

Document Citation

Title	Grin without a cat
Author(s)	Stephen Garrett
Source	<i>Time Out New York</i>
Date	2002 May 02
Type	review
Language	English
Pagination	93
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Le fond de l'air est rouge (The base of the air is red), Marker, Chris, 1977

Grin Without a Cat. →

Dir. Chris Marker. 1977/1993.

N/R. 2hrs 59mins. Documentary.

With the recent presidential runoff in France producing a contest between two conservative candidates, today's newspaper headlines serve as an apt coda to Chris Marker's examination of the Left during the turbulent '60s and '70s. Such current events seem to be the inevitable outcome of the noble but cancerous revolution that Marker captures in sometimes absorbing, sometimes wearying detail in *Grin Without a Cat*. His central thesis is that Marxist guerillas in Third World communist outposts such as Bolivia were not officially supported by like-minded parties in more developed nations, while the "fragile hands" of earnest student protests in Europe never really gained the focus they needed. Therefore, both wilted from the distorted dogma and chaotic misdirection that come without sponsorship. They were like a spearhead without a spear—"a grin without a cat," Marker points out, alluding to Lewis Carroll's famous feline.

Street-brawling, riot-generating civil protests reached their apex globally in 1967 and 1968, when violent

demonstrations in Latin America, the U.S. and Europe indicated a sea change in Marxist-fueled populist indignation and activism. The upheavals also revealed these citizens' governments each had a repressive, militarized side that led too hastily to crackdowns on their own people. But what followed after such galvanizing events was a slip toward ideological confusion that eventually led to a perilously splintered view of union issues and workers' rights.

Considering the events that have followed the film's French release a quarter-century ago, Marker's epic-length reflection on the turmoil of left-wing politics and international communism from a bygone era seems to be merely an impassioned curio. Even its jaded epilogue, added in 1993 after the rise of Reagan and the fall of the USSR, feels quaint compared with the seismic shift in world politics since September 11. "Terrorism had replaced communism as the ultimate evil," a narrator intones dryly, in a statement equal parts cheeky prophecy and, in hindsight, vulgar understatement. It's doubtful that Marker's cat would still be smiling today. (Now playing; Film Forum.)

—Stephen Garrett

The base of the air is red

Time Out NY

MAY 2-9, 2002 93