

# Algeria Deferred: The Logic of Trauma in Muriel and Caché

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*"Thus the encounter, forever missed, has occurred between dream and awakening, between the person still asleep and whose dream we will not know and the person who has dreamt merely in order to not wake up."*

Jacques Lacan (1978: 59)

In the opening sequence of Michael Haneke's *Caché* (2005), a protracted, extreme long-shot surveys the exterior of a chic townhouse belonging to the bourgeois couple, Georges and Anne. This image, upon which the opening credits are gradually inscribed, maintains a lengthy, if not punitive, duration, until interrupted by a brief scene of the couple searching for clues outside their home. When the narrative immediately returns to its "original" image, it is revealed that the surveillance shot reflects not only the film's direct camera consciousness but also the contents of a videotape framed within Georges and Anne's television. The tape, left mysteriously at their doorstep, is the first in a series of five, with each subsequent tape expressing a stronger trace of an indiscretion that Georges has unconsciously, if not consciously, repressed since his childhood. Significantly, Georges's indiscretion, which took an incalculable toll on the life of a young Algerian boy, Majid, echoes at the level of the state-induced amnesia which is arguably still characteristic of a certain French nationalist reluctance to confront the traumas of the events surrounding Algeria's decolonization. Significantly, *Caché's* inaugural image figures as a *mise en abyme*, resonating with the way in which Haneke operationalizes the logic or "grammar" of trauma throughout the film as a whole. That is, Haneke's film invariably renders the traumatic past as screened, as mediated, and as *deferred*.

Why an Austrian director, making a film forty years after Algeria's independence, would render France's colonial history in such an oblique fashion is a question that demands interrogation. Certainly, such an indirect approach is visible in Alain Resnais's *Muriel* (1962), which, as Philip Dine notes, was the "first work to lift the cinematic taboo on the French military's torture in Algeria" (Dine, 1994: 22). Yet Resnais was forced to contend with mechanisms of censorship that the French state had placed on both the moral and political content of films since 1945 (Greene, 1999: 35). As described by Naomi Greene, Resnais's 1953 documentary, *Les statues meurent aussi*, was banned from distribution in French theatres for "casting a jaundiced eye on French cultural imperialism," and the director was later coerced into removing a scene from *Night and Fog* (1955) that rendered a camp guard with a French cap (Ibid.: 35). Mechanisms of state censorship were particularly inflexible concerning the issue of torture in Algeria, and thus to depict the death of *Muriel's* title character explicitly would have been a practical impossibility for Resnais. Accordingly, a range of theorists, including Greene, Gilles Deleuze, and Celia Britton, have described *Muriel* as a film composed around a missing kernel. This de-centeredness, moreover, is argued to

manifest at the level of aesthetics through the film's spatial dispersions and temporal dislocations. Deleuze goes so far as to equate the film's entire diegesis with a shocked subjectivity, or a "psychology of pure feeling" that is demonstrative of France's still raw, and unassimilable, past (Deleuze, 1986: 124).

In this respect, an analogy between Resnais's film and Haneke's film appears, upon initial inspection, a bit far-fetched. The characters who (temporarily) populate *Muriel's* seaport town reflect at least two generations left financially impoverished and mentally scarred by the legacy that began with the defeat of 1940. By contrast, Georges and Anne are neatly settled within an upper-class, Oedipal constellation. They exemplify a millennial French intelligentsia that strays from issues deemed "too theoretical" and from a past that has faded into obscurity; one takes Majid at face-value when he suggests that Georges would never recognize him on the street. But more importantly, Resnais's and Haneke's formal protocols appear radically incommensurable. *Muriel* confronts spectators with its convulsive disorientations of time and place, and with a series of, in Deleuzian rhetoric, undecidable alternatives between the past and inexplicable differences in the present. In contrast to *Muriel's* "hacked" style, *Caché* advances like a detective picture, delicately distributing information along a linear trajectory. The film's brief digressions into the past, moreover, are clearly coded, unlike in *Muriel*, as dream and recollection images. Nonetheless, there is something uncannily "out of order" about *Caché's* chronological depiction of events. Haneke meticulously -- and dare it be said -- compulsively, repeats the exact framing of the videotapes, those signifiers of a foggy colonial past, in scenes taking place in the film's "direct" present. It is as though alongside the reality of Georges, the character who at the film's conclusion will "dream merely in order to not wake up," is cast the reality of another character, Majid, "whose dream we will not know." Between the two, as the epigraph to this essay suggests, we find the *encounter, forever missed*. In this respect, what I inappropriately called "recollection" images above take on a more profound intelligibility. Far from remembering an actual, localizable, and ontologically stable past, Georges re-experiences events as traumatic in the present. As such, the film resonates not only with *Muriel* insofar as both narratives are generated around a void center, but also with the problem that Ruth Leys identifies as fundamental to the history of trauma discourse: the problem of mimesis.

One of the first and most sophisticated examples of the problem of mimesis is expressed by the Freudian notion of *Nachträglichkeit* or "deferred action." Even in such early writings as "Studies on Hysteria" (1895) and "The Aetiology of Hysteria" (1896), Freud argues that an event is not registered as traumatic upon its initial occurrence, but only when it short-circuits with a second event that reanimates its presence in the form of memory (Leys, 2000: 21). But rather than being integrated narratively into the subject's psyche, traumatic memory is experienced as an immersion, as a mimetic repetition without cognitive distance. Here, two immediate clarifications are wanting.

