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Without Words, What Are Facts?: Looking at Susan Howe Looking at Marker

Drake Stutesman

In 1996, poet¹ Susan Howe's sizeable essay, "Sorting Facts; or, Nineteen Ways of Looking at Marker,"² was commissioned by Charles Warren for a book on nonfiction film called *Beyond Document*. This was a result of Harvard University's annual documentary film symposium (also titled "Beyond Document"), begun in 1989. Warren chose representative lectures from the series because they came from, as Stanley Cavell noted in his introduction, "outside the conventions and discourses of professional study of film." It was their "ways of addressing" the "epistemological and political and artistic issues" of "film as document" that Warren was seeking.³

Though Howe saw herself, in entering this subject, as someone who'd "agreed to meddle in a foreign discipline,"⁴ she was an obvious choice. Her writing's most dominant themes circulate around the nature of documentation, of documents themselves and how history is configured in our imaginations by documents (or lack of them). She is interested in what is recorded in or, as important, what is left out of the record. Her writing is, in many ways, visually oriented, and as such shares image-making with cinema. Her instantly recognizable texts, described by one critic as "transparently matted palimpsests,"⁵ are composed of iconographic formations on the page and odd sentences. Her text is profuse with unusual syntax and cryptic wordings that feature in otherwise thoroughly researched academic discourses.⁶

Marker is virtually stripped of Howe's signature iconographic style, and was the beginning of a new look in her writing, but her almost surreal sentences and diaphoric⁷ couplings remain. *Marker* can be a difficult essay to read. Critiques of Howe's work get caught up in her unreadability or unapproachability, and she has

heard “so often” how “inaccessible” her work is.⁸ It certainly cannot be approached without wondering how. But that question implicitly is part of the work and as such is represented by it. Howe’s work cannot discard unreadability. It is a crucial part of her take on the world. It’s not a preface through which the reader battles to arrive at “readable,” but rather it is an ever-present, companionable unknown. Howe “hope[s]” that her “sense of limit is never fixed.”⁹ She aims to conflate the divides of reader-writer as she has done in herself—“I am my ideal reader.”¹⁰ Howe’s writing is focused on reorganizing rather than simply destabilizing. An overall coherence exists in her surreality that is not so much mysterious as it is practical. Howe’s language twists shake the reader’s apprehension and are more radically demanding than the complex visual page so evident in her work before 1996. Howe’s goal is even more radical. “Freedom”¹¹ is what she wants for the reader.

In *Marker*, as in all her writing, she redefines how to inhabit that reader space. The writer writes, the reader reads. Reading is shown as a synchronic interaction of past and present. In virtually every work, Howe uses textual clusters from a given historical period and looks at how they have been (or continue to be) used to interpret the past as a have and have-not “record written by winners.”¹² She forces the reader to reexamine literally what it is to derive information from a page. By mixing original source clusters such as memoirs, treatises, biographies, commentaries, and the like with her own writing, she abolishes categories to reconstruct the either/or perspective of seen/not seen into one of both/and, where reality is not solely defined by the tangible, linear, or visibly powerful.

In an interview, Howe was asked, “[W]hat is left in words themselves? What is in the words?” She answered, “It’s the singularity. It’s a catastrophe of bifurcation. There is a sudden leap into another situation . . . the entrance point of a singularity . . . is the only thing we have.”¹³ Howe calls this energized, interconnecting singularity the “ghost under the helmet,”¹⁴ a phrase so persistent that it becomes a personal trope. It is a major image in *Marker*. Howe attempts to incarnate a singularity in her text: page, printed word, historical theme, absent voice, and conflictive nature of dominance are together, nonlinear and elemental, with ineradicable reality. She describes poetry as “language stripped to its untranslatability.”¹⁵ Her writing evokes a felt visual, communicating on a possibly nonlinguistic level as a metaphor does. This is a power created not by juxtaposed ellipses but by employing space as intense direct communication like an actual word or image.

Howe employs erasure as a thing in itself, imparting its own meaningful part of an assemblage. It galvanizes rather than depletes. It is a vehicle of activism. In making absence part of her historical field, Howe makes it part of her visual field and calls her methodology a “poetics of intervening absence.”¹⁶ Howe uses the very nature of erasure—absence—as a tool to intervene in the reader’s perception

and hence his or her opinion. She is a writer known for unusually constructed lines where absence appears graphically—as blanks, as ellipses, as interruptions (between quotations, words, syllables)—on the literal page. This absence also appears cognitively in the reader’s apprehension of the words; what initially seems elusive or incomprehensible is a means to open the mind. She challenges the primacy of text as the upholder of history. She recasts text as a basic material thing and shows its influence as being not on the page but inside the reader. The text’s construction reflects this process and provokes it. In a 1995 interview, Howe explained her historicism as intrinsically visual, and *Marker*, though not pictorial or concrete writing, propels the reader to think as if seeing: “[The] eye has some perfect knowledge that is feeling. Some enduring value, some purpose is reflected in the material you use. The mysterious link between beauty and utility is, for me, similar to the tie between poetry and historical documents; although it would take me years to explain what the connection is, I know it’s there. Or rather than explain it, I show it in my writing.”¹⁷

I. Without Words What Are Facts?”

fact: “something that has actual existence”¹⁹

This essay doesn’t attempt to situate Howe in any current film theory; rather, it is a close reading of *Marker*, as that is, arguably, the best way to approach Howe’s intricately constructed work. An intriguing weave of questions of representation and absence, *Marker’s* focus on absence and its consequences has an air of conclusion. Ostensibly about filmmaking, *Marker’s* topic is more penetratingly about the nature of “fact.” At its core, the essay is a eulogy to sculptor David von Schlegell, Howe’s husband, who died of a sudden stroke in 1992. It is this “fact” alone, as she names it, that attracted her to *Beyond Document*: “I was drawn to the project because of the fact of my husband’s death and my wish to find a way to document his life and work.”²⁰ She constructs her “wish . . . to document” as less an analysis of than an engagement with the unusual and political nonfiction films of French quasi-documentarian Chris Marker (who is, as the title suggests, the most guiding filmmaker), Soviet experimentalist Dziga Vertov, and Russian narrativist Andrei Tarkovsky. Howe only focuses on a small portion of each director’s oeuvre. She repeatedly refers to Marker’s *La Jetée* (FR, 1962) and *Sans Soleil* (FR, 1983), Vertov’s *Three Songs about Lenin* (USSR, 1934),²¹ Tarkovsky’s *Ivan’s Childhood* (USSR, 1962)²² and *Mirror* (USSR, 1975—released outside the Soviet Union in 1980),²³ also touching on Marker’s *The Mystery of Koumiko* (FR, 1965) and Vertov’s *Man With A Movie Camera* (USSR, 1929).

The nineteen sections have no readily obvious organization. They seem to

skip from item to item, run backwards over old material, and introduce fragments of information. The pieces form a kind of ever-moving montage in which there are two main structuring devices: a vortex shape and what Howe calls “endless protean linkages,” meaning uninterrupted connections made through myriad transforming links.²⁴ *Marker*’s exploration of memory is subtly substructured with memory’s fashioning not only of the past but the present. As the narrator of *Sans Soleil* remarks, “If the images of the present don’t change, then change the images of the past.”

In many ways, *Marker* follows Howe’s typical writing pattern. The nineteen sections are irregular in length (ranging from a paragraph to eighteen pages), haphazardly titled (some are not), replete with specific dates, and move unpredictably from poetic to academic style. There are a few illustrations (some film stills, a photocopy of a handwritten envelope), but, with the exception of one tiny section, the print is linear throughout (though occasionally widely spaced on the page).

The essay examines time, and, more than in her previous work, Howe finds cohesion in time. In *Marker*, space and time merge. Howe’s recurrent image of the “Abyss”—which stands for the absence in history—is now inset within a shape: a vortex. Vortex metaphors span the essay. Appearing in an opening memory about von Schlegell—“I liked to watch how he feathered the oars to glide back. Little whirlpools formed where the oar blades tipped under: their entry clean as their exit”—they continue even into Alfred Hitchcock’s swirling spiral in his film *Vertigo* (US, 1958), as absorbed by Marker in *Sans Soleil* and found iconographically in *Marker*’s last pages. The essay’s nonsequential construction makes its own vortex, driving the reader from factual information such as wars into deeper and deeper layers of inner versions of these experiences. Against a backdrop of actual battle (World War I, World War II, Spanish Civil War, Vietnam), Howe portrays inner wars, from the social (artist to bureaucrat) to the abstract (fact to fiction) to the most core of all, the psychological (memory to loss). Time is not an unfolding process—it is an enfolding one. The future is seen as enshrined in the drama of depicting time as it passes.

Marker has no solid exposition. Drifting back and forth through time periods and memories, Howe looks for her husband’s life through cinema, letters, news reports and newsreels, photographs, and memento mori. The nineteen sections are composed of episodic fragments where Howe jockeys between decades, personal information, descriptions of filmed scenes, and terse diaphoric reflections. Facts—of war, of art, of biography—are thrown into a tumult of contexts. The films appear and disappear without any set sequences. Howe doesn’t follow them chronologically or by filmmaker. She shifts from literature to celluloid, from historic fact such as the atom bomb to film’s fantasy renderings of other war conditions, from personal information to poetic metaphors, and from own

life details to sweeping human condition generalities. What Howe seeks, what all eulogies seek, is perspective on the missing “real time of emotion” with the dead.

Marker shifts these perspectives on experience (“looking at”) with having to handle experience (“sorting”) by presenting a series of facts and ways in which facts have been denied or immortalized. The essay analyzes the nature of fact as “a piece of information presented as having objective reality”²⁵ by “sorting” or looking for likeness. To sort is a casual verb, grouping “on the basis of any characteristic in common.”²⁶ Sorting is not hierarchical but sensorial, associative through size, color, sensation, longevity, and so forth.

The title’s first phrase, “Sorting Facts” is taken from Vertov’s 1926 list of what the camera can do with life’s reality. That list forms *Marker*’s epigraph. The camera is a “factory of facts” where events are reformed. This factory identifies facts as forces of nature—“Lightning flashes of facts . . . Mountains of facts . . . Hurricanes of facts”—and as human—“individual little factlets.” As a way to “decipher reality,” Vertov emphasizes that it is structuring through kind that is imperative. “It is not enough to show bits of truth on screen. [. . .] These frames must be thematically organized so that the whole is also truth.”²⁷

The second title is a spin on Wallace Stevens’ famous 1917 poem, *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird*, the first verse of which is quoted in section XIII. In the poem, the eye of the bird is the vortex around which reality is detailed, much like Vertov’s kino-eye. The theme of seeing is *Marker*’s most complex. The directors in *Marker* even highlight the lens as a seeing eye within their films. Vertov famously superimposes an eye over the lens in *Man With A Movie Camera*; in *La Jetée* and *Sans Soleil*, the key thematic moment occurs when a woman looks at the camera and when children look at the camera; in Tarkovsky’s *Mirror*, though a narrative, the lead character for a split second in the last scene looks into the lens. In Ivan’s *Childhood*, looking—literally into space—is the only contact with happiness and affection. Even in *Vertigo*, which appears within *Sans Soleil*, very unusually, a lead character (Novak) looks briefly into the camera.

