

The New Executioners: The Spectre of Algeria in Alain Resnais's *Night and Fog*

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When the Comité d'Histoire de la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale commissioned Alain Resnais to memorialize the concentration camps, they expected a newsreel-style film. But Resnais, who had been experimenting with the short documentary format since the mid-1940s, recognized that traditional documentary techniques would fall short of the task. Resnais and his circle felt that standard documentary tools such as authoritative voiceovers, interviews with talking heads, and complementary music would either serve to rationalize the incomprehensible atrocities or desensitize viewers to them.

Instead, Resnais turned to the more experimental and politicized techniques that he had already been developing with fellow documentarian Chris Marker. For their short film *Les Statues Meurent Aussi/Statues Also Die* (1953), they had employed contrapuntal editing and a provocative voiceover commentary. The twenty-two-minute film treated the art and artists of Africa with respect while its unorthodox form both challenged the tools of documentary filmmaking and encouraged viewers to reconsider dominant ideas about French colonialism. Such sentiments drew the ire of government censors; since the film too clearly indicted French cultural imperialism, *Statues Also Die* was banned for twelve years and, to this day, prints of the film remain difficult to obtain.

Within this mid-1950s political climate of French imperialism, government censorship, and postwar shock, Resnais found that the subversive techniques he employed in *Statues Also Die* suited this new project on the concentration camps remarkably well. He endeavored to expose the past horrors of World War II under the raking light of continuing imperialist atrocities committed in the name of France. The result was not the staid newsreel originally commissioned but *Nuit et Brouillard/Night and Fog* (1955), a thirty-two-minute documentary renowned for its controversial approach to its grave subject.

In this article, I argue for a reconsideration of this film, which is routinely critiqued as being either too universal in its scope or, alternately, not specific enough. Rather, I suggest that the filmmakers chose to emphasize the political "Night and Fog" prisoners of World War II in particular -- not only to express a sense of personal testimony in the film, but also to compare these political resistance prisoners to the Algerian nationalists who were presently being colonized, tortured, and murdered under French rule.

Resnais had begun work on *Night and Fog* in May 1955 and completed post-production in December 1955. Horrified and outraged that atrocities like those committed by the Nazis were now being perpetuated by French forces in Algeria, he sought ways to include pointed references to Algeria in the film despite the threat of censorship. The film's enigmatic script and its renowned oscillating temporal structure between past and present facilitated this goal. But the spectre of Algeria is also embodied more subliminally via multiple formal devices,

which I will illustrate in some detail after first situating the importance of the political resistance prisoners to *Night and Fog* and how they parallel the Algerian nationalists.

Of course, the film's unspoken link to Algeria has been noted by the filmmakers themselves and by a handful of scholars some decades ago; yet surprisingly, recent literature on the film either ignores or rejects this interpretation. To date, critics have not fully recognized the extent or implications of *Night and Fog's* focus on the camps' political prisoners. As a result, they have overlooked the centrality of the Algerian connection. I assert that the political focus and highly subversive nature of this documentary have never been more relevant; thus understanding *Night and Fog* in relation to the Algerian War is crucial to fully appreciating its formal innovations, critical tone, and continuing importance.

La Résistance, Past and Present

Resnais structured the seven major segments of *Night and Fog* so precisely that they warrant some segmentation at the outset. A prelude begins the film with five serene color shots tracking through the present-day (1955) sites of Auschwitz and other camps, with voiceover narration written by survivor/poet Jean Cayrol and music by German émigré Hanns Eisler. Following the prelude, the internal structure of the film divides into five roughly chronological segments, though there is marked thematic crossover among them. In contrast to the color cinematography of the prelude, black-and-white archival images of the camps (1933-1945) predominate in these internal segments, but a color shot from 1955 usually returns to conclude each segment. Finally, a coda echoes the prelude with four [1] more present-day shots in color.

In all seven of these segments, Resnais's expressive use of contrapuntal editing invites the viewer's complex response to the film's words, music, and images. For example, the newsreel-type archival material -- some 16mm footage but predominantly still-photographs in black-and-white -- proves surprisingly staid on its own, despite its harrowing content. Unexpectedly, the weight of the film's overall message emerges not so much from the archival imagery by itself but from its articulation with the intercut color shots from present-day; as we will see, these present-day shots surreptitiously but strongly signify present-day (1955) Algeria.

