



NUIT ET BROUILLARD (NIGHT AND FOG) is a January, 2018 LVCA dvd donation to the Ligonier Valley Library. Below is a review of that dvd film by Kino Ken.

18 of a possible 20 points

******1/2 of a possible ******

**Poland / Austria 1955 black-and-white and color 31 minutes
Como Films / Argos Films / Cocinor Producers: Anatole Dauman,
Samy Halfon, Philippe Lifchitz**

Key: *indicates outstanding technical achievement or performance

Points:

- Direction: Alain Resnais**
- 1 Editing: Alain Resnais**
- 2 Photography: Ghislain Cloquet, Sacha Vierny**
- 1 Lighting**
- Special Visual Effects: Henry Ferrand**
- 2 Text: Jean Cayrol***
- 2 Research Historical Consultants: Olga Wormser, Henri Michel**
- 2 Music: Hanns Eisler***

2 Sound: Henri Colpi, Jasmine Chasney

2 Narrator: Michel Bouquet*

2 Ambience

2 Insightfulness

18 total points

What Alfred Hitchcock lacked the stomach to edit, Alain Resnais undertook in NUIT ET BROUILLARD, reminding viewers of his short film that horrors of the Holocaust were not necessarily unique. An uninformed public led by nationalist demagogues could in the future commit the same kind of atrocities, possibly even for the same reason. Fear of strangers is deeply embedded in the human psyche.

Taking its title from a Himmler edict of December 7, 1941, this film attempts to tie together past and present in order to, among other goals, remove the mystery of “nacht und nebel” or “night and fog” which surrounded nocturnal arrest and subsequent transport of political and ethnic prisoners from occupied countries to concentration camps in Austria, Poland, and Germany.

Black-and-white documentary footage of Mauthausen, notorious final destination for many of those unfortunates, is juxtaposed with color scenes shot a decade or so later at the same site.

Will contemporary tranquility erase memories of genocidal slaughter practiced there? Not if Resnais and cinematic collaborators can help it.

Auschwitz then and now is also observed. Testaments to its horrific history are revealed through indicting stills and documentary excerpts from material recorded by camp liberators in 1945.

There are no dodges offered about what went on in those places. An ironic commentary scripted by Jean Cayrol, himself a former guest in one of Hitler's internment centers, is narrated by actor Michel Bouquet because Cayrol choked up watching film accompaniment.

Onlookers may draw their own conclusions.

A warehouse of women's shorn hair, fingernail scratches on concrete ceilings of shower rooms where disinfectant serves as code term for lethal gas, enough confiscated shoes to open a factory outlet store – all unforgettable human details left behind by a viciously prejudiced despotism preserved for posterity on celluloid.

A tyranny enjoying support from popularly elected officials in certain unnamed foreign nations. This is clearly evident in a photograph disclosing one member of the local constabulary assisting Nazi officers as they load boxcars of prisoners at a railway station. A particular style of cap betrays this helper's nationality, causing initial protest and threat of censorship when NIGHT AND FOG screened for government overseers.

Filmmakers then relented, cropping some of the controversial identifier. Criterion has restored the original, no doubt embarrassing citizens of a country still wrestling with anti-Semitism in its own population.

Apparently each German camp has its own architectural scheme. Some are intentionally exotic, others simply economical. Private companies frequently design and build these inhospitable structures in return for substantial largesse from various sources. Those include banks, aviation firms, and munition companies. In return, prisoners have the privilege of daily gruel, sunrise roll calls, advanced

experimental surgery, and, if attractively female, regular attendance at a no-star brothel improvised on site.

Promotions to targets for random shootings or lead performances at public hangings are meted out to those judged meriting of special consideration. For the hoi-polloi rabble lingering inside barbed wire what awaits are starvations, sadistic beatings by favored kapos, extermination by disease, or dead-end work details from which few or none are scheduled to return.

Another layer of wordless commentary is supplied by composer Hanns Eisler's music. Being Jewish and Marxist, Eisler had two strong reasons for participating on a film initiated by three producers after a visitation to Paris's Institut Pédagogique National exhibition documenting deportation of Jews from France and daily routines in their detention center destinations. This information comes courtesy of Peter Cowie's essay "Origins and Controversy," part of the Criterion Collection's brochure accompanying its dvd release of NUIT ET BROUILLARD. Eisler waxes melodic and lyrical for passages depicting prison interiors and grounds, becoming more brutally martial during roundup and transportation shots. In other words, when pictures focus on prisoners, he sympathetically softens tones, hardening them whenever German authorities appear.

Each section of narrative is an independent entity, suggesting active immediate reflection on the part of viewers. Cuttings are textual rather than visual. There's no attempt to weld units into a comprehensive whole. The sum of parts adds only to an unimaginable, overwhelming carnage even its chief agents never pictured in early enthusiasms. Numbers are incalculable, miseries so

commonplace as to become normative. It happened once upon a time ... and could do so again.

Neither for squeamish stomachs nor fans of wartime pornography, **NUIT ET BROUILLARD** makes an artistic statement about man's capacity for destruction and endurance. It is completely unfit for watching by children of any age. And an absolutely mandatory illumination experience for adults.

Criterion's dvd release includes as special features a five-minute 1994 audio interview of director-editor Alain Resnais concerning censored scenes, an isolated music track highlighting Hanns Eisler's attention-riveting score, Peter Cowie's brief backgrounders on key crew members, Phillip Lopate's explanation of how the film is designed structurally, Russell Lack's overview of Hanns Eisler's biography and film music philosophy, and a summarizing account of how the short came into existence and its initial reception at home by the aforementioned Mr. Cowie.