



Danièle Huillet og Jean-Marie Straub, *Le Fresnoy* (2006).  
Foto: Frédéric Papon og Jean-René Lorand.

## Frédéric Papon Den film, Chris Marker aldrig fik skabt

“Det er banalt at sige, at hukommelsen bedrager os, og det er mere interessant at betragte dens opspind som en slags naturlig forsvarsmekanisme, der kan styres og formes efter behag. Undertiden kaldes dette også for kunst.”

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– Chris Marker, *Immemory (Madeleinezonen)*

Historien om den film, Chris Marker aldrig fik skabt, kan inddeles i tre episoder.

Året er 2002. Vi befinder os i det nordlige Frankrig, i byen Tourcoing, på Le Fresnoy – Studio national des arts contemporains, som Alain Fleischer har grundlagt og nu driver. Fleischer har betroet mig rollen som pædagogisk koordinator for afdelingen for film og billedkunst. Både Alain og jeg vil gerne invitere Chris Marker. Da jeg kontakter ham, indvilliger han i at komme og se stedet.

Jeg tager til banegården i Lille sammen med Don Foresta, der underviser på Fresnoy og er ven af Marker. I taxaen, der kører os tilbage mod Tourcoing, føler jeg mig lillebitte, og jeg skælver af frygt for at sige noget upassende over for denne mand, der for mig er mere legende end menneske, en sand læremester, som man hører om i Østen, en leder, man følger, en, hvis meninger ikke er til diskussion. Og da jeg ikke udmærker mig synderligt inden for småsnak, er det eneste, jeg formår at fremstamme i bilen, der holder stille i en trafikprop: “Nå, er det så første gang, De er i Lille?” Marker smiler og peger på en gade, som han uden tøven siger navnet på. Så én til. Og så endnu en. Han forklarer mig, at han på et tidspunkt havde til opgave at finde lokationer til Costa-Gavras’ film *L’aveu* (1970), der blev indspillet her, og at han skulle genskabe Prags gader, som på daværende tidspunkt var sammenlignelige med kvarterne i Lille. Herfra glider samtalen smertefrit, som mellem to rejsekammerater på vej gennem en by med det samme ærinde.

Da vi når frem, står Alain Fleischer og venter på os, og han viser Marker rundt på stedet. Marker er forbløffet over, at vi stadig projicerer film på 35mm, og at de studerende “stadig spilder deres tid” med tungt analogt udstyr i en tid, hvor alt er blevet dematerialiseret og lettere. Han foreslår et projekt, der skulle vise sig aldrig at blive til noget, men da han sidst på dagen sætter sig tilbage i en taxa, havde vi talt længe om Cocteaus *La Belle et la Bête* (1946), som hans projektidé var udsprunget fra.

Anden episode: Året er 2003, og vi befinder os i Paris.

Jeg vil gerne invitere Chris Marker tilbage til Le Fresnoy, hvor jeg bl.a. er programansvarlig for en visningsrække, som finder sted hver mandag aften under titlen *La Cinéthèque*. Jeg har tænkt mig at foreslå Marker, at vi præsenterer et retrospektiv med hans film i anledning af udstillingen *De mémoire*, der skal åbne til vinter. Jeg ringer til ham. Han afviser kategorisk, men høfligt, da han ikke længere ønsker at vise sine egne film. I stedet

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foreslår han, at han kunne udvælge nogle af de mange film, han modtager dagligt med posten, og som interesserer ham meget mere end hans “egne gamle film”, da han ellers aldrig vil kunne dele nogle af sine favoritfilm og opdagelser med andre end sine nærmeste.