This “look” drives through *Marker* in an attempt to arrive at the place Howe finds in cinema. “Accelerated motion recalled from a distance of constructed stillness, can recuperate the hiddenness and mystery of the ‘visible’ world[.]” Howe wants to recall and reconstruct in order to “recuperate,” but she must, through sight, find its “hidden mystery.” Taking textual examples in the same way as the filmmakers have taken pictures, Howe draws the “visible world” not only from cinema but from drama, literature, and theory. Howe borrows from film as she borrows from texts in all of her writing,²⁸ incorporating stills, scenes, and quotations with her own ideas and autobiography. She quotes Walt Whitman, T.S. Eliot, Jean Racine, Emanuel Levinas, Dziga Vertov, Vladimir Mayakovsky, Annette Michelson, Andre Bazin, Melanie Klein, Antonin Artaud, Henry Thoreau, Ralph

Emerson, Sergei Eisenstein, Percy Shelley, and Andrei Tarkovsky, and refers to favorite writers Herman Melville, Emily Dickinson, Charles Olson, Gertrude Stein, H.D., Marianne Moore, William Carlos Williams, and Wallace Stevens, as well as composer John Cage. All are included in snatches, often with no direct connection to what surrounds them.

Affinity is *Marker's* signature. The visual patterns found in Howe's prior work shift into something in this essay that is more subliminal both textually and philosophically. This text doesn't need the iconographic page or the critical thesis. It is set up as a series of connectivities, as if the words were extensions of one another rather than arranged into an argument. Its thesis is posed as vantages—"ways of looking at"—and asks the reader to accept history as a series of points of view, placed together in an ever-shifting moiré. The visual for *Marker* is that of a kaleidoscope, with a central vanishing point like the hole in a vortex. *Marker* is a deeply personal work, and as such these "looks" at history are personalized as they have not been in her previous work.²⁹ The pattern inextricably interlocks the subjective with the event. Howe chooses Vertov, Marker, and Tarkovsky because they also prioritize this relationship over that of conventions of plot or character. The five cited movies have a subjective, almost fantastic, take on history. But this method is used to confront, as Marker puts it in *Sans Soleil*, society's relationship with "horror."³⁰

Similarly, *Marker's* overall concern with history is expressed in surreal dimensions. Motivated by a true death, Howe's subthemes are ghosts, and they appear as literal phantoms (Hamlet's father's ghost), as textual revenants (stories through history), mental illness (delusions), influential figures (Walt Whitman, Vladimir Lenin), artistic techniques (montage), and cultural reconstructions (reconfigured true events). The latter Howe offers as her work's major focus—"I have explored ideas of what constitutes an official version of events as opposed to a former version in imminent danger of being lost." But in *Marker* this exploration is linked specifically to von Schlegell's death. The sentences before the one above recount his last hours. The sentence after poses Howe's initial helplessness with making sense of it. Words conjure the past but do not allay it: "Sorting word-facts I only know apparitions."³¹

Out of this frustration with language, Howe gravitates to Vertov's, Marker's, and Tarkovsky's cinematic modus operandi because their process of images, for her, is able to match past moment and present moment: "superimposition of time: cinema-time immediate-time."

Words fall short—"Compared to facts words are only nets. We go on hauling what traces of affirmation we can catch."—but film does not—"A screen [film screen] is sort of a mole or sea wall. It keeps spirit back." More centrally, the essay focuses on attempts to recover the dead—from the mythic ordeal of Orpheus to

Vertov's homage to Lenin to Marker's profuse memory contemplations. Orpheus is cited as the "first documentarist" and his supernatural journey is *Marker's* own ghost. Orpheus, a fabled ancient Greek musician of supernal abilities, is able to cross by playing his lyre at the border between life and death in an effort to retrieve his dead lover, Eurydice. Warned to not look directly at her as she follows him back to life, he does, and she disappears forever. Howe uses this paradoxical vision as a contiguity between almost all of the material she combs through in *Marker*: "A look can be an embrace or a wound." This Orphean look, rife with pain, murderously powerful in its seeing yet unable to actually see, is the same look that the rememberer carries. Can the past be actually approached through memory? is the focal question not just of *Marker* but of the essay's films.

Howe augments these images with mind-bending theories about representation: from Antonin Artaud's desire to magically connect danger and reality on stage to Vertov's desire to film people's thoughts to the three filmmakers' dreamish realism to the plain, poignant desire to retrieve something gone forever. Because of the power of these attempts, Howe almost embraces the paranormal as a methodology, exercising time travel, "second sight," and telepathy as working dynamics. Virtually written in repeated non sequiturs (at times single sentences, at times paragraphs), the essay progresses as a series of resemblances, a process Howe defines from the outset as "factual telepathy." Disparities are set up to flow into the next. The films act as reference points and as frames, loosely marking places in the essay, as if Howe uses them to step toward her husband in the same way that the characters she names—Hamlet's father's ghost, Orpheus—stepped out of time. Little is discussed in-depth; a sentence on *Sans Soleil* will lead to a sentence about a sea wave and to one on Jean Racine and to one with a detail about von Schlegell. Dates appear constantly: mostly around the World War II years, though there are some from the 1920s, the 1960s, and the 1980s and a few from the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries.

The essay begins with brief details about von Schlegell's life (which Howe calls "only some facts"): his parentage, his World War II experience, his shift from painting to sculpture, influences on his artwork, a boating memory from their twenty-seven years together. This slight list ends on his last days when, unable to speak, he gestures repeatedly and no one understands what he means. In this final "horror," he enters a zone between life and death—"a physical space [where] we couldn't see what he saw." At the point of recalling this other space, in the next sentence, Howe turns her mind to filmmaking for the first time. Paraphrasing Francois Truffaut's diagnosis of the filmmaker's "basic problem" as being "how to express oneself by purely visual means," she attempts to understand, and cannot, the incomprehension between herself and her husband: "[F]or two days and three nights in the hospital I don't think David saw what "visual means" meant.

Without words what are facts? His eyes seemed to know. His hand squeezed mine. What did he mean?" "Without words what are facts?" is *Marker's* hidden epigraph. Howe's long examination of absence within social historicization is now charged in *Marker* with a shattering reality and is driven by an immediacy not found in previous work. She is engaged in what she has called "writing as physical event of immediate revelation."³² Growing out of loss, the essay is focused on fact's existence without a means of expression and the dynamics created by its enigma. *Marker* begins in the present as historical reality. It opens with the fact of a disappearance (von Schlegell) within a continuing life (Howe's). *Marker* attempts to mirror that common anomaly: the absent inset inside the concrete. The essay continually searches for representations of von Schlegell's last "physical space." Howe is trying to locate the commonality of that space, and her seemingly extraneous references, set in the midst of details of war or film, are used as incarnations of it. In few words, Howe touches on artistic theories, politics, and cultural borrowings to reveal that the "singularity"—the between-zone energized with polar experience—is not marginal to culture and human life. Rather, it is in its center, a vortex's vanishing point around which social patterns move. This search is *Marker's* true structure. It looks for, in a sense, a determinate indeterminacy. *Marker* is not a critical work; it is a meditation, centered on eulogy. It ponders memory, not film, because memory is Howe's only tool. "Action is the movement of memory searching for a lost attachment." A loss that becomes "a make-believe settlement." Vertov believed the camera was "a victory against time," its process not only holding "a visual link between phenomena separated from one another in time"³³ but able to unite the rift. But for Chris Marker, as verbalized sixty years later in *Sans Soleil*, the two remain apart, each with a substance of its own: "Time heals all except wounds. With time the desired body will cease to exist for the others. What remains is a wound disembodied." Howe is looking for an acceptable relationship between loss' present "make-believe settlement" and the "wound disembodied." Though of a particularly nonlinear construction, *Marker* inwardly moves toward a decision about the "wound," revealing a need for resolution not evident in Howe's previous writing. *Marker* ends on a satisfaction with film: "Refused mourning or melancholia here is the camera the film the projector." This is film's lure as a vehicle for eulogy. Howe turns to the moving image and cinema's interstitial space as a potential language that can help her come to grips with an inarticulate state. She finds meaning in film theorist Andre Bazin's separation of theater and film, quoting his definition: "When a character moves off screen, we accept the fact he is out of sight, but continues to exist in his own capacity at some other place in the decor which is hidden from us. There are no wings to the screen."

A movie house's screen edges do not limit the audience from making a multidimensional reality out of a movie far exceeding that of the theater stage. There

is, in film, a simultaneous, taken-for-granted, invisible continuum. Film's "out of sight" space where someone "continues to exist in his own capacity" doubles for the experience of mourning. Drama's movement from theater to film contains a parallel movement of the living to the dead. Howe feels that "in cinema people do talk from the grave."

Marker shifts between "immediacy" and "rendition," and Howe recognizes that this cannot be done as an exercise in polarities. Rather, she suggests these qualities as reverberant ghosts of each other. These ghosts are complexly portrayed. As such, the following sections outline a code, taken from certain words, phrases, associations, and films, that can contextualize *Marker's* seeming arbitrariness.

II. Chris Marker's *La Jetée*—Möbius-like Folding of Life into Death

The essay's éminence grise is the film *La Jetée*. A film without category, its thirty minutes, as historian Eric Rhodes notes it, "achieves an atmosphere of metaphysical reverie"³⁴ as it portrays a mysterious, Möbius-like folding of life into death. Its spatial convolutions figurize von Schlegell's interim "physical space," and *La Jetée* is the vehicle through which Howe approaches her husband's continuing existence and her Orphean desire to find solidity (documentation) for him. The essay's first named film (very briefly described in section IV), it continually appears in more detail, including as a still. Chris Marker is mentioned immediately following Howe's declaration that "poetry [is] factual telepathy." She describes Marker as "a poet first" before his other talents of "documentary filmmaker, photographer, and traveler." He inadvertently leads Howe to recognizing her cross-genre milieu, which she clearly identifies as also his own: "I work in the poetic documentary form. But I didn't realize it until trying to find a way to write this essay about looking at two films by Chris Marker." *La Jetée*, about a character searching his past, is *Marker's* celluloid double, in imaging and in philosophy. Howe's sense of the film reflects her own view of time and place: "[Marker's] use of photograms and freeze frames in this film that calls itself a fiction, is a compelling documentation of the interaction and multiple connections perceived separately and at once between lyric poetry and murderous history. That's the secret meaning."

This "secret meaning" is a clue to Howe's subterranean bond to *Marker's* directors. Recognizing a sympathetic medium in these documentary films, especially in questioning and pursuit of "fact," Howe takes "fact" far beyond its usual confines: "Surely nonfiction filmmakers sometimes work intuitively by factual telepathy. I call poetry factual telepathy." Attuned to Marker's manner of "compelling documentation," Howe feels she paranormally contacted its secret meaning years before. She adds to her description of *La Jetée* this mysterious statement: "I knew [the secret meaning] by telepathy in 1948 when I was eleven

and first saw the movie of *Hamlet*.” *La Jetée*, which she saw in the 1990s, seems to subliminally cross backwards in time for Howe to a moment in 1948 when she was viewing another movie. This circumstantial personal chain of reference is the kind of “factual telepathy” threading the essay’s seemingly piecemeal sections. A typical oxymoronic Howe coupling, factual telepathy’s diaphor implies wide implications of history and culture. It merges the visible and socially sanctioned implicit in “factual” with the marginal, invisible, and elusive in “telepathy.” In “factual telepathy,” the concrete works at one with sense energy, an energy reputed to connect freely across time and space.

A science fiction war tale, *La Jetée* is composed entirely of stills with the exception of an almost indiscernible movement of a few seconds. Intermittently shown with his eyes bandaged and under torture, a man, following a Third World War, recalls a childhood memory at Paris’s Orly airport, on the jetée of the title. Through great torment, he is forced to return to the past because, in having any memory at all, he is valuable to his captors’ future. Materially bereft, they want to possess time. “Capable of dreaming[,] of imagining some other time, they might be able to re-inhabit it.”³⁵ Eventually, the man makes a life for himself in this past, a desire Howe uses as section VII’s epigraph: “In the middle of his warm pre-war Sunday, where he could now stay.”³⁶ During this period, he meets a woman and they come to know each other as if they are a dating couple. She calls him her “Ghost.” At the film’s center is a sequence of grainy, dark-edged stills of her face as she sleeps. For a second, she opens her eyes in obscured shadows. Birds are chirping wildly. The film moves as she looks directly into the camera and faintly smiles with youthful sensuality. The image—so fleeting it is almost impossible to be sure that the film has actually moved—and the sound convey a feeling of something full of life. It is an extremely subtle moment. Marker creates his own vortex shape through centralizing this glimpse. The “look” is in the past but also in the mind. It structures the future because “the woman’s face is the only memory to survive the war.”³⁷ The look also expresses simultaneity in time: We look at her as she looks at us. The “we” of the audience in that instant becomes the “he” of the film.