Much of the film's notorious reserve results from the soundovers, which habitually work in counterpoint to the archival images. In these wartime archival segments, narrator Michel Bouquet's flat, factual vocal delivery refuses an emotional appeal for Jean Cayrol's largely pragmatic, explanatory words. Bouquet avoids the overbearing or affected tone frequently found in "voice-of-authority" documentary narration. Instead, he maintains a measured cadence when describing the wartime imagery, fostering a sense of contemplation. Further, the film's enigmatic, lyrical score often opposes music to word and image. When traditional documentaries might pair such grave images with swelling violins or a dramatic score in order to provide a release for the emotional content, Hanns Eisler creates a Brechtian remove from the images with a haunting, meditative, and often dissonant flute, clarinet, or violin. Eisler designed the score in keeping with Resnais's directive: "the more violent the images, the gentler the music" (Resnais, 1956/1961: 38). The result fosters a complex reaction to the wartime footage, at once shocking and contemplative, thus allowing the viewer to process the information in spite of recoil.

Conversely, the peaceful present-day images might initially seem designed as moments of refuge from the wartime images. Instead, Resnais's choices of color film stock and probing camera movement create a provocative counterpoint to the black-and-white wartime footage, further reinforced by the more impassioned tonalities of the accompanying voiceover and music. Disquieting and needling at first, the insistent color tracking shots move ever forward through the very place that harbored the horrors shown in the wartime footage. Thus, the active camera in the color imagery contrasts with the largely static images of the archival photographs and offers no moment of rest in these deceptively pretty present-day shots. It is during these color shots that the narrator increasingly questions responsibility and feigned ignorance -- of Commandants, of nearby villagers -- as the music shifts to a more unnerving staccato and pizzicato rhythm. Indeed, although the pastoral setting of the ruins now encourages ignorance of the past -- like contemporary France encouraged ignorance of present-day atrocities in Algeria -- the voiceover and music now insist on unsettling this denial.

Because of these stylistic innovations, Resnais has encountered a great deal of criticism, both aesthetic and historical, for his unorthodox choices in *Night and Fog*. Almost every formal aspect of the film has been critiqued: for not fully representing the grave subject matter of the Holocaust, for being too aesthetically conspicuous, for not being analytical enough. In contrast to the film's horrific archival images, for example, some find Ghislain Cloquet and Sacha Vierny's Eastmancolor cinematography of the present-day Auschwitz grounds too beautiful, Jean Cayrol's script too poetic, Michel Bouquet's voiceover reading too staid, and Hanns Eisler's music too lyrical. Even the title of the film has been criticized as being too enigmatic for a Holocaust documentary. (See Krantz, 1985: 10; Kreidl, 1977: 48; Michael, 1984: 36-7; Wood, 2000: 865.)

Likewise, many expect a Holocaust documentary—particularly one of the *first* Holocaust documentaries, released only ten years after the liberation of the camps—to represent all of the groups who were persecuted in the camps; the fact that *Night and Fog* does not attempt this has brought reproach. Certainly, the historical subject of the film invites identification from many groups targeted by the Nazis: Jewish, Catholic, Spanish Republican, homosexual, political dissident, Resistance fighter, and others. Critics representing several of these groups have expressed a sense of betrayal at the film's lack of equal representation—for failing to emphasize the predominantly Jewish experience of the Holocaust, for example, or for ignoring the 300,000 homosexuals who died in the camps. (See Krantz, 1985; Michael, 1984; Wilson, 2006; Wood, 2000).

I do not agree, however, that Resnais maliciously neglects these or any other groups persecuted in the camps. In fact, Jewish film scholar Ilan Avisar argues that "*Night and Fog* is the most inclusive film about the concentration camp universe" (Avisar, 1988: 12). In support of this assertion, Avisar marshals a lengthy list of images from the film that clearly depict Jewish prisoners marked by Stars of David, and he cites the often overlooked reference in the voiceover commentary to "Stern, a Jewish student from Amsterdam." He grants that the film "does not concentrate on the genocide against the Jews," but he also notes that the film "never mention[s] Germans or Germany either" (Avisar, 1988: 24).

Where those critics hostile to *Night and Fog* err, in my opinion, is in their expectation that Resnais should -- or could -- have documented an all-inclusive recounting of the event. In fact, this film never tries to be a comprehensive account of the horrors suffered in the camps. From the outset Resnais recognized his project's unavoidable limitations: it would be

impossible to recount adequately all of the individual and collective experiences of the camps. Indeed, as documentary scholars from Bill Nichols to Michael Renov to Trinh T. Minh-ha have observed, no single film could accomplish such a task. So Resnais had to narrow the scope of the project, particularly since he also recognized his lack of authority on the subject: "I didn't dare make this film [by] myself: I had never been deported. When I met with Jean Cayrol, a former deportee, he agreed to make it with me" (Resnais, 1966: 36).

Cayrol was a political organizer with the French Résistance and a Catholic who was deported to Mauthausen in northern Austria. In light of his collaboration with Resnais, *Night and Fog* should be understood as a far more specific and, indeed, personally expressive account of the camps than critics often presume. The filmmakers, primarily Resnais and screenwriter Cayrol but also assistant director Chris Marker, strove neither for comprehensive representation nor unbiased objectivity; instead, they tailored their film to more manageable and personal parameters. They focused on the *political* prisoners of the camps.

