edges that the surrealist movement, and the techniques and strategies that movement authorized, have been made obsolete, and that it is both the world and film that made them obsolete, as Cavell suggests.

Cavell writes:

> In viewing films, the sense of invisibility is an expression of modern privacy or anonymity. It is as though the world's projection explains our forms of unknownness and of our inability to know. The explanation is not so much that the world is passing us by, as that we are displaced from our natural habitation within it, placed at a distance from it. The screen overcomes our fixed distance; it makes displacement appear as our natural condition.[7]

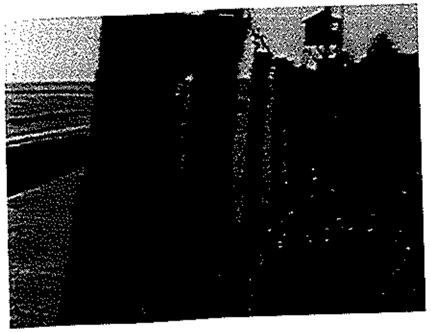
In *Land without Bread*, as we have seen, what the narrator discovers when he journeys to the heart of the region within which the Hurdanos dwell is that their existence is a sign that we have altered nature against itself, that we have rendered nature – hence ourselves – unnatural, a horror. *Land without Bread* acknowledges that the world has become such, and we have become such, that the specific techniques and strategies of surrealism are no longer needed in order for the world to be revealed to us, to reveal itself to us, on film. The world has become so unnatural to us, we have become so displaced from our natural habitation within the world, that in order to reveal the truths that for surrealism were hard-won artistic achievements a filmmaker need only train his camera on a region of the world and "document" what is to be found there. For the art of film, the difficult task is to acknowledge the camera's revelations. Buñuel never wavers in his commitment to this task.

CHAPTER III

Night and Fog

From a view of a plain, flat landscape the camera tilts down to a barbed wire fence, then holds this framing. A narrator begins to speak: "A peaceful landscape . . ."

There is a cut to another view of this "peaceful landscape." Again, the camera pulls back to the barbed wire. This time, as the narrator continues, the camera keeps pulling back to reveal an observation tower. "An ordinary field with crows flying over it. . ." There is a new shot of the landscape, the camera sustaining its smooth, silent motion across the cut. ". . . An ordinary road, an ordinary village. . . . This is the way to a concentration camp." On these last words the camera crosses the fence that separates the camp from the surrounding countryside. And this is "the way to a concentration camp" in Alain Resnais's *Night and Fog*, widely acclaimed as one of the great masterpieces of documentary film.



In *Land without Bread*, the narrator – within the film's "fiction," he is the filmmaker himself – departs from Alberca and crosses a range of high mountains into the land of the Hurdanos. Once there, he penetrates deeper and deeper into this impoverished region until the horror that is the existence of the Hurdanos reveals itself in its purest form. *Night and Fog* traces a comparable trajectory. It, too, is an allegorical journey into the heart of a region in which unspeakable horrors are to be discovered. Resnais's region of "night and fog," like Buñuel's "land without bread," is at once a geographical and spiritual place. But to enter this region, one must cross only to the other side of a fence, not traverse high mountains.

And to reach its heart one must journey through time, not space.

Before the death camps were built, "Struthol, Oranenburg, Auschwitz, Neuengamme, Belsen, Ravensbruck, and Dachau were names like any others on maps and in guide-books," the narrator reminds us. And now – Resnais's film was made in 1955 – "the blood has dried, the tongues are silent. Only the camera goes the round of the blocks. Weeds have grown where the prisoners used to walk. No footstep is heard but our own."

As the camera glides through the deserted grounds, it almost imperceptibly picks up speed. On the words "No footstep is heard but our own" there is a sudden cut to a black-and-white shot – film students may recognize it from Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* – of a line of soldiers goose-stepping right to left across the screen.

As if to suggest at once the continuity and the gap between past and present, the soldiers' movement, filmed by a stationary camera, both matches and clashes with the movement in the preceding shots, in full (if now faded) color, in which the camera moved left to right, making the landscape move right to left across the screen.

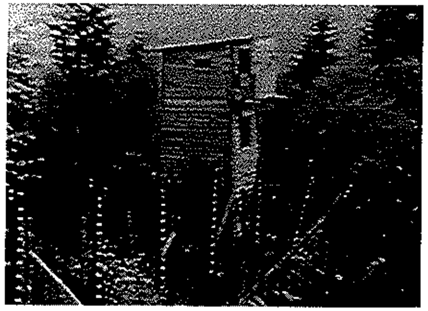
"1933: The machine gets under way," the narrator announces, and with this transition to the first of a series of what in effect are flashbacks, *Night and Fog*, too, "gets under way," begins its chronicle of the creation, operation and liberation of the death camps.

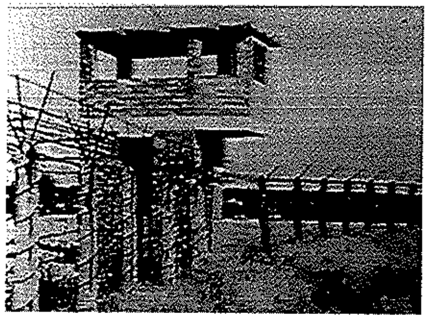
These "flashbacks" are made up of skillfully edited black-and-white archival film footage originally taken by the Germans (later in the film, by the Allied liberators) combined with still photographs – also black-and-white and from the same sources – that Resnais artfully films, sometimes "animating" them (by panning across the still image, for example, or by moving in to a close-up of a detail). Becoming progressively more horrific, the flashbacks work their way forward, chronologically, from 1933 to 1945, this linear progression interrupted only when the film returns to the present (always filmed in color, hence always recognizable *as* such).

First, the camps are constructed. "A concentration camp is built like a grand hotel," the narrator remarks, his observation illustrated by a series of black-and-white stills. "You need contractors, estimates, competitive offers. And no doubt friends in high places."

The analogy between the building of a concentration camp and a grand hotel exemplifies one of the recurring themes of the narration. As Jay Cantor eloquently puts it in "Death and the Image," his remarkable essay on *Night and Fog*, *Shoah*, and *Hotel Terminus: The Life and Times of Klaus Barbie*:

> Resnais makes the horrible ordinary, so we might believe it; and then he makes the ordinary horrible, so that we might fear it. "An ordinary road," his film begins, "an ordinary village. . . names like any other on maps and in guide books". . . . The ordinary becomes horrible – the tracks from our city of the living lead to the camp. The horrible becomes ordinary. The camp becomes a city. Not our city? Perhaps, but not, anymore, *not* our city, either.[8]





The analogy exemplifies another of the narrator's recurring themes as well. To build a hotel or a death camp one also needs architects and craftsmen. "Leisurely architects plan the gates no one will enter more than once," he goes on. "Any style will do," he adds, and his ensuing words are accompanied with an almost comic series of illustrations: "The Swiss style. The garage style. A Japanese model. No style at all."

Building a death camp is a matter of artistry and craftsmanship, in other words. And there is artistry and craftsmanship in the way the camps carry out their murderous work. On this point, too, Cantor writes with great insight:

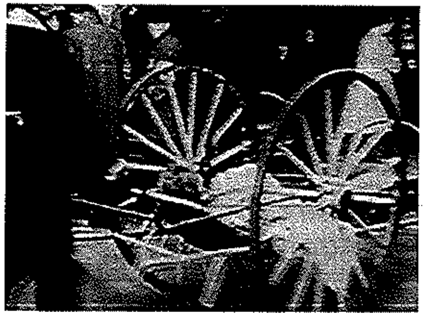
> Whereas for Claude Lanzmann, the director of *Shoah*, the Final Solution is a matter of methodical, step by step, engineering. . ., for Resnais, the most formally elegant, the most artful and elegiac of. . .filmmakers, the camp is made by art and by craft. . . . Within those crafted gates, some prisoners are classified as "Night and Fog," a piece of Hitler's poetry; the Jews were to disappear into the night and fog, their fate forever unknown. . .Poetry – art and craft – made the camp. . .Poetry is complicit with death.[9]

Even as the camps are being built, the narrator tells us,

> Burger, Stern from Amsterdam, Schmulski from Cracow. . .go on living their everyday lives, ignorant that there's a place for them six hundred miles from home. The day comes when their blocks are finished. All they have to do is arrive. Rounded up in Warsaw. Deported from Lodz, from Prague, Brussels or Athens, from Zagreb, Odessa or Rome.

