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CHRIS MARKER
—#—
S i l e n t M o v i e

wexner center
for the arts

with our compliments

Sherri Geldin
Director

LA PETITE ILLUSTRATION

CINÉMATOGRAPHIQUE



CHRIS MARKER
S i l e n t M o v i e

starring Catherine Belkhodja



WEXNER CENTER for the ARTS
THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

1995

PRODUCED IN ASSOCIATION
WITH
CHRIS MARKER: SILENT MOVIE

January 26–April 9, 1995
Wexner Center for the Arts
The Ohio State University
Columbus, Ohio

June 21–September 12, 1995
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New York, New York

January 10–March 10, 1996
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Silent Movie is presented as part of the Motion Picture Centennial: Years of Discovery, 1891–1896 / Years of Celebration 1991–1996, a six-year, nationwide, multi-institution observance of the first 100 years of the moving image arts.



Years of Discovery
1891-1896
Years of Celebration
1991-1996

Silent Movie is dedicated to the memory of Guillaume-en-Egypte.

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Every summer evening,
at the Palais-Royal...

—Gertie, this game must stop

There are ghosts
in the night

Meanwhile, in the manor...

—Sounded like a name to me...
Briseis, Dido...

Remember me
but oh forget my fate

When night comes,
a strange atmosphere
fills the house...

—Soft morning, city

—Who knows?

—A nightmare
from which
I am trying to awake...

—Step on the tail
of the tiger!

—Watch the stars...

—She cried
over the lynx...

—‘The tygers of wrath
are wiser
than the horses
of instruction’

—A ghost
with a female voice?

—Believe it or not,
I read your thoughts

—So you’re talking...
but your mind
is somewhere else

Then
fate knocks at the door...

—Bless you, madam!

Remember your last dream?

—I come from a distant planet

—Someone up there...
—ignores me!

—Can you stare
at your own devils?

—In my icy sadness...

Salome, puppet of God...

Foreword and Acknowledgments

WOULDN'T IT BE WONDERFUL
IF THIS CENTURY ENDED AS
IT BEGAN, WITH A RUSSIAN
AVANT-GARDE?

—Chris Marker¹

Ever a dreamer of global sweep, Chris Marker has spent a lifetime committing the musings of heart and mind to that most dream-like medium of film. Celebrated for an utterly original cinematic oeuvre, Marker has been hailed as “The Last Auteur,”² despite his preternatural aversion to anything resembling heroic bravado or celebrity. Yet while much has been made of his fiercely guarded anonymity, there are likely few, if any, filmmakers as subtly self-revealing. Spanning four decades and as many continents, Marker’s fascination with the face, the gesture, the journey, and the waltz (all chapters in his *Silent Movie* installation for the Wexner Center) remains boundless. A still avid explorer, he perpetually seeks that indelible memory of perfection so long ago glimpsed on the silent screen.

Wary (or constitutionally incapable) of sheer fiction, Marker has invented a genre uniquely his own: part diary, part documentary, part imaginary discourse in which cultural, political, or philosophical themes become sparks for exquisitely intimate reflection. Laced with wit, compassion, humor, and grace, Marker’s films betray a razor-sharp mind and an incurably romantic soul, in equally generous proportion. His narrators, male and female alike, seem barely disguised alter-egos, supremely articulate, resonant, and commanding from “behind” the screen, even when scripted by Marker in non-native tongue. He weaves image, voice, and music in fugue-like composition to stunning effect. Who, then, more perfectly suited to pay tribute to the medium that, perhaps more than any other, has come to be the defining artistic invention of the twentieth century? *Silent Movie* is just that—Marker’s evocative meditation on the domain of his most consuming desire.

The Wexner Center's commission of *Silent Movie* was born of both predisposition and serendipity. In late 1993, the Los Angeles-based artist Christopher Williams was spending time at the Wexner Center to plan for an exhibition that he and German artist Albert Oehlen would be presenting here in January 1995. Williams turned repeatedly in conversation to Marker's importance and influence in the evolution of his own practice, which clearly bears certain affinities to the filmmaker. Wexner Center Media Curator Bill Horrigan initiated correspondence with Marker at his home in Paris, and to our extreme pleasure (and considerable surprise), Marker agreed to develop a new installation for the Wexner Center, to be on view along with the *Oehlen Williams 95* exhibition, as well as with our presentation of *Robert Frank: The Americans*. Coincidentally, we learned that Marker had actually known Frank in the 1950s; in fact, Marker's early realization that he would "never be, say, Robert Frank,"³ helped propel him into cinema, where he would ultimately attain an eerily parallel stature: the somewhat reclusive art-world legend "emerging" to a wider public late in life. Ideally, then, the confluence of these artists in the Wexner Center galleries would illuminate their common penchant for obsessively gathering, cataloguing, editing, and sequencing images—all as its own justification and reward.

The Wexner Center's commitment to the work of Chris Marker has been manifest from the very opening of the institution in November 1989, when his astonishing *La jetée* was among the first films to be screened here. Then, in 1991, Marker's vibrant installation, *Zapping Zone*, was on view as part of the Centre Pompidou's *Passages de l'image* exhibition, accompanied by the

presentation of his incomparable *Sans soleil*. Since then, we've had the honor of sharing with our audiences Marker's video diaries and short works; his vivid exploration of the legacy of Greek civilization, *The Owl's Legacy*; and most recently, *The Last Bolshevik*, ostensibly the biography of his friend and mentor Alexander Medvedkin, but also, in characteristically refracted fashion, distinctly autobiographical as well. Clearly, the occasion to work closely with Marker to develop a new installation—his first for an American institution—was, for us, an unsurpassed opportunity. We've been indescribably privileged in coming to know the exceedingly generous, witty, and humble man who lives and works behind the famous "Chris Marker" legend.

That Marker was persuaded to accept our invitation to create a new work as a recipient of a Wexner Center Residency Award, is wholly and exclusively attributable to our Media Curator, Bill Horrigan. From the outset of this project, Bill has been its abiding inspiration, even to the extent of suggesting the centenary of cinema as a thematic trigger, or "backbone," as Marker gratefully acknowledged. Through a lovely and quite amazing exchange of letters, these two kindred spirits have coaxed *Silent Movie* into glorious being.

