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THE OWL'S LEGACY

L'heritage de la chouette

"He must have been a royal pain in the ass. It's just unbearable to have a man like that in a city." This is how George Steiner describes Socrates in one of the many provocative moments in Chris Marker's latest 'cultural documentary,' a television series based on Greek culture and its impact on the world.

Chris Marker's ability to document the relatively abstract and often specialized nature of these subjects during scores of interviews with scholars, philosophers, artists, scientists, politicians, and to be able to sustain it throughout 13 segments without ever being dull or repetitive is truly remarkable.

Greeks love to talk with passion about Greece, and about the rich and often troublesome heritage Greek culture has given the world for the past 2500 years. The film is filled with riveting interviews when Cornelius Castoriadis, Michel Serres, Xenakis, George Steiner, Jean-Pierre Vernant, Angelique Ionatos, Guila Sissa, Oswin Murray and many others speak eloquently about the unique nature of Athenian democracy, about the grammar of myths, sexuality and pleasure, about the invention of self, music, the genius of Pythagoras and the ever-dominant importance of language. Politics, war, philosophy, linguistics, tragedy, history, mathematics or this nostalgia which all speakers have for the country they love and occasionally hate, with passion.

Each segment is organized around a series of individual interviews which often seem to answer one another or pursue a line of thought across many locations: Athens, Paris, Berkeley, Tblisi, Tokyo. And alternating with the answers to Chris Marker's persistent questions -- he, of course, with his habitual humility never appears in the film -- there are literally hundreds of inserts: montage sequences of statues sensually filmed, objects, representations of all kinds, film excerpts, computer graphics, landscapes which illustrate or contextualize the speaker's reply. It is difficult to imagine a more perfect illustration of one of Castoriadis' final remarks about what he considers one of Greek philosophy's major contributions: "what should I think?" In its very structure, and the dialectics woven across many thinkers, it is also "a critique of the representation of the
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tribe," in this instance, the legacy of Greek culture to the world.

Bertrand Augst

13 episodes/25 minutes each (total 360 min):

Symposium or accepted ideas

Olympics

Democracy or the City of Dreams

Nostalgia or the impossible return

Amnesia or History on the march

Mathematics or the Empire comes back

Logomachy or the Dialect of the Tribe

Music or inner space

Cosmogony or the ways of the world

Mythology or lies like Truth

Mysogyny or the snares of desire

Tragedy or the illusion of Death

Philosophy or the triumph of the owl

France

1989

13 25 min. episodes

In English, French, Georgian and Greek with English subtitles

DIRECTOR/PRODUCER/SCREENPLAY:

Chris Marker

CAMERA (VIDEO):

Emiko Omori, Peter Chapell et al.

EDITORS:

Khadicha Bariha, Nedjma Scialom

CAST:

Iannis Xenakis, George Steiner, Elia Kazan, Théo Angelopoulos, Cornelius Castoriadis

PRINT SOURCE:

FIT

PLAYDATES:

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