

All sources for 'mental space' in 'Last year in Marienbad'

Richardson, M. (2006) Surrealism and cinema. Oxford, UK: Berg.

P73, 167: surrealist cinema concerned with direct experience of real life

Kyrou, A.(2005) Le Surréalisme au cinéma. Paris: Ramsay.

P21,22,25, 234: same idea

Deleuze, G. (1985) Cinéma 2: L'image-temps. Paris: Les Editions de Minuit.

(Deleuze, 1985) p102:

“Les deux grandes scènes de théâtre sont des images en miroir (et c’est tout l’hôtel de Marienbad qui est un cristal pur, avec sa face transparente, sa face opaque et leur échange”

(Deleuze, 1985) p136: L’année dernière à Marienbad

« Le second niveau serait celui du réel et de l’imaginaire: on a remarqué que, pour Resnais, il y a toujours du réel qui subsiste, et notamment des coordonnées spatio-temporelles qui maintiennent leur réalité, quitte à entrer en conflit avec l’imaginaire. C’est ainsi que Resnais [...] établit une topographie et une chronologie d’autant plus rigoureuses que ce qui s’y passe est imaginaire ou mental. Tandis que chez Robbe-Grillet, tout se passe « dans la tête » des personnages, ou, mieux, du spectateur lui-même. »

« La dissolution de l’image-action, et l’indiscernabilité qui s’ensuit, se feraient tantôt au profit d’une « architecture du temps » ([Resnais]), tantôt au profit d’un « présent perpétuel » coupé de sa temporalité, c’est à dire d’une structure privée de temps ([Robbe-Grillet]). »

« C’est que Resnais conçoit « L’année dernière », comme ses autres films, sous la forme de nappes ou régions de passé, tandis que Robbe-Grillet voit le temps sous la forme de pointes de présent. »

« De toute façon, les deux auteurs ne sont plus dans le domaine du réel et de l’imaginaire, mais dans le temps, nous le verrons, dans le domaine encore plus redoutable du vrai et du faux. Certes, le réel et l’imaginaire continuent leur circuit, mais seulement comme la base d’une plus haute figure. Ce n’est plus, ou ce n’est plus seulement le devenir indiscernable d’images distinctes, ce sont des alternatives indécidables entre des cercles de passé, des différences inextricables entre des pointes de présent. »

(Deleuze, 1985) p157:

« Il y a probabilisme statistique chez Resnais, très différent de l’indéterminisme de

type « quantique » chez Robbe-Grillet. »

(Deleuze, 1985) p159:

« Resnais conçoit le cinéma non comme un instrument de représentation de la réalité, mais comme le meilleur moyen pour approcher le fonctionnement psychique. »

(Deleuze, 1985) p268: Resnais and memory

« Cette membrane qui rend le dehors et le dedans présents l'un à l'autre s'appelle Mémoire. [...] Car la mémoire n'est certes plus la faculté d'avoir des souvenirs: elle est la membrane qui, sur les modes les plus divers (continuité, mais aussi discontinuité, enveloppement, etc.), fait correspondre les nappes de passé et les couches de réalité, les une émanant d'un dedans toujours déjà là, les autres advenant d'un dehors toujours à venir, toutes deux rongant le présent qui n'est plus que leur rencontre. »

Leutrat, J. (2000) L'Année dernière à Marienbad (Last Year in Marienbad). London: BFI

(Leutrat, 2000) p19:

That architecture can be the image of a psychic state is nothing new in cinema. One could cite numerous examples of architecture or architectural details being « symbolically » called on to represent the mental state of an individual or a group of people.

(Leutrat, 2000)P23: lightning cameraman Sacha vierny

While the 'Scope format usually implies a certain immobility, something extremely static, Resnais had a field day with camera movement, low angle tracking shots.

(Leutrat, 2000)P24: camera operator Philippe Brun

« Albertazzi in very big close-up beside a mirror in which two actors were reflected [...] behind him the wall is out-of-focus, but in the mirror the two actors are sharp.

