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ANIMALI D'ARTISTA. TRA FIGURAZIONE,
ASTRAZIONE ED IBRIDAZIONE
DAL SECONDO NOVECENTO AD OGGI

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Chris Marker's *Petit Bestiaire*: An Essay Film

"The animal scrutinizes across a narrow abyss of non-comprehension...
The man too is looking across a similar but not identical abyss,
of non-comprehension. And this is so whenever he looks."

(J. Berger, "Why Look at Animals?", in *About Looking*)

The independent filmmaker Chris Marker, known for his close observational eye, is associated with *cinéma vérité*, a film movement emergent in late 1950s and 1960s France. Since his early tourist documentary essay *Letters from Siberia* (1957), and throughout his *oeuvre*, especially his tour de force 1982 film *Sans Soleil*, the significance of animals in Chris Marker's feature films, documentaries, art installations, and still photographs have been pronounced [Fig. 1]. In *Sans Soleil*, for example, Marker's geographical leap from Japan to Guinea Bissau is connected via commemorations of loss. He focuses on poignant rituals at Japanese shrines honoring domestic cats [Fig. 2a, Fig. 2b], memorial offerings by school children for a deceased panda, and a gripping sequence of a hunt in West Africa showing a young giraffe reeling from gunshot wounds as it succumbs to death, wide-eyed [Fig. 3]. From poetic prayers for creatures known and unknown to gratuitous violence, the viewer is a witness to Marker's weaving together of human and animal relationships, especially poignant is the lingering eye-to-eye contact of the felled young giraffe as it struggled to survive while its death stare turns to horror as vultures gorge on the young creature's eyes.

Jacques Derrida stresses the significance of an animal gaze in his text, "The Animal That Therefore I am (More to Come)," where he proposes looking beyond the inherited philosophical discourse on



Fig. 1
Regent's Park Zoo 1, year unknown.
 Black and white photograph mounted on aluminium.
 8 1/8 x 13 7/8 inches (20.6 x 35.2 cm).
 Courtesy the Chris Marker Estate and Peter Blum Gallery (above).



Fig. 2a
 Still from *Sans Soleil*, 1983.
 Courtesy Argos Films (in the centre).



Fig. 2b
 Still from *Sans Soleil*, 1983.
 Courtesy Argos Films (in the centre).

Fig. 3
 Still from *Sans Soleil*, 1983.
 Courtesy Argos Films (below).



animals, especially the model established by René Descartes whom Derrida suggests “theoretically registered” distinctions between thinking, speaking humans and animals while failing to take into account a reciprocal gaze among the multiplicity of alterities that exist

Fig. 4
 Wim Wenders, Chris Marker,
 n.d. © Wim Wenders.



in the non-human animal world (Derrida 2002: 381-383). Derrida locates the commonality of human and animal link in our shared experience of suffering and mortality. He also cites Walter Benjamin who proposes that non-human animal “muteness” is the essence of animality with its consequential “sadness” (ivi: 388). While in the landmark text by John Berger, “Why Look at Animals?”, it is the display of animals that enables varied animals to become visible to humans making the once important reciprocal gaze in a natural environment one-sided and thus signaling the state of each species as “absolutely marginal”, thus leaving intact that partition that disables the meaningful communication between human-animal subjectivities (Berger 1980: 22). These reflections concern not just the conditions of the non-human animals, but the human-animal knowledge limitations about fellow creatures, if not disregard.

Diverse animals as subjects are omnipresent in Chris Marker's *oeuvre* – photographs, videos, films, art projects, publications, and even the experience of his own studio [Fig. 4]. As a burgeoning writer and critic, Marker knew well the influential film critic André Bazin whose seminal text, “What is cinema?”, defines medium's core as one of “intersubjective spectatorship”, that of humans and animals (Fay 2008: 43). Thus, Bazin is proposing a means by which to recognize a mediated framework within which a nascent exchange of subjectivities may occur.

In *Petit Bestiaire*, Marker turns his light-weight camera on animals and birds in this compilation of *courts métrages* – one filmed in his own studio while others are shot in zoos.

