Violence, *Encore!* Popular Music, Power, and Postwar Memory

Abstract

The open circulation of memory has been employed as a valuable tool for cultural engagement with the past. Following the affective turn in cultural and social studies, memory has been reframed as a form of labor that brings recollection into transformative dialogue with the body. Yet memory work, as a process that Paul Ricoeur (2000/2004) described as serving a duty to the other, must not be forgotten in the renewed focus on the past as affectively lived in the present. Extending this discussion further to consider memory as a form of action (Arendt 1958/1974), this chapter argues that narratives have an important role to play in pursuing judicial, moral, and social progress by setting in motion a change to the existing pattern or fabric of understanding. In cultural representations of the Algerian War, memories are often apparent but inactive because they remain outside or beyond the interpretative practices of individual and collective agents. In Didier Daeninckx's "Corvée de bois," the futility of recollection is enacted through the entanglement of violent memories and music. Drawing on the theoretical socioeconomic works of Jacques Attali and Theodor W. Adorno, this chapter argues that the explicit and even gratuitous presentation of war atrocities is entangled with background music, or *muzak*, to silence or censor memories of the past. Although memories of the war return again and again in political and cultural consciousness, this chapter suggests that the laborious standardization of memory ultimately derealizes historic violence as intangible background noise. Memory action, if it is to take place, requires that we embed narratives of violence into our everyday interpretative structures, not only to understand "what" took place then, but to give shape to "who" we are now.

Just memory

In January 2021, historian Benjamin Stora published his report on "les questions mémorielles portant sur la colonisation et la guerre d'Algérie" ["questions of memory relating to colonization and the Algerian War"].[1] Produced at the request of French President Emmanuel Macron in July 2020,[2] what is more commonly called the *rapport Stora*, or Stora report, proposed to synthesize the "travail de mémoire, de verité et de réconciliation" ["work of memory, of truth and of reconciliation"] (Stora 2021, 2) that had been achieved so far in public and private arenas, and to recommend future strategies for progress. Above all, Stora highlights the irrecoverable depth and diversity of memories, but he asserts the need to find what philosopher Paul Ricoeur called "*juste mémoire*" ["just memory"] (Stora 2021, 92),[3] an equitable balance of quantity and distribution that would avoid both excesses and poverties of memory (Ricoeur 2000, 1). As a result, Stora proposes that the future of memory work in France and Algeria must involve the open circulation of divergent memories to foreclose the possibility of a conclusive judgment (2021, 92). Yet Ricoeur's discussion of just memory precisely emphasizes the roles of judgment and justice, claiming that memory has a truthful and pragmatic duty to serve justice to the other (2004, 88–92). The duty of memory, for Ricoeur, is a productive endeavour situated at the intersections of past, present, and future that recognizes the transmission of heritage from the other to the self. The settlement of debts owed to the victims of violence does not propose to reconcile distinct histories but precisely to delineate past from present and self from other.

In this chapter, I suggest that memory of the violences committed in Algeria necessitates expression in order to incite action that would embed the past firmly into the world, not only as an episodic object of history but as part of the interpretative structures through which the world takes shape among and between others. As critics of the Stora report have argued, memory may be manipulated to stall productivity by generating parallels and

commonalities between different parties;[4] successful communication, on the other hand, depends upon distinction and plurality. In recent affective trends towards memory as a form of labor, memory is framed as a transformative activity that creates a "felt relation between the present and the past" (Allen and Brown 2011, 316). However, I argue that such embodied acts of recollection that preserve traces of the past in the present might—intentionally or otherwise—hinder the duty of memory to serve justice to others by encouraging passive inertia rather than action. Drawing on the distinctions between labor, work, and action as presented by Hannah Arendt (1958/1974; 1987), I suggest that framing memory as a form of action, rather than labor or work, contributes an important step in judicial, moral, and social progress by furnishing and maintaining the narratives through which we interpret the world (see Meretoja 2018).

