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***La jetée* in Levinasian Time**

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Monica Cecilia Bravo

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Monica Cecilia Bravo

We, the thesis committee for the above candidate for the
Master of Arts degree, hereby recommend
acceptance of this thesis.

Andrew V. Uroskie – Thesis Advisor
Assistant Professor of Art History and Criticism

Zabet Patterson – Chairperson of Defense
Assistant Professor of Art History and Criticism

Megan Craig – Chairperson of Defense
Assistant Professor of Philosophy

This thesis is accepted by the Graduate School

Lawrence Martin
Dean of the Graduate School

Abstract of the Thesis

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This thesis explores the specificity of *La jetée*'s temporality via the framework of philosopher Emmanuel Levinas's thought. Although director Chris Marker's *photo-roman* has regularly been contextualized within the French New Wave and the science fiction genre, *La jetée* (1962) is predominantly concerned with time and its inextricable links with memory, love, hope, and existence. Emmanuel Levinas's 1947 *Existence and Existents* is similarly concerned with the time of the solitary subject, the suspended time of art that nevertheless opens onto the *il y a*, and the future-enabling time of the other. A shared sociopolitical context contributes to their analogous conceptual absorbance; Levinas's text was written as a captive during the Second World War, while the post-apocalyptic setting of Marker's fictional film attests to its enduring trauma. The hero of *La jetée*'s own traumatic memory becomes the mechanism that allows him to travel in time; Marker thereby indicates that memory and film are both already forms of time travel. The film's most notable formal device, the almost exclusive use of still images, reflects the discontinuous character of traumatic memory – a theme investigated in the first chapter. Levinas's theorization of the instant, the dialectical time in which the solitary subject takes on the burden of Being, reveals the ethical dimension of the still. In the second chapter, the time of art and Levinas's alleged suspicion of all art is problematized. His formulation of art as statues on the one hand, and art as eternal dying on the other, remarkably parallels Marker's own interest in the death of statues and the time-space of the museum. Finally, *La jetée*'s heroine represents the ethical other of Levinasian thought: encountering the hero and the viewer face to face, she grants her lover the possibility of a future as she disrupts the ordered, static flow of the film with movement (as an enigma). The other is both the goal and the possibility of the hero's travels through time. The texts of *La jetée* and *Existence and Existents* are read in juxtaposition via theoretical interpretation of content, context, and formal analysis. This interdisciplinary pursuit exposes the theoretical underpinnings of Marker's film and the specificities of its temporality; as well as the enduring truth and aesthetic pertinence of Levinas's early and often overlooked text.

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Introduction

One image gives way to another: this is the indispensable premise of film from which most complications arise. In *La jetée*, this principle is challenged by the image's reluctance to be replaced. Each frame clings tenderly, achingly, to the viewer's perception, evoking a temporality distinct from that of cinema's rapid successions, which supposedly replicates the "real time" of existence. In this way, its audience is given time – to look, to see, to stitch together the traces of the present image with those of frames past and yet to come.

La jetée's narrative of time travel compliments its construction. To achieve time travel, the hero must retrieve an ineffable image of the past. His traumatic memory is society's only hope for survival. The world has been ruined by the radioactive fallout of the Third World War, forcing civilization underground. Once the image is recovered, he traverses time with the socially-imposed assignment of summoning the past and the future to the salvation of the present. After various forays into the past, the hero falls in love with the woman from his memory and is driven through time by his desire for her and the world of his childhood. *La jetée* thus exposes the links between time, memory, love, hope, and existence in their inextricability.

These are the themes that French director Chris Marker returns to repeatedly throughout his oeuvre, and in a variety of media. They are taken up in the 1983 film essay *Sans Soleil* (*Sunless*), and again in 1998's CD-ROM *Immemory*. Yet the groundwork for his more mature work is already established in this short film; *La jetée* of 1962. Marker calls it a *photo-roman*, "photo-novel," in the opening credits – perhaps to suggest that it is a text to be read, and alluding to its composition by still images. Using time travel as a narrative device, Marker chooses the science fiction genre as the necessary vehicle for exploring such weighty issues. Memory itself is a form of time travel, Marker indicates. Love and hope are the only objectives powerful enough to trigger it. And existence, *La jetée*'s hero learns, like time, cannot be escaped.

Twentieth-century philosopher and theologian Emmanuel Levinas's work reveals a similar conceptual absorption. His terminology differs and his emphases vary, but his philosophical work consistently investigates the tightly woven themes of time, being, and desire for the other that are also present in Marker's *La jetée*. In contrast, however, Levinas's thought rarely touches upon memory. On a theoretical level, this omission concerns the preeminent position of the other – and therefore the possibility for the future – in his ethics. His personal history, on the other hand, suggests another motivation for consigning memory to the past.

During World War II, Levinas was made a prisoner of work and forced into five years of hard labor. Levinas's first book, published in 1947 and written during his captivity between 1940 and 1945, is titled *De l'existence à l'existent* (*Existence and Existents*). In the preface to this book, Levinas writes, by way of explanation for his lack of engagement with recent publications: "These studies begun before the war were

continued and written down for the most part in captivity.”¹ His captivity accounts for various discussions omnipresent in the publication: the analogy of the existent being shackled to its existence, the burden of labor, and the necessity for taking on the instant in the present. Given this history, it is not surprising that Levinas should refrain from making memory, and particularly his traumatic wartime memories, the emphasis of his thought. Levinas’s thought, although it bares the scars of his past, is nevertheless hopeful as it strains always towards the other.

While the tolls of France’s colonial wars in Indochina (1948-1954) and more immediately in Algeria (1954-1962) are not as evident in Marker’s biography, *La jetée*’s bleak, post-apocalyptic setting attests to World War II’s enduring malaise. Marker had been victimized by political censorship twice before, and *La jetée*’s direct references to a Paris destroyed made this work similarly vulnerable.² Both Marker’s film and Levinas’s *Existence and Existents* were produced, then, under sociopolitical conditions marked by wartime trauma.

Beyond the similarities in their thematic interests, and the comparability of their historical contexts, there are various other motives for analyzing Marker’s and Levinas’s work together. Both figures stretch the arbitrarily-defined limits of their respective cultural realms: Marker takes on major metaphysical questions in visual form, while the overt artfulness of Levinas’s writing has typically been the province of literature. Such interdisciplinary questioning enriches the temporal structures that they both explore and create.

While emphasizing the time of the solitary subject - that of the instant in the present (encountered through labor, fatigue, and insomnia) - throughout *Existence and Existents*, the text’s various subsections systematically move through the time of art (a suspension which nevertheless opens onto the nocturnal *il y a*, or “there is”) and end suggestively with the time of the other (the future). Levinas’s framework, as well as his discussions of each of these subjects, provides a useful model for the structuring of this thesis. Scholarship on *La jetée*, when it has focused on its unique temporality at all, tends to be plagued by generic discussions of cyclical time or simply ascribes its structure to the wild inventions of science fiction. Such readings disregard Marker’s elaborate production of formal and narratological mechanisms, and the theoretical underpinnings that guided these choices.

Nevertheless, the variety of hermeneutical exercises to which *La jetée* has been subject(ed) is, if nothing else, illustrative of the richness of the text. Marker’s photo-roman has been studied in the context of the French New Wave, its date of 1962 and the director’s early collaborations with Alain Resnais linking it to the films of Truffaut and Godard.³ Rendered almost entirely in still images, *La jetée* has been employed elsewhere

¹ Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2001), xxvii.

² Lee Hilliker, “The History of the Future in Paris: Chris Marker and Jean-Luc Godard in the 1960s,” *Film Criticism* 24, no. 3 (Spring 2000): 1-22, http://vnweb.hwwilsonweb.com/hww/results/results_single_ftPES.jhtml.

³ Ibid.

to fill a gap in the filmic tradition of self-critique.⁴ The twenty-eight minute film has “done time” as a novel example of the science fiction genre, as an essay film, as a precursor to Terry Gilliam’s *Twelve Monkeys* (1995). The film’s subject matter has been interpreted psychoanalytically as an oedipal conflict;⁵ its plot paralleled to that of the “Allegory of the Cave.”⁶ More recently, *La jetée* has been appropriated by the opposing factions of Vivian Sobchack’s phenomenological camp and Garrett Stewart’s semiotic film theory.⁷

This thesis addresses many of these same issues that have been explored elsewhere and in different contexts. But by analyzing *La jetée*’s temporality through the points of conceptual convergence with Levinas’s thought, a more specific interpretation of its various formal qualities and subject matter can be made. Levinas’s discussions of time are empirically rooted, and they find parallels in the carefully constructed temporalities of Marker’s film. In this way, Marker’s own sophisticated aesthetic decisions gain support and clarity; just as some of Levinas’s theoretical points are challenged and their density informed by visual application.

Each chapter begins with a relevant summary of *La jetée*’s narrative, highlighting an aspect of the film under consideration – be it semantic play correlated to time-space, materiality and filmic language, or love and movement. The first chapter moves chronologically to examine René Descartes’s and Henri Bergson’s contributions to Levinas’s own temporal model. Marker’s emphasis on memory and his formal use of still images can be understood in collaboration with Levinas’s description of the dialectical nature of the instant. In the second chapter, the time of art and Levinas’s alleged suspicion of all art is problematized. His formulation of art as statues on the one hand, and art as eternal dying on the other, remarkably parallels Marker’s own interest in the death of statues and the time-space of the museum. Finally, the third chapter concerns the time of the other. Marker’s heroine disrupts *La jetée*’s ordered flow as an enigma, arising from the beyond past to grant the hero a future. The other is both the goal and the possibility of the hero’s travels through time. Through these investigations of the time of the instant, the time of art, and the time of the other, at last *La jetée*’s temporality gains specificity...and Marker’s reasons for the lingering replacement of one image after another, in effect *giving* time to the viewer, begins to be revealed too.

Throughout this thesis, the tension of micro- and macroscopic scales should be felt; moving now from *La jetée*’s overall theme of time travel, now to the film’s form as a succession of still images, and at last to the moments at the crux of the film when these

⁴ Rosalind Krauss, “...And Then Turn Away?” An Essay on James Coleman,” *October* 81 (Summer 1997): 5-33, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/779016>.

⁵ Marion Herz, “Prime Time Terror: The Case of *La Jetée* and *12 Monkeys*,” in *Media, Terrorism, and Theory: A Reader*, ed. Anandam P. Kavoori and Todd Fraley (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2006), 53-68.

⁶ Sander Lee, “Platonic Themes in Chris Marker’s *La Jetée*,” in *Film and Knowledge: Essays on the Integration of Images and Ideas*, ed. Kevin L. Stoehr (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2002), 95-101.

⁷ Vivian Sobchack, “The Scene of the Screen: Envisioning Cinematic and Electronic ‘Presence’,” in *Materialities of Communication*, ed. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht and K. Ludwig Pfeiffer (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 83-106; Garrett Stewart, *Between Film and Screen: Modernism’s Photo Synthesis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

still images move. A single instant will be considered, likewise the conceptualization of time itself. Ethical implications will be weighed alongside artistic and film historical consequences. Like the track-in / zoom-out shot introduced in Alfred Hitchcock's 1958 *Vertigo*, a film whose influence is readily apparent in *La jetée*, this thesis moves constantly, vertiginously, between a narrow focus and a wider panorama – always with an eye trained towards the goal of reading both Levinas and Marker anew.

Chapter 1

The Instant: Towards an Expression of Time

In the context of its eponymous photo-roman, the words “la jetée” refer simultaneously to a place, an action, and a momentous realization. But the loading of these various meanings onto the simple phrase does not occur at once for the viewer. Rather, its bearing shifts together with perception. At last the film’s title emerges as an inextricable amalgam of site, act, and thought. All of these meanings, though apprehended in consecutive fashion, are given in an instant.

As the film begins, the viewer learns that as a boy, the hero used to go to the jetty (“la jetée”) at Orly Airport to watch the planes on Sundays. On one such Sunday, he witnesses a horrible event. The memory of this trauma leaves an imprint so strong that it becomes the mechanism by which the hero will travel through time.⁸ Indeed, in the desperate post-World War III landscape which the human race inhabits underground, scientists exploit the power of this mental image, in the hopes that “having a memory of a certain time, [he] might be able to reinhabit it. This man was chosen because of his obsession with an image from the past.”⁹ The commentary explains that as humanity is rendered immobile in space, trapped below the earth’s radioactive surface, “the only hope for survival lay in time, a hole in time through which to send food, energy, supplies. The aim of the experiments was to send an emissary into time to summon the past and future to the aid of the present.”