There is a series of archival shots of "deportees" – we see the Stars of

David they are wearing, but the narrator does not identify them as Jews – being herded into boxcars as indifferent soldiers look on.[10] In one shot, the anonymous cameraman, not so indifferent, follows the movement of a wheelbarrow-turned-wheelchair, taking an interest in this odd contraption.



In another shot, the camera frames a child staring out from behind the almost closed door of a boxcar, then reframes a bit as if to create a more effective composition, that is, to create a more compelling sense that this child is looking on this scene, looking on the camera that is filming, without understanding what is happening.

The shot does not reveal what the child is thinking or feeling, only that the child is thinking and feeling something, has private thoughts and feelings about this disturbing situation. (This shot, whose framing and reframing perhaps unwittingly testifies to its subject's humanity, is not the last in the film that may well make us wonder who can be filming this, for whose eyes, for what purpose, and to what effect.)

As the train pulls away, the narrator speaks poetically. "Anonymous trains, their doors well-locked, a hundred deportees to every car. Neither night nor day, only hunger, thirst, asphyxia and madness. . . . Death makes his first pick. . . in the night and fog."

And with this, Resnais brings us back to the present, the movement of the train almost perfectly matched by the camera's movement along the track – now overgrown with weeds and tall grass – that is, by the movement of the track through the frame. "Today, on the same track," the narrator says, "the sun shines. Go slowly along it. . . looking for what? Traces of the bodies that fell to the ground? Or the footmarks of those first arrivals. . ." As the camera moves, it tilts up to reveal an entrance gate – well-crafted, of course – in the distance. ". . . While the dogs barked and searchlights wheeled. . ." The camera comes to a stop. ". . . And the incinerator flamed in the lurid decor so dear to the Nazis."

The narrator speaks as if from a vivid memory. His words evoke a scene of which, for a camera in the present, no tangible sign remains. Throughout *Night and Fog*, the narration remains in the third person, but we always have the impression that its author has to be a concentration camp survivor. This is, in fact, the case. Although the voice-over is read by Michel Bouquet, a professional actor, the text was written by Jean Cayrol, a Catholic poet who had been imprisoned by the Nazis.[11]

We might think that the narrator's point, in suggesting that it may be impossible for the camera in the present to discover any tangible signs of scenes like those he is describing, those he is remembering, is to deny that it is possible for this film – any film – to restore the reality, the true dimension, of such scenes. Yet from the shot of the entrance gate Resnais cuts to a luridly lit shot, taken at night, of the same gate, and then suddenly plunges us into a second flashback by a startling cut to a still photograph of a young man, the frame filled by his wide-open, terror-struck eyes. "First sight of the camp," the narrator says, and it is as if these terrified eyes are the narrator's own, as if he is witnessing now, experiencing now, precisely the scene his words have described.

And this compelling evocation of the point of view of a deportee entering the gate intensifies the impact of the succeeding images Resnais gives us of "the individual, humiliated," being "surrendered to the camp."

The new arrival, "classed sometimes as '*Nacht und Nebel*,' 'Night and Fog,'" is introduced to the camp hierarchy. Lowest above him are the "common criminals, masters among the underlings."

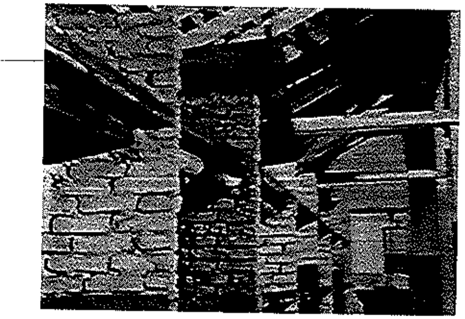
> Above them is the Kapo, again a common criminal as often as not. Still higher come the S.S., the untouchables addressed at a distance of three yards. Highest of all is the Commandant. He pretends to know nothing of the camp.

Resnais cuts from the face of this Commandant to a shot taken in the present, the camera gliding silently across the abandoned grounds. "Who doesn't, besides?" The unspoken question behind this rhetorical question is whether we, too, are to be numbered among those who "pretend to know nothing of the camp." Then the narrator formulates another rhetorical question central to *Night and Fog*: "How discover what remains of the reality of these camps when it was despised by those who made them and eluded those who suffered there?"

For a filmmaker aspiring to discover the reality of these camps, one problem is that no tangible sign of that reality seems to remain. It is no less a problem that the true dimension of the camps was denied, repressed, even when the camps were in operation. The horror that is the existence of the Hurdanos is plainly visible for the camera to see. But the denial of the reality of the death camps was always part of their reality, part of what the camera must discover a way to discover.

As the camera glides along an endless row of empty bunk beds, the narrator continues to evoke scenes not given to us to view, scenes of which no tangible sign remains:

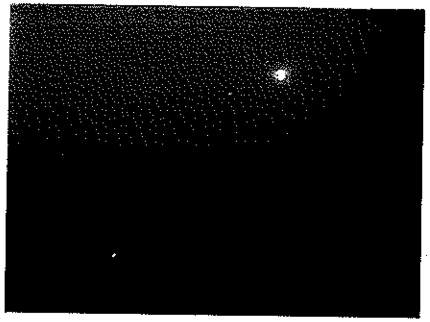
> These wooden blocks, these beds where three people slept, these burrows where people hid, where they furtively ate and sleep itself was a danger – no description, no shot, can restore their true dimension, endless, uninterrupted fear. We should need the very mattress at once meat safe and strong-box, the blanket that was fought over, the denunciations and oaths, the orders repeated in every tongue, the sudden appearance of the S.S., zealous in their check-ups and persecutions. Only the husk and shade remains of this brick dormitory.



Finally, the camera comes to the end of the row. Smoothly turning so that for a long moment it frames nothing but a featureless wall, it completes a half-revolution and then starts retracing its steps, as if it were its immutable fate to keep endlessly traversing this long row of empty beds.

Momentarily, however, Resnais cuts to the exterior of the barracks, the camera continuing its movement from the preceding shot. "Here is the setting. Buildings that might be stables, garages, workshops, a piece of land that has become a waste-land, an autumn sky indifferent to everything . . . "

The camera comes to a stop (as it did when it framed the entrance gate, signaling the cut to staring eyes that suddenly plunged us into the second flashback). ". . . Evoke a night . . . " Resnais cuts to a shot of the night sky,



the moon barely visible through heavy mist (a perfect evocation, it might be noted, of the "night and fog" of the film's title). ". . . Shrill with cries, busy with fleas. A night of chattering teeth . . . Get to sleep quickly."

And suddenly, again, Resnais plunges us into a flashback, this time by cutting to a still photograph of a row of bunk beds crowded with men staring fearfully at the camera.

The words the narrator goes on to speak form a disjointed, impressionistic monologue, as if he were at the mercy of a jumble of all-too-vivid memories.

> Wakening at dawn and people falling over one another. Muster on the parade . . . The night's dead throw the figures out. A band plays a march from some operetta, while they leave for the quarries or factory. Work in snow that is soon frozen mud. Work in the August sun . . . Thirst and dysentery . . . Three thousand Spaniards died building this stair that leads to the Mauthausen quarry. Work in the underground factories. Month after month they dig deeper down . . . But these strange workmen who weigh five stone are unreliable. The S.S. watches them. . . . The Kapo has only to count the day's victims . . . The deportee returns to the obsession of his life and dreams – food. Soup . . . A spoon less is a day off your life . . . Many are too weary to defend their ration against thieves and blows. They wait for the mud or the snow.

Resnais accompanies this monologue with stills and archival footage that relate obliquely to the scenes being evoked, as if to underscore what the narrator has already acknowledged, that "no description, no shot" can restore to these settings their "true dimension" of "endless, uninterrupted fear."

