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In the corner farthest from the entrance, at the back of the immense industrial bay converted into an exhibition space, we see, or rather, as we approach, we hear, something so small as to be barely raised off the floor—a creature crying out or imploring interminably in a heart-rending voice: “Oh no! Oh no!” The visitor must bend down to see the tiny cloth body bound to a metal bar. Its head is enormous in proportion, and what animates it is no more than the vibration of an image. The spectator is powerfully affected by that soft face, whose expression is impossible to describe: so close to horror and revulsion, although it also has neutral moments that might be interpreted as close to ecstasy. In the setting of this place, this is probably the last of the eight scenes that visitors will come upon before going back around the whole show in their own preferred order; but this is, without a doubt, the one they will remember most intensely.*

* The exhibition Tony Oursler was presented at the Centre d’Art Contemporain in Geneva from 21 January to 21 May 1995.
From his very first works in the late seventies, Tony Oursler has used video as a catalyst for the creation of worlds that painting and sculpture could not adequately conceive, and for which film proved too exterior. Only video, pulling behind it like a comet’s tail the television from which it evolved, and from which, for so many American artists, reality itself is continually reborn, had this binding character of transition capable of launching into orbit Oursler's fragmented worlds, reconstructed as a patchwork. Both in his videos and in his installations, which tend to be authentic environments, video not only performs the habitual functions of recording and projection, but is also the paste that glues together all the different elements and makes the game work, with a surprisingly lively dose of freedom and ingenuity. In his single-channel videotapes, Oursler always introduces scraps of universe; in his installations, which he has been using for some time now as a platform for his videos, he tells stories, infinite segments of stories, with an obstinate narrative sense, picaresque and childlike, and with a passion as inventive as it is mocking of word-play. A circus of partial objects drawn together by a strange energy generated by a kind of trash Caligarism conceived as a kind of cut-up of all the possible materials of pop culture: in this way Oursler’s work very soon came to the fore in the American scene, with its mixing of fragments of real bodies and fictitious bodies, drawn, modeled, patched, perpetually represented/disfigured.

For a number of years now, however, Oursler’s work has been traversed by three connected movements (all of which relate to the installations, which, in his work, as in that of other artists, have come to be the most imaginative area of videomaking). The first movement consists in working with real places, windows, rooms, or houses (or their fictive equivalents in the museum) to produce a distortion of the sense of habitation, of simulacra of behaviours. The second consists in an increasingly intensified search for the relations between the different elements within a given installation; but this coherence has been prepared in such a way as to facilitate a whole range of conjunctions with other elements, making it possible to stage, when the opportunity presents itself, mime-dramas overflowing with worlds. The third movement is the method that makes it possible to people these worlds: the alliance of a sculpted form and a projected image engenders an individualised population of dummies or dolls.

Four pillars divide the entire length of the space devoted to Oursler’s work. To the right, the tiny confined doll composes, with two other elements, a pre-existing installation. We can disregard the relative autonomy of this installation, considering that its three elements link up with the five entities dispersed through the space on the other side of the pillars, but System for Dramatic Feedback conserves a strength of its own, a strength directed at contaminating the whole group. Projected on the wall opposite the corner with the wailing doll is a gigantic image: the image of a cinema audience with its eyes raised towards an imaginary film whose soundtrack reaches us mixed with the noises coming from the theatre. Opposite this screen, halfway
along the route leading to the doll, stands a monstrous pile of objects several metres high. This pyramidal universe, made up of a motley assortment of fabrics, pieces of clothing, cushions, and knotted canvases of every shape and colour, is a chaos penetrated by the eye; this is what we might call a “body-habitat,” a sensual and decaying social space, occupied by creatures who have made their refuge in it—creatures whose confused identities, pinned to their automaton mechanisms, we perceive as we circle around the heap. We see the hand that slaps a bending rear; the man in a state of erection and repose; the pregnant woman with her child kicking inside her belly; the enormous androgynous head resting on the floor, the tongue sticking out between the teeth, which fills us with fear and the urge to kick it. The shocking impotence of these bodies consists in their being split between the immutable destiny of the puppet and the ungraspable life of the image that regards us. The flash of the image evidently calls to mind the phantom projection taking place in front of it; but its indecisive and morbid flickering is more like that of the television set that each of the creatures seems to have incorporated into it for the exclusive purpose of eternally showing its own image. Between the cinema audience gently captivated by its fictitious film screen and this space in mutation (Mutation is the title of the heap of rags and bodies), an impossible field/counter-field is created. And this has its outer limits, just as every society has its excluded: the tiny doll and its senseless shrill suffering. I have never seen an image that cried like this before. In the intense and minimal solitude of abandonment, it is an image striving to control itself in order to manifest its pain once again.

