

Identifying Jews: The Legacy of the 1941 Exhibition, "Le Juif et la France"

Raymond Bach
L'Université de Bourgogne

*for Régine Barshak, survivor of
the Rafle du Vélodrome d'Hiver,
visitor to the 1941 Exhibition*

During the Occupation there was a two-pronged effort to separate the Jews from the rest of the French population. On the one hand, a series of laws and statutes were passed that tried to define who was a Jew and what rights he possessed, or, more accurately, did not possess. On the other hand, there was the more extreme ideological attempt to convince the French that the Jews were dangerous, racially different, and nefarious, and that ordinary Frenchmen had to learn to recognize them in order to defend themselves against them. This attempt necessitated a propaganda campaign that would construct a stereotypical Jew who could be easily identified and vilified. This stereotype was both physical and moral; not only the Jews' unscrupulous nature, but their physical appearance had to be presented so as to transform the way in which actual Jews would be seen.¹ In its stereotypical representation, the Jew's body became a signifier that was meant not to correspond to a specific reality, but rather to create a reality.

This process, of course, did not begin with the Occupation, and we should recall how, at the moment of Dreyfus's condemnation, Barrès could write with disgust of the Jewish officer's "racially foreign face" and of his "ethnic nose" (qtd. in Touati-Pavaux 524), despite the fact that Dreyfus's features hardly resembled those of the traditional stereotype. Barrès saw Dreyfus through the stereotype provided most notably by Drumont, who had written in *La France juive*:

The principal signs by which the Jew can be recognized are therefore: that famous hooked nose; eyes that continually blink, teeth that are bunched together, ears that protrude, nails that are square-shaped (rather than rounded and almond-shaped), torsos that are too long; flat feet, rounded knees, ankles that are extraordinarily turned out; and the soft, fleshy hands of hypocrites and traitors. Very often they will have one arm shorter than the other. (qtd. approvingly in Montandon 39)²

It was only during the Occupation, however, that this type of construction of the Jew became part of an official policy of discrimination, the underlying goal of which was to convince the French of the necessity of accepting the principle of racial cleansing.

What were the best means for the dissemination of this stereotypical image of the Jew? Radio, posters, newspapers, journals, film—all had their usefulness in the campaign.³ But an exhibition would allow the promoters of racial difference to disguise their propaganda tactics and pseudo-scientific discourse behind a pedagogical facade. With its institutional links to the museum, an exhibition provided the setting in which anti-Semitic messages could be transmitted with a maximum amount of authority. The Jews would be put on display for the visitors, much as were exotic and dangerous creatures in natural history museums. The postwar novelist Patrick Modiano was therefore right on the mark when he labeled the 1941 exhibition, “l’exposition zoologique” (47).

In this essay, I will examine three types of responses that the memory of the 1941 exhibition, or the type of anti-Semitism incarnated by it, has provoked in France: first, the attempt, found most often in the cinema, to scandalize and outrage the public by bringing it face to face with the dehumanizing effects of anti-Semitism; second, the attempt to destroy negative Jewish stereotypes by presenting an absurdly literal reading of the kinds of anti-Semitic accusations that were to be found in the exhibition (this will be the procedure used most notably and effectively by Modiano); and finally, the attempt to convince the general public of the pseudo-scientific nature of racist discourse by explaining the current scientific approach to the question of racial difference.

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It should be noted that the initial impetus for the 1941 exhibition came from the Germans, although it certainly did not prove difficult

for them to find French willing to participate actively in its organization.⁴ The *Institut d'Etudes des Questions Juives* (IEQJ), which produced the exhibition, was created in May 1941 by the Germans, in large part because the *Commissariat Général aux Questions Juives* (CGQJ) was at that time still unwilling to become involved in an anti-Semitic propaganda campaign of the Nazi variety.⁵ "Le Juif et la France," which occupied two floors in the Palais Berlitz on the avenue de l'Opéra, ran from September 5, 1941, to January 15, 1942, and later traveled to Bordeaux and Nancy. Even though it did not prove to be the resounding success that the Germans and their French collaborators had hoped for, it did succeed in attracting nearly 200,000 visitors, not an insignificant number by any measure (Kaspi, "Le Juif et la France" 16).

Some of the material for the exhibition was supplied directly by the Nazis from earlier anti-Semitic exhibitions held in Germany and Italy, but most of the displays addressed specifically French issues and referred exclusively to French personalities. So while visitors could find nearly all the usual, trans-national anti-Semitic themes—the Jewish conspiracy to attain financial and cultural domination over the entire world, the profoundly racist nature of Judaism, the inevitable link between Jews and Bolsheviks, etc.—they could also view an important series of displays devoted to Jewish infiltration and control of the various professions in France. The 1941 exhibition also sought to establish a clear link between the anti-Jewish legislation of Vichy and similar laws that had been enacted in other countries under Nazi rule, thereby putting France squarely within the new Nazi Europe. The main point was clear: "THE JEW HAS NEVER BEEN, IS NEVER, AND WILL NEVER BE ABLE TO ASSIMILATE TO OTHER POPULATIONS" (Marquès-Rivière 21).⁶ In other words, the Jew was not, nor could he ever become, a Frenchman.

Sézille, the director of the IEQJ, wrote in his introduction to the exhibition's catalogue of the pressing need to instruct "the French public on a subject about which it knows little, or is poorly informed, or knows nothing at all" (n. pag.). The exhibition, he told his readers, would present the Jew in all his various manifestations so that the French would be able to defend themselves, both individually and collectively, "against Jewish influence." He expressed his hope that the exhibit would inspire feelings of horror, disgust, and disdain in its visitors, while at the same time giving them renewed faith and hope in a France "rid at last of its Jews." Thus, although the organizers of the exhibition supported Vichy's juridical exclusion of

the Jews as a necessary first step, they believed that only a more radical measure would put an end to France's "Jewish problem": the expulsion of all Jews from the country.

