polemics about filmic representations of the nation. This analysis will demonstrate that the discursive disjuncture the article initiates in rethinking filmmaking through creative vision may be groundbreaking, but it is

[40] Page numbers have been omitted from in-text citations for Hess' articles because I have consulted their versions in *Jump Cut*'s online archive, which does not include original page numbers.

also simultaneously reactionary in that this break is elaborated in a fashion that bares rhetorical continuities with the very eras it seeks to leave behind.

Let us first consider a brief passage taken from the essay's conclusion:

> Enfin, ces personnages abjects, qui prononcent des phrases abjects, je connais une poignée d'hommes en France qui seraient INCAPABLES de les concevoir, quelques cinéastes dont la vision du monde est au moins aussi valable que celle d'Aurenche et Bost, Sigurd et Jeanson. Il s'agit de Jean Renoir, Robert Bresson, Jean Cocteau, Jacques Becker, Abel Gance, Max Ophüls, Jacques Tati, Roger Leenhardt ; ce sont des *auteurs* qui écrivent souvent leur dialogue et quelques-uns inventent eux-mêmes les histoires qu'ils mettent en scène. (Truffaut, "Une certaine tendance" 26)
>
> Finally, these abject characters, who utter abject lines—I know a handful of men in France who would be INCAPABLE of imagining them, a few whose worldview is at least as worthy as that of Aurenche and Bost, Sigurd and Jeanson. I am speaking of Jean Renoir, Robert Bresson, Jean Cocteau, Jacques Becker, Abel Gance, Max Ophüls, Jacques Tati, Roger Leenhardt; these are auteurs who often write their own dialogue and some come up themselves with the stories they direct.

A veritable synopsis of the text, this passage outlines what is both objectionable and promising in recent French cinema. It lauds those "auteurs" who assume the responsibilities of not only *mise-en-scène* but also dialogue and screenwriting—but this only accounts for the last quarter of the paragraph. Truffaut begins with a different focus. The handful of men he admires are first contrasted with Jean Aurenche, Pierre Bost, Jacques Sigurd, and Henri Jeanson, not for this group's being screenwriters, for producing a literary cinema, but rather for their "vision du

monde," their worldview. This complaint clearly recalls debates of the late 1930s, to which I will soon return. Auteurism only brings up the rear, and one would be forgiven for supposing that the final semicolon would be better replaced with a period, since the concluding statement has little to do with what precedes it. Truffaut deplores the Tradition of Quality because it is dominated by both literary adaptions made by screenwriters *and* by a negative, "abject" view of contemporary society. And at least in this passage, more effort is spent attacking the latter than the former.

The negative significance of social issues in the article's reconfiguration of national cinema and assault on Quality film has not been totally overlooked, as demonstrated above. But despite revisionist readings, scholarship largely persists in emphasizing Truffaut's polemic on artistic creation and in obscuring the issue of social representation.[41] I am, however, not entirely of John Hess's opinion that Truffaut's article has less to do with aesthetics than with worldview, for this also presents a unidimensional approach ("*La Politique des auteurs II*"). An analysis of Truffaut's article through the lens of noir demonstrates instead that the text maintains complex and shifting relationships to cinema as both a creative means of representation and a means of representing the social. For while a negative worldview may first appear within a critique of adaptation, the article gradually and covertly detaches social critique from adaptation and the auteur to make it a distinct, equal, and sometimes primary concern.

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[41] To cite just one example, Michel Marie mentions Truffaut's objection to Quality cinema's negative vision of society—but only insofar as an illustrative detail in what he takes to be the larger attack on disloyal and corrupting adaptations of source texts: "Truffaut reproche de plus aux adaptateurs d'introduire par contrebande des thèmes anarchisants et anticléricaux dans des œuvres romanesques très diverses et fort loin de cet univers" 'Truffaut also criticizes adapters for smuggling anarchist and anticlerical themes into works that are very diverse and far removed from that universe' (32-33). Moreover, Marie employs the passage cited above not to elaborate what Truffaut finds "abjectionable," as it were, but the difference between a simple *metteur en scène*, or average director, and an auteur in their treatment of characters, which in Quality films, Marie argues, are more like "pantins manipulés par le cinéaste" 'puppets manipulated by the director' (35).

Truffaut leads with the comment that French national cinema's most successful form is marked by adaptations of classic and contemporary works of literature. Singling out the work of Jean Aurenche and Pierre Bost, he takes particular issue with their practice of adapting literary works with respect to the spirit instead of the letter according to a process of "equivalence" (Truffaut, "Une certaine tendance" 16). This procedure involves the substitution of scenes from the source text that do not lend themselves to cinematic representation with those of the screenwriters' invention that do. Truffaut, who doubts the supposed unfilmable nature of such scenes, also argues that their so-called equivalents often betray the original text by smuggling in screenwriters' and directors' personalities and politics.

His most specific example comes from Aurenche and Bost's unrealized adaption of Georges Bernanos' *Journal d'un curé de campagne* (*Diary of a Country Priest* [1936]), a novel about a priest's struggle with his faith (the work was successfully adapted to screen by Robert Bresson in 1951). The screenwriters' infidelity is best illustrated by the "equivalent" replacement of a scene in a confessional with one that mocks confession and then by the substitution of Bernanos' final words, "Qu'est-ce que cela fait, tout est grâce" 'What does it matter? All is grace,' with a line uttered by atheist Arsène in the middle of the novel, "quand on est mort, tout est mort" 'when one is dead, everything is dead.' Truffaut thus isolates two problems: "1) Un souci *d'infidélité* à l'esprit comme à la lettre constant et délibéré ; 2) Un goût très marqué pour la profanation et le blasphème" '1) A constant and deliberate care to be unfaithful to the spirit as well as the letter; 2) A very marked taste for profanation and blasphemy' ("Une certaine tendance" 18-19). Aurenche and Bost's version is disloyal to the spirit of Bernanos' novel because of their cynical attitude toward religion.

Admittedly, adaptation is the dominant concern here. The role of religion in contemporary French society appears as a single manifestation of the larger issue of artistic creation. The relationship between the social and the aesthetic remains this way in brief rebukes of other films, namely, *Douce* (*Love Story* [Claude Autant-Lara 1943]), *Dieu a besoin des hommes* (*God Needs Men* [Jean Delannoy 1950]), *Le Diable au corps* (*Devil in the Flesh* [Autant-Lara 1947]), *L'Auberge rouge* (*The Red Inn* [Autant-Lara 1951]), and *Jeux interdits* (*Forbidden Games* [René Clément 1952]) (Truffaut, "Une certaine tendance" 19). Yet the frequency with which accusations of anticlericalism, blasphemy, profanation, antimilitarism, and antibourgeois sentiment appear—not to mention the repetition of particular figures' names—functions, by that very accumulation, to place leftist social critique on the same level as falsely equivalent adaptations of literary works.

Indeed, the relationship between adaptation and a *vision du monde* inverts itself in subsequent portions of the article, proving them related but distinct matters:

> Une fois émise l'idée selon quoi ces équivalences ne sont qu'astuces timides pour contourner la difficulté [de l'adaptation] il est temps d'en venir à l'examen de l'ensemble des films dialogués et adaptés par Aurenche et Bost et de rechercher la permanence de certains thèmes qui expliqueront sans la justifier *l'infidélité* constante des deux scénaristes aux œuvres qu'ils prennent pour « prétexte » et « occasion ».
>
> […]
>
> Sous le couvert de la littérature—-et bien sûr de la qualité—on donne au public sa dose habituelle de noirceur, de non-conformisme, de facile audace. (Truffaut, "Une certaine tendance" 20-21)

> Once admitted the idea according to which these equivalences are but feeble tricks to get around the difficulty [of adaptation], it is finally time to examine the group of films dialogued and adapted by Aurenche and Bost and to look for the persistence of certain themes that will explain, without justifying it, the constant *unfaithfulness* of the two screenwriters to the works they take for 'pretext' and 'opportunity.'
>
> […]
>
> Under the cover of literature—and of course of quality—the public gets its regular dose of noirceur, nonconformism, and facile daring.

Whereas social commentary began as an example of divergence from source texts, adaptation now constitutes a vehicle and smokescreen for a particular worldview. The problem with Quality cinema is thus not only adaptation but also and primarily a particular vision of contemporary France. The inversion of the relationship is made all the more apparent when Truffaut expands his attack to include screenwriter and director pair Jacques Sigurd and Yves Allégret. Their films exhibit a taste for blasphemy and for cruel and coldly apathetic characters, thereby giving French cinema "quelques-uns de ses plus noirs chefs-d'œuvre" 'some of its noirest masterpieces,' but only two of the five Allégret-Sigurd films Truffaut names are adaptations ("Une certaine tendance" 22). *Dédé d'Anvers* (*Dédé of Antwerp* [1948]) and *La Jeune folle* (*Desperate Decision* [1952]) have source texts, but *Une si jolie petite plage* (*Such a Pretty Little Beach* [1949]), *Manèges* (*Carousel* [1950]), and *Les miracles n'ont lieu qu'une fois* (*Miracles Only Happen Once* [1951]) are all original screenplays. The issue of critical representations of the nation at this point proves superior to adaptation and the auteur in the search for a new French national cinema.

Returning to the role of noir in film criticism, the categories "noir" and "noirceur" fulfill multiple functions in the above passages. The most evident is to condense the disparate criticisms leveled at Quality film: anticlericalism, antimilitarism, antibourgeois sentiment, abjection, and cruelty—in other words, what Truffaut wants to exclude from French national cinema. Yet for him they also connote a fashionable and cyclical worldview particular to the history of French film, an opinion which has the effect of situating his article within a complex relationship to wider critical contexts:

> **ON REGRETTE PRÉVERT**
>
> A considérer l'uniformité et l'égale vilénie des scénarios d'aujourd'hui, l'on se prend à regretter les scénarios de Prévert. Lui croyait au diable, donc en Dieu, et si la plupart de ses personnages étaient par son seul caprice chargés de tous les péchés de la création, il y avait toujours place pour un couple sur qui, nouveaux Adam et Eve, le film terminé, l'histoire allait se mieux recommencer.
>
> […]
>
> il n'est pas exagéré de dire que les cent et quelques films français réalisés chaque année racontent la même histoire : il s'agit toujours d'une victime, en générale un cocu. […] La rouerie de ses proches et la haine que se vouent entre eux les membres de sa famille, amènent le « héros » à sa perte ; l'injustice de la vie, et, en couleur locale, la méchanceté du monde (Truffaut, "Une certaine tendance" 23)
>
> **PRÉVERT IS MISSED**
>
> Considering the uniformity and steady baseness of today's screenplays, one finds oneself missing Prévert's screenplays. He believed in the devil, thus in God, and if most

> of his characters were by his lone desire burdened with all the sins of creation, there was always a place for a couple from whom, new Adam and Eve, the story would begin anew and for the better at the film's conclusion.
>
> […]
>
> it is not an exaggeration to say that the hundred or so French films produced each year tell the same story: there is always a victim, in general, a cuckold. […] The scheming of those close to him and the hate that reigns between the members of his family bring this "hero" to his demise; the injustice of life and, with local color, the malice of the world

Two points should be made regarding these passages. First, the second paragraph emphasizes that at issue is French national cinema and particularly its depiction of a hateful and unjust society through stereotyped characters and narratives. At no point is American film noir mentioned anywhere in the essay. This is important because elsewhere Truffaut uses similar terms to speak positively of American films, such as *The Big Heat* (Fritz Lang 1953) and its representation of "[l]a solitude morale, l'homme menant seul une lutte contre un univers mi-hostile, mi-indifférent" 'moral solitude, man struggling against a half-hostile, half-indifferent universe' (Truffaut, "Aimer Fritz Lang…" 52). Second, the first paragraph creates historical limits, isolating postwar French cinema in contrast to prewar film, a move which recalls Chartier's own exclusion of prewar French noir, nostalgically remembered for its glimmer of hope.

That Truffaut targets postwar French cinema is itself not surprising—this focus is announced at the article's outset. Yet when his manner of speaking about postwar cinema and his condemnation of its negative representation of society are brought together with his exclusion of

prewar French cinema, a conflict emerges similar to the one isolated in Chartier. That is, Truffaut omits prewar noir from his polemic but uses a rhetoric similar to prewar noir criticism to speak of a *noirceur* in postwar film. This is important because "Une certaine tendance" thus demonstrates that while the value of noir may have changed, its function in criticism remains the same: the category marks out what one refuses to see in representations of the nation or, in Truffaut's case, representations of the national cinema.

The discordant references to Prévert and particular echoes of prewar criticism illustrate this paradoxical combination of exclusion and borrowing across different periods of film and criticism. Whereas Truffaut earlier faults Sigurd for his "synthesis" of Aurenche and Bost, Clouzot, *and* Prévert, the above passage expresses admiration and a sense of loss *for* Prévert, as the bold subheading clearly indicates[42] (Truffaut, "Une certaine tendance" 22). Through the grandeur of his Biblical allusions, Truffaut mourns the loss of Prévert's perseverance of promise, echoing Chartier's wistfulness for prewar hope, for "a better world." In recent cinema, however, he laments the ubiquity of hate, ill-intent, and the fate of victimization, all within a distinct social milieu. Such differentiation between Prévert's films and Quality cinema is confusing not only because Truffaut includes Prévert in his denigration of Sigurd and Allégret, but also because the description of recent French film vividly recalls Carné-Prévert's work and its reception before the war. *Le jour se lève* and *Le Quai des brumes* are perfect examples—not to mention other works of the period such as Renoir's *La Bête humaine*. Within the history of noir criticism Truffaut's account of Prévert seems astoundingly optimistic, not to mention amnesic.

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[42] I am baffled by anthologies' persistence in translating "On regrette Prévert" as "Prévert is to be regretted." The passage's content clearly suggests a sense of mourning, which is now only an archaic use of the English term, "regret."

Let us revisit three of the most influential film critics of the late 1930s, Rebatet (a.k.a. Vinneuil), Émile Vuillermoz, and Sadoul, and their positions on the works of Carné-Prévert. Just as Truffaut lambasts postwar French film's social pessimism, Rebatet repeatedly attacks Carné-Prévert for their negative representation of France, its hero-victims, venomous milieux, determinism, and vile stereotypes. In *Les Tribus du cinéma et du théâtre* (*The Tribes of Cinema and Theater* [1941]) Rebatet details a vile antisemitic conspiracy theory to blame the pair for the defeat to Germany:

> Les faubourgs lépreux et fumeux qui lui [Carné] servent de cadre n'exhalent que des sentiments sordides, de fielleuses revendications. Ses héros sont de médiocres assassins, des candidats au suicide, des souteneurs, des filles, des entremetteuses. Carné et ses Juifs ont vautré le cinéma français dans un fatalisme, un déterminisme dégradant. […] dans l'immense diffusion du cinéma, ces produits spécifiques du judaïsme ont joué un rôle de dissolvant social, contribué à l'avilissement des esprits et des caractères. (Rebatet 87)
>
> The leprous and smoky working class neighborhoods that serve as settings for Carné spread only sordid feelings, venomous social statements. His heroes are mediocre murders, candidates for suicide, pimps, prostitutes, procuresses. Carné and his Jews have drug French cinema through a fatalism, a degrading determinism. […] in cinema's immense reach, these specific products of Judaism were agents of social division, contributed to the degradation of mind and character.

Vuillermoz, too, isolates a negative, abject vision of then-contemporary society tainted by hate for one's peers, arguing that *Le Quai des brumes* "nous montre à quel degré de dégénérescence et d'abjection est tombée notre population provinciale. […] Ce ne sont pas des étrangers haineux,

ce sont des Français qui nous avouent que dans cette ville il n'existe pas un seul personnage propre" 'shows us the level of decline and abjection to which our provincial population has fallen […] These are not foreigners full of hate, but Frenchmen who admit to us that in this town there is not a single decent character' (Vuillermoz, "Un cas de conscience" 48). Lastly, one should also remember Sadoul's condemnation of brutal social realism, its heroes resigned to their fate in a hostile world, what he calls cinema's "pessimisme anarchique" 'anarchic pessimism' (Sadoul, "*Le jour se lève*" 30).

Although for different reasons—far-right antisemitism, anxieties about international exhibition, and leftist politics—all three prewar critics object to the poisonous atmosphere and abjection of character, formal and moralistic, that reign in prewar noir. Around fifteen years later, their complaints find strong echoes in Truffaut's disapproval and rejection of postwar noir from an ideal of national cinematic identity. What he labels "facile daring" and perpetuation of a worn-out vogue matches well with the *noirceur* that in the late thirties Rebatet/Vinneuil already called a "convention" (Vinneuil, "*L'Étrange M. Victor*…" 9), Vuillermoz "la couleur à la mode de nos studios" 'the fashionable color of our studios' ("*La Bête humaine*" 5), and that evokes in an aging Sadoul, weary since the Occupation of the "bibliothèque noire" 'noir library' and reflecting on two decades of cinema, "l'ennui contre les scénarios (non pas 'noirs,' mais moisis)" 'boredom for scenarios (not "noir"' but moldy)' ("*Les Inconnus* et *Le Corbeau*" 7; "'Quelle feuillage'" 154). Truffaut may exempt the prewar from his attack on recent film, but in these objections to Quality cinema one cannot help but hear resounding echoes of that era's criticism. Rebatet, Vuillermoz, and Sadoul may be invested in a national identity represented through

socially inclined cinema while Truffaut's criticism involves the identity of a national cinema that excludes the social, but noir marks in each case what must be shut out to constitute that ideal.

Yet, as with Rey, Kanapa, Chartier, and Borde and Chaumeton, one should be careful of asserting that on some interior level Truffaut speaks about prewar noir. While he may borrow his rhetoric from prewar critical discourse, his attack's direct object is clearly the postwar. Within wider contexts of reception, then, Truffaut follows a tendency or trajectory often found in postwar noir criticism. After the Liberation, one detaches discursive elements from the historical and critical contexts of French prewar and Occupation noir, which becomes an object of nostalgia if not loss, and subsequently associates those elements with postwar American noir, which is insistently differentiated from those earlier contexts. The exception in Truffaut, of course, is that the postwar national cinema is not American but French, a "*réalisme psychologique* au sein de la *Tradition de la Qualité*" '*psychological realism* at the heart of the *Tradition of Quality*' qualified and decried, in part, for its *noirceur* (Truffaut, "Une certaine tendance" 16).

The prewar thus appears in a state of ambivalence. This is signaled at the beginning of Truffaut's article when he simultaneously implicates and yet omits films of the prewar era from his polemic:

> La guerre et l'après-guerre ont renouvelé notre cinéma. Il a évolué sous l'effet d'une pression interne et au réalisme poétique—dont on peut dire qu'il mourut en refermant

> derrière lui *Les Portes de la nuit* [*Gates of the Night* (Carné 1946)]—s'est substitué le *réalisme psychologique* ("Une certaine tendance" 15)[43]
>
> The war and postwar renewed our cinema. It evolved under the influence of an internal pressure, and poetic realism—which died in closing behind itself *Les Portes de la nuit* [*Gates of the Night* (Carné 1946)]—was replaced by *psychological realism*

Although he suggests a progression from poetic realism to psychological realism through terms connoting growth and transformation, these are quickly replaced by death, closure, and finally substitution. Truffaut may close the door on cinema of the late 1930s, but this discontinuity is paradoxically the result of an internal pressure named by Truffaut and textually represented in a witty parenthetical comment. As with noir criticism, the relationship between the cinema he excludes and the one he focuses on appears as one of simultaneous break and continuity. Noir may have a different value or content here than it does in Borde and Chaumeton or Chartier, or in the prewar critics, but its function remains the same: to mark out in negative fashion what French national and cinematic identity ought to be.

The specificity of the text's relation to the postwar critical paradox lies in Truffaut's installing himself within a continuity of critical discourse to enact a discontinuity with it, to give that discourse different ends. Indeed, it is here that conventional readings of the article as initiating a shift from social concerns to those of auteurism and artistic autonomy, both of which are at the heart of *Cahier* critics at the beginning of the New Wave, find their condition of possibility. As Janet Staiger suggests, the tendency to "suppress historical, class, and social issues" and thus to

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[43] It should be remembered that noir and poetic realism are not wholly synonymous with one another. While they may sometimes overlap, as in Bazin's later mutation, "le réalisme noir et poétique" 'poetic and noir realism,' "le réalisme poétique" 'poetic realism' did not appear with any regularity before the war, at least not as regularly as "film noir" (Bazin, "Quinze ans du cinéma français" 27).

be about "the auteur's 'personal vision' rather than *visions* of the world" is one of the prominent characteristics of auteurist criticism (Staiger 12-13). Hess goes even further: "*La politique des auteurs* was, in fact, a justification, couched in aesthetic terms, of a culturally conservative, politically reactionary attempt to remove film from the realm of social and political concern" (Hess, "*La Politique des auteurs I*"). Yet, as I have demonstrated, this shift is accomplished by adopting prewar criticism's social rhetoric on noir, an appropriation which is also reactionary but for different, critically discursive reasons. Social categories are deployed to disengage from the realm of the social, making the article at once conservative in its expression, but original in its aims, in its transition to self-sufficient aesthetic conceptions of filmmaking. By reading "Une certaine tendance" through the lens of noir, by situating it within a mode of French postwar criticism typified by writings on noir, the simultaneity of the article's voices surges forward as its essential structuring conflict. It is at once an exception to contemporary critical and cinematic discourses yet also highly characteristic of them.

The consequences of neither agreeing with the idea that American noir released in France after the war has little connection to French prewar noir, nor dismissing that contention out of hand are threefold. First, maintaining the paradox allows for detailed, productive intertextual analyses of a critical corpus without ignoring the differences between specific texts. Second, the discontinuities between what noir means in each article put into relief the specificity of noir not as a traditional genre but as a continuous discourse about the contours of the nation, both in film and as national cinema. Lastly, by not locating noir in the films, but in its use, its deployment in speaking about the connection between nation and film, noir becomes applicable to wider contexts and proves pervasiveness within postwar film criticism as a whole. While my archival

and close analysis-based approach to mid-century film criticism gives unprecedented perspective on noir's integrality to postwar French cinema, its reach across critics and journals should come as no surprise. After all, Truffaut wrote at *Cahiers du cinéma*, the successor to *La Revue du cinéma*, where Chartier wrote along with Nino Frank, who also wrote at *L'Écran français* with Henri-François Rey, and *Cahiers* has long competed with *Positif*, Borde and Chaumeton's home journal.[44] Noir may not be the only critical mode or interest after the war, but as the above analyses demonstrate, it is a privileged site to explore intertextual reflexions on postwar memory and cinematic culture.

Noir and Critical Shifts: The Case of Julien Duvivier

This paradigm shift according to which criticism localizes the "national" in national cinema less in the content of representations of the nation than in the creative vision of an auteur is evident throughout the postwar era, but it is especially prevalent in discussions connecting noir to certain directors. Henri-Georges Clouzot, for instance, once banned from the profession for the *noirceur* of *Le Corbeau* and what was assumed to be its representation of Occupied France, benefited later in his career from this transition. In *Positif*, Jacques Marilen defends Clouzot against accusations of *noirceur* by recasting it as a question of individual style rather than discarding the idea altogether. He writes:

> On le chargea, la libération venue, des « péchés » commis par presque tout un chacun en travaillant pour la *Continentale* [*sic*] sous contrôle allemand. Qu'il s'agisse d'errements moraux ou d'inopportunité politique, le crime de Clouzot avait déjà même un nom :

[44] Charles O'Brien makes a similar point at the end of his article, "Film in France: Before the Liberation," but goes one step further by linking the personal and even workspaces of two film journals from both prewar and postwar eras, namely, *Pour vous* and *L'Écran français* (16).

> NOIRCEUR […] « le réalisme noir » : goût du sordide, misogynie, immoralisme. (Marilen 14)
>
> When the Liberation came, he was held responsible for "sins" committed by just about everyone working for Continental under German authority. Whether a question of moral misguidedness or political untimeliness, Clouzot's crime already had a name: NOIRCEUR […] "noir realism": preference for the sordid, misogyny, immoralism.

