

Chris Marker

Immemory

1997

CD-ROM, installation / dimensions variable

Chris Marker is best known as the author of essay films that are characterized by a marked subjectivity, similar to that of the literary essay. A particular feature of this filmic form is the unusual use of the narrative as a text with literary qualities: the narrative neither dominates nor is subjected to the image track, but instead is rhythmically interwoven with it. This creates a complex montage structure in which the interplay of text and image can generate multiple layers of meaning, and which can be described, following Gilles Deleuze, as an "audiovisual image."¹ As a result, the viewer is given a new role to play compared to that of the traditional cinemagoer: rather than passively consuming a film, the viewer must actively participate in its creation through his or her own mental activity.

The dominant themes in Marker's work are recollection and memory, both of which are contained in the French term *mémoire*, as the installation *Zapping Zone* (1990) and the CD-ROM *Immemory* (1997) impressively demonstrate. In Marker's films, the image functions like the Proustian madeleine, a cake dipped in tea that triggers the process of recollection. "I wonder how people remember things who don't film, don't photograph,"² as cameraman Sandor Krasna ponders in the film *Sans Soleil* (1982). Film, photography and recording tape present themselves as the media of recollection that give rise to the notion of total recall – a form of memory comprising everything that has been experienced.³ However, in his film *Le Fond de l'Air est Rouge* (1977), Marker was already drawing attention to the fact that one never knows what one is filming, because the meaning of a captured image can be changed in retrospect by a later experience. Everything that is contained in one's memory is permanently being updated, overlaid with new impressions and partially erased. In *Sans Soleil* this process is described as follows: "We do not remember, we rewrite memory, much as history is rewritten."⁴ The writing of history, placed on a level with the process of recollection, is ultimately impossible, and is disputed by Marker in the same way as he challenges an attribute that is often attached to photographic and filmed images: namely that these can give an objective representation of what has been. Marker's images function as catalysts for ever-changing views of history and past events. He uses film, installation and CD-ROM to make the process of recollection comprehensible.

In his first large installation, *Zapping Zone, Proposals for an Imaginary Television*, Marker combines photography, film, video, television and computers. Fourteen monitors are installed in a darkened space, some placed next to each other, others piled on top of one another on bases of different heights. On these screens, extracts from Marker's films are shown along with previously unpublished film material – such as footage of his encounters with the artists Matta and Christo and the filmmaker Tarkovsky – and filmed sequences of travel photographs and photomontages. Besides this, there are recordings and still images from television, two TV channels showing their current programs, various video works by Marker and computer-animated pieces, some of which can be controlled by mouse click. The film sequences, which are allocated to particular monitors described as "zones," are of different lengths and are played as a loop, with the result that the view of the installation as a whole is always changing, constantly producing new connections between the different zones. Also installed in the space are framed black-and-white and color photographs, a number of photomontages, a photographic series, four lightboxes with slides and three Japanese votive cats of different sizes. *Zapping Zone* was shown for the first time in Paris in 1990 as part of the exhibition "Passages de l'image" in the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, and was expanded for later presentations through the addition of several sequences and whole new zones. Each viewer follows his own route through the pictorial universe, determining how long to remain in front of which images, and drawing his own connections between the individual pieces.⁵

The title of the installation and the individual programs echo Tarkovsky's film *Stalker* (1978) in which a writer and a scientist, along with Stalker, their guide, cross a mysterious no-man's land, the Zone. They embark on a journey through a place that follows no logical laws and in which the path proves to be an obstacle-filled detour. The goal of the journey is a room in a dilapidated house, a room shrouded in legend in which one's deepest wish will be granted, but which ultimately none of the men will enter. Logic and imagination fail them, and the journey upon which they have embarked turns out to be one of self-knowledge. Marker makes repeated reference to Tarkovsky's Zone as a model and metaphor for the unfathomableness of *mémoire*. Like the Zone in *Stalker*, *Zapping*

Christa Blümlinger, "Zwischen den Bildern/Lesen," in Christa Blümlinger and Constantin Wulff (eds), *Schreiben Bilder Sprechen. Texte zum essayistischen Film*, Sonderzahl, Vienna, 1992, pp. 11–31, here p. 13. On the subject of the audiovisual image: Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2. The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1999 (French original 1985).

From the French commentary on *Sans Soleil*. "Chris Marker, *Sans Soleil*," in *irafic*, no. 6, Spring 1993, pp. 79–97, here p. 95.