It is in the part of the exhibition designated on the floor plan as "Etude Morphologique" that we find the clearest presentation of the anti-Semitic, pseudo-scientific construction of Jewish physical difference. A press release of September 5, 1941 affirmed that the Jews' invisibility in French society was due to overexposure to Jewish features in advertising and the cinema. This had led to a deformation of the vision (*coup d'oeil*) of the French; they had become incapable of recognizing the Jews in their midst. The exhibition, the press release claimed, would reverse this debilitating deformation by revealing to the Frenchman "the characteristic signs of their born enemy" (Archives-CDJC, XCIX-16).

What were these signs? They were to be found in the statue of a huge head that was prominently displayed in this morphological section (fig. 1). All the racial features that Drumont had described in such lurid detail were incarnated in this grotesque work. But for those visitors who needed further explanations, a "scientific" display situated next to the head contained large plaster casts of "Jewish" noses, eyes, ears, and mouths (fig. 2). The display panel encouraged the public to learn to recognize the Jew as a measure of self-defense: "Educate yourself quickly by consulting the documents." The principal source for this "étude morphologique" was the work of George Montandon, a professor at the École d'Anthropologie in Paris and author of the book, *Comment reconnaître le juif*, published in November 1940. We shall return to this infamous figure in a moment.

It is hardly surprising that a full-size photograph of Léon Blum should have been included in the exhibition, for he was seen by the collaborationists as living proof of Jewish domination of France. What is surprising is that this photograph was positioned not in the section where we might have logically expected it, "The Jews throughout French history," but in the same room as the "Etude morphologique," next to a panel entitled "French faces." The point is that the public had to be taught to see Blum as a Jew, much as it had been taught, forty years earlier, to see Dreyfus as bearing all the stereotypical Jewish features. Thus we find an especially crude press release for the exhibition belittling Blum's supposed affirmation that no traces of his racial origin could be found in his appearance: "Hey Jew! These traces are actually especially noticeable, and the least

informed visitor can't fail to tick them off when passing in front of your typical toad-like face: convex profile, enormous ears, descending nose and thick-lipped mouth. The drooping mustache is not Gallic but Jewish; and the face [*faciès*] would be complete if it were adorned with side-curls" (Archives-CDJC, XCIX-12).⁷

Drumont's voice can still be clearly heard in this diatribe. On September 24, 1941, the IEQJ paid homage to its "illustrious" predecessor by organizing a "journée Drumont," which included a commemorative ceremony to be held at "Le Juif et la France." The newsreel of this event was devoted almost exclusively to a speech by a member of the IEQJ, and was illustrated with numerous images taken from the exhibition, especially from the "section morphologique." The audience was informed that

Out of 100 Frenchmen of old French stock, at least 90% are true whites, pure of any racial mixing. It is not the same for the Jews. They are the result of interbreeding between Aryans, Mongols, and Negroes which occurred several thousand years ago. As a consequence, the Jew's face, body, bearing, and gestures are peculiar to him. It is comforting to see that the public is especially interested in the study of Jewish characteristics which are presented in the morphological section of the exhibition, 'Le Juif et la France.' In this way there is a growing number of Frenchmen who, knowing how to detect Jews, will be able to protect themselves against their schemes. (Archives-INA, 62 41 498)

It should by now be clear that a basic paradox underlay the exhibition. On the one hand, there was the organizers' premise that the Jews had succeeded in infiltrating and undermining French society because of their uncanny ability to blend into the general population, their capacity to avoid detection by imitating true Frenchman. Had not Céline claimed that ordinary Frenchmen ("le petit peuple") couldn't recognize the Jews because the latter "are all camouflaged, disguised, chameleon-like" (qtd. in Montandon 41)? On the other hand, the exhibition contained such extreme caricatures and stereotypes of the Jews that the initial premise of invisibility collapsed. Sander Gilman, in another context, has recently stated this paradox as follows: "Jews are inherently *visible* in the European Diaspora, for they look so different from everyone else; Jews are inherently *invisible*, for they look like everyone else" ("The Jew's Body" 60).⁸

The very idea that one could indeed learn to recognize Jews implied that all members of the race possessed the same distinguishing physical features and mannerisms. And yet when it came to teaching these to the public, the exhibition fell back on those exaggerated, stereotypical features which could supposedly be identified as Jewish without the slightest bit of special training. What clearer proof could there be, then, that the exhibition's true concern was the *construction* of a stereotypical Jew, and not the *recognition* or *identification* of actual Jews?

We must not, of course, forget that the identification of Jews was not an abstract issue during the Occupation, but a process that often led directly to the deportation and death of the "recognized" individual. Since even the "trained" French officials of the CGQJ could, on occasion, find such identification to be a complicated task, they had the option of requesting the opinion of the expert Jew-detector himself, George Montandon.

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Toward the end of 1941, CGQJ chief Xavier Vallat wrote to a German official: "Following our discussion . . . in which you made clear the advantage there would be in adding to the juridical opinion of my Director of the Status of Persons a physiological opinion, given by an ethnologist, for thorny cases concerning whether an individual belongs to the Jewish race, I have the honor of informing you that I have asked Professor Montandon—who has accepted—to join the CGQJ in the capacity of ethnologist" (Archives-CDJC, LXXV-150). In this way, Montandon began giving official physical examinations in order to determine an individual's eligibility for a certificate indicating that its bearer did not belong to the Jewish race ("un certificat de non-appartenance à la race juive" 'a certificate of non-belonging to the Jewish Race'), a precious document delivered on rare occasions by the CGQJ.⁹

