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**SPECIAL ISSUE
ALAIN RESNAIS'**

**LAST
YEAR
AT
MARIENBAD**



by Andre S. Labarthe and Jacques Rivette

§§ This interview deals almost exclusively with **LAST YEAR AT MARIENBAD**, Alain Resnais' second feature film. After an initial conversation with Resnais, we decided to pursue it together with Alain Robbe-Grillet, scenarist of this film.

And as **MARIENBAD** is a "sealed" work, without detail, in which all the elements are tightly linked, we have first of all questioned Alain Resnais about one of its most anecdotal aspects: the game --the confrontation of the two male characters, repeated several times.



A.R.: This is the only thing about which I can tell you nothing. I have never played it. It seems to be a very old game: the Chinese played it, 3000 years B.C. It was the game of Nim, of which Robbe-Grillet has invented a variation without knowing its existence.

§§ But it's not a game, actually. It's a trap.

A.R.: Certainly.

§§ The beginning determines everything; if the two players are equally matched, the one who makes the first move loses.

A.R.: As far as I'm concerned, I believe that when Albertazzi loses he does so lucidly and willingly...perhaps in an off-hand way. X is, moreover, a very complex character - what I mean is that he has moods of violent wilfulness, of obstinacy, followed without transition by moods of discouragement.

§§ What is the secret relationship of the game to the film?

A.R.: I believe it is the constant necessity of making a decision. And, at the same time, while the characters are playing, it may be that they are taking "time out" before deciding something. Besides, it may all be in the woman's mind; on the verge of making a decision, she gathers together all of the elements in thirty seconds. I don't think there are any other relationships, except insofar as there is a cyclic recurrence of problems - which would rather correspond to the development of a musical theme and to the obsessive nature of dreams. **MARIENBAD** is a film which, for my part, presents neither allegory nor symbol.

§§ But there are possibilities for symbols.

A.R.: Yes, of course, we may think of the myth of the Grail or of something else. But the film is open to all myths. If, for example, you set up ten cages for it, based on mythology or realism, you will arrive at a solution that would be true for 60% or 80% of the film, but never for the whole thing.

One of the approaches which interests me is the idea of parallel universes. It is very possible that all the characters were right. This isn't something which was deliberately organized...here, we should talk about "automatic writing" again. It isn't because Robbe-Grillet has an extremely precise style and exceedingly clear vision that we must reject "automatism". His manner of working often makes me think of the Douanier Rousseau, who used to begin a canvas in the left-hand corner, filling in all the details and finishing-up in the right hand corner. Here's something amusing enough about the film: we had to begin by setting up landmarks, I don't mean without knowing how it was going to end - but, in any case, the last pages were hardly typed when we began shooting. The important thing was to remain faithful at all times to a sort of intuition. It was the genre of film about which you can say, 'After the shooting, there are going to be twenty-five montage solutions'. Not at all: we fell back, exactly, on the combinations as foreseen.

This is why Robbe-Grillet and I both feel very much outside of the film and look at it as a 'thing'. We wanted to set in motion a mechanism different from the traditional spectacle, a kind of a contemplation, a meditation, by hovering around the subject. We wanted to feel somewhat as if we were in front of a piece of sculpture which you look at first from angle, then from some other, from which you withdraw, to which you come closer again.

§§ But even so, there is a resistance by the material itself, in Film which must be overcome.

A.R.: Yes. For me, the film is an 'exploratory' in several ways, in order to know which is a dead-end and which, on the other hand, is a path. It is certain that both are in the film at the same time. Right now, I confess to being still too close to it to see it with any perspective. Every morning, I read what people write to me, and I notice that they speak of a work that is cold, like Mallarmé, or else they say it is passionate and tender. Here you have two kinds of diametrically opposed reactions. This doesn't get me very far! It is quite possible that both reactions are real ones, this may be a mirror-film.

§§ It is not a question of making an exegesis of the film, but isn't there a trap in the idea of guiding the spectator, who is in the present towards the past or the future? Seeing it again, we had the impression that it was concerned with the relationships between the real and the imaginary, rather than with time.

A.R.: It is a film about greater and lesser degrees of reality. There are moments when the 'reality' is completely invented, or interior, as when the image corresponds to the conversations. The interior monolog is never on the sound track, it is always in the image, which, even when it represents the past, always corresponds to what is present in the character's mind. What is presented as present or past is thus simply a thing which is unfolded while the character speaks. For instance, I was talking the other day with a girl who had just come back from India, and all of a sudden I saw her in front of the temple at Angkor wearing a blue dress, and yet she had never gone to Angkor and the blue dress was simply the one she was wearing at the time, as I saw her.

§§ One aspect of the film is very open to interpretation. For example, when Robbe-Grillet summarizes it, it is from the point of view of the man who suggests a past to the woman...

A.R.: That's right. If we take Truffaut's formula, 'Any film must be able to be recapitulated in one word', I want very much for people to say: **LAST YEAR AT MARIENBAD** or 'persuasion'. It's a solution. But there are others.



§§ You can also look at the film as if the past were real; the woman has a block against it, and the man is somewhat in the position of playing a psychiatrist - forcing the woman to accept a deliberately repressed past.

A.R.: In any case, this is the sense in which I conceived the mise-en-scene. There is also the use of psychoanalytic themes, consciously introduced; for example, the rooms - too large - which indicates a tendency to narcissism. At one point, Albertazzi hears gun shots, which signify sexual impotence; I cut them from the final print, because this didn't correspond to my idea of the character. But perhaps I took them out because I know very well their psychoanalytical implication?

§§ The moments of tension between him and her correspond to moments of tension between the patient and the psychoanalyst.

