Chris Marker and the Audiovisual Archive

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Introduction

In her monograph on Chris Marker from 2006, Nora M. Alter gives a short, but telling description of her visit to the studio of the French filmmaker: "The studio/workplace was filled floor to ceiling with written matter, audiovisual materials, a vast array of technological devices, and computers. *As Marker explained, he could produce an entire film without ever leaving his home*" (Alter, 2006: xi; my italics). What might be read as just another proof of Marker's notorious reclusiveness, under closer scrutiny turns out to be an apt description of one of the most salient features of his film practice, namely to draw on audiovisual archive material by integrating it into the extremely heterogeneous medial tissue of his films. The "increasingly disproportionate treasure of his archives" (Bellour, 1997: 119) has become the central point of departure for many of his works dealing with the question of memory and the representation of history. And although the perception of Marker's oeuvre in the wider public is sometimes still reduced to his cult classic and his only fiction film *La jetée* (1962), it is not uncommon to encounter an assessment of his work like the one by Paul Arthur which clearly deviates from this perspective: "Forget about *La jetée*: the richer cache of frozen gestures resides in the films and videos (and installations) devoted to stripping clotted meaning from extant images" (Arthur, 2003: 34).

Without doubt, the archive represents one of the conceptual backbones of Chris Marker's work. The term "archive," which will be elaborated further in the passage "What is an archive?," here in short comprises the virtual sum of all pre-existing audiovisual archive material available for reuse in a different context. But as will be shown, the term also encompasses institutional implications, and cannot be separated from questions of power and politics. Although other filmmakers have worked extensively with archival footage as well, Chris Marker's oeuvre reveals an extraordinarily high awareness of the possibilities and the pitfalls of the archival discourse in the fields of film and video. There still exists surprisingly little research on the reuse of filmic archive material in general (except for some publications on found footage film, cf. Hausheer & Settele, 1992; Sandusky, 1992; Wees, 1993; recently Blümlinger [2010] presented a more detailed study of the topic), and there is almost none to be found on Marker's extremely close relation to the archive (cf. Orlow, 2006; Bonin, 2008). For this reason, it promises to be a rewarding task to examine Marker's approach of the audiovisual archive as an alternative access to an entity that still deeply shapes our perception of history, especially in the conventional documentaries of mainstream media.

This article aims at examining Marker's highly fragmentary and non-linear access of the archive as an example of an unconventional and politically committed

approach to the archive in an audiovisual medium. I will show that Marker's archival strategies, an ensemble of extremely heterogeneous practices, share the common claim to allow both for refreshing insights into seemingly well-known footage and for the deconstruction of simplistic but still widespread notions of archival evidence and transparency. I will also argue that Marker's historical precursors can be situated in the context of the archival discourse and practice of the historical avant-garde, especially in two projects located on the epistemological threshold of science and art: Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project* and Aby Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas*. The comparison of Marker's work with these two scholars' approaches to the archive allows for a more complex and more precise understanding of Marker's historiographic method, as not only his films but also Warburg's and Benjamin's archival thought evade the usual linearization and narrativization by a fragmented access to the archive. As will be shown, these projects of classical modernity anticipate the structure of Marker's archive-based essay films like *Le fond de l'air est rouge* (1977/1992) or *Level Five* (1996) and the CD-ROM *Immemory* (1997), which consequently prolongs the filmmaker's archival efforts into the realm of the new media. A short discussion of Marker's most prominent digital work will therefore conclude this article by claiming that the hypertextual structure of this CD-ROM is already announced by the rhizomatic form of his cinematographic and video-based works.

What is an Archive?

