EXPLORING THE INTERPLAY OF MEMORY AND POETRY IN RIVE GAUCHE CINEMA: A STUDY OF MURIEL AND HIROSHIMA MON AMOUR

EXPLORANDO A INTERAÇÃO DA MEMÓRIA E DA POESIA NO CINEMA DA RIVE GAUCHE: UM ESTUDO DE MURIEL E HIROSHIMA MON AMOUR

EXPLORANDO LA INTERACCIÓN DE LA MEMORIA Y LA POESÍA EN EL CINE DE LA RIVE GAUCHE: UN ESTUDIO DE MURIEL Y HIROSHIMA MON AMOUR

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ABSTRACT
This article examines the interrelations between memory and poetry, focusing on the films Hiroshima mon amour and Muriel, directed by Alain Resnais. It explores how memory and poetry are intertwined in the narrative and formal construction of these films, using logical principles shared between the two fields. The analysis of fragmentation, invention and associationism present in the cinematic narratives, reveals how memory and poetry influence personal identity and artistic creation. These films serve as outstanding examples of how cinema can explore the depths of human consciousness through the conscious use of memory and poetry.

Keywords: Poetry; cinema; Rive Gauche; Alain Resnais; narrative; fragmentation; invention; association; personal identity.

RESUMO
Este artigo examina as inter-relações entre memória e poesia, focando nos filmes Hiroshima, meu amor e Muriel, dirigidos por Alain Resnais. Ele explora como memória e poesia estão entrelaçadas na narrativa e na construção formal desses filmes, utilizando princípios lógicos compartilhados entre os dois campos. A análise da fragmentação, invenção e associacionismo presentes nas narrativas cinematográficas revela como memória e poesia influenciam a identidade pessoal e a criação artística. Esses filmes servem como exemplos destacados de como o cinema pode explorar as profundezas da consciência humana por meio do uso consciente de memória e poesia.

Palavras-chave: Poesia; cinema; Rive Gauche; Alain Resnais; narrativa; fragmentação; invenção; associação; identidade pessoal.
RESUMEN
Este artículo examina las interrelaciones entre la memoria y la poesía, centrándose en las películas Hiroshima, mi amor y Muriel, dirigidas por Alain Resnais. Explora cómo la memoria y la poesía están entrelazadas en la narrativa y la construcción formal de estas películas, utilizando principios lógicos compartidos entre los dos campos. El análisis de la fragmentación, la invención y el asociacionismo presentes en las narrativas cinematográficas revela cómo la memoria y la poesía influyen en la identidad personal y la creación artística. Estas películas sirven como ejemplos destacados de cómo el cine puede explorar las profundidades de la conciencia humana mediante el uso consciente de la memoria y la poesía.

Palabras clave: Poesía; cine; Rive Gauche; Alain Resnais; narrativa; fragmentación; invención; asociación; identidad personal.

1. Introduction

Memory studies have become increasingly important in recent years. Research, much of it focusing on interdisciplinarity, has shown not only its relevance but also its great topicality in various fields.

Manzanero and Álvarez (2015) talk about the importance of memory in all areas of human life. The memories of our experiences, according to these authors, are what shape us as human beings, what define who we really are and how we behave or relate to others. We are memory and, therefore, so is everything we create.

These intersections between art and memory are especially visible in the field of poetry, where the relationship goes back to its beginnings. In the times of oral societies, poetry needed the art of memory in order to remember the large number of lines that made up poems; in turn, memory needed poetry in order to be fixed and to endure over time. Therefore, it was poets and philosophers who were the first to speak, reflect and theorise about the art of memory.

Writers and poets have not only used their memories and experiences for literary creation, but they have also elaborated texts out of reflection on memory and, most interestingly and the central focus of this study, they have used and experimented with the mechanisms and formal characteristics of memory.

Indeed, human memory not only provides stories and narratives, it is not only a source of thematic inspiration in the artistic field; it is also a rich source of formal elements for creation.

Numerous artists have been aware of and made use of this throughout history, but probably the best example can be found in the avant-garde film movement Rive
Gauche - also called Left Bank Group - which emerged in the 1950s in France.

This avant-garde group was characterised by its experimental approach to film and its connection to literature in various forms, always with a focus on human memory. The artists associated with this movement (Alain Resnais, Agnès Varda, Marguerite Duras and Chris Marker) employed unique and innovative techniques, including fragmented, non-linear structures and a poetic language that permeated both the spoken word and the formal structure. These filmmakers delved into the complexities of the human condition, focusing on war, humanity, death and memory. They explored trauma, life and consciousness, and individual and collective memory.

The unique narrative derived from the connections between memory and poetry allowed the exploration of human thought, remembering and forgetting. This article aims to explore the interrelations between memory and poetry through their logical principles and main characteristics in order to examine the narratives of the films Muriel and Hiroshima mon amour, both directed by Alain Resnais.

Hiroshima mon amour was written by Marguerite Duras and directed by Resnais in 1959. This film is a clear reflection on memory, remembrance and forgetting. It tells the love story (an affair) of a French actress and a Japanese architect who explore, through dialogue, trauma, and the desire and need for memory. Muriel, released four years later, in 1963, focuses on the complexity of human memory in the context of the Algerian war.

