

# Dossier Chris Marker



Dossier Chris Marker:  
The Suffering Image

By

Gavin Keeney

**CAMBRIDGE  
SCHOLARS**

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P U B L I S H I N G

Dossier Chris Marker: The Suffering Image,  
by Gavin Keeney

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*To Nezha . . .*

Somewhere, even now, a lamb was being led up to the altar steps, a lamb chosen for its perfection and purity: even its delicate hooves, its knobby, skinny legs, were perfect. The eyes of those who had chosen it were loving – they valued it, enormously. And the lamb itself? It felt this love and shyly looked up at the eyes around it glowing with desire. It would not comprehend that desire had different depths. Gratified, it would get to its knees, it would gracefully lie before its lovers, it would never suspect the blow.

—Jane Alison

Whatever things are *true*, whatever things have *dignity of holiness on them*, whatever things are *just*, whatever things are *pure*, whatever things are *winsome*, whatever things are *fair-spoken* . . . think of the value of these things.

—Saint Paul

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## PREFACE

### UN TOMBEAU DE “CHRIS MARKER”

The public for which masterpieces are intended is not on this earth.<sup>1</sup>  
—Thornton Wilder

This book *is* and *is not* about Chris Marker; or, it is about Marker *and* not-Marker, self and not-self, “I” and Other (not-“I”). In this regard, one must bracket objective analysis, insofar as when one enters the charmed circle of art-critical exegesis, one is also entering a phantasmatic zone that encompasses interrelated and overlapping paralogisms or apparent tautologies that are also spectral forms given to artistic praxis, no less truthful *as* paralogisms, but nonetheless indicative of the absolute contingency of art as it faces and addresses the paradigmatic (the so-called Real). If in 1927 or so photography declared itself “objective,” and then failed, it is not without some value that this failure opened the floodgates of what the image, photographic and otherwise, portends.

The highest works of any philosophical and/or artistic discipline teach us that ideas belong to no one. Ideas are intelligences/principalities. Giorgio Agamben’s version of an “archaeology of knowledge” (derived, in part, from Michel Foucault) is just such an exercise, wherein the critical intelligence he brings to his inquests of the apparatuses of power and the structure of discourses unearths and reveals a dynamic principle or constellation of “lights” that are, indeed, spectral functions within the same. This dynamic is the entire point of his excavations, which are truly archaeological in the classical sense (equal to the excavations of Troy or any ancient civilization that still haunts present-day affairs). But such is also an incipient “angelology of knowledge,” engaging a very different analysis of power and its distribution/administration *through* and *crossing* worlds. This haunting of the present by the past is what also permits anything whatsoever of the futural to be present at any moment past and/or present. It is this recondite, shadowy, spectral agency (that is, in its highest instantiation, a haunting of culture and its various manifestations in disciplines, *as* “angelology”) that also marks the works (one *continuous* work, in fact) of Marker, foremost his still photography, which is also the

fundamental building block of his most impressive films and multimedia projects.

Marker's work is spectral in this regard alone – it indexes a past that is also a future (justifying the well-known *aperçu* that his past works are “memories of the future”), while this past that is also a future passes through the present (or, this future that is somehow always present in the past *definitively* haunts the here-and-now). This very dislocation of times for the eschatological-teleological present (a spectral present comprised of ghosts that circulate through all times) in many ways makes his project a deconstructivist project, but in a non-Derridean way, and only non-Derridean because the Derridean project is also an endless deferral of that essential futural moment that Marker reveals in his politics of the image (and of cinema) – the same presence that others (such as Pierre Bourdieu, Jean-Luc Nancy, and Jacques Rancière) have always bracketed due to their implicit fear of anything paradigmatic whatsoever returning to Earth proper. These inquisitions of power and the structures that substitute for life experience are what make Marker's works utterly stunning in their most salient feature – that is, the very-still images. The singular image Marker returns to with the three exhibitions of still photography he staged between 2007 and 2011, “Staring Back” (2007), “Quelle heure est-elle?” (2009), and “Passengers” (2011), are thus telltale gestures toward the irreducible humanity of his project – this almost inexpressible, but also inexhaustible humanity *qua* ethos being the signature force of a fundamental universality that crisscrosses multiple times and places. It is these three consecutive *and contiguous* exhibitions that are the origin of this study of the nature of the “Markerian” reserve that inhabits all of the works assembled personally or collectively over the course of six and one-half decades (1950-2012), an exceptional artistic-moral reserve that comes to its most exquisite expression in the mobilization of the still image itself toward ends other than the modernist fixation on the autonomy of the image of art (one of Emmanuel Levinas' points in condemning that apparent autonomy as essentially immoral).

This present study of “Marker & Co.” focuses its fire, then, on the political and subjective agency of Marker's work, in association with other practitioners and other forces that inhabit his world and his work – both named and unnamed others. This *complex* (or this *one thing*) is effectively “philo-communist,” the secret lining in all socialist affairs – political or otherwise. Within every maneuver within Marker's work is this secret lining that is also heedlessly “Christic” – it is what makes the still images “move” (a point that has been discussed in Marker scholarship without its source ever quite being properly delineated). As “secret,” it can only be

partly revealed, anyway. Suffice to say that this “philo-communist” (philosophical-communist) aspect is the scintillating heart of the dark mystery of “Markerian” affairs. It moves, decidedly, in very mysterious ways. It is evident, nonetheless, in the “semi-divine” matrix of the works, which never devolve to self-referential projects, nor to the modernist bias of Art for Art’s sake. “Self-revelation” is always bracketed, though it often creeps into the picture, just before it vanishes again. (In this latter sense, and as “philo-communist,” Marker’s work superficially resembles that of the Anglo-“French” literary light John Berger,<sup>2</sup> yet diverging as well, insofar as the former’s work ultimately focuses on the “Ideal” of the “Real,” versus the “Real” of the “Ideal.”)