Turning to cultural representations of the Algerian War, I argue that the futility of recollection as labor takes shape through entanglements of violent memories and music. In Didier Daeninckx's short story "Corvée de bois" (2003), the explicit and even gratuitous presentation of war atrocities is enmeshed with popular culture and radio. Building on Jacques Attali's socioeconomic theory of music as a means to power, I argue that narrative memories of the war are censored and silenced by the performance of monologic noise. Drawing on Theodor W. Adorno's claim that music may be exploited to arouse feelings of "distraction and inattention" (1941/1998, 205) in the listener, I suggest that the atmospheric circulation of memory pacifies and neutralizes the realities of the past as repetitious and inauthentic commodities of everyday life. Through this entanglement of violence and background music, or *muzak*, I suggest that memory of the Algerian War has been diluted in public and private spaces. Memories of the war return again and again—*encore et encore*—in political and cultural consciousness as part of the "open door" memory policy advocated by Stora (2021, 92–94), but this laborious standardization of memory derealizes historic

violence as intangible background noise that evades narrative action. To embed memories of violent histories into the human world, we must not only delineate "what" took place through narrative means but also how violence shapes "who" we are among others in the world today.

Memory labor, memory work, memory action

Memory work refers not only to the efforts of recollection but also, as Ricoeur made explicit, to the exercise of memory as justice that bridges the gap between the past and the future (2004, 363). What matters, as Annette Kuhn has argued, is not simply *what* we remember, but what we do with these memories, "*how* we use [them] to give deeper meaning to, and if necessary change, our lives" (1995/2002, 158). Following the affective turn in cultural and social studies from the end of the twentieth century (Clough 2008), processes of memory have been reframed as a form of labor rather than work that brings recollection into dialogue with the body. Building on the three *vita activa* or fundamental human activities that Hannah Arendt identifies in *The Human Condition* (1958/1974)—labor, work, and action—memory *labor* has replaced memory *work* as a resource for economic and biopolitical potential. For Arendt, work designates a process with a definite and tangible end point—the construction of a chair or a house, for example—while labor indicates the production of goods for (immediate) consumption through a circular process of "toil and trouble" (1987, 32) with "neither a beginning nor an end […] only pauses, intervals between exhaustion and regeneration" (36). In memory studies, the inextricable connection between labor and life means that memory holds cultural capital that may be circulated as affective states and thereby commemorate the past through lived experience in the present (Allen and Brown 2011; Allen 2014). For Matthew Allen and Steven Brown, the persistence of memory as a lived connection to the past is only possible as an inexhaustive process of labor:

> If we treat the production of a memorial as "work," then we see it as the production of an inert worldly artefact that has a determinate, fixed meaning once it is complete. But to see this process as "labor" means developing a sensitivity to a much more intimate and indeterminate relation between its producer and artefact, where the latter is never really "finished" as such. (2011, 316)

Yet, Arendt also qualifies labor as "'unproductive' and futile" (1987, 33) because it endlessly (re)produces the very lack that it strives to fill. As a tireless process of (re)collection, memory as a form of labor cannot fulfil its duty to settle debts of the past because it always consumes what it produces.

Understanding memory *labor* as a process of perpetual repetition brings into focus the frustrations over recycled memories of the Algerian War and the stagnation of justice. Memory as *work*, on the other hand, signifies distinct processes of "fabrication and usage" (Arendt 1987, 35) that produce stable and solid objects to be used and reused—without significant alteration—over time (34). This is not to imply that memory work fabricates only inert monuments to the past (Allen and Brown 2011, 323), but rather that it yields an objective and man-made end point that may be exploited—either materially or immaterially—over time and stand up to the "subjectivity of man" (Arendt 1987, 173–74). If it is abused, memory labor will only perpetuate inaction and contestation through endless repetition; memory work, on the other hand, might respond more effectively to the debts of the other and a duty to justice by pursuing artificial, practical, and durable outcomes, such as an acknowledgement of responsibility, judicial proceedings, and reparations. Yet the notion of objectivity in processes of memory work is contentious; can we ever say that the past has truly been reckoned, or that it yields a discernible result? Indeed, is it not more fruitful to consider how the past might come to effect change in different times and places, and between different agential subjects?

Arendt's third, and most misunderstood, human activity is action, an activity often perceived purely in political terms but relating to a more generic performance of speech and deeds that signals entry into the human world (1958/1974, 175–81). Like work, action is productive, but unlike work, action does not know what it will produce: action initiates or sets in motion a change to the existing pattern or fabric of understanding (Arendt 1958/1974, 177–78). Actions, unlike labor or work, cannot take place in isolation but in a "web of human relationships […] where their immediate consequences can be felt" (Arendt 1958/1974, 183–84), and it is because of this existing web of human relationships, interconnecting a plurality of voices, intentions, and perspectives that actions are unpredictable, irreversible, and limitless (1987, 36–41). While words and acts are themselves transient, they reveal themselves in the presence of others to produce stories "as naturally as fabrication produces tangible things" (Arendt 1958/1974, 184).