Instead of discarding *noirceur* as a category, Marilen reframes the three above elements of noir realism to pivot from the value of Clouzot's view of the nation to his personal vision as an artist. What is sordid in Clouzot's work rather becomes part of his desire to "[régler] un compte personnel avec la Libération" 'settle a personal account with the Liberation,' to speak about the hopelessness and unrelenting misfortune of his experience with the *épuration* committees who banned him from the profession[45] (Marilen 15). Misogyny transforms into a classic interest in selfless, forbidden love and the novelistic redemption of prostitutes (Marilen 20). Finally, Marilen reformulates the issue of immoralism by advancing that Clouzot should be viewed as a painter of morals, and therefore not immoral but a "moraliste" 'moralist' (Marilen 20). In short, instead of pushing back against accusations of noir, familiar categories are employed to deflect them in another direction: "Aussi croyons-nous pouvoir découvrir l'unité (et les mérites) de l'œuvre de Clouzot grâce à son style bien plutôt que dans un arbitraire goût de la noirceur" 'Thus do we believe it possible to discover the unity (and the merits) of Clouzot's work thanks to his style much rather than in an arbitrary taste for *noirceur*' (15). Yet the ambiguous distinction between noir taste and style in Marilen's intervention marks not a break but a shift, a recasting of

[45] The ban was originally for life, but then reduced to two years (Billard 433)

what used to be received as representations of the nation into the unique vision of an artist. The function of noir in discussing French cinema thus becomes a means of rejecting the value of social commentary in favor of personal experience and artistic statement.

Clouzot's significance to postwar French cinema is already well-known. Yet while reactions to his films were changing and his notoriety growing following his return to directing, the critical reception and value of other cinéastes, long-established since the 1930s, were in decline. As discussed in the previous chapter, such was the case with Marcel Carné, who was caught between the conflicting imperatives of innovation and meeting spectators' nostalgic expectations, both to continue as and live up to the myth he and his films had become ("Carné et la désincarnation" 109-110). But the figure whose critical treatment is the most striking, and perplexing, is Julien Duvivier.

More prolific than most of his contemporaries over a long career, Duvivier directed 22 films after the Occupation until his death in 1967.[46] Yet beyond its sheer volume, what makes Duvivier's output truly significant is the directness and intensifying *noirceur* with which he tackles major social issues, especially in postwar France. This is precisely where the puzzle lies —despite his work's social relevance and sheer vitriol, critics increasingly approach and often impeach it not on the grounds of its dark representations of the nation, but of its aesthetic value. The trajectory of Duvivier's work and the criticism about it veer in starkly different directions, toward and away from the social, respectively. How, then, does this reflect postwar cinematic thought, and what does it have to say about Duvivier's role in it? Does he become less significant following the war due to a lack of critical attention and praise, or does he rather become more

[46] Renoir and Carné directed, respectively, 11 and 15 after the Occupation. Duvivier's total number of films also dwarfs Renoir and Carné: 73 to 41 and 23, respectively.

relevant for the very same reason? I find that the latter possibility proves more productive. Due to the opposing trends in his work and its reception, Duvivier exposes the blind spots in a critical current increasingly concerned with aesthetics and the auteur to the detriment of the social and historical. Ultimately and paradoxically, a brief overview of Duvivier's career demonstrates his essential role in accounts of French cinema and criticism because of his growing, apparent irrelevance for critics of the postwar. The disconnect between his films and contemporary criticism puts into relief the difficulty of articulating the festering wounds on a still-healing national imaginary.

Duvivier's films have always been remarkable for their treatment of social issues. Even before the arrival of sound, his silent adaptation of *Au bonheur des dames* (*Ladies' Delight* [1930]) indicts consumerism and predatory capitalism, and later *Pépé le Moko* (1937) and *La Bandera*'s (*Escape from Yesterday* [1936]) setting in French Africa, use of documentary footage, and focus on characters exiled from metropolitan France raise questions of colonialism and marginality. But perhaps Duvivier's most directly social film of the 1930s is *La Belle équipe* (*They Were Five* [1936]), which deals with an idyllic, cooperatively owned *guinguette*, or country dance hall, that almost fails due to fate and internal competition. It was largely seen by contemporary critics as inspired by leftist coalition, *Le Front populaire*'s focus on social reform, workers, and co-ownership of enterprise (Sadoul, "A propos" 374). Yet if Duvivier and screenwriter Charles Spaak had had their way it would have been a critique of that very trend and its limits, its conditions of possibility in human nature. In their original ending, Jeannot (Jean Gabin) and Charlot (Charles Vanel), who are the only co-owners remaining after a series of deaths and forced departures, kill each other over jealousy for a woman named Gina (Viviane

Romance) (Billard 231). The pessimism of this conclusion met with less than successful box office results and so was swiftly changed to something more positive: Gabin and Vanel together abandon Gina. But the original ending represents an attitude in Duvivier's work that only grows after the war: pessimism about society's potential and an inescapable distrust of others, which is further intensified when it comes to women.

His films' reception among critics during the 30s stands out for the centrality of *noirceur*, but also for the particular way he is thought of as a creator of images. While often condemned for his dark perspective on contemporary France, critics frequently give him credit, not as an artist, but as a skilled technician. Donning his Vinneuil pseudonym, Lucien Rebatet states in 1938: "Nous avons souvent dit notre répulsion pour le romantisme du trottoir, l'ennuyeuse et sordide littérature à laquelle ont sacrifié même de bons ouvriers, comme M. Duvivier dans son vigoureux *Pépé le Moko*" 'We have often expressed our repulsion for the romanticism of the streets, the troubling and sordid literature to which even good workers have sacrificed themselves, such as M. Duvivier in his robust *Pépé le Moko*' (Vinneuil, "*Le Puritain*" 4). Rebatet here pushes once again against Duvivier's negative image of France, but admits he is a respectable artisan who produces quality objects in his chosen trade. Indeed, acknowledgments of his quality as a tradesman become just as widespread as complaints of his pessimism. Bazin notes in 1947 that, "C'est devenu un lieu commun d'écrire que Julien Duvivier n'est décidément qu'un excellent fabricant, un brillant homme de métier" 'It has become commonplace to write that Julien Duvivier is only an excellent artisan, a brilliant craftsman' (qtd. in Niogret 111). This artisan versus artist division, while apparently secondary, puts into relief the contrast between Duvivier's increasing pessimism and the critical shift from the social to the aesthetic because

while the problems about contemporary France raised by his work are increasingly elided as noir, the question of whether Duvivier is an artist or artisan gains more attention.

Any *noirceur* before the war is eclipsed by the brutal cynicism of Duvivier's output afterward. Following the Liberation and his return to France,[47] he charges directly at a bevy of sensitive postwar issues, including antisemitism; sexual power dynamics and revenge; and discord, betrayal, and political diversity in the Resistance. I have chosen this group of issues expressly to highlight three of Duvivier's postwar films that are particularly representative of the negative correlation between his work and postwar criticism: *Panique* (1946), *Voici le temps des assassins* (1954), and *Marie-Octobre* (1959).

As Duvivier's first French work after the war, *Panique* figures notably in the last gasps of a socially oriented film criticism. It also marks the formative stages of postwar national memory. In *Panique*, a Parisian faubourg is readying itself to host a fair when a woman's body is discovered among construction debris. The area's residents recognize her as one of their own: Mlle Noblet. The real killer and his mistress, Alfred (Paul Bernard) and Alice (Viviane Romance) gain the neighborhood's trust and manipulate it into suspecting a local outcast, Désiré Alphonse Hirovich, known and disliked by everyone simply as M. Hire (Michel Simon). Their mean-spirited gossip culminates in scenes of unbelievable cruelty and callousness. An angry mob ransacks his apartment, throws him out of it, beats and humiliates him in public, before finally chasing him onto a roof where, scared and ignorant of what is going on, he falls to his death. Afterward, everyone calmly returns to the fair. The real villains are quietly discovered by the

[47] During the Occupation, Duvivier worked abroad in the United States, directing among other films a remake of *Un carnet de bal* (1937) in *Lydia* (1941) and reuniting with Jean Gabin for *The Impostor* (1944).

police on an amusement ride, where they are allowed to go one more round as the film fades to black over a love song.

Although *Panique* is now a classic of postwar French cinema, it met with horrible press upon release. Jean Vidal stays true to prevailing conceptions of Duvivier when he rails against his negativity yet lauds his workmanship:

> [J]e sais que, bien souvent, j'éprouve devant ses films une espèce de malaise où le dégoût se mêle à l'humiliation […] C'est un univers glacial et sordide, peuplé d'êtres méchants mais sans passion, l'univers « morne, à l'horizon plombé » [sic] du poète maudit. Disons tout de suite que *Panique* est un film de qualité […] Souhaitons pour finir que Julien Duvivier adopte pour son prochain film un sujet digne de son grand talent. (Vidal, "Panique" 5-6)
>
> I know that very often I feel before his films a sort of unease where disgust mixes with humiliation […] It is a cold and sordid universe, populated with beings that are malicious but without passion, the "universe of leaden heaviness"[48] of the accursed poet. Let us say right away that *Panique* is a quality film […] Let us hope, lastly, that Julien Duvivier adopts for his next film a subject worthy of his great talent.

While this appraisal follows the model set out by Rebatet, what sets it apart is the lack of specificity one finds in prewar criticism. As I have shown, Rebatet, and also Sadoul, may write with an acid pen, but both situate their work with respect to contemporary history, for example, the Popular Front or Occupation. In Vidal, however, one laments the film's dark perspective on society yet says nothing about what makes it objectionable.

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[48] "univers morne à l'horizon plombé" is a line taken from Charles Baudelaire's "*De profundis clamavis*," a poem in his *Les Fleurs du mal* (*The Flowers of Evil*) (Baudelaire 62). The English translation is borrowed from James McGowan's translation in the same dual-language volume (Baudelaire 63).

Such ambiguity is significant because *Panique* is patently about mob mentality, social exclusion, and the persecution of minorities. All of these are cruelly demonstrated during a short scene at a bumper car ride. Riding alone, Hire is singled out by everyone for abuse, sacrificed for the sadistic pleasure of the laughing throng of couples who, following the example of Alfred and Alice, relentlessly chase down and collide with his car. This victimization is suggested to be a form of antisemitism. Hire's first and middle name may be French, but his family name, his prominent beard, and misplaced erudition (he delights in speaking obscure tenses) render him a clear stereotype. The very first image of Hire even shows him getting off a bus with "Villejuif" emblazoned on its front. But Vidal and other contemporary critics seem blind to the thinly veiled references to Occupation-era prejudices.[49] An article from *Humanité* outright denies that *Panique* has any relationship to true events: "Nous ne sommes pas du tout l'adversaire des films noirs lorsqu'ils sont vrais […] [m]ais *Panique* est un film faux et ignoble" 'We are not at all against films noirs when they are true […] [b]ut *Panique* is a false and vile film' (Gaillaird 4).

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[49] Recent scholars also sometimes fail to see the importance of antisemitism in *Panique*, even while noting the significance of social exclusion and cultural memory. Niogret writes:

> Julien Duvivier y a abordé des thèmes comme la délation, la xénophobie, le racisme, qui l'ont frappé à son retour des Etats-Unis et lui ont semblé nécessaires à traiter, mais qu'une partie de la société française préférait oublier au sortir d'une guerre et d'une occupation traumatisantes. *Panique* est un drame de la différence qu'une société ne veut pas accepter. Celui qui ne parle pas, dont on ne sait rien, est rejeté, comme ceux venus d'ailleurs (les gitans, les gens du cirque). La mise à mort est l'exorcisme des peurs de la société (Niogret 35)
>
> In the film Julien Duvivier takes up themes like informing, xenophobia, racism, that struck him on his return from the United States and that seemed to him necessary to talk about, but that a part of French society preferred to forget at the end of a traumatizing war and Occupation. *Panique* is a drama about the difference a society does not want to accept. He who does not speak, of whom one knows nothing, is rejected, like those from other backgrounds (gypsies, circus people). Execution is a type of exorcism of societies fears

This is an excellent description, but there is one glaring problem: there are no gypsies in the film, and the only thing close to circus people are fair workers who serve as extras. It is almost as if, even 60 years after the fact, some French critics still have difficulty saying the word "Jew" when it comes to persecution and the Second World War.

Even Duvivier stops short of recognizing the recent mass persecution of Jews as part his film's inspiration: "chacun [dans le quartier] a ses sentiments, son caractère ; mais que survienne un événement surprenant, le quartier fait bloc, le corps social réagit. Il crée alors un « climat » capable d'engendrer les effets les plus surprenants et les plus cruels" 'everyone [in the neighborhood] has one's feelings, one's nature. But when an unexpected event happens, the neighborhood becomes as one. The social body reacts. It then creates a "climate" capable of engendering the most surprising and most cruel effects' (qtd. in Chirat 109). In an interview with *Ciné-monde*, where he admits being drawn to bitter, harsh, and noir themes, Duvivier asks himself, "Que dit *Panique* ?" 'What does *Panique* say?,' but then responds evasively to his own question, "Il dit que les gens ne sont pas gentils, que la foule est imbécile […] j'ai bien l'impression que nous traversons une époque où les gens ne s'aiment pas" 'It says that people are not nice, that the masses are stupid […] I very much have the impression that we are living through a time when people just do not love each other' (qtd. in Desrichard, *Julien Duvivier* 62). One almost gets the impression that Duvivier wants to speak of the Occupation, to scream at what he saw upon his return from Hollywood, but cannot. Although the shift from the social to the aesthetic outlined in Truffaut has not yet happened, one can already glimpse the nascent lacunae, noted earlier in Kanapa, Rey, and Borde and Chaumeton, that become increasingly characteristic of postwar national memory as evidenced in film criticism.

Unlike *Panique*, *Voici le temps des assassins* proved a rare critical success for Duvivier after the war. The film's story is complicated. André Chatelin (played by an aging Jean Gabin) runs "Au rendez-vous des innocents," a respected restaurant in Les Halles, and maintains a father-son relationship with Gérard (Gérard Blain), a medical student who moonlights in the belly of Paris

with his dog, César. One day Catherine (Danièle Delorme) shows up at Chatelin's "Au rendez-vous des innocents" looking for food and a place to live after the recent passing her mother, who happens to be his ex-wife. After he takes Catherine in, she sets about forming parallel relationships with both "father" and "son," playing one off the other, but eventually marrying Chatelin. The spectator soon discovers that all this is a plot devised by Catherine and her mother, who is still, but barely, alive as a conniving drug addict. By marrying Chatelin, they have two simultaneous but alternative strategies: to alienate Gérard from Chatelin so that Catherine alone inherits the latter's wealth, or to inflame Gérard's jealousy and manipulate him into killing Chatelin so that she inherits more quickly. The first plan is foiled when Chatelin discovers Catherine and her mother's scheme, but plan number two soon fails as well because Gérard becomes suspicious. In a panic, Catherine kills Gérard by pushing him, drugged, into the Marne river. In the film's final minutes, Chatelin finds out that she murdered his "son," yet instead of seeking retribution, he passively lets César, who witnessed his owner's demise, take revenge and maul her to death.

Despite their differences, *Panique* and *Voici le temps des assassins* both participate in what film scholars Noël Burch and Geneviève Sellier have called, in the title of their book on the period, *La Drôle de guerre des sexes du cinéma français : 1930-1956* (*The Strange War of the Sexes in French Cinema: 1930-1956*).[50] This describes a trajectory in French cinema according to which films of the thirties are dominated by incestuous father-daughter couples, the Occupation by images of emasculated men and empowered women, and the postwar by the

[50] In Peter Graham's upcoming translation of Burch and Sellier's work (Duke University Press, 2013), he translates the title as *The Battle of the Sexes in French Cinema: 1930-1956*. But Graham's rendition loses the reference to the *Drôle de guerre* (sometimes translated as the Strange/Funny/Phony War), which designates the period following the declaration of war between France, the United Kingdom, and Germany, and the beginning of actual combat.

backlash of men who revenge themselves against diabolical women (Burch and Sellier 13-18).[51] While I have my reservations about applying such a rigid paradigm to 30 years of cinematic output, if this *drôle de guerre* exists, or if one limits oneself to smaller-scale analyses, Duvivier's work proves a powerful illustration. In fact, Burch and Sellier describe him as not only emblematic but central to postwar misogynistic trends (225). Whereas they single out *Panique*, I would argue that *Voici le temps des assassins*, which garners little attention in their book, is the more obvious example: Chatelin and Catherine begin a relationship that reeks of incest since her mother is his ex-wife; Catherine expresses an aggressive sense of self-determination by manipulating Chatelin and Gérard; and finally she winds up paying for it in a gruesome, demeaning, almost subhuman death.

Voici le temps des assassins is also a complicated example in that it appears totally aware of the relationship it constructs between the two lead characters. The stage for such commentary is set by the juxtaposition of a middle-aged Gabin, already revered as a myth, to the very young Délorme, who plays one of the worst *garces* (bitches)[52] in French film history. The waitresses in Chatelin's restaurant as well as in his mother's *guinguette* watch this relationship develop and inevitably fall apart like the film's actual spectators. They lurk constantly in the background, at the edge of the frame, or discreetly intrude into would-be two-shots of him and Catherine. They sometimes even mutter contemptuous commentary about Chatelin's age and his obliviousness to Catherine's plotting. Others simply observe, as the spectator does, the ridiculousness of Gabin

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[51] Although this argument runs throughout Burch and Sellier's book, and structures its three parts, the pages cited provide a lucid summary of this paradigm.

[52] *Garce* is similar to a "femme fatale" insofar as its a character-type in French cinema (Viviane Romance's roles in *La Belle équipe* and *Panique* are other perfect examples). The term is, however, more direct than "femme fatale" in its misogyny because it directly denotes a violent derogatory attitude toward women.

being interested in and duped by a young woman who could be his daughter. The waitresses' eyes glance back and forth between the two characters as if watching an unprecedented yet somehow expected upset in a tennis match. As Niogret puts it, "La confrontation d'un mythe vieillissant et d'une amoralité séduisante confère à ce film d'autant plus de force que tout est développé dans un contexte réaliste où les gestes du drame sont aussi ceux de la vie quotidienne" 'The confrontation of an aging myth and of a seductive amorality confers on this film all the more force in that everything is developed in a realist context where the gestures of drama are also those of everyday life' (47). *Voici le temps des assassins* is unmistakably the noirest film of Duvivier's career, one of his most direct attacks on national cultural myth, current social dynamics, and his most misogynist work. His prewar films pale in comparison.

Given the darkness of the film's socio-sexual politics, its reception among critics and Truffaut in particular is notable for its incongruity. Truffaut, who just two years before the release of *Voice le temps des assassins* denounced in the strongest terms the *noirceur* of postwar French cinema, writes a review whose positivity is perplexing:

> Julien Duvivier a tourné cinquante-sept films. J'en ai vu vingt-trois et j'en ai aimé huit. De tous, *Voici le temps des assassins* me semble le meilleur, celui dans lequel on peut sentir sur tous les éléments : scénario, mise en scène, jeu, photo, musique, etc., un contrôle qui est celui d'un cinéaste parvenu à une totale sûreté de lui-même, et de son métier. Le scénario de *Voici le temps des assassins* est pratiquement irréprochable dans sa construction comme dans sa conception. […] Seul le regard d'un cinéaste, regard qui

> s'exprime en termes de mise en scène, décide de la valeur morale d'un film. (qtd. in Desrichard, *Julien Duvivier* 143-144)[53]
>
> Julien Duvivier has made fifty-seven films. I have seen twenty-three and liked eight. Of all of them, *Voici le temps des assassins* seems to me the best, where one gets a feel for all the elements: screenplay, *mise-en-scène*, acting, cinematography, music, and so on, a control belonging to a director who has total confidence in himself, in his craft. The screenplay of *Voici le temps des assassins* is practically beyond reproach in its construction as in its conception. […] Only the vision of a director, vision that expresses itself through *mise-en-scène*, determines the moral value of a film.

Truffaut's treatment focuses exclusively on the film's aesthetic merit. This is important for three reasons. First, while leaning toward calling Duvivier an artist, he settles with the neutral *cinéaste* and *métier*, thereby perpetuating the image of the director as an artisan instead of an auteur. Second, whereas the look of the director, his "regard," is emphasized, the film's social significance, especially in the case of postwar sexual and generational dynamics, is completely overlooked. Finally, this is all the more significant given the emphasis on and condemnation of certain social commentaries in "Une certaine tendance." Truffaut's neglect of *Voici le temps des assassins*' social dimensions highlights the continuing trend toward the aesthetic in postwar critical trajectories to the detriment of the social. In other words, just a few years after grounding a new conception of cinematic vision by reappropriating social rhetoric on noir, noir as a type of representation of society dissolves into a near auteurist conception of aesthetic form. What proves important in this review is not the humiliating destruction of French cinema's most

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[53] Truffaut's article is quoted at length in Desrichard's monograph on Duvivier, *Julien Duvivier : Cinquante ans de noirs destins* (2001) (143-144). Unfortunately I have not be able to locate the original text from, published in the cultural review, *Arts*. 18 April 1956.

enduring myth of masculinity, the brutal comeuppance against the woman behind it, or its general reference to the settling of accounts after the war. Rather, what matters is Duvivier's control and sureness in the film's conception, construction, *mise-en-scène*, and vision. Truffaut can prove completely blind to the film's unrelenting negativity because, frankly, its social import and testimony do not matter much to criticism any more. What he calls moral value has only to do with *mise-en-scène*, and commentary on the status of the nation is elided entirely in favor of auteurist musings.

If *Panique* and *Voici le temps des assassins* indirectly raise questions about Occupation-era persecution of minorities and volatile postwar dynamics between generations and the sexes, then *Marie-Octobre* is a naked assault on the memory of the Resistance. The entire film takes place one evening when a group of ex-resistants reunites for the first time since the war. They have dinner, reminisce, and pay honor to their fallen leader, who was killed during a Gestapo raid during their last meeting in the very country estate where they now gather. The members (played by Danielle Darrieux, Bertrand Blier, Paul Meurisse, Serge Reggiani, and Lino Ventura, just to name a few) are enjoying their evening when Marie-Hélène (Darrieux), code name Marie-Octobre, reveals that the network and its leader had been betrayed to the Gestapo by one of their own. An effort to remember the night of the raid and to reveal and punish the traitor ensues. Everyone is accused, but Antoine (Reggiani) winds up the guilty party. He sold out the group and its leader out of jealousy for the latter's relationship with Marie-Octobre. They pressure him to execute himself, but she unexpectedly shoots him when he refuses.

The incipit and genre of the film as a closed-door mystery is relatively straightforward, but that it happens fifteen years after the fact is not. The information revealed in the rounds of finger-

pointing is destructive of relationships, reputations, and legacies. During the war, the group's members were black marketeers and two-bit crooks. They sometimes mingled with the enemy, and before the Occupation some had even belonged to pro-fascist political factions. While they all now work in mostly respectable professions as a tax collector, public defender, doctor, entrepreneur, fashion designer, and strip club owner, their questionable backgrounds are on full display. They rip into one another for the entire ninety minutes of the film, destroying the unity of the resistance group and rendering impossible the conception of any one of them as a hero. The inquest is even juxtaposed to a televised wrestling match that itself lasts almost an hour and a half, matching blow for blow and echoing every twist in the narrative with counter shot. *Marie-Octobre* may not have been the first film about the Resistance, but never had a commercial film dealt so directly with its factions, internal disputes, moral ambiguity, and sometimes nefarious origins. The film even referred to investigations happening in the real world: screenwriter and author of the source novel, Jacques Robert admitted to being inspired by the controversy surrounding resistance fighter René Hardy, who was repeatedly accused, but acquitted, of betraying Jean Moulin to Klaus Barbie and the Gestapo (Niogret 90).[54]

While not the critical success that was *Voici le temps des assassins*, nor did *Marie-Octobre* enjoy the negative backlash of *Panique*. The formally conventional film came and went relatively unnoticed, despite its impressive cast and even the provocative nature of its subject. Yet for these reasons *Marie-Octobre* constitutes perhaps the best example of the contrast between Duvivier's investment and film criticism's lack of interest in recent sociocultural history. Of all Duvivier's works it most directly concerns memories of the Occupation, but its unrelenting

[54] An account of René Hardy's alleged involvement in the arrest and death of Jean Moulin can be found in Jean-Pierre Azéma's *Jean Moulin : le politique, le rebelle, le résistant* (400-425).

cynicism about the Resistance as one of the pillars of postwar national identity is all but ignored by critics. In what little critical attention the work did get, critics choose instead to emphasize its formal structure and efficient production. Reviews are often limited to its minimal, classical construction, its respect of the three unities of action, place, and time: one event, one room, one night (Moullet, qtd. in Desrichard, *Julien Duvivier* 146-47).[55] In short, critics content themselves with the old tale about Duvivier the artisan, capable of cranking out decent, if not sometimes mediocre, films cheaply and quickly—in this case less than a month for both shooting and postproduction (Niogret 60-61). Well-made, but with little formal innovation, its reception is neutral, Duvivier's work turned into that of a pulp Racine. As social commentary and dark representations of the nation slide out of view, there is nothing much to say, except to continue the refrain of Duvivier, *bon ouvrier*, the good worker.