The power of this looped drama extends ideally to the other figures in the installation, in response to their virtuality. At either end of the second of the two areas delimited by the pillars are two groups that mirror or echo one another. Four large dolls loom out of the darkness, each one endowed with its own wild and mocking singularity; they present themselves in line, marked by the solipsism imposed by the separation between the standing bodies and their image-faces, animated by the painful expressiveness of actors who suffer in the elliptical image that makes them oscillate between individuation and stereotype. We will see this more clearly when we get to the end, in front of a pair of tall figures caught in a looped dialogue whose style is reminiscent of television series, soft porn, and the despairing conversations of Bergman’s Scenes of Married Life: the woman wants to sleep, the man takes her by force, which hurts her, but the pain seems to be mixed with pleasure. The population of dolls thus extends infinitely, as a catalogue of beings who suffer, open to all kinds of situations, to all kinds of setups: a new humanity that draws, for example, on the characters of Beckett or Giacometti, opening itself up to the vague but wounding condition of those more and more broken bodies. This capacity for metamorphosis and remodeling also extends to nature. Some years ago Oursler decided to re-appropriate certain aspects of painting, reworking some of his favourite objects from that tradition: the cloud. He projected moving silhouettes onto small blocks of synthetic
cotton hung from the ceiling on threads, which, at the limits of the impalpable, animated the floating masses they penetrated. These materials-cum-objects are evanescent sculptures that mix in their very vagueness the contrasted motifs of classical painting: figures and clouds. And here we find two of those “clouds” vibrating to the slightest breath of air. In this way, he sketches a world, an amusing parody of a world, inside this large, dark, low-ceilinged space, this mutant social space in which the effects of distance and the accretions of reality are organized in some strange fashion, somewhere between the horrific and the ironic. And so I actually thought that some weary visitor had sat down with her back against one of the pillars, when I walked rather quickly past a figure wearing a suit slumped on the floor, like one of the homeless without a face. With a perverse art of counterpoint and a firm perception of the image’s capacity for contagion, this time Oursler has chosen to project, with a to-and-fro movement that illuminates the man’s crotch, the image of a naked woman modeled by the creases of the trousers.

Here we find sculpture, painting, and film—video imposes itself once again as the means of bringing these mediums together—joining forces in an innovative form of spectacle that borders on the living. To achieve this sense of a beyond-the-grave and future world, Oursler has especially adapted to his purposes a technique with which film lends its services to the wax museums that had prefigured it since the late eighteenth century: the animation of a modeled face by means of a projection (American museums love this effect: one of the best-known examples has Lincoln delivering his famous address in memorial of the Gettysburg dead). The image never ceases to tremble and weep inside this space, and with the personal resources of a work that is as technologically simple as it is surprising, to seek a way out of this trembling and this sorrow. And it is in pushing the image beyond what it was thought it could or should be that it is once again and always an attempt to save the image, or to save at least something of the image and the world of which the image claims to be a sublimated presentation, when quite clearly it is no more than its inconstant mirror and its sickly skin.

In Venice, one morning during the Biennale, a handful of polyglot spectators had gathered around some installations in a little experimental theatre by the edge of the lagoon. A variety of different strategies converged there, each with an explicit commitment to extreme treatments of the image. For example, Robert Smithson and the video documentation of his Spiral Jetty, modeling the sculpture into landscape architecture; flies magnified by being projected inside a glass fishbowl; faces in exaggerated closeup that in the course of the slide sequence took on the antique appearance of Roman frescos, thanks to the rough material texture of the brick wall. On the first floor, in the dark, opposite a video projection by Douglas Gordon, in which a man could be seen continually trying to stand up in the picture plane, giving the impression of supporting the image of his desperate efforts, I suddenly heard the heart-wrenching cry of one of Oursler’s dolls: “Oh no! Oh no!” I
watched people cluster around that little face gesticulating down there in the dark, in front of the mini-video projector, and I had the sensation that we were gathered together in that place to try to save the image.