> In order to become worldly things […] they must first be seen, heard, and remembered and then transformed, reified as it were, into things—into sayings of poetry, the written page or the printed book, into paintings or sculpture, into all sorts of records, documents, and monuments. The whole factual world of human affairs depends for its reality and its continued existence, first, upon the presence of others who have seen and heard and will remember, and, second, on the transformation of the intangible into the tangibility of things. (Arendt 1958/1974, 95)

Distinguishing memory as a form of action, as opposed to labor or work, moves away from reiterative or functional outcomes of recollection and towards an understanding of how every act of memory "falls into an already existing web, where it nonetheless somehow starts a new process that will affect many others even beyond those with whom the agent comes into direct contact" (Arendt 1987, 40). At the same time, it illuminates how actors may wish to prevent memory finding expression that would lead to action in order to thwart the

progression of uncertain and irrevocable change. If action, as Arendt claims, reveals "who" rather than "what" one is in the world, then individuals and communities may prefer to remain "in complete silence and perfect passivity" (1958/1974, 179) rather than give voice to memories that will henceforth become inextricably bound up with a collective social identity.

We cannot forget that memory is never neutral but is "intertwined with power, interest, and resistance precisely because it is so vital and fundamental to what we are as citizens and to what our society is as a community capable of relations of justice" (Booth 2008, 259). In the case of memories of the Algerian War of Independence, the need for action that would embed memories of the past within the identity constructions of contemporary Franco-Algerian relations is at odds with the desire to perpetuate a specific and stable politico-historical image of the war. In the following analysis of Didier Daeninckx's "Corvée de bois," I show how memory fails to elicit action in the novel, disappearing as soon as it appears through distraction and inattention. Entangled with popular music, violent memories of the war are diffused into the background of everyday spaces and situations where they may be dismissed or neglected by social actors as futile background noise. As a result, memories of violence are instrumentalized in the impersonal, inert, and indistinct spaces of the narrative to homogenize, silence, and subvert the plurality of human stories.

Popular music, violence, and censorship in Didier Daeninckx's "Corvée de bois"

The Algerian War of Independence raged from 1954 to 1962 and it continues to spark heated debates, particularly concerning the uses of torture and contentions over free economic movement between the two countries. As a colony of France, Algeria was considered a department rather than a separate country and terminology relating to war was minimized to imply minor civil disorder.[5] Although the war began as coordinated terrorist uprisings of the FLN (*Front de Libération Nationale*), it descended into a disastrous war of attrition that gradually alienated international support and deeply divided national opinion. The war

eventually ended in March 1962, when President Charles de Gaulle ceded independence to Algeria in the Évian accords, but the topic remained—and remains—controversial, not least because de Gaulle presented Algerian independence as what he called a "victorious defeat." Official memory has been slow to accept the realities of the war—including systematic uses of rape, torture, and the murder of civilians—often reiterating that crimes were committed on both sides[6] or limited to an aberrant, unrepentant minority. Cultural memory, however, was quick to pick up the gauntlet and assume responsibility as a witness both to the events and to their mitigation in collective French memory. Cultural works, such as novels and films, laid bare the unsavoury character of the campaign and helped to expose French atrocities by dealing with the darker side of the war. Gillo Pontecorvo's historical film *La Bataille d'Alger* (1965; *The Battle of Algiers*), Rachid Bouchareb's controversial film *Hors-la-loi* (2010; *Outside the Law*), and Didier Daeninckx's detective novel *Meurtres pour mémoire* (1983; *Murder in Memoriam*, 1991) are among the most well-known of these works.

Although lesser-known, Daeninckx's 2003 short story "Corvée de bois" continues to pursue themes of truth and deception in relation to the Algerian War and to historical narrative more broadly. Published at a time of renewed public interest in the Algerian War,[7] "Corvée" is an explicit denunciation of the appalling acts of violence committed by the French army, and also of the subversive measures of censorship and interpretation used both during the war and afterwards. The title translates literally to signify the collection of firewood, but the more sinister translation is a euphemism for the execution of prisoners during the war, usually using game-like tactics. It is in line with many of the themes typically presented in Daeninckx's work, such as *Meurtres pour mémoire*, which unravels the history of the massacre of October 17, 1961 as a detective fiction recounted from the perspective of a seemingly random present-day murder in Toulouse but interlinked with the history of the Occupation in France. Although "Corvée" lacks the key *polar* or detective elements that are

present in the earlier work (see Gorrara 2003, 81–89), it is similar in that it aims to show how the truth of the past is concealed beneath intersecting stories. As Donald Reid writes, Daeninckx's obsessive play on the relationship between supposedly different histories stems from "the idea that there is a past hidden by those in power—and they seek to keep it hidden" (2010, 40). He continues: "Daeninckx is primarily concerned with revealing the power exercised through the policing of collective memory narratives, predicated on what is excluded, as well as on what is said" (Reid 2010, 40).

