

Rupture of Body and Mind in *Hiroshima Mon Amour*: Apperception of the Historical Malady in Resnais's Trauma Narrative

Ali Afridi

Lecturer, Department of English, Northern University Bangladesh
ali.afриди@nub.ac.bd | ORCID: 0009-0003-4243-7809

Abstract

Alain Resnais has devised a narrative of fractured identity, trauma, and incommunicability in *Hiroshima Mon Amour*. With its minimal aesthetics, intricate movement and jettisoned conventionality, the film becomes a new map for theorizations in literary, cultural, and psychoanalytic spaces. This study uses these spaces for a phenomenological inquisition of “rupture” by positioning the subjects of the narrative within them, thus creating a spectrum for identity analysis as well. By delineating the characters as fragments and totalities, it strives to provide a critical reading of trauma and the separation it postulates in the corporeal identity. Kristevan conceptualizations of “abject” and “melancholia,” Freud-Lacanian postulation of “spatial geometry,” and Kantian “spatiality” are used as modalities for the demarcation of new narratives within literary, social, cultural, and epistemological dialectics. The study further aims to structuralize rupture as generating new cartographies of spatiality while hinging on the film’s narrative framework of storytelling through the body and the mind.

Keywords: spatiality, rupture, abject, trauma, melancholia

Introduction

Alain Resnais, an acclaimed experimental filmmaker of the 20th century, made *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (henceforth, *Hiroshima*) from the screenplay of Marguerite Duras in 1959, which is considered a cornerstone of the French New Wave movement.¹ The story depicts a short-lived romance between two passionate lovers that transcends the frontiers of traditions, cultures, races, and histories. The narrative contains two protagonists, one French woman and one Japanese man, and is set after fourteen years of the nuclear holocaust in Hiroshima, Japan. Resnais deliberately refrains from taking a historical route in his narrative as it is “impossible to talk about Hiroshima. All one can do is talk about the impossibility of talking about Hiroshima” (Duras 151), and rather appropriates a modernist narrative technique in his film.

As the film starts, the audience are immediately assaulted with waves of images from the cold pits of historical debris to the warm embraces of the lovers. The lovers are unseen as of yet; only in a highly calculated frame are seen the shoulders and the arms of two racially distinctive figures whose bodies coincide with the backdrop of documented footage of ruin. The tone of the film is further set forth with the accompaniment of the staccatos of

¹ Nouvelle Vague or French New wave was an experimental film movement in the late 1950s that explored fragmented forms and styles as means to express abstract thoughts in cinema, akin to contemporary literature and painting.



This work is licensed under the [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

Giovanni Fusco's nocturne that stupefies the audience into a new modality of cinematic narrative which would eventually accelerate the Nouvelle Vague movement in France in the late 50s. The narrative of the film contains an apperception of trauma, a transgression of memories, a remapping of desires, and a transnational vision of a historical malady.

This study adapts a cross-disciplinary approach in delineating the characters in the film as inquisitors of symbols as victims of trauma, and their search for space where identification could be rendered possible, thus, providing a narrative of new spatiality where interactions are sublimated to concepts like spatiality, desire, abjection, and melancholia. The study seeks to examine the "rupture" that renders the mind and the body as autonomous spaces of identification and narrativization.

Rupture in Identity Formation: Space as a Psychosomatic Device

This film could be studied as an earlier exercise in trauma narrative where both of the protagonists are afflicted with the parade of time and their desire to escape from it. Memory and forgetfulness play a vital role in the development of the plot as they disparage the narrative elements of a linear plot. As the film begins, the characters are intimately engaged in what would rather be pronounced as a duet than an actual conversation. This performance, overlain on the images of dilapidation, should immediately transpose the role of the audience as voyeurs of mass destruction. The characters are already seen as engaged in their transferences: the Japanese man denounces the illusory Hiroshima as being described by the French woman and the French woman relegates from her confirmations of having actual memories of the historical catastrophe. Their dialogue goes along the lines of absurd dramatic exchange rather than a real cinematic performance as was expected by the modern audience. In the lovers' exchange, the bodies are seen as fragmented limbs covered with the elementalities of war, atop the superimposition of Hiroshima footage shot by Akira Iwasaki. The French woman, after being negated of her war memories by her Japanese lover, defeatedly admits, "The illusion, it's quite simple, the illusion is so perfect that the tourists weep" (*Hiroshima* 00:07:18-00:07:22). There is nothing else for the tourists or the documentarians to do except weep for a cataclysmic past. The role of the audience is that of grievors of an event that never existed for them.