In excavating this *dynamis* in Marker’s work, what can be found is a surreptitious homage to the vacated axis of the paradigmatic, almost always configured as “utopia” – or a certain something else (something missing) that is absolutely political, yet transcends politics anyway. (We even witness a “feline utopia,” here-and-there, by way of Marker’s penchant for using the cat as cipher for the solitary, yet principled soul.) Marker’s version of utopia resides, as usual (*qua* utopia), “no-where.” It is also for this reason that the “Markerian” moment (the reserve function that animates all of his work) is productive of a sometimes sinister, sometimes semi-redemptive “shadow-land” that requires an inherent mistrust of the power of the image and its notorious fixity and alliance with the figure of death, something that André Bazin foresaw quite early, in his 1945 essay “Ontologie de l’image photographique,”<sup>3</sup> before Levinas’ extraordinary 1948 essay “La réalité et son ombre,” and something that Bazin illustrated by employing one image, alone, in association with that essay – the Shroud of Turin.

In re-visiting Jacques Derrida’s *Spectres de Marx* (after all of these years), a book that was at first a paper delivered at the plenary session of a conference in California in 1993 (following on the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of what can only be called Capitalism Triumphant), it is possible to speak of the specters of Marker. For it is that renowned moment in Derrida’s work that launched what has become known as his “messianicity,” a very apt “end” to the deconstructivist project as such, given that it also re-launched the search for the paradigmatic within the syntagmatic (without naming the former), while signaling quietly the expectation of the return of the utopian principle *within politics*, after the ravages of both post-Marxist and neo-Marxist agitation (in concert, but as antitheses to one another) had strangely and effectively routed post-modern pessimism (late-modern nihilism), delivering, in turn, the rhetoric of the event (*à venir*), a confabulation present in the most

advanced thought of the new century (Alain Badiou et al.) and a rhetorical figure that hearkens back to – *at least* – G.W.F. Hegel.

Marker's own deconstructivist project is, then, traceable to the late 1940s when he first assumed the name "Chris Marker" in the pages of *Esprit*, a left-wing Catholic journal associated with personalism (plus all that the same embodied in pre- and post-WWII France). If Levinas' 1948 essay occurred at this exact same moment, we can only surmise that something was indeed "in the air," and that this moment marked the emergence of a project that would serve to interrogate the role of the image in cultural production for the balance of the century, with the arrival of the twenty-first century denoting a critical turning point and a return to a more sobering adjudication of the same. Indeed, following upon deconstruction (derived from Edmund Husserl, after all, or the father figure that haunts all of Derrida's works), and passing through post-phenomenology (inclusive of the so-called theological turn, informed by Paul Ricoeur, Levinas, and Derrida), what emerged on *this* side of the twenty-first century was a return to Spirit (the highest evocation of utopia possible, insofar as Spirit is synonymous with humankind). We see across the arc of these several decades leading from Marker's first independent films (after his apprenticeships with various savants and filmmakers in the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s) a slow, almost ritualistic embrace of everything that was unfolding in late-modern thought, moving ineluctably toward a re-invigoration of the High Romantic, High Idealist trope of World Soul. In this regard, Marker's work *is* decidedly "messianic," while also denouncing Big History, and, upon close examination (through close readings noting aporias, inflections, and overt evocations of death as rite of passage), it is also quietly, emphatically "Christic." Not theological and not atheological, this "Christic" moment is nonetheless semi-apocalyptic. (This semi-apocalyptic quality, which returns almost like clockwork across the trajectory of his work, is also the reason that self-revelation "returns to disappear," again and again.) What is truly stunning, however, is that this "Christic" aspect remains unnamed, and it remains unnamed because he has extracted it from a field of signifying agency (through the very "archaeological" project of expropriating its signature) in a manner that has also liberated it from all possible forms of renascent dogma and/or doctrine – a process that is intimately allied with the very nature of questioning the ontological significance of the image and mimetic practice proper. When combined with the very same operation that his works have applied to political agency (foremost left-wing and Marxist thought), the political becomes "Christic," and vice versa, strangely emptying political agency of historical agency, while also doubling that historical-

eschatological power such that it invokes utopia and/or apocalypse (suggesting they may, after all, be the same thing).<sup>4</sup> These twin principalities or intelligences, then, are the principal ghosts or specters of Marker. The “Christic” and the Marxist visions collide (arguably, as Derrida has pointed out, a collision that was also present as subtext in the writings of Karl Marx). And yet it is an unrecognizable form of each that collides with the other, producing a peculiar non-dialectical synthesis that is secretly allied with and illustrative of that which has been mostly missing for over one hundred years other than in the most bombastic and repressive regimes of thought and being – that is, the paradigmatic in/for itself. This, as well, seems to be the figure of “immemory” (the archaic field known as the immemorial) that Marker invokes by name by the 1990s, a field within thought that is *absolutely haunted* from the “beginning of time,” but mostly missing, anyway; for time immemorial is and was, at once, an indefinable, non-dogmatic something else that is also an opening to “Paradise” (that “Franciscan” vision of a virtuous world here-and-now, a notable aspect of Agamben’s project and a notable function within his work that is often criticized for its “darkening” of the horizon of thought and/or conceptual-speculative praxis *as* politics). In this sense, Antonio Negri’s and Badiou’s criticisms of Agamben count for exactly nothing, connoting the null set anyway that is at the heart of Badiou’s project and which is effectively masked by Negri’s “multitude.”

There can be no apologies, then, for locating this immense gift of Marker’s multiple works as *one work* in a Romantic-Marxist, “Christic” realm, or in what is clearly a case of “dreaming the dream”; that is, dreaming justice through dreaming utopia, through dreaming the redemptive future (as apocalypse, if necessary), and by drawing very close to the past, while also drawing the past into the present toward *that* singular future, which then (through the very dark heart of the recursive nature of vision) appears here-and-now. This redemptive chord is what is called within the pages of this dossier the “Markerian” moment. In passing through that moment, we also pass into the dream of a restored “paradigmaticity” that is redemptive, wholly *this-worldly*, utterly Romantic (in the highest sense of the word), and purely evocative of life as shadow-land – a viewpoint that is productive of a concept of being as path to the Levinasian Other, with all images, as a result, provisional images of this hazardous state of affairs. Bazin was right (and Levinas was right).<sup>5</sup> This primordial/futural state of being for the Other is fully embodied in the very image of the suffering image. The suffering image is the very image of the world of becoming (*à venir*). For this reason, the

unfinished *Owls at Noon* project remains, irreducibly, Marker's "last" project . . .