Han foreslår, at jeg kan komme hjem til ham og få nogle kopier. Jeg opdager, at han bor meget tæt på mig; for enden af gaden på venstre hånd efter figentræet. Han forsikrer mig om, at “du vil kunne genkende indgangen.” Og rigtigt nok, ved siden af et gammelt parisisk hus finder jeg et atelier med en reklame for Craven-cigaretter på døren. Jeg røg Craven A-cigaretter, da jeg var yngre. Det var mit mærke. Craven har en sort kat som logo. Reklamen består af et fotografi af en kat, der godt kunne have stået model for tegneren af logoet. Jeg banker på. Det er her. Jeg træder indenfor og befinder mig i et stort lokale, jeg knapt nok når at orientere mig i, før Marker har budt mig på te og er begyndt at fortælle om sit arbejde. Der står to computere midt i lokalet, én til at skrive mails og surfe på internettet på og en anden til at klippe film på. Og så er der et virvar af kabler, som lianer i en teknologisk regnskov, i dette rum, der både er meget kaotisk og ordnet. Dette skulle jeg også senere få at se på nogle fotografier taget af Agnès Varda, der var på et lignende besøg, og hvis blik studsede over den samme indmad. Et mentalt blotlagt rum. Og i dag, i 2023, indser jeg, at jeg ikke længere kan huske, om der var en (levende) kat i rummet. Jeg betragter bøgerne, der står sirligt arrangeret efter samlinger på en lang reol (de velsammensatte Gallimard-biografier gør særligt indtryk på mig), og drikker min te, mens jeg nyder det smukke efterårslys, der falder ind i Markers atelier i stueetagen, et sted i Paris’ 20. arrondissement.

Chris Marker fortæller mig om de unge mennesker, der sender deres film til ham, og om de intense mailkorrespondancer, han har med folk fra hele verden. Han har

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udvalgt nogle film, som han betror mig. Jeg skal vise dem på Le Fresnoy fire mandage i streg fra den 24. november til den 15. december 2003, og efter hans ønske skal de præsenteres som et Chris Marker-program. Han ønsker ikke at skrive eller sige noget om programmet, men vil blot invitere folk til at komme og opleve film af disse filmskabere, som han føler sig tæt knyttet til.

Programmet skal hedde *7 de coeur* (Syv fra hjertet): syv film, syv filmskabere. Vi skal se Henri-François Imberts *Sur la plage de Belfast* (1996), Claude Venturas *L'inconnu du Pacific Hôtel* (1980), Isild le Bescos *Demi-tarif* (2003), der på det tidspunkt endnu ikke har haft biografpremiere, *Charlotte quelque part* (2003) af Jean-Baptiste de Laubier, den unge Para One, som studerer på La Fémis, ("jeg fandt hans film liggende ude foran mit hus, så den kunne være sjov at vise," siger Chris Marker), Denis Gauberts *Monsieur William, les traces d'une vie possible* (2001), Yann Kassiles *L'expérience de Nietzsche* (2000) og John Burgans *Memory of Berlin* (1998).

En bonus eller et supplement til denne episode: Indendørs, aften, i Le Fresnoys store foyer: Jean-Marie Straub og Danièle Huillet træder ind på scenen.

Chris Marker er blandt de kunstnere, der med invitation fra kurator Philippe Dagen deltager i udstillingen *De mémoire* (18. oktober til 28. december 2003). Han skal vise et værk side om side med Christian Boltanski, Pascal Convert, Vincent Gorpel, Marc Desgrandschamps, Jean-Luc Godard, Frédéric Loutz, Robert Morris, Sigmar Pike, Sophie Ristelhueber og François Rouan. Strauberne er taget til Le Fresnoy for at klippe deres film *Une visite au Louvre*. De har set udstillingen, men vil gerne se Markers værk "i sin helhed". Det drejer sig om cd-rommen *Immemory*, der på udstillingen præsenteres som et objekt med uendelige forgreninger; et, man aldrig når til bunds i. Men Strauberne vil have det hele

med. En aften, efter lukketid, spørger de Pascale Pronnier, der driver udstillingsstedet, om at lade den computer, hvor værket kunne spilles på, stå tændt for dem. Og således blev de siddende hele natten for at udforske og spille på den lille Macintosh med cd-rommen i.

