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L’Oubli pour mémoire: l’expérience liminaire des non-lieux

By

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Doctor of Philosophy

French

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L’Oubli pour mémoire: l’expérience liminaire des non-lieux

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Advisor: Claire Nouvet, Ph.D.

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Abstract

L’Oubli pour mémoire: l’expérience liminaire des non-lieux

By Souad Kherbi

This dissertation examines the status of non-places in 20th and 21st Century French and Francophone Film and Literature. I use French anthropologist Marc Augé’s concept of “*non-lieu*”/*non-place* initially set in order to describe the inhuman quality of suburban areas, to explore and question films by Chantal Akerman and Jean-Luc Godard, and novels by Hélène Cixous and Kateb Yacine that deeply engage historical backgrounds in an indirect mode. Their spatial constructions often intertwine different temporalities in a single location: Foucault sums this up in his concept of *hétérotopie*, and Benjamin extends it allegorically in his expression of a *crime scene*. They are “non-places” in the sense that they seem at first to be vacant, places from which history has been blanked out. I argue that this very vacancy is the mark of a repression that bears on traumatic histories. I illustrate how each of these authors refuses to give a direct representation of a personal trauma, and create instead “non-places of memory” which allow them to rethink their relationship to history, memory and forgetting. My first chapter focuses on Jean-Luc Godard’s film *Eloge de l’amour* (2001): through its images of 21st century Paris urban landscape, and a narrative that intertwines past traumatic events (such as the Shoah or French Resistance’s inner conflicts) with an intimate questioning about what it means to live *here and now* in a community that keeps erasing parts of its past, I reconsider the debate between Godard and Claude Lanzmann that focused on the status of images and the possibility or not of representing anything at all of an event such as the Shoah. My second chapter on Chantal Akerman’s film *Les Rendez-vous d’Anna* (1978)explores how her images, set in a post-holocaust time, deeply engage historical backgrounds related to the Shoah in an indirect mode. I demonstrate how within the individual psyche and the repressed questions of genealogy and memory, Akerman integrates in her style, particularly through linguistic transference and constrained film framing, the very performativity that has allowed the emergence of feminist theory as a praxis/practice. My third chapter focuses on Algerian writer Kateb Yacine’s novel *Le Polygone étoilé* that describes the fragmented history and memories of a colonized land, North Africa and more specifically Algeria, and its self-estrangement from a violent official history. Emphasizing the arbitrariness and violence of nomination in a colonial context, I argue that the name and the place itself are troubled by what I refer to as a *defective nomination*. I demonstrate how the usage of the geometric notion of polygon allows to re-connect geopolitics, history and literature. My fourth chapter is on Hélène Cixous’ novel *Les Rêveries de la femme sauvage* (2000). I demonstrate how Cixous’ staging of a primary scene of origins in her writing, within the context of her conflicted relationship with French and with an Independent Algeria, encompasses issues of natural and unnatural behavior through the prism of gender difference, that in the end points to the socially constructed nature of sexual identities as much as identities in general.

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