Resnais has pledged a poetic narrative in his film, all the while maintaining a rigorous framework where words, timelines and identities are juxtaposed and highly premeditated. Rosamund Davies recognizes the difficulties with synchronicity in the interactions of the characters on both personal and historical domains by acknowledging the critical stances while saying, "the film problematizes memory, history and indeed representation itself" (151). Resnais was portraying the characters within the limitations of subjectivity, negation, and spatiality. By doing so, he exhibited a trauma narrative in which the mind got doomed by historicity whereas the body stopped receiving signification from the mind, becoming a site of multifaceted spatiality, resulting in rupture. What affected the lovers in the film was war but as subjects of different wars, the symbolizing zones of personal experiences were different for each of them. The Japanese man was fighting as a soldier during World War II, leaving his family in Hiroshima while the atomic bomb hit the city whereas the

French woman encountered an urban battle in the same war. Both subjects are remnants of a grand war that affected the lives of millions, surviving and dead, and are castrated by it.

Rupture, a result of this castration, gives the film its movement; not only are the characters' bodies and minds splintered, but the space of the narrative itself is plagued with its effects. The penetrating shots of the lovers, the close-ups of cityscapes, and the clinical detachment from its historical setting add to the diffusion of rupture in the lives of Hiroshima. A city incapacitated by the ruins of war becomes the nightmare of an unhinged collective psyche; a narrative in this setting turns into a tale of alienation and deterritorialized bodies. The body's history remains somewhat faithful to the past while the mind makes up its own account of what has occurred. Resnais's refusal to turn to a historical narrative furthers the efficacy of rupture that marks the body and haunts the symbols for signification. In this ambiguous storytelling, Resnais provides an astute statement of the historical calamity by limiting and personalizing the totalizing history. Communication of history through language, for the characters, becomes an impossibility whereas communicating through bodies becomes an essentiality.

Cathy Caruth, in *Unclaimed Experience*, notes the function of imperceptible narrative in the text:

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. (56)

In her book, Caruth dignifies the trauma narrative of *Hiroshima* and expedites the possibilities of “a new mode of seeing and of listening—a seeing and a listening from the site of trauma” (56) by addressing that “*Hiroshima Mon Amour* opens up the question of history, I would propose, as an exploration of the relation between history and the body” (26). In the narrative, the site of decimation becomes a space for the French woman to realize her own personal history of trauma – a site of trauma functioning as a site for recuperation and salvation. After the death of her German lover, the woman becomes a vacant site without signification – becoming the body that negates the mind as a mode of survival through trauma – only to materialize her new spatiality in the setting of trauma. She gets banished to the cellar (French for “cave”) which is a required space for her to make communications with the world possible by dislocation; the cellar becomes a site for new knowledge of herself and the world – alluding to the mythic cave of Plato – which would provide her corporeal identity an anchor. Here, “Forgetting is indeed a necessary part of understanding” (Caruth 32).

A crucial reading supplementary to *Hiroshima* would be Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* where memory is delineated as an unforgetting and relentless factor in the formation

of individual identity and in “Volume I,” he writes, “reality takes shape in the memory alone” (Proust 260). The cruciality is also acknowledged in the resourceful article “Summer Was Inside the Marble: Marguerite Duras and Alain Resnais’s *Hiroshima mon amour*” by Carol Mavor where she claims, “*Hiroshima mon amour* is a post-nuclear reading of Proust” (Mavor 37). She has worked on the functions of memory in the post-nuclear narrative of *Hiroshima* from a photographic perspective that includes several film and critical theories to bring out the binaries of the text to provide a register for reanalyzing history as a narrative of mass memory, and also on the incantation of Proustian “involuntary memory” in the characterizations of the text. The article simultaneously affirms the importance of representation and the impossibility of it due to the unreliability of a memory at the aftermath of a traumatic encounter.

Memory plays a critical role in the characters’ identity formation throughout the course of the film. Memory is regained, savored, obliterated, and reformed in the characters’ contestation for space for re-identification. For a space to emerge for new signification to take place, the lovers reevaluate each other’s spatial memory and look out for the possibility of creating a new one where the new memory would offer new symbolizations.

Abjectal Dialectics

You’re destroying me. You’re good for me ... Please, devour me. Deform me to the point of ugliness. (*Hiroshima* 00:15:26-00:15:39)

Only a few moments into the film and Resnais sets the dialectics in motion – the French woman’s exigency for cementing her identity in destructiveness, thus becoming a “fascinated” – if not a “submissive and willing” – victim of the “abject.” Julia Kristeva, in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, theorizes the non-spatial, yet borderline, and immoral territory of “affects and thoughts” as abjection, from which the subject “strays” in terror but identifies it as a space for jouissance all the same. She postulates that abjection “disturbs identity, system, and order. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (Kristeva 4). Abjection launches an existential threat to the subject and yet the subject pines for “signs and drives” in it. Separating it from the object, Kristeva pronounces that the abject possesses “only one quality of the object – that of being opposed to I” (1) and “is radically excluded and draws [me] toward the place where meaning collapses” (2). In *Hiroshima*, the two protagonists as subjects are terrorized by their abjects: bleeding hands and mutilated bodies become the source of their abjections. Kristeva remarks, “all abjection is in fact recognition of the want on which any being, meaning, language, or desire is founded” (5). The French woman’s account of her German lover’s death in Nevers provides the origin of her abjection:

