Knowledge, Spirit, Law, Book 1: Radical Scholarship

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Film Mysticism and “The Haunted Wood”

I. FILM MYSTICISME

Car ce n’est pas à des anges que Dieu a soumis le monde à venir....¹

Chris Marker

In terms of the speculative-intellectual pursuits of cinema, especially via the film-essay (but also via the film-fairytale), there is an unauthorized and heretical film buried within all cinema—it is called Film mysticisme. It functions as morality tale, but it is (quietly) a high-moral critique of the Imaginary itself as it comes to reside within cinema. Occasionally portions of this film escape the Saturnian pull of dark silence and appear in the world. Marker and Godard have facilitated many such sightings.

¹ Epigraph from Chris Mayor [Chris Marker], “Les vivants et les morts,” Esprit 122 (May 1946): 768 [768–785], with reference to Hebrews 11:5. Marker published this text under the pseudonym “Chris Mayor.” It is one of two articles by Marker from 1946 preceding the adoption of the nom de plume “Chris Marker,” in Esprit, in 1947.
A rumored, “lost” 8mm film said to have been made by Marker around 1946, if it ever truly existed (and if it did not, its role in his obscure early work becomes doubly interesting, as apocrypha), concerned the apocalyptic dimension within mid-century cinema, as cinema became indissolubly intertwined with history. This lost film, *La fin du monde, vu par l’ange Gabriel,* is indicative of a surrealist vein that runs through his work from the late 1940s, and from *La jetée* (1962) to *Owls at Noon Prelude: The Hollow Men* (2005). The title of the film is a reference to Blaise Cendrars’ ciné-roman *La fin du monde, filmée par l’ange N-D* (Paris: Éditions de la Sirène, 1919). The novel was originally written as a screenplay but later published as a novel with illustrations by Fernand Léger. The rumor is attributed to Alain Resnais. In characteristic self-effacing fashion, Marker mentions in 1962 his experiments with 8mm films prior to his apprenticeship with Resnais, and their collaborative project *Les statues meurent aussi* (1950–1953), saying they were “little bits of 8mm that were rather awful,” while also mentioning Resnais’ experiments with 16mm, “which one day should be the concern of cinémathèques”: cited in Jean-Louis Pays, “Extract from an Interview with Chris Marker by Jean-Louis Pays...,” in Anatole Dauman, *Anatole Dauman: Pictures of a Producer*, ed. Jacques Gerber, trans. Paul Willemen (London: British Film Institute, 1992), 93 [90–93]. Resnais described Marker’s *La fin du monde* as “mostly blurry and sometimes unidentifiable images shot in a devastated Berlin at the end of the war.” See Nora M. Alter, *Chris Marker* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 8. Resnais’ comments may be found in Alain Resnais, “Rendez-vous des amis,” in Birgit Kämper and Thomas Tode, eds., *Chris Marker: Filmessayist* (Munich: Institut Français de Munich, 1997), 207.

film’s possible non-existence hardly matters when other works attest to a similar exploration of the proverbial Night of the World. There are innumerable “intertexts” as well (or those written works of Marker’s that are often cinematic-literary events), and which one might surmise influenced later films and installations.


Additionally, there is Chris Marker, “Till the End of Time,” Esprit 129 (January 1947): 145–151, dated “Octobre 1945” (“A vivid, disquieting short story,” according to Catherine Lupton, Chris Marker: Memories of the Future [London: Reaktion Books, 2005], 27). “Set after the war in an unspecified location, ‘Till the end of time’ hallucinates the dissolution of the world in the mind of a shopkeeper who becomes transfixed by the mouth and voice of a mysterious woman after she has taken shelter in his shop during a rainstorm. With its descriptive economy and abrupt shifts of viewpoint, the story anticipates the cinematic construction of Le Coeur net”: Lupton, Chris Marker, 27–28. Also broadcast on December 30, 1949, as Jusqu’à la fin des temps (a 17-minute “essai radiophonique”), by the postwar, public radio station Paris-Inter (precursor to France Inter). This short story was translated into English after Marker’s death and is included in the catalogue for the Marker retrospective at Whitechapel Gallery, London, England. See Chris Darke, Magnus Af Petersens, and Habda
Thus, the occasional apocalyptic visions of Godard and Marker (film-essays or otherwise) point to that dimension within cinema that most interests both, as auteurs. The resources of the filmic imagination closely resemble the deeply buried, immemorial processes of thought and enunciation (language and mimesis). In many ways the visual arts (inclusive of cinema) are means for conversing with the self-same. It is axiomatic that the Revelation of John is an event that occurs on an inner plane, as vision, but it is less agreed upon that its historical value may be founded on the same schism in language and representation that tore Ruskin and Warburg in two, as above, and which accounts in part for the metaphysical-existential torsion of Godard’s *Histoire(s) du cinéma*. More cannot be said on such a subject directly, a fairly consistent aspect of art and high scholarship, other than to privilege the dynamic aspects of such a vision in works of literary, textual, and visual merit. Suffice to say that there is a trinitarian something working through Apocalypse, Death, and Resurrection. This trinitarian something is also present in cinema,