Chris Marker is well-known for his direct filmmaking but with a point of view, indebted to the Soviet filmmaker Dviga Vertov whose pri-

mary subject was recording aspects of actuality, experienced-based observations incorporating found footage, and innovating by means of film montage – all evident in Marker's oeuvre. This essay film or what Bazin describes as an "essay documented by film" is understood to stand in relation to historical and political resonances and yet "the product of a poet" (Bazin 1967).¹ Catherine Lupton considers Marker a skilled practitioner of the essay film, which she describes as "that mode of composition which proceeds by the digressive, tentative unfolding of an open-ended, intensely provisional knowledge at the scene of writing itself" (Lupton 2005: 48).

Petit Bestiaire is a set of encounters with non-human animals and birds where the camera lens functions to maximize an *égalité du regard* affording weight to each creature's subjectivities with poetic inferences through musical scores, digital sounds, or temporal pace. My aim is to focus on Marker's incisive attention to his individual subjects in these *courts métrages*, and how he probes interspecies exchange by means of focused proximity, attention to details of comportment, and recognition of each subject's alterity. The lens of the camera is the locus of exchange – the camera's eye – not the eye of the filmmaker – which then takes on resonances within political, ethical, and moral domains (Horner 2016: 245).

There is a recurrence of Marker's trinity of totem animals – cat, owl, elephant – across his varied productions over his career. Identifying cats as "never on the side of power", animals have had a role in personify his political allegiances as wry alter-egos, even self-identifying as "the cat who walks alone". *Chat écoutant la musique* (1990) is unique in *Petit Bestiaire* for its sense of intimacy and seamless use of montage [Fig. 5]. In a three-minute sequence, Marker creates a portrait of his feline companion, *Guillaume-en-Égypte* in a closely framed reflection as his cat listens to a piano sonata by the Catalan composer Federico Mompou. Mompou's score, described as "the silence of music", links aural poetry with a loving study of his cat in states of reverie subtly responding to shifts in tone or gently knead-

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 1 André Bazin, as quoted in Nora M. Alter; *Chris Marker*, University of Illinois Press (2006), p.17. According to Bazin, the cinema essay should be considered in the same manner as a literary text.

Fig. 5
 Still from *Chat Écoutant la Musique*,
 1990. Courtesy Films du Jeudi.



ing the electric keyboard keys throughout the duration of the musical arrangement. His cat's tranquil demeanor is sensitively videoed during what appears to be an uninterrupted taping but is, in fact, a gracefully structured montage with *Guillaume-en-Égypte* situated at the very center of Marker's creative work in this studio. Marker uses montage as a refinement technique interlacing creative affinities – his beloved companion, his oeuvre, and himself. Jean-André Fieschi refers to this sequence as a "montage-cat", resulting in what he refers to as a "tiny fiction, a dance of cause and effect, by the editing in time to Federico Mompou's gentle electric piano music" (Fieschi 2008: 9).² Marker is also quietly present in the studio throughout via proxy photos of his cat placed on and beside the keyboard.

Photographs in Marker's films are a series of gestures – "he breaks the thread of time and stymies death" (Roth 1997: 44). In Marker's "Lettre au chat G...", originally written for *Coréennes* (1959), an early travel documentary, Marker writes: "At the base of this journey is human friendship. The rest is silence" (Marker 1997). In this iteration of 1990, it is the "silent music" of Mompou that communicates their unspoken closeness. Marker shows animals both as what they are, shots of animals, and as complex metaphors or what Jonathan Burt has described "semantic overload" (Burt 2002: 11).

These *courts métrages* vary in the proximity to each animal or bird, visual and aural cadences, and his subjects' engagement with Marker's camera. *Zoo Piece* (1990) begins with an easy wistfulness in

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 2 Jean-André Fieschi, as quoted in Adrian Martin, "Chris Marker: Notes in the Margin of His Time," in *Cinéaste*, vol. 33, n. 4 (Fall 2008).