Mr. Klein, Joseph Losey's film of 1976, opens with a close-up of a woman's face. Her dark, expressive eyes are looking anxiously at someone we cannot see. Two hands, which belong to this unseen person, roughly raise her upper lip and pull down her lower one in order to reveal the gums. Then we hear the examiner's voice: "Gums rounded. . . . Slight prognathism. . . ." So begins a racial examination of a Jewish woman by George Montandon, for although the examiner is never identified in the film, his name is clearly indicated in the

screenplay (Solinas).¹⁰ From the gums the professor moves on to measure the woman's nostrils. Dictating to his nurse, he speaks in a cold, almost expressionless manner: "Nostrils, arched. Naso-labial gap, normal. Very low nasal partition." Next come the lower lip ("fleshy"), chin ("sign of bone prognathism common to non-European races"), forehead ("narrow"), hair ("thick, oily, shiny"), ears ("normal"), eyelids ("slightly drooping"), skin color ("dark"). The preliminary conclusion? "General appearance of the features, more or less Judaic. Non-Judaic facial expression during the examination." He then asks the woman, who is naked, to walk across the room, and notes that her hips are "naturally wide and flabby," and that her feet reveal a "complete absence of an arch." The final scientific conclusion? "Given the set of morphological and behavioral data, the subject of the examination could belong to the tribe of the Semitic race, of either Judaic, Armenian, or Arab descent. Consequently, the case is, for the time being, to be considered doubtful" (Solinas 8-9). The woman, in other words, will not receive her "certificat."

This short opening sequence constitutes the most powerful portrayal of the dehumanization of the Jews by the French in all of (non-documentary) cinema; it also happens to be the most powerful scene of the entire film.¹¹ But how historically accurate is it? Extremely. Indeed, the author of the screenplay, Franco Solinas, must have consulted transcripts of Montandon's examinations, since the terminology used in the film corresponds almost exactly to that found in the original documents. For example, on February 26, 1943, Montandon was called to Drancy to carry out an "ethno-racial examination" of a certain Mme Karsenty, *divorcée* Wallenstein. After having noted her "ethnic antecedents," as well as the events pertaining to her arrest, Montandon listed those physical features he deemed significant for the determination of her "biological race":

Above-average stature. Slender build. Normally arched feet. Sub-brachycephalic. Slightly dark skin color. Brown hair. Brown iris. Rather elongated face. Normally pronounced cheekbones. *Narrow ocular opening*. Finely shaped nose, a bit prominent; slightly sunken profile; base slightly ascending; *highly arched nostrils*; very low nasal partition. Normal naso-labial gap, a bit fleshy. Average-size mouth; average-size upper lip; lower lip a bit fuller than the upper one. Average-size ears . . . *General appearance of the features, more or less Judaic*. Facial expres-

sion: not Judaic during the examination. (Archives-CDJC, CXV-110, emphasis added)¹²

The last two sentences appear almost word for word in *Mr. Klein*.

Montandon's concluding remarks in the case of Mme Karsenty point not only to the pseudo-scientific nature of the examination, but also to the extent to which he based his judgments on non-physical evidence (name, speech patterns, official papers, etc.).¹³ After returning once more to the circumstances of Mme Karsenty's arrest, her divorce from her Jewish husband (which, since it occurred after June 25, 1940, was too late "to be valid from the ethno-racial point of view"), and the Jewish nature of her family's names, Montandon concludes: "Since finally the examined woman has no papers regarding religion . . . and since her morphology, despite the gracefulness of its expression, is rather strongly Judaic, . . . the examined woman is to be considered *Jewish*." There can be little doubt that these words were equivalent to a death sentence; since the graceful but Jewish Mme Karsenty was already being held in Drancy, the next step for her could only be deportation to Auschwitz.

Montandon's examinations were often, no doubt, even more demeaning than the one shown in *Mr. Klein*. Some transcripts, for example, include detailed descriptions of men's penises, since Montandon believed that he could differentiate surgical and Moslem circumcisions from those performed according to Jewish ritual.¹⁴ Nevertheless, his treatment of the woman in the film is already horrifying and degrading enough. The insensitive, almost brutal manner he employs when measuring her body; his cold, disdainful manner; his expressionless voice; his refusal to look directly at her when responding to her final question—all combine to reveal Montandon's belief that he is dealing with a sub-human being who possesses neither feelings nor dignity. In his eyes she is an object, not a person. But the spectator is meant to recoil from Montandon's dehumanizing gaze. We are struck by the woman's humanity, by the dignity she manages to retain despite the terrible humiliation inflicted upon her. The extraordinary actress who plays this part succeeds admirably in carrying out the screenplay's direction: "The sorrow of offended dignity can be read in her eyes" (Solinas 8).¹⁵ Indeed, her eyes are so expressive, so profoundly human that we cannot help but be drawn to her and share the fear and humiliation that she suffers before her unfeeling examiner. The ironic reversal produced

in this scene is unmistakable: Montandon, the offender of the woman's dignity, is the one who appears less than human; in humiliating the woman he demeans himself and, by implication, the racist ideology that lies behind his cruel, calculated behavior.

A similar reversal occurs in *Blanche et Marie*, Jacques Renard's film of 1985.¹⁶ This work, which has unfortunately never received the critical attention it deserves, contains a meticulous reconstruction of the "section morphologique" of "Le Juif et la France." Indeed, it is, I believe, the *only* film that contains a direct reference to the 1941 exhibition.¹⁷ Renard, however, locates the action of the film not in Paris, but in a provincial city in the north of France. As noted earlier, the actual exhibition did eventually travel to Bordeaux and Nancy. In fact, the IEQJ had initially hoped for a more extensive tour which would have included Lille, Rouen, Rennes, Nantes, Tours, Le Mans, Dijon, and Poitiers (Billig 173). There is therefore nothing unhistorical about Renard's decision to show the exhibition being held in a provincial city.

