

## 1968: A Global Perspective

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### **Order in the Streets: May '68, the Unpatriotic *foule*, and Melville's Personal "Resistancialisme"**

Jean-Pierre Melville's 1969 film *L'Armée des Ombres* seems to have "arrived on the scene too late." With very few exceptions, French postwar cinema has remained faithful to the prevailing myths of French resistance well into the late 60s. By the time *L'Armée* was released, however, the winds had changed and films focusing on French collaboration or *attentisme* had come to dominate the scene. Marcel Ophüls's *The Sorrow and the Pity* and Louis Maille's *Lacombe, Lucien* are the most famous examples of this trend. Given the cinematic and political context (*The Sorrow and the Pity* and *L'Armée* were both filmed in 1968 though released later), *L'Armée* does seem to be an anachronism. As the last in a long line of films propagating a myth of a united and widespread French Resistance, the film appeared to be completely out of touch with the prevalent currents of 1968 France.

However, a different picture arises from an analysis of Melville's later commentary on the film, as well as a comparative examination of the film in relation to the 1945 novel that inspired it. The film actually breaks the mold typical resistance narratives, encapsulated by Henry Rousso's syllogism "the Resistance equals de Gaulle; de Gaulle equals France; France equals the Resistance." In other words, the popular myth was that all French resisted, while Melville's personal myth was informed by his distaste for and mistrust of the anarchic crowds that filled the streets of Paris. The true, patriotic Resistance was of the elites, not of the masses. De Gaulle's cadre would be considered a "capital R" Resistance, while those in the streets were "small r" resistances.

It is my contention, therefore, that *L'Armée* was not a relic of Gaullist film art, oblivious to the changing political landscape. Rather, it was made in reaction to May, 1968. As Kristin Ross notes, chroniclers of the event such as Pierre Goldman and Raymond Aron suggest that the events of May were more ruckus than revolution. In this context, Melville's film is a call for a return to the serious, and to a leadership of elite.