Editor's Letter The Marker File

Chris Marker is movie history's most incompletely understood major artist—at least from an English-language perspective. He is rightly venerated among cinephiles for a handful of films and videos, most notably his 1962 science-fiction short, *La Jetée*; his epic, years-in-the-making history of militant/revolutionary struggle, *A Grin Without a Cat*; his 1982 global meditation on memory, *Sans soleil*; and his 1993 elegy for the lost utopian dream of Soviet Russia and its cinema, *The Last Bolshevik*. And yet this list represents just a fraction of Marker's output over the past 50 years.

Much of his work is no longer in circulation, and the rest remains little more than a rumor. At the same time, the personality cult surrounding Marker is fueled by the man's carefully maintained invisibility. This desire for anonymity may be a matter of shyness, but, as you will see, it also has a political dimension.

It's been one of this magazine's long-standing ambitions to publish a thorough examination of Marker's oeuvre, and so last year we began planning a special package of articles. London-based FILM COMMENT regular Chris Darke put us in touch with several Marker scholars in the U.K., while a number of our U.S. contributors quickly signed on. And then Sam DiIorio and Michael Chaiken (who shipped us his irreplaceable collection of rare Marker videotapes without hesitation) came out of the woodwork. Before we knew it, there was more material than we could possibly fit into one issue, including a rare interview with the man himself (Marker Talks!). Hence this issue's 20-page midsection, "Around the World with Chris Marker," is Part I of a two-part package (Part II will appear in the July-August FILM COMMENT).

Those of you who aren't Marker fans may admittedly have cause to grumble. But here's an astounding fact: in its near 40-year existence, nothing had appeared in this magazine's pages about Marker or any of his films until Paul Arthur's appreciation of *A Grin Without a Cat* in our May-June 2002 issue—even though the Fall 1963 issue featured Marker's *Le Joli mai* on its cover!

One final note: In June, Joanne Koch, the Executive Vice President of the Film Society of Lincoln Center, steps down as publisher of FILM COMMENT. Instrumental in the Film Society's acquisition of the magazine, she has been its publisher since 1974. She will now take on a new mission involving the Walter Reade Theater's expansion and redevelopment. Through thick and thin, Joanne has always been this magazine's staunchest supporter; as publisher, she has been everything an editor could hope for—encouraging, opinionated, energetic, respectful of editorial autonomy, unafraid of courting controversy. She played a central, vital role in making FILM COMMENT what it is today, and we all owe her a debt of gratitude. (And she's a big Marker fan, by the way.)

Gavin Smith
Editor

On the cover: Renée Zellweger in *Down With Love*

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Film Society of Lincoln Center

AROUND THE WORLD WITH *Chris Marker*

PART I
LOST HORIZONS

The Invisible Man

The crowd looks up: *A Grin Without a Cat*

Who is Chris Marker? Better to ask "How many Chris Markers have there been?" Ever since the name Chris. Marker (that *dot* patiently waiting for its *com*) first appeared in the late Forties, the man born Christian François Bouche-Villeneuve has developed into what Howard Hampton describes in the following pages as "the most unclassifiable of directors." Moving back and forth between book and film, word and image, past and present, here and there, Marker is an ever-evolving hybrid. That identity-concealing dot was left off some time ago as Marker became cinema's consummate diversifier: world traveler, film essayist, writer, photographer, politically engaged internationalist.

NEXT ISSUE:
J. Hoberman on Description of a Struggle, Min Lee on Marker's post-May '68 collaborations with SLON, Paul Arthur on the filmmaker's relationship with Soviet Cinema, Olaf Möller on Marker and Japan, Kent Jones's look at Marker's CD-ROM Immemory, André Bazin's seminal essay on Marker's Letter from Siberia translated for the first time, Sam Dilorio and Michael Chaiken on Marker's writings, and a definitive, fully annotated biblio-filmography.

Why "unclassifiable"? Partly because of the multifaceted (and, it has to be said, mostly invisible) nature of the work itself but also because Marker's achievement has been to make himself pretty much invisible, too. No mean feat, given the cult of personality that still dominates cinema. But it's been a lifetime's work, this Cheshire Cat–like vanishing act, this reverse-engineering of an absence. Modesty, or a kind of inverse narcissism? In truth, they matter little, the motives for his self-removal to the status of a recurring footnote, his multiplication of surrogates and heteronyms (Marker, Krasna, Yameneko, etc.). As a tactical ploy in the wider strategy of keeping moving, evolving, and producing, it's been the work that has mattered most, and his vanishing act has had the beneficial side effect of making the voice, the personality, reside entirely in the work. The Marker non-persona of "The Man Who Was (and Wasn't) There," the Parisian Oz, would have been just a great gag had the films not been quite so unforgettable and behind which, the suspicion grew, there may have been some kind of real wizardry at work.

There have been times when Marker's renown has been little more than a cinephile's whisper, a rumored sighting of a face said to exist in only a couple of photographic images. But steadily, the whispers have grown in volume, and ciné-kids find themselves discoursing enthusiastically with movie elders about that black pearl at the heart of cinema's crown jewels, *La Jetée*. Or, about the "spirals of time" that have encircled them, one generation after the next, in *Sans soleil*. It seems to me, and evidently to all the other writers in this two-part dossier, that the whispers have now reached such a pitch that the question "Who is Chris Marker?" may well be worth posing anew.

So, what do we know about Marker? That he was born in Paris—or Ulan Bator—in 1921. That he was a published writer in his mid-twenties, producing a novel, a critical essay on the playwright Jean Giraudoux, and a number of collaborative "montage texts" incorporating words and images, as well as regular contributions to the publications *Esprit* and *Cahiers du cinéma*. That he was a socially engaged leftist whose travels would take him to China, the USSR, Korea, Cuba, Israel, Japan, and many points in between. That he was a collaborator with other filmmakers, notably Alain Resnais, before he began making his own films and that, in the 50-plus years since his first feature, *Olympia 52* (52), his output has included films of varying lengths for the cinema, documentaries for TV, collective films, written commentaries for other filmmakers, and multimedia and video work.

It's tempting to reduce the great diversity of Marker's output to a checklist of flat thematics: time and memory, word and image, struggle and liberty, etc. Better to let this dossier's contributors guide you through the Marker labyrinth and to proceed by indirection, taking the detours offered through their chosen approaches. In some cases these take the form of explorations of specific films (*Le Joli mai*; Marker's most recent work, *Remembrance of Things to Come*; his films of the late Fifties and early Sixties). Elsewhere, the approach is thematic (Howard Hampton's overview of the Marker "memory zone" and Catherine Lupton on his ever-changing relationship with technology) or geographic (Olaf Möller on the filmmaker's lifelong relationship with Japan in Part II).

To paraphrase the man himself commenting on Japan: "If you want to get to know Marker you can as well invent him."—CHRIS DARKE

Remembrance of Revolutions Past

CHRIS MARKER'S ANATOMIES OF MELANCHOLY. BY HOWARD HAMPTON

Defining qualities of the peripheral visionary: obliquity, modesty, thoughtfulness, humor, critical engagement, a retrospective appreciation of experience. His peripatetic, zigzag mind travels on (what else?) cat feet, sidling through crowds of refugee-like images. Melting-plot specters come from everywhere—Moscow, Tokyo, Paris, Havana, Okinawa, Cape Verde, *Vertigo*'s San Francisco, Tarkovsky's *Solaris*, cyberspace, Ouija boards. (I keep forgetting: Is *La Jetée* the archaic prequel to *12 Monkeys* or the science-fiction sequel to *Laura*?) These shadow couriers carry nomadic geographies with them, imprinted like tattoos: "the map becomes the territory," inscribing the precise latitudes and longitudes of unspoken lives, hidden contradictions, telltale traces. A calm, measured voice makes itself heard above the white noise of wars, political savagery, imploded revolutions. It draws us in with the confidential, clandestine tone of a tiny ad slipped into the *Pravda* personals: lucid alertness seeks like-minded companionship, with eye toward escaping global nightmare of kamikaze ideologies, DOA utopias, domination by consumption.

Throughout a serpentine journey into—and out of—the past, Chris Marker has been the most unclassifiable of directors: a whimsical-mystical-dialectical link between Zen and Marx? A Zone poet stalking the inner life of history? Nature documentarian tracking that most elusive of endangered species—subjectivity? Is Marker the late, semi-lamented 20th century's most pitiless coroner, or its last partisan? His body of work meets us on its own heretical terms, less a series of discrete motion pictures than so many passionately sketched-out chapters. Call each a "Convolute," using Walter Benjamin's nomenclature and the OED's definition: "Rolled longitudinally upon itself, as a leaf in the bud." One by one, piece by piece, adding up to a single, lifelong quest memorializing the dreamlife of an epoch that vanished before his eyes. Marker's conversational, ever-evolving cinematic hybrids (newsreel/fiction, *La Jetée*'s stills-on-film, the gradual embrace of video's casual plasticity) always seem to be moving in several directions at once, full-circling back to the same eternal preoccupation—our times as they, and we, have seemingly passed into the dustbin of history.

One Day in the Life of Andrei Arsenevich (00), his tender, elemental panegyric to Tarkovsky, supplies a thumbnail sketch of Marker's own aesthetic: "...Andrei was raising an imaginary house, a unique house where all the rooms open onto one another, and all lead to the same corridor...." His work could be considered the cinematic equivalent of Benjamin's sprawling, saturnine notebooks for his unfinished, literally interminable *Arcades Project*—but transposed to a world where the video arcade and Internet has replaced the 19th century's cathedral-like proto-shopping-malls and flaneur-haunts. Thus the peculiar feeling of stately yet frazzled simultaneity in *La Jetée* (62), *Sans soleil* (82), and *Level Five* (97), that dual forward/backward-looking quality, the anticipatory and the retrospective scrambled together in an overlapping, boundary-blurring way that feels so like what reality has become. As much painstaking editor as auteur (as if the world were a library of outtakes and lost negatives waiting to be found and restored to life), he has narrators deliver these digressive, intuitive-leaping collages of quotations and ruminations as if they were letters read aloud to absent or deceased friends (Tarkovsky, Alexander Medvedkin, you or me). Missives composed of so many types of footage that are then sent gently pinballing back into the world, in a language that's as public as a political demonstration, reclusive as a secret life, and intimate as a love song.

For instance, "Only Love Can Break Your Heart"—except that Marker substitutes History as the source of all doomed

Fidel Castro in *Grin*

ardor. It's the sultry air-raid siren seducing and abandoning generations of the unwary and unrequited: as Lenin might have said, you can't make a revolution without breaking a few hearts, not to mention wills. (Stalin expedited the process: a bullet through the head was a quicker way

of telegraphing the message.) *A Grin Without a Cat* (77) may be Marker's most thorough, systematic exploration of "the tricks that history plays" on us, but *The Last Bolshevik* (93) traverses a landscape of ashes from a steeper, more closely observed angle. Instead of the downward Sixties arc of intoxicated idealism and clenched-fist solidarity-in-upheaval, it follows the crushed aspirations of a generation of Soviet dreamers, bridegrooms left waiting at the revolution's altar, or casually sacrificed upon it. Where *La Jetée* covers "the vertigo of time," it also evokes the physical space of history—its gaps and apertures—as well as an entity you can touch, taste, pursue, desire. Yet where there's desire, loss is sure to follow: the memory of impending death already present within the moment of deepest bliss.

Consciousness is not a theme or a trope in this work—it's the un-rarefied air his films breathe, even if they sometimes must don gas masks to wade through the stench of decomposing lies.