By relating the concept of deferred action to the personal and collective trauma articulated by *Caché*, it is not my intention to suggest that *Nachträglichkeit* reflects some sort of universal logic of trauma. Indeed, Leys's genealogical approach cogently describes how Freud's vision of trauma was mediated by the constraints of a particular time period and "scientific" discourse. Nonetheless, it is clear that Haneke's film conforms to a pattern in which an "original event" is rendered traumatic by a series of second-order events. The ambiguous status of this original event, moreover, is key to an understanding of Haneke's indirect approach to France's past (and present).

Criticisms of psychoanalysis have traditionally denounced the role attributed to deferral and repetition in shaping the subject's lived experience. Psychoanalysis positions infantile traumas as the substratum of the subject's later development, thus rendering the manifest content of his or her material present as epiphenomenal, as a masked repetition or staging of an inaccessible, but actual, past. [1] However, Freud's descendents, including Jacques Lacan and Slavoj Žižek, have stressed that the goal of analysis is not to localize the ontological origins masked by repetition, but to illuminate why repetition itself assumes a particular form. This is precisely the approach I take in the following analysis of *Muriel* and *Caché*, describing how the films' formal articulation of deferral points to the Algerian crisis as an ontologically unstable event that fractured national memory. I begin with a relevant discussion of how the Algerian war both deepened the social divisions prompted by Vichy while transforming Vichy itself into a site of conflicting recollection. Subsequently, I elaborate these problems in the context of a series of formal and thematic tropes deployed by *Muriel*: repetition, displacement, the exteriorization of memory, and the revelation of crimes linked to a reflection of the function of cinematic representation. These thematic and formal preoccupations are said to recur in *Caché*, but are reformulated to address the context of contemporary France.

### **The Mise en Abyme of Memory**

The Algerian War exacerbated the ethnic, social, and ideological divisions prompted by France's Vichy history, and drew attention to the instability of this history itself, since advocates and opponents of the war mobilized distinct versions of Vichy to advance their political causes (Rousso, 1991: 80). There is significant consensus among historians that the war was unpopular almost from its inception, as evidenced by protests among draftees as early as 1956 (Greene, 1999: 133). It was in that same year that the head of the Republican government, Guy Mollet, would "commit the country to an all-out war in defence of *Algérie française*," after being pelted with tomatoes by a group of European demonstrators in Algiers (Dine, 1994: 3). The strategies employed to fulfill this commitment included the massive use of conscription, and the systematic torture of the *Front de liberation nationale's* (FLN's) urban bombing networks in 1957 (the infamous "Battle of Algiers"). France's "peace-keeping operation" in Algiers, which manifested in the form of concentration camps and state-supported executions, bore a chilling resemblance to Nazi practices for both political and intellectual figures on the Left. Indeed, the "Manifeste de 121" of 1960, a famous petition defending French youths' rights to reject service in Algeria, signed by such leading intellectuals as Jean-Paul Sartre, Alain Robbe-Grillet, and Resnais, drew this analogy explicitly: "Is it necessary to recall that, fifteen years after the destruction of the Hitlerian order, French militarism, by virtue of the demands of such a war, has managed to restore the practice of torture and to make it once again a European institution?" [2] Yet leftist opponents to the war did not constitute a coherent body-politic, and Michael Rothberg contends that no "consensus existed among the major associations ... and resistant groups about what kind of stand to take in relationship to Algeria's decolonization" (Rothberg, 2006: 168). In the case of the Right, such splintering was considerably more grave, since military leadership in Algeria was tending toward an ultranationalist stance that, as Henry Rousso notes, "did damage to the cause of the extreme right" (Rousso, 1991: 81). The standoff between the civilian government in Paris and the intransigent military leaders in Algeria culminated in *coup d'état* threats in both 1958 and 1961. In response to the first potential *coup*, the French government called upon Charles de Gaulle, the figurehead who restored the nation's "grandeur" in 1944, to fend off an impending civil war. For the same reasons that de Gaulle was a signifier of France's national grandeur, he is also a synecdoche for Rousso's concept of the "Vichy Syndrome." In

his widely cited speech following the Occupation, de Gaulle superimposed the notion of an "eternal France" that stood solely for resistance over the Nation's internal divisions, its acts of collaboration, and its deportation of the Jews (Greene, 1999: 36). And, quite astonishingly, he would be redeployed only fourteen years later to persuade the public into yet another state of collective amnesia. Rousso's argument in *The Vichy Syndrome* stresses not only the Fifth Republic's direct acts of state censorship, but how de Gaulle's rhetoric of "resistancialism" was willingly, but imperfectly, interpolated by a public ready to forget. [3] It is precisely at this level, the level of the everyday, that Resnais's film affectively articulates the psychological and social fragmentations and the "will to amnesia" that characterized the climate of French politics in the immediate aftermath of the Algerian War.

