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Image Versus Imagination: Memory's Theatre of Cruelty in Chris Marker's *La Jetée*

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Abstract: *While the 1962 French science fiction film La Jetée presents a straightforward narrative premise, it nonetheless details the story of a man who "becomes a human projectile to be pro-jeté through time," as Paul Sandro claims. Incriminating the audience in a theatre of cruelty, the film moves through the past and future via the mental time-travel of the protagonist in a series of stills, which appear independent from the consciousness of the agent. In the course of events, the protagonist builds a cognitive map out of this chaotic sequence of memories that allows him to then create new spaces of thought. The first mention of the "theatre of cruelty" by Antonin Artaud in 1935, considered pain and terror to be the most important elements of any kind of play or film. The protagonist's situation of constantly chasing his own ghost and restoring his memory corresponds to these conditions and thus opens up new venues of considering cruelty, and in extension trauma, as an important third element in Chris Marker's film. His film La Jetée created a filmic embodiment of this interplay in both the redemptive yet productive powers of memory and the cyclical notion of time as it manifests itself in the mind of the protagonist and viewer.*

While the 1962 French science fiction film *La Jetée* (*La jetée*, Chris Marker) presents a straightforward narrative premise, it also details the story of a man who "becomes a human projectile to be *pro-jeté* through time" (Sandro 108). The plot is described in the film itself as the "story of a man marked by an image of his childhood". In the hands of experimental scientists after the Third World War, a man conjures memories of ordinary moments as he is used as a guinea pig to travel into the future for food, medicine and energy in an effort to restore society to its original form. Despite being tied to a chair, the nameless protagonist moves through a series of memory stills until he reaches the unthinkable goal. He refuses help from the future, choosing instead to relive a childhood moment—his own death. It is a story of unreachable aims, untrodden paths and manipulated memories, disguised as a narrative of time travel and scientific guinea pigs.

Incriminating the audience in a "theatre of cruelty" (Artaud "The Theater of Cruelty"), the film moves through the past and future via the mental time travel of the protagonist in a series of stills, which appear independent from the consciousness of the agent. In the course of events, out of this chaotic sequence of memories the protagonist builds a cognitive map that allows him to then create new spaces of thought. In his first mention of the "theatre of cruelty" in 1935, Antonin Artaud considers pain and terror to be the most important elements of any kind of play or film ("The Theater of Cruelty" 242). The protagonist's attempts to chase his own ghost and redeem his memory correspond to these conditions and open up new venues of considering cruelty and, by extension, trauma, as an important third element in Chris Marker's *La Jetée*. His film creates a filmic embodiment of this interplay on the redemptive yet productive powers of

memory and the cyclical notion of time as it manifests itself in the mind of the protagonist and viewer. In his travels through time, in fact, the unnamed protagonist takes on the roles of both participant and audience in the theatrical interplay of pain and terror. Artaud mentions that the strain put on the audience is of utmost importance to the theatre of cruelty. This stress leaves the audience aesthetically shocked by the all-pervasive horrific atmosphere of the work:

> Artaud's lesson is of the cruelty and tyranny of unpredictable, unfathomable forces that transcend the reasoned limits of reality as humanity understands them. The methods used to deliver this brutal lesson are based on a theory of generating a series of shocks, effected by the collision of images, sounds, and savage acts conveyed in a primarily non-verbal, synaesthetic language. (Rockett 57–8)

Tortured into time travel, the protagonist experiences a violation of his human dignity. This essay, however, argues that the torturous element comes only outwardly and superficially from the scientists in the film. Instead, it proposes that the protagonist's memory and the vision of his own death as childhood trauma are superimposed upon the other filmic elements. In the film's Deleuzian, bare life scenario, the imagination of time itself becomes an animistic power and the agent of progressively inflicted pain. Contrary to previous criticism, I argue that it is not the shattering of the protagonist's imaginary world that becomes the driving force towards death, but rather that the images and imagination of the protagonist create a fake or alternate representation of the world. It is a theatre of suggestion and corporality that leads to a mysterious and affect-charged spectacle. Here I contend that *La Jetée* is an embodiment of a "cinema of cruelty" that developed out of Artaud's theory.