For their ongoing commitment to the Wexner Center's Residency Award program, primary thanks must go to the trustees of the Wexner Center Foundation. Through their enlightened support, Chris Marker was able to spend time with us in Columbus, both for the presentation of *Silent Movie* and to work on forthcoming projects in our Art and Technology facility.

We are also honored to recognize the sponsorship of The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts. This generous grant was instrumental in making the presentation and catalogue of *Silent Movie* possible.

Silent Movie has taken shape here through the dedicated efforts of many Wexner Center staff members. Director of Exhibitions Sarah J. Rogers, along with Assistant Curator Annetta Massie and Curatorial Assistant Sean Ulmer, handled the exhibition's major and minor logistics with customary expertise and collegiality. This catalogue, inspired by a French film journal of the 1920s, was realized with exceptional care and sensitivity by Designer M. Christopher Jones and Editor Ann Bremner. For handling all registrarial aspects of the installation, our thanks go to Assistant Exhibition Registrar Kathleen Kopp. Assistant Exhibition Designer Michael Lucas and Engineer Steve Jones, as well as Exhibition Designer Benjamin Knepper, deserve special mention as well for their supreme skill and dexterity in achieving Marker's concept for the gallery installation. Director of Education Patricia Trumps and her staff have once again developed innovative interpretive programs to accompany *Silent Movie*. And not least, our great appreciation also goes to the entire Media Arts department staff for their many contributions to this residency project: Associate Curator Melodie Calvert, Program Assistant Dave Filipi, Studio Editor Tim Frank, and Graduate Associate Afif Arabi.

It is a testament to Marker's achievements that this exhibition will travel to The Museum of Modern Art in New York City, the University Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive at the

University of California, Berkeley, Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, and perhaps on to Los Angeles, Toronto, Chicago, Seattle, and Paris. We are grateful to our colleagues at each of these venues for their commitment to this project.

Most of all, we express our profound and heartfelt appreciation to Chris Marker for the magnificent gift that *Silent Movie* represents—to the Wexner Center and to the world. With characteristic modesty and candor, Marker began this enterprise by asking if the Wexner Center could risk a 1% possibility of failure. The answer went unspoken, for there was never a shred of doubt that Chris Marker would summon the sublime. It's what he does.

SHERRI GELDIN
Director

¹ Letter from Chris Marker to Bill Horrigan, October 12, 1994.

² James Quandt, "Grin Without a Cat," *Cinematheque Ontario Programme Guide* (Fall 1993), p. 4.

³ Letter from Chris Marker to Bill Horrigan, March 31, 1994.

—Never forget...

A cage
went searching
for a bird

—Are we the hollow men?

What does your mirror say?

—Bizarre! Bizarre!

—This is the end...

—Remember
the lilies of the field,
and all that?

Gloom is on this ship

—Are you sure
this world
was meant for you?

Tender is the night...

—They can't take that
away from us, can they?

—Listen to the wind

When she looked back,
she saw something unusual...

Soft as a kitten's paw...

In those days,
cats were worshipped

—Life is full
of solved mysteries
and unexplained evidences

—There are
unnamed birds
outside

—Tomorrow may be
the same day

—Never look back!

—Pardon me?

Behind a crimson curtain
the waltz goes on and on

—Are you serious?

—Don't patch up
a broken crystal

—Tears are perfect
for coded messages

—I feel sorry for you

Another Likeness

THE MOST RECENT VERSION OF WHAT HE WANTS TO SAY SEEMS TO HIM THE BEST EVERY TIME, AND HE STRIKES OUT THE ONE IT REPLACES, BUT EACH IN ITS TURN HAS HAD THE SAME EFFECTIVENESS FOR HIM (WHICH IT RETAINS FOR THE READER) AND HAS BROUGHT NEARER THAT UNSTABLE HAPPINESS WHICH IS NEVER ONE OF FEELING—INTELLECTUAL HAPPINESS, THE DISCOVERY OF A CONNECTION BETWEEN CIRCUMSTANCES AND SITUATION, LIKE THAT OF A SCIENTIST DISCOVERING A LAW, A HAPPINESS NOT TO BE COMPARED WITH THE OTHER KIND, NOR INDEED WITH ANYTHING EXCEPT LOVE, A BARELY EXPRESSIBLE HAPPINESS...

—Dominique Aury (on Proust)¹

I CLAIM, FOR THE IMAGE, THE HUMILITY AND THE POWERS OF A MADELEINE.

—Chris Marker²

"I write to you from a far-off country," the sentiment spoken in Chris Marker's 1958 *Letter from Siberia*, continues to haunt and to bless Marker's work as its presiding epigraph. Although Marker is widely regarded as one of the few indispensable, inimitable figures of post-World War II international cinema, it becomes more and more clear that, for him, cinema is simply one expressive domain, one "zone," and perhaps, at that, an interim or intermediate one. Having recently written, "I betrayed Gutenberg for McLuhan a long time ago," the genuinely self-critical Marker continues to experiment with new technological frontiers, driven in this by the spirit of inquiry itself as much as by the desire to invent and then to claim what for him would be the perfect discursive form.³

That perfect form would have a hybrid heart, partaking at once, as far as literary antecedents go, of the letter and the essay forms. Both of those traditions, within the enormity of a century of cinema, have been relatively marginal practices, quietly coursing alongside the juggernaut of the narrative feature film. Luckily for Marker, the French cinema has traditionally offered a slightly more hospitable haven to those wishing to use cinema for its essayistic potential, which would begin to explain the possibility of the very existence of *Sans soleil*, the "fiction" feature-length film structured around the letters and the footage of a cameraman never actually appearing in the film.⁴