Lastly, this book is written in diaristic mode, with all passages retaining their dates of inscription, plus a decidedly symphonic texture (with repeated themes, counter-themes, and variations crossing the structure of the work) as homage to Marker's methodologies, but also as an organizational, mnemonic, and poetical formal pattern within the overall study. As all knowledge is effectively personal, or *becomes* personal, *Dossier Chris Marker* is also inherently performative. This latter concern is one of the great paradoxes of any attempt at constructing a systematic body of knowledge, of any and all epistemologies, sciences, technologies, and/or discourses, at least before that personal engagement with ideas is handed over (handed back) to the world at large. This is also one of the reasons why every work within Marker's extensive "catalogue" is entirely personal (including the films he made with the SLON collective, which, after all, he inaugurated in and around 1967 with *Loin du Viêt-nam*). One can then read these pages in the manner of Julio Cortázar's great novel *Rayuela* (*Hopscotch*) – that is to say, any which way. In assembling any book, there is also always an aspect of montage at play (arguably the manner in which thoughts are formed or "drip" into consciousness) – a form of fluidity often destroyed in the name of "system" or "scientific study" (the antithesis of the literary work of art). In this case, these essays are an extended homage to "all of that" – to the signature aspects of Marker's work, *plus*. "All of that" is also the sole justification for these indulgences/voyages into what is (and what remains) a remarkable archive of *singular* works that belongs to no one in particular and, therefore, to everyone.

There is no right or wrong in reading Marker. *Dossier Chris Marker* is intended, thus, as homage to his work *as totality* and to the speculative agencies that inhabit and haunt it. Marker once said that if one wishes to understand him, one must actually invent him. The unintentional misreadings, the attempts to de-code, etc., are all efforts that remain, in the end, suitably imperfect and ultimately futile. One must, however try . . .

Written in Australia, and researched in libraries and archives in Australia, the UK, and France, this work is an attempt to consolidate and provide a snapshot of a record that is constantly shifting and constantly evolving, inclusive of well-meaning, but misguided attempts to fill in gaps in Marker's personal life, foremost his war years. In trying, we reach the very limit that every "Markerian" moment registers – that is, the mysterious, non-discursive hiatus given to all investigations into truth-telling procedures, plus the irreducible presence of subjectivity itself

(otherwise known as “The Fifteenth Stone”), always to be understood in relation to the impersonal forces that create, sustain, and destroy it.

As this study comes to a close on July 31, 2012, word has arrived that Chris Marker has died. In approaching immortal works of Art one best treads lightly. Marker’s work will now “return,” endlessly; superficial secrets will be revealed and his record will be examined and re-examined as his reputation soars to new heights. Perhaps the French *will* now tear down the Sorbonne and put up Chris Marker, as Henri Michaux reportedly once suggested.<sup>6</sup> (Such portends yet another French Revolution, *only if*.<sup>7</sup>) Yet the best way to honor the spirit of such an artist is to honor the spirit of the Spirit of the work.

Quite simply, “Chris Marker” is now a very bright star in every future “Night Sky” . . . Long live “Chris Marker.”

“*Ite, missa est.*”

July 31, 2012

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Thornton Wilder, *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1941), p. 87. First published Longmans, 1927. “The whole purport of literature . . . is the notation of the heart. Style is but the faintly contemptible vessel in which the bitter liquid is recommended to the world.” *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>2</sup> See Andrew Merrifield, *John Berger* (London: Reaktion, 2012). See also, Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1977), pp. 106-109, regarding John Berger’s essay on the famous October 1967 photograph of the corpse of Che Guevara and its resemblance to Mantegna’s *The Dead Christ*. See John Berger, “Che Guevara Dead,” *Aperture* 13, no. 4 (1968): pp. 36-38. “The best writing on photography has been by moralists – Marxists or would-be Marxists – hooked on photographs but troubled by the way photography inexorably beautifies. . . . Moralists who love photographs always hope that words will save the picture.” Sontag, *On Photography*, p. 107. Or, perhaps, and in a slightly different sense, another contemporary figure by which to measure Marker’s work is the high-modern, Czech-“French” literary light Milan Kundera. In tracking the figures of speech and thought (Ananda K. Coomaraswamy’s term) given to such, the “philocommunist” ethos effectively brackets *all* ideology until ideology confesses its complicity with what Fredric Jameson has called the “prison-house(s)” of language. Ideology, as such, is not the enemy. Ideology, in fact, must be restored to its pure state *in relation to* the “immemorial” or “the given.” Such implies that ideology *without* morality is the problem. Such also invokes Plato . . . Philocommunist, in present-day terms, almost always takes the form of anti-capitalism (or represents/invokes the “anti-capitalist sublime”). It often also takes the form of anti-modernism, and is effectively proto-anarchic. Marker’s relationship to anarchic

forms of Surrealism in the 1940s is suggestive of this latter strain, though his subsequent “voyages” take a more-decidedly “political” or “leftist” turn. The presence of Jean Giraudoux, Gaston Bachelard, and Denise Bellon are “signs” of Marker’s relationship to Surrealism, and, in Bachelard’s case, Surrealism. The well-known split in French Surrealism, in the 1920s, occurred along the two “patrimonial” lines of “André Breton” and “Georges Bataille,” or between the orthodoxy of Breton and the non-orthodoxy of Bataille (plus Aragon, Bachelard, Leiris et al.). Regarding Bataille’s “gnostic” worldview,” see the essay “Kant Nietzsche Undo Lacan,” pp. 81-94, in Gavin Keeney, *“Else-where”: Essays in Art, Architecture, and Cultural Production 2002-2011* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011). See also Denis Hollier, *Les dépossédés: Bataille, Caillois, Leiris, Malraux, Sartre* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1993).