When one reconsiders the film in light of this political resistance focus, the filmmakers' "too poetic" title makes much more sense. The phrase "night and fog" itself originated as the ordinary German expression "*bei Nacht und Nebel davon gehen*," meaning "to get away or escape under cover of darkness or the night" (Avisar, 1988: 14). Hitler appropriated the phrase for his *Nacht und Nebel Erlass* (Night and Fog Decree) mandated on December 7, 1941. Under this decree, political dissidents who were perceived as a threat to German rule were rounded up by SS troops in the middle of the night, the better to terrorize their families and compatriots, and made to "vanish without a trace into the night and fog" (Shirer, 1960: 1247-8). Cayrol himself was arrested at four in the morning in the summer of 1942.

Most scholars of *Night and Fog* have acknowledged these historical origins of the film's title, both Hitler's warped application of the phrase as well as Cayrol's subsequent novels and poems under the same "Night and Fog" title. But few have pursued the title's significance beyond these obvious titular connections. In fact, most have concluded that the title works largely as a poetic device. Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, for example, reads the combined terms of "night" and "fog" as a way to "reinfuse [the common German phrase] with a new meaning," in keeping with Resnais's auteurist themes of the mutable nature of memory and constructive forgetting; she argues that Resnais and Cayrol's poetic re-appropriation of the phrase comes to connote how "one survives the desperation of the night, sees through the confusion of the fog" (Flitterman-Lewis, 1998: 208). Likewise, Avisar concludes that the title signifies "the attempts to penetrate the Kingdom of the Night through the fog of the present, and the moral obligation not to let this fog make us forget the Nazi horrors" (Avisar, 1988: 13). The title certainly works at this poetic level, which is not surprising when one considers Cayrol's expertise as a poet and novelist.

But beyond the historical reference and poetic interpretation of "night and fog," the phrase invites another, more politically oriented interpretation. Like many on Paris's Left Bank in the 1950s, these filmmakers were all politically active and left-leaning: Resnais served as a soldier with the occupation army in Germany and Austria, and he signed *Le Manifeste des 121* protesting war crimes; Cayrol was a political organizer before his arrest and internment at Mauthausen; Marker fought with the French Résistance; and Eisler fled Germany after the rise of the Third Reich. Recalling that "Night and Fog" names a group of prisoners whom the Nazis targeted for their political beliefs and resistance activities, we must observe that the filmmakers' own political activities demonstrate their allegiance and testimony to their comrades interned as political prisoners during World War II.

In his scathing critique of *Night and Fog*, even critic Robert Michael acknowledges the film's focus on the "Night and Fog" prisoners, but he casts this focus in a negative light. He writes:

Based on their own standards, the net result of *Night and Fog* is complicity in silence when evil occurs, which is a form of evil itself. ... The title of the film, for example, misrepresents what the film actually shows. "Night and Fog" has nothing to do with the Holocaust per se. This phrase refers to a Nazi anti-resistance decree (Michael, 1984: 37).

Like many other critics of the film, Michael presumes that *Night and Fog* must represent all victims of the Nazis, particularly those targeted because they were Jewish. Without question, Hitler's Final Solution sought the genocide of the Jewish people, six million of whom were the concentration camps' primary targets. But the Nazis also targeted millions more who represented many other groups. I suggest that *Night and Fog* "misrepresents" nothing, and that the film's title is indeed specific to its subject: the political resistance prisoners arrested, incarcerated, tortured, and murdered under the Night and Fog Decree.

Consider how selectively the filmmakers edited, interpreted, and narrated many of the film's archival black-and-white images -- not in an effort to de-emphasize Jewish or other victims, but to focus on the Night and Fog Decree prisoners in particular. Of course, the filmmakers were careful to include the image of the "NN" ("Nacht und Nebel") symbol in the montage of the Star of David and other taxonomic patches worn by the prisoners. But perhaps the best example of this interpretation is the photograph of two inmates conversing. The two men could be discussing anything and their facial expressions, while intense, are ambiguous; the film's voiceover narration, however, identifies this image as prisoners organizing political resistance activities: "They even manage to gather to organize politically." Such a specific interpretation, while not unreasonable, clearly illustrates the filmmakers' political alliances.

The motives for this political focus in *Night and Fog* extend beyond the temporal parameters of the war (1933-1945). This temporal slippage strives not to de-emphasize Jewish or other World War II prisoners. Instead it strives -- albeit surreptitiously -- to link their suffering to other, contemporary victims of war. Indeed, a key impetus for the film's unorthodox techniques was to circumvent French censors regarding recurring atrocities at the time of *Night and Fog*'s production and release in 1955 -- most specifically the atrocities being committed in Algeria in the name of France.

