

■ UNCLAIMED
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EXPERIENCE
Trauma, Narrative, and History

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To the students of "Literature, Trauma, and Culture"

rewriting of the departure within the languages of Freud's text, that we participate most fully in Freud's central insight, in *Moses and Monotheism*, that history, like trauma, is never simply one's own, that history is precisely the way we are implicated in each other's traumas. For we—whether as German- or as English-speaking readers—cannot read this sentence without, ourselves, departing. In this departure, in the leave-taking of our hearing, we are first fully addressed by Freud's text, in ways we perhaps cannot yet fully understand. And, I would propose today, as we consider the possibilities of cultural and political analysis, that the impact of this not fully conscious address may be not only a valid but indeed a necessary point of departure.¹⁷

2 LITERATURE AND THE ENACTMENT OF MEMORY

(Duras, Resnais, *Hiroshima mon amour*)

And now each knows that in the act of survival he lived a dozen lives and saw more death than he ever thought he would see. At the same time, none of them knew anything.

John Hersey, *Hiroshima*

The surprising opening sequence of the 1959 French film *Hiroshima mon amour* (by Alain Resnais and Marguerite Duras) begins, after title and credits, with two alternating shots we do not fully comprehend: in the first shot, two interlaced elbows, arms, and a hand, their sagging skin covered with ash, then sweat, move in a slow embrace—apparently victims of the first atomic bombing of Hiroshima. This is followed by two intact elbows,

arms, and a hand, first smooth, then sweaty, locked in an act of love—an intimate encounter taking place, as we will soon discover, between a French woman and a Japanese man, who have met by chance in Hiroshima, and whose passionate encounter will form the core of the film's narrative. Confronting us with these two alternating shots, the film immediately imposes on our sight and understanding several fundamental questions: What do the dying bodies of the past—the dying bodies of Hiroshima—have to do with the living bodies of the present? And what is the role of our seeing in establishing a relation between these two sets of bodies? Introducing its filmic narrative through these problems, *Hiroshima mon amour* opens up the question of history, I would propose, as an exploration of the relation between history and the body.

The question of history in this film, however, is a matter not only of what we see and know but also of what it is ethical to tell. The action of the film is itself the story of a telling, the story of a French actress who has come to make a film in Hiroshima and who, in her chance and passionate encounter with a Japanese man, tells for the first time in her life the story of her past: of her love affair at Nevers with a German soldier during the Occupation, of his death on the very day they were to run away together, which turned out to be the day of liberation; of her subsequent punishment, by the French townspeople, who shave her head, and by her parents, who trap her in a cellar, and finally of her ensuing madness.

After telling her story for the first time to her Japanese lover, toward the end of the film, the woman bemoans the action she has taken in an address to her dead German lover:

I told our story.
I was unfaithful to you tonight with this stranger.
I told our story.
It was, you see, a story that could be told. (73)¹

Telling the story of her love affair with the German, telling, specifically, the story of his death, is for the woman a betrayal of the loved one, a betrayal of the one who died, with the one who is alive and listens. What the woman mourns is not only an erotic betrayal, that is, but a betrayal precisely in the act of telling, in the very transmission of an understanding that erases the specificity of a death. The possibility of knowing history, in this film, is thus also raised as a deeply ethical dilemma: the unremitting problem of *how not to betray the past*.

It would appear to be this problem of betrayal that is also at the heart of the film's own innovative method, which, while naming Hiroshima in its title, does not tell the story of Hiroshima in 1945 but rather uses the rebuilt Hiroshima as the setting for the telling of another story, the French woman's story of Nevers. The filmmaker Alain Resnais had originally been commissioned to make a documentary on Hiroshima, but after several months of collecting archival footage he had refused to carry out the project, claiming that such a film would not significantly differ from his previous documentary on concentration camps (*Nuit et brouillard*).² In his refusal to make a documentary on Hiroshima, Resnais paradoxically implies that it is direct archival footage that cannot maintain the very specificity of the event. And it would appear, equally paradoxically, that it is through the fictional story, not *about* Hiroshima but taking place at its site, that Resnais and Duras believe such historical specificity is conveyed. I would suggest that the interest of *Hiroshima mon amour* lies in how it explores the possibility of a faithful history in the very indirectness of this telling.

THE BETRAYAL OF SIGHT

The encounter between the French woman and the Japanese man emerges, at the opening of the film, in a disagreement about the possibility of communicating history, a conflict that

focuses precisely on the nature of seeing, and specifically on the seeing of the body. Over the opening shot of the lovemaking bodies we hear first, in French (the language of the film), the voice of a man followed by that of a woman:

He: You saw nothing in Hiroshima. Nothing.

She: I saw *everything*. *Everything*. (15)

Coming from a Japanese man at Hiroshima, the denial of the woman's seeing is also, implicitly, a powerful assertion of what the man, in effect, *has* seen. What he apparently has seen, moreover, appears, as the film continues, on the screen before us, in the shots of mutilated bodies at the museum, in archival footage, and in the hospital the woman says she has visited. But paradoxically enough, his denial of her seeing, set against this background, suggests that the difference between what she does not see and what he does see is not merely a matter of empirical perception:

She: The hospital for instance, I saw it. I'm sure I did. How could I help seeing it?

He: You did not see the hospital in Hiroshima. You saw nothing in Hiroshima.

She: Four times at the museum. . . .

He: What museum in Hiroshima? (15-17)

The man's negation, aimed not only at the woman but at the very shots of wounded bodies on the screen, suggests that the problem with the woman's sight is not what she does not perceive, but *that* she perceives, precisely, a *what*:

She: I've always wept over the fate of Hiroshima. Always.

He: No. What would you have cried about?

[Non. Sur *quoi* aurais-tu pleuré?] (18; 26)

Set against the pictures of the wounded, and directed at the repeated recitations of "I saw," the man's denial suggests that

the act of seeing, in the very establishing of a bodily referent, erases, like an empty grammar, the reality of an event.³ Within the insistent grammar of sight, the man suggests, the body erases the event of its own death.

