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MARKER'S MADELEINES: THE ESSAY BEYOND TEXT AND FILM

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Abstract: This paper focuses on Chris Marker's status as an essayist but, instead of taking his cinematic works, it explores his early print essays *Commentaires* (1967), *Le Dépays* (Chrismarker.org), and his later digital works – *Immemory* (Gorgomancy.net) and *Ouvroir* (SecondLife.com). This study is based on the argument that the essay is a malleable form and that it serves its primary function of expressing thought through a process of combining disparate elements in a non-linear format. Further, it argues that this digressive nature of the essay not only enables it to combine different media such as the use of photographs and text, but also it is capable of combining material between media and produce an entirely new medium such as multimedial works in the digital sphere.

Keywords: Chris Marker, *Commentaires*, *Le Dépays*, *Sans Soleil*, *Immemory*, *Ouvroir*

It is a difficult task to associate the name Chris Marker¹ (Lupton 12) with a recognizable face as he chose to remain anonymous as much as he could, unlike that of his Left Bank contemporaries such as Alain Resnais and Agnès Varda. When one thinks of Marker, it might conjure an image from *Sans Soleil* (1983) or *La Jetée* (1963) – his two essay films which are considered to be his masterpiece, the face of a ginger cat called *Guillaume* who surreptitiously appears on everything associated with Marker and even in Varda's *Beaches of Agnès* (2008). Apart from these, a myriad of other images are present

¹ Catherine Lupton suggests that Marker's real name could have been Christian-François Bouche-Villeneuve.

throughout his works which might manifest in the most unusual of moments as if Marker went on to plant subliminal and pensive clues – a *Madeleine* which invokes memory through sensation². It is perhaps towards this end that Marker asked in his essay film *Sans Soleil* “How does one remember thirst?”.

Marker is primarily known to be a filmmaker with nearly six decades of filmmaking starting from the 1950s. Moreover, Marker’s prolific career produced a number of works in photography, such as *Staring Back* (2007), *Coréennes* (*Koreans*, 2009), *Passengers* (2011), along with multimedia works, such as *Ouvroir* (2008), *Immemory* (1997), *Zapping Zone* (1990), to mention a few that have been prominent in gallery spaces. His view on media co-relations is particularly illuminating in this context:

The trouble (...) is that we tend to cut them [the works] into pieces and to leave each piece to the specialists: a film to the film critic, a photograph to the photographic expert, a picture to the art pundit (...). Whereas the really interesting phenomenon is the totality of these forms of expression, their obvious or secret correspondences, and their interdependencies. The painter does not really turn to photography, then to the cinema, he starts from a single preoccupation (...) and modulates it through all the media (qtd. in Lupton 10).

Throughout his works across media, one can see his pursuit in observing the quotidian and his reframing of it through techniques of portraiture, editing, collage, juxtaposition and commentary. This curatorial tenacity of Marker often re-vitalizes the otherwise banal or mundane and imbibes it with a cosmic significance against the backdrop of history as if one image gets frozen and becomes apparent just as it is bound to flow into temporal oblivion along with the rest. Marker made his art recognize and re-purpose such instances, where moments of historical insignificance are made otherwise by drawing threads from one innocuous image to another, until they attain a cosmic poignancy which can no longer be ignored while charting the course of history.

Except for *La Jetée*, Marker’s works are non-fictional and conventionally this would make him a documentary filmmaker. However, even a cursory viewing of his

² Marker in *Immemory* describes Madeleines as “thus one comes to call Madeleines all those objects, all those instants that can serve as triggers for the strange mechanisms of memory”. He takes the idea from Marcel Proust’s novel *In Search of Lost Time*.

films would reveal that the tonality of his “documentaries” which exhibit the intimacy of journal entries – eloquent memoirs with images that sometimes seem to share no direct resemblance with the commentary, the narration not bearing the apparent weight of linearity and a remarkable subjective immersion where he is at once part of and outside the events of his observation, are contrary to the objective and factual obsession of conventional documentary. The strong personal voice and its subjective expression, literariness and a departure from documentary realism and linear narrative prompts the idea of it being an audio-visual essay.