I would like to round off this brief survey of Duvivier's reception in postwar criticism with a few final examples. *Positif*, home to Borde and Chaumeton and counterweight to the New Wave critics writing for *Cahiers du cinéma* and *Arts*, is particularly harsh throughout the latter days of Duvivier's career. He is treated as a non-factor in the postwar and later the New Wave cinematic landscape, as exemplified in the journal's anonymous blurb on *Chair de poule* (*Goosebumps* [1963]), a French thriller situated in America: "Duvivier s'essaie une fois de plus au suspense et [Robert] Hossein fait ce qu'il peut pour avoir l'air terrorisé. Même en se forçant le spectateur n'y parvient pas. Catherine Rouvel est bien mignonne, la pauvre" 'Duvivier tries his hand one more time at suspense, and [Robert] Hossein does what he can to look terrified. Even forcing oneself, the spectator does not get there. Catherine Rouvel is quite cute, the poor girl' ("Films sortis"

[55] Original article in *Arts* 29, April 1959. As with Truffaut's review of *Voici le temps des assassins*, also quoted at length in Desrichard, *Julien Duvivier : Cinquant ans de noirs destins*, I have not been able to locate the original article.

70).[56] Also in *Positif*, Duvivier's rejection from trending critical foci had been building since even before Truffaut's seminal *Cahiers* article. In 1952, Jean-Paul Marquet compares him to Jean Vigo[57] on the grounds of personal, artistic—not social—value, stating of Duvivier's work that it has no soul before then asking, "Mais Duvivier en a-t-il une ?" 'But does Duvivier have one?' (3).[58] The director and his representations of the current state of the nation are belittled to the level of the trivial, incapable of having any value whatsoever. Upon Duvivier's death in late 1967, film journals find little to say about him as a director of social films or as an artist. Instead, and perhaps only in an indifferent appeal to propriety, criticism blandly evokes in epitaph Duvivier's skill as a technician one last time:

> Jamais géniale, souvent médiocre, parfois insupportable […] l'énorme production de celui que la presse étrangère […] tint longtemps pour aussi « valable » que MM. Carné, [René] Clair et [Jacques] Feyder—reste émaillé de quelque films et passages qui, compte tenu de sa capacité technique à « ficeler » lestement quoi que ce soit, méritent d'éviter l'oubli. ("Encyclopédie permanente…" 50)
>
> Never brilliant, often mediocre, sometimes intolerable […] the enormous output of the one whom the foreign press […] has long considered just as "worthy" as MM. Carné,

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[56] *Chair de poule* is, like the James Hadley Chase novel on which it is based (*Come Easy, Go Easy* [1960]), a rewrite of James M. Cain's *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1934). Yet its setting in a Franco-American gas station that gets visits from traveling basketball teams raises questions of the influence of American culture and Hollywood. A further example of such "French-American" film would be the adaptation of Boris Vian/Vernon Sullivan's *J'irai cracher sur vos tombes* [*I will spit on your grave* (Vian 1946; Michel Gast 1959)] which is set in the United States and deals with issues of racism and sexual violence.

[57] Any comparison between Vigo and Duvivier strikes me as ridiculous, not only due to the volume and type of films they made, but the social, cultural, and historical context of their films' production.

[58] Staiger and Hess mention that the shift to auteurism was also a shift to spiritualism, although they locate spiritualism primarily in the *Cahiers* critics (Staiger 12; Hess, "*La Politique des auteurs*, II").

> [René] Clair, and [Jacques] Feyder— remains marked by films and parts of films that, given his technical ability to nimbly "pull together" whatever, deserve not to be forgotten.

What *Panique*, *Voici le temps des assassins*, *Marie-Octobre*, and their reception point to is the privileged position Julien Duvivier should occupy in postwar French cinema. Contemporary criticism's characterization of him as a mere craftsman and its blindness to his work's timely commentary on flawed, postwar national imaginaries put into relief both dominant critical frameworks and their lacunae. Duvivier is a perfect case study of the role of the social in film criticism because he represents a blind spot himself. The hindsight with which one can now examine Duvivier within the postwar period is, admittedly, beneficial if not essential. Unwillingness to recognize references to antisemitism in *Panique*, sexual and generational tensions following the Occupation in *Voici le temps des assassin*, and the portrait of disintegrating myths of the Resistance in *Marie-Octobre*—similar to the critics with whom I began his chapter, fifty to seventy years of distance help these objects of critical resistance surge forward not despite but because of the difficulty they describe, namely, the task of remembering the Occupation and re-imagining France in its wake. Relevant insofar as irrelevant to contemporary criticism, then, Duvivier is the elephant in the room without which postwar French national cinema and criticism is unthinkable. He defines the other side of French film after the Liberation, contrasts and clarifies the paradigm shifts in postwar criticism at the same time as his work, as noir, outlines what that shift obscures in its effort to maintain particular forms of national identity. This is why, in the end, Duvivier is perhaps the noirest director in French cinema history.

Casting the critical archive in its vastness not as a static block but as a discursive corpus that reflects on itself while transforming itself, noir emerges from the Occupation looking quite different from noir before the Liberation. If noir of the late 1930s and Occupation marks what critics protest against in films seen as representations of France, then in the Occupation's shadow noir labels the site where difficult issues of the postwar French imaginary and collective memory, such as fascism, collaboration, and racism are elided. Yet along with this resistance, postwar noir criticism is equally marked by the tendency to draw attention to its omissions and rhetorical contradictions. This combination of forgetting and remembering that defines postwar noir criticism allows noir as a way of thinking national identity to fold back onto film criticism as a whole, bringing apparently unrelated areas of criticism under its discursive lens. Noir and the critical memory it implies reinvigorates and defamiliarizes well-known critical debates, like Truffaut's polemics, and rediscovers neglected figures, like Duvivier, infusing them with new historical perspective. From the parapraxes and projections between France and the United States in the reception of American noir, Truffaut's redefinition of national cinema through the auteur and against the social perspective his rhetoric nevertheless implies, and Duvivier's negative integrality to a critical trend of sticking one's head in the sand—noir becomes not just what is undesirable in discussions of the nation but what must be made absent the better to reinforce dominant versions of French postwar identity and collective memory. Noir accentuates in its darkness that which is obscured in postwar French national cinema but also and more broadly the history of France after the Liberation.

CHAPTER III

MYTH AND JEAN-PIERRE MELVILLE'S CINEMA OF PROCESS: NARRATIVES OF RESISTANCE

On a desolate, quiet street somewhere in metropolitan France a man waits alone. In the distance, another approaches. Without exchanging a word or a glance a suitcase changes hands. While the second figure walks off, his footsteps fading away offscreen, the first carefully opens the valise. He peels away layers of clothing and issues of Occupation-era newspapers *Combat* and *Libération* to reveal a book: Vercors' *Le Silence de la mer* (*The Silence of the Sea* [1942]), a short novel published secretly by the Resistance during the Nazi Occupation of France.[59] This is the opening scene from Jean-Pierre Melville's first feature film, released in 1949 and adapted from Vercors' text—but these inaugural images are of Melville's own invention.

They also launched a recent retrospective of Melville's work at the Cinémathèque française in the fall of 2010. More than an obvious choice as the beginning of the beginning for the *cinéaste*, Cinémathèque director, Serge Toubiana, opened the series by arguing that while the film is different from Melville's better-known crime films inspired by American noir, this scene contains the seeds of an unmistakable Melvillian style. The focus on the passing of an action, its process and duration, and its having gone through the implied stages of planning, rehearsal, and finally execution combine with the motifs of the Occupation and the Resistance to anticipate much of his later work.

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[59] Vercors is the pseudonym of pacifist-turned-resistant Jean Bruller. With Pierre de Lescure, Bruller founded the initially clandestine and now famous *Les Éditions de minuit* in 1941, of which *Le Silence de la mer* was the first publication in 1942. A concise history of Bruller's involvement in the Resistance and of the publication of *Le Silence de la mer* can be found in Frances M. Edge's half-historical and half-literary monograph on the work, *Vercors: Le Silence de la mer* (2004) (15-38).

Toubiana's observations participate in two popular approaches to Melville. First, since at least the past few decades many scholars have been interested in his unique representation of action and time, a concentration on the unfolding of action. Film scholars and critics have given it a diverse set of names. Colin McArthur calls it a "cinema of process,"[60] Ginette Vincendeau "baroque minimalism," and most recently Toubiana writes, in an edited volume released to supplement the retrospective: "Jean-Pierre Melville est considéré comme *le* cinéaste français du polar, donc du film d'action. Or il me semble que sa problématique intime et formelle est moins celle de filmer l'Action que le Temps. Disons pour aller vite : *le Temps de l'Action*" 'Jean-Pierre Melville is considered *the* French director of the crime thriller, therefore of the action film. Now, it seems to me that his personal and formal problematic is less that of filming Action than Time. To put it quickly, let us say: the *Time of Action* (McArthur, "Mise-en-scène degree zero" 191; Vincendeau, *Jean-Pierre Melville* 188; Toubiana 88). Second, much attention has also been devoted to the memory of World War Two, particularly the Resistance and its role in Melville's retelling of the history of Occupation France. Vincendeau's *Jean-Pierre Melville: An American in Paris* (2003) devotes a whole chapter to the issue, and Olivier Bohler's documentary *Sous le nom de Melville* (*Code Name Melville* [2008]) is entirely about the influence of the war and Melville's time in the Resistance (Vincendeau, *Jean-Pierre Melville* 49-98). "Melville" was, in fact, Jean-Pierre Grumbach's alias in the Resistance (Vincendeau, *Jean-Pierre Melville* 6-8). What makes Toubiana's comments on *Le Silence de la mer*'s opening scene noteworthy, however, is that they suggest that the representation of action and the Resistance in Melville are

[60] McArthur also mentions the cinema of process, although he has yet to give it a name, almost thirty years before his article (2000) on Melville's *Le Samouraï* (*The Samurai* [1967]) in a chapter of his *Underworld U.S.A.* (1971) devoted to the director. There he briefly mentions Melville's tendency to film the "*process* of doing things," of showing action in "every detail" (*Underworld U.S.A* 170-71).

two preoccupations that, instead of being separate investments, have a lot to offer one another because they bring together questions of noir, cinematic form, and national identity.

What I am after here is not another auteurist reading where the cinema of process would reflect Melville's experience of the war—nosography or biography by way of textual analysis. Rather what makes the connection between the cinema of process and the role of the Resistance in French national, historical consciousness fascinating is precisely the tension they share between the continuous elaboration of and the tendency to fix meaning. The guiding question in this chapter will thus be: how do these combined processes engage with the negotiation of postwar national identity in noir criticism and transpose this discourse into film form and story? To respond, it is first necessary to define the structure and goals of the cinema of process and then to outline how it interacts with and problematizes dominant versions of collective memory.

To get things moving, I will provide a few provisional answers. The same features of the cinema of process that allow Melville's films to grapple with issues of cinematic time and movement also enable them to engage with memories of the war and the Resistance. This is because the cinema of process involves, at filmic and diegetic levels, a *mise en abyme* of the processes of *répétition*, which in French means both repetition and rehearsal, and *mise-en-scène* through which representation, narrative, and the Resistance all emerge as different forms of myth, and where myth is understood as the separation of an idea from the conditions of its emergence. Certainly, a cinema of process and memories of war do not always appear with one another, and they can be read separately. A preoccupation with the form of action comparatively dominates Melville's filmography, most notably in the latter part of his career, where the cinema of process reaches peaks of intensity in crime movies. But that an investment in process initially

emerges and continues to converge with an interest in histories of the war and Resistance cannot be overlooked. Indeed it is in this connection that a cinema of process proves most compelling. Because as it begins to break down, so does myth, and this collapse is all the more significant when it happens in stories about the war and national history. In *Silence* and most spectacularly in *L'Armée des ombres* (*Army of Shadows* [1969]), Melville explores both wartime experience and film's capacity for narrative representation ultimately to question the very possibility of remembering or recounting the Resistance at all. It is in this respect that the cinema of process engages with noir discourse, for the former mimics the later's struggle to define national identity via the process of separation.

In other words—and this will be the hypothesis guiding this and the following, final chapter—if noir is used in criticism to sustain one's conception of how the nation ought to be represented and is deployed against films that do not conform to that representation, if noir in criticism thus serves a conservative function, then those films deemed "noir" expose the artificiality of that ideal. The thwarted effort to present a unified story of Resistance through representational continuity thus situates Melville's work with the larger discourse of noir because both involve an interplay between continually negotiating and trying to fix as myth the nation and cultural memory in the postwar era. Yet while the cinema of process is evident across his filmography, only in his films about the Occupation, and not those traditionally thought of as noir, that is his *polars*, does it fully engage with and react to what the two previous chapters have outlined as noir.

Toward a Cinema of Process: Two Levels of Articulation

So what is a cinema of process? Like noir, I take it up as a pseudo readymade concept with the intention to break it apart and remake it. While it already appears under different guises elsewhere, it often remains on the level of a stylistic attribute, referring to the representation of real-time or the mere impression of real-time due to minimal yet carefully paced *mise-en-scène* (McArthur, "Mise-en-scène degree zero" 191; Vincendeau, *Jean-Pierre Melville* 162, 187). Toubiana constitutes an exception because for him this process is deeply evocative of that involved in filmmaking in the painstaking progression of an action from its conception or writing ("Temps de l'Idée"), to its planning and rehearsing ("Temps de l'Espace"), and finally to its realization ("Temps de l'action") (89-91). I believe, however, that a cinema of process calls for further development not only because it echoes filmmaking, but because it signifies a particular mode of filmmaking, of cinematic narrative, and of history as national myth. If I appropriate McArthur's term due to its efficacy in denoting the process of becoming in time and space as the key feature of Melvillian action, then I also build upon Toubiana's metaphor of filmmaking to understand the cinema of process on two simultaneous levels: the unfolding of action *on* film and *in* a film. At its heart, the cinema of process is always an echo, a *mise en abyme* of processes.

On the one hand are the *filmic, structural process* of *how* something is represented on film. This process is constituted in two directions. First, filmic process touches on the *mise-en-scène* of the film proper, which I understand as the planning and organization of the profilmic,

everything before the camera, and of how the camera moves around within it.[61] Second, filmic process relates to the organization of the images themselves. This structure of *repetition* involves classical montage, but also and more fundamentally the material conditions of cinema, the succession of images. Together, editing and film's material conditions create the discursive unity through which a diegesis inheres, that is, the impression of spatial and temporal continuity out of discontinuous images. This filmic, discursive paradox can be seen in conventions of classical continuity editing, where spatial elements are repeated across distinct shots, and in the succession of different frames to create flowing change within a static shot.[62] Consequently, and against McArthur's notion of real time, this means that even in the sequence shot real-time is only apparent because it is technically impossible. What Vincendeau's corrective of McArthur emphasizes, however, is that the "*feeling*" of real-time becomes possible when the impression of diegetic unity is amplified by the sort of filmic *mise-en-scène* a sequence shot requires (Vincendeau, *Jean-Pierre Melville* 187). An impression of real-time becomes possible when such techniques tie it to movement and force the filmic process to approach its spatiotemporal-representational limits. The sequence shot is only an indirect image of time because it paradoxically emphasizes that the unity of movement and duration are only realizable through a

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[61] While my approach indirectly takes its inspiration from André Gaudreault, he actually distinguishes between the organization of the profilmic as "mise en scène" and the subsequent act of filming, which is defined separately as "mise en cadre," or how things enter and leave a moving frame (*Du littéraire au filmique* 118-122).

Although his narratological schema necessitates that *mise-en-scène* and *mise-en-cadre* be distinguished from one another, my approach does not require such differentiations. As indicated by the definition I have offered—the organization of the profilmic *and* how the camera moves around within it—I use *mise-en-scène* to denote the organization of everything that occurs prior to the postproduction phase. For the profilmic already contains the hypothetical and, more often than not, the literal trajectory set out for camera movement (tracks, blocking, etc.).

[62] For this level, Gaudreault employs a third term: "mise en chaîne," relating to how distinct images are articulated with one another (*Du littéraire au filmique* 118-122)

multiplicity, a sequence of superimposed yet inseparable shots (Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement Image* 25-26).

On the other hand there are the *diegetic, semantic processes* of *what* a film represents. While the structural process relates to the making of a film, the diegetic has to do with the thematization of *mise-en-scène* and repetition in the film and so is even more crucial to identifying the cinema of process. Together, *mise-en-scène* and repetition become the principle elements or dominants around which the film story organizes itself. What else could be more natural in cinema than the representation of carefully designed and executed heists, hits, alibis or fake crime scenes? Planning and plotting, explanations and executions: these are all various forms of systematic complexity, of "*mise-en-scène*" that necessitate "*répétition*," which in French denotes both repetition and rehearsal.[63] These conventional semantic elements of crime movies cannot help but recall actual film making, even in some cases the *metteur en scène*, the master of *répétition*, the director.[64] Detailed action requires detailed representation, and so the elaboration of gesture and time through that gesture amplifies itself as in an echo chamber. At the height of the cinema of process, the spectator no longer thinks of *mise-en-scène* or repetition and rehearsal as static ideas, but experiences them as ideas become processes that are akin to gerunds, that is, verbs masquerading as nouns: *mettant en scène* [staging], *répétant* [repeating].

The interaction and *mise en abyme* between filmic and diegetic processes in the larger cinema of process can be demonstrated through a singular example from *Le Deuxième souffle* (*Second*

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[63] Henceforth, "repetition" will be used to refer to something that is generally repetitive, while "répétition" will be used to speak about aspects of films that combine repetition and rehearsal.

[64] Vincendeau makes a similar argument in relation to *Bob le flambeur* (*Bob the Gambler* [1956]) : "Melville, as he will more explicitly in his later gangster films, deploys the heist as a metaphor for film-making, with its planning, timing, almost storyboarding and rehearsing. And, like film-making, robbery is teamwork—with, however, a clear figure at the head" (*Jean-Pierre Melville* 113).

Wind [1966]). Toward the beginning, a shootout occurs at a Parisian restaurant owned by Manouche (Christine Fabréga) and run by Jacques le Notaire (Raymond Loyer). Jacques is killed before the barkeep, Alban (Michel Constantin), can shoot back at the assailants, who soon flee. The customers leave shortly thereafter, along with most of the staff, who are dismissed by Alban. Only he, the other barkeep, the valet, and Manouche remain once the police arrive. Enter Commissaire Blot (Paul Meurisse) and the beginning of an extraordinary sequence shot.[65] For the entire length of the take, instead of interrogating the witnesses, since he knows they will not be forthcoming with any information, Blot recites their would-be testimony in detail back to them. Working the space and characters gathered around the bar, Blot ironically supposes that Alban did not shoot at anyone, that the other barkeep was too scared to see any of the assailants' faces, that the valet heard nothing, and that there were not any customers or other staff to witness the event anyway.

Because Blot recounts a fictitious event that has not happened, one gets the sense that he explains the scene *for* the witnesses just as much as *to* them, that is, much as a director would rehearse an upcoming sequence to his actors and crew. Everyone stands motionless as if on a set while Blot maneuvers around the room under the constant attention of the camera and expounds an elaborate but fake *mise-en-scène* he already knows and refuses to buy. The cinema of process is here articulated through action and words, at once gestural and verbal, and it accentuates itself through the irony of the Commissaire's monologue. His movement and speech, moreover, are addressed to an offscreen audience opposite the bar in a dining room full of empty seats and half-

[65] There are two "sequence" shots within the entire sequence at the restaurant. The first starts with the first images of the dining room and cuts off at the rival gangsters' ambush. The shootout and immediate aftermath are relayed through a series of short shots, until the arrival of Blot and beginning of the sequence shot examined in this paragraph.

eaten dinners. There are only four witnesses left, and none of them are in the dining room. These seats are thus places that the spectator might occupy, and the scene Blot recounts functions as a substitute for the one the spectator would see if police procedures were followed as usual. When Blot and his assistant tell this offscreen, fantom group of witnesses not to skip town without first informing the police, it is no great leap to suppose that he speaks to the spectator—for we, too, just saw everything. Character as witness, spectator as witness—the double nature of his monologue's audience renders the scene an elementary instance of diegetic *mise-en-scène* and echoes with Toubiana's concepts of the *Temps de l'Idée* and the *Temps de l'Espace*, writing and rehearsal. The exception is that instead of working toward the actual event, a real interrogation, it functions as its fictitious, virtual replacement.

The scene's filmic quality, its representation through a sequence shot, proves equally important in marking it as a cinema of process. The shot unfolds in a congested space, with the camera panning, zooming, and tracking inches forward, backward, and to the side while following Blot's movements in 360 degrees of space. The meticulous set organization, blocking, and rehearsal required to pull off such a scene is a testament to Melville's skill at filmic *mise-en-scène*. Yet beyond a virtuosity akin to that of a heist, alibi, or frame-up, the value of the shot lies in the sheer lack of roughened form, that is, its resistance to drawing attention to itself or making perception difficult.[66] This does not mean that the scene does not draw any attention to itself at all—as I have demonstrated it is dominated by tropes of *mise-en-scène* and *répétition* as rehearsal. The point is that the illusion of experiencing the sequence shot's signified—real-time, spatiotemporal unity—remains intact, but that it is simultaneously and, echoing Blot's

[66] I borrow the term "roughened form" from Kristin Thompson, who in her *Breaking the Glass Armor* draws it from Russian Formalism and Viktor Shklovsky's notion of defamiliarization, elaborated in his celebrated essay "Art as Technique" (Thompson 36-37; Shklovsky 12-13, 18-19).

monologue, ironically threatened by its very smoothness of form. What is constantly onscreen addresses what is constantly offscreen. Blot directs his speech at the space of the dining room, the empty seats for imaginary spectator-surrogates. As such, the spectator is made not only to read between the lines of the monologue, but also to feel the absences both beyond and cutting into the individual frames of the sequence shot. Having so seamlessly captured everything before the camera, the scene glaringly (and necessarily) leaves out everything behind it and suggests everything in-between.

This scene's use of the sequence shot details a vivid representation of the relationship between filmic and diegetic processes. What is depicted is Blot's *mise-en-scène* as a replacement for a would-be event, the witnesses' false testimony. Yet the very irony of substituting this scene for the virtual one that never happens is that Blot's exposition outlines by omission and replacement the testimony the witnesses refuse to give. This irony is perfectly reflected by the scene's structural aspects because the sequence shot paradoxically emphasizes the disconnect in its own relationship to the profilmic by incorporating the offscreen into the diegesis. Both Blot's speech and the sequence shot play at the boundaries of defamiliarization within the gap between what the spectator sees and what the image signifies. As a result, the efforts to fix the crime scene and the profilmic are deferred, as in a limit function, by the processes on which they depend, and the cinema of process demonstrates both the crime scene and profilmic to be empty shells or myths of themselves.

The Cinema of Process and Myth: **Répétition, Mise-en-scène**

On both diegetic and filmic levels, the cinema of process has two means of expression, *répétition* and *mise-en-scène,* through which the process of action plays with the way it signifies itself in time and space. Within film stories, a heist exists not in the moment of its execution but as a conceptual result of the totality of its rehearsals plus its final execution; from an ulterior point of view an alibi or frame-up leave clues that signify alternative stories; and Blot's monologue recounts one situation while outlining another. *Répétition* and *mise-en-scène* thematize and expose the conditions for filmic movement and narrative. But just as they are the mechanisms through which one approaches the myths of cinematic form and forges false histories, they also reveal that the cinema of process participates in two broader conditions for myth: the decontextualized permanence of myth and the synecdochical potential of pure signifying form. In other words, myth *qua* myth is subtracted from its process of becoming through *répétition*, and mythic narratives rely on a *mise-en-scène* that empties signifiers of their content to make them pliable to one's will. Like the relationship between noir and the nation, each mechanism involves a certain type of detachment. So when the cinema of process combines with Melville's films about the Resistance, they participate in yet question the conditions for a postwar French national identity that is based on it.