And yet, surely, the narrator is evoking these scenes for us, Resnais is presenting these images to us, so we can know something – the crucial thing – about these camps, or can no longer deny to ourselves that we know nothing about them. That is, the task *Night and Fog* sets for itself is precisely to restore the reality of these "buildings that might be stables, garages, workshops," this "brick dormitory" whose "husk and shade" alone remains," these "wooden blocks, these beds where three people slept, these burrows where people hid, where they furtively ate and sleep itself was a danger," this "piece of land that has become a waste-land," this "autumn sky indifferent to everything." And Resnais's film undertakes this task so that we may no longer "pretend to know nothing about" the "endless, uninterrupted fear" that was – is – the "true dimension" of these settings.

The task *Night and Fog* sets for itself is an (all but) impossible one, Resnais's film acknowledges. And yet the film succeeds in accomplishing this (all but) impossible task – at least, it succeeds if we take it upon ourselves to imagine the (all but) unimaginable scenes the narrator is evoking, scenes that once took place here on an everyday basis.

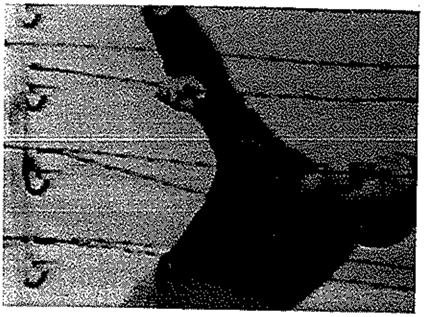
On the narrator's words "They wait for the mud or the snow . . .," the camera begins panning across a photograph of the camp in winter, the rows of barracks standing out starkly against the snow. As he adds ". . . To lie down somewhere, anywhere, and die one's own death," we are returned to the present, the camera now gliding along an endless row of latrines. Despite his invocation of the deportee's dream – his own dream – of lying down to await a peaceful death, without a pause the narrator continues in his breathless litany of horrors ("The latrines and their approaches. Skeletons with baby-flesh came here seven or eight times a night. . . . They watched one another in fear, on the look-out for the familiar symptoms. To 'pass blood' was a sign of death . . ."). The implication is that even those who died here did not "die their own deaths." Those who died, as surely as those who survived, still haunt these settings, are still haunted by their dream of dying their own deaths. The task of Resnais's film is also to allow these tortured souls to rest in peace.

As the narrator says, "You called on your friends, exchanged rumors and news," the camera, having come to the end of the row of latrines, tilts up to frame the walls. "Gradually, a society developed, its form the image of terror . . . Less mad, though, than that of the S.S., whose precepts ran 'Cleanliness is Health,' 'Work is Freedom,' 'To Each His Due,' 'A Louse Means Death.'"

There is a brief flashback: We view these slogans, one by one, emblazoned on gates, then stills and archival shots that illustrate the narrator's ensuing words ("Each camp has its surprises. A symphony orchestra. A zoo. Hothouses where Himmler cultivated rare blooms. Goethe's oak at Buchenwald. The camp was built around it. An orphanage short-lived but constantly restarted. An invalid bay.").

Resnais returns us yet again to the present. "Then the real world, the world of the past, seems far yet not so far." Strikingly, the camera is unmoving as the narrator speaks these words. Except for the opening shot of the film, a stationary camera has mainly marked the world of the past. That the film's opening is being echoed here is confirmed by the shot that follows, in which the camera moves past the double barbed-wire fence separating the camp from the landscape that surrounds it as the narrator speaks the words "For the deportee, it was an image. He belonged only to the self-contained universe hemmed in by observation posts . . . where soldiers spied on the deportees, killing them on occasion."

With this remark, the camera stops, signaling another sudden cut to a still photograph of a man whose eyes are fixed in a terrified stare. This man,



however, is dead. Evidently, he was killed trying to climb the barbed-wire fence to reach the "real world" in plain view on the other side.

This is a privileged moment. Although death has been repeatedly invoked in the film, this is the first image of literal death Resnais gives us. This man did not lie down in the snow or the mud, did not peacefully welcome his death. Neither did death steal upon him unawares. He died with his eyes wide open. His death was sudden, violent, terrible, but when it came he saw it coming. And yet the death he saw coming was a far cry from his dream – the narrator's dream, the human dream – of "dying one's own death."

Perhaps he was shot by a soldier spying on him from an observation post. Perhaps he was electrocuted by the fence, and his death was only viewed, not caused, by such a viewer. Perhaps no one was viewing when he died, and no one viewed him other than the anonymous photographer who later took this shot (as if, to the dead, there is a difference between now and later). However we imagine the scene of this man's death, this photograph reveals – its reality *means* – that his death was not private, that he could not – cannot – call his death his own. Concentration camps are designed and built not merely to kill, but to deny their victims the possibility of "dying their own deaths." To this end, gun and camera work hand in hand.

There is a cut to another still of the same man, then to a photograph of other men killed trying to cross the barbed-wire fence, all killed – and photographed – the same way. In the camps, death is off the rack, not made to order, this shot forcefully brings home. Concentration camps are designed to deny their victims the possibility of "dying their own deaths" not only by depriving them of privacy, but also by denying their individuality. And to this end, too, gun and camera work hand in hand.

"Everything is a pretext for . . . punishments, humiliation. The roll call lasts two hours . . .," the narrator goes on, as we view a lineup of naked men, all skin and bones, some pathetically trying to cover their genitals from the unflinching gaze of the camera. We view a "yard in Block XI, quite out of sight," which has been "specially arranged for executions." We view "coaches with smoked windows. . . 'Black Transport,' which leaves at night." The narrator adds, "We shall never know anything about it," as we view an ominous-looking truck slowly disappearing into a lingering cloud of dust. (This is another of the film's poetic invocations of the "night and fog" of the title.)

Then the image gradually fades out – this is the first fade-out in the film – to bring this part of *Night and Fog* to an end.

The millions who lived and died in the camps were forcefully separated from their ordinary lives. Before they entered the gates of the camps, the present was the "real world" to them – the ordinary world of home, family, friends, jobs. Once they came to "belong" to the "self-contained universe" of the camp, the real world remained in plain view, "far yet not so far" on the other side of the fence. But the "real world" on the other side of the fence was only an image – as real yet impossible to reach as the world on film, "far yet not so far" on the "other side" of the movie screen.

It meant death not to recognize that this fence could not be crossed, that even dying did not get one to the other side. But it meant madness not to recognize that what was on the other side was real. To mistake the self-contained universe of the camp for the real world was to deny the reality of the fence – and its meaning (for its reality was its meaning). The fence that was built to contain the camp, to make it a self-contained universe, meant that the camp was not, could not be, the real world. For the real world encompasses everything that exists. The real world cannot be contained; it has – can have – no fence around it.

To belong to the camp – to struggle to survive, sane, in this self-contained universe – meant denying that the present was the real world. (This is what the narrator means, I take it, when he speaks of the reality of the camps as "eluding" those who suffered there.) Like a movie screen upon which the real world is projected, the fence that made the camp a self-contained universe made the real world an image, made the real world present the way the world of the past once was present to the deportees (before they came to belong to the camp, when the present was still the real world to them).

Night and Fog, we have said, undertakes to restore to these settings their "true dimension," to restore the reality of the world of the past (to make this past as present as it ever was, or to call upon us to acknowledge that it never stopped being present). The world of the past that *Night and Fog* undertakes to restore, of course, is the world in which these self-contained universes were built and operated, the world in which their "true dimension" was denied. It is the world in which the real world *became* the world of the past, *became* present only as an image. In undertaking to restore the reality of the world of the past, then, *Night and Fog* undertakes to restore

the reality of the present, too, to enable the present to become the real world again.

There is another aspect, as well, to the idea that the fence that made the camp a self-contained universe made the real world an image. The fence was built to contain the camp, to separate it from the real world, to enable those outside to deny the reality of what was inside. But if the reality of the fence meant that the self-contained universe of the camp could not be the real world, it meant that the world outside the camp – the world that excluded the camp, that denied its reality – could not be the real world either, that it, too, was a self-contained universe. If what was inside the fence was "the semblance of a real city," as the narrator suggests, it was the semblance of a semblance, the facade of a facade. For what was outside the fence was only an image of the real world, was no less a semblance, no less a mere facade.