Tredje og sidste episode: Efteråret 2005 i Tourcoing, tilbage på Le Fresnoy.

Som de har gjort næsten hvert år siden redigeringen af *Sicilia!* (1999), er Strauberne flyttet ind i lejlighed 22, hvor de skal tilbringe vinteren med at klippe deres nye film, *Ces rencontres avec eux*. Lejligheden ligger på samme etage som deres klipperum. De arbejder om morgenen og underviser de studerende om eftermiddagen. De studerende følger med i stilhed og af og til i latter. Ordene strømmer frem og tilbage mellem de to filmskabere. Denne lektion er en livslektion. Danièle koncentrerer sig om hvert klip og beder Jean-Marie om at gå ud. "Det er nemt nok ikke at sige noget dumt. Man skal bare tie stille," siger hun. Og sådan fortsætter det dag efter dag.

De ankommer i begyndelsen af efteråret og går fra borde. Bogstaveligt talt: de aflæsser kufferter, filmdåser (altid 35mm) og deres katte. Der er selvfølgelig katte. Og det år havde de ni med sig. Inden deres ankomst havde Danièle fortalt mig, at hun ofte havde talt med Chris Marker om denne entré, og at han flere gange havde foreslået at komme og filme kattens ankomst. Jeg har ofte drømt om denne film, som Chris Marker aldrig fik skabt. Det skyldtes uden tvivl trivielle omstændigheder, såsom tid, midler eller arbejdskraft. Men det år bad Danièle mig for første gang om at komme og hjælpe dem med at aflæse. Jeg vil aldrig vide, om det var hendes skjulte hensigt, at nogen skulle kunne optage dette øjeblik, som hun måske allerede vidste ville blive det sidste af sin slags. Men hun sagde aldrig noget om det, og af ærefrygt for

det faktum, at det burde have været Chris Marker, der optog det, turde jeg ikke tage mit kamera frem og indfange et af disse øjeblikke, som betød så meget for Danièle.

Vi er altid for generte over for andre. Af ren beskedenhed, dovenskab eller generthed fortæller vi os selv, at vi bare kan tale med dem en anden gang, men pludselig går folk bort og er her ikke længere til at høre os. Det er mere eller mindre det, Valentina Cortese siger i *La nuit américaine* (François Truffaut, 1974). Men det sker ikke kun i film. Marker dukkede ikke op, og et år senere var Danièle ikke længere iblandt os.

Og her sidder jeg så tilbage og forestiller mig selv som en skyggestatist i en af Chris Markers film, der kunne have foregået sådan her: Har De nogensinde båret et kattebur med en kat indeni? Mens De tager det ene bur efter det andet ud af bilen, breder dyrets bevægelse sig fra buret og op gennem armen som en panisk og håbefuld besked om endeligt at være ankommet. Hele forløbet udspiller sig i fuldkommen stilhed, ikke så meget som et miau eller udråb, kun venten og frygt breder sig. I baggrunden kan man kun høre støjen fra den nærliggende trafikerede vej og Danièle, der udtaler alle kattenes fornavne med en uendelig øm og lindrende stemme. Så forlader man bilen og træder ind i den lille hal på bagsiden af Bernard Tschumi-bygningen, der fungerer som nødudgang fra biografen, tager elevatoren til anden etage, går derefter ned gennem gangen til en dør, der kræver nøglekort, og til sidst hen til den anden dør, lejlighed 22: deres hjem i de næste seks måneder, hvor Danièle skal hjælpe hver eneste af de små "pus" med at genfinde og mærke deres territorier. Og imens går Jean-Marie rundt i cirkler om bilen. De har ikke længere deres hund, så han står tilbage på sin udsigtspost og tygger på sin cigarillo med hænderne bag ryggen og venter på, at katteritualet er ovre, så han kan hjælpe med at slæbe kufferterne og filmdåserne ind.