Like *Caché*, *Muriel* conveys a profound sense of its global logic in the opening sequence. What is immediately striking here is that Resnais substitutes analytical editing for a series of tight and disorienting close-ups. Significantly, these close-ups are not, as we might expect, attributed to any character's subjectivity through eye-line matches. Resnais frenetically repeats the images contained within these close-ups without any explicit narrative logic: the (menacing?) image of the gloved hand grasping the door handle is repeated four times, the brewing coffee pot is rendered three times, and so on. The persistence of such repetitions throughout the film resonates with Paulo Virno's psychoanalytic distinction between the repetitions of childhood and the customs of a developed community (Virno, 2004: 39). Whereas repetition is linked to the child's need to seek refuge from early experiences of loss through simulated loss, custom describes the more historical and articulated forms of protection that govern substantial communities. Within the world depicted by *Muriel*, a world marked by generational breach and historical trauma, childlike repetitions substitute for the customs that once established a historical community or ethos. Thus scenes devoted to the "bonding" between characters frequently function as occasions for the fetishistic repetition of mechanized details. Perhaps most importantly, the opening sequence offers fragmented images of H el ene counterposed against the various objects in her flat: the chandelier, the dresser, the kettle, etc. Not much later in the narrative, we learn that H el ene collects antiques, which she sells—along with what appear to be all of her other belongings—in the apartment that she has yet to properly move into after two years. This twinning of H el ene with the apartment d ecor will become a central trope in the film. For example, Alphonse overcomes his sense of estrangement from H el ene when he detects her presence in the crystal glasses and porcelain plates that service their first meal (Britton, 1990: 42). H el ene is quick to remark that the entire collection has already been sold. If, as Alphonse indicates, H el ene's past lives in the objects that constitute her apartment, then it is not incidental that these objects no longer belong to her and that they are to be dispersed across the city of Boulogne. As Britton states in an analysis that is particularly attentive to the construction of space in the film, H el ene is "simultaneously objectified and fragmented" by the milieu (ibid.: 42). Thus even in its initial phases, *Muriel* both registers and spatializes a disordered relation to the past that was reawakened within the French nation during the Algerian War.

The relationship between character and milieu is significantly enlarged by the film's second sequence, in which H el ene collects Alphonse and Fran oise from the train station. As the three characters take a night-time walk back to H el ene's flat, Resnais cuts to a series of unmotivated insert shots depicting Boulogne during the day. The high-rises, hotels, and casinos constructed by figures like Roland de Smoke, are set against the town's bombed ruins and commemorative sites: cemeteries, signs signaling the "Place de la R sistance," etc. Such sites function as what Pierre Nora terms *lieux de m moire*—that is, material, functional, and symbolic nodal points of memory—whose purpose is to stave off the "acceleration of

history" prompted by, in Nora's own account, events such as the Second World War and decolonization (Nora, 2001: 8). [4] Yet Resnais makes it clear that such sites fail to create solidarity among *Muriel's* protagonists, to anchor their lack of direction, or to remedy their deliberate amnesia. Indeed, when *Muriel* depicts its four characters in the same setting, it is inevitable that one, if not all, of the characters will flee the scene before the meal or the discussion is over. As Britton observes, Resnais's focus is always on his characters' entrances and exits, and during the film's first dinner sequence, H  l  ne is *displaced* across three different environments—"in front of the linen cupboard, in the bathroom, in the sitting room"—despite the use of continuity sound (Britton, 1990: 41). Both H  l  ne's apartment and the town of Boulogne are rendered as transitive spaces, stripped of an ingrained sense of memory; as one of H  l  ne's clients remarks, "It's so nice to soak up the past, *especially in this town.*" Spatial points fail to demarcate the causal trajectories between then and now, and the result is an aberrant time, where the present floats without anchorage. Indeed, Resnais tends to render entire days and major narrative events through clusters of rapid cuts that last for only seconds of screen time. In one such cluster, Alphonse seems to have made friends with the townsfolk, to have reunited with H  l  ne (they appear in bed), and to have nearly split with her again (she asks him to leave), while Bernard is rendered in various spaces across town both with and without Marie-Do. All of this occurs in less than a minute. It is difficult to deny that this compressed time does articulate something like an "acceleration of history," and Fran  oise even remarks to Alphonse that he seems to have aged profoundly in a matter of days.

Resnais's compositional strategies have a broader social dimension insofar as they communicate his characters' sense of aimlessness and disassociation from the past. Among *Muriel's* protagonists, it is the two characters associated with World War II, H  l  ne and Alphonse, who refuse to take accountability for their actions and who evoke, as Naomi Greene argues, "the climate of self-serving half-truths, of deliberate amnesia, that, in the early 1960s, characterized French memories of the Vichy era" (Greene, 1999: 46). The two characters agree to "stage" a reunion at the film's inception only to evade this commitment; Alphonse brings his mistress and H  l  ne sets up a date with another man upon Alphonse's immediate arrival. Such evasions permeate their behavior generally. H  l  ne conforms her persona to the ritualistic protocols of middle-class decorum, never acknowledging the fact that her business has been rendered anachronistic by Boulogne's modern shops, and that she has a dangerous gambling addiction. Likewise, Alphonse speaks of his time in World War II and "Algeria" in the idealized terms characteristic of de Gaulle's rhetoric of resistancialism (Greene, 1999: 50). Both characters are in a sense destroyers of memory. Not only does H  l  ne forget major events, such as the death of Paul's parents in the "Great War," but also her very touch melts the archive that Bernard has devoted to Algeria. Alphonse has invented an Algeria not unlike de Gaulle's Vichy, an eternally French Algeria suited for postcards and unscathed by war. The traumatic past, however, has an unpredictable way of puncturing this screen of nostalgia. When Alphonse reminisces about the "good old days" or about how perfect H  l  ne "used to be," Resnais employs a dissonant, and almost comically excessive, harpsichord to evoke the unacknowledged memories that subsist along the surface. And reminding us of Algeria's role in the nation's memory of Vichy, both H  l  ne and Alphonse are prone to irrational fits when one's narrative of events is threatened by the other's version. Yet nothing poses a greater threat to the "climate of deliberate amnesia" exemplified by H  l  ne and Alphonse—if not the inhabitants of Boulogne in general—than Bernard and his "accumulation of proofs."