On the recollective function of media see Christina Scherer, *Ivens, Marker, Godard, Jarman. Erinnerung im Essayfilm*, Wilhelm Fink, Munich, 2001, (dissertation, University of Marburg, 1999), pp. 57–72.

Hilgt. Kämper, "Das Bild als Madelaine. *Sans Soleil* und *Immemory*," in Birgit Kämper and Thomas Tode (eds), *Chris Marker. Filmessayist*, Institut Français de Munich/CICIM, Munich, 1997, pp. 141–160, here p. 144.

See Raymond Bellour, "Eloge des mail. *Zapping Zone*," in *Phonop / Tode*, op. cit., pp. 129–134.

SI CE CD-ROM JOUE À SIMULER LE JEU DE LA MÉMOIRE AVEC SES "NOEUDS", COMME DISAIT REMIZOV, IL N'EST PAS UNE AUTOBIOGRAPHIE DÉGUISEE. LE "JE" QUI LE COMMENTE EST LARGEMENT IMAGINAIRE, ET L'AUTEUR QUI NE S'EST ÉVIDEMMENT PAS PRIVÉ DE PUISER DANS SA PROPRE MÉMOIRE S'EST PERMIS TOUTES SORTES DE LIBERTÉS, TANDIS QUE MOI, LE CHAT INTERVENANT, JE NE ME GÊNE PAS POUR Y METTRE MA PATTE...

Reuler
dans la séquence

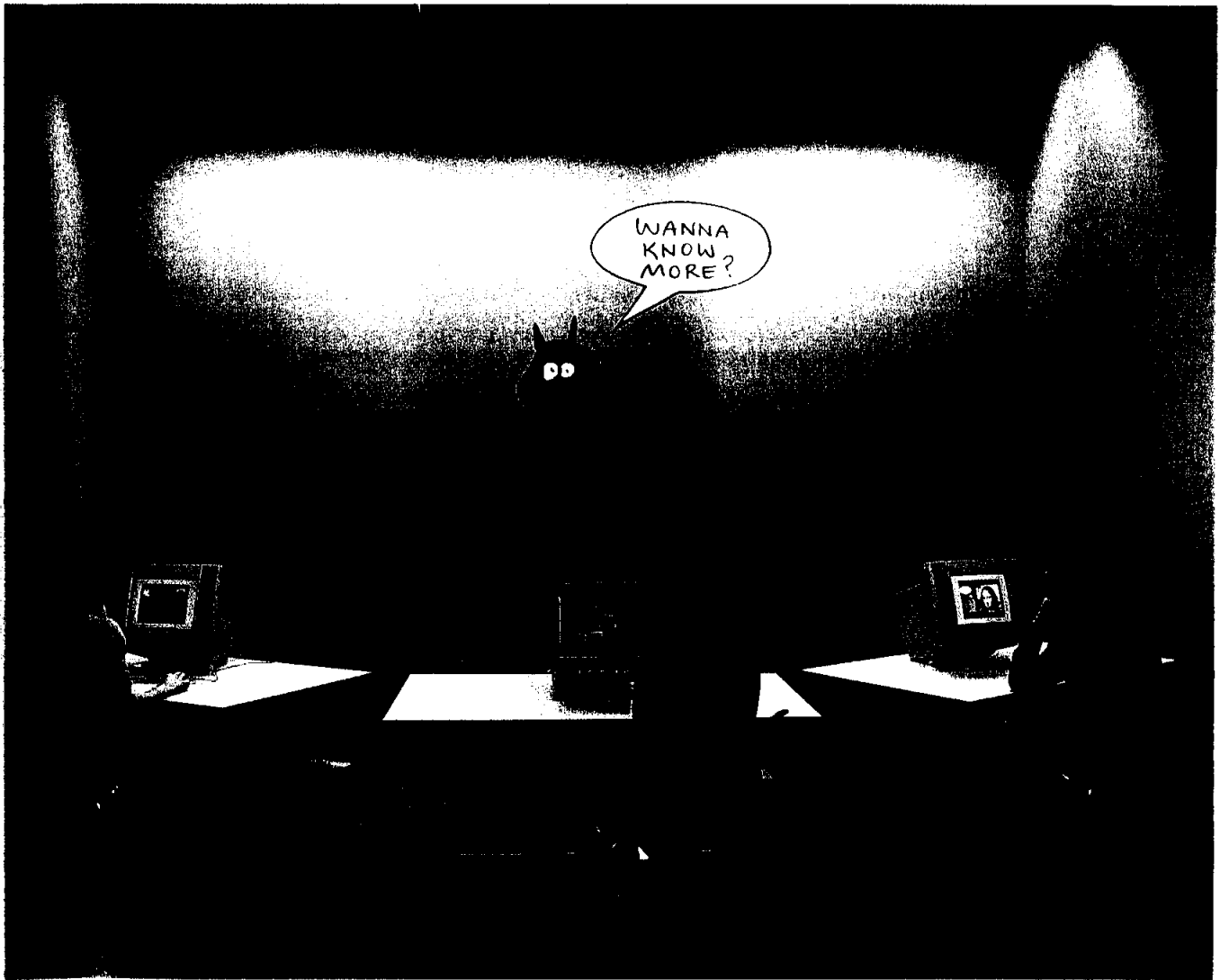
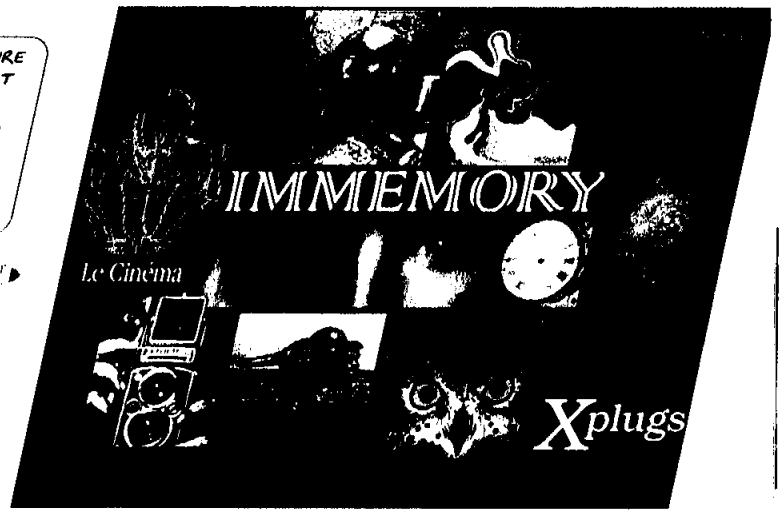
Avancer
dans la séquence