Memory appears as a central theme in both films, but also as a model in the construction of the cinematic narrative. Similarly, poetry is not only present in terms of "poetic language" or "poetic images". The principles that govern the functioning of both poetry and memory are present in the formal complexity of the films.

These films, through their fragmented narrative and non-linear structure, reflect the way memories surface and resurface in our minds. This brings us back to the process of memory construction described by cognitive science.

The dynamic interaction between memory and poetry is not a simple aesthetic choice, but a deliberate artistic effort to delve into the depths of human consciousness.

2. Initial Considerations for the Study of Memory-Poetry Relations

As we said before, we do not study memory and poetry as a theme, but as principles that serve to construct the film. We stick to the concept of poetry as
elucidated by Rafael Núñez Ramos: “Poetry is not only the poem, but a form of internal behaviour linked to the word”\(^2\) (RAMOS, 1998, p.11). This type of internal behaviour leads to memory. Moreover, poetry accompanies us in our everyday lives, being of vital importance in both perception and storage processes. The poetic within our brain - the metaphors we use, symbolism, rhythm, imagery... - serves to evoke emotional responses, and again is linked to human memory.

Wordsworth (2005, p.307) says:

> that Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity: the emotion is contemplated till by a species of reaction the tranquillity gradually disappears, and an emotion, similar to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind.

Thus, if we understand poetry as a flow of thoughts and feelings generated in the human mind, we could say that it is directly conditioned by the flow and processes dictated by memory and its functioning.

If the study of memory and the study of poetry as separate fields is difficult in itself, the joint study of their main functions and characteristics can be even more so. Therefore, in this article, we will focus on a small part of this broad field. By studying memory from the perspective of cognitive neuroscience we can demonstrate that there are different logical principles governing the functioning of human memory that can be extrapolated to the study of poetry.

Neuroscience research provides a better understanding of the physiological and neurological mechanisms underlying memory formation, storage and retrieval. It explores how the brain encodes, consolidates and accesses memories, shedding light on the complexities of our cognitive processes.

One of the main difficulties in the study of memory is its difficult definition. Memory is not something tangible, as the brain is. According to Contreras: “memory has no size because it lacks clear limits and boundaries”\(^3\) (MANZANERO Y ÁLVAREZ, 2022, p.19). Manzanero and Álvarez continue: “Memory is a construct that describes the information we have acquired by different means and that serves as a basis for the

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\(^2\) Own translation into English. Original citation: “La poesía no es sólo el poema, sino una forma de comportamiento interno ligado a la palabra”

\(^3\) Own translation into English. Original citation: “La memoria no tiene tamaño, porque carece de límites y fronteras claras”

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regulation of present behaviour and the planning of future behaviour” (MANZANERO AND ÁLVAREZ, 2022, p.26). Due to the complexity and variety of memory functions, and therefore the complexity of its description, in this presentation, we will focus on some of the basic characteristics of the different memory systems and subsystems.

3. Poetry and Memory in Hiroshima mon amour y Muriel

We will now proceed to the analysis of the proposed films and their relation to the above-mentioned films.

One of the main characteristics is fragmentation. Memory has a fragmentary nature that is evident in the main processes: encoding, storage and recall. Due to the limited capacity of human memory, our senses filter out significant amounts of information from the outside world, resulting in the encoding and storage of only a small fraction of our experiences. In addition, forgetting further fragments the memory retrieval system.

Muriel and Hiroshima mon amour present fragmented narratives; the audience witnesses how the characters' past experiences and relationships influence their present actions and emotions. Both films present a fragmented narrative with multiple time jumps, in which past and present are mixed and matched, making them intertwine in a way that can be impossible to fully unravel.

The beginning of Muriel (see Table 1) foreshadows the fragmented narrative of the rest of the film. The initial montage, consisting of quick, disjointed fixed shots, plunges the viewer into the disorientation present throughout the film.

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4 Own translation into English. Original citation: “La memoria es un constructo que describe la información que hemos adquirido por diferentes medios y que sirve de base para la regulación de la conducta presente y la planificación de la conducta futura”
Fragmentation in poetry manifests itself through its structure and rhythm, allowing poets to convey intricate emotions and ideas in fragmented pieces that blend seamlessly into an internal flow. The use of versification plays an important role in achieving this effect. Hiroshima mon amour makes use of the flow of thought derived from the memories and sensations of the two protagonists; it arises from inner poetry; or the inner conduct of which Rafael Núñez spoke. The film is not a poem, but it is poetic and follows the rules of human poetic thought.

The fragmentation of memory entails a process of invention, the next important feature to be explored in the article, at the moment of memory expression. Events, occurrences and experiences are not stored in memory as a complete, linear narrative,
but with time jumps and gaps. Memory stores fragments that must be artificially linked through invention to create a coherent story without gaps of information.