Bernard's presence evokes Algeria, and that particular element of Algeria, which, as suggested by the "Manifeste de 121," resurrected the darkest memories of France's collaborationist history: torture. Unlike the other characters in the narrative, Bernard is zealously devoted to remembering the past, and his memories are to take the form a documentary which will hold both himself and his military unit accountable for the murder (and rape?) of the film's title character. Not surprisingly, no one in Boulogne encourages the completion of this project. When he outlines his crimes to an unnamed character in the film, the man cautions him that there are "always things you can't anticipate when you start to dig." Similarly, Robert, another expatriate complicit in Muriel's death, advises Bernard that it is best for every Frenchman to keep "barbed wires around his little world." And in a gesture that was perhaps common to the older generation in France during the period, Alphonse belittles Bernard's experience of the war in general, noting "We had no transistors to lull us in the Second World War." Thus Greene concludes that "the tragedy that befalls Bernard occurs not only because of what happened in Algeria but also because those closest to him—and, implicitly, France itself—refuse to acknowledge the past" (Ibid.: 50).

What is potentially troubling about Greene's otherwise outstanding analysis of the film, however, is that she transforms Bernard into a sort of martyr of memory. Greene neglects that there is something perverse and self-serving about the *way* Bernard goes about "accumulating" the past. Bernard believes that he can exorcise himself of traumatic memory by incubating and exteriorizing it within the confines of representation. He goes so far as to slap Françoise when she unwittingly touches the recorder holding the audio of Muriel's death. What he forgets, and what the film makes visible (and audible), is that such clean divisions between "matter and memory" are never possible, that no documentary image is adequate to what he is trying to expose, and that reproduction, like memory, also bears the potential to *produce* traumatic effects anew. Nowhere is this more evident than in the film's climactic sequence, in which Françoise accidentally plays the tape of Muriel's torture, releasing a trace of the film's missing kernel into the atmosphere. Consistent with the notion of *Nachträglichkeit*, Bernard relives rather than remembers the sounds heard on the tape, and the immersive quality of the experience thrusts him into a helplessness that is followed by an eruption of violence against his expatriate double. Moreover, this trace of torture in Algeria is what ultimately prompts the dispersion of *all* of the film's central characters.

The above discussion of *Muriel* outlines the various thematic and stylistic devices employed by Resnais to render his characters as displaced: the excavation of Héléne's past through her sold belongings, an attention to entrances, exits and acts of flight, the dispersion of figures across multiple settings through hacked montage and framing. In *Caché*, Georges and Anne Laurent, a couple who belong to a radically distinct generational, geographical, and economic configuration, seem to "occupy" the exact reverse condition: they are rendered in the centre and in control of their reality. Here again, characters are offset by their milieu, but while Héléne and company enjoy the use of objects that will soon be gone, Georges and Anne collect objects for which they have no real use. Their posh, Parisian townhouse, luxury car, wide-screen television, and most importantly, colossal book collection function as commodified markers of prestige. Haneke accentuates the ways in which the Laurents, as members of the French intelligentsia, are particularly unreceptive to matters of politics or philosophy. Georges watches with indifference as images of Abu Ghraib and Israeli violence flash across the tube, too narcissistic to acknowledge that these "macro" manifestations of torture and imperialism are not autonomous from his personal drama. Anne works for a publisher, and one of her tasks is to coordinate parties for book launches. We get an indication of how sophisticated the discussion is at such gatherings when a drunken, long-

haired hipster advances a series of non-claims, and then name-drops a number of fashionable theorists: "Baudrillard ... uh, Wittgenstein." Georges both hosts and produces an intellectual, literary round-table television program, whose set is framed by a library not unlike the one in his dining room. The first and only time we see him giving directions in the studio, he prompts the editor to stop the tape when a guest appears to be making a nuanced claim about Rimbaud ("too theoretical") and to advance the segment toward a sexier dialogue about homosexuality. [5] On camera, Georges is depicted directly in the center of the frame, in frontal orientation, with his gaze directed towards us. He is, in other words, always in charge of his spatial parameters, and he extends this attitude into the streets, castigating a (not incidentally) black man on a bicycle for a near-collision that was largely due to his own negligence. But as the shot which dollies backward after Georges's first show reminds us, his centrality is sustained by what happens on the periphery. That is, Georges occupies his bourgeois position at the expense of the Arab and North African immigrants, the colonial abject, who are now the ones displaced around the low-income outer edges of the city. And, of course, he will be forced to acknowledge the existence of these zones by the series of five videotapes.