Censorship, Complicity, and "La Guerre sans nom"

The French government frequently enforced a policy of film censorship in the mid-1950s, evidenced by the earlier censure of *Statues Also Die*. During the Algerian uprisings in August 1955 and throughout the Algerian War for Independence (1954-62), government censors routinely excised any critique of French colonial exploitation in Algeria. Strictly forbidden were direct references to "la guerre sans nom" ("the war without a name"), particularly the tortures and massacres inflicted by the French paramilitary group, the O.A.S. (Organisation Armée Secrète), against the Algerian nationalists, the F.L.N. (Front de Libération Nationale). A state of emergency declared in April 1955 gave the government full control of the press, and "special powers" awarded to the military in March 1956 tightened censorship laws (Stora, 1991: 25-6). [\[2\]](#)

During this era of denial and censorship, government censors overtly targeted *Night and Fog* for its "too violent" shots of cadavers at the end of the film (Raskin, 1987: 30), but more covertly for its indictment of French complicity with Hitler's Final Solution. Though the film won the Prix Jean Vigo in January 1956 and had been unanimously selected to represent France at the 1956 Cannes Film Festival, the French government tried to withdraw it, conveniently citing pressure from Germany's ambassador. After three months of negotiation, Resnais refused to acquiesce to the majority of the government's censoring demands. He did, however, finally concede to mask a gendarme's *képi* (the cap with visor that is part of the French military uniform) in one five-second shot of the French Pithiviers concentration camp, thus eliminating clear visual evidence of French complicity. Resnais was then permitted to exhibit *Night and Fog* at Cannes, but only outside of official competition.

Despite this censorship, the filmmakers maintained subtle but clear references to French complicity with the Nazis in the film's images and voiceover, with particular attention paid to arrested members of the French Résistance: "Interned at Pithiviers. Arrested at Vel'd'Hiv'. Résistance fighters herded at Compiègne." But in their reaction to *Night and Fog's* oblique allegations of French complicity with the Germans in World War II, the censors missed entirely its subversive indictment of French colonialism in Algeria.

In her study of artists' self-censorship during the Algerian War, Cynthia Marker illustrates how Resnais's 1963 film *Muriel ou Le Temps d'un Retour* -- another collaboration with colleagues Jean Cayrol and Chris Marker -- compares World War II and the Algerian War. She particularly notes how the film condemns the French public, "whose apathy contribute[d] as much to the war's violence as the criminal actions of soldiers sent to torture in their name" (Marker, 1996: 4). Thus, in *Muriel* and, I would add, in *Night and Fog*, the filmmakers' "concern can be seen as divided between, on the one hand, getting a denunciation of the war past the state-endorsed censor, and, on the other, couching a political message so as not to repel a highly depoliticized public" (Marker, 1996: 36). Yet unlike *Muriel*, which was completed after the 1962 Evian Accords that signaled the end of the Algerian War for Independence and much of its censorship, *Night and Fog* could never mention Algeria outright despite its ever-present spectre [3]. So in order to raise consciousness in this reluctant viewing audience, get viewers to actively recognize their own complicities, and incite a call to action -- while at the same time avoiding government censorship -- the filmmakers necessarily worked via structural ambiguities. They had to invoke themes of complicity via historical analogies and "talk subtly, or at times enigmatically, about the [Algerian] war without naming it" (Marker, 1996: 45). In the following section, I'll consider how *Night and Fog* employs this enigmatic rhetorical strategy as it contrasts the banality of the French public's quotidian life with the horrors of the camps and of Algeria, and how several of the film's formal devices evoke viewers' awareness of their complicity in both wars.

Past is Present: the Horrific and the Banal

Among the many horrific sequences and lists that structure *Night and Fog*, two lists in the second segment detail surprisingly affirmative features at various camps. One catalogs a symphony, a zoo, Himmler's greenhouses, Goethe's oak tree, an orphanage, and a separate block for disabled veterans. Another list describes moments of resilience: close-ups show handmade dolls, Hebrew Scripture, and written notes secretly hidden away by the prisoners; people conspiring and organizing resistances; stronger inmates helping those too weak to walk or eat. Flitterman-Lewis explains that these lists offer contrasting moments of hope

within the gravity of the film (Flitterman-Lewis, 1998: 209 and 216-17). But I would add that they also detail surprising moments of banality within and around the camps.

This ironic theme, contrasting the banal with the horrific, resurfaces often in *Night and Fog*. It begins with the very title of the film: as I noted earlier, the phrase "night and fog" originated as an ordinary German expression that Hitler himself appropriated for his Night and Fog Decree of 1941. Understandably, the once commonplace German idiom no longer retains its innocuous meaning today, and it has come to refer only to the famous decree designed to strike terror into the inhabitants of the Reich's conquered territories.

