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Margaret Attack

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# Performing the Nation in the *Mode Rétro*

MARGARET ATACK

*University of Leeds*

The *mode rétro* has played a crucial role in the postwar historiography of the Occupation years in France. This article looks at three films of the 1970s, *Lacombe Lucien*, *L’Affiche rouge*, and *Monsieur Klein*, in order to consider the importance of performance and theatricality, and their interaction with the performatives of Frenchness and nationality. It identifies the fault-line of French and not-French as an important dimension of these texts, and suggests that their power to fascinate French audiences may stem from their mobilization of contemporary interests and anxieties.

KEYWORDS France, German Occupation, *mode rétro*, Cultural History, film, performance, Second World War

More than seven decades have passed since the extreme experiences of 1940–1944, and the historiography and evolving memorialization of the period are at one and the same time very straightforward and very complex. There is a received critical and historiographical narrative of the history and memory of Vichy and the Occupation; there is also a voluminous bibliography — thousands of novels, thousands of specialist and popular history books and articles, hundreds of films — as well as public controversies, trials, formal commemorations, explosions of public and media interest. In the 1960s and 1970s alone, there were 101 films about the war and/or the Occupation (including several very successful comedies), 55 of them appearing after the screening of Ophüls’ *Le Chagrin et la Pitié* (Guincamp and Lenco, 2014: 356). The historiography and memory of the Occupation, objects of specialist study and popular communications, have in themselves generated many works of the imagination. Not surprisingly, in this huge volume of diverse representations and cultural discourses of all kinds, there are many different paths that can be traced, many different readings of incompatible and controversial problematics and approaches. Nonetheless, one major historiographical narrative has dominated and organized this wealth of material for nearly 40 years now, namely that until the

projection of *Le Chagrin et la Pitié* in 1971 and the subsequent explosion of interest in the period known as the ‘*mode rétro*’, representation of the Occupation was dominated by a Resistance myth founded by de Gaulle in the 1940s, proclaiming that France, united, had liberated itself. The revelations of *Le Chagrin* having opened new perspectives on the period, it was followed by *Lacombe Lucien* in 1974, a film co-scripted by the director Louis Malle with Patrick Modiano, reinforcing the iconoclastic role of the latter’s three novels about the Occupation published in 1968, 1969, and 1972.<sup>1</sup>

The very term *mode rétro* — which would probably have been translated ‘retro look’ had it related solely to fashion — has become a neutral historiographical label, but was certainly not flattering at the time, and connoted a shallowness, superficiality, commodification of the past and vicarious identification with power, as well as nostalgia for the look of the 1930s and 1940s. A series of films — Visconti’s *The Damned* (1969), the more commercial *Cabaret* (1972) directed by Bob Fosse, Liliane Cavani’s *The Night Porter* (1974), Alain Resnais’s *Stavisky* (1974) and *Lacombe Lucien* (1974), were dazzling in their display of the opulence and glamour of the period, as well as exploring power, wealth, and corruption, though it can also be noted that the association of collaboration with high living, Parisian night life, the immorality of the black market, and a decadent display of wealth and glamour was a well-established theme from the 1940s onwards and present in both Roger Vailland’s *Drôle de jeu* (1945) and Simone de Beauvoir’s *Le Sang des autres* (1945).

*Le Monde* devoted a dossier to the phenomenon in April 1974, introduced by Jean-Marie Domenach who underlined the popularity of reviving the past, ‘less from regret of the good old times than from nostalgia for the dark years, for blood and death’ (Domenach, 1974).<sup>2</sup>

This fascination for the morbid, and at the same time this need to remove any guilt from those responsible for the most dreadful horrors, collective horrors, accompanied by a growth of the retro fashion in all domains, are making themselves felt everywhere: in art, in literature, in cinema, in theatre (Domenach, 1974).