This effacement of the event of Hiroshima in the very sight and understanding of the woman also constitutes, within the opening dialogue, her understanding of Hiroshima from the perspective of a national French history:

He: What did Hiroshima mean for you, in France?

She: The end of the war, I mean, really the end. . . .

He: The whole world was happy. You were happy with the whole world. (33-34)

For the French, Hiroshima did not signify the beginning of the suffering of the Japanese, but rather precisely the end of their own suffering. The knowledge of Hiroshima, for the French, understood not as the incomprehensible occurrence of the nuclear bombing of the Japanese but as the knowledge they call "the end," effaces the event of a Japanese past and inscribes it, as a referent, into the narrative of French history.⁴ And this inscription of the Japanese event into the history of the French—the inevitable self-referential reversal of the act of understanding, founded in the erasure of death—is also associated, in the dialogue, with a kind of *moral* betrayal within the act of sight, with, indeed, the filming of Hiroshima, which the French woman, as an actress, has come to do:

He: What's the film you're playing in?

She: A film about Peace. What else do you expect them to make in Hiroshima except a picture about Peace? (34)

Just as the French understand the event of Hiroshima as the end of their own war, so the perception of Hiroshima itself, from the perspective of an international history, turns the very actuality of catastrophe into the anonymous narrative of peace.⁵

In its emphasis on this inevitable inscription of the event of a catastrophe in the generality of another's history, *Hiroshima mon amour* would thus seem to reveal the necessity of betrayal in the ineluctability of sight.

It is indeed the necessary betrayal of the particular past in the understanding of a history that constitutes the story the French woman comes to tell the man, and that serves to make the story of Nevers the one story that can be told at Hiroshima. At the center of her story, as she finally reveals it, is the irony of the fact that it is on the very day of France's liberation that her German lover, waiting to flee with her from France, is shot just before she comes to meet him. The focal point of her story is the simultaneous occurrence of the event of liberation and the event of his death:

I stayed near his body all that day and then all the next night. The next morning they came to pick him up and they put him in a truck. It was that night Nevers was liberated. The bells of St. Etienne were ringing, ringing . . . Little by little he grew cold beneath me. (65)

The death of her lover is not only temporally simultaneous with the day of liberation, it is also a part of what theoretically has made liberation possible, the murder of the "enemy." This translation of a murder into the knowledge of liberation is represented in her story by the ringing of the bells—the knowledge of the time of liberation and the moment in a history that covers over, precisely, the dying of her lover's body, the event of his death.

Similarly, the woman's story of her forced entrance into the cellar as punishment by the French is essentially a representation of her own attempt, in her entrance into madness, to maintain the event of death against the understanding of liberation. This faithfulness to her lover's death takes place through the

mutilation of her body as she hears the "deafening" sound of the *Marseillaise* being played above her underground cell:

Hands become useless in cellars. They scrape. They rub the skin off . . . against the walls. . . . that's all you can find to do, to make you feel better . . . and also to remember. . . I loved blood since I had tasted yours. (55)

Not unlike the Japanese man's refusal of her sight at Hiroshima ("You saw nothing"), the woman's faithfulness to her dead German lover occurs through the refusal of sight and understanding, but a refusal that, unlike his, takes place literally in relation to her own body. Her refusal is thus carried out in the body's fragmentation, in the separation of her hands from the rest of her corporeal self and in the communion with her lover's death through the sucking of her own blood. It is thus utterly deprived of sight and understanding, and only as a fragment, that the body can become, for the woman, the faithful monument to a death.

It is likewise the unavoidable reintegration of the body in the recovery of her hands that represents in this story a betrayal in the forgetting imposed by the sight and understanding of a larger history:

My hair is growing back. I can feel it every day, with my hand. I don't care. But nevertheless my hair is growing back . . .

At six in the evening, the bells of St. Etienne Cathedral ring, winter and summer. One day, it is true, I hear them. I remember having heard them before—before—when we were in love, when we were happy.

I'm beginning to see.

I remember having already seen before—before—when we were in love, when we were happy.

I remember.

I see the ink.

I see the daylight.

I see my life. Your death.

My life that goes on. Your death that goes on. . . .

Oh! It's horrible. I'm beginning to remember you less clearly. I'm beginning to forget you. I tremble at the thought of having forgotten so much love . . . (61, 63-64)

In this story of a past, it is not just the false knowledge of others but the very movement of the woman's own consciousness that acts as the betrayal of love, as the forgetting of her own lover's death. Indeed, this forgetting is enacted in her use of *voir*, "to see," which begins as a literal perception, "I see the ink," and ends as a figure of knowing, "I see my life. Your death." Recalling her insistent seeing of Hiroshima, the insistence of her seeing in this story, as the inevitable movement from literal to figurative sight or understanding, subsumes the event of death in the continuous history of her life. Seeing thus inaugurates the forgetting of the singularity of her lover by forgetting the referential specificity of his death. Just as the entrance into the cellar represents the faithfulness of madness, the story of her exit from the cellar—which resonates, in the French word *cave*, with the Platonic story of the cave—comes to mean the emergence into a full, truer knowledge that forgetting is indeed a necessary part of understanding.⁶

This truth is also, for the woman, the complicity of understanding with the falseness of a certain kind of freedom:

I think then is when I got over my hate. I don't scream any more. I'm becoming reasonable. They say: "She's becoming reasonable." One night, a holiday, they let me go out. (66)

To be reasonable here is no longer to cling madly to the memory of the lover's death; it is to exit into the freedom of forgetting.⁷ This freedom, like her seeing, is also enacted in her own language, which transforms the literal exiting from the cellar into the figurative exiting from hate: "I think that is when I got over my hate" [*Je crois que c'est à ce moment-là que je suis sor-*

tie de la méchanceté ("that I exited from my hate"). Freedom from madness is thus equated with the forgetting that began her sane seeing and knowing, a freedom that is fundamentally a betrayal of the past.

The movement of this freedom is also characterized as an arrival, a symbolic arrival of the woman at a common site and a common moment of French history; she is let out "on a holiday," a day that commemorates, presumably, an event such as liberation. And notably, it is her insertion into a national time that also marks, for her, a relation to the history of others, and specifically, to the events at Hiroshima:

When I reach Paris two days later the name of Hiroshima is in all the newspapers.