The contrapuntal structure of *Night and Fog* replicates Hitler's tainting of this everyday phrase with such sinister ramifications. The film repeatedly contrasts the unexpected banalities of the camps' daily life with their terrible atrocities, even establishing the pattern in the first shots of the film. The prelude's roving camera repeatedly views a pleasant pastoral scene, then moves to reframe it behind barbed wire as the narrator remarks how "even a tranquil countryside, even a field with crows ... even a village for vacationers ... can all too easily shelter a concentration camp." The exposition of the camps' quotidian routines (roll calls, meal times) and institutions (hospitals, prisons, brothels, zoos) in the earlier wartime segments contrasts jarringly with the mass deaths (starvation, typhus), slaughters (gas chambers, crematoria), and post-mortem mutilations detailed in the later segments. Other examples punctuate the film, continuing the pattern: the reverence for Goethe's oak tree surrounded by the inhumane Buchenwald death camp, the delight in a handmade doll or the care for living -- though also imprisoned -- animals and plants amidst mass human slaughter.

The film's color photography particularly emphasizes this arbitrary division between the banal and the horrific. In segment three, black-and-white images of the crematoria and ovens demonstrate the mounting horrors in the camps. The three color shots that interrupt this four-minute segment all offer comparative, present-day images of these same structures. The first considers the climate of the tourist-attraction spectacle that defines the camps today: the voiceover describes the handsome, "picture-postcard" exterior of a brick crematorium building where "today, tourists have themselves photographed." The second color shot counters this moment of absurd banality by revealing extreme close-ups of fingernail marks on the interior concrete ceiling of a gas chamber that tourists now visit. The final color shot tracks along rows of ovens, which the narrator tells us were capable of burning "several thousand bodies per day," comparing the productivity of the death camps to the productivity of any everyday factory.

The choice of color cinematography itself for these present-day shots underscores Resnais's commitment to reveal their frightening ordinariness. He argues that "if the [present-day, color shots of the] camps had been sinister, everything that happened there would have been, in a sense, understandable" (Resnais quoted in Krantz, 1985: 10). Resnais designed the contrast of the beautiful, present-day color shots with the ghastly black-and-white archival images to be jarring, and therefore "more effective" (Ibid.) at inciting active questioning and outrage from the complacent, apathetic French public of 1955.

By repeatedly contrasting such polar examples of life in the camps, *Night and Fog* grapples with how the camps could come to be, how villagers living "not so far away" could look the other way, how architects could construct them like any other structures ("A concentration camp must be built, like a stadium or a grand hotel, with contractors, estimates, competitive bids"). These banal moments reach for viewers' understanding by illustrating not solely the

horrors of the camps, which might cause the viewer to turn away from the imagery, but by comparatively illustrating their commonplace details that might parallel viewers' own lives. Viewers who did not personally endure and survive the camps might identify with this quotidian material.

More sharply, though, the film compares that banal material with the horrific to link the two seemingly disparate but all too proximal realities across the temporal gaps that divide them. Ultimately, this metaphorical strategy underscores how uncomfortably narrow the divisions between the banal and the horrific can be. The subliminal message stresses how appallingly repetitive these abominable acts are in history, and how the willful ignorance of the French (and international) populace, living its own banal lifestyle "not so far away," inevitably sanctions them. [\[4\]](#)

The film thus works hard to suture viewers into an active spectatorship so that we might mourn the past but also remain vigilant against "new executioners." It employs multiple formal devices toward this end, including the color imagery, tracking camera, point-of-view editing, graphic matching, and narrational shifts in person. These devices are most effective in combination. The five prelude shots, for example, acquaint the viewer with the tone and shifting meaning of the color imagery that Resnais soon interjects throughout the film. The pastel hues that begin the film in 1955 continue to signal a momentary return to a present-day temporality at the close of most of the five archival segments. During the prelude, the motif of their slow tracking camera movements initially seems to echo the role of the narrator in their omniscient explorations of the camp. But as these color tracking shots repeatedly punctuate and then gradually interrupt the black-and-white archival sequences, they come to connote a far more subjective presence in the film. The camera's restless tracking movements roam the camps at a walking pace, always moving diagonally forward and to the right, acting as a crucial surrogate for the viewer's own eyes. Indeed, these insistent movements metaphorically connote our own presence as investigator and witness in the film, since viewers must continue to move through this place with the camera despite the overpowering subject matter. This strategic use of camera movement persuasively merges the camera/filmmakers' perspective into that of the viewers, funneling both through these tracking point-of-view (POV) shots in the prelude, coda, and throughout the film. It forces present-day viewers to see the past horrors in the present, indeed *as present* -- again, a strongly inferred metaphor for Algeria.

