

Toujours sous la neige: Snow, Stasis and Immobility in Alain Resnais' *L'Amour à mort* and *Cœurs*

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The snow lies continuously and once fallen, neither sun nor rains may melt it [...] So when an earlier fall is not yet melted another has come, and in many places 'tis wont to remain for two years [...] With skins and stitched breeches they keep out the evils of the cold; of the whole body only the face is exposed. Often their hair tinkles with hanging ice and their beards glisten white with the mantle of frost. (Ovid, quoted in Boia, 2005: 15-16)

With this missive, the exiled Roman poet Ovid undoubtedly wished to elicit mercy from those who had banished him from Rome in AD 8. Through describing in sensuous, haptic detail the Empire's frozen north-east corner, so different from his Mediterranean home, Ovid expresses a sense of stasis, of suspension in a barren, interstitial space in which time seems to stop under relentless snowfalls which he must endure until he is permitted to return to Rome. While weather conditions have long been utilised in literature to express sentiments that may not be explicitly described in a text, cinema's harnessing of meteorological phenomena may exceed the capabilities of mere pathetic fallacy through the latter medium's ability to visualise movement and texture. Indeed, as P. Adams Sitney writes, "Cinema was the first art that could represent the temporality and rhythm of a storm" (Sitney, 1995: 112). In film, weather can become a potent visual or even sonic element, adding particular texture or colour to *mise-en-scène* and embodying temporal change and progress. In 1948, André Bazin wrote an essay, "*Il neige sur le cinéma*" ("It snows on the cinema") that addresses the presence of snow on film. Bazin suggests that the enveloping whiteness of snow was destined to be represented on the cinema screen and, despite the efforts of poets to capture its seemingly infinite yet paradoxically transient blankness and *froideur*, "snow found only a minor and incomplete homage in the literary arts. It was up to the cinema to reveal fully its secrets, to make its mysteries perceptible" (Bazin, 1983: 223). [1] Bazin, mainly discussing monochromatic film, views cinema's representation of snow as an ideal visual meeting, where the stark white of monochromatic images expertly capture snow's dense colourlessness. Indeed, he suggests that words could never harness the emotive and suggestive connotations of snow as well as cinema's visual language. This article examines the significance of snow in two of Alain Resnais' later (and less widely studied) films and, as

I elucidate, its use as a signifier of characters' stasis and immobility, occasionally physical, but mainly psychological. My analysis also addresses scenes of snowfall not simply as visualisations of particular characters' emotional states, but as devices for textual segmentation, interrogating the significance of interludes between scenes when they are filled, visually, with snow.

Though characters and snow never appear simultaneously in *L'Amour à mort* (*Love unto Death*) (1984), scenes are regularly punctuated by shots of white particles falling against a dark background. In *Cœurs* (*Private Fears in Public Places*) (2006), Resnais again divides scenes with shots of falling snow, though snow is also very much part of this film's diegetic world. Characters are often covered in this white dust, brushing it from their clothes and rubbing their hands together to warm them against the Parisian winter. Both films depict characters in interstitial temporal spaces and paralysed states. In *L'Amour à mort*, Simon, a man who has been pronounced dead, rises again but is psychologically and temporally immobilised between this first death and the inevitable true death that follows. *Cœurs* portrays six characters bound by stultifying relationships, repeatedly revisiting painful memories and barely communicating.

Resnais' oeuvre is populated by exiles, not unlike the banished Ovid wandering the frozen wastes. His characters are often immobilised in sepulchral psychological states, traumatised and paralysed by memory or the inability to remember. Such themes of paralysis and trauma in Resnais' oeuvre, especially in the context of post-war Europe, have been discussed at length by other writers such as Gilles Deleuze (1989) and Naomi Greene (1999). This article makes reference to themes of memory and non-linear time in Resnais' work, but my discussion of these themes is always filtered through a specifically meteorological prism, focusing on Resnais' still under-addressed uses of snow in his films. The recurring shots of falling snow in *L'Amour à mort* and *Cœurs* may be read as textual dividers, reflecting not only characters' psychological frozenness or hibernation but also, crucially, the repetitive temporality they experience. Resnais' repeated presentation of snow's paradoxical visual density and transience not only suggests time in hiatus, but also the inevitability of death of some kind after this period.