The narrator says that “at first he is simply ejected from the present and its certainties” (“Il est jeté”). He is thrown in time to a vertiginous space of unknowns: a kind of purgatory from which he eventually escapes to the past. The homonymic relationship of this thrown-ness shifts the viewer’s understanding of “la jetée” from place to act. Nevertheless, this violent leap through time bares little resemblance to the joyful jeté of a dancer. Almost against his volition, his jeté is the thrusting byproduct of his memory’s force.

Eventually, on the thirtieth day, he recognizes the face of the girl from his dreams. Frequent, subsequent returns to that past bring them together and, perhaps inevitably, they fall in love. Having perfected the hero’s retroactive aim and their technique, the experimenters prepare to send him now to the future; believing that the future world inhabitants cannot refuse their own past. The narrator claims that “this sophism was accepted as Destiny in disguise. He was given a power supply strong enough to start the

⁸ “Orly, Sunday,” *La Jetée / Sans Soleil*, DVD, directed by Chris Marker, (1962; New York: Criterion Collection, 2007). All subsequent references to scenes from *La jetée* from this authoritative digital transfer.

⁹ Chris Marker, “The Script of Chris Marker’s *La jetée*,” trans. Dino Franco Felluga, <http://web.ics.purdue.edu/~felluga/sf/ScriptLaJetee.html>. Various English translations of Marker’s script exist, including several approved by Marker for publication and dubbing. However, these versions tend to depart from the French original. This transcription seems to be the most faithful to the intentions of the original. All further quotations from the script are from this source.

world's industry, then again the doors to the future closed.” But they do not close entirely to the hero. Banished to another part of the camp, the time traveler realizes that the experimenters will not spare him. The people of the future extend him an invitation to their present. He asks instead to be returned to the past, and his love.

The future sends him back again to the jetty at Orly. Identifying the woman's face in the crowd, he runs towards her. In the quickened succession of still images, the viewer sees too that an experimenter from his past present has followed him. In nearly the same instant he at last realizes that his younger self – the child who witnessed a tragic event; in fact, the scene of his *own* death – must also be present. He understands finally that “là j'étais” (there I was), at the end of the pier. This realization comes belatedly for the hero, just as the spectator's recognition dawns on this final rendition of “la jetée.”

Many scholars have remarked upon the semantic play of homophones in Chris Marker's title *La jetée*. Semiologist Garrett Stewart has gone so far as to extend it to the most notable formal device of the film: Marker's almost exclusive use of still images shown in projected succession. The still image, composed nevertheless of multiples of a single frame or photogram, is “the thrown away,” or “la jeté.” In this light, Marker, through *La jetée*, would be calling attention to the way in which all film operates, by “the ejection from the apparatus of one image after (and by) another.”¹⁰

Subsequent transfer to video and digital technologies aside, since its inception *La jetée* has certainly challenged traditional notions of the filmic medium. The images *move*, or are replaced in montage, but seemingly only become *moving* images for a minute fraction of the film's running time. Chris Marker dubbed *La jetée* a *photo-roman* in its opening credits, and neglected to answer questions about its production for several years after its release. The connotation of the “photo-novel” draws attention to both the narrative structure of the text and its construction by means of still images. This appellation further serves to destabilize the viewer's expectations that could be reductively simplified by the director's use of the term “film.”

Without excluding the possibility that Marker is enacting a modernist self-critique of film as Stewart suggests, I contend that “la jeté” with which Marker is most concerned is the jettisoning of one *instant* after another. More critically, the ejecting apparatus is nothing technological per se: not the film projector but the time traveler and his memory. Thus, the confluence of understandings related to “la jetée” is informed both by the specifics of the film's narrative, but also on a meta-formal level concerning the shared temporality of the instant and memory. Memory, *La jetée* clearly indicates, summons the past to the present as it simultaneously looks forward to its evolution in the future. Marker's use of still frames, or crystallized instants, further suggests this visually. However, it is not clear how the instant enacts the same double movement as memory.

Twentieth century philosopher Emmanuel Levinas is unique in the Western philosophical tradition for his characterization of the instant as both dialectical and situated in time. His thought thus contributes to the understanding of *La jetée*'s temporality, linking a theoretical conception of the instant (that is nevertheless empirically based on Levinas's lived experience) with Marker's visual rendition of instants as still images. In turn, the film signals a link between the instant and memory; a subject upon which Levinas is notably silent.

¹⁰ Garrett Stewart, *Between Film and Screen: Modernism's Photo Synthesis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

Unlike the science fiction genre's stalwart pioneer H.G. Wells and *The Time Machine* of 1895, or its beloved centenary spinoff *Back to the Future*, time travel in *La jetée* is not achieved through technological innovations, but through man's memory. While it would be reductive to categorize *La jetée* simply as a science fiction film, the film undeniably expresses itself through a narrative premised on the necessity of - and desire for - achieving time travel. Travel through time is the genre's paragon to be sure; then again, given the time-based nature of film, perhaps time travel is endemic to all film spectatorship. That is, film is a temporal art that nonetheless suspends time. It absorbs the viewer's attention, whether for twenty-eight minutes, two hours, or long beyond, and transports the spectator into its own reality, together with its own temporality. To enter the darkened theater or even to stare protractedly at and through the television or computer screen is to enter a time that has nothing to do with that of the clock, though it is circumscribed therein.¹¹ As dual forms of time travel, then, film is similar to memory. The viewer falls headlong into a good film much as *La jetée*'s hero, and indeed everyone, is able to fall headlong into the past by the transportive property of a mental image.

The hero's traumatic memory branches in a series of discontinuous flashes, paralleling the film's formal structure. *La jetée*'s nonlinear temporality opposes the chronological mode of the traditional narrative film. For example, both the past and the future are summoned to the aid of the present. A cycle that begins with a boy, who - unbeknownst to the viewer - witnesses his own adult death, becomes the haunting memory of the film's adult hero. This memory is reenacted as in a dream, each time with different details receding and coming forth. He realizes in his final moments that as a boy there I was ("là j'étais")...dying, as an adult, down the long jetty (la jetée) at Orly. In a supreme anachronism, he recognizes too, that the boy he was is also there, present. The time of *La jetée*, then, is not simply cyclical but spiraling ever closer to its mark.

The hero's traumatic remembrance begets what cinema theorist Vivian Sobchack has called *La jetée*'s "recursive structure."¹² Standing at the phenomenological extreme to, and at odds with, Garrett Stewart's semiotic approach to film theory, Sobchack elucidates the role of science fiction: "Of all genres, science fiction has been most concerned with poetically mapping the new spatiality, temporality and subjectivities informed and / or constituted by new technologies."¹³ "New technologies" must be read liberally here to refer not only to scientific progress but philosophical advances as well. For example, Sobchack writes that Alex Cox's *Repo Man* (1984) "clearly manifests the phenomenologically experienced homogeneity of postmodern discontinuity."¹⁴ Thus, the film reflects social conditions that are both experiential and subsequently theorized. While philosopher Gilles Deleuze characterizes such discontinuity as the post-war

¹¹ For a contradictory claim regarding domestic viewership, see Susan Sontag, "The Decay of Cinema," *New York Times*, sec. 6, New York edition, February 25, 1996, <http://www.nytimes.com/1996/02/25/magazine/the-decay-of-cinema.html?scp=2&sq=sontag&pagewanted=1>.

¹² Vivian Sobchack, "The Scene of the Screen: Envisioning Cinematic and Electronic 'Presence,'" in *Materialities of Communication*, ed. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht and K. Ludwig Pfeiffer (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 93.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 102n.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 102.

condition of all modern cinema in 1985's *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*,¹⁵ this account lacks the specificity to describe the unique temporality of *La jetée* that distinguishes it from its contemporaries. However, to extend Sobchack's statement with a Deleuzian one, *La jetée* can be seen not only as elucidating the "new technologies" of modern philosophy, but developing some of its own as well.

It is helpful, at this point, to map out what some influential "new technologies" – here, new philosophies of time – have been in the Western philosophical tradition of the modern period. This abridged chronological survey reflects Levinas's own methodology, employed in such essays as "Meaning and Sense" of 1964. Levinas readily acknowledges Descartes's and Bergson's influence on his own work, and indeed his *topos* of temporality cannot be adequately understood without some elaboration of his predecessors' contributions.

The most distinctive formal quality of *La jetée* is its composition by way of the projected succession of still images. Each still presents either an entirely new space, or a spatial displacement of the subject which indicates the passage of time. Despite the liberal use of dissolves, the camera does not "roll;" Marker created the work using a photographic camera rather than a film camera.¹⁶ Each frame was then reproduced on the film strip to be projected for the requisite length of the "still image," and subsequently spliced together with the next frame in a cinema reel. The single photogram does not explicitly refer to those that precede and follow it, unlike an analog animated film for example, or even a traditional non-animated film in which a sense of visual and temporal continuity is preserved. In *La jetée*, by contrast, Marker communicates a formal temporality of discrete units. Such an expression of time would seem to be in keeping with Cartesian thought.

For Descartes, life is divisible into discrete sections. His discourse on time is put forth in the Third Meditation of *Meditations on First Philosophy*, published in 1641. This section is significant for Levinas, not only for Descartes's concept of time, but also for the rupture of the infinite into a text that is otherwise resolutely modern and rational.¹⁷ Time is a mediating device, taken on by Descartes to move from the *cogito* to the certainty of God's existence. This meditation is titled, fittingly, "Concerning God: that He exists":

For the whole duration of life is divisible into countless parts, all mutually independent; so from my having existed a little while ago it does not follow that I need exist now, unless some cause creates me anew at this very moment, in other words preserved me. For it is clear, when one

¹⁵ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994). Originally published as *Cinéma 2, L'Image-temps* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1985).

¹⁶ Chris Marker, "Notes on Filmmaking," DVD booklet, *La Jetée / Sans Soleil* (New York: Criterion Collection, 2007), 41.

¹⁷ From Levinas's discussion following the presentation of his text "Transcendence and Height," in 1962 to the Société Française de Philosophie. Transcription of conference proceedings published in Emmanuel Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings*, ed. Adriaan T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 24-25.

considers the nature of time, that just the same power and agency is needed to preserve any object at the various moment of its duration, as would be needed to create it anew if it did not yet exist; there is thus only a conceptual distinction between preservation and creation, and this is one of the things that are obvious by the light of nature.¹⁸

The divisibility of duration that Descartes describes is fundamental, whether it is determined to be actual or conceptual. It follows for Descartes that the individual is created anew every instant by an external force; or what is the same, preserved in duration. He goes on to identify the cause as God, since it must not be internal or this power would be known to the *Cogito*. Not only are time and life divisible, but each moment can be construed as a “big bang” in an individual universe. To read *La jetée* via Cartesian temporality is instructive for their seemingly shared discontinuity (the divisibility of life or the film as a series of ruptures), although it proves to lack crucial elements that the Levinasian system can provide.

La jetée was produced by taking photographs of discontinuous scenes, and also therefore, moments. Rather than the homogeneous, almost languorous, temporal flow of films in cinema’s golden age (the medium’s own “early modern” phase), the viewer is given to experience a post-classical or even post-post-classical rendition of time. Proliferating cuts accelerate action and perception in the post-war era.¹⁹ In *La jetée*, frequent cuts are a means to produce movement, but also an end in themselves. They transcend the role of a formal device to become an expressive property. Each instant is delivered as an isolated unit, as indeed each still image was shot in disjunction with its predecessors and successors.