Nightclubs, theatricality, fascism, and sexualization were central to the nexus of themes that had been labelled *mode rétro*: ‘All is “retro”, and “retro” is the fashionable word of the moment. The capricious delights of “kitsch”, the bad taste of former times, and of “Camp”, Hollywood’s *Weltanschauung*, have little by little revitalized debates that one had thought would from now on belong to history’ (Even, 1974). Others saw an ideological suffocation of the politics of fascism and political resistance to it (Foucault, 1974; Sontag, 1975), or an evacuation of history in the name of human nature and its troubled and troubling instincts (Zimmer, 1974).

In his famous discussion of the *mode rétro* with Pascal Bonitzer and Serge Toubiana, the *Cahiers du cinéma* critics, Michel Foucault offered a political reading of *The*

*Night Porter* and *Lacombe Lucien*, arguing that they were depoliticizing the Resistance, and a helpful view of the significance of their re-creation of the past: ‘it’s a way of *recoding* popular memory, which exists but does not have the means of being articulated. So, people are being shown, not what they once were, but what they must remember they were’ (Foucault, 1974: 648). Representations of the past are restaging the past in the present; Foucault is suggesting that this performance is also performative, that is to say it is ‘doing’ memory in the way that performative utterances are both speech and act.

Notions of performance and the performative have become increasingly important to cultural analysis of representations of the past, although they cover different things. There is a sense in which any book, film, or novel can be read as a performance, a staging that is by definition a re-staging, even including the work of historians: ‘History — the past transformed into words or paint or play — is always a performance’ (Greg Denning, quoted Dean et al., 2015: 1). More conventionally, historical and fictional narratives recreate the past in their staging of past realities, whether they do this through the illusion of realism or through a self-reflexive theatricality. Work on performativity has brought J. L. Austin’s analysis of speech acts where the language is itself the action (such as giving orders, making promises), into a much broader cultural arena, in for example Judith Butler’s important analysis of gender as performance rather than inner identity. Gender is constituted not by nature, nor by description but by the coded performance of difference (Butler, 1990). Memory as a re-staging of the past in the present is central to Max Silverman’s notion of palimpsestic memory, where he explores the work of involuntary memory and art as a figurative ‘staging’ (Silverman, 2013: 22) of an invisible ‘elsewhere’ of memory. The operation of the memory trace is thus ‘a performative and transformative act in the present’ (Silverman, 2013: 23).

My concern here, however, is less with the operation of cultural memory than with the attempt to tease out the various strands of performance and performativity that bind together a multiplicity of discourses and interests in the present in some of the key films of the *mode rétro*. By definition the *mode rétro* involves the performance of dressing up — the fashion for the look of the 1930s and 1940s as mediated by Hollywood glamour, was at its centre. But beyond the use of period costume and props, theatricality is a recurrent feature in both theme and approach. With characters costumed or disguised, appearance and identity are in a constant and intricate relationship, with significant implications for the way these films invite reflection on French attitudes and behaviour. From Julien Duvivier’s *Marie-Octobre* in 1959 to Truffaut’s *Le Dernier Métro* in 1980, theatre in film, and self-reflexive film performance as a knowing approach to the past, has been a significant strand in films about the Occupation, and one might see *Papy fait de la résistance* (Poiré, 1983) as its final extreme statement, with its caricatural approach to established cultural figures and incorporation of its own *Dossiers de l’écran*-inspired metacommentary.<sup>3</sup>

I shall focus here firstly on *L’Affiche rouge*, directed by Frank Cassenti, and Joseph Losey’s *Monsieur Klein*, both screened in 1976, as examples of the thematic

importance of performance, and then consider *Lacombe Lucien*, the film that has become *the* iconic film of the period, within this context. Like *Le Chagrin et la Pitié* it has become a site of memory in its own right, standing metonymically as the single imaginative reprise of *Le Chagrin*'s investigation of the Occupation years, to such an extent that one would be forgiven for thinking that there were no others in this decade. Why this film and not, say, Michel Mitrani's 1973 film *Les Guichets du Louvre*, an adaptation of a 1958 novel on the infamous round-up ('rafle') of 13,000 Jews in Paris on 16 and 17 July 1942 known as the 'rafle du Vél d'Hiv', named after the stadium (the Vélodrome d'Hiver) where the majority were taken before being transported to the camp at Drancy and then the train to Auschwitz. The story of a male student, tipped off about the round-up and instructed to try and save people, it has strong images of the large numbers of buses, of the large numbers of French police arriving in the district and going from building to building, from flat to flat, and stopping people on the street. Many of those threatened refuse to believe they are at the same risk with French police as they would be with the Germans (a sentiment also expressed in *M. Klein* on the bus to the Vélodrome), particularly Jews who believe they cannot be at risk at all because they are French. The film shows graphically there is no concern for such niceties.