He grew cold beneath me little by little. He took so long to die! When? I don’t know exactly. I was lying on top of him ... the moment of his death actually escaped me, because even at that very moment, and even afterwards yes, even afterwards – yes, I can say afterwards – I couldn’t find the slightest difference between this dead body and my own. His body and mine seemed to me to be one and the same. (*Hiroshima* 00:59:36-01:00:32)

Her abjection gets territorialized with her lying over the dead body, therefore, she turns into the “deject,” as Kristeva characterizes – “the deject—the one by whom abject exists, who places, separates, situates, and therefore strays instead of getting her bearings, desiring, belonging, or refusing” (8). The separation from the lover’s body, which now territorializes her abject, castrates her being and, at the same time, facilitates polymorphous systems of significations against which she can now project her spatiality. Kristeva writes, “Abjection is a resurrection that has gone through death (of the ego). It is an alchemy that transforms death drive into a start of life, of new significance” (15). The French woman’s identification with the dead body as homogenous to her own living body represents the death of the ego, and with it, a “metonymy of desire” (Kristeva 49) occurs, trajecting desire from *objet petit a* to the Kristevan abject: “To each ego its object, to each superego its abject” (Kristeva 2) – the death of the ego brings forth the superego into motion, immediately designating the death as the point of abjection and, imminently, *jouissance* has now infiltrated this space, as Kristeva puts it, “the advent of one’s own identity demands a law that mutilates, whereas *jouissance* demands an abjection from which identity becomes absent” (54).

Both the French woman and the Japanese man are subjects of abjection in their representation of the progressiveness of the age: “the subject of abjection is eminently productive of culture. Its symptom is the rejection and reconstruction of languages” (45). Both of them are engaged in artistic or creative occupations – the woman is an actress and the man is an architect. Kristeva calls the deject “A deviser of territories, languages, works, the deject never stops demarcating his universe whose fluid confines—for they are constituted of a non-object, the abject—constantly questions his solidity and impel him to start afresh” (8) and this is personalized in the two dejects of the narrative who are persistently looking for significations to solidify their existences within their creative outlets but are repeatedly impeded – which can be seen in their familial relationships – and terrorized with their abjects since abjection draws them towards meaninglessness.

The lovers’ communication is highly intellectualized and contains stylistic departures from the existing modalities of interaction and is contrasted in the meeting with the Japanese stranger at the Casablanca and the old Japanese woman in the penultimate scene at the station that appear ordinary. The Japanese man’s abject has been determined at the beginning of the film with the footage of Hiroshima where he vehemently negates the memories of his lover so as to assert his “repugnance” towards the catastrophe, thus, identifying his abjection. The abjections of the lovers become the space for them to connect, not despite it but because of it: both lovers identify the need of the Other for a space, out of the ambiguousness of abjection, to make transgression permeable and *jouissance* to occur:

jouissance alone causes the abject to exist as such. One does not know it, one does not desire it, one joys in it [on en jouit]. Violently and painfully. A passion. And, as in *jouissance* where the object of desire, known as object a [in Lacan’s terminology], bursts with the shattered mirror where the ego gives up its image in order to contemplate itself in the Other, there is nothing either objective or objectal to the abject. (Kristeva 9)

The relationship between the deject and the world is essentially created within the unsolidified territory that is not totalizable in which the desire of the deject for one pseudo-object, for lack of the original object, after another is confirmed as its straying from the abject, thus from their destruction. In the abjectal dialectics, rupture becomes performative, for the body – in its own identification of the lack from experiencing rupture – searches for signification in the nothingness that arises from the semiotic-symbolic dialectics and, as a result, misrecognizes itself. In case of the Japanese man, the Other is obliterated by the war and for his signification to take place, he has to turn to the mainspring from where the Other was manifested in the first place to find signifiers. At this juncture, he finds the demarcations of the semiotic from the symbolic order – traces of primacy start hovering in his conscious appeal to meaning. In his search for meaning from the object (his otherness), he gets pushed away time after time until he misrecognizes the abject as his object and a new space is created, marked by the abject. The French woman's abjection of corpses is projected onto the Japanese man's abjection of war: both becoming each other's destruction. The two lovers are severed from their internalized abjections and territorialize each other's abjections in a single space to search for lost meaning in the land of oblivion, thus spawning a performative space of production in place of loss.

