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## Gender and the politics of decolonization in early 1960s French cinema

Erotophilic and politically sublimated are two barbs frequently mobilized to critique the imaginary of early 1960s French cinema. Erotophilic as, for the most part, this era in filmmaking remained anchored to the sexualised archetypes of the vamp and the dandy, cavorting in a theatre of bed sheets.<sup>1</sup> And politically sublimated as the overarching majority of films funded by the state rarely appeared willing to cast anything more than an elliptical gaze over the country's engagement with the Algerian War (1954-1962), a conflict which involved dragging a generation of young men kicking and screaming to their deaths in colonial Algeria, before President de Gaulle abruptly decided to relinquish this "jewel" in France's imperial crown. Out with the old, in with the new.

That the three films discussed in this essay emphatically support the tendency towards erotophilia and political sublimation outlined above is thus not unusual in and of itself. What is surprising, however, is that in each of the narratives analysed in this essay – Jacques Rivette's New Wave classic, *Paris nous appartient* (1961), Louis Malle's psychological drama, *Le Feu follet* (1963), and Jacques Dupont's *Les Distractions* (1960), a thriller that has been described as 'an artificial and often muddled homage to Marcel Carné and Jean-Luc Godard' (Aubriant 1960) – the vexed identity politics engendered by the Algerian War are mangled, mitigated, or, in some cases, completely "screened out" from the frame of representation, precisely through an inability to view the world through anything other than the lens of a fundamentally masculine, often sexualized, subjectivity.

To consider tropes of gender as a source of political mystification is to instigate a radical reworking of how we diagnose the style of cinematic narratives that arose in response to the rise of anti-colonial nationalism on one side, pro-colonial fascism on the other. According to the dominant critical doxa – disseminated by journals such as *Positif*, *Image et son*, and *CinémaAction*, alongside the work of Jean-Pierre Jeancolas (1977), Sébastien Denis (2006), and, to a certain extent, Benjamin Stora (1997a; 1997b) – the depoliticization of cinema of this period should be understood as a direct symptom of pressure placed upon directors by government censors, many of whom had previously worked as administrators in the colonies, before being hired under the aegis of André Malraux (The Minister of Culture), Louis Terrenoire (The Minister of Information), and, ultimately, de Gaulle himself.

Scholarship of this nature is frequently axiological and conspiratorial, carving a clear line in the sand between a cinematic community implicitly elevated to the status of left-wing martyrs, and the nefarious machinations of a fascistic state. It is also largely industry-orientated, spawning and regurgitating reams of pages littered with endless dates and figures, all imbued with similar axioms of historiographical objectivity. Finally, it often mobilizes a metaphorical imagination inherited from concentrationary art as a modality of rhetoric. Consider, for example, the following lines from the left-leaning journal *Positif*, in which Yann Le Masson and Olga Poliakoff (writing anonymously) lamented how "self-expression" is forced through a series of rolling machines until it resembles the whims of the Prince [de Gaulle]' (1962: 18), an April-May 1961 edition of *Image et son* entitled 'Censorship Against Cinema', or a more recent description of the government as 'having controlled information with an iron fist' (Anon, 2013). All of which is to say that, at least until

recently, the crime of censorship seemed to be a closed case: we had caught the killer, and the killer was de Gaulle.

At the risk of redundancy, let me be clear: there is no doubt that the scissors of the censors carved considerable holes in this era of cinema. But, by the same token, focusing exclusively, even obsessively, upon the legislative paraphernalia weaponized by officials such as Malraux, Terrenoire and de Gaulle, also prevents us from calibrating the ways in which this cinema acted as an ideological receptacle for the anxieties, desires, and fantasies of the directors of the period – in short, as the expression of a highly subjective imaginary, encouraged by the rise of auteur theory. The argument has been articulated before, albeit obliquely: in a 1994 article, Philip Dine describes how films such as Resnais's *Muriel ou le temps d'un retour* (1963) often appeared to tackle the vexed politics of decolonization, despite, in reality, 'reflecting only one thing: the European mind alone' (1994: 24), whilst Benjamin Stora explores the tendency amongst French directors to 'represent the conflict through images of personal trauma and intimacy' (2008: 265). An intimacy that Lynn Higgins has defined, scathingly, as a 'narcissistic retreat from the world' (1996: 3; 13).

As these quotations suggest, this article thus does not set out with the aim of cataloging exactly how cineastes were affected by the regime of censorship in operation at the time. Rather, drawing from a methodological approach associated with cultural studies – predicated, as it is, upon 'situating texts in relation to the characteristics of their creators [social, economic] so as to understand the production of meaning' (Esquenazi, 2007: 13) – what I aim to explore are the ways in which the regime of censorship charted above also coexisted with what could be called the subjectivization of decolonization, whose ideological and political complexity was distorted or relegated to the status of a pretext by a spiral of francocentric, anachronistic and androcentric subtexts. Privatization, authorship, ontology, World War Two and, of course, gender: these were the real concerns of the directors in question, for whom Algeria formed but a warped mirror-image of their own preoccupations.

Studded with treacherous women, slain lovers, impotent alcoholics, and libertines intoxicated by the flesh of their conquests, there is no doubt that the films discussed in this essay bear witness to a veritable cornucopia of gendered anxieties amongst directors working during the early 1960s. Anxieties so intense that they often ricochet erratically between masochistic patterns of sexual self-flagellation and sadistic tales of carnal retribution within the very same narrative. Anxieties that twist the dynamics of the decolonial debate into strange shapes, places and meanings.

In her illuminating monograph, *Masculine Singular: French New Wave Cinema*, Geneviève Sellier has identified one source of this deformation in the ontological influence of nineteenth-century Romanticism on the "New Wave", which displays a similar desire to elevate masculine identity to a transcendental state of 'splendid, apolitical isolation' (2008: 97–98; also Sellier, 2000), far away from the immanent plane of sexually sapping women or political collectives. But there are also others, too. The literature of the "Hussards", for example, has often been criticized for exalting the virtues of apoliticism at precisely the point that decolonization forced intellectuals into the workshop of identity politics.<sup>2</sup> Yet, as we will see, the popularization of Hussard novels in the 1950s also helped facilitate the rise of a certain masculine archetype found in films such as *Les Distractions*, and, in a different way, *Le Feu follet*. Narcissistic, insolent and insouciant, politics plays no

part in either of the lives of Dupont or Malle's Hussard antiheroes, Paul and Alain. All they care about is sex.

