

A CLOSE READING OF
L'ANNEE DERNIERE A MARIENBAD

BY ALAIN ROBBE-GRILLET

By

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B.A., The University of British Columbia, 1983

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
(Department of French)

We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

April, 1987

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ABSTRACT

L'Année Dernière à Marienbad is a narrative film which plays with Appearance and Reality in a baroque fashion. This thesis is an attempt to come to terms with the Marienbad world view. In the introduction are discussed the arguments against the film as expressed by Pauline Kael, as well as the commentary style of my critical approach.

In the first chapter we are faced with film as high art, as the camera takes us on an architectural tour of a baroque chateau while a nameless narrator describes the set. Eventually the voice is revealed to be that of an actor in a play. In the audience discussing this play we meet our three protagonists: A, a mysterious woman; M, a man who may be her husband; and X, a man who tries to persuade her to leave with him. We are teased by meaning and symbolism at every turn as we await the plot of our story to unfold. Chapter two takes us to the gardens where we are presented a statue of a man, woman and dog. X evokes scenes from A's and his "shared" past. The style of Marienbad's editing replaces traditional Hollywood Découpage with a version its creators believe to be closer to reality as it should be presented on film. A possible reason for the number of detractors of Marienbad is discovered to be the inherent passive aggression present in the film. The final chapter outlines X's search for

an ending and discusses our reactions to these various solutions. The conclusion compares the ending from Resnais's Hiroshima Mon Amour to the end of Marienbad presenting the timeless reality of fictitious film. The search for a conclusion or answer to the riddle of Marienbad however remains elusive. We are invited to encounter possibilities as often as we, an audience, encounter L'Année Dernière à Marienbad.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my friend June Troke with whom I first experienced L'Année Dernière à Marienbad. I owe so much to Joanne Yamaguchi who provided the inspiring winds for my sails, as well as to Ralph Sarkonak who piloted the rudder to steer me clear of the rocks. This thesis is for those who believe!

INTRODUCTION

One need not search far to find arguments against L'Année Dernière à Marienbad, written by Alain Robbe-Grillet and directed by Alain Resnais. It is the type of film which moves its audience either to love it or hate it; one can find no one left unmoved. I prefer to quote here, not a great critic of French Literature, but rather a famous and very powerful critic whose work is well known to the general public. Pauline Kael of The New Yorker writes:

The term "sleeping beauty" provides, I think, a fairly good transition to Last Year at Marienbad -- or Sleeping Beauty of the International Set, the high-fashion experimental film, the snow job in the ice palace. Here we are, back at the no-fun party with non-people, in what is described to us as an "enormous, luxurious, baroque, lugubrious hotel -- where corridors succeed endless corridors." I can scarcely quote even that much of the thick malted prose without wanting to interject -- "Oh, come off it."¹

How someone of Kael's caliber can reject so whole-heartedly such a valiant step forward in cinematic form as Marienbad is hard to fathom. Especially when she reacts so favourably to a film which also advanced film history while stirring up passionate debate: Last Tango in Paris, directed by Bernardo Bertolucci.

Realism with the terror of actual experience still live on the screen -- that's what Bertolucci and Brando achieve... I've tried to describe the impact of a film that has made the strongest impression on me in almost twenty years of reviewing. This is a movie people will be arguing about, I think, for as long as there are movies... It is a movie you can't get out of your system, and I think it will make some people very angry and disgust others... It could embarrass them, and even frighten them. For adults, it's like seeing pieces of your life, and so, of course, you can't resolve your feelings about it -- our feelings about life are never resolved.²

The first time I saw Last Tango in Paris I believed it to be a failed mistake, an utter waste of time. Just as Kael reacts to Marienbad I would want to interject to say, "Oh, come off it!" While a great deal of Tango's problem with the public is with regard to eroticism, at the same time the problem of realism in film is once more addressed. Marienbad by its form and plot structure also demands a response from its audience. As one more problem thrown into the battle of Realism, Marienbad will not leave one's emotions alone. Although the script of Marienbad was published after the release of the film as a "ciné-roman," I treat Marienbad as a film, not only as a script. There is also an argument amongst many critics as to whether it is a Resnais film or a Robbe-Grillet film. I leave that argument to others, for I have taken Robbe-Grillet at his word as he writes:

L'accord n'a pu se faire, entre Alain Resnais et moi, que parce que nous avons dès le début vu le film de la même manière; et non pas en gros de la même manière, mais exactement, dans son architecture d'ensemble comme dans la construction du moindre détail. Ce que j'écrivais, c'est comme s'il l'avait eu déjà en tête; ce qu'il ajoutait au tournage, c'était encore ce que j'aurais pu inventer.

Il est important d'insister là-dessus, car une entente si complète est probablement assez rare.³

Marienbad is a film about decision. The unknown woman A must choose between what M (a man who is perhaps her husband) and X (an unknown stranger who tries to convince her that they fell in love last year at Marienbad) offer her. My problem as critic was how to decide what was true and false in the movie as it is experienced.

Fascinated by Marienbad when I first saw it in France six years ago I knew that I wanted to write about it, but I could not decide what was the "truth" about the film and I couldn't decide how to order its themes and problems. Therefore I have adapted the form of commentary found in Roland Barthes's S/Z without the codes. I discuss Marienbad as if it is experienced by a hypothetical super viewer. I comment little or a lot about ideas and sensations as one might experience the film. Some might wonder why there are some scenes or subjects which I have omitted, but this is only due to the humble fact that one cannot comment on or explain everything.

A final note I would like to mention here is the difference between Marienbad as a script and as a film. Only by reading the script is one aware from the outset of the existence of only three main characters, A, X and M. While watching Marienbad little by little one is made aware of the fact that there are three nameless characters who dominate the story. Therefore the experience of this discovery is far more dramatic in the viewing of Marienbad as opposed to the reading of the ciné-roman.

Je rêve d'une création mobile ou des architectures fortes, et ne laissant rien au hasard, seraient

pourtant minées de l'intérieur, toujours en train de s'édifier, de s'organiser, et de s'écrouler en même temps, pour laisser au fur et à mesure le champ libre à des constructions nouvelles.⁴

NOTES

Introduction

1. Pauline Kael, "The come-dressed-as-the-sick-soul-of-Europe Parties" in I Lost it at the Movies (Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1965), p. 186.
2. Pauline Kael, Introduction to Bernardo Bertolucci and Franco Arealli Last Tango in Paris (New York: Delacorte Press, 1973).
3. Alain Robbe-Grillet, L'Année Dernière à Marienbad (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1961), p. 9.
4. Alain Robbe-Grillet as quoted on p. 1 in Roy Armes' The Films of Alain Robbe-Grillet (Amsterdam: John Benjamins B.V., 1981).

CHAPTER 1

The camera pans the walls and ceilings of a baroque chateau accompanied by eerie organ music and the voice of an unseen narrator who recites the following: "Une fois de plus je m'avance, une fois de plus, le long de ces couloirs, à travers ces salons, ces galeries, dans cette construction -- d'un autre siècle, cet hôtel immense, luxueux, baroque, lugubre, ou des couloirs interminables succèdent aux couloirs..." We follow the calm repetition of this speech, while being shown the empty luxurious halls and vast rooms of the hotel. We follow the camera to a hall where a play is being staged and the narrating voice becomes that of the actor. An actress stares at a clock and waits while the actor talks of the man she will eventually leave. On stage we find a clock, a representation of a French garden, a balcony and a statue. The play ends as the camera passes through the audience. We hear bits of mysterious dialogue, about a man named Franck and various intrigues. We see a man, intermittently seen before, who meets a beautiful woman. After describing the chateau and dancing with her, he is surprised that she doesn't remember him. The sequence ends with this man shooting in a target practice gallery.¹

The first section of Marienbad is full of unanswered intrigue. Meaning is thrown out as we turn every corner. The film's form as well as content are equally enigmatic. If the spectator tires of Marienbad it is not until much later after this initial twenty minutes, for the questions are too intriguing and the level of ambiguity is not yet too great. One imagines that everything will be resolved and answered. Marienbad works as the building up of

layer upon layer of meaning. What may be an intriguing, yet seemingly irrelevant comment or sequence of action, takes on greater meaning as we see the same thing repeated, added to, or further developed later on.

As we enter the film, a sequence of typical film-ending emotional music is played. Has the story just ended? Are we about to watch a passionate love story? The opening sequences show us the high-vaulted ceilings of the interior of a baroque chateau. The angle of the camera is a high-tilt, which enhances the height and depth, as well as cutting out every other part of the rooms from our view. These heavily decorated baroque ceilings appear as eerie organ music is played. Could this be the entry into a church -- or is this the overly serious religious-like world of "high art"? The tone of the narrator, the repetition of architectural details in his speech, as well as the images of a baroque interior give us the impression of watching a documentary on art. The architecture may be equally important as the human drama which is about to unfold here. We also wonder: is this Marienbad already or is it somewhere else?

The disembodied narrating voice seems non-human in that it is emotionless, calm, and never-ending. It is a reflection in language of the baroque feast which visually parades before our eyes. It is non-ending and ornate in the same way that the ornamentation is exaggerated and limitless. There seems to be no end to such overflowing excess. It is almost too much for the human mind to grasp all at once, all together. As we hear the speech without its human body, it provokes and seduces us.

Who is this and to whom is he speaking?

des salles silencieuses ou les pas de celui qui s'avance
sont absorbés par des tapis si lourds, si épais,
qu'aucun bruit de pas ne parvient à sa propre oreille,
-- comme si l'oreille elle-même était très loin du
sol, des tapis, très loin de ce décor lourd et vide,
(p. 27)

A double-entendre is well shaped by the constant reference to silence, sound and ears. For throughout this speech, the sound of the voice is played with so that it is sometimes hard to hear it well or understand it. The repetition and seemingly non-ending character of the speech imply its importance -- we want to hear and understand even though our efforts are due to fail. There is no full stop to finish this narration since it is presented as one long sentence in the script. It is a series of long phrases joined by dashes; eight are to be found in this one paragraph! Whole phrases such as "ou les pas de celui" and "comme si l'oreille," along with architectural descriptions, are skillfully repeated to give the impression of describing the setting meaningfully, while actually saying the same things again and again in a convoluted manner. We listen carefully to the ongoing narration and try to assemble and contain the entire flow. We are forced to exercise our ears as we strain to comprehend what is unfolding before us. In a similar fashion we carefully examine the architecture which is highlighted by the camera's close-ups. We are made to strain our senses as we watch
Marientbad: there is no room for passive observation.

It is intriguing to present a speech about silence in an

almost silent fashion. There is conflict between the ideas of silence and sound. The rooms are silent and even the sound of the narrator's footsteps cannot be heard. At the same time we hear (sometimes but not always) the voice as well as the music. The speech delivered under these conditions appears to contradict itself, yet we try to make sense of it, both acoustically and semantically.

The narrator objectifies himself with such phrases as "ou les pas de celui qui s'avance ... comme si l'oreille elle-même..." Who is this "celui," why does he refer to himself in this oblique fashion? Does this description also mirror us the spectators as we "advance" through this chateau even though we are in a theater far away from the set, or even far from the screen? It seems to be a "non-human" world where man is objectified. In a sense the voice objectifies in the same way that the camera objectifies the rooms, objects and eventually the people in the chateau. This objectification of the world by image and sound could be a demonstration in miniature of what cinema does. It presents everything in the world as objects to be viewed. It imposes and selectively reveals only a few of the many facets of an object or person as they can be seen or experienced in our "real" world.

In a passage down a hall we see a picture on the wall of a garden and chateau as well as a theater poster. The garden is a "sign" for the future of the film to come. As we enter the theater, which the poster² has hinted at, the voice of the narrator becomes "plus jouée." We are relieved, for now we understand why

the voice was so bizarre -- it was the voice of an actor. We can accept its "non-human" qualities as artistic expression. The narrator is "not a real person" but an actor!

If we thought we could relax after discovering the true nature of the voice, we are sorely mistaken after a few "new" lines of the play, which cries out at every turn to be interpreted.

entre ces murs chargés de boiseries, de stuc, de moulures de tableaux, de gravures encadrées, parmi lesquels je m'avançais, -- parmi lesquels j'étais déjà, moi-même, en train de vous attendre, très loin de ce décor où je me trouve maintenant, devant vous, en train d'attendre encore celui... (p. 29)

The past and the present are equated by changing verb tenses in one long sentence. The fact that the place from the past as well as X's present position are only described in vague architectural terms, allows the tenses to appear to change "naturally." "Parmi lesquels j'étais déjà moi-même, en train de vous attendre, très loin de ce décor ou je me trouve maintenant..." It appears that according to the speech, this actor has always been waiting in such a place for the actress. What is so unsettling is that we can neither distinguish the past decor from the present, nor can we differentiate between the past act of waiting and the present one. For us who must imagine "time" in our minds following the cues from the speech, it is difficult to equate as readily as the narrator does, the past and the present. The first architectural descriptions carry equal weight: they are of this decor (whatever place the stage set represents) and somewhere else which was where the man was awaiting this woman. "En train de vous attendre" evokes not only the present moment

as these words are uttered, but also the past. Such an effect makes us dizzy at the attempt to equate two distinct, yet very similar places and times. What can the equation be between the decor which the camera deliberately revealed to us from the very beginning of this film up to this point and the architecture described by this actor on this stage?

Not only is an actor waiting for an actress, but she may also be waiting for another man, who is referred to by the actor as "une silhouette grise" and by her as part of "un tel lien, une prison, un tel mensonge." From these descriptions we get a feeling of menace and fear, which we may have first experienced as we heard the eerie music accompanying the voice along the baroque corridors.

cet hôtel lui-même, avec ses salles désormais désertes,
ses domestiques immobiles, muets, morts depuis
longtemps sans doute, qui montent encore la garde
à l'angle des couloirs (p. 31)

This part of the man's speech continues again the play with time, equating the past with the present. The servants are both silent and probably dead now, yet they still keep guard in the corners of the corridors. "Salles désormais désertes" come to exist in the same time frame as "domestiques (morts) qui montent encore." "Désormais" = Present tense + encore? This may be minor proof of the absurdity of an ordered grammatical system which allows simple distortions of tense so easily, while at the same time giving the impression of "naturalness." The sentence can be at once logically impossible and yet grammatically and syntactically correct.

Is this a story of death -- is the narrator thinking back to a life -- his own or that of the woman for whom he was waiting? We have once more entered the realm of the "unreal" where we are uncertain as to what is real and what is not; where time exists in both the past and the present, where both life and death coexist. We are equally baffled when the actress decides to go with the actor once the clock has chimed. We await answers from the movie to come.

We follow the camera as it passes through the members of the audience as they watch the play. We, the film audience, see ourselves reflected on the screen by their moods and actions. We are watching a movie unfold with the same seriousness as we find etched in these viewers' faces. As the clapping stops, the images of the viewers who are talking are stopped and started again. We see a series of groups of the members of the audience frozen in action by the camera as they converse. If we had forgotten that we were watching a film after experiencing the sound trucage, these freeze-frames bring back to us the filmic nature of what we are attending. This film is a representation of real life: it is not meant to "be" the real thing. We will not be allowed to lose ourselves in the lives on the screen. And yet with every bit of dialogue and conversation that follows, we keep waiting for the characters who will be the focus of this story, to appear so that we may identify with them.