Finally, the time traveler returns to his original memory. At that moment he is shot and killed, making the incident he recalled seeing at the airport as a child the moment of his own death. The film has an undertone of an Orphean descent, of a man going back to look at what should remain unexamined and left in the past. He pays dearly, but the price is already there and inevitable: his demise. This peculiar narrative deliberately parallels a greater theme of memory’s need to create the present: “The aim of the experiments was to send emissaries into time to summon the past and the future to the aid of the present.”³⁸ The plot, of an imprisoned person released only through time travel, exemplifies Howe’s sense of an interrelation of time and space, of history as defined by subjectivity, and of

the need to dimensionalize notions of escape from controls in these concepts: time, history, space, subjectivity, objectivity, etc. There are many things to interest Howe in this kind of film—especially the idea of moving as a live presence in what has already happened. Her historical research enters the strangely subjective space of other people’s history and their own living being within a record of that time. Her method is rapprochement with the past and expansion of the present. Her terse summary of *La Jetée*’s story shows this method at work by provoking her reader’s limits: “A man, marked by an image from his childhood, travels through some inter-translational fragmented mirror-memory to the original line of fracture no translation will pacify.” This sentence starts from a human “fact”: a person marked by childhood image. The fact changes to a time travel abstraction, which has features of fragmentation and memory-doubling, but the last element—“inter-translational”—suddenly shifts into a different zone of comprehension. The “inter” here is about translation, not inter-temporal or inter-spatial. Translation is about understanding. Thus, what is traveled on or into in *La Jetée*, for Howe, is an interplay of understandings. (The very space she so wishes to inhabit in her husband’s final hours.) She opens another dimension in the basic space-time, science-fictional universe: perception. This is as much a piece of the world as “fragment” or “mirror.” The movement in time goes to “the original line of fracture no translation will pacify.” Howe jumps here to the inner zone of the fracture (the childhood image) as if it is a place. But what could or could not repair the fracture becomes the need for “translation.” What the fracture runs between is two worlds of expression—like von Schlegell’s and Howe’s inability to communicate. The fracture occurred in the perception of how to understand what was communicated; that is the difficulty of any attempt to understand anything, and Howe recognizes the potential futility there. Creation is not in a specific meaning but in processes toward or traveling on understanding.

The last word, “pacify,” is out-of-sync with previous contexts. Pacify, meaning to allay, to bring to rest, to calm, shows that the need here is not to find meaning but to interpret and bring solace. “Fracture” (a strong visual), “translation” (an unvisualizable concept of transference and reinterpretation), and “pacify” (an emotional response) all work together here to explain a narrative: *La Jetée*’s. The words, each realizing different perceptions, force meaning to take on dimension. Howe spatializes communication as if one traveled across variant planes of word cognitions in the same way one might travel in time.

III. Substructures—Delusion

Marker’s first substructure is false impression. *Marker* explores ways in which actuality has been depicted in theater, literature, and film. Howe adds to this

mix the condition of delusion. Inserted in the middle of the essay, section XV is a tiny paragraph on the Capgras syndrome, a psychopathology where “a patient believes that a person, usually closely related to her, has been replaced by an exact double.” Through this moment of naming, it becomes obvious that delusion has been the essay’s underground force all along. It is its primary substructure. An “illusion of double,”³⁹ the Capgras syndrome is one of many generic delusions, but unusually is in a class by itself.⁴⁰ Potentially a neural behavior subclassified under “memory and amnesia,”⁴¹ this delusion of replacement is a “condition of distorted memory,”⁴² its psychosis formed when “patients are unable to consciously access memories.”⁴³

Medically, this sickness deeply roots in human belief systems. “The subjective experience of being delusional is no different from the subjective experience of believing the earth is round . . . [b]ecause of the identical experiences of delusions and consensually held beliefs, it is impossible to argue a patient out of a delusional belief.”⁴⁴ Though seemingly far-fetched, this rare illness becomes in *Marker* an individuated version of the nature of documentary. The essay begs questions of memory’s functions and poses the dilemma of document’s inadequate version of the original while nevertheless thoroughly replacing it. This is delusion’s feature and the Capgras syndrome’s core. “The Capgras delusion is a negative misidentification that denies the genuineness of a known person (though admitting a resemblance).”⁴⁵ This same denial could be said to be documentary film’s *raison d’être*. This genre directly inherits from cinema’s very first roll of the moving picture in 1895, when the French Lumière brothers shot a train leaving a station. This and other shorts were excitedly dubbed “actualities.” Documentary has evolved from this unilateral you-are-there position into innumerable formulations of dealing with “actuality.” Nonfiction film is at the center of today’s concern with documenting reality, from reality television to amateur video as unparalleled court evidence to YouTube and more. Howe’s use of the Capgras syndrome introduces not just a sense of subjectivity to these stances on reality but one that is focused on deliberately supplanting its truth.

IV. Substructures—Literary, Cinematic

The essay’s second substructure forms by threading film with theater and literature with film. In Vertov, Marker, and Tarkovsky, Howe has chosen three directors whose work, spanning the twentieth century from the ’10s to the ’80s, mesh words with images and reality with acting in ways that virtually ask for a new genre. Vertov wished to make a “film poem,”⁴⁶ declaring, “I work in the field of the poetic documentary film”⁴⁷ aimed at no less than “towards the creation of a fresh perception of the world.”⁴⁸ Calling *La Jetée* a *ciné-roman* (a film-novel),

Marker is known for his unique straddling of genres. Tarkovsky calls his own films “sculpting in time.”⁴⁹

All arise out of a rich, interdisciplinary inheritance. Tarkovsky and Marker came from within the Soviet film tradition, of which Vertov was a prime mover.⁵⁰ Early Soviet film was fueled by narrative experiment and by political and artistic possibilities of that epistemology. Along with contemporary director Sergei Eisenstein, Vertov wrote extensive manifestos on ways to present new narratives that were especially focused on what was unique to film: speed and editorial tricks. Grounded in Russian constructivism, both found a powerful tool in montage, coming at it from separate sensibilities. Vertov located montage in the thrill of seeing, and took the lens to be a camera eye or kino-eye, synthesizing, like a human organ, all it took in. Eisenstein rejected the worth of Vertov’s kino-eye, as he found montage’s impact to be in its “collision” as a “kino-fist.” Nevertheless, he credited Vertov with radical editing, with forming montage through rhythms as subtle as musical movements,⁵¹ a subtlety that also, obviously, attracts Howe. These ideas were influenced by contemporary and past American and European literary innovations. Eisenstein “studied the development of ‘streams of consciousness’ in literature and the ‘internal monologue,’ which had come to its fullest expression in Joyce’s *Ulysses*.”⁵² Vertov followed ideas of his hero, futuristic poet Vladimir Mayakovsky, who in turn lionized Walt Whitman’s poems.⁵³

Howe mentions Eisenstein once, citing his famous dictum “montage is conflict,” but her sensibilities lie with Vertov, picking up on his special ambitions. Vertov wanted to film the act of thinking. Evolving complex, almost preternatural claims about film’s creative possibilities, Vertov was convinced that the “technical perspectives of *Kino-Eye*” could finally “record human thoughts.”⁵⁴ Howe phrases it another way: “camera’s technical eye, oscillating between presence and absence, frame and arrest that person with thoughts in place.” Howe poses the problem of this “frame”: “Is it perception or depiction I see ‘thinking’?” Theater overtly appears as an art form but always in removes from direct theater. References to Hamlet (specifically to Hamlet’s father, Ophelia, Laertes, and Polonius) come through discussion of films, specifically the 1953 film Laurence Olivier’s *Hamlet* and Tarkovsky’s production of the play in 1982. The exception is Ophelia’s line “Lord, we know not what we are, but know what we may be,” which Howe echoes earlier by quoting *La Jetée*: “[I do not ask you who you are not.]” Both recognize self only in terms of absence: the “I” (“we”) of the former only in future terms, the “I” (“you”) of the latter only in elimination.

The second-century-B.C.E. Roman comedy *Amphitryon* by Titus Plautus, a story of two gods stealing human identity in order to have sex with a woman, is obliquely introduced through the psychological Capgras syndrome. In French, the syndrome is called l’illusion des sosie, “Sosie” being the name of one identity-stolen

man in the play. Furthermore, *Amphitryon*, though only alluded to (as all theater is in *Marker*), plays a part in an immense ghosting history. The *Amphitryon* story, an obscure religious myth in prehistory, reappears through centuries of European theater.⁵⁵ It was of obvious importance in the era of Sophocles, Aeschylus, and Euripides. They each staged it as a powerful tragedy (all lost). By the time of Plautus, its stature had become farce. This comedy of errors appealed to Molière in the seventeenth century, to Heinrich von Kleist in the eighteenth, and to Jean Giradoux in the twentieth. Jean Racine's play *Bazajet* is drawn into *Marker* through *Sans Soleil's* epigraph. This particular chain of reference is discussed later.

V. Substructures—Doubles

The third substructure, which combines all the others, is the theme of the double. Howe follows her assertion that she works in the “poetic documentary form” with Vertov's doubts about what that “work” entails. Vertov asked himself: “Is it possible that I too am acting out a role? The role of the seeker after film truth? Do I truly seek truth? Perhaps this is a mask, which I myself don't realize?”⁵⁶ “Role,” made specific in the Capgras syndrome, is the material through which *Marker* makes its protean changes. It appears in numerous ways: literary allusion, specific ghosts, themes of replacement, and examples of “facts” traveling into different incarnations over time. The essay is detailed in people's need to recover the dead, which Howe likens to the documentary form itself: “A documentary work is an attempt to recapture someone something somewhere.” As the essay progresses, the recurrent image of a “look back” becomes increasingly complicated, linking with ancient figures Orpheus and Lot's wife,⁵⁷ who were severely defeated by their attempts to recapture what they loved. The Orphean double-sided look binds *Marker* because Howe continually juxtaposes the literal documentary effort of “an attempt to recapture” with its emotional futility and its potential destructiveness. The essay's alleged focus—cinema—also inherently comprises a double look. It is both looked at (audience) and is an act of looking through (lens). As a medium of documentation, Howe aligns it with Orphean sight. This theme becomes a major part of “role.” The look, implicit in *La Jetée* (looked at/looking at/looking for), is *Marker's* figuration of delusion, doubles, and interdiscipline. Howe uses it to pull the pieces together and to drive home grief's anguish.

True stories of a literal “looking back” begin and end the essay. Starting with von Schlegell's last moments, *Marker* concludes with an incident taken from Vertov's manifesto *Kino-Eye*. Howe quotes in full his recollection of showing his *Kinopravda* in a village near Moscow. When a young girl walking straight towards camera appears in the film, a woman from the audience suddenly runs up to the screen crying with her arms outstretched. She calls the girl's name, but

(like Eurydice) “the girl disappears.”⁵⁸ The woman faints. It transpires that the girl is the woman’s dead daughter. Seeing her again, the woman runs towards what is her child.