Ne cliquez pas, profitez
vous verrez souvent un texte apparaît
vous verrez un ou plusieurs mots
Guillaume en l'espèce, le chat servira
de variations supplémentaires.

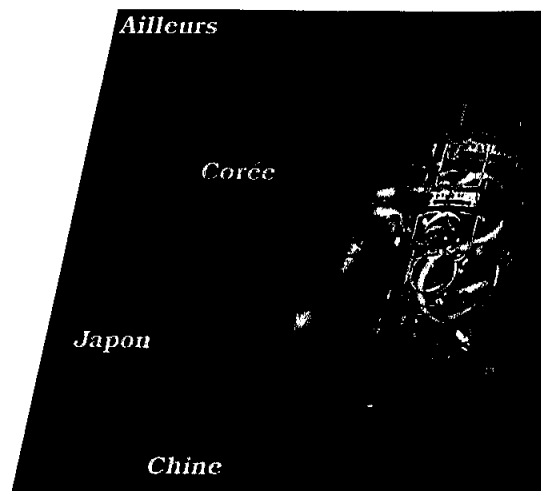


Reuler à la détermination
de la séquence

Reuler en tête de séquence



Immemory
1997
CD-ROM in Gallatin
dimension variable
in Gallatin view 2KM | Center
for Art and Media
Eindhoven, 2002
courtesy Centre Georges
Pompidou, Musée National d'Art
Moderne Centre de Création
industrielle, Paris
photo © Franz Wamhof



Zone permits no straight path of knowledge – a goal is never reached: stories, rather than one single history, emerge as a result.

The term "zapping" is used to describe how television viewers switch back and forth between different TV channels, a practice that established itself in the 1980s. This behavior is often judged to be the result of a diminished ability or willingness to focus attention, brought about by exposure to a flood of images in everyday life. *Zapping Zone* turns zapping into a creative act – the viewer creates his own film from the store of images on offer. In the framework of this installation, zapping is given a spatial dimension, in that the viewer must physically move around and walk from channel to channel. *Zapping Zone* can be regarded as an attempt to take the viewer on a journey of recollection, the installation form recalling the design of Renaissance memory theaters.