**Bill Viola**

There has been an idea in circulation for a while now, one that has traveled from one war to another, from Elie Faure to Jean-Georges Auriol, and has likened cinema to a kind of animation of painting: great painting, classical and romantic painting. According to this idea, cinema was a way of continuing to experience painting's splendour without being impeded by the image crisis foreshadowed by Balzac in The Unknown Masterpiece, before painting incarnated the drama to the point where it seemed to no longer know to which cause to devote itself. Godard, historian if ever there was one, conceived of an explanation from the instant it seemed clear that cinema was running a risk analogous to the one that finally destroyed painting: it was to be found in Passion, where tableaux vivants seemed like an attempt, with their passionate desire for flesh and mixed images, to animate these same immobile masterpieces in order to project cinema into its great incarnational adventure. But the self-perpetuation of this driven image would require an obsession with exact lighting and the use of a real story if there was to be any chance of escaping the chaos it was confronting with unparalleled determination.

The solution imagined by Bill Viola, in the last of the works that compose Buried Secrets, his large installation in the American pavilion at the Venice Biennale, is simpler, less tragic, and more extreme: one simply has to create the painting, be in the painting. To remake a painting, projected onto a wall within a space that the image itself manages to sufficiently light with a gentle twilight glow in a transitory situation somewhere between a museum gallery and a film theatre. To find, thanks to the use of video, a position somewhere precisely between painting and cinema, Viola suggested a fiction involving one or two possible stories and allowed them a specific time frame in which to develop. The time here is a perfect intermediary, since it was obtained by slowing down a forty-five-second event into a virtuality extended to ten minutes. It is through this rhythm that we are able, as Pascal Bonitzer suggested in Décadrages, to see how much less cinema (extended here to video) yields to movement than we thought and how much more movement is actually involved in painting.

But Viola did not give himself too easy a task with this installation, which could have simply consisted of an interior animation of a straightforward action, captured in a single frame. As vertical as a painting can be, this screen is as much a concealer as it is a frame, since it is projected towards a field outside the frame from which the event begins to modulate: two very preoccupied women, as we can ascertain from their gestures, seen in extreme slow motion, are waiting for a third. Are the first two women surprised as the third appears from the left to bring them some news? The
mystery remains, because the dialogue the young newcomer murmurs into the ear of the older of the two women suddenly gives way to a more specific rumour, a grumbling that becomes more violent and clear within the scope of the continuous muffled sounds that Viola has been filling his tapes and installations with for so long. One can imagine (I wasn’t the only one to think so) that this triumphant woman has just announced she is pregnant. That would be “The Greeting” and the wishes referred to in the title. But here the enigma that history painting managed to clear up (and only to a limited degree) through the information supplied by titles, as well as the erudite nature of the iconography, remains in Viola’s work. For example, the extraordinary time lengthening of the movements, which accelerate only a little with the arrival of the young woman, prevent any true psychological perspective on the women’s expressions, which remain uncertain and develop an indecisive range of emotions according to the evolution of facial movements: from concern to surprise, from delight to terror. Better yet, these expressions are never, in one sense, anything but transitional and floating, like the continuous folding, unfolding, and billowing of the women’s loose-fitting clothing, whose colours oscillate between orange-reds, blues, and gray-blacks. These variations create textures amazingly similar to those found in painting—textures achieved, among other ways, by the influence of a light wind that suddenly blows across the scene. All the pleats and folds of clothing, so intimately linked to body postures in paintings, to their intimate dramatic energy, are present here. One is reminded of Poussin, since The Greeting looks as if it might have been a reinvention of his painting, Eliezer and Rebecca, with those three admirable women regrouped on the right, while Eliezer, in the center, advances, holding her arms out to Rebecca, with a gesture reminiscent of the one made by the young woman in red who enters the scene in Viola’s work. Viola opted for a skillful compromise in his use of costumes, which evoke both ancient robes and Californian New Age (the three women are wearing sandals). Spectators regarding this scene, even if they remain in the fictional positions of cinema spectators, cannot help themselves from considering that this kind of image in perpetual movement and constantly transitional approaches the effect produced by the incessant eye scanning of all passionate viewers of paintings, where the sweeping of captivated glances produces a kind of hallucination.