Different groups of spectators utter the following:

Ça devait être en '28 ou en '29.
Vraiment, Ça semble incroyable.
Nous nous sommes rencontrés autrefois.

Vous l'avez vu vous-même?
 Non, mais cet ami me l'a raconté.
 Oh alors, raconte.

voir là-dedans un rapport quelconque... (p. 34)

With the exception of "rencontre" these particles of conversation refer to proving or disbelieving certain events. One person proposes a certain point of view, while another discredits him or refuses to believe it. However certain someone is in this film, there is always someone who refuses to believe what he states even when he is supplied with conventional "proof"; i.e. My friend saw it; these things are related therefore it must mean this. Any meaning is left precisely as a personal point of view with no more validity than what others think. The fact that everything keeps reflecting the play or some unreal seemingly impossible contradiction (life/death), existing on many different levels in Marienbad, underlines the refusal to pinpoint or decide what is real and what is fiction. (What is objectively or subjectively real.) "Raconter" is in a certain sense exactly what the film is doing to us, yet at every turn we are warned not to believe everything to be fixed and readily explained and understood. A film is decidedly a "fiction" however "real"! Nothing can be taken at face value: Appearances most definitely do deceive.

We wonder if these people are discussing the play at all or are these conversations referring to their own lives? We are relieved that these people converse instead of giving bizarre speeches like the actor. Even if the camera does stop and start

them (the freeze frames), we accept them as "living, realistic" people in contrast with the play. Yet when are we going to meet the principal protagonists in this movie?

After listening to a few abbreviated conversations, we reenter the "unreal" while we watch a series of five nameless spectators observing each other as the eerie music returns. This sequence culminates in an image of a man observing a couple in a mirror.

If Marienbad were a person, it could be said to be obsessed with observation. We the spectators are watching filmic spectators who in turn are watching each other. They are watching curiously and attentively the "real" people around them, while we in turn watch these actors perform. Both of these groups want to attach meaning to and understand what everyone is saying. We the spectators are parodied in a way as being ourselves overly obsessed with meaning. The fact that the man (X) as shown in the frame reproduced watches a couple whom we see as a filmed physical reflection in a mirror underlines this reflexivity. In this carefully composed shot, we observe X observing someone (whom we haven't yet met) while the couple is reflected in the mirror; could this importance of "REGARD" juxtaposed by the reflection of the mirror impress upon us that any observation or taking out of context of someone or something is as much a subjective reflection (of the observer) as an objective one? Surely only a mirror can truly be "objective" and even then only so much is revealed, while much is concealed or distorted. Are we not seeing

a certain part of the "reality" of the Marienbad world through either the consciousness of one person (X or...) or even through the lens of the camera?

Homme: Alors entendez mes plaintes. Je ne peux plus supporter ce rôle. Je ne peux plus supporter ce silence, ces murs, ces chuchotements où vous m'enfermez...

Femme: Taisez-vous, taisez-vous! (p. 36)

This is the conversation of the couple reflected in the mirror which X (and we) overhear. This man is indeed playing a role, but it may be at least three roles rather than one alone. For he is the actor playing this part, as well as the character in the film who is being other than what he wants to be. Yet can he be even less of a role-player as he tries to "be himself"? The ordered garden which he refers to in this dialogue is once more evoked as a sinister presence. It seems to banish emotions; is it the symbol of logic and order -- a place where man controls his world through rationality -- the irrational or inexplicable having been rooted out? A natural garden would then presumably contain both the rational and the irrational, the logical and the emotional.

The situation described by the man reflects that of the actor in the play: a man who is living a contradicting life mixed with death, trying to speak through silence. Here the couple appears to be realistic, (human enough) yet when they appear again they repeat the same dialogue. Their sincerity of voice implies the seriousness of their situation; their movements appear to be those of "normal" people. Yet when the man refers

to "deux cerceuils et un jardin figé" (p. 36) It is as though we have been transported back to the play. There is something unsettling about their contradicting signs of life/death, emotion/passionless devotion. They have been presented as members of the audience, and we presume them to be real people. They move around, discuss, while expressing apparent emotions. Yet the man's complaints uncannily echo the overtones of death amid life in a garden, as expressed by the actor in the play. The words of this man's speech imply heartfelt emotion and yet the repetition and monotony of the same phrases undermine our first reaction. We see a man who appears as both actor and non-actor; experiencing the emotion he describes, but also merely playing a role.

As his role echoes that of the actor we are deliberately reminded of the fact that this is a created film which we are watching and not the direct expression of "real life." This effect of underlining the theatrical nature of what we are experiencing I refer to as Theatricality. The object of all these shifting levels of apparent reality and theatricality seems to be part of the creators' game of playing with our expectations as members of a film audience. We keep hoping to see "realistic" people on the screen, people who will be part of the story that we have come to witness; however our prospective protagonists always turn out to be somewhat bizarre.

"une très belle femme ... beaucoup trop d'imagination" (The reference to this line is on page 38, but it is more skeletal in the script.) We see the woman (A) whom X will pursue to the

side in a "statuesque" pose as two men converse. What they discuss may refer to the woman in the play, their own private stories, A and the film to come. It is a beacon of enigmatic meaning which sent out now, will haunt us later.

ces doigts faits pour serrer, ces yeux faits pour vous voir, qui doivent se détourner de vous -- vers ces murs chargés d'ornements d'un autre siècle, boiseries noires, dorures, miroirs taillés, portraits anciens, -- guirlandes de stuc aux enlacements baroques, -- chapiteaux en trompe l'oeil, fausses portes, fausses colonnes, perspectives truquées, fausses issues. (p. 39)

Again we hear the voice of the narrator, but this time there is no play; this man is part of the unreal world of Marienbad. We are confused as the theatrical voice imposes on the "real" world of the spectators. What kind of world is this where the theatrical is quite "naturally" presented alongside the everyday, or amongst serious discussions of "real" people as they are presented on the screen? We are not getting a complete picture of what is going on -- are we looking at the world through the consciousness of someone? X or A or who?

Here begins X's copying of what other people say. He is finding a voice in which to speak -- is all of this film up to now seen from his point of view? No! The scenes delivered to us through the camera's eye divide themselves up between his view, an autonomous view, or easily enough that of someone else. We cannot be certain whether he is copying others or if they are copying him, for both occur in this first sequence.

En réalité, ça n'était pas tellement extraordinaire. C'est lui-même qui avait monté l'affaire de toutes pièces, si bien, qu'il connaissait d'avance toutes les issues. (pp. 40-41)

This is unaccompanied by any music. Just when we least expected it, yet most hoped for it, we are once more plunged into "apparent" reality. The speaker refers to some private intrigue, yet this could also refer to the film which we are watching. The creators have set up an extraordinary yet obviously calculated creation. This may posit the possibility of understanding both the play within the film as well as the film itself.

Jeune Homme: Vous n'êtes pas ici depuis longtemps?
 Jeune Femme: Mais j'y suis déjà venue, vous savez.
 Jeune Homme: C'est un endroit que vous aimez?
 Jeune Femme: Moi, non, pas tellement. C'est le hasard: on revient toujours ici. Mon père devait... (p. 41)

The simplicity of their dialogue as well as their enthusiasm give us an impression that this couple is very normal and real. They conduct a real conversation in a lively manner, unlike the repetitive, sinister, non-conversation of the other couple. They appear spontaneous and lively, which refreshes us after hearing X and the other couple speak as though they were giving speeches in a lugubrious and theatrical manner. Apparently, not everyone is "bizarre and unrealistic" in this film. (Why should some be more realistic than others?) Even the fact that the young woman has been here before does not haunt or shock us in the same way that the other couple's dialogue mirroring the actors in the play did.

In front of a picture of a garden an anonymous woman's

voice asks "dont il n'y a pas moyen de s'échapper?" (p. 42) and in echo the voice of X answers with the same phrase. X appears to be somewhat "unreal" as the copier of other people. Is all this going on in someone's mind -- someone whom we haven't yet seen? There is no escape from this endless enigmatic questioning which this film imposes upon us. It is a veritable labyrinth of questions whose satisfactory solutions elude us. There are many different paths to the center of a garden's maze. There may be no clear answer to enigmas evoked by this movie; there may not be one final meaning to it all.

Vous ne connaissez pas l'histoire? On ne parlait que de ça l'année dernière. (p. 43, the corresponding scene is described on pp. 42-44)

This is uttered to a group of three other people by an unidentified guest. Could this be the entry into what happened "l'année dernière à Marienbad"? We are used to seeing flashbacks to present a filmic story from the past; is this where we will see the bizarreness of this film dissolve and a clear story of last year presented? We hear of a man named Franck. It is the first time that someone is mentioned by name. He, just like the film we are watching is full of false appearances. He used the pretext of explaining a picture to gain entry to a woman's room. As close as we may be to our expectant story, we still are left in doubt of what happened. All we can sense is a feeling of menace and mystery.

The camera pans across this group (in picture A)³ to another room (picture B). At the same moment that the words "surveillance

plutôt bizarre, le soir où il a voulu pénétrer dans sa chambre," we enter the other room, as the camera surveys it, where the three men are playing cards. We then re-enter the other room: as the camera returns to the card players, we hear the voice of M saying: "Non pas maintenant ... je vous propose un autre jeu" (p. 45). M has apparently been in two places at the same time. In the second room (picture C), X has also "invisibly" replaced the second man at the game table. M and X have both "magically" been transported on film. The fact that the camera as well as the sound track seem to be playing tricks is underlined by the seemingly innocent reference to "un autre jeu." The effect on the spectator of this obvious TRUCAGE is one of disorientation and shock. In and of themselves the scenes appear "real" and credible as the presentation of a group conversing and a group playing cards. It is their juxtaposition, which occurs without warning, that upsets any feeling of reality. What we must admit to ourselves is that this scene is played with -- the camera can play tricks on us. We keep trying to reach a level in this film where we can identify with the characters and feel that they express our "real world." A feeling which we fleetingly had with the young couple. We are used to Hollywood realism, where the film guides us from one event to another, giving us a feeling of a complete story taking place in our world.

A film cut according to DECOUPAGE CLASSIQUE rules believes in and represents one reality: an objective one. The film tries to present the viewers with a story which portrays their "human,

rational and causal" world. This formula for reality was and is the only accepted "realism" as practiced by the Hollywood film industry from the thirties to this day.

The American filmmakers in this era found that if space were broken up according to the logic of the narrative, it would pass unnoticed as integral or real space. Editors learned to cut a scene into its narrative components and thus follow the line of curiosity of the audience. The film thereby mirrors the perceptual process of the spectator to such a degree that he barely notices that time and space are being fragmented, because he is concerned with the relationships between events not with the intrinsic value of the events themselves.⁴

What is presented as "realism" is merely a conventional means, by which the filmmaker could simplify (falsify) the complexities of reality. This style of film editing makes the psychological needs and perception of the audience its focus. The fragmentation of an event is accepted as normal because extraneous detail is cut out, while every shot is carefully chosen and presented in sequence to contribute to the story. We as spectators are faced with a causal world with every image and sound making up a logical expression of "reality."

Spectators rarely watch an event with the disinterestedness corresponding to the single take, which after all, is merely an effective mechanical mold of the event. Instead, they see it in terms of its logical, dramatic, or moral ramifications. This psychologizing of events is the very purpose of most films. They hope to give us the illusion of being at real events unravelling before us as in everyday reality. But this illusion conceals an essential bit of deceit because reality exists in continuous space and the screen presents us in fact with a succession of fragments called "shots," the choice, order, and duration of which constitutes exactly what we call the "decoupage" of the film.

If we try, by an effort of attention, to perceive the breaks imposed by the camera on the continuous development of the represented event, and try to understand why we are naturally insensible (to these breaks) we understand well enough that we tolerate them because they give us the impression all the same of a continuous homogeneous reality. The insertion of a doorbell in closeup is accepted by the mind as if this were nothing other than a concentration of our vision and interest on the doorbell, as if the camera merely anticipated the movement of our eyes.⁵

DECOUPAGE CLASSIQUE passed off a falsified reality as a faithful duplication of real life. This filmic style lulled the audience into passive acceptance of a rhetorical and false expression of reality. By making the cinematic world appear totally natural, as the "obvious" reflection of human reality, the audience is not allowed to think about or question what is presented. Their minds and senses being dulled, only asked to respond to the director's formulaic stimuli, and not work of their own accord. DECOUPAGE CLASSIQUE takes away the audience's ability and desire to perceive on their own.

While psychological montage may organize objects as we are in the habit of organizing them, it rules out the freedom which is at the base of our power to organize and the autonomy of the objects which exist for other organizations as well. "Classical editing totally suppresses this kind of reciprocal freedom between us and the object. It substitutes for a free organization, a forced breaking down where the logic of the shots controlled by the reporting of the action anesthetizes our freedom completely." (Orson Welles, p. 58) There is, then a deeper psychological reality, which must be preserved in realistic cinema: the freedom of the spectator to choose his own interpretation of the object or event.⁶

In creating Marienbad, Robbe-Grillet and Resnais wanted to

expose the film medium as a slave to a rhetoric which was no more "realistic" than other possible means. Rather than a film which presents a false reality as real, Marienbad underlines and exposes the falseness of its reality. Marienbad refuses a progression according to conventional cinematographic narrative discourse. Instead it is linked in a seemingly haphazard manner which rather than hide its decoupage, highlights its rupturing disconnectedness, to remind us of its "filmic" nature. Robbe-Grillet wanted to challenge the audience to participate and perceive actively; to question the medium which had hitherto dictated "reality" to them.

In order to prevent the viewer's mind from relying on its normal mode of perception, Resnais violates almost every convention of film-making, but he does it so smoothly that the viewer has the illusion of following conventions which have in fact been completely reversed in their function. The simplest description of the film is to say that it is a succession of faux-raccords, that is to say, matches which are not in continuity because they connect segments of space and time which cannot logically be connected. The purpose of this stylistic device is to alter our normal perception of space and time and to facilitate the constant shift of the narrative viewpoint in the film. Except for three sequences of fast cutting, it could be demonstrated that no succession of two or more shots is spatially, temporally or dramatically linked. Yet, Resnais has managed to give an organic coherence to the film and yet each shot remains autonomous.⁷

In a Brechtian sense of theatricality the creators of Marienbad want the audience to always be aware of the medium: film.

Brecht insisted that his audience maintain a consciousness of the "vehicle" (in his case the stage). To that end, he worked out the theory

of the Verfremdungs effekt (the "estrangement effect"). "The object of this 'effect,'" he wrote, "is to allow the spectator to criticize constructively from a social point of view." Consciousness of the vehicle not only allows but demands the participation of the viewer in a continual process of analysis of the images, sounds, and other phenomena with which he is confronted.⁸

Robbe-Grillet: Yes, of course, but what distinguishes Marienbad, and may prove rather disconcerting, is simply the general use of these devices. They are not disguised as exceptions to a rule, but as a consistent style of thinking, completely compatible with realism -- perhaps more realistic. When we say that what goes on in our minds is just as real as what goes on in front of our eyes, we are laying the foundations for a cinematic style which can switch to and from between the things around us, like this tape-recorder, and the subject of our conversation, and include images more or less intermediary between the scene around us, your thoughts, my thoughts, and so on. Such a film still employs conventions, but would be rather more realistic than the convention of systematically restricting oneself to any one category of reality.⁹

Marienbad presents its own version of reality which challenges the reality of DECOUPAGE CLASSIQUE. It is an attempt to renovate cinematic reality.