If the Hussards proved an undeniable inspiration on these two films, then a further, more specific, source of political sublimation can be located in the existential and misanthropic imaginary of 1940s American film noir. Rivette's film, in particular, appears saturated with the same and 'melodramatics of crime' (Durgnat, 2001: 37), 'sexual ambiguity' (Cook, 1989: 73), and 'misogynistic eroticism' (Naremore, 2008: 45) that defines the gendered interplay of the archetypal noir text. The effect is to transform what begins as an allegorical mediation of the politics of decolonization into an allegory directed against female sexuality, portrayed as inexplicable, toxic, sickening. History is smoky, the truth, diffuse. The rise of fascistic violence is reduced to a woman wearing sunglasses in a convertible.

One final source of this politics of obfuscation can be located in the interaction with – or rather, subversion of – popular discourses concerned with gender, alongside the military experience of certain directors working during the period, including Jacques Dupont, Robert Enrico, Philippe de Broca, and Philippe Durand. *Les Distractions*, for instance, could be persuasively seen both as a mirror image of the gendered politics of the army – the institutionalization of a virile 'hypersexuality', according to Philip Dine (2016: 122), or Raphaëlle Branche's conception of the conflict as a 'collective sexual initiation' (2004: 6–7) – as well as a pro-colonial attempt at stemming the flow of concerns that the practice of torture in Algeria was leading to a "militarized sexuality" amongst returning soldiers, rendering them unfit for heteronormative family life' (Kuby, 2013: 131). The result: a narrative that pushes the mystification of decolonial politics to its limits by equating the sexual violence of paratroopers with charm and seduction.

### **Paris nous appartient (1961)**

What Jacques Rivette's film lacks in clarity, it makes up in misogyny. An established paragon of the New Wave perhaps, but also a testament to the insidious power of patriarchal imagery, *Paris nous appartient* (1957/1961)<sup>3</sup> is a narrative in which the contours of the radical identity politics engendered by the War – especially after the so-called "turn against silence"<sup>4</sup> in 1957 – are consistently eroded by a psychosexual subtext infatuated with the threatening and mysterious nature of female identity.

Marrying the rhetoric of political allegory with the conservative gendered politics of film noir, the narrative itself revolves around the perspective of Anne Goupil (Betty Schneider), a young student who has just moved from Châteauroux to Paris in the summer of 1957: three years after Algerian nationalists had begun to terrorize French colons in the arid wilayas of Algeria. Despite being set at the height of the Algerian War, *Paris nous appartient* begins, however, by repressing the visibility of this crisis through an ostensibly anodyne image of Anne revising in her tiny apartment, before her brother Pierre (François Maistre) invites her to a party hosted by a famous painter. It is here that Rivette introduces the warren of elusive intellectuals and exiles that reappear sporadically throughout the film, including; Philip (Daniel Crohem), an American journalist who has moved to France in order to escape the demagogic ultra-nationalism of Senator McCarthy; Gérard Lenz (Giani Esposito), a sensitive and brooding theatre director in the process of producing a version of Shakespeare's Jacobean play, *Pericles, Prince of Tyre*; and Terry Yordan (Françoise Prévost); the contemptuous femme fatale maligned by many of the disconsolate down-and-outs that Anne meets during her search for "truth". The

remainder of the film thus chronicles Anne's first few months in the capital – her studies in literature, her newfound love for theatre, her attempts at negotiating the pitfalls of patriarchal desire. What she actually discovers is the existence of a mysterious fascistic Organization implicitly gendered as female.

### Woman as threat

*Paris nous appartient* begins with an unusual sense of finality and political tension. An enigmatic Spanish composer known as Juan has recently committed suicide in Paris after resisting then fleeing Franco's fascist regime (1936-1975), leading a number of guests at Bernard's party to eulogize the absent activist as a modern day Vladimir Mayakovsky (a Russian futurist poet whose suicide was largely read as a Stalinist murder conspiracy) or García Lorca (a Spanish playwright assassinated by Franco's nationalist militia in 1936), whilst a reserved Spanish "anarchist" performs a melancholic dirge on a guitar previously owned by his late friend. If Mary Wiles has described Juan as a 'Sartrean antihero' and 'republican warrior' (2012: 13; 14), it is undoubtedly because the dour and dithyrambic ambience of Bernard's party at least initially implies that he has sacrificed his life for a revolutionary cause.

As with the ideological debate that rages amongst Bernard's guests, Juan's privileged status a political martyr is, however, short-lived. When Anne flees the claustrophobic confines of Bernard's apartment in boredom, she suddenly stumbles upon a dramatic altercation between Philip (who has already been asked to leave the premises after drinking himself into a stupor), and Terry (who has just arrived at the premises). Suddenly, quickly, Philip flies into an inebriated rage, slapping Terry in front of her new partner Gérard and accusing her of Juan's murder in a gesture drenched in melodramatic, sexual jealousy. "You killed him" (Philip)... "I had nothing to do with it" (Terry). In what turns out to be a precursor for the patterns of victimhood, persecution and displacement that characterize the remainder of the film, the allusions to radical politics that are so visible at Bernard's party abruptly disappear behind Philip's attempt at placing the blame for Juan's death squarely on the shoulders of his ex-lover: the femme fatale, spider-woman, man-eater.

*Paris nous appartient* has been defined by Machel Marie and Émile Breton as an allegory for the multidirectional fear of hardline colonial fascism that arose largely in response to the use of torture by the French army in Algeria (especially after it was granted "special powers" in 1956, and during the Battle of Algiers [1956-1957]), but also due to the similarly heavy handed methods of control mobilized by the French police force to suppress the rise in metropolitan nationalism in Paris. As we have seen, the logic of this interpretation depends partly on the backdrop of political exile that frames the lives of Juan and Philip, and partly on a carousel of insistent yet consistently opaque allusions to a fascist "Organization" that – as the spectator later learns – has already gently seduced a number of Bernard's guests, including Pierre, Terry and de Georges (a shady economist played by Jean-Marie Robain). Hence Marie's definition of *Paris nous appartient* as 'a remarkable account of the intellectual mood at the end of the Fourth Republic [which was dissolved partly in response to a putsch orchestrated by neo-fascistic army officials], with its military and political plots surrounding the Algerian War' (2007: 277). And here is Breton, for whom 'the theme of mystery implicitly hints to what was occurring in Algeria' (2016).