In the reconstitution the first thing we see is the grotesque head of "the Jew" positioned next to a panel enjoining visitors to "learn to distinguish a Jew from a Frenchman." Then come the large plaster casts of the Jew's "distinctive" facial features, as well as a panel containing the article from the "Statut des Juifs" of June 2, 1941 that defines a Jew. The camera lingers long enough on this panel so that the viewer cannot ignore the fact that it is signed by Pétain himself. Other panels, including the full-size photograph of a man with the caption, "French or Jewish?" are also briefly shown. At the same time, a voice heard over a loudspeaker explains to visitors the corrupt nature of the Jewish race.

The curious thing, however, is that, apart from this short scene, *Blanche et Marie* never deals with the subject of anti-Semitism or the persecution of the Jews during the Occupation. In fact, it does not contain a single clearly identifiable Jewish character. Rather, its main concern is to reveal the important role of working-class women in the Resistance. Why, then, did Renard choose to include such an extraordinarily accurate reconstitution of "Le Juif et la France"? I asked him this very question in a recent letter. Here is his response:

I wrote and directed *Blanche et Marie* after my documentaries on the coal miners of the Nord-Pas de Calais. . . . A part of these is devoted to the miners' attitude during the Second World War. I heard in their words those of my mother; and I therefore decided to tell the story of these women.

Many of these women spoke to me about this exhibition, about which my mother had already spoken to me. Aside from them, few people had spoken to me of it, since there were few traces of it in the work of specialists. . . .

Finally, thanks to the Centre de recherche sur la Résistance et la Déportation de Bordeaux, I found the trace of this exhibition. . . .

I was overwhelmed and scandalized by this discovery. Once again, the silence surrounding the exhibition showed that France and the French were not looking the truth straight in the face; that concealment was still the name of the game. . . .

That being the case, it became clear to me that I had to show it, in the same way that I had decided to show in full the "fanatic activism" of the French police forces and not of the eternal occupier.

Of course, no one in the film crew had heard of this exhibition. But neither did anyone speak of it when the film came out. Nor of the "fanatic activism." Forty years later, no one wanted to see. (Renard)

By linking the "fanatic activism" of the *milice* and French police to the anti-Semitic exhibition, Renard seeks to reveal the extent of official French complicity with the Nazi authorities. It is true that relatively few Germans appear in the film, and when they do, they are generally accompanied by their French collaborators. For Renard, the terrorizing of the families of Resistance members and the horrible torture of the fighters themselves (both of which are graphically shown in the film) cannot and should not be separated from the collaborationist policies that led first to the anti-Semitic propaganda of the exhibition and later to the massive deportations of Jews from France. Thus, although we are never shown acts of violence perpetrated against Jews, or even any Jews for that matter, it is made absolutely clear that their persecution, like that of the Resistance, is to be blamed not only on the Germans (*l'éternel occupant*), but also on the French who willingly worked for them.

Just as Renard was scandalized by his discovery of the 1941 exhibition, so he tries in turn to scandalize his audience. His success hinges on having the audience view the dehumanizing displays of the "section morphologique" through the eyes of Marie, a member of the Resistance played by Sandrine Bonnaire. Marie has been given a rendezvous with another Resistance fighter at "Le Juif et la France" exhibition. It is certainly her first visit to the exhibition for she appears totally unprepared for what she encounters; as she

looks at the large plaster casts of “Jewish” eyes, noses, and mouths, her own features, which initially reveal incomprehension, quickly take on an expression of both shock and horror—not the horror of the Jews that Sézille had hoped to inspire in the exhibition’s visitors, but rather horror at the exhibition itself! Viewers are meant to share this reaction, to experience “Le Juif et la France” through Marie’s sudden disorientation, through the shock she experiences when confronted with the exhibition’s grotesque images and crude propaganda.¹⁸ As in *Mr. Klein*, the audience is forced to confront the radical dehumanization of the Jew that was such an essential part of French collaborationist policy. Renard, however, links this effort at dehumanization to similar, though non-racist, efforts to dehumanize the members of the Resistance. In this way, the anti-Semitism of the 1941 exhibition becomes part of what historians call “la guerre franco-française” ‘the Franco-French war,’ that is, the long domestic struggle between supporters of the republic and their authoritarian-leaning adversaries.

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Few films carry as many examples of the anti-Semitic discourse of the Occupation as François Truffaut’s *Le dernier métro* (1980). It is hardly surprising, therefore, that we should hear a collaborator (this time on the radio) harping once again on the urgent need for the French to learn how to *identify* the Jews hiding in their midst:

The problem stems from the fact that most Frenchmen don’t know how to recognize a Jew. If they could, they would be on their guard. But they can’t. There are those whose faces are clearly Jewish. But not all! The problem wouldn’t arise if, for example, the Jews had blue skin. But this is not the case. We must therefore be able to recognize them. (Truffaut et. al. 102-03, translation altered)¹⁹

The precise means by which the Jews are to be recognized remain unspecified. Is the reference to the crude physiognomic mode of recognition advocated by the 1941 exhibition, or to the requirement that all Jews wear the star of David? In either case, the collaborator’s diatribe forces the audience to confront the regime’s attempt at isolating the Jews from the larger French population by constructing the Jew as inherently *different*. And behind this project of isolation looms, of course, the larger project of expulsion.

But *Le dernier métro* problematizes the anti-Semitic discourse of the Occupation by showing the effect it produces on the Jews themselves. "What does it mean 'to look Jewish'?" This question is asked by Lucas Steiner, the Jewish director who, during the months he has spent hiding in the basement of his theater, has heard and read countless attacks against the Jews in the collaborationist press. As he muses on the mystery of Jewish identity, he puts on a large fake nose from his actor's makeup kit and informs his wife, Marion, "I'm trying to feel Jewish" (74). But why is it that he must put on this stereotypical "Jewish" nose in order to feel Jewish? Why does he need to bear the exterior, physical sign that will allow him to correspond to the stereotype of the Jew as constructed by the anti-Semite? In a crisis of self-doubt is he momentarily assuming the identity that his persecutors have been ceaselessly trying to impose upon him?