The camp was only the facade of the real world, but, the narrator goes on, "man has incredible powers of resistance." For those who came to belong to its self-contained universe,

> The mind works on. They make spoons, marionettes, which they carefully hide. Monsters. Boxes. They manage to write. . ., train the memory with dreams. They think of God. They even dispute with the common criminals their right to control the camp life. They look after friends worse off than themselves. They share their food with them. . . As a last recourse they take the dying to the hospital.

As the narrator speaks these last words, the camera, in the present, tracks in on the door of a building. "Approach this door and you could hope for a real bed. And there was the risk of death by syringe."

The hospital, of course, was a facade. "The medicines were make believe, the dressing mere paper. . . Sometimes the starving ate their dressings." Accompanying these words, Resnais presents us with three shots that we take to represent still photographs of patients (that is, victims). But a barely perceptible movement of a terrified eye reveals that these "stills" are really motion pictures. They are only semblances of still photographs, we might say.

Cantor writes tellingly about this passage:

> The camera. . . pans across black and white stills of patients. Or so one thinks, until an eye blinks. One thinks (forced to a telling misapprehension): so it wasn't a photo (though, of course, it is). If motion pictures-become-snapshots describe nostalgic images, then here nostalgia is defeated by momentarily making the moving picture seem like a still, and then the slight motion of the patient's eye makes a mournful scene horrifying. Death enters because we had felt protected, because we had thought we were looking at a still, at history that had already happened. Outside history's narrative, we did not have to participate in its forward motion. But because this man will die, because he has been returned for a moment to life, we try to grasp him at the edge of the precipice; and feel our failure, and await death, again, with him.[12]

bread" is not a death camp. Again, the existence of the Hurdanos is a horror, but the horror is their unawareness. The horror in *Night and Fog* is a creation of art and craft.

In *Land without Bread*, the horror that is the existence of the Hurdanos reveals that humanity, in its attempts to wall out nature, has altered nature against itself, has rendered nature itself a horror. But this horror has stolen upon humanity unawares. Humanity has become estranged from nature, nature has become estranged from itself, naturally, as it were, as an inevitable consequence of humanity's attempts – bred by horror of nature – to protect itself from nature, to keep nature at bay.

Buñuel's faith is that art can awaken humanity to – from – the horror of nature that has rendered nature unnatural, a horror. Art is to save us from the horror, to reconcile us with nature. But in the world of *Night and Fog*, the reality of the death camps means that a further estrangement has taken place: Humanity has altered art against its own nature, has rendered art unnatural, a horror. Death camps were built with fences around them not to try to contain nature, but to try to contain art, to try to protect nature from art, to try to keep art itself at bay. If a death camp is a work of art, how can art save us?

Buñuel asserts an ironic distance, we have said, between his own perspective and that of his obtuse narrator. And he uses the camera ironically, uses it the way the narrator would in order to reveal the narrator's unawareness. In *Night and Fog*, Resnais asserts no ironic distance between himself and his narrator, a concentration camp survivor who is anything but unaware or obtuse. But Resnais carries a crucial step further Buñuel's strategy of using the camera ironically. Most of what is on view in *Night and Fog* is "found" footage or still photographs originally shot by the Nazis themselves. In *Night and Fog*, the camera most often belongs not to Resnais at all, but to the builders and operators of the camps. Insofar as these shots were originally taken in the service of the Nazis' project of denying the humanity of their victims, Resnais uses them precisely to undo their original purpose, to acknowledge the humanity they reveal but were meant to deny.

Yet underlying Buñuel's irony in identifying the narrator with himself is his film's acknowledgment that the narrator's camera is really the filmmaker's own camera. Similarly, it is a central thrust of Resnais's film to acknowledge that there is an affinity as well as a difference between the Nazis' use of the camera and his own, between their project and his. *Night and Fog* acknowledges that there is an affinity in general between guns and cameras, between murder and the art of film (as Renoir's and Hitchcock's films, for example, insistently declare). Beyond this, Resnais's film acknowledges that the particular artistic sensibility it exemplifies, its way of representing the death camps, has a particular affinity with the way the camps were built and operated.

It is one of Jay Cantor's deepest insights that *Night and Fog* understands these cities of death to have been made by art and craft, and in this respect

to be akin not only to our ordinary cities, but to ordinary works of art. And that the building and operation of the death camps are not only congruent with ordinary acts of artistic creation (and with ordinary acts of filmmaking, we might add), but have a special link with the creation of Resnais's film, with its particular way of representing the camps. As Cantor puts it, "Poetry – art and craft – made the camps; poetry – art and craft – makes Resnais's response to the camps, its representation."[14]

As we have suggested, *Night and Fog*'s way of representing the death camps is by undertaking to restore their reality. To restore the reality of the camps means to create these cities of death all over again, to create them symbolically, we might say (with our discussion of *Land without Bread* in mind, were might also say "mythically" or "allegorically").

Art and craft are in complicity with the way literal murder is carried out in – by – the camps. And art and craft are in complicity with the way *Night and Fog* symbolically re-creates the death camps, with the way death is represented in – by – Resnais's film. And this must be so, as Cantor observes, for "if Resnais's art did not openly display this complicity it would distance him and us from the camp, turn us into spectators, and the camp into spectacle."[15] Re-creating the death camps in – by – the medium of film, Resnais acknowledges that his artistic sensibility is capable of making the camps, that his art is capable of creating the "endless, uninterrupted fear" that is their "true dimension," is capable of bringing death, at least symbolically.

"In the Talmud it is asked," Cantor writes,

> How, now that the Temple is destroyed, are we to make sacrifices? And why, now that the Temple is destroyed, do we study in such detail how sacrifices were made there? The sages answer that our way of making a sacrifice at the Temple is, of course, *to study* how the sacrifice had been made, to sacrifice our lives briefly through study, in remembering the sacrifice, remembering it meticulously, step by step. In this way we symbolically enact sacrifice; our own detailed delineation, which calls upon all our powers of imagination and interpretation, both describes and is symbol for the sacrifice. . . Such symbolic sacrifices are not bloodless, not without scars;. . . death. . . truly operates in the symbolic sacrifice as well as in the. . . literal one.[16]

In studying, now that the Temple is destroyed, how sacrifices were made in the Temple, the act of representation itself is a symbolic equivalent for the action to be represented. Cantor's point is that the making of *Night and Fog*, too, is an act of representation of this kind. The way Resnais makes his film is equivalent, symbolically, to the way the death camps were made. The way the film represents the operation of the death camps is equivalent, symbolically, to the way "endless, uninterrupted fear" was created, the way death was brought, in – by – the camps.

This is why, as Cantor observes, death is

> . . . most felt not in still photos or documentary footage from the camps, not in the

silence of nature, but in all these things only when the artist has found a way to making himself and us participate in the *building* of these images of the destruction of the Jews, and so, in that limited, symbolic, so necessary way, in what the images show. We can participate, then, *symbolically* in the destruction of the Jews, and in our own destruction; for to imagine properly is also, symbolically, to perform and to suffer.[17]

◆

"Nothing distinguishes the gas chamber from an ordinary block," the narrator says, as the camera, in the present, traverses first the exterior and then the interior of a faceless brick building. "What looked like a shower-room welcomed the arrivals. The doors were closed. A watch was kept." The camera stops. There is an ominous cut to a barred window. Then the camera, pulling out, "climbs" the stone wall until it reaches the ceiling. "The only sign – but you have to know – is this ceiling scored by fingernails. Even the concrete was torn." The camera pans and tracks slowly across the length of the ceiling. Then Resnais cuts to a photograph of a wide-eyed face, and to a horrifying still of a pile of corpses.

These marks in the ceiling are the only tangible signs that Resnais's camera, in the present, ever discovers that reveal the "endless, uninterrupted fear" that was the "true dimension" of these settings. But to recognize what these marks reveal, to comprehend the significance of these signs, even to recognize them *as* signs, "You have to know," as the narrator puts it. You have to know what the narrator tells us. You have to know what Resnais's film enables us to know, assures that we cannot but know, allows us no longer to pretend to ourselves not to know.