Howe titles this final paragraph “1994. Facsimile,” and the last words from the previous section leading up to it “To memory”—titles that summarize the entire essay. 1994 is the year of *Marker*’s first complete draft. As such, the heading reveals the writing moment in 1994 as a “facsimile” of the incident that took place over half a century earlier. This anecdote and its title suggest that in *Marker* Howe is reaching for her vanishing husband with the same urgency as the mother decades before rushed to her lost girl. The “facsimile” of the mother’s despair mirrors Howe’s during von Schlegell’s last, unreachable hours.

Marker is held by this ghostly parenthesis, its ideas bracketed by two misbegotten contacts with “a physical space” that holds—untouchably—a beloved lost person. In both episodes, the living try fervently to reach the dead in a virtual reality—one in near-death and the other in film’s false life. But contact’s failure does not nullify the “facts” of that median physical space’s existence. Framing the essay, these real stories of ambiguity and suffering highlight the death and absences discussed throughout *Marker* as beyond facile description. Death is not just now-then or known-unknown but includes an ineffable contact, a factual telepathy comprising “endless protean linkages” where disappeared facts reappear in their effect on others. The mother runs to the screen and is so overwhelmed that she becomes insensible. She has contacted something, but what is it? Can it be named? Howe craves to understand her husband’s gestures. She never does, but, later, creates the commemorative *Marker*.

The double also appears as a ghost, a feature so strong in *Marker* it could be said that the essay is about ghosting. The most important theme (and most linked to “sight”), “ghost” multiplies in *Marker* through spectral names—“apparition . . . soul . . . spirit,” even “dream”—through Howe’s pursuit of her husband’s life and through a chain of protean links around “ghost” that is her essay’s engine. Ghosting appears as a discussed topic and in literary tricks from the outset. At the end of section I, in *Marker*’s second page, Howe sparks a series of inner links between theater and film and between corporeality and the invisible by quoting Antonin Artaud’s demand: “I want soul to be body, so they won’t be able to say that the body is soul, because it will be the soul which is body.” Never mentioned again, Artaud is appropriate to *Marker* because he wanted “physical space” to itself communicate, without the addition of language. A French actor and writer of the 1920s, Artaud was a polemicist so influential on modern drama that Susan Sontag, in her introduction to his writings, flatly states that “no one who works in theater now is untouched by his impact.”⁵⁹ Artaud felt that the “only value” of theater “lies in its excruciating magical connection with reality and danger.”⁶⁰ Furthermore,

“the stage is a physical and concrete place which demands to be filled and which must be made to speak its own concrete language.”⁶¹ Artaud advocated a “theater of cruelty,” a dramatics stunning in its emotional violence, which deplored the privilege of word over *mise-en-scène* and of mind over body. “Cruelty” was specific. It signified “rigor, implacable intention and decision, irreversible and absolute determination” that “above all” was “lucid.” There was “no cruelty without consciousness and without application of consciousness. It is consciousness that gives the exercise of every act of life its blood-red color, its cruel nuance, since it is understood that life is always someone’s death.”⁶² Conscientiousness, atemporal continuity (each life is another’s death), and awareness of the indefinable could describe Artaud’s sense of theater, and, in this way, he corresponds to the timelessness and lived life espoused in *Marker*. Artaud’s theater space is Howe’s paper space. For Artaud, “it is not a question of bringing metaphysical ideas directly onto the stage but of creating what you might call temptations, indraughts of air around these ideas.”⁶³ Martin Esslin, in his study of Artaud, explains these ideas as a “theater based on a complex language of fixed signs, gestures and expressions.”⁶⁴ In a sense, *Marker* sets an Artaudian stage: provocative (disorienting), gestural (non sequiturs), tempting (inconclusive), and building an unstageable dramatic around a locus of “horror” (von Schlegell’s last space). Howe quotes Vertov’s like desire, in his declaration that cinema “leads past the heads of film actors and beyond the studio roof, into life, into genuine reality, full of its own drama and detective plots.” *Marker*’s films attempt this: “Let image speak for itself in its own volumes of connotations and reverberations.”⁶⁵

VI. Substructures—Delay

The fourth substructure is the theme of a “delayed beginning,” which runs through *Marker* and instates a kind of physical version of elusiveness. *Marker* suggests that a search for an absence beyond grasping can jumpstart a new energy. Howes spans the essay with a leitmotif (on which the essay ends and, of course, begins) of death as provoking creativity. Howe finds a “delayed beginning” in poet Charles Olson, who was galvanized into a new writing form by President Roosevelt’s death; and a “delayed beginning” in the tumult of confused processes that inaugurated Herman Melville’s *Moby-Dick*. Howe herself is brought into a wider world through her exploration of nonfiction film that began when she “collided” with *Marker*’s pseudonym. Lenin’s death brought about Vertov’s exceptional tribute to him in *Three Songs about Lenin*, and Howe finds in Wagner’s “funeral music,” which Vertov used as part of the film’s score, “a delayed reaction to Hegel’s faith in human reason.” She calls *Sans Soleil* a film with a “delayed beginning,” probably the delayed beginning most conflated with life and death.

Secondarily, the text makes ghosting gestures. Howe introduces the line “I want soul to be body” in four removes. Artaud’s words, credited to a book on women in Jean-Luc Godard films, are quoted by Godard and relayed by Phillippe Sollers in his Godard interview. By shunting Artaud’s words through time, through borrowings, intentions, and people, they thus arrive in *Marker* filtered through people’s desires of them, and Howe uses them in the same way. Artaud’s “want” is Howe’s “wish.” She wishes to make present her husband’s intangible presence. Virtually impossible, it nevertheless exists.

Another ghost is the old character of Hamlet’s father, the “ghost beneath the helmet.” That personal trope continues to stand for an irretrievable vitality in the past that directs the present (as Hamlet’s father did Hamlet), but it is also the personal “lost beloved.” The “ghost” is increasingly complex. It appears in subtle inhabitations: in film’s flickering figures (“projector’s phantom-photogram”; “all people captured on film are ghosts”), in film’s dubbed voices (Jean Simmon’s Ophelia) and narrations (“the ghostly presence of two women, their trace, is in Stewart’s accentless narrative voice”), in borrowed verbatim ideas (Racine “lifted . . . a quotation without marks” from Roman historian Tacitus’s *Annals*), and even in the alphabet (“words are symbols of spirits”: letters are “colliding objects and divine messages”). “Anagrams” as carriers of hidden forces are a “feeling for letters” that is a seventeenth-century “obsession” of “Puritan theologians and historians like Cotton Mather and Roger Williams.” She traces this unseen “inheritance” to twentieth century Americans Ralph Emerson, Herman Melville, Emily Dickinson, Gertrude Stein, T.S. Eliot, H.D., Marianne Moore, William Carlos Williams, Wallace Stevens, Charles Olson, and John Cage. “Ghost” transfigures into visible modalities—writing especially—that harbor “secret meaning,” and invisible modalities that are nevertheless existential (the human voice, the projected film image, and natural sound). This spirit and form is also mirrored in Howe’s description of a human being as a “mortal parenthesis.” She sweeps through these examples, dwelling on them for only two or three sentences, forcing the links to transparently stitch what is very much, in form at least, a stream of consciousness piece of writing. These invisible stitches also act as “ghosts.”

VII. Substructures—Filmmakers

The fifth substructure is filmmakers. They are a kind of glue that binds these ghosts, doubles, delusions, delays, and historical creativities. *Marker*’s bibliography indicates that Howe looked through a range of filmmakers’ work—Frederick Wiseman, Jean-Luc Godard, Yvonne Rainer, Jean Rouch, John Grierson, Robert Altman, Shirley Clarke, and Maya Deren, among others⁶⁶—before settling on Vertov, Marker, and Tarkovsky. Howe’s affinity with these filmmakers is political—all

are challenging conventional historicization—and visual—each are conscious of how to render the past. The directors are preoccupied with time as a subject, and play with chronicle by overlapping categories of past-present-future. All regarded (and wrote about) film as an instrument of immense creativity. All were politically galvanized, and their films, at one time or another, suffered governmental sanctions. All were mavericks of cross discipline who, like Howe, took techniques from a range of sources. All believe that film's ability to document is not simply what passes before the camera. Rather, the charged "physical space" of an ephemeral moment should be reconstructed as a series of vantages to best affect its first reality. Like Howe, their work involves ambivalences about the medium in which they create. As Howe stated in *The Birth-mark*, "print is a phobic response"⁶⁷; so Chris Marker states, "My work is to question images."⁶⁸

Though Howe's choices in the films are obvious, they reflect her feeling about von Schlegell as much as they represent nonfiction genres or her own ideas. As visually oriented artists influenced by Russian constructivism and profoundly affected by war, von Schlegell and the filmmakers share personal details.⁶⁹ Through air force imagery, Howe finds von Schlegell, a pilot, in their films. There are many allusions to planes. For example, "In the beginning of each Marker film [*La Jetée* and *Sans Soleil*] jet planes escape the eye of the camera." Also, Howe includes a still from *Mirror* of Russian military aerialists. Tarkovsky is aligned in Howe's perception with von Schlegell as a man. She finds her husband in *Ivan's Childhood's* *mise-en-scène*, not only because of his war experience but because he even resembles Ivan's friend: "the young actor who plays Galtsev reminds me of David, who was only twenty-three during the time he was a second lieutenant." The youngest of the three directors, born in 1932 and dying in 1986, Tarkovsky is the odd one out, having made narrative features eventually successful in art and even mainstream cinema. But his unconventional approach to social realism has echoes of Howe's own. She describes him as having "often mixed documentary footage with fiction." He also "scattered professional actors, stage hands, friends, and family members throughout his films and arbitrarily blended time periods with international and domestic situations."

Even among Soviet innovators (Eisenstein, Kuleshov, Medvedkin, Dovshenko, Pudovkin), Vertov stands alone, a man who Annette Michelson, who edited his notebooks, found "most problematic in his radicalism."⁷⁰ Beginning in a climate of Leninist encouragement, Vertov crashed under Stalin. Much-referenced in *Marker*, Vertov appears from the outset as a "dapper realist," forestalled by bureaucracy's "wall of perplexity and indifference" where he was left "dying for work." The originator of cinema vérité, the "unsurpassed . . . incorruptibility of [Vertov's] representation of real life," as Dadist filmmaker Hans Richter described it, arose from an unprecedented use of montage juxtaposition.⁷¹ Filmmaker

Jean Rouch noted that Vertov created by “editing at intervals reports on current events, by playing on the counterpoint of image and sound, by mixing poetic subtitles with shock images,” introducing “into cinema for the first time the ‘direct interview’ in the form of frank testimonies.”⁷² In *Marker*, Howe reinvents this “interview.” It is solely in the look: “In *La Jetée* and *Sans Soleil* as in a play by Racine, glances are the equivalents of interviews.” Rather than a series of pictures, Vertov saw montage as a “theory of intervals,”⁷³ a technique Howe ghosts inside her own textual montage. Vertov called for the “construction of the film-object upon ‘intervals,’ that is, upon the movement between shots, upon the correlation of shots with one another, upon transitions from one visual stimuli to another.”⁷⁴ Vertov’s moving “visual interval” was composed of the “sum of various correlations.”⁷⁵ The creator of this process was an “author-editor” whose “difficult task” was to find the “most expedient ‘itinerary’ for the eye of the viewer” in a set of “mutual reactions . . . attractions . . . repulsions.”⁷⁶ *Marker* uses this idea to incorporate “absence” as a functioning dimension. Vertov’s “theory of relativity on screen”⁷⁷ matches *Marker*’s non sequitur connections. An interesting example of this occurs in three sentences in section V, where each conveys different levels of absorbing information. Each sentence approaches the same subject: What is a gap? “Firstness can only be feeling. Vertovian theory of interval. What if a film never reaches the screen because viewers walk away?”⁷⁸ The first sentence is a poetic description of that space as a primacy state without words. The second specifies that space within a working theory and practice. The third, a physical action, depicts that space as abnegation. From first impression to working life to discontinuity (death), they work as a set of spaces almost like life stages. Equally, readers have to push further and ask more of their minds to grasp the sequence.