With this trucage in which X and M are so cleverly moved around as though they were objects rather than people, we see clearly that the director is playing with filmic space. The camera which we expect to present reality in a recognizable, sterotypical fashion, here refuses to do so. Resnais and Robbe-Grillet want us to be alert and watch every change the camera and soundtrack make. Film can lie: it doesn't always treat its subject equally; in fact what we so readily accept as "real" in a Hollywood movie is equally TRUCAGE. It is only

the fact that we have decided to accept its rules, that allows us to feel its "reality." It is a convention like any other in any school of "Realism." We innocently assume that films present the world as coherent, logical and understandable. But the Marienbad vision is entirely the opposite: incoherent and undecipherable. Our hopes that we will find a story reflecting our "real" world are destroyed.

- M: Non pas maintenant ... Je vous propose un autre jeu plutot: je connais un jeu auquel je gagne toujours...
- X: Si vous ne pouvez pas perdre, ce n'est pas un jeu!
- M: Je peux perdre ... mais je gagne toujours.
- X: Essayons.
- M: (étalant les cartes devant X) Cela se joue à deux. Les cartes sont disposées comme ceci. Sept. Cinq. Trois. Une. Chacun des joueurs ramasse des cartes, à tour de role, autant de cartes qu'il veut, à condition de n'en prendre que dans une seule rangée à chaque fois. Celui qui ramasse la dernière carte a perdu... (p. 45)

A game introduced into this ludic film tempts our curiosity. How can a game be a game when one person always wins? Is M so skillful at this game or is he merely bragging? The fact that opposites (life/death, past/present) have been presented on the screen as "naturally" fitting together, has prepared us for a more ready, yet still uneasy, acceptance of this apparent contradiction. We are at once shocked and not surprised to hear of this unlikely impossibility. The fact that the loser is the one who picks up the last card is also a reversal of typical game rules according to which the winner usually is the one who wins cards rather than loses them. Here

the object of the game is to take away cards rather than to amass them. Why does M want to play a game at which he is so skillful? Or does he rig it and therefore know all its tricks? But who among us would give up playing any game especially if we had become masters at it? M might want to demonstrate his superiority over X or others by playing this game; but to what end? What is overwhelmingly appealing about this game, the Nim game, is its "apparent" simplicity. It seems so easy to play -- especially to the uninitiated -- in the same way that Tic-tac-toe is "easy." All it takes is some thought!

In the playing of the game, M watches X closely and seems to pick up his cards without thought, whereas X pauses before each move, paying close attention to the game. The Nim game may be a source of power or bizarre social interaction for M, while to X it still is played as a game. M appears to be in control, since he wins the game effortlessly, just as he said he would, whereas X seems to struggle. Why is M so certain about his winning; surely this must be rigged! As they finish the game they eye each other menacingly; is M the evil one or X? Evil and "the sinister" pervade the air.

In the context of Marienbad the Nim game is but another small puzzle to analyze, which we hope will give us greater understanding and the power to interpret the meaning of the whole. The seriousness with which both X and M play and the close-up of the last card remaining on the table emanate meaning.

Il reste la carte isolée; comme toutes les cartes
ont été étalés montrant leur dos, on ne voit pas

non plus quelle est cette carte-ci. Pourtant la caméra s'est rapprochée de la table au cours du jeu comme si elle avait une signification. (p. 46)

Resnais chose to embellish this description by focusing on a table showing an odd unidentifiable card with fourteen marks on it face up, with the reflection of M and X on either side framed by the table. The game as focussed through this image is self-consciously abundant with meaning. Yet it is a question of how much importance we choose to give it. Could we accept an image which really had no meaning, as merely an event in a sequence? The problem (or the issue) is that because of the frame of the screen we as an audience expect to understand and be elucidated by "Art." Once a detail -- no matter how small -- appears as a filmic unit, it can be judged to be meaningful by the spectator in his role as "critic." What is interesting is that Marienbad, which until now presents such an "unreal" world, implies and demands meaning simply because of its difference from Hollywood films. If we cannot readily comprehend an action or dialogue in a film, we presume that it must have some greater meaning. We must be able to interpret and explain it or what is the purpose of "Art"?

But if we were to look at a "realistic" movie such as Gone With the Wind, we would surely not be in such a quandry to discover the meaning of the colour of Scarlet O'Hara's hair. When faced with such an "unrealistic" and difficult movie as Marienbad, we feel that there must be great hidden or implied meaning to be attached to parts which we do not understand. We

are afraid of being forced into a position of unknowing, where all we can do is question. Marienbad is carefully constructed so as to offer hope of understanding, while at the same time frustrating and complicating that very search for meaning. Resnais/Robbe-Grillet are well aware of our desire for understanding a film, a desire which they tease and exploit in every scene. What if the Nim game had no meaning but was exactly what it is on the screen: a game? What is the meaning of a poker game or Canasta? Are they not played for the sheer fun of playing? Could Marienbad itself then be a film playing with meaning?

We see a shot of a woman glimpsed here and there in the preceding shots of these first twenty minutes, as we hear X's voice. "Vous êtes toujours la même. J'ai l'impression de vous avoir quittée hier." The camera remains fixed on her as she holds her head to one side as though she were listening, while we hear the voices of the young couple once more. From what we hear, X appears to be addressing a woman. Is she the same one whom we see on the screen or another? From the romantic and pensive fashion by which X makes this declaration, we suppose he has met this woman once again. We are on the verge of the beginning of our story -- surely we will soon meet this woman; the object of his comments.

Voix d'homme: Qu'êtes-vous devenue depuis tout ce temps?

Voix de jeune femme: Rien, vous voyez, puisque je suis toujours la même.

Voix d'homme: Vous n'êtes pas mariée?

We come back to our most realistic people in the film. The echo of "toujours la même" between X's words and this man's is ironic. We could believe either X or this man saying this phrase just once but the dédoublement makes the phrase seem less sincere, or else a parody of such words. The phrase could be said to or about anyone -- with the person thus described either agreeing or disagreeing. It shows a subjective impression, one on the part of X, the other on the part of this young woman. The statement of being "toujours la même" is a very subjective judgement by the evaluator, and is actually a hard statement to prove. Yet it is so often and easily said by many people. It all depends on one's point of view.

Jeune Femme: Non, non!
 Homme: Vous avez tort, c'est très amusant.
 Jeune Femme: J'aime la liberté.

 Homme: Ici par exemple?
 Jeune Femme: Pourquoi pas ici?
 Homme: C'est un drôle d'endroit.
 Jeune Femme: Vous voulez dire pour être libre?
 Homme: Pour être libre, oui, en particulier.
 Jeune Femme: Vous êtes toujours aussi... (p. 47)

The idea of freedom appears equally absurd to us, the spectators as it does to this young woman's companion. As is usual in Marienbad, the beginning of the conversation is not relayed to us. But the ideas of freedom in this hotel is questioned. If one were to apply this phrase to the movie itself, couldn't one accept these contradictions as an index of the Marienbad world? On the one hand, the architecture of the chateau is rigid, heavy and old, which along with the stuffy

upper-class characters imply Tradition. Yet the way in which we have experienced this world through the duping of our eyes and ears has been anything but traditional or conventional. We have yet to meet the protagonists after twenty minutes of viewing time. The film keeps playing with our sense of causality and logic as well as our senses, as we move in and out of unreal and real worlds. The creators of Marienbad have certainly discarded conventional "realism" for their own expression on film. We seem to be as free in interpreting an open work which offers many meanings to every facet of the film as they have been in creating this non-conventional film. It is indeed a "drôle d'endroit pour être libre," for we associate freedom with our real world and everyday life. Our sense of shock and misapprehension as one "rigged scene" after another frustrates and confuses us, reveals us to be overly dependent on traditional film rhetoric. We are not free to accept a novel change in filmic form, since we are firmly bound to conventional film rules. What Robbe-Grillet and Resnais have done is to loosen these binds and return to film its radical creativity, not only to the story to be told, but also to the manner of its telling. They have recreated film by freeing its form of expression in order to express better the film's vision.

"X: Vous êtes toujours aussi belle" (p. 48). We are shown two shots of A: in one she is standing still in a statuesque manner, in the other she is turning around. The connection between X and A is at last (yet not definitively) made. Surely this must be the woman of whom he is thinking, if not looking at.

Why else would we keep seeing her in close-up? We are again made to realize the deliberate discontinuity of this film: we see A from one angle and then another. Since these two shots belong to two apparently different timeframes (as the clothes and lighting have drastically changed), we are robbed of a feeling of psychological continuity. In this film, shots are often connected not by chronology but by related subject matter. The pictures we are shown do not fit together in time: we are not encouraged to believe that the film is presenting a continuous reality. The film once again exposes itself as film. One might imagine this to be X seeing her in his mind's eye, or seeing her there in front of him at this hotel and thinking of how she looked at another time. Does she yet see him? There is no connection yet made with both of them in the same shot.

There follows a series of five shots:

1-2) Hotel guests slowly ascending and descending staircase. (2 shots)

3) A game of checkers.

4) A Balustrade which overlooks a garden;
no music.

5) Eerie music plays throughout except during shot #4. These pictures flash at us, returning us to our sense of the eeriness and menace of the Marienbad world. The game of chess is particularly "decorative." It is as though people and objects were all part of the same decor; they are part of one vision: Marienbad. We see two apparently real men playing checkers against an obviously painted facade which appears

endless. The animate and inanimate worlds combine here as one complete aesthetic picture. The emphasis on black and white in the facade could be taken as a comment on the coexistence of reality/theatricality in Marienbad. All is in perfect proportion by careful design.

Robbe-Grillet had intended to use sound instead of music to expand our sense of the unreal in this scene, as the script indicates.

Au cours de ces images, et sans rapport avec ce qu'elles représentent, on entend, disséminés sans raisons causales apparentes, soit à un changement de plan, soit au beau milieu d'un plan, un certain nombre de bruits irritants, tels que sonneries électriques, bruits de portes mécaniques, timbres d'appel, etc., qui tous doivent à la fois résonner de façon insolite et pouvoir se justifier sur le plan de la vraisemblance: ce sont des bruits que l'on peut en effet entendre dans un hôtel. En outre ils doivent être à la fois très nets et comme feutrés, amortis par les tapis, etc. Ils doivent enfin se détacher sur un fond de silence, où ils n'occupent que des temps très brefs. (pp. 48-49)

This might have been even more effective as a destabilizer of our sense of the real, due to the fact that noises which at first sounded strange, would have been revealed to be part of the normal noises in a hotel. What at first would have seemed out of place would soon have been realized by us to be precisely appropriate for this place: a hotel. We would have been unsettled by the fact that we ourselves discovered that what at first appears to be unreal is actually very real and entirely appropriate. It really depends on one's point of view. Marienbad sets out to reveal the unreality and apparent strangeness of reality

which we believe to understand, know and control so well. Our uneasiness potentially awakened by such a sequence coaxes us to be not so certain of our own reality. What appears to be so understandable as the reality which surrounds us, may be as unreliable as our senses prove to be when we experience this movie.

A is presented in an empty hall as we hear the voice of X: "Mais vous ne semblez guère vous souvenir." The delightful ambiguity of the phrase is overwhelming. She doesn't seem to remember; but perhaps she does; could it be X's perspective which is obscured? What should she remember? Through these words she seems so heartless; and he so deserving of her attention. (How could she have forgotten?) Maybe she does remember -- she just hasn't indicated it yet.

La caméra se rapproche d'un détail décoratif de la dernière image. Autant que possible un détail extrêmement chargé en baroque et situé au-dessus des têtes de personnes debouts ... la voix de X est toujours cette belle voix, neutre et précise ... Voix de X: Pourtant vous connaissez déjà ces ornements baroques, ces linteaux decorez, ces rinceaux, cette main de stuc qui tient une grappe ... L'index tendu semble retenir un raisin prêt à se détacher ... Derrière la main, vous apercevez des feuillages ... comme des feuillages vivants, d'un jardin qui nous attendrait. (pp. 50-51)

Once again we are back watching a commentary on an art film. We are first shown the ceiling and then we hear X's voice; we have returned to the beginning of the film. The illusion of reality is the highest achievement of baroque art. Here a hand holds a life-like bunch of grapes, behind which seemingly living leaves beckon us. This "us" contains all of the spectators, the

man who is speaking (X) as well as the guests who are listening, although we haven't yet seen the people in this scene, since we are still gazing at the ceiling. The notion of the garden brought forth by this description refers back in time to the play and the picture of the garden. The use of the conditional: "comme ... un jardin qui nous attendrait" emphasizes the temptation of believing that art; either film (DECOUPAGE CLASSIQUE) or baroque sculpture is as real as our real world. Or perhaps both art and the real world are equally as unfixed and elusive. At the same time it poetically and romantically seduces the listeners, A and us, as a special invitation to get lost in the verisimilitude of art. It could well be the motto of Marienbad: "comme un monde qui nous attendrait..."

The camera pans down from the ceiling and it is revealed that X is talking to A surrounded by a small group of listeners. X: "N'avez-vous jamais remarqué tout cela?"/ A: "Je n'avais jamais eu d'aussi bon guide." At last we meet A and X together. Although this art commentary scene has been presented in a continuous present, we wonder if it is in the past. (As a flash-back?) For the idea of "jamais" implies that this is the first time that they ever met. We must accept the fact that this movie (as all movies) is carefully constructed so as to reveal and conceal at will. We are meant to notice and look closely at art, but the camera and the soundtrack will continue to mold our view and to guide us. This is also an intimate/banal compliment. Only you (X) could show me (us) the meanings of art and explain its value.

Someone says to A: "Vous connaissez le proverbe: de la boussole au navire..." (p. 52). A proverb, introduced as such, is full of "great" meaning. The guests present in the film all laugh knowingly at this saying. Yet what does it mean? It is a comment about guiding ships: A compass can guide you in the right direction. Is X this accurate guide? We feel as though this proverb may also be as clear an indication of our journey and its meaning. Even within our certainty, we could not say what it means. Robbe-Grillet has admitted that he invented this proverb, which he mentions in the interview by Labarthe and Rivette in Cinéma '61:

Robbe-Grillet: Oui si vous-voulez. J'ai inventé une moitié de proverbe. Encore une fois on n'a rien caché à personne. A quoi bon inventer un proverbe entier quand on doit n'en conserver que la première partie? Evidemment à partir de ce demi-proverbe on peut imaginer beaucoup de choses.
Resnais: Il n'est pas nécessaire d'en connaître plus. Dites-cela dans un salon, tout le monde connaîtra le proverbe. Personne ne demandera la suite. Je le sais: j'en ai fait l'expérience!¹⁰

This film leaves many routes open for exploration. The imagination is asked to participate and perform along with that of the artists who created Marienbad. Even a small detail can open our minds to many hours of speculation.

What Resnais' comment points to is the fact that we so often fill in the gaps between what we perceive and what we think we should understand or see. Even when we judge what we see with our eyes we have to decipher reality not through our senses but according to past experience. His example shows how the mind is willing to invent in order to create what it thinks it

should understand.