Lynchpin of the classic historiographical narrative, then, the *mode rétro* was, as the term suggests, a phenomenon of the media whose boundaries were wider than the question of the Occupation and the obsession with the dark side of the period, for the fascination with the Occupation in the 1970s is part of a well-documented interest in the past that culminated in the massive public enthusiasm for the *année du patrimoine* in 1980 and the heritage industry of the following decade (Nora, 1996). Reinforcing Richard Kuisel's identification of the repeated exploitation of France's history as an affirmation of difference in the face of Americanization (Kuisel, 1993), Nora and others consider the interest in regional and local roots to be a reaction against the anonymous and anonymizing forces of globalization, pointing for example to the success of Pierre-Jakez Hélias's *Le Cheval d'orgueil* (1975), a runaway bestseller on rural Brittany, and the explosion in the numbers of television programmes on France's rural past (Bosséno, 1976).

*L'Affiche rouge* demonstrates many of the qualities praised in the Foucault interview where a Bolivian film is cited appreciatively for its alignment of class history and political resistance, for the presentation of the French Resistance in *L'Affiche rouge* is resolutely political and popular. Dismissed by some at the time for clichés redolent of 1968 contestation, the film mixes present and past in ways that ensure the audience is always aware of the imaginative work of reconstruction involved in filming the past, drawing on the self-reflexive theatricality of the Théâtre du Soleil, the avant-garde theatre company founded by Ariane Mnouchkine in 1964, with much of the film shot at its base La Cartoucherie, as well as on a juxtaposition of naturalistic and stylized scenes, to explore the story of a group of resisters, mainly Jewish and immigrants, known as the Groupe Manouchian. Led by

Missak Manouchian and arrested in 1943, put on trial and shot in February 1944, they were the subject of a famous poem by Louis Aragon that was written for the naming of a Paris street in their honour in 1956, later set to music and given the title of 'L’Affiche rouge' by Léo Ferré, since the faces of 10 of them, each captioned by their foreign origins and the attacks and deaths they were responsible for, appeared on a German poster with a red background with the slogans: 'Liberators?' and 'The Army of Crime.' In the film, a group of friends and relatives of the Resisters have gathered with the young actors taking the roles of the group's members in a play, to celebrate their memory. The present is therefore part fête, part rehearsal, and slips easily into scenes from the war and the Spanish Civil War as the film cuts between the here-and-now of the preparations for the fete and re-enactments of the past. There are discussions between the actors and the witnesses, including Mélinée, Missak's wife, about the events and the motivations of the resisters, intercut with naturalistic scenes of the past introduced by non-naturalistic shifts from the present, and also a scene of stylized violence and tyranny portrayed by Commedia dell'Arte figures, that shifts back into naturalism as a letter from one of the executed men is quietly read out. Some scenes are deliberately engineered so that one is not sure whether the actor is speaking as himself or in character.

*L’Affiche rouge* uses performance to problematize access to the past which is shown as process of representation, not life relived, although the authenticity of personal memories, of keeping alive songs of protest and struggle, are certainly important. This past is present and alive, carried by an international cast with a wide variety of accents representing these Jewish, Armenian, Spanish, and Italian Communist immigrants typical of many thousands who fled political persecution in the first decades of the twentieth century. And the continuity of past and present is the fight for liberty.

