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Synopsis

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A Play of Memory: Chris Marker's Sans Soleil

Catherine Summerhayes

Memories must make do with their delirium, with their drift

Chris Marker, Sans Soleil (1983)

Through the trope of "play", this paper explores Chris Marker's interpretation of memory as time and space in his experimental essay film Sans Soleil. My discussion draws primarily on Gadamer's concept of the work of art as "transformative play" as I seek to describe two particular aspects of the film: firstly, the formal construction in terms of its generic arrangement of images, both visual and aural, which Marker uses to make his film, and which we see projected onscreen; and secondly, the film's content which represents both the process and social practice of memory. My analysis does not formally draw on previous theories of reception. I propose rather another way of understanding how we use film as social practice. Gadamer's idea of "transformative play" offers a way of understanding further the overall experience of film as a means for society to act out social issues in the subjunctive, "as if" mode of behaviour, and in the case of this film, an acting out of various kinds of remembering.

My discussion of memory play in Sans Soleil also serves as a reflection on how film might be understood as signifying in developing an epistemology for memory itself. Gadamer's concept of "recognition" further contributes a conceptual device for exploring how a film might operate to provide a representation of the world as something with which we are very familiar no matter how surprising or disconcerting. Gadamer suggests that:

In recognition what we know emerges, from all the chance and variable circumstances that condition it and is grasped in its essence. It is known as something. (Gadamer 1989: 114)

This idea of recognition correlates with how memories can emerge from an awareness of the process of recognition itself. Our personal "recognition" of sounds and images and the links which Sans Soleil makes between them, is indeed the process that a viewer needs for understanding the associative memories which are displayed in the film as relevant to our own understanding of the world. Recognition is the way in which we identify Marker's filmic world as part of our own. Sans Soleil's audiovisual images become part of our own negotiation and finally, our own "remembering" of the stories embedded in the film.

Play/ing

Within the relationships between people who experience film we can find the parameters of various kinds of behaviour which have been described as play. Roger Callois describes four categories of play, two of which pertain to games, one called "ilinx" which induces a "dizzy" feeling, and one which involves mimicry and simulation (Schechner 2002: 84). This last one is relevant to all kinds of representation, but what is more interesting in the context of making and receiving films, however, is the process of play. I want to make a fine distinction here between an understanding of play as a category of behaviour and the process of play itself: playing. This distinction is important because it allows a move away from reifying play as an activity achieved in the past. Play can then be described in terms of "playing", of "playful", of behaviour in the subjunctive mode of the "as if" world which exists at the shared boundary between imagination, memory and historical reality.

There are two concepts of "playing" which are particularly relevant to thinking about film as a form of playing, because they both draw on the idea of play as communication at the level of social practice. Firstly there is Gregory Bateson's idea of play as communicative behaviour, an idea derived from his study of children playing games. In this understanding of play, the "frame of playing" is primary, and players must adhere to the rules that initiate play in order to play and to be accepted as players of a game. These rules mean that it is possible to distinguish between "play" and "non-play" (Bateson 1980: 139), even though the rules of the game can at times be open to debate and innovation. He describes this playing with rules as one of "the paradoxes of abstraction" without which life would be "an endless interchange of stylised messages, a game with rigid rules, unrelieved by change or humour" (Bateson 1972: 193). In this sense, although play involves rules, according to Bateson, playing can nevertheless be understood as a source of experimental behaviour and innovative creativity. In the context of this idea of play, Sans Soleil experiments with how far the filmic form can be pushed before its content is incomprehensible. The convention which is retained most obviously is that of the spoken, explicatory narrative. One filmic "rule" then is kept while other conventions, especially that of filmic continuity of image and time, are overturned. As I discuss further on, the viewer's recognition of the esoteric time/image structure of the essay film, for example, would allow easier and quicker access to a further recognition of the interplay between audiovisual memories and processes of personal remembering.