This (theatrical) assumption of an imposed identity finds its most extreme representation in Patrick Modiano's novel of 1968, *La Place de l'étoile*. Listen, for example, to the Vicomte Lévy-Vendôme, a dealer in French women on the white slave market, as he "performs" for his protégé, Raphaël Schlemilovitch:

He removed his turban and put on a fantastically hooked fake nose. "You've never seen me in my interpretation of the Jew Süß? Imagine this, Schlemilovitch! I've just come from the Marquise, and like any self-respecting vampire I drank her blood. . . . Now I unfold my vulture-like wings. I make a face. I twist my body. . . . Look at my hands, Schlemilovitch! at my bird-of-prey nails!" (137)²⁰

As in *Le dernier métro*, a Jew puts on a fake nose in order to "become" the stereotypical Jew he is accused of being by the anti-Semites. But whereas Steiner's attempt to understand his Jewish identity in the face of a torrent of anti-Semitic propaganda is tinged by pathos and despair, Lévy-Vendôme's effort produces, at least on the surface, a grotesque, painfully comic effect. But even more importantly, whereas the assumption of an imposed identity by Steiner lasts only a moment, that of Lévy-Vendôme and the other Jewish characters of *La Place de l'Étoile* constitutes the principal narrative motor of the text. These characters will, during the course of the novel, succeed in incarnating nearly every traditional stereotype that the French anti-Semitic tradition has created or appropriated, and they will do so, for the most part, without the benefit of a fake nose or any other type of disguise. They will play their as-

signed parts gleefully, with a verve and enthusiasm that the reader finds both comic and unsettling. And yet it is precisely by having his characters interpret *literally* the anti-Semites' fantastic descriptions of the Jews' appearance and behavior that Modiano succeeds in revealing the ludicrousness and absurdity of these very stereotypes. In the author's universe there is no easy escape from such stereotypes; its Jews (unlike Lucas Steiner) cannot simply take off a fake nose in order to return to some fairly neutral national identity. Modiano's Jews feel the need to continue playing the roles assigned them during the Occupation, despite the fact that they are living in a postwar France that has rejected the anti-Semitic policies of Vichy. Indeed, the trauma of this period remains so great that it affects even younger Jews who have no direct experience of the anti-Semitism of the Occupation.

Two direct references to the 1941 exhibition in *La Place de l'étoile* reveal its importance for Modiano as one of the central "lieux de mémoire" 'sites of memory' of the anti-Semitic stereotype. After inheriting a fortune, the young Schlemilovitch proclaims to reporters: "I am JEWISH. As a consequence, I am interested only in money and lust. They find me very photogenic. I'll make hideous faces. I'll wear orangutan masks. I'll be the archetype of the Jew that the Aryans came to observe, around 1941, at the zoological exhibition of the Palais Berlitz" (47). In a desperate attempt to obtain recognition, Schlemilovitch will transform himself into the stereotypical Jew that was constructed in "Le Juif et la France"—that dangerous creature with its distinctive, hideous animal-like features. For Schlemilovitch it appears that any identity, even the one offered by the "Etude morphologique" of the 1941 Exhibition, is better than no identity at all. But this strategy fails, for even though he is willing to incarnate every stereotypical feature of Drumont's and Montandon's Jew, Schlemilovitch does not succeed in provoking the slightest public reaction. And so he decides to take his provocation a step further: on his yacht, he places loudspeakers that blare out a continuous stream of vicious anti-Semitic diatribe. He is ready to agree with every one of the traditional accusations made against the Jews, no matter how outrageous: "Yes, I direct the world Jewish conspiracy by means of orgies and millions. Yes, it was my fault that the war of 1939 was declared. Yes, I am a kind of Bluebeard, a cannibal who devours little Aryan girls after having raped them. Yes, I dream of ruining the entire French peasantry and of judaicizing the Cantal region" (47-48).

These very accusations, which strike us as gross absurdities within the context of Modiano's novel, were (alas) made in all seriousness in the 1941 Exhibition. The Jewish conspiracy to control the world? The official poster shows a vampire-like Jew grasping the globe in his claws (fig. 3), and the exhibition catalogue states that "The Jews dream of dominating the world and are working at fulfilling this dream." Jewish responsibility for starting the war? "The Jews are at the root of all the troubles, all the disturbances, all the conflicts, all the revolts of the modern world" (Marquès-Rivière 29). Jewish sexual exploitation of French women? "During the day it's the French worker, the employee, the peasant who works for a Bader, a Lehman, a Gompel, or a L.-L. Dreyfus; at night it's their daughters who, in order to live, become pleasure providers [*chair à plaisir*] and dancers; they show their legs and shoulders in order to bring money into the coffers of the Michels, the Goldin-Rottenbourgs, the Pacal-Rothschilds, and other company managers" (19). Jewish destruction of the French identity? "The Jews, through their powerful means of propaganda (movies, publishing houses, news agencies, organizations of all kinds), are working at killing national, racial and religious sentiment in order to destroy the civilization constructed by the whites [*les peuples blancs*]" (29).

The same type of correlation with the 1941 Exhibition can be made for the very definition of the Jew that Lévy-Vendôme offers Schlemilovitch:

Jews are the very substance of God; but non-Jews were created to serve Jews day and night. We order that every Jew curse the Christian people three times a day, and pray that God exterminate them with their kings and princes. The Jew who rapes or corrupts a non-Jewish woman, or even kills her, must be absolved by the courts, for he has hurt only a mare. (Modiano 137)

Here, now, are several quotes supposedly taken from the Talmud that the catalogue for "Le Juif et la France" includes in order to prove the profoundly racist nature of Judaism: "Non-Jews were created to serve the Jew day and night"; "All Christians will be exterminated"; "The souls of other peoples descend from the demon and resemble that of animals. The non-Jew is a seed of livestock" (Marques-Rivière 20-21).