What fewer critics have identified are the ways in which these allegorical allusions to fascism are often framed by – and thus subsumed within – a starkly

gendered lexicon, more often than not predicated upon an ontological dichotomy between man-as-victim and woman-as-threat. Catalyzed by the scene discussed above, this process of displacement occurs again and again in the film, including; when Philip apostrophizes about an opaque fraternity of “unnamable leaders”, menacing the world and menacing Gérard, before almost immediately pleading Anne to “beware of Terry”; when Juan’s ex-lover frames Juan’s death as a political “plot”, before then describing it as the inevitable outcome of his relationship with Terry, who, in her own words, “led him astray” (qui l’a détraqué); and, finally, when Philip, Terry and Anne discover Gérard’s limp and lifeless body – a modern day Thomas Chatterton – splayed poetically on his bed. Suicide? Political assassination? Or murder committed in vacuo by a jealous femme fatale? Once again, the film’s logic of deadly ritual is at least initially cast in a political mold: “maybe they can push their victims to suicide...”, muses Philip; his use of a pronoun in the plural suggesting multiplicity, shared complicity, the machinations of an Organization. Yet, in contrast to many of the earlier scenes that feature in the film, the weave of Philip’s reasoning here finds itself almost completely undone by a potent combination of formal factors. Firstly, after beginning his soliloquy in a modality suggesting the scope of a political faction, the embattled journalist then suddenly twists his words into the shape of a sexualized metaphor: “... through the art of seduction, of persuasion”. Lest we miss the point, it is then spelled out for the spectator after the following cut: a medium shot of Terry peering at her profile in a mirror posed in the corner of the room (mirrors being an established visual metaphor for duplicity), before she eventually forces the hypothesis of a fascist perpetrator from the realm of the possible and the visible to the impossible peripheries of off-screen space. “Its all my fault”, she states, flatly. Her face: a picture of sexual transgression.

### Woman as mystery

When Terry doesn’t pose a threat, she is framed as mystery. Mystery: her ossified profile and tendency towards reticence than emotional expression (both of which stand in contrast to both to Philip’s frequently sweaty brow and Gérard’s softer, more quizzical countenance). Mystery: her opaque sunglasses, that she wears whilst voyeuristically watching Anne perform a recital of Pericles. Mystery: the deep chiaroscuro of her apartment, or what might be considered as a contemporary equivalent to the deathly crypts that populated classic Gothic narratives before reappearing under the guise of ‘cheap dives [and] shadowy doorways’ (Place, 1989: 41) in 1940s film noir, and again in the ‘one-removed but transparently related language of doors, gates, portals, channels, inner rooms’ that crops up throughout the classic horror film (Clover, 2015: 48; 101). Finally, Terry’s mystery is evident in her implied promiscuity. At no point in the film, for example, does she ever provide an adequate reason for leaving Philip, Juan and Gérard, but rather appears beset by an insatiable although unexplained desire for sexual conquest, for the pleasures of the flesh.

From what might be considered a feminist perspective, Rivette’s representation of Woman-as-mystery opens the film up to an obvious criticism. For by depicting Terry as indecipherable, opaque, and therefore potentially duplicitous, the narrative both subtly confirms Philip’s sublimated accusations of sexual culpability (inherited from the Judeo-Christian figure of Eve as personified guilt), and, in a concomitant trope, equates female identity with a sense of enigma inscribed in the work of male authors as disparate as Montherlant, D.H. Lawrence, Claudel,

Breton, Stendhal, Kierkegaard and Levinas, all of which have represented woman as ‘mysterious in essence’, thus essentially allowing Man to excuse his profound ignorance of female desire through an alibi of Otherness (Beauvoir, 1986: 18). It is no wonder that Claude-Jean Philippe has defined Terry as somebody who ‘seems to possess dangerous secrets’ (1966) whilst Almut Steinlein goes one step further, describing her as ‘privy to a secret to that she alone understands’ (2007: 216).

Understanding is however different from recounting. It is also different from revealing. And it is drastically different from taking action. Whilst initially confined to the politics of gender, the implications of Terry’s mysterious behaviour upon the narrative gradually begin to germinate – from episodic spurts of incongruous reticence to full-blown incomprehensible monologues – until it eventually begins to trespass, in certain scenes, upon the kingdom of politics. In one particular scene that takes place towards the end of the narrative, Anne arrives at Terry’s apartment in a desperately futile attempt at determining Gérard’s location after he threatens to commit suicide. Suddenly, the ‘deceptive’ surface (Morrey and Smith, 2015: 26) of Rivette’s Paris gives way to a distinctly interuterine and oneiric topography, composed of tight murky corridors, a claustrophobic communal area (shrouded in darkness by a curtain pulled tight over the only window), and a hidden extra chamber (to which Philip secretly retreats), whilst Terry begins to apprehensively auto-narrate her own history of exile from McCarthy’s America, providing a compelling if not enigmatic antithesis to Philip’s own campaign of virile slander. If the spectator is expecting a revelation to level the unhinged logic of the diegesis, they will be sadly disappointed. Just as Terry’s apartment embodies the patriarchal myth of feminine mystery, her monologue remains profoundly mysterious. At no point in the scene, does she, for example, directly discuss the impact of McCarthy’s neo-fascistic witch-hunt upon American politics, and how this has led – in the film at least – to the emergence of a fascistic faction operating in Paris, but rather retreats into a highly evasive commentary regarding “the greatest conspiracy that has ever existed”. When Anne enquires as to whom Terry is referring, her response is unremittingly opaque: “the same ones”.

If that wasn’t enough, the same pattern of political mystification reoccurs in the climatic final sequence of the narrative, when a number of characters incongruously find themselves holed up in an isolated keepers lodge in Ermenonville (located in the north of Paris), although, as Roland-François Lack points out (2010: 143), Philip describes the action as taking place in Antony (located in the south of Paris). It is at this point in the film that Terry is seen shooting Pierre after she falsely suspects he is guilty for Gérard’s death (although the act appears to take place – or doesn’t – in the spatial-temporal plane of a winter-yet-to-come rather than the summer, seeing as there is snow on the ground). Before Terry, dressed in black in the inky folds of the keepers lodge, once again erupts into a highly convoluted monologue concerning “money, policing, political parties... all the faces of fascism”, whilst simultaneously undermining her own account of the fascistic Organization operating in the city as a “idea” that ceases to exist outside the parameters of Philip’s paranoid mind.

In criticism on the film, scholars have defined this dialectic of deception and affirmation in number of ways: as an aesthetic vestige of Bazin’s ideology of ambiguity (Gozlan, 1962); as a phenomenological commentary on the ‘infernal logic of secrecy’ (Morrey and Smith, 2015: 24); even as a throwback to Balzac’s nineteenth-century brand of Literary Realism (Breton, 2016). What none of these writers consider is the possibility that this political ambiguity is consistently

exacerbated through, if not originally created by, Terry's role in the film: as an individual who knows but does not divulge, who understands but does not – will not – reveal. Only Almut Steinlein has broached the existence of this problematic – albeit in a way that does not distinguish between genders – by claiming that 'the testimonies articulated by the different characters cloud the plot [obscurcissent le suspense] instead of explaining it' (2007: 219). It is no surprise that, by the end of *Paris nous appartient*, all that remains is the blank eyes of a female archetype staring through a fog of political contradiction.