Gadamer's concept of play and playing both includes and extends Bateson's idea of play as experimental communicative behaviour. In his exploration of the "work of art" as play, Gadamer describes the hermeneutic
potential that exists in continuing receptions of a work of art over time in terms of transformative processes that depend on time and place for their effect. (Gadamer 1986: 100-101). Bateson's idea works best in the micro-context of individual events of communication between individual people and it is interesting from the point of view of film studies that his idea of "frames of playing" might also be of use in determining and describing audience perception of those categories of films known as filmic "genres". Bateson's primary interest, however, is the conceptualisation and creation of complex frames of play rather than with their potential for explaining and redeploying the broader social significance of a particular "playful" event. Gadamer's concept of play is, on the other hand, directly concerned with particular examples of a playful event, i.e. the "work of art". For Gadamer, it is not so much the "playful" attitude of creative artists and their audiences that is of interest, as the broad mode of behaviour that is concerned with "playing": "the mode of being of play becomes significant. For play has its own essence, "independent of the consciousness of those who play" (Gadamer 1989: 102). With these words, Gadamer draws attention to two aspects of play that are directly relevant to the study of film as art.

The first is that the essence of play can be discerned within the content and form of a text. When a projected film is understood as text and/or a work of art, then it too can embody the essence of play. The second aspect is contained in the idea that the experience of playing can perhaps extend below the level of consciousness, and that this subconscious experience of playing happens when the (filmic) text imposes its own rules of perception on the viewer. For Gadamer, play is not so much a subjective understanding of and playing out of rules as a mediation that is able to access greater levels of knowledge about the historically real world. He focuses on the historical and political process of playing. The "players" of film (filmmakers and film audiences) come consciously or subconsciously to know something that they did not know before they viewed a particular filmic text. This knowledge comes from the pansensual experience evoked by film's own special audiovisual medium.

When viewing a film, we enter into an "as if", subjunctive mood of being; we enter into a contract with the film which we are watching that it is a "work of art/creativity" (sometimes in a very broad loose sense!), invoking our particular "playful" response: that what we see and hear has some truthful relation with the historically real world, in form if not in content. In Victor Turner's words, we enter the "liminal phase" of experience: "in the subjunctive mood of culture, the mood of maybe, might-be, as-if, hypothesis, fantasy, conjecture, desire.." (Turner 1990: 11) If play is understood to be liminal in Turner's sense of "as if" behaviour, then it becomes possible to describe further some of the ways in which playing belongs simultaneously to the world of a text and to the world in which everyday life is lived. Once we have played out the liminal experience of a film, we will never again be that person who can claim no knowledge of what the form and content of a film shows and suggests to us. As Gadamer notes: "The work of art has its true being in the fact that it becomes an experience that changes the person who experiences it" (Gadamer 1989: 102).

But how do we come to this kind of experiential knowledge that is a result of the "playing" of a particular film? Gadamer uses the process of recognition as the key link between the "as if" experience of a work of art and our knowledge of the historically real world: "What one experiences in a work of art and what one is directed towards is rather how true it is, i.e. to what extent one knows and recognises something and oneself" (Gadamer 1989: 102). This recognition is not simply of a new sense of knowing of something known before, not even of a new way of understanding something known before. Again, in Gadamer's words: "The joy of recognition is rather that more becomes known than is already known" (Gadamer 1989: 102). He then goes on to describe how this kind of recognition "emerges, as if through an illumination...and is grasped in its essence" (Gadamer 1989: 102). He further notes that this process of recognition is "the central motif of Platonism" (Gadamer 1989: 103) and that its experience can be one of feeling that one has been able to link what one knows to an idealised realm of knowledge about the real. The playing of a single film to many different people, however, presents a clear case that such an idealised realm of knowledge is going to be different for different individuals through time and space; the clearly subjective and individualised playing of film thus challenges any Platonic claim that such knowledge can be universally classified as essential. Recognition, then, can be rather thought of as a personal correlation between the experience of playing a film and our familiarity with the historically real world and categories that we have previously used for describing it. One of the ways in which film viewers initially "recognise" how to respond to a film is via the filmic genre it most closely adheres to.