For Marker, the ideal form for the theme of memory and recollection ultimately appears to be the medium of CD-ROM, used by the filmmaker for the

first time in his work *Immemory*, which was published in 1997. Here, zapping has given way to the mouse click, and entry into the memory archive is gained through seven "zones," in which Marker's subjects reappear in different images and texts: the themes of cinema, travel, museum, *mémoire*, photography, war, poetry, and the Xplugs, which are computer-generated visual montages. Of the "three cult films" in the "cinema" zone, for example, one is Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, the story of a man who is obsessed by the memory of his dead lover, Madeleine. The user also encounters the director in the "*mémoire*" zone under the heading "What is a Madeleine?" alongside Marcel Proust. The filmmakers Andrei Tarkovsky and Akira Kurosawa are to be found, as are numerous photographs by Marker such as those from his books *Le Dépayés* (1982) and *Coréens* (1959), together with previously unpublished pictures which can be accessed by following a number of different paths. One also finds "personal information" on the imaginary person who appears as "I" on the CD-ROM, as the user instructions emphasize.



Immemory
1997
screenshots
courtesy Centre Georges
Pompidou, Musée National d'Art
Moderne Centre de Création
industrielle, Paris



For example, two relatives from the Krasna family appear, Aunt Edith and Uncle Anton: Marker had already given this name to the letter-writer and cameraman in his film *Sans Soleil*. The “travel” zone opens with the relevant literature from the author’s youth, including the fantastic journeys of Jules Verne and the Comte de Beauvoir’s *Voyage autour du monde*.

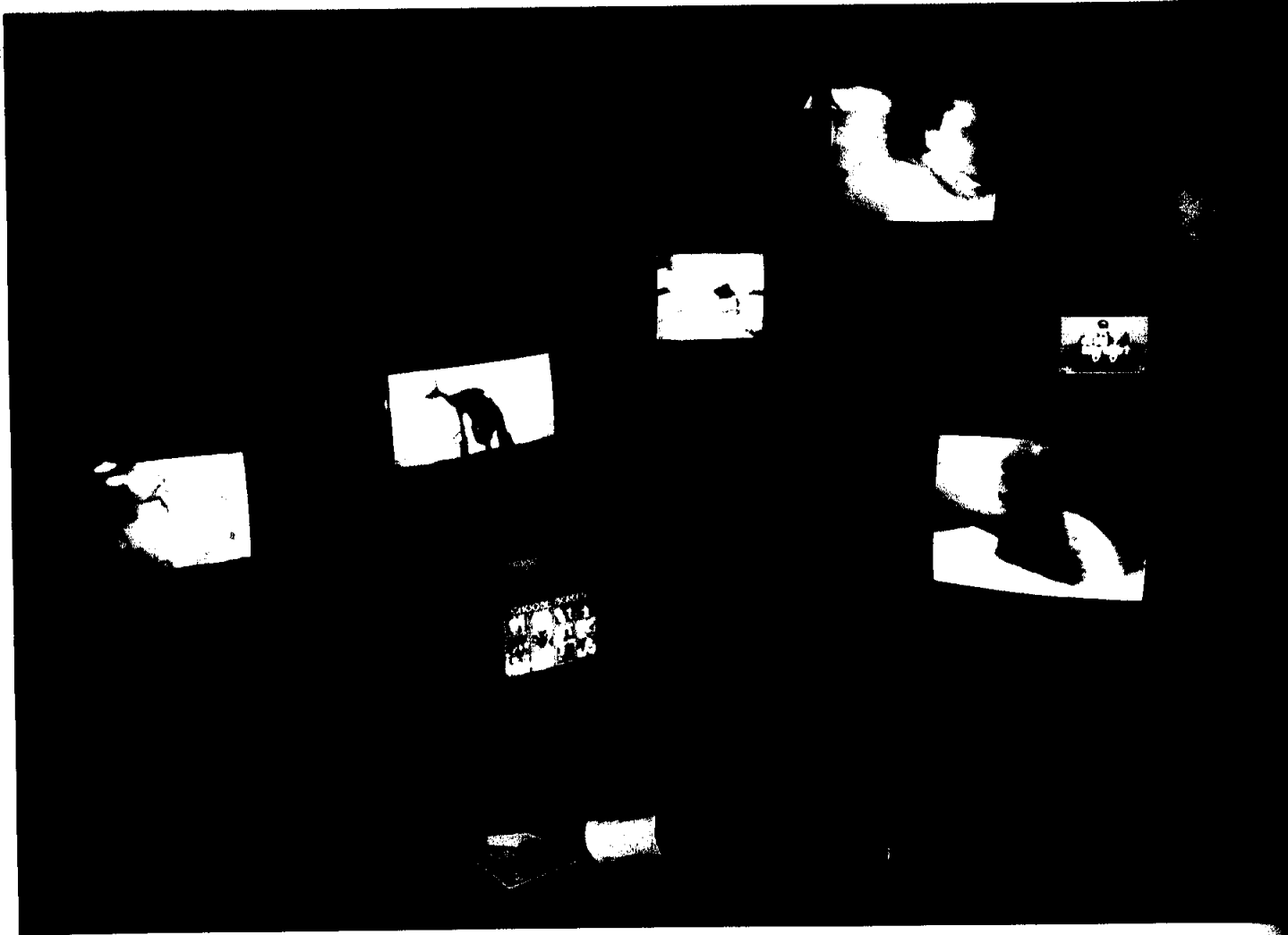
Immemory offers the possibility of travelling into the past of the imaginary author. The journey is guided by the paths offered by the program, a navigational system which in many places allows one to branch off and enter another zone. Guillaume-Égypte presents himself as the guide through the labyrinth of *souvenirs*; however the hand-drawn cat is an unreliable guide. Most of the time it steers the user again and again towards detours and up wrong tracks.

