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★ Je t'Aime, Je t'Aime

France, 1967

Director: Alain Resnais

Cert—A. dist—20th Century-Fox. p.c—Parc Film/Fox Europa. p—Mag Bodard p. manager—Philippe Dussart. asst. d—Jean Lefèvre, Florence Malraux. sc—Jacques Sternberg. ph—Jean Boffety. col—Eastman Colour. ed—Albert Jurgenson, Colette Leloup. a.d—Jacques Dugied, (for the Sphere) Auguste Pace. m—Krzysztof Penderecki. addit. m—Jean-Claude Pelletier, Jean Dandeny. choir—I Musici Cantanti di Varsavia. sd—Antoine Bonfanti, Jean Neny. sd effects—Daniel Couteau. l.p—Claude Rich (Claude Ridder), Olga Georges-Picot (Catrine) Anouk Ferjac (Wiana Lust), Annie Fargue (Agnès de Smet), Bernard Fresson (Bernard Hannecart), Yvette Etievant (Germaine Coster), Irène Tunc (Marcelle Hannecart), Van Doude (Jan Rouffer), Dominique Rozan (Dr. Haesaerts), Yves Kerboul (Antoine Kammers), Ray Verhaege (Paul Goofers), Pierre Barbaud (Georges Levino), Alain MacMoy (André Moyens), Vania Vilers (Jacques Rhuys), Georges Jamin (Dr. Delavoix), Carla Marlier (Christine Yseux), Marie-Blanche Vergne (Marie-Noire Demoon), Claire Duhamel (Jane Swolfs), Annie Bertin (Hélène Wiertz), Hélène Callot (Odile Piquet), Bernard Valdeneige (Claude Loërs), Jean Martin (Henri Troots), Georges Walter (André Symons), Alan Adair (1st Glasgow Inspector), Ian Macgregor (2nd Glasgow Inspector), Jean-Louis Richard (Pierre Vandael Heuvel), M. Floquet (Mr. Grabet), Pierre Motte (Edward Monnot), René Bazart (Jean de Calwaers), Jean Perre (Frédéric Poëls), Michèle Blondel (Hélène Mankels), Jean Michaud (Pierre van Heerswingels), Ben Danou (Dr. Uyttenhoef), Catherine Robbe-Grillet (Maryse de Neten), Alain Robbe-Grillet (Hughes Mechelynck), Jacques Doniol-Valcroze (Francis Devos), Sylvain Dhomme (Louis Lambert), François Régis-Bastide (Hubert Brun), Francis Lacassin (Ad. Man), Jean-Claude Romer (Party Guest), Gérard Lorin (Guy Puyaubert), Guilène Pean (Bernadette Bellemans), Alain Tercinet, Michel Choquet, Jorge Semprun, Billy Fasbender. 8,460 ft. 94 mins. Subtitles.

Following his slow recovery from a suicide attempt, Claude Ridder is released from one clinic only to be accosted by two strangers who persuade him to accompany them to another—the Crespel Research Centre where, under the guise of agricultural research, a group of specialists is investigating the nature of time itself. Accepting their spokesman's statement that he has nothing to lose, Ridder listlessly allows himself to be prepared for a journey back into one minute of his own past. Enclosed in the curious embrace of the Crespel time machine, with only a mouse (a seasoned time traveller) for company, Ridder experiences the first stages of the trip in the form of fragmentary glimpses of the seashore where a year ago he had been swimming with Catrine, the girl he loved. The sensation is disturbingly non-continuous, and as Ridder finds himself reliving a seemingly random series of moments from different stages of his life, both he and the specialists begin to realise that the experiment has gone wrong. Despite brief reappearances in the time-sphere, Ridder is snatched back into the arbitrary encounters with past events, too quickly on each occasion for him to be rescued. Slowly the potent reality of the disordered months that led to Catrine's death and his own suicide attempt takes a renewed grip on him, and the present ceases to be of importance: once more, he meets Catrine for the first time working as a temporary typist in his office, once more her oblique and morbid philosophies both attract and depress him, once more they go for a catastrophic holiday in Glasgow, and once more he is interrogated about the gas fire that caused her death, for which he once more blames himself. Finally,

he again shoots himself ineptly in the heart and the shock breaks open the trap in which he has been caught; as the specialists leave their testing-chamber, convinced that Ridder is irretrievable, they find him lying in the grass outside.

Since the only form of time-travel, apart from the cinema, commonly available to us is our own memory, it is tempting to interpret *Je t'Aime, Je t'Aime* as the kind of yarn in which the key moments of a man's life are permitted to unreel before our eyes at the instant of death. Certainly there is room for the argument that the Claude-Catrine relationship is so beguiling in its own right that the rudimentary science fiction trappings are merely a pretext for the recollection process, and one could even go further and suggest that the plainly organic design of the time-sphere (a mixture of brain, heart and womb) is a metaphor for Ridder's own body into which his soul has been thrust like a condemned man into a gas chamber. The team of earnest and lugubrious scientists, however, gazing disconsolately at their unreliable hardware and resorting to frequent outbursts of their own unintelligible language, serve to contribute the vital Ouspenskian element to the film: the pathos of Ridder's predicament is that, like Ivan Osokin, he is aware that this is his second time around (although it could as easily be his thousandth), and that he will continue to be unable to change the course of his life—even that basically he doesn't want to change the events leading to his suicide attempt. As in Resnais' previous work, the flashbacks enable us to find out what kind of person the central character is while he is making his own reassessment; but more explicitly than other Resnais films, *Je t'Aime, Je t'Aime* is concerned less with personal reconciliation than with the struggle to define and come to terms with the process of time, which robs one of experience even as one enjoys it. Much of the work of Resnais' scriptwriter Jacques Sternberg, like his novel *Sexualis '95* or perhaps his best-known short *La Brûlure de Mille Soleils*, is concerned with ritualised repetition, with conventional behaviour upended the better to examine it, and with an obsessive pursuit of an unusually ideal woman. Here, these elements are combined into the figure of Catrine, whose suppositions that, for example, we are all allergic to the colour green or that man was created specifically to be the servant of cats, reinforce Ridder's Melvillean sense that the universe was designed to support more vital pursuits than pen-pushing. It is Catrine, with her talk of laws suspended, of interrupted sleep, of imminent death, to whom Ridder returns when he surfaces from the sea (a multiple resurrection dripping with implications), and it is Catrine—with much the same casual power as when she pours water over a beetle—who drives him back into the sea again. Hence the frequency with which they are seen wandering on the sands, hence the images of drowning that recur throughout the film, hence the characteristic submarine noise of the swimming shots that is heard again as Ridder shoots himself. Catrine, whom he likens to a beach at low tide (and who is first seen by us lounging rather awkwardly on the very edge of the sea), represents both the impulse and the interruption for the flow of his existence; although we are given little opportunity to get to know her well, the yearning repetition in the film's title is fully justified by her dominance of Ridder's otherwise purposeless life. Stemming from this is the parallel theme of the difficulty of keeping in touch with the world outside one's skull (another Melvillean concern). Ridder is constantly on the telephone, maintaining a tenuous contact with phenomena such as Catrine that are beyond his control; at one point he even talks to T.I.M.E. itself, droning on without attention to his banal remarks. It is no surprise that the most striking image in the film—and it has many that are memorable—is of a drowning man talking on the telephone. Resnais continues to have much to tell us, if he can only get through.

PHILIP STRICK

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