<sup>3</sup> André Bazin, “Ontologie de l’image photographique,” pp. 9-17, in Gaston Diehl, ed., *Les problèmes de la peinture* (Paris: Confluences, 1945). For a Lacanian (psychoanalytical and eroticized) application of this famous essay to the works of Marker, foremost *Sans soleil* (1982), see Laurent Roth, “A Yakut Afflicted with Strabismus,” pp. 37-63, trans. Brian Holmes, in Laurent Roth, Raymond Bellour, *Qu’est-ce qu’une madeleine? À propos du CD-ROM “Immemory” de Chris Marker*, ed. Christine van Assche, Yves Gevaert (Brussels: Yves Gevaert Éditeur; Paris: Éditions du Centre Georges Pompidou, 1997).

<sup>4</sup> This apolitical, atheological aspect of Marker’s work is always provisional, versus canonical. It is for this reason that it is also possible to claim that, ultimately, the work is “Christic” and “philo-communist.”

<sup>5</sup> “Man as Other comes to us from the outside, a separated – or holy – face. His exteriority, that is, his appeal to me is his truth. My response is not added as an accident to a ‘nucleus’ of his objectivity, but first *produces* his truth (which his ‘point of view’ upon me can not nullify). This surplus of truth over being and over its idea, which we suggest by the metaphor of the ‘curvature of intersubjective space,’ signifies the divine intention of all truth. This ‘curvature of space’ is, perhaps, the very presence of God.” Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991), p. 291. First published *Totalité et infini: Essai sur l’extériorité* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1961).

<sup>6</sup> “Il faut raser le Sorbonne et mettre Chris Marker à la place.” This often-cited statement appears in Anatole Dauman, *Anatole Dauman: Argos Films: Souvenir-écran*, ed. Jacques Gerber, with Noëlle de Chambrun (Paris: Éditions du Centre Georges Pompidou, 1989), p. 149; cited in Raymond Bellour, “The Book, Back and Forth,” pp. 109-54, in Roth, Bellour, *Qu’est-ce qu’une madeleine? À propos du CD-ROM “Immemory” de Chris Marker*, p. 150 n 10.

<sup>7</sup> Indeed, an alternative title for this book might have been *Chris Marker: Another French Revolution*. Notably, Bill Horrigan recently revealed in *Wexblog* that Marker lived on rue Courat, in Paris, “an unfashionable neighborhood he liked in part because it was where the Paris Commune made one of its bloody last stands.” That he lived and worked in the shadow of *that* event is extraordinarily telltale. That his works are, arguably, “Christic” also recalls Dostoevsky’s remark that

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revolutions generally fail because they are not *spiritual* enough. See Bill Horrigan, "Chris Marker: 1921-2012," *Wexblog*, August 1, 2012, <http://wexarts.org/wexblog/?p=6413>.



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The author also wishes to acknowledge the multitude of scholars whose works have influenced the course of this study (foremost the “Three Graces,” Catherine Lupton, Nora M. Alter, and Sarah Cooper, who penned the first exhaustive, critical-biographical studies of Marker in English), as well as various artists and interlocutors over the years who have indirectly, but nonetheless *personally*, precipitated this close reading of the works of Marker through their own intense artistic and critical activities.

Lastly, it is to Chris Marker that this work is addressed; in gratitude, and – alas – *In memoriam*.

This book could, then, be placed upon Marker’s grave (at Père Lachaise), as gift, but he is not there. As John Berger has written, “The dead do not stay where they are buried.”

\* \* \* \* \*

The (mis)adventures of this text include attempting (and failing) to reconcile discrepancies in the public record regarding dates and details of Marker’s films and film collaborations, plus precise contents of key multimedia projects. The Filmography/Videography presented here is and remains, as a result, entirely provisional.

*Dossier Chris Marker* closes a trilogy of books (produced and compiled between 2010 and 2012) focusing on art, architecture, and the allied arts *as* conceptual thought – that is, the author’s self-denoted “Saturn Trilogy.” The previous two titles in the series are: *Art as “Night”*: *An Art-Theological Treatise* (CSP, 2010), and *“Else-where”*: *Essays in Art, Architecture, and Cultural Production 2002-2011* (CSP, 2011). These three books effectively track the passage through *and out of* post-modern or late-modern nihilism and the return to the paradigmatic and the utopian, or Idealism proper, foremost the return *from* atheology *to* theology in artistic and political discourses.

# INTRODUCTION

## THE SUFFERING IMAGE

Why, sometimes, do images begin to tremble?<sup>1</sup>  
—Chris Marker

The question as to why images sometimes tremble suggests the antithesis or corollary embedded in the very image *of* images trembling; that is, the modern conundrum regarding the fixity (stasis) of images. This recourse to movement is a gesture toward what has come to be known as *the event*, a conflation of effects that may be traced back through post-structuralism, post-phenomenology, structuralism, and phenomenology to the purely conceptual or non-contingent issue of phenomenality itself.

What moves within images? And what is the event of painting and photography? Or, how do images betray any event (arguably, the arrival of what is merely fixed in images). Several analogues arrive all at once: Veronese and his recourse to architectural *mise-en-scène*; Caravaggio and his late paintings (and what they portend as much as reveal); Friedrich Hölderlin and his fidelity to the event of poetry (by way of Alain Badiou and Martin Heidegger); Walter Benjamin and his early animosity toward photography and cinema (and his highly charged Arcades Project, in which it might be said the event hides); Surrealism's vision of statues walking around at night (leaving their pedestals under cover of "darkness" as signature gesture toward all that statuary represses, and – of course – all that representational orders imprison); Dziga Vertov and Sergei Mikhailovich Eisenstein's semi-coincidental theory and practice of montage (and its reliance on a multiplicity of effects and "times" to circumvent any privileging of individual subjects in favor of the collective); Adolf Loos' architecture (suggesting, at once, the privileged "interior" of architecture and its dissembling status as object by way of its exterior as "mask"); Yves Klein's overt and furtive gestures to de-stabilize art (at mid-century and the historically inexact advent of conceptual art); Marcel Duchamp's *Étant donnés* (with its mesmerizing and surreptitious damning of mimetic orders per se, or its possible suggestion of a return of a wholly speculative mimesis); Rosalind E. Krauss' "thinking the complex" (plus its assimilation

into architecture and art, and architectural and art criticism, perhaps best exemplified by Yve-Alain Bois' "A Picturesque Stroll around Clara-Clara"); all of Richard Serra's work (but especially his Grand Palais exhibition in 2007); and Gerhard Richter's refusal of closure in painting (especially his swerving back and forth between photo-realism and abstraction, and the attendant middle ground of the blurred paintings or the over-painted photographs).<sup>2</sup>

