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## Tracing the shadows of Occupation: Memory as ‘Screen’ in *La Dénonciation* (1962) and *Tu ne tueras point* (1961/1963)

“Nous vivons dans l’oubli de nos métamorphoses”. This epigraph – included as an extradiegetic insert at the beginning of Jacques Doniol-Valcroze’s *La Dénonciation*, although originally coined by the poet Paul Eluard – forms a fitting precursor to some of the themes that will henceforth dominate this article: memorial metamorphosis, temporal displacement, and the dialectic of remembering and forgetting that haunts so much of post-World War Two French cinema. For if, as Naomi Greene has astutely argued, modern France remains anchored to a ‘cult of memory’ (1999, 14; 190) that saps and embellishes its national identity in equal measure, then nowhere were the consequences of this cult more problematic than with respect to the Algerian War, a sulphurous decolonisation conflict played out largely in rural Algeria between nationalists and French conscripts (known as *appelés*), between the years of 1954 and 1962.

As a point of departure, this article will therefore analyse Doniol-Valcroze’s aforementioned *La Dénonciation/The Denunciation* (1962) and Claude Autant-Lara’s *Tu ne tueras point/L’Objecteur/Thou Shall not kill* (1961/1963),<sup>1</sup> two important although critically neglected French films that alternately misrepresent, distort, and “screen out” this history of decolonisation through reference to a distant Nazi past. As such, both of these narratives typify the dangers of twisting memory into a cult, or myth.

War warps memory. For those of us who have not experienced the dull horror of military conflict, it is difficult to imagine how the sight of a corpse – forcibly stripped of its eyes and genitals – can etch a profound trace on the mind of a young soldier, ripped away from their family, friends, loved ones, alongside the carousel of chores that constitutes the veneer of “everyday life”. Indeed, for the permanent contingent of 5,000 French conscripts cast adrift in the arid vistas of Algeria, this dance with death often proved impossible to forget. ‘Et je dois obéir à cette LAIDEUR pendant deux ans’ lamented one distressed conscript in a letter to his father, dated 1958 (Segura cited in Stora and Quemeneur 2012, 51 [emphasis in original]). One year later, he too would lie dead and forgotten.

Whilst conscripts struggled to forget, France struggled to remember. As the stakes in the War intensified during the late 1950s and early 1960s, a concoction of political, cultural, and economic factors conspired in order to prevent the private memories of soldiers from entering into – and therefore registering within – the public, metropolitan imaginary. In existing scholarship, censorship<sup>2</sup> is often named as the main culprit of this will-to-forget, with the string of official amnesties that took place in the 1960s and 1970s coming a close second. A different interpretation of the cultural politics of the period has been proposed by Kristin Ross (1995), who defines 1960s modernisation and Americanisation as similar catalysts for this process of post-colonial amnesia. Blinded by the dazzling sheen of cars, stars, and domestic interiors, France quickly forgot about its awkward, “archaic” past in the colonies, which was subsequently swept under the rug like a dirty family secret.

As this article will demonstrate, a further reason for this amnesia can be located in the turn towards transhistorical analogy that occurred during the decline of

France's Empire. Galvanised by Claude Bourdet's 1951 article 'Y a-t-il une Gestapo algérienne?' (1951), during the 1950s and 1960s, a plethora of politicians, intellectuals and artists began to forge memorial correspondences between the Occupation and the Algerian War as the legitimacy of colonialism began to wane. In a 1957 edition of *Le Monde*, Hubert Beuve-Méry thus claimed that 'à partir de ce moment, les Français n'ont plus le droit de condamner les auteurs d'Oradour et les tortionnaires de la Gestapo de la même manière qu'il y a dix ans' (1957), whilst, in his 1962 clandestine documentary, *Octobre à Paris/October in Paris*, Jacques Panijel overlaid stark archival footage taken at a police massacre committed at Charonne metro station on the 8 February 1962 with the universalising epigram: "tout le monde est un youpin [slang for Jew], tout le monde est un bicot [slang for Arab]". This was despite the fact that the nine French militants killed as a result of this massacre were victims of state endorsed 'anti-communist' (Péju and Péju 2011, 101) antipathy, rather than the anti-Semitism or anti-Algerian prejudice witnessed respectively during Vichy and the Algerian War.

Were such examples of transhistorical analogy justified? Yes. And no. Certainly, the French army in Algeria did practice torture like the Gestapo – this, now, is well known; as are the potential benefits of analogy as a spur for acts of transversal resistance between victims of state violence.<sup>3</sup> However, as the fragment of non-diegetic narration from Panijel's film so aptly demonstrates, mechanically conflating the dark ambience of the Algerian War with the Occupation also ran the very real risk of glossing over the ideological differences that existed between these two epochs, characterised, alternately by the annihilation of the Jewish race in the name of National Socialism, and the subjugation of Algerians in the name of colonialism. Hence, Philip Dine describes the 'regular appeal by [postwar] French artists to the Liberation theme [as] part of a wider occultation of the radical ideological challenge of militant colonial nationalism' (1995, 280), whilst Isabelle Lambert has defined the pervasive tendency to construct parallels between decolonisation and the Second World War 'as one of the main causes of the collective and wilful amnesia that surrounds the Algerian War' (1990, 557). Moreover, these comparisons rarely represented an attempt to engage with the suffering of Algerians nor understand the politico-ideological complexities of Algerian nationalism (and, in this respect, Panijel's aforementioned documentary was atypical), but remained firmly limited to the scope of European historiography and victimisation: Nazi repression during the period of Occupation and acts of violence perpetrated by the state during decolonisation. With this in mind, neither director dares to forge the comparatively contentious analogy between the French Resistance and Algerian nationalism, despite the fact that this analogy was mobilised by a wide range of nationalist leaders and disillusioned conscripts to describe the un-equal power dynamics between coloniser and colonised (Anon 2012, 54).