"Hands scraping stone," Cantor observes, "is an image that will recur in [Resnais's] *Hiroshima, mon amour*... The image must have spoken precisely *to him*, to his sense of himself and his project."[18] Cantor goes on to convey that he "felt almost" about this passage, that in this image Resnais is "defining himself," as an artist, by responding to an image in Rilke's essay, "In Regard to Art."

> "The artist is a dancer whose movements are broken by the constraints of his cell. That which finds no expression in his steps and limited swing of his arms comes in exhaustion from his lips, or else he has to scratch the unlived lines of his body into the walls with his wounded fingers." Art, for Rilke, is eros, sensuousness not yet able to be born, blocked by the recalcitrant unreadiness of history. But art, too, built these camps as well as their sensuous representation. Is there art then in the marks the victims' fingers made in *these* walls? Is this the end of art, or its grim mockery, or what defeats it – its hidden residue? Are these markings ugly? beautiful? sublime? Here are the dangers; the unlived lines; the wounded fingers. "...but you have to know."[19]

I, too, "feel almost" that in this passage in *Night and Fog* (and its counterpart in *Hiroshima, mon amour*) Resnais is defining himself as an artist by responding to the passage in Rilke that Cantor quotes. But there is something else, too, I "feel almost" about this image of marks painfully scraped in stone, namely, that Resnais is defining himself specifically as a filmmaker, defining his artistic project as one cut to the particular measure of the medium of film. For in every film image, the subject's "mark" ("the unlived lines of his body") is "scratched," is scratched by the subject's own flesh and blood (his "wounded fingers").

Further, I "feel almost" that in defining himself as an artist in the medium of film, the creator of *Night and Fog* is responding to an image in *Grand Illusion*, Jean Renoir's masterpiece about prisoner camps during the First World War (a film that, along with *The Rules of the Game*, marks Renoir's artistic project as a central source and inspiration for Resnais's own). I am thinking of the passage in which Maréchal, the Jean Gabin character, on the verge of madness from solitary confinement, digs furrows with a spoon into the stone wall of his cell before he makes his hopelessly abortive attempt to escape.

Like *Land without Bread*, *Grand Illusion* was made before the death camps were built, of course. And it is set in a world that was already past when the film was made. In *Grand Illusion*, to "belong" to a prisoner-of-war camp means to be deprived of the company of women, a condition not easy to bear for any character played by Jean Gabin. But in the world of *Grand Illusion*, the prison camp is not a self-contained universe that makes the real world only an image. Inside and outside the camp, in Renoir's film, the present is still the real world. That is why solitary confinement – being cut off from a world whose reality he does not doubt – is a fate worse than death for Maréchal. (In a death camp, solitary confinement is a blessing.)

In Renoir's film, everyone – Frenchman and German alike – has sympathy for Maréchal. No one wishes to deny his humanity. Yet the machinery is already in place to fence such a man off from the world, even to kill him.

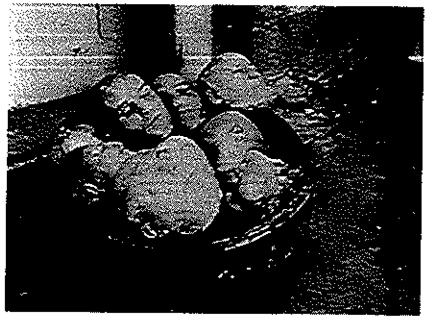
Acknowledging that it represents a world already past, *Grand Illusion* represents a moment at which the present is still the real world, but is on its way to becoming only a facade. The image of Maréchal digging marks in the stone, on the verge of madness, is the one sign in Renoir's film – but it only takes one – that the present may be threatened with horrors that are unimagined, unimaginable, in the world of *Grand Illusion.*

In the world of *Night and Fog*, innocent-looking ovens "coped with thousands of bodies per day," the narrator notes, as the camera moves along the row of ovens, finally stops on an oven door. Resnais cuts to a still of a heap of sunglasses as the narrator says, "Nothing is lost. Here are the reserves of the Nazis at war. Here are their stores."

The camera moves along a mound of hair, then tilts up to emphasize the height of the mound. "Women's hair." The camera pans across rolls of cloth. "At fifteen pfennigs the kilo, it's used for making cloth." The oven door opens, revealing to the camera the remains of cremated bodies. "Bones." The camera pans a mountain of bones. "They're intended for manure."

We view men opening an oven door. "Bodies." We view a charred body with a hand heartbreakingly trying to cover what remains of a face. "There's nothing left to say."

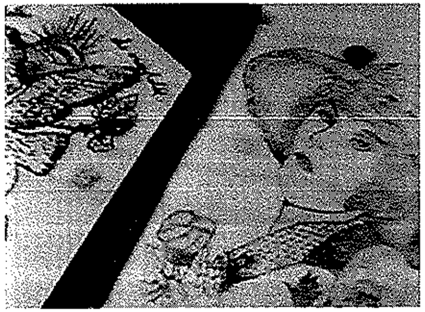
We view heads and headless bodies; motion picture footage of a huge vat; two stills of bars of soap. "The bodies were meant for soap."



"As for skin. . ." There is a motion picture shot that pans across pictures painted on human skin.

This last image, however innocent-looking, is so horrifying in its implications that the narrator does not or cannot finish his sentence ("There's nothing left to say").

"The film shows images painted on skin," Cantor writes of this passage. "That is to say: *we watch images of images painted on skin.*"[20] If it is an unspeakable horror to use the skin of murdered human beings as a canvas on which to paint images in the name of art, Cantor's use of italics suggests, what makes it less a horror for Resnais to make art out of images of these images-painted-on-skin?

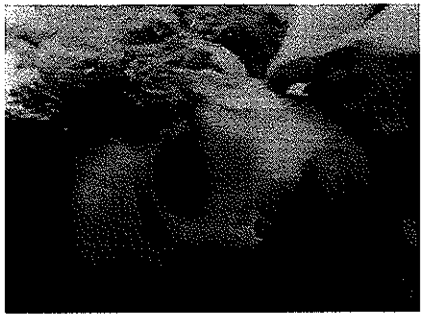


Complementing Cantor's point, we might add that these are no mere representations of images-painted-on-skin that Resnais presents to us. Through the "magic" of photography, we are given to view and contemplate the images-painted-on-skin themselves, as it were, which have "scratched their mark" on these frames. These images of images-painted-on-skin are not painted on skin; film images are not painted at all. In the medium of film, the image *is* the skin, the surface, of the subject. If we may say that film images, symbolically, are "scratched" by their subjects' "bleeding fingers," we may also say that the camera does not paint its subjects; symbolically, it skins them alive. In the face of the camera, there are no horrors. Yet there is something horrific about every film image, not just these images of images-painted-on-skin.

And after this culminating image of images-painted-on-skin, Resnais effects a transition to the last part of his film. "1945," the narrator announces.

> The camps are full and spreading. . . . The Nazis may win the war. . . . But they lose. There is no coal for the incinerators. No bread for the men. The camp streets are strewn with corpses. Typhus. When the Allies open the doors, all the doors. . .

We view a series of stills – heartbreaking, grotesque, strangely beautiful – of bodies strewn on the ground; corpses in piles; mounds of severed legs, heads, feet; a woman's dead, sightless eye.



Then we view a series of motion picture images – if anything, even more heartbreaking, grotesque, strangely beautiful – of bodies and body parts being plowed into a ditch, the bulldozers "animating" the lifeless flesh,

causing these corpses to take on a succession of expressive contortions; of uniformed Kapos and officers being led into custody; of Allied soldiers carrying bodies on their backs, tossing them into the ditch, carrying severed heads and adding them to a pile of heads on the ground.

Then there is a still photograph, followed by motion picture footage, of survivors staring blankly across the barbed-wire fence at the camera – in their denial of these subjects' individuality as well as their privacy, these shots are counterparts to the shots of the victims impaled on the barbed wire who died trying to reach the real world in plain view on the other side of the fence – as the narrator speaks the haunting words, "The deportees look on without understanding. Are they free? Will life know them again?"

In this passage, the camera belongs, not to the Nazis who were responsible for building and operating this city of death, but to the Allied soldiers charged with opening the doors (". . . all the doors . . .") of the camp. As we have seen, the camera played an integral role in the murderous operation of the camps. And the camera played an integral role as well in their "liberation" by the Allies. But what is that role? In the face of *this* camera, are these survivors really free? Does life really know them again?

