



Je t'aime Je t'aime

Director: Alain Resnais

Production Companies: Parc Film, Fox Europa

Producer: Mag Bodard

Unit Production Manager: Michel Choquet

Unit Managers: René Pascal, Jean-Jacques Lecot

Production Manager: Philippe Dussart

Production Accountant: Jean-Marc Garrouste

Production Secretary: Giselle Moreau

Assistant Director: Florence Malraux

2nd Assistant Director: Jean Lefèvre

Script Supervisor: Sylvette Baudrot

Screenplay: Jacques Sternberg

Adaptation/Dialogue: Alain Resnais,

Jacques Sternberg

Director of Photography: Jean Boffety

Camera Assistants: Patrice Wyers,

Guy Lecouvette, Jean Tasso

Gaffer: Pierre Cornier

Key Grip: André Thierry

Stills Photography: Jürgen Vollmer

Editors: Albert Jurgenson, Colette Leloup

Assistant Editor: Ziva Postec

Art Director: Jacques Dugied

Art Director of Sphere: Auguste Pace

Set Decorator: Éric Simon

Floor Properties: Jean Brunet

Furniture Properties: Guy Auge

Wardrobe: Odette Le Barbenchon

Make-up: Alexandre Marcus

Music: Krzysztof Penderecki

Additional Music: Jean-Claude Pelletier,

Jean Dandeny

Choir: Musici Cantanti di Varsavia

Sound: Antoine Bonfanti

Boom Operator: Michel Desrois

Mixer: Jean Nény

Post-synchronization: Jacques Lévy

Sound Effects: Daniel Couteau

Publicity: Nicole Loustalot

Cast:

Claude Rich (*Claude Ridder*)

Olga Georges-Picot (*Catrine*)

Anouk Ferjac (*Wiana Lust*)

Georges Jamin (*Dr Delavoix, clinical surgeon*)

Van Doude (*Jan Rouffer*)

Dominique Rozan (*Dr Haesaerts*)

Ray Verhaege (*Paul Goofers, technician A*)

Yves Kerboul (*Antoine Kammers*)

Vania Vilers (*Jacques Rhuys*)

Pierre Barbaud (*Georges Levino, technician B*)

Alain Macmoy (*André Moyëns*)

Bernard Fresson (*Bernard Hannecart*)

Irène Tunc (*Marcelle Hannecart*)

Yvette Etiévant (*Germaine Coster*)

Annie Fargue (*Agnès de Smet*)

Marie-Blanche Vergne (*Marie-Noire Demoon*)

Carla Marlier (*Christine Yseux*)

Annie Bertin (*Hélène Wiertz, young mother*)

Alain Robbe-Grillet (*Hughes Mechelynck*)

Catherine Robbe-Grillet (*Maryse de Neter*)

Jean Michaud (*Pierre van Heerswingels*)

Alan Adair (*Glasgow inspector 1*)

Ian Macgregor (*Glasgow inspector 2*)

Hélène Callot (*Odile Piquet, nurse*)

Gérard Lorin (*Guy Puyaubert*)

Jean-Louis Richard (*Pierre Vandel Heuvel*)

Jacques Doniol-Valcroze (*Francis Devos, editor*)

François Régis-Bastide (*Hubert Brun*)

Jean-Claude Romer (*party guest*)

Francis Lacassin (*ad man*)

Bernard Valdeneige (*Claude Loërs, ad man*)

Jean Martin (*Henri Troots, ad man*)

DESTINATION TIME TRAVEL: PLAYING WITH TIME IN FILM AND TV

Je t'aime Je t'aime

SPOILER WARNING The following notes give away some of the plot.

For Alain Resnais there is a place but not necessarily a time, for everything. There are often several times. A man's stored experience is like a high walled garden fretted with innumerable doors, and apertures of every shape set at different heights; some are easy of access, others require large efforts to reach and reward the owner of the garden sometimes with views which appear exactly the same as others, sometimes with a lying perspective, and occasionally with no more than the door or aperture itself. The owner may be pacing within the garden, speculating about turns in its paths and the state of the plants, too engrossed to notice that he has passed his own corpse lying at his feet. *Je t'aime Je t'aime* shows us Resnais' preoccupation with the charms and terrors of time at its most exciting, confident and beguiling.

Claude Ridder, a young man just released from hospital in Brussels after a suicide attempt, is waylaid by a couple of quietly dressed men who ask him if he will accompany them to Crespel, a clinic in the countryside where they would be grateful to him if he will co-operate in an experiment. He complies almost as if he had expected such an invitation; and as the party drives through the suburbs and into the country, accompanied on the soundtrack by an elegiac electronic wail, Ridder asks if his stewards will do something extraordinary – like turning the Mercedes in which they are driving into a pumpkin.