Melancholia, Desire, and Corporeal Identity

Melancholia can be seen as the constructive and perpetuated space of rupture in which the body-mind duality is essentially fractured into distinct spatiality. The theorization of melancholia, especially in the post-war females, is a topic that has also been illustrated by Julia Kristeva in her book *Black Sun* where she dedicates a chapter titled "The Malady of Grief: Duras" to Marguerite Duras' narratives and her female characters. She theorizes melancholia in the political spectrum as such: "Duras' melancholia is also like an explosion in history. Private suffering absorbs political horror into the subject's psychic microcosm" (234). Melancholia is represented both as an outcome of trauma and an affect which is especially apprehended in her discussion on "melancholy woman" when she says, "modest, silent, without verbal or desiring bonds with others, she wastes away by striking moral and physic blows against herself, which, nevertheless, do not give her sufficient pleasures" (30). This is apparent in the characterization of Emmanuelle Riva as the French Woman: Duras adds in her notes, which were intended to complete the original text, to the original screenplay, "my mind was already confused by different standards of morality" (104) and "in my dreams morality and immorality were so intertwined that soon I couldn't tell one from the other" (106), which almost adds an additional layer to the female protagonist as simultaneously being extremely aware of herself and not understanding herself at all. Kristeva would identify these traits as a sign of melancholia and an exercise in comprehending the politicization of the body and the mind that has been rendered impossible with the post-reality of war.

The French woman would certainly try to accomplish a vision of reality for herself that soothes her utterly ruptured sense of one but the devices engaged in the process – the same devices that are supposed to make identification possible in the first place – obliterate any credibility of it. Loss, trauma, and catastrophe function as mechanistic instruments

of severing the body-mind duality and reconstructing body and mind as individualistic spaces of signification that concoct melancholia. For the French woman, the loss of her German lover castrated her, threatened her with the loss of ego, and rendered her entire psychic and symbolic spaces of signification unfunctional. Until her confrontation with the Japanese man in the café, the source of the French woman's melancholia was unknown to her – it was still unconscious. It is also at that instance that she unconsciously identifies with the Japanese man as her lost object – the source of her melancholia from the loss of the German lover. The cellar becomes the melancholic space for her in the lack of a social space. While talking about the differences in acting out in melancholia and being entrapped by it, Khan Touseef Osman records, “melancholy implies the impossibility of moving on. The melancholic state traps a person in an obsession with a loss, where s/he keeps acting out the scene of loss” (134). With the remembering of the past events that forged the French woman's identity and desire at the café, she is confronted with her provenance of melancholia – in an attempt to inoculate herself to the experience. In the act of remembering, she finds out she is also forgetting, for the topography of desiring symbolizations is shifting. She has reduplicated the lost object (the German soldier) in the Japanese man that has propelled time and space to a momentum of temporality – extracting, perpetuating, and projecting loss onto a subject for her identity's inherent yearning for suffering.

The lovers' severed bodies from their minds, and hence the epistemological abstractions of the world, function as Deleuzoguattarian deterritorialized spaces which “make the outside a territory in space; consolidate that territory by the construction of a second, adjacent territory”; here, each of the characters “deterritorialize(s) oneself by renouncing” (Deleuze and Guattari 353). These spaces are vacant of the significations of the external world at a given time for new significations to take place through the operational process of reterritorialization. Kristeva declares the formation of new history as expropriating old ones when she says “the horror of Hiroshima somehow liberated her from her French tragedy” (232). The Freudian Eros and Thanatos dynamic calls for action in Kristeva's inquiry into the nature of love in *Hiroshima*: “A love crippled by death or a love of death? A love that was made impossible or a necrophiliac passion for death?” (232). Here, she encourages a phenomenological investigation into the ancient dualism that has mapped the human unconscious: only with the loss of her German lover could the French woman fall in love with the Japanese man, the mark of death on whose body lingers and perpetuates. Love and death become the territories of signification for the lovers.

Death is where the body of the German soldier shuts off and the French woman's embrace of the dying soldier becomes an effort to externalize her death drive (Thanatos) into the world, but with no reciprocity. This vacant site becomes her new spatiality – the preface to new signification is written and the reconstruction of her corporeal identity finds inception. The tasting of her own blood and the licking of the saltpeter in the cellar are vapid manifestations of the lack of that reciprocity in the external world which she could, then, only internalize with someone who has been similarly marked by death, the Japanese architect, the reciprocity of whose death drive would make her whole again. The Japanese

man comprehends the immediacy of this exchange which can be seen in the dialogue with his lover about Nevers: "I somehow understand that it was there, that you began to be who you are today" (*Hiroshima* 00:43:32-00:43:42).