As they were established around the same time as the surrealist movement, to which Artaud's theatre of cruelty is connected, and shaped by the same desire for anarchy, it seems fitting to utilise Gilles Deleuze's theories of the world as processes of becoming that are not weighed down by certainties, order or the reliability of individuals and their actions. Chris Marker's film is a piece of performance art that changes the traditional relationship between artist, artwork and viewer. The result is a transformative experience that emerges out of the violent and brutal atmosphere of *La Jetée* and illustrates the traumatic becomings of which Deleuze speaks (*Thousand Plateaus* 117). In place of a fully coherent subject is a nonlinear dynamic process of change that enables any subject to deal with problems of an aesthetic nature as well as a lack of subjective clarity.

La Jetée illustrates the power of a stream of consciousness and the human will to synthesise and fuse memories in a specious present. It is the protagonist's influence that violates the intrinsic articulation of inner time and impacts the cinematographic trajectory to create a cyclical plot. Aby Warburg comments on human production, human compulsion and the simultaneous failure to bring these to the attention of the film's audience: "cinema as a medium of communication allows the vision of pathological symptoms of an archaic human past to come to the fore independent of volition" (qtd. in Ffrench 34). Positing an expressionistic philosophy of the image, the art historian Warburg's description of movement as dynamic and a pathological symptom has recently been reinterpreted by scholars as being connected to Deleuze and to trauma studies. Christa Blümlinger uses Warburg's body images with the concept of pathos formulas as a storage space of cultural memory ("Das Imaginäre" 94), while Simon O'Sullivan

concentrates on the performative aspect of myth and the relation to Deleuze and Guattari's "Pragmatics" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 317).



The protagonist first remembers the woman's face in *La Jetée* (Chris Marker, 1962).

Artaud was forced to admit that the theatre could not fulfil the demand to revitalise life through chaos and thus persuade the human audience to master what does not exist yet. Film, however, had the potential to achieve the creation of an alternate reality that did not just imitate reality. *La Jetée* portrays memories that are in the sphere between reality and virtuality, without attempting to imitate life. Marker's film unites all three prerequisites of Artaud's theatre of cruelty and manages to combine them in unique ways that could not possibly be achieved by the theatre. First, there is neither a discursive, ordered text or unfragmented language sequences that could conform to civilisation and cultural methods. Equally, the second premise of a disembodied body as an important transmitter of signs is fulfilled, since the actual body of our protagonist might be tied down, but his movements in his dreams still signal survival. One also finds the third prerequisite of the blocked voice in Marker's film, because he might be able to move with his body in his dreams, but this state of being is accompanied by the failure to articulate oppressed thoughts or expressions of pain (Artaud "Theater of Cruelty" 242). Artaud's thoughts mirror the film's message best when one considers his emphasis of the cognitive experience that is triggered by failure and pain. His moralistic criterion for knowledge presupposes that an image is only true (and meaningful) insofar as it is violent. This violence forms the basis of Marker's film.

Artaud's interest in cinema led him to apply his concept of the theatre of cruelty and its philosophical principles to the new medium. Marker's films also generally operate on the most primitive of human spiritual levels with fearful wonder and astonishment at the inexplicable.[i] As Will Rockett argues in his Artaudian analysis of the horror genre, "[w]hile the transcendent cause of such savagery remains indeterminate and terrifying, its horrible effects are concrete and clear, so as to lend credence to the terrible reality of that cause" (88–9). However, the audience's construction of "a coherent universe and a narrative meaning from a chaos of a series of snapshots" within Marker's *La Jetée* does not inevitably require a return to these levels without

offering glimpses of progress and creation (88). *La Jetée* adds new narrative levels of understanding to the theatre of cruelty.

In *La Jetée*, it is mainly human pathology and its interactions with time and memory that establish the theatre of cruelty. In relation to the relevance of theories of memory and forgetting to Marker's film, this essay will delve into some recent trauma scholars' work on the subject, that support the suggestion that the traumatised protagonist in fact copes with the pain and cruelty of his experiences in more productive and insightful ways than previously argued.

A Journey of Pain and Cruelty

A pathological subject drives the story of *La Jetée*, yet critics of the film, for instance, Jean-Louis Schefer (1), tend to claim that it is within the means of his torturers to bring about the protagonist's death. Equally, it may be assumed that the subdued, traumatised but remembering subject gradually inches closer to the actual memory that continues to elude him. Since the viewer is only privy to the information given by the protagonist, he or she might also imagine progress is being made towards this goal, as the multiple instances of this moment in the series of stills indicate.



One of the first images of the captors.