Between death and death once more: *L'Amour à mort*

As *L'Amour à mort* begins, Simon (Pierre Arditi), a seemingly healthy man aged around forty, who has been in a relationship for two months with Elisabeth (Sabine Azéma), is pronounced dead. Moments later, however, Elisabeth sees him rise to life again. The couple initially rejoice in Simon's apparently renewed existence, but it soon becomes clear that this is no miraculous recovery, and that his health is declining. Refusing medical tests, Simon becomes obsessed with death: his own "first" death, his

apparent resurrection, and his “second” inevitable death. Thus, Simon exists in an oddly timeless interstice. He is at once dying and already dead. An interlude appears after the opening scene of Simon’s first death. These interludes occur throughout the film—sixty-two times, with no discernible rhythm—with some punctuating scenes of barely a minute and others appearing after scenes of more than ten minutes. In the interlude, the scene cuts to a static shot of white particles falling against a black background, accompanied by Hans Werner Henze’s jarring, atonal music. These particles are never explicitly presented as snow in the film, but they have been read as such (see Murat, 2008: 30). As I argue herein, this interpretation is fruitful in terms of interrogating these interludes’ presence in the film as signifiers of stasis. Furthermore, we occasionally see faint suggestions of what appears to be the ground, under a white layer, suggesting that it is indeed snow that falls. These interludes jolt the spectator from within the narrative, into a strange, unfathomable “exterior.” As Emma Wilson suggests, “The film remains fissured by moments that suspend sense-making, leaving the spectator interrupted” (Wilson, 2006: 161). Each interlude momentarily shifts the viewer from the narrative to a scene in which no action occurs, encouraging us to interrogate the meaning of these gaps and possibly causing frustration. The narrative is so frequently and irregularly disturbed that it becomes difficult to follow. These textual disturbances therefore reflect the monumental disruption that has occurred in Simon’s life. I would suggest, however, that these interludes also reflect the hiatus Simon experiences on awakening, a sense of temporal stoppage, known both during his moments of death and now as he waits helplessly between two deaths, fixated upon his fate. The repetitiveness of the interludes supports this interpretation, presenting an inescapable extra-narrative strand of visual stillness, a freezing of time and Simon’s psychological mobility. Bazin discusses snow’s links with death in cinema, suggesting that, in monochromatic film, the deep blackness blood acquires onscreen is the most appropriate partner for snow’s whiteness. White, of course, has its own associations with death. As Bazin opines, “the whiteness of girls’ first holy communion veils is also that of shrouds” (Bazin, 1983: 223). Though no blood is spilled in the film, Bazin’s suggestion that snow’s whiteness perfectly complements blood’s darkness reflects snow’s associations with morbidity and whiteness’ connotations of death. Images of snow may evoke barren, frozen landscapes; a long winter in which nothing may grow, and the stalled temporality of hibernation, a prolonged sleep, akin to death. Matthieu Guillot addresses snow as the visualisation of “absolute immobility,” asking “is there anything more definitively, but also more desperately silent than a large stretch of countryside, all covered in snow?” (Guillot, 1999: 95). Guillot describes the breathtaking, yet oppressive sensation of watching “whiteness take possession of everything, transforming *without a sound* the smallest element of nature, which was still shivering, and fixing it in

absolute immobility" (*Ibid.*). In its own transient solidity, snow also represents the inevitable progression from life to death. Both aspects reflect Simon's state of living morbidity, of death stalled, and yet the inevitability of his passing. Naomi Greene, discussing characters in Resnais' earlier films, particularly *Hiroshima, mon amour* (1959) which depicts the resurfacing of a French actress's traumatic memories of the Second World War as she shoots a film in Hiroshima, writes, "wounded and numb [they] inhabit a prisonlike world of *temps morts* [dead time], of endless waiting" (Greene, 1999: 32). Though Greene specifically addresses female characters' reactions to past trauma, the phrase "*temps morts*" appropriately describes Simon's experience of halted time, of an interstitial space in which he no longer considers himself truly alive, but instead inevitably linked with death.