(Leutrat, 2000)P25: Robbe-Grillet disagrees with Resnais' choice of music

a music to set one's teeth on edge. Instead of this beautiful, captivating continuity, I was after a structure of absences and shocks; with percussive elements in the widest sense, not just drums and cymbals. I'd imagined a composition based on the essentially real noises one hears in a hotel, in particular in an old fashioned hotel like that one. Lift doors, for instance, those metal doors on hinged rods that make a very beautiful sound if properly recorded; or then again the ringing of different bells: the porter's, the chambermaid's, etc... more or less strident or distant; and the whole thing composed with footsteps, isolated notes, shouts.

(Leutrat, 2000)P27: Francis Seyrig composer

« I realised that he wanted Wagnerian touches for the love-story side of the film, but

also a 1925 feel, plus modern bits, all mixed together. »

(Leutrat, 2000)P27

Resnais wanted 'functional' but also lyrical music, the sound curve of which would reproduce that of the film. This image of the curve, of its plotting so to speak, is essential: it is something which seemed to obsess Resnais, and which functions as a connecting thread in the 'scenario' of *L'Année dernière à Marienbad*. Music was needed that would blend with the décor.

(Leutrat, 2000)P27: Art director Jacques Saunier

We devised some panels and reworked certain sculpture which were carved in these panels, the motif of which made him think, he said, of the repetition of a musical phrase.

(Leutrat, 2000)P27 resnais:

I reckon there must be forty minutes of speech in *Marienbad*. It could almost be sung. It's like an opera libretto with very beautiful and very simple words, which are endlessly repeated.

(Leutrat, 2000)P27 resnais:

I think one can arrive at a cinema without psychologically defined characters, in which the play of emotions would be in motion, as in contemporary painting where the play of forms contrives to be stronger than the anecdote.

(Leutrat, 2000)P29: death imagery:

the immobile servants 'doubtless long since dead'; the compliment addressed to the woman, 'You seem lively'; or the statement she makes, 'You're like a shadow'; or there again, this fragment of a couple's conversation, 'We live like two coffins side by side in the frozen ground of a garden'; and in one of the very last images as, framed in the distance X and A go off together, the curtains around the door under which they pass are like the drapes of a catafalque.

(Leutrat, 2000)P31: script supervisor Sylvette Baudrot

« in his shooting script Resnais spoke of 'eternity' shots [...] shots that had no precise date, everything that was future time or timeless. »

Bernard Pingaut

« succession of static views, or travelling shots along the corridors, shots of promenades in the garden – dead time, a sort of pure description escaping the rigorous order of the narrative.

(Leutrat, 2000)P32: Jean Louis Bory

« Mouldings, dadoes, friezes, cornices, astragals and festoons... the baroque sensuality of the interior architecture and decoration of the grand hotel-palace contrasts with the exterior Cartesianism of the formal gardens – or rather, there is a play between them. *L'année dernière à Marienbad* is based on the kind of play

which opposes, to the Cartesianism of conscious life, the baroque nature of our memory and our affective life. »

(Leutrat, 2000)P33:

In effect interior and exterior contaminate one another.

(Leutrat, 2000)P33: script supervisor Sylvie Baudrot

« a very long scene in which Delphine Seyrig and Albertazzi walk side by side down a corridor. We shot it in three different corridors. [...] we'd put potted plants so that the continuity between the potted plants might disguise the passage from one section of corridor to another, but Resnais didn't want to hide the fact that three different corridors were involved. »

(Leutrat, 2000)p36:

« the bedroom mantelpiece changes from one moment to the next: a mirror here, a snowy landscape there »

(Leutrat, 2000)p36:

resnais has strewn the hotel décor with representations of this garden, which served to decorate the walls. They encourage the idea that there's no longer an inside or an outside, only spaces imbricated in each other.

(Leutrat, 2000)P37: the voice over at the beginning describing the setting

« thematically, it emphasises the funereal (lugubrious, black, dark, silent, deserted, empty, sombre, cold, oppressive »

the voices shifts closer and further from the camera, lacking a distinct origin.