For all its ideological confusion, its metaphysical and existential musings, its labored and cynical monologues, *Paris nous appartient* does represent a genuine attempt at engaging with the political mess in which France found itself at the end of the 1950s. The constant allegorical references to "parables", "plots", "Organizations", "fascism" and "concentration camps", provide ample evidence of this intention. In 1961, Agnès Varda even went so far as to state that one would have to be 'short-sighted to overlook the similarities between *Paris nous appartient* and the ideological crisis gripping the nation' (1961).

Yet, as this analysis has shown, Varda's interpretation is not as watertight as it at first might seem – primarily as Rivette's allegory also coexists with, and is constantly undone by, a number of tropes inherited from the patriarchal imaginary. Firstly, there is Terry's promiscuity, which not only appears to induce a communal contagion amongst almost all of the tragic masculine martyrs that Anne meets during her first few months in Paris, but also, and more importantly, eventually ends up displacing fascism as the determining factor in the deaths of Juan and Gérard. Then there is Terry's mystery, which again acts in order to dampen the visibility of political ideologies in the film, but in a different way: through obfuscation and the privatization of political knowledge rather than the campaign of misogynistic slander orchestrated by Philip. In both cases, the reality of post-war fascism – which, in colonial Algeria, at least, frequently involved the violent violation of women's bodies by male paratroopers – disappears behind a highly gendered allegory, a misogynist fantasy, obsessed with probing the inherent mystery of female sexuality.

### **Le Feu follet (1963)**

Inspired by an acrimonious novel published in 1931 by the French novelist Drieu de la Rochelle – who would later commit suicide after pledging his unequivocal support for Nazi Occupation – Malle's understandably controversial fifth feature length film, *Le Feu follet*, recounts the final forty eight hours of Alain Leroy (Maurice Ronet), a down-and-out former playboy and military officer voluntarily detained in a Versailles sanitarium for chronic alcohol addiction.

Naturally enough, Alain's life is marked by a state of psychological disarray: in the opening scene, the spectator is forced to witness his infidelity – committed with a friend of his estranged wife Dorothy – before he spends the rest of the day ruminating unhealthily about mortality in the claustrophobic miasma of his clinic-room. Alain's doctor insists he is "cured"; his erratic behaviour suggests otherwise.

And so it proves. The next day, Alain's psychological state quickly deteriorates when he decides – with an enthusiasm as optimistic as it is dubious – to visit a series of old acquaintances in Paris: a middle aged Egyptologist Dubourg (Bernard Noël); a charismatic art enthusiast whose charm is only tainted by her opium addled and arrogant poet-friends (Jeanne Moreau); and two brothers involved in the



campaign of pro-colonial proto-fascistic violence orchestrated by the OAS<sup>5</sup> (Organisation l'armée secrete [Secret Armed Organisation]), in Algeria as in France during the early 1960s (played by Romain Bouteille and François Gragnon), after which the ex-alcoholic suddenly breaks his four month abstinence before dragging his listless body to a party hosted by a clique of aristocratic friends. Yet, as with almost all of the encounters that dictate the ambience of Alain's last day, this soiree only serves to further emphasise his isolation from a world that he consistently describes as both meaningless and riddled with "mediocrity". His suicide at the end of the film, although shocking in its depiction of an individual half in love with easeful death, nevertheless forms the logical response to this lack of meaning. It also represents the final stage of an episodic withdrawal from political engagement to an involuted innerverse haunted by erotogenic masochism and masculine narcissism.

### Penis envy

In an echo of the opening scene from Alain Resnais's 1959 film, *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959), *Le Feu follet* begins with an abstract vision of sex, of evasive sexual abstraction. Alain's pallid profile – captured in a long, static close-up – hovers precariously over the presumably naked body of his American lover, Lydia (Léna Skerla). Yet, where Resnais suggests carnal plenitude, unbounded pleasure, a transcendental unity, Malle's representation of amorous relations revolves around the cold and lingering signs of impotence. "I hate myself", claims Alain, before Lydia unconvincingly insists that she feels "satisfied". Her hollow eyes, however, belie the sense of her words; there is nothing sensual about this sterile encounter of bodies.

As writers such as René Fugler, Claude Mauriac, and Nathan Southern/Jacques Weissgerber have all suggested,<sup>6</sup> sexual fragility, then, is the crisis that launches the film into its obdurate orbit. It is the pathology that fissures Alain's already fragile identity, seeping into a later conversation with Dubourg (to whom he confesses "I drink because I make love badly!"); his financial affairs (Alain is economically dependent on his lover and Dorothy in order to compensate for his lack of work); his artistic commitments (he struggles to complete the journal that he tepidly tinkers with before destroying in a moment of frustration); and, most importantly, his political engagement, or, rather disengagement.

During a short but pertinent piece of textual analysis of *Le Feu follet*, Antoine de Baecque has described Malle's film as characterized 'neither by insouciance, nor action, nor engagement, nor creation; only despair', before associating its antihero with 'an inability [impuissance] to play a part in History' (2009: 110). In the narrative itself, this lack of political engagement can be glimpsed in two early scenes that take place before Alain's trip to Paris; firstly when he responds to his doctor's inquires about his military past as an officer in Algeria with indifference (stating "it's irrelevant"); and secondly when he brusquely refuses to engage in conversation about the War with a fellow barfly in a bar next to the Hôtel du Quai Voltaire (he almost knocks over his glass in irritation). But whilst these early scenes largely mitigate Alain's desire to disengage from political matters by placing him in dialogue with two ostensibly apolitical individuals, Alain's later contact with activists for whom political action is paramount brings this extent of this disengagement into sharp relief – as a malaise inextricably intertwined with his thwarted quest for masculinity.

A prime example of this disengagement through emasculation (or what might be termed a state of mâle-être) occurs in a scene that does not appear in Drieu's novel, when the increasingly disillusioned ex-officer decides to visit Jérôme and François

Minville: two former military-comrades-turned-OAS-members at the chic Café de Flore. Despite being surrounded by people, the brothers do not attempt to hide the extent of their activism. They have no qualms, for example, about divulging the details of a recent spell in prison for what could have hypothetically been an extremely violent act of political engagement (given that the modus operandi of the OAS often involved plastic bombs concealed around the premises of left-wing intellectuals, including Sartre). Nor do they seem perturbed about revealing their desire to continue on this path until the job is done. “We are stubborn”, hyperbolizes François, whilst Alain unsuccessfully attempts to convince them of their naivety. But it’s too late: they have already left, without paying the bill. End of conversation.