This juxtaposition of passages from the novel and the 1941 exhibition reveals the degree to which Modiano based the stereotypes embraced by his characters on the actual anti-Semitic propa-

ganda of the Occupation period. The black humor of the novel is to be found in the gap between the ridiculous nature of Schlemilovitch's and Lévy-Vendôme's self-accusations and the all-too-deathly seriousness with which such accusations were made by French anti-Semites. Through their relentlessly literal interpretations of anti-Semitic stereotypes, the Jewish characters of *La Place de l'étoile* create an atmosphere of such *grand guignol* absurdity that the reader cannot imagine anyone taking these stereotypes seriously. And yet they had been, just twenty-five years earlier.

It should be added that in playing the role of the Jew as represented in the 1941 Exhibition, Schlemilovitch also seeks to imitate his father, for we learn that the latter's photograph "appeared in the anti-Jewish exhibit of the Palais Berlitz, embellished by the caption: 'Cunning Jew. He can pass for a South-American.' My father was not without a sense of humor: one afternoon he went to the Palais Berlitz and proposed to act as a guide for several visitors. When they stopped in front of his photo, he shouted: 'Peekaboo, here I am.' One can simply never speak enough of the hey-look-at-me side of the Jews" (56). The very fact that Schlemilovitch senior has to identify himself to the visitors as a Jew points to the absurdity of the exhibition's entire project of racial recognition and identification. But even as Modiano undermines the ideology of racial physical difference, he manages to ridicule yet another stereotype by having Schlemilovitch's father's behavior correspond to the Jews "côté m'as-tu-vu"—the supposedly attention-seeking, exhibitionist side of their character.

There is a clue here, I believe, to the style that the youthful Modiano chose to adopt in this first novel, a style that could, in all fairness, be characterized as "un style m'as-tu-vu." The novel opens with remarkable pastiches of Céline's and Rebatet's anti-Semitic vitriol, and goes on to include equally impressive imitations of Sartre, Proust, Mauriac and others. But by adopting this style, Modiano is himself conforming to the stereotype of the Jewish writer that could be found in the 1941 exhibition. In a display panel devoted to the dangerous influence of the Jews on the literary profession in France, we find the following definition of the Jewish writer:

The Jewish writer "produces," "launches," and "sells." In their works, Jewish writers betray above all their racial concerns and sexual perversions. They are, by temperament, destroyers of all the beautiful traditions, of old French customs, of the honest

ways of the provinces, of respect for the country and its beliefs. For them, plagiarism and scandals are simply the means by which to get ahead. (Archives-CDJC, CIII)²¹

La Place de l'étoile can be read as Modiano's response to the above definition. Given the painfully self-conscious universe in which Modiano's characters feel obligated to incarnate anti-Semitic stereotypes, it is hardly surprising that a similar obligation should be felt by the author himself. As a young Jewish writer in postwar France, Modiano seems to be saying, "this is what you said I was; well then, watch, this is what I will be." But as in the case of his characters, it is by accepting this role, by assuming, *with a vengeance* (the expression seems remarkably apt in this case), the identity of "the French Jewish writer" as defined by the anti-Semites of 1941, that he will reveal its absurdity, and yet in so doing he will also, paradoxically, start to find his own voice, one of the most important and original voices in post-'68 French literature.²²

* * *

We come now to the last of the three responses to the anti-Semitism of the 1941 exhibition that I mentioned at the start of this essay: the scientists' attempt to show the fallacy of basing racist theories on supposedly scientific evidence. Perhaps the clearest example of this type of response is to be found in the exhibition, "Tous Parents, Tous Différents," 'All Related, All Different' which went on display in 1992 at the Musée de l'Homme in Paris. This exhibition, although it makes no mention of the earlier Palais Berlitz exhibition, constitutes in many ways a direct response to the type of pseudo-scientific claims that were found in the latter's morphological section, for it seeks to show the inadequacy of racial classifications based on physical characteristics. Its principal claim is that all humans, despite physical differences between individuals and populations ("tous différents"), possess a common genetic makeup and therefore a common heritage ("tous parents").

The first thing that the visitor to the exhibition encounters is a changing room in which figures of men and women of various racial origins are undressing. Like the vestiaire in *Mr. Klein*, this changing room will reveal the human body in all its nudity, stripped of the cultural objects (clothes, jewelry, etc.) that might mask its appearance. But the exhibition's point is that although these bodies do in

fact reveal striking physical differences, such differences cannot be taken as unambiguous signs of specific racial groups.

In the second room visitors are shown the enormous diversity of such physical characteristics as hair, eye, and skin color; hair texture; the shapes of eyes, noses, and heads. In addition, they are given the possibility of measuring certain aspects of their own appearance: "Thus, little by little, the visitor is made to realize that every individual, whatever his origin, is an original combination . . . of visible characteristics. Moreover, there is such variability of these characteristics within . . . populations that their distribution overlaps from one population to another" ("Tous Parents"). Thus the very physical signs that were displayed in order to indicate racial difference in "Le Juif et la France" are presented in "Tous Parents, Tous Différents" with the opposite intent: to show that "it is impossible to divide up humanity on the basis of physical characteristics."²³

After reaching a similar conclusion with regard to genetic (or hidden) differences, the exhibition concludes with a section entitled "The Arbitrary Classifications of Man." Here we find the most explicit response to the type of stereotypical construction that occurred in "Le Juif et la France." One panel, "The Illusion of Races," informs us that "racial classifications do not produce coherent results; there is nothing scientific about 'races'." And a second panel refers explicitly to earlier, misguided attempts to undertake precisely such types of classifications: "These classifications confuse visible biological characteristics with arbitrarily proclaimed mental aptitudes or features. Certain pseudo-scientific works sought only to justify contempt for others." Among these "misguided attempts" the exhibition's organizers mention the racial policies of Nazi Germany, the segregation of blacks in the United States, and, more generally, the racism of European colonizers from the fifteenth century onward. They say nothing, however, of the 1941 exhibition or of the racial policies of Vichy France.