[Quand j'arrive à Paris, le surlendemain, le nom Hiroshima est sur tous les journaux.] (67; 101-2)

Telling the "when" of her arrival in Paris as the moment that she learned of Hiroshima, the woman connects her own arrival, her insertion into collective French time, with a factual knowledge of Japan's catastrophe, which, as she has said before, has meant for her only "the end of the war." The arrival into national history thus erases not only her past but that of other nations as well. Ending with the decisive act of her reintegrated body—she arrives in Paris on a bicycle—the story implies that the erasure of the event takes place in the historical and social situation of the integrated body.⁸ And it is through precisely this erasure of her past that she can see and "know" the past of others as well, the past of Hiroshima as much as the past of Nevers. In telling her story of Nevers, the woman thus seems to reinterpret her earlier claims to see and to know Hiroshima as essentially at one with the man's denials: Hiroshima and Nevers are linked, in their very forgetting, through the ceaseless betrayal of bodily sight.

■ "LISTEN TO ME"

Yet if the film seems to isolate memory within the all of madness and the nothing of forgetting, it also invokes these extremes at the very opening of a dialogue, and asks what might become possible within a discourse that is not simply *about* Hiroshima (or Nevers), but within an encounter that takes place *at* Hiroshima, a discourse spoken, as it were, *on the site of a catastrophe*. Within the context of her own story, the woman's "I saw everything" is not simply the claim to know all about Hiroshima, but a claim to have faithfully remembered Nevers. Between the man's "nothing" and the woman's "everything" is not, then, simply an opposition about what she does or does not see of Hiroshima, but the coming together of two absolute claims to faithfulness—to Hiroshima and to Nevers. The problem of knowing Hiroshima is not simply the problem of an outsider's knowing the inside of another's experience; more profoundly, the film dramatizes something that happens when two different experiences, absolutely alien to one another, are brought together:

She: . . . Listen to me.

Like you, I know what it is to forget. . . .

Like you, I have a memory. I know what it is to forget. . . .

Like you, I too have tried with all my might not to forget. Like you, I forgot. Like you, I wanted to have an inconsolable memory, a memory of shadows and stone.

For my part, I struggled with all my might, every day, against the horror of no longer understanding at all the reason for remembering. Like you, I forgot.

Why deny the obvious necessity for memory? (22–23)

The similarity between Hiroshima and Nevers is not only an analogy, "like you," but an address: "listen to me." Within this address, the forgetting of Hiroshima and Nevers is also a claim to a discovered and not fully comprehensible knowledge, "I know what it is to forget" [*Je connais l'oubli*]. The knowledge

of forgetting here is not something owned, that is, but something *addressed to another*, addressed not simply as a fact, but as a command—"Listen to me"—and as a question—"Why deny the obvious necessity for memory?" The words "like you," that is, spoken in the context of disaster, do not necessarily only state the banal truth of an already given likeness, but demand a listening, and ask for memory as a question. Not simply spoken *after* Hiroshima, but spoken *on the site of* Hiroshima, the words of the encounter establish an opening, not only through their meaning, but in the performance of a command that breaks their meaning and in the question that this disruption opens.

The encounter at Hiroshima, as it unfolds in the film, thus emerges not as an exchange of histories, but as the disruption of the sight and knowledge of the woman in her very telling of the story of Nevers:

No, you don't know what it is to forget. . . . No, you don't have a memory. (23)

The man's challenge to the woman's memory is not a simple denial of what she does or can remember but, paradoxically, a denial of both her memory and her forgetting: a denial, that is, that she can simply know, and tell, the difference between remembering and what it is to forget. From this perspective, likewise, his insistence that she "saw nothing" at Hiroshima does not so much reassert the clarity of his sight as it addresses what, in her, is *not simple* about seeing. Indeed, the scene in which her story first unfolds begins with her encounter with a mode of seeing that is neither precisely remembering nor forgetting:

She: What were you dreaming about?

He: I don't remember. . . . Why?

She: I was looking at your hands. They move when you're asleep.

He: Maybe it's when you dream without knowing it. (29)

The man's forgetting of the dream here does not so much concern the fact that one might not know *what* one has dreamed as it opens up the possibility that one might not know *that* one is dreaming; that one might see, that is, without knowing it. This seeing, moreover, unlike the seeing whose appearance and disappearance mark the passage of time in the woman's story, itself constitutes a time *of* not knowing: "Maybe it's when you dream without knowing it" [C'est quand on rêve, peut-être, sans le savoir].

In fact, just such a seeing has arisen cinematically in how the woman looks at the sleeping Japanese man, and specifically, in how she sees his body and, more precisely, his hands: "I was looking at your hands." In a series of shots that precede this exchange, the film first introduces into its visual sequence an uncertainty of seeing linked to the woman's gaze upon the man: after passing from the image of her intent face to the barely moving hand of the sleeping man at whom she stares, the shot switches suddenly, for just a flash, to the twitching hand of another man, upon the ground, then to a young woman kissing the bloody, supine face, then back to the sleeping man upon the bed. In the juxtaposition of hands—a series of images that is presumably seen by the woman, and that the spectator sees without quite grasping them and without understanding—we are first introduced, in sight, to the event that forms her story, to the death of her German lover (whom the woman apparently sees while looking at the hand of the Japanese man).⁹ But if the woman is opened to a past here through what she sees, it is not in how the living body at Hiroshima represents for her the knowledge of the dead—how the sight of the living body represents and replaces the body of the dead—but in the uncanny similarity that the seen body, the hand, reveals between the unconsciousness of sleeping and the unconsciousness of dying.¹⁰ Seeing, here, as a seeing of the body, is what cannot tell the difference between living and dying. Rather than erasing, in the

movement from literal to figurative seeing, the reality of a death, the woman's literal seeing precisely introduces, in its radical confusion, the death of her German lover into the sight of the living body of the man she sees. As it occurs in the process of the encounter, the woman's seeing is not the erasure of a death that was once known, but the continual reappearance of a death she has not quite grasped, the reemergence, in sight, of her *not knowing* the difference between life and death.