(Leutrat, 2000)P54:

Resnais' substitution in the rape episode of a series of 'bleached-out' travelling shots of the young woman »

Chion, M. (2009) Film, a sound art. New York: Colombia University Press.

(Chion, 2009) P267: « temporal vectorization » means that a sound gives spatial cues from the way it varies

« We can also find a sound interesting when it offers no temporal vectors, either because it does not vary over time or because it varies in a chaotic and unpredictable way. Such sounds can contribute to a feeling of fixity, stagnation, or deconstruction. For example, since Francis Seyrig's organ music in Last Year at Marienbad has no discernible direction, it acts to create the feeling that those long tracking shots in the baroque palace aren't going in any particular direction either and certainly not leading to a predetermined destination. Another type of music – say, a very well-defined melody – could give these same tracking shots a sense of deliberate progression toward a goal. »

p423: « a verbal or musical sound event is synchronised with an abrupt change in lightning. »

P424: « Resnais synchs the hoarse « No! » spoken by Delphine Seyrig with the lightning of two lamps on either side of a large bed. [...]It is impossible to say which of the two events – audio or visual – is the diegetic cause of the other. There is no way we can take Seyrig's « no » [...] as the noise of the light switch [...], nor can we understand [it] as the cause of these lights turning on or off. The lightning event does not cause the sound, and the sounds do not cause the lights to change. But synchresis is at work, and it leads to that question of who decides what. »

Resnais, A. (1967) Trying to understand my own film. In: Geduld, H. (1967) Film makers on film making: statement on their art by thirty directors. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

(Resnais, 1967) P157:

'The film is about degrees of reality. There are moments where it is altogether invented, or interior, as at the moments where the picture corresponds to the dialogue. The interior monologue is never in the sound track; it is almost always in the visuals, which, even when they show events in the past, correspond to the present thoughts in the mind of the character. So what is presented as the present or the past is simply a reality which exists while the character is speaking.'

(Resnais, 1967)P158:

Questioned about Robbe-Grillet's interpretation of the film as X's point of view as he attempt to convince A of past occurrences, Resnais, following Truffaut's dictum that "every film should be summarized in one word", proposes the title 'L'Année Dernière à Marienbad, or, Persuasion'.

(Resnais, 1967)P158:

Resnais originally consciously introduced some 'psychoanalytic themes' such as 'ostentatiously large rooms, indicating a tendency towards narcissism' and signifying 'impotence' but he cut them out because they did not conform to his idea of the character (he does not precise which one, one could perhaps suppose M, the possibly -husband), or 'possibly' because he was 'too aware of their psychoanalytical significance'.

(Resnais, 1967)P158: A possible reading is that 'the hotel is really a clinic' and X is A's psychoanalyst, helping her to accept events which she has deliberately repressed.

P159: Resnais continues on this interpretation: provide that we assume that A's denegation in the beginning is genuine and not 'sheer coquetry or fear', from the scene where laces her shoe, 'we can take that she has remembered'

(Resnais, 1967)P159: possible interpretation, X is death

‘Robbe-Grillet finally hit on the phrase “granite flagstone” and he realised that the description of the garden would fit a cemetery’

‘the old Breton legends – the story of Death coming to fetch his victim and allowing him a year’s respite’

(Resnais, 1967)P159:

‘In the first quarter of the film, things seem to have a fairly high degree of reality; we stray further and further from it as the film proceeds; it is quite conceivable that, at the end, suddenly, everything converges, that the conclusion of the film is the most real part of all.’

‘we never really know if the scenes are occurring in the man’s mind or the woman’s. There is a perpetual oscillation between the two. You could even maintain that everything is told from her viewpoint.’

(Resnais, 1967)P160:

‘For me the film represents an attempt, still crude and primitive, to approach the complexity of thought and its mechanism.’