mood and movement as the viewer accompanies the filmmaker's stroll among the outdoor animal displays passing seals in a concrete water habitat; kangaroos and emus in their outdoor compound; and a chimpanzee gazing upward as if lost in reverie with the ambient tone set by a jazz rendition of Rodgers and Hart's 1937 love song, *My Funny Valentine*. The airy garden space shifts quickly as the prison-like environments housing a rhinoceros and bears demonstrates the incongruity of image/score, which is increasingly problematized. Marker is a witness to the actuality of caged wild animals with his empirical methods not overdetermining a clear position on this zoological collection. Displacement becomes increasingly evident in the shot of a de-horned rhinoceros whose single movement – lifting of one ear only to let it fall again – appears a despondent refusal to engage with Marker's presence [Fig. 6]. This bleak confinement documents the reality of a specimen approach to animal display, a woe-ful legacy of nineteenth century zoological design where an animal cannot escape human gaze; they are framed for scopic examination. Deprived of specific modes of being, they become an emblematic model of a non-human animals divorced from context and community as is evident in shots of other creatures – tiger, wolf, bear, and chimpanzees – languishing, pacing, pressing against cages or calling out [Fig. 7]. There is even a section of domestic cats staring out with paws outreached from the grid of the cage. Yet this scopic drive is one of possible reversibility implicating the viewer in these actions. While each animal has been collected from a unique environment, the single image of a rhinoceros evokes memories of colonialism as Western and Eastern empires engaged in exotic gift-giving. In this case, these frames recall the official gift from India to the king of Portugal, made famous internationally by Albrecht Dürer's 1515 engraving which, in its widespread dissemination, peaked European fascination with exotic animals [Fig. 8]. The rhinoceros is associated with ferocity, speed, and strength, but Marker documents how displacement from its natural environment has stifled this animal inherent capabilities that can be neither experienced nor expressed by the individual leaving the creature solitary in abject confinement. This single sequence conveys how the zoo itself manifests an exer-

Fig. 6
Still from *Zoo Piece*, 1993. Courtesy Films du Jeudi (above).

Fig. 7
Still from *Zoo Piece*, 1993. Courtesy Films du Jeudi (in the centre).

Fig. 8
Albrecht Dürer, *Rhinoceros*, woodcut, 1515. Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY. Gift of Junius Spencer Morgan. 19.73.159 (below).



tion of power rendering powerful creatures inert through control and other means. As Cary Wolfe writes: "animals have disappeared from everyday encounters and the interconnections that are the foundational ecological web have been reduced to spectacle, or worse, captivity" (Wolfe 2003: 1-57). As we gaze at the confined rhinoceros and other species, Marker invites each viewer – as we too are lone voyeurs – to reflect on the heterogeneity of each animal on screen, question our moral dispositions as witnesses to perceptual and emotional worlds we cannot fully know, and consider how such institutions echo an aspect of our human loss as this elegiac love song accompanies viewers as the scenario unfolds. This section



Fig. 9
Still from *An Owl is an Owl is an Owl*, 1990. Courtesy Films du Jeudi.

concludes with caged bears and their handlers in a sequence when the animals' vocal communication and human voice intermingle, decipherable only is the word, "L'Amour." In *Petit Bestiaire*, the viewer is a third party to what s/he sees... "a direct formula of exchange" (Bellour 1997: 110).

The owl plays a prominent role in his work, and Marker even produced a television series in 1989 titled, *The Legacy of the Owl*, a thirteen-part series premised on Plato's symposium with the mythical owl embodying and guiding the viewer through key tenets of western philosophy. By contrast, his three-minute video, *An Owl is an Owl is an Owl* (1990), brings us close to real owls wherein Marker accentuates their unbreakable gaze using montage to construct framed close-ups of the diversity of owls in tandem with computer-manipulated distorted human voices repeating the word "owl" or the phrase of the video title – a sonic repetition that mirrors visual sequences – a sort of affirmation of the owl-ness of the owl [Fig. 9]. Recalling Gertrude Stein's famous 1913 line from the poem, *Sacred Emily*,³ the owl like the rose, is identifier of both the unique individual and the archetypal. A distinguished creature in western and eastern thought, associated with wisdom, knowledge, insight, memory, philosophy, and awareness of death, the owl underpins cultural memory but as a living creature, we know little of the subjective ways in which the owl experiences our shared world realities, let alone the unique subjectivity of the individual owl specimen. Yet again, that which has captured the human imagination about

3 "A Rose is a Rose is a Rose". Gertrude Stein published this poem in the 1922 book *Geography and Plays*.

this bird has been stifled. The owl's most most-often nocturnal disposition and territorial nature are violated by a diurnal existence, a confined habitat, and inability to fly and hunt for prey. The owls remain silent in the strangeness of environment separation often with protracted life spans sustained by a diet of euthanized rats, which in this video are scanned with a sense of indifference. The alterity of owl is recorded by Marker in the acute exchange of gazes, "between two consciousnesses", or what philosopher Emmanuel Levinas describes as a condition where one "cannot fully know each other". Marker portrays that notion with the disquieting aural/visual effects in this film and the quick recording of the owls' steady gazes creating a sense of disturbance as the directed gaze of the birds is focused back on us as viewers; their comportment compact and still.