Likewise, the camera's diagonal movements in the color sequences repeatedly echo the strong diagonal compositions of the black-and-white archival imagery: cuts between the two are graphically matched with remarkable precision, fluidly linking the two temporalities and the two wars, and thereby eroding a sense of safe temporal distance between them. At the close of segment one, for example, a shadowy black-and-white image of train cars full of deportees disappearing into the night cuts to a 1955 color tracking shot of sunny railroad tracks. Across the cut that divides them, the two images contrast jarringly as the dark, black-and-white nighttime image cuts to the bright daytime shot, but they match exactly in their diagonal composition. Again, the camera movement, framing, and positioning combine to suggest that the 1955 viewers and the filmmakers view the very same tracks from the same POV in both shots, creating slippages between the temporalities and identificatory positions. The voiceover confirms this visual merging, remarking on the irony of the scene's beauty and banal normalcy as it notes that "today, along the same tracks, the sun shines."

In the film's second segment, the longest of the five, the present-day color shots begin to exceed their established role as segment-concluding shots. Now punctuating the black-and-white sequences with increasing frequency, they begin to play a more active role in the film's subversive uses of POV editing. A total of five cuts to color footage infiltrate this segment lasting twelve minutes and twenty-two seconds -- almost half of the thirty-minute screen time in a film ostensibly about the past. Each of these color shots signals the film's increasing conflation of past and present -- not only of past World War II atrocities and present-day complicity through forgetting, denial, or willful ignorance, but also of present-day denial of atrocities in Algeria.

One cut, for example, shifts from black-and-white footage of a nearby village glimpsed through the barbed-wire fences to color footage of camp barracks surrounded by verdant swaying grasses, all spied from the glass windows of a camp watchtower in a high-angle panning shot. The voiceover describes the village as "the real world of peaceful landscapes, the world of the past, it seems far off ... but not so far away." This statement suggests not only that inmates longed for escape, but more stridently, that the villagers must have known about the nearby camp. The next shot's panning movement from within the camp's watchtower emphasizes this point through a remarkable connection. The panning from within the watchtower might initially suggest the camera's omniscient POV, but the camera location and movement more specifically place viewers in the position of a tower guard, panoptically surveying the camp from a high-angle position of knowledge and power. Thus, by disjunctively cutting from the village to the watchtower POV shot, the film subtly but clearly underscores that those villagers "not so far away" likely saw and knew -- and therefore perpetrated -- far more about the neighboring atrocities than they were willing to admit, just as the 1955 French public ignored its atrocities in Algeria.

The first shot of the second segment shows a harrowing extreme close-up of a prisoner's frightened, wide-open eyes. By cutting from this black-and-white photograph to a series of black-and-white images of the camps, Resnais cleverly manufactures another approximation of POV editing. Recreating the prisoner's shock at first glimpse of "another planet," the ensuing reverse shots seem to represent POV shots from the prisoner's perspective. This POV editing again encourages viewers to share the filmmakers' narrational viewpoint, but rather than viewing through the tower guard executioner's eyes, this example is the only time viewers specifically share an inmate's visual viewpoint. The strategy increases the viewers' shock factor for their own first glimpse of the camps in this segment, especially as it contrasts with the more pronounced distance from the black-and-white Nazi parades and deportations of the first segment. It's an unorthodox but classic use of POV suturing to encourage identification with the victims of war.

Likewise, Resnais's formal strategy of graphic matching adeptly ties together material from disparate segments of the film and adds to the temporal flux. The diagonal compositions described earlier characterize almost all of the film's images in both the black-and-white and color sequences. This is particularly noteworthy in the black-and-white material; the skill, artistry, and stylized composition with which the past photographers and filmmakers captured their gruesome subject matter render these images all the more upsetting. Most of the archival images are still photographs or 16mm footage with little or no camera movement, but their use of the diagonal creates a remarkable sense of movement and dynamism in otherwise static images. Resnais replicates these compositions when shifting from black-and-white to color footage, often with smooth cuts-on-movement: while tracking diagonally along the railroad tracks in the first segment, latrines in the second segment, crematorium ovens or a

gas chamber in the third segment. After the narrator explains the origin of the gas chamber's fingernail marks, he falls silent while the camera continues to track diagonally to the right across the ceiling, ceding any ability to explain or understand the terror through words. Once again, this framing of the gas chamber functions as a POV shot for viewers who now must eyewitness evidence of attempts to escape from these buildings that tourists now pose before in snapshots.