What moves, then, within all of these situations is the figure of the repressed Other of modernity (everything bracketed, as in the phenomenological reduction itself, or what cannot be known, and everything present as formative force in all forms of formalism). In this manner, Chris Marker is a "formalist," but without the additional baggage of the severe reduction to essence given to modernist types of formalism (if such was ever at play in any serious manner, anyway). It is to the type of formalism given to the nineteenth century (in literature and art) that we might turn to unearth what "moves" within Marker's still photography (suggesting also that there is a Proustian dimension to his oeuvre), while also beginning to understand why Marker has "super-added" an affective sense of movement by digitizing his photo archive. That much of his recently exhibited still photography is derived from his video and film archive is instructive. These images, supplemented by new, still photography in the recent exhibitions "Staring Back" (2007), "Quelle heure est-elle?" (2009), and "Passengers" (2011), provide a type of passage to what always inheres within any artistic event; that is to say, the presence of wholly other forces that signal a mnemonic-aesthetic reserve in all systems of representation and all systems of repression (instrumental orders, personal and otherwise). Images move in mysterious ways . . . Marker's great gift is to show us how different or differential times inhabit so-called objective states (both representational states and putative objective states). The super-added movement, after the fact, invokes what all forms of fixing time-space betray – or, *very-still* photography, while nominally invoking a past-present, opens on to a universal and non-objective realm, the same that Kasimir Malevich quite literally fell into.<sup>3</sup>

All of this brings forth another question buried in all representational forms of formalizing experience (arguably the central issue of art), raising again the refusal of presence, yet not in the form of denial or repression, but, instead, in the form of re-sublimation or re-naturalization. Perhaps it is Gaston Bachelard's description of Novalis' "dialectical sublimation"<sup>4</sup> that begins to access this alternative process of *re-naturalization*, versus repression and/or the imposition of a newly authorized order (totalizing formalization of difference). Badiou's meditations on Immanuel Kant's

“subtractive ontology” (passim) offer this refusal as a necessary rite of passage toward the event proper. In Marker’s still photography (and in Marker’s film-essays) the stillness of the image is troubled by what crosses over the image itself, marking time in a manner that re-introduces the non-discursive, speculative agency that is the cause of the work (its origin and its future, at once). Notably, Marker’s work is always *semi*-semiological, with signs signing something that is not quite nameable (or, arguably, something not present). As a result, and without naming that rite of passage to the event otherwise than *as* art (and even this turn is problematic), all such works figure the event, which (*pace* Andrei Tarkovsky) has, indeed, something to do with “conscience.”<sup>5</sup>

What is missing, then, is what has been tossed out over the past century (in the passage from Phenomenology proper to post-phenomenology). It is no accident that the principal means of critique in the passage through post-structuralism has been that of troubling representation (or a questioning and circling of what has haunted representation since the emergence of a sustained critique of its structuralization as a form of persistent and catastrophic hegemony). What moves in Marker’s still photography is also what is missing since the arrival of the great aporia (vacuum and void) created by the demise of modernism (the post-modern condition and its recourse to endless semiosis and reified/de-materialized orders that suggest but always defer presence as such). This missing something is what was figured in cinema along the same path out of late-modern nihilism: it is found in Michelangelo Antonioni’s work, in Tarkovsky’s work, and – emphatically – in Jean-Luc Godard’s work, but most succinctly, and less truculently, in the latter’s more recent elegiac works, perhaps starting with the majestic *JLG/JLG: Autoportrait de décembre* (1994).<sup>6</sup>

To name this something missing “the paradigmatic” means also to name the unnamable. This is what all works of art that access this austere territory *within* representation “index.” The seminal figure in this regard is no doubt Antonin Artaud, who quite literally went through the looking-glass.

Each time I happen to recall . . . the surrealist rebellion as expressed in its original purity and intransigence, it is the personality of Antonin Artaud that stands out in dark magnificence, it is a certain intonation in his voice that injects specks of gold into his whispering voice. . . .

I know that Antonin Artaud saw, the way Rimbaud, as well as Novalis and Arnim before him, had spoken of seeing. It is of little consequence, ever since the publication of *Aurélia* [1855], that what was seen this way does

not coincide with what is objectively visible. The real tragedy is that the society to which we are less and less honored to belong persists in making it an inexpiable crime to have gone over to the other side of the looking glass.<sup>7</sup>

It is the so-called fixity of subject and object, and the subsequent dialectical play between the two, that is, then, the source of both the problem (question) and the answer. If we approach the vast intelligence embedded in nature (and in mimesis, plus in the cybernetic, not New-Age theory of memes) then we also approach the theory of “conscience” embedded in Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Émile* (1762), a work also embedded or buried within post-phenomenology in the form of an exit to the speculative-aesthetic event.<sup>8</sup> Exiting the discursive apparatuses of fixed images and fixed (authorized) systems of representation, this same intelligence, given to “the world as such,” returns in the speculative agency of the image, or in representation itself. Once past the fixity of the self and its other-as-object (or the self-as-object and its other as subject), with Artaud, we enter the mirror and exit through the other side into spectrality, noumena, and – without question – a vast system of inference, echo, and conscience. For conscience to resound in such a way also means to access the echoing tableau and source of all images. To be faithful to this event requires, paradoxically, to *re-naturalize the vision in images or works of art*. To re-naturalize this event also requires that the resultant images or works effectively privilege the paradigmatic, or the axis of representation that has been more or less evacuated en route to the post-modern impasse.

