

Chats Perchés

Réalisateur (director) et auteur (writer): Chris Marker

Release date: December 5, 2004

Historical Context:

“In November 2001, the filmmaker became intrigued, as did many other Parisians, by the sudden appearance of alluring portraits of grinning yellow cats on buildings, Metro walls and other public surfaces. Marker's cinematic efforts to document the mysterious materializations of this charming feline throughout Paris are a recurring theme of *Chats perchés*” or *The Case of the Grinning Cat* in English. The film chronicles strikes, demonstrations, memorials, the 2002 French presidential election campaign, celebrity scandals, international political incidents, and a variety of political protests (against the War in Iraq, against China's occupation of Tibet, and against the government ban on Muslim headscarves).

<http://www.frif.com/new2006/case.html>

“Débutant en 2001 dans l'après 09/11, le film passe chronologiquement par les grands moments de notre actualité récente : du 21 avril aux manifestations contre la guerre en Irak, de la révolte des intermittents jusqu'à l'affaire Bertrand Cantat.”

<http://www.fluctuat.net/1879-Chats-Perches-Cris-Marker>

Timeline: Chris Marker

- Chris Marker was born Christian François Bouche-Villeneuve on July 29, 1921 in Neuilly-sur-Seine, France
- After the end of World War II, Marker began working as a writer, publishing his first book in 1949
- In the 1950s he turned to documentary filmmaking. Some of his classic works from the period include, *Lettre de Sibérie* (1957), *Cuba Si!* (1961), *Le Joli Mai* (1963), and *La Jetée* (1962).
- In the 1960s and 1970s Marker was actively involved with SLON, a filmmaking collective dedicated to activist productions.
- Marker reemerged to make films under his own name again in 1977 with *Le Fond de l'air est rouge*
- Marker made several films on other filmmakers in the 1980s and 1990s.
- In 1982, he completed *Sans Soleil*, which tested the limits of what could be considered a documentary. The film is an essay, a montage, a mix of documentary with fiction and philosophical comments.
- Since working on *Sans Soleil*, Marker has developed an avid interest in digital technology, which has led to his current concentration on video and computer-controlled imagery. Some of his more current projects include *Level 5* and *Immemory*.
- In 2004 Chris Marker released *Chats perchés*, an innovative film, which “reflects on French and international politics, art and culture at the start of the new millennium.”

"The film's message, finally, is to leave a little place for the imagination in a world that has become more and more violent. We are far from Chris Marker's militancy of the years 1960-1970, but the social satire is definitely here. And also, and above all, poetry!"

-Le Parisien

Pre-watching discussion questions:

What is a documentary? What are the differences between documentaries and other types of film?

What were some major international events that occurred after 9/11?

Do you remember these events? What were your reactions to these incidents?

How did the United States react to the terrorist attacks and the events that followed?

Timeline: French/International political events (2001-2004)

- September 11, 2001: Terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City and on the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. Fourth attack thwarted by passengers on flight United Airlines 93.
- October 7, 2001: War in Afghanistan begins in response to the 9/11 attacks. This conflict marks the beginning of the U.S. "War on Terror"
- April 21, 2002: First round of French presidential elections. 16 candidates ran, representing an extremely wide political spectrum. Jean-Marie Le Pen, the candidate from the extreme right party *le Front National (FN)*, arrives in second place; and thus qualifies for the second round with about 17% of the vote. He faces off against Jacques Chirac (20% of the vote), the incumbent president, from the center-right party, *l'Union pour un mouvement populaire (UMP)*. The Socialist candidate, Lionel Jospin, was therefore excluded from the second round. Political analysts noted record low participation rates for a presidential election; about 30% of the eligible population abstained from voting. Protests began immediately after the results were released. Citizens from both the left and the right flooded the streets to protest the presence of Jean-Marie Le Pen in the second round. His presence was seen as a threat to France's democracy, since his policies and views are authoritarian and extreme.
- May 5, 2002: Jacques Chirac wins the French presidency with about 82% of the vote, the largest percentage ever received by a French president. The political leaders on the left called for their voters to mobilize against the threat of Le Pen, and the rate of abstention fell to about 20%.
- June 9, 2002: First round of France's legislative elections. Le Front National lost about half of its support from the presidential elections, and the abstention rate rose to 35.6.
- June 16, 2002: The parliamentary right won a clear majority (399/577), in what has been called the "blue surge". The left, without a clear leader and weakened after the presidential election, did not fare as well: le Parti Socialiste won only 140 seats, while les Communistes obtained only about 20.