In the case of *A Grin Without a Cat* and its companions, it isn't the death of the corporeal body Marker is so much concerned with (though he makes beautiful funeral music for Medvedkin, Tarkovsky, Ché Guevara, and others), but the death of hope—that chimera of a better, more just, Cheshire-smile of a world in the offing that was to be strangled by bureaucrats, zealots, cultural conformists, media overload, spiritual exhaustion, insensate venality, apathy. His ceaseless recontextualizing and repositioning of images is a way of reading—and writing—between their lines: reediting a clip from Tarkovsky's 1956 student film adaptation of Hemingway's *The Killers*, Marker turns its pair of overcoated baby-faced assassins into stand-ins for all the secret policemen who would serve as the century's exterminators. Cut to Andrei Arsenevich himself, making a portrait-of-the-artist-as-a-young-man walk-on in the black-and-white production. He has an incongruously jaunty tune on his lips, which Marker's narrator identifies, with graveyard irony that transcends itself, as "Lullaby of Birdland"—the kind of freeze-framing moment that occurs so often in Marker, where a perfectly mundane fact/observation/punchline becomes supercharged with crosscurrents of "melancholy and dazzlement," a droll little aside impregnated with tragic awareness. Here is the unmistakable euphoric-forlorn tinge of Marker's sensibility, those plucky, tactile Django-Vertov chords of thought, "things that quicken the heart" as well as rend it.

Other notes struck on the same fretboard: "It was a time of bitterness and madness from which some people would never emerge." "The battle was lost in advance.... The purpose was to fix the aftermath." "They opened the door and he vanished." "Capsizing in a world of signs." "Voyeurizing the voyeurs." "The Marienbad game." "Pick your mask."

Parallels may be drawn with an indelible Marker to Godard's archly aphoristic *Histoire* lessons, as well as philosopher-cum-antifilmmaker Guy Debord's cinematic negations: lines of influence, overlap, coincidental-or-not similarities. But what *The Last Bolshevik* demonstrates through its poignant saber-wit is what is missing from Godard and Debord—the tricky integration of the aesthetic, the historic, and the personal. Godard knee-jerks the aesthetic above other considerations, while Debord sought to dissolve cinema like clearing away so much rubbishy smoke-and-mirrors (even as he bathed his own legend in a romantic-nihilist Harry Lime light). Marker's self-effacement contrasts with the former's cosmic self-regard (the singular devotion to propagating his aura of significance—"Isn't that so, Mr. Godard?") and the latter's imperious misanthropy (the would-be revolutionary with an Abel Gance–size Napoleonic complex, whose Situationist movement boasted more excommunicated members than ones in good standing). *The Last Bolshevik* is committed to both allusive density and plain speaking, to the multi-layered, many-faceted, and polyphonic, the superimposed frame within the frame and the abstract picture-in-picture, giving history's witnesses enough breathing space to have their say. Marker believes in listening, in looking closely (at faces, montages, concepts), in linking generalizations to the paradoxes of the particular, and in questioning the virginal certainty behind so many assumptions of innocence. (Time and again, he shows the most effective obstacles against last century's struggles for liberation coming from within, in those authoritarian-totalitarian impulses that hitched their hunger for power to utopian visions). Debord and Godard present unified narcissistic fronts, a more didactic mode of address: the solemn voice of artistic or theoretical authority tossing its elegant pearls before swine.

Marker will end *The Last Bolshevik* with a mournful, knock-knock non sequitur of a joke: "I know what you would call these men," it says of the final remnants of Soviet cinema's long departed heroic era—"Dinosaurs." A get-out-your-hankerchiefs pause. "But you know what happened to dinosaurs"—only instead of tar pits we get a shot of a smiling little girl cradling an inflatable Godzilla in her arms—"Kids love 'em." The absurd, footloose-in-quicksand spirit of Medvedkin's *Happiness* returns here, as a strange buoyancy amid the Soviet Union's collapse: the end of the line for a long-abandoned train, the tricks history plays coming home to roost. There's no either/or in Marker, no split-level sacred/profane segregation: even in the agonized ecstasies of Tarkovsky, he uncovers a latent amusement, the existential ironies perched above the deader-than-deadpan zone between holiness and nothingness.

Animals have a special, folk-allegoric place in his heart: the real and pantomime horses out of Medvedkin, the lone wolves being hunted by helicopter in the last frames of *A Grin Without a Cat*. And naturally, those cryptic cats themselves, a favorite Marker motif: the cat temple in *Sans soleil*, the eerily dignified parade footage of medieval-costumed, papier-mâché-masked cat-people that turns up in *Grin* ("The cat is never on the side of power"). Emblems of watchfulness, patience, self-possession, they are Marker's good-luck charms, warding off the herd instincts nurtured by mushrooming cults of personality, rent-a-martyrs, information officers, televised unreality, Internet gamesmanship, and all the other pressing distractions that loom in our waking and dreaming minds like the kitschy, mocking Japanese blowup-doll of Munch's *The Scream* that flashes before us in *Level Five*.

Of course, I have one sitting in the corner of my living room, too—a *Scream* someone gave me as a fond token of a shared history, though the Red Army cap she got from a souvenir stand in Tiananmen Square keeps falling off the poor thing's head. It, too, is a dinosaur of sorts, and, à la the one Marker's girl grasps like a teddy bear, if you look at it from a certain perspective, you can just about see "the black hole" of history condensed in its silent banshee mouth. (That "O" is also the spyglass-telescope shape he loves to insert in the frame: zeroing in, as it were.) "So this is the summing up," a Marker narrator would say: a cheap novelty item to show how much meaning can be emptied out of the world in a wave of indifferent mass production. Yet the same inanimate thing may also be filled with personalized meanings, made a beacon for the future, a repository of memory, or a piñata whose illusions are ripe for the bursting. Consciousness is not a theme or a trope in this work—it's the un-rarefied air his films breathe, even if they sometimes must don gas masks to wade through the stench of decomposing lies.

With Marker, the same motion that weaves layers of evocation also peels them back; homing in on the beauty of images, he also interrogates them endlessly. Add one other ineffable quality to this metaphysical-materialist penumbra: the fact that his films are so little circulated, so hard to track down, always something of a chance encounter. Is Marker then the greatest living film director (even though he doesn't make "films" exactly, or quite "direct" them in the conventional sense of the term)? I would answer that his work, though uneven by its very exploratory, feeling-its-way-under-the-skin nature, equals the objects of his ardor: *Vertigo*, Medvedkin's *Happiness*, Tarkovsky's *The Mirror*. Only not in turn, but all at once, and more as well. There's a headstrong overabundance of tangents, impressions, sensations, and ideas here that goes against any smooth grain of shrink-wrapped, boxed-in, edifying perfection. This is the signature of cinema's last dissident, like a rugged Malevich cross found in an ancient Rublev painting, the future already present in the past and vice versa, the bittersweet lullaby of "negative signs of life."

In other words, the Marker touch.

Howard Hampton resides in that suburb of the Zone known as the Mojave Desert.

***A Grin Without a Cat* x 4**

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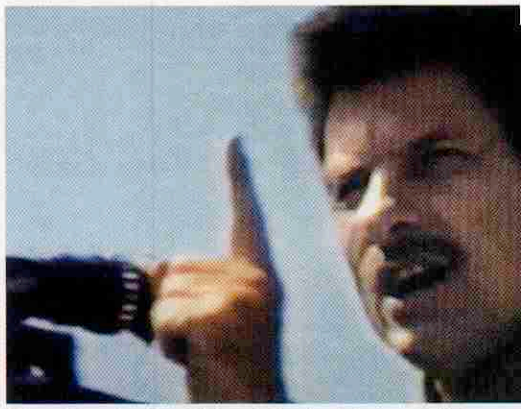
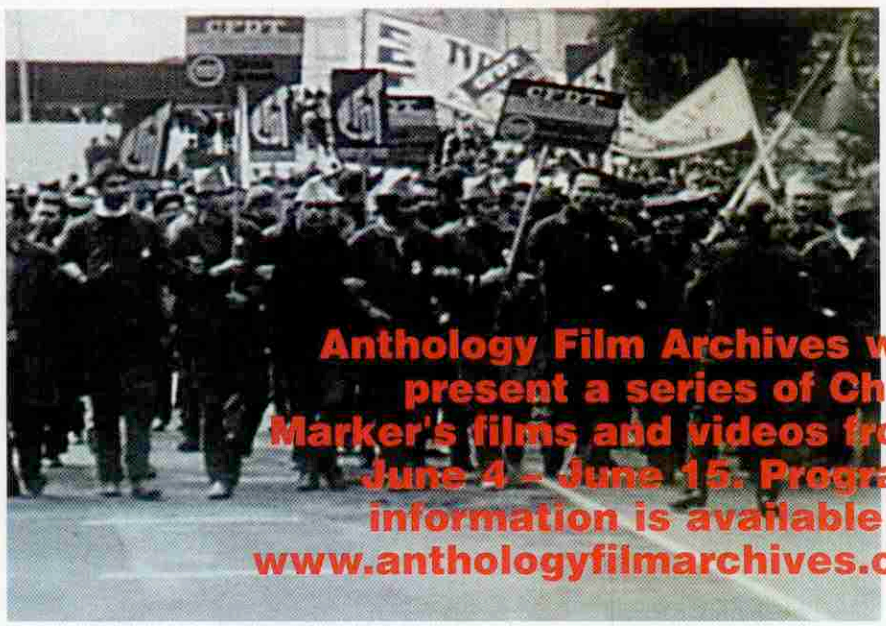


One Day in the Life of Andrei Arsenevich



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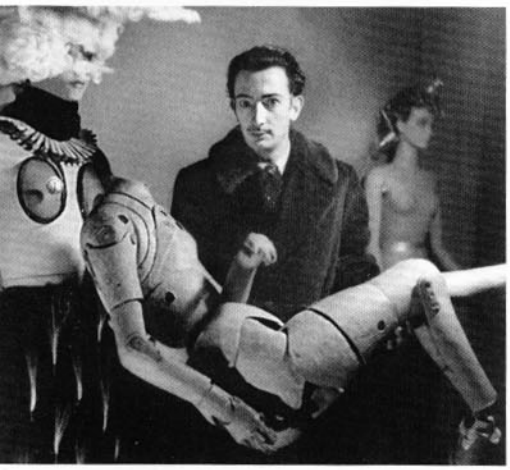
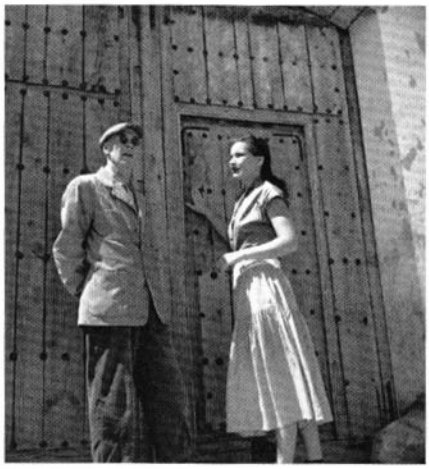
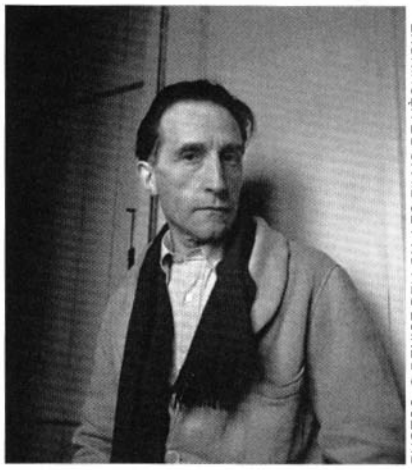
***The Last Bolshevik* x 2**

Deciphering the Future

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS TO COME EXAMINES THE PERIOD BETWEEN THE WARS THROUGH THE PROPHETIC CAMERA-EYE OF DENISE BELLON. BY MICHAEL ALMEREYDA







PHOTOS: © DENISE BELLON, LES FILMS DE L'ÉQUINOXE

From the Bellon archives (left to right): Salvador Dali, Henry Miller with Eve McClure, and Marcel Duchamp

"If a man has learned to think," wrote André Breton, "it hardly matters what he is thinking. At bottom, he is always thinking about his own death." Breton is a recurring presence in Chris Marker's new video, *Remembrance of Things to Come* (*Souvenir d'un avenir*), though the filmmaker himself—an extremely agile thinker at 81—sidesteps, or at least suppresses, direct contemplation of his own mortality while searching out historic ghosts, clues, and portents of tragedy in the work of departed colleague Denise Bellon, French photojournalist and world traveler in the Thirties, a time "when post-war was becoming pre-war."