Chris Marker’s politics of representation are probably closer to Howe’s than those of Vertov’s and Tarkovsky’s. Marker’s militant films, as Eric Rhodes encapsulates it, “disrupt the conventional grammar of film signs far more completely”⁷⁹ than other directors. In 1950s France, he founded the cinema-verité club Medvedkin with filmmakers Agnès Varda, Alan Resnais, and Louis Malle. This strong force in postwar cinema was followed by the Nouvelle Vague (also under the Soviet cinema spell, they were previously called the Dziga Vertov group) whose members included Francois Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, and Claude Chabrol. Starting from different sides of the film industry—the Medvedkin began as practitioners (editors and assistants), the Nouvelle Vague (New Wave) as theorists—both saw themselves as highly politicized. However, the New Wave did not tackle material as sensitive to French politics as the Medvedkin did. The latter paid in censorship.⁸⁰

Within the possibilities of this pluralistic language, many ties exist between Howe’s and Marker’s work in their respective disciplines. *Marker* plays with

identities, deliberately confusing the notion of character in the film with the actual filmmaker or confusing autobiography with fiction, as in his ironic documentary about Japan, *Sans Soleil*, where “we aren’t sure who is real or who is imaginary.” Furthermore, Marker’s work is steeped in crossed genres, characterized by Rhodes as “a series of film letters or essays.”⁸¹ Never entering mainstream cinema, his films remain a unique version of auteurism. Like Howe, Marker is concerned with connectivity, “believ[ing] that the fate of each of us is related to the other.”⁸² Even *Marker’s* topic comes through intuitive conduit with Marker. Howe had originally thought of “writing something on documentaries about poets” but turned to experimental nonfiction film instead when urged by a friend to look at *Sans Soleil*. The friend felt that the film “wasn’t about poetry; it was poetry.” Howe’s initial attraction was quirky. Hearing the movie was “an autobiographical work about a French film-maker with an assumed name” and having “just finished” *The Birth-mark*, she felt “Marker collided with birth-mark, the assumed name struck.” Born Christian Bouche-Villeneuve in 1921, Marker made up a name he felt was unidentifiably transatlantic (and yet metaphoric of the English word mark). Vertov too worked pseudonymously. Born Denis Kaufman in 1896, he concocted “Dziga Vertov” from Russian words connotative of “turning, revolving”⁸³ or “spinning top.” Both pseudonyms (“mark” and “turning”) are ones for which Howe has an innate preference.⁸⁴ The “assumed name” continues as a theme in the essay and is a twist in *Marker’s* title. The essay is not about ways of looking at “films of Chris Marker” but simply “Marker,” a terseness pointing to “marker” as noun and verb. Through nonfiction cinema, Howe is looking at the nature of “making a mark”—not just in these directors’ work but in people’s lives and memories.

VIII. Chris Marker’s *Sans Soleil*—Psychic Reality Restored

Sans Soleil is Marker’s most dominant film. *Sans Soleil* is feature length, made in 1982, and is by far the most complex of the five films cited in the essay. In the way that *La Jetée* reflects Howe’s private search for von Schlegell through memory, *Sans Soleil* represents her public search through history.

Many characteristics of Howe’s writing are reflected in the film’s complications. Both require multiple attentions, rereadings, and reviewings. Both focus on history’s rendition and human feeling; both privilege the visual yet dash expectations of what the visual will yield: “[T]he unseen narrator repairs or restores psychic reality and its relation to external reality though we are never really certain who has collected, edited, and marked each shot or short cut.” Though Marker is considered one of the most consummate film essayists, “film-essay” inadequately describes *Sans Soleil’s* interplays, confusions, lushness, and sensory orchestration. Its category is indefinable. Howe sees it as possibly “a rejection of the documentary

form,” yet it is structured almost as a travelogue. Marker builds footage of Tokyo and of Japanese customs into short but recurrent scenes and images from the African plain, the Cape Verde Islands, a seaside town in Iceland, the Cambodian Khmer Rouge, and Hitchcock’s California locations for *Vertigo*.

There is a continual, poetically articulate narration spoken by a woman whose mid-Atlantic accent (or to Howe “accentless”) occasionally dramatizes certain phrases. These words accompany on-the-street vérité images that at times shift very quickly, at times slowly, at times are borrowed from newsreel, and at times are solarized (blurred into shapes) into an abstract electric swirl of color and movement. The narration is lyrical, interesting, and philosophical. It has a sensorial clash with the film images because they have similar qualities. A complexity of sound and image intertwine these two devices such that the mind is overwhelmed and can only absorb in snatches—both experiences at once—like with a complicated melody. Completely within its own mold, *Sans Soleil* is literally a palimpsest so ornate that, as Howe comments, “you can’t figure out what’s real and what’s imaginary.”

The narration has tricks. Because a woman narrates, Marker isn’t actually speaking, yet the words are in the first person. Are they his own? Moreover, she constantly refers to an unknown “he,” as in “he told me” or “he wrote,” suggesting there is a guide in this travelogue. The “he” knows about various customs yet is more reflective about them than a guide would be. Is Marker the “he”? The spoken story is about history and memory. Japan’s image-ridden culture that privileges the eye and its mix of state-of-the-art technology and ancient tradition acts as a background through which *Sans Soleil* ponders the possibility (or impossibility) of rendering real events. It runs through time with impunity. It ties film into a distant past—“The graphic genius that allows the Japanese to invent cinemascope ten centuries before the movies”⁸⁵—it enters the “40th century.” At that place, the narrator, undoubtedly Marker himself, sets forth from that unimaginably distant future to turn toward the past: “It was there for the first time he perceived something he didn’t understand. . . . Something to do with unhappiness and memory and towards which, slowly, heavily he began to walk.”⁸⁶ In its center and Howe’s “favorite sequence” of *Sans Soleil*, Marker reflects on *Vertigo*, a film he has seen “nineteen times.” *Vertigo* is a story of a man (played by James Stewart) traumatized into fear of heights who is fooled into helping murder a woman. Through these circumstances, he becomes obsessed with forcing another woman (Kim Novak) into dressing up as the dead person. (She is actually the same woman.) It is a very twisty tale of unrequited love within the very object that is loved (i.e., the pretended dead woman and the live pretending woman are the same). This convolution—in the abstract—is the same that the remembering person faces: Where does memory switch from subjective pretence to real occurrence? At what

point does the rememberer's domination of pretence kill the original (as Novak is eventually killed)? Strategically (and unheard of in a 1950s narrative film), Novak, in a cloud of emotions, looks, for a second, into the camera.⁸⁷ This theme is equally crucial to *Sans Soleil*, because Marker asks why a filmmaker should have his or her subjects avoid looking at the lens and lauds a moment when a woman, as fleetingly as Novak does, looks straight at him while he is gathering *Sans Soleil* footage. This suggests Vertov's interviews and Howe's sense of the "glance" interview. Who is interviewing whom? The audience/memoirist is jarred by the direct (out of role) look yet craves the contact that the role (player/remembered memory) tantalizes.

In *Sans Soleil*, scenes of *Vertigo*'s main character, Stewart, who is following the role-playing Novak around California, are interspersed with Marker's tracking the same places, seemingly as a fan. *Vertigo* graphically relays time on screen as a cartooned whirlpool because the film contains so many layers of period, place, motive, and feeling. *Sans Soleil* describes the vortex as "Power and freedom, melancholy and dazzlement. So carefully coded within the spiral that you could miss it." Images on screen are positioned as being in similar indeterminate states. Stewart's selfishness, which destroys Novak, is layered in *Sans Soleil* into political situations where rebel leader Amilcar Cabral, insurgent against Portuguese rule in Guinea and Cape Verde islands, is himself dissolved into the next power. Over Cabral's images, the narrator declares, "Every protagonist represents only himself. In place of a change in the social setting he seeks simply the sublimation of his own image in every revolutionary act." Equally, Marker shows disconnections. In the face of such true guerrilla warfare, he has "shame over using the words 'guerrilla filmmaking.'"

There is a theme of death. One of the few *Sans Soleil* details that Howe highlights is a scene from the film's beginning and end: a Japanese custom of commemorating dead cats. Marker weaves this minor cultural detail into a larger view of Japanese culture. The cat is a symbolic animal, a common figurine for luck apparent everywhere. The word for cat, "tora," repeated three times, was the Pearl Harbor bombing code in 1941. Across this tremendous scope—personal to genocidal—death has a special feature. "History has only one friend, that which Brando spoke about in *Apocalypse*—horror."⁸⁸ "Horror" is given various focuses: colonialism, revolution, political duplicity, arbitrary violence, natural disaster, and human grief. Brando's words in a commercial movie nevertheless sum up reality's possibly most edited and most elusive dimension: the messy act of being alive. *Sans Soleil* weaves a complex series of connections around this act by looking at "facts." But no "fact" is isolated from the rest. Culture is shown, on the one hand, as attempting to seal the "disembodied wound" into a concrete image, and on the other as enduring piercingly strong indeterminate feelings around horror, grief, obsession, joy, and so on.

An isolated example can suggest the film's demands made on the viewer. Over images of people in the street, the narrator intones: "If images of the present don't change then change the images of the past" into "a portable, compact form of an already inaccessible reality." At this moment, the figures on the screen become solarized, so liquid they're only smears of color. They are unrecognizable, yet viewers "know"—by memory only—that they are the same clear pictures seen moments before. To this, the narrator adds that the inventor of solarizing film images "called them the Zone in homage to Tarkovsky."⁸⁹ The sonorous narration is so ponderable that memory's easy switch from image to image is stalled, clouded. Operating in a shifting series of removes and reconnections, the film sweeps sound into image and image into sound so that they hang between each other like a singularity. The film makes it impossible to discern who the observer is and who the participant is because identification of the narrator's "I" is so disturbed. But the simplicity of the poignant prayer Marker overhears at the dead cat memorial sums up, at the end, what the living can ultimately do with loss: contact it through well-being. "Cat, wherever you are, peace be with you."⁹⁰

IX. Seeing as Eros

"[W]e couldn't see what he saw."

Marker's most complex theme is the polarized dynamic of looking at death. Howe's mourning becomes her camera eye. She uses the text as a lens able to see across metaphysical distance. The epigraph's words become eyes—"a second sight," able to envision a foreign state and so, in some sense, pull the reader into it. Like the Orphean look, it fails, but despite that her text aims towards what Sontag termed the "physiological phenomenology"⁹¹ for which Artaud and also Vertov strove. However, film can do more with this than text. Film's built-in incorporeality already absorbs some contradiction. All of *Marker's* films use the eye as a symbol of life's sensual crux.

The essay's middle sections, XI through to XV, are the vortex in which this theme, like a kaleidoscope, centralizes. *Marker's* opening and closing stories of the true Orphean looks are its furthest sides. Beginning from the everyday impasse between life and death, Howe works the essay inward into the complexity of its internalization and then works it out again into the everyday. Ending with a "facsimile" of the beginning, the middle focuses on the spookier themes of those manifestations: A "double is a facsimile."

Section XI, the longest at eighteen pages, outstretching every other section by at least fifteen sides, includes information and discussion of four films: *Three Songs about Lenin*, *La Jetée*, *Mirror*, and *Sans Soleil*. Titled "This soil'd world," section

XI explores world brutality and von Schlegell's loss as a dimension within that fact. Sections XII, XIII, XIV, and XV reexamine these themes and dig esoterically deeper into them. Together they focus on ways of seeing the world and could even be described as the essay's eidetic "eye."