Of course, the cameraman need not actually appear in order for spectators to think he has, thanks to the celebrated “tone” of Marker’s voice, unwavering and instantly identifiable through and within the dozens of works to which he has attached his name. The withholding, in all of Marker’s work, of his own physical, visible presence other than what’s carried in the tone of the voice, has paradoxically contrived to produce a body of commentary in which the workings of the artist’s mind, the exercise of his sensibility, appear to be offered up for view with extraordinary intimacy.⁵ This voice, which informs Marker’s printed essays and books as much as his film and video dispatches, is that of an amused melancholic, a romantic skeptic, “Russian” in its passionate depths and “French” in its intellectual playfulness. It’s the voice of a insomniac dreamer, projecting a cat-like simultaneity of intimacy and absence in which there is no ego, only alter-ego. “Logical consequence: total recall is memory anaesthetized. After so many stories of men who had lost their memory, here is the story of one who has lost forgetting...and who, through some peculiarity of his nature, instead of drawing pride from the fact and scorning mankind of the past and its shadows, turned to it first with curiosity and then with compassion.”⁶

Just as Proust could only accommodate the claims of memory in a novel that would at every moment be a commentary on its own creation and hence remain perpetually open and unconcluded, so too with Marker do the linear and closed structures of traditional filmed and written languages present impediments to the desired expressive imperative. Rare exceptions aside, the privileged rhetorical gesture in Marker’s work is provided by the digression, the unexpected lateral move un-

folding theretofore unseen vistas for exploration. In this regard, it would not be unjust to see all of Marker’s most characteristic work as having been produced in anticipation and advance of the existence of those technological means that his combination of material and expressive intent would “ideally” require. To the extent that Marker’s film and video works have attempted to assume such forms as would resemble the logics and biases of memory itself, one could say that to that same extent, the presently evolving technology of non-linear digital editing would appear to provide in hindsight the structural paradigm to which his earlier work aspired. As Marker himself put this, in discussing the AVID video editing system, “I thought immediately of the computer: finally, they’ve done what I was aiming at with the rudimentary tools I had, since I tried to shape things my way. (This with the reflection that *they* could have speeded it up a bit—let’s say ten years earlier...)”⁷

Increasingly drawn to emerging visual and literary forms, Marker in his recent works is declaring that the image as it has been up until now constructed is only a kind of impatience on the part of vision. In his proposal for his forthcoming CD-ROM, *Immemory*, Marker writes:

As compasses go, I went looking for my bearings long ago in history. Strangely enough it is not the immediate past that provides us with models of a possible computerized navigation around the Memory theme. It is too heavily dominated by the arrogance of classical story-telling and the positivism of biology. While the “Art of Memory” is a very ancient discipline, which has fallen into (gasp!) oblivion, while physiology and psychology evolved in separate domains, some old scholars had a more functional vision of the whole

thing:... But the best description of the insides of a CD-ROM like the one I have in mind could be found in the writings of Robert Hooke (1635/1702—the man who foresaw, before Newton, gravitation's laws): "Now I will build a mechanical model and sensitive representation of Memory. I will suppose there is a certain location, or point, in Man's brain, where the Soul has its principal siege. I won't elaborate on the precise place of that point; all I will postulate is that such a location exists where all impressions are received by the senses are transmitted and received for contemplation, and furthermore that these impressions are nothing else than the Movements of particles and bodies."⁸

Silent Movie, Marker's newest video installation, provides another kind of mechanical model of memory.⁹ Occasioned by the centenary of the cinema, Marker imagined the project from its earliest inception in the form it would eventually take:

When you mentioned '95 as cinema's centenary, I thought that could be a good focal point. I'd need a backbone anyway. Otherwise, picking at will inside myriads of images should be really mind-boggling... First a title: SILENT MOVIE. A subtitle "to celebrate one century of filmmaking" or something like it. Then an installation: a few monitors where photographs, film excerpts in black-and-white treated frame-by-frame, then freezing, computer images, etc., would appear, each tape a different length which means that the sequence embraced by a viewer's scope would never be the same, and in the middle one monitor exclusively devoted to "captions," the kind they used in silent movies precisely, telling short, mysterious pieces of unknown stories, borrowing sometimes from famous movie quotes, like: "play it again, Sam" or "when he crossed the bridge, ghosts came to meet

him." Given the human need for logic, every sequence of x images left and right, and the caption in the middle, would develop a random series of imaginary film segments, and that would roll on, randomly, all day long, with somewhere in the distance the feeble, nostalgic sound of a piano (as if one of those moviehouse piano-players, the kind you were begged not to shoot at, was performing for himself). I think that this kind of installation could ooze some magic... ¹⁰

In the course of further conceptualizing *Silent Movie*, two differences from the above description emerged: all of the five monitors play tapes (transferred to laser discs) of the same length (approximately twenty minutes each), the desired random sequencing being provided by a computer interface program; and rather than being placed side by side, the five monitors are stacked in an industrial-metal "tower," which "should get its proportions from hardcore constructivism (I picked my module from the 'project for *Pravda* building' by the Vesnin brothers)."¹¹ In a subsequent communication, Marker further elaborated on "the tower": "It can be very crude: on the contrary, that should fit the constructivist innuendo—given the misery of the country at that time, they weren't playing with too luxurious materials (just like their space cabins, later on, would look like second-rate boilers)."¹² Adjacent to the physically imposing tower are hung eighteen framed, photographic blow-ups of images drawn from the monitors, as well as a display of ten computer-designed posters for a series of "imaginary" films concocted by Marker—witty prototype poster-sketches for films that, according to Marker's alternative narrative of cinema history, *should* have existed but never did. Among these fractured classics that never were are silent versions of *Hiroshima*, *Mon Amour*, starring Greta Garbo and

Sessue Hayakawa, and Raoul Walsh's version of *Breathless*, starring Wallace Beery and Bebe Daniels; Ernst Lubitsch's version of *Remembrance of Things Past*, starring Gloria Swanson as the Duchess of Guermantes, John Barrymore as Swann, Ramon Novarro as Morel, and Edna Purviance as Albertine ("The first movie where the captions take more space than the image"); the Cecil B. DeMille spectacular, *Hastings*, starring Douglas Fairbanks as William the Conqueror ("How the Channel Was Won!"); and Oliver Stone, Sr.'s, *It's a Mad, Mad, Mad Dog* ("Rin Tin Tin—He Came to Help Our Russian Allies—The Bolsheviks Turned Him into a Monster"), among several others.