As we will see, a tendency to distort and occult the memories of these two periods through the rhetoric of analogy is particularly apparent in Jacques Doniol-Valcroze's *La Dénonciation*, which simultaneously critiques the neo-fascistic tactics adopted by the Parisian police during the 1960s (endorsed by the Prefect of Police, Maurice Papon, who would later also be inculpated for his part in the round-ups of Jews during the Occupation), whilst stripping these tactics of their roots in the history of colonialism and colonial racism. Fascism, in this film, acts as a "screen", which distorts rather than illuminates; a cracked mirror for a generation fractured by the death throes of the colonial order. In the final part of this article, I will also show how this turn-towards-analogy can be glimpsed in the dithyrambic response of leftist

critics enamoured with *Tu ne tueras point*, despite the fact that Autant-Lara nimbly avoids the thorny question of Algeria altogether.

Apart from analogy, another way in which the films that feature in this article facilitate the forgetting of the Algerian War is by remaining obsessively fixated on the contours of France's traumatic past under Vichy, whilst failing to join the dots between this past and the challenges of the decolonial present. As we will see, the problems engendered by this ahistorical overinvestment in *what was* rather than *what is* are particularly apparent in Doniol-Valcroze's decision to reiterate the well-worn narrative of a *Résistant* tortured during Occupation (through the medium of flashback), instead of attempting to expose the waves of racially motivated torture being committed at that very moment by members of the police in Paris (where the film is set), and the French army (in Algeria). If, by 1961, Jean-Paul Sartre could confidently although elliptically claim that 'the blinding sun of [colonial] torture was reaching its zenith, illuminating the whole country' (2001, 86), then its rays nevertheless failed to penetrate the sombre *huis clos* that is Valcroze's film. All that remains is an apolitical antihero consumed by guilty memories of denunciation and Collaboration.

As I will show, ahistoricism is also a syndrome that plagues Autant-Lara's narrative of conscientious objection, set in Paris in 1949. When it was released in 1961/1963, many critics interpreted *Tu ne tueras point* as a trenchant transhistorical allegory (or, more specifically parable) for France's intervention in Algeria (an interpretation supported by the allegorical approach adopted by certain artists at the time, alongside the rise of conscientious objection as a central subject of debate within anti-War and anti-colonial discourses). Yet, by examining the genealogy of the project in more detail, this article will instead come to a radically different conclusion: namely that, like Valcroze's narrative, *Tu ne tueras point* should be understood as embodying an anxious retreat from – rather than engagement with – the vexed identity politics of the Algerian War. Hopefully, this reading will force the re-conceptualisation of a film that has been consistently misinterpreted and overvalued as an anti-colonial artefact since its staggered release in the early 1960s.

Ultimately, for different reasons, both films discussed in this article thus provide perfect examples of how cultural memories of the Algerian War were eroded at precisely the point at which they should have been consolidated. In the first instance, this process of amnesia is facilitated through the establishment of a constellation of imperfect transhistorical analogies (which distort the memories of both Vichy and decolonisation), whilst, in the second instance, notions of guilt, nostalgia and ahistoricity prove key. Finally, I will conclude with a more general reflection on the tangled politics of this doomed period in French cinema, 'born out of time and out of place in a hazy present' (Betz 2009, 105).

### ***La Dénonciation (1962)***

Jacques Doniol-Valcroze was a man of many talents. Not only was he an actor, critic, former *Résistant*, and self-proclaimed 'leftist libertine' (Sellier 2000, 483), but, during the 1950s, he co-cofounded the extremely influential if largely apolitical *Cahiers du Cinéma* (in 1951), and directed two relatively conservative although well received romantic dramas (*L'Eau à la bouche* [1959] and *Le Cœur battant* [1960]), before releasing *La Dénonciation* in 1962. In the popular press of the period, certain journalists were quick to point out the political merit of *La Dénonciation*, citing, as

evidence, Doniol-Valcroze's earlier participation in the *Manifeste des 121* (an open letter of military insubordination signed by 121 well known intellectuals, artists and politicians), alongside the film's marginalised status in the French provinces (rather than central Parisian venues), 'un purgatoire qui menace les films considérés par les distributeurs comme difficiles' (Chazal 1962), in other words too political for widespread public consumption. Yet, as this section will illustrate, *La Dénonciation* also appears to obscure – or, in other words, screen out – the complex reality of decolonisation, firstly by subordinating the torture of Algerians during the War to the memories of a French *Résistant* tortured during Vichy, but also by establishing an imperfect parallel between the "fascism" of the Gaullist state and Nazi rule.

*La Dénonciation* begins when the young and dapper film producer Michel Jussieu (Maurice Ronet) accidentally stumbles across the body of an individual hidden in a dimly lit Parisian stripclub (Playboy), before being himself beaten into a state of unconsciousness by initially unidentified men. It is around this initial discovery that the remainder of the narrative henceforth revolves; firstly, through the revelation that the body belongs to a former paratrooper and member of the pro-colonial neo-fascist OAS (Organisation armée secrète), murdered due to divisions within the group (who attempted to protect the French colonial system in Algeria through a spree of attacks in Algeria and France, committed largely in the years 1961 and 1962); secondly, through Michel's attempts at piecing together a coherent narrative of the crime scene (obscured, significantly, through the symptoms of quasi-amnesia); and thirdly, through the resurgence of a series of repressed memories, formed during Michel's participation in the Resistance during the Occupation and whose involuntary reappearance is precipitated by a round of questioning led by the police commissioner Malterer (Sacha Pitoëff).