(Resnais, 1967)P161:

‘one has to know how much of one’s subjective reality one can share with others’

(Resnais, 1967)P161:

‘When I see a film, I am less interested in the characters than in the play of feelings. I think we could arrive at a Cinema without psychologically definite characters, where the pattern of feelings exists freely, just as, in a modern painting, the play of forms is more important than the “story”’

(Resnais, 1967)P162:

‘all the changes of costume correspond to different “layers” of time’

(Resnais, 1967)P163:

‘I would be reluctant to transform a setting, even in small details, to suit the camera. It is up to the camera to present the décor in the right way, it’s not for the setting to conform to the camera.’

Resnais, A. & Robbe-Grillet, A. (1967) Last words on last year. In: Geduld, H. (1967) Film makers on film making: statement on their art by thirty directors. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

(Resnais & Robbe-Grillet, 1967) P164:

‘an image is always in the present’ (RG)

(Resnais & Robbe-Grillet, 1967)P166:

‘what goes on in our minds is just as real as what goes on in front of our eyes’ (RG)

(Resnais & Robbe-Grillet, 1967)P166:R

'if you study Marienbad closely, you see that certain images are ambiguous, that their degree of reality is equivocal. But some images are far more clearly false, and there are images of lying whose falsity is, I feel, quite evident.'

(Resnais & Robbe-Grillet, 1967)P166:RG

'The use of décor is characteristic. When the room has an extraordinary complicated baroque décor, or the wall is heavily encrusted with wedding-cake ornamentation, we are probably watching a rather unreliable image. Similarly when the heroine takes 300 identical photographs from a drawer, the image is improbable and must be more imaginary than objective. Perhaps, if we were speaking in terms of a strictly objective reality, we might say she only took one picture out; but she wished there were 300.

(Resnais & Robbe-Grillet, 1967)P167: RG

'The question is whether the uncertainties aroused by the images are more intense than all the uncertainties of everyday encounters or whether they are of the same order. Personally I believe that things really happen as vaguely as this. The theme is of a passionate love affair and it is precisely these relationships which comprises the highest proportion of inconsistencies, doubts and phantasms. Marienbad is as opaque as the moments we live through in the climaxes of our feeling, in our loves, in our whole emotional life. So to reproach the film for its lack of clarity is really to reproach human feelings for their obscurity.

[...] It is strange how people will quite willingly accept the plethora of irrational or ambiguous factors in everyday life, yet complain bitterly when they come across them in works of art. [...] They feel the work of art is made to explain the world to them, to provide them with reassurances. I am quite sure that art is not meant simply to reassure people. If the world is so complex, then we must recreate its complexity. For the sake of realism.

(Resnais & Robbe-Grillet, 1967)P169: R on the scene where the balustrade crumbles, it looks like from the Fantômas series.

'It is one of the lying images. [...] It is an image of the future, probably imagined, under the stress of her anguish, by the young woman, it is quite natural that she should have recourse to popular novels.'

Robbe-Grillet says the extreme 'theatricality' of the dialogue reinforces this impression.

(Resnais & Robbe-Grillet, 1967)P170: RG

'I think that the artist replenishes himself directly from the reality and that art interests us because we find in it ready-made the things to which we feel impelled by the emotions reality has generated in us. I don't think we really derive our inspiration from art, not during our creative moments. [...] The real shock is produced by the world and art is only a reminiscence of it. An illumination,

perhaps. [...] When an image strikes me in the cinema, it is always because I recognise my own experience, otherwise communication would be impossible. Every work of art would be purely subjective and absolutely no contact with anyone else would be possible.'

(Resnais & Robbe-Grillet, 1967)P171:

Robbe-Grillet's script already contained 'numerous specifications as to editing, composition, and the camera-movement.

(Resnais & Robbe-Grillet, 1967)P171: RG

'the only time is the time of the film. [...] There is no reality outside the film. Everything is show. Nothing is ever hidden.'

(Resnais & Robbe-Grillet, 1967)P172: The long over-exposed tracking shot which concludes with a repetition of the last part of the movement, and the quick succession of shots where A is alternatively sitting on either side of her bed, were not anticipated in Robbe-Grillet's script.

