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| Marker, Chris (1921 –2012) |
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| Chris Marker was a French filmmaker, photographer, writer, and multi-media artist who is widely considered to be the foremost pioneer of the essay film. More digressive, meditative, and playful than traditional documentaries, Marker’s films combine observational footage, often from his travels, with ruminative voice-overs. Ironically, his most famous work was his only foray into fiction, *La Jetée* (1962), a short science-fiction film composed almost exclusively of black-and-white still photographs. Despite Marker’s often secretive and reclusive relationship with the public, his intimate authorial voice gained him an international cult following.  <Image 1>  Born François Bouche-Villeneuve, Marker was a writer before he was a filmmaker. His intellectual roots lay in the popular education movements of post-war Paris and a mixture of existentialism, surrealism, and communism. In the early 1950s he published a novel, *Le Coeur Net*, as well as an academic study of the writer Giraudoux. At the publishing house *Seuil*, Marker and designer Juliette Caputo oversaw the *Petite Planète* series of travel books, experimenting with techniques of image juxtaposition and visual rhyme. These techniques, borrowed from the 1920s Soviet avant-garde, soon found their way into Marker’s early film work. After two credited collaborations with Alain Resnais – the discursive documentaries *Les Statues meurent aussi* (*Statues Also Die* [ 1952]) and *Toute la mémoire du monde* (*All The Memory of the World* [1956]) – Marker released *Lettre de Sibérie* (*Letter from Siberia* [1958]). The film set forth many features that would characterize Marker’s later film-essays: the combination of travelogue footage with an epistolary voice-over; the suggestive, often provocative, use of counter-point in the editing; the invocation of animals as both victims and witnesses to human history; and the filtering of twentieth century events through a transcendental, yet anonymous, consciousness.  During the 1960s, Marker’s filmmaking grew increasingly political. His 1961 film *Cuba, Si!* aimed to document the success of Castro’s post-revolutionary society. *Le Joli Mai* (1963) used newly available sync-sound technology to capture the uneasy mood of Paris during the Algerian war for independence and urban modernization. In the late 1960s, Marker became an active member in the left-wing film collective SLON, chronicling political struggles in Latin America as well as the worker’s movement in France. During the unrest of May 1968, he rallied prominent French filmmakers to contribute to the agitational series *Ciné-Tract*s. Marker’s subsequent, four-hour documentary, *Le Fond de l'air est rouge* (*A Grin without a Cat* [1977])*,* provides a personalized, retrospective tableau of the global left’s rise and retreat.  <Image 2>  Marker’s most famous film from his later period is his 1983 masterpiece, *Sans Soleil* (*Sunless*). *Sans Soleil* combines the epistolary meditations of a fictional freelance cameraman, read by an anonymous woman, with observational footage of African rituals and postmodern Tokyo. The film crystallized many of the tendencies latent in Marker’s earlier work while reflecting his increasing preoccupation with the interrelationship of technology, history, and memory. In the 1990s, he was one of the first filmmakers to embrace new media. His CD-ROM *Immemory* (1998)transposed his signature concerns to the digital sphere, prominently featuring his alter ego, Guillaume, a cartoon cat. Animals, notably cats, have appeared throughout Marker’s oeuvre. A testament to his international influence and following, when news of his death spread in 2012, many informal shrines of toy cats appeared throughout the world.  <Image 3>  <Image 4>  Images:   1. <http://www.thisisourfauna.com/uploads/lajettee1.jpg> 2. <http://blogs.artinfo.com/moviejournal/files/2013/09/lojolimaitrailercover.jpg> 3. <http://1.bp.blogspot.com/-Ebnjc55jo1M/UCMkuFD3SuI/AAAAAAAABm0/V89sQ9GYA3g/s1600/1.gif> 4. http://nyoobserver.files.wordpress.com/2012/08/photo3.jpg?w=225&h=300  List of WorksWritten Works *Le Coeur Net* (1949)  *Commentaires* (1961) Film *Les Statues meurent aussi* (*Statues Also Die*, 1953])  *Toute la mémoire du monde* (*All The Memory of the World* [1956])  *Lettre de Sibérie* (*Letter from Siberia* [1957])  *Cuba, Si!* (1961)  *La Jetée* (1962)  *Le Joli Mai* (1963)  *Loin du Vietnam* (*Far from Vietnam* [1967])  *Ciné-Tract*s (1968)  *Le Fond de l'air est rouge* (*A Grin without a Cat* [1977])  *Sans Soleil* (*Sunless* [1983]) Other Media *Immemory* (CDROM, 1997)  Links:  Statues Also Die on youtube: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d5Pb9nykjQA  Homage to Chris Marker by Seuil: http://www.seuil.com/page-hommage-chris-marker.htm  Intro of Grin Without a Cat: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zP1AoocnoXM |
| Further reading:  (Alter)  (Arnaud)  (Corrigan) |