Lejligheden består af to etager: et stort rum med et køkken nedenunder samt et soveværelse og et badeværelse ovenpå.

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Hvordan ville Marker have fulgt hver kat ud af sit bur? Danièle kender alle kattenes personligheder samt ved, hvor den ene vil gemme sig, og hvor den anden vil løbe hen. Kattene værner sig hurtigt til deres nye sted, da størstedelen af dem allerede har været her før og kender stedet. Men der er også nogle nytillkomne. Deres ansigtsudtryk er omskiftelige, de kigger nysgerrigt rundt og deres klør laver små tørre lyde mod det grå gulvtæppe.

Alt og alle, inklusive kattene, finder deres plads i rummet. Filmdåserne sættes ved filmspolen, Danièle stiller sin filmsplejser på gennemsynsbordet, hvorefter hun sætter de indkøbsposer fra sig, de har taget med fra Paris, "så vi ikke behøver at haste ud til et supermarked og i stedet hurtigt kan fodre kattene." Og Marker ville være fulgt med Danièle ud i aftenens mørke, idet hun sætter madskåle og en kurv frem ved et lille forladt værksted for foden af Fresnoys have, i nærheden af Alain Fleischers bolig. De andre nabolagskatte, der boede i Tourcoing og Blanc Seau-kvarteret, havde nemlig også ventet på, at filmskaberne fra Rom og Paris skulle komme tilbage, så vinteren skulle blive mindre hård for dem.

Film er som løfter, vi giver til vores nærmeste. Vi ønsker at opfylde dem, men mod vores vilje løber tiden fra os, og ven efter ven mærker vi tomrummet tage til omkring os.

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Oversat fra fransk af Frederik Tøt Godsk.

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## The Film Chris Marker Never Got to Make

It's trite to say that memory deceives us, and more intriguing to consider its lies as a kind of natural defence mechanism that can be controlled and shaped at will. Sometimes this is also called art.

– Chris Marker, *Immemory (The Madeleine Zone)*

The story of the film Chris Marker never got to make can be divided into three episodes.

The year is 2002. We are in northern France, in Tourcoing, at Le Fresnoy - Studio national des arts contemporains, which Alain Fleischer had created and is at this time running. Fleischer has entrusted me with the role of educational coordinator for the Department of Film and Visual Arts. We both want to invite Chris Marker: I call him, and he agrees to come and see the place. I go to the train station in Lille with Don Foresta, who is also teaching at Le Fresnoy and is a friend of Marker.

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In the taxi that takes us back to Tourcoing, I feel tiny, and I tremble with fear of saying something inappropriate to this man who, for me, is more legend than a human, a true teacher like the ones you hear about in the East, a leader you follow, someone whose opinions are not open to discussion. And as I'm not very good at small talk, the only thing I manage to stammer out in the car, which is stuck in traffic, is: "So, is this your first time in Lille?" Marker smiles and points to a street, which he names without hesitation. Then another. And yet another. He explains to me that he was once tasked with finding locations for Costa Gavra's film *L'aveu* (1970), which was shot here, and that he had to recreate the streets of Prague, which at the time were comparable to the neighbourhoods of Lille. From then on, the conversation went smoothly and unhindered, like two travelling companions passing through a city on the same errand. As we arrive at Le Fresnoy, Alain Fleischer welcomes us and shows Marker around. Marker is amazed that we still project film on 35mm and that students are "still wasting their time" with heavy analogue equipment in an age where everything has become dematerialised and lighter. He then proposes a project that unfortunately will remain unmaterialised, and by the end of the day, as he got back in a taxi, we had talked at length about Cocteau's *La Belle et la Bête* (1946), from which his project idea had sprung.

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Second episode: The year is 2003 and we are in Paris.