A.R.: Towards the end, I don't know if you remember that scene in which the man has his hand against the door, after the hypothetical sequence of death, when she imagines that if she were to leave she would be killed, etc. When she says, as if in despair, 'But I have never stayed so long anywhere', this gives me the feeling, above all by her tone of voice, of a total acquiescence; therefore the thing is real. Now, it is also attractive to make her an invalid. First of all, the hotel itself has a odd look. Moreover, there is a line which has always intrigued me, it's when Sacha Pitoeff says to the woman as she is stretched out on the bed, 'You must rest. Don't forget that's what we're here for'. I am always reminded of CALIGARI, of the end, when the doctor says, 'Yes, he is going to calm down. I shall cure him'. It seems to me that this is something on the same order. Perhaps the hotel is only a clinic.

§§ There is another interpretation, with which you seemed to agree: that Albertazzi is Death.

A.R.: At the end, Robbe-Grillet thought of the phrase 'granite flagstone', and he realized that, after all, the description of the garden corresponded pretty closely to that of a cemetery. Going on from there, he came to the conclusion that one might very well make a connection between the film and the old Breton legends of Death, who came looking for his victims to whom he had given a year of reprieve. But we never tried to limit the story in a strict sense, always retaining an ambiguity.

§§ There is never an "absolute" real or "absolute" imaginary.

A.R.: It seems that in the first quarter of the film, there are things which have a pretty high degree of reality; we stray further and further from it as the film unfolds, and it is possible that at the end, suddenly, everything is set so as to converge and the end of the film is what is most real. It needs to be studied very closely.

§§ With a big climax in the middle, when she recognizes the statue.

A.R.: Yes, when she discovers the garden and realizes that it is, after all, simply the place where they happen to be - which poses all the problems of the film's chronology.

§§ There is a moment when she feels trapped: when she laces her shoe?

A.R.: Exactly. From this moment on, we may consider her to have remembered. If, by chance, she is sincere at the beginning, if her refusal is truly not pure coquetry or fear, from this moment on, she has recognized. For her, it is true. But, of course, we never know if the images are in the man's mind or in the woman's. There is always a fluctuation between the two. We may imagine that, basically, everything is told from her point of view. Several spectators have told me that this woman doesn't exist, that she has been dead for a long time, that everything takes place among dead people. But these are things one thinks about after the film is completed, not at all during the shooting, not even during the editing.

§§ What guided you in the organization of this material, which you wanted to keep light and soft? Was it a feeling of affinity between themes, images? Internal rhymes?

A.R.: Interestingly enough, I was not the only one to be guided. During the shooting, there was no discussion, either among the actors or the crew. At several points, we would say: 'we may be able to do this or that'. We talked a little before shooting a scene; we would say, 'this is in the tone of the film; that isn't'. And this type of discussion never lasted more

than forty seconds. We were all obliged to follow a path from which we couldn't escape. It was a unifying element between the film and the crew. We were in a sense prisoners, not of a logic but of a paralogic which kept us in constant agreement, from the cameraman Philippe Brun to Sacha Vierny (our director of photography) or to Albertazzi. It would be instructive if we had kept a diary of the correspondences in the choice of locations and actors. There was any number of very bizarre things, phenomena which would have delighted Andre Breton or Jean Cocteau and which occurred very frequently. I have the feeling that the form must have pre-existed, I know neither where nor how, and that automatically, when it was written, the story must have slipped into the mould. Each time I've made a film, whether it was in 16mm or in 35mm, I have noticed that it is impossible to insist on any gestures, no matter what character it is, or make them say anything, no matter what it happens to be.

There was a moment, during the preparation for *MARIENBAD*, when I arrived with my little black notebook and suggested to Robbe-Grillet that we introduce the real world in the form of conversations about an insoluble political problem - at least, insoluble to those who were talking about it. We came to the conclusion that it would be the spectators themselves who, while watching the film, would naturally represent the real world and thus it was impossible to include them in advance. I also wanted, at one point, the woman to be pregnant; I talked to Robbe-Grillet about it, but it was hardly feasible. We weren't free. Moreover, I am convinced that we don't make our own films.

For me the film is also an attempt, still very crude and primitive, to approach the complexity of thought and its mechanism. But I stress the fact that this is only a tiny step forward by comparison with what we should be able to do someday. I find that as soon as we delve into the Unconscious, an emotion may be born. For example, I remember how I felt while watching *LE JOUR SE LEVE*, when there were sudden moments of incertitude, when the image of the wardrobe begins to disappear, then another image materializes. I believe that, in life, we don't think chronologically, that our decisions never correspond to an ordered logic. All of us have 'clouds', things which determine us but which are not a logical succession of acts arranged in perfect sequence. I am interested in exploring that universe, from the point of view of truth, if not of morality.

§§ There is the danger of falling into a trap, rather like the one spoken of by Paulhan with respect to language: what we conceive to be the height of liberty risks being received by someone else as the height of arbitrariness.

A.R.: This is the problem in all communication, whether between two people or ten million. One must know to what extent one can share one's subjective reality with "everyone", in the sense that we all have two eyes, hair, a thought, etc. One arrives quite naturally at the notion of a planetary Unconscious. What tempts me and always interests me would be the application of somewhat different disciplines than you find in contemporary films. It's a curiosity I have. There is a notion which pleases me very much, in the cinema, and that is the idea of popularization. A book or a painting, first of all, is seen by a thousand people, while a film reaches millions right away. In this light, it is interesting to recall the experience of a writer in 1880 or a painter known only to a few initiates. I am against sectarianism, and any attempt to shatter its walls seduces me *a priori*. In any case, even if we wanted to redo exactly the same thing which has already been done, the chemistry of the cinema is different. Certainly when Van Gogh amuses himself by copying Delacroix, or Picasso Velasquez, we have a new picture. But the cinema is something of a bull-in-the-china-shop, with its concrete images. Its style is rather pachydermous. The old duality of Lumiere and Melies is still with us. Between these two possibilities, we oscillate and sometimes get stuck. If we take *LOLA*, for example, it is Lumiere or is it Melies?