“In a sense, fear is the daughter of God, redeemed on Good Friday night. She’s not beautiful, mocked, cursed and disowned by all. But don’t get it wrong: she watches over all mortal agony, she intercedes for mankind. For there’s a rule and an exception. Culture is the rule, and art is the exception....Nobody speaks the exception. It isn’t spoken, it’s written...It’s composed...It’s painted...Or it’s lived, and then it’s the art of living....”: Jean-Luc Godard, *Je vous salue, Sarajevo* (1993). Godard’s two-minute film was included in the exhibition “The Image in Question: War – Media – Art” at the Carpenter Center, Harvard University, October 21–December 23, 2010. The exhibition was curated by Harun Farocki and Antje Ehmann. *Je vous salue, Sarajevo* is included in the DVD set, Jean-Luc Godard and Anne-Marie Miéville, *Four Short Films: De l’origine du XXie siècle* (2000); *The Old Place* (1999); *Liberté et patrie* (2002); and *Je vous salue, Sarajevo* (1993), DVD (Munich: ECM, 2006).
but only when cinema is conscious of the mysterious origins of its own internalizing time-images. These images are, indeed, projected outward. Yet these images return to the threshold of thought, where they have a more archaic purpose to contain and give life to moods, premonitions, ideas, thoughts, and whimsy. The Holy Trinity of Apocalypse, Death, and Resurrection in cinema belongs to the regime of cinema only insofar as cinema escapes final closure. The analogous relation to history is, therefore, that the trinity of Apocalypse, Death, and Resurrection proceeds on the world-historical stage as externalized event, on the one hand, while its secret address is (quietly versus noisily) elsewhere—in Spirit.

The film-essay, as avant-garde “text,” engages linguistic reserves that are clearly of a pre-conscious order (utilizing what Gustave Guillaume calls time-images and scrambling tenses accordingly and according to rules that apply from within the parameters of the work underway). It is within such a strata within filmmaking that both visual and discursive knowledge, as complex, resumes its quest for the nonperishable in the perishable. Verb tenses betray (speak of) the mystery of the time-image active within thought proper (an immemorial reserve). The entire event of history and its mirror, historiography, is predicated on tectonic shifts in verb tenses, as is the strife to be observed in biblical exegesis and elsewhere when comparing teleological time and eschatological time. This is Godard’s cinema as mystery (or, cinema as Passion Play). Re-mapping many of his most gnomic statements, as above, reveals what is at play in his own pre-filmic pre-consciousness.

Thus, care of Chris Marker, a preliminary report on the second coming of cinema after its reputed death c. 2000:

When I announced in the French newspaper *Libération...* the emergence of a new new wave of which *Half-Price* would be the *Breathless*, many were kind enough to go and see the object in question, and had no regrets afterwards, but a few curious minds came back to ask me, ra-
ther sensibly, what I precisely meant by that.