Yet while the framing of the photo-roman, the material of the film, is produced and projected as discrete, discontinuous still images, it does not follow that the viewer necessarily experiences *La jetée* in this Cartesian manner. Although the mode of the narrative’s delivery is unfamiliar, certain filmic conventions are nevertheless implemented allowing for a degree of spectatorial accessibility and perceived continuity. For example, a cut may occur in response to the voice-over narration, much as diegetic sound triggers a different point of view in Hollywood cinema. Similarly, the speed of *La jetée*’s montage alters in response to mood, much as a traditional movie might slacken its pace at a melancholic sequence in the narrative. Thus, while every projected *image* of *La jetée* may appear to the viewer to have been created afresh at each moment by its maker, the Cartesian modality of time fails to account for the viewer’s experience of time in watching the film. Rather, the viewer develops a sense of continuity through Marker’s use of certain filmic conventions or shot patterns,²⁰ from the narrative arc of the story, and perhaps even from a growing empathy towards the hero and his society’s plight.

¹⁸ René Descartes, “Third Meditation,” in *Descartes Philosophical Writings*, trans. and ed. Elizabeth Anscombe and Peter Thomas Geach, rev. ed. (1954; repr., Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1971), 88.

¹⁹ For a more complete account of these formal distinctions and their historical and theoretical contexts, see: Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*.

²⁰ As argued, for example, by Catherine Lupton, *Chris Marker: Memories of the Future* (London: Reaktion Books, 2005), 91.

Furthermore, Marker does not espouse a Cartesian theory of “being created anew” in the time travel narrative he develops through *La jetée*. The Cartesian system approaches an ahistorical framework in which life itself could be temporally dissected into smaller and smaller units. At times in *La jetée*, the present does seem to be independent of past and future, as when the experimenters seek their solution in time rather than inaccessible space – as if moments were autonomous sites to be visited. But the film’s very structure is predicated on the traumatic, haunting memory of a man; that is, on the summoning of the past into the present. This indicates that the hero has a personal history that he can access, with memories branching to various moments of his existence. Similarly, the scene witnessed at the beginning of the film through the eyes of the child promises that the hero who is introduced shortly thereafter has not been created anew and will – in order to follow his predestined trajectory – exist in the next.

If one accepts Descartes’s assertion that creation and preservation are not really distinct, then, indeed, Bergson is quite close to Descartes theoretically. Bergson’s notion of duration or “*durée*” had a direct influence on Levinas’s thought, and appropriately bookends the temporal spectrum that Descartes opens in the modern era.

Bergson, like Descartes, bases his theory of time on human perception.²¹ Rather than accentuating the idea that the individual is every static moment created afresh along with Descartes, however, Bergson stresses the experience, the very movement, of duration: “My mental state, as it advances on the road of time, is continually swelling with the duration which it accumulates: it goes on increasing – rolling upon itself, as a snowball on the snow.”²² Even the prolonged observation of a static object – such as a still image on a movie screen – entails a change in vision. Thus, the psyche may experience a revolution whose duration is utterly divorced from a single revolution of the clock’s second hand that has simultaneously elapsed. For Bergson, psychic temporality is irreducible to clock time.²³

This notion of duration was extremely influential for Levinas. Contemporary philosopher Adriaan Peperzak affirms: “What is most important for Levinas in Bergson is this theory of *la durée*, namely that the dominant conception of time in physics and philosophy – time as linear, homogeneous, measurable, and representable – is derived from a more primordial experience of time as duration that describes our lived experience of temporality.”²⁴ Certainly Bergson’s revolutionary upheaval of the dominant Cartesian temporality re-opened philosophical discourse on time and forever challenged the simple “truth” of linear time. However, as Peperzak suggests, it is the empirical derivation of Bergson’s temporal model that Levinas emulates, rather than duration per se. For *durée* is

²¹ See especially Henri Bergson, “The Evolution of Life – Mechanism and Teleology,” chap. 1, in *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1911), 1-97; Henri Bergson, “The Multiplicity of Conscious States: The Idea of Duration,” chap. 2, in *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, trans. F. L. Pogson (1910; repr., New York: Harper and Row, 1960), 75-139.

²² Bergson, “The Evolution of Life,” 2.

²³ Bergson, “The Multiplicity of Conscious States,” 90.

²⁴ Explanatory note by Adriaan T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi, eds., in *Basic Philosophical Writings*, by Emmanuel Levinas, 18n193.

eminently concerned with the past and the memories that preserve it. Bergson writes: “Duration is the continuous progress of the past which gnaws into the future and which swells as it advances. And as the past grows without ceasing, so also there is no limit to its preservation.”²⁵ Levinas, in painful recognition of the present-ness of the solitary subject, and in the primacy he ascribes to the other and therefore the future, cannot follow Bergson on this point.

Nevertheless, the emphasis on memory in *La jetée* and from a very concrete perspective, the duration or running time of a film, makes the Bergsonian conceptualization of time seductive. John G. Handhardt, consulting curator on film and media at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, asserts regarding *La jetée* that “a Bergsonian concept of time and memory is the basis of the shifting cognitive world of meaning and desire that the protagonist experiences as he is thrust into past and future.”²⁶ Certainly *La jetée* corresponds with Bergson’s thought in the sense that its time is nonlinear because the hero’s memory is a time machine. Bergson’s conception may explain why *La jetée*’s hero can live and move around in his memories, the past state of his conscious mind, yet it seemingly disallows the possibility of time travel in that Bergson’s model clings to the “true duration” of clock time as an unconditional reality. For Bergson, although psychic time is as incontrovertible as clock time, the latter’s linearity cannot be subverted.

More critically, the memory that Bergson articulates is distinct from Marker’s. For Bergson, memory creates the continuity that is psychic duration. The memory that Marker is concerned with, however, is the discontinuous, staccato memory of trauma. *La jetée*’s narrator explains that “his [the hero’s] childhood memory had been the bait. He had played his part, and now they would liquidate him, together with the memory of a time twice-lived.” The possibility that moments can be relived in time’s spiral, that memory can be nearly effaced, is utterly foreign to Bergson. He argues that through memory the past is so present that it invades the future. Bergson contends that “our duration is irreversible. We could not live over again a single moment, for we should have to begin by effacing the memory of all that had followed. Even could we erase this memory from our intellect, we could not from our will.”²⁷ The singular memory of *La jetée*’s hero however, is nearly irretrievable and dimmed by uncertainty (early in the film, the commentary reads: “Had he really seen it? Or had he invented the tender gesture to shield him from the madness to come?”). His mental image does not simply contribute to a lived experience of duration; his psyche so successfully isolates pre-war memory from his post-war present that he cannot resolve his past self, the child at Orly Airport, with his adult one.

For Levinas, neither Descartes nor Bergson, nor indeed any formulation in Western philosophy, could account for the time that *La jetée*’s hero experiences as traumatic discontinuity. Descartes’s linear temporality reduces the distinction of creation and preservation to a conceptual one rather than a viable phenomenological possibility.

²⁵ Bergson, “The Evolution of Life,” 4.

²⁶ John G. Handhardt, “The Cinematic Avant-Garde,” chap. 2 in *The Worlds of Nam June Paik* (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2000), 87, published in conjunction with the eponymous exhibition.

²⁷ Bergson, “The Evolution of Life,” 6.

Bergson, by contrast, portrays duration as a gradual psychic unfolding, with memory expanding to proffer continuity. Levinas himself, while acknowledging his indebtedness to his philosophical predecessors, identifies some of the shortcomings of the Cartesian and Bergsonian systems that fail to account for his observations on the paradoxes of time:

Since Bergson it has become customary to take the continuity of time to be the very essence of duration. The Cartesian teaching of the discontinuity of duration is at most taken as the illusion of a time grasped in its spatial trace, an origin of false problems for minds incapable of conceiving duration. And a metaphor, one that is eminently spatial, of a cross-section made in duration, a photographic metaphor of a snapshot of movement, is accepted as a truism.

We on the contrary have been sensitive to the paradox that an instant can stop.²⁸

Levinas wants to retain the concept of discontinuity inherited from Descartes not as a conceptual placeholder for a Bergsonian spatial understanding of time; but actually, as a possibility for time, that it *can* stop. Such a stoppage would not be cross-sectional in the manner of a snapshot, but perhaps cinematic – like a discontinuous still image whose duration is not assured. Levinas’s formulation uniquely acknowledges time’s ethical responsiveness to the conditions of duress, indolence, and fatigue. His 1947 publication *Existence and Existents* establishes the groundwork for his conception of time that would alter little in the next fifty years of his output. Tellingly, it was written during Levinas’s five-year captivity, doing hard labor as a prisoner of war. Levinas’s refrain that existence, and hence time, is a burden to be taken up, is in sincere, direct relationship to his lived experience. He encountered in the labor camp the realization that “where the continual play of our relations with the world is interrupted we find neither death nor the ‘pure ego,’ but the anonymous state of being.”²⁹ The being must take on Being, not in any pre-originary action but constantly, continuously. In Levinas’s work, time becomes an ethical matter, incumbent upon the existent.

The impossibility of escaping one’s Being, of escaping time, for Levinas entails the obligation to take on the burden of existence at every moment. The experience of labor proved to him the discontinuity inherent in work and the burden of taking on Being and life itself. Unlike the Heideggerian model, Being represents not the struggle for preservation, not a struggle for the future and thus necessarily death, but a painful, joyful, struggle for the present.³⁰ Where previous theories of time and philosophers perpetuated a teleological model of time that pre-supposes order, design, in short, *the end*, Levinas allows for a pre-reflective (r)evolution of time.

La jétée’s hero is a time traveler. Yet as a solitary subject, he can never go beyond the immediacy of the present – those moments in which he moves in the past, in his own

²⁸ Emmanuel Levinas, “Reality and its Shadow,” trans. Alphonso Lingis, chap. 7 in *The Levinas Reader*, ed. Seán Hand (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1989), 140.

²⁹ Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2001), 8.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

post-war present, and in the future. He does not merely circulate in and through time, he activates each successive present. Levinas writes: “In place of the ‘I’ that circulates in time, we posit the ‘I’ as the very ferment of time in the present, the dynamism of time.”³¹ The “I” arises from the struggle for the present. Through *La jetée*, the viewer bears witness to the hero’s anguish in his underground world as he strains in his hammock to take on his Being in an anachronistic present. The film thus dramatizes the struggle of all existents in the discontinuous temporality of labor or pain. To evade the burden of Being in the present is impossible. The viewer learns, along with *La jetée*’s hero at the film’s close, “that one cannot escape time.”

The hero accesses each present time through his own memory. He searches through memory not for an escapist pleasure, but for the apparatus that will send him through time: the indelible memory of a woman’s face seen as a child – a sweet substitute for the traumatic death he witnessed in nearly the same moments. Crucially, this memory refers not only to the past, but also to his future. Apprehended in the present, the woman’s face belongs to childhood memory as much as to her future horror at his adult death on the jetty. The confluence of all these temporalities; past, present, and future, crystallized in a single memory, allow the hero to travel through time. This mental image, like the film’s title “*La jetée*,” instantaneously compresses a range of significations, although they are drawn out over time.

The temporality of the hero’s memory, a present that simultaneously looks from the past and toward the future, is equivalent to that of the instant that Levinas describes. Levinas writes: “A beginning *is*, but in addition, it possesses itself in a movement back upon itself. The movement of an action turns to its point of departure at the same time that it proceeds towards its goal, and thus possesses itself while it is.”³² The instant of a beginning is a dialectic that encapsulates its beginning and end. If the instant had a face, it would have two, like the Greek Janus. The Levinasian instant, like the Markerian memory, is “the dynamism of time” as it strains simultaneously towards the past and the future. The instant, furthermore, has ontological implications in Levinas’s formulation. For the instant is not simply given in a passive river of flowing time. The existent produces time in his hope for the present, through the taking on of Being in each instant: “Time is not a succession of instants filing by before an I, but the response to the hope for the present, which in the present is the very expression of the ‘I,’ and is itself equivalent to the present.”³³ The “I” is the present, the inescapable time of the subject without an other. But even the accomplishment of the present indicates hope, for it is only and always through the *articulation* of the instant that the existent takes on its existence. “It [a being] already exercises over Being the domination a subject exercises over its attributes. It exercises it in an instant, which phenomenological analysis takes as something that cannot be decomposed.”³⁴ Levinas discredits the Western philosophical convention of situating the instant, the very building block of time, outside of action and event. For Levinas, it is on the microtemporal scale of the instant, rather than the macroscopic scale

³¹ Ibid., 95.