When I see a film, I am more interested in the play of feelings than by the characters. I think we could arrive at a Cinema without psychologically definite characters, in which the feelings would have free play in the way that, in a contemporary canvas, the play of forms becomes stronger than the anecdote.

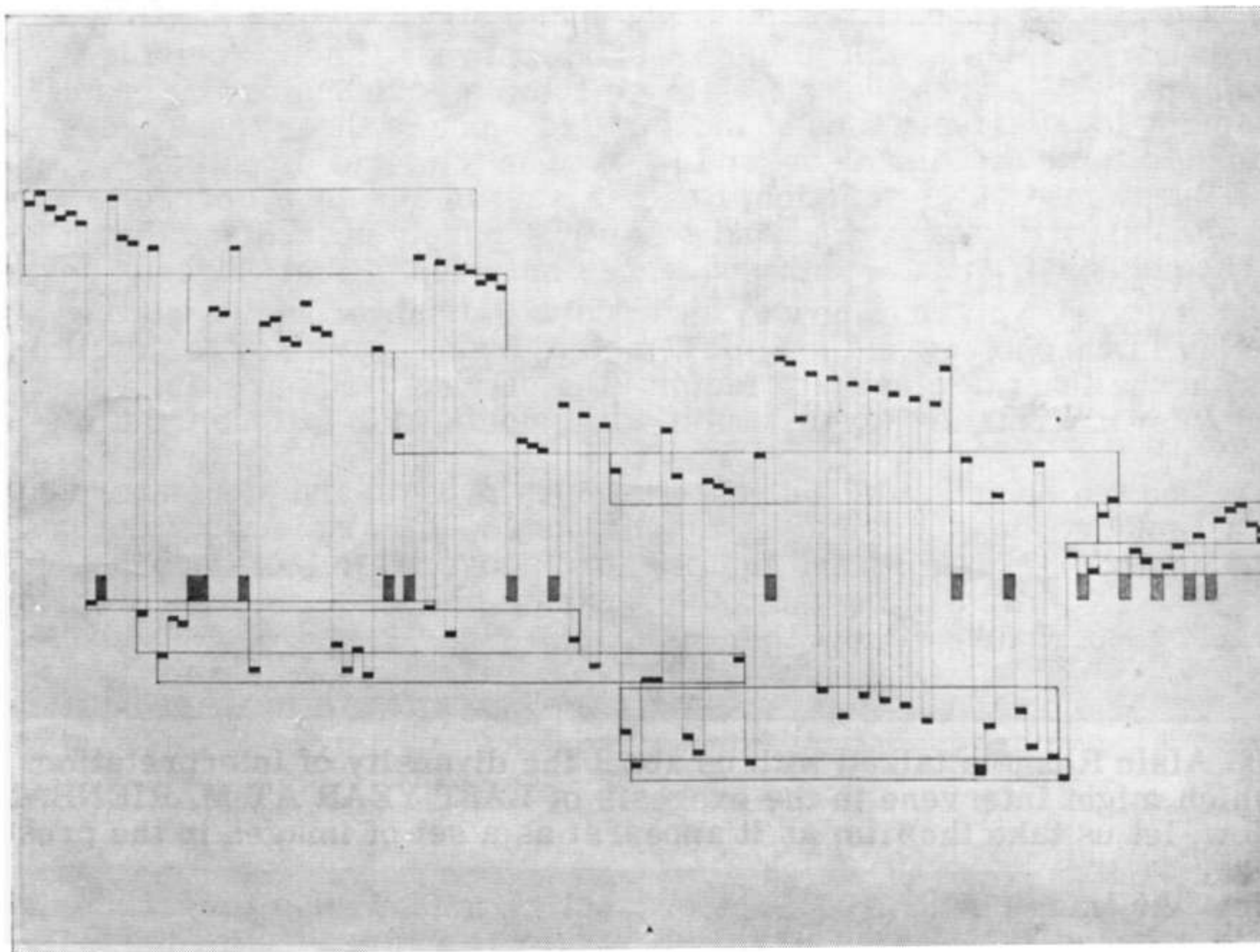
§§ What is terrifying, is the position which Rene Clair pushes to the absurd when he says, 'Shooting is only work'.

A.R.: For me, shooting is elucidation. I'll admit that I do make sketches beforehand, but it's for my peace of mind.

§§ While shooting, what is your attitude toward these sketches?

A.R.: I keep looking at them. It helps my relationships with the actors, with the photographer, with the camera operator. These sketches save the actors from getting panicky eight or ten days before shooting starts. If he has read the shooting script and has a clear idea of it, and I suddenly, in the midst of shooting, place him in a position or set-up which he hasn't anticipated he is going to worry. And as I like everyone to be as relaxed as possible on set, I prefer arguments to be over before the shooting. I'm in favor of rehearsing the entire film before shooting begins.

For MARIENBAD, we made a complete chronology on graph paper.



And we always said, before beginning any scene with the actors: 'This scene follows, on the level of the montage, such and such a scene, but in terms of its degree of reality, it follows another scene which will appear much later in the film'. Moreover, very often, I would film a bit from the preceding scene, in order to work from the continuity and not from the cue itself. Of course, this chronology was established once the scenario was finished. For example, all costume changes naturally correspond to different pieces of time. This is certainly not the key to the film, if indeed there is one. But it is true that we could re-edit the film so as to restore the chronological order of the scenes. We might imagine, for example, that the film extends over a week, or at least that everything which is in the present takes from Sunday to Sunday inclusive. Which doesn't keep Robbe-Grillet from saying: 'Perhaps it happens in five minutes'. This is consistent with the dilatation of time in dreams, insofar as we understand the mechanism of dreams.