When asked to explain his reasons for interposing this scene into an otherwise largely faithful adaptation of Drieu’s original novel, Malle framed his decision as a question of narrative logic, stating that he wanted to ‘increase the number of ideological positions with which Alain disagrees, thus providing an even more watertight rationale for taking his own life’ (1963). Simple enough. But does Alain’s encounter with the OAS really offer the acrimonious clash between ideologies that Malle seems to imply? One part of the sequence that suggests otherwise is the series of panning shots that immediately follow the departure of the Minville brothers, when Alain pauses to reflect on the café terrace after being subjected to their condescending diatribe. For any “politically engaged” member of 1960s French society, this would have been the moment to take action against the OAS – especially as two of its members have just brazenly revealed their future plans for chaos. But instead, Alain tumbles back into a state of profound sexual anxiety; illustrated firstly in his self-effacing reaction to the alluring gaze of a female client (who rocks back and forward on her chair in a seductive manner before losing interest), and then towards an unidentified male client, with whom he shares a moment of confused intimacy in the toilets of the café (the two men gaze at each other intensely via a mirror on the wall). If the sequence could be applauded for offering an important if brief counter to the ubiquitous heterosexuality of post-war French cinema – a moment whose importance, I should add, was acknowledged by absolutely none of the critics that reviewed the film upon its release – it could also be equally criticized for abruptly shifting the focus of the narrative away from the reactionary values of the OAS. Here, and throughout, the value of political activism disappears behind a smokescreen of phallic anxiety, as Alain, just like the tragic hero of Drieu’s eponymous novel,<sup>7</sup> is held captive by his flailing desire.

Hussard?

Interestingly, a number of commentators have compared *Le Feu Follet* to the work of the Hussards: a reactionary group of writers who challenged the model of political action proposed, for example, by Sartrean existentialism, in favour of a staunch commitment to political disengagement (or what has also been termed right-wing anarchism [See Pascal Ory [1985]], shaded, at times, with flecks of colonial nationalism (see, for example, the journal article ‘Algérie française’, published in *Carrefour* in 1960 [De Baecque, 2008: 149]). Antoine de Baecque is explicit in this comparison, describing Alain as ‘the most beautiful Hussard hero of the New Wave [although whether *Le Feu Follet* could unequivocally be described as a New Wave narrative is debatable]’ (2009: 109), whilst Malle’s close relationship with the Hussard firebrands, Antoine Blondin and Roger Nimier (who had written the script for Malle’s first film, *Ascenseur pour l’échafaud* [1958]) ‘illustrates a personal

fascination, if not full membership of, the era's right-wing counter-culture' (Frey, 2004a: 226). Yet, if Alain undeniably reflects the ethos of political disengagement that characterises the work of the Hussards, the dynamics of this analogy must also be treated with caution: firstly because this scene appears to undermine the legitimacy of the reactionary Right by depicting the OAS as exaggerated caricatures of political activism, certainly in comparison to the endearing self-deprecation and acerbic wit possessed by Alain (Marie-Claire Ropars-Wuilleumier describes the incident as 'comic' [1963: 929]); and secondly, as *Le Feu follet* is conspicuously devoid of the 'Eighteenth Century libertinism' (Hewitt, 1995: 291) that subtends the archetypal Hussard text. Jacques Laurent's *Caroline Chérie* (1947), for example, revels in the debauchery and sexual transgression of a sixteen-year-old adolescent caught up in the French Revolution, whilst Roger Nimer's *Le Hussard bleu* (1950) focus on the carnal escapades of a military cavalryman. This fact appears to have been lost on Blondin who – in an act of dazzling misinterpretation – completely subverts the sexual politics of Malle's narrative by describing it as 'oozing with virility' (1963: 7). It is anything but that.

Alain's encounter with OAS activism is not the only example of how Malle elevates the question of wounded male sexuality above political concerns, represented subsequently as derisory – even though it does form an exemplary instance of this phenomenon. It also occurs during the aristocratic dinner party hosted by Cyrille (Jacques Sereys), when Alain – by this point intoxicated by his first sip of alcohol in months – tumbles into the presence of Marc Brancion (Tony Taffin). Imposing, eminent and portentous, in Drieu's novel, Brancion is framed as a rich and virile entrepreneur whose colonial exploits in Asia have brought him extraordinary wealth (he is alternately described as possessing 'the face of a hero', and as 'a force of nature'). Malle maintains Brancion's sexual potency, his unyielding gaze and wanderlust (at one point vigorously demonstrating his knowledge of Oriental erotica to an evidently entranced throng of female guests), whilst granting him an important if not ambiguous political edge. Whilst Alain rests before dinner, Cyrille describes Brancion as a "controversial intellectual" (un intellectuel de choc), whereas a further clue to his political persuasion emerges when he responds with disgust to an anecdote recounting Alain's lack of respect for the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier (a historical war monument located in Paris). Crucially, like the Minville brothers, Brancion's dedication to 'action' (Granger, 2004: 79) induces what turns out to be the definitive crisis in Alain's short life – a life, it must be stated, that has been carved in two by the taste of cold flesh and burning nostalgia and private malady and days and days of sickly alcoholic reverie. To put it bluntly: 'psycho-sexual collapse' (Frey, 2004b: 26). As the party reaches its melodramatic denouement, Alain thus abruptly addresses Brancion in a groundswell of inebriated, masochistic emotion: "Just so you know, I'm a man, but I've never had money or women. Yet I'm very active. The thing is, I can't reach out with my hands... I can't touch things... and when I touch things... I feel nothing". Immediately after, he complains of being "unable to desire the women at the party".

As in Drieu's text, Alain's soliloquy strikes an unsettling balance between humanist empathy and narcissistic egocentrism. Empathetic in the sense that it is delivered with an unexpected touch of pathos that once again raises the possibility of a submerged sexual subtext, expressed in Alain's increasingly homoerotic attempts at salvaging the loss of his own virility by taking vicarious pleasure in the virility of others. And egocentric in that it continues to coil the narrative around the lynchpin of ontology – of what it means to be a man, or what happens when one is no longer a

man – rather than fostering the political debate that briefly threatens to engulf the dinner party. So much so, in fact, that the question of why exactly Brancion has come to be known as a controversial intellectual remains unresolved as Alain exits the property. An echo: the words of a man for whom coitus alone is king.