As for the five separate video tracks of the installation itself, the vast majority of the video imagery is drawn from the pre-1940 world of black and white global cinema, mainly of French and American vintages. Superbly sequenced and edited in the key of Dziga Vertov, each of the five tracks has its own theme. The top two monitors are dedicated respectively to "The Journey" and "The Face"; the bottom two monitors disclose "The Gesture" and "The Waltz." Each designation is announced via written intertitles in English, French, Japanese, German, and Spanish. The third, middle, monitor intercuts images of eyes¹³ and somewhat more abstracted archival imagery with ninety-four discrete silent film-style intertitles; when read in sequence, it's as though Gertrude Stein had willed herself into an Orphic trance. Because the computer interface program piloting the installation is responsible for generating perpetually different sequences and visual relationships across the five monitors, the written intertitles provide very strong (though still random) interpretive or associative inferences in relation

to the content of the upper and lower images; as Marker sees it, "It's the Kulechov experiment extended to writing."¹⁴

The brilliantly evocative music track—eighteen solo piano pieces from sources as disparate as Alexander Scriabin and Billy Strayhorn, Federico Mompou and Bill Evans—further the silent movie hallucination as images and entire sets of images appear to be cut in response to the music, despite the random sequencing and interrelationships of the images having precluded any exact calculations of that nature. It's the art of the fugue as ordered by chance. Or, as Marker put it in another context, "A filmmaker grabs hold of this situation and makes a film of it, but rather than present the characters and show their relationships, real or supposed, he prefers to put forward the elements of the dossier in the fashion of a musical composition, with recurrent themes, counterpoints and mirror-like fugues: the letters, the comments, the images gathered, the images created, together with some images borrowed. In this way, out of these juxtaposed memories is born a fictional memory..."¹⁵

Hovering throughout the entirety of the installation are images of Catherine Belkhodja, a woman in whom Marker recognized something of the spirit and the plastic genius of silent film acting, and whom he whimsically characterizes as a "conceptual artist and amateur flyer." Appearing as the main character, a "Cyberpunk Lorelei" in Marker's forthcoming feature, *Level Five*, Belkhodja also becomes in effect the "star" of *Silent Movie*. Marker's relegation of her into the zone of silent cinema (his launching her back into the monochromatic past to retrieve its secrets) tends to propose her as the entire installation's

unacknowledged narrator—or, rather, as its dreamer. Yet for all that, *Silent Movie*, in its orchestration of movement and memento, text and image and music, emerges as a rivetingly emblematic Marker endeavor. As he himself notes in “The Rest Is Silent,” this is the story of a man marked by an image from his childhood.

BILL HARRIGAN

In addition to those already acknowledged in the Foreword, a number of other individuals have contributed to this project. In Paris, Harouth Bezdjian and Jean-Pierre Six provided invaluable assistance on the computer program aspects of the installation, and Roger Wagner, through his HyperStudio program, was a great help in establishing the computer links necessary for the production of the “imaginary” posters. Colleagues in this country providing encouragement include Edith Kramer (Pacific Film Archive/University Art Museum, Berkeley), Barbara London (The Museum of Modern Art, New York), Bruce Jenkins (Walker Art Center, Minneapolis), Robert Riley (San Francisco Museum of Modern Art), Kerry Brougher (Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles), and James Quandt (Cinematheque Ontario, Toronto). Finally, thanks to my friends and colleagues, Claire Aguilar, Robert Scott Brooks, David Covey, Moyra Davey, Steve Fagin, Chuck Helm, Janet Jenkins, Judith Mayne, Michael Nash, B. Ruby Rich, Mark Robbins, Julia Scher, Jason Simon, and Geoffrey Stier.

Thanks beyond measure to Chris Marker and Catherine Belkhodja for making *Silent Movie* for us.

¹ Dominique Aury, “Marcel Proust: Another Likeness,” in *Literary Landfalls*, trans. Denise Folliot (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1961), p. 83.

² Chris Marker, *Immemory* proposal (January 1994), p. 3.

³ Marker, letter to author, October 12, 1994.

⁴ Marker, on the cameraman in *Sans soleil*: “An unknown woman reads and comments upon the letters she receives from a friend—a free-lance cameraman who travels around the world and is particularly attached to those ‘two extreme poles of survival’—Japan and Africa, represented here by two of its poorest and most forgotten countries, even though they played an historical role: Guinea-Bissau and the Cape-Verde Islands. The cameraman wonders (as cameramen do, at least those you see in the movies) about the meaning of this representation of the world in which he is the instrument, and about the role of memory he helps to create.” From “The story of *Sans soleil* by Chris Marker,” New Yorker Films publicity material, 1983.

⁵ In his dazzlingly wide and apparently effortless erudition, as well as in his constitutional aversion to forthright self-exposure (e.g., the reluctance to be photographed, etc.), Marker resembles no one as much as the French essayist, poet, and artist Henri Michaux.

⁶ Marker, “Sunless,” *Semiotexte* vol. IV, no. 3 (“Oasis,” 1984), p. 37.

⁷ Marker, letter to author, March 31, 1994.

⁸ Marker, *Immemory* proposal, p. 4.

⁹ Marker’s two previous video installations are *Zapping Zone*, commissioned by the Centre Georges Pompidou as part of its *Passages de l’image* exhibition in 1990, subsequently seen in Barcelona, Columbus, and San Francisco, and now a part of the Centre Pompidou’s permanent collection, and *Quand le Siècle a pris formes* (When the Century took shapes), a multi-screen montage produced for the Centre Pompidou’s *Paris-Berlin* exhibition in 1978.

¹⁰ Marker, letter to author, March 31, 1994.

¹¹ Marker, letter to author, May 15, 1994.

¹² Marker, letter to author, June 8, 1994.

¹³ Marker, in *The Train Rolls On* (1971): “First, the eye. Then the cinema, which prints the look.”

¹⁴ Marker, letter to author, April 16, 1994.

¹⁵ Marker, “The story of *Sans soleil* by Chris Marker.”

—Some knives have blades...

—You may play with words,
but sometimes
the words are winning!

—There are vampires
around the place...

—‘And where you are
is where you are not’

—I’m against knowing secrets

—Seems your soul is restless...