A QUESTION OF LIFE AND DEATH

It is indeed the question of this difference that, framing her closed narrative of remembering and forgetting, opens up the woman's history. It opens it up, however, not by asking for a knowledge she owns and can thus simply state within her story, but by calling upon the movement of her not knowing within the very language of her telling. When the man begins the questioning that leads to her final telling of her story, he does not ask about the lover's death as a fact she could know; rather, by assuming the position of the lover himself, he asks her to speak of his death through the very impossibility of distinguishing the living from the dead:

When you are in the cellar, am I dead?

[Quand tu es dans la cave, je suis mort?] (54; 87)

Asked as if it were possible to answer, this question first reduces the whole story of the woman's past, the whole truth of her history, to the telling of a single time, the "when" [quand] of her lover's death. The "when," as *the* question of history, is the difference between life and death. Yet, spoken within the living man's assumption of the dead man's voice, the question recognizes that the answer cannot simply be spoken, that the possibility of this knowledge can only arise within the very act of its denial; that the woman cannot know the death of her loved one, that is, without sharing this knowledge, and addressing this

story, to him. Her not knowing, as the man's question calls upon it, is an endless address to her dead lover. And it is only from the perspective of this death, assumed by the man who listens, that her story can be heard.

What she comes to tell is likewise both the story of her confrontation with her lover's death and an appeal to the impossibility of such a confrontation:

We were supposed to meet at noon on the quay of the Loire. I was going to leave with him. When I arrived at noon on the quay of the Loire, he wasn't quite dead yet. Someone had fired on him from a garden.

I stayed near his body all that day and then all the next night. The next morning they came to pick him up and they put him in a truck. It was that night Nevers was liberated. The bells of St. Etienne were ringing, ringing . . . Little by little he grew cold beneath me. Oh! how long it took him to die! When? I'm not quite sure. I was lying on top of him . . . yes . . . the moment of his death actually escaped me, because . . . because even at that very moment, and even afterward, yes, even afterward, I can say that I couldn't feel the slightest difference between this dead body and mine. All I could find between this body and mine were obvious similarities, do you understand? (Shouting) He was my first love . . . (64-65)

Speaking of her first sight of the dying soldier, what she in fact tells of is not the sight of death itself but rather, and more terribly, the shock of her encounter with the passage from life to death: "When I arrived at noon on the quay of the Loire, he wasn't quite dead yet" [*Quand je suis arrivée à midi sur le quai de la Loire il n'était pas tout à fait mort*]. Indeed, while it is framed as a simple narrative beginning ("when I arrived at noon"), the very immediacy of this sight, the "when" of its occurrence, becomes at once, in her telling, the very inability to know the moment of his death: "When? I'm not quite sure. . . the moment of his death actually escaped me" [*Quand? Je ne*

sais plus au juste. . . le moment de sa mort m'a échappé vraiment]. Between the "when" of seeing his dying and the "when" of his actual death there is an unbridgeable abyss, an inherent gap of knowing, within the very immediacy of sight, the moment of the other's death.

This missing of the "when" within the shock of sight is also experienced as a confusion of the body; for in missing the moment of his death, the woman is also unable to recognize the continuation of her life: "I couldn't feel the slightest difference between this dead body and mine. All I could find between this body and mine were obvious similarities, do you understand?" As the culmination of her story, the body marks the very transformation, in her own telling, from the shock of an arrival at an utterly singular and irrefutable moment—"Quand je suis arrivée à midi sur le quai"—into an endless impossibility of arriving—"Je n'arrivais pas à trouver la moindre différence entre ce corps mort et le mien." Her bodily life, that is, has become the endless attempt to witness her lover's death.¹¹ Her final address—"do you understand?"—spoken from within this eternity, no longer truly knows a history of loss, but rather speaks, beyond its knowing, the impossibility, precisely, of having her own history.

THE BEGINNING OF A HISTORY

The truth of the woman's story thus emerges not only in the power of its reference, but in the address that enacts the impossibility of her history. Yet it is also precisely within what this address cannot fully know that the possibility of another history opens up. For the solicitation "do you understand," in distinguishing the "you" momentarily from the dead body, responds to another, implicit dimension within the very words of the Japanese man's question, "Am I dead?" Within the very confusion that the question, by both addressing the French woman and apostrophizing the girl of Nevers, creates between the German

soldier and the Japanese man, the words "am I dead?" curiously enough introduce into the dialogue the reality of the Japanese man himself, who does not simply assume figuratively the "I" of the dead German soldier but also refers to himself as what is still a question, as what has not been determined in his own life. For, as we discover in an earlier exchange in the film, the man who insists that the woman has seen nothing at Hiroshima does not do so precisely from the position of his own seeing:

She: You were here, at Hiroshima. . . .

He: No. . . Of course I wasn't.

She: That's true. . . How stupid of me.

He: But my family was at Hiroshima. I was off fighting the war.
(28)

The Japanese man has, himself, missed the catastrophe at Hiroshima. What he knows, therefore, of his story, as he enters the dialogue with the French woman, is that he himself "saw nothing" at Hiroshima. Yet this missing of the event, a missing that is different from the woman's, resonates with hers in the passion of its argument and in his reference to his family. Through its very missing, his story, like hers, bears the impact of a trauma.

The man can step into the woman's story, then, when he poses his question of life and death only because he can, and perhaps in some way must, ask of her the question of his own survival: "When you are in the cellar, am I dead?" He listens to her, that is, out of his own not knowing, out of the impossibility of confrontation with his own past, and out of the lack of self that is spoken in his question. And it is precisely because he speaks from this impossible place, and asks a question that he himself does not fully own, that he can also enter her story, that he makes the answer to her story speak more than it can possibly tell. Not because he knows her truth but because he *does not know* his own, he can discover, even as she tells him of the im-

possibility of her own life, the survival of another for whom she unwittingly speaks in the double testimony of her response.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE EXCHANGE

Because the lovers are thus linked in the missing of their traumas, what takes place in their dialogue is the establishment of their respective histories. This establishment of history, however, is not simply an act of empathy or understanding. From the beginning, the man has refused the woman's tears over the fate of Hiroshima in much the same way as the woman herself had, earlier in her life, refused her mother:

She: I've always wept over the fate of Hiroshima. Always.