I would like to invite Chris Marker back to Le Fresnoy, where I am programming a series of screenings that take place every Monday evening under the heading *La Cinéthèque*. I want to suggest to him that we present a retrospective of his films in connection with the exhibition *De mémoire*, which is due to open in the winter. I call him up. He categorically but politely declines, as he no longer wants to show his own

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films. Instead, he suggests that he could select some of the many films he receives daily by mail. These films interest him much more than “his own old films”; otherwise, he would never be able to share some of his favourite films and discoveries with anyone other than those closest to him.

He asks me to come see him at his place so I can get the copies. I discover that he lives very close to me; at the end of the street on the left, past the fig tree. He assures me that “you will recognise the entrance.” Sure enough, next to an old Parisian house, I find an atelier with an ad for Craven cigarettes on the door. I smoked Craven A when I was younger. That was my brand. The Craven logo is a black cat’s head. The ad consists of a photograph of a cat that could have been the model for the logo designer. I knock on the door. This is the place. I step inside and find myself in a large room where I barely have time to glance around before Marker offers me tea and starts talking about his work. There are two computers in the centre of the room, one for emails and surfing the internet, the other for editing films. And then there is a tangle of cables, like vines in a technological rainforest, in this room, which is both chaotic and orderly. I would later see this again in photographs taken by Agnès Varda, who had made a similar visit and whose gaze was struck by the same innards. A mental space laid bare. And now, in 2023, I realise that I can no longer remember if there was a real cat in the room. I look at the books, neatly arranged by collections on a long shelf (the well-assembled Gallimard biographies stand out) and drink my tea while enjoying the beautiful autumn light that falls into Marker’s studio on the ground floor, somewhere in the 20<sup>th</sup> arrondissement of Paris.

Chris Marker tells me about the young people who send him their films and his intense email correspondence with people worldwide. He has selected a few films that he entrusts to me. I will show them at Le Fresnoy on four consecutive Mondays from November 24 to December 15, 2003, and present

them, at his request, as a Chris Marker program. He doesn’t want to write or say anything about the program, but simply to invite people to come and experience the films of these filmmakers with whom he felt a close connection.

The program will bear the title he chose: *7 de coeur* [Seven from the heart], symbolising seven films and seven filmmakers. We will show Henri François Imbert’s *Sur la plage de Belfast* (1996), Claude Ventura’s *L’inconnu du Pacific Hôtel* (1980), Isild le Besco’s *Demi-tarif* (2003), which at the time had not yet premiered, *Charlotte quelque part* (2003) by Jean-Baptiste de Laubier, the young Para One, when he was still studying at La Fémis, (“I found his film in front of my house, so it would be fun to show,” said Chris Marker), Denis Gaubert’s *Monsieur William, les traces d’une vie possible* (2001), Yann Kassile’s *L’expérience de Nietzsche* (2000) and John Burgan’s *Memory of Berlin* (1998).

A bonus or supplement to this episode: Interior, evening, in the grand foyer of Le Fresnoy: Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet enter the stage.

Among the artists invited by curator Philippe Dagen to participate in the exhibition *De mémoire* (October 18 to December 28, 2003) is Chris Marker, who is showing a work alongside Christian Boltanski, Pascal Convert, Vincent Gorpel, Marc Desgrandschamps, Jean-Luc Godard, Frédéric Loutz, Robert Morris, Sigmar Pike, Sophie Ristelhueber and François Rouan. The Straubs are at Le Fresnoy to edit their film *Une visite au Louvre*. They have seen the exhibition but would like to see Marker’s work “in its entirety”. This piece is the CD-ROM *Immemory*, presented in the exhibition as an object with infinite ramifications; one that can never be fully explored. But the Straubs want to see it all. One evening, after closing time, they ask Pascale Pronnier, who runs the exhibition space, to leave the computer turned on. And

so, they spent the whole night exploring and playing on the little Macintosh with the CD-ROM in it.