§§ Your montage is, in a certain sense, the modern version of 'montage of attractions'. For Pudovkin, the shots were the words of the line; for Eisenstein, each shot remained as a living element in itself.

A.R.: Eisenstein is much closer to the 'meeting of the umbrella and the sewing machine on the dissecting table'. And, to the extent that I am still very much aware of the Surrealist discipline, I feel much closer to Eisenstein's conceptions. Each shot has its own life.

§§ There is a feeling of great humility before each element, whether it is real or part of an oeuvre, which must preserve its organic life and at the same time become part of an ensemble.

A.R.: Even when it concerns an element of the decor, I would prefer not to transform it to suit the camera. It's up to the camera to find the right way to present the decor, it's not for the decor to conform to the camera. The same thing holds true for the actor. I have had an enormous respect for an actor's work. The shooting schedule is never altered to suit an actor's mental state, whereas a sunny or rainy day will call for changes.

§§ We suspect that despite the tightness of the script and the rigidity of the cutting, the filming of *LAST YEAR AT MARIENBAD* was not accomplished (if the story be properly told) without "ruses" on the part of its director. It was really a question of grabbing the film by one end, completing it at the other, and, between times, "driving the camera". The previously mentioned complete chronology on graph paper was, precisely, one of those ruses - one of those traps - destined to tame the film in order to lead it in the right direction.

§§ Questioned on its function, Resnais was, in any case, forced to admit his inability to inform us. And so we just barely understand that it concerns an organization of sequences in terms of their diverse degrees of reality. If you know how to look you will discover in this picture an essay in chronology and may be tempted to see in it a key to the film or, at the least, a clarifying factor: the playing cards are finally set in order. A patently absurd enterprise, dommed to failure from the start

§§ The true interest of the graph is more prosaic and more anecdotal. It is a chart for studio use; today completed, its mission is: to order the choice of costumes and lighting, and above all to facilitate the actors' work while helping them to give their playing a coherence which would be perhaps, without this, missing.

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§§ Alain Resnais talked with us about the diversity of interpretations which might intervene in the exegesis of *LAST YEAR AT MARIENBAD*. Now, let us take the film as it appears: as a set of images in the present.

Robbe-Grillet: An image is always in the present. I remember a time when the idea of "past" was introduced by a halo-- a halo which often persisted during the entire sequence in the past. But we came back very quickly to retaining the same image for the present and for the past -- that is to say, to admitting that everything is, at any rate, of the present.

Alain Resnais: You say, "we came back very quickly". It wasn't so very rapid. The first absolutely typical example of an introduction of the past into the present, with entirely clean images and without any recourse to the chain dissolve or to some bit of music to indicate that we are going backwards, I believe (all the same) is in *ORPHEUS*, when Roger Blin makes his deposition to the police commissioner and declares that such-and-such things happened. At this moment, we see an image from this past, then the conversation in the office picks up again in the exact same manner. I have a strong feeling that it is Jean Cocteau who utilized this procedure for the first time in so precise a way.

§§ -- Already, in *HIROSHIMA, MON AMOUR*, it seemed that the flashback was no longer used strictly for dramatic ends. The profusion of images that it engendered considerably submerged its dramatic function.

A.R.G.: Yes, but in *HIROSHIMA* the spectator was able, even so, after the first shock, to place the scene in a chronology of the story. There were certainly images about which one didn't understand at first that they belonged to the past. For example, the frame showing the German soldier's corpse. Its shock value is complete but evidently the spectator, scrupulously looking for "significance", could always say to himself later: oh yes, it's because she was thinking back to the death of her first lover. It is this species of mental realism that we are looking for: she sees the Japanese on the bed, and then --all at once --she sees the dead German. There are two images, one is exterior to her, the other is interior. But at the moment when she sees them in the same way, so to speak, it is right that the camera be able to render them in the same present tense.



A.R.: To sum it up, it is a victory for realism. In any case, it is a gain for realism. Certainly the old rhetoric which consisted of introducing the past by means of a "sign" has, in any case, if we can judge it, no more *raison d'être* than another. Experience it: you talk for a quarter-hour with someone. Then you stop, and you say to him, "You've seen what happened. We are here, in a restaurant, eating. I spoke to you about the sea, about vacations. If I had to describe this 15 minutes out of our lives, what would be the most realistic way?"

Would it be to show the two of us eating in this restaurant, or rather to show the beach with the waves we spoke of? Or even to show all of that, not by the way we spoke of it, but by showing the images that were in our minds at that moment: the ones that corresponded, those which interfered, even the contradictory ones?"

A.R.G.: We can see that this is contrary to an established custom, to a rhetoric accepted by the public; this is not functionally linked to the mechanism of the human spirit. It is linked to an artistic order, to the romantic if you will, but not at all to a mental order. It is not at all to and for reasons of truth--human truth--that we introduced the past with an explicit reference to the past, that we show the restaurant rather than the waves, in the you evoke. It is strictly a convention; I will say pure formalism.

A.R.: Now, I have scruples. You must not say that this was never done. I am thinking of *STORM OVER ASIA* which I saw about seventeen years ago. At a certain point you see the big capitalist in a dining-car, thrusting his hands forward. You see a hand with three big fingers and, immediately after, we cut to a frame which shows three submarines which make practically the same movements as the fingers. Then the conversation picks up at the place where it left off.

A.R.G.: Yes, of course, but what is a bit different in *MARIENBAD* and which risks being disconcerting, is simply generalization: this mechanism was accepted not as an infraction of the rule but, on the contrary, as a general order of thought completely conceivable. When we say that reality is just as much what we have in our minds as we see before our eyes, we lay the foundation for a cinematographic image which would sometimes show what is in front of us, like this tape recorder we are using now, sometimes what we are talking about, sometimes images which are more or less intermediate, between what we both know, what is in your mind, what I have in mine, etc. In this way, film is still a convention but is to a certain extent more realistic than the convention which would consist in systematically keeping to a single category of reality.