- January 15, 2003: French newspaper, Le Monde, says European opinion is “resolutely opposed to a military intervention to disarm Saddam Hussein.” Opinion polls show that 60% of the British public and over 70% of the French are opposed to the war in Iraq.
- January 18, 2003: A day marked by worldwide anti-war protests. Several protests were held in the United States itself, but also in countries such as, Japan, Pakistan, Syria, Egypt, Russia, France, Britain, Argentina and Mexico.
- February 2003: The U.S. and Britain prepare to go to war with Iraq unless Saddam Hussein complies with UN inspections. France, Germany, and much of the international community oppose this decision.
- March 20, 2003: The Iraq War begins with strikes on Baghdad.
- April 9, 2003: Saddam Hussein’s government falls.
- May 1, 2003: President George W. Bush declares the end of major combat.
- December 13, 2003: Saddam Hussein is captured by US troops.
- January 17, 2004: French citizens protest a law which bans Muslim headscarves, Jewish yarmulkes, and large Christian crosses in schools. Protests also occurred in the Middle East and in London.
- February 15, 2004: More protests in France against the passage of the law which bans “ostentatious” religious symbols in schools.
- March 16, 2004: French singer, Bertrand Cantat, is on trial for murdering his girlfriend, French actress, Marie Trintignant.
- April 29, 2004: Photos of prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib prison near Baghdad cause uproar in the international press. Some of the guards face prosecution.
- May 11, 2004: Hostage Nick Berg is beheaded on video by a group of Islamic extremists claiming to be avenging the abuse of Iraqi prisoners. Several other hostages in Iraq are subjected to the same treatment.
- June 8, 2004: The UN Security Council approves a resolution to end the formal occupation of Iraq on June 30.
- June 28, 2004: The US-led coalition hands over power to the interim government in Iraq.
- July 1, 2004: Saddam Hussein appears in court in Iraq. He dismisses the charges against him, and says George Bush is the real criminal.
- August 18, 2004: 100 national assembly members are chosen to oversee the government until the general elections
- November 22, 2004: The first general election since the fall of Saddam Hussein’s government is set for January 30, 2005.

Post-viewing discussion questions:

What do you think of the cinematographic representation of the events?

Why is this story told as a film? What does it being a film add?

Why did the grinning cats interest Marker?

Why were the cats present at the demonstrations? What do you think they symbolize?

The Cheshire cat in *Alice in Wonderland* “appears and disappears at will, engaging Alice in amusing but sometimes vexing conversation”. The cat often talks about philosophical points that annoy Alice. Do we see any connections with the grinning cats in the film?

"Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?"

"That depends a good deal on where you want to get to," said the Cat.

(quotes from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cheshire_cat)

Do you think this film qualifies as a documentary? Why or why not?

Post-viewing activity:

After viewing the film, have the students break up into small groups and assign each group an article (links in French and English below). If the students are studying French, underline any challenging/new vocabulary, and have the students define the words and use them in a sentence. After the students have read and understood the articles, ask them to write a summary of the articles (in French if their level permits). Each group should then present the summary of their article and their vocabulary list to the rest of the class. As an independent, out of class assignment, have the students write a reaction paper to the film and the discussion questions. Ask them to analyze the film using the cinema vocabulary reviewed in class, but also to give their personal reactions. They can also refer to the articles they read for historical/political background information.

Links:

- <http://www.radiofrance.fr/reportage/dossiers/irak/reperes.php?type=4>
- <http://www.cyberhumanisme.org/breves.html>
- <http://www2.lacrhttp://www.lexpress.fr/info/monde/dossier/irak2/dossier.asp?ida=389732oix.com/dossiers/index.jsp?docId=40757&rubId=1311>
- http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4192189.stm
- <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/3037886/site/newsweek/>
- <http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/2003/iraq/>
- <http://www.nytimes.com/pages/world/worldspecial/index.html?excamp=GGGNthewariniraq>

La Jetée

Directed and written by: Chris Marker

Music: Trevor Duncan

Released in 1962; 28 min black and white film

Characters:

The Narrator

The Woman

The Man

The Experimenter

Actors :

Jean Négroni

Hélène Chatelain

Davos Hanich

Jacques Ledoux

Quick Summary:

This science-fiction film is in fact a photo-montage of still frames which are shown at varying pace with a voice-over narration. This film tells the story of a man living in France post-nuclear WWII. He and the other survivors live underground and have been subjected to experimentation in time travel. The experimenters hope to find ways in which they can “summon the past and future to the aid of the present.” The male traveler that the film focuses on is repeatedly thrown into his past where he continuously searches for a woman that he remembers from a violent childhood memory of a death in the main terminal (la jetée) at Orly airport

Vocabulary:

La jetée- The jetty, or terminal

Tête d’apotre- Head of the apostle (of Christ)

Post-Viewing Activities / Activités:

Because this film is being shown as a double feature with *Chats Perchés*, one would follow the same format for pre-viewing for both films. However, because the pedagogical materials for both *Indigènes* and *Chats Perchés* are history-based, perhaps any discussion facilitated by this movie can be more cinematic in nature.

Discussion:

1. If you didn't know that *Chats Perchés* and *La Jetée* were written and directed by Chris Marker, would you be able to identify a similar style between the two films? What are the techniques or specifics that define Marker as an « auteur »? Define “auteurism.”
2. This film is a photo-montage, with a single gesture of movement. In spite of this, why is *La Jetée* considered a film?

3. Even though this film is fictional, *La Jetée* contains real images of destruction in France after WWII. Could one argue that this film is indeed a documentary, like *Chats Perchés* ?
 4. How does this film depict the world after WWII in the same way that *Chats Perchés* addresses the issues of the world after 9/11?
 5. This film inspired *12 Monkeys*, a film by Terry Gilliam, released in 1995. In which ways are these two films similar? Different? In your opinion, what are the differences between American and French films? Which do you prefer?
- 