Répétition

Le Samouraï (*The Samurai* [1967]) is divided into three acts: hit man Jef Costello's (Alain Delon) construction of an alibi leading up to a job, the Commissaire's (François Périer) interrogation and pursuit of Jef, and finally, Jef's failure and death during another job. The third act is largely a repetition of the first because Jef follows the same sequence of actions in both: he

steals a car, has its plates changed, procures a gun, and asks Jeanne, a friend, to corroborate his alibi. While the last third of the film may be a copy of the first, both can be seen as the latest instances of a simple, frequent routine. In the first act, Jef steals a car by trying all the combinations on a massive key chain until the motor starts, his fingers operating independently of his body and his gaze peering unflinchingly though the windshield. Soon after, an unnamed man silently switches the license plates without being asked, and at the click of Jef's fingers he hands him a gun in exchange for cash. Jeanne agrees to help without asking a single question, commenting only that she likes it when he needs her. Even the camera anticipates Jef's every movement. Not only is the third act a repetition of the first, then, but the first itself is a reoccurrence, just another iteration in a larger series extending back into the indeterminate prehistory of the film. The double meaning in French of "*répétition*" is entirely appropriate here, for each instance proves both a *repetition* of a preceding instance and a *rehearsal* of one to follow:

> L'homme n'avait, à aucun moment, précipité ses mouvements, et pourtant il avait terminé sa besogne en quelque minutes. Il avait opéré avec son habituelle nonchalance, l'œil inexpressif. Il semblait que sa pensée devançait l'instant présent : chacun de ses gestes avait été conçu avant même qu'il n'entre dans le logement. Maintenant, tout s'accomplissait comme cela devait s'accomplir, c'est-à-dire comme il l'avait prévu. Pour [lui], le présent, et même le futur, immédiat, étaient du passé. Tout était bâti, minuté, vécu d'avance, sans faille. Et jamais, de mémoire d'homme, [il] ne s'était trompé… (Lesou 42)

> At no moment had the man hurried his movements, and yet he had finished the job in a few minutes. He had operated with his usual nonchalance, his eye expressionless. It seemed that his thoughts anticipated/were ahead of the present moment: each of his movements had been conceived even before he entered the apartment. Now everything accomplished itself as it should have, that is to say, as he had planned it. For [him], the present and even the immediate future were in the past. Everything was constructed, timed, lived in advance, flawless. And never, in anyone's memory, had [he] made a mistake

Although this passage comes from the source novel for another Melville film, *Le Doulos* (*The Fingerman* [novel: Pierre V. Lesou, 1957; film: 1962]), and refers to that narrative's main character, Silien, its relegation of a majority of his action to the pluperfect describes just as perfectly Jef in *Le Samouraï*. Beyond illustrating the pervasiveness of a particular conception of action in Melville's work and even in its inspiration, the description draws attention to one of the essential characteristics of repetitive action in the cinema of process. In *Le Samouraï* as in *Le Doulos*, action proves organized and automatized to such a degree that the context of its unfolding becomes insignificant and fades away into a distant past. Approaching habitual action, *répétition* "passes out of time" to exist in an atemporal continuous tense, engulfed by its own isolated duration (Bergson 95). Whence, perhaps, the combination of nostalgia and future that is also part of Melvillian style and manifest in *Le Samouraï* through the mix of contemporary Paris, Jef's outdated costume, and temporally ambiguous interior decor. The very first shot of the film, a dolly zoom that simultaneously tracks backward and zooms in, underscores this unique positioning in time and space, existing both in proximity and distance.

Répétition thus plays on the decontextualized permanence of myth. It references and is conceived in the past, expands and shapes experience in the present, and allows glimpses into the future (Lévi-Strauss 231).[67] This mythic temporality and the creation of mythic space are fundamentally due to the structure of *répétition*. Like the relationship between individual film frames and their accumulation, no iteration proves any more authentic than any other. Indeed *répétition*'s product exceeds the sum of its constitutive parts and through its becoming aims at the obliteration their spatiotemporal individualities. It represents a process whose task is to annihilate the memory of its trace. Because the particularity of any given situation loses its significance, *répétition* is tied not to difference, as a Deleuzian paradigm might have it, nor even to the memory of specific moments perpetuated in the general, but to the in-differentiation and de-contextualization of myth (Deleuze, *Différence et répétition* 7-8). Like cinematic time, space, and movement, these are the conditions in which myth surges forward: "La répétition a une fonction propre, qui est de rendre manifeste la structure du mythe" '*Répétition* has a particular function, which is to make the structure of myth manifest' (Lévi-Strauss 254). What, then, would be more natural than a film, and specifically a film marked in its story and form by *répétition*, to lay the groundwork for myth? *Répétition* is the very means by which myth becomes readable as such, and so Jef Costello is not simply an example of a generic, conventionally noir character—he is the shell of the very thing.

Mise-en-scène

[67] Lévi-Strauss makes the point that this makes myth like political ideology (231). One might venture, however, that the difference between one and the other is minimal.

Whereas *répétition* addresses the articulation and elaboration of action, *mise-en-scène* relates to how it is received as narrative. In other words, if the former expresses the writing of the cinema of process, the latter describes how it is read. Both are thus closely related to one another and often found together, but they constitute different types of support for myth. The prime examples for *mise-en-scène* are *Le Doulos* and again *Le Samouraï*, for in both the central characters manipulate the traces of diegetic *mise-en-scènes* to create false narratives.

In one of *Le Doulos*' most memorable sequences, Silien (Jean-Paul Belmondo) constructs a false crime scene to help his friend, Faugel (Serge Reggiani). He kills two rival gangsters, but arranges the scene to look like they killed each other over a set of jewels that were originally stolen by Faugel. Wearing what looks like editing gloves, he makes sure that their fingerprints are not only on the stolen goods but also on the guns used to kill them. For the spectator, the sequence is a spectacular frame-up, an alibi from which the signs of Silien's participation are completely erased. For the police, however, it signifies a murder scene, one that we know did not actually happen.[68]

Jef's alibi in *Le Samouraï* works in a similar but more concentrated fashion. After the initial hit, Jef returns to Jeanne's building minutes before the time he would leave according to their story. Instead of going inside her apartment, he waits just outside the door for the arrival of M. Wiener, a client or friend (the difference is not clear) of Jeanne's. Once Wiener arrives, Jef quits

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[68] Taking to extremes the *mise en abyme* nature of the cinema of process, this sequence represents in miniature a dominant feature of the film as a whole. Indeed the entire film could be considered a fake crime scene organized by the director. Until the end, the spectator is led to interpret from visual and editorial cues that Silien is the informant and origin of Faugel's troubles. In a sense, Melville frames Silien. This, however, would entail assuming Silien's innocence and accepting as true his revelation of the "real" sequence of events in the penultimate scene. But since the spectator is so easily misled by the director, and since Silien has proved himself also adept at subterfuge, the supposition of any "real story" begs its own question. In this way, *Le Doulos* announces more directly the problems one encounters in *L'Armée des ombres*, as I will demonstrate shortly.

the building, brushing past him as if just then leaving Jeanne. During the subsequent interrogation, the Commissaire aims to discredit Wiener's testimony of having seen Jef and thus disprove the his alibi by making him exchange his trench coat and fedora with other men in a lineup, hopefully making it more difficult for Wiener to identify him. Despite these efforts, Wiener recognizes not only Jef's face, but his coat and hat, reassembling the look and reaffirming the alibi. The fragments are pieced together to create a narrative that both did and did not happen, constructing a false sense of unity. As the spectator knows and the Commissaire comes to suspect, Jef was indeed present, but only insofar as he was also absent, that is to say, not in Jeanne's building the way Wiener thinks he was.

The difficulty posed by the set-pieces in *Le Doulos* and *Le Samouraï* involves not the evidence, the clues themselves, but their function as traces of something else. After all, clues are but signifiers calling out for a lost signified, fragments of narrative discourse begging the reader to reconstruct a larger sequence of actions from them. As synecdochical indexes, they possess something like the "irrational power" of the cinematic image to represent, regardless of its ambiguity, the existence of an event in time and space (Bazin, "L'Ontologie de l'image photographique" 13-14).[69] But as much as the clue echoes the structure of signification that

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[69] Bazin writes, "Quelles que soient les objections de notre esprit nous sommes obligés de croire à l'existence de l'objet représenté, effectivement re-présenté, c'est-à-dire, rendu présent dans le temps and dans l'espace. La photographie bénéficie d'un transfert de réalité de la chose sur sa reproduction" 'Whatever the objections of our critical mind, we must believe in the existence of the object represented, indeed re-presented, that is, made present in time and space. The photograph benefits from a transfer of reality from the thing to its reproduction' (Bazin, "L'Ontologie de l'image photographique" 13-14).

undergirds film narrative—if not of narrative discourse in any form whatsoever[70]—*mise-en-scène*'s structure exposes another condition for myth.

This is because the alibis designed by Jef and Silien take advantage of the "pure signifying function" of the clue, which through its simultaneous readiness for and emptiness in signification assumes the grammar of what Roland Barthes calls "mythic speech" (*Mythologies* 114):

> the ubiquity of the signifier in myth exactly reproduces the physique of the *alibi* (which is, as one realizes, a spatial term): in the alibi too, there is a place which is full and one which is empty, linked by a relation of negative identity ("I am not where you think I am; I am where you think I am not"). […] And there never is any contradiction, conflict, or split between meaning and the form: they are never in the same place. (*Mythologies* 123)[71]

The *mise-en-scène* of a well-executed alibi empties the clue of its history, of its meaning, and wields it as pure index. It effaces its own process. So while detaching the clue from the process or story that left it, its synecdochical potential for narrative remains in place, "call[ing] for a signification to fill it" (*Mythologies* 117-118). The guns, jewels, and bodies strewn on the floor

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[70] This is essentially the argument made by Tzvetan Todorov in his essay, "The Typology of Detective Fiction," where he contends that detective narratives have two story levels. The first story, the investigation, is the text followed by the reader, but the second, the crime, is absent, left to the main character of the first story, the detective, to reconstruct or read himself. In this way, all detective narratives are essentially about narrative itself (44-46). Peter Brooks reprises a similar argument in his *Reading for the Plot* (1984) (25, 34).

[71] The passage on myth and the alibi is not the only place where Barthes draws a connection between myth and the duplicitous, or the covert:

> [Myth] assumes the look of a generality: it stiffens, makes itself look neutral and innocent. […] On the surface of language something has stopped moving: the use of the signification is here, hiding behind the fact, and conferring on it a notifying look; but at the same time, the fact paralyses the intention, gives it something like a malaise producing immobility: in order to make it innocent, it freezes it. This is because myth is speech *stolen and restored*. Only, speech which is restored is no longer quite that which was stolen: when it was brought back, it was not put exactly in its place. It is this brief act of larceny, this moment taken for a surreptitious faking, which gives mythical speech its benumbed look. (*Mythologies* 125)

of a nightclub in *Le Doulos*, Jef's hat, coat, and countenance engrained on Wiener's memory in *Le Samouraï*—these clues are all real signifiers because they undoubtedly refer to something, to some event. But estranged from the conditions of their emergence, they rise together to the level of myth in that they can be filled with and made to recount certain narratives.[72]

Répétition and *mise-en-scène*'s broad engagement with the conditions for myth, its freezing of a series of specificities into a decontextualized unit and ability to create empty signifiers hungry for narrative satisfaction, echoes with those underlying the effort to outline national identity at the heart of noir critical discourse. The previous two chapters have shown that there is a tension in how French film critics wield noir to define what the nation and national cinema should be by marking out and separating what is unacceptable in that definition. Noir, whether it connotes supposed fascist, leftist, collaborationist, reactionary, or any other undesirable representation of the nation, changes according to how the critic's historical situation and ideological bias allows him to envision France through film. National cinema becomes, as Alan Williams puts it, "whatever you need it to be to make a point in the ongoing struggle to conceptualize France" ("Introduction" 5). Never the same thing at any time for any one critic, then, national identity inheres in a process of conceptualizing the nation, and noir serves as its obscure corollary. Andrew Higson refers to this sort of operation when he describes national cinema as a

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[72] From another perspective, Jef and Silien might therefore seem embodiments of what Gilles Deleuze terms the "forger" in *Cinema 2: The Time Image*:

> simultaneously the man of pure descriptions and the maker of the crystal image, the indiscernibility of the real and the imaginary; he passes into the crystal, and makes the direct time-image visible; he provokes undecidable alternatives and inexplicable differences between the true and the false, and thereby imposes a power of the false as adequate to time, in contrast to any form of the true which would control time. (132)

Yet this description of the films' protagonists can only loosely apply, and only from the perspective of other characters (the detective, Faugel etc.). For in these films, instead of a "chain of forgers" that "permeates the film" the forger is unique, singular, and purely diegetic (Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image* 132-133). It is for this reason that I choose not to follow this path here.

"mythologizing *process*" (my emphasis; 37). Yet if this relentless change partakes in myth, this is because the goal in deploying noir in the service of defining the nation is to arrest that change, not only to separate noir from the nation but to separate the nation from the conditions that make its unique formulations possible and ever-changing. The myths of the nation and noir emerge as the result of an operation that forgets its own processes, that empties each of its contents and uses the shells to mold certain narratives of identity. In the transition from criticism to film, then, *répétition* and *mise-en-scène* are the means by which noir discourse on the nation is translated to and exposed by cinematic form.

Melville's Cinema of Process and Les Années noires

Melville made only three films directly related to the war and Resistance: *Le Silence de la mer* (1949), *Léon Morin, prêtre* (*Léon Morin, Priest* [1961]), and *L'Armée des ombres* (1969), respectively from the beginning, middle, and later part of his career. All, and *Le Silence de la mer* and *L'Armée des ombres* in particular, feature a cinema of process. While by no means secretly about the Resistance, an investment in the cinema of process first appears with, develops alongside, and continually intersects with an interest in the nationalist narratives of the Occupation. As mentioned at the outset of this chapter, memories of war and rigorous, formal attention to action constitute the two points around which Melvillian style elaborates itself. While not identical, then, I do believe that Melville's cinema of process and fascination with stories of the Resistance have much to say about one another. Both depend on similar conditions in their perpetuation of cinematic and nationalist myth, but by bringing these together process

problematizes the ability to speak national, historical myths of identity through filmic representations of the Resistance.

Admittedly, Melville's war films rarely reach the distillation of process, the pure extract of form represented in *Le Samouraï*, with *Le Doulos* and *Le Deuxième souffle* following close behind. Yet from the very first scene of Melville's adaptation of *Le Silence de la mer*, process and memories of the Resistance clearly have similar modes of expressing themselves, and Toubiana is right in pointing to it as a potential nexus from which the rest of his work continues to develop.[73] The concealed object of this *mise-en-scène*, of this scene's clandestine "drop," is Vercors' text, buried in a suitcase under a couple dress shirts and Resistance newspapers. For postwar French audiences, the book and its author's name are immediate signifiers of the Resistance, already myth in a Barthesian sense. It passes here from one person to the next, just as it circulated, clandestinely and hand to hand, during the Occupation. The scene thus figures among and adds to innumerable other repetitions of such happenings, and the singular event, filmed and fictional, represents as archetype all those actual "drops" at once. Moreover, the scene represents a *mise en abyme* of multiple types of collective action, for it also labels the simple act of reading—like keeping silent in the novella/film—a gesture of resistance. The appearance of *Combat* and *Libération* make this abundantly clear. But since Vercors' novella is realized on film, the drop involves the spectator, too, and makes watching Melville's adaptation a type of

[73] In the chapter of her *Jean-Pierre Melville: an American in Paris* devoted to *Le Silence de la mer*, *Léon Morin, prêtre*, and *L'Armée des ombres*, Vincendeau also sees the opening of *Silence* as combining two aspects of his work: "Décor, lighting and action combine to the two major strands of his work, the thriller and the war film. The two men in the prologue clearly signify the 'army in the shadows,' but equally they could also be two gangsters doing a 'drop'" (54).

retroactive resistance.[74] Everyone is a Resistant: all one has to do is read or watch and pass the story on to the next reader or spectator.[75] Under everyone's clothes and close to their hearts lies *Combat*, *Libération*, and an edition of *Le Silence de la mer*. This first scene of Melville's career participates in what Henri Rousso in *Le Syndrome de Vichy* (*The Vichy Syndrome* [1987]) famously calls the myth of "résistancialisme" 'resistancialism,' which itself depends on a three-part process: the obscuring of the Vichy regime and of its negative effects; the creation of the Resistance as an object of memory separate from its ideological factions and small number of actual participants; and the identification of this decontextualized Resistance with the nation as a whole (21). Resistancialism signifies less a simple "glorification de la Résistance" 'glorification of the Resistance' than the celebratory image of solidarity or "un peuple *en résistance*" 'a people *in resistance*' (Rousso 28). By glossing over the realities of the Occupation, the diversity and frequent antagonisms within Resistance groups, and the fact that only a minority of the population belonged to them, the opening of *Le Silence de la mer* perpetuates the dominant, nationalist myth of unified and universal action (Davies 43; Paxton 294).[76]

This example demonstrates that myth and its elaboration through *répétition* and *mise-en-scène* play a significant role in Melville's films about the war from the very beginning. Instead of

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[74] The adaptation of *Le Silence de la mer* was also, in a sense, produced clandestinely since it was made outside of conventional cinematic avenues and in defiance of union regulations. See Tim Palmer's "An Amateur of Quality: Postwar French Cinema and Jean-Pierre Melville's Le Silence de la mer" (2007).

[75] …or merely listen. Vincendeau points out that uncle's voice also works in this direction: "the voiceover establishes a complicity with the audience which underlines von Ebrennac's status as an outsider—we hear it but he does not. Via the book but also on an aural level, it constructs a French community of resistance" (*Jean Pierre Melville* 65).

[76] Peter Davies reminds us that if Jean Moulin's formation in 1943 of the *Conseil national de la Résistance* (National Council of the Resistance) had as its goal the coordination and unification of Resistance movements, this was because each group represented distinct and competitive interests, the most well-known of which being those of the communists and the Gaullists (43). As for the fiction of universal participation, Robert Paxton estimates that only two or, if one is generous, ten percent of the population contributed to the Resistance (294).

featuring in formally complex crime stories, however, here the cinema of process engages with formally *and* historically complex stories of war: *H/histoires de guerre*.[77] What sets these films about the Occupation apart from much of Melville's other work is that *répétition* in his adaptation of *Le Silence de la mer* and *mise-en-scène* in *L'Armée des ombres*, while more subtle than what one finds in *Le Samouraï*, constitute the very conditions for narratives and memories of the Resistance. Extending from crime stories to history, then, the cinema of process goes beyond mere action to slip under the surface of things. In *Le Silence de la mer*, process and particularly *répétition* concern the transformation of protagonists' mental states and their relationship to myth, at once perpetuating and challenging the idea of universal resistance at the heart of the film. In *L'Armée des ombres*, Melville's most direct and final film about the Resistance, and the closest to his iconic crime films, *mise-en-scène* infuses the structure of a narrative that founders under that weight, questioning the possibility of recounting any history of Resistance. These films thus demonstrate that when the cinema of process is undermined or when its manifestations reach extreme degrees of intensity, the sustainability of the Resistance myth also begins to collapse. As such, continual process and unceasing negotiation are put into relief as the supports of a national identity based on that myth, but they are also what must remain in check for those narratives to emerge. The cinema of process transposes, in its becoming and on a formal level, the issues at the center of discourses of noir and national cinema.

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[77] As in the title of Jean-Luc Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, I am playing on the meanings of *histoire* in French: history and story. It can also connote trouble, fuss, or intrigue: "Qu'est-ce que c'est que cette histoire?" 'What is going on here?'; "Ça va faire des histoires…" 'It will cause trouble…'; "Une vie sans histoires" 'an uneventful life.'

Le Silence de la mer (1949)

In *Le Silence*, a German officer named Werner von Ebrennac (Howard Vernon) is billeted in the French countryside house of an unnamed uncle and niece (Jean-Marie Robain and Nicole Stéphane). Each night of his stay, von Ebrennac rambles on about himself and his optimistic thoughts on Franco-German relations and their future, but the French couple respond with a stubborn silence that expresses their resistance to his occupation of their home. The situation continues until von Ebrennac visits fellow officers in Paris, where he learns that France's future under the German Occupation is not as delightful as he once imagined. Crestfallen and confused, he leaves the couple to rejoin the front and most likely die.

The degree of myth represented through the uncle and niece's quiet protest—that everyone could have been and indeed was a resistant—is matched by the German officer's faith in facile archetypes of Germany and France and his hope for love and reconciliation between the two nations. While the film attacks the naïve convictions entertained by the officer by emphasizing his ignorance of the current sociopolitical situation, it appears to perpetuate those of universal resistance. Both myths, however, are not only buttressed but entirely undergirded by von Ebrennac's frequent and formally repetitive visits to his hosts' living room. As such, in dismantling the officer's belief in ahistorical myths through finally arresting the *répétition* that makes them possible, the film necessarily begs the question of the postwar nationalist myth of universal, silent resistance.

The fifteen scenes—in a film that lasts under 90 minutes—that represent the officer's nightly visits are so structured that they constitute a strict "routine" within the film's form and its story (Vincendeau, *Jean-Pierre Melville* 62). The shots of each resemble one another, consisting of

comparable silhouettes, static and claustrophobic framing, and low angles. There are only a limited number of camera positions throughout film, and each are systematically repeated from one sequence to the next, with minimal variation. During each meeting, Von Ebrennac stands and dreamily pontificates while the uncle and niece sit by the fire, him puffing on his pipe at regular intervals and her going through the rehearsed movements of putting needle to thread, marking the characters and especially the couple by *répétition* in and across each scene. As for the officer, just as almost every visit concludes with the announcement, "je vous souhaite une bonne nuit" 'I wish you a good night,' the subject of his conversation or, more precisely, monologue also remains constant. He prattles on about Franco-German relations on political, artistic, and everyday levels, comparing the seasons, women, music, and literature. Continually gazing down at the niece, he dreams about a half-metaphoric future when both countries would be happily unified in what he calls "marriage." The monologue becomes so predictable that it becomes colored by irony. Like Blot's speech in *Le Deuxième souffle*, von Ebrennac's rehearsal of an idyllic future between Germany and France screams out its absence. The exception, however, is that while Blot is aware of the gap, the officer exists in a persistent state of blissful oblivion.

The *répétition* makes the visits blend into one another, on both filmic, diegetic, and even grammatical levels. On no less than three occasions, one scene is meant to represent multiple visits at once, with the uncle's ever-present voiceover recounting the officer's habits in the imperfect. These scenes may occur when the routine slightly changes, but the use of the imperfect, or what literary narratologist Gérard Genette would call "la fréquence narrative" 'narrative frequentative,' to affect the perception of such scenes installs them within *répétition* by

detaching and abstracting each instance from its particularity (Genette 145).[78] All fifteen individual visits thus combine to represent the total idea of the German officer's stay and the uncle and niece's resistance through silence. Like the drop-off that launches the film, the stay emanates but is also removed from the multiplicity of single nightly visits. Moreover, the only two meetings outside the home between von Ebrennac and the French couple occur during the day and are accidental and ignored by all involved. The particularizing force of the world outside fades into the broad obscurity of the house at night. This archetypical state is especially true of the uncle and niece because while soaking up information on von Ebrennac's youth, education, hobbies, and politics, the spectator learns nothing about the French couple—not their age, professions, status in the village, or even their names. All one knows of them is their habits of smoking and sewing. The film stages them as vacant figures, vessels waiting to be filled by ideals. If the officer lives through a *répétition* that sustains myth, then the uncle and niece act out the former and embody the latter.

Despite the *répétition*, detachment, and abstraction that permeate the film as a whole, von Ebrennac alone is singled out for scrutiny. He and the uncle are both often shot from low angles, potentially giving the impression that both are lifted out of the surrounding space. Yet only the officer is portrayed as "un-grounded," completely oblivious to what is happening "on the ground" around him, whether in immediate contiguous space, such as the uncle and niece's persistent muteness, or in the sociopolitical space of the Occupation, of which he is a symbol.

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[78] Genette writes of narrative frequency that, "La « répétition » est en fait une construction de l'esprit, qui élimine de chaque occurrence tout ce qui lui appartient en propre pour n'en conserver que ce qu'elle partage avec toutes les autres de la même classe, et qui est une abstraction: « le soleil », « le matin », « se lever »" '*Répétition* is in fact a construction of the mind that eliminates from each occurrence all that belongs to it in particular only to conserve what it shares with all others of the same group and which is only an abstraction: 'sun,' 'morning,' 'dawn'" (145).

His droning monologues, like soliloquies on stage, prove this all too well. For him, France and Germany reenact the tactless fairy tale of Beauty and the Beast, where the Beauty/France/the niece is destined to love the Beast/Germany/von Ebrennac himself.