For example, in his celebrated work *Sans Soleil*, the script of the film is in the form of a letter that a fictional Sandor Krasna writes to an unknown woman about his travels around Africa, Japan, San Francisco, Guinea-Bissau, Iceland, and the Cape Verde islands. The letter is read out in a voice-over format by Alexandra Stewart in the English version of the film, around miscellaneous visuals shot by Marker himself, some by his photographer friends along with some archival footage. The epistolary format of the script proceeds in a Proustian manner, where one image plucked from a random mnemonic node leads to another, as if each one is prompted through Madeleine cues where a sensation prompts an avalanche of memories. Similarly, *Sans Soleil* is permeated by cultural symbols that seem to be long forgotten above the bustling cityscapes of Tokyo, forgotten episodes of history beneath the impatient faces of the fishermen at Cape Verde islands or in the eyes of women at Guinea-Bissau. The trajectories are so infinite that it becomes impossible to digest the film in one sitting. The dissociation from the visuals and the soundscape is so much that one can read the script alone or mute the sound and just see the visuals themselves as an experiment and still leave satisfied at the end of the exercise. While retaining a strong subjective voice through the epistolary format, it’s interesting to observe how Marker foregrounds the conditions of modern existence in a clash with the traditional highlighting of a historical shift.

The Essay film as “*ars combinatoria*”

To categorize a film such as *Sans Soleil* as an essay film, and not simply a “documentary,” is to point at its experimental quality, to a non-compliance with conventional rules of narration and an expressivity that goes beyond documentary

modes of exposition. The essay, right from its early days of practice from Montaigne and Bacon, existed in a contentious zone between fiction and non-fiction. In his interpretation of the essay genre, Max Bense highlights its experimental nature, drawing from the very etymology of the word “essay” as “experiment” or “Versuch,” in German:

“Essay” means “attempt” or “experiment” [*Versuch*] in German. This raises the question whether this expression means that a literary-leaning person “attempts” to write about something, or whether the writing about an explicit or a partly explicit topic has the character of an attempt, an experiment with that topic. I am convinced that the essay is an expression of an experimental method; the essay is experimental writing (Bense 52).

The essay’s primary task is the expression of thoughts, ideas and concepts. At the same time, as Adorno³ highlights, this intellectual experience need not proceed in a continuum. He further notes:

Thought does not progress in a single direction; instead, the moments are interwoven as in a carpet. The fruitfulness of the thoughts depends on the density of the texture. The thinker does not actually think but rather makes himself into an arena for intellectual experience, without unraveling it... the essay proceeds, so to speak, methodically unmethodically (Bense 70).

This ‘methodically unmethodical’ nature of the essayistic gave immense opportunities to those filmmakers who sought such an *avant-garde* mode of expression, right from the early years of cinema. Nora M. Alter gives an excellent account of such early exercises of filmmakers, where she highlights the presence of the essayistic in their well-known works (31-56). Her reading of these films ranging from Richter’s *Inflation* (1928), Ruttmann’s *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* (1927) and Vertov’s *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) are quite interesting, as she interprets the *avant-garde* techniques used in these films through the lens of the essayistic. For example, she notes how the lack of “scenario, sets or actors,” linear narration along with formal experimentations and shots

³ See Theodor W. Adorno, “The Essay as Form.” *Essay on the Essay Film*, edited by Nora M Alter and Timothy Corrigan, Columbia University Press, 2017, pp. 60–82. Originally published in *Notes to Literature*, 1: 3–23, edited by Rolf Tiedemann. Translated by Shierry Weber Nicolsen. New York: Columbia University Press, 1991.

based on quotidian reality “attempt to produce an essayistic communication based not on linguistic code but rather on visual representation” (Alter 51).

On the precise nature of essay’s experimentation, Bense argues that the essayist is engaged in a process of a literary “ars combinatoria,” that he is a “combiner, a tireless creator of configurations around a specific object,” that produces a “new configuration.” He further argues that:

The transformation of a configuration, in which the object is located, is the point of the experiment, and the goal of the essay is less the revelation of the object’s definition than is the sum of factors, the sum of configurations, in which it becomes possible (Bense 51).

While Bense’s arguments are made on the literary essay, they hold true for the cinematic essay as well. The essay film configures and reconfigures disparate elements of material and narration within itself, such as the incorporation of textual and photographic material and other means of formal experimentation. It can make extensive use of collage, where images are gleaned from a variety of different sources, with the soundtrack often progressing independently of it. Such exercises, along with an equally fragmented narrative scheme, can contribute to the transgressive and disjunctive ethos of the essay film. It is also deeply self-reflexive of the process of such re-configurations of existing material and often this mirrors the dynamic nature of human memory, which also reconfigures the past in varying degrees during the present. In the following sections I shall discuss various works of Marker ranging from his print essays to electronic ones, and through this process I will highlight Marker’s seamless movements between media.