In the intellectual crucible forged in the embers of decolonization, taking sides for or against the colonial order was a political necessity. Those who did were either absolved for supporting Algerian nationalism (see Jean-Paul Sartre), or deplored for defending the values of a dying colonialism (see Jacques Soustelle), whilst the unfortunate few who attempted to maintain a lofty neutrality in the debate – for example Albert Camus – found themselves marginalized by an intellectual community, indeed society, inexorably radicalized into mutually exclusive, political camps. Not that this radicalization of identity politics seems to have affected Alain, who, in *Le Feu follet*, appears completely cut-off from the “events” in Algeria, despite having fought there as an officer, and despite constantly tumbling into contact with individuals for whom political commitment is paramount. As we have seen, part of the reason for his ethos of disengagement, this withdrawal into the Self, arises out of Malle’s proximity to the so-called Hussards, who produced a string of texts studded with similarly apolitical antiheroes whilst themselves espousing right-wing political ideals. But, unlike these writers, Malle’s narrative also displays a highly singular infatuation with wounded male sexuality that serves to further displace the visibility of politics from the diegesis. Incidentally, visibility is a theme that Alain evokes at Cyrille’s party, when he states that “we fade away fast”, before the irredeemably damaged antihero swiftly delivers on this promise by turning his gun on himself.

In *Le Feu follet*, suicide is thus Alain’s calling card, his terrible destiny; an autoerotic gesture which – whilst originally framed by Drieu as absolution for the steady decline of Alain’s sexual prowess, ‘as proof that he really is a man’ (1959: 172) – at the same time, definitively closes off any possibility of engaging with politics, with History, with the subsequently uncontested and hence unexplored political activism of Brancion and the Minville brothers. Wherein lies the fundamental problem of Malle’s film: Alain yearns to be loved, but making love proves elusive; Malle attempts to be political, but even the most tangential allusion to the death of colonization proves impossible within the scope of a narrative that remains so unrelentingly focused on the subjective pathologization of pleasure, the deadly decomposition of the penis.

### **Les Distractions (1960)**

Released at the height of the Algerian crisis in 1960, Jacques Dupont’s *Les Distractions* (a title that can loosely be translated as entertainment, but is also linked to absent-mindedness) represents a right-wing variation of Rivette and Malle’s vaguely left-wing films, but with a twist: here, the harsh reality of the War is screened out by the sexual escapades of a young dandy and the homosociality of two military veterans rather than images of feminine mystery or masculine impotence.

The plot is simple enough. Two paras (paratroopers) have returned from Algeria respectively scarred and untouched by their experience in the conflict. The first – a reserved young drifter named Laurent (Claude Brasseur, who had actually served in Algeria as a para before appearing in the film) – is quite obviously troubled by his military past: in the opening scene, he is pictured hurtling along the boulevards of Paris in a stolen car, before fatally forcing a police motorcyclist off the road. Luckily, all is not lost, as, shortly after, Laurent is granted a surreptitious lifeline from

his former para friend Paul (Jean-Paul Belmondo), who offers to help the neurotic murderer evade the police whilst attempting to juggle his responsibilities as a photographer for the glossy news magazine *Jours de France*. The remainder of the narrative is this largely orientated towards chronicling this game of cat and mouse – played out across the ultra bourgeois backdrop of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, Montparnasse, and Les Champs-Élysées – until Laurent is eventually cornered in a rural suburb of Paris. But, by this point, the sullen veteran has realised that his luck has run dry. The only escape from a lifetime of incarceration: suicide.

### Nothing but sex

From Paul's underhand slights about his "sensitive" and "idiotic" lovers, to the highly problematic depictions of sexual consent and seduction that characterise the latter half of the film, *Les Distractions* is a veritable ode to machismo, garnished, for good measure, with a hefty dose of fast-living and fast cars (an Austin-Healey owned, in real life, by Dupont). Not that this imagery will come as a surprise to anyone even half-acquainted with Dupont's passion for "cultural appropriation" and patriarchy. By casting Jean-Paul Belmondo as an anarchic dandy obsessed with automobiles and "easy" women, the director reveals his barely veiled desire to emulate Godard's 1960s smash-hit *A bout de souffle* (itself predicated upon identification with the misogynistic figure of Michel Poiccard, for whom "female drivers are cowards"), whilst, in his polemical autobiography, *Profession: cinéaste...politiquement incorrect!*, Dupont gaudily admits to remembering little about the shooting of the film, that is, apart from the sexual 'liaisons' that he pursued in his free time as a self-confessed Hussard (2013: 127). Conservative then, in its vision of gender, that is for certain. But hidden in the vicariously misogynistic thickets of Dupont's plot lie further blind spots, equally central and equally problematic. And, once again, the question of politics rears its head.

At first sight, *Les Distractions* seems to represent a significant attempt at engaging with the sulphurous history of decolonization, its Baudelarian spleen. During one of the earliest scenes in the film, the superintendent presiding over Laurent's crime describes it as symptomatic of his "inability to adapt to civil life", before Laurent is seen gazing silently at Paul with a curious blend of shame and pathos. Laurent is melancholic. He is mercurial. He dreads. Crucially, when Armand Monjo describes Laurent as an individual who has 'lost his soul at the same time as his gun' (1960), it is because, like Bernard in Alain Resnais's *Muriel* (1963), Dédé in Jacques Rozier's *Adieu Philippine* (1962), and Frédéric in Robert Enrico's *La Belle vie* (1963), Laurent is a man for whom the mortal threat of combat remains omnipresent and ever-present, despite leaving behind the dazzling vistas of Algeria for the dank streets of Paris. To such an extent, in fact, that he is unable to prevent his fearful memories from involuntarily taking control of his body in a compulsive, albeit senseless, act of killing.

Yet, on reflection, Laurent's dance with death appears largely displaced from the plot by a nagging concern with something else. One source of this sense of displacement lies in the simple fact that, as an avid supporter of French Algeria, Dupont had no reason to overemphasize the dirty underbelly of colonisation, at least above and beyond the sublimated trauma embodied by Laurent. But another, more forceful reason emerges if we return to examine the director's decision to divide the plot between what are two radically different visions of masculinity: one chained to a colonial past that constantly threatens to erupt into the present, the other swathed in

the embrace of cover-girls and colonial amnesia. Consider, for example, the jarring discussion that takes place immediately after Laurent's crime, when Paul greets his friend not by probing him about the rationale behind his act, his evidently troubled state of mind, or, for that matter, the significance of the military keepsake that Laurent has tellingly clung onto since his days as a para, but by instead launching into a self-aggrandizing and narcissistic series of anecdotes about his needy American date Véra (Alexandra Stewart). Or when Paul later introduces Laurent to friend Dany (Eva Damien) as "a brother from Algeria", before swiftly ushering his "brother" into an adjacent room whilst the two lovers cavort in private. In both of these scenes, Laurent finds himself overwhelmed into a state of apolitical non-speech, of political quietism, by his imposing and voluble Hussard friend. So much so, in fact, that it led to a kind of incredulity amongst certain critics, frustrated by Dupont's lack of political exposition. Writing in *Cinéma 61*, Marc Zazzo demanded: 'where does Laurent come from? What has he done in life apart from his training as a para? None of these questions are answered. His behavior, his acts, his words: all devoid of clarification' (1961: 126).