There are at least two different kinds of pain for the protagonist. While one is defined as the traumatising impetus for the journey inflicted by the torturers, the other is essentially his own desire to follow the woman (and her face) to the very end. It is the successful feat of the protagonist to perpetuate his life through memory and revive his human impulses and even humanity. He never loses his ability to dream, invent stories or develop unadulterated trust. If we take the blurring effects and deformed figures as indicators of a fading of the psychotic subject, as Réda Bensmaia does, then the protagonist lives out repressed fictions of his early childhood in an "unceasing struggle between the desires for fusion and for destruction" (qtd. in Sandro 110). The theatre of cruelty requires a metaphysical and abstract kind of pain and, in this case, pain is even continued out of the protagonist's own volition. The subject, indeed, takes on a torturous

journey. It does not matter if the woman is real or merely an idea or unknown presence—the fidelity with which he maintains her image is essential. Jean-Louis Schefer explains this with regard to *La Jetée*: "But sometimes it is the fleeting fidelity to a destiny in which that game is but a ruse" (qtd. in Pollock 290). After all, it is this game that creates not only interest in, but also sympathy for, the subject. Attempting to flee from the scientists would also result in losing faith in his memory and his possible salvation. It also explains the protagonist's refusal to give in to the deal that could save him, which comes at the cost of not knowing his destiny and the woman's relation to it.

Memory, as Griselda Pollock claims, is played "between sweetness and violence" and the subject finds solace in staying focused on its truth, imagination and power (290). The images might be based on a repeated trauma, but this does not change in any way the audience's attitude towards them. It encourages one to believe in the truthfulness of the visual representation, but at the same time as life is lived, death is close by. The audience is constantly reminded that the protagonist is a tool in the hands of others and, as he himself says, is aware that there is no way out of time. Artaud's theatre of cruelty is an attempt at overcoming a conception of consciousness as an internal representation of the exterior world. At the heart of both Marker's film and Artaud's theory of the theatre of cruelty lies the desire to reinvestigate the meaning of being rather than give in to the traditional duality of consciousness and external world.

While the scientists search for a hole in time, the subject in the chair attempts to find the overarching theme in his collection of remembrances. As the film suggests, both parties reach the same point in the end, which is but the perennial repetition of death and destruction. The audience is imprisoned in the same cage of impressions as the protagonist and the scientists, who are equally dependent on the outcome of the protagonist's journey. According to Artaud's principles, the scene exemplifies that cruelty is an essential part of life, which even makes community and society possible. As is to be expected from a silent film, Marker's production goes to the utmost to emphasise unheard screams and inarticulate cries as well as highly symbolic gestures. The portrayal of the protagonist's humanity and of his inhuman treatment functions as a means to shock the audience and draw them into the story.

All parties depend strongly on the tortured subject's strength to synthesise the various memories in order to come to his desired conclusion. The protagonist, however, refuses to become the object of the scientists' manipulation and chooses to end things (and ultimately his life) his way. The effect on the audience is a stronger awareness of the disturbing and potentially fake nature of this representation. On the one hand, this encourages the audience's production of meaning; on the other hand, it illustrates the human compulsion and power of repetition over reality. According to Artaud's theory, it brings the demons and the terror to the surface. Yet as much as the protagonist tries to remember and relive particular situations, his fiction violates the intrinsic articulation of inner time. The character can only inhabit a setting through his imaginary gaze and express it either as spectacle or as routine reality. Through the captivating voice of the narrator, the protagonist's story becomes a fairy tale of linked consciousnesses. The audience experiences a sense of creation in totalitarian circumstances of which it usually only sees limited portions. This creative impulse is indeed the most convincing explanation for the force of the protagonist's imagination and his connection to other consciousnesses.

In resisting the servitude expected by the captors, the protagonist suffers in a self-propelled creative act of resistance. He pays for his dignity with additional pain. Gilles Deleuze reminds us that Sigmund Freud privileged pain as a source of memory. As Freud, here quoted by Derrida, says, "in a certain sense, there is no breaching without a beginning of pain, and 'pain leaves behind it particularly rich breaches'" (qtd. in Schwab 19). It becomes necessary to accept betrayal and pain on the part of the traumatised subject, as suffering cannot be forgotten. In Cathy Caruth's understanding of trauma, the subject allows history to arise rather than finding a straightforwardly referential version of history. Pain then means that the protagonist is able to distance himself from his persecutors and attempts to rewrite his (his)tory of suffering. He tries to impose psychical organisation in order to avoid the complete destruction of his being, even though unbearable pain eclipses consciousness and memory (3–12).