### *New victims*

A piercing scream. A light switched off. A body being dragged down the corridors of a sterile building. Such are the confused visual snapshots that announce Michel's first psychic foray into the past, when the then young *Résistant* is brought beaten and bruised before an irascible Nazi officer in a Gestapo headquarters. Slouched meekly next to the officer is a sympathetic French-German translator (collaborator) named Jérôme Loinod (Jean-Pierre Darnal) – 'très jeune, très beau, comme un tueur angélique' (Doniol-Valcroze 1962, 52) according to the original script – who discreetly informs him that his superior has previously gleaned all of the information he ostensibly requires from his captured comrades ('le colonel sait tout'), thus effectively rendering further resistance to torture futile and Michel's subsequent act of denunciation both logical and effectively 'sans conséquence' (Anon 1962). This alibi does not however prevent the memories of this event from returning to haunt Michel twenty years later, before eventually plunging our fearful antihero into a fatal abyss.<sup>4</sup>

Doniol-Valcroze's representation of a *Résistant* who succumbs to the demands of the Gestapo is an undeniably important moment in the film. The singularity of this flashback, and, indeed, its political iconoclasm, is especially apparent if we compare it to the contemporaneous endeavour to lionise the rare few *Résistants* who had successfully resisted torture during the Occupation (notably Jean Moulin), inaugurated by Charles de Gaulle as part of a campaign of obsessive commemoration that Henry Rousso has famously termed *résistantialisme* (1987, 95-110). If only in this respect, *La Dénonciation* shares parallels with a small group of late 1950s and early 1960s films such as *Hiroshima mon amour* (Alain Resnais, 1959), *Le Passage*

*du Rhin/Tomorrow is my Turn* (André Cayatte, 1960) and *Léon Morin, prêtre/Léon Morin, Priest* (Jean-Pierre Melville, 1961), all of which evoke France's past during the Occupation with a sense of historical sensibility conspicuously absent from the Manichaeism of immediate post-Liberation cinema, based as it was, upon two imposing myths inherited from the dominant political doxa: 'Résistance et victoire' (Daniel 1972, 271). Furthermore, by subjecting Michel to physical degradation 'pour le principe', the behaviour of the Gestapo officer forms a stark and rare reminder of the ways in which torture is more often than not weaponised as a method of destroying the will of an individual rather than to precipitate the relinquishment of military secrets. Jean-Pierre Guéno has defined torture as 'a gangrene of the soul and the rape of human dignity', before describing it more metaphorically, as 'the older sister' of 'murder, the death penalty and slavery' (2011, 8).

So there are many factors that render this scene important: firstly as an ideological counterpoint to the 'institutionalised amnesia' (Higgins 1998, 144) disseminated by de Gaulle's rhetoric of Resistance, and secondly as a deontological retort to the many politicians and military figures who advocated and continue to advocate the myth of torture as a purely epistemological rather than ontological weapon (Adams 2016, 115). The Gestapo officer doesn't torture because he *needs* to, but because he *wants* to; Michel doesn't break *because* of torture, but due to a utilitarian rationale concocted in response to the duplicity of the Nazis.

In addition to exposing the hidden aims of torture – to dehumanise, to depersonalise – let us also accept, for the moment, that this scene constructs a trans-historical analogy of victimisation, in which the present suffering of Algerians tortured by the army, such as Djamilia Boupacha and Larbi Ben M'hidi – the former infamously raped by paratroopers, the latter killed by them – not to mention the innumerable Algerian citizens subjected to violent interrogation in Paris before and after the "events" of October 17 1961, are exposed, between the lines, or rather lacerations, carved in Michel's head, and torso, by the Gestapo. Articulating the suffering of one person through the suffering of another is always a perilous choice of representation for any artist, raising important questions regarding legibility and eligibility (whether the metaphor can be understood; whether the figure represented on-screen is an appropriate surrogate for the person or people they have replaced). Nonetheless, as Deberati Sanyal has illustrated, 'as censorship had forbidden a frontal approach to the problem of violence in French society, only oblique, allegorical allusions could bring the question of torture home to French terrain' (2010, 55).

Only once we begin to examine the wider patterns of identification that characterise the film do we realise that the metaphorical logic that forms the nexus of this flashback is, in fact, driven less by an impulse to tease into view the pain experienced by Algerians by colonial discrimination and torture, than it is by a desire to set in motion an empathetic relationship between the spectator and Michel, who subtly comes to displace Algerians as the primary victim of the colonial crisis. After having been tortured by the Gestapo in the distant past, Michel is henceforth subjected to an extraordinarily tortuous litany of trials and tribulations in the present, including: being beaten with a stool, hounded by anonymous jigsaw letters, hounded by phone calls, forced to endure the uncompromising glare of Malterer, betrayed by his wife, tailed by cars, disrespected by his condescending former Resistant leader, before being eventually gunned down by an OAS agent – due to an amorous misunderstanding. If Bernard Dort has claimed that 'Michel Jussieu joue au détective [parce que] la situation où il se trouve brusquement placé répète celle qu'il a vécue

autrefois, du temps de la Résistance' (1962), it is because each of these scenes contributes to Michel's status as the *sui generis*, ur-victim of a trans-historical cycle of violence, involving torture and state oppression. His destiny is tragic, his tragedy, Romantic: it is *his* suffering, not the suffering of Algerians, that is constantly foregrounded in the film, in the same way that the film is really about the threat of fascism to leftist ideals rather than the impact of racialised violence on the colonised. Unsurprisingly, *La Dénonciation* features precisely zero Algerians – tortured or not.

