


*Hiroshima mon amour* (Alain Resnais, 1959)  
Lecture 7 (4/20/4)



- Moses, J.W. "Vision Denied in *Night and Fog* and *Hiroshima, Mon Amour*" in *Literature/ Film Quarterly*, Salisbury, Md., Salisbury State College, 15.3 (1987): 159-163.
- Mercken-Spaas, C. "Destruction and Reconstruction in *Hiroshima, Mon Amour*" in *Literature/ Film Quarterly*, Salisbury, Md., Salisbury State College, 8.4 (1980): 244-250.
- Hanet, Kari. "Does the Camera Lie? Notes on 'Hiroshima mon amour'" in *Screen*, London, Society for Education in Film and Television, 24.3 (1973): 59-66.

## August 6, 1945

- On September 27 1939 Japan signed a pact with Germany and Italy. The pact joined the three nations in an effort to create a new order. Under this agreement Germany and Italy would control Europe and Japan would control Greater East Asia.
- On July 26 1945 Allied leaders met in Potsdam, Germany. They demanded that Japan immediately surrender or face utter destruction. Japan fought on.
- On August 6 1945 a B-29 dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Japan, destroying about three fifths of the city. Three days later a more powerful atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki, leaving it in ruins. World War II ended shortly after these bombings.
- Many people have declared that both targets were effectively military and that the bombings hastened Japan's surrender, thus saving countless lives on both sides. Others have argued that it was not necessary to kill so many people—about 75,000 in Hiroshima and 40,000 in Nagasaki—with such horrifying weapons and that the bombings did not significantly shorten the war.

### John W. Moses, "Vision Denied in *Night and Fog* and *Hiroshima, Mon Amour*"

- **Can we trust our eyes** (during the event, post-event, representations of the event)? → Resnais subverts/questions the entire ideology of vision as a way of knowing [ Compare to Everett's argument in *The Seeing Century*] → ""You saw nothing in Hiroshima. Nothing" – the denial of vision's ability to grasp real experience, past or present." (161) → Epistemological illusions (163)
- Memory of horror 10+ years later → Resnais' ability and interest in capturing traces of the event → "Hiroshima reconstructed is a city in which the traces of the past are ubiquitous, but it is also a city in which the *meaning* of that past is not." (162)
- Cinematic particularities of the prologue

## Epistemological Illusions

- "... as Judith Mayne notes, the fictional narrative confronts the documentary prologue, or rather the ideology of telling confronts the ideology of seeing. Just as the prologue undermines the act of vision, so the love story undermines the act of narration: we cannot know the public tragedy of Hiroshima by a series of documentary images any more than the architect can know the personal tragedy of Nevers by a story. Both are **epistemological illusions.**" (163)

### Writing Techniques: Argument & Conclusion

- *This article's argument stems from the paradox of the opening dialogue where the negating/affirming exchange leads the author to raise a question that will direct the argument throughout the entire article: whether we can trust what we see.*

"He: You saw nothing in Hiroshima. Nothing.  
She: I saw everything. Everything.

It is with this paradox that Alain Resnais begins his first feature film, *Hiroshima Mon Amour*. We are forewarned: the veracity of all that we are about to see in the film's documentary prologue is suspect the hospital, Peace Square, the newsreels, even the exhibits within the museums. For, if the first speaker is correct, if the other is witness to all these signs of Hiroshima's past yet "sees"-understands-nothing, then how can we, at an additional remove from them, trust our eyes?" (159)

### Writing Techniques: Argument & Conclusion

- *His conclusion revisits the same "yes/no" question and finds an alternative answer, "yes+no," that goes beyond simple polarity.*

"The dialectic between our faith in the cinematic images we see and Resnais's subversion of those images, between seeing "everything" and concurrently seeing "nothing," produces a synthesis by which we do indeed see something. That is, by questioning our basic assumptions about epistemology and memory, cinematic discourse and the ideology of vision, Resnais teaches us to understand the past more fully, to remember it more accurately." (163)

## Godelieve Mercken-Spaas, "Destruction and Reconstruction in *Hiroshima, Mon Amour*"

- Play on **binary oppositions**: "Resnais conceived of linking destruction and reconstruction, [by] placing the atom bomb, the symbol of hatred, in the setting of its opposite, love" (244); death & life, despair & hope
- "Twofold level on which destruction and reconstruction operate: the manifest and general level of Hiroshima, the latent and individual level of Nevers" (245)
- Cinematic particularities: traveling shots
- "In both Hiroshima and Nevers, life continues in spite of the attempt to terminate it, but, whereas in Hiroshima the continuation is on an environmental/physical level, in Nevers it is on an emotional/psychological level." (246)