The term "archive" has seen a tremendous rise in attention during the last decade. From the designation of an institution where different kinds of remnants of the past are stored (for a long time, the term had been applied almost exclusively to written documents), it has adopted increasingly metaphorical connotations. For this reason, the term has also been applied to the stock of images and texts currently in circulation in a certain society, a notion that comes close to that of cultural memory. Thus, according to Hans Belting's differentiation between interior and exterior images (Belting, 2001), one may distinguish between a physical archive that stores the material remains of past epochs, and an inner archive that resides in the minds of the members of this society. Naturally, both sides of the archive are closely dependent on each other: the interior archive of a society must always be supported by media that circulate material from the physical archive. On the other hand, documents in the physical archive are of no relevance to a society at all if they are not circulated, and thus remain "dead" archival matter – a phenomenon sometimes referred to as the "latency" of the archive (Ernst, 2002: 478; Orlow, 2006). Lacunas in an archive or even its entire destruction may result in a complete obliteration of the memory of the objects or events to which the archival items referred. Some of Marker's films explicitly deal with lacunas on both sides of the archive. In *Le tombeau d'Alexandre*, for instance, Marker on a number of occasions points to the fact that Alexander Medvedkin's masterpiece *Happiness* (1934) was long deprived of any public recognition, as it was banned by the Soviet authorities to archival latency, until in 1971 Marker unearthed it from the shelves for a re-release.

Contemporary archival discourse usually insists on several presuppositions critical of received notions of the archive concerning its status as universal and

evidentiary. Hedwig Pompe and Leander Scholz detect a "hybris of the world without rest and without loss" (Pompe & Scholz, 2002: 10; my translation) and a phantasmatic "tendency towards the whole" (*Ibid.*: 13; my translation) in the archive. The conventional notion of the archive roots in the methodology (and one may add: megalomania) of scientific positivism in the 19th century. Nevertheless, an archive always contains gaps and holes, not least because the capacity of every archive is limited and therefore calls for the (irreversible) destruction of a part of the objects – due to rules that are not always shared by posterity. By doing so, archivists sometimes even become – *nolens volens* – "historians of the future" (Schenk, 2008: 86; my translation), as they inevitably influence future perspectives on their present by their decisions.

Furthermore, archives are always involved in structures of power and politics. Thus, the archive becomes a site of the negotiation of political power struggles and is in danger of being instrumentalized for political ends. Many authors insist on the questionable neutrality of the archive, and most of them would agree with Jean-Louis Comolli, who states: "There are no 'raw,' 'true' archives" (quoted after Roskis, 1997: 32; my translation). The archive's dependence on political ends is accompanied by its dependence on the media that assure the externalized storage of its "contents." For this reason, an archive is always subject to the epistemology of the medium/media involved in the storage process, and can never be separated from it. As Sven Spieker points out: "In the archive, the stored materials, the principles of its organization and the media which record them are entangled in such a way that they cannot be subtracted from each other" (Spieker, 2004: 15; my translation).

What is Archival Material?

Archival material may be defined as footage not filmed by a filmmaker deliberately for a current project, but taken from a different context and appropriated into the structure of the new work. In most cases, footage re-used in this way was shot by someone else. However, there are occasions in which filmmakers re-use their own material and perform a reassessment by placing it into a new constellation with other material. In Marker's work, there are indeed many examples for this practice, for instance the recycling of footage from *La sixième face du Pentagone* (1968) in *Le fond de l'air est rouge* (1977) or from *Le train en marche* (1971) in *Le tombeau d'Alexandre* (1993). This definition of archival material partly overlaps with the term "found footage," which nevertheless is usually taken more literally, as it conventionally applies mostly to material which is indeed "found" in obscure places like attics, trashcans and so on (cf. Hausheer & Settele, 1992, Sandusky, 1992, Wees, 1993). The appearance of archival sources is normally indicated by the occurrence of certain conventionalized signals such as a change in the grain of the footage, a shift to black-and-white or to silent film, or even an explicit hint by the commentary. However, these signals can easily be faked, as "mockumentaries" like Woody Allen's *Zelig* (1980) or even mainstream feature films such as Robert Zemeckis' *Forrest Gump* (1994) demonstrate. Marker himself has delivered a prime example of this aesthetic strategy: *L'ambassade* (1973) at first pretends to be a "found" Super-8 document of a *coup d'état* in some South American country, like the historical one in Chile in the year of the film's production, until the last shot

(a foggy urban horizon with the silhouette of the Eiffel Tower) finally reveals the fictitious (or better: dystopian) character of the film.