(Resnais & Robbe-Grillet, 1967)P173: RG

'In Marienbad the important thing is always a sort of hollow in the heart of the reality. In Marienbad it is the "last year" which provides the hollow. What happened then – if anything – produces a constant emptiness in the story. [...] In Marienbad at first we think that there is no last year, then we realise that last year dominates everything: that we are definitely caught up in it. At first we think that Marienbad did not exist, only to realise that we have been there from the beginning. The event which the girl repudiates has, by the end of the film, contaminated everything. So much so that she has never ceased to struggle against it, to believe that she was winning, since she has always rejected everything, and, in the end, she realises it is all too late, she has, after all, accepted everything. As if everything were true – although probably it isn't. But true or false have been emptied of meaning.

Liandrat-Guigues, S. & Leutrat, J. (2006) Alain Resnais, liaisons secrètes, accords vagabonds. Paris: Cahiers du Cinéma.

(Liandrat-Guigues & Leutrat, 2006) P40: Marienbad is a black and white film, where most images tend to on the lighter side, very legible with bright lightning that does not leave ambiguously obscured corners. Resnais tends to alternate between visually light and visually dark films, the "clear line" movies (to reuse Floc'h's expression, quoted in Liandrat-Guigues & Leutrat, 2006, my translation) taking place in the upper-class and the dark ones in the lower middle-class.

(Liandrat-Guigues & Leutrat, 2006)P49: In the hotel garden, the luminosity is such that the trees and statues have no shadows. Yet the characters have shadows that have been painted. Jacques Saulnier comments that Resnais had this concept in mind from the very beginning. If, as Leutrat (2000, p50) puts it, the characters are

‘turned into stones (by their immobility, poses, rigid gestures, etc.)’ and also by those fixed painted shadows, there is a statue in the garden which appears ‘animated by the shots of it taken from different angles’, and its ‘change of location’ throughout the film. The characters postures also uncannily mirror this statue: ‘the hands of the female figure in the statuary group is extended, while her other hand rests on the man’s shoulder’ whereas in the scene where X pleads with A, his hand is ‘extended toward’ her while she ‘places her hand on his shoulder’.

P64: ‘Ces journées, pires que la mort, que nous vivons ici côte à côte, vous et moi comme deux cercueils placés côte à côte sous la terre d’un jardin figé lui même.’

(Liandrat-Guigues & Leutrat, 2006)P90:

According to Jacques Saulnier, Resnais had planned from the beginning that A’s bedroom would transform according to her acceptance of what is told to her: at first, the room is incomplete, bare of any detail because she rejects the very notion of XX. Then, progressively, the bedroom gets more and more precise until it reaches the appearance it had in reality. But immediately, A starts feverishly elaborating in her mind an hypothetical future, and the design of the bedroom becomes totally delirious.

(Liandrat-Guigues & Leutrat, 2006)P91: Francis Seyrig explains that the music contains several “themes” corresponding to various settings such as “garden” or “hall” and changes as the character move in the hotel. The music “mimicks the editing”.

P130: Resnais on Surrealism

“Dire que je suis fidèle à la ligne surréaliste serait prétentieux. Mais disons que je rôde autour.”

P131:

“Je n’applique mes idées que d’une manière inconsciente – instinctive, surréaliste, proche de l’écriture automatique -, faisant en sorte qu’elles fonctionnent naturellement.”

P151: they don’t say who said this!!!

“Marienbad, ce sont deux ou trois thèmes qui reviennent, qui se développent, qui sont repris. Si on regarde l’image, c’est entièrement musical.”

P162: further death references

A shot showing A in a flowing black dress is accompanied by the noise of a tomb being closed.

Brown, R. (2009) Last year at Marienbad. Cineaste. vol 34, Issue 4, Fall 2009.

(Brown, 2009) ‘a verbal tracking shot’ (about the introductory voice over)

(Brown, 2009) Sometimes the visuals follow the narration, at other times 'the visuals actually contradict an event that X' narrates. For example, a shot of A's bedroom shows an open door while X narrates "the door was closed now" and 'X angrily repeats "No! No! The door was closed!"'