### *Old enemies*

In addition to subscribing to a Eurocentric conception of victimhood, *La Dénonciation* also distorts the memorial specificity of the colonial situation by establishing an imperfect lineage of perpetration between the Gestapo and the Parisian police. The traces of this transhistorical analogy are littered throughout the film, from the bureaucratic confines of Malterer's office (which evokes the similarly sterile state of the Gestapo headquarters), to Malterer's "collaborator" M. Mercier (whose role is reminiscent of the collaborator/translator present immediately after Michel is tortured). More importantly, it is evident in Malterer's attempts at forcing Michel to denounce Eleonore Germain (Nicole Berger) – the nightclub presenter and OAS sympathizer whose testimony finally proves paramount to solving the case. Whilst Malterer ultimately fails in his desire to elicit this information from an increasingly antagonistic Michel, his poise and posture nevertheless bring to mind the admittedly more violent – and therefore successful – tactics of interrogation and dehumanization employed fifteen years ago by Michel's Gestapo tormentor. Finally, this parallel is evident in the over-determined references to the perpetuity of police perpetration and "collaboration" that both punctuate the following exchange between Michel and his wife Elsa (Françoise Brion), and immediately precipitates the involuntary flashback of torture detailed above:

Michel: Charmant ou pas charmant, je n'aime pas les flics. Je les connais, et je les ai que trop connus.

Elsa: Ça n'a aucun rapport Michel, tu crois toujours dans la Résistance, tu joues toujours au petit soldat

Michel: Les petits soldats passent, la police reste

Elsa: Enfin, Michel, ce Malterer, il fait son métier. Et par-dessus le marché il le fait très gentiment

Michel: ah oui oui oui... Il appelle même ça une collaboration amiable

Elsa: Mais disons qu'avec les hommes d'une certaine taille, il faut savoir collaborer avec la police

Michel: Tu as sûrement raison, mais je ne dois pas avoir l'organe *pour*

Doniol-Valcroze was not the only director working at the time to conceive of crimes committed by the state in such transhistorical terms. As I mentioned earlier in this article, Jacques Panijel constructs a similar analogy in his documentary *Octobre à Paris*, firstly between the victimization of Jews under Vichy and Arabs under the Fifth Republic, but also by defining the police violence witnessed at Charonne metro station in February 1962 as an expression of state "fascism". Furthermore, both directors were, to a certain degree, justified in their comparison. Maxim Silverman, in particular, has described how 'administrative practices of surveillance, classification, round-up, deportation and violence were developed and applied in different contexts,

circulating freely between France and the colonies and between the Nazi and colonial eras' (Silverman 2013, 15). In *La Dénonciation*, the fascism of yesterday becomes the fascism of today as the protectors of the people become the persecutors of a nation.

This does not mean, however, that Doniol-Valcroze's analogy is without limitations. For, if it is true that *La Dénonciation* justifiably criticises the Parisian police for reiterating the fascism of Nation Socialism, the film also ignores the specifically colonial aspect of the police violence that defined the 1950s and 1960s, including, although not limited to; the creation of specialized intelligence agencies that targeted Algerians; wide spread round-ups (known as *ratonnades*) largely carried out in the disenfranchised *bidonvilles* (shanty towns) surrounding the city; the implementation of camps and detention blocs for Algerians caught up in these round-ups; discriminatory legislation conceived with the specific aim of stemming the rise in Algerian nationalism (the essentially racist curfew created by the Prefect of Police, Maurice Papon on the 5 October 1961 being exemplary in this respect) – all of which essentially amounted to 'a campaign of terror aimed at the Algerian community' (House and MacMaster 2006, 88) – before this campaign eventually led to the night of unprecedented violence that took place on the 17 October 1961, when hundreds of Algerians demonstrating against the use of excessive police force were beaten into submission by a phalanx of armed officers strategically positioned throughout Paris. None of these racially motivated crimes find representation in the depoliticised topography of *La Dénonciation*. Instead, Doniol-Valcroze's film shares similarities with the work of many contemporaneous intellectuals, firstly by 'approaching colonial power relations through an analogy with "non-colonial" forms of racism practiced during the Occupation' (House 2010, 24), and secondly by proposing 'a nostalgic vision of a past enemy, wilfully fantasised into a state of petrification, despite the sands of time' (Rouso 1992 352). Although Papon's police force did practice torture, they were also radically different from the Gestapo in that they subjected Algerians to aggression rather than Jews, *Résistants* and other political prisoners. It is this crucial shift in victimhood that is lost in the sublimated voice of film.

In his aforementioned 1962 article, Bernard Dort defines *La Dénonciation* as 'un film boomerang' (1962). It is a trenchant although fitting description for a narrative preoccupied with the problematics of historical and personal memory: how memory is lost and then regained, how dark memories may be repressed before suddenly surging forth into the unwilling light of day. Moreover, this quote also alludes to one of the main problems inherent in Doniol-Valcroze's shadowy narrative, which, as we have seen, involves a tendency to obscure, or screen out, the complex political horror of the Algerian War, firstly by refusing to confront the gangrenous spread of torture that was in the process of infecting the Parisian police force (after being initially confined to the French army in Algeria), and, secondly, by constructing 'la plus fragile des analogies' (Dort 1962) between the techniques of interrogation employed by the Gestapo during Occupation and those employed during decolonisation by the French police. Through this analogy, *La Dénonciation* mitigates the increasingly racialised aspect of 1960s police violence – a violence whose seeds had originally been sown in the arid vistas of Algeria.