Finally, Viola arranged in the background of this street setting under blue skies—scenery created in the studio, where the impossible perspective evokes at leisure the constructivist artifice of so many paintings since the Renaissance—a second action that we can choose, or not, to connect to the first scene. It was inserted within a small square opening that veers obliquely between the colors white and blue (a blue very similar to that of the sky), where two minuscule silhouettes are involved in an enigmatic back and forth. This opening is undeniably reminiscent of the open door revealing the man in the background of Las Meninas (or rather, one of the many reinterpretations: in Picasso’s series, Les Ménines...
which experiences—alternately progressive and regressive—had seemed and lined the image, had been the rate of action, twoFollow much of these be the de
descriptions, field-counter-field. Vélasquez, Ulises, or
tiny, or minuscule to light. Greeting is the end of a
to point that we cannot really
be the crystallization of a desire, but signaling at any
time this sudden, insistently elliptical point of escape, like a point
of pure light.

The Greeting is the end of a journey. The visitor previously
had to enter four other rooms that mimed as many states of
image and sound. The first one, Hall of Whispers, is a hallway
lined with projections of ghostly, gagged faces (ten in all, men
and women), and these images haunt the walls from which they
seem to emanate. The second installation, Interval, organized as a
progressive acceleration, creates an almost impossible distinction
between two images—a calm action, then a sequence of violent
states—alternately projected on two opposing walls, realizing in
this fashion an illusory, but physically very real unity on a spatialized
field-counter-field. The third, Presence, is a purely sonic ex-
perience achieved by hanging separate lines from the ceiling from
which are heard whispered phrases. In the fourth, The Veiling, Viola
set up two projections using mirrors to refract images through
a multiplicity of veils, composing as many translucent screens,
among which the visitor can circulate and be tempted to capture,
by viewing and by touching, impossible-to-capture images. These
are, first and foremost, uncertain image states, connected by both
impossible distances and positions, thus becoming even more
purely mental through their excess of physicality. Confronted
by these states that make the viewer more of a visitor than a
spectator, The Greeting restores a kind of serenity. The image is no
longer something that disturbs, eludes, attacks, and tenses up the
body by pressures essentially unknown. It re-assembles itself, so
to speak, into one single image whose mysterious ending—the
physical impression produced—finds itself suddenly guaranteed
by two recognisable forces. The first is the presence of a story,
a fictional one, but so minimal that the tradition of art and idea
still stands here in all its former legitimacy. The second force is
born from the reality of a position: the projection, whose position,
although relative here, is no less undeniable and assures us, while
the scene lasts, of a partial identity, thanks to which the irreversible
mutation of the image, which is accomplished here and there, can
also remain our safeguard.

Chantal Akerman
Why is Chantal Akerman's installation Bordering on Fiction: D'Est,
shown in 1995 at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis and at
the Jeu de Paume in Paris, such an exemplary work? Because it
experiments for the first time, in such a clear way, with the destiny of cinematic projection and beyond.

The first of the installation's three rooms is a film theatre. Not a real theatre, but a museum cinema built for the occasion that we can enter and leave at will, where we can sit on real theatre seats in the dark and follow a 107-minute projection from beginning to end if we choose. D'Est (From the East) is one of Akerman's films à dispositif, like Hotel Monterey or News From Home, in which the power of the camera eye is fully released and exercises a subtle pressure on objects, creating a documentary force from captured reality that is even sharper than we realise, for we feel it being penetrated by a fiction that is actually rooted in personal life, experience, and memory of self. A young woman, in voluntary exile, facing a New York she is in the process of discovering, reads her mother's letters from Belgium while filming these letters that are left unanswered. Through off-screen commentary and the power of the camera eye alone, we hear the echo of a Belgian Jew from Central Europe rediscovering the necessity of a native country. By the skillfully hierarchical alternation of insistent fixed shots and long tracking shots, mostly of the streets of Moscow, and by an unexpected treatment of direct sounds edited and expanded on over the course of the sequences, thereby creating a procession-like effect of images, Akerman conveys with sensitive, shattering evidence the shock of historical and social change that affected postcommunist Russia. We feel the example speaking for all the chilling events that have reshaped the human species.

And such is the projection in the second room, in which the projection of the film is fractured at the viewer's eye level into eight rows of three monitors each, a space in which the film is submitted to intense circulation. This grouping creates a complex circuit of sequences or moments drawn from the film. By approaching, retreating, stopping, or starting, viewers are exposed through purely physical movement to an infinite number of reprojections without true beginnings or ends. One becomes a party, to varying degrees, according to each individual (therein lies the interest in the way each person chooses to move), to a memory effect almost impossible to master through film, here exhibited through the renewed exchange created by eye movement and the concept of the work. The most moving parts of the installation are found in the alternate ways that the same scenes are replayed, animated from within by varying gestures (I think of the scene of that woman compulsively cutting sausage, which is repeated in diverse combinations with other scenes), and in the long tracking shots of crowds and frozen beings. One finds oneself captured by a double flow of action: that of an attentive, anxious, and loving camera, constantly renewing its distance from the object, but in such a way as to question the meaning of this distance; and that of our own unknown body learning a lesson from this other eye.