Image and Text Juxtapositions

Before enquiring into the intermediality of Marker’s photographs and multimedia works, it is vital to highlight Marker’s primary status as an essayist. Marker’s first intermedial work, and perhaps also his first assignment, was to develop a series of unusual travel guides called the *Petite Planète* for *Editions de Seuil*. Marker’s own introduction to the series, as noted by Isabel Stevens, goes as follows:

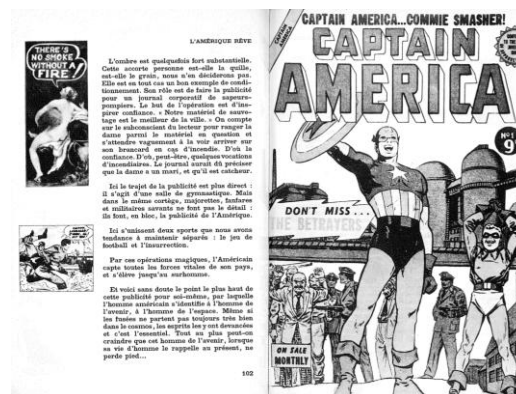
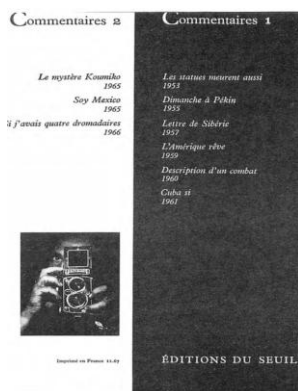
Not a guidebook, not a history book, not a propaganda brochure, not a traveller's impressions, but instead equivalent to the conversation we would like to have with someone intelligent and well versed in the country that interests us (*On Chris Marker's 'Petite Planète'*)

Stevens notes that a number of artists worked along with Marker for the series, which includes Henri Cartier-Bresson, Inge Morath, Robert Capa, David Seymour, Elliot Erwitt, Agnès Varda and William Klein. More importantly, her analysis of the work, apart from substantiating Marker's ethnographic curiosity, highlights his characteristic technique of combining images and texts with a certain essayistic quality which acts as a prelude to his later works.

Illustrations creep over the essays, which are broken up with quotes, poems, and song lyrics. Above all, the books demonstrate Marker's sophisticated pairings of words and pictures, with photographs used at varying sizes throughout: taking over spreads, jostling against blocks of text or color, and arranged in lively sequences of small images (as qtd. in Stevens).

This juxtaposition of text and image often carries the simplicity of a children's book wherein each illustration further acts as a visual-aid that is meant to provoke the imagination, like a memory-image whose *punctum* is in a constant process of being reshaped by the text. Marker was always fascinated with the combination of words and images and his *Petite Planète* can be considered as a precursor to his later works and can be notably seen as its pinnacle in *La Jetée*.

Marker's *Commentaires I* and *II* can be considered as his first major work in this regard, which includes a collection of photographs/stills from his films, set alongside with complete scripts. It even includes two imaginary films— *L'Amérique Rêve* (*The American Dream*) and *Soy Mexico* (*I am Mexico*) that Marker had never shot and is an evidence of Marker's visual thinking or what Bazin termed "verbal intelligence" or "horizontal montage," "forged from ear to eye" (1958, p. 103) – imbuing his images with a literariness and also rendering colours to the text.



It has to be noted that the works presented in this two volume collection are specifically his travel essay films – *Les Statues Meurent Aussi* (1953) on Africa, *Dimanche en Pekin* (1955), *Letter from Siberia* (1959), *Description of a Combat* (1960) on Israel, *Cuba Si* (1962), *Koumiko Mystery* (1965) on Tokyo and *If I had Four Camels* (1966) consisting of travel photographs from various locations. This clearly resonates with the editorial idea behind his *Petite Planète* series and gives us sufficient proof to understand Marker as primarily a traveling essayist or even a graphic artist given his love for comics, and as someone who does not distinguish between photography and film as binaries, but rather is keen to explore the artistic potential of how one form remediates the other.

Perhaps, to better understand this, one will have to look at Marker's script for *Soy Mexico* (I am Mexico), the film he never made. It would not be precise enough to call this material a script, because it is not written with the explicit purpose to be shot later. Instead, it can be called a photo-essay that seeks to break the cliché of framing Mexico as nothing beyond the land of flowers.