Ultimately, whilst Michel recovers from the amnesia that hinders his recollection of the crime committed during the opening sequence, *La Dénonciation* should thus be seen as a work which – for these very reasons – contributes to the more general process of historical amnesia that characterised France's blinkered response to



decolonisation in the 1950s and 1960s. Michel's futile desire to forget everything before dying at the end of the film thus forms a fitting although inadvertent allegory for the symbolic death of Algerian suffering within the cultural topography of the period. As we now see, forgetting is also a syndrome that plagues *Tu ne tueras point*.

### *Tu ne tueras point (1961/1963)*

Whilst *La Dénonciation* establishes an imperfect analogy between the regimes of oppression operating during decolonisation and France's dark experience of fascism under Vichy, Claude Autant-Lara's notorious although often misunderstood 1961/1963 film, *Tu ne tueras point* (Figure 1), completely screens out any direct reference to the Algerian War. This absence is, for a number of reasons, surprising. Firstly, as the principal thrust of the narrative revolves around two subjects that rose to prominence precisely during the twilight of colonial rule (conscientious objection and pacifism), and secondly given the degree of artistic licence granted by Autant-Lara's acquisition of foreign investment. As a means of departure, this analysis will question why (rather than how) the director chose to disengage from the conflict as it was unfolding, before exploring how critics working at the time invested the film with a false political prestige by mythologising it as a transnational allegory. Throughout this analysis, the contours of historical memory will again be a central concern, alongside the ways in which memories can 'function as a shield in the present rather than as a bond with the past' (Wilkinson 1996, 86).

Inspired by the details of a double trial that took place at the *Cherche-Midi* court (Paris) in 1949, Claude Autant-Lara began writing *Tu ne tueras point* in 1950, four years before France would be forced to confront the threat of Algerian nationalism catalysed by the Toussaint uprising (when 30 individual attacks were made by FLN militants against military and police targets around colonial Algeria). Consequently, decolonisation did not feature in the original version of the screenplay, which focused exclusively on the politico-existential fallout of the Liberation and an idealized conception of peace rather than the radical impact of Algerian nationalism. In the first part of the film, the spectator is therefore introduced to Jean-François Cordier (Laurent Terzieff<sup>5</sup>), a young draftee who refuses to comply with the demands of military officials when summoned to a local barracks. The implications of this refusal gradually grow in severity until Cordier is arrested for conscientious objection, despite the fact that the film takes place five years after France had been dramatically emancipated from Nazi Occupation by allied forces. Whilst awaiting his sentence in a military prison, Cordier meets Adler (Horst Frank), a German priest arrested for killing a French Résistant during the chaotic Liberation of France in August 1944. Little by little, the director prises open the moral fissure embodied by these two protagonists, until the film reaches its didactic climax when the two men are summoned to appear at the same military tribunal, orchestrated as a cynical attempt at unconditionally legitimizing military obedience. Whilst Adler is acquitted of his crime, Cordier is sentenced to two years imprisonment for military insubordination.

### *Total Freedom*

If there was one person who was swept up in the shifting sands of decolonisation, then that person was Autant-Lara. The director's early decision to explore the theme of peace is exemplary in this regard. For if pacifism was a

discourse that had been all but discredited as an anachronistic ‘perversion’ and a ‘pariah’ (Ingman 1995, 209) in the fallout of the Liberation (due to its association with defeatism and Collaboration), then it was also an ideology that once again rose to prominence amongst moderate leftist thinkers during the decomposition of the colonial world. Indeed, according to Benjamin Stora, ‘jusqu’en 1960, la gauche française était pour “la paix en Algérie”. Elle ne se prononcera pour l’indépendance que tardivement’ (2002). As Picasso’s famous 1949 painting of a dove was appropriated by a new generation of anti-colonial iconographers, Autant-Lara’s choice of pacifism as the central subtext of his film suddenly appeared miraculously providential.

In the 1950s, Autant-Lara was presented with the opportunity to capitalize upon this unlikely coincidence, when he managed to acquire foreign investment from producers based in Italy, Liechtenstein and Yugoslavia (where many of the scenes in the film were shot between May and August 1960). As certain critics have pointed out, this acquisition proved astute in the sense that it offered Autant-Lara a rare level of artistic license unavailable to those working behind the stringent screen of censorship facilitated by the French funding system, and, in this respect Autant-Lara’s financial *modus operandi* had parallels with that adopted by Jacques Panijel. Indeed, in an interview published by *Les Lettres françaises* in 1961 (a literary publication founded in 1941 by writers Jacques Decour and Jean Paulhan with the aim of resisting the Occupation), the director hubristically claimed that, thanks to this funding, he had filmed *Tu ne tueras point* ‘en toute liberté, s’exprimant enfin sans restriction’ (Autant-Lara 1961). Finally, in 1957, Autant-Lara’s project again acquired a renewed significance when Louis Lecoin began his campaign to grant conscientious objectors the right to refuse military obligations (he emerged victorious in 1963). Lecoin was even photographed next to a promotional poster for *Tu ne tueras point* at a 1962 screening in Belgium, again reinforcing a preconceived conception of the film as a crystal-clear mirror of the era, made by a director unafraid to confront one of the most contentious subjects rendered taboo by censorship: the Algerian War.