A form of knowledge emerges . . . This form of knowledge entails its very own form of reduction – a passage to a type of silence or stillness that inhabits the very-still images of a world given over to the speculative-aesthetic event. If Rousseau’s *Émile* is a touchstone in this regard, it is so because it touches the “hem” of the paradigmatic. What moves in very-still images is phenomenality itself, or what has come to be called formal ontology. Yet such ontology does engage new temptations to presence – whereas all such maneuvers are ultimately disposed of in the austere gesturalism of the paradigmatic fold of conscience.

Michel Serres’ notion of the vast noise that must be repressed (naturalized) for anything at all to “appear” (to be experienced) is such an invocation of the idea of the paradigmatic or the singular “nature” of the synthesis given to the subject-object as one.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps it is the reversibility or doubling of this event that is the secret address of very-still photography and its paradigmatic referentiality (its representational

poverty as exit from the proverbial or Jamesonian, late-Marxist “prison-house of language”).

In many ways, the theoretical coordinates for a type of visuality or visual knowledge that accesses the speculative-conceptual origin of images and conscience, while silencing mere discursive “noise” (through the re-naturalization of experience and through the production of a mnemonic and echoing archive), are to be found in positive form in symmetrical operations given to art criticism, and in negative form through asymmetrical or antithetical operations given to cultural criticism. Foremost in the positive or symmetrical sense is the vitalist-inspired, art-historical works of Henri Focillon. *The Life of Forms in Art*,<sup>10</sup> his most famous work, remains today a testament to a formalist undertaking aimed at cultural production proper. Its origin in 1934 attests to its historical status, as it immediately precedes the destruction of WWII, as Malevich’s quest to reach the “ground” of representational agency preceded the destruction of WWI. Focillon’s book (and his overall methodology) arrived – not without significance – from his studies of Medieval art and architecture. Similarly, Jacob Burckhardt’s *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*,<sup>11</sup> as an example of the “antithetical mode” (or asymmetrical critique of the production of culture), while accessing the origins of the Renaissance through an examination of “where” its earliest gestures coalesced, and “from where” such gestures were drawn, succeeds where other types of art-historical and cultural surveys fail, insofar as there is contained in the very structure of the work a critique of Burckhardt’s own times, plus a second “move” (from within the historical path of the work) to invoke the synchronic “Medieval.” Burckhardt’s device (the apparatus of his historicizing critique), therefore, performs what Hayden White has rightly shown to be the bias or cut of historiography; an elective aspect of writing history that suggests the “non-objective” is present nonetheless.<sup>12</sup> In the instance of *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, this elective conscience is figured in the form of Pico della Mirandola. The Medieval gesture made by Pico is to the precursors of the Renaissance (and to their supposedly suppressed “voice”); or to those who act in the context of this work as echo – an acknowledgement that the source code for the Renaissance resides, after all, in Medieval scholasticism (most especially in the wandering scribes who copied and, thereby, transmitted the collective archive of that body of knowledge, a body of knowledge that just happened to include “hieratic” works from Greek, Islamic, and Hebraic sources, and which became, in many ways, the foundation stones for speculative Renaissance scholarship).

Art and culture are strange bedfellows; as they are not necessarily or *always* contiguous. Culture absorbs and in many ways anathematizes the implicit event of Art. Art criticism might free this imprisoned “soul,” yet cultural criticism is the primary and privileged means of doing so. The latter liberates the work and the times (memory itself). All critical methodologies that “historicize” (Fredric Jameson’s great dictum) also, to a degree, perform (in reverse) the process of assimilation that art undergoes. All art-critical methodologies that embrace a formalistic and conscientious critique of works and times become works of art in their own right. For all of these reasons, and for many yet unnamable causes hiding out in the work, the still photography of Chris Marker is both critique and work of art. It is this synthesis (versus dialectical struggle) that liberates the speculative agency of photography, while it also re-naturalizes and/or re-sublimates the disasters visited upon the same.

White notes in *Metahistory* that Burckhardt’s “fabric of greater or lesser brilliance,” or “greater or lesser freedom or oppression,” marks the true tonality of his entire historiographic project; that is, that “there was no *progressive* evolution in artistic sensibility, and in the end nothing but oppression stemmed from political and religious impulses.”<sup>13</sup> Additionally, “The truths taught by history were melancholy ones. They led neither to hope nor to action. They did not even suggest that humanity would *endure*.”<sup>14</sup>

There is a sense in Marker’s photography of this same tragic chord. Yet there is also optimism (or optimistic pessimism, and vice versa). Given the seminal nature of *La jetée* (1962), one might even say that Marker’s work senses WWII approaching, or anticipates and attempts to pre-empt its arrival, as Tarkovsky’s film *The Sacrifice* (1986) attempted, years later.<sup>15</sup> The sense of history endlessly falling out of its own nest survives in these two works. Yet it is humanity that is the true subject of both; albeit humanity perhaps finally freed of its own history through the aegis of memory and the re-writing of all images within the protean field of the universal conscience – Marker’s and Tarkovsky’s “Zone.”

The figure of the Medieval voice operates in the examples above as it operates in Novalis’ invocation of the same. It is not a literal or historical voice, time, or place. It is, however, an *elective* voice, time, and place; and it signals a tilting toward the paradigmatic in the form of a nominally “lost cause” and/or “lost time.”<sup>16</sup> It asks/demands of its interlocutor the same that the interlocutor asks of it: “Speak, so that I may see you.”