While the historical reconstruction is not consistently accurate,<sup>4</sup> the dissection of the dishonest manipulation of images in the poster in the scene of the prisoners being individually photographed sits alongside the knowledge that access to the past also involved process and performance that it is truthful to display. The stylization of the Commedia dell'Arte scenes, where Harlequin and his wife play out an angry confrontation over servility to the occupiers, two dark sinister figures with stereotypical German accents, or a teacher reads out the names of Jewish students expelled from his class, is echoed by the stylization of the depiction of Goebbels, which surely owes something to Joel Grey in *Cabaret*, wearing the extreme makeup of a cabaret-style master of ceremonies and spot lit against a black screen from below, promising to put 'received ideas in their place'. Fascism is theatre, said Genet (*Sontag, 1975*), and the film distinctively combines its analysis of the theatricality of propaganda with the deliberate theatricality of the process of constructing a story of Resistance. History with a capital H ignores the stories of immigrants, Mélinée tells the young actors; the Brechtian critical distance towards filming the past is a raising of consciousness, not only of history as process, but also of the manipulation of representation: the doxa of received ideas championed by Goebbels finds expression in the

poster photos of the foreign resisters as dangerous outsiders and in the exclusion of immigrants from official memorialization of the Resistance.

'Brechtian' is a term also frequently applied to Joseph Losey's *Monsieur Klein* and its complex exploration of antisemitism under the Occupation, and the multiple discourses of state, cultural representations, and ideology that all play their part in the lived experience of identity that the film slowly shreds into its constituent parts. Scripted by Franco Solinas whose previous work included the *Battle of Algiers* (1966), *Kapo* (1960), and *State of Siege* (1972), the story focuses upon Robert Klein (Alain Delon), an unscrupulous, amoral charmer who buys art works at derisory prices from Jews desperate for money. A copy of the newspaper *Informations juives* is forwarded to his home, addressed to a Robert Klein. He follows it up, and the film combines the story of his attempt to track down this elusive other Robert Klein, from the newspaper offices to the Préfecture de police and beyond, with the preparation of the 'rafle du Vél d'Hiv' (enigmatically at first with the unexplained insertion of short scenes of a rather formal meeting of unidentified officials), and the parallel development of the pursuit of Klein as a Jew hiding in plain sight whom it will ensnare and deport.

The artifice involved in the correlation between identity and appearance is explored in multiple ways in the course of the film. It opens with a very shocking scene, as a naked woman is being examined, or rather classified. A doctor (named in the script as Professor Montandon who did produce a biological classification of Jewish features) is measuring the features of her face and watching her walk, to determine if she is Jewish; anti-Semitism posits a necessary, ontological identity between being Jewish and appearing Jewish, but, as is well known from the massive production of caricatural cartoons, films, and the deployment of the legal apparatus of the state, huge efforts are required to sustain this fiction. The abject dehumanization of the woman's treatment is underscored by Klein's later reaction to a suggestion he could be so examined to clarify his situation; he indignantly refuses to be inspected like a horse. Later in the film, in an extraordinary cabaret scene, a group of actors perform Jewishness for an audience of the rich, including Klein and his girlfriend Jeanine, and German officers. To gales of laughter from the audience at his caricaturally Jewish behaviour, a man with a grotesque half mask giving him a prominent nose steals jewellery from another man, dressed as a woman, all in black and singing a fierce lament, watched by another man dressed as a pretty Aryan maid. The powerfully emotive singing of the man in drag contrasts in a most unsettling way with the context and the vaudeville of the other characters, but the amused audience is, like the doctor, quite closed to the expression of authentic anguish. The thematics of appearance and costume is supported by the interiors of Klein's flat and the chateau he visits, adorned with paintings and portraits of all kinds to produce a formal richness, in combination with baroque decors, mirrors and the framing of figures by doorways, halls and windows which also serve as mirrors, in an endless replication echoed also in the labyrinthine travelling shots through empty flats and empty corridors. A painting of a night scene of

pink figures dancing in a ronde is echoed in the pink dresses of the cabaret dancers in a circle. In Klein's opulent, mirrored bathroom, a close-up of Jeanine applying lipstick is a knowing repetition of the doctor's examination of the mouth and gums of the Jewish woman, and the pink slip she is wearing anticipates the pink slip of the drag artist in the mirrored performers' dressing room that Klein visits in the course of his quest. The camera frames formal portraits and Delon's inscrutable face together, underscoring the awareness of appearance as performance; the frequent close-ups of Delon's face invite the spectator to read and interpret the features which give nothing away, reinforcing the existential uncertainty of what appearance may or may not reveal.