Among the Sunday walkers, two characters stand out: Nagel and Moore, American filmmakers who filming this idyllic image of a flower-filled Mexico and filming exactly that which corresponds to what their audience hopes... Kilometers away, in an Indian village, an adulterous woman condemned to several days of forced labor digs the earth under the non-compassionate gaze of the crowd. The lover is in prison... Follow the faces of children who do not laugh. They are no less beautiful. But even if we can always make a child laugh, no one could force them to bear this sadness in the eyes, if it did not come from far away. From where comes the sadness, and particularly the Indian sadness? And where do the Indians come from? Nagel and Moore will not be able to explain this crucial point⁴ (*Commentaires* 42-43).

What I would like to highlight here is that the essay as a genre can be literary, photographic, filmic — celluloid, video or digital, graphic and even performative owing to its transgressive quality. Jihoon Kim highlights this intermediality of the essay film genre by locating his intervention within existing theoretical discussions on the essay:

Whereas Rascaroli stresses voice-over, intertitles, and the director's diegetic presence as primary to the essay film, Corrigan, Lopate, and Arthur regard the montage, camera movement, use of interviews, and other representational manipulations of the image as expressive of subjectivity that is multilayered, fragmentary, and unstable. Again, this variety of formal devices and materials attests to the textual richness of the essay film, which contributes to the transgressive aspects of its genre, enunciation, and media (Kim 519).

Sans Soleil's status as an essay film is often a widely discussed subject. However, a year before the film Marker came out with a photo-essay collection *Le Dépays* on his travels through Japan. Apart from the striking similarities between the photographs, its accompanying commentary and the film, Marker's introduction to the book highlights his take on the relationship between the image and text, the dissociation of which

⁴ “Parmi les promeneurs du dimanche, deux personnages se détachent: Nagel et Moore, cinéastes américaines en train de filmer pour la télévision cette image idyllique d'un Mexique fleuri et nonchalant qui correspond exactement à ce qu'espère leur public. Kilomètres de là, dans un village indien, une femme adultère condamnée à plusieurs jours de travaux forcés bêche la terre sous les regards sans compassion de la foule. L'amant est en prison. Suite de visages d'enfants qui ne rient pas. Ils n'en sont pas moins beaux. Mais si l'on peut toujours faire rire un enfant, personne ne pourrait les forcer à porter cette tristesse dans les yeux, si elle ne venait pas de très loin. D'où vient la tristesse, et singulièrement celle-ci, la tristesse indienne ? Et d'où viennent les Indiens? Nagel et Moore n'éluderont pas ce point capital.” My translation.

becomes an important technique in the film and is indicative of its modernist aesthetics. Marker writes, “The text does not comment more on the images than the images illustrate the text... Let them therefore be taken in disorder, simplicity, and duplication, as it is proper to take all things in Japan”⁵ (*Le Dépayés*).

Le Dépayés was published only in French, causing some amount of disappointment to the English audience. However, in one corner of Marker’s online archive *Immemory* (which will be discussed later), hides a rubric titled *The Disorient*⁶, and in it lies the English version of the text in three chapters – “Insomnia of the Tokyo Dawn,” “You called that one...” and “It’s not just...”. Familiar images and names from *Sans Soleil* greet the reader of *The Disorient*. The cat shrine in *Go To Ku Ji*, suburban areas of Shinjuku, the Hokkaido islands, the *takenoko* dancers, sleepy commuters, the “horror” in Japanese television shows, the anti-communist politician – *Mr. Akao*, departmental stores, the *Yamanote* suburban line along with many other familiar instances from *Sans Soleil*. Both in *The Disorient* and *Sans Soleil*, Marker is the subterranean tourist who investigates foreign lands with the “relentlessness of a bounty hunter,” a phrase which he used to describe his own travels in *Sans Soleil*. The richness in both *The Disorient* and *Sans Soleil* lies in Marker’s essayistic observation that absorbs colours and textures, musing over its myths and totems, wherein each image indicates Marker’s ethnography of the everyday and becomes a Proustian *Madeleine* that opens up a vertigo of infinite associations.

Marker himself talks about *Madeleines*, and in *Immemory* under the rubric of “memory,” taking his cue from both Proust and Hitchcock, he says “thus one comes to call Madeleines, all those objects, all those instants that serve as triggers for the strange mechanism of Memory.”⁷ In *The Disorient* Marker recounts his conversation with the Japanese composer Toru Takemitsu in a little bar in Shinjuku, who tells him “We have a very special relationship with cats.” While Marker limits the details of the conversation in *Sans Soleil*, he offers a more detailed version of this in *The Disorient*. For Marker, whose favourite animals are the cat and the owl, the cat becomes synonymous with

⁵ “Le texte ne commente pas plus les images que les images n’illustrent le texte... Qu’on veuille donc bien les prendre dans le désordre, la simplicité et le dédoublement, comme il convient de prendre toutes choses au Japon.” My translation.