Section XI opens as an epigraph graphically set in a triangle:

This soil'd world
Walt Whitman—"Reconciliation"

It is almost as if the three points of this epigraph become the lens-sight through which Howe looks at her husband's loss: The world is very real, "soil'd"; within that truth there can be a "reconciliation" with its dirt; a writer or artist like Whitman can be the ballast for finding that harmony. Quotations from Whitman begin and end the section. The final words are taken from his Civil War experiences as written in his poem *The Wound-Dresser*: "Thus in silence in dream's projections." Between these two realities—the soil'd world and its noise and the dream's projections and its silence—are a series of linked passages, seemingly a drifting stream of consciousness, that pass through circumstances of war—from Soviet soldiers wading through muddy water to the dropping of the atom bomb. The dates that repeat rarely vary from a World War II specificity: 1938, 1941, and 1943 are mentioned once; 1945, five times.

Section X's letter from von Schlegell to his parents in 1943, written when he was learning to be a pilot in New Mexico and waiting to join the war, is followed by XI's contrasting of real war letters with the historical, euphemistic fantasy of a European Theater of War. These are followed by a quotation from Vertov's diaries where he likens his problems with bureaucracy to a "battle." Even in the midst of this, he will not relinquish his creative principles, never "[s]ubstituting the appearance of truth for truth itself." This is followed by Howe's difficulty in looking: "Since David died I can look at photographs of him, though I still haven't been able to look at the video copy of a home movie his daughter sent us in 1991." This sequence poses the question of all documentation. What can stand for the "truth itself"? Is the video a substitute? Are the letters also euphemistic? (No soldier is allowed to convey real information about his circumstances.) Where, in the midst of all these substitutes, is the space for feelings about these events? What is their appearance of "truth itself"?

Howe focuses particularly on Vertov's homage, *Three Songs about Lenin*. The film appears and disappears in *Marker's* passages as if, like Lenin's cortege, its real event and its manipulated document wind through Howe's own attempts to commemorate and not substitute for a lost truth. Vertov transposes grief into what Michelson⁹² calls a "Work of Mourning," and Howe clearly identifies with

this. Paraphrasing psychologist Melanie Klein, Howe describes mourning as the “pain experienced in the slow process of testing reality.” She finds a successful such testing in *Three Songs about Lenin*, “a cinematographic embodiment of the fluid and passing states, the interaction and interjection, between sorrow and distress.”

In section XI, looking back is personal and worldly, expressed in individuals—“Some of the mourners are acting looking back”—and in all time—“history does run backwards through endless generations of murderers.” Into this motif of loss-to-work, Howe introduces a fragmentary reality. Children dominate this section. Initially seen as forced to conform to strictures of society by learning to talk, “[i]n order to qualify for language they must stifle unrelenting internalization.” This internalization recognizes “how precariously names cling to civilization.” She suggests that children have a freedom to merge “categories.” This fluidity is forced from them as they learn to differentiate. In the sense of eulogy, and like Artaud’s desire to compress polarities, Howe wishes to have this literal merging. She recognizes that the lines between the dead, the memory or the commemoration, no matter how magnificent or how tantalizingly mysterious, are there forever. In adult life, some vestige of this childlike acceptance can be found in factual telepathy, in poetry (“I call poetry factual telepathy”) or in artistic attempts at “actual truth.”

Later children appear as tormentors or as tormented. Howe expounds in great detail her memories of weekly watching “a newsreel, a cartoon, previews, the main feature, and a serial.” It is here that the war, sanitized, is presented to her. This too is a “theater of war,” as Howe stresses. (Movie “theaters [were] never called cinemas.”) She feels that the children “were alert to the subliminal disjunction between actual and fictional cinematographic realism.” They even went so far as to displace their fears through “aggressive impulses” directed at the hapless manager, unnamed and “scorned for being human,” a state Howe reduces to a “mortal parenthesis” and an “open parenthesis.”

The “mortal parenthesis” has a variety of connotations: it is the frame put on human experience; it is the theater’s frame (the two theaters of war and of cinema); it is the inadequate frames put around war’s reality. She describes a newsreel scene of people running while bombs drop. “Theater for whom?” she asks. Within all these images, Howe sets an unusual series of links. “In English the word mole can mean, aside from burrowing mammal, a mound or massive work formed of masonry and large stones or earth laid in the sea as a pier or breakwater. Thoreau calls it a ‘noble mole’ because the sea is silent but as waves wash against and around it they sound and sound is language.”

Here this chain of “factual telepathy” draws the “mortal parenthesis” of a tiny mammal into a “massive work” of stones, which, in accord with the sea crashing on it, makes rhythmic sound that is also a language. This sequence creates a series of transformations that know no limits. There are no categories here. Like Howe’s

diaphoric summation of *La Jetée*'s plot, the mind begins on an animal "mole" and then moves into earth substances, which in turn return to language, but one both natural and without verbal articulation. Again, these protean links arrive at von Schlegell's "physical space"—without words yet part of an organic process. There is a seamless rhythm to it, a montage trope distinctly Howe's. The section constantly upturns its images because the ultimate goal, as the transformations do in the above example, is for Howe to reach a natural if not inarticulate acceptance of loss. By the end of section XI, the frames of the "soil'd world" become "the sea is a theater."

Section XI cuts back and forth between anonymity and name. Name can, in Whitman's exultation, "identify and bind" something that is otherwise a "vegetable mass" and a "clump." Four people, appearing anecdotally, have no name—a movie theater manager, a military instructor, a soldier who dies in the lake, an anonymous newsreel cameraman—and they are portrayed as unimportant natural "mortal parenthesis" neglected by a tormenting world. Words are "vegetable" clumps too, and Howe has an ambivalent feeling, like Artaud's, that, as Sontag phrases it, "words rot."⁹³

The central sections XIV and XV draw ideas of sight and of extrasensory perception complexly together. In section XIV, sight is eroticized and is discussed through an idiosyncratic chain of thought moving from ancient theater to psychological theater. Sight is given the kind of power that Artaud wants for his stage. Wordless, it literally tells volumes; it is in itself an "interview." Once again, the focus returns, in disguise, to the von Schlegell space, where his only communication was visual. In brief bits of information, these pages develop complex inter-cuttings between the outer world and the inner world. References to legends, psychosis, and more are set up as transfigurations of one another. In both inner and outer worlds, the act of seeing is prime, a perception both mythically privileged and a failure. *Marker* is about "looking at" and what the nature of "looking at" entails. Human eyes see violence but often refuse to accept its reality, dimming the information down into images. This fact is posed alongside another reality. The images themselves, though only a ghost of the lived moment, are what remain of the experience.

Though only four pages long, section XIV interweaves links from theater to film through playwrights Plautus and Racine to filmmakers Hitchcock and Marker. This is done through three of *Marker*'s films' use of sound, false identities, other sources, and memories. An eroticism in sight connects Marker with Racine: "For Roland Barthes the essence of the Racinian Eros is sight. In both *La Jetée* and *Sans Soleil* sight is privileged. The image takes the place of the thing. . . . In *La Jetée* and *Sans Soleil* as in a play by Racine, glances are the equivalents of interviews." Howe makes a distinction between the English and the French

version of *Sans Soleil*. The English version takes an epigraph from T. S. Eliot; the French, a sentence from Racine's second preface to his late play, *Bazajet*, his "most violent"⁹⁴ and only contemporary one, set in a Turkish palace. In his preface, Racine accepts that the subject's foreignness is equitable to the safety of a distant mythic past where he set every other play.⁹⁵

The line "L'Eloignement des pays repare en quelque sort la trop grande proximite des temps" translates as follows: "The distance in country makes up in some sort for the too great nearness in time."⁹⁶ Set in the enclosure of a seraglio (harem and palace, both undifferentiated in the story), *Bazajet* is understood as a tragedy of "the narrow room"—a concept that conveys both the closeted seraglio and the seventeenth-century idea that staging should be centered on a "unity of place." This meant that the drama was in one locale, with scripted lines that underscored the setting. Racine both adhered to that formula and expanded it.⁹⁷ This holistic use of theatrical space and the words spoken in that space evokes Artaud. Barthes too focuses on that relationship and sees the play as less a character drama than "the form of a space" to such a degree that it is a "close inquiry into the nature of the tragic site."⁹⁸ Vertov's idea of film reforming an event into the energy of its reality is picked up obliquely through Barthes' ideas about Racine's theater. Barthes sees Racinian drama as "both tableau and theater, or tableau vivant, frozen movement, accessible to an endlessly repeated reading."⁹⁹ In Racinian tragedy, "between these two classes of substances, there is an ever-immanent but never achieved exchange that Racine expresses by a specific word, the verb *relever* [gather, collect]."¹⁰⁰

Racine's drama is thus an energy (gathering of parts) between solid pieces (frozen movement), in which an otherworldly (immanent) substance resides that is never reachable. In a sense, this volatile situation encased by absolutes is like the condition of a singularity where, like montage, the two parts construct indeterminacy between them. The singularity, the montage, and the Racinian drama are a zone of between. This between and how it is contacted is *Sans Soleil's* thesis.

Sans Soleil dominates section XV, and there is a tangential appearance of Hitchcock's *Vertigo* in *Sans Soleil*, the part in the film Howe calls her "favorite." It is in this section that the Capgras syndrome is mentioned, also by proxy involving the Roman comedy, *Amphitryon*. Howe's description of Marker's use of *Vertigo* mirrors *Amphitryon's* evolution or the manner in which frames are appropriated through history. These snatches of information prelude Howe's almost metempsychotic exploration of the theme of the double. Linking *Sans Soleil* with Olivier's *Hamlet*, Vertov's *Man With A Movie Camera*, von Schlegell, and *Vertigo*, Howe follows odd doubles such as a dubbed voice (in *Hamlet*), a translated narration (a woman speaks for Marker in *Sans Soleil*), the peculiar interplay of identities in *Vertigo's* plot and in its staging, and how "memory of this earlier time" in a

different film “crops up in *Sans Soleil*.” Howe’s method here resembles Marker’s: “Marker’s practice of cutting isolating grafting and synthesizing music, languages, machine noises, musical synthesizers, quotations . . . depends on invisible verbal flashes, optical surprises, split images.” *Sans Soleil*’s use of *Bazajet* is deeper than the enfolding of time and place. The play, Racine’s “most terrible,”¹⁰¹ is not simply his only contemporary story but it is also, by Racine’s telling, “very true.”¹⁰² The play, thus, has something of the document. Racine is representing Turkish life to his countrymen at Louis XIV’s court and he says that he “owes this story” to Comte de Cezy, Constantinople’s French ambassador. Even more, this is fresh information. The play’s story, “not to be found in any historical publication,”¹⁰³ will mix reality with the form through which reality is perceived. Racine’s “politico-amorous” plot, as Racine’s translator Samuel Solomon describes it,¹⁰⁴ is created around a psychological double-bind: Roxanne, the court’s sultanness, desires Bajazet and offers him marriage and the kingdom. Refusal means death. But *Bazajet* loves someone else. He is utterly compromised in a no-win situation. Roxanne emphasizes her sway over him with a few brutal words: “Go back, back to the void I snatched you from.”¹⁰⁵ This may be as much a clue to Marker’s use of *Bazajet* as anything else. The double-bind plot in its abstraction mirrors the position of memory in the rememberer; the rememberer holds autocratic power over the remembered, and is at any time able to banish the past’s “desired body” back to the void from which it was snatched.