A white mare
on a dark pond

—I’ll tell you
a family secret...

In a hidden place...

Can this hand
write the future?

—There is still
an untold episode...

—And an unbroken pledge...

—Watch your mirror!

Apocalypse soon...

—Life is gloriously improbable...

—Damned!

—I’m listening...

—Fare thee well...

—Wait till you learn
you were a frog
after all...

—Good night, sweet ladies

Nights belong to the gods

—Did you hear
an owl singin’?

—Things have a way
of happening by themselves

—Sometimes it is better
to leave a question
unanswered

The Rest Is Silent

Silent Movie. To give an installation the name of something that never existed is probably less innocent than the average cat may infer. There was never anything like silent cinema, except at the very beginning, or in film libraries, or when the pianist had caught a bad flu. There ever was at least a pianist, and soon an orchestra, next the Wurlitzer, and what contraptions did they use, in the day of my childhood, to play regularly the same tunes to accompany the same films? I'm probably one of the last earthlings—the “last,” says the cat—to remember what themes came with what films: *A Midsummer Night's Dream* on *Wings* (the dogfights), Liszt's *The Preludes* on *Ben Hur*. A touch of *humour noir* here, to think that the saga of the young Hebrew prince was adorned by Hitler's favorite music, which in turn explains why you hear it more often than Wagner on the German war newsreels—but I get carried away...

Ah, yes, the pianist. The *tapeur* as we Russians say, from the French *taper* (to hit, to strike), thus coining a word that, interestingly enough, doesn't exist in pure French, only in slang, where it means a moocher. So you see, already two non-existences listed. As if everything connected with that strange “silent movie” concept was struck, not by a *tapeur*, but by some sort of cinematographic antimatter. Silent movie, silent era... There was considerably less silence in a movie house of the Twenties than, say, in a vintage Antonioni. People already needed music to fix their emotions (music doesn't create emotions, it fixes them, like you fix color), and the pianist was busy fixing emotions, and people whose emotions had been improperly fixed (a wrong chord, for one) reacted by shooting at him: I remember Jouvet, with his unmistakable staccato, “*le pianiste sur lequel on était prié de ne pas tirer, c'était moi.*” Perhaps we

Frenchmen are closer to the point by using “*cinéma muet*”: *mute*, meaning simply that people didn’t speak, which left the music question open. But even that wasn’t true. They *were* talking, they were talking a lot (those interminable captions in *Wings* precisely... Not so farfetched to me to herald my imaginary *Remembrance of Things Past* with the advertising line: “The first movie where the captions take more space than the image”), they were articulating sentence after sentence, the only difference was that you didn’t hear them and that, finally, it was less a case of mute movies than of deaf audiences.

To be true, playing music wasn’t the only way to prevent the silent films from being silent: when the public simply didn’t understand the captions—be they illiterate, or foreigners—then appeared the character we Japanese call *benshi*, “the narrator,” who stood beside the screen to translate, or arrange, or interpret the printed text. Kurosawa’s brother was one of these narrators, and the prestige of his function did play a part in the Master’s early fascination with movies. For, as he puts it in his autobiography, these *benshi* “not only recounted the plot of the films, they enhanced the emotional content by performing the voices and sound effects and providing evocative descriptions of the events and images on the screen.” You’d swear you’re listening to the Chorus at the beginning of *Henry V*—and you dream of having seen *Way Down East* narrated that way...

(I had a similar experience in Mexico in the Fifties: an English-speaking, subtitled version of a US movie was sort of cryptic for the ordinary peasant who didn’t speak English, nor could read the subtitles. So every Saturday night the only member of the community reputed literate would stand and com-

ment on the screening, more or less the *benshi* way. Their mastery of the Hollywood lingo being debatable, they “worked on their imaginary forces” not to lose face in front of the audience. More than often, the result was quite refreshing.)

Wings is certainly not the first picture I saw: it’s the first I remember—quite vividly. When I saw it again, after a lapse of some fifty years, I was struck by the crystal-clear memory I had kept of certain sequences. With a difference: as I had no doubt, really not, about the leading lady (Clara Bow), on the men’s side I remembered Gary Cooper as the star. Yet I discovered young Gary had just one scene and was killed at the end of Reel One. I suppose this is what makes a star: one gesture, one smile, and it’s him you remember, not the vague young man who was then in charge to get the girl.

Next came Gastyne’s *Joan of Arc* and the close-ups of Simone Genevoix. It was probably the first time I saw a dame’s face enlarged on a 44 x 33-ft screen (even Clara Bow didn’t attain such proportions) but I don’t think this quantitative phenomenon explains by itself the state of exhilaration I found myself in. I couldn’t describe it otherwise than with comic-strip onomatopoeias like “Wham!,” “Thud-thud!,” “Bump-bump!,” “Shudder!”—another way to put sound on film, mostly indecipherable for a seven-year-old boy, but which I identified clearly, later on, as the true symptoms of Romance. And when some years ago the French Cinémathèque issued a beautifully restored copy of *La merveilleuse vie de Jeanne d’Arc*, I found myself sitting not far from a charming old lady, who didn’t suspect for one minute she had been, literally, my first love.

Such memories obviously account for one's fascination with the so-called silent era. But even before these precise, identified filmic flashes, there is, like in any self-respecting cosmogony, a period of chaos, vague images of gods and goddesses, untied, disorderly, full of gaps and black holes, that shadowy period that always comes before the structured mythology. I find in my early childhood memory such shadows. I couldn't imagine they were real people (how could I comprehend the process of filmmaking?) but some sorts of machines, a complex organization of cranks and wheels aimed at animating these shapes of Indians and Cowboys (the usual stuff these memories are made of)—by which, mind you, I was simply inventing the concept of animated synthetic images of today: some foresight for a toddler.

Perhaps it's that, strictly speaking, pre-historic state of film memory that carried me toward this evocation, even more than my *amours enfantines* with Clara Bow and Simone Genevoix. The idea of a state of perception anterior to understanding, anterior to conscience, anterior by millennia to film critics and analysis. A kind of *Ur-Kino*, the cinema of origins, closer to Aphrodite than to Garbo. And whose main feature was certainly not silence—I guess I proved it—but that other kind of mutism, the muffling of another kind of signal, much more meaningful than the words: the erasing of colors, the Black-and-White.