In one scene, Simon and Elisabeth flip a coin, which is shown in close-up, spinning relentlessly, and again this shot is punctuated by a cut to falling particles. Emmanuel Burdeau describes Simon's desperate desire for new life as "similar to a throw of the dice, a perpetual heads or tails [...] and finally the definitive separation of the lovers, not due to the death of one or the other, but to Death in person" (2006: 88). The fact that the coin is still spinning as if perpetually as the scene ends reflects the suspension of time for Simon. He has become, as Burdeau suggests, "Death in person"—obsessed with his own death, and fixated on memories or dreams of the moments he believes he spent in the world of the dead. He need not be physically absent for there to be a separation between himself and Elisabeth. His presence as one who is both living and dead immediately marks them as different, and they no longer inhabit the same temporal plane. Guillot describes snow's extinguishing power which "anaesthetises [...] proving itself capable of paralysing willpower or thought, until it annihilates all rationality" (Guillot, 1999: 102). His words not only reflect Simon's sense of psychological immobility, unable as he is to withdraw his thoughts from death, but also the physical sense of paralysis and compulsion he experiences. Simon repeatedly returns to a site he "remembers" from his period of death, a stream in the forest, and he sits on the floor of his home at night, reflecting on his fate as Elisabeth tries to rouse him. Through the hiatus it creates in the diegesis, falling snow is visually and formally a constant, jarring reminder of Simon's halted, repetitive temporality. His "resurrection" is a repetition of his birth, and yet a re-birth into a moribund, stalled existence, characterised by his obsessive revisiting of his memories of death. In one scene, Simon states that "I'm interested in death: my death, because I am dead. The doctor said so and he was right, even if I came back to life [...] I saw myself dead. I saw my corpse and the doctor bending over me." Gilles Deleuze has described the archetypal Resnaisian character as "Lazarean," suggesting that "he returns from death, from the land of the dead; he has passed through death and is born from death, whose sensory-motor

disturbances he retains" (Deleuze, 1989: 207-208). The story of Lazarus is mentioned during a sermon by Simon's minister friend Judith, and indeed this sense of "sensory-motor disturbance" fits Simon, who moves as any living man would. His heart beats, but he is drawn, both in memory and physically, to the stream over which he thinks he was to pass into the afterlife. We might draw comparisons with the figure of the vampire in cinema, of Murnau's *Nosferatu: eine Symphonie des Grauens* (*Nosferatu: A Symphony of Horror*) (1922), Dreyer's *Vampyr* (1931) and Herzog's *Nosferatu: Phantom der Nacht* (*Nosferatu: Phantom of the Night*) (1979), to name a few examples. Simon is a character that has experienced life's end, but whose body still moves, suspended between life and death.

Music is crucial in *L'Amour à mort's* linking of Simon to the world of the dead. Resnais originally intended the film to be divided by interludes of complete blackness, with only the aural presence of Henze's music. In one scene, Simon attempts to play a piece on the piano, which he cannot quite remember, and the few bars we hear recall Henze's music, heard during the interludes. Simon states: "It's that music. I think I've found it, then I lose it again. That music I heard there ... among the dead." The visual and aural combination of the falling snow with Henze's music of "the dead" reflects Sergei Eisenstein's theory of the music of landscape in cinema. For Eisenstein, silent cinema uses landscape shots to represent absent music:

The greatest share in 'making sound' fell to landscape. For landscape is the freest element of film, the least burdened with servile narrative tasks, and the most flexible in conveying moods, emotional states and spiritual experiences. In a word, all that, in its exhaustive total, is accessible only to music, with its hazily perceptible, flowing imagery. (Eisenstein, 1987: 217)

Eisenstein argues that landscape in early cinema possesses a lyrical quality akin to music's ability to express non-discursive elements of narrative. I would argue that the word "landscape" may be used to cover natural phenomena, such as snow, as Eisenstein himself applies this theory to the Odessa mist moving across the water and the dead body of the hero in his own *Battleship Potemkin* (1925). Henze's music and Resnais' shots of snow are irrevocably bound together in meaning. Both describe a realm of death not of the characters' immediate world—they never share the screen with these particles—but one that may be described as a "spiritual experience." To use Eisenstein's terms, a place of stasis and deathliness to which Simon belongs more now than he does to the living world.