As a “true” rendered story, the play symbolizes both the nature of document and the nature of recollection. *Bazajet* stands for the “true” events and as such can present them in any reformation, casting truth to oblivion. The one who remembers can do the same to the genuine person, replacing him or her, as in the Capgras syndrome, with an impostor. In both circumstances, document and memory have autocratic control. Racine portrays Roxanne in Orphean terms. She wants *Bazajet* but does not see him: She doesn’t know he is already in love with another woman. When she finds out, she clearly sees and kills the person she craves. (He is strangled.) Orpheus has a similar desire. The instant Eurydice is visible to him she disappears. By making an image of her in his consciousness, Orpheus’s look at Eurydice—no matter how agonized by love—kills her—again. She is controlled through his eyesight. In seeing (as in remembering, bringing forth an image out of murky feeling about a “wound disembodied”), his power is immense at the moment that his pain is immeasurable.

This dual nature of recollection is in Roxanne and in Orpheus. They feel a pain in their clarity that the viewer does not. They also have power to kill the past by their own imagining or keep it alive as an unclear object. Both opt, as culture will opt, as people remembering often opt, for delusion and the impostor and the power that goes with it. *Bajazet*’s “narrow room” is, for Barthes, a place

“endlessly ambiguous, [a] ceaselessly inverted structure as a site both captive and imprisoning, acting and acting upon.”¹⁰⁶ This mirrors Howe’s similar use of text as imprisoning and freeing. In a sense, documentaries are the same. They are a “tragedy of the narrow room” because they are forced to stage their visions by virtue of a frame. Memory must do the like. It becomes a Racinian stage where the proximity of the event in reality is rendered distant and foreign because it has entered the mind. This paradox underlying *Sans Soleil* underlies *Marker*.

Through this coded secret meaning, *Marker* contrives to portray life as a Eurydice-phantom, subject to the sway of whoever tries to retrieve it. That retrieval takes place in a confined space of psychodrama or dramatic spectacle. Through the inhabited being of delusion in the Racinian “narrow room,” Howe tries to open confinement into the “offscreen” or the diaphoric space. Situating memory in the synthesizing, staged space of Racine, Artaud, Vertov, Tarkovsky, and *Marker*, Howe composes a theory of intervals such that the space energizes its solid surrounds.

The faulting site is taken up in *Marker*’s beginning. Howe opens section III, titled “Life, Life” (title of a poem by Tarkovsky’s father that is used in *Mirror*) with Mayakovsky’s disparagement of “an epic canvas’ as a true rendering of experience,” declaring “it will be torn to shreds on all sides.” This statement can be applied to Howe’s manner of cutting up texts. It is also a fate meted out to Orpheus, who was torn to pieces by a band of Greek fanatics, the Dionysian Maenad women. These shreds form instead an important and uncanny domain, one which Howe associates with “epigraph’s second sight.” The “second sight” implicit in “telepathy” is *Marker*’s memory-world, where the Orphean desire for the past descends. Howe glories in its “fact”—as a sentence or as a filmed image—as much as she despairs of its distance. The epigraph’s “second sight” sees the other world from which it has been displaced, but it cannot re-grasp it. Instead, the past’s other world haunts the present, and the present, revenant, reconfigures it (like Howe’s reconstructive texts, which recreate historical time).

X. Montage

Marker’s montage is designed to suggest a live, protean rendering. Through an odd, constructed stream of consciousness, rendering thought as a thing made concrete in the text, *Marker* associates text with natural substances. This is Howe’s version of de-solarizing the image. She takes the textual remove (the solarization) and places it within an elemental jumble so that it is almost tactile, visible in all kinds of worldly forms. Montage technique in *Marker* transfigures into a “magpie,” a creature given arcane qualities. Note the following paragraph’s tumble of resemblances that, like “fact,” hide core cultural issues.

An epigraph is an afterthought. Usually it follows the title of a work. An epigraph is second sight. Severed from its original position, re-placed at a foreign margin, the magpie quotation now suggests a theme or acts as a talisman. Magpies are pied: mostly black with white patches and white tail stripes. Harbingers of ill omen they tend to be associated with thresholds and secret ministry. In Ireland, if we saw any, my mother taught us to count quickly: “one is for sorrow, two is for joy, three is for a marriage, and four for a boy.” The word magpie also refers to the black and white ceremonial dress of an Anglican bishop. In captivity magpies imitate human speech. An early English dictionary describes these members of the jay family as the “cleverest, the most grotesque, the most musical of crows.” In 1852, Webster’s American Dictionary of the English Language, bluntly defines magpie: “a chattering bird of the row tribe.”

Among twenty snowy mountains,
The only moving thing
was the eye of the blackbird.

Wallace Stevens—Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird

People say the magpie has spot of blood of the devil on its tongue.
People who like anagrams are usually attracted to epigraphs.

This paragraph swoops through context as a series of ghosts. Each arbitrary lead can be identified as a kind of taxonomy: classifications (birds), principles (themes), definitions (dictionary), advice (maternal), customs (superstition, games, songs, clothing), symbols (esoteric, secret, folkloric), linguistics (language, speech patterns, dictionaries), etc. Each, “severed from its original position,” becomes reverberant of whatever it is placed beside. This listing mirrors social structures: birds become writing becomes folklore becomes literature becomes religion becomes clothing becomes symbols. Text and the paranormal blend from the start, leading to “theme” as textual telepathy or an object (talisman) as having invisible power. This leads to a living bird that carries many meanings—from jay to jinx to center of the universe. But, like a whirlpool, the whole sequence begins where it left off: at the epigraph—the only piece on the edge (or the graspable present “rail”) of this mixture. This mirrors a shot in *Sans Soleil* of a hand resting on a boat’s rail while the boat skims over water.

Through film, literature, and theater, *Marker* looks at dramatic spectacle, its mutations of ideas and means of juxtaposition. The essay contextualizes its pieces as being on the brink of something else. The epigraph takes on a quality also found in divisions between life and death. Epigraphs play an interesting role in *Marker*. Looked at in both film and literature, they open to immense dimensions

of reflexivity that travel across sources without boundary, like the time traveler in *Sans Soleil* who, from the fortieth century, begins to look at his own “something about memory and unhappiness.” They represent the cut-up energy of montage also found in life experience, and they represent the vestige of the whole that is left in present time.

XI. Frame

Finally, what draws *Marker* all together—visually, cognitively, culturally—is a frame; ultimately, *Marker* reevaluates the context of what frame is. The vortex, surrounding sight, with all its problems and pleasures, is composed in *Marker* of links that create a frame. In a sense, they make a rail on which the human hand rests, as the remembering person looks. Like an inhabited being, frame has multiple meanings or incarnations—as words, as points in time, as walls, as nature, as human life, as memento mori. The last section, XIX’s opening paragraph, describes a mixture of shots from *Sans Soleil* and *Mirror*. Howe quotes *Sans Soleil*’s beginning lines, heard over a picture of the three children smiling at the camera on a cold, sunlit country road before the credits appear: “If they don’t see the happiness then at least they’ll see the black leader.” “Leader” is the celluloid that precedes or ends a film, often black or with numbers, used to protect the print and give the film lengths of feeder for the projector. It can also black out between scenes, a device *Marker* uses in *Sans Soleil*’s opening: the first shot of children is followed by black leader, then by the credits. This is the interrelationship of mourning: irretrievable living happiness must find some rapport with its poor substitute, a presently contrived frame of that experience. This same dynamic is implicit in attempts to recapture the past. The ghost’s “parameter” is the “frame.” The word “frame” appears a number of times and in many examples. The frame tries to make an image out of the past: the “work of mourning” of a documentary eulogy; the frame of black leader inserted into newsreel; the “frame of the screen”; even the frame of name.

The other kind of frame is mark. The word “mark,” appearing many times, has a double presence, like an Orphean look’s two sides: the commemorative, remembered mark that is visible and the mark left in the lived moment that is irretrievable. “Sense will never resurrect the moment of the mark.”¹⁰⁷ But marks and frames translate back into textual images: So many hyphens and parentheses surround him.” What they point to can’t be framed about a person’s life, nevertheless these marks serve as guides to show that something else is there. Just as the reader looks through the epigraph’s second sight into an indeterminate time and place, “Words are symbols of spirits.” Still, there is more: “The off screen person speaking and writing through her voice.” This line, opening section XIX, is true of *Sans Soleil*, the female narrator referring to the unknown “he” of “he wrote”

and “he said.” But also, it brings together text and film in their most insubstantial incarnations. The essay’s dynamic of return and the look back as well as the present’s reconstruction of the past can be found in Howe’s especially choppy style. She employs odd jumps from sentence to sentence that are not transformative links but rather return to the same subject referred to a sentence before. In *Marker*, this conflict becomes a kind of mimesis of jump-cuts. The page, no longer iconographic, instead asks the reader to swerve between ideas differently expressed only by degrees and repetitively phased into one another. A review of the following paragraph demonstrates:

A mark is the face of a fact. A letter is naked matter breaking from form from meaning. An anagram defies linear logic. Any letter of the alphabet may contain its particular indwelling spirit. A mark a dynamic cut. Dynamic cutting is a highly stylized form of editing. Sequences magpie together from optical surprises, invisible but omnipresent verbal flashes, flashes of facts. A documentary work is an attempt to recapture someone something somewhere looking back. Looking back, Orpheus was the first known documentarist: Orpheus, or Lot’s wife.

wavering between the profit and the loss
in this brief transit where dreams cross

T. S. Eliot—Ash Wednesday

An epigraph is an afterthought. Usually it follows the title of a work. An epigraph is second sight. Severed from its original position, re-placed at a foreign margin, the magpie quotation now suggests a theme or acts as a talisman.

Here, Howe associates the “backward look” with two elements of montage: firstly with “edit” and secondly with “epigraph.” The former is linked with “mark.” The two sentences—“A mark is a face of a fact” and “A mark is a dynamic cut”—are intercut with her associations of language as animate—“Any letter of the alphabet may contain its particular indwelling spirit” and “A letter is naked matter breaking from form from meaning.” The mark is both active (“dynamic cut”) and stationary (“face of”) in ways similar to letter. Inwardly, the letter has spirit; outwardly, it is rebellious, “naked matter.”

She oddly rushes between two trains of thought until they associate as one another or ghost within each other. Howe gives the epigraph the surrogate status of the “lost beloved” or the being looked at in the past. Like the past drawn into the present, it is “re-placed at a foreign margin.” This new position causes it to lose its

“magpie” nature or the jumbled collective reality of any person or event. Instead, it cleans up to beam a “theme” or a “talisman.” In short, the replacement of any part of the past transforms it into a symbol. The beloved cannot be retained as a living experience. It can only become, as Vertov succeeded in doing with Lenin, a “work.”

XII. Refused Mourning

fact: “the quality of being actual”¹⁰⁸

The essay’s valedictory last line—“Refused mourning or melancholia here is the camera the film the projector.”—brings Howe and reader back into the present. Loss, mourning, and melancholia are “refused” by accepting what the present has to offer: documentation in the form of film. *Marker* is orchestrated around not seeing “fact” as simply a site of interpretation. That conclusiveness devalues its actuality. A fact must be given a zone of reality that has no name—much like von Schlegell’s last living experience. That Howe doesn’t understand him doesn’t preclude his being there or preempt his efforts to be understood.

The work in *Marker*, once placed so visibly in Howe’s typical, visually cut-up page, now goes on inside the reader’s mind. In this essay, Howe has left the engaging props of pictorial text and entered into metaphoric space where the reader, virtually from word to word and sentence to sentence, must bind, interpret, and cognitively leap across referents with almost psychic speed. *Marker* comes to terms with the “fact” of a contretemps between past and present that Howe’s work has so emphasized and to which she has tried to bring new perspectives. From the first page, following her question “What did he mean?,” Howe links her husband’s death with her work’s most purposeful *raison d’être*, which she describes as an exploration of “ideas of what constitutes an official version of events as opposed to a former version in imminent danger of being lost.” Anchored between those opposing views, Howe begins *Marker*’s exploration of nonfiction film in von Schlegell’s “physical space [where] we couldn’t see what he saw.” This “physical” presence beyond the scope of ordinary human perception stands for the unrepresentable. It exists, can be felt, but cannot be described.