A title announces the third space, a more modest, sober room: La vingt-cinquième image (The Twenty-Fifth Image). In the first room, spectators sit down to enter into the image projection. In the second, they freely circulate among the images.
In the third, they are given the option of sitting on an ordinary bench and entering into a different rapport with the image, somewhere between transmission and reflection. The twenty-fifth image is the one that video adds to the film: the television image. It subtly opposes itself to the twenty-four film images still being reshuffled on the monitors in the second room. This television image is played out in one single long shot, sliding imperceptibly from uncertain representation (a street lined with lights radiating a yellow glow) to almost complete abstraction (when this light, shown in extreme close-up, is overtaken by the “snow” on the video image). It takes about ten minutes for this image to live and then completely dissolve within a monitor placed on the ground, while the voice-over does the essential work, reverberating through two separate loud speakers. Akerman’s voice speaks to us while this transformation of a possible television image into an experimental video image ensues. First she reads us an extract in Hebrew from Exodus, which she pursues after a point in French, broaching on the Jewish commandment against idol and image worship. In a hushed, confiding tone, she tells us about the history and the project, the sensations produced by this film, D’Est, which could have also been a letter addressed to a father, touching on what was accomplished during the voyage from Belgium to Russia through Germany and Poland. She announces the images to come in this film in words she had to write down first in order to reply to the images surging up in her: current images, past images, and those to come, images of “people for whom history doesn’t even have an ‘H’ anymore, but who get hit by history nevertheless.” She then adds, with a touching simplicity: “There is nothing to be done, it’s obsessing and it obsesses me. In spite of the cello, in spite of cinema.” In spite of the beautiful cello solo played by Sonia Wieder-Altherton underneath Akerman’s words. In spite of the film that is rolling, so close and yet suddenly so far, in the first room.

And here we are, after the initial projection and crowd circulation appropriate to the installation, in a place created as a kind of meditation room within the installation. A place to think—under the effect of a counter-transmission of the television image that finally leads us to writing and the book—about the relationship between the projection and circulation of images that is undeniably accomplished through this dual project of film and installation, which are connected and use the other as a pretext. When Akerman transformed her title D’Est by supplementing it with Bordering on Fiction, she was measuring, or at least letting us imagine, the overflow that results from a “documentary style bordering on fiction,” opening the way to the idea of a fiction whose edges we can only glimpse: the fiction of a cinema saving itself

* The genesis of the project is outlined in the text by Kathy Halbreich and Bruce Jenkins that introduces the beautiful catalogue dedicated to the installation. There are also two essays from Catherine David and Michael Tarentino, in addition to a kind of travelogue by Akerman, “A propos de D’Est” (About From the East), where we read about how the film took shape.
Christian Boltanski

A dispositif is an act of the mind. Each new dispositif is a thought form made concrete and thereby enhanced. In the enormous, stark chambre envisioned by Christian Boltanski in Les Concessions, on display at Galerie Yvon Lambert, the invention is the result of two separate but equally forceful elements. Placed at different angles on the floor in the middle of the room are eight double-sided frames, human-scale in height. Laid out in three irregular rows on the walls are sixty-eight black cloth rectangles or squares, each one concealing an image: a photograph. Four fans hanging from the ceiling cause these cloths to rise and fall at random, revealing the images to one degree or another; on the bottom and most accessible row, visitors may choose the images they want to unveil. Although each one is unique, they are alike in that they all show faces and bodies mutilated by pain, torture, violence, and death. These enlarged photographs were extracted from a Spanish newspaper, El Caso, which is similar to our own Détective, and bear the imprint of the dot screen, which sometimes renders facial features and bodily forms into troubling abstractions. What one sees—or almost sees—is at any rate reflected in the serial horror of what we do not see, represented by these black cloths that vibrate like announcements that have retained the trembling of the hands that sealed them.