The tapes strip Georges of the "self-composed" persona he usually enjoys in front of the camera, and the powers of malleability he exerts over the image behind the camera. He is rendered in his intimate comings and goings, his fits of rage, and no amount of rewinding or fast-forwarding will erase or clarify the meaning of the images. For these reasons, the contents of the tapes appear to resonate with the early "suture" film theory of the 1970s, since they depict blocs of excess visibility unanchored to a known symbolic gaze within the diegesis, and thus threaten anxiety by pointing to the absent and unknown look that structures the fiction from "without." However, given that Georges's role in the production of the round table program *also* works to destabilize point-of-view in the film, the anxiety surrounding the tapes cannot be reduced to their interruptions of "invisible" narration. Rather, the tapes transform the *signs* of Georges's control over the gaze—the horizontal scan-lines that accompany his acts of rewinding and fast-forwarding—into technological inscriptions of a kind of imprisonment within the frame of the image. The quality of this imprisonment is as much temporal as it is spatial, since the spectator, like Georges and Anne, must wait vulnerably through minutes of dead, ambiguous screen time. But despite the apparent contrast between *Muriel's* modernist strategies for disrupting chronological time and *Caché's* more conventional, future-directed reliance on suspense, the latter's narrative contains equally non-linear elements. This is because the tapes are quite literally "of the past." Recalling Janet Malcolm's description of psychoanalysis, "a horrible kind of predestination hovers over" the tapes, since they describe what has already happened, leaving us to watch these events repeat themselves as though for the first time (Malcolm, 1982: 6).

This leads to the first narrative function of the tapes and their accompanying childlike drawings, which is that they *direct* Georges, who is usually the figure in the producer's chair, to repeat their contents through his visions, dreams, and behavior. For instance, the second tape, which is a night-time double of the first, is wrapped in a crude drawing of a child's face spurting blood from its mouth. As Georges motions the video-image backward and forward for clues, the film cuts to a brief insert shot, in which a young Majid is rendered coughing up blood in the main room of Georges's family farmhouse. Subsequently, Georges has a protracted nightmare of Majid coughing up blood when he learns that his son, Pierrot, was given a version of this sketch at school. The third tape, which intrudes upon Georges's and Anne's dinner party, captures the farmhouse in which Georges grew up, accompanied by the sketch of a rooster with its throat slashed. In the adjoining scene, Georges returns to his

childhood home where he delicately breaches the topic of Majid with his aged and near-paralyzed mother. During his stay, he has a lengthy and menacing dream of Majid beheading a rooster with an axe. In the fourth tape, the camera peers through the windshield of a car traveling along the streets of Paris, and then takes a mobile point-of-view shot down the halls of a squalid apartment building in the *banlieues*—low-income housing projects on the periphery of the city, heavily populated by immigrants. Consistent with the film's patterning, Georges will take this exact journey through the halls of Majid's apartment in the *banlieue* not only in the next scene, but also in three additional scenes. The final, and most moving, tape captures Majid sobbing in his apartment following Georges's aggressive accusations. It is not long in the film before Georges has a duplicate breakdown in his own kitchen. These various repetitions pose two interrelated problems, each bearing upon the larger theoretical concerns at hand. The first problem pertains to the tapes as second-order events that prompt Georges to re-experience the past (both individual and national) as traumatic. The second, more complex, problem concerns the way in which *Caché* is itself framed by or complicit with the construction of the tapes. It will be necessary to address the former as an inroad to the latter.

Georges's "crimes" consist of two lies told at the age of six that motivated his parents to revoke their guardianship of Majid, forcing the young Arab boy into a life of foster homes. Significantly, Georges's parents assumed care of Majid when his own parents were murdered by Paris police during the October 1961 protest against state-imposed curfews on Arabs—an issue to which I will return. To reverse their decision, Georges first attempts to persuade his parents that Majid is diseased, claiming that he witnessed the young boy coughing up blood. When doctors discover nothing medically anomalous about him, Georges resorts to an alternate and successful plan, falsifying orders from his father that lure the Arab boy into beheading one of the family's roosters. As Haneke has emphasized across a series of interviews, these childhood transgressions were not experienced as traumatic by Georges upon their initial occurrence. He behaved in the fashion typical of a selfish, upper-class child, and was, if anything, comforted by the reclamation of his parents' attention. Insofar as Georges's crimes were the act of a six-year-old, he is perhaps justified in not accepting accountability for Majid's "wrecked life." Like Hélène and Alphonse, however, he has sustained this climate of deception throughout the trajectory of his own life. Georges is well aware by the second tape that the surveillance is linked to a deliberately forgotten past, but he remains silent despite the potential threat posed to his family. It is only after the fourth tape that he unwisely discloses his "hunch" to Anne without giving her any further information. She is justifiably incensed, perceiving what is self-serving and sexist about his rhetoric of trust and protection; he refuses to place her on equal footing though their child's life may be jeopardized. And even when the final tape forces the illumination of his past, Georges is vague about details, refusing to allow his transgressions to enter the domain of language. Accordingly, like the intrusion of Bernard's final "tape," the tapes in *Caché* act as an agent of dispersal, threatening the repressive familial microcosm that sustains bourgeois culture more generally. And Georges's willed amnesia is very much a matter of family inheritance, since the only character who lived through the experience with him, his mother, is even more evasive about her role in Majid's history. She seems bewildered that Georges even considers this dimension of the past, since it was, after all, "not a happy memory." It is this entrenched refusal to accord the events surrounding Majid, and by corollary, Majid himself, any kind of intelligibility that produces the monstrous figure depicted in Georges's dreams and visions.