In structuring these videos, Marker has fashioned sound/image elements to achieve markedly different ends – from alignment to dissonances. He has been acknowledged as having defined a new form of comparison between image and sound which consists of bringing together two apparently disparate ideas and in their conjunction giving these films an unforeseen and often eloquent resonance (Porcile 1993: 16).⁴ André Bazin defined this method as "horizontal montage" where connections move from ear to eye in reverse direction of traditional reels (Lecoite 2011: 100).⁵ In Bazin's words: "As a time embalming medium, cinema may represent the convergence of human and natural temporality, as well as human-animal mutuality when it shows the political truth which lies just beyond our powers of compassion" (Fay 2008: 50). Marker, as an engaged artistic practitioner, has proposed an ethical challenge in these works without an overt ideological leaning.

Marker's four-minute essay film, *Slon Tango*, was filmed in the Ljubljana Zoo in 1993, two years after Slovenia voted for independence from the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia [Fig. 10]. This en-

4 François Porcile, quoted in François Lecoite from "Images Documentaire 15," in Chris Marker Special Issue 19, 1993, p. 16.

5 See André Bazin, "Chris Marker: Lettre de Sibéria," in *France Observatoire*, 30, October 1958 and *Le Cinéma français de la Libération à la Nouvelle Vague (1945-1958)*, Cahiers du Cinéma L'Étoile, Paris 1983, p. 181.



Fig. 10
Still from *Slon Tango*, 1993.
Courtesy Films du Jeudi.

grossing meditation on a sole elephant in this zoo is also a mnemonic analogy to Marker's earlier participation in S.L.O.N., *La Société pour le Lancement des Oeuvres Nouvelles*, an activist Parisian film collective formed in the era of Mai '68 supporting political rights from Viet Nam to Chile, and neatly translating to "elephant" in Russian, signaling his admiration for the legacy of Soviet filmmaking. Marker's still video camera records (without montage) the measured choreographic ambling of this individual elephant in a single taping, evoking the early filmmaking of the Lumière Brothers, but with a difference. While filming, Marker recalled that he had "thought about Stravinsky's *Tango*" and once in the studio he added the soundtrack (Desbarats 2018: 6). Yet, Marker also diverges from the early paradigm of the fixed frame by focusing in on the abrasion scar on the face of the elephant as it returns to its cell while the music continues for additional bars. As Carole Desbarats writes: "By reusing a technique dating from the beginning of cinema (the fixed frame with two cuts – the beginning and the end of the film), he makes us dream of the grace of an elephant and faces us with the plight of captive wild animals in a shot that combines political and moral reflection on the nature of cinema itself..." (ibidem). In parallel, with his choice of Igor Stravinsky's 1940 *Tango*, written while the composer himself was exiled in California, the contrast between a musical score is traditionally based on a coordinated embrace between two bodies is poignant. Stravinsky's own isolation and out of place-ness is analogous to the displacement of this lone creature. This film conveys weightiness in its visual and musical syncopation creating a

mood of world-weariness and melancholy. This tonal work based on the number four; accompanies the elephant's choreographic steps – forward and back; and a cross-over of its front legs, and then, back legs, begging the question, what is movement about? Film critic Tom McCarthy has pointed out this tango creates the effect of two dancers linked in an *abrazo* (McCarthy 2013: 152). Yet, how can we comprehend the incongruity of the elegant movements we witness with a sense that this animal has been broken, subject to the cruelty of a solitary life, especially given the extended family orientation of its species. Elephants are most closely associated with memory and known for expressing visible emotional sentiments, making this film even more heart-rending. Are we watching this animal reenacting touch remembered? After a brief exchange of gazes, she turns back towards her dismal enclosure.