Of course, there is neither Belmondo nor Jean Sèberg, neither crime nor pursuit, nor even *The Herald Tribune*, and in order to explain that I hadn’t been heavy on the vodka that day, I must go back to a moment in my life. The very moment I saw *Breathless* for the first time. As it is not a comparison “movie to movie” I had in mind, but a comparison “moment to moment.” I can still see us on the sidewalk of the avenue Mac-Mahon, it was the end of the day, Agnès Varda was there, with Paul Paviot, and when later we compared our memories, what had struck us was to hear ourselves talking faster and louder than usual, as if something had just happened to us like a kind of urgency, a message to send out immediately. The message approximately was “whatever it is, this we’ve just seen, we had never seen it before on a screen.” Since then I had admired many magnificent, moving, innovating movies, but that physical sense of freshness and urgency, I had never felt that again until *Half-Price*. I had seen, we all have seen many children in movies, sometimes full of genius, and filmed by geniuses. But even geniuses can’t forget to be adults and to film children, in a way, from a high angle. During the glorious period of militant cinema, I had explained one day to my workmen comrades that the real movies about their condition, they would have to manage to make them themselves, because the real movies about penguins could only be convincing the day that a penguin would be able to use a camera. This animal metaphor had had some success, and I found it again in quite a number of commentaries about that period. And here we are: thanks to DV cameras, penguins have seized power, and that “wildlife” aspect of Isild’s movie—my friends know that coming from me this is a huge compliment—allows us to see what we had never seen before, children the way they are by themselves, when there is no adult gaze, however benevolent, however subtle, to mod-
ify what is filmed. Thus another danger: that others may cry “but it's so easy, you only have to put a camera into their paws, and you will get as much as you wish of the childhood you were seeking, raw childhood....” Those people should really make the effort of imagining the work, the amount of work by which a young lady still living in the echo of her childhood found the talent and the energy to reconstruct, with other children, in set-up chosen places, according to a rhythm and a style of her own, not by chance or luck, moments of a lifetime still close enough for her to transmit through them the vibration of captured reality, and already distant enough for her to be able to realize its complexity. This is neither a reality show that the Le Besco kid is offering us, nor that other moronic thing that was called “cinéma-vérité,” this is a real director’s work, and this is the birth, whether one likes the word or not, of an artist.⁶

Some possible answers to this problem of the redemption of cinema come by way of Marker’s Level Five (1996), yet problematic answers—“problematic” in the sense that this film was generally poorly received by critics and only confounded a proper reading of its intentions due to it being a type of fairytale. Additionally, its apparent extolling the virtues of the World Wide Web as repository for collective memory only misled viewers and the critical response was essentially an argument over the forms of digital media invoked versus their mnemonic power of persuasion or dissuasion.

At one point we hear Laura (Catherine Belkhodja) in typical Markerian soliloquy asking if the angels do not tap us on the forehead a second or so before birth such that we forget everything (the premise being that we already know everything prior to birth—everything that will befall us and, presumable, why such will befall us). She then asks if they do not

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tap us again on the forehead before death, and we forget everything once again. The proximity of this philosophical affectation to the Eternal Return and to Platonic anamnesis is obvious (and Marker at least mentions Plato, to orient us, if he does not mention Nietzsche). Yet *Level Five* ostensibly concerns the tragedy of Okinawa, as precursor to Hiroshima and Nagasaki, because the Japanese military sacrificed Okinawa (with 150,000 civilian casualties, one-third of the archipelago’s population, many by mass suicide). The enormity of the tragedy covers the enormity of the questions posed via the computer game Laura has inherited from her deceased lover. What “Level Five” within the game entails is entirely unclear. But Laura asks at one point whether or not we have to be dead to reach it. The computer game is unfinished, and half of the pretense of the film is that Laura has been charged with completing it through additional research into the Okinawa debacle by entering into conversation with masked interlocutors on O.W.L. (Optional World Link, a digital platform and forum resembling both The Well, from San Francisco, and the early days of the Internet, and Marker’s own *Ouvroir*, a digital museum in cyberspace designed with Max Moswitzer in conjunction with the 2008 exhibition, “Chris Marker: A Farewell to Movies,” at the Museum of Design in

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9 Christophe Chazalon states (within an essay contained in the booklet accompanying the DVD issued by Icarus Films in 2014) that “Level Five” is when all of the information in the game is complete and accurate, thus implying that Level Five is equal to the truth. Yet Marker suggests, elsewhere, that such is impossible and Level Five seems to imply a zone in memory where everything becomes, instead, luminous, or, as in *Immemory*, completely subjectivized. Raymond Bellour writes as to the significance of *Level Five*, that “[it is] the last of his ‘cinema films’ strictly speaking, [and] for that very reason the one in which we see the best way to inscribe the mutations which cinema has undergone—in a career that is singular out of all others, and within which cinema has always been submitted to paradoxical pressures”: Raymond Bellour, “Chris Marker and Level Five,” trans. Adrian Martin, *Screening the Past*, 2009, http://www.screeningthepast.com/2013/12/chris-marker-and-level-five/.
Zurich, Switzerland). Thus *Level Five*, *Immemory*, and *Ouvroir* cross the ground of *fin-de-siècle* pessimism regarding the future of cinema, and, indeed, Marker is found making grave statements about cinema in the run up to the new Year Zero (2000).10

If cinema resides in the interstices, so to speak, of this “game” (Level Five or any other virtual enterprise of the same order), if the various programmatic codes and permutations of the events of Okinawa serve to schematize cinema as maelstrom of imagery (historical, mnemonic, iterative, and possibly recombinative), Marker is addressing the inherent anti-schema of the unmakeable *Film mysticisme*; or, of hyper-consciously altering events and not forgetting them, at once—in a similar manner to the Zone in *Sans soleil*, origin for many of his later experiments with disintegrated imagery.

