

# Chris Marker: A Moving Image Artist Who Kills Cinema

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Cinema and video can have a strange relationship, like a Freudian father and son. That is, as Oedipus, video is the son of cinema who wants to kill its father to establish itself as a media. When we see Chris Marker's wide range of moving images on film, video, installation and computer works in CD-ROM or second-life, a similar relationship exists between cinema and video.

To begin with, Marker as a "filmmaker" who made *La jetée* (1962) or *Sans soleil* (1982) seems too serious and awkward to me. What is this "awkwardness"? I found that the term "cinema essay" isn't a clear answer to the question.

I found the key to this question when I saw his video installation *When the Century Took Shape (War and Revolution)* (1978) at the Marian Goodman Gallery in New York in 2007. In that piece, he added violent video effects to recorded images from the Russian revolution and WW2, and zapped them quickly. The images were operated on as data and had lost any connection to their objective "facts," while they didn't tell any "truth" with a constructive narrative. They were very far from the cinematic aesthetics of realism or strength of story — they were blunt and profane.

In the past, Marker as the assistant director of *Night and Fog* (1955), had questioned the meaning of hazardingly telling unspeakable "factual" or "truthful" stories with moving images. In the latter half of his career, what did he seek with video? I believe it's a relentless objection to the illusion that cinema must tell the truth.

In *Level Five* (1996), he depicted the antagonistic relationship between video and cinema most vividly. In it, the only way for the heroine (and the spectator whom she speaks to) to approach the tragedy of the Battle of Okinawa — a traumatic fact in Modern history — is through the operation of dubious computers. It reveals that an image is essentially data and its operation.

Marker developed that kind of attitude to an image more thoroughly in his video installation works. In *Zapping Zone* (1990), he zapped many images including some fragments from his own

past works. In *Silent Movie* (1995), he put effects on a silent-cinema-like image, changed its speed, and showed variations in multiple monitors. In the exhibition *Starring Back* (2007) in Wexner Center for Arts at the Ohio State University, he showed photos in which some frames picked from his past films were altered with softwares like Photoshop or Painter. In this way, he often used his own work's image repeatedly without any concern for its contents, reminding me of Nam June Paik, the founder of video art.

The bluntness of Marker's image reaches its extreme in *Bestiary* (1985–90), a compilation of "one-off-trick" video works on animals and in the second-life project where his beloved cat, the late Guillaume, is revived with computer graphics. With these works, we can find images liberated from the law of realism or story, a freedom that is only attainable with image data.

Needless to say, we are living in the age of electronic media where all image is nothing but data. But this common fact needs to be questioned hereafter, not receptively but critically, and not reactionary but positively. And for that, we need to have a sense for electronic art which can discover profound desire in data image itself.

We don't care if cinephiles gloomily moan the fact that moving image wouldn't tell the truth in cinematic way. Godard, who has been bound to the cinematic image of objects and story, negatively "exploited" video in his *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1988–98) to make cinema outlive. On the contrary, Marker has unsentimentally been finding the direct possibility of image as data. Even though his way may be seen as a blasphemy towards cinema, it only proves that the attachment to cinematic aesthetics is just a perversion. Why do we need to forcibly call his work "essay"? Marker, who has been an "awkward filmmaker," could liberate his "blunt" sense of image by video and computer without restraint. When we open our eyes to the sense, we definitely are overcoming cinema. Video begins to kill its father with Chris Marker.