The term "archival material" usually refers to documentary footage, but it is crucial to emphasize that in the context of this article its meaning is also expanded to material from fiction films. As will be shown, Marker's films not only feature many excerpts (be they clips or still photographs) from more or less known fiction sources like the films of Eisenstein (himself one of the great masters of intermingling fact and fiction), Hitchcock, Medvedkin, Costa-Gavras and so on. What is even more, his films permanently deconstruct the binary dichotomy between the seemingly remote realms of documentary and feature film. Marker (and some other filmmakers such as Godard and Farocki) suggests that there are no two strictly separated archives of "authentic" documentary and "staged" fiction but only one large universe of images which ceaselessly interconnect and overlap with each other, regardless of the ontological register from which they originate.

The following sections analyze specific sequences from those of Marker's films that feature a considerable amount of archival material, and will compare the occurring montage structures and the underlying historiographic/archival approach to two famous enterprises of classical modernity. The two different approaches of Benjamin and Warburg are not conceived as mutually exclusive, but are meant to complement each other where one falls short of explaining specific structures and phenomena emerging from the analyzed montage sequences.

The Archive and the Philosophy of History (Walter Benjamin)

Archival theory often refers to one of the major thinkers of critical theory, Walter Benjamin. Not only do Benjamin's late writings open up a historiographic approach that deviates decidedly from positivist ideas of historical progress and continuity, but he himself devised a gigantic and obviously unfinishable project relying heavily on archive material without merging it into an unequivocal linear narrative. The *Arcades Project (Passagen-Werk)*, which remained a gigantic fragment of quotations from literary sources of all kinds and annotations due to its creator's untimely death, is still one of the most complex achievements in the field of the archive.

Chris Marker is, similar to Godard, one of the essayist filmmakers whose historiographic approach turns out to be astonishingly close to the thought and philosophy of Walter Benjamin, and at least some scholars (Kämper, 1997; Lindroos, 2003 and others) have noted the astonishing intellectual proximity between those two figures located at the intersection of visual culture and cultural memory — an insight found, for instance, in this statement by Howard Hampton:

> His [Marker's] work could be considered the cinematic equivalent of Benjamin's sprawling saturnine notebooks for his unfinished, literally interminable Arcades Project – but transposed to a world where the video arcade and Internet has replaced the 19th century's cathedral-like proto-shopping-malls and flaneur-haunts. (Hampton, 2003: 33)

Benjamin's rejection of the construction of historical continuity by traditional historiography turns out to be enormously fruitful for the analysis of Marker's non-linear approach of the archive. This point of view is addressed most explicitly in the "Theses on the Philosophy of History" and the convolute "N" of the *Arcades Project*. History is usually written from the perspective of the victorious party, which then strives to construct a linear narrative with a clear teleology that lets the efforts of the defeated party seem vain and useless from the beginning, doomed to failure with no hope of success. Benjamin proposes a different kind of historiography that he himself calls "redeeming critique" ("*rettende Kritik*"). Utopian moments (for example from the history of socialism) are not integrated into a smooth teleological narrative of continuously increasing disillusionment and failure, but "blasted" ("*herausgesprengt*") out of the historical continuum and thus retained as an unaccomplished claim of the past to a possible realization in the future. The "liquidation of the epic element" (Benjamin, GS: I/3, 1241; my translation) of historiography therefore implies the abandonment of narrative and teleological notions of the archive – a powerful tool, as Benjamin's famous quotation goes, "to brush history against the grain" (Benjamin, GS: I/2, 697; my translation).

Two of Marker's films seem to be structured by a dramaturgy surprisingly close to Benjamin's suggestions, namely *Le fond de l'air est rouge* and *Le tombeau d'Alexandre*. Both of them were produced (*Le tombeau d'Alexandre*) or significantly re-edited (*Le fond de l'air est rouge* in 1992) shortly after the collapse of the Eastern Bloc, the fall of the Berlin Wall and thus the apparent end of any utopian idea of communism. Both films deal with the history of the left, be it with reference to direct political action around 1968 (*Le fond de l'air est rouge*) or to Soviet filmmaking and art from the 1920s to the breakup of the USSR (*Le tombeau d'Alexandre*), and both use an extremely high quantity of archival material. However, these films refrain from melting the fragments of the archive into a linear narrative that lets the utopian moments of the leftist movements head straightly into the seemingly inevitable collapse – a historiographic tendency to which conservative historians still cling in these days. In *Le Fond de l'air est rouge*, Marker represents the archival shots of street riots, the strikes, the guerilla battles in South America and others as utopian actions. They radiate an amount of energy that the left might be unaware of at its moments of disillusionment (1977/1992), but which still contains sparks of revolutionary momentum and thus a promise for a possible future redemption. Instead of causal, logical or chronological order, the montage of the film proceeds by a free-floating associative form of linkage of the found material. Catherine Lupton sums up the structure of the film in the following way:

> *Le fond* is opposed to the selective versions of the past that are created by the winners of history, and to the resolution of history into a tidy linear narrative of causal progress. Instead, it attempts to trace the decline of the Left back to its sources, by juxtaposing an array of competing perspectives and events in a mosaic structure of film and television images, location sound, music and multi-vocal commentary, which benefits from the kind of hindsight that is able to see the complex interplay of different forces more clearly, but not the sort that assumes from the outset that defeat was inevitable or desirable. (Lupton, 2006: 143)

Hal Foster has precisely this archival utopia in mind, when he talks about the archive's

utopian ambition – its desire to turn belatedness into becomingness, to recoup failed visions in art, literature, philosophy and everyday life into possible scenarios of alternative kinds of social relations, to transform the no-place of the archive into the no-place of a utopia. (Foster, 2006: 146)

In *Le tombeau d'Alexandre*, the archival excerpts from 1920s and 1930s Soviet silent films, and especially from Alexander Medvedkin's *Happiness*, represent a kind of utopian promise to a future cinema whose real fate would be determined by the doctrine of Socialist Realism and the threat of the Stalinist purges. But here also the fragmentary mode of representation, which at times effortlessly moves in space and time, prevents a smooth narrative of decline. Furthermore, it might be added that especially *Le fond de l'air est rouge* was assembled with unused audiovisual sources (Marker calls them the "*chutes*" ["the dropped"] or "*non utilisées*" ["the unused;" my translations] in his foreword to the written version of the film, cf. Marker, 1978: 5) that had been cut from militant films, displaying a fascination with audiovisual "litter" that clearly recalls Benjamin's predilection for discarded, seemingly superfluous or meaningless objects, manifest so strongly in the *Arcades Project*. Marker is clearly an audiovisual counterpart to the Parisian chiffoniers and scavengers Benjamin described with such attention.

A proximity to Benjaminian thought cannot only be encountered in the macrostructure of Marker's films (the dramaturgy), but also in their microstructure, the level of montage from shot to shot. In his late works, Benjamin conceives an alternative model of historiography, which proceeds by the construction of unexpected "constellations" of similar elements from different epochs, a method he sometimes calls the "dialectical image." It appears at the moment when "the has-been enters in a flash into a constellation with the now" (Benjamin, GS: V/1, 576; my translation). Some interpreters have already established a connection between Benjamin's constellations and film montage (Wees, 1993; Sjöberg, 2001), and indeed, film turns out to be the most appropriate medium to achieve what Benjamin called the "tiger's leap into the past" (Benjamin, GS: I/2, 701; my translation). Benjamin's suggestion for an allegorical mode of representation, which breaks fragments out of their (historical) context and inserts them into new contexts with other fragments, as Peter Bürger has so aptly described in his *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1974), proves to be an adequate description of the way many experimental filmmakers working with techniques of montage/collage treat archival footage. Marker's essay films abound with montages of different layers of historical time contracted into dialectical images. One sequence from *Le tombeau d'Alexandre* is clearly constructed in the vein of Benjamin, although it turns out to be, contrary to Benjamin's ideas, not only quite critical towards revolutionary imagery (and action), but also ironic or even iconoclastic in its attitude. Here, Marker undercuts scenes from Eisenstein's famous Odessa Steps sequence from *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) with newly recorded video images of the same place. They show an elderly man descending the Odessa steps, and the montage crosscuts between them and the Eisenstein shots by graphic matches. But not only are Eisenstein's highly emotionalizing images countered with the soberness

of the video, not only is Eisenstein's revolutionary energy confronted with the slow pace of a retired man (and thereby with the present decrepitude of revolution), but Marker's iconoclastic sacrilege of the canonical revolutionary imagery – and *Battleship Potemkin* belongs to this iconographic tradition more surely than any other film – goes so far to replace Eisenstein's baby carriage with a kind of cart older people use for shopping. With this dialectical image, Marker clearly hints both at the disillusionment of revolutionary utopia and at the commodification of leftist symbols after the breakdown of the USSR.