X: Il y a, ici, beaucoup d'autres choses à voir, si vous-voulez.

"Changement brutal..." [A and X are as close as they were in the previous scene, but now they are dancing.] La première phrase que prononce A s'enchaîne comme s'il s'agissait de la même conversation que sur le plan précédent.

A: Avec plaisir. Cet hôtel contient-il tant de secrets?

X: Enormément!

A: Quel air mystérieux! Pourquoi me regardez-vous ainsi?

X: Vous semblez guère vous souvenir de moi. (p. 52)

Once again we have a violent trucage which jumps out at us. Here it is a question of equating two different places and moments in time as happening concurrently. We have already experienced this in the actor's monologue in the play. But this is the first time that we are involved with X and A in a time jump. The film is one large trucage in which everything appears and never is one thing for too long. The secrets referred to in this chateau are enigmas for the audience as well as those presented to A. We hear X's demand for recall in A's memory. At last we seem to have the beginning of a story! We will soon see what happened in their past. But why is A so reticent, avoiding to acknowledge her acquaintance with him?

pp. 53-57 Although a lengthy description follows, the next scene takes about two minutes on the screen. We hear the loud ticking of a clock as four men take aim at targets in the shape of men, in a shooting gallery. We see alternating close-ups of the men shooting and the targets as we hear the sound of bullets. We see a close-up of X about to shoot but the scene is cut before

his gun detonates.

This scene is haunting because of its constant rhythm, the guns, the clock and the alternating images of targets and men. It produces a somewhat calming effect as it seems unconnected with the previous scenes, as well as appearing to be very realistic. We cannot help but puzzle as to its overall reference to the rest of the film; however, it appears less threatening than simply curious due to its compelling rhythm. Surely this shooting is only one among the many recreations and games at which the inhabitants of this hotel play. Yet does X intend to kill someone whom he is pursuing? Why do we not hear the detonation of his gun?¹¹

Here ends chapter one as it appears to me to be an obvious break, due to the fact that X and A have been introduced as the protagonists of our story to come. We await the revelation of what did happen last year at Marienbad and why A is so distant with regard to X. Who are these people? We want a complete story including their personal backgrounds. Why are they referred to as A and X rather than by their names?

NOTES

Chapter 1

1. Summary of the first 30 minutes of L'Année Dernière à Marienbad pp. 23-56. All following quotes from the text are taken from Alain Robbe-Grillet, L'Année Dernière à Marienbad (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1961).
2. As viewers and critics grapple with the meaning of Marienbad so much has been written about the relationship between the play's title "Rosmer" and a play by Ibsen "Rosmerholm." The stagnation of love and death by suicide in Ibsen's work has been taken as evidence that Resnais included this oblique reference to associate Ibsen's dramatic world and the cinematic world of Marienbad. However, nothing could be further from the truth. Resnais chose this name because he wanted "something as unspecific as possible and simply based on the name of a childhood friend, Rosmer." What to many critical viewers imparted a deeper meaning to Marienbad was intended to be an empty signifier for the audience. Geoffrey Wagner, The Novel and the Cinema, (Cranbury, New Jersey: Associated University Presses, 1975), p. 283.
3. Two pictures facing p. 32 in the script.
4. James Dudley Andrew, The Major Film Theories: An Introduction (London, New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 160.
5. Andrew, p. 161.
6. What is quoted by James Andrew comes from André Bazin and Jean Cocteau, Orson Welles (Paris: Editions du Chavanne, 1950), p. 57.
7. Bertrand Augst, as quoted from an unpublished paper quoted in Freddy Sweet, The Film Narratives of Alain Resnais, (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1981), pp. 50-51.
8. James Monaco, The New Wave (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), pp. 129-130.
9. Harry M. Geduld, ed., Film Makers on Film Making (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967), p. 166.
10. André S. Labarthe et Jacques Rivette, "Entretien avec Resnais et Robbe-Grillet," Cahiers du Cinéma, No. 123 (September, 1961), pp. 1-8.
11. The psychoanalyst Chasseguet-Smirgel sees the absence of sound as a sign of X's impotence. Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel, Pour une Psychoanalyse de l'Art et de la Créativité, (Paris: Payot, 1971), p. 131.

Chapter 2

In this second of four parts the pursuit of A by X begins in earnest. X evokes the gardens of Fredericksbad where he assures her that they met for the first time. X and M play once more the Nim game at which X inevitably loses. X mentions another time in the same garden where they discussed a pair of statues. To support his point, X shows A an artist's rendering of the garden containing the statue which M declares to be a representation of Charles III and his wife at a trial of treason. X continues to relate to A their shared past as she listens amusedly. Again X reminds her of another time when, amongst a group of acquaintances, he claims they exchanged words. He assures her of an incident when she broke one of the heels of her shoe, and she declined his offer of assistance to return to the chateau. The final scene is in a corner of a salon where A and X stand beside a bar, as X recalls a night when he entered her bedroom. During his monologue we have a glimpse of her white room. She cries out in a shout of horror or recognition and drops her glass to the floor, causing a scandal as silence overtakes the room while all the dancers stop and stare at her.. (pp. 57-96)

The camera shows a dark room in which only A is visible. As X relates their first encounter the camera steadily approaches A.

Voix de X: La première fois que je vous ai vue, c'était dans les jardins de Frederiksbad ... Vous étiez seule, un peu à l'écart des autres, debout contre une balustrade de pierre sur laquelle votre main était posée, le bras à demi étendu... vous avez tourné la tête.

A: Je ne crois pas qu'il s'agisse de moi. Vous devez vous tromper...

la camera recule et l'on decouvre que A n'est pas seule: X se tient à côté d'elle; d'autres gens se trouvent aussi près d'eux...

X: Rappelez-vous: il y avait, tout près de nous, un groupe de pierre... c'était vous et moi, aussi bien. (pp. 57-58)

What is intriguing about the first scene is the juxtaposition between the outside and the inside, between a garden which we must imagine in our minds and a room which we watch on the screen. We are forced just like A to imagine in our minds this unseen garden. His tone of voice as well as his attention to apparently minor detail adds credibility to the episode which X relates. The description of A in which the position of her hands as well as her pose are evoked is remarkably similar to that of a statue. Whenever we see A, she is often in the pose of a statue. This is both how X describes her as well as how the camera presents her. Are we really only shown A through X's eyes? (For the most part the camera shows A when X discusses her; however some scenes [i.e. pp. 141-144] make no reference to X.)

Mais le regard de X n'est nullement exclusif ou omnipresent: la caméra endosse souvent le point de vue de A, réel ou imaginaire, ou d'un personnage accessoire (voir p. 42, par exemple), ou même d'un personnage inexistant, placé à un endroit impossible (lorsqu'elle plane au-dessus de la statue). Elle s'associe souvent aux personnages, replace à côté d'eux leur fait vis-à-vis, s'avance avec eux ou recule devant eux. Loin de se limiter à la règle stricte d'une caméra -- observatrice se substituant à l'œil humain Robbe-Grillet -- et Resnais avec lui -- déplace l'objectif avec une grande liberté, mais cette liberté est toujours en accord avec la subjectivité foncière de l'oeuvre.¹

X's memory here concentrates on how people and things are arranged in space. Perhaps because when things are described in a spatial manner and with such apparent assurance they appear to be "obviously" real. How could anyone invent a picture which they describe to us detail by detail? Such a description also seems to be objective by its reference to outside appearances. X's mention of the sound of his footsteps on gravel is both inconsequential and important. It is a minor detail which adds a touch of "truth" to the episode, because it appears so natural a part of their meeting. The sound of gravel is repeated later on at different moments of action in Marienbad. A politely rebuffs X's story and we are inclined to believe, but X continues his story. Why is A so hesitant about her past? Who is lying and who is telling the truth?

The camera can reveal and conceal; creating space at will. It moves back to reveal that X is standing right next to A, which the soundtrack had implied but the image had up until then denied. The seed is planted for a future conversation about this "past" in the garden of Fredericksbad where X met A and presumably tried to explicate a nameless statue found there. Throughout the narrating of this episode, we stay within this dark room of the chateau. At this point A smiles and begins to laugh. X's comment unites the present moment with their remembered past meeting as he says, "J'aime -- j'aimais déjà -- vous entendre rire." X could be "innocently" remembering the past, or he could be transposing her present action into the past. I love you laughing now as you did before. As he evokes the general quality of A's laughter, this adds a touch of the "poetic" to X's love.

Laughter is presumably what anyone might often engage in. It sounds as though X knows A intimately as he equates her laughter from the present moment to the past, giving her the "nature" of one who laughs. A is charming X with her laughter as she apparently did in the past at Fredericksbad. It is also implied that X has heard A laugh on more than one occasion. By being flattered in the present moment about her laughter, how could A deny that she did indeed laugh at this past meeting, and that she is indeed a laugher by nature? By the addition of an extra verb tense (+ déjà), a simple action in the present becomes a "timeless" part of A's nature, which adds proof to X's case of knowing and loving her in the past.

Les autres autour de nous, s'étaient rapprochés.
 Quelqu'un a donné le nom de la statue; c'étaient
 des personnages mythologiques... (p.59)

As these "others" are evoked from the past the camera passes through the dark room showing us groups of people talking. We are again forced to equate this group of people with the one in the past at Fredericksbad. In fact, the others do not come closer to the speaker, ("s'étaient rapprochés") as they do according to X's dialogue; rather it is the camera which moves towards them. In the circle which the camera covers as it pans the room, X is displaced to arrive in an impossible position, while A also appears in an "incongruous" position with regard to the previous shot, from a balustrade facing outside. We are once more, though visually this time, forced to equate the inside with the outside;

for this balustrade could be the balustrade from which A is said to have observed the statue in the garden. The cut from this scene to the next is equally as dizzying as we hear a series of numbers called out; then the camera pans to another room where a man plays and loses the Nim game as X looks on. At the end of the previous shot, X is looking up at A who is on a balcony looking outside. As the shot is cut to the next scene, X is looking in the same direction as in the previous scene. It is as though he were standing in exactly the same room as the one in which the game was played, which is spatially impossible, yet visually possible on film. We cannot forget that the trucage is important in this film, not its verisimilitude. According to Hollywood DECOUPAGE, elements are cut to follow a psychological train of thought in the minds of the spectators; the pretence of "reality" is never abandoned. But in Marienbad the shots are linked to disturb our sense of spatial reality. What is logically impossible to link is defiantly and easily connected by film in Marienbad. It is a reminder that film is one big trucage -- it is always trying to order what is only arbitrarily assigned an order. It is man's (or the artist's) conception of order which imposes these connections, as in all films.

The silence which surrounds our concentration on the game is refreshing after we have lost our way once again through a maze of distorted time by the image and the narrative. We watch the game and question ourselves: who is this M and why does he always win? X proposes the next game, saying "Et si c'était à vous de jouer le premier?" (p. 63). As we watch the game played and as X

loses again, we hear:

Et une fois de plus je m'avançais, seul, le long de ces mêmes couloirs, à travers ces mêmes salles désertes, je longeais ces mêmes colonnades, ces mêmes galeries sans fenêtres, je franchissais ces mêmes portails, choisissant mon chemin comme au hasard parmi le dédale des itinéraires semblables. (p. 64)

Robbe-Grillet plays delicately with the continuing mystery of the game. X and we the spectators want to discover its rules. Is the first player always the winner? Losing the game is equated with X's search for the woman by this return to the "une fois de plus" monologue. Is M her husband or protector who stands in the way of X in convincing her of their shared past and their implied commitment to love? (Why else would he be so obsessed with this woman?) The idea of a maze evokes the spatial convolutions which the camera and narrative have demonstrated, as well as the paths of thought that our minds are following to find the key or the meaning of Mariénbad. The film itself by its "faux-raccords" seems to be precisely put together "comme au hasard"; however, in fact, it is really a carefully constructed puzzle with only the appearance of "le hasard." Mariénbad is constructed like a carefully thought out labyrinth for the mind to play with. The very essence of a labyrinth is to cause one to lose the way; only with patience can one reach the centre. Though death may well lie at its centre, we still want to unravel the mystery of the maze, but do we want to free the minotaur? Does Mariénbad even contain a minotaur at its centre?

Suites de plans mobiles montrant des personnages fixes. Groupes de gens à travers l'hôtel, dans

des postures arrê^{te}ées, mais sans caractère surnaturel: ils ne sont pas en train de bouger, et c'est tout ... la caméra se déplace autour d'eux, tourne, revient en arrière, comme autour de figures de cire dans un musée. C'est peut-être seulement les mouvements de la caméra qui donnent à leur immobilité un air bizarre...

Voix de X: Et une fois de plus tout était désert, dans cet hôtel immense, tout était vide ... Salons vides. Couloirs. Salons. Portes. Portes. Salons. Chaises vides, fauteuils profonds... (p. 64)

Once again we find conflict between the image we see on the screen and the words narrated by X. Which, soundtrack or image, communicates his thoughts to us? Could his thoughts be the interior monologue which he recites as he wanders about the chateau? If he feels unconnected and cut off from the people and the world, he might well dwell on the emptiness of the vast chateau in this manner. Or is this Marienbad-world but a fiction in his mind as he reviews his past or present life? The recitation of objects by X is characteristic of his monologues. They are both calming and disturbing due to their very banality. It is as though he were reporting the objects he sees in a supposedly objective manner while the camera passes through the main lobby, but the very act of such reporting is a subjective indication of his state of mind. He is disturbed, obsessed and haunted by A within this Marienbad world to which he seems incapable of making any connection. The world is full of objects and people who are turned into objects, being observed and viewed by the camera, without their human qualities (life-like qualities) being emphasized. They are just part of the decor: lifeless and still.

The camera enters another room where A is sitting alone

reading. X's voice accompanies the camera as it circles A who is frozen in a statuesque position.

Un an déjà -- ou peut-être plus. -- Vous, du moins, n'avez pas changé. Vous avez toujours les mêmes yeux absents, le même sourire, le même rire tout à coup, la même façon d'étendre le bras comme pour écarter quelque chose, un enfant, une branche, et de ramener lentement la main vers le creux de votre épaule ... et vous portez, aussi, le même parfum. (p.68)

The close proximity of the camera to A accompanied by the personal tone of X's voice produces an illusion of intimacy. We believe them to be conversing, yet A is observed by the camera and X is nowhere in sight. This view which the camera reveals to us may be either from X himself at her side, physically in the room, or it may be a "view" from his mind's eye. We still do not fully accept A's refusal of X's story. But she could either have suppressed their meeting, or she could be pretending not to recognize him. Her actions and words in response to X could easily be the same, regardless of which of these situations is true, or even in fact if it is X who is the deceitful one. X by emphasizing her "immutability" implies a certain intimacy with her. But these lines could be said to anyone and they would be as believable. A's physical features, eyes, laughter and smiles could have been readily observed upon this meeting at this chateau and transposed into the past event. What adds life to the still statuesque position in which the camera holds A as it circles her, is X's recalling the movement of her arm. An exterior life-filled world is emphasized by mentioning a child or a branch. It would seem that X has seen A in many different

situations, where she performed such "banal" movements. Having no visual reference to these movements (except the static pose of her arm held upon her shoulder), such a statement condenses a great deal of life into one minor part of A. Such a banal description becomes bizarre, because it implies an intimate knowledge of A and her past, which X has scarcely proven to us. The essence of a woman could be remembered by a man as her perfume. Such an emotional and amorous sign as perfume is too readily socially accepted as a possible sign of intimacy. Yet that such a statement might mean nothing is equally apparent. X continues to weave an ambiguous evocation of A. She is still the same and yet...