In *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, the actress says: "I lie and I tell the truth" (RESNAIS, 1959), (images 1). All discourse coming from memory is composed of a part of "truth", understood as personal truth derived from the event stored in memory, and a part of "lie", of invention, which corresponds to the filling of the gaps in memory.

![Image 1](source: frames from Hiroshima mon amour (Alain Resnais, 1959))

In reality, he is not saying that he is doing both, but that he is lying and telling the truth at the same time, or perhaps that he does not know whether he is lying or telling the truth. When you talk about the past and "narrate" your memories, you cannot know for sure whether what you are saying is true. Memories change in our minds depending on the present moment, how we feel at that moment, on what has happened between the event and the moment of remembering it. Everything we remember has a part of truth and a part of lie, of invention.

The invention that derives from the fragmentary nature of the mind, in turn, derives from the dynamism present in the processes of human memory: "Memory is not passive" (RADVANSKY, 2017, p.23). Due to the loss of information that is suffered in the different processes involving memory (encoding, storage, and retrieval), it is required that people "re-create the missing pieces of a memory, using a constructive process" (RADVANSKY, 2017, p.23). This process leads to an "active manipulation of information" which derives from the fragmentary nature of memory and the information that is stored (RADVANSKY, 2017, p.23).

Poets, masters of language and emotions, shape the continuity of ideas and
feelings through structure, rhythm, and words. This dynamic flows in individual poems and complete collections, reflecting the evolution of human thinking. The ability to adapt to changing experiences makes poetry an eternal and moving art form.

Aristotle, one of the most important Greek philosophers who studied memory and recollection, expounded another fundamental characteristic: "three laws of association: similarity, contrast and contiguity. That is, memory associations provide links to ideas that are similar in nature" (RADVANSKY, 2017, p.26). Another essential feature to take into account is associationism, which postulates that memories consist mainly of interconnected simple concepts or ideas (RADVANSKY, 2017). Poetry is the art of associationism: while using metaphors, imagery, and symbolism, and also, using the associationism poets can connect ideas, emotions and feelings, creating a strong force between language and human experience.

Muriel and Hiroshima mon amour demonstrate a strong impact of memory and associationism on personal identity. Both films illustrate how memory and associationism have a profound effect on personal identity. The characters' past actions and choices continue to influence their lives and highlight the perpetual impact of memory associations.

This motif illuminates the interconnection between past experiences and our present and future, similar to how associations shape our memories, as evidenced in Hiroshima mon amour where "the association of the position of one hand in the present with another in the past is the channel that introduces the memory of an unhealed wound"5 (ZÁRATE, 2022, p.187), as can be seen in the following two frames taken from the film (Images 2).

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5 Own translation into English. Original citation: “La asociación de la posición de una mano en el presente con otra en el pasado es el canal que introduce el recuerdo de una herida sin cicatrizar”
4. Conclusions

Alain Resnais was a remarkable figure in French cinema, known for his distinct and meticulously constructed narratives, which always rested on a solid foundation. His interest in themes such as memory, the aftermath of war and the individual psyche earned him the title of “filmmaker of memory” from many critics.

Throughout his work, war serves as a trauma of the past that activates the mechanism of memory modifies the present and shapes the future of his characters. The author establishes a comparison between the present, where visible wounds are evident, and the past, when terrible atrocities were committed by human beings (BARRUECO, 2022).

Detailed analysis of the films, Hiroshima mon amour and Muriel, directed by Alain Resnais, reveals the richness of the interrelations between memory and poetry in the cinematic context. These films not only serve as masterpieces of French avant-garde cinema but also vividly illustrate how memory and poetry are intrinsically intertwined in narrative and formal construction.

First, fragmentation emerges as a fundamental characteristic of both human memory and poetry. The fragmentary nature of memory manifests itself in the processes of encoding, storage and recall, while in poetry it is reflected through structure and rhythm. In Resnais’ films, this fragmentation is translated into non-linear narratives and time jumps, reflecting the complexity of human experience and the way memories are interwoven in our minds.

Moreover, invention plays a crucial role in the construction of memory and poetry. Memories are not stored as linear narratives but are actively reconstructed as
we remember, filling in gaps and creating a coherent narrative. In Resnais' films, this manifests itself in the mixture of truth and fiction in the characters’ accounts, reflecting the dynamic and subjective nature of memory.

On the other hand, associationism emerges as a shared principle between memory and poetry. In both the human mind and poetry, associations between ideas, emotions and experiences are fundamental to the construction of meaning and personal identity. In Resnais' films, these associations are explored through images and metaphors that connect the characters' past and present, revealing the persistence of past experiences in the present life.

In short, the films Hiroshima mon amour and Muriel offer a profound and moving exploration of the interrelationships between memory and poetry. Through their innovative approach and their conscious use of formal and logical principles shared between the two fields, these films demonstrate the power of cinema to capture the complexity of human consciousness and explore the depths of human experience.

The characteristics outlined in this study, which are not the only indicators of these intimate connections, are closely interconnected: fragmentation leads to invention and associationism, which in turn leads to dynamism. The characteristics seem fused, inseparable, like the scenes in Hiroshima mon amour that are linked by fades one after the other.

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