### *Nostalgia*

Due to this heady concoction of economic and ideological factors, by 1961 Autant-Lara’s project had acquired the status of an overdetermined myth within the French imaginary. Many critics impatiently awaited the release of a film that would finally be able to translate the ubiquitous absence of Algeria that marked France’s censored cinematic landscape into a devastating presence, thus reversing the ‘collective amnesia’ (Ageron 1990, 623) that had saturated the nation-state since the mid-1950s. According to the hagiographic lexicon of Jean Carta, Autant-Lara represented ‘un homme debout dans le cinéma français’ (1961). Yet, when *Tu ne tueras point* was finally granted a quasi-commercial release in Italy, Belgium and England in 1962, certain writers responded with disillusionment rather than adulation. Once again, the Algerian War remained hidden within the repressed folds of the diegesis, and the thousands of belligerents and victims of this conflict were silenced by a unwavering fidelity to Autant-Lara’s original screenplay, written in 1950, and unequivocally dedicated to the acrimonious political hairlines that fractured French society throughout this period. Nowhere in the narrative was the crisis in Algeria either seen or discussed. Instead, the contemporaneous reality of decolonisation was temporally displaced by an anterior *mise-en-scène*, compounded, in turn, by an act of

spatial displacement, in which Yugoslavia (Belgrade) masqueraded as Paris, Serbians as Parisians.

To a certain extent, Autant-Lara's tendency towards ahistoricism and nostalgia was to be expected. In his 1995 work *Les Abus de la mémoire*, Tzveten Todorov has drawn a discursive line between 'commemorating the victims of the past' – which is 'gratifying' – and 'acknowledging those of today' – which is 'disturbing' (1992, 54), whilst Alain Finkielkraut has argued that, during decolonisation, ruminating upon 'the mistakes of the past helped forget the mistakes of the present' (1992, 69). Furthermore, these theories – which, as with the work of Henry Rousso, remain arguably limited by a propensity towards sweeping generalizations regarding the dynamic of collective memory – were applied in a more precise fashion in critical reviews of *Tu ne tueras point*. Thus, according to Samuel Lachize, Autant-Lara's film remained anchored to 'un sentimentalisme incompatible avec l'action révolutionnaire' (1961). Writing in *Les Lettres françaises*, J. P. Thiraud put the point more bluntly, stating 'nous sommes en un temps où "défendre ses idées par les armes" peut très bien, demain, devenir une nécessité concrète, et nous regardons avec méfiance le pacifisme. Le film d'Autant Lara est là pour nous rappeler à la fois les limites de ce pacifisme, est son honnête foncière' (1961). Finally – as many of the more conservative journalists pointed out – Autant-Lara could also be criticised for his ahistorical portrayal of religion, embodied in Cordier's decision to denounce Catholicism during the trial that takes place during towards the end of the narrative. Certainly, this *deus ex machina* did not reflect the contemporaneous ethos of conscientious objectors operating during the Algerian War, the majority of whom explicitly and unconditionally justified their actions through reference to religious conviction (for example Jean le Meur and Abbé Davezies).

Only one piece of extra-diegetic evidence suggests that Autant-Lara attempted to engage with the Algerian crisis during the protracted development of his film, albeit in a limited capacity. In a January 1962 review of *Tu ne tueras point* published in *Les Lettres françaises*, Georges Sadoul praised the director for ironically appropriating the following couplets from René Clair's 1952 quasi-Orientalist apology for colonial intervention, *Belles de Nuit* (1952): 'Qu'il était beau d'avoir vingt ans; Quand les Enfants de la Patrie; Clairon sonnante, tambour battant; Allaient pacifier Algérie' (1962). Sadoul's comments are as enlightening as they are cryptic. For if this song did indeed contribute to the total prohibition of the film by French censors as Sadoul suggests, it is also puzzlingly absent from the 1962 Italian version of *Tu ne tueras point*, which includes all of the scenes and snippets of dialogue cut from the narrative by French censors in 1963. In an intriguing act of self-censorship, Autant-Lara again appears to reiterate 'l'étrange silence' (Nora 1982, 9) that softly stifled the cultural landscape of the era, despite the director's own claims of having worked in "total freedom" during his project. Instead of attempting to grapple with the thorny beast of decolonisation, Autant-Lara shies away, blinded by an ahistorical desire to explore the last vestiges of France's traumatic past.

### *Mytho-analogisation*

The historical screen erected through Autant-Lara's outdated depiction of pacifism was also mirrored in the perspective of critics writing during the era. In his now classic 1987 study of French historical memory, *Le Syndrome de Vichy*, Henry Rousso has drawn attention to a particular discourse of comparative misinterpretation that characterised the years 1945-1962. Whilst Rousso begins his argument with a

discussion of how the post-Occupation era precipitated a groundswell of reductive and imperfect comparisons with the Dreyfus affair (1894-1906), he then develops this line of thought in order to apply it to the Algerian situation, stating: ‘in order to exist, to survive, it was important to mythologize the enemy, to represent them as untouched by time [...]. The Algerian War, observed from the metropolis, was therefore really a replay of the Franco-French War’ (1987, 94). Since the publication of Rousso’s seminal text, certain critics have adopted a similar approach to the cultural fabric of the epoch. Philip Dine, for example, emphatically asserts that ‘the Algerian struggle for national liberation was ultimately conceived – and is, perhaps, only ever conceivable – as a pale reflection of the processes and the personnel of the Liberation of France’ (Dine 1995, 280).