The film's personalized account protracts the trauma narrative where the personal and private worlds of the lovers are relegated from the objective and external world of body-mind dualism. Thus, the body-mind rupture creates dislocated subjectivity where identities are formed in the social sphere through intercession: the sudden slap of the Japanese man entertains this space, for instance, with which the destruction of the overlaying past narrative is urgently committed so as to clear an immediate space of desire in the rupture of the French woman. Points of rupture become the breach of the characters' identification in which they would want to revel in each other but these domains are permeated with symbols from their personalized histories. The unsanctioned territories of the lovers are the source of their romantic melancholia, marking both of them together, bonding them in ambiguity and imprisoning their desires for each other. Time and the obliteration of any sense of it perpetuate melancholia for the French woman whereas a total denouncement of the past is the scourge of the Japanese man's existence, both causing desire to manifest in a state of abandoned hope and absconded reality. The affective spatiality of their *jouissance* lets them move towards a transgressive present where desire is sidelined to a reification of the rupture. The melancholic couple's fulfilment of desire for each other is an exercise in demarcating new body narratives that amends their pasts and preterms the future; an enclave of desire is manifested in their union where time and space are transcended into performative dimensions of reality – striving to attain new territorialities in the lovers' uncommunicated space.

In "Desire, Duras, and Melancholia: Theorizing Desire after the 'Affective Turn'," Kristyn Gorton suggests the transformative aspect of desire, that it does not limit but liberates the body, by assessing the Deleuzian "becoming" of the body through desire. She talks about *Hiroshima* thus:

Desire is embodied in the characters and expressed in various ways: as something that can release the past, as something that is contained in the past, as something that produces connections and forges new bonds and as something that is destructive and annihilating. (23)

The movement of desire creates the space for the body's "becomings" and "unbecomings" and in the case of *Hiroshima*, it works as a locomotive for the body in creating points of departure in the existing body narrative to enter newer ones. In deliriously positioning herself as a subject of trauma, and hence melancholia, the French woman finds out the images, symbols, and memories that fixed her identity ever since. She is confined in her melancholia, the freedom from which now appears to her in madness. When she looks at herself through the mirror at the next scene of the film and chastises herself, she is driven by the need to exorcise herself of not only her memory but also of her desire and her identity. Trauma ruptured her identity; melancholia incarcerated it. Since the separation from the German soldier's body, her body has been configuring the language of desire

in the modalities of alienation, secrecy, and shame. It is not until the spatio-temporal reduplication of the Japanese man is completed through transference that the remapping of desire in the flesh becomes plausible. But the mind, persecuted by melancholia, is still mystified by the desiring symbolizations of the lost object of love. At the recognition of the need for demystification of her desire, she acknowledges the reification of it. She is, finally, prepared to manifest her desires onto the Japanese man, thus creating a space of desire for the two, shattering previous connections to memory, the entrapment of desire. The rewriting of memory and loss refigures her melancholia and desire into a new spatio-temporality in a chain of spatio-temporalities where her corporeal identity would find stasis in the symbolic order.

The rupture is already playing its role in severing the sanest parts of the memory from the body's capacity to inhabit history, thus, lacerating the personal identification at the onset of new spatiality. The lovers' connection to this body narrative, which is marked by ruin, death, collapse, and misidentification, is reinforced with the prerequisite of association through trauma.

Spatial Geometry

To turn to psychoanalysis, a mode of analysis that deters the body-mind dyadism, *Hiroshima* becomes fraught with spaces of thought and matter where thoughts are seen as actions in the linguistic field, thus affecting the space of matter (body) of the subject. In the historical spectrum of trauma, the subjects are displaced, disfigured, and negated from their historico-cultural space and thrust into a new spatial topology. While talking about memory and its role in the French woman's psyche, Freud's concept of *Nachträglichkeit* (translated as "deferred action") becomes apparent. The death of her German lover and the subsequent events preclude her signification of the tragedy in the outside world. The lack of signified, while she stays in the cellar, perpetuates her psychical trauma while she suffers. Where the world of external signification fails, she resorts to language – where the world of objects is metonymized into mere signifiers, thus heightening her alienation. Even then, the only language she avails while staying there is the language of touch, as she momentarily thwarts her memory from taking over at the aftershock of the traumatic event, and the limited objects she has access to are fixed, with the exception of the rolling marble which she feels with her lips – she feels warmth as opposed to the cold and deadness of her lover's corpse. It is also at that moment that she feels her "hatred left" her and learns to avoid present afflictions, for otherwise she would "suffocate".

The café scene where she accounts for her memory becomes the first instance of her remembering, against the fourteen years of repressing. This is also where Freud's *Nachträglichkeit* is seen in play: the woman retroactively living the same event that begot her trauma; only the actual event that marked her did not exact her trauma, rather the expressing of it is what made her memory haunted with trauma. This association of a past traumatic memory to a present state of consciousness is not merely reliving an old wound but a complete construction of trauma in a space that was only inscribed with images. Complete dissociation is an effect of trauma and it is one of the defensive mechanisms

the mind creates to protect itself. The French woman's choice of career as an actress, in which she does not have to be herself for an extended period of time, epitomizes her dissociation. The association could only ever be possible with the belatedness of the subject's projection of the initial memory in what Freud calls a "hypnoid state" in which the rest of the consciousness is momentarily bracketed off while a genuine introspection of the unresolved incident finds action in speech, in this instance. Anticipation is also an aspect of the creation of trauma: the subject anticipates signification of the actual event but remains in search of the signified.