At the *préfecture* a different classification practice is being enacted, the classification of the *état civil* (state record of identity) and police files as we see a room full of men and women at desks typing record cards: the bureaucracy of registration and certification. Because of the law Klein needs the birth certificates of three grandparents to prove he is French. His work as art dealer replicates this need for a written certainty about provenance and authentication as he enjoins the Jewish vendor to record the history and material description of the painting Klein has just bought from him. Written language, and the anti-Semitic language of the state, determines identity, and the performative nature of language in *Monsieur Klein* functions as the hate speech that Judith Butler discusses in *Excitable Speech* (Butler, 1997). Hate speech interpellates and thus identifies its victim as bearing the attributes the hate speech lists; interpellation is the term Althusser used for the constitution of the individual in ideology: one is addressed as a constituted subject and constituted as a subject by the address itself. As Butler says, interpellation in French is a common term for being hailed across a street, but Althusser was no doubt also punningly including its legal usage as detaining someone to carrying an identity check — when the police interpellate someone, they are not always just saying 'hey you'. Hate speech is powerful indeed when operated by a state (Butler, 1997: 32); Robert Klein's self-naming as French, his origins authenticated within family history — 'We've been Catholic since Louis XIV,' exclaims his father — are annihilated by the law that performatively pronounces him Jewish, in the absence of three certificates, thereby condemning him to death.

Theatricality may not seem an obvious term to apply to *Lacombe Lucien*, but in the transformation of a young man of the countryside from a hospital cleaner to one of the 'gestapistes' at German headquarters, the elegant clothes made for him by the Jewish tailor are crucial to the way Lucien as a narrative figure articulates urban and rural, present and past. This story of the young peasant lad, who finds himself ushered into the Hotel des Grottes, the German headquarters in the local town, after standing and staring at some noisy revellers getting out of a posh car in the courtyard, and who remains to become a member of the team, would be a relatively straightforward story of collaboration, were it not for the relationship with the young Jewish woman France Horn, a relationship between violent oppressor and victim that ensured its frequent coupling in critical discussion with *The Night Porter*.



*Lacombe Lucien* certainly satisfied the contemporary interest in all things rural — the panoramic shots of the countryside as Lucien cycles home are followed by scenes one could describe as mythological scenes of rural life: sheep being marshalled in the road, shooting rabbits and killing and plucking chickens, processing and singing for the Virgin Mary, gathering the sheep in the evening light — all very familiar tropes of rurality performatively establishing the existential Frenchness of the film. The articulation of the rural with the urban in the form of retro fashion glamour is fundamental to the diegesis as well as connoting a recognizable past. It is the collaborationist group that imports Parisian high glamour of clothes, lifestyle, and cars into the south-west town of Figeac, and high glamour that connects Jean-Bernard and the Horn family, refugees from Paris. Lucien is transformed into a beautifully dressed if rather ridiculous figure in his Prince of Wales plus fours, though he had already changed, into leather jacket and decent trousers, on his first outing as a member of the *police allemande*, and without comment he later wears a very elegant blue suit.