(Brown, 2009) A scene of A and X standing at the hotel bar is interrupted by 'a quick series of startling, soundless flash shots showing A in a white gown standing in a white bedroom.' 'In the midst of these shots, we see and hear X telling A, "One night, I went up to your room". Then, A drops a cocktail glass that breaks and her terrified reaction is out of proportion to this mundane event. From then on, the possibility that a rape has taken place is introduced and 'images of violence' increasingly perturb the narrative (the crumbling balustrade, M shooting A). It all culminates in the possible rape scene with 'X approaching A as she recoils in fear on her bed'. We see a 'track backwards out of the room over which X's voice-over insists that the act was not "by force", followed by a fast return tracking shot through the hotel's corridors.' The sequence ends in an 'overexposed white on white shot of A in her room, followed by nine varied repetitions of the end of the track-in shot in ten seconds. Brown (2009) highlight the ambiguity, that the 'thrusting camera movement' and the 'loud and dissonant music' 'suggest rape', while 'A's smile and outstretched arms suggest the contrary.'

I would suggest that the overexposure suggests A's illumination when she remembers and is confronted to her memory, and the nine alternative end shots her confused attempt at deciding on what to believe amongst several possibilities with various degrees of truthfulness, repression and wishful thinking.

Robbe-Grillet, A. (1962) Last Year at Marienbad. London: John Calder. That's the screenplay.

There are numerous instances where Robbe-Grillet (1962, for example p88) explicitly says that the décor must be ornamentated, suggesting a lying image.

A's changing bedroom is described in detail by Robbe-Grillet (1962, p84-85, 91,92, 104, 121,122,127,132,138,139,146) including indications about the mirror moving from the chimney to the chest and the painting on the chimney, and the single bed turning into a double bed. The probable truth image is indicated 'it is apparent that everything is now in its right place' (p122) A's anxiety then produces 'a proliferation of ornaments' (p135) then they disappear (p139).

The voice over (Robbe-Grillet, 1962) p17

'this enormous, lyxirious, baroque – lugubrious hotel, where endless corridors succeed silent – deserted corridors overlooked with a dim, cold ornamentation [...] transverse corridors that open in turn on empty salons, rooms overloaded with an ornamentation from another century, silent halls...'

p29

'false door, false columns, painted perspective'

p30

'and there's no way of escaping' (bit of dialogue)

p146 'among this trompe l'oeil architecture, among these mirrors and these columns, among these doors always ajar, these staircases that are too long...'

p55

'choosing my way as though by accident among the labyrinth of similar itineraries'

Leutrat (2000) even suggests the whole hotel looks funereal.

p49: scenic indications

'in all these images of the hotel, there are never any windows; or in any case, the landscape outside is never shown, or even the window panes'

p123: after she submits to X, A sees the garden from a window for the first time.

(Robbe-Grillet, 1962)p56 discrepancies between verbal description by X and shown image

Robbe-Grillet (1962) repeatedly gives elaborate indications regarding non-continuity: he specifies consecutive shots where, for example, either the characters keep the same clothes, posture and position in the frame but the décor has changed, or the décor is the same but characters have inexplicably moved. He also indicates to reuse elements of décor or secondary characters previously seen in different circumstances.

Synopsis

Last year in Marienbad (1960) takes place in a luxurious spa hotel. A man, X (played by Giorgio Albertazzi) tries to convince a woman, A (played by Delphine Seyrig) that they met the year before in Marienbad and planned to meet again this year to run off together. A denies that they have ever met. A is accompanied by an older man M (played by Sacha Pitoëff) who may be her husband, although this is never confirmed. X keeps trying to convince A of his version of the events, and different hypothetical versions of past, present and future events are played out as the various characters mentally consider them.

This entry was posted on December 14, 2010 at 1:43 am and is filed under [Cinema](#), [Critical theory](#), [Reading notes](#), [Research Paper](#) with tags [Alain Resnais](#), [Alain Robbe-Grillet](#), [L'année dernière à Marienbad](#), [Last year in Marienbad](#), [Mental space](#). You can follow any responses to this entry through the [RSS 2.0 feed](#) You can leave a response, or [trackback](#) from your own site.