He: No. What would you have cried about? (18)¹²

The tears of empathy here are refused by the man as a kind of misunderstanding. But in this dialogue, as we have seen, the refusal is not simply the isolation of two opposed and locked understandings. It rather constitutes the very heart of their link to each other. It is indeed at the climax of the narration of her story that her request for understanding and its refusal by him mark precisely the possibility of their connection:

. . . All I could find between this body and mine were obvious similarities, do you understand? (*Shouting.*) He was my first love (*The Japanese slaps her. . . She acts as though she didn't know where it had come from. But she snaps out of it, and acts as though she realized it had been necessary.*) (65-66)

As a response to her request for understanding, for understanding the impossibility of distinguishing the dead body from her own, the man's slap is a refusal of understanding, a refusal of empathy that, on the level of immediate experience and emotions, is experienced as an act of violence. But on the level of the address, and within the significance of the dialogue, the slap

constitutes the imperative of distinguishing between life and death. This imperative is not truly experienced as a *knowing* of that crucial difference but as a *break* within the apostrophe, a disruption of the apostrophic—or prosopopoeic—confusion, in the woman's sight of the living body and in her address to the Japanese man as the dead soldier, which robbed both the Japanese man and the French woman of a history, and which joined them only in their absence within their own stories.¹³

What takes place in the disruption of the slap, then, is precisely the beginning of a history. It takes place, moreover, in a body that is seen, in the hand, precisely, that, raised to her face, no longer permits the confusion between her life and the German soldier's death, because it does not permit the confusion of his death with the Japanese man's life. This marking of a difference does not take place, indeed, in a corrected seeing or in the mere physical reality of a seen hand, but in the very way in which the hand, in its slap, surprises sight and interrupts the continuity of the face-to-face encounter of the lovers locked in a narrative-without-history. The slap indeed interrupts the pathos and the ahistorical sense of "firstness" in the cry—"He was my first love"—and thus interrupts the isolated self-enclosure of the narrative of firsts: a narrative that, incidentally, would include Hiroshima as the place in which the first atomic bomb was dropped.

This interruption and this *shock of sight* thus establishes within the film the opening of a history that had not yet truly taken place. The possibility of history arises, indeed, within this movement of the film, as the interruption of understanding in a brutal shock of sight that ineluctably connects the history of Nev-ers with that of Hiroshima. The traumatic histories of the two lovers can emerge, that is, only in their relation to each other and only in the way in which this relation creates, precisely, a break within the mutual understanding of their address.¹⁴

THE OTHER'S STORY

The film does not end, however, with the completion of the woman's story. The last, somewhat enigmatic, scenes of the film focus, rather, on the woman's silent attempt to separate from her new lover as she prepares to depart from Hiroshima. In their first encounter after the climactic scene of the confession and the slap in the café, they meet in a train station, where the woman has wandered by herself, and where she has been followed by the man, who does not invade her privacy but sits down on the bench not far from her, separated from her by an old Japanese woman. Rather than conversing with his lover, the Japanese man watches her in silence until he is interrupted by the Japanese woman. Their conversation, in Japanese, remains untranslated—and with no subtitles—in the film. In the written, published script, the conversation is transcribed as follows:

Vieille Femme: Qui c'est?

[The Old Woman: Who is she?]

Lui: Une Française.

[He: A French woman.]

Vieille Femme: Qu'est-ce qu'il y a?

[The Old Woman: What's the matter?]

Lui: Elle va quitter le Japon tout à l'heure. Nous sommes tristes de nous quitter.

[He: She's leaving Japan in a little while. We're sad at having to leave each other.] (120, 80)

As it is represented in this scene, the separation of the man and the woman in the film is not simply an ending, but leads also, implicitly, to the introduction of a new story and a new language: the story told by the Japanese man, spoken in a language native to him but new to the film and foreign to the French woman as well as to most of the audience at whom the film is aimed. The story of the man, as he tells it to his own compatriot, is the story

told by the film itself, the story of his relationship with, or more specifically, his separation from, the woman. But as this story of the ending comes to us in translation, its language, Japanese, does not represent a simple break from the language and the story of the woman. It also constitutes, in resonance with her own narrative, another language of departure: a language of *quitter* and of *leaving*—"Elle va quitter le Japon tout à l'heure; nous sommes tristes de nous quitter" [She's leaving Japan in a little while. We're sad at having to leave each other]. The closing of the woman's story of departure is also, then, the opening of a question about the man: about the possibility, for those who listen, of precisely understanding what it means to depart; of understanding, that is, the language of the Japanese man's own trauma.¹⁵

THE SPECTATOR AND THE QUESTION OF LANGUAGE

The element of incomprehensibility introduced by the sound of the Japanese does not, however, merely signal the inaccessibility of another culture, but draws in the spectator of the film as a participant in its action and as a part of the complex attempt to know—or to come to know—Hiroshima. The old Japanese woman to whom the man speaks is herself, above all, a spectator of the relationship between the two lovers, and her question, "Who is she?" is the film's first explicit representation of what it means to watch this film and to question it, a watching and a questioning that, notably, takes places in a language that does not fully belong to the action of the film. An analogous representation had already, implicitly, arisen with the occurrence of the slap in the scene at the café, at the climax of the telling of the woman's story. For at this moment of the slap, the camera pans quickly to the faces of the Japanese customers at the bar, all of whom suddenly turn toward the couple in surprise at the unexpectedly loud and explosive sound. The sound of the slap thus breaks the private bond of the two lovers

and introduces into their passionate intimacy the eyes and ears of others.