The themes and style of *Je t'aime Je t'aime* are established early. The discreet and serious scientists who walk the lawns at Crespel explain to Ridder that they are working on time and their investigations are as yet at an early, even a primitive stage. He is shown a mouse, a pioneer who has travelled back one year in time; it is for just this journey that Ridder will be the first human guinea pig. He is laconic and yet alert to the care with which he has been selected: he is a man with no useful future. Yes, the scientists agree there might be some danger in the experiment, but, they insist, they are not after anything spectacular. He will only be on a short trip, he will be drugged, he will return in four minutes. 'It may seem uninteresting,' they say apologetically.

These sober, chronologically designed opening scenes in which Ridder is briefed, tested and drugged establish an atmosphere of seemingly impeccable scientific investigation. It is only when Ridder is shown into the chamber which contains the time machine, and exclaims that he had expected a laboratory, that elements of menace and fancy lurch into view. Connected by naked cables to a number of serviceable but unsophisticated data-reading desks is a gigantic pumpkin, crowned with a stubble of pipes like drinking straws.

The rest of the film describes Ridder's adventures inside this soft machine. In a series of brief, perfectly timed and seemingly arbitrary scenes we witness the hesitant and painful gropings in time for the moment one year ago which the scientists have appointed as Ridder's time-goal. He is swimming, masked head under water, in the Mediterranean. He is floating between the elements of air and water, just as he is between the present in his time-machine and the multiple pasts which constellate round the banal moment he has been asked to regain in his past. The audience is made aware of the precarious and makeshift quality of the experiment by observing the struggles of Ridder to be

Georges Walter (*André Symons, ad man*)
René Bazart
(*Jean de Calwaers, magazine employee*)
Billy Fasbender (*2nd employee*)
Jean Perre (*Frédéric Poëls*)
Sylvain Dhomme (*Louis Lambert*)
Ben Danou (*Dr Uyttenhoef*)
Pierre Motte (*Edward Monnot*)
Michèle Blondel (*Hélène Mankels, secretary*)
M. Floquet (*Mr Grabet*)
Claire Duhamel (*Jane Swolfs, Ridder's secretary*)
Guilène Péan (*Bernadette Bellemans*)
Alain Tercinet
Michel Choquet
Jorge Semprún
France 1968
91 mins
Digital

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obedient to the dictates of the drug, the machine and the watching scientists. It becomes clear as he blinks and stares at his past progress that Ridder is a more formidable man than we may have guessed – we see him speculate wittily upon philosophical questions with his girl friends, we see him at one moment as a younger man refusing to take promotion in the printing firm where he works, at another as a well dressed executive interviewing Catrine, the girl he falls in love with, charmed by her own indifference to getting a job. Every image, including those which we may take to be dreams, becomes a metaphor of struggle; a struggle against passivity, against embracing death.

'I love confusion, disorder...' Ridder announces provocatively at one moment. Only in the ironic contemplation of disorder can he enjoy a sense of life. It is a signal success of Resnais' film and Claude Rich's performance that Ridder is a richly individual and charming character. He is aware of the absurdity both of his past life, with its hesitant speculations, and of his present condition, accompanied only by a caged mouse in a comic simulacrum of the human brain. Whether or not he murdered Catrine in a Glasgow boarding house, how he tried to kill himself and why he failed, are shown to be little more than pedantic obsessions in *Je t'aime Je t'aime*: the soft machine face of the chaotic comedy of his consciousness. The 'blocks' to the moment assigned to him by the scientists are a densely woven, arbitrary pattern of desires, dreams, dream-tellings and useless seconds. He is by a tram stop repeatedly; he goes out of the Glasgow room again and again, meeting, or on the edge of meeting, someone different each time. He tells a man in a train about seducing a girl in a bathroom, and later we see this scene; clearly it is a fantasy. His brain is a teasing and cumbersome contraption; it is subject to every form of evasion and inefficiency, like the whole scientific operation in which he is involved.

Where *Marienbad* and *Muriel* were meditations, *Je t'aime Je t'aime* is an investigation. In the earlier films the incongruities of memory were bathed in poetry; the new film wins its marvellous effects of realism by its editing. There is not a mix or a dissolve in the whole picture and only rarely does the camera move within a shot. The filming of the experiment is broken into sharp, separated instances, few of them lasting two minutes, many of them less than five seconds. The result is that after the leisurely opening scenes there are no sequences in the customary cinematic sense of the word – and none of them reflect the style we associate with Resnais in the past, his camera prowling and staring, in constant movement, at creatures immersed in time. Instead, from the first moment that Ridder disappears from his bed in the time machine to the final frozen frame of his mouse companion coming up for air, we follow the cataract of consciousness in what seems like a single, infinitely fragmented moment of urgency. When Ridder finally regains a moment in his past it is not the one assigned to him, but the most significant of all, his own attempted suicide with a revolver. Immediately following are three shots of his dying body lying in various parts of the grounds at Crespel. He has been projected into death.

Julian Jebb, *Sight and Sound*, Summer 1971