Elephant isolation is one measure of how zoos have demonstrated pervasive apathy towards animals' physical and cognitive attributes and needs. This segment also again evokes a history of colonialism. The Asian elephant, in particular, and the title of this short leads us directly back to Marker's central role in film collective S.L.O.N. and its signature film *Far from Vietnam* (1967), a collaboration with Jean-Luc Godard, Agnès Varda, William Klein, and others. Their methods in these *Cinétracts* are evident in Marker's *Slon Tango*:

For the images, we have to 'feel' the rhythm; in terms of the proper impact of the image, its plastic relationship with that which precedes and follows it, the role that we attribute to it (information – commentary/punctuation, vibration). The sequence of images is a discourse, sometimes closely, sometimes distantly, to the ensuing discourse (Lecoite 2011: 96).

Filipa Ramos has written, "Zoos make animals visible. By exhibiting, editing, framing, and fixating on the living beings they detain, zoological gardens activate specific modes of looking and being looked upon, which transforms the status of the displayed animals and condition the ways in which they are dealt with and thought about" (Ramos 2019: 85). She further proposes that there is a corollary between live animal display and the film/video framing, present-

ing non-human animals as more than isolated object, but also an “event”. While zoos are designed to enable spectator observation of their living creature collections, there are also animals selected to entertain visitors, as we likely see in this short film, capturing a sort of “behind the scenes” take. Marker’s construction of this video appears themed on ideas of displacement, display, performance, confinement, and resignation along with the melancholic tone of Stravinsky’s tango is critically haunting. Specifically, we are witnessing the female Asian elephant, Ganga, born in the wild in 1975 and living on her own in Ljubljana since former President Tito offered the animal to the zoo in 1977, as Ramos has written. Ganga appears to be carrying out what are referred to as stereotypic behaviors commonly seen in a variety of animals experiencing confinement stress or compulsively rehearsing tricks geared to visitor entertainment. Ramos argues that Ganga is an in-between creature neither wild nor domestic, one displaced in myriad ways while undergoing a “life under continuous scrutiny” (ivi: 89). The limited space of the zoo compound enables Marker to “fit her body in the frame” (ibidem). This solo performance and seeming resignation of Ganga underscores her existence as one of controlled performativity and isolation from her own species.

As individual works, each of these videos convey a longing for knowledge and connection with Marker’s subjects and an awareness that these encounters are moments of poetic wistfulness. No matter what the geographic location of origin, human and non-human animal connections have been severed – by a physical space and the gap between possible communication. With the exception of *Chat écoutant la musique* and his sequence of commemoration of animal lives in Japan, which he described as an attempt “to repair the thread of time,” our human-non-human animal ecological soundness of a prelapsarian state has long ago been ruptured with our human exposure to a biodiverse environment narrowed to staged settings. Nora Alter has written that there are three interdependent aspects of Marker’s work that are apropos to these *courts métrages*. Marker has prioritized the audio-visual essay in his works and these poetic shorts are segments of a broader oeuvre in which themes and

Fig. 11
Raoul Dufy, woodcut, 1911. Illustration for *Le Bestiaire ou le Cortège d’Orphée* by Guillaume Apollinaire. Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY. Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1926.
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images recur in relation to the chosen mediums he uses. Alter has further emphasized the pedagogical aspects of his work in which Marker puts himself at a site of learning where one is aware of how he is able to “read authentic images” rather than reinforce a strict ideological position. Finally, in Marker’s innovative use of sound and digital montage, his documentary essays are the product of artistic and experimental filmmaking (Alter 2006: 17).

Philosophic reflection on non-human animals in Western thought have long prioritized complex linguistic structuring as an affirmation of human status and with it, attendant control of animals broadly. Marker has focused his cinematic reflections within the domestic space and the zoo in these “video haiku.” By titling these separate short films *Petit Bestiaire*, Marker evokes ancient, medieval, and early modern worlds where natural science and human moralizing often merge, as well as the literary charm and memory of children’s books, an early introduction to the heterogeneity of endearing creatures. Marker’s childhood recollections are given visual form in his 1966 film essay, *Si J’avais quatre dromadaires* an homage to Guillaume Apollinaire’s poem of the same title in his book of poems, *Le Bestiaire ou le Cortège d’Orphée* [Fig. 11]. This four-line poem, *The Dromedary*, references the 16th century Portuguese world traveler Don Pedro d’Alfarubeyrais (Apolliniare 1980: 20). Guided by Orpheus, known for this ability to speak to fellow creatures in their

own language, he travels the realms of animals, insects, sea life, and mythic creatures as a poet of the world. Marker's parallel film essay is composed of black and white still photographs exploring vast geographic zones through the lens of animals, humans, art, history, and more, but importantly, he emphasizes the connections between animals and human; from an owl visage appearing on the face of Leonardo da Vinci's *La Gioconda* to the cats at the monastery of Mount Athos, as well as photos of seals, lions, prairie dogs, lions in zoos; he also highlights human animal relationships between horses, dogs, and cats by means of a non-verbal cues demonstrating closeness and affection. "Marker's camera treats all subjects in front of his lens without differentiating between humans, statues, animals, landscapes, architecture or signs." (Alter 2006: 59). They are filmed as equals-companions and guides. In Marker's words:

And always the animals
 From each trip
 You bring back a gaze
 A pose
 A gesture
 That points to the truest of humanity
 Better
 than images of humanity itself (Marker 1998).⁶

Marker turned to computer technology for the project commissioned by the Centre Georges Pompidou in 1990 with his installation titled *Zapping Zone: Proposals for Imaginary Television*, for the exhibition *Passages de l'Image* [Fig. 12]. This multi-media production is composed of 20 monitors on which computer-generated images and sound providing the spectator with "space enabling a zap in the zone." (Bellour 1997: 190). Raymond Bellour describes the work as follows: "A waste disposal of history and its utopias." As a viewer, one is able to "zap" into a thematic zone resulting in a non-linear "disorganization" of visual and sound fragments wherein Marker's *oeuvre* is reimagined. *Chat écoutant la musique* was composed for this work

⁶ Chris Marker, quoted from *Immemory* (1998) in *Chris Marker Staring Back*. Columbus, OH: Wexner Center for the Arts at Ohio State University, 2007, p. 126.



Fig. 12
 Chris Marker, *Zapping Zone* (Proposals for an Imaginary television).
 Photo (C) Centre Pompidou, MNAM-CCI, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais/
 Philippe Migeat/Art Resource, NY.

with two zones dedicated to owls and a graphic elephant engages with the history of western art leading the viewer through memory museum. This ambitious project displays the arc of Marker's works yet allows the spectator agency to engage with the images overall or to "zap" into the work on a single screen. With live animals that he filmed over his career and digital equivalents of his totem beings; his work constitutes a technological equivalent of Apollinaire's "book of the future." Apollinaire imagined the growing significance of film and photography as an art medium gaining more significance over static images in this essay and did so by evoking enchantment in medieval legends in "The New Spirit and the Poets" (1918); new mediums enabling "the entire world, its noises and appearances, the thought and language of man, song, dance, all the arts and all the artifices...the poet will have a freedom heretofore unknown." Likewise for Marker, many decades later, it was technological advance that would increasingly sideline modernist advances in film and photography as computer technology and image software expanded the scope and possibilities of still or moving image making. Working much like memory in its non-linear re-collection of images, sounds,

and geographies, Marker presents the spectator with the vast array of his work and that of other artists and poets composed and re-composed within the sprawling sensation-driven excavation of images – past and in the imagined future. The monitors mesh the analogue realm with digital spaces enabling the spectators to select his/her own images. One may even take part in the evolution of images (Van Assche 1997: 5). The relationships and digressions enabled through images, sounds, and words create an archive of memories, and for Marker, he is probing “memories of the future” (Bellour 1997: 190) as they are projected from a past and conceptualized as zones, designated fields or in-between spaces. This art of “rap-prochement” of layers of past memories and imagined pathways and combinations these fragments are generative image banks of thoughts and sensations (Roth 1997: 52). Marker’s *Petit Bestiaire*, rendered simply and poetically, in the manner of early filmmaking, is embedded here as personal memory and artefact projected from past to future. The exchange of gazes between himself and those of his animal subjects leave intact the partition separating human and non-human animal subjectivities but he provides visual zones in which to imagine those rich possibilities of the future (ibidem). Memory is the overarching theme of his multi-media CD-ROM commissioned by the Pompidou Center in 1998 titled, *Immemory* [Fig. 13]. In these later museum projects, one sees the intertextuality of Marker’s works as images and texts migrate across his multi-media platforms. Likewise, in Marker’s photobook *Le Dépays* (1982), he quotes cinematographer Andrei Tarkovsky: “We do not move in one direction, rather we wander back and forth, turning now this way and now that. We go back on our own tracks...” (Marker 1982).⁷ And, so it is with *Immemory*, in which the viewer navigates an expansive “book” of images, texts, and sounds or what van Assche has described as his “imaginary museum” (van Assche 1997: 5). Guided by a graphic representation of his cat, *Guillaume-en-Égypte*, the viewer can navigate this multi-media programs that can unfold in a linear manner opening up feature films such as Hitchcock’s *Ver-*

⁷ Marker quoting Andrei Tarkovsky in his photobook on Japan titled *Le Dépays*, Herscher, Paris, 1982.