"Corvée" tells the story of an unidentified 23-year-old French medical student at the Sorbonne who is inadvertently caught up in a riot in Paris and opts to avoid prison by joining the French campaign in Algeria. After the protagonist's military training, he is assigned to a paratrooper detachment in Algeria where the short story portrays, in harrowing detail, acts of rape, torture, and the execution of civilians committed by the narrator and his military colleagues. The narrator eventually returns to France after an insurgent attack leaves him paraplegic, and here he performs duties with the censorship bureau where he helps to prevent the truth of the war filtering out into public consciousness. Popular music is a curious trespasser into the narrative that is seemingly at odds with the overwhelmingly historical tale of violence and censorship, and yet the performance of music functions to silence the other and prevent communication as loudspeakers become instruments of censorship, reproducing noise and seizing power.

The riot in which the protagonist becomes caught up occurs following a Gilbert Bécaud concert at the Olympia in mid-1950s Paris.[8] When the audience, enthralled by the enthusiasm of their idol, start to destroy their concert seats, the narrator and his friend, Jacques, kick an armrest across the room before breaking the glass of a display cabinet and taking some pictures of Bécaud. Although their transgressions are minor, they are arrested and held overnight but avoid prison by agreeing to sign up for military service in Algeria.

Jacques is sent to the medical service while the narrator integrates a paratrooper regiment in south-west France before he is posted to commence service in Algeria. In this brief prelude to the narrative of Algeria itself, the popular music of Bécaud performs a paradoxically inflammatory and extinguishing role. For economic and social theorist Jacques Attali, music is a means of establishing and maintaining social control through interrelations of economics, technology, politics, and culture; it is a form of entertainment but a means to power (1977/1985, 6–9). The scene of the music concert, a site of (re)production and repetition, is an instrument of power that can silence people by "mass-producing a deafening, syncretic kind of music, and censoring all other human noises" (19). According to Attali, spaces of music and dancing are little more than "a pretext for […] noncommunication, […] solitude, and […] silence" (Attali 1977/1985, 118), and in places such as popular music concerts and night clubs, where music is at its loudest, Attali sees an ironic imposition of silence as "the music prevents people from speaking—people who in any event do not want to, or cannot, speak" (1977/1985, 118). In the vociferous repetitions of noise, all other dialogue is silenced by the organized monologue of the performer, and the words and deeds that Arendt defended in the production of action become uniform, repetitious, and oblique.

Of course, music has been shown to have strong connections precisely with what Arendt would define as action, setting in motion unstoppable and unknown operations (Hintjens and Ubaldo 2019; Pieslak 2015; Pegley and Fast 2012; Anderson and Carnagey 2003), but it may also be the case that music prevents action by subverting the words and deeds necessary for new beginnings. In "Corvée," Bécaud's music silences the crowd by reducing dialogue to a chorus of repetitions, firstly as the audience scream his name when he appears on stage—"Bécaud, Bécaud, Bécaud…"—and then throughout the performance as the crowd sing along, repeating and echoing the words of their idol (Daeninckx 2003, 14). Bécaud's lyrics are themselves reproduced and transcribed on the page, generating an

acoustic ekphrasis, or noiseless noise, that shows nothing but repetition. Finally, the only attempt at spontaneous, dialogic communication in this scene—when Bruno Coquatrix, the director of the Olympia, appears alongside Bécaud on stage to congratulate him and end the concert—is interrupted by the commotion of the audience as they attempt to invade the stage (Daeninckx 2003, 14–15). In all these examples, music is the prelude to the disruption of communication, privileging repetition and meaningless noise over autonomous discourse.