Everybody knows color was there too, like music. Color systems were ready, and sometimes used for prestige. Some sequences of Fred Niblo's aforementioned *Ben Hur* were painted. Moszhukhin's *Casanova* was tinted. Night scenes were often

wrapped in blue and period sequences in sepia. Yet for half a century cinema remained true to black-and-white, and I'm not marxist enough to explain it solely by economic factors. It's as if the industry's collective unconscious had held its breath, suspended its step, like Angelopoulos's stork, to enjoy a privileged stage of perception before joining the mainstream of realistic representation, like a child who tries to refrain from growing up too fast in order to retain the privileges of childhood. Like photography, where color was immediately available by the unexpected virtues of a potato slice, cinema decided to remain for a while in this happy new colorless world.¹ In a trade carried on by people who were everything but ascetical, suddenly we meet a choice that had all the characteristics of pure asceticism, where less is more, and where loss is gain. Abandoning the futile prestiges of a colorized universe, cinema and photography began to draw the map of a new empire where shades of grey were there to detail the various scales of humankindness. (The *Kingdom of Shadows* Gorky was describing after his first view of the Lumière Cinematograph in Nizhny Novgorod, 1896.) And people started to dream in black-and-white. Everybody has heard that sentence: "Do you dream in colors?" And why, pray thee, should I dream the world otherwise than I see it, if cinema hadn't been there to substitute a new way to look at dreams? I am convinced that until year 1900 or so, people dreamt in colors, and I'm afraid that after year 2000 they shall do so again. In the meantime, managers have won over the unconscious. All that this awful twentieth century will have brought us, between genocides, AIDS, and sitcoms, will have been one century of fine grain, high-contrast, panchromatic B&W personal dreams. (There a question arises: does Ted Turner dream in black-and-white? Jane, if you read this, gimme a call.)

In fact, this refusal of color goes far deeper than the *Ur-Kino* itself. It's simply a refusal of nature's original system of seduction. If we believe with Claude Gudin that "around three billion years ago, with Chance and Necessity getting things going, a seduction process using colors and perfumes got under way amongst some micro-organisms who, by nibbling away at the sunshine, invented Photosynthesis,"² the choice of black-and-white is nothing less than a haughty denial of our biological heritage, a way to assert man's inner resources against nature's consoling paraphernalia. But if Gudin goes as far as saying (I summarize) "color is sex," does that imply that black-and-white is sexless or rather that this sudden apparition of a world completely deprived of our usual (and basic) systems of references draws us to the necessity of finding these systems within ourselves — just as music forces us to invent an inner space where painting provides the outer space too easily? The panchromatic film would then be the music of our plastic souls, a way to reinvent seduction with our bare, black-and-white hands. When I began to play with B&W film clips, and to film in B&W myself for this experiment, I just wanted it to be a light, unpretentious way to celebrate in my manner one hundred years of cinematography, and God forbid that I theorize all this in a solemn way: only the pleasure, or is it sweet sorrow, to part with the already doomed glory of that era. But to put it more simply, wasn't it fun to free oneself from a three-billion-year-long addiction?

In Mexico, I didn't discover only the persistence of the *benshi* tradition. In these pre-television days, radio itself was a rarity, and what I discovered was the altar-like status of some technical tools, the total discrepancy between a medium's avowed

aims and its real function. In every house of the little village I lived in, radio screamed at full blast, all day, while the owner went to the fields. It was there simply to be, not to be listened to, like a fire whose sole purpose is to burn, not to light or to warm. Perhaps this installation aims to be just that kind of altar: the sheer exposure to film magic, free from anecdote or direct emotions, where the viewer may hang around, pick something of the perpetual flame, brood over these adventures of black-and-white, change perhaps my images against his or hers, replace Catherine Belkhodja's beautiful face by a closer and dearer face, and go away with an imaginary picture unrolling within his/her deep inner screening room with that untranslatable feeling we Germans call *Sehnsucht*, and we Brazilians *saudade*, and the rest is silence.

CHRIS MARKER

¹ The *autochrome* invented by the Lumière Bros. in 1907 used potato starch as "grains" to filter the three basic colors. These grains were $\frac{1}{1000}$ millimeters thick, and you'd need 140 million of them to cover one 13 x 18 plate. Some timid souls may argue that with such a device, no wonder mankind waited for Ektachrome to generalize color, but where there is a will...

² Claude Gudin, "The ways of colour are not impenetrable," in *Art Cognition*.

I forgot...

In another life,
was a martian princess

er friendly perfume...

Haven't I been here before?

But should we fail?

'Thou hast murdered sleep'...

a silent mood...

he bore that distracted look
omen bear,
who have been loved by kings

Then suddenly
hand appears...

While, in quite
different circumstances...

And when they had crossed the
bridge...

Breathless...

Listening to the sea
when it was beating
like a heart

That night,
in a silent house...

Did you say your name
was Laura?