Remembrance of Things to Come will show at Film Forum May 28 – June 10.

Throughout the Thirties and Forties, Bellon photographed Paris streets and World's Fair exhibits, made portraits of Breton and other surrealists, and chronicled the childhood of her two adorable daughters, one of whom, Yannick Bellon, shares a directing credit on this film. Also, as a member of the Alliance Photo agency (precursor to Magnum), the photographer managed to get out of the house a good deal, documenting Africa under French colonial rule, Legionnaires in Megreb, prostitutes in Morocco, military preparations in Finland. Being Jewish (née Hulmann), she waited out the war in Lyon—"capital of the underground," Marker informs us—but by 1944 she was at large in the Pyrenées, recording an "insane" and all but forgotten Republican attempt to reconquer Franco's Spain.

Bellon by Bellon

Remembrance of Things to Come is a lovingly opaque tribute to Bellon, a virtual rummage sale of her life's work, but the film's full power and reach have everything to do with Marker's ability to see impending doom in nearly every image in the photographer's archive—to conjure connections between Bellon's subjects and the currents of feeling and thought that would carry the world into war. It's unclear to what extent Marker has leaned on his collaborator, since the film's explicit voice—the flow of narrated commentary—is uniquely, familiarly Marker's. The mode is discursive, descriptive, quick-witted, dense. The tone is at once tender and stoic. A certain tough-guy nostalgia is somehow enhanced by the fact that Marker's narrator is a woman (Alexandra Stewart) with a calm, lucid voice. As if emboldened by an air of feminine/feline amusement, intimate asides telescope into riffs of wide-ranging speculation. And, clothed in this voice, Marker's stern aphorisms become seductive.

On Bellon's vocation: "Being a photographer means not only to look but to

sustain the gaze of others." On Marcel Duchamp: "He wanted to reveal the vanity of art. One day he'll be used to vindicate the art of vanity." On the pomp of World's Fairs in the Thirties: "It seems that nations on the verge of war make a point of parading their wealth." On one of Bellon's last surrealist group portraits: "The history of the century's end will be that of its masks."

That said, there's an engaging, amateurish simplicity to the movie. The filmmakers pan and zoom their way through the photos, with an occasional overlay of film footage—stock shots of WWII aerial combat, a clip from Feuillade's *Les Vampires*—and now and then a jarring video cutaway, in color, showing hands flipping through a magazine or book. A plaintive synth score enforces a mounting sense of dread.

The film serves up a few images of Denise Bellon herself, glamorously young, with a wide, bright smile in every shot. But her eagerness, optimism, and sense of adventure are attributed to the spirit of the time she was documenting; her personal story is implied, or buried, in her pictures. (A perfunctory Google search reveals that she raised her daughters with a second husband, later married a third, and died at 97 in 1999. The filmmakers leave out even these bare biographical facts.)

A more awkward omission, and a significant measure of Marker's mastery as a conjurer, involves the blunt truth that Bellon was not a particularly remarkable photographer. Her pictures of Dali's 1938 World's Fair show do not compare favorably with the lush and loopy photos by Eric Schaal recently collected in *Salvador Dali's Dream of Venus*, documenting the artist's 1939 exhibition in New York. In the massive *Modern History of the Surrealist Movement*, just issued by Chicago University Press, totaling some 750 pages, Bellon's work is neither cited nor seen. Unlike, say, Lee Miller, one of the era's truly gifted camera-carrying icons, Marker's muse did not possess an extraordinary eye. Perhaps this makes Marker's project more interesting. Bellon was, simply and mysteriously, a solid witness, a reliable observer in remote locations, a photojournalist whose pictures become revelatory only when re-captioned, nearly 70 years later, by a poet.

All the same, there's cause to concede that *Remembrance of Things to Come* registers as a retreat from Marker's essay/portraits concerning fellow filmmakers Medvedkin (*The Last Bolshevik*) and Tarkovsky (*One Day in the Life of Andrei Arsenevich*). You could take these earlier films, like the new one, as brilliant, unorthodox slide lectures, but they also work as poignant posthumous extensions of the friendships they recount and the careers they review. They're probingly personal, searching, playful, even quarrelsome. They make their points with riskier cinematic conceits and feature more direct evidence of Marker's affection and sense of loss, making this current project seem tame by comparison. To what extent did Marker know Bellon—or Breton, Duchamp, Henri Langlois, or any of the other figures appearing in this film? He's self-effacing enough to steer clear of personal admissions.

But a tame Marker film is wild by any other standard, and invaluable under any circumstance. And this latest happens to weigh in with heightened relevance. Depicted as a recording angel, a sidekick to Walter Benjamin's Angel of History blown backward into the future, Denise Bellon provides a portrait of a world under the cloud of unseen and inevitable war. You don't have to look too closely for dire parallels with the current era, or to feel, with Marker, an implicit ache and awe shadowing the spectacle of people and things that no longer exist.

I happened to be in the audience when Marker presented *The Last Bolshevik* at the San Francisco International Film Festival in 1993. I knew of his identification with cats and owls—evasive, predatory creatures—and his aversion to being photographed (the man can be glimpsed in a sake bar, hiding behind a napkin, in Wim Wenders's *Tokyo Ga*). A surprise, then, to see Chris Marker in the flesh, an impish figure, unaffected and even comical, with a quick stammering voice and a giddy air of agitation—a Gallic Woody Allen. I hovered in the small crowd gathered around him after the screening. As if his shyness protected him from close scrutiny, I remember his hands better than his face. He was clutching his video camera, one of the earliest compact models, which he confessed to love and take with him everywhere, like a cherished pet. At one point he set it on a table (his knobby knuckles never far away) and, grinning, compared the camera to a cat. I wondered then—and still wonder, up to a point—why he chose to entrust the narration of his films to people with calm, neutral voices. The films would be so different if he narrated them himself! But maybe he considers his work already brimful with his own personality. Maybe he has a dream of himself as an objective, lucid, level-headed observer. Maybe he simply prefers to hear his words spoken by Alexandra Stewart. In any case, plainly enough Marker is intent on rejecting the false authority of routine documentary voiceover, trading standard (masculine) assurance for something quieter, deeper, more questioning, and, not incidentally, more poetic.

While we're somewhere near the subject, I find it curious that Marker, in this new movie, salutes Breton as a connoisseur of visual images ("He had a perfect eye, as some have perfect pitch") and quotes him at length, but never gets around to confessing an appreciation of Breton as a conscience for his generation, a voice combining moral imagination with lyrical impulses, a poet pushing the boundaries of everything he undertook. Who other than Chris Marker, on his own idiosyncratic terms, has carried this voice into filmmaking and into the current, perilous century? Taking in even his simplest movie—crammed with inklings, warnings, and recognitions—it's impossible not to feel a rush of gratitude.

Bellon was, simply and mysteriously, a solid witness, a reliable observer in remote locations, a photojournalist whose pictures become revelatory only when re-captioned, nearly 70 years later, by a poet.

Michael Almereyda's latest film, This So-Called Disaster, *is a documentary portrait of Sam Shepard.*

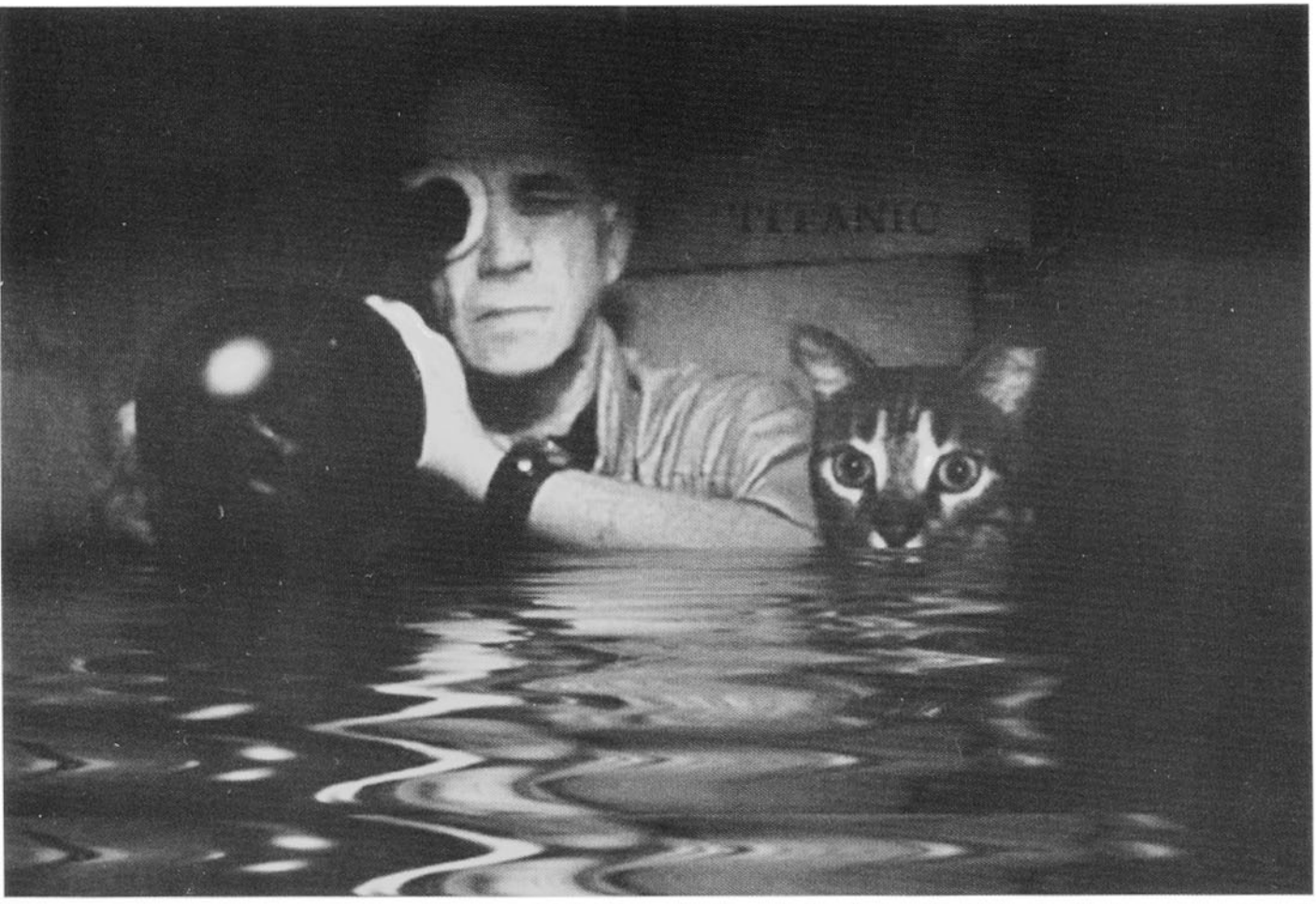
Marker Direct

A RARE INTERVIEW WITH ONE OF CINEMA'S MOST SECRETIVE

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN LIBÉRATION, MARCH 5, 2003. WITH THANKS TO

"What interests me is history, and politics only interests me to the degree that it is the mark history makes on the present." The French release of *Sans soleil* and *La Jetée* on DVD is an event, as is every furtive apparition in the news by Chris Marker, one of the great cineastes of our time as well as one of the most private.

Marker, 81, has always preferred to allow his filmed images, rather than his image as a filmmaker, to speak for him. Less than a dozen photographs of Marker exist, and his interviews are even more rare. The director agreed to an interview with *Libération* via an email do-it-yourself kit: four topics, with ten questions each. He did not respond to every question, but these 12 pages, at times "frankly Dostoevskian," more than satisfied us.



Chris Marker "with my beloved cat and collaborator Guillaume-en-Egypte."

PHOTO: WIM WENDERS

Cinema, photo-novels, CD-ROMs, video installations—is there any medium you haven't tried?

Yes, gouache.

Why have you agreed to the release of some of your films on DVD, and how did you make the choice?