Neither Rousso nor Dine identify *Tu ne tueras point* as an example of how this process of misinterpretation might function via a film released during decolonisation. That said, a similar tendency towards misreading (rather than misrepresenting) images of the fallout of the Second World War and the Liberation as an echo of the Algerian War can be identified in the smattering of critical articles released both during and after the film’s staggered release. One example of this tendency to mythologize (or what might be termed mytho-analogize) these two epochs appeared in a 1963 article written by Michel Capdenac, who describes how the Algerian War ‘s’inscrivait en filigranes dans le film [donnant], à chacune de ses séquences un prolongement et une résolution particulière’ (1963), before linking Adler’s pained decision to obey Nazi orders by executing a French *Résistant* in ‘une vaste cave éclairée par une seule et sinistre ampoule’ to the similarly shadowy politics of disappearance employed by the French army in Algeria (Autant-Lara 1960, 315). Writing in *Les Lettres françaises*, Georges Sadoul proposed an extended version of this theory by associating Adler’s acquittal of this act with the similarly lenient forms of justice meted out to OAS members in the early 1960s (1962), whilst, in a rare academic chapter on the film, Jean-Pierre Bertin-Maghit and Alain Marty have significantly positioned *Tu ne tueras point* in close proximity to Jean Dewever’s 1960 *Les Honneurs de la guerre/The Honors Of War*, which, according to the authors, ‘develops an implicit discourse against the Algerian War through a narrative that takes place during the Second World War’ (2001, 138).

Implicit within all of these observations is a conception of *Tu ne tueras point* as a form of transhistorical allegory, whose primary subject (the Algerian War) is dislodged, spirited away, and replaced with over-determined visual allusions to an earlier epoch (the 1940s). From a political point of view, this allegorical approach is significant as it essentially authorizes the absence of Algeria from the text (in the sense that allegories are predicated upon absence); it is also unsurprising given that allegory – especially in its transhistorical form – was a rhetorical device mobilised by many artists during the death of the French Empire. Yet, by again returning to the genealogy of Autant-Lara’s project, the cracks in an allegorical interpretation of the film quickly begin to show. In particular, whilst artists such as Alain Resnais (*Nuit et Brouillard/Night and Fog* [1956]) and Jean-Paul Sartre (*Les Séquestrés d'Altona/ The Condemned of Altona* [1959]) had expressly adopted the ruse of allegory in order to circumvent the parameters of state censorship, Autant-Lara had essentially been liberated from the chains of the censors (and thus from the need to adopt an allegorical modality) through the acquisition of foreign finance. This was for a project that had crucially been launched at least four years before France had begun embroiled in the Algerian War. Finally, it is significant that the political imaginary identified by critics as evidence of an allegorical inscription was in no way restricted

to decolonisation. Conscientious objectors, for example, had played a part in the First and Second World Wars (and, to a lesser extent, the First Indochina War [1946-1954]), whilst the scene in which Adler executes a quivering *Résistant* could hypothetically be linked to any conflict in which humanity has been confronted with an injunction to kill. Autant-Lara does not “speak otherwise” – in other words, allegorically – about France’s colonial predicament, but ‘escamote son sujet’ – completely (Marcabru 1963).

With this in mind, the fragments of cultural criticism detailed above must therefore ultimately be reckoned as examples of a wider tendency towards mytho-analogisation, identified by Rousso and Dine and narrativised in *La Dénonciation*, rather than as a persuasive attempt at probing the conspicuous absence of Algeria that lingers at the heart of *Tu ne tueras point*. This observation gains a particular clarity given the lofty vocabulary of idealised humanism used by Autant-Lara to describe *Tu ne tueras point*, as ‘un film qui fût pour la Paix, contre l’esprit de guerre’ (1961), rather than as an allegory for decolonisation. It is also in spite of the fact that, for nationalist thinkers such as Frantz Fanon, peace was increasingly viewed as a discourse to be distrusted; firstly, due to the propensity of moderate intellectuals to privilege European pacifism over non-Western nationalism, and secondly, as it had been appropriated by the French government as a way of euphemistically describing colonial intervention, also known as *pacification*. In this respect, Autant-Lara could even be accused of indirectly reiterating the neo-colonial discourse condoned by supporters of French Algeria.

As this analysis has illustrated, *Tu ne tueras point* was a project sown with the seeds of ahistoricism. This ahistoricism was apparent from the very moment that Autant-Lara chose to dedicate his film to the discredited notion of pacifism in 1950, before the director then controversially refused to visualise the Algerian drama as it was unfolding (in much the same way that Doniol-Valcroze refused to engage with the torture of Algerians that was occurring in Paris at precisely the moment that he shot his film in the capital). Finally, in what is arguably one of the most spectacular acts of misinterpretation ever committed within the continuum of French film criticism, *Tu ne tueras point* was subsequently received by many writers as a trenchant anti-colonial tirade, despite the fact that Algeria is absolutely absent from the anterior landscape of the diegesis. Ultimately, whilst Cordier becomes a prisoner of the state for refusing to kill, Autant-Lara kills off the nascent memories of the Algerian War through an obsession with ‘the screen-memory’ of the Liberation (Rousso 1987, 25).

This obsession acquires an ominous resonance given that Autant-Lara has more recently been accused of denouncing Jews during Occupation by the producer Pierre Braunberger – the same person who produced *La Dénonciation*.

## Conclusion

Consider this metaphor. Two veterans are flicking through a box of photographs marked “memories of the Algerian War”. The ritual begins as expected, with landscapes replete with smiling conscripts passed between warm, receptive hands. Suddenly, the ambience darkens as one of the veterans realizes that the collection has been tampered with: some of the photos have been defaced or are missing, others have been replaced with anachronistic images belonging to an earlier conflict. Faced with the holes in this fragmented puzzle, the individuals are left jaded by the impossibility of recollection.

