



FILM

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10.23.13



Alain Resnais, *You Ain't Seen Nothin' Yet*, 2012, 35 mm, color, sound, 115 minutes.

THIS IS TO ANNOUNCE that Alain Resnais is not having a retrospective in New York at the moment. What we have instead is a window of opportunity to enjoy a brief *Resnaissance* of sorts (pardon, but the pun wrote itself). Currently on view is an exhibition titled "Last Year at Marienbad Redux" at EFA Project Space; its titular inspiration, Resnais's masterwork *Last Year At Marienbad* (1961) is screening at Film Forum; and his most recent release *You Ain't Seen Nothin' Yet* (2012) is having a weeklong run at Anthology Film Archives. Neither exhaustive (nor exhausting), this convergence invites an audience to play a looser, simpler game of connect-the-thoughts regarding Resnais and his achievements in this, the year he turned ninety-one and completed his fiftieth film.

When it first screened, *Last Year At Marienbad* was both lauded and loathed by critics and audiences, an unsurprisingly polarized response to a film that remains by turns scrupulously refined and comically oblique. "You hardly seem to remember me," Giorgio Albertazzi (as X) tells Delphine Seyrig (as A), "Try to remember." So begins the cat-and-mouse game of memory and refusal, storytelling and seduction, as X tries to prove to the doubting A that they met the year before, became lovers, and made a plan to run away together. Much ink has been spilled about *Marienbad* and its lavish austerity, the intoxicating agency of its architecture, and the seemingly evaporated consciousness of its characters (the latter is often attributed to the influence of its screenwriter, author/theorist Alain Robbe-Grillet). The film is, among many things, a model for cinema as pure



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concoction. Even the rambling grand chateau in which the story unfolds is, in fact, a fabrication, constructed in the editing room from footage shot at three different locations (a sneaky aide-mémoire that suggests how in the spaces of film things are only ever what they appear to be).

None of the fourteen works on display in the exhibition "Last Year At Marienbad Redux" engage with Resnais's film directly, even if the title denotes that the show will perform some sort of hybrid form of film criticism. Instead, curator James Voorhies invokes *Marienbad* to brand a curatorial query that marks certain points of interest along the fact/fiction continuum, and explores the ways in which visual artists use cinematic devices to produce "memory, meaning and, ultimately, an understanding of reality." Reflective panels hang throughout the gallery, surely an homage to the "hall of mirrors" in which Resnais's characters are captured; other than that, the film is disappointingly immaterial to the conversation at hand, except in the broadest sense. Nonetheless, there are gems in the show that bend both time and attention to the desired effect.

Tacita Dean's *Washington Cathedral*, 2002, is easy enough to breeze by and believe you've got it in a single glance; closer study—better yet, a collector's eye—reveals that the 130 postcards of the gothic cathedral that make up this work are not images of the actual landmark, but of the projected vision of the building that took decades to complete. Gordon Matta-Clark's *Blast from the Past*, 1970–72, presents us with a small handful of litter including cigarette butts, screws, and stones as well as a photograph documenting the way in which it was strewn on his studio floor. "All the parts necessary to recreate this compelling scene from history of my floor," Matta-Clark writes to instruct the debris' new owner, a delightful dig at the ease with which history may repeat itself, while Allan Sekula and Noël Burch's *Reagan Tape*, 1984, a ham-fisted mash up of Ronald Reagan's first State of the Union address with clips from his Hollywood films, rouses a worrisome nostalgia in a contemporary viewer for 1980s-era Republicanism.

If the exhibition does illuminate one thing about *Marienbad*, it is that the film has become a shorthand invocation of certain productions of cinema, and that it is a touchstone for popular conversations around the subjects of narrative, memory, and film's complex constructions of realities. Which brings us to Resnais's latest: *You Ain't Seen Nothin' Yet*, an adaptation of Jean Anouilh's plays *Eurydice* (1941) and *Dear Antoine: Or, The Love That Failed* (1969). Here, a deceased playwright named Antoine d'Anthac (Denis Podalydès) posthumously invites a group of actor friends (played by an ensemble that includes Michel Piccoli, Mathieu Amalric, Sabine Azéma, and Anne Consigny) to gather at his chateau to attend the reading of his will. Once together, the group watches a video made by d'Anthac before his death, asking them to act as the executors of his estate and approve (or not) a taped rehearsal of a young theater troupe that has asked permission to perform his adaptation of *Eurydice*. As the play unfolds on the screen before them, the guests—all actors who have performed the playwright's *Eurydice* at one time or another—slowly begin to take on their roles, first speaking the lines in sync with the young troupe in the video until they finally (re)create an entirely new production.

Resnais further complicates the story's playing spaces: The actors in the video begin to interact with the actors gathered to watch (and vice versa) as the film's audience watch all of their performances converge across time, space, and media. The director also employs some rather goofy and graceless CG effects—a door appears just as an actor's hand reaches for the knob; a hotel room appears so acid-warped and eye-wrenching that one can only hope it was a choice made in post-production. At its core, the film remains true to the story of *Eurydice*: death looms over our lovers—here and now, then as always—once upon a time because of a deal with the underworld, now a little closer for our actors mourning the loss of their playwright. If the film's final coup de théâtre feels a bit of a cheat, it's not a surprise; after all, Resnais has always been a director with more than a few tricks up his sleeve.

If one is in a mood to be wistful, there are echoes of *Last Year At Marienbad* in the new film, so much so that at times, it seems as though *You Ain't Seen Nothin' Yet* could be read as a kind of final bow for the auteur. Both films begin with its actors in the role of audience members; both tell a story of doomed lovers (Orpheus tries to retrieve *Eurydice* from Hades, while X struggles to return A to her memory); both stage their dramas inside of an imposing, shifting architecture. Though many parallels are certainly present, there is no need for nostalgia. With a new film currently in post-production—and as Resnais's title suggests—there is still more to come.

— Jennifer Krasinski

"*Last Year at Marienbad Redux*" is on view through Saturday, October 26 at EFA Project Space; *You Ain't Seen Nothin' Yet* runs from October 18 to 24 at Anthology Film Archives.

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