Paradoxically, these strangers are linked to the lovers precisely through what they do not comprehend. Indeed the surprise of the sound of the slap first draws into the scene, and incorporates within the film as a whole, the relationship between the Japanese man and his own compatriots, who, from their own perspective, hear him speak a language not his own. Simultaneously, the scene introduces the spectators of the film as those who not only watch but listen, and whose understanding of Hiroshima must pass through the fiction of the film and through the multiplicity of the languages it speaks. Indeed, the scenes that follow the slap can be said to reintroduce the questions raised by the opening of the film, the problem of knowing Hiroshima not only as what can be seen and understood in the body but also as what can be heard and understood in the voice that speaks through it.

The spectators' language is, however, not only Japanese. After the scene at the train station, the man follows the French actress through the streets of Hiroshima into a cocktail lounge, a café called Casablanca. Seating himself apart from her, he watches and listens as she is approached by another Japanese man, a stranger who assumes she is a tourist and tries to pick her up by speaking to her in English, with the following words, which again remain untranslated in the film (and appear as follows in both the French and English texts):

Are you alone?
It is very late to be lonely.
May I sit down? Are you just visiting Hiroshima?
Do you like Japan?
Do you live in Paris? (81)¹⁶

The sound of the English, following closely upon the Japanese spoken by the man and the old woman at the train station, acts

as yet another sign of the separation and imminent departure of the woman, through the intrusion of a language that belongs to neither of the two lovers. The English, like the Japanese, seems to represent their separation through the intrusion of others and through the link between the Japanese man and a Japanese perspective that divides him from her. Yet the English, spoken in short, memorized guidebook phrases by a Japanese man who clearly does not know the language well, and observed in turn by a Japanese man who may or may not know this language, also suggests that the Japanese perspective (and, indeed, the perspective of the film) may not have a single accessible language of its own. If this scene, like the ones before it, opens up the possibility of the Japanese man's history beyond the French woman's departure, it does so only within an address to those who speak another language, and who view the story—and the film—from the perspective of another past.

Café Casablanca, or the Cinematic Past

This language and this past themselves are not anonymous. In a film appearing, as did *Hiroshima mon amour*, in 1959, the café Casablanca, in which this scene takes place, cannot but be understood as an allusion to the American classic of 1942, *Casablanca*, a World War II film that centers on a café in Casablanca, a café called Rick's Café Americain. The Casablanca in *Hiroshima mon amour* can thus be considered, through its allusion to the French name of the café in the American film, a version of the Café Americain. And the English spoken here is, likewise, an address to those whose history, like that of the Japanese, is also tied to the catastrophic event at Hiroshima, an address to the Americans, who so far have been virtually absent from the film. The history of the Japanese man is not directly told, that is, but is elliptically suggested as an address to the listening and to the hearing of the Americans who watch the film. His story can be told, that is, only when the Americans can hear, through

the speaking of their own language by the Japanese and through the translation of their own fiction into the fiction of others, the story of their own reality, not yet recognized but introduced, as a question, into the fiction of the address.

The Americans are thus addressed not directly as participants in the events of the past but rather as spectators, as viewers of a fictional film. They are addressed, that is, in this fiction, through their indirect relation to their own history.

In *Casablanca* this fiction was indeed, specifically, the story of a departure. Set in Casablanca, which is described as the last point of passage from "imprisoned Europe" to the free world, and taking place specifically in Rick's Café Americain, where exit visas are illegally sold, the film follows the story of an American named Rick, who, unable to return to the United States himself, makes possible the departures of others and, ultimately, of the very woman he loves and of her husband, a resistance fighter fleeing the Nazis and the French Vichy collaborators who have cornered him at Casablanca.

The film *Casablanca* thus represents the Americans as the liberators of Europe. But this fiction was itself less a depiction of a truth already in existence than an attempt to address an America that was not yet, in fact, playing the role of liberator: when the film was made in 1942, Roosevelt, against Churchill's advice, was still reluctant to withdraw support from the Vichy government in France. It has been suggested that *Casablanca* was in fact used as propaganda aimed at enlisting his support for de Gaulle, in which task it was successful (the film was shown at the White House on New Year's Eve, 1942–1943).¹⁷ If, in its political drama of departure, the film represents the successful liberation of Europeans by the Americans, it nonetheless offers its representation in the service of an address to what it conceives as America's own blindness. This blindness was even apparent, as it has been noted, in two of its most famous lines, the only lines that name the time of the action of the film itself: in

his dialogue with the black piano player Louis, Rick says, "If it's December 1941 in Casablanca, what time is it in New York? . . . I bet they're asleep in New York, I bet they're asleep all over America."¹⁸ In his own fictional, representational role as the American who liberates Europe, the character Rick also addresses those of his compatriots who have not awoken from their sleep, or from their blindness to the urgency of shifting foreign policy in the war. Even in its retrospective representation, *Casablanca* serves not only as a depiction of America's liberating action but as a continual reminder, an address concerning the necessity of awakening to what Americans have not yet seen of their participation in the war.

In its transposition to the café in Hiroshima, the story of *Casablanca* thus resonates with what the American film touches on but cannot know in the history of the war: the other side of "December 1941," the final stage of the war that develops between the Japanese and the Americans and concludes with the dropping of the bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945. Casablanca, as the name of a Japanese café, essentially calls forth the other side of what seemed, in the American film, a simple passage to freedom: "Now I know," says the resistance fighter to Rick as he leaves Casablanca, "that our side will win."¹⁹ Located in post-Hiroshima Japan, in a film made jointly by the French and the Japanese, the American representation of liberation from the enemy is returned in the form of its own blindness, the literal realization of the logic of liberation by which the understanding of one's own national identity has taken place through the forgetting, and obliteration, of the other.²⁰

In the scene in which the Japanese protagonist watches the Japanese stranger approach his French lover with stereotypical expressions of a memorized English, the consequences of this forgetting can be said to take place in a double form. The intrusion of English implies, first of all, a gap within the bond of the Japanese in their common desire for a woman from the West:

this desire places the men at odds, since the woman's possible involvement with the new Japanese stranger signals her departure from her lover. But there is also, perhaps, a certain loss of self implicit in the speaking of another's language. In this respect, in spite of the difference in their linguistic skills, the Japanese lover can recognize in the stranger's use of English a symbol of his own speaking in French. English, in this scene, is the language of forgetting.