⁶ As seen in <https://gorgomancy.net/>. Navigate to “Photography” and then “Japan.”

⁷ As seen in <https://gorgomancy.net/>. Navigate to “Index” and then “Marcel Proust.”

Japan and a *Madeleine* that cuts across his works. In *The Disorient*, Marker explains further that his fascination for cats in Japanese society is not just his personal “mania,” but rather a persistent cultural object or trace, and refers to the book published in 1980 by a certain “Keybunsha,” which has a “methodical inventory, complete with maps, of all places in Tokyo connected to the Cat.” He also mentions that the cat is “dogged by a lousy reputation,” culturally as it was the “only animal to arrive late for Buddha’s death” and thus a symbol of the “Japanese way of siding with the weakest, with the undercat, alongside the well-established and justified — reputation of Japanese cruelty” (*The Disorient*).

Both in *The Disorient* and *Sans Soleil*, Marker talks about cat shrines. In *Sans Soleil* Marker tells us about the shrine at Go To Ku Ji, where a couple come to pray for their lost cat Tora. In *The Disorient*, Marker recalls how he found his way to the cat shrine. In a typical Proustian manner, both these images become inextricable from each other. In *Sans Soleil*, one is struck by the way in which Marker renders ordinary images with a poetic intensity using the essayistic voice-over, and as one reads the prose from *The Disorient*, it becomes impossible not to construct virtual images of his visit to Go To Ku Ji, especially because of his reference to the rain sequences from *Rashomon*. The quality of the *Madeleine* is such that it renders ordinary images with a timeless quality which in a Proustian manner can be seen as an exercise to regain lost time. The image of the white cat with its paw raised to offer blessings is a popular totem in Japan and is called a *maneki-neko*, and as totems they link the individual to the cosmic or the collective cutting across spatio-temporal boundaries. Marker’s *Madeleines* apart from having an atemporal potential also cut across the mediums of photography, film and prose/poetry. Below I quote two passages on Marker’s visit to the cat shrine in Go To Ku Ji, one from his film *Sans Soleil* and the other from his photo-book *The Disorient*:

He wrote me that in the suburbs of Tokyo there is a temple consecrated to cats. I wish I could convey to you the simplicity — the lack of affectation — of this couple who had come to place an inscribed wooden slat in the cat cemetery so their cat Tora would be protected. No, she wasn't dead, only run away (*Sans Soleil*).

Then you had more leeway to tell of your other adventures, the one of the twins in the train bringing you precisely to Go To Ku ji (it was raining, just like in *Rashomon*), you didn't yet know where the temple was, you stopped the passers-by saying “*neko*” and joining your hands in the gesture of Buddhist prayer (*The Disorient*).



(Image of Go To Ku Ji from *Sans Soleil*)



(Image of Go To Ku Ji from *Le Dépayés*)

Another aspect which connects both *The Disorient* and *Sans Soleil* into a seamless fabric is Marker's idiosyncratic love for portraits and especially for sleeping Japanese commuters. In *Sans Soleil* Marker says that the “train inhabited by sleeping people puts together all the fragments of dreams, makes a single film of them — the ultimate film. The tickets from the automatic dispenser grant admission to the show.” He then captures portraits of commuters inside the train and splices their reverie with images from Japanese television shows, marked by their violence and explicitness. This montage of juxtapositions is an extension of Marker's earlier line of thought, where he wonders whether the entire city of Tokyo is a projection emanating from a collective dream. In “The Disorient,” Marker gives further clues to his fascination for sleeping commuters albeit in a different fashion:

One can spend entire days navigating from train to metro, underground to sky-rail... there are plenty of long empty stretches allowing one to choose a strategic angle or a face-to face position. Then begins the hunt for the sleepers. They fascinate you. You take the tube to see them, you forget your appointments, you neglect to change trains, just to remain a few more minutes before the absolute shot, the ideal close-up of a sleeper's face. Their slumber frees up a range of expressions that social standing and a concern for appearances hold

back in the waking state, and on their dozing faces you can eat entire life histories, smiles and stress, nodding and ecstasy. How many scenarios did you invent in those moments... (*The Disorient*).