Fig. 13
Chris Marker, *Immemory*, Ressource électronique [avant-propos de Christine Van Assche], CD-Rom, 1998. Bibliothèque Kandinsky, Centre de documentation et de recherche du Musée National d’Art Moderne, Paris.



tigo and literary texts including Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland*, with its communing legion of non-human encounters and guides, or encounter rhizomatic pathways that extend in full for a number of hours.

Immemory, or what Marker called “impossible memory” constitutes a series of seven zones with the area *Poetry* devoted to his favored animal beings in analogue and digital forms. Laurent Roth has described Marker’s “fusion of time, the dislocation of places, the climax of identity” as a wish for “simultaneity”, which he himself describes as “Edenic” (Roth 1997: 53). While simultaneous moments of occurrences in different places happen, perception of these shared instances depends on the individual observer’s frame of reference. Notably, these concepts are core in his productions aiming to prompt questions with visual/aural images and films that transcend linear time and places yet maintaining a recognition of the enigma of non-human sentient beings, via the gaze – an acknowledgement of looking back. And the questions raised in these instances holds seeds of a re-imagining and change in future understanding.

Bellour writes that there are two types of memory in Marker’s work: local/temporal and ineluctable. It was via travel that Marker built his visual memory documented in his extensive number of productions and erudite writings. *Immemory* is constructed to give agency to these memories in an open-ended framework. As Thomas Tode has written about Marker, the choice of a multi-media platform is analogous to the working of memory. “In *Immemory*, he approaches, in a novel way, the question of how certain key images of one’s memory

can be moved instantly into ever new constellations" (Tode 2005: 83). In Marker's words: "The aim of this project is to give a tour through the private repository of an individual, to give each user the opportunity to put together, with the help of the computer, their own geography book – chosen by themselves, or left to the random choices of the program." He proposes here that memory is not only fluid but crosses between the personal and geographically specific to an expansive field of images, sounds, and connections that is inclusive of human and non-human beings. As he put it, "Welcome to Memory or what I call it: *Immemory*." His avatar *Guillaume-en-Égypte*, is again the "guide" through this CD-ROM and Marker has identified himself with the curious elephant child in Rudyard Kipling, *Just So Stories* (1902). This project manifests the probing of a relentless traveler, Marker himself, now constructing a virtual memory travelogue integrating human-non-human animal experiences, and an often-humorous return to childhood experience, imagination, and wonder: "And then, one fine day, I was there. One is seldom able to walk into a picture of one's childhood" (Marker 1956).

The eye of the camera lens itself may unleash images and sensations from that unconscious tunneling systems of minds to allow for the "future of the past to come into focus", a recuperation of something lost, a space of exchange that human attachment to language has eviscerated (Fay 2008: 53). Marker's *Petit Bestiaire* are poetic anchors in this technological space, appearing in the flux of trans-temporal and trans-spatial fields, a memory prompt where the limitations of human knowledge of animal alterities remains and a reminder of the possibility of awareness of shared interrelations. In Jennifer Fay's study of Bazin's post-humanist cultural criticism, she argues that film provides the viewer with a "surplus of detail" that eludes momentary apperception. By considering Walter Benjamin's notion of the optical unconscious apropos Marker's *oeuvre* in this case, we may experience a return of the image's force and with it, a resonance of memory connected to the actuality we are observing. It is via the screen that animal alterity is projected, and this theory of projection is one that may foment exchange and empathy. Marker's incisive attention to his non-human animal subjects invites viewers

to recognize his subjects' alterities while raising questions about human capacity for reciprocity. As Fay writes apropos the possibility of intersubjectivity, we might "invest in animals their capacity to return the gaze and feel ourselves seen." an investment in our human ability to look back (ivi: 55). It is this investment that we can see in Marker's films with non-human animals where he proposes an *égalité du regard*.

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