The two sequences that recount his visit to Paris further accentuate this separation from and blindness to the sociopolitical conditions of his presence in France and in their home. In the first sequence, von Ebrennac continues to float above his surroundings due to low angle shots. Images of the Arc de Triomphe de l'Étoile and Cathedral of Notre Dame cast both him and the monuments against the sky, omitting any cityscape and creating a flatness evocative of postcards. For him, the Arc de Triomphe du Carrousel at the site of the old Tuileries Palace and the statue of Jean d'Arc at Place St. Augustin, whose inscriptions are respectively about the Napoleonic wars and driving the English out of France,[79] are mere tourist sites. For von Ebrennac, French legacies of military grandeur and histories of rebellion against previous occupiers have no relationship to the present moment and thus are just as decontextualized as he is from what surrounds him.

Yet the Paris voyage as a whole constitutes an interruption of the regular, nightly visits. It is not until the second sequence relating his stay in Paris that this disruption of routine is recognized on a formal level. The uncle relinquishes narration duties to the officer, who recounts his own trip in voiceover, and this time von Ebrennac and the city are finally filmed at either eye-level or at a high angle. The sequence grounds von Ebrennac in streets littered with Nazi

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[79] The inscriptions are clearly visible in the film through close-ups. The inscription on the Arc de Triomphe du Carrousel reads: "L'armée française embarquée à Boulogne menaçait l'Angleterre/ Une troisième coalition éclate sur le continent/ Les Français volent de l'océan au Danube/ La Bavière est délivrée, l'armée autrichienne prisonnière à Ulm/ Napoléon entre dans Vienne, il triomphe à Austerlitz/ En moins de cent jours, la coalition est dissoute" 'The French army taken in Boulogne was threatening England/ A third coalition breaks out on the continent/ The French fly from the ocean to the Danube/ Bavaria is liberated, the Austrian army held prisoner at Ulm/ Napoleon enters Vienna, he triumphs at Austerlitz/ In less than one hundred days, the coalition is dissolved.' The statue of Jean d'Arc reads: "Je suis cy envoiée de par dieu le roy du ciel corps pour corps pour vous bouter hors de toute France" 'I am sent here through God the king of heaven body for body to drive you entirely out of France.'

soldiers, flags emblazoned with swastikas, and German-language signposts. The formal break also marks a transformation in how he understands the goals of the Nazi Occupation. Indeed it is at or above eye-level, in medium shots, where he learns of the ultimate plan to decimate French culture and national spirit from an SS colleague who, perched on top of a desk and peering down at him, also tells him about the extermination camps. When the film's formal *répétition* ceases, when the spectator ventures outside the house and away from the uncle's ubiquitous voice, when the camera exchanges low angles for high angles, the officer and his myths of Franco-German reconciliation come crashing down into the reality of the Occupation.

The officer may be ripped from his routine and brought back down to earth, but the uncle remains suspended in the space of myth where his silent act of resistance defeats itself. Once von Ebrennac finishes his account of the trip to Paris and announces his decision not to resist the Nazi regime but hopelessly to rejoin its front lines, the uncle's silence prevents him from protesting in any terms but those of proverb: "Il est beau qu'un soldat désobéisse à des ordres criminels" 'It is beautiful that a soldier should disobey criminal orders.'[80] Rather than physically articulate this quote from Anatole France, the uncle leaves it in printed form at the front door so that von Ebrennac may discover it before leaving. The gesture does not constitute an instance of breaking silence, of addressing the officer who remains committed to a myth of at least national duty. Instead, the citation proves an extension of the uncle's voiceover. Not only do both belong to detached, literary idioms, but the uncle persists in *répétition* while the proverb is defined by *répétition*. Whereas the film criticizes the officer's groundless abstraction of Franco-German

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[80] The quote is taken from the title of an editorial attributed to Anatole France and published in *Humanité* in 1922. The article concerns the controversy over André Marty, who was one of the leaders of the Black Sea Mutiny in 1919. The mutiny was in part due to French soldiers' refusal to fight with the White Russians against the Bolsheviks during the Russian Civil War. Marty later became a leader of the *Parti communiste française* (French Communist Party) (Guttridge 168-70).

relations, it stays true to noir discourses of the nation by relegating the fractious and minority history of the Resistance to the offscreen the better to perpetuate a postwar nationalism based on universalist resistancialism. Yet in emphasizing and thereby frustrating the processes that support the officer's detachment from historical reality, the film must also expose the conditions for myths of Resistance. The uncle is shown to persist in the space of myth in the same motion as he allows von Ebrennac to return to it.[81]

L'Armée des ombres (1969)

Whereas *répétition* in *Le Silence de la mer* is more sedate than in Melville's later work, *mise-en-scène* proliferates in *L'Armée des ombres*, where the cinema of process and its relationship to Melville's narratives of the Resistance prove fundamental. Of all his films about the war, *L'Armée des ombres* is closest to the type of process defined earlier in this chapter: emphasis on action through repetition, rehearsal, and *mise-en-scène* on both filmic and diegetic levels. This has to do with the film's generic orientation and its timing. While thematically about the Resistance, the film's narrative and visual motifs, ranging from assassinations, escapes, and drops to men donning fedoras, overcoats, and guns, situate it firmly within the minimalist, conventional "noir"—in the sense of postwar American-influenced crime films—stylistics for which Melville is famous. One could easily classify it among his *polar*s, his crimes films, and the pervasiveness of process throughout each of its many episodes indeed reflects its position between *Le Samouraï* (1967) and *Le Cercle rouge* (*The Red Circle* [1970]) in his filmography.

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[81] On the other hand, the niece's whisper, "Adieu," works in the opposite direction because it constitutes a break in her persistent sewing as well in her muteness. Vincendeau's argument that Nicole Stéphane plays the role of an ideal or national symbol akin to Marianne thus needs to be nuanced (*Jean Pierre Melville* 58-60). For not only does her *adieu* arrest *répétition*, but it also removes the support for the film's particular version of the myth of universal resistance, that is, silence.

What makes *L'Armée des ombres* similar to *Le Silence de la mer*, however, is its obsession with how to recount the Resistance.

In Melville's final film on the subject, this fascination is expressed through the proliferation of narrative instances. These are represented by the film's multiple voiceovers, but also the ubiquity of *mise-en-scènes*. Both involve the deployment and sometimes manipulation of pure signifying forms, the voice and complex arrangements of information, to tell a story. But as with an alibi, these multiple accounts, this relay and layering of narrative, gradually detach this story of the Resistance from an anchoring point or center from which a supposedly authentic history of Resistance could be spoken. The film's multiplicity of voices combine with a kaleidoscopic *mise-en-scène* to obliterate the ability to recount any *histoire* of the Resistance.

The film constantly puts into relief the voices, literal and figurative, through which it is told and emphasizes their inability to tell a complete story. Narrating duties frequently change hands. Although the voiceover is first held by a French prison camp director, it is most often assumed by Philippe Gerbier (Lino Ventura), who occasionally alternates with fellow resistant Jean-François (Jean-Pierre Cassel). They speak in the past and the present, thereby suggesting an ability to travel through and master time, but they often fail to presage the film's events. Gerbier is captured no less than twice and escapes certain death at least as many times, and Jean-François speaks of smuggling a Resistance leader to an allied submarine, but has no idea that the man is his brother, Luc Jardie (Paul Meurisse). Narration is also taken over by anonymous figures who never appear onscreen. Following Gerbier's escape from the Gestapo at the Hôtel Majestic, the film passes to Marseille, where a man's voice appears from nowhere to tell the spectator that the person now on screen, Dounat a.k.a. Henri, is waiting for a rendezvous. Yet while this narrator

knows Dounat's name and codename, and thus introduces itself as in part what Michel Chion would call an ubiquitous, all-powerful, knowing, and seeing "*acousmêtre*," it, too, proves flawed: it is unaware that Dounat is about to be executed for having denounced Gerbier (Chion 24). Together, the constant relay of narrators and their incomplete knowledge result in a gap between voice and image that underlines the film's failure to fashion a complete story.

While the relationship between narration and story is strained through these voiceovers, it is also challenged from the perspective of the image. While Gerbier marches to a firing squad in the bowels of a Gestapo prison, he ruminates on the theoretical potential of indefinitely prolonging life through disbelieving in the possibility of death. But before he launches into this tangent four images flash on the screen: his visit to London with Jardie to meet Charles de Gaulle, a walk with Mathilde (Simone Signoret) in the countryside, the liquidation of Dounat, and finally a shot of a book by Luc Jardie, *Transfini et continu*, which triggers Gerbier's philosophical peregrinations.[82] The first three are flashbacks to images the spectator has already seen. The fourth, however, is entirely new—at least, that is, until the same exact image reappears fourteen minutes later. It reemerges when Gerbier is in hiding, having escaped the firing squad, and spends time reading Jardie's books. Because the fourth image is from the future whereas the previous three are from the past, a difficult question arises: how does one define the narrating instance behind them? One might assume that the first three images are the product of Gerbier's mind, the proverbial moment of life flashing before his eyes. Yet if speaking from the present, then how can Gerbier relate an image from the future? Might the images instead come from somewhere else, some other instance belonging to the film itself?

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[82] *Transfini et continu* (*Transfinite and Continuous* [1947]), which was actually posthumously published after the war, was written by real-life philosopher/resistant, Jean Cavaillès, on whom Jardie was partially based (Vincendeau, *Jean Pierre Melville* 80)

Film narratologist André Gaudreault contends that visual jumps through time, flashbacks and flash-forwards, cannot belong to the character possessing the voiceover, but to a filmic narrator, a "narrateur fondamental" 'fundamental narrator' who commands and communicates through images (176-182).[83] Gerbier may control the voice, what the spectator hears, then, but this other narrator controls what one sees. According to this perspective, the final image, like the others, comes from a narrator of images who can travel through time, while Gerbier's thoughts must therefore be launched by a memory of having read Jardie's book before--he just happens to read it again later when in hiding. The problem with this interpretation, beyond its being cumbersome, is that it separates the voice and the image into incommensurable narrative instances. It does not account for the exact identity between the two images spaced fourteen minutes apart. Nor does it explain the fact that it is the image of *Transfini et continu* that triggers Gerbier's thoughts on life and death.

While maintaining the base assumptions of Gaudreault's theory, a more compelling reading would argue that while the filmic narrator shows the spectator these images from the past and future, Gerbier senses them, too, and that this communication initiates his voiceover. Gerbier and a "narrateur fondamental" communicate with one another from different perspectives and through different forms of language to piece together a film narrative. Consequently, the fundamental narrator is not so fundamental after all since it exists on the same level as all the voiceovers. The film's story depends not only on a relay, then, but on a give and take between

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[83] Whereas in literature the material of narration is the word, Gaudreault argues that in cinema it is primarily the image, *but that it can also be,* as in the case of a voiceover, the word. Thus while a flashback or flash-forward may be accompanied in a film by a character's voiceover, the images of such sequences belong to a *narrateur fondamental*, also known as a *méga-narrateur* 'mega-narrator' or a *grand imagier* 'great image maker.' It is this fundamental narrator who speaks through images, since a character cannot narrate through voice in the first person while simultaneously occupying the image in the third person (Gaudreault, *Du littéraire au filmique* 176-182).

different sets of narrators. These include characters, disembodied voices, and a narrator of the image, each sometimes and others not in communication with each other. The film's narrative discourse takes its form from this succession and accumulation of narrative voices. But in this state of becoming it creates a potential yet always incomplete story of Resistance founded on a logic of *répétition* and *mise-en-scène* that gives lie to its wholly abstract, mythological status.

A diegetic use of *mise-en-scène* further outlines the tension between the processes that create but also subvert narrative. Along with its multiple narrative instances, *L'Armée des ombres* is marked by a fragmented structure. There are few spatiotemporal or causal connections between the film's many episodes. The characters themselves sometimes seem aware of it, as when Félix (Paul Crauchet) warns Jean-François, "Il faut jamais chercher à savoir ni à comprendre" 'One must never try to know or understand.' Almost all the pieces of this disjointed narrative are examples of the diegetic thematization of *mise-en-scène*: Gerbier's escape from the Hôtel Majestic, Dounat's execution, Jean-François' drop-off of the radio, the rendezvous at the country home and with the British submarine, Félix's capture, the landing of allied planes at the country estate, Jean-François' self-denunciation and failed attempt to rescue Félix, the firing squad as well as Gerbier's escape from it, and finally Mathilde's death.

All of these instances of *mise-en-scène* essentially have the same purpose: outdoing other *mise-en-scènes*, often those of the Nazi occupiers. They are stratagems designed to circumvent what Jardie tellingly refers to as "les données du problème" 'the givens of the problem,' to rearrange and manipulate these set-pieces to one's advantage. Put more simply, *L'Armée des ombres* is organized by a series of conflicts one may describe as *mise-en-scène* versus *mise-en-scène*, and this competitive dialogue also represents how the characters react to their

surroundings and interact with one another. Gerbier's cruel and almost ritualistic execution at the hands of the Gestapo can only be thwarted by Mathilde's even more expertly honed escape plan. The layering of *mise-en-scène* even sometimes occurs between resistants: Jean-François aims to help rescue Félix by secretly supplementing another of Mathilde's schemes with one of his own (unfortunately it does not come off as intended).

Eventually, the piling of stratagem on set-piece and vice versa results in the originating situation being lost in the sheer depth of layers, in the multiple manipulations of that situation's givens. The mystery surrounding Mathilde's capture perfectly illustrates this problematic. The network is aware of three things: first, that she had to tell the Gestapo everything she knows about the Resistance or else have her daughter sent to a brothel on the eastern front; second, that she was released; and finally, that shortly after her release two resistants were arrested. Is this just a coincidence, or are the events related? Without hesitation, Gerbier orders that Mathilde be liquidated to maintain the safety and secrecy of the organization. Yet Le Bison (Christian Barbier) has unwavering faith in her and refuses the assignment. To convince him that the job is necessary, Jardie explains that Mathilde has undoubtedly designed her own counter-plan to trump the Nazi set-piece: she wants to be killed to save both the Resistance and her daughter. Having reassured Le Bison, Jardie later admits to Gerbier that this explanation was itself a stratagem. Indeed, Jardie wants to be present when Mathilde is assassinated to discover, by the look on her face when she realizes her imminent death, whether he was correct. Unfortunately, her final expression reveals nothing. The actual circumstances of the situation are lost under the accumulation of *mise-en-scènes*, of multiple alibis suggesting alternative stories.

Throughout *L'Armée des ombres*, a story of Resistance proliferates into a multiplicity of accounts that relay, communicate with, and deceive one another. In combining the repetitive plurality of narrative instances with layers of diegetic *mise-en-scène*, each recollection of Resistance becomes further removed from the space and time from which the need for a national narrative emerges. Because the cinema of process slouches under its own weight, a sense of national history based on memories of the Resistance staggers in its revelation as intangible myth. Ultimately, the momentum of process overruns and short-circuits the need to fix national identity.

Cinemas of Process and Jean-Pierre Melville

The cinema of process describes a way of representing action in film that is meta-cinematic, but also acts as the support for myth, and its two main axes of articulation are *répétition* and *mise-en-scène*. Now, based on this definition, the point may be made that such a representation of action does not exclusively apply to Melville. McArthur points out that it also finds legs in Jules Dassin's *Du rififi chez les hommes* (*Rififi* [1955]) and in Jacques Becker's *Le Trou* (*The Hole* [1960]) ("Mise-en-scène degree zero" 191). One may also mention Robert Bresson's work, notably *Pickpocket* (1959) and *Un condamné à mort s'est échappé* (*A Man Escaped* [1956]),[84] or other less well-known films of the same era such as *Un témoin dans la ville* (*A Witness in the City* [Edouard Molinaro 1959]), *Du rififi chez les femmes* (*Riff Raff Girls* [Alex Joffé 1959]), and *L'Arme à gauche* (*The Dictator's Guns* [Claude Sautet 1965]). One could easily venture outside France to include *The Asphalt Jungle* (John Huston 1950), *The Killing* (Stanely Kubrick 1956),

[84] See Emmanuel Burdeau's article "Le revolver et la culture" for a brief comparison between the two directors.

Branded to Kill (Seijun Suzuki 1967), or countless other crime films. Given a thorough argument, process could stretch as far as one desires, outside crime narratives and perhaps to something like the performance of ideologically determined domesticity in *Jeanne Dielman, 23, Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (Chantal Akerman 1975). Does this mean that all these other films also participate in myth? Maybe. Process' commentary on cultural and cinematic myth is potentially powerful when it addresses issues of postwar masculinity, unity, and the offscreen in *Le Trou*, modernization's threat to projected narratives in *Un témoin dans la ville*,[85] refracting temporalities in *The Killing*, or the sexual violence of gender-specific routine in *Jeanne Dielman*.

But what makes the cinema of process unique and integral in Melville is not just its regularity and formal rigor, but its connection to the Occupation and noir narratives of national identity.[86] His film's exaggeration of process combines an unflinching interrogation of the conditions for filmic time, space, and movement with thwarted efforts to remember and speak a history of the Resistance, whether resistancialist, as in *Le Silence de la mer*, or any account whatsoever, as in *L'Armée des ombres*. As such, *Le Silence de la mer* and *L'Armée des ombres* de-equilibrate noir discourse's characteristic tension between the need to fix a representation of the nation and that representation's elusiveness. Melville may have been attacked later in his career by critics who derided his work's increasing repetitiveness and reliance on *mise-en-scène*,[87] seeing in them evidence that "l'idéologie se parle" 'ideology speaks to itself' (Comolli and Narboni 13). Yet what these critics fail to see is that *répétition* and *mise-en-scène* are not mere signs of generic

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[85] Louis Malle's *L'Ascenseur pour l'échafaud* would also work in this direction, for both films present the car as an element of contingency working against process.

[86] The obvious exception here is Bresson's *Un condamné à mort s'est échappé*.

[87] See for example Jacques Aumont's critique of repetition and *mise-en-scène* in his review of "*Le Cercle rouge*" (1970).

convention but the very means of a profound and simultaneously aesthetic and cultural analysis. The cinema of process in Melville intersects with the concerns of postwar noir discourse to ask how and under what conditions it is possible to envision both film narrative and history. The myths it engages are thus not merely generic, but form the epistemic and ideological bases for cinematic representation national identity in a France still reeling from the Occupation. This exploration, and not his crime stories, is what makes Melville a director of films noirs.

CHAPTER IV

FROM POSTWAR NATIONAL IMAGINARIES TO NARRATIVE FORM AND THE OFFSCREEN:

HENRI DECOIN, MARCEL PETIOT, AND *NON COUPABLE* (HENRI DECOIN 1947)

Throughout this book, I have maintained that noir in French cinema describes less a genre than the ongoing effort to think national identity in relation to the Occupation. The first two chapters' exploration of the French critical archive from the mid 1930s through the 1950s shows that critics continually use noir as a fluid category to fix politically and historically charged formulations of the nation against what one refuses to see in its filmic representation. The above chapter on Melville, however, argues that the cinema of process in his films about World War Two challenges the effort to freeze national identity within unified and uniform narratives of the Resistance by accentuating the processes behind their construction. I advanced that French films noirs, unlike noir's conservative function in criticism, are thus more about challenging dominant formulations of national identity than conforming to any fixed narrative. This final chapter works in a similar direction. Yet instead of focusing on fixity and process, I will analyze how the interplay between presence and absence in Henri Decoin's *Non coupable* (*Not Guilty* [1947]), a thriller about a serial killer who commits his crimes offscreen, creates two diametrically opposed and equally insufficient narratives about the main character's guilt. By thus accentuating the inability of the onscreen to explain the "realities" of the unseen fictional universe, the film conjures the intertexts of Decoin and actual serial killer, Marcel Petiot, whose trials were dominated by narratives of national identity relying on historical omissions and facile oppositions. As such, *Non coupable* translates through what I call its "narrative imaginary"

problematics faced by formulations of a postwar French national imaginary, and it suggests that noir may describe not only issues of national identity in criticism and film, but a collection of phenomena and perhaps an entire era of national experience in France.

Non coupable's story appears simple. Michel Ancelin (Michel Simon) is an alcoholic, miserable, small-town doctor with a poor reputation who discovers by accident that he has a gift: murder. Driving home drunk late one evening with live-in girlfriend, Madeleine (Jany Holt), Ancelin inadvertently kills a motorcyclist. In a sudden moment of lucidity, Ancelin rearranges the scene to look as if he were never there, like an accident of the motorcyclist's own fault. He gets away with the crime, and three more murders follow: Madeleine's secret lover, a rival doctor with information about this second killing, and finally Madeleine, who plans to denounce Ancelin to the police for a reward. He wields his newfound talent to exact revenge on those who have wronged him and takes pleasure in confounding the authorities, reveling in what he views as respect for his long-overlooked intelligence. However, when he starts to regret Madeleine's death and turns himself in to the police, no one thinks he is smart or sober enough to be the elusive culprit, and he is turned away. Instead, they suspect Madeleine, whose death is viewed as a freak accident. Desperate and despondent, Ancelin drafts a "vindicating" confession letter before committing suicide. But as he slumps to his death, the sealed envelope accidentally falls into a fire, damning him to be buried, against his wishes, an imbecile.

Yet the simplicity of *Non coupable*'s murder story is only apparent. The first and last of the four murders are essentially accidents, and the others happen in an offscreen that is not contiguous with the frame, but entirely elsewhere in the fictional universe. The spectator never sees Ancelin kill anyone. Moreover, editing conventions disallow any spatiotemporal connection

between him and the second and third murders. “Non coupable” might refer to the police’s verdict, but it could also refer to the possibility that Ancelin is really not guilty. Since the film’s intrigue mostly happens offscreen, the possible scenarios for his guilt and innocence both depend on the very same visible and invisible evidence. Due to this extensive staging of action offscreen, the spectator cannot form a cohesive “narrative imaginary,” a unified, logical concept of the film’s diegesis, and Ancelin must be thought of as simultaneously *coupable* and *non coupable*, guilty and not guilty.

The film further emphasizes that this first offscreen, that of the film’s fictional world, overlaps with a second, that of the contemporaneous “real” world. Ancelin obsessively follows the account of his crimes in newspapers that also feature stories about current events and politics. By thus highlighting in equal measure the ambivalences of Ancelin’s guilt and its own historical context, the film offers itself up to historical analysis by evoking particular postwar intertexts: the inquest of Decoin for working with German-run production company Continental Films, and the trial of real-life doctor-serial killer Dr. Marcel Petiot for murdering at least twenty-six people. Although the cases were very different, both were framed by discourses of national identity that hinged on the Manichean opposition between resistant and collaborator, and both revealed the artificiality of that duality by supporting simultaneous, contradictory interpretations of the evidence. *Non coupable* thus echoes the intertextual problematics of forging a national imaginary dependent on simplistic dichotomies by translating to its narrative imaginary the ambivalence

and deficiencies of Decoin and Petiot's trials.[88] It deploys the offscreen to suggest that narratives of identity in postwar France are constructed much like film narratives.

Destabilizing the unity of its diegesis and supporting contradictory interpretations of its narrative, *Non coupable* testifies to a dissatisfaction with rigid dualities used to create both filmic and national discourses. More than just a formal anomaly, then, *Non coupable* extends its frustration with narrative convention beyond the limits of its fictional world and reflects discontent with recent narratives of the Occupation and postwar French identity. To be sure, the film does not speak directly about contemporary history, does not adapt for cinema Henri Decoin's experience during the *épuration* nor the strategies used in Marcel Petiot's trial. But it does speak to the limits of the imaginary frameworks deployed against Decoin and Petiot. Having explored the archives of French noir film criticism and witnessed the effort to erect and maintain national identities based on facile oppositions and glaring omissions, we will see that, as a French film noir, *Non coupable* speaks to the desire to venture beyond them, toward spaces-off that contemporary frameworks fail to fathom.