³² Ibid., 15.

³³ Ibid., 94.

³⁴ Ibid., 1-2.

of eternity, that change occurs. It is at the level of the inherent drama of the instant, its possession of itself while it is, where the taking on of Being occurs. The instant, hitherto considered an isolated unit, is itself the site of ontology; the stance of the existent taking on its existence.

The single frame progression of *La jetée* dramatizes this concept on a formal level: each still image strains in the viewer's perception to unite with those past, just as the viewer struggles to situate it with images to come. Marker presents crystallized instants – each still is created afresh, representing the existent's taking on of existence every moment anew.

Is not an instant, then, a form of time travel? The instant is the site wherein the being takes on Being. Like the indelible memory of the hero in Marker's tale, the instant is the mechanism whereby travel through time, the taking on of the present, is effected. The taking on of this memory, the taking on of an instant, is to take on both his Being and his society's demand for salvation. The sociality here already foreshadows the necessity of the other that will be considered more deeply in chapter three, for: "The impossibility of constituting time dialectically is the impossibility of saving oneself by oneself and of saving oneself alone."³⁵

³⁵ Ibid., 95.

Chapter 2

The Time of Art: Intervals, Statues, and Dying

La jetée slips through the projector as it simultaneously files past the ocular receiver. It is both film strip and projection, object and image. The viewer is situated in the spatial interval between these two manifestations.

A fragment of film, its basic unit a photogram, here constructs a still rather than a sequence. Regardless of its content or context, a photogram is nevertheless subject to the persistence of vision. *La jetée* is constituted by a series of stills that move through the projector at the standard rate. Chris Marker delivers a fresh frame, albeit identical to the last, at twenty-four frames per second. Each frame is separated on the strip with a margin of blank leader to accommodate afterimages. This spatial interstice becomes a temporal one in projection; the interval is indiscernible to the eye, the replacement of the frame is similarly imperceptible. Yet the still image's effect on the viewer is not simply impressed, but perceived – the vision changes as new details are noticed or connections are drawn to past experience. The viewer is positioned in the temporal interval, in the instant between photograms.

The interval is indeed a curious space and time in art. I have been intimating that the viewer is situated in the gaps of cinema, that the audience is both spatially confined between film and screen, and temporally suspended through viewership. Emmanuel Levinas calls this suspension “the meanwhile”: not only is the viewer taken out of his or her lived time, but the artwork itself endures in a state of dying without the promised relief of death. In *La jetée*, the hero's life is given the character of an interval. He is a “marked man,”³⁶ he dies in the beginning of the film as if he cannot die soon enough. And yet we wait for him to die again at its finale, a death made more poignant by the interval endured with him.

It is fitting, then, that the film should begin at the site of the hero's death. We hear a plane arrive and through a zoom shot are given to see the Grand Jetty at Orly airport. That is, we see a small fragment of towers on a runway that becomes tarmac with planes and attendant aviatic equipment. The “boy who's story this is” becomes the “man who's story this is” (although we are not explicitly told), the latter inheriting only the former's memory; specifically, the indelible memory of what will be his own adult death.³⁷ We understand this language of cinema: allow for the part to become a whole through zooms or pans, allow an image to dissolve and an enigma to resolve. Although Marker tends to use radically discontinuous cuts, other familiar cinematic conventions such as eyeline matches and establishing shots are employed – as is the almost banal plot of time travel

³⁶ Phrase borrowed from Garrett Stewart, “Marker's Marked Man,” in *Between Film and Screen: Modernism's Photo Synthesis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 102-105.

³⁷ “Orly, Sunday,” *La Jetée / Sans Soleil*, DVD, directed by Chris Marker, (1962; New York: Criterion Collection, 2007). All subsequent references to scenes from *La jetée* from this authoritative digital transfer.

and love. As spectators, we expect that in most films a long-shot will give way to medium shots and close-ups; just as we can be assured in cinema that acquaintance gives way to love. We anticipate the shot-reverse shot of conversation. We have acquired the ability to unconsciously decipher the special semiotics of film, to predict the moods given devices will bestow – even if we cannot give the technical elements a name.

Marker's experimental film retains many of the traditional conventions and shot patterns of narrative cinema.³⁸ *La jetée*'s composition by way of still images, however, represents a radical departure from the cinematic norm and proves to be the film's most challenging symbolic element to decipher. The incorporation of static frames has a long tradition in film history,³⁹ and much "documentary" film continues to rely on the still image for practical as well as aesthetic reasons. Marker's own 1953 *Les Statues meurent aussi* (*Even Statues Die*), made in collaboration with Alain Resnais, helped to cement this tradition. By the 1960s, however, when *La jetée* was created almost exclusively using still images, such a feature had fallen out of favor in "narrative" film. Rather than turning to cinematic precursors, its modern and now contemporary viewer grasps for a foothold from the very nascence - and continuing essence - of the filmic medium; that is, from photography. Marker encourages this reading by referring to *La jetée* in the opening credits as a "photo-roman," or photo-novel.

A familiar theoretical trope links the photograph to death and cinema, if not quite to life, at least to dying. In a recent iteration of this dogma, semiotician Garrett Stewart writes: "Photography is death in replica; cinema is a dying away in progress, hence death in serial abeyance."⁴⁰ This rhetoric of death and dying in art will be taken up again with Levinas and Marker later in this chapter; nevertheless, the basis of this ideological axiom lies in historical reality. Since the 1840s, which is to say photography's first decade, photographs have been taken of the living and of the recently deceased. As with the recorded voice of the phonograph, the permanence of the photograph meant that "death has lost some of its sting."⁴¹ The photograph can offer a likeness that sustains the image of the beloved, thus delaying her inevitable erasure from memory. Unlike a drawing or painting of the deceased, "in Photography I can never deny that *the thing has been there*. There is a superimposition here: of reality and of the past."⁴² These words, written by Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida*, isolate the core of photography in the midst of what is fundamentally an elegy for his deceased mother. Barthes draws attention to the fixity of photographs: objects which he is free to peruse after his mother's death. A photograph, at least in the pre-digital age, is a physical possession of image and appearance. The

³⁸ Catherine Lupton asserts that these filmic conventions help to provide coherence in *La jetée*. See her monograph *Chris Marker: Memories of the Future* (London: Reaktion Books, 2005), 91.

³⁹ For example, much early film such as *Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat* of 1896, and Dziga Vertov's landmark 1929 *Man with a Movie Camera*.

⁴⁰ Stewart, *Between Film and Screen*, xi.

⁴¹ Frederic Myers, "Voices of the Dead" *Phonoscope* 1 (1896), 1. The full quote reads: "Death has lost some of its sting since we are forever able to retain the voices of the dead."

⁴² Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 76.

photograph, and the stilled image too, announces itself to the viewer as an object. It gains fixity, even permanence, in prolonged viewing.

What is meant then, by Marker's use of still images, whose referent is photography? Are we asked to believe in the "truth," in the "that has been" of *La jetée*? Or does each image, each moment, become a monument to the film's unfolding tragedy? The viewer is given time to examine each frame on a formal level, at the same time that conventional narrative filmic flow is disrupted. It is as if Marker wants to delay the inevitable rush to the hero's demise – and in this sense one might well agree with Stewart's cinematic theory of "death in serial abeyance."

However, Stewart, and to a lesser extent Barthes, do not unravel to their full extent the implications of theorizing photography as death or film as dying. The ethical ramifications of this move are at stake, particularly with regard to *La jetée*. Marker's story moves inevitably to a death foretold while on a formal level that progression wants always to be withheld - as if the still images are necessary obstacles. To understand how the time of film operates in *La jetée*, we must look to the time of art that Emmanuel Levinas describes in his earliest published work, *Existence and Existents*, and a slightly later essay published in 1948, "Reality and Its Shadow." The turn to Levinas here is founded not on a parallelism of aesthetic views with Marker, but rather on their shared interest in the unique temporality of art. The ethical conclusions they ultimately draw from their investigations are inextricably linked to death and dying, although both Levinas and Marker subversively contest this rhetoric's inherent negativity.

A first barrier to continuation is Levinas's alleged mistrust of all art, calling into question whether his thought is compatible with any aesthetics. "Reality and Its Shadow" represents Levinas's most vehement critique (although perhaps only apparently so) and was in fact originally prefaced in *Les Temps Modernes* by a Sartrean critique on behalf of the editorial board.⁴³ It is easy to recognize the cause for their consternation: whereas Jean-Paul Sartre advocated art as a public good with inherent ethical value, art is likened successively by Levinas to rhythm, statues, and death.⁴⁴

For Levinas, art abstracts time; its duration is bound by a beginning and end lacking in seriousness. This levity stands in contrast to the acute sensation of labor, in which time itself is effort, and every instant must be taken on as a present. The solitary subject takes on the burden of being in the instant, paradigmatically through engagement in labor, whereas play is an evasion from being to which the subject is nevertheless shackled. It is helpful to consider this distinction in light of Levinas's personal history: as an interpreter he was drafted into the French army, and, as a Jew, held captive in a labor

⁴³ Emmanuel Levinas, "Reality and its Shadow," trans. Alphonso Lingis, chap. 7 in *The Levinas Reader*, ed. Seán Hand (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1989), 129; preface originally published in *Les Temps Modernes* 38 (1948), 769-70.

⁴⁴ One source indicates that Sartre was Marker's high school philosophy teacher; see Molly Nesbit, "In Hindsight," in *Chris Marker: Staring Back*, ed. Ann Bremner (Columbus: Wexner Center for the Arts, 2007), 152, published in conjunction with the exhibition. A notoriously private and enigmatic individual, this myth cannot be established concretely. I will not attempt to trace out the impact of Sartre's thought on Marker's oeuvre here because the temporal obsession that links the latter with Levinas is more compelling. Suffice it to add, however, that Sartre was greatly impressed with Levinas's first book, and the two continued to influence / spar with each other throughout their philosophical careers.

camp from 1940 to 1945.⁴⁵ In consideration of the contrast between the laborious difficulty of clearing forests with the comparative pleasure of aesthetic creation, it is not surprising that for Levinas “effort and play are mutually exclusive.”⁴⁶ So exclusive are these bodily states that they differ even in their temporality.

Levinas categorizes the time of art as that of “the eternal duration of the interval – the *meanwhile*.”⁴⁷ Referring not to the permanence of literature or longevity of marble sculpture, the eternity of art is characterized almost as a painful limbo. Unlike the instant of the solitary subject, in which the existent takes on its existence in the present, the instant of art is eternal. Art’s present fails in its task, leaving manifest only an interminable presence – presence devoid of a present. Artworks, what Levinas calls “statues,” endure in a state of dying without the promised relief of death. The invocation of this analogy deliberately draws a parallel between the figural representation and the observing figure. That is, a statue typically represents a scaled three-dimensional image of a human, animal, or mythological character. In the observation of the statue, Levinas implies, the viewer similarly takes on the character of a statue – inhabiting a time of limbo, as in the invoked temporal suspension of the film spectator. The relationship of the viewer to the work of art is unlike that of the ethical intersubjective relationship between humans; the statue is only an image, the shadow of reality.

In one of the most striking scenes of *La jetée*, on what is to be the hero’s penultimate return to the past, he meets the woman with whom he has fallen in love at a museum of natural history. They wander, quite literally, among statues: “On about the fiftieth day, they meet in a museum filled with eternal creatures. By now, the technique has been perfected. Aimed at a given moment in time, he can live there and move about freely,” the narrator explains. “She too seems used to it. She accepts the behavior of this visitor who comes and goes, exists, speaks, laughs with her, is silent, listens, disappears.”⁴⁸ The “eternal creatures” that the lovers encounter are not works of art, but animal victims of taxidermy. To the hero they are exotic insofar as large predators would have been made extinct by the radioactive fallout of his present’s recent past. And even to her these exhibits might seem strange, despite her acquiescent disposition. While the narrator proclaims that the hero “can live there and move about freely,” the contrast of his capability (which is nevertheless restrained by Marker’s use of static images) to the immobility of the displayed statues becomes more acute. However, the lengthy scene

⁴⁵ Adriaan Peperzak, in preface to *Basic Philosophical Writings*, by Emmanuel Levinas (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), ix.