It is necessary to allow some pain to come to the fore, while avoiding too much of it in order to survive. Resistance and human suffering go hand in hand to avoid complete traumatic amnesia. As the narrator tells it, the protagonist "does not want the pacified future" and remains conscious and proud of "the memory of a twice-lived time", caught "deep in these limbos". The conjured series of images illustrates the remaining will to live and survive the trauma on the part of the protagonist. This cruel display of will and perseverance echoes Artaud's vision of an immediate performance which "must permit, by its use of man's nervous magnetism, the transgression of the ordinary limits of art and speech, in order to realize actively, that is to say magically, in real terms, a kind of total creation in which man must reassume his place between dreams and events" (3). Even if the protagonist's death puts a sudden end to his images, they create a personal and uninhibited history that ultimately leads him to the inherent truth of the matter and to witnessing his own demise.

Artaud's positivity in creation through pain indicates that the memories might not have been created in vain. Considering that the man is glued to an image from his supposed past, the audience is made to believe that there is no escape from the vicious cycle of repetition. Gilles Deleuze claims that a new interiority and sensibility is created in coping with this pain ("On Four Poetic Formulas" 31). Everyone is equally implicated in this pain and there is no necessity to feel any guilt on the part of the main subject. One possible interpretation is that the subject punishes himself in reliving these painful memories. On the tenth day of the experiment, images "begin to ooze, like confessions", but what is there to confess? If the subject has done nothing wrong, such a statement seems uncalled for, unless it refers to the relief within the images. Becoming is thus generative of a new way of being that is a function of influences rather than resemblances. It is a process of change, flight or movement where new unities are created. Artaud has speculated that a connection between creation, becoming and chaos requires temptations or "indraughts of air around these ideas" in order to channel the individual into placing themselves into the cosmic order of this kind of theatre (2).

Trauma and Time

I argue that *La Jetée* is an attempt to portray trauma as a collective, cosmopolitan, ahistorical experience. Accordingly, the collection of items in the museum scene and the accumulation of particularly desired shots throughout the film can be seen as a manifestation of

this traumatic shock. Jean-Louis Schefer comes close to calling this the trauma of the entire post-Second-World-War generation: "That for those of my generation, is the memory (an imperfect memory, but one that induces the greater part of our sensibility), the memory of or the kind of mnemonic damage caused by the war in our childhood" (qtd. in Pollock 291). It shows the protagonist's awareness of his own nostalgia; he seems grateful for "this haunted moment he was granted to see as a child". These memories constitute a means to review the protagonist's poetic place within reality and to consider his anarchistic destruction of the external world as a spectacle of the imagination. It is certainly possible that the protagonist/survivor is a site of damage—regardless of the traumatising moment of his own death. "Unique images of peacetime" haunt the protagonist throughout the film, as the scientists "stood guard over a kingdom of rats". They, for one, seem to lack understanding for these sentiments. Everything the protagonist imagines is a new vision upon which either the generational or childhood trauma of watching his own death is superimposed. These images account for the physical object that every spectacle in Artaud's metaphysical theatre requires, and which allows the protagonist to transfer his energy and atrocity into showing the continuity of his thoughts.



The protagonist imagines himself and the woman interacting at a museum.

Introducing the metaphor of an "unreachable country" regarding the protagonist's waking state, the film sets up the concept of spaces in time as external or imagined mechanisms. The sequence of interwoven dreams and waking states imposes a framework upon an otherwise terrifying state of placelessness and lack of belonging. As the narrator says early on, the protagonist is "stripped out of the present" before "another wave lifts him up" and thus experiences the full range of emotions. The articulation of this primal fear of displacement makes him the ideal subject of the spectacle of cruelty, which calls for freedom through the portrayal of the repressed forces of man. "The theatre must make itself the equal of … liberated life which sweeps away human individuality and in which man is only a reflection" (Jannarone 107). The actuality of his loss is turned into an anonymous narrative of peace, as Cathy Caruth explains (29). In essence, Marker's film shows the betrayal of an individual narrative and a particular past through suffering. The protagonist is further isolated in this traumatic experience as memory is blind to all but the group it binds. As trauma scholar Maurice Halbwachs has

claimed, memory takes root in the concrete—in spaces, gestures or images, whereas history is a concept that binds itself only to temporal relations (qtd. in Vickroy 169). Memory is a living organism that is shaped by and remains in a state of permanent evolution. It is at the same time more fluid, open, revived and vulnerable (168). The film "proceeds" precisely to provide a counterpoint to the director's desire "to *freeze*, through obsessive and stately image-documentation, a certain period, a certain sensibility, which he felt to be imperiled, on the verge of passing away" (Martin 87). Despite few references to the Second World War, the exact nature of this historical framework eludes the viewer.