To orient readers who may not be familiar with Decoin and Petiot's trials, I will first analyze how the terms and arguments of these events perform and thus undermine Manichean and

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[88] *Non coupable* situates itself at the nexus of other multiple postwar intertexts besides Petiot and Decoin. It was one of the first French productions to be clearly influenced by the visual style and tone of contemporary American films noirs. Decoin's awareness of *Non coupable*'s participation in the genre is clearly outlined in an interview about the film in *Humanité*, where he describes noir as "une maladie de l'époque" 'an obsession of the period' (Angel 4). Decoin was even supposed to be the first to adapt the work of Peter Cheyney, the British pulp writer whose novels' translations launched the *Série noire*. Following casting problems, however, such as Douglas Fairbanks Junior not being able to play Lemmy Caution (!), Decoin abandoned *Cet homme est dangereux* (*This Man is Dangerous* [Cheney 1936]. It was later made by Jean Sacha with Eddie Constantine in the lead role in 1953 (Desrichard, *Henri Decoin* 62). *Non coupable* also strongly recalls a tradition of French noir, including films banned shortly before and during the war, such as *Le Quai des brumes* (*Port of Shadows* [Marcel Carné 1938]) and *Le Dernier tournant* (*The Last Turn* [Pierre Chenal 1939]), as well as others linked to anxieties following the Liberation, such as *Panique* (*Panic* [Julien Duvivier 1947]). *Non coupable*'s lead actor, Michel Simon, has significant roles in all of these films. His role in *Panique*, which was released less than a year before *Non coupable* and where he plays another doctor suspected of murder, is clearly resurrected by Decoin.

incomplete formulations of postwar national identity. Subsequently, I will demonstrate through theories of the cinematic offscreen and theatrical offstage how *Non coupable* deploys unseen narrative space to two ends: first, to create incommensurable yet necessary opposing stories to question the power of narrative discourse; and second, to invoke the world beyond the cinematic frame that includes Decoin and Petiot and thus transpose the obstacles of national identity featured in those cases into narrative form. Ultimately, it will becomes evident that noir may be a cinematic phenomenon, but that *noirceur* pervades large parts of the sociocultural sphere in France after the Liberation.

The Reach of Postwar Manichaeism and National Identity: Henri Decoin, Marcel Petiot

In 1941, Continental released Henri Decoin's *Les Inconnus dans la maison* (*Strangers in the House*), adapted by Henri-Georges Clouzot from Georges Simenon's 1940 novel. The story centers on Loursat (Raimu), an alcoholic and former lawyer, and opens with a offscreen murder in which his daughter, Nicole (Juliette Faber), and her friends are implicated. Her boyfriend, Manu (Héléna Manson), the poorest member of an otherwise well-off group of adolescents, is the prime suspect, and Loursat returns to the courtroom to defend him. At the film's climax, he delivers a speech in which he accuses society of creating the conditions for the crime, citing amorality, parental neglect, lack of physical activity, brothels, cafés, bistros, and even movie theaters. Eventually, however, he forces another group-member, Luska (Marcel Mouloudji), to reveal that he framed Manu out of jealousy for Nicole.

The combination of Loursat's tirade, the ethnic identity of Luska, and Continental drew much ire after the Liberation. For many, including Roger Régent and Georges Sadoul, the climactic

description of France smacks of Vichyite, national socialist ideology's promotion of traditional, Catholic, family values and fear of mass culture and foreigners,[89] and so Régent and Sadoul also found Luska's vaguely Semitic name and appearance disgraceful (Régent 64; Sadoul, *Le Cinéma français* 90).[90] *L'Écran français* even claimed, falsely, as they did with *Le Corbeau* (The Raven [Clouzot 1943]), that the film was shown as anti-French propaganda in Germany under the title *Die Französische Jugend* (*French Youth*) (Ehrlich 51). As with Clouzot and his great film noir, the *épuration* (purging) committees banned *Les Inconnus* from screens and Decoin from the profession for collaborating with the enemy and promoting negative images of France.

The controversy, however, is motivated by little belonging properly to the film or its production itself. Its historical context and three specific intertexts are what make the above charges possible—but they also make them problematic. First, Luska's Jewish identity is explicit in Simenon's novel, where his father's name, Ephraïm, is also mentioned, whereas neither are given attention in the film (Simenon 88, 170). Second, *Les Inconnus* was preceded in theaters by *Les Corrupteurs* (*The Corrupters* [Pierre Ramelot 1941]), a short documentary about the negative influence of Jews on society. As Pierre Billard puts it, this film "pervertissait, par son simple voisinage la signification du long-métrage" 'perverted, by its simple presence, the meaning of the feature film' (376). Third, Decoin not only worked with Continental during the war, but had "collaborated" with the German film industry in the 1930s (Jeancolas 26-29, 276).

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[89] An excellent exposition of Vichy ideology can be found in the second chapter of Robert Paxton's seminal *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order* (especially 136-168).

[90] His full name, not mentioned in the film, but given in Simenon's novel is Ephraïm Luska. His Semitic appearance has been noted by a number of contemporary and more recent viewers (Siclier 61, Billard 384, Sadoul 90, Ehrlich 51-52). Judith Mayne writes, "there are no explicit references to Luska's Jewish identity, although the actor who plays the role, Marcel Mouloudji, is visually different from his friends with his curly hair and his full lips. He is a 'foreigner' (actor Mouloudji was French-Algerian), the all-purpose category of otherness, which was implicitly defined as Jewish during the war" (403).

Yet just as these intertexts may have influenced the significance of the film for contemporary audiences, others could just as well have exonerated both it and its director, or at least complicated its political value. Decoin fought against the suggestion that Luska is Jewish, and Continental boss Alfred Greven famously disallowed any political messages whatsoever in the firm's productions (Siclier 67). Moreover, several French film professionals had worked in Germany during the 1930s and continued to do so with Continental during the Occupation (Ehrlich 175).[91] "Collaboration" was for them business as usual. Finally, some critics outline that Luska was just as easily identified not as Jewish, but as speaking to issues of class difference in contemporary France (Siclier 61). To adopt Billard's phrase, the postwar desire to reconfigure national identity against Vichy perverted the extent to which the film could be seen as reflecting the regime's ideals.

At issue here is not a defense of the film. To claim that it is pro-Vichy, or the inverse, is to detach it from one or another of the above intertexts. Citing the suppression of anything that could explicitly label Luska as Jewish, for example, to contend that the film is not anti-Semitic, would favor the intertext of production over that of its consumption, would forget that the film was screened with *Les Corrupteurs*. The point is not whether the work is Vichyite, but that the totality of evidence, existing outside the film's own frame, makes both views possible at the same time and thus exposes the deficiency of such a Manichean point of view. Like *Le Corbeau*, *Les Inconnus* may have been noir for certain critical groups because of its representation of France, but what makes it a film noir is its refusal to conform to one or the other side of a dualistic narrative of postwar national identity. As a consequence Decoin was given a "lifetime"

[91] These include not only Clouzot and Decoin but even members of the épuration committees, such as director Christian-Jaques (Ehrlich 175)!

ban from the profession that lasted until *La Fille du diable* (*The Devil's Daughter*) in 1946. *Non coupable* followed a year later and, as we will explore in a moment, can be viewed as a translation of and reaction to the frustrating limits of dualistic discourses.

Although the case surrounding Doctor Marcel Petiot may appear far removed from Decoin's *épuration* trial, it also put into relief and imploded emerging discourses of national identity and so, while not a film noir, engages in a sort of socioculturally pervasive *noirceur*. Petiot ran a fake escape network designed to rob and kill those who sought to flee occupied France. The majority of his victims consisted of gangsters who had worked with the French Gestapo or Jews who were often former German citizens. Because disappearances were a common event during the Occupation, it took a noxious black smoke billowing from the chimney at 21 rue le Sueur to attract the attention of neighbors. The responding firefighters discovered countless dismembered bodies strewn about the basement, burning in the furnace, and decaying in a pit of quicklime. After a manhunt during which he was accused of working with the Gestapo, Petiot was finally arrested and tried for twenty-seven counts of murder. He admitted killing over sixty people, but specified that he had liquidated Nazis and traitors as a member of the Resistance and that those in his basement were killed by others in his network and not him. Indeed, Petiot had been in a Nazi prison for his escape "network" shortly before the discovery at his home and was a member of the *Forces françaises de l'intérieor* (French Forces of the Interior) while on the run. His trial was an outright spectacle whose attendees and participants more than entertained these claims,

but he was eventually found guilty on circumstantial evidence for twenty-six counts and sent to the guillotine.[92]

While the complexities of the case against Decoin and *Les Inconnus* hinge on their resistance to fitting within dichotomous models of postwar national identity, those of the Petiot affair lie in his and his lawyer's willingness to stage and destabilize the case through them. For example, Petiot first eluded the police by pretending to be part of the Resistance (Césaire 37); while on the run he was accused of cooperating with the Gestapo (Césaire 39);[93] and his defense attorney Maître René Floriot's central strategy was to follow Petiot's example and respond to these accusations by casting him as a Resistance fighter. It proved a brilliant tactic because it reframed the central question of the trail. No longer was it important whether Petiot had killed these twenty-seven people—he admitted to most of them and even more than he was being tried for (Césaire 43)—but whether he had done so as a freedom fighter. He must be condemned to death unless he could prove that he killed under Resistance orders and that his victims were

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[92] Accounts of Petiot's crimes and trial have not attracted much scholarly attention, but have formed the basis for many non-fiction works. See Seth, *Petiot Victim of Chance*; Bertin, *Les Assassins hors série: Gilles de Rais, Petiot*; Césaire, *L'Affaire Petiot*; Maeder, *The Unspeakable Crimes of Doctor Petiot*; and King, *Death in the City of Light*.

Ester Rowlands' *Cinematic Portraits of Evil* contains an explanatory chapter about the Petiot affair leading up to her readings of Christian de Chalonge's *Docteur Petiot* (1990), and Jean-Pierre Jeunet and Marc Caro's *Delicatessen* (1991) as horrific reflections of experience during the Occupation (33-52). I have chosen to focus on *Non coupable* here instead of de Chalonge's film in keeping with this study's focus on cinema of the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, but also because *Non coupable* does a better job of exploiting the narrative ambivalences of the Petiot affair without being directly based on it. De Chalonge instead focuses on the issue of spectacularity, mixing the historical event with self-reflective genre conventions, but he unfortunately leaves out Petiot's imprisonment by the Nazis and his trail after the war, which neglects the precise ambiguities I intend to concentrate on here.

[93] These accusations were actually what led to Petiot's capture. The police had a defamatory article entitled "Petiot, soldat du Reich" 'Petiot, Soldier of the Reich' published in the newspaper *Résistance*, and Petiot duly responded with a letter defending his reputation and stating that he was active in the Resistance. Although he lived under a handful of pseudonyms, his handwriting eventually gave him away (Césaire 39-41).

collaborators or German agents, in other words, that he was a patriot and that they were the enemy (Seth 168).

The ambivalences and ambiguities of the evidence on this point greatly complicated the issue. Many of Petiot's suspected victims, and those to which he admitted, were indeed known for collaborating with the Gestapo, and even some of his admitted Jewish victims had suspicious relationships with the Germans.[94] However, the bodies found at his home could not be identified in either name, number, or cause of death. The issue is made more complicated still by a number of other facts. After the Gestapo caught wind of his "network," he was imprisoned and tortured with known Resistance fighters before being released (Césaire 34-35; King 106, 114). He joined the *Forces Françaises de l'Intérieure* (French Forces of the Interior) when the end of the war was near, and then was active and extraordinarily successful in investigations into and interrogations of collaborators (Seth 97; King 198; Césaire 41-42).[95] Some actual Resistance fighters testified against him, but others defended him, such as those who spent time with him at Fresnes prison (Césaire 109). Finally, some of his witting or unwitting accomplices had contacts,

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[94] Pierre Bonny and Henri Lafont, leaders of the French Gestapo, were brought from prison to testify that suspected victims of Petiot and known gangsters Jo Réocreux (aka Jo le Boxer), François Albertini (le Corse), and Adrien Estébétéguy (le Basque) were all one-time informers or part of the *Carlingue* who had got on its bad side (Seth 177). This, including the gangsters' entourage, accounted for nine of the victims. As for the others, Petiot asserted that if they had not benefited from his network or fled through their own means—little effort was put into verifying or disproving either claim (Seth 142, 157)—that he had killed them because they, too, were working for the Germans. According to him, they were German before they were Jews, spies aiming to dismantle the network (Césaire 99-103). What lent this claim some support were two facts. First, many of his victims were furnished by Eryane Kahan, a purported member of the Resistance who was also strongly suspected of having ties to the Gestapo as an informant (King 292-293). Second, the Gestapo did use spies to gain access to Petiot's "network." For instance, one of the victim's Petiot admitted killing was Yvan Dreyfus, a Jew and former Resistance fighter who was forced to work with the Nazis to uncover Petiot's network in return for his freedom. Like the other victims his body could not be found or was not identified (King 106-111).

[95] Many collaborators chose to change sides when it became clear that the Germans were losing the war. These included members of the French Gestapo, such as Pierre Loutrel (Pierrot le fou) and Abel Danos (le Mammouth) (Auda 215-18)

like many in the Occupation-era underworld, with both the Resistance and the Gestapo (Césaire 96-98; King 291-293). Based strictly on available evidence and testimony, Petiot could have been part of either the Resistance or the Gestapo, and by relocating the trial to the uneasy ground where a postwar French imaginary was being reconstructed through such an us-versus-them discourse it tapped into contemporary anxieties about national identity.

Yet Floriot and Petiot were not content to rely on cryptic circumstantial evidence, on the power of the unknown. Along with asking whether Petiot was a member of an actual Resistance network, they also reframed the trial by demonstrating the difficulties and ambiguities in defining the idea of resistance.[96] This was the second step in Floriot's clever restaging of Petiot's responsibility through postwar national identity and universal myths of the Resistance. After the prosecution had taken the defense's bait by calling their own Resistance fighters as witnesses to dispute Petiot's membership, Floriot then asked whether resistance had to be institutional, that is, if official Resistance was even relevant. As Ronald Seth puts it:

> if he were not a member of official Resistance, but could prove that in the course of carrying out private Resistance he had killed from motives of patriotism, no one would reproach him with the fact that he had not been incorporated in an official network. (Seth 175)

Ingeniously, Floriot first set the terms of debate by stating that Petiot should be acquitted if he killed under the aegis of the Resistance, and then later questioned that debate's very presuppositions. Must R/resistance be exclusive, official, and hierarchical, or can it revolve around simple questions of patriotic motivation? If the latter, then why focus on the issue of

[96] I use "Resistance" to refer to the official, institutional organization of networks, while employing "resistance" in this loose, non-institutional sense.

Resistance at all? Appealing to the imaginary of Charles de Gaulle's "résistancialisme," the strategy transformed exclusive Resistance into inclusive resistance by implying that anyone could be a resistant (Rousso 28). To condemn Petiot would deny that possibility. Further still, because of the discursive edifice Floriot constructs, this national identity can only be maintained by affirming the following: Petiot must not be a Resistant, but a resistant, and is guilty yet therefore also not guilty of serial murder.

That the jury ultimately condemned Petiot to the guillotine does little to disrupt the defense's logic in reframing the trail. Because the prosecution responded to instead of rejecting the tactic, Floriot proved that mass murder could be articulated through both resistancialism and dominant dichotomies of retrospective Occupation-era identity. The verdict reaffirms that dichotomy by pushing back against any challenge to the crucial opposition between resistant and collaborator. The jury bought the premises of the defense's arguments, but rejected Petiot due to the ambiguity and ambivalence he introduced into a supposedly clear sense of national identity. In other words, because Petiot could not be proved one hundred percent resistant, but could easily exploit and expose the insufficiencies of dualistic notions of national experience during the Occupation, he and the dark kernel of *noirceur* he introduced into that discourse had to be rejected entirely.

The controversies surrounding Decoin and Petiot illustrate a striving for a univocal postwar identity, but as what might be called noir socio-cultural phenomenons they also outline the factors and omissions that put the artificiality of any such an imaginary into relief. The dualistic frameworks between patriot and collaborator are threatened by what they leave, so to speak, out of frame: the complexities of experience during the Occupation that resist conforming to such simplification. Within the intransigeant, Manichean perspective brought to bear on these cases,

narratives of Decoin and Petiot's infractions can only manifest a stubborn ambivalence. Decoin's lifetime ban from the profession—even if it was short-lived—and Petiot's execution both eliminate the noir threats of exposure they represent to deficient imaginary discourses of what it meant to be French during and after the Occupation. However—and this will be the argument of the following section—these threats manage to reappear in different guises elsewhere in the cultural sphere, particularly in the narrative structure of a film like *Non coupable*, whose story about a doctor serial-killer, as chance would have it, readily recalled for critics the recent memory of Doctor Petiot (Thévenot 11).

From Popular Imaginaries to Narrative Imaginaries: **Non coupable**

While the challenges of the cases against Decoin and Petiot hinge upon the struggle for a cohesive popular imaginary after the Occupation, those of *Non coupable* are a function of a frustrated narrative imaginary. A narrative imaginary, by which I mean one's understanding of and relationship to the diegesis as a unified fictional universe reconstructed from visual evidence, is particularly problematic for spectators of *Non coupable* because the events at the center of the story, the murders, happen offscreen. Moreover, different sets of narrative cues suggest contradicting scenarios according to which Ancelin may be either guilty or innocent of serial homicide. Since these cues fail to supersede one another and so collectively constitute any basis for reconstructing the film's universe, both explanations must be accepted as not only equally possible but also simultaneously true, resulting in a narrative imaginary fractured into paradox. As in Decoin and Petiot, then, where dominant imaginary frameworks are menaced by what they fail to circumscribe or be open to, the out-of-frame in *Non coupable* destabilizes the spectator's

understanding of what happens within it. By calling upon the unruly possibilities of the offscreen, employing the frame as a formal and discursive limit, and exposing narrative's inability to accommodate ambiguity and ambivalence into a unified view of its world, *Non coupable* echoes contemporary difficulties in speaking of and narrating recent historical experience. As a French film noir of extreme degree, not only does it reappropriate absence to reflect back on and challenge dominant dualistic representations of the nation like those evidenced in Decoin and Petiot, but it challenges the adequacy of any representation at all.

"Narrative imaginary" emphasizes the formal and ideological relationship between a film and spectator whereby the latter is conditioned to interpret the former as a consisting of coherent spatiotemporal relations in the creation of a unified fictional universe, a diegesis. Its stability fundamentally depends on the interplay between onscreen and offscreen space inasmuch as one can infer the latter from the former. According to film theorist Noël Burch, offscreen space may be conceived as either imaginary or concrete. In his *Praxis du cinéma* (*Theory of Film Practice* [1969]), he argues that when the content of space existing beyond the frame is not known, that space is imaginary. When this same offscreen content subsequently enters the frame or is introduced by a second shot, it becomes known, that is, concrete. Consequently, concrete offscreen space only exists retrospectively because the moment it becomes concrete it is no longer offscreen (Burch 21). Alternatively, while offscreen space is initially imaginary, concrete space always reverts to being imaginary since its contents may change once it slips again out of frame. Therefore, Burch's distinction ultimately means that concrete offscreen space does not exist since all offscreen space insofar as it is truly offscreen is imaginary. My use of the "imaginary" to characterize an understanding or reconstruction of narrative events in a story

world thus differs from Burch's use of the term while building on his central premise. Imaginary space takes part in a narrative imaginary insofar as the positing of invisible space and the hypothesizing of its contents are the conditions for cinematic narrative.[97] This is because the spaces that compose any film story are inherently imaginary. From the space coextensive with the frame to those heterogeneous spaces, known or unknown, previously seen or not, that constitute the rest of the fictional world—all emanate from the imaginary offscreen. The ability to relate formerly "concrete" imaginary spaces to one another and then induce the existence of other permanently imaginary spaces from them constitutes the foundation of a stable, unified relationship to a filmic narrative. This interplay, this narrative imaginary, allows the spectator to envisage, indeed to (re)construct, the temporal and spatial whole that is the diegesis and find the unity of one's own subjecthood reflected in it.

Whereas most theoretical accounts of the cinematic offscreen have been about the space contiguous with that enclosed by the frame, as in Burch, but also in André Bazin's "Peinture et cinéma" 'Painting and Cinema,' or even the space of production just outside the frame, as in Pascal Bonitzer's notion of "hors cadre" 'off frame' (Bonitzer 20)—what is at stake in *Non coupable* are offscreen spaces that are heterogeneous and not contiguous to the onscreen and whose contents are never revealed to the spectator. These spaces are perpetually absent, remaining in what Deleuze calls a "radical Elsewhere" that disturbingly "insists" or "subsists" rather than exists (*Cinema I: The Movement Image* 17). They recall how Abbé d'Aubignac in his

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[97] The fortunate echo between Burch's "imaginary" space and the imaginary as having to do with an effort toward unity is why I employ "narrative imaginary" instead of the related concept of "suture," which Jean-Pierre Oudart was one of the first to develop for film theory in his two part essay for *Cahiers du cinéma*, "La Suture" (1969). The concept refers the operation by which the spectator is able to close the gaps of cinematic discourse, that is, the cut, and through these seams thereby suture or stitch oneself into the diegesis as subject to that discourse. Oudart adopts the idea from Jacques-Alain Miller and Lacanian theories of subject formation more generally.

La Pratique du théâtre (*Practice of Theater* [1657]) describes the interval between acts in theater: one cannot represent the spatiotemporal whole of a fictional world, and so the interval between acts is meant to represent and yet to hide that which cannot or, occasionally, should not be shown to the spectator who infers and imagines what is absent from the cues available onstage (349-350). To illustrate the significance of the radical offscreen in *Non coupable*, I have drafted a rough outline of narrative events (located at the end of this chapter) that differentiates between onscreen and inducible offscreen events. Within the offscreen column one finds the following inferable events: the second and third murders, that is, those of Mailleux and Dr. Dormont;[98] the conditions that give Ancelin a motive, such as Madeleine's affair and Dormont's professional backstabbing; the murders' planning; the police investigation; and the interrogation of a possible suspect, attended by Ancelin himself. One can determine through various onscreen visual and verbal cues that these happen offscreen: parts of the set design, such as clocks and lifeless bodies, interactions between characters, but also elements of montage. Ancelin occupies nearly every shot in the film, but this table emphasizes that he is just as often in an offscreen space that is wholly elsewhere in the diegesis, not just out of frame. As a result, the majority of *Non coupable*'s intrigue, and what marks it as a story about murder, remains in an imaginary space perpetually beyond reach and poses certain obstacles to configuring a stable narrative imaginary.

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[98] As previously noted, the first and fourth murders are accidents. The motorcyclist's death is a mix of chance and drunkenness. Madeleine's death presents a more complicated picture since her demise depends on a complicated series of actions put in motion by Ancelin but of which he has no control after the initial moment. This is proven by the fact that he tries to arrest this domino effect when he changes his mind, but does not succeed in doing so.

Because this chapter deals with the offscreen and the ambivalence of Ancelin's guilt, I will be dealing with the murders of Mailleux and Dormont, and not those of the motorcyclist and Madeleine. If one were to concentrate on the issue of guilt alone, these "accidents" would represent great opportunities for thinking the ambivalence of Ancelin's responsibility, his status as an agent in causing the motorcyclist and Madeleine's deaths.

The distinction between the inferable and non-inferable offscreen proves vital because it recognizes that the extrapolation of offscreen events comes with significant limitations. All clues about what happens offscreen are only indirect, circumstantial. So while the spectator can safely assume that there are murders, an investigation, and possible motives, the particularities of the crimes' unfolding, police work, and conditions that lead to the homicides can never be known with any certainty. Ancelin's involvement, actual or not, persists as a literal blind spot since the spectator's knowledge of the offscreen depends on an enigmatic collection of visual and verbal cues. Ancelin's confessions, for example, carry just as much weight as other characters' disbelief, and visual indices gesturing toward his guilt are just as valid as those suggesting the contrary. The narrative of *Non coupable* is split against itself, a product of offscreen ambivalence and ambiguity. While *Non coupable* may in a sense translate to a formal level noir criticism's tendency to make the undesirable absent, the film emphasizes that its own narrative, its own imaginary is entirely dependent on those omissions.

Central among these visual cues is how, like d'Aubignac's interval between acts, the cut determines the offscreen between sequences. There are two reasons for this. First, the offscreen where the murders happen is a pure diegetic elsewhere, not coextensive with the space demarcated by the frame. Second, the onscreen nearly always features Ancelin, which as outlined above is not the same thing as saying that he is always onscreen. Formally speaking, then, the spatiotemporal conditions for the crimes, if committed by Ancelin, are circumscribed by the matches that straddle the interstices between not only successive images, but more precisely successive sequences. I will demonstrate the paradox of Ancelin's culpability through two of these ellipses: the cuts between the sequences that reveal Ancelin's motives for killing Mailleux

and Dormont and those during which their bodies are discovered. While both inter-sequential cuts center on the spatiotemporal dimensions of the offscreen, the first hinges on questions of time, whereas the second primarily involves issues of space.