A.R.: Moreover, if we take a very close look at *MARIENBAD*, we will see that certain images are equivocal, that their degree of reality is doubtful. But there are images whose falseness is much cleaner and lying images which in my opinion are completely evident. You mustn't believe that we amused ourselves by saying while shooting: the spectator will unravel it.

A.R.G.: The use of the decor itself is a good example. At the moment when the room has an extraordinary, complicated-baroque decor, when the walls are laden with incredible pastry volutes, we are probably in the presence of a more "doubtful" image. In the same way, when the heroine takes 300 identical photographs out of a drawer, it is an image which begins to be extremely irrational and which must be much more mental than objective. Perhaps, if we had been obliged to speak of a strictly objective reality, she only took out one photo at that moment; but she saw three hundred. Without our being ourselves always able, moreover, to give a unique and definite interpretation of the intentions of each image.

§§ Certainly what is first of all striking, on seeing *MARIENBAD*, is that the film presents itself to us like an object which requires all of our faculty for comprehension and for seeing the moral of a fable. Like any fragment of reality.

A.R.G.: It is entirely a question of knowing whether the uncertainty which is attached to the film's images is exaggerated when compared to what surrounds us in daily life, or if it is rather of the same order. For my part, I have the impression that things really happen this way. The question, for these people, is that of an adventure of the passions, and these are exactly the adventures which contain the greatest proportion of contradictions, of doubts, of phantazms. *MARIENBAD* as a story is as opaque as the way we live our crises of passion, our loves, all of our affective lives. Consequently, to reproach the film for not being clear is to reproach human passions for always being a bit opaque.

§§ The word risks a misunderstanding. For, finally if MARIENBAD appears "opaque" to us, it is not because you are willingly using certain fragments which might furnish us with a clear idea of the film.

A.R.G.: Exactly. We show everything, but these are things which are not resolved by a simple explanation. What is amusing is that people very willingly admit to meeting, in their lives, so many irrational and ambiguous real elements and that these same people complain when they meet them in works of art, as well, in novels or films, which supposedly should present something more reassuring than the "real world". As if the work were made to explain the world, in order to reassure man about the world. I do not believe, not at all, that art is made in order to reassure. If the world is really so complex, what is needed is to find its complexity again. Again by attention to realism. But we should go further than that. If we don't, we seem to suppose that reality exists outside of the work and even that isn't all sure. A work is a kind of consciousness. Just as, in life, the world doesn't exist at all without the consciousness which perceives it, the same goes for the work of art. The things told about do not truly exist outside of the tale.

§§ With relation to this, we have heard the reproach of "formalism" made several times about the film.

A.R.G.: Very curiously, the people who reproach MARIENBAD for being "contrived" are those who accept as spontaneous works which respect fixed rules of contrivance, recipes, norms. And these people reason as if there were a previously existent reality and as if it were no more than a question of finding the forms which would make a good understanding of the story available to the public. For us, on the contrary, the anecdote is nothing outside of the fashion in which it is told. Moreover, the genesis of the film clarifies this very well. When I met Alain Resnais and we had our first talk, it turned out that we had cinematographic forms of the same genre in mind. I knew that all the cinema ideas I might have would agree in some manner with what Resnais wanted to do at that moment. It happened that he wanted to make the kind of a film about which I myself was thinking. I didn't really write four scripts in three days for Resnais, but I wrote four page-and-a-half outlines that I'd doubtless had in mind for a long time.

A.R.: When I had finished reading Robbe-Grillet's work, I said to myself: There is already a film which we clearly made together, that is TOUTE LA MEMOIRE DU MONDE.

A.R.G.: Which doesn't keep us from having different views, each of us, of the ensemble of his films or of the ensemble of my writings. But it happens that there was a world common to the two of us, which was inhabitable for one as for the other. It was not a question of a compromise between Resnais and me, but of a common form which would function in the same way for both of us, even though we might not attach the same importance to each detail.

A.R.: For example, we don't have the same tastes at all and we would violently oppose each other - about a book, about a film, about a way of life ...

A.R.G.: At each instant, in spite of that, we had the same intuitions. For example, I was describing a camera movement and Resnais said to me, "It doesn't matter - that's the movement I would have chosen in any case." Moreover, it is still possible that MARIENBAD is not at all the same film for Resnais and for me. In the same way doubtless we each see the real world differently, the same world around us.

§§ We may perhaps shock you, but when we saw MARIENBAD we thought of the book by Bioy Casares: "Morel's Invention".

A.R.G.: Not at all. I've practically always been disappointed by the S.F. books I was able to read, but "Morel's Invention" is, on the contrary, an astounding science fiction book. And a curious thing...I had a telephone call from Claude Oller, after MARIENBAD was shown, who said to me, "But it's 'Morel's Invention'!"

A.R.: I'm in a bad position for talking about this, because I don't know the book.

§§ It's a novel written in the first person and based on the myth of the total cinema. The narrator finds himself on an island where a machine is running, set up 20 years previously, which reproduces in their three dimensions the events

registered by it. You understand, these 3-D images mix with the real world to the point of being impossible to distinguish the one from the other. Like certain frames of **MARIENBAD**, the objects are thus subject to suspicion - they are there, but are they really? That's the whole problem.



A.R.: The relationship to **MARIENBAD** is, in effect, striking. But we've often had surprises like this. I remember the first scene we had projected. It was the sequence with the young woman, full sunlight, the length of the balustrade, behind the statue. When the lights were turned on afterward, I said to myself, "It's amusing, we are plainly in Feuillade's *feuilletons*".

A.R.G.: And I myself described the shot without even knowing these articles. I haven't read the *Fantomas* stories, or so little...