With its blurring of fiction and nonfiction and loose narrative structure, Sans Soleil presents a considerable challenge for this initial form of recognition that presupposes there to be some essential categorical description of filmic form. In Sans Soleil, the dream-like narration and the wildly different visual images of people and animals which it links together across time and space defy concepts of play that adhere to rigid frames or conventions of widely recognised filmic genres. There is one genre however, whose loose and porous parameters can be applied to this film as a frame of playing in Bateson's sense. Michael Renov comments as follows on the indeterminacy of the essay form: "Neither focus of meaning - subject nor historical object - anchors discourse so much as it problematizes or interrogates it" (Renov 2004: 70).

The essay form then is one which defies easy categorisation as a specific genre and which allows immense freedom of expressive platforms. It defies boundaries as it looks for continua of truthful expression of ideas within the tropes of fiction and non-fiction, art and science, convention and the avant-garde. The pansensual vehicle of film then offers a relatively new and rich palette for the sometimes mild and sometimes fierce self-reflexive polemic of the essay, previously thought exclusive to literature. This resonates with Adorno's claim that "the essay is not intimidated by the depraved profundity which claims that truth and history are incompatible" (Adorno 1984: 158). Such words certainly support Marker's filmmaking approach as an explicit search for truth within the mêlée of both collective and individual memories and those inscribed by official histories. Marker tracks constantly between individuals and communities, and his own involvement. He people and that archived by established historical documents. Sans Soleil's wide-ranging juxtaposition of rich images and carefully crafted soundscapes allows the viewer a very broad perceptual platform: people can trace many personal and interpersonal narratives and these can change on each viewing over time, even more, I suggest, than the differences in perception that happen with other film genres. On these grounds, Sans Soleil fits beautifully into the category of essay film. The filmmaker can experiment and improvise, as can the viewer. How you each play with ideas and stories, though, depends on the text. This filmic text becomes the stuff of memories not just for the maker but also for the viewer.
The essay film then can be described as a genre that over-rides, or embraces many others, and whose recognition as such can be a key to the complex process of playing/spectatorship which is involved in viewing Sans Soleil. There is in the making, the editing together, this film, a frame of playfulness in its simplest, most joyous sense. The "rule breaking" license provided by the essay genre, however, also contributes to that process of "transformative play". In Gadamer's words: "the work of art has its true being in the fact that it becomes an experience that changes the person who experiences it" (Gadamer 1989: 102).

In previous work, I have explored film as transformative play through Australian artist/filmmaker Tracey Moffatt's film beDevil (Summerhayes 2007). This work plays both with stereotypes of Aboriginal people, and with the genres of fiction and non-fiction film. Moffatt also, and very significantly, plays with the boundaries that are seen to exist between film and visual art. She plays across cultures. The playing that occurs in Moffatt's work offers new possibilities for understanding the complexity in relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. It re-describes these relationships by offering multiple, not simply "double", descriptions of how such relationships are experienced. She uses "old" stereotypes through which we can easily recognise people, places and modes of behaviour to create new depictions of people, and "old" ways of categorising film in order to comment on new rules of playing. Her texts clearly articulate their relationship with the historical world. They play; they move "to and fro" (Gadamer 1989: 103) between different cultures; they work as transformative negotiations between people and between different and perhaps new ways of understanding our world. The transformative play that is involved in Sans Soleil, however, is concerned with our use of memory and its processes as ways of understanding what at first appears "strange" in the world around us.

Sans Soleil

Without entering into an overly auteurist analysis of this film, it is nevertheless both useful and interesting to briefly address the stylistic choices and narrative motivation of its highly innovative filmmaker. An introduction to Chris Marker offers an insight into how this particular film passes through the boundaries that mark personal and the public spheres of experience and opens up a discussion on how Marker explicitly uses a mix of memory and imagination to "reveal" aspects of the historically real world. Legends describe Chris Marker in terms of high romance and mystery. He appears not to mind the legends and indeed encourages them, giving few interviews, no details of his personal life and by taking the arts of obfuscation and confusion as his tools of trade. Jaime N. Christley quotes Marker's reply to his fellow artist and web-designer Mikkel Aaland who wanted to record an interview with him in the 1990s when Marker was working on his interactive CD-ROM Immemory:

No interviews. Instead, if you must write something, use your imagination. Place us on a boat on the Nile. We are drunk. It's your story (Christley 2002).