(Stills from *Sans Soleil*)

(Stills from *Le Dépayés*)

Slumber, as visually thought and described by Marker in its subterranean hues, becomes a means for Marker to investigate the unconscious layers of Japanese culture torn between tradition and the implosion of mass-media images. In *Sans Soleil*, he captures the sleeping commuters, and borrowing the cryptic images of late night television, implants them on the screen as their dreams, where each ordinary commuter becomes a character of a late night television show carrying the horror, sexuality, magic and violence of a bygone era as imagined by the popular images of the present.

The Disorient not only highlights the process of media combination through the use of the literary essay and photography, but at the same time the similarities between *The Disorient* and *Sans Soleil* demonstrate Marker's intermedial way of thinking which combines both the literary and the cinematic through the discursive technique of the essay. While there is also an element of intertextuality in play between both these works, it cannot be denied that it nevertheless shows the lucidity by which Marker is able to traverse different types of media using both text and images.

The Digital Turn: *Immemory* and *Ouvroir*

Marker's *Immemory* is a multimedia archive organized as an intuitive network, in the form of photographs, videos and simple graphics, and it does not only help to perceive the "hypermediacy" (Bolter and Grusin, 2000) of Marker's works, but can also be used as an important resource that would help understand Marker's ethnographic impulse, his status as an essayist and his interest in using the hypermediated universe to understand the materiality of memory as dynamic and that which is always being reconstituted. Though originally created as a CD-ROM, *Immemory* is presently archived online in web-format, and can be considered a hypermediated essay and an archive to his entire career as an essayist, filmmaker, photographer and graphic artist. For this very reason, *Immemory* is a complex labyrinth that amalgamates various media forms into its fabric but that which even while originating from a single authorial voice, effaces its presence as it combines multiple enunciating positions in a dialogue. The graphic outlay of *Immemory* remediates his previous work in such a way that it introduces an interactivity whose different zones can be navigated by the viewer. It also effectively remediates his previous work wherein, for example, the images from his earlier photo-essays archived in this labyrinth pop up at the click of a button and are sometimes accompanied by soundbites.

One cannot hope to navigate this labyrinth quickly and with the ease of doing so on a website, as Marker cautions "Don't zap, take your time." One of the striking features of *Immemory* is that it reflects Marker's idiosyncratic way of relating to memories and forming other abstractions through its different "interdependent zones," for which *Sans Soleil* is the best example. In the introduction to *Immemory*, Marker says:

In every life we would find continents, islands, deserts, swamps, overpopulated territories and *terrae incognitae*. We could draw the map of such a memory and extract images from it with greater ease (and truthfulness) than from tales and legends...Each of them in its turn intersects with other zones which are so many islands or continents, of which my memory contains the descriptions, and my archives, the illustrations. Of course, this work in no way constitutes an autobiography, and I've permitted myself to drift in all directions. Nonetheless, if you're going to work on memory, you might as well use the one you've always got on you... (*Immemory*).

My immediate intention would be to understand how *Immemory's* status as a hypermediated text works with its repertoire of short films, photographs, essays and anecdotes. Along with various multimedia content, *Immemory* has a number of original writings by Marker which further helps in substantiating his favourite preoccupation as that of a traveling essayist. *Immemory*, which is ultimately an autobiographical work, has three versions — *Immemory One* which is in an exhibition format and *Immemory* which is a CD-ROM and finally an online version. Nora Alter (2006) reveals that, during its exhibition at the Antoni Tapies Foundation (Barcelona, 1998), Marker extended the concept of *Immemory* to the general public:

transforming the project in a way that enabled the participants to substitute their own images and memories. The result was *Roseware*, an interactive installation in which visitors were encouraged to add new information, culminating in a dynamic and continuously chafing project (120).

The very structure of *Immemory* works like a giant electronic album which is a repertoire of Marker's various works in multiple formats. However, the modernist artist — Marker, doesn't strive for an absolute transparent immediacy of the interface but demands the viewer to reformulate their own method of navigating through this cavern. There is no single route to reach a particular zone of *Immemory*, but its logic is determined through the infinite divergent paths the viewer chooses to undertake. Alter further writes:

The route chosen by the viewer dramatically transforms him or her from the role of being a mere witness of Marker's memory and lived history to that of a co-producer of histories and memories in the twentieth century. Marker recorded and selected the bits of information in advance. Yet the order in which the information is processed is left to an active spectator. Marker's CD-ROM thus places the viewers as co-organizers of history (121).