Twenty years separate *La Jetée* from *Sans soleil*. And another 20 years separate *Sans soleil* from the present. Under the circumstances, if I were to speak in the name of the person who made these movies it would no longer be an interview but a séance. In fact, I don't think I either chose or accepted: somebody talked about it, and it got done. That there was a certain relationship between these two films was something I was aware of but didn't think I needed to explain—until I found a small anonymous note published in a program in Tokyo that said, "Soon the voyage will be at an end. It's only then that we will know if the juxtaposition of images makes any sense. We will understand that we have prayed with film, as one must on a pilgrimage, each time we have been in the presence of death: in the cat cemetery, standing in front of the dead giraffe, with the kamikazes at the moment of take-off, in front of the guerillas killed in the war for independence. In *La Jetée*, the foolhardy experiment to look into the future ends in death. By treat-

FILMMAKERS. BY SAMUEL DOUHAIRE AND ANNICK RIVOIRE
ANTOINE DE BAECQUE.

ing the same subject 20 years later, Marker has overcome death by prayer." When you read that, written by someone you don't know, who knows nothing of how the films came to be, you feel a certain emotion. "Something" has happened.

When Immemory, *your CD-ROM, was released in 1999, you said that you had found the ideal medium. What do you think of DVD?*

With the CD-ROM, it's not so much the technology that's important as the architecture, the tree-like branching, the play. We'll make DVD-ROMs. The DVD technology is obviously superb, but it isn't always cinema. Godard nailed it once and for all: at the cinema, you raise your eyes to the screen; in front of the television, you lower them. Then there is the role of the shutter. Out of the two hours you spend in a movie theater, you spend one of them in the dark. It's this nocturnal portion that stays with us, that fixes our memory of a film in a different way than the same film seen on television or on a monitor. But having said that, let's be honest. I've just watched the ballet from *An American in Paris* on the screen of my iBook, and I very nearly rediscovered the lightness that we felt in London in 1952, when I was there with [Alain] Resnais and [Ghislain] Cloquet during the filming of *Statues Also Die*, when we started every day by seeing the 10 a.m. show of *An American in Paris* at a theater in Leicester Square. I thought I'd lost that lightness forever when I saw it on cassette.

Does the democratization of the means of filmmaking (DV, digital editing, distribution via the Internet) seduce the socially engaged filmmaker that you are?

Here's a good opportunity to get rid of a label that's been stuck on me. For many people, "engaged" means "political," and politics, the art of compromise (which is as it should be—if there is no compromise there is only brute force, of which we're seeing an example right now) bores me deeply. What interests me is history, and politics interests me only to the degree that it represents the mark history makes on the present. With an obsessive curiosity (if I identify with any of Kipling's characters, it's the Elephant Boy of the Just-So Stories, because of his "insatiable curiosity") I keep asking: How do people manage to live in such a world? And that's where my mania comes from, to see "how things are going" in this place or that. For a long time, those who were best placed to see "how it's going" didn't have access to the tools to give form to their perceptions—and perception without form is tiring. And now, suddenly, these tools exist. It's true that for people like me it's a dream come true. I wrote about it, in a small text in the booklet of the DVD.

I feed my hunger for fiction with what is by far the most accomplished source: those great American TV series, like The Practice. There is a knowledge in them, a sense of story and economy, of ellipsis, a science of framing and of cutting, a dramaturgy and an acting style that has no equal anywhere, and certainly not in Hollywood.

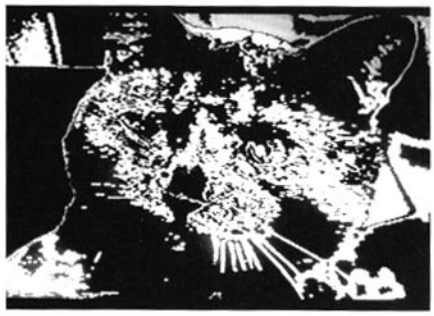
A necessary caution: the "democratization of tools" entails many financial and technical constraints, and does not save us from the necessity of work. Owning a DV camera does not magically confer talent on someone who doesn't have any or who is too lazy to ask himself if he has any. You can miniaturize as much as you want, but a film will always require a great deal of work—and a reason to do it. That was the whole story of the Medvedkin groups, the young workers who, in the post-'68 era, tried to make short films about their own lives, and whom we tried to help on the technical level, with the means of the time. How they complained! "We come home from work and you ask us to work some more. . . ." But they stuck with it, and you have to believe that something happened there, because 30 years later we saw them present their films at the Belfort festival, in front of an attentive audience. The means of the time was 16mm silent, which meant three-minute camera rolls, a laboratory, an editing table, some way of adding sound—everything that you have now right inside a little case that fits in your hand. A little lesson in modesty for the spoiled children of today, just like the spoiled children of 1970 got their lesson in modesty by putting themselves under the patronage of Alexander Ivanovitch Medvedkin and his ciné-train. For the benefit of the younger generation, Medvedkin was a Russian filmmaker who, in 1936 and with the means that were proper to his time (35mm film, editing table, and film lab installed in the train), essentially invented television: shoot during the day, print and edit at night, show it the next day to the people you filmed (and who often participated in the editing). I think that it's this fabled and long forgotten bit of history (Medvedkin isn't even mentioned in Georges Sadoul's book, considered in its day the Soviet Cinema bible) that underlies a large part of my work—in the end, perhaps, the only coherent part. To try to give the power of speech to people who don't have it, and, when it's possible, to help them find their own means of expression. The workers I filmed in 1967 in Rhodesia, just like the Kosovars I filmed in 2000, had never been heard on television: everyone was speaking on their behalf, but once you no longer saw

them on the road, bloody and sobbing, people lost interest in them. To my great surprise, I once found myself explaining the editing of *Battleship Potemkin* to a group of aspiring filmmakers in Guinea-Bissau, using an old print on rusty reels; now those filmmakers are having their films selected for competition in Venice (keep an eye out for the next musical by Flora Gomes). I found the Medvedkin syndrome again in a Bosnian refugee camp in 1993—a bunch of kids who had learned all the techniques of television, with newsreaders and captions, by pirating satellite TV and using equipment supplied by an NGO (nongovernmental organization). But they didn't copy the dominant language—they just used the codes in order to establish credibility and reclaim the news for other refugees. An exemplary experience. They had the tools and they had the necessity. Both are indispensable.

Do you prefer television, movies on a big screen, or surfing the Internet?

I have a completely schizophrenic relationship with television. When I'm feeling lonely, I adore it, particularly since there's been cable. It's curious how cable offers an entire catalog of antidotes to the poisons of standard TV. If one network shows a ridiculous TV movie about Napoleon, you can flip over to the History Channel to hear Henri Guillermin's brilliantly mean commentary on it. If a literary program makes us submit to a parade of currently fashionable female monsters, we can change over to Mezzo to contemplate the luminous face of Hélène Grimaud surrounded by her wolves, and it's as if the others never existed. Now there are moments when I remember I am not alone, and that's when I fall apart. The exponential growth of stupidity and vulgarity is something that everyone has noticed, but it's not just a vague sense of disgust—it's a concrete quantifiable fact (you can measure it by the volume of the cheers that greet the talk-show hosts, which have grown by an alarming number of decibels in the last five years) and a crime against humanity. Not to mention the permanent aggressions against the French language. . . . And since you are exploiting my Russian penchant for confession, I must say the worst: I am allergic to commercials. In the early Sixties, making commercials was perfectly acceptable; now, it's something that no one will own up to. I can do nothing about it. This manner of placing the mechanism of the lie in the service of praise has always irritated me, even if I have to admit that this diabolical patron has occasionally given us some of the most beautiful images you can see on the small screen (have you seen the David Lynch commercial with the blue lips?). But cynics always betray themselves, and there is a small consolation in the industry's own terminology: they stop short of calling themselves "creators," so they call themselves "creatives."

And the movies in all this? For the reasons mentioned above, and under the orders of Jean-Luc, I've said for a long time that films should be seen first in theaters, and that television and video are only there to refresh your memory. Now that I no longer have any time at all to go to the



Sans soleil

cinema, I've started seeing films by lowering my eyes, with an ever increasing sense of sinfulness (this interview is indeed becoming Dostoevskian). But to tell the truth I no longer watch many films, only those by friends, or curiosities that an American acquaintance tapes for me on TCM. There is too much to see on the news, on the music channels or on the indispensable Animal Channel. And I feed my hunger for fiction with what is by far the most accomplished source: those great American TV series, like *The Practice*. There is a knowledge in them, a sense of story and economy, of ellipsis, a science of framing and of cutting, a dramaturgy and an acting style that has no equal anywhere, and certainly not in Hollywood.

La Jetée *inspired a video by David Bowie and a film by Terry Gilliam. And there's also a bar called "La Jetée," in Japan. How do you feel about this cult? Does Terry Gilliam's imagination intersect with yours?*

Terry's imagination is rich enough that there's no need to play with comparisons. Certainly, for me *12 Monkeys* is a magnificent film (there are people who think they are flattering me by saying otherwise, that *La Jetée* is much better—the world is a strange place). It's just one of the happy signs, like Bowie's video, like the bar in Shinjuku (Hello, Tomoyo! To know that for almost 40 years, a group of Japanese are getting slightly drunk beneath my images every night—that's worth more to me than any number of Oscars!), that have accompanied the strange destiny of this particular film. It was made like a piece of automatic writing. I was filming *Le Joli mai*, completely immersed in the reality of Paris 1962, and the euphoric discovery of "direct cinema" (you will never make me say "cinema verité") and on the crew's day off, I photographed a story I didn't completely understand. It was in the editing that the pieces of the puzzle came together, and it wasn't me who designed the puzzle. I'd have a hard time taking credit for it. It just happened, that's all.

You are a witness of history. Are you still interested in world affairs? What makes you jump to your feet, react, shout?

Right now there are some very obvious reasons to jump, and we know them all so well that I have very little desire to talk more about them. What remains are the small, personal resentments. For me, 2002 will be the year of a failure that will never pass. It begins with a flashback, as in *The Barefoot Contessa*. Among our circle in the Forties, the one we all considered to be a future great writer was François Vernet. He had already published three books, and the fourth was to be a collection of short stories that he had written during the Occupation, with a vigor and an insolence that obviously left him little hope with the censors. The book wasn't published until 1945. Meanwhile, François had died in Dachau. I don't mean to label him as a martyr—that's not my style. Even if this death puts a kind of symbolic seal on a destiny that was already quite singular, the texts themselves are of such a rare quality that there is no need for reasons other than literary in order to love them and introduce them to others. François Maspero wasn't wrong when he said in an article that they "transverse time with only an extreme lightness of being as ballast." Because last year a courageous publisher, Michel Reynaud (Tirésias), fell in love with the book and took the risk of reprinting it. I did everything I could to mobilize people I knew, not in order to make it the event of the season but simply to get it talked about. But no, there were too many books during

that season. Except for Maspero, there wasn't a word in the press. And so—failure.

Was that reaction too personal? By chance, it was paired with a similar event, to which no line of friendship attached me. The same year, Capriccio Records released a new recording by Viktor Ullman. Under his name alone, this time. Previously, he and Gideon Klein had been recorded as "Theresienstadt composers" (for younger readers: Theresienstadt was the model concentration camp designed to be visited by the Red Cross; the Nazis made a film about it called *The Führer Gives a City to the Jews.*) With the best intentions in the world, [calling them] that was a way of putting them both back in the camp. If Messiaen had died after he composed the "Quartet for the End of Time," would he be the "prison camp composer"?