Resnais asked Sabine Azéma (who plays Elisabeth) to read Henry James' story *The Altar of the Dead* (1895)—which depicts a man's wish to

preserve the memory of his dead friends—and to look at the paintings of Edvard Munch to prepare for shooting. Both address perceptions of death in the nineteenth century, and the shadow death casts across the living. Resnais' recommendations to Azéma evoke the ability of art and literature to bring the living into brief contact with the world of the dead, and *L'Amour à mort* addresses this contact using the familiar image of falling snow which, as argued above, has its own established connotations of death. As Richard Combs writes of the film's interludes, they are filled with "snow, or something like particles of nothingness falling in darkness [...] little deaths anticipating the big death the film was trying to approach" (Combs, 2007: 42). Crucially, this suggests not only snow's connotations of frozen morbidity, but its transience and the sense of repetition in the film, which weighs heavily on its protagonists and also disrupts the spectator's viewing experience. Each dissolving flake reflects the imminence of Simon's death, and his constant memories of his death. It is the incongruity with which these images are inserted as visual motifs that highlights the ability of the cinematic medium to allow the spectator to identify with the frustrating hiatus Simon experiences. With each jarring interlude, we experience temporal stoppage ourselves, in an interstice between life and death, and the snow's stark whiteness suggests not only the inanimate barrenness of this space, but the inevitability of the journey from life to death.

The snow which falls inside: *Cœurs*

Cœurs was adapted from English dramatist Alan Ayckbourn's play *Private Fears in Public Places* (2004) and is Resnais' second Ayckbourn adaptation, his first being 1993's *Smoking/No Smoking*. *Cœurs* depicts a sextet of individuals living in Paris whose lives interlink in various ways. Time seems to have stalled for each member of this group, tied as they are to stultifying relationships and painful memories. In *Cœurs*, snow is constantly present in the characters' visible and sensual world, viewed through every window, and the scenes are divided (fifty-four times) by shots of falling snow and gentle piano music composed by the aptly named Michael Snow (Snow's music bears no resemblance to Henze's atonal score in *L'Amour à mort*). As in *L'Amour à mort*, these interludes provide periods of hiatus for the viewer, interruptions that frustrate the smooth trajectory of the narrative and emphasise the sense of stasis and repetition the characters experience. These characters are often covered in snow, as if emerging from within the interludes, suggesting a frozenness that permeates their lives and temporal experience. Richard Combs compares the significance of snow in *Cœurs* to its presence in Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane* (1941), suggesting "it's as if the whole film were taking place inside the glass snowglobe that becomes Kane's totemic reminder of his lost past" (Combs, 2007: 42). In Welles' film, the snow-covered sledge symbolises Kane's past and his desire to forget as it

disappears under snow, but also his unshakeable memories as it remains present, albeit hidden. Indeed, *Cœurs*, as with many of Resnais' films, seems to take place in a closed world, a space of temporal and psychological paralysis, inhabited by characters bound to revisit and desperate to forget the past. Cobs argues that the snow in *Cœurs* may be read as "a blanket of forgetfulness that starts to fall on the sorrows of characters at the end of one scene before we move into the next" (*Ibid.*). The film's characters cling self-destructively to the past, and repetitive behaviour results in painful psychological immobility. Nicole (Laura Morante) re-reads fiancé Dan's (Lambert Wilson) letters as their relationship falls apart. Dan drinks daily in the same bar, regretting his past disgraces. Lionel (Pierre Arditi, again) recounts the deaths of those he has loved. Thierry (André Dussollier) and his sister Gaëlle (Isabelle Carré) crave love, but remain melancholically attached to each other.