Yet, there is one even more perplexing overlapping between Benjamin's historiographic reflections and Marker's filmic practice. Benjamin developed the notion of the "historical index" of an (archival) image (Benjamin, GS: V/1, 577; my translation). This means that not every image might be recognized in its meaning by the present of its production, but it might be seized in its full significance only by a certain future epoch: "The historical index of the images does not only tell that they belong to a certain time, it tells above all that they only enter into readability at a certain time. [...] Every present is determined by those images which are synchronistic with it: every now is the now of a certain recognizability" (*Ibid.*). Only then, sometimes much later, the image enters into a state of recognizability and readability. Thus, semantic potentials of an archival object may be latent through a certain period of time until they become manifest under the impact of a given historio-political constellation. As Allan Sekula puts it: "Archival potentials change over time" (Sekula, 1987: 117). Benjamin has even transferred his notion of the historical index to the medium of photography, and it is crucial not to misunderstand this transferral as a mere metaphor, but as a sincere reflection of the archival potentialities of audiovisual media:

> If one wants to consider history as a text, then what a recent author says of literary texts would apply to it. The past has deposited in it images, which one could compare to those captured by a light-sensitive plate. 'Only the future has developers at its disposal which are strong enough to allow the image to come to light in all its details.' (Benjamin GS: I/3, 1238; translation quoted after Cadava, 1997: 85/6)

Marker's films abound with this kind of archival images, which change their meaning in the course of history and become readable in a new light. One of the most famous sequences of *Le fond de l'air est rouge* re-uses excerpts from Marker's documentary of the Olympic Games in Helsinki 1952, *Olympia 52* (1952). What seemed to be an innocent competition of show jumping in 1952, later became an uncanny foreboding of geopolitical developments, as one of the Chilean winners of the Helsinki silver medal in the team competition, César Mendoza, turned out to be one of Pinochet's generals involved in the overthrow of the socialist Allende government in 1973. Marker comments on the archival sequence from 1952: "You never know what you're filming." In *Sans soleil* (1982), the tears of a general during a decoration ceremony in Cape Verde seem to be a sign of pride, but as one hears that this same general will have taken power a few years later and will have put the president Luis Cabral, who had decorated him in the archive footage, into prison, one understands that his tears must have expressed disappointment of not being promoted higher. You never know what you're filming. One of Marker's latest films even raises the historical indexicality of images to its structuring principle: *Le souvenir d'un avenir* (2001)

consists almost exclusively of photographs by French artist Denise Bellon (1902-1999), and concentrates on her works from the epoch between the two world wars. Bellon depicts in her works a treacherous time of peace that in Marker's commentary retrospectively swarms with unconscious premonitions of future catastrophes. A now famous photograph shows the German and Soviet pavilions of the World Exhibition in 1937 facing each other like opponents on the battlefield, an anticipation of what would happen in reality only four years later. But not only the verbal commentary reveals the prophetic qualities of the photographs. By superimposing film material over Bellon's pictures and thereby creating graphic matches between the material, Marker lets them also adopt new meanings and become uncanny premonitions of future events: a leisure parachutist becomes a paratrooper, and a nude woman sunbathing in peacetime turns into a victim of warfare in the mind of the viewer as film footage of an attacking Stuka is superimposed onto the frame. Thus, Marker exposes the semantic volatility of the archive: if the context of the footage changes, its "archival potentials" (Sekula, op. cit.) might change as well.