⁴⁶ Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2001), 22. On 92 of the same text he indicates however that “the alternation of leisure and effort” together constitute the “time of the world,” what he calls economic time. Nevertheless, a distinction can still be drawn between the destabilizing time of art and that leisure time which is as regulated as labor in the modern capitalist system.

⁴⁷ Levinas, “Reality and Its Shadow,” 141.

⁴⁸ Chris Marker, “The Script of Chris Marker’s *La jetée*,” trans. Dino Franco Felluga, <http://web.ics.purdue.edu/~felluga/sf/ScriptLaJetee.html>. Various English translations of Marker’s script exist, including several approved by Marker for publication and dubbing. However, these versions tend to depart from the French original. This transcription seems to be the most faithful to the intentions of the original. All further quotations from the script are from this source.

gives the impression that the characters are simply passing time, evading the responsibilities of their own respective presents to become passive observers, as Levinas posits. This impression is verified by the following scene in the camp: having perfected their technique, the experimenters now prepare to send the hero to the future where his real work can begin.

Film studies professor Nora M. Alter indicates another facet unique to the natural history museum that motivated Marker's choice of this setting: "it is a hybrid, a location where what was once animate is now preserved and displayed. With its prehistoric remains and dioramas, the natural history museum operates like a film set; both reconstitute an imaginary world."⁴⁹ Marker adds memory to this litany of imaginary worlds in *La jetée*, demonstrating that the hero's memory is itself a museum in which a world is reconstructed. Prior to the couple's visit to the physical museum, and just prior to their initial meeting, the hero is thrown out of the present to an unspecified time and space. It is as though he is wandering, or more violently, falling through memories. The script reads: "On the sixteenth day, he is on the jetty. Empty. Sometimes he recaptures a happy day, but different; a happy face, but different; ruins; a girl who might be the one he seeks. He passes her on the jetty. She smiles at him from an automobile. Other images appear, merge, in that museum which is, perhaps, his memory." This disjuncted narration describes the spectator's disoriented visual experiences as well as the hero's blurred visual impressions. The images in his memory are deconstructed and reconstructed, forming a ramshackle architecture of the *imaginaire*. The narrator's invocation of the museum is accompanied by images of statues from the hero's memory. These sculptures of antiquity are sightless and captive; some headless, and all in ruins.

This passage begins with specific temporal and spatial coordinates: it is the sixteenth day of the experiments, and the hero is on the empty jetty. It is unclear whether time has elapsed in his own present as he voyages to different places and days in his past. Eventually he spots her again on the jetty, and immediately afterwards passing him in a car. It is as though the museum of his memory is a space, but also a time, in which space and time are rendered fluid and malleable. Alter describes memory in *La jetée* as "a highly personalized virtual museum without a physical site or walls."⁵⁰ Lending support to this interpretation, Marker himself extended the metaphor with his 1998 CD-ROM *Immemory*. The user navigates Marker's archive freely, articulating his or her own path – and thereby organize a personal museum - through the collected images, texts, clips, and music.⁵¹ With this digital piece, Marker updates André Malraux's "imaginary museum" for the virtual era.⁵²

The museum in *La jetée* is presented first as the intangible space-time of memory, and then again as a space for the exhibition of dead animals. Both are populated by

⁴⁹ Nora M. Alter, *Chris Marker* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 33.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁵¹ Chris Marker, *Immemory*, CD-ROM (Cambridge, MA: Exact Change, 2002). Originally published in French (Paris: Éditions du Centre Pompidou, 1998).

⁵² See André Malraux, *Museum Without Walls*, trans. S. Gilbert and F. Price (London : Secker and Warburg, 1967). Originally published as "Le musée imaginaire," in *Les voix du silence* (Paris: Gallimard, 1951).

statues, although Levinas would argue that the film itself is a statue. The spectator, in his transfixion before the screen, parallels the passivity of the characters as they wander through the natural history museum. Thus, Levinas says that the temporal arts do not escape the fate of statues; “time, apparently introduced into images by the non-plastic arts such as music, literature, theatre, and cinema, does not shatter the fixity of images.”⁵³ It is evident that this “fixity of images” is Levinas’s target. What would fixity mean, however, in the context of continuous change? In the art forms identified here, each aural or visual sensation is constantly superseded by another, now and then overlapping.

La jetée, nevertheless, defies the continuous change of traditional cinema. It rejects the very innovation of capturing the world in “real time” that film seemed to make possible. Marker is intent on establishing each image’s fixity. While it has been tempting for some to read this straightforwardly as a modernist critique of the filmic medium,⁵⁴ this intervallic form is more symbolic than critical. It is as if Marker wants to impress each image on the viewer’s mind, much as the hero’s memory is stamped with a traumatic childhood memory. Marker indicates that such indelible fragmentation is characteristic of traumatic memory: the narrator remarks that “moments to remember are just like other moments. They are only made memorable by the scars they leave.” The hero is powerless to reconstruct the images of the event on the jetty, and even the memory of the woman’s face is plagued with uncertainty. Similarly, the spectator can only receive this narrative through a succession of discontinuous, static images. In this way, each prolonged frame is drawn out to a dying without death; as one image is simply superseded by or faded into another. The viewer watches the drama unfold, but not in “real time” and not even in “reel time.” Rather, it is the intervallic time of traumatic memory that correlates visually with the static suspension of all art that Levinas calls “the meanwhile.”

Although Levinas categorically characterizes “the meanwhile” of art as a horror, one might still glimpse a beyond through the curtain that is already beneficial, like the face of the infinite that Levinas believes Descartes saw in his Third Meditation.⁵⁵ In the experience of art, perhaps the viewer can bear witness to dying, learn something of its character. To learn from another’s dying, still worse, the death of the other, would be a violence to the primacy of the ethical relationship. Indeed, fear for the death of the other (unfettered by the inverse anxiety over one’s own related pain, or own death) establishes in part the basis of the asymmetrical relationship.⁵⁶ Levinas steadfastly avoids dwelling on death as many of his immediate predecessors did, yet it subtly permeates his account of the burden of living. Further, the next chapter concerning the time of the other shows that the enigma arises as a trace (rather than as a presence or non-presence) from the

⁵³ Levinas, “Reality and Its Shadow,” 139.

⁵⁴ Rosalind Krauss, “...And Then Turn Away?” An Essay on James Coleman,” *October* 81 (Summer 1997): 5-33, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/779016>.

⁵⁵ From Levinas’s discussion following the presentation of his text “Transcendence and Height,” in 1962 to the Société Française de Philosophie. Transcription of conference proceedings published in Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings*, 25.

⁵⁶ Emmanuel Levinas, “Nonintentional Consciousness,” *Entre Nous: on thinking-of-the-other*, trans. Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 146.

beyond past. It is redolent that art should have a temporality similar in its dislocated, inconclusive spatiality and temporality to that of the ethical other. To these attributes, Marker adds another: the possibility that statues can die and therefore transcend the eternal dying Levinas describes. Crucially, Marker returns throughout his oeuvre to a fascination with cultures like those of Japan and Africa that “accommodate death, rather than fearing and repressing it.”⁵⁷ The only death that is to be mourned, Marker implies, is that of cultural signification.

In an earlier film co-directed with Alain Resnais and titled, fittingly, *Les Statues meurent aussi*, or *Even Statues Die*, Marker makes convincing precisely this claim. Part documentary, part eulogy, this film laments the French colonial impact on African art and the latter’s subsequent decline. It begins with a view of public sculpture in Africa, an indicator that art was once integral to communal life. In contrast, the next scene depicts Europeans inspecting hermetized objects in a museum.⁵⁸ Banned by French censors for over a decade upon its release in 1953, *Even Statues Die* expresses the clash of cultures and negative colonial impact through the lens of art.⁵⁹

Marker, mainly responsible for the commentary in this film, begins comparably to *La jetée* with darkness and voice-over: “When men have died they enter history. When statues have died they enter art. This botany of death is what we call *culture*.”⁶⁰ Marker and Resnais’s argument is similar to that of Levinas: African sculptures are integrally a part of their world, but by decontextualizing them as mere representations, the work is extracted from that world. That is, once the object is conceived as “art,” here by a Western audience, its functionality in a healing ritual, as a fertility charm, etc., is effectively removed. Alter asserts, following Walter Benjamin, that the religious fetish is hereby transformed into a Western commodity fetish.⁶¹ This formulation differs from Levinas’s, however, on several counts. First, *Even Statues Die* makes no claim that all art is statues, nor that all statues are art. Second, statues are not *a priori* dead – they may suffer a death by decontextualization which for Marker converts them into “Art” as canonized by the Western cultural tradition. The new context to which the African sculptures in *Even Statues Die* are extracted is the museum.

Even Statues Die formulates a third conception of the museum; one that Marker develops in filmic form prior to that of the museum as memory, but co-extensive with that of the natural history museum in *La jetée*. The museum of natural history is a site where wild animals and nature can be represented in cultured form – their deaths are on display. The art museum is even more insidious; the displacement of the ritualistic object to its spare, blank context actually kills the statue. It is an agent of death.

⁵⁷ Lupton, *Chris Marker*, 158-9.

⁵⁸ *Les Statues meurent aussi*, online video, directed by Alain Resnais and Chris Marker (Paris: Tadié Cinéma Production / Présence Africaine, 1953), http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xfukz_les-statues-meurent-aussi-chris-mar_creation.

⁵⁹ Dr Grey, “Even Statues Die – A Film by Alain Resnais and Chris Marker” (Grey Lodge, 2006), <http://www.greylodge.org/gpc/?p=352>.

⁶⁰ Dennis Grunes, “Statues Also Die (Alain Resnais, Chris Marker, 1953)” (2008), <http://grunes.wordpress.com/2008/02/01/statues-also-die-alain-resnais-chris-marker-1953/>.

⁶¹ Alter, *Chris Marker*, 59-60.

It is not at all arbitrary that Marker should have focused on the museum as a sort of mausoleum where “even statues die.” The museum emerged as a contested site in the eyes of many artists in the 1950s and 1960s. Allan Kaprow’s Happenings, though often considered an outgrowth of performance, stemmed from a desire to break free of the institution. The Earthworks artists similarly rejected the trappings of the gallery space for more natural, public environments. And curator / critic Lucy Lippard’s book *Overlay: Contemporary Art and the Art of Prehistory*, which highlights the parallelism of site-specificity and symbolism between these two periods, went further than *Even Statues Die* in its advocacy for the reintegration of art into the fabric of communities.⁶² Marker’s own choice of medium reflects similar concerns to those of his artistic contemporaries: he made ‘art films’ in the 1950s and 1960s that would not be screened in average movie theatres nor in museums which had yet to fully embrace the medium, but in a third space – that of the independent cinémathèque.

It is remarkable that Marker chose to set *La jetée*’s underground world of the post-war present in what would soon become precisely this third space – the archives of Henri Langlois’s French Cinémathèque. In 1963, just a few months after *La jetée*’s production, the underground galleries of the Palais Chaillot would be populated by film reels and stills.⁶³ Marker alludes to this future, perhaps, by placing a large statue draped in heavy cloth and a smaller sculpture of a boy embracing a swan in the corridor that the hero and his insane predecessors traverse en route to the site of the scientists’ experiments. The statues are placeholders for the reels that will replace them. Confined to storage, films await the reactivation of projection and viewership to burst to life, Marker seems to suggest. In this way, “reality” leaks into the “imaginary” world of the film.

Chaillot’s architectural history intensifies the transitional character of this underground setting.⁶⁴ *La jetée*’s narrator explains that the war’s survivors have settled underground only because “above ground, Paris and no doubt most of the world was uninhabitable, riddled with radioactivity.” This society’s leaders seek an answer in time out of necessity, because space is closed to them. Their world is impenetrable; they must identify an envoy who can access another world, but, the narrator explains, “the future was better protected than the past.” The hero is successful nevertheless – he mediates the relationship of his world to another that is completely foreign to his, “a world transformed; Paris rebuilt; ten thousand unknown avenues.”