Voix de X: Souvenez-vous. C'était dans les jardins de Fredericksbad...

La caméra s'arrête sur un personnage solitaire, (A) une femme debout qui s'appuie à une balustrade de pierre...

Vous étiez seule, à l'écart. Vous vous teniez, un peu de biais, contre une balustrade de pierre, sur laquelle votre main était posée, le bras à demi étendu...

La voix s'arrête. A ne se trouve pas dans la pose indiquée par le texte que l'on entend... Elle rectifie ensuite la posture [slowly] ... A ayant corrigé sa position, la voix de X aussitôt continue, comme si elle n'attendait que cela. (p. 69)

What is so remarkable about this scene is the slow unfolding of the actions described by the narrative, before our very eyes in the images. It is not a question of being disturbed by simple contradictions within one shot or sequence as in the scenes that we have observed where the past and present or life and death enigmatically coexist. What is disturbing here is the initial discordance between the text and image, which is slowly but

eventually corrected. It appears as though A were willfully resisting following X's description of her only to acquiesce in the end. This sequence illustrates on film what A is doing mentally as she resists acknowledging any of X's story. Yet unlike her verbal reactions to X up to this moment in Marienbad, she does yield to him and becomes the image which he describes. Might this indicate an eventual acceptance by her of their shared past?

What we desperately want to know is the basis or reason for the discrepancy between the soundtrack and the images: which one is telling us the "truth"? We participate in the film creating itself. A in the image follows X's instructions as though she were an actress he is directing. He creates the story and she molds herself to fit his description/perception of her. Could this be a clash between subjectivities: his reflected in the words, hers in the image? X creates an image of A which she refuses to accept but which she eventually gives in to. Or does this disagreement occur in X's own creation of this scene? The blatant clash between sound and image draws our attention once again to the fact that this is a film which reveals itself as an evolving aesthetic object. Whether or not this sequence is a recall from memory or pure invention on the part of X, the process of conveying it would be the same -- one of re-creation. When one recalls a past event, some details are obscured while others are highlighted. When we construct the past, we often see, or describe as if we were seeing, an image of the past in the present.² Even if we decide that something was

wrong with our first impression of a past event, the image that we at first "saw" and described nevertheless appears equally as valid because we imagined it visually. Could this discordance not be a cinematic example of a faulty memory which X actually relays, or else invents? As X continues his story, he often claims ignorance about certain details which could be important. This "je ne sais pas" could be his attempt at creating presumed ignorance, or actual forgetting. (One would expect a certain amount of forgetting in anyone's memory. If they had a picture perfect view of the past, their story might be more "suspect.") What this image conveys as well is X's constant obsession with A as a statue herself. His perception of her may well be frozen in the past; however, he refuses to accept this, preferring instead to refer to a distant shadow of her present self.

Je vous regardais. Vous ne faisiez pas un geste.
Je vous ai dit que vous aviez l'air vivante. (p. 70)

It is as if X were talking to or about someone who had died. Why wouldn't she look "alive"? This banal comment evokes the bizarre because the obvious is over-emphasized. The simplicity of this (evident) statement calls its premise into doubt. The image by its presence impresses upon us the "living" quality of its subject; yet for us A is just an image, a statue and not a living subject at all. However, she does appear as if alive:

Voix de X: Pour dire quelque chose, j'ai parlé de la statue. Je vous ai raconté que l'homme voulait empêcher la jeune femme de s'avancer plus loin: il

avait aperçu quelque chose -- un danger sûrement -- et il arrêta d'un geste sa compagne. Vous m'avez répondu que c'était elle, plutôt, qui semblait avoir vu quelque chose -- mais une chose au contraire merveilleuse -- devant eux, qu'elle désigne de sa main tendue.

Mais ça n'était pas incompatible:... (p. 71)

Here we have reached one of the apparent foci of Marienbad. The idea of a statue has been embodied to a large degree by A who stands in a statuesque pose every time we get a glimpse of her. She is constantly being observed and described as a static entity. It would seem that X sees her in a way which is transmitted to us by the camera and his words. She may well be totally "other" than what he perceives, but we are seldom allowed to observe her by herself, since she is so often presented through the words of X. The actress in the play also holds a statuesque pose which gives us the impression of an automaton, rather than that of a living human being. To a lesser extent the other inhabitants of Marienbad as well have displayed statuesque features as the camera freezes them in motion and then allows them to move again. (cf. pp. 33-34 scenes after the play as well as p. 64: "La caméra se déplace autour d'eux, tourne, revient en arrière, comme autour de figures de cire dans un musée.") We are reminded of the objectification of people in the mind of a subject as well as the objectification of art. X defines A in terms of what he sees and what he wants to see. We have only seen A in the terms in which X has been willing to describe her. In trying to convince her of their shared past, X relays what he observed (or has recently observed)

of A from the outside, rather than describe any personal details of her interior life. This would imply a connection which A would find harder to refute. (Does this imply that X is creating his story, or simply that it is easier to describe a relationship in terms of past events and actions, rather than through intimate secrets?) Does this also imply that X really was not all that close to A in the past? or that they did share the "adventure" which X describes but that the connection was rather shallow?

In this close-up scene of the statue, we are led back to the mystery of art and our desire for its understanding and resolution. Could this statue provide us with the key to understanding Marienbad and the relationship between A and X? We add all the new elements that are revealed to the puzzle of Marienbad itself. On a smaller scale, we are forced to appreciate the possibility of a work of art being open to many different interpretations. X presents his views alongside those of A's and concludes that though they may be opposing, they could easily coexist and be part of one scenario. What is also emphasized is the subjective nature of one's responses to a work of art. The interpretation which we choose over any other as being appropriate or valid reveals as much if not more about ourselves than about the interpreted object. X's interpretation of the male statue, i.e. that he wants to protect his companion, may well be a reflection of his own desire to protect or manipulate A. His explanation presents a fearfully pessimistic view of the world which opposes A's optimistic world of "émerveillement."

However definite the statement of the statue may be to either

X or A, seeing their impressions related side by side, we can appreciate how arbitrary and ambiguous a work of art may be. It is the viewers who give colour and meaning to a work of art, even perhaps contrary to those intended by the artist who created it. Or the reality perceived by the viewer may be equally ambiguous. Does X not interpret A's actions and looks to be significant? How often in our everyday lives do two people discuss what another person is like, only to come to entirely different conclusions about the individual, due to preconceived judgements and evaluations which they themselves have already made? Just as X invents a story to interpret the statue, we as viewers are asked to invent and create a story to encompass Marienbad. On a small scale this may be possible, but the film as a whole has too many signs overly pregnant with meaning to be fixed to one definition, or to embody only one meaning, for it is a veritable multitude of significant meanings.

To embellish this scene, Resnais chose to allow the camera some "legitimate" TRUCAGE to emphasize the story which X creates around the statue. Figuratively and physically: the camera circles the statue and creates out of the surrounding space the elements which X describes. As he relates the idea of the couple reaching a cliff, we see a body of water which "comes from nowhere" to fill the screen: "mer, à leurs pieds, jusqu'à l'horizon " (p. 71). What is meant by legitimate TRUCAGE is the notion of the camera illustrating details which are essential to the story that the film is telling. The fact that they are selected and chosen by the director, as advancing the plot and are presented

as being "naturally" essential to the plot, is an integral part of a typical narrative (Hollywood DECOUPAGE) film. In Marienbad, Resnais and Robbe-Grillet, up to and until this point, have expressly avoided such psychological connections as its story is related. They have sought to expose such connections as being a falsified version of reality, one only created through tradition and a desire to interpret the world. This TRUCAGE is false because it implies that film is a direct window on exterior reality, rather than admitting to be an arbitrary creation of an ordered reality. Of course, we are quite comfortable with this brief return to conventional DECOUPAGE and do not find the sudden appearance of the sea as being at all disconcerting, since we have long ago conceded to the apparent "reality" of film. Resnais also shows himself to be perfectly capable and willing to provide some conventional scenes created by traditional DECOUPAGE in Marienbad, if only to highlight the bizarre TRUCAGE which is the style of the rest of the film.

Ensuite, vous m'avez demandé le nom des personnages. J'ai répondu que ça n'avait pas d'importance. -- Vous n'étiez pas de cet avis, et vous vous êtes mise à leur donner des noms, un peu au hasard je crois... Pyrrhus et Andromaque, Hélène et Agamemnon ... Alors j'ai dit que c'était vous et moi, aussi bien... (un silence) ou n'importe qui. (p. 71)

A wants to name the statues, which opens up even more avenues of interpretation, while at the same time narrowing the scope of such interpretation. The power of naming is reassuring in the same way that defining and interpreting allows the mind to rest at one explanation of an enigmatic work of art. What happens by naming the statue is

that its intrinsic quality is ignored in all its detail, incongruity and physical beauty, since it is forced to signify and represent one couple instead of many. By naming, one subordinates the imagination to a simplistic definition of a complex work of art. Naming is another way of defining and therefore limiting the subject. One gives up the challenge to observe and fully appreciate the work of art as art. If the statue is named, it loses its enigmatic presence to some degree, and becomes an obvious signifier of one couple rather than remaining an ever changing representation of the many different facets of all couples.

The scene quickly changes, becoming an active participation between A and X in this "remembered" inspection of the statue.

X: Ne leur donnez pas de nom... Ils pourraient avoir eu tant d'autres aventures.
 A: Vous oubliez le chien. Pourquoi ont-ils un chien avec eux?
 X: Le chien n'est pas avec eux. Il passait là par hasard.
 A: Mais on voit bien qu'il se serre contre sa maîtresse.
 X: Ce n'est pas sa maîtresse. Il se serre contre elle parce que le socle est trop étroit. Regardez-les là-bas, ce sont les mêmes et ils n'ont plus le chien avec eux... Mais de plus près, vous verrez qu'elle regarde ailleurs... Venez-vous?
 A: Non... Je n'ai pas envie... C'est trop loin...
 X: Suivez-moi, je vous en prie. (pp. 72-73)

This is an active dialogue in which we see A and X conversing on the screen, which contrasts with the previous scene that was narrated by X as A listened. We have the feeling of a flashback which implies a certain validity to X's story: He is not inventing it, for it is presented as realistically as possible in the form of a "flash-back." However, we must remember that Marienbad is a film which lies and distorts the "truth." This may simply be the impression

which X receives as he creates the past; whether he is remembering or actually inventing it. As one critic, Chasseguet-Smirgel, has seen, X's interpretation of the dog having no relationship with the female statue is indicative of his alienation from others, and is a sign of his disconnectedness with A.³

This scene is the first one in which X and A laugh together. This implies an intimacy and camaraderie which is the very opposite of their otherwise "formalistic" conversations. X and A speak in "legal terms," always trying to prove what happened. Perhaps this is precisely X's problem -- to have sensed an intimate understanding with A which never really was there.

The audience is teased by A's stubborn refusal to look at the other statue. X presents it as another clue to prove his hypotheses about the statue, which we hope will enlighten us with regard to Marienbad. We are inveigled to believe that this path will be the key we are looking for, only to have the proof unrevealed, left OFF CAMERA. Here again we are refused a Hollywood plot advancement which might satisfy our curiosity.

Voix de X: Je vous en prie.

A: Je vous répète que c'est impossible. Je n'ai même jamais été à Fredericksbad.

X: Eh bien, c'était ailleurs peut-être. à Karlstadt, à Marienbad, ou à Baden-Salsa -- ou même ici, dans ce salon. Vous m'avez suivi jusqu'ici pour que je vous montre cette image. (p. 74)

X continues describing the statue as he interprets it, as he

shows A an artist's print of the statue and garden, which is conveniently on the wall. We return to the "present" time wherein A continues to deny the possibility of X's "story" being at all true.

This list of possible places for a past encounter produces vertigo among the spectators as well as in A. We become confused with all these possibilities. Since we have come to a movie entitled L'année dernière à Marienbad, we assume that the meeting unfolded there last year. But with the evocation of places, they all become the equal of the other and we lose any certainty of this story having happened at all. Marienbad or the place where X and A are purported to have met may be a complete fabrication by X. Playing with our imaginations as well as A's, he has created a story out of the very place where they wander -- which is nameless -- and all the more menacing because of this fact. Even in the apparent present (when he tries to convince her of her past) we return to look at a picture of the statue of "last year." X is examining the present place and projecting it as the past. The apparent similarity between these various German resorts, while outside the context of this film, is not at all extraordinary, since many were built by the same architects in the same styles for the same class of people. Each no doubt would contain a French garden with statues, as well as engravings of the estates. But this evident similarity is twisted into something bizarre and frightening within the convolutions of X's creation. If four or five places are all "equivalent", one loses any sense of assurance in "reality". A is displaced in

her own mind as she tries to define one chateau as being distinct from another. X's descriptions are so general as to include and hint at any chateau A may have visited.

The evidence of the architecture itself affronts A's belief in having been only in one place. Trying to evoke a memory can also confuse someone who has been in many similar places. The distinguishing features could be transposed by her own mind or by X's present description from one place to another. What is frightening is the power of the language of description which distorts a certainty of place. X's constant attack on A's refusal presents at least a certain "truthfulness" in that it is based on what can be seen. It is a battle between A's "common sense," of knowing her own past and the places that she has visited, and X's unrelenting projection of possibilities.

As X explains the etching to A, M arrives out of the shadows to inform them of the statue's background.

M: Pardonnez-moi, cher Monsieur. Je crois que je peux vous renseigner d'une façon plus précise: cette statue représente Charles III et son épouse, mais elle ne date pas de cette époque, naturellement. La scène est celle du serment devant la Diète, au moment du procès en trahison. Les costumes antiques sont de convention pure. (p. 76)

M speaks with the voice of authority. Some critics see him as being in the "real world" as opposed to A and X who are presumed to live in a fantasy world.⁴ This explication of the statue as well as the lunch meeting alluded to with Patterson at the end, makes M a man of business. His explanation leaves no room for interpretation or doubt, being the opposite of X's descriptions.

M's explicit verbalization of this work of art is a threat to X's creation, for precision will corroborate or negate the proofs which X continues to profer. We are impressed by the unsatisfactory quality of M's explanation. (Here we can definitely agree with X's statement that names do not mean anything and are truly of little importance whatsoever.) This explanation itself is a jewel of signs which can only frustrate the keen critics, who sit here, as the audience, puzzling over this film. There are seven Charles III in European history,⁵ but not one of them was put on trial for treason, nor did they have access to a Diet.⁶ (This signifier Diet evokes German history as Diets existed as parliaments in Germany only in the Middle Ages and during the Renaissance; we must not forget that the action takes place at a German chateau.) What does the idea of "Betrayal" or "Treason" have to do with our conversant couple X and A? Marienbad tries to hint at meaning to connect it to our historical world, but these leads are only "red herrings" to expose the futility of explanations. Robbe-Grillet prefers that we struggle and experience the flow and process of meaning which Marienbad illustrates, rather than define and limit his art to one definitive solution. Art for him is a question of creation not only for the artist but for the audience as well.