Part of the explanation for this is perhaps that "Tous Parents, Tous Différents" aims less at refuting past pseudo-scientific attempts to incite and justify racial division, than at combating more recent forms of racism directed mainly toward immigrant populations in France. When it denounces the "irresponsible propaganda which seizes on color, noise, religion, and odor as a pretext to hide a rejection of the Other" (Langaney et. al. 64) and insists on the viability of the assimilation of foreign populations, it is targeting both earlier

enterprises (such as "Le Juif et la France") and current efforts by the National Front to create iron-clad distinctions between true and false Frenchmen. Indeed, one can hear in the catalogue of the current exhibition an almost direct response to the claim of Jewish inassimilability that I quoted earlier from the 1941 catalogue ("THE JEW HAS NEVER, IS NEVER, AND WILL NEVER BE ABLE TO ASSIMILATE TO OTHER POPULATIONS"): "In large cities, where vast foreign communities have assimilated for a long time (even while retaining certain customs of their country of origin), ethnic origin or different physical characteristics become quickly negligible when, in the second or third generation, everyone speaks the same language and works and plays in the same places" (64). By insisting on the viability of assimilation, "Tous Parents, Tous Différents" moves from scientific to sociological analysis. Ironically, the same move could be found in "Le Juif et la France," although the science presented there was nothing more than pseudo-science and its social agenda nothing less than racial separation and ethnic cleansing.²⁴

* * *

I would like to conclude with a poem by Jacques Roubaud which, like the exhibition "Tous Parents, Tous Différents," attacks both the anti-Semitism of the 1930s and 1940s and the racism of Le Pen's National Front, although in this case, the method employed is not scientific rationalism but irony and *reductio ad absurdum*.

In his introduction to "Le Pen est-il français?" Roubaud remarks ironically that if France has recently borrowed from the Germans "the concept of a political movement of fascist tendencies" (i.e., the National Front), it is only to show that "it no longer holds a grudge against Germany for certain misunderstandings that occurred in their recent common history." Roubaud exaggerates France's debt here, for it would be more accurate to say that the National Front emerged quite logically from France's own tradition of xenophobic, extreme right-wing movements, and that the French did not have to do much borrowing at all in creating it. Roubaud notes that the National Front's slogan, "France for the French" ("la France aux Français"), implies not only that France must "get rid of its foreigners," but also that the latter "can, in a manner both clear and indisputable, be *distinguished* from the French. . . ." (14, emphasis added). This language brings us back yet again to the Occupation and to that activity that so preoccupied the French collaborationists: the

identification of the paradoxically visible/invisible Jew as the first step in a process of ethnic cleansing. Although Roubaud does not refer directly to Vichy's statutes against the Jews—his implicit reference is rather to the Nazi racial laws—it is impossible for us not to hear an echo of the language of these French statutes in the definition that he quotes from Le Pen: "Is French he or she whose two parents are French." Article 1 of the statute of October 3, 1940 reads, in part: "Is Jewish . . . any person born of three grand-parents of the Jewish race or of two grand-parents of the same race, if his or her spouse is Jewish" (qtd. in Kaspi, *Les Juifs* 55).²⁵ And it should be recalled that the organizers of the 1941 exhibition, despite their conviction that Vichy's anti-Jewish laws were in themselves insufficient for ridding France of its Jews, did include a large panel containing excerpts of this statute. Roubaud, unfortunately, never makes explicit this crucial link between the discourse of the National Front and the official anti-Semitic discourse of Vichy—a discourse that was only partially inspired by the Nazis.

Nevertheless, Roubaud's rigorous poetic response to the National Front's attempt at defining true Frenchmen deserves to be quoted in full, for it reveals not only the profoundly problematic nature of such exclusionary definitions, whether made in 1941 or 1994, but also the way in which the memory of the construction of Jewish difference during the Occupation continues to influence anti-racist discourse in France. It also reminds us that talk of *detecting* false Frenchman through various identificatory strategies remains part of French political discourse in the final years of this century. Here then, *en guise de conclusion*, is Roubaud's poem (which, he tells us, must be read as fast as possible):

Is Le Pen French?

If Le Pen were French, according to Le Pen's definition, that would mean that, according to Le Pen's definition, Le Pen's mother and Le Pen's father would themselves have been French, according to Le Pen's definition, which would indicate that, according to Le Pen's definition, the mother of Le Pen's mother, as well as the father of Le Pen's mother as well as the mother of Le Pen's father, without forgetting the father of Le Pen's father would have been, according to Le Pen's definition, French and consequently the mother of the mother of Le Pen's mother, as well as that of the father of Le Pen's mother as well as that of the mother of Le Pen's

father and that of the father of Le Pen's father would have been French according to Le Pen's definition and in the same way and for the same reasons the father of the mother of Le Pen's mother, as well as that of the father of Le Pen's mother as well as that of the mother of Le Pen's father, and that of the father of Le Pen's father would have been French from which, without Le Pen's help, by continuing this reasoning one will easily conclude either that there is an infinite number of French who were born French according to Le Pen's definition, who lived and died French according to Le Pen's definition since the dawn of the beginning of time or else that Le Pen is not French according to Le Pen's definition. (15-16)