She woke up,
and the world had changed









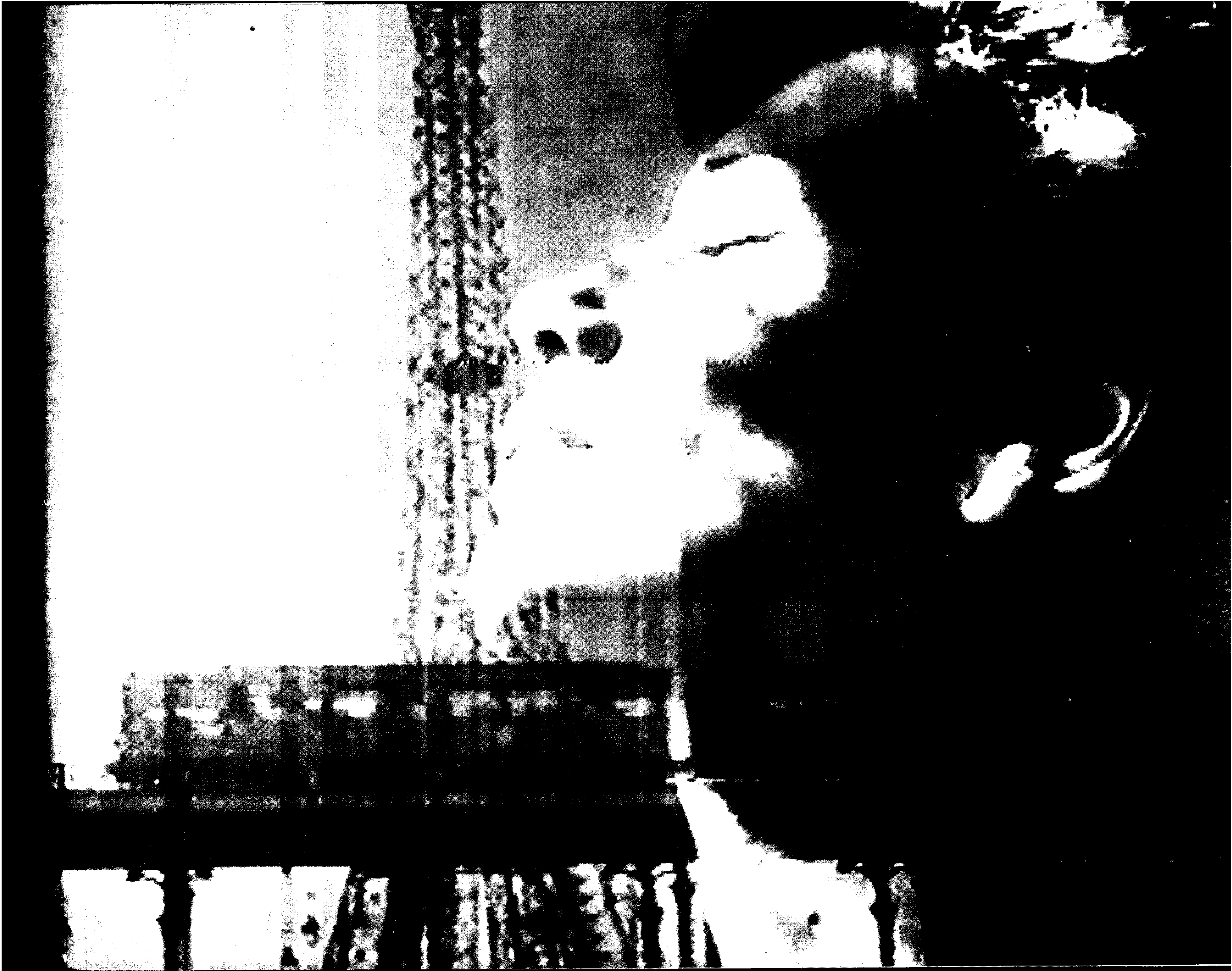
























Exhibition Checklist

SILENT MOVIE 1994-95

modular tower of Tensco slotted angle steel post,

144" high x 23" deep x 30 3/8" wide

steel airplane cable, 1/6" in diameter

computer interface box

five Sony 25" video monitors

five Pioneer laser disc players

five laser discs (20 minutes each)

top monitor: *The Journey*

second monitor: *The Face*

middle monitor: *Captions*

fourth monitor: *The Gesture*

bottom monitor: *The Waltz*

SILENT MOVIE SOUNDTRACK: THE PERFECT TAPEUR

tape cassette from DAT tape: 59 mins. 32 secs.

1. Scott Joplin, *Bethena* (Katia & Marielle Labèque/Sony SK 48381), 7 mins. 39 secs.

2. Artur Lourié, *Dodo* (Marie-Catherine Girod/Accord 20172), 1 mins. 46 secs.

3. Alexander Scriabin, *Mazurka op. 3 Nr 2* (Samuel Feinberg/Chant du Monde LDC 288032), 2 mins. 7 secs.

4. Domenico Scarlatti, *Sonata B minor Kk 87* (Narcelle Meyer/EMI CDZD 68092), 5 mins. 27 secs.

5. Billy Strayhorn, *Lotus Blossom* (Duke Ellington/RCA ND82178), 3 mins. 56 secs.

6. Nino Rota, *Cantilena* (Danielle Laval/AUVIDIS V4698), 1 mins. 37 secs.

7. Alexander Scriabin, *Mazurka op. 3 Nr 7* (Samuel Feinberg/Chant du Monde LDC 288032), 3 mins. 26 secs.

8. Federico Mompou, *Canço VI* (Mompou/ENSAYO ENY-CD-3453), 1 mins. 43 secs.

9. Duke Ellington, *Reflections in D* (Sir Roland Hanna/MusicMasters 5045-2-C), 4 mins. 3 secs.

10. Artur Lourié, *Valse* (Marie-Catherine Girod/Accord 20172), 4 mins. 11 secs.

11. Federico Mompou, *Canço VIII* (Mompou/EN-SAYO ENY-CD-3453), 2 mins. 1 sec.

12. Leonard Bernstein, *Lucky to Be Me* (Bill Evans/Riverside 98944), 3 mins. 35 secs.

13. Alexander Scriabin, *Prelude op. 11 Nr 10* (Vladimir Horowitz/RCA GD86215), 1 mins. 22 secs.

14. Alexander Scriabin, *Etude op. 2 Nr 1* (Vladimir Sofronitski/Chant du Monde LDC 288032), 3 mins. 12 secs.

15. Peter Ilich Tchaikovsky, *June* (Katia & Marielle Labèque/Sony SK 48381), 4 mins. 57 secs.

16. Cesar Cui, *Prelude op. 64 Nr 2* (Margaret Fingerhut/Chandos CHAN 8439), 2 mins. 35 secs.

17. Alexander Borodin, *Nocturne* (Margaret Fingerhut/Chandos CHAN 8439), 3 mins. 6 secs.

18. Federico Mompou, *Pajaro triste* (Mompou/ENSAYO ENY-CD-3418), 2 mins. 43 secs.

SELECTION OF 18 VIDEOSTILLS FROM SILENT MOVIE

black-and-white Sony UPC 7010 video prints from Beta-SP master (Labo Duran, Paris), 8 1/2" x 11 1/4", paper size

SELECTION OF 10 POSTERS

produced on Macintosh 8100 computer; Painter program, 25 1/4" x 31 1/4", paper size

1. *Bow to the Rain*

2. *Breathless*

3. *Hastings*

4. *Hiroshima Mon Amour*

5. *It's a Mad, Mad, Mad Dog*

6. *Owl People*

7. *The Quicksands of Time*

8. *Rambo Minus One*

9. *Remembrances of Things Past*

10. *The War That Wasn't*

Commissioned by Wexner Center for the Arts, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio; courtesy of the artist.