Unlike conventional dream and recollection images, Georges's mental encounters with the past do not render "the past," as such; nor do they act as digressions which restore narrative



clarity in the present. Images of Majid coughing up blood, for instance, have no relation to a material past-actuality, insofar as such events were always tied to the hero's imaginary. Rather, Georges's visions manifest as perverse translations of his lies about the past. And consistent with the notion of *Nachträglichkeit*, such visions are triggered by a set of second events—the tapes—and come to the hero in terms of "unbidden and unexpected" repetitions (Freud, 1964: 248). In this respect, Haneke produces a grave diagnosis of the French nation's political "progress," emphasizing, as *Muriel* did over forty years ago, the oppressor's inability either to integrate or communicate the Algerian past. What is conspicuous about Georges's dreams, particularly the dream of the beheading, is their near-expressionist sense of *unreality*. Georges's dream at his childhood home first depicts Majid from an exaggerated low angle, as he relentlessly hacks at the rooster with a crazed expression, indifferent to the blood that spurts across his face. Majid appears barbaric, subhuman, and buried in darkness. This darkness occupies the middle and foreground of the frame, preserving the farmhouse in the deep background as a nostalgic, sun-bathed ideal. The dream concludes on a note of menace, as Majid advances toward a childhood Georges and then swallows the frame. More alarming than the contents of this dream, however, is the way in which Georges extends its sense of unreality toward his conscious perception. When driving in the police car with Majid and his son, an uncanny mirror of the young Majid, an eye-line match renders the protagonist staring at the pair who, again, appear cloaked in total darkness. To exist as a subject, even an oppressed subject, Judith Butler reminds us, one must first become visible and intelligible, but "to find that you are fundamentally unintelligible (indeed, that the laws of culture and of language find you to be an impossibility) is to find that you have not yet achieved the status of the human" (Butler, 2004: 30). It is precisely the hidden, unreal, subhuman status of the Arab within contemporary French society that *Caché* struggles to bring to visibility. Moreover, the film reengages with the Algerian War precisely at a moment when the influx of Maghrebins, immigrants from former French North African colonies, have prompted the kind of ultranationalist affiliations—e.g. *Le front national*—which proliferated in the period of decolonization. But prior to engaging what is a potential repetition at the level of nation, it is productive to consider the repetitions that manifest at the level of *Caché*'s form (Greene, 1999: 135).

The stylistic device which contributes most to *Caché*'s uncanny quality of feeling is the use of an identical cinematography for both the videotapes and the film itself (if such a distinction can be made). The static shot which opens the film recurs throughout the narrative without being subject to its initial source. Similarly, when Georges storms the halls of Majid's apartment on three different occasions, the look and framing of these scenes is identical with the fourth tape. Presumably, the protagonist is not oblivious to the presence of a figure stalking behind him with a video camera. And even the scene which commands that we be "present"—Majid's suicide—is depicted in a highly mediated fashion, echoing the composition of the final tape. These repetitions re-engage with the dialogue between origins and form that has subtended the theorization of trauma above. The question is to whom or to what ontological source do we attribute the film's image production? Since the tapes seem to determine the film's later patterning, perhaps we should assign the film's meaning to the culprit behind the tapes. Or rather, emphasis might be placed on the cultural, historical, and economic sources motivating the production of these tapes. Yet considering that the identity of the figure behind the tapes is an unsolvable riddle, would it not be best to attribute the meaning of the film's imagery to the film itself? But to claim that the film is "producing" the tapes is to assign the film a psychological agency and to posit the film as critically outside the tapes. This argument could be neatly reversed. It is more plausible to localize the film's meaning to Haneke's "objective" camera consciousness *and* the tapes' "subjective"

camera consciousness, the two coexisting simultaneously in a mode of "free indirect discourse." [6] While this latter hypothesis is applicable to the film, the aesthetic merit of *Caché* rests in its capacity to deflect the question of "what" or "whom" with the question of "how." How, that is, does the spectator generate the meaning of the film's tapes in the absence of any explicit authorial intention?

Such acts of self-reflection are thoroughly evaded by the film's protagonist. Rather than analyzing or discussing the feelings of guilt conjured by the tapes, Georges abruptly casts Majid into the stereotyped role of terrorist. What comes into relief during their first encounter, however, is Majid's pacifism, his sense of defeat, but also his refusal to attribute blame to Georges or his family. This meeting marks an opportunity for Georges to discern the various ways in which he has impoverished Majid's life, an opportunity he takes to align himself with the law and to make threats of violence. The surveillance footage produced from this meeting highlights the ethical imperative behind the tapes, insofar as they work to challenge Georges's deductive methods for producing knowledge about the world. [7] In this respect, it is telling that Haneke films Majid's suicide *as if* it were framed by the surveillance camera. As has been noted, all of the tapes in the film create the strong impression of pastness (their outcomes being predetermined) and are mediated by Georges's and Anne's gaze. This combination of pastness with Georges's subjectivity invites us to watch Majid's death from the perspective of Georges's memory, but a memory that is decidedly altered by the ethical consciousness of the tapes. If film has the potential to transform our experience of memory, however, then *Caché* suggests that the culture industry employs this potential to promulgate amnesia; after Majid's suicide, Georges immediately goes to the movies to forget.

