

THESE HAUNTING STRAINS

Nora Alter –I was preparing for class one day and I was watching *Night and Fog*... And I remember thinking: wait a minute, I've heard that music before! And I tried to think, where is that music, and then suddenly, I had it, and that it was in *Loin du Vietnam*... But I was convinced that Marker had something to do with that. And I was also curious, well, how does this piece of music work? And so then I actually was investigating every time you heard these haunting strains of Eisler's music in *Nuit et Brouillard*, and when did they come up in *Loin du Vietnam*. And it was interesting because one of the first instances at the end of Part One of *Loin du Vietnam*, there's a sequence where the North Vietnamese are rebuilding a destroyed hamlet, and there's a voice over of Ho Chi Minh who says: Victory remains the only path, and then suddenly you have Eisler's haunting strains which come across in that instance of being very triumphant... And I was struck, because here you have the North Vietnamese and they're building and they're building and they're building, and to the same notes, versus in *Nuit et Brouillard*, where those are the same notes that are played in the sequences where he is inside the, actual gas chambers... So I was really struck by what was going on, how one piece of music could be mobilized in different ways... And then I started to investigate the Eisler soundtrack and it was under Hanns Eisler's *Werke Orchestra II* ! And I realized, well this was a whole libretto, to an operato or a play by Johannes Becher... And I remember thinking well, that's... bizarre... I mean, I wonder if Resnais and Marker knew about this. In the play, there's a young German soldier who says: no, I'm not going to fight, and he puts down his arms and he's of course killed on the battle-field by his fellow Germans, precisely for resisting, but he resists! And at that moment, that's when you have that one recognizable score of Eisler that is then repeated in *Nuit et Brouillard*, and again repeated in *Loin du Vietnam*... So then, when I was rewinding *Loin du Vietnam*, I realized that the music also is played during an interview with the widow of Norman Morrison. *Le 2 novembre 1965, Norman Morrison, quaker de Baltimore, s'est donné la mort devant le Pentagone, la citadelle de l'état-major américain, en mettant le feu à ses vêtements imprégnés d'essence*... So again, this idea of sacrifice, of drawing attention to the fact that wars are not just, and as an individual, you always have the power to say no and to resist... And then I went to the very end of *Nuit et Brouillard*, "we who pretend to believe... *Nous qui feignons de croire que tout cela est d'un seul temps et d'un seul pays, et qui ne pensons pas à regarder autour de nous et qui n'entendons pas qu'on crie sans fin*. And the continuation of the cries, gets echoed, I would say, through the continuation of Eisler's composition and the way Marker, Resnais and others have used it to continue to say: It's still going on.

04min 02sec