Filmography

FEATURE FILMS

- 1952 *Olympia 52*, 82 mins., Helsinki
 1958 *Lettre de Sibérie* (Letter from Siberia), 62 mins.
 1960 *Description d'un combat* (Description of a Struggle), 60 mins., Israel
 1961 *Cuba Si*, 52 mins.
 1962 *Le joli mai*, 165 mins., Paris
 In two parts:
 1. *Prière sur la Tour Eiffel*
 2. *Le retour de fantomas*
 1965 *Le mystère Koumiko* (The Koumiko Mystery), 54 mins., Tokyo
 1966 *Si j'avais quatre dromadaires* (If I Had Four Dromedaries), 49 mins.
 1970 *La bataille des dix millions* (The Battle of the Ten Millions), 58 mins., Cuba
 1974 *La solitude du chanteur de fond* (The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Singer), 60 mins. (portrait of Yves Montand)
 1977 *Le fond de l'air est rouge*, 240 mins. (A Grin without a Cat, 180 mins.)
 In two parts:
 Les mains fragiles (Fragile Hands)
 Les mains coupées (Severed Hands)
 1982 *Sans soleil* (Sunless), 110 mins.
 1985 *AK*, 71 mins. (portrait of Akira Kurosawa)
 1995 *Level Five*, 100 mins.

FILM SHORTS

- 1956 *Dimanche à Peking* (Sunday in Peking), 22 mins.
 1962 *La jetée*, 28 mins.
 1969 *Le deuxième procès d'Artur London*, 28 mins.
 1969 *Jour de tournage*, 11 mins. ("The Confession")
 1969 *On vous parle du Brésil*, 20 mins.
 1970 *Carlos Marighela*, 17 mins.
 1970 *Les mots ont un sens*, 20 mins. (portrait of François Maspero)
 1971 *Le train en marche* (The Train Rolls On), 92 mins. (portrait of Alexander Medvedkin)
 1973 *L'ambassade* (Embassy), Super-8, 20 mins.
 1981 *Junkopia*, 6 mins., San Francisco
 1984 *2084*, 10 mins. (one century of unionism)

TELEVISION

- 1989 *L'héritage de la chouette* (The Owl's Legacy), 13 segments, each 26 mins.
 1990 *Berliner ballade*, 25 mins. (Antenne 2 "Envoyé Spécial" TV version); 29 mins. 5 secs. (integral version)
 1993 *Le tombeau d'Alexandre* (The Last Bolshevik), 2 segments, each 52 mins.
 1993 *Le 20 heures dans les camps* (Prime Time in the Camps), 28 mins.
 1995 *Le facteur sonne toujours Cheval*, 52 mins.

MULTIMEDIA

- 1978 *Quand le Siècle a pris formes*, video/multiscreen, 12 mins. in the *Paris-Berlin* exhibition at Centre Pompidou
 1990 *Zapping Zone*, video/computer/film, in the *Passages de l'image* exhibition at Centre Pompidou
 1995 *Silent Movie*, video/multiscreen/random loop
 1995 *Immemory*, interactive CD-ROM

VIDEO

- Included in *Zapping Zone*, 1985–1990
Matta '85, 14 mins. 18 secs.
Christo '85, 24 mins.
Tarkovsky '86, 26 mins.
Eclats, 20 mins.
Bestiaire, 9 mins. 4 secs.
 Chat écoutant la musique, 2 mins. 47 secs.
 An Owl Is an Owl Is an Owl, 3 mins. 18 secs.
 Zoo Piece, 2 mins. 45 secs.
Spectre, 27 mins.
Tokyo Days, 24 mins.
Berlin '90, 20 mins. 35 secs.
Photo. Browse, 17 mins. 20 secs. (301 photos)
Détour. Ceausescu, 8 mins. 2 secs.
Théorie des ensembles (Theory of Sets), 11 mins.

Additions to *Zapping Zone*

- 1992 *Azulmoon*, loop
 1992 *Coin fenêtre*, 9 mins. 35 secs.
 1993 *Slon-Tango*, 4 mins. 15 secs.
 1994 *Bullfight/Okinawa*

VIDEO HAIKUS

- 1994 *Petite Ceinture*, 1 min.
1994 *Chaika*, 1 min. 29 secs.
1994 *Owl Gets in Your Eyes*, 1 min. 10 secs.

MUSIC VIDEO

- 1990 *Getting Away with It* (for the group Electronic), 4 mins. 27 secs., London

CO-DIRECTED FILMS

- 1950 *Les statues meurent aussi*, with Alain Resnais, 30 mins.
1968 *A bientôt j'espère*, with Mario Marret, 55 mins.
1968 *La sixième face du Pentagone* (The Sixth Face of the Pentagon), with
François Reichenbach, 28 mins.
1972 *Vive la baleine*, with Mario Ruspoli, 80 mins.

COLLECTIVE FILMS

- 1967 *Loin du Viet-Nam* (Far from Vietnam), 115 mins.
1974 *Puisqu'on vous dit que c'est possible* (Lip), 60 mins.
1975 *La spirale* (Spiral), 155 mins., Chile

NARRATIONS

- 1956 *Les hommes de la baleine*, for Mario Ruspoli
1957 *Le mystère de l'atelier quinze*, for Alain Resnais
1959 *Django Reinhardt*, for Paul Paviot
1963 *A Valparaiso*, for Joris Ivens
1966 *Le volcan interdit*, for Haroun Tazieff

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CINÉMATOGRAPHIQUE



CHRIS MARKER
S i l e n t M o v i e

starring Catherine Belkhodja

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FILM ARCHIVE
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