Georges's personal politics, despite his purported liberalism, are informed by the nationalist attitudes that permeate his cultural setting. It is when he fears that his job might be threatened that he returns to Majid's house for a second time. And when Georges's defiant son goes missing for an evening, he summons the police to have Majid and his son arrested based on zero evidence. Put differently, Georges directs the repressive force of the law against the most available source, but what he is trying to pacify is both an ambiguous threat and an emotion (terror). In this respect, his attempts to repress the ghost of Majid's memory ultimately reproduce the repressive state logic that killed Majid's parents. On the night of October 17, 1961, the Paris police, operating under the auspices of Maurice Papon, confronted a mass of 30,000 nonviolent and unarmed Algerian civilians protesting a crackdown on Paris's Algerian population. An excessive measure of retaliation against the FLN, the crackdown entailed both a racist curfew imposed on Arabs and a series of violent raids on the French Algerian ghettos that resulted in the deaths of five innocent Algerians. By the conclusion of the Algerian communities' protest against such "Hitlerian" measures on the night of October 17th, the police had murdered an estimated 200 Algerians, literally tossing their bodies into the Seine. [8] That this event constitutes one of *Caché's* structuring absences leads to the last question posed by my essay concerning Haneke's "indirect" approach to French national history.

Until this point, my analysis of *Caché* has focused on how what is viewed in the film is displaced across a palimpsest of viewing bodies. The argument for the political force of these displacements was largely concerned with questions of "psycho-affectivity," or the ways in which one distribution of the sensible appears uncanny when imputed to another viewing body. Consider the privileged medium of television in the film. Throughout *Caché's* narrative, television becomes heavily overdetermined by Georges's subjectivity: his culturally elitist class milieu, his exhibitionism, but also the superimposition of his gaze, his dreams and

projections. Television also forges a threshold between Georges's world and Majid's world, as when Majid reports his *sickness* at viewing Georges's round table program (an event that we don't see), knowing that Georges would never recognize him on the street. When the images of the tapes come to inhabit the body of the television, many of these same relations remain intact: Majid's invisibility, Georges's exposure, an unbridgeable threshold. But while these relations were formerly based on the clean exclusion of the spatially and racially distinguished subjectivities inhabiting the *banlieues*, here, the colonized subject is *felt* as paradoxically *belonging* to the colonizer's side of the image through this very absence. The political import of Haneke's "indirect" approach to the crises surrounding the Parisian *banlieues* thus pertains to the decomposition of cultural and spatial boundaries via the colonizer's *incorporation* of the colonized subject's affective agitations. Georges, for instance, is provoked to experience the signifiers of his own gaze (via the television) in terms of the internalized surveillance this gaze has imposed on the citizens of the *banlieue*. [\[9\]](#)

However, there is another kind of displacement operating in *Caché*, the logic of which may be neither as politically nor ethically justifiable. This is the superimposition of the image of one historical "trauma" (the crises in the *banlieue*) over the image of another (the Algerian War in general and the events of October 1961 in particular). In *Foregone Conclusions: Against Apocalyptic History* (1994), Michael Bernstein intelligently cautions against the ways in which psychoanalytic accounts of historical trauma tend to de-particularize local instances of horror. Bernstein suspects that metaphors like *Nachträglichkeit* inhibit the understanding of localized events by producing a rhetorical remove that is ethically questionable. Accordingly, does *Caché*'s deferred model of French national history not liquidate the distinctions between an anti-colonial context—conditioned by socialist ideologies and the desire for territorial sovereignty—and a globalized context—conditioned by free market ideas and deterritorialized exchanges among various "-scapes", including ethnoscapas, financescapas, etc. (Appadurai, 1996: cited in Bhabha, 2004: xi)? Here, two immediate clarifications are wanting.

First, in Haneke's defense, a comprehensive and situated analysis of the events surrounding the Algerian war would be remiss to deny the quality of repetition that cast itself over these events in their own right. This repetition was, to a certain extent, "discursive" or "rhetorical," as illustrated by the quoted passage from the "Manifeste de 121," or by Simone de Beauvoir's oft-cited observation that "Ten thousand Algerians had been herded into Vel' d'Hiv' like the Jews at Drancy once before. Again I loathed it all—this country, myself, the world" (de Beauvoir, 1992: 321). But the complicity de Beauvoir recognized between Vichy and the Algerian War also had its basis in state *institutional practice*. Maurice Papon, the police prefect who presided over October 1961, was also responsible for deporting an estimated 1,500 Jews to Drancy and to their deaths. In the interim period between these events, Papon was mislabeled as a resistance hero for informing on Nazis during the conclusion of World War Two (Milfull, 2008: 465). This is just one example of how the myth of resistancialism critiqued by *Muriel* led to a national failure to discern the past operating in the present. The consequence of this failure was the repetition of systematized racial violence at a substantive level.