The fact that *Level Five* is roughly contiguous with the creation of *Immemory One* (1995–1997) is not coincidental. (That *Silent Movie* also falls within this time frame is also instructive.) Marker embarked on a trip through the possible purposes and technical proficiencies of new media as early as the 1980s. Yet by the late 2000s he was back at the origin—the very-still photographic image. This circularity is emblematic of the redemptive path for cinema in Markerian terms, yet also spirals outward toward much larger and much more...
ominous “universalizing” terms. For what he seems to extol in the work of Isild Le Besco and others is its profound and pro-leptic “innocence.”

Paratactically, the hyper-conscious tenses of Level Five are configured as traces of the Immemorial and of immortality proper (the Markerian term Immemory connoting the same). In a preternatural or hyper-natural sense we do have to be “dead” to be immortal (to speak across time). It is for this reason that Marker still speaks through his works today, following his death in July 2012. Indeed, the paratactical exuberance of his works is matched, if not countered, by the grave and somber reflections given to anamnesis (a formidable return to memory of things forgotten and/or things forsaken). This returns the immortal élan or spirit of cinema, literature, and the multiple arts to the proverbial and utterly contingent figure of the Other—yet the Other who lives. In this Other who lives, time moves forward, and in this respect for the Other, the “other always to come” is immemorialized (set free). The prospective resources of Film mysticisme overlap time forgotten, time lost, time regained, and time redeemed. To regain and redeem are not synonymous. The former connotes “to [temporally] recover,” whereas the latter connotes “to [end and] start again.” Marker’s hyperbolic extravagances within Level Five place the immemorial resources of the arts of memory on the side of, or in the hands of, the angels, while the primary non-visual gestures within the film-

\[\text{In part: “We possess the wherewithal—and this is something new—for intimate, solitary filmmaking. The process of making films in communion with oneself, the way a painter works or a writer, need not now be solely experimental. My comrade Astruc’s notion of the camera as a pen was only a metaphor. In his day, the humblest cinematographic product required a lab, a cutting room and plenty of money....Nowadays, a young filmmaker needs only an idea and a small amount of equipment to prove himself. He needn’t kowtow to producers, TV stations, or committees.” Chris Marker, “Level Five” [interview with Dolores Walfisch], Berkeley Lantern (November 1996); cited in Alter, Chris Marker, 146–147.}\]
fable reveal that to reach this immemorial threshold in things ("Level Five") requires crossing through fire and the strange liquidity of memory. The world seems to end, then, by both fire and water.

Thus we have—finally—the ideal in the Real, again, but without destroying either (making the One subservient to the Many, or the Many subservient to the One). The avant-garde and antinomial quest for pure immanence, while normally favoring the contingent, might through the redemptive power of memory and its analogues preserve the curious and instructive measures of the multiple arts in service to thought as conception (or, those regions in thought that are purely generative). The film-essay seems, upon examination, to contain this exact prolepsis—a nuanced foreshadowing, but also an eclipse, of some things for other things.
III. NOTES ON “ZAPPING ZONE”

Marker’s storehouse of images produces a new cosmos of over determined meanings. In this sense, the filmmaker’s game with the documentary film genre becomes more of an ironic analysis of the documentary’s latent tendencies to monumentalize. Marker’s approach is more like a kind of evolution than a lofty sublimity, like folding Japanese origami paper, or new digital photo processes, such as the zapping, windowing, linking, and morphing that actually dominate Marker’s more recent works (“Zapping Zone,” 1990, Level Five, 1997, “Immemory,” 1997).