To the protagonist, however, the outside circumstances are not inevitably tied to a certain time period, as his mental journey is merely initiated and propelled by these external terrors. The viewer is similarly concerned with the "attempt to achieve a transition between a traumatic past and an unforeseeable future" (Rafferty 287). Paul Sandro claims that the mental image of the jetty is a point of departure for the entire narrative, thus becoming the most important image that is not historically embedded (107). The protagonist's imagination returns to this moment, which thus becomes a point of no return in signalling the moment of death. He envisions that "the child he had been was doomed to be their tool, but first of all he looked for a woman's face at the end of a pier". All other instances experienced by the protagonist are malleable and unfixed as well as random. These projections lead the audience deeper into the subject's virtual world of memory. As subject and as onlooker, the main character finds himself in a position that is unique from the point of view of trauma studies. He is the victim of his illusory images, yet works through his trauma without the usual separation into text and experience or, in Artaud's words, art and life.

If processes of working through, as Dominick LaCapra claims, transcend toward a "state of closure or full ego identity" (171), the protagonist's search for logic amidst his derealisation is also a means of testifying in spite of his inability to speak. It requires a dialogue of multiple perspectives due to the visceral quality that forms the basis of this "fiction". Mary Ann Doane and Laura Mulvey argue that the "effectiveness of cinema rests upon an illusional logic … creating a fundamentally discontinuous but nonetheless highly effective simulacrum of our own subjective space-time" (qtd. in Chamarette 219). The illusion of a rhythm extends to the protagonist as a tableau vivant—a blank space filled with images whose meaning remains to be determined by the viewer. The protagonist is at first defined by his ordinariness, with the exception of his desire for one moment. Both the protagonist's conjured images and the audience's reaction serve to destroy the illusion of tranquillity. The resulting "psychical matrix", first described by Philippe Dubois (qtd. in Chamarette 225), is created in conjunction with the protagonist and viewers who need to read it accordingly. Viewers move in and out of various pasts and prospective futures in one perfect psychical loop.

In fact, "time builds itself painlessly around them", as the protagonist's memories as a collection of moments in time determine direction, while one's psyche retreats into the background. As in the fiction of Marker's role model Jorge Luis Borges, a labyrinth of knowledge is needed to fill the void—the memories supply the rational explanation for events. The protagonist moves smoothly through this world until death as non-time catches up with him. This requires the audience to follow him on what seems to be the path towards infinity. If freedom is indeed, as Artaud suggests, merely an illusion and a cliché, this infinity is the greatest

freedom the protagonist can hope to attain. Artaud's performance theory encapsulates the portrayal of another kind of dangerous reality where the principles of life are always just disappearing from one's vision. Contrary to Jenny Chamarette's support of Dubois's claim that the protagonist is locked within a temporal loop that creates and destroys his subjecthood, I argue that the flux of events rather asserts his subjectivity. His becoming counters the forgetting and stillness that is death.

When a time traveller from the future offers him refuge, the protagonist chooses to continue his journey along an uncertain path rather than give up what he strives for. He opts for an immersion in this dangerous reality instead of holding on to an alternate vision. They believe him to be the messenger of a truth "too fantastic to be believed". After first "refusing this slag from another time", they agree to help him later. It is his own desire that drives his progress towards a certain goal, as he takes the audience down that same road. These psychical temporalities become an almost dream-like escape route that eventually allows all to reach the real moment of destruction. The protagonist's will to control time and situate himself in relation to a reference point in that cycle—the woman—replaces geography and enables the protagonist to create an ideology of his own. Artaud claims that the "authentic madman … is a man who preferred to become mad, in the socially accepted sense of the word, rather than forfeit a certain superior idea of human honour" (Artaud "Van Gogh" 485). This can neither be stopped, nor resisted, nor influenced by the men who experiment with him for their own purposes.