Freud's *Nachträglichkeit* is understood further in the Lacanian framework: Lacan proposes concatenation of signifiers and the incidental meaning at only a given frame of reference. Hence comes the notion of *asubjectivity* – the subject being unaware of an event's traumata until the chain of signifiers come in association with the corresponding signified. In case of the French woman, the signified is a lover. Her language reshuffles around it and both signifier and signified become accessible to her with the contact of her lover, the Japanese man with whom she shares the most intricate details of her traumatic overture, thus, constituting trauma as she shares and realizes. The moment of her most crucial suffering actualizes into the most defining trauma of her life. She accepts her trauma with the utterance: "I had no doubt you'd cross my path one day" (*Hiroshima* 01:16:59-01:17:02). Until this realization, the lovers were incarcerated in a different relationship in which the devices that construct memory did not come into play; they were intoxicated in a borrowed heaven until the truth became the most intimate aspect of their relationship. The Japanese man is, unwittingly, now a device of her trauma, the realization of which makes him leave her alone. The perverse implication of the Japanese man when he mentions "a war" while talking about a next time they might meet underscores his lack of understanding of his personal trauma. The signification of the Japanese man after the war has yet to take place and does not find its grounds in the confines of the film; he suffers in limbo while anticipating the full process of *Nachträglichkeit* to take place.

At this point, the lovers could not be more distant from each other and their reconciliation is not perceived as a possibility in the narrative but through a montage of fragmented images, Resnais shows the internal psyche of the French woman. Through fragmentation, she discovers the separation of the mind and the body narratives. The bodies become the place for the lovers to remember the signification of what love once was for them. The body's memory is celebrated in Resnais's vision of jarring materiality at the end of the film where the woman walks and thinks, and the town's depictions are, perhaps, seen through her eyes. It is in Hiroshima she found her Japanese lover in his physicality and thus confirms his name as "Hiroshima" at the final scene whereas the Japanese man, in his reductive identity as a subject still in search of signification, finds a place in her body's memory of Nevers, thus naming her "Nevers". In "Body, Memory, and Irrelevancies in *Hiroshima mon amour*," Christopher Hamilton yields a description of the memories as experienced by the body:

It is as if she moved in Hiroshima as if it were Nevers, as if her bodily memory

of Nevers were found again, here, in Hiroshima. Hence, she finds startling “meeting-in-Hiroshima” or possibly “getting-to-know-one another-in-Hiroshima [se connaître-à-Hiroshima]” —the hyphenated phrase emphasizes the necessity of place, of the body’s sense of place, of its memory of place, for the erotic attraction she feels toward Lui and which becomes indistinguishable from that which she felt (feels) for her dead German lover ... reveals her memory in her body, in her body’s possibility of erotic encounter, of its need for erotic encounter and the way in which this is her way of remembering. (80)

The giving of space by the French woman and the taking of it by the Japanese man are the last spectacle of spatial identification – a metonymic, infantile recognition of the fragmented self in the illusory totality. The memory of the body is the space where recognition at this level takes place with its own language – movements, nakedness, and stylizations. That the Japanese man is often perceived as being the German soldier’s replacement is a phenomenon enacted by the body where the damages of the trauma have been somewhat ameliorated – healed hands and healthy hair of the French woman are testaments to this. The Japanese man, on the other hand, is not acquainted with his trauma, still awaiting the deferred meaning due to a massive lack of signifiers. The signifiers for him would be, ironically and peculiarly, available to him with his confrontation with a subject similarly branded by war which is exactly what he perceives the French woman to be. But to avail signifiers from her, he needs to enter into her linguistic domain and the most personalized experience of war, otherwise it would simply be a historical calamity, which might be inflicted with the signifiers that he lacks in his personalized space of war to understand. The need for each other is thus described as a “glove” fitting a hand several times in the narrative. That the lack of space in one’s fragmented self is promised to be gratified by the other is what Lacan calls “geometrical” or “kaleidoscopic” – the reciprocity of space in identity.

The two protagonists of the narrative are seen to have been advancing with “the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality” (Lacan 3). Their identifications with each other and the world are fraught with significations constituted of this lure and it is always in progress, rendering the spatial identity assimilated – just now – invalid, towards marking new territories for exhibiting newer spatial geometries until a sense of totality is accomplished. The totality will always be elusive in the living space and but a form of it is still promised by the lure. The positionalities of the subjects get projected onto the realization that the modalities of their identification in the social field are only ever diminishing, with the unavailability of significations.