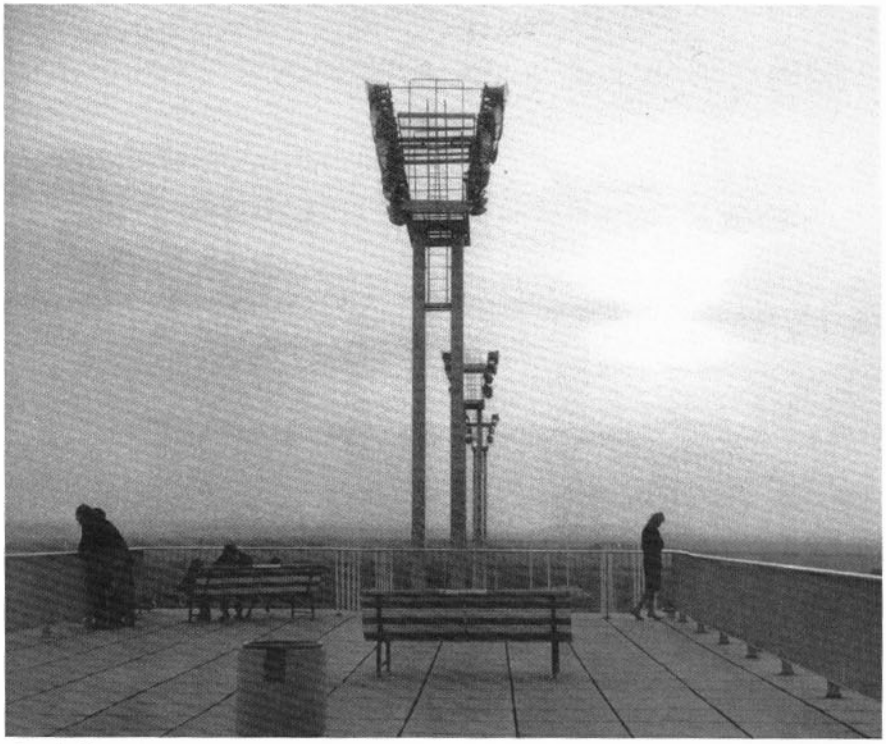
This record is astounding: it contains lieder based on texts by Holerlin and Rilke, and one is struck by the vertiginous thought that, at that particular time, no one was glorifying the true German culture more than this Jewish musician who was soon to die at Auschwitz. This time, there wasn't total silence—just a few flattering lines on the arts pages. Wasn't it worth a bit more? What makes me mad isn't that what we call "media coverage" is generally reserved for people I personally find rather mediocre—that's a matter of opinion and I wish them no ill. It's that the noise, in the electronic sense, just gets louder and louder and ends up drowning out everything, until it becomes a monopoly just like the way supermarkets force out the corner stores. That the unknown writer and the brilliant musician have the right to the same consideration as the corner store keeper may be too much to ask. And as long as you've handed me the microphone, I would add one more name to my list of the little injustices of the year: no one has said enough of the most beautiful book I have read for a long time, short stories again—*La Fiancée d'Odessa*, by [filmmaker] Edgardo Cozarinsky.

Have your travels made you suspicious of dogmatism?

I think I was already suspicious when I was born. I must have traveled a lot before then!

Samuel Douhaire and Annick Rivoire write for the Paris daily Libération.

I once found myself explaining the editing of Battleship Potemkin to a group of aspiring filmmakers in Guinea-Bissau, using an old print on rusty reels; now those filmmakers are having their films selected for competition in Venice



La Jetée

Shock of the Old

HOW THE "GENTLEMAN AMATEUR" OF THE DIGITAL ERA USES NOT-SO-NEW MEDIA TO MAP THE WORKINGS OF HUMAN MEMORY

BY CATHERINE LUPTON

I remember discussing Chris Marker's last feature film, *Level Five*, with a friend of mine when it first came out. She was generally enthusiastic, but irritated by what she described as "an old man's view of the Internet." I did not share her annoyance, but I could see what she meant. Even at the moment of its release, before the impact of the accelerated obsolescence that today makes the film look definitively dated, the computer hardware and digital hypermedia effects—which both appear in *Level Five* as characters, and had been used to create it—looked distinctly quaint, old-fashioned, and clumsy. The Apple II GS that is seen in the film was not a recent model, with its low-resolution screen and discolored plastic casing. I admired the "Gallery of Masks" sequence for its lateral evocation of "Laura" (Catherine Belkhodja) as a *mise-en-abyme* of receding and ambiguous projections, and for Marker's evident relish in amusing himself with Roger Wagner's Hyperstudio; but nevertheless I winced inwardly at the awkwardness and tackiness of the effects, their uncomfortable echo of a late Seventies music video reinforced by a brashly pounding soundtrack.

Upon closer, renewed, or recollected acquaintance with Marker's other recent multimedia works, I encountered further provocative tensions between my received sense of Marker as a new media pioneer and the jarring shocks of the old or willfully archaic. The 1990 installation *Zapping Zone** invites random sampling and multilateral exploration of a series of discontinuous video and digital hypermedia sequences; yet physically it first strikes the eye as a ramshackle, junkyard assemblage of elderly televisions and computer monitors. The fluid passage of cinematic fragments in *Silent Movie* (95), controlled by a digital interface that randomly determines the order in which themed film sequences and intertitles appear on five vertically stacked televisions, pulls against both the nostalgic lure of the old movie clips that have been sampled and reenacted, and the solid weight of the crude steel tower designed to hold the TVs, which Marker describes as his homage to Russian Constructivism in both form and roughness of materials. The user instructions for the CD-ROM *Immemory* (98) anticipate and counter the temptation of high-speed processing by firmly advising the user "Don't zap; take your time." *Immemory* preserves the early technical limitations of the CD-ROM with its small QuickTime video loops in the Cinema zone, and the processing glitches and lags that give the user no option but to navigate slowly and patiently.

Marker himself offers an explanation of such contraries: his notion of "naive informatics." He compares his creative use of digital and computer tools to the work of 20th-century primitive painters like Henri Rousseau, describing himself as a "Sunday programmer," a gentleman amateur of the digital era who rejects professional training and slick production values in favor of means that may be limited and deemed obsolete but that allow him to remain true to his own vision. Marker affirms his desire to work in an artisanal fashion with tools he can master himself, rather than opting for more sophisticated equipment and effects that would require the cooperation and collaboration of professional technicians, producers, and financiers.

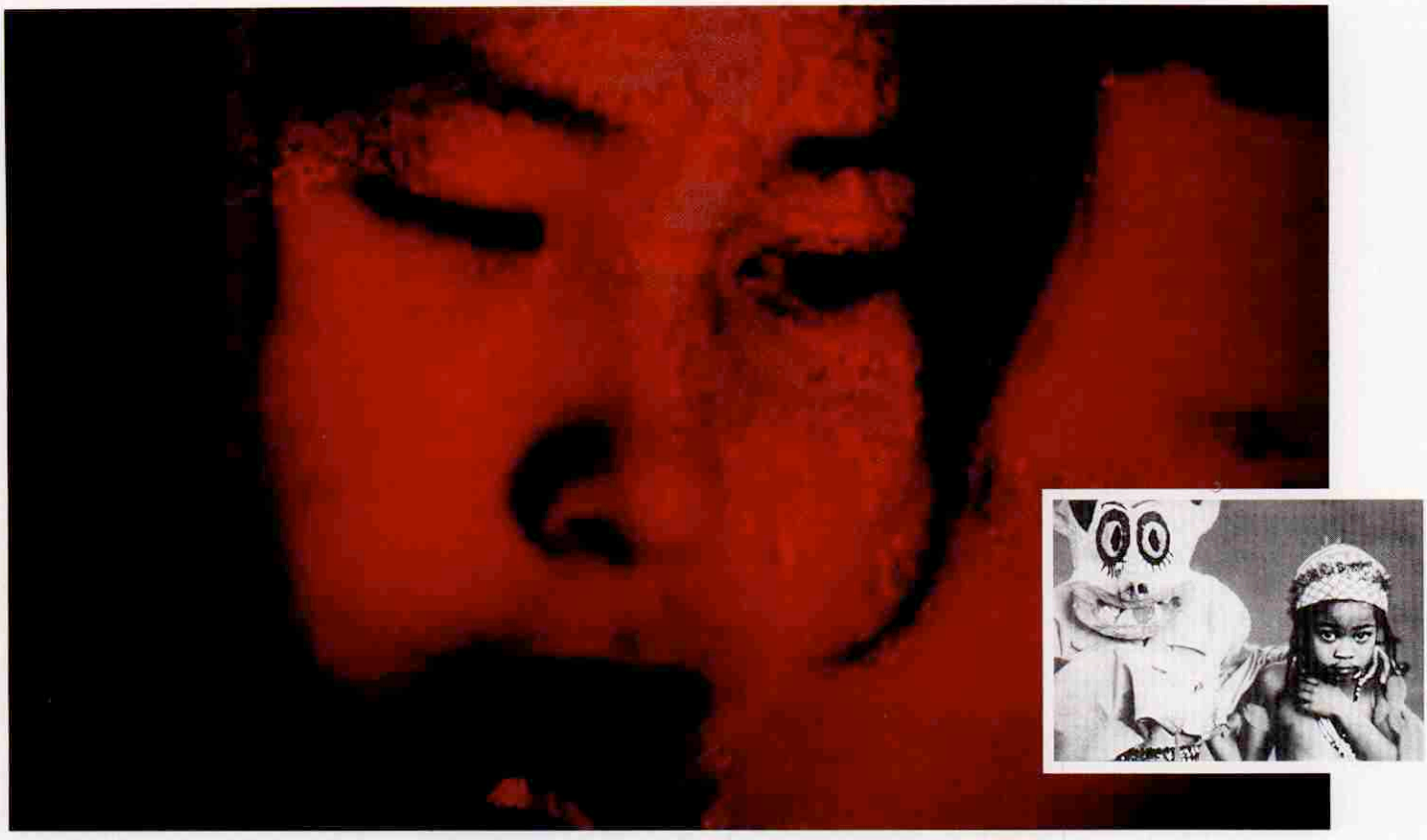
Illuminating as these explanations are, they do not account for what interests me most about the dialectic of new and outmoded media in Marker's recent projects: the impact of the "shock of the old" upon myself as a viewer or user of Marker's works, which manifests itself as awkwardness and embarrassment, a dislocation of my sense of how such ostensibly cutting-edge works ought to appear. I imagine my reaction to be something like that of Walter Benjamin, faced with the spectacle of the fading, outmoded arcades of early 20th century Paris. Marker's casting of the novel and the archaic together in his new media works functions as a critical gesture recalling the ur-history of contemporary technology—its obsolete, forgotten, and discarded fossils—and breaking the spell of a homogeneous, future-oriented technological present, whose history has been either evacuated or selectively manufactured.

Benjamin's sense of history forcibly obliterated and rewritten to suit the ideological interests of the present is engaged explicitly by Marker in his 1982 film *Sans soleil*. History, the commentary tells us, "throws its empty bottles out of the window, blocking memory as you might block your ears." *Sans soleil* offers itself as an extended, digressive meditation on the role of film representations in creating history and memory; indeed in *becoming* history and memory, as the following passage from the commentary puts it:

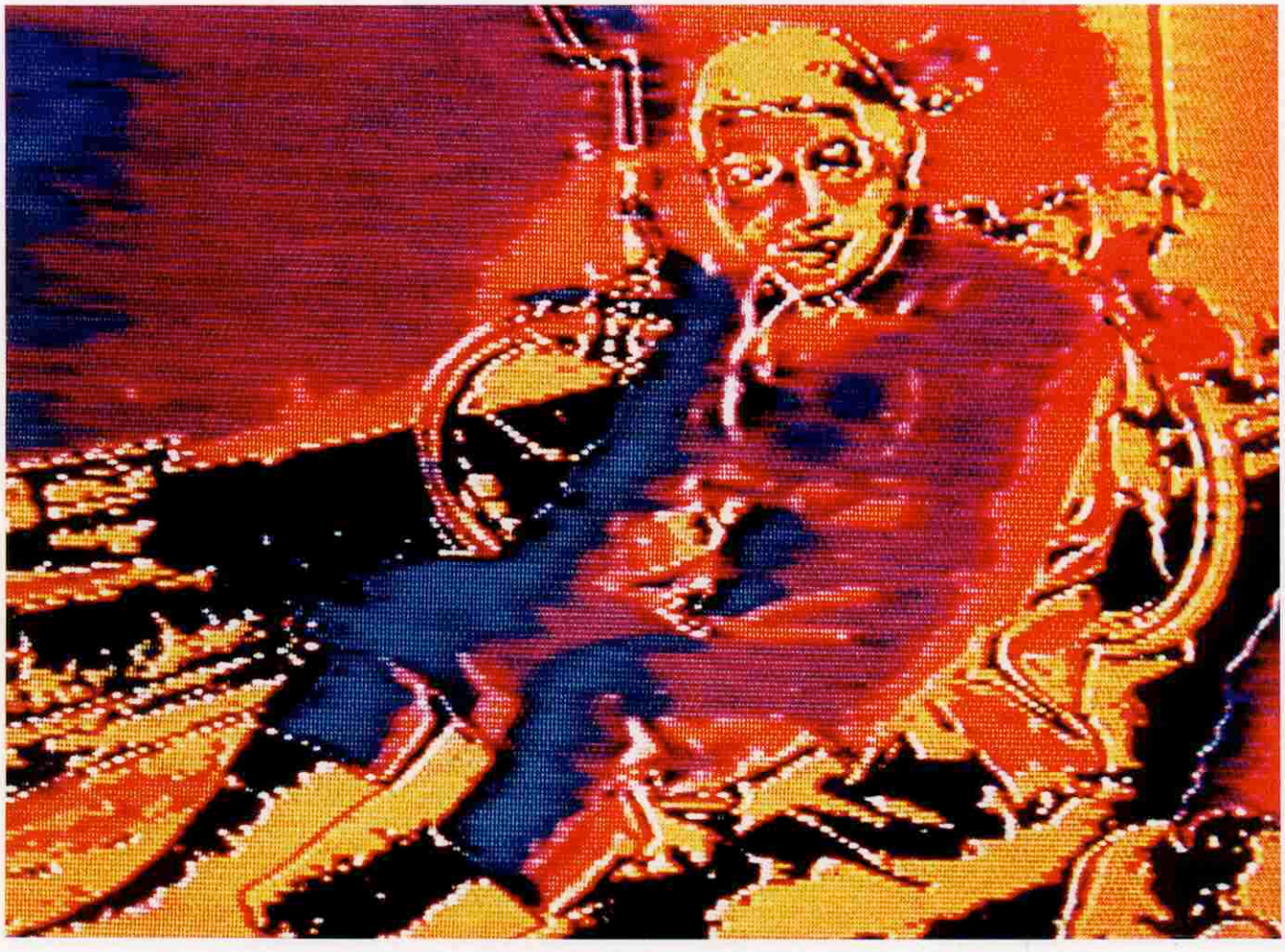
"I remember that month of January in Tokyo—or rather I remember the images I filmed in that month of January in Tokyo. They have substituted themselves for my memory—they *are* my memory. I wonder how people remember things who don't film, don't photograph, don't tape. How has mankind managed to remember? I know—the Bible. The new Bible will be the eternal magnetic tape of a time that will have to reread itself constantly just to know it existed."

These oft-quoted lines seem to offer a poetic corroboration of the familiar founding principle of the study of memory: namely that memory is always a retrospective representation of past events, never the direct manifestation of the past in the present. The work of memory is to selectively reshape the past, and its existence depends upon the particular medium in which memories are articulated—whether spoken testimonies, written recollections, photographs, films, or multimedia installations. In *Sans soleil* memories are manifested as film images, with the distinction between subjective memory and visible image erased. The soundtrack of

* *Zapping Zone* is part of the permanent collection of the Musée National d'Art Moderne (Centre Georges Pompidou), Paris.



Ghosts within and without machines: *Level Five* (above) and *Sans soleil* (below and inset)



the film consists in part of spoken recollections, but these reach us by at least two removes—they are attributed to a fictional cameraman named Sandor Krasna, and presented in the form of letters read and commented upon by an unseen female narrator. This displacement of memory's source alerts us to the fact that even the most apparently spontaneous verbal recollections are selected and given shape by established forms of representation.

Sans soleil significantly anticipates the central preoccupations of Marker's later film and multimedia projects by suggesting convergences between newer media technologies and memory. It celebrates the exaggerated visual mutations wrought upon mimetic film footage by the digital image synthesizer known as "the Zone," precisely because they give concrete and graceful visual form to the distorting, transforming operations of remembrance. The Zone blocks the illusion that mimetic images of the past give us, which is that we can have immediate access to that past. Its synthetic image manipulations function both materially and metaphorically to underline the irretrievability of the past, the nature of memory as selective, transformative, and even aesthetic representation, and the fact that, by virtue of the novel technology adopted, memories are always formed in and for the present.

Primed by such insights, *Level Five* engages cyberspace as the medium for a concerted historical inquiry into the Battle of Okinawa, the last conventional battle of WWII. It enfolds a documentary investigation of the battle and its tragic consequences—the destruction of one third of the island's civilian population and the mass suicides that followed the defeat of the Japanese army—within a fictional armature that reimagines the battle as an unfinished computer game whose creator has died in mysterious circumstances, leaving his lover, Laura, with the task of completing it. Laura's historical research into the battle is entirely reliant on the infinite resources of Optional World Link (OWL), an alter ego of the World Wide Web that is able to source information from every existing and possible database on the planet, whether past, present, or future. The game itself is programmed with the moral conscience that refuses to allow Laura to play the Angel of History and alter the outcome of the battle to produce a more palatable result; instead it forces her to confront dreadful testimonies to the full horror of the battle and its deadly aftermath.

Marker's insistent use of new technologies as conduits of human memory and historical representation offers a challenge to the argument presented by Andreas Huyssen in his 1995 book *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of America* that new media are intrinsically unsuited to the processes of private and collective remembrance. Huyssen accounts for our cultural obsession with memory by suggesting that memory and memorial activities function as a "reaction formation" against a temporal crisis brought about by the ever-accelerating pace of technological change, and by the insidious tendency of new media to make all the information that they process appear of equal value. For Huyssen, memory represents a desire for contemplation and temporal grounding in a world dominated by "puzzling and often threatening heterogeneity, non-synchronicity and information overload."

Level Five

In contrast to Huyssen's pessimistic view, the digital media historian Lev Manovich proposes a striking affinity between new media and memory that closely echoes Marker's preoccupations. In his essay "What Is Digital Cinema?" Manovich writes: "The logic of replacement, characteristic of cinema, gives way to the logic of addition and coexistence. Time becomes spatialized, distributed over the surface of the screen. Nothing is forgotten, nothing is erased. Just as we use computers to accumulate endless texts, messages, notes, and data ... 'spatial montage' accumulates events and images as it progresses through its narrative. In contrast to cinema's screen, which primarily functioned as a record of perception, the computer screen functions as a record of memory."

Level Five's Laura anticipates Manovich when she imagines explaining to a future ethnographer how, at the close of the 20th century, people worshiped household familiars named computers, to whom they would confide all their memories. The logic of coexistence also underpins the CD-ROM form assumed by Marker's *Immemory*, through whose zones one may navigate in any direction and order, and where one can slip from one zone to another with the click of a mouse. In the introductory text to *Immemory*, Marker contends that the virtual architectures of cyberspace allow much closer approximations of the aleatory, nonlinear drift of actual human recollection than do older media like film. The CD-ROM format has allowed Marker to realize the long-cherished project of creating a topography of his own memory, much more effectively than *Sans soleil* and the earlier photo-film *If I Had Four Camels* (66), both of which may be regarded as prototype memory-maps in which Marker reflects, via the intermediary of alter egos, on a former period of his own history and creative work but which remain restricted by the linearity and fixed temporal rate of film.

Marker's awareness and representation of memory is, however, more complex than I have suggested so far. While his works give intricate formal recognition to the truism that memory is always selective representation, Marker has also written "I claim, for the image, the humility and the powers of a madeleine." The invocation of Proustian memory acknowledges an affective experience in which an arbitrary, unwilled, and trivial experience (famously, for Proust, the mouthful of madeleine soaked in herbal tea) triggers the complete return of the subject into a lived moment from their past. In proclaiming the image as a madeleine, Marker puts a different cast on the memory-images of *Sans soleil*. If the cameraman's footage becomes his memory, perhaps it has precisely this power to return him involuntarily to that moment of his past, outside his habitual, mediated recollections. It is no longer the present that gives shape to the past, but the past that spontaneously and completely reasserts itself in the present.

The access of memory provoked by the

madeleine links to my unsettling experience of the archaic within the new technologies of Marker's recent works. Both experiences disrupt the orderly temporality of existing in what Benjamin would have thought of as the "mythical" present, which is certain of its own identity in relation to past and future, and where progress from the past and into the future appears preordained and free of influence from the historical forces of human choice and action.

The mythical present is especially dominant in the realm of discourse about new technologies, although this power is manifested, paradoxically, as an insistent orientation towards the future. The media historian William Boddy has examined some of the mythical dimensions in the development of popular discourses about virtual reality (VR). Quoting Tom Gunning's observation that "technology can reveal the dream world of society as much as its pragmatic realization," and extending it to include the ways in which we imagine and discuss new technological developments, Boddy reminds us that technological progress is never simply neutral, progressive, and practical, but is actively shaped by unconscious facets of desire and wish fulfillment as much as consciously formulated instrumental needs. He argues that we are inclined or invited to live so much in the fantasy world of what we think technology can, should, or might be that we ignore the gap between fantasy potential and pragmatic realization. Put another way, we often don't acknowledge that the technology we have now does not match up to our mythic projection of its (rather than our own) capabilities. Boddy contrasts blithe, affirmative claims made by early advocates of VR that it would allow users to completely overcome the social and physical limitations of their bodies with more cautionary voices that remind us that the physical body cannot be transcended by VR, only temporarily repressed and forgotten.

Marker's works offer an alternative means of navigating the gulf between the reality of technological developments and their fantasy potential. Their approach is to invoke the memory of the future in order to establish a historical, rather than a mythical, perspective on the present. The time travel narrative of *La Jetée* is perhaps the most obvious and the most complex example. The past of the film corresponds to the present in which it was made. Its fictional present is both an imagined future and a metaphorical displacement of traumatic and taboo aspects of postwar Europe's historical past and the immediate present. The guards in the underground prison camp where the hero of the film is used for time travel experiments speak in German, and their actions also invoke the extensive use of torture by the French authorities during the Algerian war. The future proper in *La Jetée* is a science-fiction projection of perfected human capability, which, significantly, is offered to the film's hero but which he rejects in favor of annihilation in the past. *Sans soleil* describes a film that Sandor Krasna never made but that he was going to call *Sans soleil*. It concerns a time traveler from the year 4001 who returns to his planet's past. He is drawn by a fragmented memory of the Mussorgsky song cycle that gave Krasna his film's title, and by a compassionate fascination with the "third-worlders of time," who are doomed to the pain of forgetting, but who, because of this, enjoy emotional experiences foreign to his own epoch. *2084*, a ten-minute film made by Marker in 1984, imagines the French trade union centenary from another 100 years into the future and explicitly reminds viewers that the shape that history might take in the meantime is entirely up to them. *Level Five* projects its vision of the capacity of the Internet into a science-fiction future borrowed from William Gibson's novel *Neuromancer*, in which computers users "jack in," connecting their nervous systems directly to the network. *Level Five*'s imaginatively enhanced capacities for the World Wide Web make for a striking juxtaposition with the mundane-looking and old-fashioned technological hardware that appears in the film, underlining (rather than eliding) the gulf that exists between them.

Sans soleil

These science-fictional conceits are certainly playful, and may seem rather too obvious in their neat reversal of expectations to have much critical impact. Yet they do offer an insistent reminder of the present's historical nature, by invoking a perspective from which our present has itself become absorbed by myth: either iconically frozen into manufactured nostalgia or simply cast into oblivion—another empty bottle tossed out of the window. In borrowing the devices of science fiction, Marker's projected futures may be read as engaged in their own fashion with Boddy's analysis of the way that even our most pragmatic discussions of technological and scientific development are infused with a good measure of desire and fantasy projection.

Returning to my affective, awkward response to *Level Five*, I recognize that its power depends not only on my ability to understand Marker's film as having the quality of Benjamin's dialectical image, which can pull fragments of past and present (and indeed future) together in a constellation that activates historical consciousness. It also rests on the way that I am involuntarily returned to my own forgotten place *within* history. I am embarrassed because I am being returned to the moment when *Level Five*'s quaint-looking graphics were new and exciting, forced to recall a historical time I lived through but whose memory I have rewritten, forgotten, or repressed in order to subscribe to the myths of the technological present and future. My sense of shock comes from an Apple Mac that belongs to that ur-historical limbo of technology that is old enough to be obsolete but not safely old enough to have been recycled as nostalgia. Nothing looks so old-fashioned as that which has only just gone out of fashion. In trying to understand these responses to some of Marker's works, I am compelled to understand myself as a participant in the myths of the present, and at the same time to grasp an alternative perspective on history that may have the potential to disrupt that mythologizing impulse.