The Archive and Iconography (Aby Warburg)

Benjamin's musings on historiography represent a useful tool for the understanding of Marker's anti-teleological approach to the archive. Nevertheless, when it comes to the analysis of specific montage sequences, Benjamin's theories tend to fall short of explaining the mnemonic dimensions of the transition from one concrete archival image to another, especially if the sequence deals with the continuity of aesthetic forms in different historical epochs. In this context, Aby Warburg's theory of the "pathos formula," developed in the context of art history, provides a necessary supplement to Benjamin's considerations. While Benjamin has been regarded as one of the most important philosophers of visual culture since his academic rediscovery in the 1970s, his contemporary and fellow-countryman Aby Warburg was doomed to archival latency a little longer. He has begun to be recognized as an equally significant contributor to the exploration of visuality only during the last decade. Recent comparative studies have suggested a close intellectual affinity between those two German-Jewish thinkers (Rampley, 2000; Efal, 2000; Emden, 2003). Cultural studies in general rely heavily on those two thinkers today, not least because both displayed a deep skepticism towards the "grand narratives" of ideologically biased systems and instead insisted on the priority of the seemingly insignificant detail. In archival discourse, both Benjamin and Warburg now occupy a crucial role (Rampley, 1999), and especially the *Mnemosyne Atlas*, just like Benjamin's *Passagen-Werk*, is hailed as one of the great archival works between science and art. In this unfinished project, Warburg assembled photographs of paintings, artworks and even newspaper photographs, coins and stamps on a series of wooden panels. By doing so, he attempted to trace the trajectory of certain bodily gestures in painting and other forms of representation from Greek antiquity to the present. Warburg was particularly interested in the continuity and variation of so-called "pathos formulas," bodily gestures that express an extreme form of inner movement. For example, he juxtaposed images from Greek mythology showing nymphs in savage excitement and a contemporary photograph of a female golf player. Although Warburg's underlying cultural theory, which interprets human existence as a constant oscillation between primordial impulses and scientific reflection, may seem

problematic today, he has recently been rehabilitated as a precursor of visual culture and as a theoretician of cultural memory. The collages of the *Mnemosyne Atlas* accomplished during the late 1920s have been related both to Dadaist and Surrealist art (Hofmann, 1995; Forster, 1995) and to cinematic montage of the same period, especially to the work of Eisenstein and Vertov (Michaud, 2004). Warburg's use of archival material makes him a particularly apt precursor of the essay film, since he also juxtaposed highly heterogeneous sources like paintings, coins, stamps and photographs, thus transgressing not only the borders between different media and between high and low culture, but also between documentary (press photographs, e.g. of Mussolini) and fiction sources (classical paintings).

The opening sequence of Marker's *Le Fond de l'air est rouge* displays a tremendous correspondence to Warburg's method of establishing visual series from the archive. I suggest reading this passage as a kind of moving *Mnemosyne Atlas*, in which the filmmaker assembles a catalogue of revolutionary "pathos formulas." Marker, by a process similar to Warburg's, links the heterogeneous material by graphic matches, which overcome the limitations of geographical space and historical time. Clenched fists, marching soldiers and policemen, mourning crowds and, finally, falling and dying bodies from revolutionary uprisings of the sixties and seventies do not only reverberate with each other by visual analogies. Marker's cinematic scrutiny of revolutionary corporeality and theatricality also employs eyeline matches that suggest that an American MP of the 1970s shoots a bullet at one of the women on the Odessa steps in Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin*. Marker's deconstruction of the binary opposition between fiction and documentary film suggests that Eisenstein's epic, in which the Soviet director according to Marker "staged the imaginary of several generations" (Marker, 1978: 10; my translation), provides a kind of gestural and bodily formula that was (unconsciously) remembered and (re-) performed by the revolutionaries of the 1960s and 1970s. This is not only in tune with Warburg's theory of gestural negotiation between bodies and images, but even with Eisenstein's own reception theory, which claimed that the movements of characters on the screen were physically imitated by the audience – a fact the Soviet filmmaker aimed to exploit in his propaganda films for the physical inscription of revolutionary corporeality into the bodies of the audience.