Second, Homi Bhabha observes that the *rhetoric* of globalization—its promise of a world comprised of "virtual transnational domains"—masks the reality of renewed forms of colonial governance. "The landscape of opportunity and 'choice' has certainly widened the scope," Bhabha argues, "but the colonial shadow falls across the successes of globalization" (Bhabha, 2004: xi). Globalization has not completely purged itself of the "spatial imaginary"

or "geographical configuration" of race that Frantz Fanon associated with the colonial world, "a world divided in two ... inhabited by different species" (Fanon, 2004: 5). But this spatial marginalization adopts new forms under the conditions of modernization. That is, the extended crises in the Parisian *banlieues* are inseparable from an economic boom in the 1960s that entailed processes of deindustrialization and the proliferation of a cultural intermediary class. As Ginette Vincendeau notes, the "expansion of Paris and other major cities under de Gaulle's administration demanded a massive building programme to house the displaced French workers of the *exode rural* and the freshly arrived immigrants" (Vincendeau, 2000: 312). Throughout the 1970s to the 1990s, immigrants from the former French colonies of Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco were increasingly scattered across the city's peripheral *grands ensembles* or "rabbit hutches", facing escalating figures of unemployment with the loss of industrial jobs concentrated in these areas (Siciliano, 2007: 215). Spatially and economically immobilized, the multi-ethnic populations of the *banlieues* have been subjected to a recalibrated form of racism. This is a classist form of racism that tacitly perpetuates a less obvious form of "biological" racism by directing its discrimination against the "cultural" impoverishment of those living beyond the metropolis (Ibid.: 220). This is the subtle and insular racism of the Laurent family, which has learned to forget the "unhappy memory" of France's colonial past (and present) and which fails to perceive the images of racial violence on television as other than commodified forms of entertainment. But the riots that have plagued the *banlieues* since the 1990s also point to the insistence of a more repressive state-induced form of colonial governance whose connections to the later de Gaulle era are, again, both discursive and institutional. Prolonging the legacy of resistancialism, the Chirac administration, in an attempt to fend off the riots' potential to awaken historical consciousness to events like October 1961, imposed pedagogical legislation on historians and teachers, forcing them to "stress the positive role of the French presence overseas" (Milfull, 2008: 468). Recalling Fanon's critique of the colonizer's vision of the colonized subject as belonging to a lower species, as late as 2005, President Nicolas Sarkozy called for a national crackdown on the *racaille* (scum, rabble) associated with the suburban riots. And, in that same year, Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin declared a "State of Emergency" which has conspicuous origins. As Amy Siciliano notes, "This law, designed to suppress the rights of citizens in both public and private spaces, and first conceived in 1955 in an effort by the state to quell support for the emerging Algerian liberation movement, has been applied four times previously – all in colonial contexts" (Siciliano, 2007: 226).

The strategies of repetition that govern *Caché's* articulation of French colonial history are not reducible to rhetorical fancy. Repetition in the film produces a psycho-affective displacement between the subjectivities of the colonizer and the colonized, in which the phenomenological agitations of the latter come to inhabit the perceptual world of the former. Repetition also points to the persistence of a French colonial imaginary, an imaginary that is re-embodied in institutionalized practice. *Caché's* "indirect" vision of history mobilizes contemporary French racism and urban segregation to awaken historical consciousness to the institutionally repressed memory of the Algerian War. But this indirect image is neither of the Algerian War nor of the crises in the *banlieues*, but their constellation. *Caché's* indirect image is a dialectical image, yoking past and present together in an image of danger intended for the future (Benjamin, 1968: 263). This points to a crucial distinction between the often blunt racism of France in the 1960s and contemporary multi-ethnic France in which youth in general have been discursively labeled and targeted as "terrorists" (Siciliano, 2007: 220). In *Code inconnu* (2000), Haneke is reluctant to render this condition in polarized terms, demonstrating how racially and economically marginalized youth can transform the fear of

discrimination into a self-fulfilling prophecy (Quart, 2002: 36). *Caché*, however, concludes with what is potentially a different kind of prophetic image, the merger of the two youths that were economically and racially divided by repetitions of a colonial past. The future represented by the meeting between Georges's and Majid's sons is the virtual image that Haneke leaves to the imagination of the spectator. The film is more explicit about the culpability of the existing French upper-class, however, through its invocation of a line from another Resnais film, *Night and Fog*, that was also implicitly about the Algerian War: "I am not to blame."

## Notes

[1]. Janet Malcolm exemplifies this attitude when she castigates psychoanalysis on the following grounds: "A horrible kind of predestination hovers over each new attachment we form" (Malcolm, 1982: 6).

[2]. "Declaration sur le droit à l'insoumission dans la guerre d'Algérie" (qtd. in Rothberg, 2006: 175).

[3]. According to Rousso, the term *resistancialism* defines "first, a process that sought to minimize the importance of the Vichy regime and its impact on French society, *including its most negative aspects*; second, the construction of an object of memory, the "Resistance," whose significance transcended by far the sum of its parts ... and third, the identification of this 'Resistance' with the nation as a whole, a characteristic feature of the Gaullist version of the myth." Also see Chapter 7: "Fin de guerre, éclatement et consensus" in Stora, 1992.

[4]. Here it is worth noting that Nora's massive, three-volume collection is itself tempered by the nostalgia for a golden past which he identifies with such sites.

[5]. The two above points are noted in Christopher Sharrett's cogent review of the film in *Cineaste* (Sharrett, 2005).

[6]. Through free indirect discourse, Deleuze writes, "the distinction between what the character sees subjectively and what the camera sees objectively vanishes, not in favour of one or the other, but because the camera assumes a subjective presence, acquires an internal vision, which enters into a relation of *simulation* ('mimesis') with the character's way of seeing" (Deleuze, 1986: 148).

[7]. Indeed, according to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, ethics is precisely a matter of "interruption of the epistemological" (Spivak, 2004: 92).

[8]. For an extended chronicle of the events of October 1961, see House and McMaster, 2006; also see Milfull, 2008.

[9]. My discussion of issues of psycho-affectivity in *Caché* is indebted to Homi Bhabha's foreword to Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*.

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