The way these survivors "look on without understanding" at the camera on the other side of the barbed-wire fence is uncannily reminiscent of the way, in *Land without Bread*, the fever sufferers submit in "stolid silence" to the gaze of Buñuel's camera. The camera of the "liberators" – like Buñuel's camera, like the cameras of the Nazis – recognizes no horrors, but also shows no pity. But if *Land without Bread* condemns its "pitiful human wrecks" for not awakening to the reality of their condition, Resnais's film does not condemn these survivors who "look on without understanding." According to the narrator of *Night and Fog*, himself a camp survivor reliving his experience as he speaks, what the survivors do not "understand," specifically, are the answers to two questions: whether they are free, and (in the narrator's peculiar phrase) whether "life" will "know them again" (not "Will they know life again?").

The fact that they cannot answer these questions does not mean that the survivors, like the suffering Hurdanos, are pathetically, horribly, unaware of the reality of their condition. On the contrary, that it is not within their power to answer these questions *is* the reality of their condition. Whether they are free, whether life will know them again, are not questions it is possible for them to answer because these are not questions about them alone, not questions for them alone. They are no less questions about the world, questions for the world. They are questions about, questions for, us. And they are questions about, questions for, the camera.

In *Grand Illusion*, when Maréchal is finally released from solitary confinement, he shows up at the room he is once again to share with his friends. He appears just as the aristocratic de Boeldieu is saying that it is painful for him ("rather embarrassing, in fact"), as it is for the others, that it seems their comrade will not be able to join them in their planned escape. "But after all it's war, not a matter of sentiment," de Boeldieu says. Then his eyes light up – he is as sentimental as the next man – and Renoir cuts to the doorway through which Maréchal, accompanied by a young German guard, has just entered. Maréchal and the guard step forward, in the direction of the camera, so for a moment they are framed in a tight two shot. The guard studies Maréchal's face with concern, as we do, for the Frenchman's eyes are fixed in an expressionless stare; he is "looking on without understanding" like the survivors at the concentration camp fence.

Maréchal, too, does not understand whether he is really free, whether life will know him again. And in his case, too, these are questions he cannot answer on his own, because these questions are not about him alone, not for him alone. Yet in *Grand Illusion* the camera and the world of the film join with Maréchal to provide definitive – and wonderfully satisfying – answers to these questions. First, the camera tactfully pulls back as if to respect his privacy at this difficult moment, but also as if to create room within the frame for Maréchal's friends to join him. And so they do, as the guard nods his permission, or,

rather, his approval. Embraced by his world, acknowledged by the camera, Maréchal is welcomed back to life.

In *Night and Fog*, however, these questions remain unanswered. Within the "fiction" created by Resnais's editing, what the survivors are "looking on without understanding" are the activities of the Allied soldiers, dutifully going about their horrendous work (piling up body parts, plowing corpses into ditches, and so on). Within this "fiction," the survivors are viewing scenes like those we have just viewed, in other words. This sequence casts them as viewers, links them with us, as if our fates were joined. And yet, these shots also remind us, these survivors belonged, as we did not, to the self-contained universe of the camp. Even in these frames, the barbed-wire fence still separates them from the camera, from us.

Of course, what these subjects of the camera are really "looking on without understanding" are the Allied soldiers who are filming them without embracing them, without welcoming them back to life. In using the camera to "document" the status of these subjects as victims of the inhuman Nazis, the "liberators" are denying their privacy and their individuality just as the Nazis did. If in these shots they are still separated from us by the barbed wire fence, the movie screen separates them from us, too. Once they belonged – we did not – to the camp. Now they belong – we do not – to the world on film.

Resnais's film, we have said repeatedly, undertakes to restore the reality of the world of the past – to make this past present, or to acknowledge that it never stopped being present. To restore the reality of the world in which these camps were built and operated, the world in which the real world became present only as an image, means to acknowledge the reality of the fence that made the camp a self-contained universe. It also means to tear that fence down, symbolically, to deny that it is a real barrier. That is the only way to restore the reality of the present, to enable the present to become the real world once again.

And that is why, I take it, Resnais ends this passage – the film's final flashback – the way he does.

First, Resnais cuts from the survivors staring across the fence to film footage of the trials of a Kapo and a Nazi officer. Lending his voice to their words, the narrator says, "I am not responsible. . . I am not responsible. . ." Then Resnais cuts to a still photograph of a man – presumably, he is a survivor of the camps – looking toward the camera, but with his eyes in shadow, as the narrator poses a question we take to be this man's as well as the narrator's own: "Who is responsible, then?" (The shadow covering his eyes does not suggest that the horror he has witnessed has left him unable

to see, like the woman with the bloody eye at the climax of the Odessa Steps sequence in Eisenstein's *Potemkin*. It suggests, rather, that in the face of the camera he retains his privacy, keeps his own counsel, is committed to the pursuit of justice. He is blind the way justice is blind. His gaze has the power to pierce facades. His judgment cannot be swayed.)

The passage ends with two unspeakably horrible shots of mutilated bodies that sum up the horror that he – this man, the narrator – has witnessed.

This man is a survivor of the camps, a stand-in for the narrator. But in this privileged frame there is no fence between him and the camera, no sign that he once belonged, as we did not, to the self-contained universe of the camp. He is in our world, and we are in his. Nothing in this frame distinguishes his place from ours, in other words. The only thing that separates us is the utterly contingent fact that he happens to be a subject of the camera at this moment, and we are not. Whether he is free, whether life will know him again, remain unanswered questions about him, unanswered questions for him. This means that they remain unanswered questions about us, unanswered questions for us, as well.

Throughout *Night and Fog*, the fence that made the camp a self-contained universe is identified, symbolically, with the movie screen. By this means, Resnais's film identifies its world – present and past – with its image of the world of the past, with the self-contained universe of the camp, with the "endless fear" that was – is – the "true dimension" of these settings. To acknowledge the presentness of this world of the past is to acknowledge that for us, too, the present is a self-contained universe, not the real world, that the real world is present to us, too, only as an image. Only by acknowledging this can we transform the present from a self-contained universe into the real world once again.

This survivor cannot be free, this passage is saying, life cannot know him again – and *we* cannot be free, life cannot know *us* – unless we acknowledge this past as present, unless we acknowledge that – like the Kapo and the Nazi officer – this man belongs to our world, that we belong to his, unless we acknowledge the world of the film as our world. And to do this means at once to acknowledge the movie screen that separates us from him, and to stop pretending that this screen is a real barrier.

What this passage is saying – what all of *Night and Fog* is saying – is that the Kapo and the officer are responsible – as this victim is not, as we are not – for building and operating these cities of death, for the "endless fear" that was their "true dimension." But responsibility for liberating the camps – condemning the executioners, laying the dead to rest, welcoming the survivors into our midst, freeing ourselves and our world – is in our hands, the hands of all us survivors.

And so Resnais's film returns us, for the last time, to the present. The camera glides along the ground, overgrown with weeds, to a stagnant pond as the narrator intones, "As I speak to you now, the icy water of the ponds and ruins lies in the hollows of the charnel-house. A water as sluggish as our own bad memories. War nods, but has one eye open." The camera now moves across a field of grass, the movement continuing across the cut. "Faithful as ever, the grass flourishes on the muster ground round the blocks. An abandoned village, still heavy with threats." The camera passes the remains of a furnace. "The furnace is no longer in use."

"The skill of the Nazis is child's play today," the narrator goes on, alluding to the awesome fact that one thermonuclear bomb can incinerate millions of human beings in a flash. "Nine million dead haunt this landscape."

And then the narrator, like the old woman at the end of *Land without Bread*, speaks a warning to those who may be listening. "Who is on the lookout," he asks, "to warn us of our new executioners' arrival? Are their faces really different from ours? Somewhere in our midst lucky Kapos survive, reinstated officers and anonymous informers."