In its overwhelming musical flow and its stirring montage rhythm, this sequence strives to prolong Eisenstein's pathos-laden imagery and the revolutionary energy it doubtlessly conveys directly into the present of its audience, without any attempt at critical reflection. Similar sequences occur frequently in Marker's work, and although his films clearly demonstrate his awareness of the historicity and geographical specificity of his source material, it is in passages like these that the more problematic aspects of his archival approach become evident. By juxtaposing material from diverse countries and epochs and by emphasizing its universal validity, Marker tends to dissolve its historicity and the concrete geographical/political context from which it stems. Here, Marker's archival project is in danger of tipping over into a rather problematic universalism. Thus, Sarah Cooper, with regard to *Les statues meurent aussi*, criticizes the "universalism of the film's humanism" that "levels out distinctions in favour of commonality" (Cooper, 2008: 14). Indeed, Marker and Resnais had assembled material from diverse African countries without any regard of the cultural

differences between the disparate tribes and nations, thereby evoking an essentialist view on "African" culture that, of course, turns out to be a Eurocentric projection.

However, Marker also knows how to use the Warburg approach to the archive toward more critical ends. As already mentioned, he subjugates the same images from Eisenstein's film to a much more ironic, even iconoclast treatment in *Le tombeau d'Alexandre*, although he still uses graphic matches as linkage between the materials. In the same film, a series can be found that forms a kind of iconographical investigation of one of the most (in)famous pathos formulas of Soviet art. Vera Mukhina's statue of a male worker and a female *kolkhoz* member striding solemnly into the future is not only clearly identifiable as a Warburgian "pathos formula," but also figures as a prime example of Socialist Realism under Stalin. The series begins with a surprising visual confrontation: A digital rendition of El Lissitzky's semi-abstract painting "New Man" from the early 1920s is superimposed with a grainy photograph of Mukhina's statue from 1937, revealing almost shocking visual and gestural analogies between the avant-garde and the Stalinist propaganda work, a comparison that runs strongly in the vein of Boris Groys, who in 1988 provocatively claimed that Stalinist art was not the aesthetic and political opposite of the "innocent" avant-garde, but on the contrary the fulfillment of the avant-garde's dream of a total transformation of society (Groys, 1988). This shot is followed by film material from a parade in which a woman and a man imitate the Mukhina statue in a sort of *tableau vivant*. Afterwards, the film presents another variation of the Mukhina pattern: the logo of the state controlled production company Mosfilm, which from 1947 on consisted of a small copy of the statue revolving in front of one of the Kremlin towers. Needless to say, Socialist Realism at the time had already become the guiding principle of film production, which made the appearance of the statue at the beginning of these state-produced films an all the more programmatic statement. In this short passage, Marker carries out an extremely complex investigation of the migration of gestures from media to bodies and back again in the Soviet archive. Warburg's approach of the archive turns out to be a powerful model of explanation for the proliferation of politically charged aesthetic forms in sequences like this one.

Later on in his oeuvre, in *Level Five* (1996), Marker applies the same method to another iconic pathos formula which stems from a completely different historical background but nevertheless deserves the same amount of critical attention: the notorious flag raising photograph from Iwo Jima in 1945. After Laura, the film's female protagonist, has told the story of the first photo, which was considered not presentable, of the unfortunate fate of Ira Hayes and of the restaging of the event for the camera, the film presents a series of archival material that documents the ensuing migration of the motif. From the "original" he cuts via graphic matches to an advertisement that promotes support for art, then to several caricatures that obviously refer to American foreign policy (for example in the former Yugoslavia) and the accompanying financial claims — one shows Uncle Sam planting a dollar bill into the ground just as the solders did with the flag (Christa Blümlinger already applies the Warburg paradigm to this series of images; cf. Blümlinger, 1998: 94). As Marker suggests through Laura's explanations: "*La photo est devenue une des icônes de notre temps*" ("The photograph has become one of the icons of our time;" my translation). It has

become an easily recognizable visual pattern that can be filled with many meanings and even converted in its ideological bias to the contrary, as its satirical use in the context of the caricatures clearly shows.