§§ Actually, we thought of Feuillade, too, but at the point when the balustrade collapses.

A.R.G.: This image, however, is one of those which figured in the scenario. And I couldn't have been influenced, as you see.

A.R.: It's a deceitful image. When we were shooting I remember having told Albertazzi to leap over the balustrade "like Arsene Lupin". That was the mood. And, in my opinion, it's justified, for, in the sense that it is a future image projected, doubtless, by the young woman's anguish, it's completely normal that she appeal, in such circumstances, to traditions from popular novels. That sort of happens by itself.

A.R.G.: At that point the young woman says, moreover, "Disappear, I beg of you, if you love me!", which is enough indication of the degree of "theatricality" of the scene!

A.R.: Which makes me regret all the more not having filmed "*Fantomas*".

§§ These coincidences tend to confirm some ideas clear and dear to Andre Malraux, according to which art would be nourished by and live on art.

A.R.G.: I believe that reality is what nourishes the artist, directly, and that if art interests us deeply it is because we find in it things we want to do under the influence of emotions entirely caused by the real world. I don't believe we really live on art, at the moment of creation.

§§ Then you are opposed to Malraux's theory?

A.R.: Personally, I am for Malraux's theory. I believe that the desire to participate in the universe of art exists very strongly. It is in other respects not incompatible with what Robbe-Grillet says.

A.R.G.: Shock is produced by the world and art is only a recollection. An illumination, perhaps. If I like Kafka's work, for example, it's really because I recognize in it the fashion in which I saw the world around me; it was as if I understood it before reading it. When a film image is striking to me, it is always because I recognize in it an experience as I lived it. If not, communication wouldn't be possible. Every work of art would become uniquely subjective and absolutely without any possible chance for contact with anyone.

A.R.: With respect to this, here is an anecdote which was interesting for me. I received, several years ago, a letter from a woman who said in substance, "Oh, I saw your short film VAN GOGH...what a marvelous picture, and what great trips you must have made in order to film all those places". That lady had a memory of the film which was simultaneously Van Gogh's canvases and real landscapes.

§§ Coming back to MARIENBAD, there is a curious phenomenon. One might just as well say, "It's a film by Resnais," or, "It's a film by Robbe-Grillet." On the other hand, it's no secret that there are several minimal differences between the very precise cutting scheme of the film and the result.

A.R.G.: In the scenario as I handed it to Resnais, there were already numerous indications as to the framing, camera movements, montage. But I had no idea of the technical terms which are used in film making, nor of its real possibilities. I described a film as I saw it in my imagination, and in perfectly naive language.

A.R.: Not at all. In any case, it was very precise. There was even the guile of an old hand!



§§ In any case, the dissolve-insofar as it transforms duration-is indispensable in MARIENBAD. Moreover, can we reasonably affirm that the story unfolds in 8 days, in 24 hours, or in the actual running time of the film?

A.R.G.: We can say that the only time is the film's time...that there is no reality outside of the film. You see everything. Nothing is hidden and you mustn't believe that the film lasts an hour-and-a-half and thus recapitulates a longer time - 2 hours, 2 days or a week. I wouldn't say that about Clouzot's THE TRUTH, for example, where you have the impression that there is another time, more real than the film's. For MARIENBAD, I don't even see another possibility. All other durations depend on the interpretation and only limit it. What leaves it intact is the statement that the story lasts an hour-and-a-half.

§§ There is a shot that surprised us and surprises us still more now that we know that all the sequences of the film and their continuity were anticipated by Robbe-Grillet on paper. This is the over-exposed tracking shot which ends with the repetition of the of its final portion. It is difficult for us to imagine that such a shot could have been foreseen.

A.R.: That's precisely one of those rare shots which was not foreseen at the beginning.

A.R.G.: There, Resnais knew he wasn't going to shoot what was in the scenario. He told me. That was the point of friction between us! Resnais knew that, for several seconds, there would be some other thing.

A.R.: And this other thing, I had the idea of it occur to me a couple of weeks before the shooting, or a little more.

A.R.G.: There is another passage that I didn't anticipate, but this one I should have found by myself, for I recognize it absolutely: it's the series of shots where you see Delphine Seyrig sit down on the bed in diverse ways, on the right and on the left, successively. This is the kind of thing that makes me suffer for having not invented!

§§ What was your feeling on seeing the film for the first time?

A.R.G.: I didn't believe it would be so beautiful. I recognized it completely, of course, but at the same time it had become quite marvelous. Basically, everything had been seen for in advance and everything had to be done. It isn't true that you can describe an image as it will be. It's at the moment that it is realized that you give it an existence.

A.R.: If I was able to prepare the shooting-script for the film in two-and-a-half days, it's really because everything was scrupulously prepared by Robbe-Grillet.

A.R.G.: It is nonetheless true that, even if a frame is described beforehand it remains to be realized. It is clear that the film wouldn't have been the same had it been given to another director or to an electronic robot. My descriptions weren't meant to be followed to the letter, but, once more, to be "realized".

A.R.: In the same way that it was necessary to "realize" the statue in the park.

A.R.G.: We can imagine that MARIENBAD is a documentary about a statue. With interpretive take-offs on the gestures and the return, each time, to the gestures themselves, just as they stand, frozen in sculpture. Imagine a documentary that would succeed, with a statue of two people, by uniting a series of views taken from diverse angles and with the help of diverse camera movements, in telling in this way a whole story. And at the end you would see that you had come back to the point of departure, to the statue itself.

§§ In this sense all your books are documentaries, and it is because they are documentaries that they are fantastic. So that the father of the fantastic would not be Melies but Lumiere.

A.R.: The fantastic is thus, in any case, much stronger. The most fantastic moments in NOSFERATU, for example, are "real" moments. There's no doubt about it.