This anonymous and seemingly limitless representation largely draws its force from the images on the frames set up in the middle of the room. These images, also photographs, but much more enigmatic, amplify the resonance of the images on the walls. The upper part of the frames are intensely lit by a fluorescent light hidden underneath the same sheet that covers the photographs and falls to the floor, leaving recognisable forms attracted to the bottom of the frame, where they dissolve into a neutral space. In one frame, we view the radiant face of a dark-haired adolescent, her slightly crude charm exposed in a hair stylist’s advertisement; in another, we see a glittering, wide-open eye; and in another, we find the terrifying sight of a man’s head, or simply nothing but an incoherent mass of uncertain folds and features. Could we guess for ourselves what the chambre is hinting at by this willful absence of all press information? These faces and bodies are those of both murderers and victims, and all derive from newspaper photographs. Imagine these images back to back, eight times over on the eight frames. The staging of these paradoxical shots/counter-shots illuminated by a common light is effective: we forget as we move from one side of a frame to the other the image-memory formed from the previous side; simultaneously, each time we shift places, and hence perspectives, in the room, we also discover other sets of instants-to-instants that come to us from the wild, wan images surrounding us. These silent images also tremble from currents of air that vibrate the sheets—both their screens and their veils.
Boltanski incorporates three principles into this work that demonstrate the extent to which installation art has become an unsettling, increasingly undeniable presence somewhere between the conventions of the visual arts and those of theatre and film. The first of these principles is virtuality. Virtuality affects the two series of images in different ways, but also holds them together, all of them being interchangeable in terms of three resonant elements: the evidentiary, the monstrously sublime, and the statistical. The second principle involves a perceptual uncertainty that operates differently in each of the two series, but is mutually supported by them, as well as through the combination of two important modes of image elaboration. First, there is the uncertain balance between representation and disfiguration, and then there is the interaction between stillness and movement. It is striking to see how much these highly singular frames resonate with recently produced images for video installations, such as Gary Hill’s *Tall Ships* or two episodes of Bill Viola’s *Buried Secrets, Hall of Whispers* and *The Veiling*, each of which plays with “veiled” images as well. From the moment the spectators enter the room, their very movements produce the variations that affect other spectators and absorb their attention at will. But how exactly? All possibilities are present, including the sense of being a witness to, or maybe a victim and possibly even perpetrator of, this horror surrounding them. The political or at least ethical sense of this intervention is achieved through the skillful application of the dispositif in question: determined by their own strong responses to the spectacle—increasingly necessary as a means of opposing the spectacular flow of the unrepresentable—visitors must constantly reinvent their stance by crossing into the territory itself.

Upon leaving the room, visitors fall upon three reliquaries at the entrance. These metal coffins are placed on bases and secured to the wall with fine wire mesh. We also see two photographs of children’s faces, and a third one of a child lying down, in a bed or a real coffin. At the foot of the base, a rumpled white sheet reminds us of the translucent screen-veils draped on the upright images and the black cloths over the other images. One’s mind is unceasingly atoning with its memory duties, the duty to conceive a counter-staging.

*Terry Gilliam*

How does Boltanski’s installation provide us with the impetus to understand the effect produced by the false-true remake of Chris Marker’s *La Jetée, Twelve Monkeys*? In *Twelve Monkeys*, the photograph is not questioned. Its role is infinitesimal. It forms the wall of images that the heroine-psychiatrist uses to illustrate her book on the future visionaries, and in which she suddenly notices the photograph of the hero as a soldier in the First World War, just as she was trying to understand the “insanity” of this man during the most consistent—and most present—time frame (shortly before the end of the twentieth century) among the various times depicted in the film. A true indicator of the temporal paradox, the photograph incarnates nothing here. It contributes to the notion of another world in *Blade Runner*, becoming both troubled image
matter (in the photographic blowup sequence) and virtual indicator (the packet of photographs of the heroine, woman or replicant). It was even employed as a slightly abstract concept by screenwriters who were both fans of Philip Dick and fascinated by La Jetée, and might have left Marker something to hope for: if not a possible image of what he had dared, at least the use of the photograph as one of those shift anticipators that the big American machines sometimes have the genius of employing to capture the future of their time and to precipitate variations of the image’s destiny (in Terminator, for example—even in the second one with its attempts at synthesis—or in Who Framed Roger Rabbit?, as it was in the past with The Wizard of Oz).