The hero’s ability to connect these disparate worlds, isolated by temporal distance, is paralleled by Marker’s ability to link the temporally distinct worlds of cinema and so-called reality (Levinas’s play vs. labor). He hints at this bridge obliquely with the setting of Chaillot; a finite space that nevertheless harbors distinct worlds at different times. This “coexistence of worlds that are mutually alien and impenetrable,” Levinas

⁶² Lucy R. Lippard, *Overlay: Contemporary Art and the Art of Prehistory* (New York: New Press, 1995).

⁶³ “On *Vertigo*,” video piece, directed by Luc Lagier, French television series *Court-circuit (le magazine)*, (Paris: MK2 TV-ARTE, 2003); excerpted for inclusion as extra material on Chris Marker, *La Jetée / Sans Soleil*, DVD.

⁶⁴ Catherine Lupton has a provocative reading of this underground space as representative of the unconscious, in relation to the subterranean aspect of Marker’s *Le Joli mai* of the same period. See *Chris Marker*, 88.

adds, “has already a positive esthetic function.”⁶⁵ Art brings about a positive effect in the juxtaposition of foreign worlds: the world in which humans regularly move, and that of the *il y a*.

The *il y a* or “there is,” is what is left when nothingness is negated. Following Henri Bergson, Levinas argues that absence is a presence, though not its counterpart. “This impersonal, anonymous, yet inextinguishable ‘consummation’ of being, which murmurs in the depths of nothingness itself we shall designate by the term *there is*. The *there is*, inasmuch as it resists a personal form, is ‘being in general’.” It is a nocturnal, and hence temporal, darkness which transcends inwardness and exteriority. It is prior to consciousness and subjectivity in which being in its anonymity nevertheless remains.⁶⁶

In the middle chapter of *Existence and Existents*, “Existence Without a World,” the *il y a* proceeds directly from a discussion of art and its “exoticism” in the etymological sense of the word. That is, art extracts things from the world and thereby relegates them to an outside without relation to an interior. It bears mentioning that in *La jetée*, the hero and the woman’s meeting in the museum of natural history comes just after the painfully beautiful apex of the film, which is, perhaps, a dream. The heroine turns her head, blinks, smiles, in what Marker calls “the only ‘cinema’ part” of the film.”⁶⁷ Her motion occurs in the intimacy of a bedroom, closed off from the rest of *La jetée*’s filmic world. Is it the artifice of cinema to which the wandering in the museum is a response? To beauty? Or to her other-ness? Only a cut to the present, a glimpse of the head scientist and the hero, divides the scenes. Marker’s heroine is exotic insofar as she is foreign to the hero’s world, and through her movement disrupts the temporality of *La jetée* as well. On a formal and conceptual level, then, the recognition of the woman’s otherness is comparable to art’s exoticism, while the anonymous space of the museum parallels Levinas’s *il y a*. The museum has the ability to abstract objects from the perspective of the world; there, perhaps, the *il y a* can be accessed. In this way, the decontextualization that Marker fears in *Even Statues Die*, may be redeemed in part if the new European viewers of the African sculptures thereby gain access to the unknown.

The *il y a* is unknown and unknowable in its anonymity and twilight. But through art, Levinas implies, we can catch a glimpse of the *il y a* beyond the curtain of the known world. This is especially true of modern art, which Levinas believes completely divorces world referents from the art object and forces the viewer to relate to art not through the soul of things or sympathy for the artist. Instead: “We come to understand in this way the quest of modern painting and poetry, which attempts to preserve the exoticism in artistic reality, to banish from it that soul to which the visible forms were subjected, and to remove from represented objects their servile function as expressions.” The sheer materiality of modernism’s forms, its “naked elements, simple and absolute,” are revolutionary on an ontological level beyond its formal and art historical importance.⁶⁸ The equation does not begin with expression; art is rendered autonomous in contrast to

⁶⁵ Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, 48.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 52-55.

⁶⁷ Chris Marker, “Notes on Filmmaking,” DVD booklet, *La Jetée / Sans Soleil* (Paris: Criterion Collection: 2007), 41.

⁶⁸ Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, 49-51.

prior formulations of Western thought. Art does not provide access to a higher plane, instead it opens onto the wholly unknown plane of the *il y a*. Levinas continues:

In the representation of matter by modern painting this deformation, that is, this laying bare, of the world is brought about in a particularly striking way. The breakup of continuity even on the surface of things, the preference for broken lines, the scorning of perspective and of the ‘real’ proportions between things, indicate a revolt against the continuity of curves. From a space without horizons, things break away and are cast toward us like chunks that have weight in themselves, blocks, cubes, planes, triangles, without transitions between them.⁶⁹

La jetée ‘lays bare the world’ similarly to modern painting in Levinas’s description. The continuity of identical photograms on its film strip belies the discontinuity of transition from still to still image. Marker employs various unexpected framings and cuts in a ‘revolt against continuity.’ The blocks and triangles of modern painting are translated into still images in Marker’s filmic vocabulary. Like photographs, they are presented as objects to perception.

Levinas specifically extends his praise of modernism to film:

Effects of the same kind are obtained in cinema with close-ups. Their interest does not only lie in that they can show details; they stop the action in which a particular is bound up with a whole, and let it exist apart. They let it manifest its particular and absurd nature which the camera discovers in a normally unexpected perspective – in a shoulder line to which the close-up gives hallucinatory dimensions, laying bare what the visible universe and the play of its normal proportions tone down and conceal.⁷⁰

Here Levinas moves beyond materiality to acknowledge other means by which art allows its viewers to transcend the visible universe. A close-up is unique not in that it gives more to see, but that it delivers to the spectator a dimension beyond expectations. The still image, like the close-up, “stop[s] the action in which a particular is bound up with a whole, and let[s] it exist apart.” The still image and the close-up present new ways to see and experience the world.

La jetée, then, goes beyond offering a glimpse of the *il y a*. Unlike the close-up Levinas praises, its illeity is not ephemeral but lasting. The temporal fragmentation of its images establishes intervals akin to that of traumatic memory, yet Marker extends such an experiential referent to create a total environment of discontinuity. In such a world, the woman’s awakening – her ability to move - is the invasion of the “real” into the *il y a*. She provides a glimpse of the other in an otherwise nocturnal darkness.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 50-51.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 49.

Chapter 3

Time of the Other: From the Beyond Past to the Future

Vertigo, from *vertere*, to turn.⁷¹

If this were a story, it would be about love.

The first sound heard at the beginning of *La jetée* is the departure of a plane. It is an inhuman sound that situates the film's point of departure at the jetty of Orly Airport. There, one Sunday before the war, a child observes a horrible event. But first, a woman's face – in fact, it is the first face to appear in the twenty-eight minute film. A still image fills the screen with her visage: windswept hair, melancholic smile, fingers crooked and pressed to her lips. She commands the viewer's attention for a full twenty-five seconds.⁷² The spectator learns, from voice-over, that: "The face he had seen was to be the only peacetime image to survive the war. Had he really seen it? Or had he invented the tender gesture to shield him from the madness to come? The sudden noise, the woman's gesture, the crumpling body, the cries of the crowd. Later, he knew he had seen a man die."⁷³ The image of the woman's face is coupled with that of a traumatic death in the mind of a boy seen silhouetted against the sun-bleached jetty. Her existence cannot be confirmed except by that most unreliable of witnesses: memory. Whereas her face is shrouded in uncertainty, the "madness to come" is enveloped in the certainty of death.

Following the end of the Third World War, "the man who's story this is" is selected for an experiment based on "his obsession with an image of the past." He struggles through time, sorts through real memories from peacetime, some images perhaps hers, until at last he recovers the one he wants. "On the thirtieth day, the meeting takes place. He is sure he recognizes her. It is the only thing he is sure of," the narrator proclaims. He loses sight of her in amazement at his surroundings, but the next time he is sent back he speaks. "She welcomes him without surprise. They are without plans, without memories. *Time builds up around them.*"⁷⁴

⁷¹ "Vertigo," *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary* (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, 2009), <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/vertigo>.

⁷² "Orly, Sunday," *La Jetée / Sans Soleil*, DVD, directed by Chris Marker, (1962; New York: Criterion Collection, 2007). All subsequent references to scenes from *La jetée* from this authoritative digital transfer.

⁷³ Chris Marker, "The Script of Chris Marker's *La jetée*," trans. Dino Franco Felluga, <http://web.ics.purdue.edu/~felluga/sf/ScriptLaJetee.html>. Various English translations of Marker's script exist, including several approved by Marker for publication and dubbing. However, these versions tend to depart from the French original. This transcription seems to be the most faithful to the intentions of the original. All further quotations from the script are from this source.

⁷⁴ Ibid. Italics mine.

“Time builds up around them,” as though carving a volume out of space for them to co-exist. Their tenuous co-incidence in time is made more secure by its enveloping walls. But how does time build and who is building it? Is the narrator simply indicating, albeit poetically, that time passes when they are together? This in itself would be significant; juxtaposing this durational contact to the brief, disjointed glimpses of the hero’s prior wanderings in time. In subsequent returns, he will search for her, “live there and move about freely.” The characters’ emphasis seems always to be on the present; the narrator says that “they are without plans,” suggesting preparation for the future, and “without memories,” a retrieval of the past. But this is not true for the hero alone. Although he may not have plans of his own, the experimenters of his underground society have plans for him: to send him to the future to retrieve a power-supply to restart the world’s industry. Furthermore, the hero retains a significant memory that allows him to return to her repeatedly, and eventually becomes the mechanism by which he travels to the future.

The heroine’s plans and future are more shadowy, however. She accepts his appearances and disappearances guilelessly; without expectations developed through past experiences, and without the anticipation that implies an assured future. On the day of that first meeting they go to a park. She asks him about his dog tags; he invents a false explanation in substitution for the real one of the war to come. In the following moments, they reenact a scene from Alfred Hitchcock’s *Vertigo* (1958) in reverse. In *Vertigo*, released four years prior to *La jetée*, ‘Madeleine’ and Scottie approach the cross-section of a tree displayed in a national forest. She points to a tree ring too far in the past, ostensibly possessed by the spirit of her ancestor. “Somewhere in here I was born...and there I died. It was only a moment for you,” ‘Carlotta’ reprimands the tree; “You took no notice.”⁷⁵ Marker pays homage to the scene, as *La jetée*’s hero and heroine come across a tree trunk in the park similar to that of *Vertigo*. The commentary states that she utters a foreign name unknown to the hero. The name, the viewer infers, is “Hitchcock.” As if he too is possessed, the hero indicates that he is from a time too far in the future, beyond the concentric rings of the tree’s trunk. The woman looks down sorrowfully, while the hero is torn back to his time.⁷⁶

He eventually returns to find her asleep in the sun. He is uncertain of the temporality she inhabits, fearful that she might have died in the time it has taken him to return. He tells her of a distant country and a long journey while she listens, without judgment: “This was the first of a series of experiments in which he would meet her at different times,” the voice-over explains. “Sometimes he finds her in front of their markings. She welcomes him happily. She calls him her ghost. One day she seems frightened. Another day she leans toward him. He is never sure whether he seeks her out or is sent, whether he invents or dreams.” During this narration, the film fades back and

⁷⁵ Alec Coppel and Samuel Taylor, script for *Vertigo* (1957), <http://www.dailyscript.com/scripts/vertigo.html>.

⁷⁶ Luc Lagier, “On *Vertigo*,” *La Jetée / Sans Soleil*, DVD, directed by Chris Marker (1962; Criterion Collection, 2007). Longer form originally screened on television series *Court-circuit (le magazine)*, (Paris: MK2 TV-ARTE, 2003). The piece extends the analogy and interprets the entire film as an homage to *Vertigo*. Catherine Lupton also draws a parallel between Scottie’s mission and that of *La jetée*’s hero: to recreate the image of a lost woman that nevertheless ends in failure. See her monograph *Chris Marker: Memories of the Future* (London: Reaktion Books, 2005), 95.

forth from still images of her to stills of him in the camp, eyes covered by the experimenters' mask, tensed in his hammock. His reunions with her no more testify to her "real" existence than his first memory of her face, on the jetty at Orly on that long ago day. Her emotional states are varied, but the hero does not know to what he should attribute her apparitions, or are they his?