Cinema is obviously different from the static modality of documentation that is photography. However, this metaphor remains an effective way of visualising the problematics of commemoration that both blight this troubled time in French filmmaking and provide the impetus for my own investigation into the critical politics of memory.

Furthermore, this article has come to a number of conclusions that subtly challenge scholarship on the subject, both past and present. Firstly, by drawing attention to a subterranean stream of cinematic narratives that explore the dark side of France's experience of World War Two, I have shown how, despite the vice-like grip of the censors, French cinema continued to offer artists a way of critiquing the dominant doxa of the era. Instead of lionising the martyrs of Resistance like de Gaulle, both Valcroze and Autant-Lara populate their films with a carousel of ambivalent antiheroes associated alternately with weakness-under-torture (as opposed to virile endurance), and individualized pacifism (as opposed to nationalist belligerence). These observations – which make up the argument of this article – would not be so potentially contentious if scholars such as Rousso had not spent the last thirty years mechanically equating the contours of collective memory – including the imaginary of cinema – with the president's political memories of Resistance.

This is not to say, however, that *La Dénonciation* and *Tu ne tueras point* functioned in order to reverse the process of institutionalised amnesia initiated by de Gaulle. As we have seen, neither narrative succeeds in exposing the complex contemporaneous impact of decolonisation upon France or Algeria, but – for reasons that were undoubtedly as personal as they were cultural – remain instead blinkered by the 'cult of memory' outlined at the beginning of this piece. In this respect, I have highlighted the limitations of more recent critical attempts at defining the emergence of early Holocaust memory as a catalyst for the articulation and preservation of memories associated with decolonisation, and vice versa. Despite forming an invaluable contribution to the field of memory studies, these 'multidirectional' (Rothberg 2009) and 'palimpsestic' (Silverman 2013) approaches appear particularly incompatible with the fog of amnesia that generation after generation of interdisciplinary scholars have associated with France's experience of decolonisation: if allusions to the Second World War were such a powerful modality of memorial preservation, then why was the Algerian War subsequently cast into oblivion?

Finally, one subject that looms large over much film history despite being almost totally absent from this inquiry is the regime of official censorship that slowly encroached upon directors working during this era. 'La censure', claims Benjamin Stora, 'a joué un rôle essentiel' in the absence of Algeria in cinema (2004, 111), whilst, writing during the early 1960s, one critic from the Paris based *ciné-club* UFOLEIS (Union française des œuvres laïques pour l'éducation par l'image et le son) lambasted French cinema as an industry that had 'essentially been engineered in order to destroy or curtail freedom of expression' (Anon 1963, 3). This article does not aim to deny or mitigate the *modus operandi* of the censors, based, as it was, upon the nebulous aim of suppressing 'tout film de propagande idéologique' (Jeancolas 1979, 39). Rather, what I have tried to illustrate is that censorship was not the *only* phenomenon responsible for the wide-scale repression of the Algerian War as it was unfolding, alongside the ways in which it was subsequently denied, repressed or forgotten (and, in this respect, this article shares certain methodological parallels with Kristin Ross's aforementioned work, which focuses upon the impact of modernisation upon cultural representation rather than censorship). As we have seen, this march towards memorial oblivion was also somewhat ironically facilitated by the turn

towards transhistorical analogy that defined the period, alongside a crucial failure to ‘make links between the *then* and the *now*’ (Eades 2006, 37 [emphasis added by the author]), exemplified firstly in the episodic flashbacks that puncture *La Dénonciation*, and then in the absolute disavowal of anticolonial conflict that characterises *Tu ne tueras point*. It is no wonder that Jean-Pierre Jeancolas has chided directors working during the Algerian War for making films ‘coupés de la vie, coupés du présent ou de l’histoire’ (1979, 97), whilst Joseph Daniel has described 1950s and 1960s cinema as ‘dégagé des contraintes de l’authenticité historique, dégagé aussi de l’activité et du passé proche’, and ultimately, ‘hors du présent’ (1972, 356; 261). In both of the films discussed in this article, anamnesis engenders amnesia as decolonisation is forgotten.

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<sup>1</sup> Autant-Lara changed the name of his project due to political pressures placed on French producers, from *L'Objecteur* to *Tu ne tueras point*. The film was granted a staggered release throughout Europe in 1961 before Autant-Lara eventually applied for a French screening certificate in 1963. Contrary to popular belief, *Tu ne tueras point* was therefore never technically banned in France, although censors did cut nine moments from the final version of the film.

<sup>2</sup> It is no exaggeration to define this period as one of the stringent in the country's history of filmmaking. In order to erase images of the Algerian War from cinema screens, the state used three main tactics: 1) a precautionary system used by officials to annul a project prior to shooting 2) cuts and 3) temporary or total or prohibition.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example: Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonisation* (California: Stanford University Press, 2009), and Max Silverman, *Palimpsestic Memory: The Holocaust and Colonialism in French and Francophone Fiction and Film* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> Michel becomes more and more consumed by his memories of denunciation as the narrative progresses, until effectively committing suicide during the final scene of the film. As certain critics at the time suggested, this suicide can be interpreted as an act of absolution performed by an individual desperate to prove the extent of his guilt. Death, in this respect, is framed as self-edifying and transcendental rather than narcissistic and inconsequential.

<sup>5</sup> Laurent Terzieff was one of the rare ex-soldiers who was active as an actor during the 1950s and 1960s. He also signed the *Manifeste des 121* in 1961.