In Algeria, repetition of Bécaud's music again imposes a select silencing as the screams of tortured civilians are drowned out by a powerful sound system. As in the scene of the concert, this episode contains no direct speech but reproduces, through acoustic ekphrasis, refrains of the popular track "Quand tu danses" ["When you dance"] (Daeninckx 2003, 48). The suppression of human voice by music both during the concert and in Algeria demonstrates not so much the ways in which music *itself* may be violent (such as at extreme volumes, Attali 1977/1985; Carvalho 2013) but rather how it is used to cover up, interrupt, or extinguish the words of others. This theme is not in itself remarkable; throughout the narrative, instances of cover-ups, counter narratives, and censorship are rife. Indeed, the narrator's presence in Algeria was itself a cover-up, a way of avoiding prison by feigning to volunteer for military service. When he is caught on camera murdering an Algerian boy, the narrator kills the American journalist who took the photo to eliminate the evidence. These actions are in turn covered-up by the French army who dispatch him to carry out propaganda work among the local community. In this capacity, he promotes an alternative historical narrative that boasts the accomplishments of the French in Algeria and portrays the rebel army as grasshoppers, a destructive, exploitative, and thankless pest to be exterminated from the population (Daeninckx 2003, 41). When the narrator is returned to France in a wheelchair, he accepts a position in the censorship bureau where he passes much of his time viewing films or reviewing books to note "les scènes litigieuses, les dialogues faussement

anodins qui cachaient un double sens, les allusions à l'actualité, les atteintes à la dignité de nos gouvernants" [the litigious scenes, dialogues that were falsely benign and hid a double sense, allusions to current affairs, attacks on the dignity of our governing powers] (Daeninckx 2003, 53). In this capacity, he prevents the reprinting of the Marquis de Sade's *Histoire de Juliette* [*Juliette*], an explicitly violent text that weaves together sexual pleasure and pain. In these examples, music becomes another instrument for the silencing of discordant voices and a way of organizing political and social masses according to a strict monologic view. As the narrator's former friend Jacques, who is heading up the printing team of de Sade's *Histoire* exclaims: "Ce n'est pas ce que vous faites là-bas [en Algérie] qui vous gêne… C'est quand on met des mots dessus!" [It's not what you are doing over there [in Algeria] that bothers you… It's when you see it in writing!] (Daeninckx 2003, 58). By silencing these narratives of violence, the novel shows that memory can fail to elicit action when it is denied the tools of speech and expression.

Facing the *muzak*

The most intriguing imposition of music as a force for silencing comes much later, when Bécaud's lyrics are entangled with memories of the violences committed at the concert and in Algeria. In the final paragraph of "Corvée," the narrator presents a summative future past: "Je me suis marié, quelques mois après la fin de la guerre. Et j'ai tout effacé. Ça revient par bouffées que j'ai appris à maîtriser quand, par moments, Bécaud passe à la radio." [I got married, a few months after the end of the war. And I erased everything. It returns in flashes that I've learnt to control when, every now and then, Bécaud plays on the radio.] (Daeninckx 2003, 58) Beyond the disturbing composure of the narrator's postwar return to civilian life, this paragraph brings the reader back in a complete circle to the beginning of the story and the Bécaud concert at the Olympia. In doing so, it emphasizes the repetitive labor of recollection—whether willed or unwilled—that is both traumatic and trivial. Through the

radio, this music enables the infiltration of memories into the home, where the intimation of violence is domesticated and normalized. Despite the mass transmission of music over the airways and the parallels created with an everyday knowledge of the atrocities committed in Algeria, the entanglement of this awareness with popular culture pacifies and suppresses these narratives as repetitions and simulacra. Played over the radio, the music—and with it the memories of the war—is at once pervasive and radically ineffective, producing little more than a repetitive refrain or a background sound for everyday living.

With the subversive intrusion of memory into the home, "Corvée" begins to connect popular culture and music to the futility of memory labor. In "On Popular Music," Adorno establishes a critique between "popular" and "serious" music that hinges on "the fundamental characteristic of popular music: standardization" (1941/1998, 197). By standardization in popular music versus non-standardization in serious music—most masterfully displayed, in Adorno's view, in Beethoven's symphonies and sonatas—he argues that popular music conforms to a pre-established code that ensures every hit will "lead back to the same familiar experience" (1941/1998, 198). For Adorno, what he calls popular music is derivative and predictable; a popular hit—however unique or free it attempts to be—is merely a variation on the theme of another hit, one chorus substitutable by any other.[9] For the listener, this standardization of popular culture means that a piece of music arrives "pre-digested" (Adorno 1941/1998, 201): "the whole is pre-given and pre-accepted, even before the actual experience of the music starts" (198). While Adorno's critique of popular music translates poorly beyond the temporal and spatial specificity of 1930s Germany and has been subsequently resisted in contemporary analysis as elitist and dichotomous, overlooking the dynamics of consumer and industry (Paddison 1982; DeNora 2003; Hamilton 2007), his theory is useful in providing a pivot for notions of familiarity, domestication, and repetition. As Daeninckx's work suggests, the explicit (re)presentation of atrocities in Algeria is not unexpected or unfamiliar: details