Embedded in systems of power and representation, these iconographical variations demonstrate how propagandistic imagery becomes inscribed performatively into the subjects' bodies in a totalitarian state. The Warburg approach to the archive does not only allow for insights into such processes of gestural negotiation between media and bodies, but also for a (sometimes ironic) genealogy of ideologically biased imagery, and thus may subvert the spell of those formula which exerted such a powerful grip on many people. Warburg's theory (and practice) is capable of making comprehensible the migration of images between historical epochs, geographical regions and different media – clearly a blind spot in the Benjamin paradigm. Furthermore, it helps reveal what is politically and ideologically at stake in processes of this kind. And this is indeed where Marker's basic intention in these sequences lies – not in the superficial recovering of the continuity of certain aesthetic forms, but in the political implications of these processes.

Going Digital

Marker had already begun to transgress the limited boundaries of cinema in 1978 with his first installation in the art context, *Quand le siècle a pris formes*, where he modified archival footage in a way that already anticipated Yamaneko's "Zone" in *Sans soleil*:

> The piece contained archive film images from the First World War and the Russian Revolution that had been treated by an image synthesizer, their representational content drained away in favour of shifting coloured fields that just retained the outlines of recognizable figures and objects as a solarized flair. (Lupton, 2006: 148)

From then on, Marker's oeuvre increasingly opened up to hypertextual and interactive structures. The essayistic qualities of many of his films, such as *Le fond de l'air est rouge* or *Sans soleil,* already integrated associative, rhizomatic structures beyond linear narrative, and demanded a high degree of active participation from their audiences. Marker's continuous re-editing of *Le fond de l'air est rouge* (in 2008 he once again presented a slightly altered cut of the film) and the accompanying "work in progress" character of this magnum opus foreshadowed *Immemory*'s arborescent screen menus, with their endless possibilities of bifurcation. But as these works were still films to be watched from beginning to end (at least in the cinema) without any actual possibility to control the flow of images, the interactive elements remained a mere simulation. It did not come as a big surprise that Marker finally embraced the "new media" of the computer and Internet, a measure that also both prolonged and modified his access to the archive. *Level Five* also remained a (video) film, but it already integrated the new media into its structure in a complex form of intermediality. Medially heterogeneous archival traces of the battle of Okinawa appear on Laura's computer screen as she connects to the O.W.L. network, accessible by icons and menus just as on a CD-ROM. So it seems only consequential that Marker in the end decided to produce a "real" CD-ROM with the telling name

Immemory, a "personal archive" (Alter, 2006: 121) subdivided into topographical "zones" in which the user is invited to navigate between manifold possibilities of bifurcation that subjugate the archival items to new readings each time they are embedded into a freshly opened up narrative:

> There is no preestablished sequential logic. The route chosen by the viewer dramatically transforms him or her from the role of being a mere witness of Marker's memory and lived history to that of a coproducer of histories and memories in the twentieth century. (Alter, 2006: 121)

Just as in Benjamin's *Arcades Project* and in Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas*, there is no definite archival order in *Immemory*. Archival fragments enter into new constellations and thus into new states of readability with every different path through the menus. Another iconographical genealogy of "pathos formula" emerges each time, just as Warburg permanently reshuffled the photographs on the wooden panels of the *Atlas*. Alongside the mediation of *Immemory*, Benjamin's and Warburg's fragmented, hypertextual works themselves figure as early anticipations of the possibilities of digital media.

Comparing the CD-ROM to Marker's precedent works, the user/navigator of *Immemory* may be stunned by the extraordinary increase of private hints about the persona of the reclusive filmmaker. Marker even grants the user insight into his family tree and some of his rather whimsical relatives, although he from time to time insinuates that these people might be products of his lively imagination. Family album, diary, scratch book, museum and archive melt into a cabinet of curiosities full of private jokes only decipherable for the Marker aficionado. Contrary to the apparent politically committed intention of spreading his works as far as possible, Marker already showed a surprising reluctance to grant a wider public access to his earliest films, since some of his first works were banned by the filmmaker himself for public screening and can only be viewed at the CNC in Bois d'Arcy, which limits the access to a part of his own archive to a small group of insiders. *Immemory* picks up on this exclusivity through the deliberate incomprehensibility of at least parts of its archival content for a wider public. Thus, the alleged easy accessibility of digital media, which are often deemed to annihilate what is still left of private space, here is thwarted by the semantic opaqueness of the archive – an archive that many may enter but whose items only a few privileged can truly read.

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