This screening out of politics by machismo is not only facilitated by patterns of mise-en-scène; it is also inscribed within the trajectory of the narrative itself, prompting journalists to describe Dupont's depiction of politics as a 'pretext' for a film that remains, in reality, concerned with one thing only: sex (Laroche 1960; Garson 1960). When the director depicts Laurent holed up in Dany's rural bolthole, for instance, the spectator would be forgiven for expecting to enter into a more psychologically empathetic relationship with the increasingly agitated fugitive – especially, given that, according to the Dany, he remains in this state of isolation for at least "a few days". But, here more than ever, Dupont's interest in Laurent appears to wane as Paul's sexual odyssey waxes, from bedroom to bedroom, from starlet to starlet. An erotic cathexis. Which brings us to the far more serious question of rape.

## Rape

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of June 1960, an incendiary article appeared in the French newspaper, *Le Monde*. Written by Simone de Beauvoir, the article itself provided a harrowing account of torture sessions conducted in Algeria by French military officials, including paras, against a twenty-two year old woman suspected of nationalist activity named Djamilia Boupacha. Djamilia had been raped with a bottle, tortured with electrodes, and beaten, to within an inch of her life. The only reason that she was spared the death penalty was thanks to the Evian Accords that also exonerated her torturers in 1962.

Although shocking in its anatomical precision, Beauvoir's article did not, strictly speaking, break new thematic ground. The rhetorical "question" of whether torture existed within the French army had been raised as early as 1958, with the publication and swift prohibition of *La Question* – Henri Alleg's sulphurous account of his own captivity at El-Biar detention centre (where Boupacha was also momentarily held), whilst, writing for *L'Express*, Françoise Giroud had already addressed the diseased sexuality of the paras on a number of occasions, defining them as 'good boys, gone wrong' whose experience of torture led them to 'beat their wives'. That is, if they didn't find themselves 'interned in psychiatric hospitals' (1961; 1957). To these largely Eurocentric and androcentric anti-torture inquiries Beauvoir added a simple but devastating gendered critique, focusing, in particular, on Boupacha's young age and virginity.

Les Distractions does not contain any images of rape per se, but it certainly comes very close. One of the most controversial scenes in this respect occurs when Paul – who, lest we forget, is an ex-para like Laurent – pays a drunken visit to Véra’s colleague and fellow cover-girl, Arabelle (Sylva Koscina). Not that Arabelle appears pleased by the timing of Paul’s impromptu charm offensive (he arrives at three in the morning), nor by his increasingly impertinent behaviour: she brusquely serves him a scotch (“without ice, never with ice” he emphasises insouciantly), before firmly demanding he leave the premises, quickly, and quietly. But, as is so often the case in Dupont’s narrative, these pleas appear to fall on Paul’s deaf ears. Instead, in what is undeniably the most damning evidence of Dupont’s misogynistic conception of women, as ‘dirty objects and orifices’, ‘undressed if possible’ (Durand 1961: 91) Arabelle eventually succumbs to Paul’s violent act of “seduction” (he forces her body down onto her sofa whilst she protests), before she later playfully dismisses the episode as an act committed by a “Hussard”. The sexual politics of this scene are particularly problematic considering that Les Distractions was released merely five months after Beauvoir had published her damning article concerning sexualised colonial violence committed against Djamilia Boupacha by paras like Paul.

### Homosociality

Paul and Laurent’s relationship does not only revolve around rituals of sex and violence. At various points in the film, the two ex-paras also share moments of homosocial intimacy, far away from the morass of tiresome lovers and patronizing officers that swarm around the streets of Paris and its environs. When Laurent initially hides from the police in Paris, for example, Paul offers to lend the panicked fugitive a set of clothes in order to drift into anonymity (he gets changed in front of his host), before much later putting his own life at risk by negotiating with Laurent when he is eventually surrounded by police in Fontainebleau (he brings him a small supply of food and wine whilst a police helicopter hovers ominously overhead). Too little, too late. Like a rat in a trap, Laurent dies in a scene that perversely evokes the brutal search and sweep operations conducted by army officials in the vistas of Algeria.

Apart from a sporadically empathetic review published in the right-wing Arts (a weekly magazine run by the Hussards Jacques Laurent and Roger Nimier), critics did not seem overly impressed with Dupont’s attempt at injecting a sense of masculine intimacy into a film that remained otherwise cold, detached and derivative. According to René Gilson, Dupont’s lack of directorial experience ‘serves to render this virile brotherhood of arms unnatural’ (1966), whilst Pierre Macabru defined the director’s images of ‘militant generosity’ (1960) as a cynical screen, concealing what is, in effect, a profound lack of inspiration. More generally, these scenes echo Jean-Pierre Bertin-Maghit’s theorization of the Algerian War as a form of schizophrenic sexual initiation (2015: 163), during which young French soldiers were at once confronted with the normalization of acts associated in civil society with homosexual desire (touching, cuddling, bed-sharing), and, at the same time, expected to either respect or incarnate a ‘cult of virility’ (1981: 61), depending on their status as soldiers from the contingent (known as *appelés*) or paras, respectively. As Bertin-Maghit argues (2015: 169–178), the dialectics of this gendered performance can be found not only throughout the homosocial imaginary of early 1960s French cinema, but also within a select corpus of amateur military documentaries, including one self-reflexive mediation on the ethics of colonial prostitution, made by a conscript called René Charles and entitled *Distractions simples mais ... variées* (loosely translated as Simple

but varied entertainment).

Whether Dupont was aware of this gendered, military performance is, of course, debatable, and, in many respects, irrelevant. In relation to the scope of our own inquiry, what is more important are the ways in which the director's unusual depiction of intimacy between military veterans (as opposed to the much more common trope of individualized trauma) once again acts in order to exacerbate the process of political screening established by the misogynistic subtext of the film. Contemplate, for a second, the overdetermined exhibition of homosociality that occurs when Paul and Laurent take a break from their journey to Dany's house in a secluded patch of woodland. From the wine that they share, to Richard Cornu's whimsical score, to the series of highly physical, almost erotic, military manoeuvres that they perform on the floor: everything about the scene – right down to its setting, far away from the interiority of the domestic realm – screams brotherhood. Crucially, unlike the images of apolitical macho posturing that dominate the majority of the plot, this scene also includes an ambiguous although important allusion to the history of decolonization, when Laurent and Paul discuss a series of military figures that feature in their memories of the War: Gayette ("never shaven but nice"); Portail ("a big blond judo expert"); and Adjudan (an Algerian military auxiliary that Paul sarcastically ridicules, firstly by referring to him using a demeaning nick-name ["roly-poly"], and then by imitating his accent whilst barking orders at Laurent). Suddenly, Dupont's depiction of homosocial bonding appears less as an attempt to unite the two men in a moment of shared grief, than a chance to fill in the memorial gaps carved in the narrative by Laurent's silence and Paul's amnesia with a colonial myth predicated upon positive military intervention. It is the same myth that would be retroactively regurgitated in a slightly less military-centric guise as nostalgia by certain pieds-noirs (colonial settlers) and OAS members.