are widely available and frequently circulated. The problem is quite the opposite; although the narrative is available, listening is no longer necessary or even possible since it has already been heard so many times before; words and deeds, if indeed they do find expression, no longer provoke actions.

In contemporary applications of functional background music, or *muzak*, the instrumental, unobtrusive "easy-listening" music played in workplaces, public transport, shops, elevators, and on telephones, such inattention is privileged to distract from activity and enhance productivity and wellbeing (Vanel 2013; Lanza 1994; Jones and Schumacher 1992; LaBelle 2010, 171–72). As a socially engineered aesthetic of distraction, *muzak* incites a numbness that "[lulls] the listener to inattention" (Adorno 1941/1998, 206). For Simon C. Jones and Thomas G. Schumacher, in their discussion of power and functional music: "by encouraging non-reflective, nonintentional listening, and by producing low-level cognitive responses, functional music defies traditional notions of musical reception, use, and meaning" (1992, 166). Yet, the inattention that is both a presupposition and a product of *muzak* may distract or mislead the listener for subversive gains. While historically viewed as a contemptuous object of auditory inconsequence—the performative background to activity—Hervé Vanel notes that *muzak* is also a powerful weapon for psychological stimulation: "its pervasiveness is dreaded as a powerful ideological tool" (2013, 5). For the American composer, Roger Reynolds, "Muzak is the single most reprehensible and destructive phenomenon of Western music" (Peyser 1978, 253).[10] In the manipulation and deployment of sound as *muzak*, Vanel and Reynolds point to the ways in which it is not innocent or anodyne but often representative of a more insidious social agenda.

This is certainly true of the background music Adorno identified with bars and cafés of the 1930s. "The first characteristic of background music is that you don't have to listen to it," (1934/2002, 507) he wrote, even going so far as to suggest that such music was only

evident when it suddenly disappeared, replaced by silence (508). Like the sounds of *muzak* that would follow, this background music performed a homogenizing or standardizing role as "a social cement" (Adorno 1941/1998, 206), binding customers together in a shared space. Although Adorno's reflections seem, here again, to speak to the insignificance and inconspicuousness of background music, there is a more subversive ideological potential intermingled in the auditory anaesthetic. As Vanel has suggested, *muzak* is to be feared precisely because it escapes our attention. For Adorno, background music in cafés and bars "seeps into the murmur of the conversations" (1934/2002, 507), while radio music "serves to keep listeners from criticizing social realities; in short, it has a soporific effect upon social consciousness" (1945/1996, 232). Attali goes further, suggesting that background music is "a means of silencing" (1977/1985, 111), not through noise—as he observed in concert halls and night clubs—but through neglect. Like Adorno, Attali notes the inconspicuous infiltration of music into every aspect of life:

> It has replaced natural background noise, invaded and even annulled the noise of machinery. It slips into the growing spaces of activity void of meaning and relations, into the organization of our everyday life: in all of the world's hotels, all of the elevators, all of the factories and offices, all of the airplanes, all of the cars, everywhere, it signifies the presence of a power that needs no flag or symbol. (Attali 1977/1985, 111)

As memories seep back into the life of Daeninckx's narrator and into his home, they are—like the innocuous music that carries them—"perceptible but not intrusive" (Peyser 1978, 252). Intertwined with the music of Bécaud played over the radio, these memories become as unnoticeable, even inexistent, as the noise that transmits them, perpetuating inattention, ignorance, and inaction.