Thirty-three years ago, the age of Christ, after Nuit et brouillard (Night and Fog) and Hiroshima mon amour, after A bout de souffle (Breathless) and Les quatre cent coups (The Four Hundred Blows), with its final freeze-frame of Jean-Pierre Léaud running with his back to the sea, La Jetée was to define once and for all a new order of things involving the irreversible non-return of the image placed into the category of frozen-forever-in-time. After the camp, after the bomb, after cinema falling for the first time into its own past. Vertigo, with its eye-hair spiral and the sequoia cross-section whose concentric circles represented, to the terrified eyes of the couple, the abstraction of time, was the melancholy referent and elective sign of cinema’s passage towards itself, thus entering into its own transformation. The hero of La Jetée, imprisoned among others by a population of conquerors and buried like rats underground in Chaillot (where Langlois, during the war, had saved many films banned by the Nazis, and where the Cinémathèque Française had just opened its doors in 1963, the same year Marker’s film was released), receives an explanation of the new genre from the head of the camp’s labour division: “The human race was now condemned. Space was now closed to them, and the only possible link to survival was through Time.” In this film, the “story of a man marked by a childhood image” is developed through four different time frames. The first is the time of his childhood, the time of an image glimpsed on the Orly jetty. The second time frame is the underground camp period, after the Third World War and the destruction of Paris. The third time frame—the clearest of the film—is the Past, where the camp authorities first send their prisoner—guinea pig to create “a hole in Time.” The fourth time frame is the Future, which is also called upon in vain to rescue the present. And it is through its original image that the film’s paradox is resolved and completed; this image from childhood that absorbs all of the past unto itself alone and makes sure “that we were not trying to escape Time and the instant that he witnessed as a child that continued to obsess him, was the instant of his own death.”

What remains of all this in Terry Gilliam’s film? Almost nothing. Only what can be drawn from “a film inspired by the film written by Chris Marker.” The necessary lapsus in the generic version speaks volumes. La jetée is a film-nonfilm that borrows a strong, although insipid, idea (to all sci-fi amateurs, of which Marker is one): the story of a man projected into a past to save humanity
from the effects of its own self-destruction. There are also four separate time frames in "Twelve Monkeys." The year 2035 is the present, following the catastrophe that must be overcome. The year 1991 is where the hero is first sent (the essential part of the film unfolds in a psychiatric institute). The First World War is where he finds himself in the trenches. And then there is the year 1996, when the virus that must be destroyed to render the Earth habitable once more first begins to spread. This is the clearest time frame of the film, when the rapport between the psychiatrist-heroine and the hero--guinea pig is established, up until the end, where we witness the scene, which has already been elliptically inserted several times, of the hero's death as seen from the eyes of a child. The four time frames are, of course, interspersed with linking images of a baroque intricacy, images refined at leisure by screenwriters in order to maintain the spectator somewhere between enigma and reason. But the film's weakness can be measured by the fact that two of these returns into the past are simply navigational errors, in relation to a false present that becomes in spite of it all the "real" one needed as a scene to answer the story's action, images of this action, an image-action that is the logical result of these time interplays, but still able to stand completely on its own--certainly not like these melodramatically charged slow motion scenes that were supposed to equate the matrix-image of Marker's film. But this image is not the subject of this spectacular film, which is neither worse, nor better than others by which American cinema continues to systematically ensure its empire. In Marker's film, everything depended on the fact that this image was a photograph, or rather photography, and that the photograph be not out of context in a film that derives from it, a photograph that is continually reanimated by the editing, the music, and a commentary that becomes living theory of a shift occurring in another time that held the promise of cinema.

This is how Gilliam was able to substitute—to believe that this substitution could be made believable: logic of loans, logic of empires—an absolute masterpiece of image-time for a pure movement-film. This movement-film, at once soft and hard, is propelled by all the ceaseless, hysterical shots of movements, bodies, gestures, looks—all actions that work in favor of the film's success, thanks to the actors, the male hero, especially, who is strong enough to keep the viewer wondering for a long time if all of this might well be an internal projection, his own increasing insanity. But whereas "Vertigo" inspired "La Jetée" with its use of obsessive fear, its incarnation of the theme of "impossible memory, insane memory," re-created once more by Marker in "Sans Soleil," the memory of cinema calling on its past to help a future yet to be invented, this is not the case with Gilliam's film, which aligns itself with Hitchcock's through the use of actual scenes from "Vertigo." "Twelve Monkeys" drew little from its source of inspiration and is nothing more than a cinematic offering to the filmmaking duo destined to recycle the medium's own past for the purposes of cinematic spectacle.
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