But the forgetting and the loss implied by the intrusion of English is equally a loss for the Americans, who can see and hear themselves only through the face and voice of the Japanese man, and, through the name of the café, in an allusion to their own culture translated into the terms of Japanese culture. If Americans can recognize themselves in *Hiroshima mon amour*, it would appear to be only in the fiction of a false resemblance—in the artificiality of a cultural takeover—that serves, precisely, as the forgetting of the event of Hiroshima. The relation between the Americans and the Japanese—a relation defined after 1945 first and foremost by the dropping of two atomic bombs—can only be perceived, it would seem, through a language of fiction, a fiction that inherently erases the reality of the past it conveys.²¹

EPILOGUE: THE PRODUCTION OF THE FILM, OR THE UNTRANSLATABILITY OF THE VOICE

I would suggest, however, that the final significance of *Hiroshima mon amour*, in its meditation on communication across traumatic and cultural boundaries, is not closed off with this self-reflective, critical dimension of the film. It is indeed interesting to note that the question of translation and of untranslatability played a role, as well, in the production of the film, and in the actual communication between the actors. In a 1986 interview about the film, Emmanuelle Riva—the actress who played the French actress in the film—described how the pro-

duction of the film crossed the line between acting and living, or between fiction and reality, and how the very process of the making of the film was itself, for its participants, at once a rare achievement of cross-cultural communication and a unique experience of accoustic and linguistic difference:

ER: As far as the work was concerned, we communicated totally. It became better and better because each day we entered fully into the story. Finally one's engagement with the work reached a point that the story of the film became one's own. I no longer made any distinction between the life of the film and real life. Oh no! It was my life. It meant everything. During the two months of shooting, I gave myself to it totally. Within some limits of course. And that was true of everyone. We spoke with each other incessantly in utter felicity. With the Japanese actor, the marvelous Eiji Okada, too, thanks to an interpreter. Same thing for the Japanese technicians. We were together, do you understand? Together. That was what was beautiful.

I: You say that you communicated with your Japanese partner thanks to an interpreter. Then he didn't speak French?

ER: Not a word. He learned everything phonetically. What a performance! But the most terrible thing was that we found out too late that our camera had made noise and that it was necessary to repeat the entire film. From A to Z. Can you imagine? Alain searched for a Japanese man in Paris who could lend his voice, but no one satisfied him. He had to make Eiji Okada come [from Japan] in order to begin again his linguistic exploit, and we repeated the entire film in the studio, taking the time that was necessary. But as you have seen, the work was remarkable.²²

The Japanese man who speaks such beautiful French throughout the film (a fact that, at two points, is explicitly referred to in the script)²³ is played by a man who, in reality, knows no French whatsoever, a man who has not even truly memorized the tex-

tual lines that he recites, but who has memorized only their sounds, which, grammatically, make no sense to him at all. This fact is quite remarkable. Okada introduces a difference that he does not truly *act* through his role: The Japanese man speaking French in the story does not, that is, truly represent, in any mimetic or specular relation, the actor who plays him. Unlike the Japanese lover, who has learned a foreign language that momentarily takes over his own, the Japanese actor only voices the sounds of a language he has phonetically memorized. Far from absencing him, this voicing of sounds in fact distinguishes him from the fictional character whose well-learned French represents, in part, the loss of the Japanese referent: Okada's memorization cannot be considered in the same terms of loss and forgetting. Okada, in other words, does not represent, but rather voices his difference quite literally, and untranslatably. What he contributes to the role is the unique concreteness of his voice. Okada thus introduces a mode of speaking that, quite in line with the philosophy and the profound human truth articulated by the film, does not *own* or master its own meaning, but uniquely transmits the difference of its voice.²⁴

Indeed, as Emmanuelle Riva points out, it would appear to be precisely Eiji Okada's capacity to memorize purely phonetically that cannot be duplicated and that, when the film has to be remade, makes it necessary that Eiji Okada and no other be located and brought back from Japan, to repeat the whole unique experience of the making of the film, and to allow once more for the singularity—for the creative *difference*—of its effect. And it is the memory, precisely, of this singularity of voice and of effect that, in the interview itself, years later, still has the effect of creating the peculiar moment of a crossing between the fiction of the film and the mirror-action of the reminiscence that takes place in the reality of the interview itself: for it is precisely in her introduction of the need for an

interpreter for Eiji Okada that Emmanuelle Riva turns to the interviewer with the very literal pathos of the words with which, as the French actress in the film, she turned to her lover: "With the Japanese actor, the marvelous Eiji Okada . . . thanks to an interpreter. . . . We were together, *do you understand?*"

In the film, she had said: "I can say that I couldn't feel the slightest difference between this dead body and mine. All I could find between this body and mine were obvious similarities, *do you understand?*" Against our understanding, the film interrupted, at that moment, the narrator's pathos in her plea for understanding, and the intimacy of her confession, by the explosive sound of the slap by which the Japanese man dramatized, in yet another concrete figure, the radical disjoining of sound from meaning through which the film's dialogue precisely speaks. And likewise Emmanuelle Riva's surprising revelation of Okada's phonetic feat helps us recognize that the sound of Okada's speaking, in its own disjunctive voicing or empty articulation, may introduce a specificity and singularity into the film that exceeds what it is able to convey on the level of its representation. And it is for this reason, indeed, that the final scenes of the film do not simply represent a loss of culture and history in the forgetting imposed by the assumption of a foreign language. For the voice of the Japanese actor bears witness to his resistant, irreducible singularity, and opens as a future possibility the telling of another history.²⁵

ANOTHER HIROSHIMA

It is this actor's voice that, finally, returns to us from the opening scenes of the film, to interrupt once more our sight and understanding of the bodies that we see with a bodily voice that, once again, denies our facile empathy and our rush to comprehension, and demands a different kind of listening and a different speaking. In this speaking—a speaking literally of the body—we might hear, for example, another implicit emergence

of the Japanese story, in the form of a specific address, woven within the opening argument of man and woman:

He: You saw nothing in Hiroshima. Nothing.