Christley goes on to say that he does not think that Marker is advocating lying so much as expressing his "chief fascination" with "the nature of truth, how it is perceived, understood... how it is created..." (Christley 2002). In his work as poet, journalist, filmmaker and multimedia/installation artist, Marker is ever looking for ways of presenting the truth and what it means to him and to different people. He does not hesitate to use fiction in the service of non-fiction, the past in order to inform the present, memory in the service of the new real. In his own words:

What interests me is history, and politics interests me only to the degree that it represents the mark history makes on the present (Marker in Douhaire & Rivoire 2003: 239).

Clearly, consciously focused pathways of thought are part of Marker's creative work. Lupton describes the way in which Marker's travel films in particular adhere to a rigorously thought-out approach to the world and to society:

The distinctive, disembodied "it" who speaks or is implied in Marker's travel commentaries measures this distance by tracing his own displacement in the effort to show and enter imaginatively into the living worlds of other nations and cultures, reversing expectations by perceiving strangeness as familiarity and depicting the routine habits of his own culture as bizarre and outlandish rites (Lupton 2005: 44).

The "distance" that Lupton speaks of here is the distance of difference between familiar and unfamiliar as distinguished by the traveller. In Marker's words:

What we call past is somehow similar to what we call abroad. It is not a matter of distance; it is the passing of a boundary (Marker in Lupton 2005: 158).

These words well capture the meaning of cultural, spatial and temporal differences as perceived by Marker and which he explores in his films. These differences create the boundaries between present and past, memory and forgetting that he explores over and over again in his films, often through the trope of travelling through exotically different cultures to his own.

A Filmic Template for Playing Memory
Here are Marker's wonderful words on history and memory quoted in his earlier fictional film, La Jetée (1962):

Nothing sorts out memories from ordinary moments. Later on they do claim remembrance when they show their scars.

These scars of memory are what Marker presents to us in Sans Soleil. Marker's use of the word "scars" implies that memory can be described as a response, indeed often a painful response to life experiences. This implication is taken up by the website Silverthreaded which names its comprehensive viewing notes on Sans Soleil "Wounded Time" (2002). Such a bodily, emotional response is generally referred to as "affect". Marker and his film do not distinguish between representational practices and affect. In her discussion of trauma in the context of the visual arts, Jill Bennett refers to the "experience of trauma and representation (which) also subsumes early work on trauma and memory" (Bennett 2003: 27). The experience of Sans Soleil, however, slips through such an opposition and thereby constitutes an argument that perceived differences between representation and affect simply refer to different but related epistemologies for describing, communicating both to ourselves and to others, the various workings of memory.

In the context of how memory is both reflected on and acted out through Sans Soleil, it is significant that we draw from the above biographical information that Marker's concepts of "revelation" and "truth" are concerned with a careful negotiation between a form of expressionistic representation of the workings of the imagination and the conventions of history. In other words, he weaves his version of the truth—in this case his interpretation of the processes of memory—from flights of imaginative correlations and unequivocal statements about the historically real world. He achieves this difficult epistemology by tripping the boundaries which generally are perceived between fiction and non-fiction film, by, for example, combining archival footage and historical detail with a narration which is based on a fictional letters received and sent. In Sans Soleil, Marker mends wildly dissociative non-fiction footage with a fictional narration in order to make an audiovisual poem/essay that explicitly implicates the historically real world with that of the imagination. The film is a complex work of art and fits well within the broad and eclectic format known as "the essay film", as described above.

The issue of time and memory is currently being explored to a large extent in terms of "machinic time" (Hansen 2006: 255). One of the most interesting insights comes from Mark B.N. Hansen's exploration of Bernard Stiegler's description of three different kinds of memory: retractive, secondary and tertiary. Tertiary memory is the most relevant to film and "...can be defined as experience that has been recorded and is available to consciousness without ever having been lived by that consciousness" (Hansen 2006: 255). In other words, we are able to integrate into our memories, our data-base of our own experiences, events, people, places and times that have been experienced by others and which are represented as experienced by others by means of various representational technologies such as film, photography and literature. This is one of the most powerful ways in which the filmic experience in general becomes part of our social practice at both the level of the individual and of society. If we accept that the mechanism of tertiary memory exists, then it provides a way for understanding how we can believe something we only experience through representation. In the case of Sans Soleil, the mechanism of tertiary memory can be used to reinforce the idea that this film is both a playing out of memory, a visualisation of memory as personal and public history and a spoken narrative commentary that weaves the playing out and the visualisation together in such a poignant way that we can move beyond what we see and hear on screen and in turn weave together our own awareness of how memory works. The images of Sans Soleil become our own memories but they are also there to be "recognised" as images that should or could justifiably be identified as part of our own world.