Released merely a year before Dupont was imprisoned in the Paris based Prison de la Santé for activism within the OAS, *Les Distractions* is the work of a reactionary director caught between a desire to identify with the hoards of listless soldiers returning from Algeria (embodied here in the figure of Laurent), and the realisation that this process of identification could potentially jeopardize the pro-colonial message of the film by revealing too much, too soon. Enter Paul: Dupont's savoir, Laurent's antithesis.

King of the roost and king of the capital, Paul is more than just a misogynistic libertine gone awry; he is a veritable instrument of selective forgetting. In a recent article concerning the "amnesia" so frequently attributed to the Algerian War, Jacques Inrep has framed the phenomenon as a break in communication, stating: 'the problem wasn't so much a question of [soldiers] speaking out, but of being heard' (2011). Paul hears nothing in *Les Distractions*, apart from the grating timbre of his own voice, reeling off anecdote after anecdote about his sexual conquests, or, later in the film, his racist imitation of former Algerian officers. Whatever Laurent has witnessed in Algeria, whatever he has seen, whatever has caused his erratic behaviour, is never stated, but silenced, by the imposing rhetoric of his Hussard friend – a maestro of machismo if ever there was one. And it is this profound indifference that above all, renders the film apolitical, especially as it coincides with a gendered turn in the torture debate – from a discourse that was primarily focused on the diseased sexuality of male soldiers returning from the War, to a more decolonial empathy towards Algerian women caught up in the colonial machine. Not that any of these questions find representation in Dupont's narrative, fixated, as it is, upon Paul's derisive rictus



as he careers around the city, picking up girls in his shiny new car. In short, like the spectator, distracted.

### **Conclusion: cinema at the limits of representation**

In a recent monograph, Todd Shepard has implored us to examine the ways in ‘which the Algerian War modified the form and the content of debates surrounding contemporary sexuality in France’, from the anticolonial revolution of nationalists in Algeria, to the sexual revolution of May ’68 (2017: 21). An important injunction, undoubtedly. But also an injunction that, as we have seen, could also be inverted in order to examine how the identitarian politics of gender deformed the identity politics of decolonization, especially in the erotophilic vestibules of early 1960s cinema.

What these films present us with, therefore, are the flickering remnants of a War, distorted. Distorted by Rivette’s decision to equate female sexuality with fascism at exactly the moment when the army was being accused of fascistic sexual violence against women in Algeria. Distorted by Malle’s portrait of a poet for whom the new cogito of political engagement pales into insignificance compared with the politics of his penis. Distorted by Dupont’s vicarious hymn to a virile-yet-charming paratrooper idolized by the objects of his erotic quest. In different ways, all of these tropes prove revelatory in the sense that they are symptomatic of a community of directors hopelessly attempting to draw from their own subjective, sexual anxieties as heterosexual men to chronicle a conflict catalysed by an entirely different history of “anxieties”: racism, spatial segregation, economic disenfranchisement, torture. Not one of the films features an Algerian protagonist, let alone an Algerian woman.

During decolonization, censorship was often administered in an arbitrary, even reactionary manner, bestowing a misplaced sense of political importance onto a group of films that were rarely more than ontological odysseys into the male psyche.<sup>8</sup> Nor did the softening of censorship during the 1960s lead to the explosion of political expression that many had expected. Both Pierre Schoendoerffer’s *Le Crabe-tambour* (1977) and Brigitte Roüen’s *Outremer* (1990), for example, ‘cast a highly subjective and partial light on the history of decolonization’ (Greene, 1999: 142), long after regulative censorship had been abolished in 1972. All of which leads us to a perhaps controversial conclusion: that censorship was an instrument used to chastise a community that, actually, has never been unable to conceive of the Algerian crisis through anything other than a Eurocentric visual vocabulary, often permeated with lust and violence.

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<sup>1</sup> In an issue of *L'Express* published on the 29 September 1960, Michèle Manceaux chastises cinema of the period for featuring 'too many sports cars, too many bed sheets, too much seduction'. Writing again in *L'Express*, Jean Cau described the same films as having 'reduced France to the image of a couple embracing on a bed: calm, happy, dead!' (1960).

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Nicholas Hewitt (1995: 285–296).

<sup>3</sup> The film was begun in 1957 but only released four years later due to financial complications.

<sup>4</sup> The year 1957 is generally considered a watershed moment in the history of decolonization due to the clandestine publication of a number of literary accounts of torture (for example *Des Rappelés témoignent* and Pierre-Henri Simon's *Contre la torture*).

<sup>5</sup> The OAS was a proto-fascistic military organization formed in 1961 with the aim of using violence (shootings, kidnappings, plastic bombings) in an ultimately futile attempt to stop Algeria from achieving independence.

<sup>6</sup> Fugler describes how the film explores 'the erosion of vital energy, the drying up of desire, the paralysis of willpower' (1964), whilst Mauriac associates Alain with a 'virility under threat' (1963). Nathan Southern and Jacques Weissgerber are even more precise in their analysis, defining Alain's existential angst as deriving from 'doubts about his ability to give Lydia orgasms' (2006: 82).

<sup>7</sup> According to Allen Thiher, in Drieu's novel, 'Alain's pursuit of [women] is by its very nature contradictory, a continual affirmation of his decadence and lack of virility. The woman, then, is both the object desired and the source of emasculation that destroys desire. In reaction to this constant castration, Alain gives in to fantasies in which he seems to seek self-humiliation' (1973: 38).

<sup>8</sup> Jean-Luc Godard's *Le Petit soldat* forms a prime example of this phenomenon. For if the film was totally banned from 1960 for challenging the ideological legitimacy of the War, then critics responded differently when it was eventually released in 1963. For Jean de Baroncelli, 'Godard's framing of the Algerian War formed but a pretext for a narrative that was really focused on the character's becoming conscious, as a man, of certain problems of existence' (cited in Sellier 2008: 135).