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The Truth About Paris

RECONSIDERING LE JOLI MAI'S INVESTIGATION OF FRENCH SOCIAL ATTITUDES IN THE EARLY SIXTIES

BY SAM DIIORIO

Located in the gray area between personal essay and objective document, Chris Marker and Pierre Lhomme's 1963 film *Le Joli mai* is both a tender portrait of a city and an indictment of a way of life. In addition to being one of the key works about the French reaction to the Algerian war, the film is also a far-reaching meditation on the relationship between individual and society, one that corresponds to the leftist social vision elaborated in much of Marker's work. For a number of reasons (not the least of which being that the video currently circulating in the U.S. is missing a significant portion of the original film), none of this might be evident to the casual viewer. Understanding *Le Joli mai* becomes easier once the film is placed within the larger currents of French culture in general and Marker's career in particular.

When Marker and Lhomme began filming on May 1, 1962, they started out in the shadow of illustrious predecessors. The previous year had seen the release of a film with exactly the same point of departure. Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin's *Chronicle of a Summer* was the influential portrait of the Parisian everyday responsible for the slow-burning cinema verité revolution of the Sixties. Rouch and Morin effectively transformed French filmmaking by introducing new technology (a prototype of the Coutant-Éclair 16mm sync camera made especially for the film) and a new filmmaking style (cameraman Michel Brault was flown to France from Canada to shoot some of the most ambitious scenes). Using a lightweight portable camera, it was now possible to film sound and image simultaneously in practically any location. These innovations heralded a new kind of informal, improvised cinema in closer contact with the real world.

Le Joli mai's professed goal was identical to that of *Chronicle*: Marker and

France at the crossroads: *Le Joli mai*

Lhomme wanted to use emerging technology to create a portrait of everyday Paris. While recognizing their debt to their precursors (in homage, they even include a brief shot of the self-proclaimed Martin and Lewis of ethnographic cinema), in practical terms they made a very different film. Whereas *Chronicle* tracks the personal journeys of a small group of protagonists over a number of months, Marker and Lhomme wanted to organize a shorter time span around a wider scope of events. If Rouch and Morin's film focuses on individuals, *Le Joli mai* is edited around themes.

By the end of May, Marker and Lhomme's team had accumulated 55 hours of footage, which they cut down to shorter montages lasting from seven to 20 hours. The film's actual running time is a matter of some confusion. Although the French version of *Le Joli mai* is just over two and a half hours long, the print circulating in the U.S. is more than 30 minutes shorter: a significant amount of material has been removed. Several scenes have been trimmed (one of the film's key sequences, an interview with a young Algerian, is missing its final segment) and others completely eliminated. Here are some of the things U.S. audiences have not seen:

A sincere and affectionate portrait of life on the Rue Mouffetard, one of Paris's most tightly knit popular neighborhoods.

Two architects in a vacant lot criticizing the dehumanizing aspects of modern housing and sharing their dream projects. One of them, inspired by Babar the Elephant, imagines an ideal community of cities in the trees.

An interview with Lydia, a costume designer who admits that she fears others and prefers to spend her time indoors

designing outfits for her pets. In what is undoubtedly one of the most outlandish cat scenes in Marker's filmography, we see part of her spring collection shown off by a surprisingly patient feline model.

Rehearsals for *La Femme sauvage*, a play by Algerian writer Kateb Yacine.

An interview regarding the French army's use of torture during the Algerian war.

A discussion with students from the prestigious prep school Janson de Sailly that takes place during target practice. Marker and another interviewer criticize the students' naively elitist political stance.

A folk concert at the Théâtre Mouffetard. Agnès Varda, Armand Gatti, and Alain Resnais are all in attendance. Gilbert Samson's song of a homesick soldier is intercut with footage of the prep school students being trained to shoot and radio messages from French soldiers in Algeria to their families.

As the above list demonstrates, the U.S. print is a much less political film. Although the exact reasons for the cuts remain unclear, they were presumably made to make the film more marketable to foreign audiences. The same issues that once seemed too French for overseas markets, however, have grown in importance with each passing year. It is a shame that the full version of this invaluable document remains out of reach for English-speaking spectators.

Despite serious disparities in content, the general approach to Paris in both versions is the same. Ultimately, *Le Joli mai* is a film about montage. As many have recognized, Marker is a filmmaker obsessed with editing: in his case, the term must be understood in its broadest sense. Not only is he concerned with how shots are linked together, he establishes tension within individual shots through idiosyncratic combinations of sound and image. *Le Joli mai* marks a turning point in his career since it further complicates this intricate relationship. It is a bridge film that simultaneously looks back to the early travelogues and forward to later political vérité works like *À bientôt, j'espère*. If his first films bear the unmistakable stamp of a singular commentary, the later ones are often collaborative efforts that move closer to their subjects and incorporate a number of distinct voices.

Halfway between these two periods, *Le Joli mai* is based around a principle of limited dialogue. Marker and Lhomme wanted to open the cinema to the complexities of spontaneous speech generated by ordinary people. At the same time, this guileless testimony was not unconditionally accepted. Rather than naively showing the world "as it is," they insist on retaining a critical approach strongly marked by subjective presence. As critic Roger Tailleur perceptively claimed, *Le Joli mai* is not cinema verité, it is cine *ma* verité: not a cinema of truth, but one that expresses a personal take on truth. This individual viewpoint is primarily revealed through montage: when a pair of engineering consultants become insufferably pompous, images of yawning cats interrupt their conversation. The truth about Paris is revealed not through single images but through a combination of shots. Via editing, the sheen of the everyday is stripped away and the deeper concerns that condition contemporary society are revealed.

It's safe to say that in May 1962, Paris was harboring a great deal of anxiety. *Le Joli mai* was made as France was nearing the end of a brutal eight-year war with Algeria, which was trying to gain its independence after more than 100 years of French colonization. The film takes place during "the first springtime of peace," that is, after the signing of the ceasefire accords on March 19 but before the official referendum for independence on July 1. It's important to point out that violence continued despite the March ceasefire. During the month of May, ten to 50 Algerian citizens were killed every day by pro-French terrorists.

Algeria's slow and painful struggle for independence threw France into a severe crisis of conscience. Hesitant to see the end of a profitable colonial empire, the government was unable to resolve the conflict. Not only did its continued indecision bring the country to the verge of political collapse, its tacit sanction of the French army's use of torture during the war seriously called into question the republic's moral foundations. As it realized the extent of the army's oppressive tactics, France's image of itself was seriously damaged.

In addition to this international crisis, Paris's domestic situation that May was uneasy at best. The news wasn't all bad: in the first place, growing economic prosperity undercut the political tension. By 1962, France was finally throwing off a legacy of postwar penury to become a nation of avid consumers. Nevertheless, as strikes and changes in government continued, the public's faith in its social institutions decreased. *Le Joli mai* also testifies to another emerging uncertainty. During the Fifties, the French government had instigated the most radical attempts to restructure Paris since the 19th century. In an ostensible attempt to improve the quality of life in the city, whole neighborhoods were torn down and their inhabitants forcibly relocated. By 1962, it's evident that these changes in urban space were beginning to produce a certain anxiety: the old Paris was disappearing and it was difficult to predict what would come next.

All of these factors—increased economic prosperity, the Algerian war, changes in the urban landscape, internal political strife—inform Marker and Lhomme's complex portrait of Paris. While *Le Joli mai* is a relentlessly political film, politics must be understood here in its widest sense, as the framework through which individuals relate to a larger community. The film denounces France's apathy to the Algerian war, but this apathy is also taken as symptomatic of a larger deficiency. Parisians seem to have closed themselves off from others: the city has lost its identity as a community. *Le Joli mai* attacks Parisians for their disengagement, for their racism and classism, for their self-obsession in the face of injustice, and for their silence. This distanced critique, however, is balanced with empathy: the film's harsh conclusions are mitigated by unmistakable affection.

Marker and Lhomme's urban portrait is haunted by the utopian dream of an egalitarian society in which individuals live with rather than against others. The hallmarks of this film—its emphasis on the social, its interest in dialogue, its political conscience—became the foundations for Marker's work throughout the Sixties. From this point on, he drew closer and closer to specific political struggles in France, embracing the local in order to further the larger cause of global revolution. This idiosyncratic verité portrait of 1962, then, can be considered a direct springboard to the militant cinema of 1968. One May contains the seeds of another.

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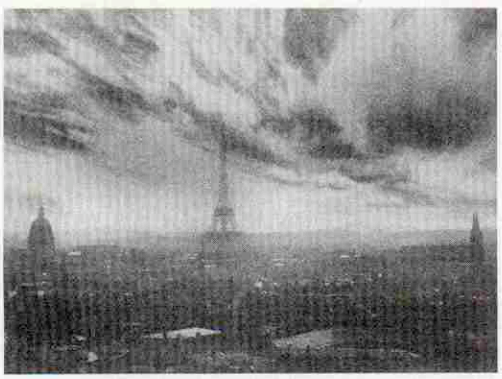
Eyesight

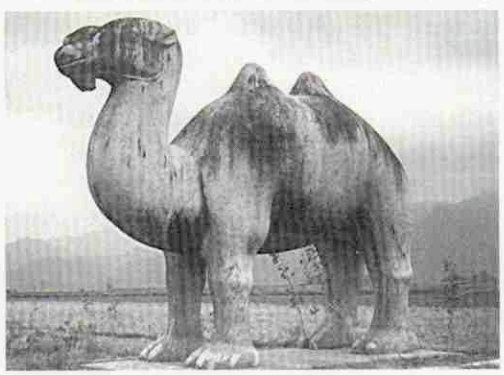
CHRIS DARKE UNEARTHS MARKER'S "LOST WORKS"

"It's pretty rare to be able to take a walk in an image of childhood." These words from Chris Marker's 1958 film-essay *Letter from Siberia* are echoed, later, in *La Jetée*, a film about "a man marked by an image from his childhood." Both of these "images of childhood" are reprised and subtly modulated at the beginning of *Sans soleil* in the film's opening "image of happiness": three children on a road in Iceland. Between *Letter* and *La Jetée* lies Marker's "lost period"—what one might call the childhood of his oeuvre. Maybe "childhood" is too precious a designation for what is, after all, early work, but it's work that is more or less lost to us, orphaned from the back catalogue if not disowned by its creator. When the Cinémathèque Française presented a Marker retrospective in 1997, the director denied practicing any "retrospective self-censorship" in choosing 1962 (the year of both *La Jetée* and *Le Joli mai*) as his Year Zero. Rather, it was the case that Marker deemed this work to be merely "rudimentary" compared with later efforts. "Rudimentary" is a carefully chosen word, one that suggests "primitive" and "fundamental," with this work representing the tyro efforts that contain all the tropes, tricks, and strategies, all the obsessions that will recur throughout the filmmaker's career.