Marker's *Immemory* can thus be argued as an autobiographical digital essay, which while retaining the properties of its older counterpart, i.e. the literary essay's reflexivity and subjectivity, becomes a hypermediated form which also carries the memory trace of these audio-visual objects as they are displaced into their post-filmic contexts. In its new hybrid techno-cultural aesthetic, these images also transform their relationship to memory wherein the audience is interpellated into the text not through the author's subjectivity but through an interactivity of the digital interface which they can freely manoeuvre.

The digital interface thus offers a new affective technoscape, wherein the objects navigated are personal objects of the artist/filmmaker/programmer, and yet become *Madeleines* that open new trajectories of mnemonic exploration to the viewer creating a fluid, intersubjective and transgressive spatio-temporal movements. The digital colouring and remediation of older media in a post-filmic context in Marker is also invariably tied to memory as it's seen in Hayao Yamaneko's image synthesizer in *Sans Soleil*. The image synthesizer reflects upon the prosthetic nature of memories as they are remediated from one digital context to the other, and in this case from the analog to the digital.

Like his essay film *Level 5* (1997), *Immemory* can be seen as a work which highlights Marker's turn to the digital, providing him with a more dynamic and fluid arsenal of gleaning through the images of the past, and navigating through history. However, his *Ouvroir* (2003) can be seen as his most definitive digital masterpiece which creates in an online virtual experiencing of the museum. *Ouvroir* was developed by Marker and co-designer Max Moswitzer in the virtual world of *Second Life* which is an online 3-D platform that principally features user generated content. Though it resembles the virtual worlds of Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games

(MMORPG), *Second Life* does not have any set objectives or conflicts to overcome. Users create avatars, interact with other residents and objects, build spaces and communities and premium users even trade in real estate using the platform's virtual currency. Essentially, *Second Life* offers any of its members complete freedom to explore, navigate and discover a seemingly infinite number of locations with assigned coordinates which is further enhanced by the power to teleport and even fly. *Ouvroir* is built at coordinates "187, 61, 39" on an archipelago running into sand and sea. On first look, after my avatar materializes, I can view the main attraction of the installation which consists of a red sphere suspended in air with Saturn-like rings and similar platforms that would remind one of space stations from popular sci-fiction. Given that my avatar can fly, I land myself on a thin walkway that leads into the sphere. One has to navigate carefully to stay on course. *Guillame en Egypt*, Marker's spritely ginger cat alter-ego makes his presence felt similar to *Immemory*. Once inside the sphere, the black indoor walls are lined with photographs from his photography collection *Staring Back* and there is no more doubt that Marker intends this to be a virtual museum. Though lacking in resolution, one can interact with the images and Guillame often offers explanations for the photographs. A nearby table has a display of Marker's *Petite Planète* series which unfortunately do not carry the detailing of his works archived in *Immemory* owing to the technological limitations of *Second Life*. One can further spiral down into the sphere and view further material of Marker's *oeuvre* that overlaps with *Immemory*. The accompanying platform to the sphere is a display room that resembles once again an actual exhibition space. On screen, one can watch a short film titled *Leila* which is a home-video recording of a mouse attacking a cat. Further on, as I descend to the ground, there is another tent which is a cinema hall that plays a section from Marker's *La Jetée* on loop. There is also a café decorated with film posters. However, further loitering around the archipelago would reveal a surreal port nested deep within the island which consists of model ships, levitating sci-fi globes and a Japanese pagoda that plays oriental music.



Marker had been exploring what constitutes the materiality of memory throughout his career from essays, photographs, moving images to the digital. Throughout his works, Marker took immense pleasure in navigating through archives, so much so that his own investigations on media and its representations of history has necessitated the creation of an archive that can consolidate these journeys. However, Marker also enjoys the erasure of his face to be replaced by *Guillame-en-Egypt*, an animated presence with a distinct subjective voice, a feline Virgil. If *Immemory* can be considered as a hypermediated essay which through its navigational interface becomes capable of inducing a dynamic polyphony of different media forms, it still wouldn't allow for a complete erasure of the authorial presence.

Bolter and Grusin point out that the Virtual Reality (VR) experience is a highly immersive one, which as a medium is meant to disappear by instilling in the viewer a sense of presence. This presence ultimately depends on the technological refinement of the apparatus that can generate and sustain this illusion of presence. However, modernist artists choose to not abide by the logic of transparency and immediacy as their art is ultimately self-reflexive of the process, and yet at the same time they would like to make use of VR's interactive potential by specifically making the user aware of its interface. Marker's *Immemory*, as noted previously, requires the user to learn its navigational manoeuvres. A new visitor would be first hit by the vertigo of its labyrinths.