The effort of the spectator, like that of the reader, has become to an over-increasing extent an integral part of cinematographic and novelistic creation. "The hour of the reader" that Jose-Maria Castellet has declared for the new novel has as its counterpart the "hour of the spectator" for the new cinema. This collaborative effort, which has never been wholly absent in art, becomes more essential, more critical: not in the former sense of the "deciphering" demanded by the hermeneutic poetry of a Rimbaud or a Mallarmé -- wherein the search for meaning, for multiple

interpretations, constitutes a first requirement for the comprehension of a given work -- but in the sense of participating in the aesthetic functioning of the novel or film.⁷

The arrival at an answer is a denial of the enriching journey so often ignored when critics label, define and destroy the enigma of art.

Real art has the capacity to make us nervous. By reducing the work of art to its content and then interpreting that, one tames the work of art. Interpretation makes art manageable, comfortable ... What is important now is to recover our senses. We must learn to see more, to hear more, to feel more.⁸

We are shown a series of quiet scenes in the chateau which call forth the quiet, sinister nature of Marienbad. After a few frames X and A come into view again. The image vacillates between A and X, as the following dialogue is presented.

X: Vous m'attendiez.
 A: Non... Pourquoi vous attendrais-je?
 X: Je vous ai moi-même attendue longtemps.
 A: Dans vos rêves?
 X: Et vous essayez à nouveau de vous échapper.
 Voix de A: Mais de quoi parlez-vous? Je ne comprends rien à ce que vous dites.
 X: Si c'étaient des rêves, pourquoi auriez-vous peur?
 Voix de A: Eh bien, racontez-moi donc la suite de notre histoire. (pp. 79-80)

Waiting indeed is an ambiguous act. Standing on the stairs A can seem to be waiting without having any such intent. Yet by observing A from the outside, as spectators must, we see X arrive. A may or may not have been awaiting X, since his arrival allows, rather than denies that possibility. X becomes the "eternal," poetic lover as he states "attendre longtemps." But

his romantic allusion is humourously destroyed by A's quick rebuttal. What very few critics have mentioned is the inherent humour⁹ in this journey into ambiguity as a man denies a woman's past (to her very face!). We are very much involved in trying to sort out the meaning of Marienbad, while at the same time feeling menaced by its mutability and impermeability to concrete, "real" certainty. While being a very serious adventure, Marienbad is undeniably humorous as an equally ridiculous quest. We tire of repetition; as we see the bedroom appear for the umpteenth time, and see the options for an end to the story, murder, rape, etc., we become exasperated. Is there no end to Marienbad?

Why is A afraid? She fears the present adventure as a threat to her connection with reality. Her place in the world along with her sense of reality and dreams is threatened by X's denial of her own self-knowledge. The nightmare of losing her identity becomes ever more real, as X continues to confuse her with different versions of reality so close to what she may have experienced in the past as to be possibly valid. X's repetitious recollection of similar events gives A a sense of déjà-vu even though she may have experienced these events only by listening to what X tells her. A, like we the spectators, must yield to X's ongoing narrative if we are to resolve this conflict between his story and her reality.

pp. 83-86. X recalls A back to their "next" meeting which

took place among a small group of guests at the hotel. In a monologue by X not a word of the dialogue is uttered, only its contours and implications are described. In the first half of this monologue we see A alone moving around the labyrinthine garden in a seductive gown of light white material, apparently going nowhere but around! The robe as it is blown around by the wind gives her an ephemeral quality. She walks calmly, while constantly changing direction, moving about with directionless purpose. She wears one sandal while carrying the other nonchalantly in her hand. Once again there is no correlation between the images and the words. A's course through the maze implies her continuing loss of control over her own story as X weaves once again his web of open text. (A as subject is caught in this net; whereas A is presented here as an object presumably observed by X in this, his subjective vision.) She like us tries to make sense out of X's never-ending recounting which assures us by its certainty, yet baffles us by its contradictions. Can we assume that it is X who imagines A running around the labyrinth in this manner, given the alluring costume she is wearing? He imagines concretely what his complicated tale is doing abstractly: luring A into a trap through which he can possess her.

What this dissonance between narrated text and image does is to force us to imagine the scene X describes as we watch and try to make sense of what we see on the screen. This is yet again another way in which Marienbad forces us to create by imagining as we experience the film. Normally when we watch a film we expect to be led by the sequence of relevant images and

dialogue which make up a narrative film. But the authors of Marienbad try to make us work along with the artists by creating our own image of what X describes as the film shows us another event. In this way too we are put in the same situation as A since, like her, we must try to visualize what he describes in words.

X: Je vous regardais. Vous vous mêliez à la conversation. Avec un entrain qui m'a paru factice. Il me semblait que personne ne savait qui vous étiez parmi tous ces gens, que j'étais le seul à le savoir. Et vous ne le saviez pas non plus... (p. 83)

We are presented by the camera with a cross-cut of a group of persons in the garden, among whom we find A, M and X. X relates that he said something to attract her attention. She repounded:

d'une phrase ironique sur l'invraisemblance de [son] propos. Les autres continuaient de se taire.

Voix de X: J'ai eu de nouveau l'impression que personne ne comprenait vos paroles, peut-être même que j'étais le seul à les avoir entendues. (p. 85)

X attacks A's own confidence in herself by suggesting this disconnection between herself and the group. He accuses her indirectly of being somewhat false and fabricated. (She is but a façade!) The others do not know who she is, nor do they understand what she says. It is X who knows her and implies that he is able to understand her. This point of view is an attempt to undermine her self-hood, which is what he must do to make her believe in the story he relates. She must question her own belief in her past which he dictates to her. However directly this incident is related, it remains only the impressions of X as he

himself reports. He egotistically emphasizes his own invaluable importance to A.

P. 89. We watch X and A dancing in two shots. Then we are shown a game of poker with M and X among other guests. X is the last to accede the victory to M who nonchalantly collects the cards and the poker chips he has won. X calmly adds the required chips to the center of the table but when M raises the ante, X smilingly admits defeat. M regards him indifferently while X appears to appreciate the humour of his loss. Throughout the game we hear X's voice as it describes another incident from A's past. It appears that she once broke a heel of her shoe as she was walking with him in the garden. The lugubrious waltz music that we have heard previously continues on throughout this scene.

The juxtaposition of music, the seriousness/non-seriousness of the game alongside X's narrated (unrelated to the images) memory of A breaking one of her heels -- all of this teases us by its incongruity. It is a banal story presented in an odd fashion, which imbues it with a bizarre quality. Does X imagine this past event as he plays poker? The story is directed towards A, and yet she is not present, it is we who receive the incongruous connection between poker, the table, haunting music and humour. This memory as it is described for us appears to come out of place, as though it should have preceded (chronologically speaking) the images of A running around the labyrinth with one shoe on. X relates his memories of the past in an achronological fashion, which could be read differently by us as implying truth or falsehood. If he

relates the past as he truly remembers it, one could easily accept the distortions and convolutions. Whose memory does not also interpret and create perceived experiences?

We should no doubt wish to deny this. "Common sense" should tell us that we can remember what we ourselves experience. But a good example of faulty memory could be provided by psychological tests which study police witness reports. Different subjects are asked to participate in an experiment. During the course of their waiting, a staged event is played out. The subjects are then examined and their eye-witness accounts of what happened are collected and compared. What is exposed is the idea that eye-witnesses' testimony of observed crime is reliable. Their stories usually conflict so as to provide a myriad of solutions as to what "really" happened. What can only be explained is that we as subjects interpret the fluid reality in which we live. We are creating, translating and defining what we experience. Reality as an objective entity is hard to grasp or define; we have only our own mutations to believe in. If this experiment which involves actors who are unrelated to the subjects demonstrates the innaccuracy of "objective" reporting on an event, imagine how even more distorted our memories must be about the events which involve us personally! Even the eye invents what it sees: it fills in the gaps which are missing according to past experiences.

On the other hand if we believe X to be inventing his story, his achronology would be part of his attempt to confuse and displace A's mind so as to convince her of the validity of his

claims. If she cannot control and believe in part of her own mind, perhaps she would accept one so emphatically defended by X.

J'ai dit, alors, que je pouvais aussi vous porter dans mes bras pour revenir. Vous avez ri seulement, sans répondre, comme si c'était...vous avez dû, ce jour-là rentrer vos souliers à main, sur les graviers, jusqu'à l'hôtel. (p. 89)

X puts himself or remembers himself to be in a gallant position as the rescuer of A, "a damsel in distress." He uses his intuition in examining A and projects the person whom he thinks he sees into a past event. She has frail expensive shoes which might easily break: the incident could have easily and may well have happened. He sees her also (as she presently resists him) as one to refuse his aid whether it is a question of bringing her shoe or carrying her off. These galantries are easily a reflection of X's desire for control over A as her protector and helper. How could A deny the advances of such a gallant and chivalrous man? He describes himself as a character in a romantic fiction.

The way in which this scene unfolds is an attempt by Robbe-Grillet/Resnais to encompass us in the same field of distortion through which A is forced to pass. We are intended to experience confusion as we watch Marienbad. We too are called upon to question our past histories as being anything but certain.

The waltz music continues as the scene changes from the poker table to a bar. The camera slowly tracks toward A and X who stand beside the bar. X talks once more of another encounter

from the past.

Je vous rencontrais de nouveau. -- Vous n'avez jamais l'air de m'attendre, mais nous nous retrouvions a chaque detour d'allée, derrière chaque buisson -- au pied de chaque statue -- au bord de chaque bassin. C'était comme s'il n'y avait eu, dans tout ce jardin, que vous et moi. (p. 91)

These simple words about a meeting evoke the timeless quality of two lovers who meet everywhere, whose minds are filled with thoughts of the beloved and who search for each other everywhere. Or they could also evoke pursuit -- being trapped in the garden, forced into seeing one person again and again. These words spoken by X could represent his own feelings or those of both people involved. What would otherwise be a positive sign of mutual love, here in this one-sided conversation evokes a limitless obsession. X is trying to rekindle the mutual love which he implies they both share.

Nous parlions de n'importe quoi -- du nom des statues, de la forme des buissons, de l'eau des bassins. -- Ou bien nous ne parlions pas du tout.

Temps d'arrêt. Silence complet. Pendant que X parle, d'une voix toujours égale, les deux visages demeurent impaisissibles. X semble en train de voir le jardin et les scènes qu'il évoque; A semble ne rien entendre du tout...

X: La nuit, surtout, vous aimiez vous taire. (pp. 91-92)

At this juncture a very brief scene of A in a bright, white, denuded bedroom flashes across the screen. We return to the bar only to see the bedroom brought back again and again -- each time for a few more seconds. X: "Un soir, je suis monté jusqu'à votre chambre..." We oscillate between the bar scene and the bedroom scene, while the bedroom scenes become steadily longer. (Here if we refer to the editing chart in

Techniques of Editing¹⁰ we notice that the shots are usually all of the same length, they just appear to be longer because we see new movements or objects appearing in what has become a familiar background. Our physical senses are played with in the same way that our minds are.

We see A eventually surrounded by ten shoes in the room as she begins to laugh. At this point a woman in the bar laughs. We see A in the bar walking backwards looking horrified. We hear A drop her glass as we see X entering the bedroom scene in which A falls off her chair. The noise of the shocked gathering is carried over, since when we return to the bar a waiter calmly and silently picks up the shattered pieces of glass.

A opens her eyes halfway through the bright shots of the room, as if she is imagining what X relays to her. The look of shock on her face and the ensuing shattering of her glass imply a recognition of the truth in X's story, or as Karel Reisz describes:¹¹ a victory of X's mind over A: in convincing her about the truth of something which she has steadily denied. Resnais has approximated this domination not through words as dialogue, but through images. X imposes an image to which he forces A to comply. Finally A appears to agree with X's conjectures, even if such agreement is exposed by fear, rather than by optimistic acceptance. This fear could be a recognition of what A has been suppressing all along or the absolute manipulation of X of her memory. The bedroom hints also at a strong sexual desire on the part of X for A. Did something happen last year which A has suppressed? The pile of shoes also "cries out" to be interpreted

as a powerful and enigmatic symbol. What is the connection between A's breaking a shoe, refusing help by X and a surplus of shoes in her bedroom?¹² Perhaps A's feelings at this intense moment in the room make her "see" many shoes in place of the one shoe which she needs to put on in order to leave without encountering X. There is no definitive answer to the reality or explanation of this scene.

Here again Resnais/Robbe-Grillet have broken through convention and expressed communication in a novel way. The violent opposition between black and white enhanced in this sequence by harsh lighting effects is evidence of the suppressed yet powerful aggression inherent in Marienbad. The active pursuit by X of A has been maintained by an unrelenting progression of episodes expressed and repeated by X. X has followed her to every corner of this chateau in unrelenting fashion; he appears to be more harrassing than loving. We cannot forget the scene where X is practising marksmanship, since it might be an expression of sexual aggression aimed at A. He attempts to impose his reality upon her in order to possess her. Is the root of such aggressive desire not a demonstration of his own power, which he attempts to wield, rather than limitless love for A which he has implied all along with his "poetic lover's language"?

Agression is the means of manipulation by Marienbad's creators of A by X, as well as of us, the spectators. X questions A's attachment to reality and her past, in exactly the same way as

Robbe-Grillet/Resnais question our connection to reality. We have come to see a film, expecting to see "our reality" up on the screen. But time and time again this apparent reality is exposed as a fiction. We have a new vision of what film can do, aggressively imposed upon us. For many viewers, Marienbad is but a carefully unfolded trick, played by the writer on his audience. Pauline Kael refers to it as "the snow job in the ice palace," in her critique of Marienbad.¹³

Yet this reaction may be a safety valve viewers have used to disregard the effect which Marienbad attempts to create on them. Noel Burch who writes about French New Wave delineates the violence which directors inflict on their audiences not only through content (as one would normally expect) but also through form, in a chapter entitled "Structures of Aggression":

Whatever his level of critical awareness, a viewer sitting in the dark alone and suddenly face to face with the screen is completely at the mercy of the film-maker, who may do violence to him at any moment and through any means. Should the viewer be forced beyond the pain threshold, his defense mechanisms may well be called forth and he may remind himself that "it's only a movie" (that distancing phenomenon to be described in more detail below), but it will always be too late... the harm will already have been done; intense discomfort, and perhaps even terror, will already have crept across the threshold.¹⁴

Marienbad is precisely such an aggressive movie which attempts to make us question not only the film medium and how it reflects reality, but also the very nature of reality itself. Robbe-Grillet is "on the warpath" against complacent non-creative viewing of film, a process which has enslaved both director and spectator alike. We are meant to participate and create along with the

artist, to involve ourselves in the questioning of reality, rather than accepting a pre-formulated shallow reflection of our world.

This scene only lasts three minutes but it has caused such a large rupture in the flow of our narrative. A yields ground to X, be it for truth, lack of power, or fear. The silence surrounding the final shot as the waiter picks up the pieces of broken glass is an attempt to calm us down and return us to yet another path of our overwhelming puzzle. Resnais uses the conflict between silence and sound, as well as rhythm to affect us emotively in the same manner that music moves us. Film becomes an expression for itself as a emotive piece rather than being considered important only for what it means.