Ancelin learns of Madeleine's affair with Mailleux one sunny afternoon during a shopping trip to an antique shop in Chartres after having visited a patient in Lormières (unlike Chartres, Lormières is a purely fictional place). He arrives in the afternoon, at or after 3pm at the sound of church bells.[99] The purpose of the excursion is to replace a ring Madeleine says she lost the night before at the site of the collision with the motorcyclist. To Ancelin's surprise, the shopkeeper shows him this very ring. Furthermore, he learns that the young couple who pawned it in the morning also previously hocked a broach and coat, which as chance would have it are other things Madeleine recently "lost." According to the shop's register the man's name is Mailleux, a mechanic in Lormières. Ancelin assures the worried clerk that "il n'y aurait pas d'histoires" 'there will not be any trouble [literally: stories]' and exists to the left. The film cuts immediately to Mailleux's garage, bathed in sunlight, where a crowd controlled by gendarmes swarms around the building. Ancelin enters the frame from the right wearing the same clothes and crushed expression as when he quit the antique shop. He learns that Mailleux was killed between 10pm and 2am the night before. Ancelin tells friend and local journalist Aubignac (Georges Bréhat)—whose name fortuitously recalls the seventeenth century drama theorist mentioned earlier and to whom I shall return in a moment—that he just came to pick up his car. Just before they part, they set a friendly appointment for noon, and Ancelin jokes that the killer might be one of Aubignac's friends.

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[99] At the end of the previous sequence, a shot of a grandfather clock in the home of Ancelin's patient signals his departure at 2pm. The very next shot features his arrival in Chartres with the sound of church bells, indicating that he arrives at the antique shop at or after 3pm.

The diegetic cues within these two sequences indicate a vast period of offscreen time whereas the way they are edited together suggests only a short gap. Ancelin leaves the antique dealer mid to late afternoon in the first sequence and arrives at the garage sometime in the morning the next day. During this time Ancelin brought his car to Mailleux, who repaired it before being killed, and if Ancelin is the killer, he had to leave and come back with a murder weapon. For a film in which Ancelin is the central character, this represents a vast and potentially juicy section to omit in a single cut. One is unaware of this possibility, however, until Aubignac and Ancelin make their appointment at the end of the second sequence. Before that moment, several matches bridging the inter-sequential cut lead the spectator to believe in, if not direct spatiotemporal continuity, then at least in a relative diegetic continuity between the sequences. These include that fact that the value of sunlight makes both appear to happen at the same time of day, that Ancelin dons the same clothes and composure, and most significantly, that Ancelin exits left in the first sequence and reappears in the next from the right. This last point suggests what film narratologists André Gaudreault and François Jost call a "disjonction proximale" 'proximal disjunction,' in that the match minimizes spatiotemporal difference and discontinuity across the cut (96). Ancelin's exit to the left in one sequence and reentry from the right in the next follows a well known editing convention to imply that he comes to the garage straight from the antique shop. In contrast to the temporal cues that suggest a great gap of offscreen time, the editing and especially the directional match involve a construction of offscreen time and space that mitigates that very difference.

It is not until after the scheduling of the appointment with Aubignac that one infers—and only if paying close attention easily neglected details—the temporal conditions that might have

allowed Ancelin the chance to kill Mailleux. The specific offscreen that would implicate Ancelin in the crime is therefore only deducible retroactively, long after the cut that before disallowed its possibility altogether. The appointment participates in what Burch calls "deferred" or "retroactive matching," where the relationship between two shots is initially thought to be of one nature, continuous or discontinuous, but later proved to be of another (Burch 12-13). Gaudreault and Jost more vividly label it a form of *détournement*, diversion, hijacking, or even embezzlement (Gaudreault and Jost 96-97). Yet Burch, Gaudreault and Jost all outline the deferred match on the level of spatiotemporally coextensive shot-to-shot articulations within the same scene, whereas in *Non coupable* it occurs between two sequences.

This difference introduces two complications. The first involves questions of diegetic continuity. In articulations between shots belonging to the same scene, the illusion of a determinate diegetic unity allows one to revise initially erroneous spatiotemporal perceptions and arrive at a more correct understanding of the setting.[100] One can piece together and be better sutured into a narrative imaginary. As in d'Aubignac's interval, a cut between sequences, however, is by definition predicated on a spatiotemporal ellipsis of indeterminate amplitude, on

[100] To echo the example Burch gives of a deferred match: a shot of a man looking offscreen followed by a counter shot of an object leads one to believe he is looking at that object. Yet a third, wider shot shows that he is looking at something else, or in the opposite direction, or even that he and the object occupy different spaces. In this example one can revise a first impression and come to a truer understanding of the relationship between the first and second shots because of the third shot (Burch 12-13).

the breaking of continuity (Gaudreault and Jost 119).[101] Yet while the gap between two sequences cannot be eliminated, it can be mitigated by the same sort of visual and directional matching performed between shots within a scene. In *Non coupable*, then, the spatiotemporal nature of the cut between the antique shop and the garage cannot be defined, but the matching that straddles it suggests that it is not all that significant.

The second complication builds on the first and depends on the negative correlation between the impact of a retroactive match between sequences and the subsequent sequence's duration. The deferred match (the scheduling of the appointment) between the two sequences in *Non coupable* occurs over three minutes after the cut whose significance it alters. The initial match and its mitigation of difference between the antique shop and garage sequences has ample time to color the narrative existing between the cut and the appearance of the deferred match. At the end of Ancelin's discussion with Aubignac, one may become aware of the temporal amplitude of the offscreen contained by the cut, but due to the minimization of difference and the lengthy delay of the deferred match, the initial understanding of the cut is complicated by *and* complicates that

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[101] Gaudreault and Jost give the following definition of ellipses. Although excessive in Genettian algebra, its precision is welcome:

> TR = 0 et TH = n, d'où TR < ∞ TH
> qui se lit comme suit :
>
> Le Temps du Récit équivaut à zéro,
> alors que le Temps de l'Histoire équivaut à « n », durée indéterminée,
> donc : le Temps du Récit est infiniment moins important
> que le Temps de l'Histoire.
>
> À la différence du sommaire, qui résume une action homogène, l'ellipse est une suppression temporelle qui intervient entre deux actions différentes, entre deux séquences. (Gaudreault 119)
>
> TD = 0 and TS = n, hence TD < ∞ TS
> which means the following:
>
> The Time of the [Narrative] Discourse equals zero,
> whereas the Time of the Story equals "n," an indeterminate duration,
> thus: The Time of the [Narrative] Discourse is infinitely less considerable
> than the Time of the Story.
>
> Unlike summary, which summarizes a homogeneous action, the ellipses is a temporal suppression that intervenes between two different actions, between two sequences.

revision. One may speak here of a sort of "cognitive drag," a stubbornness of first impressions.[102] The second match does not supersede the first, but ultimately takes a seat alongside it, and the possibility for Ancelin's guilt overlaps its own impossibility.

The second ellipsis involves the murder of a rival doctor, Dormont, and raises similar questions of amplitude and parallel possibilities while lacking any deferred match. Following the discovery of Mailleux' body, Ancelin requests Dormont's consult for the patient in Lormières. They leave immediately for the countryside in Dormont's car, leaving Ancelin's in town. En route, Dormont reveals that he has information concerning the Mailleux case and can pinpoint the time of the murder to within fifteen to twenty minutes. Later, after reluctantly confirming Ancelin's diagnosis, Dormont's snobbery leads to an argument in which he openly doubts Ancelin's professional credibility and takes a swipe at his lifestyle. After Ancelin rebuts the first attack and accuses Dormont of sleeping with other doctors' wives, they vaguely threaten one another, and Dormont leaves in a huff, stranding Ancelin in the country. As Ancelin stands motionless before the fire place, the camera tracks backward as day quickly turns into night and the image fades to black. When it fades in again, the camera is motionless and shows Ancelin walking directly toward it. He enters a café and sits at table where Aubignac is already in conversation with inspector Chambon (Jean Debucourt). When Ancelin learns that Dormont has not talked to Chambon, they all leave straight for his house, where they find his body stretched out at the front gate.

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[102] I am here adapting the idea of "emotional drag" advanced by Murray Smith, who uses the idea to argue that our positive or negative first impressions of a character usually persists in some form even if they are later proven wrong. Smith's primary example of emotional drag comes from another film riddled with narrative ellipses: Jean-Pierre Melville's *Le Doulos* (*The Fingerman* [1962]) (216-223).

When, how, and by whom is Dormont killed? If by Ancelin, then how did he manage to surprise him at his home after being stranded in the country, and why should he lead the police to the body? The relay of motion from the camera tracking backward in the last shot of the first sequence and Ancelin's approach in the first image of the next creates another directional match, suggesting that he comes straight to the café from Lormières. Unlike the first ellipses there are no subsequent, deferred clarifications, only Ancelin's puzzling investment in the case. He has multiple motives for killing Dormont, and he perhaps knowingly leads Aubignac and Chambon to the body. The ambivalence and the stratification of the ellipsis by competing editing and diegetic cues again leaves two equally valid, yet contradicting possibilities.

This particular cut, even more than the ellipsis involved in Mailleux's murder, emphasizes that the offscreen between sequences is stubbornly indeterminate and perpetually imaginary. Although Ancelin is always onscreen or in the space just offscreen in both sequences, one has no clue of what happens between them. Indeed, one might say, more radically, that the descriptors "indeterminate" and "imaginary" space are different ways of stating the simple fact that there is no inter-sequential offscreen, that nothing happens, at least on the level of narrative discourse, during the cut, and that ultimately, as d'Aubignac would put it, "les Actions ne sont que dans l'imagination du Spectateur" 'the events only exist in the spectator's imagination" (408).[103] In other words and in a way that should appear pedestrian: the diegesis is an imaginary effect of filmic-narrative discourse and emanates from the latter's form instead of determining it. The inter-sequential cut and Ancelin's leading the police to Dormont's body do not suggest possible

[103] D'Aubignac makes this assertion when speaking of the significance of *discours* or speech in theater, whereas one may often but wrongly think action is privileged over speech onstage. In fact, says d'Aubignac, and especially because of the classical rule of the unity of place, most of the action in classical drama is not witnessed at all by the spectator, but only learned of through the verbal accounts of actors (407-408). I will return to this point in a moment.

scenarios of past action, but paradoxically indicate potentialities for "past" actions suggested by the succession of present images. Guilty or not guilty of killing Dormont is an irresolvable question—each scenario's evidence comes from the same discourse, rendering hypotheses for Ancelin's guilt and innocence both equally valid. Moreover, although one contradicts the other on the story-level, each scenario depends on the other's discursive possibility for itself to be possible. Ultimately, narrative discourse itself is proven inadequate to the construction of certain narratives. The very condition for an imaginary relationship with *Non coupable*'s diegesis irrevocably splits the story in two parts that can neither coexist nor exist by themselves, and any representation of the story world is rendered impossible *because of*—not despite—the absences on which it depends.

At the Limits of the Diegetic and Historical

When I stated at the outset of this chapter that *Non coupable* offers itself as a postwar French film noir to historical analysis, this does not mean that the film text and its simultaneous yet contradictory possibilities are made significant by a historical context that circumscribes and thus determines it. If "context" etymologically involves a weaving together in the construction of a larger text, a film can only be described as a witness to history insofar as it actively reads, reacts to, and often is aware of its place in history without, however, being subordinated to nor fully independent from it. My reading of *Non coupable*'s connection to the mid to late 1940s thus takes its cue from how Roland Barthes envisions textual analysis: "[it] tries to say no longer *from where* the text comes (historical criticism), nor even *how* it is made (structural analysis), but how it is unmade, how it explodes, disseminates—by what coded paths it *goes off*" (Barthes "Struggle

with the Angel" 126-127). French film noir may thus best be described as those texts that magnify the insufficiencies of nationalizing narratives perpetrated or perpetuated in criticism and larger dominant sociocultural discourses and that thereby muddle discursive distinctions in the elaboration of a postwar text of *noirceur*. Having just demonstrated how *Non coupable* creates dual simultaneous yet paradoxical scenarios for diegetic offscreen action, in this final section I would like to shift focus to specifically how the film confuses the division between narrative structure and history. That is, how does *Non coupable* weave the unseen part of its fictional universe with a non-diegetic offscreen? How does it creatively envision its relationship to history as an interaction between several intertexts? And, in particular, how do these spaces conspire with one another to flesh out a hybrid, non-totalizable universe that reflects on and laments incoherencies in formulations of postwar French identity?

Toward the end of the film, Ancelin sits alone in friend and journalist Aubignac's office skimming through a series of newspapers while a crowd, hopeful for new information on the murders, gathers outside. Ancelin calmly works his way through front-page articles about the killings. Next to these are other articles about other recent events, each with a headline recognizable to the average French spectator of the mid-to-late 1940s. They deal with peace treaties ("La paix sera signée" 'Peace will be signed'), former war heroes and decolonialization ("D'Argenlieu est attendu à Paris" 'D'Argenlieu is Expected in Paris'), and issues in the Middle East ("Le sort de la Palestine se décide aujourd'hui à Londres" 'The Future of Palestine will be

Decided Upon Today in London').[104] Elsewhere in the news office, a blackboard features a list of world cities and notes for future articles about still more current news.

The scene emphasizes the role of contemporary events: their account in media, the public need for them to be recounted, and reflection on one's own position in that recounting. In short, the scene plays on the demand for one's position in the event to be recounted back, to be narrativized. After all, Ancelin is looking for himself in the newspapers' pages. Moreover, since the film takes place in the fictional village of Lormières, and since headlines of actual events appear alongside those of fictional ones (the murders), *Non coupable* accentuates that the event is *media*ted, simultaneously reconstructed and constructed, and only available through an archive, a discourse. At work here, then, is not only a demand for context understood as the intersection and interrelation of events, but also an event's creative textuality.

In highlighting this scene, I am not arguing that the film is really about the desire for peace, the search for new heroes, decolonization, or—of course not—the remapping of the Levant. Rather, it outlines the film's awareness of its position in a cultural and historical forcefield**.** Profiting from the representation of temporal simultaneity in the newspaper, which Benedict Anderson has also isolated in the rise of the novel and ultimately the nation, *Non coupable* attests to its place in a type of imagined community, even if and especially because it is fiction (32-34). It invites and expects the spectator to view it through the lens of 1947 and the aftermath of war. Furthermore, the emphasis on both the actual and fictional events goes beyond a simple

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[104] These headlines respectively refer, with a high level of probability, to the following events: the peace treaty between World War Two Allies and Bulgaria, Finland, Hungary, Italy, and Romania that was signed on February 10, 1947, following the Paris Peace Conference (Wiktor 464-66); the early February 1947 recall and subsequent resignation of World War Two hero and high commissioner to Indochina Georges Thierry d'Argenlieu after his perceived failure to restore France's colonial sovereignty in the region (Roure 1; Tucker 259-60); and the announcement on February 14, 1947, that Britain would refer its Mandate of Palestine to the United Nations (Bregman 10). *Non coupable* was released the following September.

awareness of historical intertexts and toward an acknowledgement of their reconstruction. The film is not witness to something, a passive document, but responds to a public need as a creative historical consciousness aware of its production of meaning and particularly, as Jacqueline Rose describes the relationship between fantasy and society, of its "constitutive role in the modern world of states and nations," in "political identities and destinies" (4).

Such an awareness gives multiple layers of signification to Ancelin's subsequent musings about the capacity of normal men to commit horrible acts under certain conditions:

> Et pourtant, voyez-vous, j'ai l'impression que le meurtrier ne doit pas être un type anormal. Non, ça doit être un homme de tous les jours. […] Vous savez, un sentiment poussé au paroxysme peut donner du génie à n'importe qui—la colère par exemple, la souffrance, la haine, la peur […] A quoi pense-t-il maintenant—à sa gloire, à son génie ? Pas sûr. Il pense peut-être aux ambitions de son enfance, de belles ambitions pures, magnifiques, démesurées. Il doit se dire que c'est fini, qu'il ne les retrouvera jamais, qu'il ne pourra jamais revenir en arrière ni refaire ce qu'il a fait. Non, au fond c'est peut-être ça, le remords : se percevoir qu'on a tué ses vingt ans.
>
> And yet, you see, I have the impression that the murderer must not be an abnormal guy. No, he must be a man like any other. […] You know, a feeling pushed to paroxysm can give genius to anyone—anger, for example, suffering, hate, fear […] What is he thinking about now—his fame, his genius? I am not sure. He is thinking perhaps about his childhood dreams, beautiful, pure, wonderful, limitless dreams. He must be telling himself that it is all finished, that he will never get them back, that he can never go back,

> nor redo what he has done. No, deep down, maybe that is what regret is: to realize that one has wasted one's youth.

Ancelin speaks these words in the presence of Aubignac, but his gaze is locked on something else, on an elsewhere non-localizable within the physical space of the scene, his speech pressing up against the limits of the story world.[105] Just as the addressee of this soliloquy is ambiguous, so, too, is its subject, in the sense of both who speaks and what is spoken. One cannot help but listen to Ancelin as if he were speaking at once about the murders and about something else, and simultaneously about a part of his own life years before the film even started and yet also about someone else. That which is particular to the film and general to the world beyond it are confused in a powerful way that straddles the boundary between the diegetic and non-diegetic. In an earlier scene, Ancelin tells Madeleine that such a paroxysm gave him the lucidity to erase traces of his involvement in the motorcyclist's death, and so the passage may be read in that direction. Yet given his perusal of the newspapers moments earlier, these reflections on the conditions of possibility for destructive genius inevitably also conjure recent history, namely, the traumatic memories and aftermath of World War Two.

Through these direct and indirect articulations of the film's relationship to the postwar era, *Non coupable* stresses not only the connection between its diegetic offscreen and the non-diegetic offscreen of its intertexts, but also that this connection relates to the ambivalence of Ancelin's guilt. For it is he who gives voice to the overlap between the fictional and "real" worlds. Although an investigation into all the film's intertexts can never be exhaustive—how can one recover all possible intertexts?—the controversies surrounding *Non coupable*'s director,

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[105] The confusion of the diegetic and non-diegetic through the double address of such an account, at once to a character within the diegesis and yet also to the spectator, is exactly how d'Aubignac describes "les narrations pathétiques" 'moving narratives" in classical and neoclassical drama (422).

Henri Decoin, and Marcel Petiot offer rich points of reflection. As we saw earlier, while the Decoin and Petiot cases illustrate the failure of dichotomies used to rethink French national identity in the wake of World War Two and the Occupation, *Non coupable* transposes the frustration with dominant dualistic frameworks to a formal level by expressing a dissatisfaction with the filmic frame and resisting the classical tendency toward a unified diegesis. Taken together as a set phenomena that may be collectively described as noir, Decoin, Petiot, and *Non coupable* constitute at once symptoms of and statements of protest against the inability of national and narratological imaginaries to tell stories.

Reflecting back on Decoin and Petiot through *Non coupable*, then, one can better envisage the echoes between the conceptual issues raised in their cases and those involved in the film's narrative. Just as efforts to articulate Decoin and Petiot through postwar categories of French identity are thwarted by the ambivalence and limits of available evidence, the need to cast the film as about either a man guilty or not guilty of murder is challenged by a multitude of absent evidence suggesting the possibility of both scenarios. The evidence in all three situations refuses to conform to the univocality of an imaginary striving to tell a story according to the rules of its own discourse. Instead of being either Vichyite or not, collaborator or resistant, guilty or innocent, once submitted to such dichotomies, Decoin, Petiot, and Ancelin easily occupy both positions at once. The presuppositions at play in all instances are undone by a performance of their imaginary logic. Postwar national identity is destabilized by its own shortcomings in thinking about experience during and since the Occupation, and the effort toward conventional diegetic cohesion results in its irreparable self-destruction.

There are, however, important differences between the problems raised by Petiot and Decoin, on the one hand, and by *Non coupable* on the other. Chief among these is the film's deliberate use of the unknown to create narrative without recourse to an anchoring sense of reality, that is, of the film describing a real-life event. This difference is the reason both scenarios of Ancelin's involvement in the murders must be accepted and thought together, and they give special value to the function of the offscreen and to Ancelin's confessional monologue. This value can be framed by the following questions: what is gained by staging a central narrative act in the offscreen; to what end does the indeterminate offscreen make the issue of Ancelin's guilt open-ended; and why is it significant that he confess to something that the spectator does not see and with which the former may have no real involvement?

When combined with Ancelin's speech, these inquiries become all the more important because they recall characteristics of neoclassical, seventeenth century French drama, where the account and existence of the offstage serve a similar purpose. One may recall Racine's *Phèdre*, for example, and particularly *le récit de Théramène*, the famous account of Hippolyte's encounter with and gruesome death at the hands of a sea monster as well as Phèdre's persecution by Venus (1498-1570). I am speaking here not of the unity of place nor of an isolated instance of *bienséance* or decorum, but rather of the possibilities for representation and thought opened up by an account of something that occurs in the unseen space offstage. As for decorum, Hippolyte's death constitutes something that should not be represented on stage, but this is not the same thing as saying that it should not be represented at all. Indeed, Théramène's narration serves this very function, and its indirectness even increases the level of shock in the listener. Taking this one step further, by putting the murders of *Non coupable* offscreen in the inter-sequential cut and

referencing them through the ambiguity of Ancelin's speech, the film does not merely draw attention to the crimes. For it also emphasizes the paradox, the fracturing of the narrative imaginary between two diegetic scenarios as well as between the diegetic and non-diegetic, these multiple spaces produced by the unseen murders and Ancelin's speech. *Non coupable*, as a film noir, undermines the absences created by the use of noir in national narratives insofar as it signals that narrative in general creates and is created by such select omissions.

What further makes classical drama a reference point in thinking about *Non coupable* is the former's relegation of myth as a source of perhaps self-fulfilling prophecies to the unwitnessed and unanswerable elsewhere of the radically offstage. The gods can only exist out of sight, and what exists beyond vision's reach, such as the sea monster in *Phèdre*, approaches the abstraction of the mythic deities who command its violence. This is akin to what Leo Spitzer is getting at when he says that the *récit de Théramène* employs the technique of "klassische Dämpfung," the repression of the emotional by the intellectual. It entails the creation of a purely abstract space—abstract, that is, not only in its existence but also in the intellectual work involved in its imagining (Spitzer 110). Turning again to *Non coupable*, the point is that the question of whether Ancelin is guilty does not demand an answer, since it hinges on an indeterminable offscreen, but persists and insists as its own end. The rhetorical space of his innocence or guilt is all the more abstract in that the spaces it simultaneously relies upon yet also makes possible are, like the responsibility of Neptune or Venus for Hippolyte's death and Phèdre's misery, irreducible. *Non coupable*'s ambivalent offstage splits the narrative thread into two, and launches the struggle for a stable narrative imaginary into the dimension of endless, spiraling thought. By extension, the same endless process may be seen in the struggle to define and install a postwar identity in

Decoin and Petiot's cases; the exception, however, is that this movement of thought subtending and driving the search for a French national imaginary is arrested, fixed in precarious meaning by Decoin's expulsion from the profession and Petiot's execution.

Lastly, and returning to d'Aubignac's assertions about the place of action in classical drama, John Lyons contends that what happens offstage "does not, in concrete terms, happen at all" (72). Conjuring Jacques Scherer, Lyons argues that accounts of the offstage function rather to represent the speaker's beliefs, desires, and relationship to the imaginary event that is then mediated by them (Lyons 79; Scherer 233). The echoes between Lyons' word choice and the terminology in which Noël Burch couches his differentiation between different types of cinematic offscreen space is coincidental, and yet, while not altogether uniform, fortunate. What might now be called Ancelin's own *récit*, that is, his confession to the crimes, speaks to a desire to position oneself with them in the same fractured imaginary, abstract, indeterminable space. Guilty or not, Ancelin's words express a need to exist in the space of crime as pure violation, exception, free from the specificity of law. The offscreen crimes and Ancelin's confessions to them, because his innocence cannot be determined, represent an exasperation with constricting, univocal narrative discourses.