This deliberate skewing of the medium's transparency can be found in all modernist works, especially in their distortion of spatio-temporal contiguities, to produce the sense of durational time. VR or other digital platforms which allow real time interactivity with the medium exist in a constant state of presence, where the present is always becoming the past and the future. And in this state of mass media implosion, one risks forgetting the risk of forgetting. The infinite archive of images and data offers a new problem — that of navigating yet another “spiral” of time or the “vertigo of time” that of “space and reality” as noted by Marker in *Sans Soleil* referring to Hitchcock, or the futuristic traveller.

Marker's choice of installing a virtual museum in *Second Life* is an exercise of subjectivity towards curating from an infinite repertoire of images. While the first rung of the sphere consists of his photos from *Staring Back* which he has gleaned from personal and public archives, the second rung contains portraits of his favourite directors and the lowest deck is an assortment of various material from *Immemory*, including X-plugs, which is a collage of classical and modernist paintings fused with popular culture, virtually displayed in a gallery space. This process is much similar to Marker's essay films where collage becomes the means of expressing a subjectivity which not only responds to particular historical moments, but at the same time garners these as personal interventions in a media culture that fails to capture the individual as the agent of history.

Analysing essayistic subjectivity and dialogism in Marker and especially in his commentaries on the digital, such as *Level 5* and *Immemory*, David Montero highlights Marker's essayistic subjectivity as being not that of an *auteur*. Montero argues that self-portraiture in Marker occurs not because “he wants to offer a picture of himself to the viewer or to bring his own memories back to life using film” but rather because he “cannot divorce himself from his own experiences or opinions.” He further adds that instead of wanting to “present a recognizable picture of himself,” he presents the self as in a state of “constant flux, continually transformed through contact with others,” the transformations which “most clearly define Marker's work as essayistic” (82), thus formulating a thesis on Marker's dialogical authorship. In relation to the CD-ROM *Immemory*, Montero translates and cites Josep M. Català's argument that the author disappears “completely” and “precisely” at the “same moment in which the elements

that constitute him become more visible and available to the spectator/user”; who is free to “construct/deconstruct the author’s figure” (qtd. in Montero 88). Montero also translates from Chris Marker’s accompanying note to the CD-ROM, in which he is noted as saying that the ultimate aim of the work is to provide “the viewer with enough familiar codes [...] so that, without almost noticing, she replaces my images and my memories with his or hers” (87-88).

Another aspect which Montero notes about *Immemory*, and that which is particularly pertinent to *Ouvroir* is the dialogism intrinsic to these digital archives which consist of the arrangement of various media forms “revealing hidden correspondences between them” and their “discursive set up” which “constantly encourages the viewer to relate them to their own experience and *draw their own conclusions*” (88). *Ouvroir* succeeds in effectively juxtaposing its authorial subjectivity with that of the viewer, as it is the user who ultimately navigates this space of memory through her avatar. The museum is an intersubjective space which depends on an individual’s embodied experiencing of collective memory. Literature, painting, photography and cinema while being objects of memory, are also themselves capable of embodying memory within themselves. Marker believes memory to be not something which exists outside representation but as being embodied within it, and thus the virtual spaces of *Immemory* or *Ouvroir* become an essayistic and dialogical apparatus within which these works communicate intermedially.

Additionally, what *Ouvroir* offers and that which *Immemory* doesn’t is a 3-dimensional experiencing of space, which brings it much closer to cinema. Marker’s short film on his digital installation also certifies this link. Within this short-film, Marker’s Guillioume, the ginger cat, becomes the avatar that explores the installation. Camera angles, tracking shots, pans and zooms are replicated through changes in points of view and the movements of the cursor. While open world games today use back stories and game objectives to replicate narrative patterns in films, *Second Life* is unique as an engine which subtracts these distractions, giving its characters a near to total subjective control. Also, it differs from other virtual environments by allowing the users to significantly interact and construct objects and also by allowing users to introduce multimedia content into these spaces. For Marker, whose imagination was fuelled by the way in which children’s classics invigorated imagination through one-page illustrations,

and who set out to view if those places really existed, *Second Life* not only offers the ultimate intermedial experience but that of his imaginary museum which Marker recounts as such in *Immemory*.

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