NOTES

Chapter 2

1. Bruce Morrisette, Les Romans de Robbe-Grillet (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1963), p. 207.
2. In the Labarthe, Rivette interview, Resnais and Robbe-Grillet discuss what is the best way of producing reality on film. They admit that scenes in film no matter what time frame they occur in, are always presented in the present tense. Labarthe, Rivette interview, pp. 10-11.
3. Chasseguet-Smirgel, p. 135.
4. "M, en somme, est insere dans la realite. Il est "positif," fait des affaires (le dejeuner avec Anderson)." Chasseguet-Smirgel, p. 73.
5. There are seven references to Charles III in European history in Le Robert Noms Propres, Vol. I, pp. 434-435, 623, 625, 626, 627.
6. "Diete germanique" is explained in Le Robert Noms Propres, Vol. 2, p. 891.
7. Bruce Morrisette, The Novels of Robbe-Grillet, (London: Cornell University Press, 1971), pp. 210-211.
8. Susan Sontag, Against Interpretation and Other Essays (New York: Farrer, Straus & Giroux, 1967), pp. 8, 14.
9. James Monaco is a noted exception. He writes about the humour in the reptillian structure of sentences as well as the humour of constantly posing. With regard to M he writes: "Sacha Pitoeff cuts a lugubrious figure which is by turns comical and vicious. It reminds us that vampire psychology underlies the film." James Monaco, Alain Resnais (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 65-66
10. Karel Reisz and Gavin Millar, The Technique of Film Editing (London: Focal Press, 1968, 2nd enlarged edition), pp. 365-369.
11. Karel Reisz and Gavin Millar, p. 369.
12. Chasseguet-Smirgel discusses the shoes in her chapter on Marienbad, pp. 64-65. The shoes are part of a psycho-analytical explanation which although very richly developed I cannot fully accept.

13. Pauline Kael, "The Come-Dressed-As-The-Sick-Soul-Of-Europe Parties" in I Lost it at the Movies (Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1965), p. 185.
14. Noel Burch, Theory of Film Practice (New York: Praeger, 1973), p. 124.

Chapter 3

Part three is interspersed at length with discordant music which repeats as the scenes of X and A dancing together repeat. The story of A's pursuit is minutely elaborated on, giving us the feeling of a story which while appearing not to advance or change is nevertheless growing and developing. X describes A as a statue, while he talks at length of her fear... Of him, or of M perhaps. They discuss and project different views of the room where he took her by force or perhaps did not. More proof is alluded to by reference to a bracelet in the text, but by a ring in the movie. "But it is too late!" cries X. A moves about in the bedroom, refusing to look at or accept what X describes. (pp. 97-172)

Gradually, A seems to accept X's verbalized past but not his invitation to go away with him. With the possibility that A might be persuaded, X seems to lose grasp of his accounts; his tales have been of the past, of last year, toward convincing A. Their going away together points now toward the present and future, which leaves X confused and struggling between possible "endings" to the story. In one possible ending, a jealous M kills A. X rejects this, saying that he must have A alive. Another ending involves a rape, also rejected by X and visualized in the film by the repeated overexposed shots of A coming to meet X with feathered arms outstretched. After a meeting in the garden, X hurdles the balustrade of the balcony and it breaks. A screams, and her screams are identical with those of an earlier scene, the visuals returning to that earlier scene in the bar when A dropped her glass. M and A meet in her bedroom, and it is clear that M knows she will leave him, despite her protestations that he keep her. While everyone else at the chateau is attending the play that began the film, X and A leave at midnight, as they had previously agreed.¹

Different scenes of A and X inside and outside.

"C'était toujours des murs -- partout, autour de moi -- unis, lisses, vernis sans la moindre prise, c'était toujours des murs..." (p. 97).

This situation refers to a "hero" who in the past was always confronted with obstructions. This is also a hopeless situation in which the hero X is powerless: "C'était toujours" underlines the infinity (limitless time) in X's search for A, as well as reminding us of a labyrinth, which allows for infinite advancement in a straightforward traceless path. The film complies by showing us a series of halls and corridors, all seeming to lead somewhere and nowhere at the same time.

Voix de X: ...et aussi le silence. Je n'ai jamais entendu personne élever la voix, dans cet hôtel -- personne... Les conversations se déroulaient à vide, comme si les phrases ne signifiaient rien, ne devaient rien signifier, de toute manière. Et la phrase commencée restait tout à coup en suspens, comme figée par le gel... Mais pour reprendre ensuite, sans doute, au même point, ou ailleurs. Ça n'avait pas d'importance. C'étaient toujours les mêmes conversations qui revenaient, les mêmes voix absentes. Les serviteurs étaient muets. Les jeux étaient silencieux, naturellement. C'était un lieu de repos, on n'y traitait aucune affaire, on n'y tramait pas de complot, on n'y parlait jamais de quoi que ce fût qui pût éveiller les passions. Il y avait partout des écriteaux: taisez-vous, taisez-vous. (pp. 98-99)

This sequence of dialogue has both a concrete as well as a figurative meaning to it. On the one hand, this place (chateau Marienbad or wherever "we are") is really "un lieu de repos" where the wealthy have come to get better. On the other hand these lines may refer equally as well to a movie/movie experience where "les conversations se déroulent à vide comme si les phrases

ne signifiaient rien, ne devaient rien signifier de toute manière. Et la phrase commencée restait tout à coup en suspens, comme figée par le gel..." It is ironic that movies purport to be realistic and show life exactly as it is and yet all we ever hear in a movie is "meaningful" dialogue; no boring chitchat ever remains. No passage of space or time which is devoid of significant meaning. However in Marienbad, all we hear is the inconsequential repetition ad infinitum, so that details and objects however banal -- le talon brisé...la bague...la statue -- all take on much more meaning because of their juxtaposition and their value as "meaningful" movie dialogue. We as spectators crave meaning and so avidly produce meaning for every twist in Marienbad which may or may not have any meaning at all. This paragraph may actually refer to repetition in time of movie dialogue as it is played over and over again. "Figée par le gel" is a cross over of concrete language into figurative language. ("Le gel de '28 ou '29" is often repeated.)

The obsession with silence in this sequence is overwhelming. The chateau is auspiciously a place of calm tranquility, yet in the midst of this calm, we have a man, X, who is desperately trying to stir up the passions of A precisely to join him in his plot to have A abandon M. The reference to silence also refers to the strange couple who conversed in the midst of cries from the woman to remain quiet. "Supporter ces silences, ces murs, ces chuchotements pires que le silence, ou vous m'enfermez..."
Femme: Taisez-vous, taisez-vous!" (p. 39)

As well we remember our first encounter with the narrator

who spoke of silence and hearing at the very beginning of Marienbad.

Three people discuss the weather of a particular day in the past. "Mais il s'agit d'une chose facile à contrôler. Dans n'importe quelle collection de journal... Allons voir à la bibliothèque... Mais cela doit être une erreur." (p. 100)

Marienbad often provides possible proof. We can check this out "objectively" while denying it at the same time. Like any "realistic movie" everything is explainable following a logical sequence. Marienbad however alludes to and negates the possibility of proof all at the same time. We want desperately to believe in one fixed reality of Marienbad, but we cannot find just one.

The famous shadow scene (p. 106)² which is the best metaphor for Marienbad: what appears to be so natural is not. This leaves the spectator uneasy without his being able to explain precisely why. Shadows are cast by the people but not by the bushes. Which of the bushes or the people are more real? But how can one think of two different sets of objects, one with shadows and the other without? One is true and one is false? Our "trustworthy" sense of vision is tricked by the simple "view" of trees with no shadows.

This is subliminal distortion which is so unsettling. The fact that there are shadows is in itself not disturbing, but the fact that these shadows appear when there is no sun is more than slightly disarming. Once again, Marienbad shows itself for what it is: the demasking of the reproduction of reality on film.

"C'était comme s'il n'y avait eu, dans tout ce jardin, que

vous et moi." (p. 110) If A was enamoured of X it would be such a credible line, but as it appears that A is relentlessly pursued by X, this is a hollow echo of his obsession.

"Nous parlions de n'importe quoi: ou bien nous ne parlions pas du tout." The irony of this expression is that having spoken or not, the result is the same: they "spent time" together. One considers that speech is an important part of the human condition; one would remember the act of speaking with someone. Yet vaguely too, one could remember having forgotten what was discussed. In being so flexible as to what occurred, X assures and bothers us at the same time. His apparent evasiveness implies that A and X actually were together, by its over-banality.

"Approchez-vous! ... Il est trop tard déjà." In this sequence we have the feeling that a change is about to take place. We hope that A will approach and that this will lead to some action.

"Vous ne savez pas tout ce qu'il a fallu traverser." We are reminded of other myths where great suffering and tests of endurance and courage resulted in the hero finally obtaining the desired woman. We as spectators wish to believe that X really has undergone much to get here.

"Qui ^{êtes}-vous? Vous le savez. Comment vous appelez-vous? Ça n'a pas d'importance." Perhaps not enough has been written about the humour in this movie. At this stage of over halfway through the movie we hear one of the most obvious questions one would ever think of asking an unknown stranger. A constantly denies not knowing X and we are eager to pinpoint him with his

name and biography. Not having names, these characters can assume names as new scenes or situations describe them. For example, X being nameless can assume the role of Death, Fate or Illusion. Being nameless allows their characters to be so much more, as well as being exactly just the two people we see on the screen and nothing more. We give them new names as the story evolves.

"Il est trop tard déjà." (p. 115) This implies that the fight is over and yet the movie carries on! Or is everything already decided by fate?

"X: Mais vous savez bien que c'est possible. A: Oui peut-être, mais non. Je ne sais plus." Here is the first moment that A is uncertain. The perception of her reality would collapse if she were to admit that X is telling the truth.

"Vous étiez morte. Ce n'est pas vrai! Vous êtes vivante encore." The reference to death implies that perhaps X killed A and that the movie is a reminiscence of their shared past. Or she is "dead" once she gives in to and believes in what he tells her. Therefore she is no longer herself but is a dead character no longer evolving and moving forward in time.

"A: Pourquoi? Que voulez-vous? Qu'avez-vous d'autre à m'offrir? X: Je n'ai rien à vous offrir." These lines could refer both to the quest for love as well as the contract between viewers and the director. This line implies that there may be no final conclusion to the story. "I

have nothing to offer you but the pursuit of love," in the eternal present. Perhaps X has just randomly chosen A out of any number of possibilities and perhaps he is constructing his story from the play he sees, Rosmer, and the dialogue he hears at a chateau where he encounters A for the first time.

M appears behind X and A as they discuss him.

Marienbad tries to be the mental space of X or A, or both of them at the same time, without using conventional framing or flash-back techniques to show us exactly who is thinking at which moment. When M mysteriously appears behind them, it is as though their discussing him brought him physically into their presence.

To speak is to create. In the first book of the Bible, Genesis, it says: "And God said, Let there be light and there was light."³ In this way A and X's words create a vision, that of an ominous obstacle between them. Although X tries to frighten A by referring to her fear of M as being overpowering, at the same time M threatens X as the would-be suitor of A. It is only in the game of Nim that X and M actually confront one another. M as well contests the reality which X describes to A. (When they discuss a print of the statue in the garden; when M examines the photo which X claims to have taken last year. [p. 142]) Both X and M compete (or could they be adversaries) in the shooting gallery?

"C'est de lui que vous avez peur... Qui est-il? Votre mari peut-etre. Il vous cherchait, ou passait-il là par hasard." (p. 118)

M is the ultimate "Nouveau Roman" character, since he is defined so sketchily. He "could be" her husband but nothing definite is admitted. He plays conceivably both the role of husband or chaperone, and even X could be a chaperone as well (cf. p. 42). Due to the fact that these two men are competing to control A or be with her, X and M fulfill complementary roles. Could X be life and M death or the opposite? Could M be reality (the real world/the business world) as opposed to X, the world of the imagination?

X finally takes A out of the Marienbad chateau and into the garden, but the garden seems no less enigmatic than the chateau. Does M represent platonic love vs. X who eventually represents romantic/physical love? Surely other variables could be possible.

There are also the mathematical possibilities that $A+X+M=1$ and $A+X+M=0$, that is that each of the characters is a facet of the same personality, or that none of them exist at all. But most of this sort of analysis is specious. It focuses on the characters, as if they were central to the film, and they are not.⁴

"A cette heure-là, de toute façon, il est à la salle de jeu. --Je vous avais prévenue que je viendrais. En arrivant j'ai trouvé toutes les portes entr'ouvertes. Vous connaissez déjà la suite." (p. 120) This sequence is dramatic in that it is the first proposed visit of A by X in her bedroom, which ultimately is the focus of the last part of Marienbad. A has already appeared to agree with X, which builds up tension. At the same time, we, like A, are becoming tired of this game.

"Non, non, non! ...Jene connais pas la suite... ce lit ridicule, cette cheminée avec son miroir...X: Quel miroir? Quelle cheminée?"

These referants are deliciously ambiguous. I don't really believe that A is trapped by the "Truth" as she "remembers" these details. A bed and a fireplace are common enough to any bedroom in an old chateau. X takes these details to start describing the entire bedroom scene.

In the script there is a bracelet which X says she gave to him as "un gage." Once again X plays the role of the romantic hero who has fulfilled the challenge set before him, having returned after a year of absence with the beloved's ring, as a sign of his fidelity and trustworthiness.

"Ne reconnaissez-vous non plus, ce bracelet? Si...Non... J'ai eu autrefois un bracelet de ce genre. Et qu'est-il devenu... C'était l'année dernière. Et vous ne l'avez pas perdu. Vous me l'avez laissé comme un gage. Votre nom est gravé sur le fermoir. ...Mais c'est le prénom le plus courant ... Et toutes les perles se ressemblent... des bracelets comme ça, il doit y en avoir des centaines... X: Supposez donc que ce soit le vôtre, et que je l'aie trouvé " (p. 124). In the film unfortunately this reference was not used. Once again what seems like a safe bit of proof of the truth of which X is constantly expounding is exposed to be only tenuous proof. But the name A could be "Anne" which is a common enough name. A bracelet in our modern world is common enough and mass produced so that even such an apparently personal item as this is consequently no proof of intimacy at all. This is precisely the supposition which X is demanding that we as spectators and A as "victim" should make. Yet by saying this, X would be implying that he had just found it and constructed his whole story upon details such as these.

"Vous avez toujours eu peur ... je vous ai prise à moitié de force." (p. 126) Here at last we have the first direct (Blunt as opposed to oblique) reference to sex. However, we don't fully know that M is the husband. He may just be the chaperone who is nevertheless protecting her innocence. Yet the sexual encounter still remains ambiguous: did it occur or not?

"Probablement, ça n'était pas de force ... Mais c'est vous seulement qui le savez " (p. 126). Subjectivity is very uncertain. Imagine in a trial of rape: he the accused indicates only that the victim knows the truth. What does she say or think if this event never took place? What a powerful "persuasive" phrase to use! Only you know for sure.