Cœurs does not deal as explicitly with death as *L'Amour à mort* (bartender Lionel's elderly father is the only character who dies in the film, off-screen). However, the characters seem to exist in a purgatorial state, condemned to revisit painful actions and memories. Nicole searches for an apartment for herself and Dan, whilst their love is gradually yet clearly dying due to constant tensions arising from his unemployment, dishonourable discharge from the army and alcoholism. As heavy snow falls against the windows, estate agent Thierry shows Nicole an apartment, apparently containing three rooms, one of which has been obviously (and clumsily) partitioned. She opens a window, split by the dividing wall, demonstrating how the inhabitants of either "room" must experience the same temperature: "either they freeze together or they both stifle." Snow drifts through the window, a physical signifier of the enshrouding of the inhabitants of both "rooms" in temporal and psychological frozenness. The split room is a space in which two people must be divided by the partition and yet are unwillingly linked by the shared window, reflecting the morbidity of her relationship with Dan (their bond serves only to have them "freeze together"). Bazin writes of the ambiguities inherent in the representation of snow on film. It is at once all-consuming and insubstantial, "under the uniformity of a colour which is not a colour, since it has the power to contain all other colours, snow mysteriously reconciles life and death" (Bazin, 1983: 224). Snow's moribund whiteness and constant presence in *Cœurs*' perpetual winter reflects the frigid repetition of Nicole and Dan's relationship (epitomised by Nicole's weary apartment search) and, in its transience, the couple's inevitable parting. As Resnais himself said, "snow is something which we think we can grab hold of but, no, it's impossible. Like the mercury which fascinated me in my father's pharmacy. Something impalpable, elusive" (Resnais, interviewed by Tranchant, 2006: 32). Comparisons may be drawn here with *L'Amour à mort*, where the falling particles suggest both the psychological frozenness Simon experiences between life and death

and the imminence of the death that awaits him. Dan returns daily to the Hôtel Globe's bar, its mise-en-scène illuminated by brightly coloured lights, counterbalanced by the whiteness of the curtain of falling snow against the windows. Nicole describes Dan as being "in limbo [...] six months without moving." Dan's "limbo" is not the existential hiatus between life and death Simon experiences in *L'Amour à mort*, but the character again embodies Resnais' fascination with immobility. Time has slowed for Dan, and as the days merge he dwells constantly on his past shames and the hotel becomes a space for forgetting the past as he drinks. Naomi Greene suggests that Resnais' films are "peopled by men and women for whom time has stopped: numbed survivors chained to the past by remembered trauma [...] infused with the 'malady of death'" (Greene, 1999: 32). Greene refers to Resnais' earlier films within a context of post-war trauma, but this "malady of death" (Julia Kristeva's phrase) resonates throughout Resnais' oeuvre, and his psychologically paralysed characters are haunted by the past. We may find similarities between the sepulchral hotel of *Cœurs* and the Overlook Hotel in Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* (1980). The Overlook is a locus of temporal stillness and incongruity, populated by ghosts. Though the main protagonist Jack (Jack Nicholson) seems never to have been there, we see his face in a photograph taken in the ballroom fifty years earlier. Like the Globe in *Cœurs*, the Overlook is shrouded in snow, as is Jack, eventually, as he freezes to death in the garden maze. Discussing Artur Lundkvist's poem, *Neige (Snow)*, Matthieu Guillot perceives in its stanzas "an oppressive snow which conquers the whole world, so strongly present that it seems to have been there for all time, and everywhere" (Guillot, 1999: 102). These snow-bound hotels are places of temporal stoppage, their inhabitants condemned to revisit the past, as past and present become indistinguishable. Indeed, the hotel of Resnais' *L'Année dernière à Marienbad* is a much-discussed site of temporal discontinuity, populated by protagonists left psychologically immobilised by memories, or the lack thereof. As a man tries to convince a woman that they had known and loved each other the previous year, the woman does not seem to remember, but vague hints are given of some past trauma, possibly involving sexual violence. As John Ward suggests, "The 'frozen' guests in particular point to the way in which past events are fixed timelessly in personal recollection" (Ward, 1968: 45). The word "frozen" is crucial here. Though it describes the choreographed still poses of the hotel's inhabitants in certain scenes in *Marienbad*, it also reflects Dan's role in *Cœurs*, who is an eternal tenant of the snow-covered hotel, bound in a repetitive process of recalling and suppressing painful memories.

