

## Memories of the Future

7 december 2005

*Hiroshima mon amour* (Dir: Alain Resnais,  
France/Japan, 1959)  
Screenplay: Marguerite Duras  
Cinematography: Takahashi Michio (Japan), Sacha Vierny  
(France)  
Music: Giovanni Fusco

("I think that in a few years, in ten, twenty, or thirty years, we will know whether *Hiroshima mon amour* was the most important film since the war, the first modern film of sound cinema." – Eric Rohmer, *Cahiers du Cinema*, July 1959)



### Major themes:

#### Memory

- Flashback techniques
- Documentary footage and strange recreations
- The necessity and fear of "forgetting"
- Recreations of victims in Japanese film and in peace march

("Hiroshima mon amour opened the way for sophisticated games of time in mainstream cinema." - Peter Cowie, from commentary track on Criterion Collection DVD)

#### Place

- The city as a protagonist
- Linking of Nevers and Hiroshima through montage

("The way Resnais finally made it, *Hiroshima* turned out to be a film about the impossibility of making a documentary about Hiroshima." – John Francis Kriedl, *Alain Resnais*, 1978)

#### Repression

- Personal and global
- Impossibility of comprehension
- Faces turning away in hospital during opening sequence
- Sexual freedom emerges (as in Balchin, Green, Southern, etc.)

("Tu n'as rien vu à Hiroshima." – male character, *Hiroshima mon amour* opening scene)

### The body

- Skin (especially in opening shots)
- Hands
- Hair

### Water/rain

- Stream at Nevers vs. rain in Hiroshima's night sky
- Ambiguous use is another sort of game-playing

("It is the setting and the emblem of love, both as creation and destruction ... water is also the medium of love and sensuality in the past and present." - F. Sweet, *The Film Narratives of Alain Resnais*, 1981)

### Cycle of destruction and rebirth

- Riva's character must bury her tragedy and move on
- 1950's Hiroshima is modernized, rebuilt, ie: "Hotel New Hiroshima"
- Okada's character is an architect
- Hair growing back on Riva parallels Hiroshima being rebuilt

("Listen to me. I know something else. It will begin all over again. Two hundred thousand dead. Eighty thousand wounded. In nine seconds. These figures are official. It will begin all over again. It will be ten thousand degrees on the earth. Ten thousand suns, they will say. The asphalt will burn. Chaos will prevail. A whole city will be raised from the earth and fall back in ashes...." - female character, *HMA*)

### QUESTIONS:

- Does Resnais avoid cliché? How do we deal with places like Auschwitz, Hiroshima, the Cambodian killing fields, Rwanda, Bangladesh, etc. without forgetting about them, but without cheapening them?
- Is the approach of Resnais/Duras sophisticated, or is it just a cop-out? Is it wrong to personalize tragedy in an attempt to understand it or empathize?
- How can one personal loss even approach the magnitude of the Holocaust or Hiroshima?
- Can we appropriate the history of a physical place that is not our own and find meaning in it? Is there something inherently "false" about this?

("It's not my role to give explanations ... each spectator can find his own solution, and it will in all likelihood be a good one. But what's certain is that the solution won't be the same for everyone, meaning that my solution is of no more interest than that of any other viewer." -Alain Resnais, interview with François Chalais on *Cinepanorama*, 1961)

*La Jetée* (Dir: Chris Marker, France, 1962)

("La Jetée's fans insist that it's the finest science fiction film ever made .... It's no exaggeration, finally, to say that *La Jetée* may represent film's closest approach to poetry." - Bryant Frazer, Deep-focus.com)



### Themes

#### Memory (again)

- Clearly influenced by Resnais
- Use of stills is an alternate vision of mnemonic representation
- Collective memory of World War II

#### The jetty at Orly

- Symbol of technology
- A familiar, common memory
- Child's fascination with aircraft linked to death

#### Motion

- Linear motion vs. duration
- Still image vs. motion picture

#### QUESTION:

-Why does Marker use a familiar environment (Orly) in this story, and how is this provocation of the audience similar to what Resnais/Duras does in *Hiroshima mon amour*?

("The egoistic pleasure of watching by myself images pertaining to the unfathomable realm of Movieland very soon had a dialectical byproduct: when I couldn't even imagine having anything in common with the process of filmmaking (whose basic principles were naturally far beyond my comprehension), there something of the film itself was within my reach, pieces of celluloid that were not that different from the photographic negatives when they came back from the lab. Something I could touch and feel, something of the real world. And why couldn't I in turn *make* something of the same kind? All I needed was translucent material and the right measurements ... Of all my school buddies, Jonathan was the most prestigious; he was mechanically minded and quite inventive ... So it was natural that he was the first to whom I wished to show my masterwork. I was rather pleased with the result... Jonathan managed to get me sobered up: 'Movies are supposed to move, stupid,' he said. 'Nobody can do a movie with still images.'

Thirty years passed. Then I made *La Jetée*". - Chris Marker, *Film Quarterly*, Vol. 52, No. 1, Autumn 1998)