Just as important as the identity of the person who recounts the offscreen is the place where it is recounted. The offscreen of *Non coupable* contains not only the murderous events of its story, but overlaps with those of the "real" world. In this respect, the newspapers featured in the scene analyzed above constitute a collection of *récits*, accounts of the offstage or offscreen. It is only fitting, then, or as d'Aubignac would put it, *convenable*, that Aubignac's newsroom should be the space where Ancelin delivers his own *récit*—for there is a reason that the account of the

unwitnessed space happens in this witnessed space (d'Aubignac 426). As Ancelin reads the paper in Aubignac's office, news stories of actual events of the mid-to-late 1940s, peace treaties, fallen war heroes, and the Middle East conflict, are literally printed alongside those recounting the serial murders. The image emphasizes that the *hors champ*, the diegetic offscreen, overlaps with a *hors cadre* that is not only the space of production, but the space of history, and it thus plays upon the dual meaning of *histoire*, story and history, by situating them both in the same spaces-off. History is subsumed into in the world of the story just as the inverse is also true: the film presents itself as part of the world of actual historical events. Similar to Ancelin's confession, the film itself acknowledges and invites the spectator to think about the story's place in and relationship to the space of history, to examine the overlap between narrative form and national history as the imaginary of the former echoes problematics of national identity. While not by any means an adaptation, then, *Non coupable* testifies not only to a frustration with the unifying laws of narrative discourse, but with the simplistic nationalist discourses at work in Decoin, Petiot, and in noir film criticism more largely.

(Table 1) Onscreen	Offscreen
Day 1———————————————	Day 1———————————————
	- (before Day 1:) Madeleine's affair with Mailleux, including their selling her coat and broach to antique shop - Dormont steals a client from Ancelin
- Night: Madeleine looking for Ancelin, who is drunk in a bar - **FIRST MURDER:** Ancelin, still drunk, drives home with Madeleine, accidentally killing a motorcyclist.	
Day 2———————————————	Day 2———————————————-
	- Madelein and Mailleux sell ring in morning
- Conversation with Madeleine about lost ring and broach - Visit from Gendarmerie - Visit to sick child, promise to get Dormont's consultation - 14h00 leaves client for Chartre - 15h00 (?) Visits Antique shop, finds Madeleine's ring. Leaves saying there will not be any trouble regarding the ring.	
	- Car breaks down - Scissors go missing - **SECOND MURDER:** Mailleux killed. (According to gendarmerie between 10h-2h/ According to Dormont's information, offered next day: 10h40-11h)
Day 3———————————————	Day 3———————————————
	- Discovery of 2nd murder - Ancelin does his rounds, visits clients

- Ancelin visits garage, makes quip about murderer being one of Aubignac's friends, and makes appointment to meet with Aubignac at noon.
- (12h20) Arrives at journalist's office (talk and praise of perfect crime and intellect)
- (Before 13h)
  - On way back home, discovers faulty footbridge
  - Arrives back home to have lunch with Madeleine
  - She cannot find the scissors
  - She asks if Ancelin fell asleep in office previous night
  - He tells her of Mailleux's murder. She faints. He confesses and threatens her if she goes to the police
- Ancelin visits Dormont, asks for his consult	

Onscreen	Offscreen
- Goes with Dormont to client, gets info on first murder, and has argument - (time of day?) Dormont storms out and leaves him there	- Rain storm, night falls - **THIRD MURDER:** Dormont killed right outside his own house
- Ancelin appears on dark, wet street, enters café - Café. Ancelin asks police if they have talked with Dormont. Since they have not they all go to Dormont's house and find his body.	
Day 4———	Day 4———
- (Day) Ancelin meets with Aubignac at his office and reflects on state of killer's mind	- With Aubignac goes to see about a suspect
- (Night) Madeline sees poster eliciting information for reward while returning home, - Ancelin catches her calling police, threatens her and chases her out of the house. - **FORTH MURDER**: Madeleine falls through the footbridge during her flight and dies	
	Days 5, 6, 7——— - Discovery of Madeleine's body, and investigation into her guilt. Ancelin disappears.
Day 8——— - Ancelin, drunk, confesses to inspector Chambon, who does not believe him intelligent enough to commit the murders - Ancelin writes a suicide note to confess again, but as he slumps to his death, the letter falls in the fireplace.	

CONCLUSION

NOIR AND "THE LONG OCCUPATION"

This book has given new meaning to film noir as a category that emerges and is pervasive in French critical discourse before, during, and after the Occupation and that has a privileged position in French cinema's negotiation of national identity. Within criticism, noir demarcates what one does not admit in representations of the nation, and it therefore constitutes that upon which French national identity regarding the Occupation negatively depends. I articulated the task of redefining film noir for French cinema in response to three specific shortcomings in current scholarship: a lack of grounding in the criticism where noir materializes as a way of speaking about film and the nation; a reluctance to recognize that noir changes meaning through time and often means different things to different critics contemporaneous to one another; and a paucity of work on French film noir if not a tendency to transpose notions of American noir back onto French cinema. In short, I found that scholarship was quite content to perpetuate what Marc Vernet calls the "cinephilic readymade," to put dusty arguments back into circulation without seriously reassessing, tracing, or expanding upon the—otherwise much anthologized—critical source texts where noir becomes manifest as a mode of thinking about the network of relationships between cinema, its historical context, and its audience (Vernet 2).

To tackle this quandary, I took a cue from the most promising studies of noir to emphasize that noir exists less as a "group of artifacts" that coalesce as some immutable, platonic, classic genre and more as a "history of ideas" (Naremore 11). As a discourse, therefore, and in the simplest sense of the term, noir in criticism from the late 1930s through the 1950s constitutes an ongoing discussion of a particular topic, in this case, the reception of films as representations the

nation of France by French critics. This proposition and the arguments born out of it are only possible through an exploration of the vastness of the French cinematic archive, including both the well-known and not so well-known titles and figures of French film and, especially, criticism. Only through such extensive reconnaissance work has it been possible to arrest the scholarly repetition surrounding film noir, to break the readymade, and finally to realize that noir's value in mid-twentieth-century France lies in what it means, and particularly in what one does not want it to mean, to speak of French national identity in relationship to *les années noires*, the dark years, the Occupation.

The value of noir as a negative, nationalizing discourse in French film criticism was the direct object of the first half of this book, which introduced and emphasized the three ideas essential to exploring French film noir. First and most generally, noir within film criticism is related to an ongoing conversation about the representation of the nation and national cinema. Second, noir's value changes throughout the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s and just as frequently differs between contemporary, individual critics depending on their political, historical, and theoretical positions. As such, noir criticism sketches out changing conceptions of national identity. Third, at any point in this endless and multifaceted process, noir consistently relates to how the nation should represent itself to itself by naming what should be left out of that representation. It is used by critics to fix one idea of the nation against another, and this tension regularly refers to, directly or indirectly, by anticipation, contemporary reflection, or remembrance, World War Two and the Occupation.

The two chapters that undertook this task represent contrasting perspectives on noir criticism. The first set the stage for the rest of the book by performing a direct analysis of the relationship

between noir and the nation in criticism from the late 1930s through the 1950s. By bringing together for the first time in scholarship, whether in cinema studies or French studies, a diverse set of prewar, Occupation, and postwar critics, ranging from Georges Sadoul to Lucien Rebatet, and André Bazin to Raymond Borde, I traced how their treatments of noir create a series of oppositions between spectator positions identified as French, on the one hand, and figuratively and literally foreign, on the other. The analysis of these texts showed that by the threats to the integrity of the French spectator that these Fascist, leftist, Jewish, Nazi, Vichyite, prewar French, and American others represent, they secure and even make possible the versions of French cinematic and national identity advanced by these notable critics. In the end, rather than suggesting that this national identity exists as a static whole, I argued that it inheres in the very change represented by the transformation of this series of threats of alterity.

The subsequent chapter then examined the same corpus of criticism from a different angle by identifying how and why postwar critics, even if they share a rhetoric and investment in the nation similar to prewar and Occupation noir criticism, resist any relationship between French noir of those periods and postwar American noir. Since noir is a function of criticism rather than of the films themselves, I maintain this paradox to assert that glosses concerning the immediate prewar and Occupation within postwar criticism are crucial to the value of noir following 1945. This is because noir gestures towards the ways one could and could not imagine national identity following the Liberation. Moreover, I found that similar paradoxes and omissions were constitutive of the way François Truffaut recasts national cinema through an emphasis on the auteur and disengages from the social and of the way postwar critics receive Julien Duvivier, whose artistic value is derided even as his films' social commentary becomes more incisive and

timely. If the first chapter showed that noir is central to how one imagines and reimagines national identity, the second proved that noir is also fundamental to the changes in how one imagines the purpose of cinema as a national art form.

In the second half, I turned my attention to the analysis of select films, but attached specific conditions to their their being called films noirs. In the first couple chapters, I reimagined the field where one locates noir by stating that it has more do more with the way critics articulate the relationship between film, nation, and the Occupation through a loss of collective memory than with some vague notion of noir stylistics. In the last two chapters, accordingly, I radically argued that individual films noirs—rather than the idea of film noir—can only be defined as such insofar as they react against, complicate, or reveal the tensions behind the dominant formulations of the national imaginary at work in noir criticism. If noir is used in criticism to reject filmic representations of the nation in support of particular nationalisms, then films noirs must represent a challenge to these visions of the nation. Because noir is a critical category first and a filmic category second, no film, within French cinema, may be considered noir without an awareness and the backdrop of the critical conversations on national identity informed by the experience of the Occupation.

The specific examples I chose to illustrate this departure from conventional approaches to noir engage with postwar notions of national identity that rely on a uniform, universal myth of the Resistance and on Manichean dualisms. Jean-Pierre Melville's use of the cinema of process both to thematize meta-cinematic forms and explore narratives of Occupation experience undermines the historical myths on which dominant articulations of national identity born out of that experience depend. I argued that process draws attention to the decontextualization and

survival through repetition and rehearsal of univocal narratives of Resistance to show that such elements of the postwar imaginary behave like instances of *mise-en-scène*, like alibis. Similarly, the immense role of the offscreen in Decoin's *Non coupable* (*Not Guilty* [1947]) constructs dualistic narratives whose simplicity underlines the insufficiency of narrative itself. The little-known B movie thereby testifies to a frustration with Manichean frameworks that dominate postwar narratives of national identity and pit Resistant against collaborator, one "real" France against a "false" France, a dichotomy already evident the controversy surrounding Henri-Georges Clouzot's *Le Corbeau* (*The Raven* [1943]). This dissatisfaction is put into relief through *Non coupable*'s parallelism with two intertexts where such dualistic frameworks are on full display: its director, Decoin's trial for collaboration and Petiot's trial for murder. Both involve questions of culpability that are capable of conforming simultaneously to hypotheses of both Resistant action and collaboration with the Gestapo. Like *Non coupable*, the ambivalent results of these trails ultimately illustrate the failure of such binary discourses to think Occupation experience.

Although Melville's work and *Non coupable* may have a thematics in common with conventional notions of noir as having to do with crime, only their engagement with postwar French nationalizing myths render them noir. Indeed, Melville's *Le Silence de la mer* (*The Silence of the Sea* [1949]) would never be considered a film noir by traditional standards, and only the approach described above is capable of reading it as such because it takes noir as a failure or refusal to incorporate aspects of collective memory into the national imaginary. Moreover, these filmic analyses and especially the final chapter's evocation of Decoin and Petiot's trials have the effect of further dislocating noir from film itself. Noir may emerge in

criticism, but rather than isolating it there, the filmic textual analyses in the final two chapters suggests that it exists as a shroud impeding a larger elaboration of French nationalism in the wake of the Occupation. Collectively, the above chapters trace the contours of noir as a complex network of allusions, omissions, memories, and identifications in reference to *les années noires*.

This book as a whole and especially the archival research that undergirds it goes a long way toward reinvigorating noir scholarship. It shakes off the languishing, repetitive approaches to film noir that focus on American cinema and begin with the preambular lists of formal and technical features with little awareness of or interest in the conditions from which the category arose. The above chapters argue that once noir is explored from the perspective of those who first leveled the term at cinematic works and with an eye toward the conditions that made their polemics and debates about national identity and the Occupation possible, that is, once one starts to care about noir as a *critical category* in a specific corpus of *French* film discourse, noir winds up looking entirely different. No longer an object for film fetishists, subject to growing inventories that belie their own usefulness, nor support for American generic and cinematic hegemony, when taken in French film criticism noir is the color of an entire epoch struggling to feel out the contours of national identity going into and coming out of the Occupation. In short, noir is about the definition, the *découpage* of a national imaginary during a period when the nation itself was, as it were, suspended. Noir is at once the means by which discourses of national identity are articulated and that which threatens their very integrity.

That said, I envision three principle, interrelated ways that this ambitious project could be improved. Each represents a necessary avenue for further work on French noir: a wider scope extending beyond the New Wave; a consideration of the Algerian war and its relationship to the

Occupation; and a study of literary noir. These paths constitute not only extensions of the work I have performed here; some of them also pose potentially serious challenges to its premises and conclusions.

First, future research would have to take into account a larger period to see how the legacy of the Occupation informs other formulations of French national identity in cinema from the 1960s to today. This is especially true with what French studies has called "la mode rétro" (the retro style). This describes a tendency beginning in the early 1970s following the death of Georges Pompidou and end of the Gaullist era when films like *Le Chagrin et la pitié* (*The Sorrow and the Pity* [Marcel Ophüls, 1969]), *Lacombe, Lucien* (Louis Malle, 1974), or *Monsieur Klein* (*Mr. Klein* [Joseph Losey, 1976]) challenged dominant, resistancialist myths and narratives about the Occupation (Austin, *Contemporary French Cinema* 28-29).[106] Such a scope would also have to consider the more recent wave of films dealing with the Occupation. Works such as *Un Secret* (*A Secret* [Claude Miller, 2007]), *La Rafle* (*The Round up* [Rose Bosch, 2010]), and *L'Armée du crime* (*The Army of Crime* [Robert Guédiguian, 2009]), not to mention countless other works from the 1980s and 1990s, continue to revise dominant articulations of twentieth-century French history. Each probes specific absences in narratives of the Occupation, whether concerning the private, particular history of a French family, the Vel d'Hiv round-up and French-led mass arrests of Jews, or the very "Frenchness" of the French Resistance.[107]

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[106] *La mode rétro* is also represented in literature by Patrick Modiano's *Place de l'étoile* (1968) and especially by the imbrication of individual amnesia and identity with the national history of the Occupation in Modiano's later novel, *La Rue des boutiques obscures* (*Missing Person* [1978]). Revisions of the legacy of the Occupation were of course also spurred on by studies such as Robert Paxton's seminal *Vichy France* (1972).

[107] Guédiguian's representation of an immigrant-led Resistance cell, in particular, is in many respects a response to the Gaullist, nationalist tendencies in Melville's *L'Armée des ombres*.

The issue here is not simply to create a list of films about the Occupation. Scholarship on Occupation cinema and on later works about the war has been one of the most productive areas of French film studies for the past few decades in both France, the United Kingdom, and the United States. I have relied on many of these sources here, from Evelyn Ehrlich, Jean-Pierre Bertin-Maghit, Jacques Siclier, Noël Burch and Geneviève Sellier, to Judith Mayne, to name a few. Rather than deal in lists, the point I want to make here is the fruitful convergence of existing French film scholarship on the Occupation with work on film noir, fields that have been separate for far too long. Instead of absorbing each other, both should form the parallel trajectories of a double helix that share an axis made of common questions and texts. Work on *la mode rétro*, especially, would discover through such a cooperation with noir scholarship that dissatisfaction with postwar narratives of the Occupation had been simmering for some time before Marcel Ophüls' and Patrick Modiano's supposedly inaugurating works—particularly in the case of the films noirs by Melville and Decoin that I have analyzed here. Moreover, the combination of conventionally "noir," mystery, or general crime motifs—I prefer the latter descriptor because it keeps distinct the crime genre and a noir nationalizing discourse—with narratives inspired by the Occupation is already present in films contemporary to the period like *Le Corbeau* (*The Raven* [Henri-Georges Clouzot, 1943]). A next step might then also involve an informed but cautious return to genre to investigate how and why these crime narratives may have a tendency to intersect with noir and the Occupation. I will return to this point and the challenges it introduces in a moment.

Second and building upon the need for a wider scope, if noir emphasizes that historical omissions are constitutive of a supposedly cohesive postwar national imaginary, then any further

exploration would absolutely have to explore the significance of the Algerian War. Noir film and criticism may, respectively, draw attention to and perpetuate certain omissions in narratives about the Occupation—but the Algerian War is altogether absent in cinema during the same period. Indeed, films about the conflict were subject to strict censorship (Austin, *Contemporary French Cinema* 39). Also, if cinematic reflection on the Occupation experienced a revisionist trend starting in the late 1960s and 1970s, this must be seen as contemporary to the sudden appearance, if sometimes indirect, of the Algerian War on screen in works like *Le Petit soldat* (*The Little Soldier* [Jean-Luc Godard, 1960]), *Muriel* (Alain Renais, 1963), *Le Boucher* (*The Butcher* [Claude Chabrol, 1970]), and of course *La Bataille d'Alger* (*The Battle of Algers* [*Gillo Pontecorvo*, 1966]) (Austin, "Seeing and Listening" 115).[108] And again like the Occupation, much can be said about recent films, especially those that emphasize a relationship between *les années noires* and the Algerian War. I am thinking here of Rachid Bouchareb's diptych *Les Indigènes* (*Days of Glory* [2006]) and *Hors la loi* (*Outside the Law* [2010]), which are about North African-French soldiers during World War Two and the FLN (Front de libération nationale [National Liberation Front]) in Paris during the Algerian war. Both follow, if not exactly the same three characters, the same three actors (Jamel Debbouze, Roschdy Zem, and Sami Bouajila) as quasi-diegetic/non-diegetic points of continuity between the two periods. Taken together, they emphasize a link between the Sétif massacre on May 8, 1945, and the massacre of

[108] *Le Petit soldat* and *La Bataille d'Alger* were both banned from screens and only released later, in 1963 and 1974 respectively, for their representation of the war.

protesters in Paris on October 17, 1961.[109] These violent suppressions of demonstrations against colonialism and for Algerian independence on the day of Nazi surrender and toward the end of the Algerian war received little attention until the 1990s. The Paris massacre in particular was not officially recognized by the French government until 1998. As in much work on the Occupation, some have argued that this failure to transmit the collective memory of the Algerian War has led to current social divisions and conflict within current day France (McCormack 21-22). In short, I may have concentrated on the role of the Occupation in thinking film noir and *noirceur* together, but this represents only the first step in a necessarily two-part project investigating the palimpsestic interaction between the dark years and the Algerian War.[110] The relationship between both would surely prove constitutive of different, simultaneous types of *noirceur*, two axes around which mid-twentieth-century French national identity uncomfortably revolves.

Lastly, as my reference to *la mode rétro* already suggests, the inevitable other side of French *film* noir is of course *literary* noir. From the translations and original works published as part of Gallimard's famous *Série noire* to more canonical authors like Louis-Ferdinand Céline and Boris Vian—these texts represent an entirely new space to explore the relationship between noir and nation. However, their value would prove simultaneously complementary and problematic in view of the work I have done here regarding French film noir. The fake translations "de

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[109] The massacre in Sétif began with an approved victory parade celebrating the German Surrender. Some participants took the occasion to protest against the French and demand the release of Ahmed Massali Hadj, an Algerian nationalist leader. Although there were violent acts committed by both Algerians and French authorities, there is some debate on who attacked first. There is no question, however, that the French response was disproportionate, with some estimates as high at 10,000 Algerian dead (Veve and Tucker 819-820). The massacre in Paris on October 17, 1961, was the result of a violent crackdown by the police on an otherwise peaceful, FLN-led protest against a racist, unconstitutional, and event Nazi-like curfew stipulating that "Muslim Algerian Workers" were not to be in the streets from 8:30pm to 5:30am (Goslan, *Vichy's Afterlife* 168-72).

[110] This line of enquiry may lead to the issue of decolonization more generally. The news articles about Indochina and the fallout of World War Two featured in *Non coupable* point in this direction as early as 1947, before the beginning of the Algerian War in 1954.

l'américain" 'from the American'[111] published by the *Série noire* beginning in 1945 and penned by French writers with American pseudonyms may be compatible with my analyses of film critics' attitudes toward and projection of national anxieties onto American noir. For instance, Boris Vian's first two *polars* written under the name Vernon Sullivan, an African-American from the Deep South, relate the revenge of black men against racists in the United States. *J'irai cracher sur vos tombes* (*I Will Spit on Your Grave* [1946]) and *Les Morts ont tous la même peau* (*The Dead All Have the Same Skin* [1947]) thus prompt questions such as how, why, and which specific domestic issues are being staged through contemporary racial conflicts abroad, and they force the reader to ask what is gained by such transposition. Similarly, Didier Daeninckx's more recent *Meurtres pous mémoire* (*Murder in Memoriam* [1984]) would converse well with Bouchareb's films because it draws a specific relationship between World War Two and Algeria. The novel focuses on actual historic and fictional links between Vichy's deportation of Jews to concentration camps and the October 17, 1961, Paris massacre: a character resembling Maurice Papon and a fictional father-son pair who are both historians investigating these specific lacunae of national identity and killed for their research.[112] In many respects, my hypothesis that noir is about what is omitted from the postwar French national imaginary in order to make it possible could comfortably shift over to literature.

However, literary noir poses several questions that complicate, if not severely challenge, the work I have done here. This is particularly and most evidently true when it comes to my

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[111] "Traduit de l'américain" is found at the beginning of much of the early *Série noire* titles, including those originally written by British and even French authors.

[112] Maurice Papon was convicted in 1998 of ordering the deportation of Jews in France to concentration camps during the Second World War. He was also responsible, but was not punished, for the brutal crackdown on the peaceful protest of Algerians in Paris on October 17, 1961. See Goslan's edited volume, *The Papon Affaire* for a collection of articles exploring Papon's role in twentieth-century French history.

privileging of film criticism as an originary space for noir as a category. To wit: if, as the chapter on *Non coupable* and its intertexts suggest, noir is a sociocultural phenomenon that extends beyond cinema, then to what degree can a conception of French noir that begins with film criticism and initially understands it a mode of speaking about representations of the nation in film be applicable to literature? What makes an extension of these fundamental premises to literature all the more thorny is my persistence in being skeptical of the role of generic, semantic motifs such as crime, detectives, lighting, and so on. How does one integrate noir literature into a perspective that resists conventional notions of noir as a crime genre and, moreover, begins with the social impact of what is now known as poetic realism in the late 1930s? Without being able to fall back on the reactions of film critics, must one venture into the fictions to find common ground between both novels and films? If so, this puts the tenability of my thesis about the centrality of the film critical archive into question. If not, are there different types of *noirceur* unique to cinema criticism on the one hand and to literary criticism on the other? What then constitutes the archive of literary noir criticism, how does one create its limits, and how do its writers, texts, and debates differ from their cinematic cousins? Are they elaborated through the reception of the *Série noire* and its postwar look-alikes, the dark novels of Céline, the popular literature of Eugène Dabit or Pierre Mac Orlan, or maybe even the work of Francis Carco? Does it perhaps have more to do with the reception of American novelists like Dashiell Hammet, Raymond Chandler, James M. Cain, and William Faulkner by surrealist and existentialist intellectuals? If this last possibility, then what does that mean for *French* noir, and does it bring one back to the hypothesis of a cross-Atlantic cultural projection of anxieties proposed in the first two chapters on film criticism?

This final "conclusion" may pretend to some superficial sense of finality, but one can already see the sorts of extensions, questions, and challenges a wider scope, the Algerian War, and especially literature would present to future work into French noir. As I just demonstrated, literature, while in some places an easy reapplication and adjustment of many theses contained in this book, may also prove their ultimate undoing, may point to their ambitious yet ultimately flawed assumptions.

Yet if these directions for subsequent research appear to suck one into an unwieldy spiral of speculation and uncertainty and even threaten to derail some of the concepts and trajectories I have set out here, I believe this is due less to a flimsy analytic logic than to the rigidity of decades of noir research. The vast unknown that now lies before noir scholarship is the very product of the overdue return to French film criticism this study represents. Even if this investment in the vastness of French critical discourse may not be as central as I have argued here, its understanding of the connection between film "noir," the Occupation, and French spectators has proved invaluable by opening new paths for exciting work into a cultural and intellectual category. Calling for an end to the lists become proverbs or clichés of a type of filmmaking, to the notion of film noir as a specifically American phenomenon or at best a generic black hole, absorbing everything close to it but contributing little to the other fields of study—noir as it is articulated here, and as it should be understood from here forward, describes what is at stake in thinking and representing France through the formative period, *les années noires*, that shares its name. Noir describes in one word what mid-twentieth-century France both wants to be and does not want to be as well as the conditions and means under and through

which that national imaginary is possible. Indeed, *les années noires* stretch far beyond the four years of Nazi Occupation.

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