Marker's montage style of editing is a crucial element in how we perceive this film. The colours, the mixing of archival footage, of television images with observational sequences of market places or of people sleeping in a speeding train, as well as the length of time that each image appears before us are integral to the very story of this film. As we are carried further and further along with Marker's filmic journey across continents and time, we are to a certain extent lifted into accepting the incongruities of place and time, of reflective and yet to some extent, disassociated commentary. Our acceptance of these very incongruities and disassociations certainly can be understood as part of the "suspension of disbelief" which we use when correlating filmic content with our own historical world.

Yet our very "suspension of disbelief" in this case is also an experience which correlates with the social practice of memory. We are acting out memories, both our own and Marker's as defined by the film. Richard Terdman well describes the "ability of memory" in the context of how current technologies and postmodern sensibilities lend themselves to an easy acceptance of apparently dissociative representations of the world in the contexts of time and space:

The everyday experience with which our mnemonic faculty familiarises us allows us, without the sort of psychic dissociation that would render us non-functional, to find ourselves instantaneously somewhere else. Less and less does incongruity surprise (Terdman 2003: 192).

He cites the Internet and World Wide Web as examples of how we now communicate with each other generally with disregard for the dislocations in time and space which are integral to their use. In a sense, our use of memory processes as both identity-based recollections and as a database for future constructions of reality resembles Web technology. And yet in 1982, before the current common, everyday usage of the Web, Marker created a film that carries us into an imaginary world where apparently incongruous links and leaps between time and place are made in such a way as to feel like the experiential logic of memory. What at first appear to be dissociative memory images, for example Marker's geographic and narrative leaps between Guinea Bissau and Japan, become part of an experience of associative memory and thought. Image duration is of particular interest as one of the ways in which
memory is both mimicked and lived in experiencing Sans Soleil, especially when the image is played over and over, and then captured in a freeze frame, as is the image of the woman in the African market place. Marker is a master of playing with the juxtaposition of still and moving images.

These moving images are sometimes "frozen," presenting to us what Garrett Stewart defines as a "photogram," for example the frozen stare at the camera which Marker captures from the woman in the market-place. His melding of still photographs and frozen filmic images into film sometimes even challenges us to know which is which. His earlier film, La Jetée (1962), is a film made of photographs, with only one image that moves. This series of images is bound together by a story told again by a single narrator, and yet the images are not simply illustrations of the story; in fact the story becomes more of a necessary clue to understanding the images whose complexities form the main focus of fascination for the viewer (certainly this one). In Sans Soleil, the style of narrative is similar to that in La Jetée and yet I suggest that the narration, this time, is equally dominant with the images - as we hurtle across the world with Marker's filmic avatar, Sandor Krasna, between Africa, Iceland and Japan, often accompanied by icons of death, e.g. skulls, skeletons, a murdered giraffe, rituals for dead animals and people. Stewart is concerned with how "photography engravés the death it resembles, [while] cinema defers the death whose escape it simulates" (Stewart 1999: xi). He distinguishes, then, very strongly between the photograph which appears in a film as a photograph, and the frozen photographic image taken from a film itself.

Stewart's exposition on the photogram is yet another example of the several ways in which film, with its edited form derived from a database of recorded sounds and visual images, necessarily implicates the process and application of memory. Hansen further describes how filmmakers use and apply their own and others' memories to create a film that in turn can trigger a viewer's integration of a film's sounds and images into an individualised database of memories—a base that can then be used as personally experienced knowledge about the world. Film, then, is a template for memory, in its making and textual structure and it relies on processes of memory for its interpretation. Both its making and reception depends on processes of memory.