In one of the final scenes, Lionel (Arditi) and Charlotte (Azéma, again) sit together in the kitchen of the home he shares with his elderly father, whom Charlotte looks after in the evenings. She asks how he will cope if his father dies. As a close-up of the pair's hands linking across the table

appears, snow begins to fall on them inside the house, followed by a cut to the pair in medium-shot as the room gradually darkens, illuminated by a shaft of cool light in which the snow falls. Lionel admits “I could move away, but I’ve been here forever. This is my home. It’s not much, but it’s full of memories. So many things I’ve loved.” Lionel mourns the deaths of his mother and partner, and the camera repeatedly focuses on a photograph of an unnamed dead friend. Emmanuel Burdeau aligns the “*neige d’intérieur*” (interior snow) (Burdeau, 2006: 88) with the variety of screens that separate characters in *Cœurs*, such as a sheet of glass between Thierry and Charlotte in their office and the beaded curtain behind which Lionel disappears at the hotel bar, suggesting that “each space in *Cœurs* is cut in two by a phantom division” (*Ibid.*). These divisions suggest a lapse in communication between characters, and thus the cessation of forward movement Gilles Deleuze observes in Resnais’ earlier films (Deleuze, 1989: 103). Indeed, the shots of snow separating scenes in *Cœurs* can be read as screens evoking characters’ insularity and lack of connection. While the screens in *Cœurs* do not disrupt the narrative as jarringly as in *L’Amour à mort*, they do not seem completely extrinsic to the narrative. Moreover, we might argue that there is some significance to the fact that it is the characters played by Arditi and Azéma whose world is penetrated most deeply by snow—they are the only characters to experience the “*neige d’intérieur*.” This of course does not suggest that Resnais’ repeated casting of the two actors (they appear together in seven of his films) means they are, like so many of Resnais’ fictional characters, bound perpetually to repetition in a kind of extra-textual or pro-filmic *mise-en-abyme*. Rather, the union of Arditi and Azéma under a snowfall in *Cœurs* may recall poignantly their roles in *L’Amour à mort*. The snow, with which they never share the screen in the latter film, and which signifies the world of the dead, now enters their space with an overwhelming, unnatural proximity, as if death now surrounds them completely. The interludes that suggest time standing still for both Simon and the viewer now penetrate *Cœurs*’ diegetic world. Unlike *L’amour à mort*, however, in *Cœurs* death is not a mysterious, monolithic source of existential suffering. Rather, it is an occurrence to which Lionel has become accustomed—a quotidian sadness. Neither Lionel nor Charlotte seem to notice the snow falling inside, suggesting that death in this film can be read as a quieter, more familiar presence that the characters learn to live with. Unlike Simon’s strange, insular disposition in *L’Amour à mort*, in *Cœurs* death is palpable in the everyday presences of ageing parents and memories of lost friends. The sets in *Cœurs* are staged in a notably theatrical manner, often shot from a static viewpoint, with corners of certain rooms never observable by the spectator (as if they cannot be contained in a theatre set). Indeed, the fact that Lionel’s father is never seen in full, only heard, as if calling from off-stage, adds to the stage-like nature of the film’s *mise-en-scène*. This reflects the repetitiveness of the dramas played out between the

characters, as they constantly revisit old memories, as if performing the same script on the same set every night (appropriately, the French word for a rehearsal is “*répétition*”). Max Picard describes snow as “silence become visible” (Picard, 1948: 116), reflecting Resnais’ harnessing of snow’s visual qualities. In Resnais’ films, the unrelenting snow visualises a paradoxically deafening silence, one that is overwhelming and inescapable, its ambiguous engulfing whiteness and transience describing both the characters’ psychological stasis and the inevitability of physical death, or the death of love that haunts them. The snow that penetrates Lionel’s home reflects these somnambulistic characters’ depth of immobility, bound by the past, and the “phantom divisions” of silence that divide them and halt their movements. The impossibility of snow intruding between two characters in an interior setting encapsulates this universe not governed by standard time or reality, but infused with a temporal stillness governed by memory. As I have argued, however, the visualisation of the spectre of death as snow in *Cœurs* is not imbued with the horror it evokes in *L’Amour à mort*. It is a softer, more familiar sadness that becomes part of everyday life.