Michael Wetzel

There are five antinomies that animate Marker’s work across various media and platforms: (1) Here and There; (2) Image and Word (non-discursive agency versus discursive knowledge); (3) Politics and Life (Power and its Other); (4) Self and Other (Not-self); and (5) Art and Culture (knowledge or experience versus ideology). These antinomies are in many respects the “signature” aspects of his work, or dynamic principles that have no true content as such, or have shifting content, based on the context in which they are embedded. To excavate them is to also reveal their universality and formal or austere purposes in the production of works of art (whether filmic, literary, or pictorial). While present-day formalism tends to focus on non-discursive aspects of artistic production, in Marker’s world it is actually a highly evocative means to no particular end that invokes the dynamic field of visual agency proper, or visualitas—as defined prior to the emergence of High Modernism in the Arts and Letters, pace Thomas Carlyle (and, perhaps, Ruskin), and as present in homeopathic form in Marcel Proust, Proust but one reference for the translation of the same toward modern literature, from its pre-modernist past, and literary criticism’s shift toward structuralist brink-

manship (plus so-called New Criticism). Marker, arguably, has inherited this more austere, grave, and formative aspect of formalism through Russian progenitors (in film, Sergei Eisenstein and Dziga Vertov), while it is his inherent literary-critical intelligence that safeguards this older, more speculative form of artistic praxis that contains or focuses its own subterranean/furtive sublimity (feigned closure) while opening, nonetheless, onto the infinite.

The multimedia works from the 1990s forward are, as a result, testing grounds for many of these “structural” (dyadic) presentiments, but only insofar as they cut across various projects, returning to Marker’s earliest forays into film while retaining the late-1940s’ imprint of his first literary-philosophical undertakings under the spell of left-wing Catholic praxis (personalism) and his alliances with the radical collective Peuple et Culture and the existentialist-inspired journal Esprit. The entire course of Marker’s investigation of the image, then, almost always circles back to the seminal moment (the mid-to-late 1940s) of the twin essays by André Bazin and Emmanuel Levinas regarding the ontology of the photographic image and its implied limit (what it indexes as limit). If Lettre de Sibérie was the first place/instance where Marker’s “three rays of intelligence” (sonic, pictorial, and narratological) converged, from “eye to ear” (and back and forth), in a symphonic-filmic poem as high-Romantic “literary work of art,” all of the subsequent works might be related to this thematic, which is always half-apocalyptic and always in reference in some way to Bazin’s recourse to the foremost singular image of the suffering image, the Shroud of Turin (as touchstone for the production of images drawn nominally from a metaphysical-immemorial reserve that transcends the media utilized and the existential factors invoked). Never to be defined or pinned down, Marker would first deny the truth-telling apparatuses of documentary film (in the late 1950s) and then undermine its antithesis or Other, the film-essay or film-poem. Circumventing what he was, in fact (and in part), helping to produce (that is, French New Wave cinema), he
would then exit (or denounce) “auteur-driven” film and return to collaborative and semi-collaborative works in the 1960s (after La jetée, with few exceptions), until exhausting that vein (the semi-anonymous, overtly political film), and then producing his second semi-solo masterwork, Sans soleil (1982), where the “Zone” first appeared and where EMS Spectre was first broached as a means for pushing filmic images back into a realm where they hovered on the horizon of legibility and disintegration, between historical/narrative value and formal value (or “no” discernible value whatsoever). This fruitful vortex, in turn, led to the earliest projects with digitizing his archive and the beginning of the highly experimental new-media installations.

In this manner, “Zapping Zone” is a pre-eminent moment in Marker’s experimentation across multiple platforms (digital and otherwise), plus the cannibalizing or “plagiarizing” of his own work. As “Zapping Zone” went through various incar-

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nations after its initial installation at the Pompidou, it also stands as the essential artistic vortex out of which, and into which, much of Marker’s later digital experiments will emerge and/or vanish.14

The origins of “Zapping Zone” reside somewhere around 1985; that is, its first versions. The release of the Apple IIIGS computer, in 1986, with its enhanced graphics capabilities and sound synthesizers, was also instrumental in Marker’s move away from the projection toward the monitor. The IIIGS’ demise in 1992 prompted the homage that occurred with the subsequent 1997-1998 iterations, culminating in the 2009 version of “Zapping Zone” for the Pompidou’s “Air de Paris” exhibition, while also prompting a belated reply to Steve Jobs via YouTube—a somewhat sardonic, short animated video entitled iDead (2011).15

“Zapping Zone was initially called Logiciel/Catacombes (Software/Catacombs). It involved putting images onto the computer reminiscent of the subterranean tunnels in La jetée or those in Fellini’s Roma, consequently leading back to Sans Si Mineur,” in Passages de l’image, 169–171. English translations of these essays appeared in the Spanish edition of the catalogue, Passages de l’image (Barcelona: Centre Cultural de la Fundació Caixa de Pensions, 1991).