The concomitant effect of trauma is the lapse of personal memory in the face of a historical one. In case of the relationship portrayed by Resnais, memory, an essential component of the mind and body-mind dualism, is seen as being severed from its receptacle, the body that it inhabits. This severance provides a singular memory narrative of the minds that strive to consolidate their obfuscations into one corresponding memory: a space made out of psychological fissure and its effects, that is being restructured with incantation,

exoneration, and assimilation. In the film, the memory of the Japanese architect is almost absent which is only essential after the nuclear fallout, after which his identification cannot exist with symbols from his world that has been conspicuously annihilated and, thus, has created a lack and a negation in his identification. His search for a memory that would anchor his identity, hence saving himself from the malady of history, is coalesced with the French woman's need for the actualization of memory. Both find a space where they can play their roles as fabricators of their memory narrative and that space becomes grounded in the site of innocence, which has not yet become the site of trauma, for the French woman: a space forged out of time and is now inhabited by the lovers. But that space is not creating new spatial arrangements for the French woman who needs it as much as her Japanese lover; this realization is unmistakable in the following exchange of affirmation and negation:

SHE: Like you, I am endowed with memory. I know what it is to forget.

HE: No, you are not endowed with memory.

SHE: Like you, I too have struggled with all my might not to forget. Like you, I forgot. Like you, I longed for a memory beyond consolation, a memory of shadows and stone. (*Hiroshima* 00:12:05-00:12:35)

The space in the French woman's memory is getting devoid of signifiers, which is identified as an opening of new space for the Japanese man and as a betrayal by her; so, the motif of betraying memory comes into motion in the narrative. The film becomes a ground for negotiation between the two lovers for this space through negation; the rupture between the body and the mind is only getting perpetuated throughout this process. As Žižek puts it:

the true choice apropos of historical traumas is not the one between remembering or forgetting them: traumas we are not ready or able to remember haunt us all the more forcefully. We should therefore accept the paradox that, in order really to forget an event, we must first summon up the strength to remember it properly. (22)

The French woman's memory of Nevers posits a ground for her and her Japanese lover to live in forgetfulness and through this mutual participation, the memory starts to become haunted with images from the present which is marked by the procession of the historical malady that she has been trying to escape in the first place. The Japanese man is unable to ascertain the destructiveness of the situation, of the dangers of misrecognizing their pasts, so he persists in chasing his newfound ecstasy in the space in her memory; but she rejects, constantly. By the end of the film, they are seen to come to an understanding that their spaces of new signification should be carved out of each other's in order for the external world to make sense for them. They assert the existence of their corporeal bodies again through proclamation (in Duras' screenplay, the names are hyphenated):

SHE: Hi-ro-shi-ma.

Hi-ro-shi-ma. That's your name.

HE: Yes, that's my name. And your name is Nevers. Ne-vers in France. (*Hiroshima* 01:29:47 -01:30:29)

The pauses in their speech accentuate the concreteness of their identification; and the memory narrative is now replaced with negotiated spaces, namely the spaces devising their corporeal bodies.

Narrative of New Spatiality

In *Hiroshima*, we see the protagonists striving for cognizance at two levels: the psychological and the corporeal, both of which has been rendered dismissive by the traumatic backdrop of the story. The endeavor to corporealize spatiality is one of the foundations of epistemology, especially Kantian Transcendental Idealism. Immanuel Kant, in "Inaugural Dissertation," says,

Space is not something objective and real, nor a substance, nor an accident, nor a relation; instead, it is subjective and ideal, and originates from the mind's nature in accord with a stable law as a scheme, as it were, for coordinating everything sensed externally. (397)

Kant points out in this dissertation that space and time are both *a priori* and give an external object cognizability, that is to say, space and time are the part of consciousness that can be categorized as what Kant refers to as intuition which is devoid of sensibilities. Space is not to be realized, elaborated, or comprehended in the corporeal world but the corporeal world is an extension of that *a priori* which renders the venture from the abstract to the corporeal, the absolute to the subjective, intelligible. Kant continues:

Space and time are conceived as though they contained within themselves all the things which in any way present themselves to the senses. Thus, according to the laws of the human mind, an intuition of an entity is only ever given if that being is contained in space and time. ... Whatever exists, space and time are in it; that is to say, every substance is extended and continuously changed. (409)

What Kant posits as the "principles" of the physical world can be incorporated into the understanding of the body and the mind: the mind being the abstract and the body being the corporeal, conjoined by the confinement of physicality and positionality of the subject. The characters in *Hiroshima*, as Kantian subjects, are seen as torn between this confinement and the desire of the subjects' occupation in the grand abstraction of creating new spatiality. This web of relationalities has been further understood in Merleau-Ponty's concept of "spatializing space" which "disintegrates and re-forms before our eyes" (219) with a catalyst; in *Hiroshima's* case, the catalyst being the traumas experienced by the characters. Albeit functioning in different spaces and experiencing trauma from what might appear as two distinct sources, historical catastrophe and personal loss, their individual search for a new spatiality might appear entirely distinct but when looked at carefully, the film is so well-constructed and craftily narrated that the confusions in the narrative regarding histories, identities, and spatiality resolve themselves. Duras writes in the "synopsis" of the script, "she remained in a cellar in Nevers, with her head shaved. It was only when the bomb

was dropped on Hiroshima that she was presentable enough to leave the cellar and join the delirious crowd in the streets” (12). Duras essentially analogizes the two protagonists' separate histories and consolidates them into one single history overarching their conscious and unconscious existences.