The Joy of Recognition: "perceiving strangeness as familiarity"

One of the most moving images in Sans Soleil, one of those poignant images that "quicken the heart", is the above mentioned frozen frame of the woman in Praia, in the Cape Verde market place: the woman who refuses, except for one fleeting moment, to meet the eye of the camera. This frozen frame is one of the many many photograms (photographic images) that make up celluloid film and when projected at 24 frames a second, together give the illusion of continuous movement. Indeed, it is possible to understand Marker's filmmaking in Sans Soleil as an analogue precursor to what John Hess and Patricia Zimmerman name "digital image composting" where a filmmaker "hones images, piling them up on each other...for the creation of new imaginaries and realities" (Hess and Zimmerman 1999: 162). In this sense, Adorno claims that the essay form "does justice to the consciousness of non-identity... in accentuating the fragmentary, the partial rather than the total" (Adorno 1984: 157) supports the idea that the essay form itself implicitly offers filmmakers the opportunity for grounding their subject in the process of transformative play.

I suggest that viewing this particular process of playing with the duration of images on film, and their seemingly disconnected assemblage as a travelogue of thought more than of place, constitutes a process of transformation of the ways in which we imagine and live in the real world. Such a transformation is necessarily complex and is experienced at both an individual level and at the level of society. It is not enacted by simply viewing certain images and following the narrator's storyline. It is also achieved via the impact of mixing still image with moving, the distorted image with undistorted, and the mixing of disparate images with spoken narrative. This last kind of mixing is of a kind where the visual image is not merely illustrative and the spoken image is not merely explanatory. It is the very mix of the audio and visual that provokes an experience of uncertainty if not confusion.

The film disturbs conventional codes of filmic perception. The array of images and their accompanying sounds, the formal structure of the array of visual and auditory information and the disjunction between the information that we receive from them and their interpretation via the voice of the narrator all contribute to the ways in which this film plays with us. We are provoked to ask questions: "Why are we being shown this? What does this information add up to?" There are so many clues and so little time to take them all in. What can I recognize? What will I remember? As Tzvetan Todorov says: "Memory is too much. But in particular and for this reason, memory tells us how complicated things are" (2003: 199). He also describes how

In the image world anything can connect with anything. But some associations are more important than the randomized average (2003: 193).

An instance of this would be if I were to describe to you my memories of Sans Soleil. I remember the tone of the female narrator's voice, low and hypnotic, almost weary. I remember the giraffe falling and what I perceived as the obscenity of its wounds and the clumsiness of its killers. I remember the black woman in the marketplace whom Marker harassed with his camera until she finally looked him in the eye, the funeral pyre of discarded dolls in Tokyo, together with the ceremony for lost cats. My memories may not accurately reflect the film, but they document the film itself as a memory. I know Marker/Krasna is remembering, and I choose and discard some of his for mine, real or imagined, my secondary and tertiary memories of my past and Marker's/Krasna's.

Memory Play in Sans Soleil

For me, the trigger for memory in the film is the audiovisual motif described by Marker as "things that quicken the heart", when he refers to the 10th century Japanese author Sekishonan's list of so-called trivial glimpses and objects from everyday life. These are the memorabilia of Krasna's travels around which the film is constructed. From these sometimes incoherently edited visual scenes and objects, Marker weaves a narrative that reflects on death and memory, both of which involve a crossing of the boundary that exists in our perceptions of past and present - e.g. the passing of a ritual on Okinawa, the killing of a giraffe, a Japanese memorial for cats, the burning of old dolls.
Another boundary that he examines in this film is the unreliability of the visual image inferring perhaps the further lack in reliability associated with memory, with how we remember. His film can be regarded as an examination of memory and how it can be worked to produce both individual and social platforms for truth-saying.

Marker confronts us with images we would rather not see, or with images that lie, e.g. when we are shown a military award ceremony and learn, via the voiceover, that the recipient of the medal is in fact insulted by the level of award and deposes the officer awarding it to him a year later. He puts images together that themselves startle us and even more so through their juxtaposition. Towards the end of the film, Marker shows us some of his earlier images after they have gone through his Japanese friend's synthesiser, becoming distorted and garishly coloured. In this film, images are marked as critical to remembering, they are the "scars of memory" named in La Jetée, the only things perhaps that we have left of the past.