Conclusion

Alain Resnais’ films are populated by Lazarean characters and exiles from linear, uninterrupted time. Discussions of stillness and immobility are, as I have suggested, relevant throughout Resnais’ work and have been addressed many times. His earlier films reflect the psychological paralysis that lingered long amongst the ruins of Europe after the Second World War, and if his later work no longer references the war specifically, the investigation of traumatic *mise-en-abymes* of memory is still inescapably present. This article has built on such readings of Resnais’ oeuvre to re-address notions of temporal and mental stasis through the prism of weather. This is an under-investigated aspect of the filmmaker’s work, in which snow is certainly the most prominent recurring meteorological element. Indeed, snow has a significant role in Resnais’ 1974 film *Stavisky*. As in *L’Amour à mort* and *Cœurs*, it has connotations of death. In *Stavisky*, which is loosely based on the downfall and death of financier and conman Alexandre Stavisky in the 1930s, Alexandre’s (Jean-Paul Belmondo) wife Arlette (Anny Duperey) has a recurring dream in which she and her husband plunge over a cliff in a car in a flurry of snow. Though Alexandre is not killed in a car accident, he does die (he is shot) in a snow-covered lodge in Chamonix. We can therefore read the scenes of heavy snowfall that occur suddenly in the diegesis, as Alexandre’s ill-gotten financial empire disintegrates before his death, as harbingers of his fate. Summer weather characterises the scenes of Alexandre’s earlier, carefree life. At one point he reassures Arlette by telling her “there’s no snow [...] there’s a July sun shining.” Furthermore, in an early scene, Alexandre reads a monologue by the Spectre from Jean Giraudoux’s play

Intermezzo, in which a woman seems to communicate with a ghost. Alexandre/the Spectre's lines speak of the ethereal presence of the dead in an in-between realm (which of course can be compared with Simon's position between two deaths in *L'Amour à mort*, or even the inability to break free from moribund cycles of memory and repetition in *Cœurs*). Alexandre delivers his monologue on a theatre set depicting an Alpine lodge covered in snow, which is unrelated to his speech but foreshadows his own death scene. I refrain from aligning *Stavisky* in greater depth with *L'Amour à mort* and *Cœurs*, as it lacks the snow-filled interludes that so notably disrupt both later films. If snow can be read as a sign of death in *Stavisky*, by the time Resnais makes *L'Amour à mort* it has also become a visual vehicle for textual fragmentation, which recurs in *Cœurs*.

The capture or representation of meteorological phenomena has been a speciality of the cinema almost since its inception. In the Lumière brothers' short film *Repas de bébé* (1895), a strong wind hinders a couple's efforts to feed their baby as his bib blows into his face. More recently, Roland Emmerich's *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004) was a cautionary blockbuster depicting apocalyptic weather conditions caused by global warming (visualised through a combination of CGI and live action set-ups). However, little research has addressed the role of weather in films. As yet, the only in-depth study devoted entirely to weather in film is Kristi McKim's forthcoming book, *Cinema as Weather: Stylistic Screens and Atmospheric Change*, which focuses not only on natural phenomena as reflections of characters' emotions, but also on the use of weather as a stylistic textual device. Generally, discussions of weather in cinema appear as part of wider studies on cinematic landscapes. For example, amid its discussion of cinematic representations of natural beauty, P. Adams Sitney's essay "Landscape in the Cinema: The Rhythms of the World and the Camera" interrogates cinema's capacity to represent movements of or movements affected by weather (Sitney, 1995: 113). Sitney also argues that cinema can render "gentler meteorological phenomena" such as changes in light and the shifting of clouds with "nuances previously the exclusive domain of poetry" (*Ibid.*). A great deal of space exists for investigation of the temporal, visual and textural specificities of particular elemental phenomena used to disrupt or enrich films' visual and narrative fabric. The blankets of snow that fall in *L'Amour à mort* and *Cœurs* see Resnais repeatedly utilising this visual motif to communicate the ideas of paralysis that unite his oeuvre. The engulfing whiteness of Resnais' snow becomes a recognisable visual sign of the wintry "hibernation" his characters experience, existing in worlds where time seems to halt, and the only psychological movement is towards death, or the death of love. Eventual death is suggested in the dissolving of these fragile particles in the air or on characters' clothing. Crucially, the visual presence of snow in recurrent interludes allows Resnais to further emphasise characters' temporal and mental hiatus. In

halting the narrative for the viewer, the repetitiveness of these interludes highlights characters' repetitive behaviour, as they return, both mentally and physically, to unshakeable memories and the sites in which these memories haunt them. Resnais' films exist in a space where life is shadowed by death. The malady of frozenness and morbidity that has plagued his characters since his early career lingers still.

Notes

[1] All translations from French are my own, unless otherwise indicated.

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