The third and final episode: Fall 2005 in Tourcoing, back at Le Fresnoy.

As they have done almost every year since the editing of *Sicilia!* in 1998, the Straubs move into duplex 22, where they will spend the winter editing their new film *Ces rencontres avec eux*. The duplex is on the same floor as their editing suite. They work alone in the mornings and teach the students in the afternoon. In silence and sometimes with amusement, the students look on with admiration and respect. Words flow back and forth between the two filmmakers. This lesson is a life lesson. Danièle concentrates on each cut and asks Jean-Marie to leave. “It’s easy not to say something stupid. You just have to keep quiet,” she says. And so it goes, day after day.

They arrive in early autumn and disembark. Literally: they unload suitcases, film cans (always 35mm), and their cats. There are cats, of course. And that year they had brought nine. Before their arrival, Danièle had told me that she had often spoken to Chris Marker about this entrance and that he had offered several times to come and film the arrival of the cats. I have often dreamt of this movie that Chris Marker never got to make. I am sure it never happened due to some rather trivial circumstance such as scheduling, availability, or fatigue. But that year, for the first time, Danièle asked me to come and help them unload. I will never know if it was her hidden intention to have someone record this moment, which she may have already known would be the last of its kind. She never said anything about it, and out of reverence for the fact that it should have been Chris Marker who recorded it, I didn’t dare take out my camera and capture one of these moments that meant so much to Danièle.

We’re always too shy around other people. Out of sheer modesty, laziness, or shyness, we tell ourselves that we can just

talk to them another time, but suddenly people walk away and are no longer here to hear us. That’s more or less what Valentina Cortese says in *La nuit américaine* (François Truffaut, 1974). But it doesn’t just happen in movies. Marker didn’t show up, and a year later, Danièle was no longer with us.

And here I am, imagining myself as a shadowy extra in a Chris Marker film that could have gone something like this: Have you ever transported a cat carrier with a cat inside? As you take one cage after another out of the car, the animal’s movement spreads from the cage up your arm like a panicked and hopeful message of finally having arrived. The whole process unfolds in perfect silence, not so much as a single meow or outcry, just waiting and fear. In the background, all you hear is the noise of the nearby expressway and Daniele addressing each cat by its first name in an infinitely tender and soothing voice. Then you leave the car and enter the small hall at the back of the Bernard Tschumi building that serves as the emergency exit from the cinema, take the elevator to the second floor, then walk down the corridor to a door that requires a key card, and finally to the second door, duplex 22: their home for the next six months, where Danièle will help each “bug” rediscover and mark their territories. Meanwhile, Jean-Marie walks in circles around the car. They no longer have their dog, so he stands alone, on the lookout, chewing on his cigarillo with his hands behind his back, waiting for the cat ritual to end to help lug in the suitcases and film cans.

The duplex has two floors: a large room with a kitchen downstairs and a bedroom and bathroom upstairs. How would Marker have followed each cat out of its cage? Danièle knows each cat’s personality, and where one will hide and the other will run. The cats quickly get used to their new location as most of them have been here before and know the place. But there are also a few newcomers. Their facial expressions

change, they look around curiously and their claws make little dry sounds against the grey carpet.

Everything and everyone, including the cats, find their place in the room. The film cans are placed by the winder, Danièle puts her film splicer on the editing table, then sets down the groceries they bought in Paris “so we don’t have to rush to a supermarket and can quickly feed the cats instead.” And Marker would have followed Danièle into the darkness of the night, where she set out bowls of food and a basket near a small, abandoned garage at the foot of Fresnoy’s garden, near Alain Fleischer’s home. The other neighbourhood cats living in Tourcoing and the Blanc Seau district have also been waiting for the filmmakers from Rome and Paris to return so that the winter would be less harsh for them.

Films are like promises we make to our loved ones: We want to fulfil them, but against our will, time slips away, and friend after friend, the void grows around us.

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