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NOTES

1. This is how Howe describes herself but her body of work—scholarly, poetic, personal, and critical—is a mixture of prose and poetry, often blended together.
2. Henceforth referred to as *Marker*.
3. Charles Warren, *Beyond Document* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1996), Bdxiii.
4. Susan Howe, "Sorting Facts; or, Nineteen Ways of Looking at Marker," *Beyond Document*, 297.
5. Rachel Blau DuPlessis, *Pink Guitar* (London: Routledge Kegan Paul, 1990), 126.
6. Howe uses scattered words, split syllables, halved or backwards letters, diagonal lines, upside-down or mirrored writing. Words fan off from a linear line set up to be read left to right or turned upside-down; the words break up into letters or syllables, overlap, make odd geometries, or seem to collapse into chaotic jumbles among mixed capitals, italics, parentheses, and more. There are blank pages, formal repeating verses, referenced quotations, pages made of single lines or single paragraphs, replicated pages, precise critical writing, and photocopies of handwritten manuscripts. Her typography varies through italics, titles, handwriting, fonts, and sizes.
7. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980). Linguist George Lakoff's succinct definition—"new metaphors create a new reality"—recognizes the metaphoric combination as one of creativity. Howe's narrativity has to be learned similarly. It is its own montage but one that is built diaphorically. The diaphor and the epiphor define metaphoric categories. The epiphor puts together a known with a known and can be obvious. (My feet are blocks of ice.) Diaphor is the opposite, focusing on dissimilarities and using zen-koanish riddle types. (Toasted Susie is my ice cream.) Because its construct is in dissimilarity, the diaphor can't be broken down. Its meaning is multiple, not obvious, and moody.
8. Janet Ruth Falon, "Speaking with Susan Howe," *The Difficulties* 3.2 (1989): 41.
9. Tom Beckett, "The Difficulties Interview with Susan Howe," *The Difficulties* 3.2 (1989): 27.
10. Janet Ruth Falon, 42.
11. Lynn Keller, "An Interview with Susan Howe," *Contemporary Literature* XXXVI, no. 1 (Spring 1995): 31.
12. Susan Howe, *The Birth-mark* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1993), 158.
13. Howe, *The Birth-mark*, 177.
14. Howe, *The Birth-mark*, 162.
15. Beckett, 19.
16. Howe, *The Birth-mark*, 27.
17. Keller, 5.
18. *Marker*, 295.
19. Definition of "fact" from Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary, 10th edition (Springfield: Merriam-Webster Inc., 1998).

20. All quotations without accreditation are from *Marker*.
21. *Three Songs for Lenin* is an impassioned sixty-minute homage made ten years after Lenin's 1924 death. Vertov and co-editor Elizabeth Svilova searched thousands of archival reels to compile a filmic sweep of the Soviet Union from Moscow to Uzbekistan to Siberia and Mongolia. In doing this, they inadvertently saved invaluable newsreels of early century Russia that were already disintegrating and would have been forever lost. Divided into three Songs, respectively titled "My Face Was a Dark Prison," "We Loved Him," and "In a Big City of Stone," the film they eventually put together is a beautifully visualized propagandistic eulogy of Soviet change, socialism, and progress across gender, age, race and tribe, woven with a storyline of Lenin's supernal power, before and after death.
22. *Ivan's Childhood*, a black and white film which mixes actual newsreel, constructed narrative and impressionistic imagery, is about a child military scout working on the Soviet-German frontline. A devastating story, this film seems to capture World War II emotionally for Howe because of the war's effect on her husband, who fought in it—"the war wounded him in ways he could never recover."
23. *Mirror* has the same issues as *Ivan's Childhood*: children in war, mother-son relationship, absent father, and renderings of the past. However, the film has no conventional narrative. Set between the 1930s and the modern era, it contains much newsreel footage: Russian soldiers journeying through swamps, Mao Tse-tung marches in China, Spanish Civil War street fighting, and the dropping of the atom bomb. Yet with powerful subliminal tightness, it conveys themes—overtly stated and covertly implied—around history as subjective memory and history as documented fact. The time is difficult to calculate, the characters, often, impossible to differentiate, and their relationships full of question. The film sweeps forward through vignettes. It seamlessly moves between sepia-tinged black and white to color, between acted scenes and newsreel footage, between dreams and waking, and between remembered childhood and present day. The film's feel is dreamy and elemental, using continual images of water and fire, yet it portrays subjective-objective indeterminacy with an emotional clarity.
24. Susan Howe, *The Europe of Trusts* (Los Angeles: Sun and Moon Press, 1990), 91.
25. See note 19.
26. Definition of "sort" from Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary, 10th edition.
27. Dziga Vertov, "Kinocks-Revolution," *Film Makers on Film Making*, ed. Harry M. Geduld (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), 99–100.
28. Howe's work quotes from, critiques, and iconographically reedits as visually cut up words, multiple texts.
29. Her writing, though replete with personal references, is driven by examinations of history as an idea. In *Marker*, the eulogy takes precedence and the essay is driven by Howe's own life.
30. *Sans Soleil* (Chris Marker, FR, 1983).
31. *Marker*, 297.
32. *The Birth-mark*, 1. Howe uses this phrase to define what Dickinson's writing aims to achieve. She has a very similar ambition—that is, to expose in history what has been eclipsed. "For

me, the manuscripts of Emily Dickinson represent a contradiction to canonical social power, whose predominant purpose seems to have been to render isolate voices devoted to writing as a physical event of immediate revelation.”

33. Vertov, 1967, 111.
34. Eric Rhodes, *A History of Cinema from its Origins to 1970* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1976), 536.
35. *La Jetée* (Chris Marker, FR, 1962).
36. *La Jetée*, 307.
37. *La Jetée*.
38. *La Jetée*.
39. Robert Campbell, ed., *Psychiatric Dictionary 6th edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 287.
40. Others are generic: persecution, grandiosity, somaticism, jealousy, eroticization, and so forth.
41. Armand M. Nicoli, ed., *Harvard Guide to Psychiatry* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1999), 109.
42. Nicoli, 111.
43. Harold Kaplan and Benjamin Saddock, eds., *Comprehensive Textbook of Psychiatry/VI*. Vol. I, 6th edition (Baltimore: Williams and Wilkins, 1995), 281.
44. Kaplan, 646.
45. Campbell, 720.
46. Vertov, 1967, 103.
47. Vertov, 1967, 104.
48. Vertov, 1967, 96.
49. Tarkovsky, 121.
50. Russian Tarkovsky as a direct inheritor and French Marker as an avowed disciple. Marker named his film movement after Soviet filmmaker Alexander Medvedkin.
51. Peter Wollen, reprint 1972, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969), 41, 48.
52. Marie Seaton, *Sergei M. Eisenstein* (New York: Grove Press, 1960), 179.
53. Vertov 1967, 104.
54. Vertov 1967, 111.
55. Amphitryon's wife produces twins after this night of double sex (with one god and one man). The children are both male: one is mortal and the other a demi-god, Heracles. Heracles is known to have had supernal importance before the time of Homer.
56. *Marker*, 300.
57. In Genesis 19:26, Lot's wife, fleeing with her family from the destruction of Sodom, is warned not to look back at the city she once loved. She does and is instantly transformed into a pillar of salt.
58. Kino Pravda translates as “film-truth,” and was for Vertov a “film-newspaper” comprising three years of newsreel footage.

59. Antonin Artaud, *Selected Writings*, ed. Susan Sontag (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1976), xxxviii.
60. Antonin Artaud, *The Theater and its Double*, trans. Mary Caroline Richards (New York: Grove Press, 1958), 89.
61. Artaud, 1976, 231.
62. Artaud, 1958, 101–2.
63. Artaud, 1958, 90.
64. Martin Esslin, *Antonin Artaud* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1976), 94.
65. *Sans Soleil*.
66. Frederick Wiseman, Jean Rouch, John Grierson, Robert Altman, and Shirley Clarke are known for their groundbreaking documentaries. Jean-Luc Godard and Yvonne Rainer, among others, have done unusual filmic commentaries on history and culture. Maya Deren is one of the key originators in America of subjective avant-garde cinema. Howe also looked into Indian and Japanese films.
67. Howe, *The Birth-mark*, 38.
68. Spoken by the narrator, who represents Marker, in his film *The Last Bolshevik* (FR, 1993).
69. As described in *Marker*, 296.
70. Dziga Vertov, *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, ed. Annette Michelson, trans. Kevin O'Brien (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), xvii.
71. Hans Richter, reprint 1976, *The Struggle for the Film*, trans. Ben Brewster (Hants: Wildwood, 1938), 49.
72. Jean Rouch, "Five Faces of Vertov," trans. Charlotte Vokes-Dudgen, *Framework* 11 (Autumn 1979): 29. One of nonfiction film's leading forces, French documentarian Rouch was a major influence on American documentarians of the Sixties including Pennebaker, Maysles, and Wiseman, as well as on French New Wave directors such as Jean-Luc Godard.
73. Vertov, 1984, 91.
74. Vertov, 1984, 90.
75. Vertov, 1984, 90.
76. Vertov, 1984, 91.
77. Vertov, 1984, 131.
78. *Marker*, 302.
79. Eric Rhodes, *A History of Cinema from its Origins to 1970* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1976), 534.
80. Susan Hayward, *French National Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 241. Some Marker and Resnais documentaries were banned.
81. Rhodes, 534.
82. Rhodes, 534.
83. Erik Barnouw, reprint 1993, *Documentary: A History of Nonfiction Film* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), 52.
84. They are important especially in *The Nonconformist's Memorial* (New York: New Directions,

- 1993).
85. *Sans Soleil*.
 86. *Sans Soleil*.
 87. This is at the moment that Novak is re-created by Stewart to look like the woman with whom he is obsessed. Only Novak knows that she is both women. She loves Stewart and, in her overwhelmed emotion, as an expression of it, she looks out of the narrative action and straight into the camera.
 88. Refers to *Apocalypse Now* (Francis Ford Coppola, US, 1979). Quotation from *Sans Soleil*.
 89. The Zone is the name of a science-fiction wasteland in his film *Stalker* (Andrei Tarkovsky, USSR, 1979).
 90. *Sans Soleil*.
 91. Artaud, 1976, xxi. Susan Sontag, Introduction.
 92. Vertov, 1984.
 93. Artaud, 1976, xx. Susan Sontag, Introduction.
 94. Jean Racine. *The Complete Plays of Jean Racine*. Vol. 2. trans. Samuel Solomon (New York: The Modern Library, 1969), xxii. Katherine Wheatley, Introduction.
 95. Racine's great repeating subjects were ancient legends and historical personages: Phaedre, Iphigenia, Esther, Mithridates, Alexandre le Grande, and the like.
 96. Jean Racine's "Second Preface" to *Bazajet* (1676), 5.
 97. Racine, xxiv. Katherine Wheatley, Introduction.
 98. Roland Barthes, reprint 1992, *On Racine*. trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960), 97.
 99. Barthes, 21.
 100. Barthes, 22.
 101. Racine, 2. Samuel Solomon, "Extract from Translator's Note in Volume I."
 102. Jean Racine's "First Preface" to *Bazajet* (1672), 3.
 103. Racine, 3.
 104. See Racine, 2; and Samuel Solomon, "Extract from Translator's Note in Volume I."
 105. Racine, 524.
 106. Barthes, 103.
 107. "Sorting Facts; or, Nineteen Ways of Looking at Marker;" unpublished first draft, 1994.
 108. Merriam-Webster, "fact."