14 It is important to distinguish between the various iterations of key Marker new-media projects, such as “Immemory One” and “Zapping Zone,” as they subsequently traveled and/or re-appeared in published form, re-formatted and otherwise altered. Criticism of the CD-ROM platform, both for the installation “Immemory” and its two published editions, is, therefore, of limited value. While both projects nominally started as exhibitions at the Centre Pompidou, and each had a very specific mise-en-scène in which they appeared (in the case of “Immemory One,” an accompanying mural of Guillaume-en-Égypte, and in the case of “Zapping Zone,” a series of wall-mounted photos, etc., as above, plus the original “Tatlin-esque” stand that supported the various television monitors), the beginning, middle, and end for each project is utterly indeterminate.

15 Chris Marker, iDead (2011). Video (2 minutes 27 seconds). Posted to YouTube under the pseudonym “Kosinki.”
soleil and memories of Tarkovsky."\(^{16}\) The subject of the "Zone," in its "Markerian" dimensions as a place for reducing images to their most primitive or—perhaps—innocent stage, is first broached in Sans soleil. The reference is to Tarkovsky’s Stalker, with its own version of the "Zone."\(^{17}\)

"The Zone is preeminently a universe of haunted memories, new obsessions brought about by ‘the world of technology’, against which we would be helpless if we didn’t have the strength to seize the techniques to generate—as a way of resisting—an increasing amount of metamorphoses."\(^{18}\) The collages included in “Zapping Zone” are in many respects Marker’s removal of the digital image from the vortex of the machine and the placing of that image in the semi-conventional setting of the art gallery as still image of re-synthesized images, etc. The mise-en-abyme aspects of this are self-evident.

Zapping Zone is thus a space enabling to zap in the zone. Zapping means moving between zones. Some twenty monitors crammed together, a few individual sound entries and computers. Altogether they form a mass which is compact and discrete—in the linguistic sense. It is both a


\(^{17}\) See Michael Sand, ed., Aperture 145, Surface and Illusion: Ten Portfolios (Autumn 1996), for comments on Marker and Wim Wenders in this regard. See Jan-Christopher Horak, “Chris Marker’s Reality Bytes,” in the same volume, 60–65, for remarks regarding still photography and moving images, human memory, transformation of real geographical places into subjective visions, the camera as a tool for the objective documentation of reality bytes, and consciously constructed aesthetic subjectivity. With reference to Charles Baudelaire’s comments in 1859, “If photography is allowed to stand in for art....”

rattling chaos and a calculated arrangement, a dump and the dream of an oeuvre originated in the waste disposal of History and its utopias. More simply Zapping Zone is a small supermarket, a mini department store cleverly disorganized where if you cannot find whatever you need at least you can see some of your desires displayed.\textsuperscript{19}

Close viewing of the various elements of “Zapping Zone” reveal the mesmeric aspects of the project.\textsuperscript{20} Summaries,

\textsuperscript{19} Bellour, “Eulogy in B Minor,” 190.
\textsuperscript{20} The first iteration of “Zapping Zone,” Centre Pompidou, 1990, included the following components, divided into 13 zones: “Zone Frisco” (Junkopia, 6 minutes, 1981); “Zone Christo” (From Chris to Christo, S-VHS video, 24 minutes, music by Dmitri Shostakovich, 1985); “Zone Matta” (Matta ’85, S-VHS video, 12 minutes, 1985); “Zone Tarkovski” (Tarkovski ‘86, S-VHS video, 26 minutes, 1985); “Zone Éclats” (video, 21 minutes 51 seconds); “Zone Bestiare” (S-VHS video, 9 minutes 4 seconds); “Zone Spectre” (EMS-spectre video, 27 minutes); “Zone Tokyo” (Tokyo Days, video, with Arielle Dombasle, 24 minutes, 1986); “Zone Berlin” (Berliner Ballade, Hi-8 video, 20 minutes 35 seconds, 1990); “Zone Photos” (Photo Browse, 301 computer-animated photographs, 17 minutes 20 seconds, 1990); “Zone Clip” (Getting Away With It, 4 minutes 17 seconds, 1990); “Zone TV” (Détour Ceaușescu, video, 8 minutes 2 seconds, 1990); and “Zone Séquences” (20 minutes 45 seconds). “Zone Bestiare” included: Chat écoutant la musique (2 minutes 47 seconds, 1990); An Owl is an Owl is an Owl (3 minutes 18 seconds, 1990); and Zoo Pièce (2 minutes 42 seconds, 1990). “Zone Séquences” included clips from: Le fond de l’air est rouge (3 minutes 57 seconds; and 1 minute); Sans soleil (3 minutes 32 seconds; and 3 minutes 3 seconds); La solitude du chanteur de fond (2 minutes 57 seconds); Le joli mai (2 minutes 39 seconds); La sixième face du Pentagone (1 minute 37 seconds); and L’héritage de la chouette (1 minute 52 seconds). “Zone Éclats” included: Cocteau (47 seconds); 2084 (3 minutes 40 seconds); KFX (38 seconds, 15 frames); Statues 1 (1 minute 23 seconds); Taps (32 seconds); Statues 2 (52 seconds); Kat Klip (54 seconds); Alexandra (1 minute 40 seconds); Vertov (1 minute 52 seconds); Arielle (26 seconds); Chouettes (33 seconds); Zeroins (2 minutes 47 seconds); Moonfeet (1 minute 5 seconds); and Flyin’ Fractals (3 minutes 41 seconds). By the time of “Air de Paris,” Centre Pompidou, 2009,
while useful, hardly do justice to the full effect of a darkened room full of simultaneously screened vignettes, plus the mixing (and blurring) of their soundtracks. The effect is to enter a haunted wood.... Nonetheless, both summary and full immersion suggest that everything Marker was dealing with in cinema was transferred to (and further elaborated upon in) new-media installations, thereby justifying his constantly shifting intentions and means toward suggesting, but never quite saying that such media (cinema and video) have the potential for invoking intelligences that are strangely "ex officio"—that is, of, but also somehow beyond cinema and video.  