A.R.G.: But, in MARIENBAD, the important phenomenon is always the basic lack of substance at the heart of this reality. In MARIENBAD, what is chimerical is "last year". What happened -- if something did happen once upon a time--constantly produces sort of a gap in the story. In the way that the principal character in "Jealousy" is only a deep emptiness, as the principal act (the murder) is a blank in "Le Voyeur". Everything, up to the 'hole', is told - then told again after the hole - and we try to reconcile the two edges in order to make this annoying emptiness disappear. But what happens is the exact opposite: it's the emptiness that overruns, that fills everything. In MARIENBAD, at first we believe that there was no last year and then we notice that last year has crept in everywhere: there you have it, entirely. In the same way we believe that there was no MARIENBAD (the place, i.e.), and then we realize we're at home there from the beginning. The event refused by the young woman has, at the end, contaminated everything. So much so

§§§§§§ HENRI COLPI on LAST YEAR AT MARIENBAD.....

When Henri Colpi and Jasmine Chasney (editors of Resnais' HIROSHIMA, MON AMOUR and close personal friends of the director), editors of MARIENBAD visited New York recently, the editors were fortunate enough to meet this engaging young couple (in private life M. and Mme. Colpi) and speak with them at length, quite informally, about various aspects of working on the production.

M. Colpi is the director of UNE AUSSI LONGUE ABSENCE which, in 1961, shared with Bunuel's VIRIDIANA, the coveted Palme D'Or at the Cannes Film Festival.

While M. Colpi had been asked many times in Europe for his comments on the editing of MARIENBAD, heretofore he had declined; however, being in New York gave M. Colpi the refreshing perspective of distance, and while he makes no attempt to 'explain' MARIENBAD in the following statement, what he has to say is most interesting and important to this special issue devoted to the film.

* * * * *

What shall I tell you about the editing of MARIENBAD?

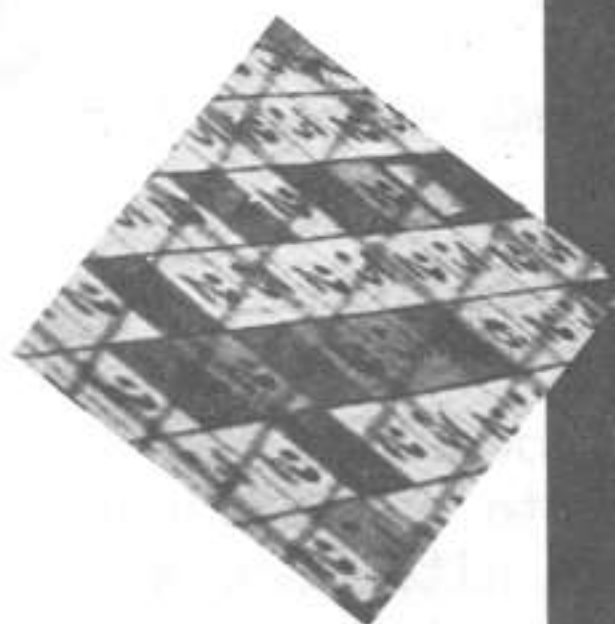
Jasmine Chasney and I started to work on the montage in December of 1960 and finished in April, 1961. Four months of work. The first thing you should know about the editing of a film by Alain Resnais is that the labor in the cutting room does not begin with the breakdown of the first day's shooting but, quite the contrary, every foot of film remains untouched until the entire film has been shot. This method implies a great self-assurance in the course of shooting, since no extra material or 'emergency' sequences are ever shot by Resnais, and this virtuoso method of working without cover indicates clearly that he has every intention of following the montage operation from A to Z.

And, in fact, Resnais is constantly in the cutting room. He is always the first to arrive...yet he never touches either the film or the viewer. He never interferes unless we ask...and we ask him about even the tiniest problem which may come up. In general, people regard our editing room as something much akin to a temple... a place where we work under extreme tensions, with an aura of 'genius-at-work' glowing about all; but, definitively, operations proceed in an atmosphere of the most congenial good humor.

MARIENBAD was so precisely and so diabolically thought-out by Robbe-Grillet and Resnais that the editing is an integral reflection of the shooting script, give or take two or three shots. The principal difficulty lay in determining the exact duration of each shot that was used.... how many frames here to convey the effect there, etc.

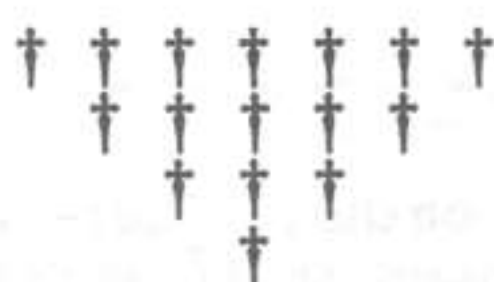
As for the sound montage, these operations were much more complex, and we allowed for a maximum of possibilities in view of the final phase -- the mixing of sound effects, music and dialogue...plus the all important narration. In our opinion, Jasmine Chasney and I regard MARIENBAD as the most perfectly mixed film we have ever seen in our career as editors. There isn't a single error, not one weakness on which the mixing can be called. Well, the sound has a great importance in MARIENBAD, which is meant to be an engulfing, obsessive film, and it succeeds...it is this: in effect, this is as much because of the sound as it is due to the images.

But what's the good of speaking at additional length about the montage of LAST YEAR AT MARIENBAD, really? This work, like that of the cameraman or the set designer, would not render an account of the thing that is of most profound interest in this film: its conception. To tell about thatthis would take pages and pages...



The Rules of the Game.....