Notes

1. See Sander Gilman's analysis of the basic structure of stereotypes and their links to larger representational systems in *Difference and Pathology*.
2. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from the French are my own.
3. See Gervereau and Peschanski; see also Rossignol.
4. The most complete source of information on the 1941 exhibition remains Joseph Billig's *L'Institut d'Etude des Questions Juives*. See also André Kaspi, "Le Juif et la France."
5. See Marrus and Paxton 211. Captain Paul Sézille was the Institute's first director. His dismissal in the summer of 1942 coincided with the demise of the organization. In addition to mounting the exhibition, the IEQJ was also involved in publishing a number of anti-Semitic journals, including *Le Cahier jaune* and *Action juive*, and in presenting sparsely attended lectures by so-called "leading authorities" on Jewish issues.
6. This sentence is capitalized in the catalogue. Similar assertions could be found in most of the anti-Semitic writings of the period. For example, the collaborator Jacques de Lesdain wrote that "Between us, the French and them, the Jews, there are no affinities possible. Our mind and soul are noble, broad, easy. Those of the Jew are base, vulgar, acquisitive" (35).
7. Pierre Birnbaum's *Un Mythe politique* contains an exhaustive analysis of the various anti-Semitic stereotypes imposed upon Léon Blum and Pierre Mendès France. See also Montandon's description of Blum (16).
8. We might note here a contrary opinion, that of Jean-Paul Sartre in *Réflexions sur la question juive* (*Anti-Semite and Jew*), who apparently did

not believe that the French Jews were as invisible as all that, and felt confident of his ability to identify them (even though the Germans often seemed unable to do so): "Before the Armistice, to be sure, the Jew did not wear a star. But his name, his face, his gestures, and a thousand other traits designated him as a Jew; walking in the streets, entering a café, a store, a drawing room, he knew himself marked as a Jew" (77-78). For a detailed and provocative analysis of Sartre and the problem of Jewish stereotyping, see Suleiman 201-18. Despite Sartre's claim to the contrary, it seems reasonable to assume that if the Germans and their French collaborators believed that the general population needed to be taught to recognize a Jew, it was because the Jews did *not* always stand out in a crowd of Frenchmen.

9. After the IEQJ under Sézille was disbanded, Montandon became the head of its short-lived successor: *L'Institut d'Etudes des Questions Juives et Ethno-raciales*.

10. For details on Montandon's career, see Billig 186-205; Knobel ("L'ethnologie" 179-92, and "L'ethnologue" 107-13); Birnbaum (*La France aux Français* 187-98); Schneider; and Lebovics.

11. Losey himself remarked that "there wouldn't be a film without this introductory sequence" (Ciment 355). The scene sets the stage for a complex story which will turn on the question of identity and on the power of an impersonal, pseudo-scientific, and bureaucratic system to determine the nature of this identity for a given individual.

12. Pierre Birnbaum quotes extensively from several other transcripts of Montandon's racial examinations in *La France aux Français*.

13. As early as 1933, Montandon had developed the concept of "ethnie," as opposed to race, which included the cultural as well as physical characteristics of a given people. See Knobel ("L'ethnologue" 107).

14. For example, in the examination of Jacques Mering on 21 August 1943, Montandon notes: "Status [of the penis]: very long sheath (4 cm), clearly demarcated by a pigmented rim. . . . It appears to be a Moslem circumcision" (Archives-CDJC, CXV-136).

15. In the following scene as well we are struck by the way in which the woman and her husband (who has undergone a similar racial examination) retain their humanity despite the indignity they have been made to suffer: "The husband tenderly puts his arm around her neck. She bows her head slightly, then forces herself to smile. A tender smile" (Solinas 9). Tenderness, that precious *human* quality, is to be found among the examined, not among the examiners.

16. I would like to thank Suzanne Langlois for bringing this film to my attention.

17. In his reconstruction, Renard places in one room some displays that were actually located in different parts of the original (Parisian) exhibition.
 18. And yet, given the silence that greeted the film's references to the 1941 Exhibition, we should perhaps be cautious about overstating the effect produced by this scene.

19. The film contains other links to the 1941 exhibition. For example, the exhibition's attack on the Jewish presence in the theater is echoed by a similar denunciation in the film: "Yes, the French theater must be purged of Jews from the rafters to the prompter's box. . . . The Jew must be pushed off the stage, out of the wings. He must never be allowed on it again. A Jew must never again own, direct, or administer a theater because all Jews who have been in that position have brought to it their devious and dirty methods" (68, translation altered).

20. For the link between Jews and images of vampires (including the Jew on the official poster for "Le Juif et la France"), see Cone.

21. Text transcribed from exhibition panels.

22. There has been some debate among critics as to whether Modiano lost or gained something as a writer after leaving behind the explicit questioning of his French Jewish identity that we find in his first three novels (*La Place de l'étoile*, *La Ronde de nuit*, *Les Boulevards de Ceinture*). See Avni.

23. Transcribed from exhibition panels.

24. For an interesting critique of the attempt to fight racism through science, see the work of Pierre-André Taguieff, especially *La Force du préjugé* and "Les Métamorphoses idéologiques du racisme et la crise de l'antiracisme." Taguieff argues that scientific anti-racism is incapable of answering some of the new forms of racism adopted by the extreme right, forms, ironically enough, that appropriate the cultural relativism found in traditional anti-racist discourse. Instead of asserting the presence of insuperable biological differences, the extreme right now casts its rejection of immigrant populations as a defense of French cultural identity, as a defense of its own right to difference, much as anti-racists claim that ethnic groups have the right to retain their specific identities. He quotes, for example, the following passage from a right-wing publication: "The truth is that peoples must preserve and cultivate their cultural differences. . . . Immigration can be condemned because it assails the identity of the host culture as well as that of the immigrants" (qtd. in "Métamorphoses" 50). A similar example is quoted by Pierre Birnbaum in *La France aux Français*: "I am a racist because I say: 'Let's remain French, French, French, French!' Because, without claiming to be of a superior race, I worry about the one to which I belong. And for this reason, I unflinchingly declared that I was fed up with the consequences for my people which the presence on our soil of immi-

grants who have no place here are [now] having [and in ways that] are becoming more visible every day. In the face of such a problem, it is ludicrous to speak of racism. It's about sociology. And also about national survival" (275).

25. This article was modified by Xavier Vallat on June 2, 1941.

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Fig. 1
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Fig. 2
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Fig. 3

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