“Zapping Zone” had expanded to 20 zones (plus 10 collages, four lightboxes, and one Maneki Neko): “Zone Frisco”; “Zone Matta”; “Zone Photos”; “Zone Christo”; “Zone Tokyo”; “Zone Bestiaire”; “Zone Berlin”; “Zone Séquences”; “Zone Clip”; “Zone Bosniaque”; “Zone Tarkovski”; “Zone Spectre”; “Zone TV”; plus “Zone Show”; “Zone Collages”; “Zone HyperStudio”; “Zone Slide Show”; “Zone Vidéo”; “Zone Graphs”; and “Zone Éléphant.” The latter seven, new zones were presented on Apple IIGS computer stations as homage, by Marker, to the by-then-defunct computer system. “Zone Show” was placed at the entrance to the gallery, as an introduction/program guide to the installation, and utilized a television monitor. Technical specifications, layout of the exhibition, etc., plus images of the “Air de Paris” installation at Arts Santa Mònica, Barcelona, Spain, are to be found in “Zapping Zone (Proposals for an Imaginary Television): Chris Marker, 1990.” The various monitors were set upon pedestals, dispensing with the iconic, pyramidal metal stand (the “Tatlin-esque” version, with antennae) of the 1990 installation. For an image of this earlier installation (1990-1991), see Passages de l’image (1991), 190.

21 A restored “Zapping Zone” was included in the 2014 Marker retrospective held at Whitechapel Gallery, London, England.

22 “Zapping Zone” media viewed courtesy of Sylvie Douala-Bell, at Nouveaux Médias, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France, June 25, 2012. The 13 DVDs, prepared for the “Air de Paris” exhibition, and now in the Pompidou archive, are: “Zone TV”; “Zone Spectre”; “Zone Tarkovski”; “Zone Bosniaque”; “Zone Clip”; “Zone Berlin”; “Zone Séquences”; “Zone Tokyo”; “Zone Bestiaire”; “Zone Christo”; “Zone Photos”; “Zone Frisco”; and “Zone Matta.” See “3/ Liste des DVDs,” in “Zapping Zone (Proposals for an Imaginary Television):
“Zone Spectre” is emblematic. Subtitled “Formes aléatoires,” it is composed of lights, apparitions, principalities, and/or “angels,” generated with EMS Spectre.23 The synthesizer generates two fields: One (the middle ground), spinning like a top (formed along two axes, X, Y), and a second (the apparent background), composed of a geometrical pattern of abstract cubic units (à la Gustav Klimt and such). This two-fold dynamic structure, of course, floats in a third space, which is the ether of the digital void (the synthesizer’s virtual void), a possible encapsulation of an unknown field that resides in all works of art, and a field that forms the basis of all theories for “framing” a work.