The motif of the journey makes it clear that in *Immemory*, Marker does not conceive recollection and memory to be like a history book, but instead considers geography to be the “more modest and

perhaps more fruitful” model.¹⁰ The user is offered the opportunity to map the movements of remembering by using memory traces and to make visible, at least in part, the hidden plan which, according to Marker’s hypothesis, lies behind every comprehensive memory. Memory is not subject to any causal order or chronological succession. The paths of recollection remain incomplete, something Marker emphasizes in his choice of the title *Immemory*, a negation of *mémoire*. It brings to mind the notion of the impossibility of total recall, against which Marker sets the recollective model developed by Robert Hooke (1635–1702) in the seventeenth century. This assumes that there is a certain spot within the brain, one that is not further defined, “in which all sensory impressions are received and transmitted for contemplation.” Impressions that are “only the movements of particles and bodies.”¹¹

Barbara Filsar
Translated from the German by Jacqueline Todd

¹⁰ Cited from the booklet accompanying *Immemory*, unpaginated.
¹¹ See also his films *La Jetée* and *Sans Soleil*.
¹² Cited from the booklet accompanying *Immemory*, unpaginated.



Zapping Zone. Proposals for an Imaginary Television 1990-1992
media installation
thirteen monitors, thirteen PAL video tapes (color, sound), seven computers, seven programs on computer disk, twenty b/w and color photographs, four blocks of eighty slides
dimensions variable
installation views, steirischer herbst, Graz, 1998



Zapping Zone

Zapping Zone consists in a number of photographs, computer programs and video tapes produced by the artist. The latter can be seen on computers and monitors either stacked or laid out in the form of a circle in a darkened space, the "zone." This idea is reminiscent of the film *Stalker* by the Russian director Andreï Tarkovsky. Here it represents a hermetically sealed, complex and enigmatic space that only its initiates, or those who want to, can conquer. Chris Marker's "zone" consists in selected pieces from his films, extracts from his television programs, documentaries filmed in various places but not broadcast, photographs taken during his frequent travels, or even taken from televised images, and finally from active and interactive computers. In this way Chris Marker has composed new computer-graphics images, has retouched others, reworked television images either randomly through aerial distortions or deliberately. He has also inserted a short fictional film made in animated synthesized images: *Théorie des ensembles*. In addition, some images picked up

direct from television are mixed with the "manufactured" images.

The idea of "zapping" refers to the viewer's attitude in the 1980s when faced with the profusion of sounds and pictures broadcast on our television channels, an idea very familiar to readers of Serge Daney.

Several key focal points structure this "open ended" work, enhancing each showing with additional images: parts of the world close to the artist's heart, that is to say Tokyo, San Francisco and Berlin, faces of great friends, such as the painter Matta and the director Andreï Tarkovsky, favorite animals and a cat, called Guillaume in Egypt, and so forth.

The subtitle of the work *Proposals for an Imaginary Television* reminds us that this is certainly not only a severe criticism of television and its content, but also of its production system. An imaginary electronic world is not an utopia.

Christine van Assche