She: The reconstructions have been made as authentically as possible.

The illusion, it's quite simple, the illusion is so perfect that the tourists cry.

One can always scoff, but what else can a tourist do, really, but cry?

I've always wept over the fate of Hiroshima. Always.

He: No. What would you have cried about?

She: I saw the newsreels.

On the second day, History tells, I'm not making it up, on the second day certain species of animals rose again from the depths of the earth and from the ashes.

Dogs were photographed.

For all eternity.

I saw them.

I *saw* the newsreels.

I *saw* them.

On the first day.

On the second day.

On the third day.

He: You saw nothing. Nothing.

She: . . . on the fifteenth day too.

Hiroshima was blanketed with flowers. There were cornflowers and gladiolas everywhere, and morning glories and day lilies that rose again from the ashes with an extraordinary vigor, quite unheard of for flowers till then.*

I didn't make anything up.

He: You made it *all* up.

She: *Nothing*.

Just as in love this illusion exists, this illusion of being able never to forget, so I was under the illusion that I would never forget Hiroshima.

Just as in love.

*This sentence is taken almost verbatim from John Hersey's admirable report on Hiroshima. All I did was apply it to the martyred children. (18-19)

Arguing for the intensity and the extremity of what she *has* seen, and implicitly for her communion in that horror and that misery through the unthinkable experience of her own madness in Nevers, the French-speaking woman cites, in translation, a striking sentence—an unsettling line from what was the first English-language text to introduce the human reality of Hiroshima to the American public: John Hersey's *Hiroshima*, published in the United States one year after the dropping of the atomic bombs. This original English-language text that *Hiroshima mon amour* recites in French was itself, moreover, to a certain extent a textual translation, an English transcription and rewriting of Japanese eyewitness reports. The echo of Hersey thus introduces into the film not only another possible address to Americans but a different Japanese perspective and a new mode of seeing.²⁶

The line in Hersey's book about the wildflowers blooming in the devastated Hiroshima is indeed taken from a striking passage that, in the original text, is largely about seeing. It is narrated as part of the testimonial story of Miss Sasaki, who had to be moved from some other hospital to the Red Cross Hospital in Hiroshima because "her leg did not improve but swelled more and more." Hersey writes:

This was the first chance she had had to look at the ruins of Hiroshima; the last time she had been carried through the city's streets, she had been hovering on the edge of unconsciousness. Even though the wreckage had been described to her, and though she was still in pain, the sight horrified and amazed her, and there was something she noticed about it that particularly gave her the creeps. Over everything—up through the wreckage of the city, in gutters, along the riverbanks, tangled among tiles and tin roofing, climbing on charred tree trunks—was a blanket of fresh,

vivid, lush, optimistic green; the verdancy rose even from the foundations of ruined houses. Weeds already hid the ashes, and wild flowers were in bloom among the city's bones. The bomb had not only left the underground organs of plants intact; it had stimulated them. Everywhere were bluets and Spanish bayonets, goosefoot, morning glories and day lilies, the hairy-fruited bean, purslane and clover and sesame and panic grass and feverfew. Especially in a circle at the center, sickle senna grew in extraordinary regeneration, not only standing among the charred remnants of the same plant but pushing up in new places, among bricks and through cracks in the asphalt. It actually seemed as if a load of sickle-senna seed had been dropped along with the bomb.²⁷

Miss Sasaki's return to Hiroshima is a return to a new kind of vision. The whole text of Duras could be viewed, indeed, as a French translation, or rather, as a variation, on the story of this wounded woman: the story of a repetition of her "seeing Hiroshima," the first time from "the edge of unconsciousness," the second time regaining consciousness (even as the ravage of the wound persists) and "looking at the ruins" out of which the flowers sprout. Returning to the site of the catastrophe—which is also the site of unconsciousness (or, "the edge of unconsciousness")—Miss Sasaki now sees something that "gives her the creeps," the flowers "optimistically" growing over the ruins, a form of ongoing life inextricably bound up with the very act of destruction.

In the film, however, Marguerite Duras disturbs the second seeing by superimposing it on the first, by "transferring," as she puts it, the line about the sprouting flowers, onto the footage of the "burnt children screaming." In juxtaposing the "optimism" of the flowers growing over the ruins with the documents and reconstructions of the moments of the catastrophe, Duras emphasizes the catastrophic sight that remains disjointed and insistently returning along with the strange survival of life. And like-

wise, in introducing into the French woman's dialogue the words of Hersey—which are themselves the translated citation of a Japanese woman's eyewitness report—Duras makes possible the emergence, in the French woman's words, in her very claim to her own true vision of Hiroshima, of the insistence of another vision and another perspective, the perspective of the Japanese woman, whose experience of the catastrophe both is covered over and yet, in the dialogue of the lovers, persistently and uncannily returns.²⁸

It is indeed the enigmatic language of untold stories—of experiences not yet completely grasped—that resonates, throughout the film, within the dialogue between the French woman and the Japanese man, and allows them to communicate, across the gap between their cultures and their experiences, precisely through what they do not directly comprehend. Their ability to speak and to listen in their passionate encounter does not rely, that is, on what they simply know of one another, but on what they do not fully know in their own traumatic pasts.

In a similar way, a new mode of seeing and of listening—a seeing and a listening *from the site of trauma*—is opened up to us as spectators of the film, and offered as the very possibility, in a catastrophic era, of a link between cultures. What we see and hear, in *Hiroshima mon amour*, resonates beyond what we can know and understand; but it is in the event of this incomprehension and in our departure from sense and understanding that our own witnessing may indeed begin to take place.²⁹

3 TRAUMATIC DEPARTURES: SURVIVAL AND HISTORY IN FREUD

(*Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Moses and Monotheism*)

—What happened?

—Happened?

—Yes.

—I didn't die.

The Pawnbroker

In recent years, psychiatry, psychoanalysis, and neurobiology have increasingly insisted on the direct effects of external violence in psychic disorders. This trend has culminated in the study of *post-traumatic stress disorder*, or PTSD, which describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often uncontrolled, repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intru-