In the later film, Sans Soleil, he contemplates memory again through the voice of his avatar Krasna. Marker is playing with the idea of memory in the later film by using "things that quicken the heart" as the scars from which memories primarily emerge. With its oddly frenetic filmic imaging of still photographs, the earlier film is a meditation on how memories are made. The still photographs match and reinforce the story told by the film's narrator, they form the photographic "punctuation": "what I add to the photograph and what is nonetheless already there" (Barthes 1993: 55). They are the "scars" from which our scars are created. In real life these scars shift and change at the same times as do our memories, our stories of the past in the ever-newer contexts of the present. In a film, such scars are fixed in the time and place of the film; they remain the same even though the contexts of our interpretations change. It is interpretation that is at issue in the later film, Sans Soleil. In this film, Marker plays with our ability to interpret film, and in so doing he creates a text through which we can play out, in the "as if" mode of the interpretative imagination, our own experience of this specific filmic representation of memories as part of our own imaginative experience of the world and its history. Through these memories, some of which show us personal truths otherwise seldom available to us, we adjust our own actual and "tertiary" memories of the people, places and events.

The process of playing with interpretation, with memory and images, with death and the present is all a part of the meta-play involved in the experience of Sans Soleil. This is how the content of the film, the narrative "stuff" of the film, offers an opportunity for playing with our own ideas of death and memory, for using the film's images to extrapolate into our own stories and vision of Marker's vision. But there is another way in which Marker plays with us and which is crucial to the content of the film. The style, engendered by his subject, is an unusual one. Many disparate peoples, cultures and places are also disparately edited together; this is no chronologically or spatially continuous journey. We zig-zag across continents, backwards and forwards as memories and thoughts come to Marker/Krasna, reflecting where he has been and what he has seen and heard.

After enacting the play which is inherent in this film, I suggest that it is not possible for the viewer to remain ignorant of the ambiguity, complexity and poignancy of the captured visual image together with its importance in the process and social practice of memory. What you see (and hear) is not necessarily only "what you get" in this film. Through this stylistic complexity, the viewer can glimpse and meditate with Marker on the boundaries between forgetting and memory, between time and place, between illusion and the real. Sans Soleil presents us with peoples, places and objects that we recognize but which are difficult to understand. Our recognition of certain images is indeed "joyful" in Gadamer's sense: such recognition is our first point of access into understanding what we are seeing. But how can we understand why we are seeing a giraffe in Africa being shot and dying and understand at the same time what seems to be a narration disconnected from what we are watching? One of the primary transformations offered to us via this film is a new experience of interpretation of how we see, and hear, understand and remember the world around us with all its cacophonies of sounds and image.

Transformative play: how are we transformed by being engaged in Marker's play with memory and its imaging of time and space? We use image as a record of time, passing and past, that is part of the play, and we are left with the experience of image and sound as memory; but I suggest that another important aspect to the transformation involved in the playing of Sans Soleil is how we can use this play to speculate on how we can change the past through memory, and on how we reflect on the world via a Benjaminian sense of an architectural relationship between objects, people and places which marks our experience of life with both poignancy and confusion. Marker's play of memory takes this sense of poignancy and confusion and transforms it via film into coherent speculative thought which strongly challenges the idea that memory belongs to the past. Every new viewing of Sans Soleil involves the viewer in a new thought of how the present is experienced in time, of how we make memories of the present.

Sans Soleil is a significant film, both for its format and content, and as a major work of an important filmmaker and artist. It challenges our ideas of what is fiction and non-fiction in terms of our own perception and memory processes. Since it is not a film that belongs within popular culture, it can be understood not so much as an "acting out" of society in the broad context of mass media, but rather as an acting out of reflection, of speculation on the issue of memory as it is experienced at the level of the individual. Through this film, we are able to understand in an experiential way, sometimes purely imaginary and sometimes at the level of affect, how memory works - how it can become a link to the lives of others and how this link is forged by our taking in as our own the memories of other people.

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