May 31, 2011

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Chris Marker, *Le fond de l'air est rouge/A Grin without a Cat*, 1977/1993. The title *Le fond de l'air est rouge/A Grin without a Cat* invokes several things all at once: the issue at stake in Régis Debray's text *Révolution dans la révolution?*, which invokes the image of the guerrilla as often a "spearhead without a spear," plus the death of Che Guevara in Bolivia, in 1967; Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-glass* (and the enigmatic Cheshire Cat); the penchant of the Left to descend into factional infighting (and the recurring betrayal of workers by unions); and the spirit of Revolution in/for itself, or the red banners and such that pronounce the arrival/presence of the impersonal agency of revolt proper. Notably, Che appears in several of Marker's films as a shadowy presence, half-remembered, half-forgotten (a scarf in *La sixième face du Pentagone*, a t-shirt in *Le fond de l'air est rouge*). He never quite appears directly, no doubt as homage to his shadowy activities in Latin America in the 1960s, but also as a type of "halo" permeating Marker's political films.

<sup>2</sup> In many ways, Marker's archive resembles Gerhard Richter's archive ("Atlas"), while its purpose is much closer to that of Aby Warburg's "Mnemosyne-Atlas" ("Mnemosyne, A Picture Series Examining the Function of Preconditioned Antiquity-Related Expressive Values for the Presentation of Eventful Life in the Art of the European Renaissance"), 1924-1929. Warburg's "Atlas" was composed of images mounted on wooden boards covered with black cloth, with a thematic cut being the justification for new iterations of the project. The subject matter or precise content of the images was not the issue, whereas the dynamic relation between the images *was*; that is, a similar dynamic to that which ruled the organization of books in his library. See: Aby Warburg, *Aby Warburg: Der Bilderatlas Mnemosyne*, ed. Martin Warnke, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2003); E.H. Gombrich, *Aby Warburg: An Intellectual Biography* (London: Warburg Institute, 1970); and Philippe-Alain Michaud, *Aby Warburg and the Image in Motion*, trans. Sophie Hawkes (New York: Zone Books, 2004). Richter's atlas, with its various iterations, has been published and exhibited repeatedly. For the most recent publication, see *Gerhard Richter: Atlas*, ed. Helmut Friedel, trans. Michael Eldred (New York: DAP, 2007). The 1997 edition, *Gerhard Richter: Atlas of the Photographs, Collages and Sketches*, ed. Helmut Friedel, Ulrich Wilmes, trans. David Brit (New York: DAP; New York: Marian Goodman; London: Anthony d'Offay, 1997), was published on the occasion of an exhibition at the Dia Center for the Arts, New York, New York, April 27, 1995-March 3, 1996, and at the Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich, April 8-June 21, 1998. The German edition of the exhibition catalogue, *Gerhard Richter: Atlas der Fotos, Collagen und Skizzen: Lenbachhaus München*, ed. Helmut Friedel, Ulrich Wilmes, was published by Oktagon, Cologne, 1997. Warburg's atlas has – apparently – not survived other than in photographs of the photographs. For such images of Warburg's atlas c.1926, see <http://www.medienkunstnetz.de/works/mnemosyne/images/1/>. This image of an associative or promiscuous magic existing amongst images placed close together appears in Tarkovsky's film *Solaris*

(1972), and more recently in Lars von Trier's *Melancholia* (2011). In both of these cases the key images in question appear in a library (as surviving images of Warburg's atlas also show his mnemonic tableau of photographs, maps, etc. displayed), functioning as a critical-poetical moment (or caesura), wherein a certain indefinable solution to an interminable problem is sought. An image common to the Tarkovsky and von Trier films, as above, is Pieter Brueghel the Elder's *The Hunters in the Snow* (1565). In *Melancholia*, however, this image appears in the opening montage of the film (the Prologue), perhaps as homage, versus the scene in Part I when Justine has retired to the library and assembled an array of books from which she is seeking the tag line to an advertising image her sadistic boss has confronted her with at her wedding dinner. (The Brueghel image is a classic condensing of the weariness of the world.) Jean-Luc Godard's recourse to a similar form of *mise-en-scène* that includes books and images placed discreetly and/or otherwise within the frame of his films is of the same order.

<sup>3</sup> Without descending into the Lacanian house of mirrors, we can understand this on an everyday level if we observe what Slavoj Žižek is up to with "Lenin." In his essay "Repeating Lenin" (1997) – ever the trickster, he convened a symposium on Lenin, in Germany, in part to see what the reaction would be – Žižek sets up a deconstruction of the idea of form to effectively liberate the idea of *radical* form. "One should not confuse this properly dialectical notion of Form with the liberal-multiculturalist notion of Form as the neutral framework of the multitude of 'narratives' – not only literature, but also politics, religion, science, they are all different narratives, stories we are telling ourselves about ourselves, and the ultimate goal of ethics is to guarantee the neutral space in which this multitude of narratives can peacefully coexist, in which everyone, from ethnic to sexual minorities, will have the right and possibility to tell his story. The properly dialectical notion of Form signals precisely the *impossibility* of this liberal notion of Form: Form has nothing to do with 'formalism,' with the idea of a neutral Form, independent of its contingent particular content; it rather stands for the traumatic kernel of the Real, for the antagonism, which 'colors' the entire field in question." Žižek is interested, as most fire-breathing artists are, in discerning the real Real amidst the rubbish of systems. In part, in appropriating "Lenin" he is also looking for the moment when Lenin realized that politics could one day be dissolved for a technocratic and agronomic utopia – "the [pure] management of things." That Lenin failed is immaterial, since Žižek is extracting the signifier "Lenin" from the historical continuum, which includes that failure – or the onslaught of Stalinism. See Slavoj Žižek, "Repeating Lenin," *Lacan*, 1997, <http://www.lacan.com/replenin.htm>.

<sup>4</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*, trans. Alan C.M. Ross, preface by Northrop Frye (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964). First published *La psychanalyse du feu* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1938).

<sup>5</sup> See Andrei Tarkovsky, *Solaris* (1972).