The following sequence in the film includes some of the most beautiful moments in cinematic history. They are not memorable in themselves, perhaps, but for the sensations they induce in the spectator – a constricting of the chest, an ardent desire that she, in bed, should be real. There are no words, it is silent, until the slow introduction of twittering, non-diegetic birds: it is morning. She stirs, languorous fades of her shifting face and body quicken, sensual in the extreme, until at last her eyes open, her mouth smiles.⁷⁷ Her movement is actually depicted, negating the need to fill it in imaginatively as with other transitions from still to still image. It is a revolution as swift as it is poignant in the context of a film that is always formally otherwise, resistant of continuous movement. The sequence is abruptly halted, as if by 'coming alive' the heroine has violated the conditions of space-time; or as if the hero has been too inattentive to his mission, for the next shots show the head experimenter disapprovingly looking down at the guilty time traveler. He is sent next, on the fiftieth day, to a museum. The narrator speaks: "By now, the technique has been perfected. Aimed at a given moment in time, he can live there and move about freely. She too seems used to it. She accepts the behavior of this visitor who comes and goes, exists, speaks, laughs with her, is silent, listens, disappears." He realizes retrospectively that this meeting is to be their last. The experimenters, pleased with their success, attempt to send him now to the future. After initial struggle and eventual completion of his task, his destiny is assured in being sent to another part of the camp. He will not be spared for his assistance: "He had been a tool in their hands. His childhood memory had been the bait. He had played his part, and now they would liquidate him, together with his memory of a time twice-lived." The time is twice-lived, but the moments are not; he lives there as a pre-war child, then again as a post-war man. The dividing line between the individual's multiple selves could equally be drawn from the time before he was in love with the woman, to the time after. This shift would chronicle the hero's personal history through love rather than the war.

An alternative to his death presents itself, he believes. The future world inhabitants telepathically invite him to their time. He rejects their sterilized future for one of his own, in the past of his childhood, where he hopes the woman waits for him. Back on the jetty, he realizes that he must be there too, the self that was a child watching the planes arrive and depart from Orly Airport. But first, he looks for the woman's face. His body is shown from various angles as he runs towards her, his progress quickened by the rapid substitution of one still for another. Yet he does not achieve the real movement of the woman in bed. The narrator's final words proclaim: "When he saw the man from the underground camp he realized that one cannot escape time, and that this haunted moment, given him to see as a child, was the moment of his own death."

The possibility of the hero's actions is driven by *his* memory, a traumatic memory that is nevertheless integrally related to the woman's face. This mental image occupies his thoughts so forcefully that eventually he is able to occupy the woman's time. Their

⁷⁷ Catherine Lupton describes the woman's motion as a "flight into life," comparable to that of the birds. See *Chris Marker*, 93.

relationship prolongs his sojourns into the past. Because of her, “*time builds up around them.*” And it is her face, an image from the past become present, that he spies in his final moments on the jetty. Who is this mysterious woman who arises not from a concrete past, but an uncertain memory? Although she is presented to the spectator as physically “real” as the hero himself, he doubts her actuality. He thinks he might have dreamed her, invented her as self-defensive coping mechanism; for him, she is not truly present although they experience each other in a present.

Emmanuel Levinas’s formulation of the ethical other is the only philosophical description that accounts for Chris Marker’s mysterious woman. Time travel is conditional on her in *La jetée*, as indeed the future is not possible without the other according to Levinas. He is alone in the history of Western philosophy in positing the unique temporality of the other, beyond the usual external and objective time, or wholly subjective time. Marker introduces this idea in filmic form, in accordance with Levinas regarding the primacy of the other and her indispensability for the future. On one point, however, they disagree. Where Levinas insists on the performative movement of being towards the other, what he calls “saying” (*dire*), these movements in Marker’s film have necessarily already been captured or “said” (*dit*). The *saying* is the dimension of the ethical for Levinas, although it is inevitably transformed into the *said* once uttered, where it loses its eventfulness.⁷⁸ The juxtaposition of Levinas’s theoretical *saying* of the other with Marker’s artistically shown *said*, suggests that the *said* does not imperatively reduce the alterity of the other: she may exist still.

As distinct from Hegel’s, Husserl’s, and even Sartre’s notion of the other; Levinas radically conceives of the Other (*Autre* or *Autrui*) as an absolute other, foreign to extrapolation from the self/same.⁷⁹ One of Levinas’s earliest formulations of the other appears in the final pages of 1947’s *Existence and Existents*. It erupts in the text at the point where the solitary subject can go no further:

The relationship with the other is not to be conceived as a bond with another ego, nor as a comprehension of the other which makes his alterity disappear, nor as a communion with him around some third term.

It is not possible to grasp the alterity of the other, which is to shatter the definitiveness of the ego, in terms of any of the relationships which characterize light. Let us anticipate a moment, and say that the plane of

⁷⁸ Simon Critchley, introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, ed. Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 18.

⁷⁹ Levinas distinguishes the terminology of the “*Autre*” (from the Same to the Other) and the “*Autrui*” (from Self to Other), which are nevertheless commonly rendered as “the other” in English translation, sometimes with Levinas’s French term included parenthetically. See for example: Emmanuel Levinas, “The Servant and her Master,” trans. Michael Holland, chap. 8 in *The Levinas Reader*, ed. Seán Hand (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1989), 156. I use the generic “the other” throughout: a thorough analysis of the specificities of Levinas’s various orthographies are beyond the scope of this project.

eros allows us to see that the other *par excellence* is the feminine, through which a world behind the scenes prolongs the world.⁸⁰

Here, Levinas is proposing an otherness that cannot be effaced, because it is not subsumed in relationship, comprehension, or community. Phenomenology fails to grasp the other for its insistence on light and attendant characterizations: revealing, clarifying, illuminating. But for Levinas, ethics happens in the dark - the nocturnal time and space of the *il y a* ("there is"). The bare nakedness of Being is encountered in the *il y a*, attesting to the significance of shadows. Levinas identifies both art and the other as points of access to the *il y a*. Levinas further affirms, without elaboration, that the other is the feminine.

This controversial claim is not without its detractors, most notably Simone de Beauvoir's disavowal of Levinas's sexism and Luce Irigaray, who argues that Levinas reduces the feminine to the male object of desire.⁸¹ Levinas's final words of *Existence and Existents*, prior to the conclusion, undeniably implicate the feminine as a means to an end. That is, that the asymmetrical intersubjectivity inherent to the relationship with the other allows "the possibility of being fecund and (to anticipate what we shall examine later) having a son."⁸² This comes as a surprise for such a staunchly Platonist view has no precedent within the text.

Nevertheless, elsewhere in the preceding pages the other is referred to in the masculine, i.e., "He is what I am not."⁸³ Therefore, one can conclude that the other's alterity is not reducible to sex, although *eros* shows the feminine as the other *par excellence*. Levinas does not refer here to a "woman" or the "female," though later texts use the former vocabulary interchangeably with "the feminine." French philosopher and Levinas scholar Catherine Chaliier interprets Levinas in publications such as *Difficult Freedom* (1976) to attribute characteristics to the feminine such as hospitality. This analysis stems from Levinas's characterization of the feminine as interiority ("the return to oneself") and dwelling; therefore the feminine sex is unique in its ability to welcome.⁸⁴ "The woman," Levinas continues in 1961's *Totality and Infinity*, because of feminine introversion, "is the *condition for recollection*, the interiority of the Home, and inhabitation."⁸⁵

⁸⁰ Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2001), 86.

⁸¹ See especially: Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H. M. Parshley (1953; repr. New York: Vintage Books, 1989); Luce Irigaray, "The Fecundity of the Caress," chap. 12 in *Face to Face with Levinas*, ed. Richard A. Cohen (Albany: SUNY Press, 1986); Luce Irigaray, "Questions to Emmanuel Levinas: On the Divinity of Love," trans. Margaret Whitford, chap. 6 in *Re-Reading Levinas*, ed. Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley (New York: Continuum International Publishing, 1991), 115.

⁸² Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, 100.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 98.

⁸⁴ Catherine Chaliier, "Ethics and the Feminine," chap. 7 in *Re-Reading Levinas*, 122-123.

⁸⁵ Emmanuel Levinas, "The Dwelling," in *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991), 155. Emphasis mine.

Perhaps it is unwise to retroactively understand the feminine in *Existence and Existents* as possessing these same qualities of hospitality and introversion. However, even at this relatively early phase of Levinas's career, the relationship with the (feminine) other is endowed with an explicit distance and locus. It is possible that Levinas, despite his intentions to distance himself from the Western philosophical tradition nevertheless employs the Platonic idea of the *chora*, theorized by both Jacques Derrida and Julia Kristeva in the contemporary era, as an outside-the-polis receptacle that is simultaneously mother and nurse.⁸⁶ Woman, according to this tradition, is the only one who can offer hospitality for her inherent exteriority and receptiveness. Perhaps Levinas is more deeply entrenched in this tradition than he believed. Furthermore, he willingly acknowledges that his notion of the feminine relates to a trope of modesty (and "hiding"), while rejecting "feminine mystery" for its conventionality.⁸⁷

The other in Marker's film is obviously feminine, and is unquestionably the male hero's object of desire. She welcomes the hero again and again as a host, as he leaves behind his present for another. His travel through time is contrasted to her temporal stasis. She literally becomes his "condition for recollection," as the mental image of her face propels him to the past. The hero is drawn through time, as though by a magnet, to the woman. "He is never sure whether he seeks her out or is sent," asserts the narrator. With each ejection to the past, he is drawn away from himself as assuredly as from his own present.

Love is never made manifest, despite the voice over's intonation that "a deep unspoken trust will grow between them." More overtly sexual, the memorable awakening of the woman in bed is relayed to the spectator in such detail, her smile so intimately addressing the camera, that the viewer must believe for a moment that this action is observed through the hero's eyes, through his position of proximity. And yet this proximity expresses an insurmountable distance. Levinas laments: "eros where, in the other's proximity, distance is integrally maintained, and whose pathos is made of both this proximity and this duality."⁸⁸ Elsewhere Levinas describes the insatiability of love – the love object can never be consumed or internalized, not with a hundred devouring kisses or a thousand longing caresses. The hero's desires, first to retrieve a mental image of her, and then for the woman herself, revolve around her. He falls towards her, in the vertigo of his decentering – in the inexorable movement away from the self.

This decentering of the individual is crucial to Levinas's thought as well, as the "I" moves always towards the other. Levinas views this transcendence of the self as the positive outcome of the interaction with the other: "It is in eros that transcendence can be conceived as something radical, which brings to the ego caught up in being, ineluctably returning to itself, something else than this return, can free it of its shadow..."

⁸⁶ Jacques Derrida, "Khōra," in *On the Name*, ed. Thomas Dutoit, trans. David Wood, John P. Leavey, Jr., and Ian McLeod (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995); Julia Kristeva, "The Semiotic *Chora* Ordering the Drives," in *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).

⁸⁷ Emmanuel Levinas, "Time and the Other," trans. Richard A. Cohen, chap. 3 in *The Levinas Reader*, 49.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 54.

Asymmetrical intersubjectivity is the locus of transcendence in which the subject, while preserving its structure's subject, has the possibility of not inevitably returning to itself."⁸⁹ Both eros and asymmetrical intersubjectivity, desire for and relationship with the other, allow the subject to break free from the cycle of its endless return to self. At last with the other, the subject is given the possibility of escaping the dialectical temporality of the instant, the stance of the "I" for a time that is otherwise. The other, in her capacity as host, welcomes the subject to another site, external to self-consciousness.

Through his learned ability to live in the past with the other, *La jetée*'s hero is finally able to travel to the future. He does not rest there however; rather, he passes through the world's future with the precise objective of retrieving a power supply for his society. He finds that this is not *his* future. Given the choice by that society's inhabitants, he prefers a future in the past with the woman he loves rather than a world without her. Although the past is familiar to him as the world of his childhood, his future life there is unknowable as it promises a profound and prolonged intersubjective relationship with the other. "The other is the future. The very relationship with the other is the relationship with the future,"⁹⁰ Levinas writes. It is "always still to come (*à venir*). The caress is the anticipation of this pure future (*avenir*) without content."⁹¹ The future is "always still" ... a stasis only in that the goal is never achieved. The relationship with the other opens onto a truly unknown future, not extrapolated from cognition of the present - in an ultimate departure from the self/same.