On these words, the camera begins pulling out, reprising its movement from the film's opening. "There are those reluctant to believe, or believing from time to time. There are those who look at these ruins today as though the monster were dead and buried beneath them. Those who take hope again as the image fades, as though there were a cure for the scourge of these camps. Those who pretend all this happened only once. . ." The camera abruptly stops. ". . . At a certain time and in a certain place. Those who refuse to look around them, deaf to the endless cry." The music cadences and ends, and the narrator, too, falls silent – this is the only time in the film that there is complete silence. Finally, our view of the present gives way to a blank screen – not blackness but blinding whiteness (an invocation of the nuclear apocalypse that now threatens to come without warning?). And this is the way Resnais's film ends.

The ending of *Land without Bread* is strikingly akin to the ending of *Nanook of the North*, as we observed. And the ending of *Night and Fog* even more strikingly echoes the last moments of Buñuel's film, especially in the original Spanish version, in which the narrator falls silent (for the only time in the film) and we hear the voice of the old woman crying out her warning ("Awake, awake, lest the Angel of Death steal upon you unawares! Awaken and say an 'Ave Maria' that his soul may rest in peace!").

In *Land without Bread*, the narrator's silence is an acknowledgment – the narrator's? Buñuel's? – of his commonality with this Nietzschean herald warning those who are listening to awaken to the horror of their existence. And the silence of Buñuel's narrator is also an acknowledgment – the narrator's? Buñuel's? – of his commonality with the Hurdanos in their homes, who may be listening but who also may be sleeping, heedless of the warning.

Resnais's narrator warns us not to be "deaf to the endless cry" that is all around us (and within us). The silence with which *Night and Fog* ends may be understood as invoking this deafness, as if to acknowledge the possibility that even viewers of this film may remain "deaf to the endless cry." But this silence may also be understood as creating the condition most conducive for us to hear the cry, or to stop pretending we do not hear it. The "endless cry" is also to be heard within the silence.

As we began this chapter by observing, *Night and Fog*, like *Land without Bread*, is an allegorical journey into the heart of a region – at once geographical and spiritual – where unspeakable horror is to be discovered. Both films end with an appeal to acknowledge the horror. In *Land without Bread*, the horror is the unawareness of the Hurdanos, which is our unawareness, too. In *Night and Fog*, neither those who built and operated the camps nor the victims who died there were unaware of the "endless fear" that was – is – the "true dimension" of these cities of death. If we fail to look around us – fail to punish the guilty, fail to free the survivors, fail to lay the dead to rest, fail to recognize the executioners and victims that are everywhere in our world, fail to recognize the executioners and victims that we, ourselves, are – that does not mean we are unaware of the horror, that our unawareness is the horror. It means we are masters of the art of pretending not to know what we cannot help knowing. If we remain deaf to the "endless cry," it means we are pretending not to hear.

■

Readers of *Hitchcock – The Murderous Gaze* and *The "I" of the Camera* may recognize that it is a recurring idea in my writing that a number of the greatest and most influential films that have ever been made have meditated on the mysterious barrier-that-is-no-real-barrier of the movie screen, and that their meditations have led them to envision this "barrier" as magically transcended or transgressed, as *Night and Fog* does in its privileged vision of the death-camp survivor no longer separated from us by the fence that made the camp a self-contained universe. (Evidently, this is an idea that speaks precisely to me, is as definitive for my sense of myself and my project as is the image of "hands scraping stone" for Resnais.)

In the ending of D. W. Griffith's *True Heart Susie*, for example, as I characterized it in *The "I" of the Camera*, "When William appears before Susie as a ghostly apparition and then enters the frame in the flesh, it is as if a dead man comes to life before her eyes, a shadow assumes substance. It is also as if William steps into, or out of, the world of a film, crossing the 'barrier' of the screen."[21] This ending anticipates the ending of Chaplin's *City*

Lights, which provided deep inspiration to films such as *It Happened One Night* and *Stella Dallas* and through them the genres of romantic comedy and melodrama central to the "classical" American cinema of the thirties and forties.

When the Little Tramp finally finds himself face-to-face with the woman he loves, her sight now restored, the glass window of the flower store, which had served as a symbolic stand-in for the movie screen, no longer separates them. Chaplin calls upon us to imagine that he has stepped out of the world of the film and into our presence, that no "window," no screen, separates us. To follow this shot with the woman's reaction would be to speak for her on the subject of what is in her heart about him. Chaplin refrains from doing this because he cannot say what the camera reveals about him, whether he is worthy of this woman's love – or ours. (Chaplin is the Little Tramp, but the Tramp is a mask as well. Chaplin is also the director in control. And even the Tramp is not as innocent as he seems. Chaplin's films come to dwell more and more on this split in his self. Hence *The Great Dictator*, in which Chaplin plays two roles, a Tramp-like Jewish barber and Adolf Hitler himself.) Showing the woman's reaction would also be to cue us as to what we are to feel. Chaplin chooses, rather, to allow us no way to know the woman's feeling, or our own, other than by imagining how we would feel in her place. That is, in the same gesture by which he calls upon us to imagine that he has stepped out of the world of the film, Chaplin also calls upon us to imagine that we find ourselves within his world, not outside and safely fenced off from it. By calling upon us to imagine that the movie screen is a real barrier that has magically been breached, Chaplin steps forward without his mask, and calls upon us to acknowledge him – and love him.

In *The River*, Jean Renoir takes up and literalizes the fantasy (which goes back to Griffith and Chaplin and to Renoir's own earlier work) that the movie screen is a barrier that has magically been breached. And, as I wrote in *The "I" of the Camera*, "it broadens that fantasy into an all-encompassing metaphysical vision – a vision that is indigenous to India, but which has always been at the heart of Renoir's own world-view. 'Reality' is illusion, 'illusion' is real, and to suppose otherwise is 'the grand illusion.'"[22]

Like *True Heart Susie*, *The River* begins with a claim that its story "really happened." But

> . . . in *The River*'s meditation, as in classical Indian philosophy, what "really happens" cannot be separated from what is dreamed, fantasized, remembered, acted on stage, or, for that matter, projected on a movie screen. "Reality" itself is theater, a spectacle through which alone the truth reveals itself to human beings, a spectacle whose creator and audience are, ultimately, one, even as they are separated by a boundary. The boundary between imagination and reality, like the boundary between India and the West, is itself a creation of the human imagination. Paradoxically, this means that nothing is or could be more real to human beings.[23]

Chaplin understands film to be a medium whose conditions must be overcome or transcended if he is to fulfill his desperate longing for acknowledgment and love. This is not Renoir's understanding. For Renoir, the way the real world appears on the movie screen is exemplary of the conditions under which alone reality can ever appear to us. For Renoir, "so-called reality," as it is dubbed in *The Golden Coach*, is neither more nor less real, neither more nor less unreal, than the world on film. And it is at once the reality and the unreality of the real world – the fact that nature itself is spectacle, is theater, is a creation of the human imagination; and the fact that imagination, art itself, is natural for human creatures like us – that *The River* undertakes to acknowledge – and to embrace. In *The River*, film is the medium in which Renoir gives his consent to these conditions. At the same time, the medium of film stands in for the conditions he consents to.

However Resnais may respect and admire Renoir's achievement as a filmmaker, the creator of *Night and Fog* cannot bring himself to consent to these conditions. In the self-contained universe of the death camp, the real world *is* only spectacle, only theater, only art. If *Night and Fog* is no different from a death camp, it completely fails in its undertaking. Resnais's project is not to consent to the world that built and operated the death camps, the world that still denies their "true dimension." Resnais's project is not simply to "document" but to transform the world of the past, to restore its reality. And he undertakes this project in order that the present, too, may be transformed, may be made worthy of consent. Death camps, too, are "creations of the human imagination." To restore their reality is to acknowledge that art no longer "naturally" reveals the truth; art lies, and art kills. To make the present the real world, art has to be overcome. Overcoming art is the new end for art.

Night and Fog acknowledges the reality of the fence that made the camp a self-contained universe, and tears that fence down, symbolically. Resnais's film takes upon itself the task of creating these cities of death all over again. It also takes upon itself the task of opening the doors (". . . all the doors . . ."). Resnais understands that the liberation of the camps is not something his film can simply "document." In the world of the past, the doors of the camp were opened. But the reality of this past stands in need of being restored. Otherwise, the opening of the doors is only an image, a mere facade. Symbolically, *Night and Fog* calls upon us to participate in liberating the camps, liberating the world that built and operated them, by acknowledging the movie screen that makes the world on film appear a self-contained universe, and by tearing that fence down, no longer pretending there is a real barrier separating us from the world on film. Overcoming the art of film is the new end for the art of film.