<sup>6</sup> Catherine Lupton notes that both Marker and Godard are responsible for preserving the emphatic-didactic nature of the short film through to its re-birth in the 1970s, with its subsequent re-deployment *as singular art form* in the 1990s (for

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example, in the works of Harun Farocki, Tacita Dean et al.). Lupton names Chantal Akerman, Atom Egoyan, Isaac Julien, and Harun Farocki as exemplars of the “next wave,” while also noting that the venue in which these typically short films are shown shifts to galleries, versus theaters proper. See Catherine Lupton, “Introduction: Free Radical,” pp. 7-12, in *Chris Marker: Memories of the Future* (London: Reaktion, 2005), pp. 8, 218 n 3. Lupton also notes that Godard was one of the few filmmakers of the French postwar generation who returned to the literary emphasis of the film-essay following the collapse of French New Wave cinema in the late 1960s. Foremost in this regard is *Allemagne année 90 neuf zero* (1991), *Je vous salue, Sarajevo* (1993), *JLG/JLG: Autoportrait de décembre* (1994), his hallmark *Moments choisis des Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1988-1998), *L’origine du XXIème siècle* (2000), and *Film socialisme* (2010). (It is said that during his post-New Wave years of self-imposed exile in Switzerland, he lived on \$24,000 a year. This idyll appears in *JLG/JLG*. His return to France, and Paris, is in many ways the central theme of the pensive 2001 feature *Éloge de l’amour*.) Lupton also notes that Godard was effectively destroying the presumptions of cinema along the path of his New Wave work, a project that is evident in the general economy of his cinematic works, but foremost in the caustic and/or ascerbic narrative chord of the later works; for example, *For Ever Mozart* (1996), *Éloge de l’amour* (2001), and *Notre musique* (2004). *JLG/JLG* notably closes with the director interviewing and hiring a *blind* film editor. Regarding the literary aspects of the “autoportrait” (the “cogito of dislocated instances”), inclusive of comments on *JLG/JLG*, versus the autobiographical film proper, see Bellour, “The Book, Back and Forth,” in Roth, Bellour, *Qu’est-ce qu’une madeleine? À propos du CD-ROM “Immemory” de Chris Marker*, pp. 120-24. The literary force-field of the short film returns with particular paradigmatic precision in Tacita Dean’s 28-minute *Michael Hamburger* (2007). Hamburger was, as of 2007, the unsurpassed translator of Friedrich Hölderlin’s poetry into English. At one memorable point in the film, Hamburger is in the garden of his modest house in Suffolk, England, pointing to an apple tree that he grew from a pip given to him by the poet Ted Hughes. *Michael Hamburger* was included in the exhibition “Tacita Dean,” April 2-29, 2009, at Marian Goodman Gallery, New York, New York. The exhibition included two other short films, *Darmstädter Werkblock* (2007) and *Prisoner Pair* (2008), with her photogravure series *Fernweh* (2009) and the series of over-painted photographs entitled *Painted Kotzsch Trees I-VI* (2009) in the middle gallery, plus three large-scale, over-painted photographs, *Urdolmen*, *Hünengrab* (both 2008) and *Riesenhett* (2009), in the north gallery. Regarding the prints and over-painted photographs: “The photographs are of dolmen or ancient burial sites that can be found all over Northern Europe. Unlike the large photographs of ancient trees, which Dean has worked with before, the images of the stones are isolated by dark matte backgrounds making them other-worldly – detached from and of history – and imposing in their solemnity. Alongside these hang *Painted Kotzsch Trees I-VI*, a set of small, damaged albumen prints by the pioneering 19<sup>th</sup>-century German photographer, August Kotzsch. The backgrounds of the photographs have been painstakingly hand-painted in white gouache by Dean, isolating the delicate beauty

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and luminosity of these fragile images, while also treating the damage as equal part of the pictorial surface. *Fernweh*, 2009 is a new and ambitious gravure project with the Danish printmaker, Niels Borch Jensen. Using four found photographs as source material to create an improbable landscape, the work quotes Goethe's *Italian Journey*. 'Fernweh' is an old fashioned German word for 'a longing to travel.'" "Tacita Dean," Press Release, *Marian Goodman Gallery*, <http://i1.exhibite.com/mariangoodman/e116fa6d.pdf>. Dean also produces editioned albums or folios of her works, for example, Tacita Dean, *The Russian Ending* (New York: Peter Blum Edition, 2001). See <http://peterblumgallery.com/editions/tacita-dean/the-russian-ending>. Peter Blum Gallery, of course, also represents and exhibits works by Chris Marker.

<sup>7</sup> André Breton, "A Tribute to Antonin Artaud," pp. 77-79, in *Free Rein (La clé des champs)*, trans. Michel Parmentier, Jacqueline d'Amboise (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995); cited in Jacques Derrida, Paule Thévenin, *The Secret Art of Antonin Artaud*, trans. Mary Ann Caws (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), p. v.

<sup>8</sup> See Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002). First published *Étant donné: Essai d'une phénoménologie de la donation* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1997).

<sup>9</sup> See Michel Serres, "The Origin of Language: Biology, Information Theory, and Thermodynamics," in *Hermès: Literature, Science, Philosophy*, ed. Josué V. Harari, David F. Bell (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982). Selections from the five-volume *Hermès* (1969-1980), first published by Éditions de Minuit.

<sup>10</sup> Henri Focillon, *La vies des formes* (Paris: Flammarion, 1934); English edition, *The Life of Forms in Art*, trans. Charles Beecher Hogan, George Kubler (New York: Zone Books, 1989); published in English, in 1948 by Wittenborn, with the addition of the essay "In Praise of Hands," trans. S.L. Faison Jr. The Zone edition is a re-print of the Wittenborn edition.

<sup>11</sup> Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, trans. S.G.C. Middlemore (London: Phaidon, 1944). First published *Die Cultur der Renaissance in Italien: Ein Versuch* (Basel: Schweighauser, 1860).

<sup>12</sup> Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-century Europe* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973). Burckhardt appears in Part Two, Chapter Six, "Burckhardt: Historical Reason as Satire" (pp. 230-64), closing the section that opens with Jules Michelet, Chapter Three, "Michelet: Historical Realism as Romance" (pp. 135-61).

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 230.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Watching Tarkovsky's films, repeatedly, one learns to think and see, at once, *topologically*. Marker notes, in the voice-over of *Une journée d'Andreï Arsenevitch* (1999), that Tarkovsky essentially returns religious speculation to metaphysical speculation, the former's supposed origin.