Visually and structurally, there is a filmic coherence to *Lacombe Lucien* in terms of film noir and its reworkings by Hollywood. *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967), directed by Arthur Penn, shares many structural features with *Lacombe Lucien*: the high glamour of violence and riches, particularly in Faye Dunaway's wardrobe and the cars; the intersection of urban glamour and rural poverty, and the fascination the killers exert over the poor such as garage attendant CW Moss, or the travelling destitute farmers of the great depression, recalled visually in so many of the film's group shots and in the posters of Roosevelt; the use of a distinctive soundtrack, in this case blue grass banjo music accompanying the cars, quite incongruous for film noir but which ties them to the social and political context; the many beautiful and peaceful shots of Clyde and Bonnie in the countryside, the basis of the very shocking ending as they die in the hail of bullets, structurally similar to the use of titles across the screen over Lucien's face in the final country idyll, announcing his execution. In Malle's first film, the masterly *Lift for the Scaffold* (1958), the plans of the murderer Julien and his mistress Florence are thwarted when the lift in the building happens to get switched off as Julien seeks to make his escape. Lucien's tyre bursts, and he ends up with the Gestapo. Chance in the shape of bad luck is absolutely essential to the doom-laden vision of the world of film noir: Lucien moves in a world of violence and death from the outset. It is not Miles Davis providing the jazz sound track of modernity, but the Quintet of the Hot club de France, incongruously linking the bike ride through the south-west countryside at the start of the film to Paris night life of the Occupation — but not incongruous at all at the level of the trope of collaboration, nor at the level of the narrative of fatality and the Parisian gangster-types that the music is announcing will claim him (and in the shoot-outs and attacks, the Resisters, men with guns in large black cars, are indistinguishable from the Gestapo's French gangsters).

Opinion has been sharply divided on the film's realism, with some praising its meticulous recreation of the past (Golsan, 1988), others pointing to the absence of reference to the rural politics of the 1930s (Greene, 1999). From the very

beginning, radio broadcasts and objects index the Occupation as the historical reality of the text, like the photograph of Pétain draped with a rosary, serving to denote veneration of *Le Maréchal* and Catholicism, connoting traditional rural France and Vichy ideology in contrast to the insolence of the Parisian incomers taking shots at the famous poster of Pétain captioned: ‘Are you more French than he is?’. The final scenes in the town, as France and her grandmother are summoned by the German soldier reading their names from his list (rather undermining Jean-Bernard’s earlier comment that the family were in hiding), seem to amalgamate the iconography of the rounding up and deportation of Jews (each being allowed a small suitcase) and the reprisal shooting of hostages for attacks on the occupying forces (the soldier explains it is because of a recent attack, and we have just witnessed one at the Hotel des Grottes). However, Jean-Louis Bory, author of the prize-winning *Mon village à l’heure allemande* (1945), praised its veracity unambiguously: ‘In its every detail, *Lacombe Lucien* is like the film I would have loved to have seen made of *Mon village à l’heure allemande*’ (Bory, [1974] 1976: 246).

Part of the sense of recognition may stem from the convergence between the characterization in the film and the plotting of the individual life story that Jean Bessière shows was central to the prize-winning novels of 1974 (Bessière, 1981). Best-sellers and prize-winners meet cultural and ideological expectations, rather than challenge or disturb them. Bessière argues that all these novels have the figure of the orphan as a central figure, fatherless or presenting troubled relations with the father. The convergence with the writers of the *mode rétro*, those cultural orphans (Morris, 1992), is striking. Drawing on Marthe Robert’s major study of the origin of the novel in the family romance (Robert, 1972), Bessière maps these characters onto the figures of the foundling or the bastard as they weave together the mute passivity of the abandoned or the vengeance of those having to forge their own way in the world: ‘this individual is characterized as being present in the world without being truly active: he merges with the paradox which defines him as a subject in exteriority’ (Bessière, 1981: 16). Bory made the same point about Lucien:

*Lacombe Lucien* is a portrait completed by a biography. A precise portrait. A detailed biography. A file rather than a data sheet. Where identity is enumerated as in any interrogation, first name last, surname first. And, since his schooldays, the boy in question is used to so naming himself. He doesn’t introduce himself, he identifies himself. For he is never addressed as a person. He is interpellated as an individual (Bory, [1974] 1976: 247).