“Zone Séquences” (1994 version), a highly focused section from the subsequently withdrawn 13-part, 1989 television series L’héritage de la chouette, consists of a sustained view of the slightly upturned faces of an audience in a theater watching film images drift across a screen (with narrative references to Plato’s cave), but with Marker’s camera mostly watching the audience watching the images, and the images drifting (flickering/reflecting) across the faces of the audience as screen. See Level Five and 2084 for the human/digital interface (skin as screen) this invokes, as Marker’s camera is interested in the expressions on the faces of the people sitting in the theater, in the same manner that his camera has repeatedly focused on the faces of people sitting in the subway or marching through the streets of Paris or elsewhere. The face becomes, as such, a screen/mask, and the images are projected/reflected onto the face both literally and expressively, both by Marker and/or by the subject in terms of their response.24


23 See Sans soleil for the early use of this analogue video synthesizer from the early 1970s.

“Zone Bestiare” (1994 version), ultimately an oblique, yet elegant homage to Guillaume-en-Égypte (Marker’s cat, correspondent, alter ego, and “familiar”) and his various confreres, with the central moment being (and forever remaining) Chat écoutant la musique—a very short film of Guillaume cat-napping on the keyboard of a Yamaha DX7 electric piano, in Marker’s studio presumably, “listening” to a recording of an étude (the piano sonata “Pajaro triste”/“Sad Bird,” no less) by Spanish composer Federico Mompou—is stunningly simple in its presentiments for elegiac time. LED light levels rise and fall as Guillaume opens and closes his eyes. “He was fond of Ravel (any cat is) but he had a special crush on Mompou. That day (a beautiful sunny day, I remember) I placed Volume I of the complete ‘Mompou by Mompou’ on the CD player to please him....” As counterpoint, An Owl is an Owl is an Owl is a repetitive, surrealistic, digitized voice poem read by two voices (perhaps male and female) to an owl.

ings on cinema as a gigantic body (a giant “leaning across a white screen”) and the spectator’s place within this “giant anatomy”—“a body infinitely larger than our own (and not just because the eye that momentarily projects images of it is like a lighthouse).” “I don’t think that we’re seated in Plato’s cave; we are, for an unthinkable eternity, suspended between a giant body and the object of its gaze. So I am, not seated, but suspended beneath a sheaf of light. This sheaf is animated. The easy anteriority of its movement in the animation of the film’s objects is visible as a scissor effect, or as if the rays hit upon legs, and from time to time crossed them, uncrossed them”: Jean-Louis Schefer, “Cinema,” in Jean-Louis Schefer, The Enigmatic Body: Essays on the Arts by Jean-Louis Schefer, ed. and trans. Paul Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 130–131 [108–138]. See also, Jean-Louis Schefer, “On La jetée,” in the same volume.

25 Chat écoutant la musique is an exceptional, short film that also formed the “Entr’acte” for Le tombeau d’Alexandre. It was subsequently added as an extra to DVD releases of Chats perchés (2004).


27 Marker has processed the soundtrack in such a way that it renders the voices nearly inhuman.
Perhaps “Zone Tarkovski” speaks for the entire operation—for video as cinema. It features an excerpt from Marker’s documentation of Offret (The Sacrifice), but acutely focuses on Tarkovsky filming, in his usual painstaking manner, Leonardo’s Adoration of the Magi, tracing the tree upward through the foliage by way of his signature, excessively long tracking shot, but this time by moving “inside” of a painting, by way of scanning its surface, as he did, as well, in the closing sequence of Andrei Rublev. There is no narrative or commentary added by Marker other than the on-site dialogue and occasional diegetic sound from the set/soundtrack, extracted, in part, from Tarkovsky’s Offret proper (a sonic montage, by Marker, nonetheless, of voice, wind and fire, by appropriation). Filming the final conflagration from Tarkovsky’s last film, plus on-site deliberations (focusing on the construction and orchestration of the sequence, or the final, extraordinarily long Tarkovskian tracking shot), Marker brings it to a close with “post-production” scenes he filmed in a Paris hospital, with Tarkovsky editing the film (intercut with passages from the film itself), and the penultimate “ending” for this ending; that is, scenes of the Maestro watching the final edit of Offret for the first time from his hospital bed in Paris, in January 1986 or so. Offret was subsequently released in May 1986, in Europe, and November 1986, in the United States. Tarkovsky died on December 29, 1986, in Paris. Offret was the last of seven acknowledged masterpieces. Elsewhere, by way of a detour through an anecdote about a séance, Marker notes that, yes, Tarkovsky made seven masterpieces; but he also made only seven films.\(^28\)

February 5, 2015

\(^28\) Marker tells the story of the séance in Chris Marker, Une journée d’Andrei Arsenevitch.