Imaginary Relationships

According to Artaud, the unconscious is structured like a language, with outside markers resonating others' voices ("The Theatre and its Double" 31). At the time of the protagonist's death, the outsiders assert the powerfulness of the vision and enter said vision in order to harm him. It is, in a way, simultaneously a victory and a defeat for the protagonist. To some extent, this is the cruelty played out in the film at the same time as happiness only results from inching closer to the desired memory. Artaud has corresponding thoughts in "Fragments of a Diary from Hell", where he describes the tormented individual's right to speak in order to get out of this suspension: "No precise information can ever be given by this soul that is choking; for the torment that is killing it, flaying it fibre by fibre, is occurring below the level of thought" (95). The roles of tormentor, tormented and fool (who thrives on this pain) are intertwined and the protagonist's sense is most cruelly affected by the unexpected. Artaud's theatre of cruelty aims at this kind of contagion and allows the passing of the interminable new in order to combat mere reproduction, repetition or representation.

Artaud has claimed that the truth of life lies in the impulsiveness of matter and the keener perception that are products of this theatre of cruelty. Marker's art "reaches for the poetic (even Utopian) moment when time and memory become, precisely, *inventive:* when time doubles back or springs forward, layering itself; and when memory creates a living (rather than dead) archive, and a collective connection" (Martin 85–6 original emphasis). It often remains unclear whether the collections of objects in the film's background and the assembly of characters are deliberate or merely deliberately "corrupted" in nature. For this reason, the protagonist and the viewers need to reanimate these corrupted elements of memory. One is lured into accepting the idea that

there might be an evolution, but is ultimately disappointed by the questionable nature of the film's "lived experience".



The final scene in which the protagonist witnesses his own death.

In prioritising sensation, Deleuze and Marker put less emphasis on the mere form of cinema and more on the relationships and intimate investigation of cultural paradigms in its various manifestations—namely, time and memory. "Sensation is the affect, which is neither subjective nor objective; rather it is both at once: we become in sensation and at the same time something happens because of it" (Parr 132). In the "museum of memory" the protagonist wanders from one sensation to another, passing time crystals and moments of intensity in the hope of becoming the agent who can conjure the desired scene. These wanderings illustrate most of all the dissolution of difference between the I and others. In the tradition of Montaigne, Resnais and Marker, the essayistic film connects radical views with changing definitions in a dialectic process. History moves back and forth between the two poles of individual and collective memory—always as it pleases. Much of the subject's becoming depends on bringing unruly and unacceptable desires under control through a system of signification. The reconstruction of traumatic events leads to the subjectivisation of the individual. It is the true work of memory in art when sensation is conserved rather than commemorated.

By accepting the premise that the mental images of the protagonist are freely conjured, they can be treated as results of the interplay of different identities within one person, who is driven, but nonetheless stifled, by his own hesitancies. It is the epitome of unbroken curiosity and playfulness that eludes the torturers on the outside. This is illustrated by Cees Nooteboom's assessment of travel writing per se: "The world to which one travels becomes a vision; experiences of the senses take place in memory. Blurriness kidnaps me into a space of thought without mass or borders" (qtd. in Binczek 79). There is no positive exploration in *La Jetée*, but an exceedingly painful return to the traumatic event that made the protagonist so fitting to the experiment in the first place. As the film voices, "the man doesn't die, nor does he get mad, he suffers". It is the trauma of being manipulated by the scientists that triggers this hidden memory in all its force.

The real cruelty of the film seems to come in the form of an impossibility to unite all consciousnesses lastingly. The narrator's voice further violates the protagonist's inner time, since it can only articulate its different experience through the actual images and breaks. Just as pain can get out of control, memory itself might be self-perpetuating after its initial phase, although the protagonist would still be the initiator of the images. The audience experiences the force of thought and the unthinkable—that is, the creation of an in-between that in turn positions thought within the innermost part of the image. The narrator assesses this situation in the phrase "the only link of survival passed through time".

The audience is constantly reminded of a potential aftermath that is a yet-untold story, just as the humans of the future are somehow "ready to accept him as one of their own". This story seems to go beyond time travel, temporal implications of memory or the potential cruelty of humankind. It is a narrative of grief and vulnerability that emerges from the historical context and larger ethics of suffering and violence, yet it hints at the positive nature of collective mourning and grief in opposition to individual powers of relating to such violent circumstances. As it is rendered in *La Jetée*, it raises ideas about a moral commitment to peace, humanity and even dignity.

The battle between image and imagination in Chris Marker's version of an individual and collective apocalypse within the field of time-travel hinges as much on what remains unsaid and embedded within memory as it does on open acknowledgments of social fault lines. *La Jetée* thus becomes a starting point for negotiating the unspeakable and pathological inabilities to comprehend particular realities in the genre of science fiction film that simultaneously integrates the findings of recent trauma studies.

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