The figure of Lucien, whose blank features are presented so often to the spectator, echoes the enigmatic Pomme, the working-class hairdresser in Lainé’s *La Dentelière*, Goncourt winner in 1974. Lucien is described in the course of the Foucault interview as having no autonomy: ‘he is but the object of the discourse of another’ (Foucault, 1974: 658). With his father absent (prisoner of war) and his place usurped (Emile, a farmworker is installed with his family in Lucien’s home, and the ‘boss’ Laborit is sleeping with Lucien’s mother), Lucien is the ‘bastard’

who is often seen as avenging, through his new-found power, his poor situation in life; and also the foundling, the ‘found child’ of the French ‘gestapistes’ who adopt him into their group, where his joyous recognition of the famous cyclist whom with his father he had seen race is very much his passport to entry, and where the rather asexual Mademoiselle, sternly correcting Lucien when he calls her Madame, and whom Tonin calls *maman*, contrasts with his own sexualized mother. Lucien forces himself into the Horn family group as a powerful potential son, effectively expelling the good yet feminized father Albert (‘sewing is women’s work’, says Lucien) and aligning himself with the bad son Jean-Bernard (his father would have been very disappointed in him, says Albert). In this rather intricate structure of family patterns around the foundling/bastard, Lucien reacts rather than acts. He is a serial copier and follower: approaching the Resistance after Laborit tells him his son Joseph has left for the maquis; copying Jean-Bernard’s words to introduce himself as ‘*police allemande*’; copying Jean-Bernard who initiates the destruction of the precious model boat of a young man (who is a debased echo of Lucien, looking as fascinated by him as Lucien was by the Hotel des Grottes group, and seeking to impress this Gestapo associate with his boat even as his father is being arrested); copying Albert calling his daughter ‘*chérie*’; copying Albert’s words when he reacts against being addressed as ‘*tu*’ by putting a plaster over an arrested Resister’s mouth.

The communicative structure of silence and speech is then a key vector in the distribution of the various roles and structuring of Frenchness. Lucien is as much a vehicle of the discourse of the other as he is a speaker. As indeed is France, who mirrors Lucien in so many ways, whose face, framed in close-ups, is as enigmatic as his. Is she playing a role, using him to get her family to Spain? Is she contemplating killing him when she holds the stone up at the end? As in the other *mode rétro* films, the range of accents, Parisian, regional, and foreign, positions all the characters: France is the perfect Parisian, by her glamorous looks, social and cultural sophistication, and unaccented French. An urban migrant like the French gangsters, socially their equal, unlike Lucien (‘Don’t you dance?’ she asks him mockingly, using the *tu* form for the first time), she remains not-French. The *mise en abyme* of resistance versus subjection played out within the Horn family (‘my daughter is a whore,’ says Albert; ‘she is like me,’ he says) does not address its French audience in the way Lucien does. The notion of her as ‘France’, incarnation of Frenchness, is completely short-circuited, a failed performative if ever there was one. She is spoken as ‘France’ by her father’s naming of her, but unlike Frantz, in Sartre’s *Séquestrés d’Altona* (Sartre, 1960), she cannot perform the symbolic role of nationhood. The symbolic role she does perform is no more than the desire to integrate.

It is Lucien, then, summoned to his role by responding to the address of the other, who is the lynchpin of the film’s performative effects. Part of its power is that it does more than offer historical tableaux to its audience, it interpellates them as French subjects in Lucien’s place. In an early review, Jean de Baroncelli points to ‘the theme of freedom of decision-making and of the responsibility *which falls to each*

*one of us* in the choice of our actions' (Baroncelli, 1974; my emphasis). That this is a film which asks each one of us: 'what would I have done?', is the leitmotif of Pierre Bayard's extended analysis (Bayard, 2013) and identified by many others (Altman, 1976: 557, Cieutat, 2000: 91, Jacquet, 2011: 80). Pascal Bonitzer has written a persuasive analysis of the famous scene of Lucien silencing the Resister with sticking plaster and drawing a mouth in red lipstick upon it, arguing that Lucien thus side-steps the Resister's question — 'Are you with us or against us?', by ignoring the message and responding only to the mode of address (Bonitzer, 1974), a foreclosing of history in favour of psychology. As Lucien reacts to the situation without actively articulating a response, so is the French spectator positioned. The ultimate performativity of *Lacombe Lucien* is to interpellate the spectator as perplexed, without an answer, oscillating between resistance and collaboration in some interminable psychological drama stripped of historical substance.