Is Paris Burning?: *La Jetée*

Letter from Siberia* and *Sunday in Peking



If the three long-form films that Marker made between 1958 and 1962—*Letter from Siberia*, *Description of a Struggle* (60) and *Cuba Si* (61)—have the legendary allure of "lost" works, what of the others? What of the shorts, such as *Sunday in Peking* (56)? What of the collaborations with Alain Resnais, such as *Statues Also Die* (59), which Marker and Resnais co-directed, or *Toute la mémoire du monde* (56) and *Le Mystère de l'atelier quinze* (57), to which Marker contributed commentaries? The fascination of these films doesn't only reside in their invisibility. In them, one discovers the elements that remain central to Marker's activities and that have always informed and run parallel to his filmmaking. It's lately become fashionable to refer to Marker as a "multimedia artist," particularly since he recently produced an Internet-themed feature film (*Level Five*), a CD-ROM, and a number of video installations. But this misses the fact that Marker was Multiple Media Man *avant la lettre*—active in publishing and as a writer and photographer prior to and throughout his film career. *Letter* and *La Jetée* are films, of course, but both also exist as books. The text of *Letter* was published in *Commentaires 1* (61), which, with its companion volume *Commentaires 2* (67), collected words and images from the films Marker had made between 1950 and 1966. Marker's relationship with the publishing company Editions du Seuil dates back further still: to a photography-and-text collection called *Coréenes* (59), a critical monograph on the writer Jean Girardoux (52), a novel, *Le Coeur net* (The Tidy Heart, 49), as well as a long-standing and important role in designing the series of travel books "Petite Planete" in the Fifties, which, according to Guy Gauthier (the author of a recent French study on Marker's work), "revitalized illustrated publishing in the Fifties." Seen in this context, *La Jetée* was a project born not only from its director's activities as a photographer but equally from his involvement in book design. And it, too, is also a book. Or, rather, the *photo-roman* (as Marker described the film) became a *ciné-roman* in 1992, when the director produced from the still photographs and commentary text a further hybrid *objet*.

If Marker was seen to have innovated in his exploration of image/text relations on the printed page, this was equally true of his early filmmaking. It was André Bazin, who observed in a 1958 article that, with *Sunday in Peking*, the filmmaker had "already profoundly transformed the customary relationship of the text to the image." Bazin stated that Marker "brings to his films an absolutely new idea of montage, which I shall call 'horizontal'.... Here, the image does not refer back to that which precedes it or to the one that follows, but laterally, to what is said about it.... Montage is made from the ear to the eye." Bazin develops this formal insight into a description of Marker's method by examining perhaps the most famous sequence in *Letter*. Over the same three shots of a street in the Siberian city of Yakutsk—in which we see, consecutively, a bus, workers toiling on a road, and a local man glancing at the camera as he crosses its field of vision—run three different commentaries. The first is conventional Com-

munist-era propaganda; the second, "Voice of America"-style misinformation; the third is "neutral" in tone, but no more or less revealing for that. In this act of comically juxtaposing registers, Marker, according to Bazin, reveals that "impartiality is an illusion: the operation in which we participate is therefore precisely dialectical and consists of scanning the same image with three different intellectual rays and receiving back the echo." In short, a philosophical question—"What do these images show?"—is posed with literary legerdemain. And *Letter*, in all its literariness, all its baggy epistolary diversity and travelogue-happy self-consciousness, is truly the model for many of the films that follow, all the way to *Sans soleil*, where the time-traveler (this time given a name, Sandor Krasna) writes to his anonymous female pen pal that he has "been around the world several times and now only banality still interests me."

Banality has a face and a name. You must make a friend of banality. In *Sans soleil* Marker's surrogate-heteronym tracks it "with the relentlessness of a bounty hunter," just as Marker himself has done throughout his career. Think of *Le Joli mai* and its verité vox-pops. Or of the less well-known *The Koumiko Mystery* (65) for which Marker traveled to Tokyo ostensibly to film the 1964 Olympic Games and ended up making a portrait of a young Japanese woman, Koumiko Muraoka. Koumiko gives "banality" a face and a name and hence becomes the opposite of "exotic." But then, perhaps "the exotic" is only the mask that banality wears, anyway.

Alert to the exotic, its lures and perils alike, Marker has invented for himself the persona of a voyager in multiple dimensions. Every continent-hopping travelogue is simultaneously a way of slicing through time; every destination is acknowledged as being already frozen in one image-repertoire or another. Take the "childhood image" of the Gates of Peking that opens *Sunday in Peking*, for example, over which Marker comments, "For 30 years in Paris, I'd been dreaming about Peking without knowing it" as he steps into the image from childhood and matches it against the territorial reality. It's an image of the past set against a present that is itself in flux, and it's often been noted that Marker's travelogues privilege countries in moments of transformation: China under Maoism (*Sunday in Peking*), Siberia during a Soviet-promoted Five-Year Plan of industrialization and electrification (*Letter from Siberia*), Israel in its infancy (*Description of a Struggle*), Cuba attempting to consolidate Castro's Revolution (*Cuba Si*). And while some of these films have the flavor of "Bulletins to the Brotherhood of Man" about them, *engagé* dispatches sent out in the spirit of international solidarity (in this respect, Marker the left-leaning Catholic humanist was very much of his generation), they also represent the development of a filmic language that would wrest the travelogue free from its taint of easeful Colonialist observation. And this is where Marker's achievements come into their own and merit the tag of "greatness."

Marker has explored and developed two of the most rudimentary aspects of film language: the look and the cut. "The look" is understood here as being both that of the camera itself (hence, the look of the filmmaker and, by extension, the look of the spectator) as well as "the look returned" (the reciprocal gaze of the person being filmed). It's this look that becomes his modus operandi, his favored fetishized moment and whose motto comes in *Sans soleil* when, with a career's worth of frustration behind him at cinema's underemployment and misuse of this extraordinarily potent device, Krasna/Marker complains: "Have you ever heard of anything more stupid than what they teach at film school—*not* to look at the camera?" In my imagination, a young Marker-fixated video-artist is out there somewhere laboring over a found-footage opus that would be composed entirely of an assembly of all those eyes staring into the heart of Marker's lens. In fact, Marker's entire output is shot through with these moments that are lingered over and meditated upon. Cinema in general is described as *l'imprimerie du regard* (the "printing press of the look") and Marker's own cinema hymns "the magical function of the eye." In this respect, he stays true to an effect of cinema's own childhood that his alma mater, the French New Wave, actively exploited: the moment when a passerby glances into the camera's lens and which the French film historian Jean-Pierre Jeancolas has named the "Feuillade effect" after the cinematic pioneer Louis Feuillade, whose own films, often shot on the streets of Paris, included such moments. When conventional fiction films capture these glances they come across as merely charming, naive, and unguarded reminders of primitive cinema. Marker explores them more probingly, aware that there is

The money shot: *La Jetée*

something magical at work here, something literally transporting in this contact between the camera eye and the human eye. The contact he seeks is less of a glance than a gaze (and even when it is only a glance, he lingers on it like a gaze) keen to establish that moment when two looks meet in a kind of equality, when the eye is, quite literally, "open."

In *La Jetée* the opening eye becomes the emblem of time. The significance of this moment in the film is emphasized by a brilliantly inventive, "rudimentary" special effect whose impact is worked up to through a refined, rhythmic panoply of cross-fades, superimpositions, and fades-to-black. A woman's eyes open from sleep at 24 frames per second, movement animates the stills, and cinema is awoken from a *photo-roman*. But blink and

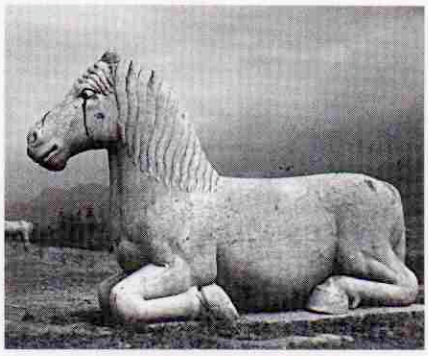
Grimace without a face: *La Jetée*

you'll miss it. It's interesting to consider the way the photograph in *La Jetée* is associated both with death and reanimation, and to do so in the light of the first words of the commentary to *If I Had Four Camels*, a film made up entirely of the photographs taken in 26 countries between 1955 and 1965: "Photography is like hunting, it's the instinct of the hunt without the desire to kill. It's the hunt of angels.... One stalks, aims, shoots and—click! Rather than killing someone, you make them eternal." It is into this "eternity" that the photograph delivers a landscape or a face, an eternity where time is stilled for memory to linger and reanimate it. This is what the time traveler does in *La Jetée*. Or, rather, it is what time has done to him and to the lost love of his memory. (Marker has spoken of *La Jetée* as his "remake" of Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, a film about "impossible memory, insane memory.") It is these words from *La Jetée* that best encapsulate the emblematic role of memory in Marker's work: "Nothing distinguishes memories from ordinary moments. It is only later that they claim remembrance. By their scars."

Childhood memories hit us all in the same spot, where imagination and remembering are truly indistinguishable. What gives *La Jetée* its force is the way it conflates childhood memory with the historical trauma of war. In a key essay on the film, Jean-Louis Schefer identifies "the memory of, or the kind of mnemonic damage, caused by war in our childhood: a primal consciousness of an era of planetary destruction which has lodged a soul within us, like a bullet or a piece of shrapnel that hit us and by chance reached a center where it could live on after having done no more than destroy a town or kill someone other than us." Need one be reminded of how the time-traveler in *La Jetée* yields up, and yields to, "the image from his childhood?" under torture, in the irradiated ruins of Paris, submitted to experiments in an underground laboratory. *La Jetée* inhabited an historical context full of dread: the postwar legacy of barbarous inhumanity (WWII: the Holocaust, Hiroshima), domestic shame and strife (Algeria: torture, terrorism), and knife-edge atomic brinkmanship (the Cuban Missile Crisis). On one level, the film can be seen as having skillfully sidestepped the possible objections of the censors through its use of the science-fiction genre. After all, who was going to object to a black-and-white sci-fi *photo-roman*, even if its subject matter included torture and atomic devastation? Because, by the time he came to make *La Jetée*, censorship was no academic matter for Marker.

The heavy hand of the French state had already been brought to bear twice before, on *Statues Also Die* and *Cuba Si*.

Marker revives a Soviet film practice from the Twenties and Thirties, a technique that turns editing into creative geography.



Sunday in Peking

Statues, made with Alain Resnais, is a graceful but nonetheless piercing critique of colonialism in the guise of an arts documentary. "We find the picturesque where a member of the Black community sees the face of a culture" the commentary states, and the film gradually constructs an African cosmology from the "dead" statuary in museum displays of so-called primitive art. *Statues* remains a striking film, for the brilliance of Resnais's camera, the polished irony of Marker's commentary, and the supple sophistication of the editing. It is, as Marker describes it in *Commentaires 1*, an example of a "pamphlet-film" and its barely veiled polemical thrust was not missed by state censors who banned it for ten years before authorizing the release of a truncated version. *Cuba Si*, shot "at full tilt" in January 1961, was conceived, wrote Marker, "in order to oppose the monstrous wave of misinformation in the [French] press" over Castro's revolution. The Cold War logic of the French state found its censorious alibi for refusing the film a distribution visa by invoking generic niceties; the film could not be described as a documentary because "it constituted an apology for the Castro regime."

A last word about "the cut" in Marker, the bit that strikes me as missing from Bazin's anatomization of "lateral montage." Marker uses his editing to traverse great stretches of time where years pass in the space of a step. Think of *Sans soleil*'s time-traveler who stumbles into the future as he tramps across Icelandic tundra. It strikes me that, in this understanding of the cut, Marker is close to the Soviets who, in the teens and Twenties, in cinema's childhood, called editing "creative geography," able to create a filmic space-time from discrete space-times. This is where Marker's time-travelers really come into their own, and where Marker himself, "our unknown cosmonaut" as Jean Quéval christened him, endows cinema with a technical capacity that is intrinsic to it and that exceeds the simple repertoire of flashback/flashforward and in which time is understood as cinema's true material.

Maybe we shouldn't resent Marker's "childhood" films being denied us. After all, obsessives are always deeply grateful for stuff that needs digging up in order to be rediscovered. But one can't help wondering whether Marker's example—his solitary wanderings with camera and pen, his exploration of the forms of essay, travelogue, and first-person filmmaking—is not now an example whose time has come around again. Mini DV cameras, desktop editing software, all these new technological tools are currently revitalizing first-person filmmaking. It would be a salutary realization for those exploring this form to understand that they are not the first to do so. That they are themselves the children of an elusive, mercurial, quixotic father who, with a play of words for his name, with a speedy cut and the click of a shutter, has removed himself into another dimension, leaving the rest of us to make our own journeys, not so much following in his footsteps as traveling in a time machine of his design.

Chris Darke's short video portrait of Chris Marker is included on the recently released Arte/Argos Films DVD of La Jetée *and* Sans soleil.