"X: Qu'y a t-il? A: Ce n'est rien. X: Vous êtes fatiguée. A: Un peu oui je crois. X: Nous allons rentrer si vous voulez. A: Si vous voulez " (p. 128). The spectators could be the tired ones here. This conversation is banal enough to fit easily into X's constructions of the past. Here A twists her ankle and is helped out by X. (Let us not forget the reference to "un talon brisé" from the beginning: "une chaussure au talon brisé" [p. 42]); "C'est ce jour-là que vous m'avez donné le petit bracelet blanc. Et vous m'avez demandé de vous laisser une année entière, pensant peut-être ainsi me mettre à l'épreuve ... ou me lasser ... ou m'oublier vous même " (p. 130). Here is the epic feature of a gallant hero put to the test of waiting for an entire year before returning to claim his beloved. Of course time is no object for those who truly love! Did she try

to forget him and succeed too well?

"A: Qu'est-ce qui vous donne cette certitude? Partir pour aller où? X: N'importe où... je ne sais pas." (pp. 130-131) It is ironic that despite all of this man's assumed certainty as to what happened in the past, he is vague about the actual specifics of a destination. Did X not think he could get this far? Does this prove that he is just inventing their past as he goes along? He implies that what is important is that they be together. But as soon as she tells him to get lost if there is no future destination for them, he becomes hysterical. "A: Vous voyez bien. Il vaut mieux nous séparer pour toujours." (p.131) you mean nothing to me. You have yet to convince me of the reality of last year. Let's just end our relationship (past and present) right here.

"X: Ce n'est pas vrai que nous avons besoin de l'absence, de la solitude, de l'éternelle attente." (p. 131) He over-dramatizes the situation, implying his stature as the great rejected, long-suffering, spurned "Romeo." He wants to sound wounded and give the impression that already, since last year he has waited so very long. But he manipulates A once more by harping on her fear. Wouldn't anyone be afraid of someone who for an hour and a half kept invalidating one's memory in this anguish provoking way?

"X: Mais il est trop tard maintenant." (p. 136) The game is lost/won? What exactly is too late? This phrase of course is a double entendre par excellence. It is too late for you, I (X) have won. It is too late for me (A you have won) the battle of Truth,

or reality, or the game of illusion.

"Je ne sais quelle scène violente avait lieu entre vous un instant auparavant." (p.134) Assuming this is a creation of the past, X is clever to dwell upon the feelings of A toward M -- Fear. M does look sinister, even though he is always a polished gentleman as the camera presents him.

Here once again there is a conflict between what X says and what A does (pp. 133-135). It is as though the battle between their wills is played out in the bedroom, where X eventually says he took her by force.

Voix de X: Puis vous êtes retournée vers le lit...
indécise d'abord, ne sachant d'abord où aller...vous
êtes retournée vers le lit, vous vous y êtes assise,
après être restée quelques secondes, quelques minutes
même peut-être, indécise, ne sachant où aller ou que
faire, regardant droit devant vous dans le vide. Et
vous êtes retournée vers le lit... Oh écoutez-moi...
rappelez-vous... Ecoutez-moi, je vous en supplie...
Oui... il y avait. Oui c'est vrai, il y avait un
grand miroir, juste auprès de la porte, un miroir immense...
Mais vous vous entêtez à faire semblant de ne pas me
croire. Ou êtes-vous? Ou êtes-vous partie? Pourquoi
vouloir toujours vous échapper? C'est trop tard.
C'était trop tard déjà. (p. 134)

This is a repetition of the same competition between what is said by X and what A performs before our very eyes. (Compare this to the first instance of Visual/Textual Dissonance p. 69 discussed in Chapter Two.) It is very startling, and now almost beyond words, to see such a dissonance. We really do not want to believe it, but we cannot deny what is happening right before our very eyes and ears. It also seems ironic, that X does not want to admit the presence of a mirror which A in this scene gravitates towards. A mirror both tells the absolute truth (Snow White and

the Seven Dwarves) and yet twists the truth by inverting it.

The presentational immediacy of film, then, not only can provide us the pure blind joy that Santayana called beauty but also can open our eyes. Because of its peculiar abilities to warp time and space, it can reshuffle our past and can renew the game of life. This may be and often is painful.⁴

Throughout this final part of Marienbad, many scenes appear which remind one of the rest of the film we have already seen. To avoid monotonous repetition, I have left out or commented little about scenes which are repeated. The problem is how to convey the same scenes through words in a new way. As new approaches to old scenes are presented, they are in fact fascinating, not boring. But in a constructive sense they add no further comment to the critique (for little has changed). They add more conviction of the reality of these scenes having taken place. The more we see an action repeated in Marienbad, the more inclined we are to believe in its reality.

"Quelle preuve vous faudrait-il encore?" (pp. 136-137)
 Have you ever seen or heard of such an ambiguous bit of proof? And yet the camera is supposed to tell the truth and yet at the same time we know how much the camera distorts and creates. For example, professional models do not look the same on their own, outside a studio, or wearing no make-up. This is the epitome of ambiguous proof. This picture could have been taken anywhere. X could have even found it among A or M's belongings. Especially since he seems to have so much knowledge (too much knowledge --

he is like a detective who knows too much) about their rooms, both the past and the present.

Looking around the room, A glances at various objects as though she were judging them. There are three different shots of more objects, three visual sequences of her walking; she falls on the bed four times in a theatrical shot. This sequence points to the final meeting between A and M. The presentation of this scene is an example of how Resnais produces meaning from movement vs. stasis. As actions are repeated we have the feeling of great movement. But in fact this is repetition of one motion. We feel as though there is progression, but it is only repetition.

Although A is looking at the most ordinary things, a mirror, a comb etc., they take on meaning because she looks at them. The proliferation of objects around her is made to appear frightening and ominous, given the obsessive way in which A looks around the room at objects which appear and disappear -- appearing to grow from A's anguished mental state or the physical space surrounding A herself.

The ambiguity of M's visit is haunting: is he here to question A? Does he know of her plans with X? And that she has been spending time with him? Contradictions between what is presented on screen and their dialogue take place, so that we can trust neither what we see, nor what we hear. Each sense gives us a different story. We hear his knock, but we do not hear her say "Entrez!" which while speaking to him she claims to have said. (Therefore is this absolute proof that she is a liar or that she lies from time to time?) M questions A about

the photograph. He points out the fallacy of what A has been led to believe from talking to X. (Franck was not here last year.) He announces that they will have lunch with Patterson if she has no other plans. She says, "of course I have no other plans," and yet according to X, she is to leave with him the following day.

We hear the sound of suspenseful beating (like a heart, drum, shots, or clock). She is like a bird on the bed -- shot though seductive. (She gestures towards the camera (X) to be quiet.) There is contradiction in her getting shot -- yet still being alive -- not only as X talks to her but also, lying there, as she tells the camera to shhh! Should we believe this scene to be the product of the overly romantic imagination of X?

It is only now after having viewed Marienbad at least twenty times and studying the script intensely that I realize that in watching the movie I never made any distinction between the varying truthfulness of these various endings to Marienbad. Because they were presented on film, therefore they were all seen, they all had equal validity in my mind. Once again the very power of a photograph implies that what is shown is real. Ultimately it is hard to justify one scene over another. It is as though they all took place and none took place: they were in someone's mind and there was no distinction made between what was imagined and what really happened.

Close up of a snowy picture. It is a picture of three people on horses in the snow. We are reminded of a sequence of dialogue from the opening scenes. "C'était une surveillance plutôt

bizarre, bien entendu. Il (Franck) prétendait lui donner des explications sur les tableaux anciens qui se trouvaient chez elle. Il n'y avait pas un seul tableau dans la chambre." (p. 43) This reference of a man explaining art to A could refer to either X or M.

The fact that X and A are never referred to by name gives them more scope within which our imaginations can play. By being nameless, X and A exist only as the people whom we see on the screen in this Movie. Robbe-Grillet wrote about the Nouveau Roman that people whom we see randomly in our lives are no less real because they are "Nameless" or because we do not know their personal biographies (cf. the realistic novels in which we are given a million intimate details about characters and their lives).

In Madame Bovary for example, we know the background of Emma and her husband too well. We are provided with details of emotions, explanations for actions, the meaning of colours. It is a world overflowing with sense and meaning. Little is left to the imagination, Emma might be better known and explainable to us, than people in our real lives. Emma therefore appears to be real. In Marienbad the aesthetic is from an opposite pole. We know absolutely nothing about A and X. We see their actions, hear their words, but nothing is explained. It is as though we met strangers for an hour and a half on a train and all we did was observe their actions and hear their words.

A and X by being nameless can also take on the possibilities of many characters as the script alludes to classical mythical settings. By not having a name to refer to, we as spectators

are constantly seeking new names to apply to them.

This seems like a real scene (pp. 158-159). (Attendre un an romantic/Death) Due to the triple repetition here of virtually the same scene, we are made to believe in the reality of this wait of one year. This scene is played out almost at the end of the movie because it is at this point in the exchange between A and X that she appears convinced by his story and willing to believe what X has been telling her all along. The relationship between X and time implies either the mythic lover for whom time is no object, Fate or Death for whom time would be of little consequence. This scene of suspended waiting -- asking for more time, a year, and then "quelques heures" -- is the final obstacle between A and X which is thrown up at the last minute before A finally yields to X. A is quite alluring as she says she does not have much courage. She plays again (either "really" or in X's mind) the role of a "damsel" in distress who needs help from the dominant male, either X or M, to make a move.

"Et une fois de plus je m'avançais le long des mêmes couloirs, marchant depuis des jours, depuis des mois, depuis des années à votre rencontre. Il n'y aurait pas d'arrêt possible. Entre ces murs, pas de repos... Je partirai ce soir vous emmenant avec moi " (pp. 164-165). The finality of these words bring about the ending. What X says becomes reality. The power of words evokes reality. X is the writer of A's fiction/reality!

How can he be so sure? He is just giving himself confidence, while adding more credibility to the whole story. "Il y aurait" -- why the conditional? This could refer to the possibility or supposition of various realities. Is he imagining what might

have happened but didn't?

If A were not to leave with X, we could simply believe that X had invented the story and was playing with her memory and mind. The fact that she does go with him leaves the question of the veracity of his claims ambiguous. Did they meet last year?--we simply do not know. This ambiguity is maintained as A loses herself in the garden with X. Even in giving into his story, she is not liberated, but enters a world equally as enigmatic as the chateau where she was endlessly pursued. If she were to have simply tricked X by arranging to be rescued by M at the last minute, one might think that she was playing the Marienbad game in bad faith. We have been misled and this type of ending would be unsatisfying as being too easy. We have been hoping for an answer to this question all along and it would be disappointing to find out the absolute truth about last year. Marienbad ends where it began, at the play. We have been entertained by a world which reflects itself endlessly. Time has no limit in this fictional space. The past resembles the present. Even though the beginning and ending of the movie take place with the play, we cannot say that one episode is more truthful than the other. Even though it seems impossible to our minds concerned with chronological sequence, both of these times are one and the same, while also being different. But this is precisely what has been performed with "last year" and "this year," the year that we have watched unfold at Marienbad. The impossible becomes probable on film where boundaries are played with to allow a multiplicity of possibilities.

NOTES

Chapter 3

1. William F. Van Wert, The Film Career of Alain Robbe-Grillet (Boston: G.K. Hall and Co., 1977), p. 20.
2. See the second photo between pages 96 and 97, Alain Robbe-Grillet, L'Année Dernière à Marienbad.
3. All references to the Bible are to the King James version, Genesis I:3.
4. James Monaco, Alain Resnais (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 35.
5. George William Linden, Reflections on the Screen (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1970), p. 86.

CONCLUSION

How can one conclude something which has no end? Marienbad ends where it began with the performance of the play Rosmer. Since the beginning of Marienbad returns at the end, time has entered a loop: there is no beginning, there is no real end, there is only eternity. The whole movie in a sense is supposed to have occurred after the presentation of the play which comes at the end of the movie. M attends the play, whereas A and X do not. They leave the chateau for an eternal adventure in the garden. An analysis of X's final words to A can present the Marienbad world in a nutshell.

Voix de X: Le parc de cet hôtel était une sorte de jardin à la française, sans arbre, sans fleur, sans végétation aucune... Le gravier, la pierre, le marbre, la ligne droite, y marquaient des espaces rigides, des surfaces sans mystère. Il semblait, au premier abord, impossible de s'y perdre... au premier abord... le long des allées rectilignes, entre les statues aux gestes figés et les dalles de granit, ou vous étiez maintenant déjà en train de vous perdre, pour toujours, dans la nuit tranquille, seule avec moi.

La musique prend ensuite le dessus. (p. 172)

Once again the present is mixed in with the past. In the final sentence the imperfect tense "vous étiez" is placed alongside "maintenant" and "toujours." This is the game of Marienbad which tries to be and act in two or more places at the same time. Enigmatically A was already in the act of losing herself, alone

(yet) with X forever. This is as impossible to imagine as it seems impossible to imagine the story of L'Année Dernière à Marienbad taking place after the play which appears in the beginning at the end. But this quest of the impossible is precisely what Resnais and Robbe-Grillet set out to entangle the audience in.

This essay began as a comparison between Resnais' first feature film Hiroshima Mon Amour in which the protagonists, a French actress and a Japanese architect, end up forever in a hotel room of Hiroshima as they name one another.

Elle: Je t'oublierai! Je t'oublie déjà. Regarde, comme je t'oublie! Regarde-moi!

Il la regarde, tandis qu'elle le regarde comme elle regarderait la ville et l'appelle tout à coup très doucement.

Elle l'appelle "au loin," dans l'émerveillement. Elle a réussi à le noyer dans l'oubli universel. Elle en est émerveillée.

Elle: Hi-ro-shi-ma. Hi-ro-shi-ma. C'est ton nom. Ils se regardent sans se voir. Pour toujours.

Lui: C'est mon nom. Oui.
[On en est là seulement encore. Et on restera la pour toujours.] Ton nom à toi est Nevers. Ne-vers-en-France.

FIN¹

Both these films have succeeded in their endings to have given an eternal moment. There is no real Ending. The man and woman of Hiroshima Mon Amour are trapped forever in that room. They do not leave it for a blissful existence in Hiroshima. Likewise in Marienbad A and X are forever trapped in the garden; neither do they go off to death, nor do they find a new life.

Movies appear to be real. They talk to us of "real life," but ultimately they are only aesthetic creations. We so desperately want real life and all its emotions from film but Marienbad and Hiroshima Mon Amour emphatically resist our fulfilling our wishes.

One is tempted to finalize, to say that Marienbad focuses perhaps around the statue in the garden of the man and woman. They are forever trapped in Art, just as A and X only live for ninety-four minutes, the time needed for the film to elapse. They exist nowhere else but on film. They only live for the time that they engage us in their intrigue. But this is just one possible emphasis. Marienbad tried seductively to make us conjecture and guess as to whether X's story is true or not, or to what extent A and X are true or false. How much does the film reveal or conceal from the real adventure of what happened last year at Marienbad? We are meant to be taken in, to try our best to find an answer, but we are to remain lost in the search for this conclusion. We are only offered L'Année Dernière à Marienbad as a ludic puzzle. We are given no answers, we cannot win a game which M (Marienbad?) always wins. But we are to play as often as we watch the film. Marienbad only exists in the playing of its game -- reacting to the teasing of its contours we must lose ourselves with A and X in the garden, forever.

NOTES

Conclusion

1. Marguerite Duras, Hiroshima Mon Amour (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), p. 101. The passage cited in brackets was left out of the actual film dialogue.

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