These repetitions and compositional matches create a sense of connection among the film's segments, linking otherwise disparate images and mobilizing Resnais's auteurist vocabulary of variable memory and fluid time. Such frequent visual rhymes encourage viewers to compare similarities among the film's images and themes, but they also offer striking dissimilarities between its two temporalities as past and present -- World War II and Algeria - - confront each other across the film's disjunctive cuts in time. The space between temporalities offered by these cuts thus creates a contemplative pause, inviting reconsideration of the not-so-distant past and awareness of the all-too-current present.

By the end of the film, the relentless present-day tracking through this place -- disturbingly edited in counterpoint with the incongruous music and the voiceover -- incites viewers to question, judge, and indict not only those officially held responsible for the camps, but ourselves as well -- for the past concentration camps and for present-day Algeria. This is particularly underscored by the film's narrational shifts from third-person to first- and second-person. Many scholars of *Night and Fog* have previously remarked on this shift in address during the film's coda, but they have overlooked the earlier uses of the first-person in the prelude and the second segment. In these instances, the voiceover's shift to first-person address initiates the film's indictments of complicity lodged against viewers, filmmakers, and indeed all humanity alike.

At the end of the prelude, for example, the narrator remarks that "No footstep but *our own*" can be heard (my emphasis). [5] Likewise, the first cut to color in the second segment is accompanied by narration that begins, "This reality of the camps, despised by those who created them, incomprehensible to those who lived them -- it is in vain that *we in our turn* try to uncover their remains" (my emphasis). The narration for this color shot ends, "Of this brick dormitory, of these menaced sleepers, *we can only show you* the shell, the color" (my emphasis). [6] These early first-person references initially seem to refer only to the filmmakers (their footsteps at Auschwitz, their attempts to understand "the reality of the camps"), but as I mentioned above, the tracking POV movements of the camera work with the narration to suture viewers into the argument as well.

Crucially, Resnais always pairs these shifts in narrational address with the present-day tracking movements, and therefore provides strong foreshadows of the coda's group indictment of the past concentration camps and collective warning against ongoing atrocities in Algeria. The coda's final monologue makes a startling direct address to viewers, and Cayrol's pointed shift in address is clear: we must all be vigilant so that our ignorance, whether willful or blind, does not allow present and future repetition of such atrocities in Algeria and elsewhere. The coda cautions:

War is napping, but with one eye always open ... still full of menace ... Who among us keeps watch from this strange watchtower to warn us of the coming new executioners? Are their faces really so different from ours? Somewhere among us, there are lucky Kapos, reinstated officers, and unknown informers.

There are those who refuse to believe this, or believe it only from time to time. And there are those of us who sincerely look upon the ruins today, as if the old concentration camp monster were dead beneath them, who pretend to take hope again before this fading image, as if there were a cure for the plague of these camps. Those of us who pretend to believe that all this happened only once and in only one country, and those of us who do not think to look around us and who do not hear the cry without end (my translation).

While these potent lines condemn the past and poignantly mourn the atrocities of the German camps, they also invoke the filmmakers' concerns with the *present* -- the Algerian War and the torture and murder practiced by the French O.A.S., emphatically the "new executioners." Working just beneath the surface, then, these filmmakers draw a condemnatory link between the French O.A.S. and the German SS. As Cayrol implied soon after the film's release: "Memory of the past is only permanent when illuminated by the present" (Cayrol, 1956).

All of the filmmakers echo this subversive tone in their necessarily guarded remarks about the film. Resnais carefully ducked the censors as he hinted at Algeria and future wars in a 1961 interview: "when I made *Night and Fog*, it wasn't a question of making another monument to the dead, but of thinking about the present and the future" (Resnais, 1961/1966: 50). In a 1966 interview, Cayrol remarked that the film "is not only an example on which to reflect [about the past], but an appeal, an alarm, a 'warning siren' ... a film of recollections, but also of a great anxiety" -- censored anxiety about present and future atrocities in Algeria (Cayrol, 1956). Likewise, cinematographer Ghislain Cloquet noted in 1967 that through their shooting style, Resnais "was aiming at the present, and the future" (Cloquet, 1967: 60). Resnais became more explicit in a 1980 interview with Annette Insdorf: "The constant idea was to not make a monument to the dead, turned to the past. If this existed, it could happen again; it exists now, in another form" (Insdorf, 1980: xix). Finally in his 1985 interview with historian Charles Krantz, Resnais bluntly confirmed his goal for *Night and Fog*: "The whole point was Algeria" (Krantz, 1985: 11).

In fact, the link to Algeria had been interpreted five years before Resnais's "whole point" assertion, when Robert Benayoun wrote that the film's "refusal to forget is also a refusal to ignore, where the Algerian present is condemned on the same basis as the concentration camp of the past. ... The courage of *Night and Fog* consists in reminding us that, in 1955, the victims' cries had not yet died ... reappearing among the torturers of Audin and the O.A.S" (Benayoun, 1980: 55, my translation).