## Traveling Shots: Going Beyond Spatio-Temporal Limits

- "The viewer is thus not simply taken to a Hiroshima destroyed in 1945. The endless travelings in the film (89 out of 423 takes) not only give the idea of penetrating into the past, but also convey an impression of a timeless discovery of many sites. In the first part of the film the pace of the long travelings in the streets of Hiroshima prevents the viewer from absorbing the images. The concrete images of Hiroshima do not provide the framework of the film: the viewer, who has a feeling of getting lost in the streets of the city, realizes that he is traveling through space and time to an a-temporal and a-spatial Hiroshima, to an internalized Hiroshima and not to a specific historical event or place. Time is past, present and future; space is east and west." (246)

## Trauma of War & Transference in *Hiroshima mon amour*

- "Both cities are linked and reconstructed, but whereas Hiroshima is reconstructed to become the subject of a film on peace, Nevers is constructed to uncover the repressed harm of the war. Reconstruction thus occurs on two levels: Hiroshima is re-enacted in a filmic way, Nevers is re-enacted in a mental-emotional way through the process of transference." (247)

## Transference

- Attentive listening and "empathy" on the part of the therapist allows the patient to express thoughts and feelings that in turn permit the uncovering of his underlying emotional conflicts.
- In the course of treatment, the patient often seeks to project (attribute to something other than himself) the disturbing emotions he feels in the process of recollection and free association, and the person who is almost invariably selected for the focus of such projection is the psychoanalyst; that is, the patient is likely to blame his emotional distress on the analyst.
- In this way, the patient comes to feel love or hatred, dependence or rebellion, and rivalry or rejection toward the analyst. These are the same attitudes the patient has felt but has never consciously acknowledged toward his parents or other people with whom he shared important relations earlier in life. The patient's projection onto the therapist of these feelings and behaviors that originated in his earlier relationships is called the transference.

## Transference

- To facilitate the development of the transference, the analyst endeavors to maintain a neutral stance toward the patient in order to serve as a "blank screen" onto which the patient can project his inner feelings.
- The analyst's handling of the transference situation is of vital importance in psychoanalysis or, indeed, in any form of dynamic psychotherapy.
- It is through the transference that the patient discovers the nature of his unconscious feelings and then becomes able to acknowledge them.
- Once this has been done, he often finds himself able to regard them in a far more dispassionate and tolerant light and often feels himself liberated from their influence upon his future behavior.

## Transference in *Hiroshima mon amour*

- "A double displacement operates: The German soldier is impersonated in the Japanese architect, and Nevers, is integrated into Hiroshima. In the process of transference the actress, when relating her suffering to the architect, shifts from a third-person to a second-person narrative. She no longer talks about the German soldier but addresses herself to him in the Japanese architect." (247-248) - in the dialogue, exchange of pronouns and tenses
- "In the last part of the film, Hiroshima and Nevers merge." - through crosscutting + math-on-movement traveling shots
- "The lexical decomposing of the names of the two cities (pronounced Ne-vers, Hi-ro-shi-ma) which recurs in the film, expresses on the surface level the de-construction at work, whereas the transfer of these names to the lovers (she becomes Nevers, he becomes Hiroshima) completes the transference process. The transformation process negates spatial and temporal convention: Hiroshima has become a-historical and universal." (248)

## Transfer of Meaning & Emotion

- "The woman integrates her own experience of Nevers into Hiroshima, thus internalizing Hiroshima's objective reality. The permanent but cheap recollection of 1945 (the commercial exploitation of the events, the souvenirs, the smiling hostess of the "atomic tours," the Hotel "New Hiroshima"), and the filmic simulacrum of the tragedy are validated in this transfer of meaning and emotion. The Hiroshima events, first contingent upon the woman's consciousness, become necessary elements in the narrative of her war experience." (249)

## Film quotes

- 13:01 – "Cela recommencera"
- 15:40 – "Tu me tues, tu me fais du bien"
- 18:38 – "De bien regarder, je crois que ça s'apprend"
- 27:30 – « Nevers, c'est la chose à laquelle je rêve le plus la nuit et c'est la chose à laquelle je pense le moins le jour. »
- 30:10 « La folie c'est comme l'intelligence. »
- 39:15 « Il n'était pas Français »
- 43:50 « -Pourquoi Nevers? – C'est là où tu as commencé à être qui tu es aujourd'hui »
- 47:00 « Quand tu es dans la cave, je suis mort? »
- 70:00 « Tu crois savoir et puis... jamais »
- 80:00 « Je t'oublierai »

## Notes on Representation & Trauma

Psychological & physiological responses/ "guards":  
Fear, shame, pain, panic, etc.