The girl from the bank of the Loire – which could easily be recognized as a metaphor for the Lethe: the mythological river of forgetfulness – is affected by the same catastrophe that destroys the entire family of her future Japanese lover. Here, spaces are transgressed and transformed with historical events that have affected the lives of millions who could be seen, not unlike these characters, as searching for new indexicalities in their spatiality. The French woman's shaved head also alludes to the loss of hair due to radiation in Hiroshima's survivors; this is contrasted in Resnais' film where he shows the documentary footage of a victim of Hiroshima's atrocity losing her hair and later, in her memory, the French woman is seen getting shaved while suffering from the traumatic loss of her German lover. Thus, the characters are, what Heidegger calls “de-severed”: “‘De-severing’ amounts to making the farness vanish—that is, making the remoteness of something disappear, bringing it close” (139). The juxtaposition of the images in different settings and timelines in the story provides the audience an insight into the characters' quest for an anchor in the ever-expansive corporeal spatiality.

Conclusion

Hiroshima is a narrative set against a historical malady which makes it a ground for an upheaval of older narratives and embarking on new theoretical frameworks. In this study, the subjects are set against a kaleidoscope of critical theories to bring forth the elements of rupture that stimulate the possibilities of radical abstraction in the cultural space. It has strived to illustrate a panorama of analogies in Resnais' *Hiroshima Mon Amour* by assimilating theories on spatiality, psychoanalysis, and finally, epistemology, where the concept of spatiality finds its emergence. By mapping new cartographies through the conceptualization of “rupture,” it delineates how *Hiroshima Mon Amour* functions as a narrative of abjectal dialectics, spatial geometry, and new spatiality.

Works Cited

- Caruth, Cathy. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*. The Johns Hopkins UP, 1996.
- Davies, Rosamund. “Screenwriting Strategies in Marguerite Duras's Script for *Hiroshima, Mon Amour* (1960).” *Journal of Screenwriting*, vol. 1, no. 1, Intellect, Jan. 2010, pp. 149-73. doi.org/10.1386/josc.1.1.149/1.
- Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. U of Minnesota P, 1987.
- Duras, Marguerite. *Hiroshima Mon Amour*. Translated by Richard Seaver, Grove P, 1961.
- Gorton, Kristyn. “Desire, Duras, and Melancholia: Theorizing Desire after the ‘Affective Turn.’” *Feminist Review*, vol. 89, no. 1, 2008, pp. 16-33. doi.org/10.1057/fr.2008.10.

- Hamilton, Christopher. "Body, Memory, and Irrelevancies in *Hiroshima Mon Amour*." *The Philosophy of Autobiography*, edited by Christopher Cowley, The U of Chicago P, 2015, pp. 72-95. doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226268088.001.0001.
- Heidegger, Martin, et al. *Being and Time*. Translated by John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson. Blackwell, 1967.
- Hiroshima Mon Amour*. Directed by Alain Resnais, performances by Emmanuelle Riva, Eiji Okada. Argos Films, 1959.
- Kant, Immanuel. *Theoretical Philosophy, 1755-1770*. Cambridge UP, 1992.
- Kristeva, Julia. *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*. Columbia UP, 1989.
- . *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Translated by Leon S. Roudiez, Columbia UP, 1982.
- Lacan, Jacques. *Écrits: A Selection*. Routledge, 2001.
- Mavor, Carol. "'Summer Was Inside the Marble': Marguerite Duras and Alain Resnais's *Hiroshima Mon Amour*." *Photography and Culture*, Taylor and Francis, July 2008. doi.org/10.2752/175145108784861464.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Phenomenology of Perception*. Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962.
- Osman, Khan Touseef. "The Struggle of Memory against Forgetting in Kamila Shamsie's *Salt and Saffron*." *Crossings: A Journal of English Studies*, vol. 11, Sept. 2020, pp. 133-148, doi.org/10.59817/cjes.v11i.54.
- Proust, Marcel. *In Search of Lost Time: Swann's Way, Vol. I*. Edited by D. J. Enright et al., Modern Library, 1992.
- Žižek, Slavoj. *Welcome to the Desert of the Real: Five Essays on September 11 and Related Dates*. Verso, 2002.