Starting position:



The object of the game is to win. Only two can play. The only markers used may be matches of which 16 are required at the start. The above layout represents the set-up required to commence the game. In consecutive moves each participant is permitted to take-up as many, or as few, matches from any single line as he or she may desire, including the line with the single match. The player who is forced to confront the last remaining match has 'lost'. The Orphic variation, as originated in New York, may be played with shot glasses of Scotch rather than matches, with the contents imbibed by each participant, according to the move he, or she, makes. As the players successively pass-out, they may be arranged in the above diagramed position.



Alain Resnais Speaks at Random.....

"My favorite American musical?

That's SINGING IN THE RAIN."

(1)

"What I know about film has been learned from comic-strips as much as from cinema - the rules of cutting and editing are the same for the comics as for the cinema."

(2)

On cinema influences: "...surely, at the same time, in a certain way Buñuel, Cocteau's ORPHEUS, Atonioni, and Welles, and Eisenstein, Visconti. It's a bit ridiculous to evoke these names a propos my work...at bottom, one doesn't know. Very recently, on seeing Hitchcock's SUSPICION again (besides the fact that I liked it better than in 1944), I had the impression of seeing a shot that might have been literally copied in HIROSHIMA. If there has been an influence, it's simultaneously very precise and very subterranean. But how to really know?"

(3)

HIROSHIMA and MARIENBAD compared: "In both of these films there is the refusal of a chronological story in which the happenings are presented in apparently reasonable order. They both have in common the utilization of mental images as counterpoint to the conversation and dialogues. Finally, with MARIENBAD, this time it is again a question of a love story or, rather, a film about the uncertainties of love. MARIENBAD is addressed less to the intelligence than to the feelings."

(4)

"We may arrive at the same point by different paths. There are moments when things are in the air. Look at ZAZIE: there are ideas taken-up in this film that are so close to my own that I have the impression of having copied Louis Malle."

(5)

"While making MARIENBAD I thought of the public constantly...we wanted to try to appeal to a collective Unconscious by dealing with the conventional, well-known themes. These themes---classical---we find them again and again in popular novels and in fairy tales."

(6)

On language problems, particularly during the shooting of HIROSHIMA MON AMOUR: "Naturally, there were several difficulties springing from the differences of the languages...but what was a great help to us was the common language given to us by certain cinematic references. The entire crew knew ORPHEUS and swore by it. The film served as a sort of interpreter in our shooting in Japan, and when I wanted to get some precise thing which wasn't very well understood, I would translate it by referring to the language of ORPHEUS. The universal cinema language..."

(7)

(1) Premier Plan #18-Alain Resnais

(4) Le Monde-August 29, 1961

(2) Image et Son-February 1960

(5) Clarté-February 1961 (#33)

(3) Esprit-June 1960

(6) ibid.

(7) Cinema 59-#38-July 1959

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-----A FILMOGRAPHY OF ALAIN RESNAIS:

1945-1946:

SCHEMA d'UNE IDENTIFICATION
16mm. silent. 30 minutes. Print lost.

OUVERT POUR CAUSE d'INVENTAIRE
16mm. silent. 90 minutes. Print lost.

1946-1948:

Series of 16mm. silent films ranging in length from 10 to 30 minutes:
(B&W unless noted)

PORTRAIT d'HENRI GOETZ; VISITE a LUCIEN COUTAUD; VISITE a FÉLIX LABISSE;
VISITE a HANS HARTUNG; VISITE a CÉSAR DOMELA; JOURNÉE NATURELLE-A color
film dedicated to Max Ernst.; LA BAGUE-A mime drama with Marcel Marceau;
VISITE a OSCAR DOMINGUEZ.

1948:

VAN GOGH. Made at the request of Gaston Diehl and The Friends of Art.
First filmed in 16mm., it was blown-up to 35mm. The film was voted an
Academy Award in 1948. A sound film. B&W.

MALFRAY. 20 minutes. Filmed in 16mm. sound. Commissioned privately. B&W

1950:

GAUGUIN. 15 minutes. Filmed in 16mm. sound. B&W. Comm.: P. Braunberger.

L'ALCOOL TUE. 16mm. silent. 25 minutes. Visuals, text and editing by
Resnais. B&W.

GUERNICA. 15 minutes. B&W sound. Directed by Resnais and Robert Hessens
for Pierre Braunberger. Text by Paul Eluard.

1951:

LES STATUES MEURENT AUSSI. Directed by Resnais and Chris Marker in asso-
ciation with Chislain Cloquet. Commissioned by the magazine "Présence
Africaine" and André Tadié. 32 minutes. Banned by the French Government
in 1954, a cut version was released in Paris last year after Resnais &
Marker sadly agreed that better cut than not at all.

1955:

NUIT ET BROUILLARD. 30 minutes. Color-(Eastmancolor). Produced by Argos
and Como Films for le Comité d'Histoire de la Déportation.

1956:

TOUTE LA MEMOIRE DU MONDE. 22 minutes. B&W. Produced by Pierre Braun-
berger for France's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

1957:

LE MYSTÈRE de l'ATELIER 15. Resnais one of many contributors.

1958:

LE CHANT DU STYRENE. Color-(Eastmancolor). Cinemascope. Produced by P.
Braunberger for the Péchiney Plastics Company. 12 minutes.

1959:

HIROSHIMA MON AMOUR. Produced by Argos Films, Como Films, Pathé Overseas
Productions, Daiei Company. B&W. 91 minutes. Scenario & dialogue by
Marguerite Duras. Music by G. Fusco and G. Delerue. Edited by Henri
Colpi and Jasmine Chasney. Photography by Michio Takahashi(Japan) and
Sacha Vierny(France). Starring Emmanuelle Riva and Eiji Okada.

1960:

L'ANNEE DERNIERE A MARIENBAD--see data on Page 2. of this issue.

BIOGRAPHY

Alain Resnais was born on June 3, 1922 at Vannes, France. His astral sign is Gemini.



L'Année Dernière à Marienbad