Benayoun's dual interpretation of the film -- as a lament for the atrocities of World War II but also as a warning siren against those of the Algerian War and after -- was generally accepted in the immediate years after his writing, and rightly so.

Yet despite this parallel -- drawn by the filmmakers, by a handful of scholars like Benayoun [7], and, as I have shown, by the film itself -- it is remarkable how many recent *Night and Fog* scholars condemn the film's specific focus on the night and fog prisoners and downplay or even ignore their link to the spectre of Algeria. In his critique of the film, Charles Krantz callously denounces Cayrol's "pretension" for his "preoccupation with deportees snatched away into 'night and fog'" (Krantz, 1985: 8), though he does somewhat begrudgingly discuss Resnais's "point" about Algeria. Robert Michael, as I mentioned earlier, decries *Night and Fog's* "moral neglect" in its focus on "Western European resisters to Nazis" yet he ignores the Algerian subtext altogether (Michael, 1984: 37). Likewise, Emma Wilson's recent survey of

Resnais's oeuvre critiques the film's specificity and includes no mention of Algeria (Wilson 2006). And even in her otherwise thorough analysis of *Night and Fog*, Flitterman-Lewis relegates Resnais's statement about "the whole point" of the film to a footnote, and insists instead on the film's multiple and ambiguous interpretations (Flitterman-Lewis, 1998: 221-222, n11).

I agree that interpretations of the film must be varied and diverse, in keeping with Resnais's complex filmmaking style and the film's own remarkable fluidity. For *Night and Fog* remains productively enigmatic; its comparisons between World War II and the Algerian War are never overt. This is likely the case for several reasons. First, as mentioned above, Resnais recognized that government censors would never have tolerated such blatant accusations; like *Statues Also Die* two years earlier, *Night and Fog* would have been banned. Second -- and most importantly -- out of respect for those imprisoned in Nazi concentration camps, since explicit comparison to victims of the Algerian War might have effaced the particular horrors of the World War II camps. And third, out of hope that a forceful -- but necessarily implicit -- reminder would incite willfully blind French and international audiences to realize that this present-day repetition of atrocities is not so removed from those of the past. It is a frighteningly current message and one that should remain at the forefront of scholarship on *Night and Fog*.

Indeed, the true power of *Night and Fog* is its continuing relevance to international audiences. The film maintains its specificity regarding its commissioned subject of World War II concentration camps; yet that specificity may slip productively for subsequent viewing audiences of many nationalities. The film's "warning siren" message against the "new executioners" readily metamorphoses to address forthcoming wars and "conflicts" not only in Algeria, but then the Cold War, Viet Nam, Bosnia, Iraq... the list over the past fifty years is long and still grows today. The persistence of *Night and Fog's* relevance lies in its indictment of *all* atrocities committed in the name of war, national sovereignty, and socio-economic dominance.

Notes

[1] Not five shots, as is usually stated in literature on the film.

[2] For more on French censorship during these years, see Greene 1999, Jeancolas 1979, Marker 1996, and Stora 1991.

[3] Though it is outside the scope of this article, we may, of course, consider our own era of war and censorship as well. Like *Night and Fog* and *Muriel*, underground and independent documentaries do expose some of the atrocities being committed in Iraq and Afghanistan despite resurgent official censorship of contemporary war footage by American and British governments. Films like *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004. Dir. Michael Moore), *Gunner Palace* (2005. Dir. Petra Epperlein), *The Ground Truth* (2006. Dir. Patricia Foulkrad), and *No End in Sight* (2007. Dir. Charles Ferguson) counter mainstream news media and its pro-war reports. But these films certainly would have received little to no distribution, if they even could have existed, under the tighter censorship of the Ministry of Culture and the state-funded film industry of 1950s France.

[4] This covert message prefigures two documentaries made soon after *Night and Fog*: *Chronique d'un été/Chronicle of a Summer* (1961. Dir. Edgar Morin and Jean Rouch) and *Le*

Joli mai/The Pretty Month of May (1963. Dir. Chris Marker). In these two films, random Parisians are asked the loaded question "Are you happy?" as a critique of their banal obsession with postwar bourgeois prosperity and their willful ignorance of Algeria.

[5] "Plus aucun pas, que le nôtre." (*L'Avant-Scène du Cinéma*, 1961: 51.)

[6] "Cette réalité des camps, méprisée par ceux qui la fabriquent, insaisissable pour ceux qui la subissent, c'est bien en vain qu'à notre tour nous essayons d'en découvrir les restes ... De ce dortoir de brique, de ces sommeils menacés, nous ne pouvons que vous montrer l'écorce, la couleur." (*L'Avant-Scène du Cinéma*, 1961: 52.)

[7] See also Dreyfus, 2006; Marker, 1996; Greene, 1999.

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