Interpreting violence

In the commercial advent of the radio that saw mass transmission of popular culture, Adorno observed what he saw as the degradation of music to repetition that was not listened to but rather assimilated by the consumer (1945/1996, 231; 1941/1998, 203–04). The memories that return to the narrator in "Corvée" through Bécaud's songs on the radio are equally corrupted; they are repetitious and inconspicuous, concealed within a seemingly inoffensive and unobtrusive musical interlude. Narratives of the Algerian War, Daeninckx suggests, although (re)presented again and again—*encore et encore*[11]—fail to fulfil the duty of memory to justice if they are automatically distilled into an anodyne acoustic environment that "encourages passive hearing rather than active listening" (Peyser 1978, 253). More than this, memory must go beyond the functional instrumentalization enacted by work if it is to effect genuine change and instigate new possibilities. This discussion has therefore argued that there is a need for some form of memory *action* that not only conjures the past in the present but sets in motion a series of unknown, uncertain, and unstoppable operations. Certainly, it cannot be guaranteed that any sort of action would be necessarily and objectively good, since it inheres in the unreliability of the human condition, but it would, at the very least, demonstrate a movement that breaks away from homogenizing and generalizing discussions of the past. As Arendt writes, "one deed, one gesture, one word may suffice to change every constellation" (1987, 41).

As this discussion of *musak* in "Corvée de bois" has shown, simply because memories are present and engaged in cultural parlance does not inherently mean that they will elicit action. In the interference of recollection through music, "Corvée" reveals the potential inertia of individual and collective memory when it is forced into the background as the indistinct murmur of historic violence. Indeed, most telling is the unresolved anonymity of the narrator who can never reveal "who" he is if not an indistinct and atemporal spectre of

violent memories. Despite the explicit evocation of violent acts, the narrator's persistent anonymity reveals the inaction of memory to give shape to identity if it is not taken up and embedded within the narrative spaces of interpretation, rather than itemization. This task, Daeninckx suggests, cannot take place in isolation but necessitates the interconnections and interrelations of multiple others if it is to succeed, and it will not only reveal the plurality of violent memories but more importantly, and also distressingly, the ways in which violence enacted in the past shapes our relationships, our worlds, and our individual selves today.

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Biography

Avril Tynan is a postdoctoral researcher in comparative literature at the Turku Institute for Advanced Studies in Finland and member of the SELMA Centre for the Study of Storytelling, Experientiality and Memory. She has published widely on representations of history, memory, and trauma in post-Holocaust French literature, including in *Modern Language Review*, *French Forum*, and *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Trauma.* Her current research examines the intersections of narrative and ethics in literary representations of ageing, illness, and death. She is co-organizer of the SELMA Medical Humanities Seminar Series and co-editor of *Storyworlds: A Journal of Narrative Studies*.

[1] All translations from French my own unless otherwise stated.

[2] As leader of *En Marche!* and presidential candidate in 2017, Macron had already staked his candidacy on the "reconciliation of memories" in Franco-Algerian relations when he declared the French colonization of Algeria a "crime against humanity" (Roger 2017). His comments enflamed political opponents from right-wing and extreme-right-wing parties, such as François Fillon, then presidential candidate for *Les Républicains*, who claimed that Macron's comment was little short of a hate crime against his own country. See also "En Algérie" 2017.

[3] The English translation does not allow for such ambiguity, claiming specifically the author's preoccupation with "the just *allotment* of memory" (Ricoeur 2004, xv, emphasis mine).

[4] Criticism of juridical stagnation between France and Algeria, and the inadequacy of the Stora report builds on Algerian historian Noureddine Amara's presentation at an online discussion event ("Rapport Stora" 2021; see also Amara 2021; Jordi and Pervillé 2021; Larkeche 2021; "Pour Alger" 2021).

[5] Euphemisms referring to security operations and enforcement were only officially replaced by "war" in 1999.

[6] See Stora 1991. In September 2018, Emmanuel Macron became the first president to admit the systematic use of torture during the war.

[7] The trial of Maurice Papon (1997–1998) played a significant role in this revived consideration, particularly turning attention to the October 1961 massacre in Paris.

[8] Daeninckx is most likely drawing on the events of February 17, 1955, when a riot broke out at Bécaud's concert at the Olympia ("Disparition" 2001, C3).

[9] Jacques Attali makes a similar point when he argues against the "banalization of the message" in popular music and rock (1977/1985, 109).

[10] Reynolds' comments are aimed at the Muzak Corporation, a company producing ambient music for various situations. However, Muzak and *muzak* are often used as synonyms, and his comments are here applicable both to the company and to the product.

[11] In live music events, the encore is often perceived as spontaneous but has become increasingly ritualized as a part of the structure of performance (Webster 2012).