But this transcendence would perhaps mean little if it stopped at this ontological position without describing what the subject touches in the departure from self. Levinas elaborates further in 1962's "Transcendence and Height":

the 'putting into question' of the I is not a special case of self-knowledge, for it opens the infinite process of scrupulousness which causes the I to coincide less and less with itself. The situation so little resembles war that it is ethical. So little does the Other deliver himself or herself over to me that he does not fit into the adequate idea of being but only in the inadequation par excellence of the idea of the Infinite.

In this way, we rediscover the Cartesian itinerary, which moves from the Cogito to the World by passing through the idea of the infinite. In a more general way, the priority of the idea of the infinite is asserted over the idea of being and ontology.⁹²

Levinas here continues his project of radicalizing the other – not only is he or she unapprehendable as an extrapolation of the self, the other eludes the category of being altogether. The other draws the "I" out of the narrow confines of the instant; the "I"

⁸⁹ Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, 99-100.

⁹⁰ Levinas, "Time and the Other," 44.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁹² Emmanuel Levinas, "Transcendence and Height," chap. 2, in *Basic Philosophical Writings*, ed. Adriaan T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 12.

repositions the other before the self, and the infinite over being. In a sense, however, the asymmetrical responsibility of the self to the other is always already established. The vertiginous movement away from the “I” towards the other, the fact of *saying*, the very desire to expose oneself before the other, already testifies to this responsibility. *Saying* is a primordial bond to the other, in that speech first requires responsibility to the other before it can be *said*. “Saying,” Levinas writes, “is therefore a way of signifying prior to all experience.”⁹³

Levinas insists that this divorcing of the “I” from itself by the centripetal force of the other is ethical. He specifies that “the situation so little resembles war that it is ethical.” The reference to war is not unusual given Levinas’s historical context. For Levinas, war is synonymous with captivity. He characterizes the “I” as being shackled to its being throughout *Existence and Existents*, written during his five-year imprisonment during the Second World War. The other, then, represents freedom from the inevitable solitary return to self and the present.

Levinas affirms moreover, that in contrast to Descartes, the infinite he is interested in is manifested in the human rather than God. Levinas nevertheless retains an acknowledged structural similarity to Cartesian thought:

And yet, at the end of the Third Meditation – a text which I have always exploited – Descartes comes to admire the divine Majesty, as if, suddenly, he had glimpsed a face behind the arguments... One then suddenly sees that the reflection upon the idea of Infinity places Descartes before something which reflects majesty and which we can call the face. I would just like to add that, as I see it, it is not a question of God encountered outside of humans.⁹⁴

On a formal level, the other’s eruption is similar to Descartes’s passage through the infinite at the end of the Third Meditation. A notable distinction, however, is that Levinas’s passage through the infinite is not a detour but the climax of his thought. For Levinas, it is a question of coming face to face with the infinite in humans, rather than in God. The face to face encounter with the other is the ethical relation *par excellence*.

Keeping in mind Levinas’s analogy of Descartes glimpsing a “face” behind reason, the encounter need not be strictly visual although it certainly implies proximity. The woman’s face, exposed in its nakedness at the beginning of *La jetée*, appears to the hero as a *face* – a glimpse of the beyond in the midst of horror. Her face is fleeting and uncertain to him, but is impressed on the viewer’s perception. Echoing Levinas, Gilles Deleuze writes concerning the effect of the close-up: “When a face that we have just seen in the middle of a crowd is detached from its surroundings, put into relief, it is as if we

⁹³ Levinas, “God and philosophy,” chap. 8, in *Basic Philosophical Writings*, 183.

⁹⁴ From Levinas’s discussion following the presentation of his text “Transcendence and Height,” in 1962 to the Société Française de Philosophie. Transcription of conference proceedings published in Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings*, 25.

were suddenly face to face with it.”⁹⁵ This face, immobilized on the screen for twenty-five seconds, is a *saying* that becomes a *said* after it has passed. Yet it retains its uncertainty, the alterity of unknowability, for the hero.

At last the enigmatic character of the other arises. And yet, “at last” suggests a chronology that the other evades. The other’s temporality cannot be understood in terms of a subjective solitary time, or art’s false suspension of “real time.” The other introduces the possibility of a future although he or she is never fully present and arises from the beyond past of the Infinite. Notably, *La jetée*’s heroine similarly eludes the hero’s certainty, and issues forth from a shadowy space and time. Levinas maintains and extends the unknowability of the other in 1965’s “Enigma and Phenomenon.” The other does not truly appear as a phenomenon, rather, she disturbs order as a trace:

A lover makes an advance, but the provocative or seductive gesture has, if one likes, not interrupted the decency of the conversation and attitudes; it withdraws as lightly as it has slipped in... This way the Other has of seeking my recognition while preserving his *incognito*, disdaining recourse to a wink-of-the-eye of understanding or complicity, this way of manifesting himself without manifesting himself, we call enigma.⁹⁶

The enigma is that which withdraws before entering. Again Levinas has recourse to an erotic example, telling in its discretion. The sole evidence of the enigma’s passing is the trace she has tried to erase – to remove all indication that she has passed, for the enigma is always past. “By a supreme anachronism,” Levinas acknowledges, “the past of the Other must never have been present.”⁹⁷

In her infinite character, the woman of *La jetée* has no past precisely because she is beyond past and has never been present to the hero. He is never sure whether she is real, even when she is beside him, and especially when he is alone in his present. But she seems to become exponentially more real in her enigmatic disruption. The moments at the crux of the film when she awakens in bed nearly evade the viewer’s perception: can we be sure that she moves, so quickly has the moment passed? Her awakening disturbs the ordered succession of still images as subtly as the blink of an eye, but as explosively as the eruption of the unknown. This moment of movement is the enigma – the viewer recognizes the heroine’s, the other’s, passing only through the trace of uncertainty that lingers. It is as though we catch a glimpse of her face, and beyond that, infinity fully exposed, for just a moment.

Perhaps film is a medium whose essential movement is tracing rather than appearing – an image is past as soon as it appears. This film, however, delays the erasure to create an intervallic vacuum. The moment of the woman’s evanescence differs from other moments because in its static context, movement becomes enigmatic. As the narrator of *La jetée* says; “Moments to remember are just like other moments. They are

⁹⁵ Gilles Deleuze, “The affection-image Face and close-up,” chap. 6 in *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 96. Originally published as *Cinéma 2, L’Image-temps* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1985).

⁹⁶ Levinas, “Enigma and Phenomenon,” chap. 4 in *Basic Philosophical Writings*, 70.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 72.

only made memorable by the scars they leave.” This moment is memorable because its subtle movement signals a rupture. It is as though after all that has been *said* in static images, at last in bed, in the nakedness of morning, she is *saying*.

Here we run into a crucial difference between Marker’s exposition of speech and Levinas’s. No one speaks in *La jetée*, save an ambient announcement at Orly Airport, and the unintelligible German susurrations of the underground experimenters. Music is often employed for dramatic effect however, and extra-diegetic sound is introduced sparingly. Recall that the film begins with the inhuman sound of a departing airplane. Nevertheless, a disembodied voice guides the spectator through the narrative. It is saying all that needs to be said with words, the rest is left to the language of images. In this film, with its distinctive formal employment of still images, each image has the character of a static utterance – a discrete *said* rather than a fluid *saying*. And yet, the film is no less poignant for the near omission of imagistic *saying*. Although a film is an act accomplished, it is in every viewing nevertheless *saying* as it spins on its reels. This film, *La jetée*, says that if it were a story, it would be about love.

Conclusion

The time that introduced this thesis was characterized as a mark of the director's generosity: Chris Marker, through *La jetée*'s still frames, gives the viewer time to see. In defiance of "real time" that rushes through the world, and in opposition to the standard cinematic "reel time" that mimics its pace, *La jetée* lingers. At last the image's relentless charge forward in time is suspended, if only for a moment. Yet the still frame is not converted into a painting whose texture can be examined at leisure, or a sculpture to be circumambulated. Its closest kinship is to a photograph, and even then the still is something other – part object, part image. The still's successor will invade the screen, perhaps coexist for a few seconds in a slow dissolve, and then crystallize. The photogram remains on the film strip, but its projected image is inevitably effaced.

It is proper that this thesis should conclude with ef-face-ment, given the primacy of the face in *La jetée*. The heroine's face, the face of the other in Levinasian terms, fills the screen and the viewer's vision far longer than any other single image. In addition to appearing longest, it is first – before all other faces, establishing its importance. Finally, it is alone on screen and unique: the narrator states that "the face he [the hero] had seen was to be the only peacetime image to survive the war."⁹⁸ Of longest duration, foremost, and solitary; this is the face that endures in the mind of the spectator and in the memory of the hero long after it disappears from the screen. It represents a past that the hero longs to recapture, a trauma too painful to recall, and a future so unimaginable that the hero can never be certain it is real. All of these significations are born on its surface, in the nuances of its features, in its unreadable gesture. Like film, the woman's face is both object and image – the actual, warm, face of a human being, and a picture so forceful it draws the hero through time.

The mental image of the face – materialized by the hero in his present - refers both to the past and to the future; this is the argument of chapter one. In its dialectical pull, this memory acts like the instant that Levinas describes in *Existence and Existents*. The instant is the site where the being takes on its Being, to which it is nevertheless shackled. The existent *is* in the instant, the "I" articulates the self through that momentary present. Similarly, *La jetée*'s hero takes on the traumatic memory which he has replaced with the image of the woman's face; it is a latent memory that must be retrieved. The memory's many significations and temporalities are circumscribed in the face – given in an instant though articulated through time. Memory and the instant are modes of time travel then, as transportive as any time machine imagined in science fiction.

Film, in contrast, is both a vehicle that carries the viewer away to its own space-time, and a suspension of time. The second chapter considers Levinas's characterization

⁹⁸ Chris Marker, "The Script of Chris Marker's *La jetée*," trans. Dino Franco Felluga, <http://web.ics.purdue.edu/~felluga/sf/ScriptLaJetee.html>. Various English translations of Marker's script exist, including several approved by Marker for publication and dubbing. However, these versions tend to depart from the French original. This transcription seems to be the most faithful to the intentions of the original.

of the time of art as “the meanwhile.” Levinas states that works of art – including the temporal arts - are statues confined to a state of dying without death. Yet through art, he allows, the viewer may have access to the *il y a* (the “there is”), the nocturnal space and time of “being in general.” *La jetée*’s various allusions to statues and depiction of the physical museum as a sort of mausoleum has resonance with Levinas’s thought. One of Marker’s earlier films, *Even Statues Die*, indicates an alternative to the eternal dying Levinas describes. Together, Levinas’s and Marker’s thought resuscitates the trope of cinema as a dying away, while subverting the inherent negativity of that mortality.

Finally, the third chapter concerns the time of the other. In *La jetée*, she is the woman first seen on the pier. Noting the hero’s obsession with the image of her face, the scientific experimenters of his world ask him to retrieve it. As memory is correlated to a specific moment, they think that the hero might be able to reinhabit that past time. The hero’s assignment begins with the search for the image of her face. But slowly, after various meetings, they fall in love. His returns to her are prompted now by his desire for her *face* – the physical object of her face, and the face to face relationship she makes possible. This interaction represents the apex of Levinas’s ethical thought: the fundamental encounter is with the Infinite in man rather than divinities. The absolute other is unknown and unknowable, and she disrupts order as an enigma to grant the possibility of a future. *La jetée*’s heroine erupts into movement for a few brief seconds in the film... tantalizingly, and almost imperceptibly. However, because the other can not be understood as a presence, because she is never fully present, her face must be effaced. As an enigma, she withdraws before entering. Only a trace left behind by her erasure indicates her passage. The image of the heroine’s face on the screen fades too –the melancholy frames bereft of her visage alone testify to her past projection there. And yet her face persists on the film strip.

Chris Marker gives the viewer time to see the other’s face. He is not as generous with his own: notoriously private, known to the public only through pseudonyms, Marker has learned how to disappear completely. But the other shows that complete effacement is impossible. Marker leaves a trace. His face is not an image in projection, nor a physical reality save for an intimate circle. But through *La jetée*, and now with Levinas too, perhaps the nakedness of his face is encountered by the viewer.

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