The original title of *Lacombe Lucien* was *Le Milicien*, which would have seen a film focused much more explicitly on the murderous confrontation of French v. French. The rediscovery of divisions within the French nation is a major element in the *mode rétro*, but the divisions of French v. French are played out with and through the division between French and not-French, taken from a time when the latter were so often described as a threat to the former. Is it pure chance that this aspect of the past comes to the fore in the years when the 30 glorious years of growth were stuttering and when immigration was rising up the political agenda to explode in the 1980s with the prominence of the *Front National*? If *Bonnie and Clyde* is steeped in the violence of Vietnam and its implications for America, *la mode rétro* reconfigures a French past with a handle on contemporary interests and anxieties. It works on the instabilities of the divisions between French and outsider, showing how easily one could fall on the wrong side. 'Do I look Jewish in this?' asks Lucas in *Le Dernier Métro*, playing with a false nose, in a film where the theatricality of the theme pervades every exchange (Higgins, 1996: 152–3). Without identity papers and with that accent, Marion tells him, he cannot pass as French. 'Are you more French than Pétain?' asks the poster; if your name is Klein, probably not. Lucien could not be more rooted in the French countryside, but his relations to his family have become very fragile (and would have been even more so if an original idea, to create the character as a foster child placed on the farm to work, had been retained), as he oscillates between his two adopted families, intersecting the choice of Resistance or Collaboration with the choice of 'bad French' or 'not-French'.

The combination of Lucien's "'pure" Frenchness' (Frey, 2004: 107), the fashionably nostalgic rural France and Parisian 40s chic, the limpid clarity of the plot, which includes the famous ambiguity of motivation, and its transitive nature in interpellating the French spectators to project themselves back into Lucien's place, is indeed a powerful and a distinctive one. Historiographically it has helped to pin the *mode rétro* to Lucien's choice which is thus France's choice: Resistance or Collaboration, with the latter looming much larger than the former, and thus effectively narrowing

the broad scope and the very different cultural politics of *Le Chagrin et la Pitié* by suggesting there is a continuum between them.<sup>5</sup> But ‘Frenchness’ proves to be no more stable in *Lacombe Lucien* than in other *mode rétro* films more overtly placing the national on performative display. Through all his transformations, from raw rural brutality to pastoral idyll at the end, it is his unmarked face in huge close-up that is the only real constant.

The multi-layered performance of names and accents, appearance and disguise, and the intricate jigsaw of origins and displacements, immigrations and migrations, all are crucial to the ways the *mode rétro* enacts the dramas of the Occupation as dramas of being French. Performance of nationality and performatives of nationality are prised apart, with the artifice and uncertainties of the former overwhelming the power of the latter. Across the *mode rétro*, the dramas of political choice are inseparable from the dramas of origins.

## Notes

- 1 For discussion of the obsessive return to the past in the 1970s, see for example *Rouso*, 1990; *Morris*, 1992; for *Lacombe Lucien* and the *mode rétro*, see for example *Frey*, 2004: 101–7 and *Nacache*, 2008.
- 2 All translations are my own.
- 3 The *Dossiers de l'écran* were a popular television series. A film addressing topical social issues was followed by a studio discussion.
- 4 The early scene of the men in the countryside lined up to face the firing squad is motivated by well-known photographs of them lined up in a courtyard in Paris.
- 5 A connection its director Marcel Ophuls apparently hated as much as he hated *Lacombe Lucien*, as Sobanet records in his thoughtful exploration of the similarities and differences between them at the level of theme and approach to history (*Sobanet*, 2007: 234–5).

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## Note on contributor

Margaret Attack is Professor of French at the University of Leeds. Her publications include *Literature and the French Resistance* (1989), and *Framing Narratives of the Second World War and Occupation in France 1939–2009* co-edited with Christopher Lloyd (2012). Her current research projects include the Occupation novels of Valentine Goby, the use of history in French postwar fiction on the Second World War, and the works of Jean-Francois Vilar.

Correspondence to: Margaret Attack, University of Leeds, Leeds, UK. Email: m.k.atack@leeds.ac.uk