"Part of *Psycho*'s myth," I wrote in *Hitchcock – The Murderous Gaze*, "is that there is no world outside its own, that we are fated to be born, live our alienated lives, and die in the very world in which Norman Bates also dwells."[24] When we first view Norman/mother, wrapped in a blanket, the bottom of the frame is masked (this is, after all, the point of view of the disgusted guard looking into the prison cell through the peephole in the door). Hitchcock cuts away to the fly on Norman's/mother's hand, then back to what might seem to be a reprise of the previous setup. However, the mask at the bottom of the frame is now gone. We are now inside the cell, in the presence of Norman/mother, not separated from this being by a window, a screen. Symbolically, the "barrier" of the movie screen has been breached.

The famous shower murder sequence, too, envisions the breaching of the "barrier" of the movie screen. When the frame-within-the-frame of the shower curtain comes to engulf the frame, it is as if nothing separates this curtain from the screen on which this view is projected. In this shower curtain, the camera's gesture declares, our world and the world of *Psycho* magically come together. Or this gesture declares that there has never been a real barrier separating them. Thus when Marion Crane's killer theatrically pulls the shower curtain open, it is as if the torn curtain reveals that we – like Marion, like the wide-eyed victims who died attempting to climb over the concentration camp fence – are confronting the imminent prospect of our own murder.

To view the world on film as a "private island" (to use Marion's term) wherein we can escape the real conditions of our existence is to make the world on film a self-contained universe. This is to make the real world – the world into which we have been born, the world in which we are fated to die – only an image, not the real world at all. It is to be condemned to a condition of death-in-life, as if we, too, were shadows on a screen, not human beings of flesh and blood.

Psycho is an allegory about the death of the art of film as Hitchcock has known and mastered it – the art of creating self-contained universes on film, "private islands," to which viewers can imagine themselves escaping from the real conditions of their existence. "Marion Crane's dead eye and Norman/mother's final grin prophesy the end of the era of film whose achievement *Psycho* also sums up, and the death of the Hitchcock film," I wrote in *Hitchcock – The Murderous Gaze*. "In *Psycho*, Hitchcock's camera singles out a human subject *as if for the last time*, then presides over her murder. Marion Crane's death in the shower, mythically, is also our death – the death of the movie viewer – and Hitchcock's death."[25]

When Chaplin steps forward in the final frames of *City Lights*, this human being of flesh and blood stops pretending that his desperate longing for love can be fulfilled within the world of the film, stops pretending that the world on film is a self-contained universe, stops pretending that he is separated from us, that his world is separated from our world, by a real barrier.

In *Psycho*, Hitchcock, too, steps forward. His desperate longing to make connection with the world moves him, too, to envision, in the medium of film, that the movie screen "barrier" has magically been breached. Unlike

Chaplin, but like Norman Bates, Hitchcock envisions no possibility of liberation. For Chaplin, the breaching of the "barrier" means the possibility of freedom, the promise that life may know him again. In *Psycho*, it means death. That is, it changes nothing, for we are already fated to die. In Hitchcock's dark vision, we *are* condemned to a condition of death-in-life. We are born and die in our "private traps," as Norman puts it. We scratch and claw, but never budge an inch.

Viewed from the perspective of *Night and Fog*, *Psycho* offers a precise diagnosis of the horror of our present condition, the horror of the unhinging of the present from the real world. But Hitchcock's film, scratched and clawed from within its author's "private trap," is also profoundly symptomatic of the present horror. Hitchcock is not a "special case"; he is representative. In Resnais's understanding, as in Hitchcock's, we *are* all clamped in our "private traps," unable to free ourselves for all we scratch and claw.

Unlike *Psycho*, however, Resnais's film undertakes, at least symbolically, to liberate us and our world. But from what "place" is it possible for Resnais to discover a way to freedom? And how has it been possible for Resnais to have arrived at this place? In *Psycho*, the author's "self" – his sense of himself as a human being, as a filmmaker, which also means his sense of the "private trap" he is desperate to escape – is endlessly present; it is trapped within every shot, every gesture of the camera. Where, in *Night and Fog*, is Resnais's "self" to be located? Where does it locate itself?

The narrator, reliving his own experience as he speaks, clearly locates himself in the world of the past. For the reality of the world of the past to be restored is for life to know him again, for him to be freed from his "private trap." But in *Night and Fog*, Resnais does not speak in his own voice, the way the narrator does. Nor does he reveal himself through the camera, the way Hitchcock does. In *Night and Fog*, the camera most often belongs to the Nazis, sometimes to the "liberators," only occasionally to Resnais himself. True, there is footage taken by Resnais's camera, not simply "found" by him. Yet in these shots the world appears unpeopled, devoid even of signs that human beings still walk the face of the earth. (This is the way the world appears in *Psycho* in the immediate aftermath of the shower murder sequence.) Again, where are we to discover Resnais, where is Resnais to discover himself, in this "peaceful landscape"?

To discover in the frames of *Night and Fog* a tangible sign of Resnais's "self" is a problem of the same kind, and the same magnitude, as the problem Resnais's camera encounters in discovering, in the present, a tangible sign of the "true dimension" of the world of the past.

As we have seen, Jay Cantor discovers a sign of Resnais's "self" – perhaps the only one in the film, but it only takes one – in the image Cantor calls "hand scraping stone," the eloquent shot in which the camera tracks the length of the ceiling scratched and clawed by the fingernails of victims who knew this "shower" was only a facade, who knew they were being murdered, that their dream of dying their own death was being denied.

And in these telltale marks scratched and clawed in the stone as if by the artist's bleeding fingers, the camera, in the present, also discovers a tangible sign – perhaps the only one it discovers, but, again, it only takes one – of the "true dimension" of the "world of the past."

In these marks in the medium of stone – and in the marks of these marks in the medium of film – the "world of the past" is tangible, is present to Resnais's camera. In these marks – and in the marks of these marks – the past is present, is present *as* past, which is the only way the past can be present in the real world. And in these marks in the medium of stone – and in the marks of these marks in the medium of film – the reality of the world of the past is restored. The present becomes the real world again, is no longer a mere image.

But, again, as the narrator puts it, "You have to know." You have to know what *Night and Fog* enables us to know, makes it impossible for us not to know, impossible to keep pretending to ourselves that we do not know.

CHAPTER IV

Chronicle of a Summer

> The one thing which we seek with insatiable desire is to forget ourselves, to be surprised out of our propriety, to lose our sempiternal memory, and to do something without knowing how or why; in short, to draw a new circle. Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm. The way of life is wonderful; it is by abandonment.
>
> – Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Circles"

I.

In the concluding sequence of *Chronicle of a Summer*, the pioneering experiment in "cinéma-vérité" they filmed in 1960 and released the following year, Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin walk the corridors of the *Musée de l'Homme* in Paris conducting a postmortem of the event that has just taken place. They have screened rough-cut sequences from their work-in-progress to the ordinary men and women of various walks of life who are in it, whose everyday lives are what the film is about, and presided over a discussion, at times heated, of the film's strengths and weaknesses.

A chagrined Morin sums this discussion up by saying, "They either criticized our characters as not being true to life or else they found them too true." That is, they complained that the people in the film came across as actors who masked their true selves, or else as exhibitionists who stripped their souls bare to the point of indecency. Morin laments the audience's unwillingness or inability to recognize sincerity when it is, as he puts it, "a bit more than life-size." As for himself, he declares himself certain that the people in the film were not acting, and that there is nothing indecent about the way they behaved in the presence of the camera.

Rouch points out that people do not always know whether they are acting. He cites Marceline, who plays a central role in the film. In the discussion following the screening, she maintained that she was acting when she strolled through the Place de la Concorde, followed at a distance by the hand-held camera, and, in a monologue to her dead father, mused about the day the Nazis rounded up the Jews in her neighborhood and she and her family were separated.

No matter what she may think, Marceline did not act this scene, Rouch argues. By this he means that she was not merely pretending to be speaking